Local democracy does not consist merely in local administration of functions. Nor does it mean simply having a local councillor, or even a local council, just round the corner. The essential point is that there should be an elected local council genuinely in charge of the local situation, and answerable for its handling of it.2

In May 1974, Scottish local government was reorganised - 1,600 councillors replacing 15,000, and a patchwork pattern of services delivered by between one and four councils (458 in total) replaced on the mainland by a two-tier system of 53 Districts and 9 Regions.

According to the publicity of the time, it was a "change for the better". It was certainly a major upheaval although just how fundamental was a moot point. John Mackintosh, for one, had been relentless in his criticism of the restriction of the 1966 Royal Commission Terms of Reference to "existing" local government functions and of the deliberate exclusion of the basic issue of local government finance.2

Reflecting on the events in the subsequent decade can be done at various levels -

1. Anecdotal/personal: indicating just how local authority work in 1983/84 compares with that of 1973/74. This would reflect the different world with which local government personnel have to cope now, compared with the late 1960s when Wheatley was shaping the terms of the subsequent debate and legislation. These were the days of "cost-free liberalism".

2. Polemical: assessing the implications of the various developments over that decade for the future (if any) of local democracy.

3. Academic: comparing the aims and aspirations of the reformists with the outcome. Wheatley gave us a useful test for such an exercise which I have used to structure my reflections viz:

"Power: local government should be enabled to play a more important, responsible and positive part in the running of the country - to bring the reality of government nearer to the people.

Effectiveness: local government should be equipped to provide services in the most satisfactory manner, particularly from the point of view of the people receiving the services.

Local democracy: local government should constitute a system in which power is exercised through the elected representatives of the people, and in which those representatives are locally accountable for its exercise.

Local involvement: local government should bring the people into the process of reaching decisions as much as possible and enable those decisions to be made intelligible to the people".

What follows straddles all three levels since only thus can justice be done to the complexity of that period and to the significance of the choices which face the different groups involved in local government. In a sense what the article tries to do is to explore what those of us who use the rhetoric of local democracy should be trying to establish as the agenda for the future. Is it simply an attempt to return to "normality"? (that is, resisting cuts and privatisation); or is it about re-shaping the "partnership" with the community?; or about altering the balance of power between professions and politicians?; or about extending democratic control to those unaccountable agencies and quangos in health, MSC and other areas?

The Context

The last ten years have been turbulent ones. Local government reorganisation represented a profound disturbance of existing networks...
and power structures. But it was by no means the only, or even the
biggest, change. In addition local authorities have had to cope with:

(a) **New management machinery:** the new conventional wisdom of
corporate management was enshrined in the Paterson Report(3) which
reflected the work of certain English local authorities and INLO
prior to reorganisation. This was not paralleled in Scotland whose new
authorities were therefore involved in the mid 1970s in working out
additional new roles and relationships.

(b) **New ways of thinking about problems:** the kindest way to
describe pre-reorganisation local government would be "reactive". No
analytical capacity existed. In the space of a few years they
apparently moved from a "primitive" attitude to policy planning to a
sophisticated one with Regional Reports, Structure Plans, Housing
Plans, TPPs and Financial Plans;

(c) **Less deferential population:** community pressures have never
been particularly strong on local authorities in Scotland.
Particularly in the central belt, the local authorities, despite the
scale of their intervention in community affairs, have generally had
it all their own way, perhaps because the local political
establishment, being Labour, defused potential opposition(4). Even
Scotland, however, could not remain immune from the effect of the
"spirit of 1968" on urban politics. In the 1970s community action
developed in urban areas and was indeed encouraged by authorities such
as Strathclyde Region(5), who could be assured that the focus of
discontent would be on housing and local planning authorities rather
than on the regional functions of education, police or social work.

Even central government was in the business of encouraging
community "involvement", if not "action", and wrote into the 1973
legislation provision for community and schools councils which,
retrospectively, can be seen as pre-emptive strikes by those in
authority to divert genuine community action.

(d) **Hostile central government:** it was in 1976 that Tony Crosland
heralded the new era for local government spending with his statement
that "the party's over". Initially it was the music that was turned
down; cash limits and non-mandatory "guidelines" were introduced. From
this beginning we were quickly led to the infamous Miscellaneous
provisions Act of 1981 which gave the Secretary of State and his
advisers the right to judge the spending of an individual local
authority to be "excessive and unreasonable" and, with Parliamentary
approval, to remove grant from them and declare a new rate(6). And
from there to "rate-capping".

It is not, however, only the level of local government spending
that concerned the Conservative government in 1979-1983; it was the
particular decisions individual local authorities were taking in
housing (rent levels and their sale), education (parental choice) and
indeed the basic question of whether local authorities should actually
be offering certain services at all. "Privatisation" is an ugly word; it
does, however, relate to a perfectly reasonable and respectable
question, namely the best way of delivering and organising services.
Monopoly provision by local authority of cleansing, transport,
repairs, let alone social services, may or may not be the best method.
Certainly the early 1970s saw a very strong critique particularly from
the Left(7) and from "radicals" such as Illich and Colin Ward(8)
of the consequences of such a method of organisation. Unfortunately, the
critique of professionalism(9), for such it was, was diverted in the
mid 1970s, partly by reorganisation, and was never taken seriously by
councillors, particularly Labour ones.

(e) **More complex environment:** despite the Wheatley injunctions for
an end to non-elected quangos (and apparent Conservative distaste for
them) it is these in Scotland which have developed and grown more
powerful rather than the directly elected and reformed local
authorities. The SDA has diversified, despite its initial reservations
and lack of experience, into area initiatives, and the MSC look set to
become a rival educational system. The post-reorganisation world has,
therefore, become more rather than less organisationally complex.

(f) **More turbulent environment:** for most local authorities
unemployment in their localities is about three times what it was a
decade ago. This has increased the pressures on their services, and
eventhose services such as education, whose traditional clientele has
been declining, are faced with major upheavals as they strive to be
more relevant to a changing world.

Putting reorganisation in this context is essential for two
reasons:
1. It indicates the extent to which local government has been at the receiving end of (other people's) change - and how little influence the local political system has exercised. This is clearly changing, caused more, it must be said, as English local authorities try to move into the employment strategy vacuum left by government (in a non-SDA landscape). Even, however, in Scotland, political initiatives are more in evidence recently in relation not only to urban poverty but in the approach to management issues such as decentralisation. Indeed one might suggest that the decade can be divided quite clearly into two parts - in the 1970s, change was administrative and, within the terms of its limited logic, coherent, whereas in the 1980s, change is more political (whether from local Left or central Right) and incoherent (or pluralist).

2. Placing reorganisation in the wider context also indicates the limitations of any single development - be it yet another bout of reorganisation, or the latest managerial, consultative or planning weaponry. As the table below shows there have been a lot of views about how to improve local government (fewer about what precisely was "wrong").

Whatever the latest fashion may be - be it privatisation, industrial democracy, the "catch-all" of decentralisation or all-purpose authorities - it relates to a small part only of a complex organisation and political system. Whatever gains are produced, there will be costs elsewhere for some. I say this not to discourage change endeavours but rather to ensure they are more firmly based and less cavalierly carried out than has so far been our experience in local government. It is time that those responsible for local government (wherever they are) took some lessons in organisational development.

Reformists always have to simplify and exaggerate: "To overcome inertia and dramatise its own necessity, reform seems to proceed most characteristically by polarising the issue and insisting upon the side of the debate least honoured in the prevailing order," but after the change of the past decade some intellectual synthesis is required.
The 1974 Reorganisation

Having looked at the wider context of reorganisation, let us look at reorganisation itself, its assumptions, aims and, more arguably, outcomes.

First a personal comment. I entered local government in 1968 and therefore experienced six years in what, on the face of it, was a fairly typical council in the "old system", viz the large burgh of Greenock Corporation which tended 78,000 souls. I even reached the dizzy heights of Senior Magistrate and was, therefore, clearly one of the individuals of whom it was said during the reorganisation debate that "the only things they have to lose are their chains". In fact, however, Greenock Corporation was not typical. It was one of the few councils of the immediate pre-reorganisation era characterised by democratic competition. The Liberals replaced the Moderates and Progressives in the early 1960s, and by 1966 had won enough seats in the annual elections (one third out was then the electoral system) to give them power. Labour won this back in 1972 on the basis of a major input of new young blood which led them to embark, in the last three years of the Corporation's life, on an unusual programme (for Scotland) of positive discrimination and community development[16].

For me, therefore, it was a very innovating local authority, which could not be said of most other local authorities I encountered. And it was this that led me, during the debate on the Wheatley Report in 1969/71 and the committee stage of the bill in 1972/73, to support so enthusiastically not only reorganisation but specifically the Wheatley recommendations, not least those relating to the establishment of Strathclyde Region.

Quite simply, as the opening sentence of Wheatley put it, "something is seriously wrong with local government in Scotland". The Augean stables need cleansing; and not just the image of local government (which increasingly was affected by cases of corruption), but rather the parochialism and limited ideals that was such fertile grounds for such behaviour.

The gloss Wheatley put on reorganisation was quite simply that local government was losing credibility with both public and central government: only one third of the seats were contested and there was a drift of administrative power to St. Andrew's House as well as the increased establishment of ad hoc authorities to deal with police, water, tourism and even social work. This seemed to flow from the inadequate scale of local authorities which were, so the argument went, not attractive enough for officials and councillors of calibre. Boundaries, in any event, needed rationalisation. The reduction of 430 authorities to the 44 proposed by Wheatley and the 65 eventually approved by Parliament was supposed to give local government the capacity to deal with the problems of the latter part of the 20th century. This general argument was more plausible than the detailed and patently spurious arguments conducted in the Royal Commission reports about the optimum scale of specific functions of local government[17].

These were the days of heady talk of "growth points", of strategic industrial, transport and housing developments. And the boundaries and behaviour of small local authorities were patently an obstacle to such ambitious plans. It was in these technocratic terms - rather than in terms of social and human services - that reorganisation was justified. It is indeed salutary to read the evidence given to Wheatley to appreciate just how much the world has changed in 15 years.

These were days of optimism, and a little naivety. Few asked about the motives behind the change and whose interests would be served. It was obvious that most local politicians were opposed but as they were being defined as part of the problem this, if anything, proved the point. It is only recently that we have seen a senior civil servant of the time quietly articulate some "subversive thoughts":

"The conviction that local government must be reformed - which took root at the beginning of the 1960s, was reflected in a White Paper of 1963 and grew steadily till reform was achieved - was a conviction of government more than of the population at large. It was keenly shared by very small professional groups such as land use and economic planners. Specifically, certain policies which the government conceived good for the citizen were being frustrated or delayed, in the government's view, by the inadequacies of local government - particularly the boundaries".

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"Insofar as the intending reformers envisaged a change in the balance of power it was a reduction in the power of the local government system generally, whether or not by design, to frustrate or delay the implementation of government policy. Of course government deplored what they saw as the necessity of detailed control of local authority activity - it took up a lot of their time and they found it an ineffective way of getting government policy implemented". (18)

One remembers vividly Dick Mabon in the late 1960s, when Minister of State for Housing at the Scottish Office, using every trick of the trade to exhort local authorities to build, build, build council houses regardless, almost, of the quality.

The Wheatley recommendations got a mixed reception, particularly in the west where few favoured the idea of the giant new region. At the end of the day, however, despite the active lobbying in the committee stage and of the government (19) the Wheatley logic held, with only two major exceptions:

i. the allocation of housing to the Districts - largely because of fears that otherwise the District Councils would not be viable;

ii. the creation of an extra 21 authorities - largely to assuage the anxieties of middle class areas about being brought under the tutelage (and rate burden) of Labour city councillors.

The logic held in Scotland but not in England, where a dog's breakfast was made of the Redcliffe-Maud proposals (20). There is now a government commitment to, and a major constituency in England for, a further reorganisation which is not evident in Scotland. Depending on your view of (a) local government reorganisation, (b) the British parliamentary process respectively, the different outcomes demonstrate the sense of the Scots, of the civil servants, or the naivety of ever expecting anything sensible to emerge from a parliamentary process embracing such oddities as Royal Commissions!

More Reorganisation?

The present system works in Scotland. The question of whether there is a better system is, after the June 1983 Tory victory, somewhat academic. Nationalists and Liberals, with no foot in local government and with their eyes firmly set on an Assembly/Parliament, tend to treat the present local government system with disdain and wish to see it scrapped. Labour, also committed to an Assembly, are the natural rulers in central Scotland at least, and are therefore more ambivalent. They know from bitter experience how exhausting, distracting and expensive a major reorganisation is.

What criticism there has been from local authorities themselves about the 1973 Act comes essentially from the four cities who still hanker, understandably, after their lost all-purpose status. In Dundee and Aberdeen there is the added complication that Labour councillors have lost education, social work, highways and strategic planning, to Conservative regions. Few would deny the theoretical beauty of all-purpose authorities (21). The practical problems, however, are three-fold:

Why limit it to return to the status quo ante? The idea is developing of "community government" to embrace the Health Service. Where, that is, does one draw the functional line?

What about the rest of Scotland? Wheatley tried to achieve all-purpose authorities but failed. Where, that is, does one draw the geographical line?

Is it worthwhile, given the cost of reorganisation?

In the present crisis the claims of the cities are nothing short of divisive and should be put aside for balmier days, not least because of the question they beg.

One of the few issues on the other hand on which there would be unanimity is that local government has in 1984 considerably less rather than more power than in 1974 when the first elections were held for the new local authorities. Whether this represents a success or failure, however, depends whether one is standing in New St. Andrew's House or in Strathclyde House. Bearing in mind the earlier argument about the underlying reasons for reorganisation it has clearly been a success for central government and its civil servants. It has been easier for central government to control 65 rather than 440 authorities - particularly when the name of the game is no longer development but demolition.
Again, what some might see as a draw-back - the tension endemic in a two-tier system - is, from the government interest in dividing and defusing any political opposition, a positive benefit.

The full-scale nature of the attack there has been on local government does tend to be clouded by the understandable media concentration on the financial cutbacks and the constitutional issues involved in Edinburgh civil servants and English MPs imagining they know local needs in Scotland better than locally elected councillors. This, however, is not quite as novel a departure as is being made out. I have already mentioned the curious development of quangos: behind a smoke screen of political hostility they have in fact advanced at local government cost. Urban Development Corporations may so far be limited to England but phenomena as disparate as MSC and enterprise zones have already eaten into any pretension of local democracy in a far more serious way than privatisation. Subtly and insidiously local government has been transformed from the provider of major facilities such as houses, schools, road and industrial infrastructure into a role more akin to handing out sweets! I first noticed this myself less than a year ago when advising a community group how best to approach local government for help in improving their area, and found myself saying that if it was major investment they wanted, they should forget it, local authorities were no longer in that game, but if they wanted a few thousand pounds for a small project lasting from 1 to 5 years we had an embarrassment of such funds. It is, in fact, virtually impossible to obtain agreed statistics of local government capital spending over time, particularly with the recent alteration by government of their prevention of such information from "volume" to "cash" terms. The most recent comparison was in the COSLA Critique and showed the following picture.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPITAL SPENDING IN SCOTLAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TRANSPORT</th>
<th>HOUSING (incl. mortgages)</th>
<th>EDUCATION/LIBRARIES</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(£m at 1980 survey prices)*

These, it must be said, are the most dramatic cutbacks, since Capital Programmes must be approved by central government. The revenue side is, apart from housing revenue (down by a massive 60% since 1979), very different and has generally held up, with the exception of maintenance of council property and roads and non-statutory "frills" (such as pre-school and adult education, concessionary fares, aids to the disabled, home helps, etc). The "easy options" local authorities have so far been able to take at budget time could prove eventually, however, to have profound political consequences, in alienating the public support for local government it so desperately needs in the fights that lie ahead. Financial constraints and the legal powers which the Secretary of State has taken to block the loopholes which have been open to individual local authorities he dislikes are not, however, the end of it. The tying of housing capital allocations to the establishment by the District Councils of acceptable rent levels is a new infringement of local rights, as is the legislation on the sale of council houses and the Parents' Charter. Whatever these last may mean for the rhetoric of freedom, there is little doubt about the local social divisions they create.

**Effectiveness**

Local authority power is wanted not for its own sake nor for the amour propre of its holders but to give democratically elected local agencies a greater capacity to deal effectively with modern problems. And patently these problems have increased and diversified at a time when the resources at any rate have decreased.

Effectiveness, the second of Wheatley's criteria, does not flow necessarily from financial resources. It is not the same as efficiency which is simply the technical achievement of low costs. A concern for effectiveness is about ensuring that organisational resources make a reasonable contribution to the solution of problems in the community. It requires, according to the Wheatley Report, a concern for "value for money" and "coherent decision-making" but even more, a critical problem orientation which local government has still not developed, notwithstanding the existence of corporate planning and policy planning remits. Put more systematically, "solving" or "coping with" local problems involves people with varying degrees of money and skills pursuing policies of more or less coherence addressed, with...
varying degrees of enthusiasm and relevance, against problems defined with more or less precision in varying degrees of conjunction with other agencies. "Dealing more effectively with local problems" involves therefore a matter of changing resources (their level or pattern); policies; skills; relationships with other agencies; the definition of the problem.

Ten years ago there was a lot of optimistic talk about the scope for new approaches in local government, particularly about the greater "coherence" larger authorities could make of existing resources. Since then we have been fixated on the level of resources and have forgotten the other factors. I shall return to this later in the paper.

The key question for us to pose at the moment is whether local government services (notwithstanding the financial and legal constraints), by virtue of the new organisational arrangements, are better able to make sense of local problems and to respond to them relevantly and to effect.

This is really two separate questions: the first relating to the allocation of functions to local government and public agencies, the second, strangely neglected in political discussion, to how these functions (however allocated) are then managed and planned within the aggregate of local authorities.

The Two-Tier System

Notwithstanding Stodart(23), there are still grumbles about co-ordination between Districts and Regions. In some cases it is non-existent, in others fraught or creative depending not only on the personalities involved but the levels attempted. Passing the buck is, of course, a useful smokescreen for people to use for their own deficiencies, or those relating to shortage of cash. And the belief that one achieves co-ordination between two agencies more simply or more effectively by absorbing them into one organisation is a naive one(24). Agencies for example, such as housing, social work, have very different ideologies and concerns. Housing and social work officials and councillors were in conflict pre-reorganisation despite being within the same council in many places. If that conflict was resolved it was generally by the crude assertion of the dominant interest within the council, rather than by negotiation in the client interest(25). Since reorganisation, housing-social work relationships have improved immeasurably - particularly in Glasgow - largely because these differences could no longer be papered over and had to be negotiated.

Integration continues to be the watchword - housing and social work being the most quoted examples of functions that should be within one authority viz the District. It is, of course, the Districts who argue this way and it is certainly true that most Districts are of a size that could very competently handle social work. This was not, however, acceptable at the time to the social work profession who were quite clear that they had most to gain from being allocated to the Regions rather than continue to be treated as a soup-kitchen by those with a traditional housing mentality. Many people argued at the time that social work, being the most human of services, was one that should never certainly be given to an organisation the size of Strathclyde Region. Experience has shown just how wrong that was. Not only has social work progressed far more in that large Region (it has effectively been politicised) but the fatal predictions which were being made about Strathclyde could well have come true without the humanising influence of social work personnel both professional and political. All this, of course, is water under the bridge. The fact that in the decade both social work and Regions have benefitted from such an allocation does not necessarily mean that the separation of housing and social work will always make sense, particularly with the dramatic decline in the scale of the Districts' traditional housing function. It does, however, mean that those who wish to transfer social work to the housing authority do have to try to prove their case. It is not self-evident.

The other area where the present two-tier system has caused problems, and arguably more, is Planning. This was a function deliberately split by the legislation which has certainly generated a lot of conflict, particularly in relation to the long drawn-out process of the Structure Plan.

I have to say first that I don't quite understand why such conflict is intrinsically bad. Democracy is about choice and we
certainly saw a few important strategic issues being publicly discussed during this process for the first time. It is, of course, regrettable that the media coverage too often trivialises the issues. And it is equally true that some resentments and old scores were patently being settled by Planning officials during these processes on some issues moreover which left many politicians, let alone the public, yawning somewhat.

There is, however, a third area of conflict of greater significance than that of strategic planning which richly illustrates the old adage about too many cooks spoiling the broth, viz., leisure facilities. These involve not only the Recreation Departments of District Councils but also the Community Education sections of the Regions (and sometime even social group work in Social Work) and also many voluntary organisations. Curiously the combination of inter-organisational rivalry and "collusive neglect" which one finds in this area has not attracted press or public comment - perhaps because it relates to activities which do not enjoy high standing among the established professionals.

The area has a large number of well-intentioned people casting their nets so widely that they sometime seem to be spending more time trying to untie their fankled nets than bringing in fish. Again, however, I would have to say that there are no simple solutions to this problem. Pre-school services, for example, despite being the responsibility of one local authority type, the Regions, also have problems Education and Social Work are dug into entrenched positions to the cost of parents and young children. Inasmuch, too, as the Health Board is also involved (as well as the S.P.P.A.), this raises the whole question of democratic control of our quangos if we are to make more sense of the local pattern of their spending of public agencies.

This is now being raised as an issue again in England by such prestigious figures as John Stewart of INLOGOV and has been submitted in evidence by the Western Isles authority to the Committee of Inquiry into the functions of Islands Councils(26). It is certainly an issue worth persevering with, although clearly a long-term one.

In the short-term, experience has demonstrated that there are creative ways of working across the boundaries of agencies, particularly at a local level. Clearly the liaison committees which the neat bureaucratic mind sees as the means of achieving such coordination are generally counter-productive, serving essentially as a means of reaffirming on each side the rectitude of their distinctive positions and the deficiencies of the other organisations. They certainly do not allow the creative search for local answers to common problems. Where, however, elected members have chosen to challenge such structure, and take charge of more localised "missions", there is generally a better story to tell.

Some of the most interesting work is to be found in Strathclyde - not so much the highly publicised GEAR which, in many ways, is a bit of a dinosaur(27). It is rather in such things as the jointly negotiated District-Region Area Initiatives established in 1978 in seven areas of priority treatment involving the joint appointment by both authorities of an Area Co-ordinator(28). Since 1981 there have been several joint economic initiatives involving District, Region and SDA. We have also seen a plethora of local enterprise trusts. Where, therefore, the aims are clear, agreed and important and professional jealousies absent, boundaries do not appear to cause trouble. Even when this is not the case however progress can be made if the political will is there. Fourteen neighbourhoods, for example, were selected in 1982 by the Strathclyde Member/Officer Group on Pre-5 Services as being particularly deficient in these services and local link groups of social work, health, education and voluntary organisations were established to improve the services with a combination of re-organisation of local arrangements and urban aid money(29). Equally there are some 20 areas which enjoy the presence of Area Development Teams - a simple device of the local councillors heading a team of local officials and community activists to pursue a manageable number of local improvements. The experience of the last two years offers some helpful lessons of what can be achieved across boundaries when clear and manageable targets are identified and pursued creatively and determinedly by an authoritative group with a local base.

In conclusion, therefore, while the two-tier system in Scotland patently works, it has its problems. A system of all-purpose
authorities is probably more achievable than Wheatley indicated but would not, of itself, solve these sorts of problems, not least because many important services are now with non-elected quangos. In the meantime, if those few who complain about the system chose to spend more time in creative joint endeavours and less in peddling vested interests of their own organisations, particularly through the local press, even more progress would be made. More positively the two-tier system has allowed some overdue political specialisation. District councillors have been able to concentrate on the overdue radical changes needed in housing management and the provision of a wide range of appropriate responses to a variety of housing needs which were being neglected. Regional councillors equally are beginning to face up to the need to make such empires as education and social work (let alone police) more accountable both to themselves and to the community.

Management and Policy-making

I mentioned at the start the innovations in certain English local authorities in the late 1960s which, in conjunction with the work of the Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University, led to the wholesale adoption by the new Scottish local authorities of the organisational paraphernalia of corporate management, viz:

- Policy committees - to ensure an end to departmentalisation and incrementalism
- Appointment of Chief Executive Officers - to guide the new strategic thinking and to enforce the political will on the authority as a whole
- A smaller number of programme-based committees and departments served by inter-departmental working parties

With hindsight it is amazing how naive and trusting we were. The notion that by creating corporate structures you change anything is naive. If service departments and committees no longer enjoy the power and self-esteem they once did, this has far more to do with cuts, fewer clients and greater competition than policy committees and policy planning units. To be fair, most adherents of the corporate gospel appreciated that the management structures were simply the basic tools, and that everything depended on the blueprint (and, they might have added, the skills). Scottish Office, immediately set the new authorities new tasks to flex their strategic muscles on. Since 1976 they have been required to produce Regional Reports, Structure Plans and Transport Plans and Programmes (a Regional responsibility) and Housing Plans (the Districts) - all concerned to ensure that local authorities were looking at the impact of their activities on specific problems or aims. Arguably these should have given rise to new policy initiatives; there have, however, been four fundamental problems about these devices. Firstly, they are increasingly compartmentalised at a time when the importance of inter-agency linkages are obvious. Secondly, they have a technical bias in as much as social plans have no real place in what, in Scotland, has been called the "family of plans". Thirdly, they are increasingly professional both in their origin, their processes and concerns and exclude not only the public but the local politicians who, despite all the lip service during the decade about the importance of earlier political input into policy making, are generally brought into these things only at the last moment, confronting a volume of jargon which is so daunting that very few politicians even bother to read the documents. Finally, they are increasingly arid inasmuch as one must really question the extent to which they influence real events.

In a sense they are, with the exception of the housing plans, the last remains of the Scottish Office planning ambitions and the sooner local authorities cut loose from them the better. Etzioni, discussing the basic political issue of how you get other people to do what you want, suggested a long time ago there were essentially three basic methods - the carrot, the stick and what he called "normative compliance" viz., insinuating your concerns and perceptions into others without their realising it. There is a whole professional and academic network which has been doing this in relation to the "rationalistic" planning processes imposed on local authorities.

This takes me nicely to the basic aspects of local democracy - the power, that is, of elected members in relation to full-time officials.

Local Democracy

Confusion and ambivalence is evident when people within local
government try to identify the exercise and location of power. Power is something most people would wish to have, but fewer to be seen to have. Those who have it generally deny it; those who don't (like Lord Provosts) try to flaunt it. It can be all very confusing, and largely semantic: There are different sorts of power, and the most visible, veto power, is arguably the most limited, practised generally by groups united only in their opposition to a particular proposal(35). Individuals who have real power tend to exercise it in less visible ways, particularly at the early stages of decision making before issues get polarised. Many people fail to appreciate that decision making has separate stages; that indeed reflects the successful exercise of power by certain people(36).

Officials are able to exercise considerable influence within local authorities because they have a recognised expertise in a specialised area of activity which, unlike councillors, they have the time to concentrate on. They control, in a fairly detailed way, the sort of information flow which their nominal masters receive (as well as knowing the stage a discussion has reached). They have security of tenure (too much) in a way that councillors certainly do not, and most professionals certainly have a social standing (declining) which again is not the case for councillors or bureaucrats(37). On the other hand it is councillors who have the legal authority to take decisions (which all too often they are threatened into surrendering - "we'll lose this excellent quote unless you approve it today") and also have a range of personal skills and political bases which can be used to good effect, but very seldom are, not least because of their policy and organisational incoherence.

In discussing in this way the sources of power, one gets some pointers towards the means of increasing the influence of elected members in local government. It is certainly my view that this is needed, not the crude, unthinking assertion, however, of political dogma or personal prejudice, but rather the considered intervention of lay people to ensure appropriate initiatives.

There is considerable confusion about the role and function of councillors. Councillors themselves certainly get no help in thinking this through(38). I reckon it took me 14 years to realise that my job as a councillor is essentially to ask awkward questions, to resolve the policy and resource conflicts that no-one else will or can, to help break log jams that increasingly build up between vested interests, and to try to determine the key issues to which the authority should be bending its mind, energies and money.

If councillors wish to alter what is currently a very unequal balance of power (despite or indeed perhaps because of the apparent power of a privileged few of their number) the previous discussion suggests a wide range of possibilities, viz: increasing their skills; increasing the coherence of their organisations and aims; increasing the time to do the job, e.g. some full-time councillors; rearranging existing time; increasing the administrative help; altering structures.

This is not the place to discuss the first two of these but a few comments are called for on the others. The last ten years have seen major advances in the facilities available to councillors(39). Pre-reorganisation the average councillor was lucky to be given a seat (although sycophancy was in plentiful supply). Now typing and postage facilities are taken for granted, seminar facilities increasingly demanded. Responsibility allowances for those councillors carrying particularly crucial responsibilities, despite their risible level (£1,251 a year for being a Chairman of Europe's largest Social Work Committee) are at least recognition in principle that running a big business with some modicum of democratic control is not done on the same basis as lording it over a small burgh. But there is some considerable way still to go, not just in the improvement of facilities but in the development of political structures appropriate to the task of representing the community.

I have already touched on the perversities of the policy planning processes we saw develop in the 1970s, most of which, with the exception of the housing plans, diverted political attention and energies down blind alleys. Many councillors have sensed the gigantic irrelevance but have lacked the self confidence to cry "The Emperor has no clothes". The production of these bland, earnest and ultimately dangerous tomes does, however, nicely crystallise what I regard as a central problem today for local authorities (from which the others flow) - its over-professionalisation. This has developed to the extent that it is not just councillors who do not understand such
technocratic activities; the professionals in many cases cannot any longer communicate with one another. And this largely reflects developments outside local government in, for example, our academic institutions(40).

Local government has, over the years, recruited a series of experts and organised increasingly highly-paid bureaucracies around them whose activities have seemed to many to consist largely of taking one another’s washing in. Councillors have not been able, or willing, to control such developments since the structures they inhabit have been established, if not colonised, by the professionals. The agenda of committees reflects the concerns of local and central civil servants, not local people and politicians. A committee exists to service a department, not to control it. Behind the illusion of democratic control lies the old departmentalisation. It is a most curious fact that a councillor is elected very often because of his desire to help a neighbourhood or to fight a particular issue, and is immediately thrown into a complex and alienating structure which treats those concerns as illegitimate.

Generally, it must be said, those things which cause councillors and the public most concern - problems relating to youngsters, access to building, don’t easily get on committee agendas. This is either because they are not statutory or because so many departments are involved in these problems that there is a collusion of silence. They are low in the priority of professionals partly because of budget pressures, partly because they lack the skills, and partly because they pose sensitive rivalries. They, therefore, tend to fall into the cracks between committees.

In addition there are problems relating to the group dynamics involved in such a process. The problems of the committee system can be briefly stated. First, its size, particularly in the large urban authorities with up to 15 or 20 councillors and around a dozen officers, is about three times the effective number for creative group dynamics(41).

Second, its role is to take decisions. Councillors become impatient with colleagues who question fundamental issues and are generally keen to move on to the "next business".

Problems of accountability also rise, often because the proliferation of committees and their operating techniques do not allow the public to establish easily who has taken a particular decision, and why(42).

Anyone who is naive enough to want to change things in local government comes up against certain deep-rooted traditions and values, e.g. organisational hierarchies; belief in the uniformity of services; and respect for professional 'expertise'(43). All of these, and more, are sustained by the committee system.

Recent Innovations

Over the past five years, there have been two promising developments - member-officer task forces and area/neighbourhood committees(44). While these new mechanisms have had some clear successes in terms of improved service delivery, the difficulty has been that they are generally grafted on to the existing system and consequently require more time and energy. Even more significantly, they all challenge the basic traditions and values inherent in local government.

Space does not permit a proper exploration of these experiences or their lessons for new structures. Very briefly, however, the member-officer groups have the following characteristics:

"(i) Members and officers are working as equals in a task-oriented framework.

(ii) New policies are assumed to derive from such a joint search and not from circulars, professional or political prejudice.

(iii) New emphasis is given politically to the process of implementation.

What, however, is just as important is the satisfaction both councillors and officials derived from this experience, the former developing specialised areas of knowledge, having the opportunity to explore issues in depth and making field visits with a central purpose. This is what they had come into local government for not to be cannon fodder in committees. Field and middle management equally now felt they had some involvement in policy-making. The dynamics of
the inter-relationship have also been crucial, with mutual respect growing as skills and understanding developed (45)."

These and some equivalent area structures are effective recognition that local government structures are now outdated. While they may be reasonably good at routine management and the development of departmental services, they are incapable of assessing the impact of local authority policies on client groups and neighbourhoods and exploring creative solutions to problems. What is required is political rather than administrative change. Our system at the moment encourages councillors to think they are surrogate managers. They should be given proper support for (a) their local representative role and (b) for the critical review of a policy area that interests them. Councillors are certainly exposed to far more opportunities for learning, both skills and substantive knowledge, for such representative and critical roles than the surrogate manager one.

A structure built on these lines would also recognise the diverse characteristics of individual councillors (46). Some want to and are able to be full-time. Others cannot and would be happy to concentrate on ward work or the more analytical and critical performance review. There are, at least, three major jobs our local democratic system would require to be done if it is to be effective and responsive, i.e., the local representative; strategic management; and critical review. Our existing structures however neither recognise this nor ensure that time and resources are available for these tasks. That, I would suggest, is the critical problem we must tackle in the 1980s.

It would, of course, ultimately entail the relaxing of the legislation which prevents local authorities from organising certain education and social work functions on an integrated basis and requires them instead to be dealt with by Committees. There are, of course, ways around a veto, and have been taken, for example, by Strathclyde Region on Community Development and by Leeds Council in relation to the Pre-S Services. But they can be awkward administratively.

Involvement and Accountability

Local Government, as Wheatley put it, should

"bring the people into the process of reaching the decisions as much as possible: and enable these decisions to be made intelligible to the people."

Ours is, of course, a representative system of democracy. Some would argue that bringing people into the process essentially means strengthening the people's representatives, that is councillors, i.e., the views of the ordinary person to be (or to feel) more involved in municipal affairs than the representative model would allow (now only once every four years) and would, therefore, wish to build in devices that signal his opinions on specific matters to decision makers.

Some would argue that there is a contradiction between greater political power on the one hand and community involvement on the other, on the basis that one threatens the other. This view sees political power as a zero-sum game, and any increase in the influence of pressure groups or in community action as being at the expense of the traditional role of the Councillor.

Certainly for Councillors who see their role as surrogate manager, pressure groups are threatening. Those, however, who see their role as "brokers" of change see pressure group activity as grist to their mill, giving them the arguments and legitimacy for their political activities within the Council.

The trouble is that too few people seem to have the patience to fight. Too many fail to appreciate that power and influence has to be earned the hard way. It does not come, for example, by virtue of being a member of a Community Council with 5% perhaps of electoral support, or even councillors with 25%.

I should at this stage indicate my own unease about Community Councils. Ten years ago 1 spoke in their favour. Given the autocratic attitudes which then prevailed in local government, and the lack of neighbourhood structures, they seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to assert one of the missing components in local government - the neighbourhood component. We should have known that you cannot achieve community involvement through structures imposed by statute. Genuine community involvement is threatening and spontaneous. The various
statutory bodies which exist such as Community Councils, School Councils and Health Councils are generally cosy little clubs, with all the worst features of local government and no particular relationship with the community they purport to represent.(40).

Having said all this however, the one thing recent developments have done is to ensure that more information is made available and that people are alerted at an early stage to proposals which would have a negative impact on them, such as traffic management proposals and school closures. There is certainly less excuse now for citizens being ignorant of local government affairs. Not only does the media give more coverage to local council activities but many local authorities have taken to publishing a variety of material, including municipal newspapers.

Those interested in genuine involvement and accountability should however be looking critically at the language and format of information from local government to the public (and media), about what it is trying/proposing to do and at the time and priority councillors give to collective discussions with community organisations generally, and to explaining decisions in particular.

In my experience the media and councillors all too often fail the public by not even attempting to give the background to decisions which go against local opinion, or simply look daft.

Let me make a simple suggestion on this, that local authorities should institute three sorts of annual reports.

(a) By Councillors to their ward: one of the traditions my own town dropped at reorganisation was the practice of councillors giving an account of their stewardship at the annual ratepayers' meeting each April before the election campaign got under way.

(b) By Departments to their Committee: At the moment it is ironic that it is only officials such as Police, Consumer Protection and Environmental Health who give Annual Reports.

(c) By the Council to the Public: Many newspapers give their Provost and Convenor space at New Year for "regal" greetings. Surely it is not beyond the wit and skills of the talent employed by local authorities to produce something between such cliches on the one hand, and the turgid prose of structure plans and TPPs on the other. A simple statement of the key problems facing the authority and what is being attempted in the forthcoming year would be a great help. Such suggestions are the bare minimum of the sort of change we need if we are to have genuine involvement and accountability.(49).

Conclusion

Taking stock of local government ten years after major reorganisation, particularly when one has been so deeply involved oneself, is a highly individual process.

Many people will perhaps be surprised by the particular balance I have struck with virtually no mention of the struggle which has been waged during the latter half of the period on the basic right of local authorities to determine their own rates.

I have chosen however, quite deliberately, to concentrate on neglected issues. The media, let alone previous issues of the Scottish Government Yearbook, have given detailed coverage to the central/local conflict to the exclusion of most of what I would regard as the real issues relating to local democracy. "Local democracy", bear in mind, is when "an elected council is genuinely in charge of the local situation". The attacks we are now seeing, on what little power local government has left, is not a sudden thing. It is the logical culmination of a deep ambivalence, if not contempt, felt by most people in central government (regardless of political affiliation) for the principles and aspirations of local government.(50). With Bruce Millan in the mid-1970s there was actually the beginnings of a real dialogue between central and local government that bore some resemblance to the concept of "partnership"(51). Had that climate and commitment continued we might now be spending time not in a rearguard defence of the status quo, but in creating some of the preconditions of genuine local democracy such as local income tax; incorporating such quangos as the MSC and Health Boards into local government; giving elected councillors the tools to do the job(52). That, in turn, would be leading us inevitably to reshape the
Crisis is an overworked word, but there is little doubt of the crisis that faces Scottish Local Government in 1984, and equally little doubt that we have not, in local government, so far found the strategy to withstand it. One of the reasons is the ambivalence of those who have the time to fight the battle, i.e. parliamentarians and senior officials. My argument has been that the seeds of the present crisis were sown a long time ago, not just 20 years ago when Scottish Office first issued its White Paper on reorganising local government but at least 40 years ago in some of the assumptions of the apparatus of the Welfare State. Embedded in that were technocratic assumptions which had no place for local community control. Education and Police, who have never really seen themselves as belonging to local government, are simply the most extreme examples. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, let alone the Miscellaneous Provisions Act (1981), have both been about making it easier for central government to control local authorities. But these have been only parts of a series of such disabling acts. The establishment and growth of MSC, Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones represent a clear indication of the view that the Whitehall 'Fat Cats' have of local democratic control.

What is less evident is how insidious their control has been of the way local authorities have seen their role and their daily tasks. It was civil servants (central and local) who thought up and produced the Paterson Report on Management and Political Structures for the new local authorities which, I have argued, are so irrelevant for tackling the problems of the 1980s and which certainly don't help us control the excesses of professionalisation.

It was civil servants who dreamed up the new planning system which kept officials and some councillors so busy during the 1970s. And the networks of many senior local authority staff commit them as much, if not more, to central government than to local people and their representatives. It is that network that must change if there is to be any future for local democracy.

I do not pretend to know what the defence strategy of local government should be, faced with what now seems to be the final onslaught on its powers and existence. Certainly, however, it would seem obvious that we should come together politically to explore rigorously the real nature of the crisis and our response. This has not been done. In a sense we lost the argument about local democracy a long time ago. Indeed I am not even sure whether it was ever conducted. The forthcoming battle looks more like Custer's Last Stand i.e., about whether the defeated will die with dignity.

There is, it must be said, a curious mis-match between the rhetoric of the fight and what people in local government are spending their time on. Life carries on as before. And that, I would argue reflects the way councillors have been seduced by local government culture and structures. It is still a cosy little club having a dialogue with itself. The public are not really aware of what is going on and are somewhat confused about all the talk of crisis. Of course they can cuts, restrictions on access to schools for example, but they increasingly resent the protection which local government staff have apparently been given from the exigencies of the modern world(53) a resentment which is all the greater when they experience the local government system an occasion as so incompetent and unaccountable. And the more senior and highly paid the job generally the more incompetently, as the Peter principle would tell us, it is done!

Paradoxically the very brutality of the destruction of the last pretence of local autonomy could supply the long needed stimulus to local political action. Now that local government has so few powers left, elected people have had their management role removed and can only justify themselves if they start playing a proper political role in relation both to the professional system and to the public generally. This, however, will call for a new understanding of the nature and potential of local government(54) and some new skills.

The problems local authorities face in the 1980s were never envisaged by the Wheatley Commissioners almost 20 years ago. Officials have had no training to deal with them and inhabit traditional structures whose assumptions are rooted in the pre-war era. A heavy responsibility, therefore, rests with elected members to create some sense from an increasingly nonsensical world. At the moment there is a
quite criminal mis-match between the richness of the resources at the
disposal of a variety of local agencies (only some of which are
elected) and the problems of those localities. Some political
authority is needed to make sense of this at a local level. The public
don't care who does it. Local authorities are the easy scapegoats
for the problem and nonsenses we face and are clearly being set up by
central government. If they wish to survive, it is crucial they change
their agenda and direct themselves more to the difficult and long-
term process of so altering the relationship between local government
(and its disparate elements) and local people, that the latter would
actually notice and care if and when local government were no longer
with us.

References

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3. The New Scottish Local Authorities: organisation and management.
   (E&SO 1973).
4. See The Right to a Decent House, Syd Jacobs (Routledge & Kegan
   Paul 1976) and Change and Conflict by B & K Bryant (Aberdeen
   Press 1981) both of which cover community action in Glasgow in the early
1970s.
5. See the Policy Review Group Report on Community Development by
   Strathclyde Region (1978) and the two issues of Strathclyde Studies in
   Community Work.
6. See the two major documents from COSLA - The COSLA Critique (1981)
   and A time to listen: a time to speak out (1982), and the article by
7. Representative of the prevailing thinking is The Sociology of
8. In Deschooling Society (Penguin 1973) and Tenants Take Over
   (Architectural Press 1974) respectively.
9. For an excellent overview of the critique of professionalism and its
   lack of accountability in our present system, see Christopher
   Pollitt's 'Professionals and Public Policy', delivered at the 1981
   RIPA Annual Conference.
10. See Urban Economic Development, edited by K Young and C Mason,
    (Macmillan 1983), for a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of
    action.
11. See Strathclyde Region's recent review of its deprivation strategy
    since 1976, viz A Social Strategy for the 1980s; and my article "A
    Little Local Inequality" in the recent book on Urban Poverty in
    Scotland, ed. by G. Brown M.P.
12. Which has once again come on the local political agenda - with
    highly publicised (but brief) initiatives in Walsall. In the late
    1970s Area Management was encouraged by the Department of the
    Environment (see the INLOGOV evaluations) and influenced the Area
    Initiatives of Strathclyde Region as well as the Area Management
    System of Glasgow District.
13. Taken from FORUM 3 (the Local Government Unit newsletter).
14. p.294 of Dilemmas of Social Reform by P Harris and M Rein (Penguin
15. This is being attempted in the work of people such as P Dunleavy - see
16. See the various Local Government Unit occasional Papers for a
    description and analysis.
17. See I Bowen Rees' withering critique in his sadly neglected
    Government by Community (Barry Rose, 1971).
18. Ptom 'Local Government in Scotland: some subversive reflections',
    J M Ross, Minedd paper, Centre for Study of Public Policy.
    Strathclyde University. The Reorganisation of British Local Government
    by John Hastie (Cambridge University Press, 1979); also "Reforming
    the Grass Roots: an alternative analysis" by L Sharpe in Policy and
19. See "The Scottish Local Government Bill" by M Keating in Local
20. See English Local Government Reform by B Wood and J Redcliffe
    Maud, (OUP, 1974).
21. See, "Is Small Necessarily Beautiful?" by F Newton, (Centre for
    the Study of Public Policy). Also John Stewart's most recent
    publication.
23. Committee of Inquiry into Local Government in Scotland, Cmd. 8115
24. As has been well documented by the numerous studies of
    "reorganisation", few of whose lessons sadly seem to be appreciated by
    reformists. A very useful recent publication (American) is Federal
    Reorganisation - what have we learned? by P Stanton (Chatham House
    Pubs. Inc., 1981). See also Understanding Organisations by C Handy
    (Penguin 1976).
25. See Housing and Social Work: a joint approach, (The Morris Report,
    HMSO, 1975).
26. Community Government in the Western Isles: submission by Western


33. in Chapter 5 of his Social Problems, (Prentice Hall, 1976).


37. One of the few sustained explorations of this question is Second City Politics by K Newton, (Oxford 1976).

38. The focus of the work of the Local Government Unit at Paisley College of Technology has, over the years, been the roles of and relationships between citizens, councillors and officials: our concern both to increase the traffic across these boundaries and to change the boundaries.


42. See A Headless State - the unaccountable executive in local government by D Regan, (University of Nottingham 1980).

43. For an elaboration of this argument read John Stewart's The Governance of the Conurbations, (1979).

44. See "From Programme Budgeting to Policy Analysis", C Skelcher, Public Administration, Summer 1980.

45. Taken from my article "The Management of Political Innovation" in Local Government Studies, November/December 1981, which elaborates the arguments as well as detailing the Strathclyde experience and its implications.

46. Local Politics in Britain by John Oxford, (Croom Helm, 1976), is a useful summary of the literature. We are in the Local Government Unit now undertaking a major survey on this in relation to Scottish councillors.

47. Para 48 of the Wheatley Report (p. 44).

48. The literature on participation is now legion. A coherent, critical and practical study is Neighbourhood Participation by Peter Hain, (Temple Smith 1980).

49. Proportional representation is now a fashionable topic of discussion at a national level and it is interesting that it has not really raised itself at a local level. A remarkable feature of organisation was the way in which, with minimal discussion, a system of quadrennial elections was introduced - replacing annual elections (one third out) and triennial elections for county councils. It is interesting that when the 1981 Miscellaneous Provisions Act debate was at its height, Willie Ross, the ex-Secretary of State for Scotland, suggested that annual elections be reintroduced to ensure that no-one had any doubt about the views of the local public about current and contentious issues.

Equally one might suggest that the introduction of proportional representation would ensure that the views of the election were reflected, perhaps in something like 70% of the Councillors at election time having no previous experience of local government. Such major shifts certainly do not reflect public opinion and are not particularly good for the balance of political power in the local authority.

50. See the excellent analysis - Ten Billion Pounds - Whitehall's Takeover of the Town Halls by Tony Travers and Tyrrell Burgess. (Grant McIntyre 1980).

51. See the Layfield Report for an extended discussion of this much abused term. (Cmd. 6453 1976).

52. i.e. proper facilities and remuneration. I write this in some bitterness in the aftermath of the Commons' outrageous vote on their own pay. They forget that most Councillors work as hard as they do and have greater responsibilities.

53. see the special survey commissioned by NALGO and leaked in the 25th March, 1983 issue of The Guardian.

54. It is salutary to recognise how influential French local authorities have apparently been, despite their low spending base, because of the interpenetration of its central/local political and administrative elites. See British Dogmatism and French Pragmatism, by D. Ashford, (Allen & Unwin, 1982).