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## THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN A DEMOCRACY

I.—An address before the combined Annual Meeting of the  
Citizens' Research Institute of Canada and Bureau of Muni-  
cipal Research, Toronto, April 24th, 1945.

Speaker: PROFESSOR HAROLD A. INNIS, PH.D., F.R.S.C.

Subject: DEMOCRACY AND THE FREE CITY.

II.—An address before the 45th Annual Meeting of the Ontario  
Municipal Association, September 2nd, 1943.

Speaker: PROFESSOR J. A. CORRY, LL.B., B.C.L., F.R.S.C.

Subject: THE PLACE OF MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS  
IN A DEMOCRACY.

III.—From the Year Book of the Citizens' Research Institute of  
Canada, April, 1945.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT THE TRAINING GROUND  
OF DEMOCRACY.

HORACE L. BRITAIN, M.A., PH.D.

## FOREWORD

This war is being fought to preserve the freedom of the individual. One aspect of this freedom is the right to participate effectively in government.

At the time it was established, the Citizens' Research Institute of Canada announced as its foundation principle that "the only sure basis of democratic government is informed and active citizenship". For a quarter of a century all its activities have been based on this principle, and no activity has been undertaken which has not contributed directly or indirectly to building up a body of enlightened citizenship.

Information as to public affairs is of vital importance, but no matter how detailed or extensive it may be, it is not enough. It is a truism that we best learn by doing. Theoretical information as to citizenship can only be digested and made effective by the practice of citizenship in a laboratory of public affairs.

Canadian citizens have available three such laboratories — local, provincial and federal.

The first of these is most important from the standpoint of training in citizenship, because

### **Local Government the best laboratory of citizenship**

(1) the processes of local government are carried on under the eyes of all citizens

(2) the services it renders touch the individual directly at more points

(3) the citizen can, if he or she will, take part in it, not only at election time but continuously

(4) It makes readily available more first-hand illustrative material as a basis for instruction in public affairs in the elementary and secondary schools.

### **Fascism and local popular institutions cannot exist together**

The distrust of local popular institutions by fascist authorities was well founded from their respective standpoints. If we wish to maintain the health of national and provincial government we must preserve and further strengthen vigorous local popular institutions.

Cities from the time of Ancient Greece and Municipal In-



stitutions from the time of Ancient Rome have had a glorious record in the spread of civilization and culture.

If democracy is not to wither at its root, the maintenance of the vitality of local political institutions is essential.

The addresses and article contained in this publication present in more detail the arguments for the maintenance and strengthening of local representative institutions.

## I. DEMOCRACY AND THE FREE CITY

PROF. HAROLD A. INNIS, Ph.D.

At the Combined Annual Meeting of the Citizens' Research Institute of Canada and The Bureau of Municipal Research.

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen and friends. I am very grateful for the honour of being asked to speak at your annual meeting and for the opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the work of your organizations and of Dr. Brittain. It is a work of deep concern not only to this city and to other cities in Canada but also to modern democracies and western civilization. I know of no more crucial problem in responsible government than that of governing cities. The solution of the problems of democratic government rests in the cities.

It will be unnecessary to emphasize the significance of this work to you but I am not sure that even you realize the role of the city in Western Civilization. You will remember that when the King visits the city of London he must be admitted at Temple Bar by the mayor. This is the continuation of a custom suggesting how very strongly the city held its privileges. It not only resented the intrusion of the Crown, it also insisted that even parliament had limitations. Wilkes would not have been able to win the great struggle for freedom of the press against parliament without the solid support of the city of London and its insistence on its rights.

The tradition of the city continued from Athens to the Roman empire, which was built on municipal institutions, and to the cities which survived the Roman empire and broke the power of feudalism by their ability to compel the concession of privileges. But aside from Florence according to Burckhardt "these later centres were never anything but courts, residences, etc. Florence alone could vie with Athens." The glory of the city tradition reflected from Athens has never been more glowingly presented than in the funeral speech of Pericles in words which are particularly apt at this moment.

"For we have compelled every land and every sea to open a path for our valour, and have everywhere planted eternal memorials of our friendship and of our enmity. Such is the city for whose sake these men nobly fought and died; they could not bear the thought that she might be taken from them; and every one of us who survive should gladly toil on her behalf. I would have you day by day fix your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become filled with the love of her; and when you are impressed by the spectacle of her glory, reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it, who in the hour of conflict had the fear of dishonour always present to them, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but freely gave their lives to her as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast. The sacrifice which they collectively made was individually repaid to them; for they received again and again each one for himself a praise which grows not old and the noblest of all sepulchres — I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion both in word and deed. For the whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men. Make them your example."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J. B. Bury, *A History of Greece*, Jowett's translation.



The free cities which emphasized commerce and peace included Venice, the members of the Hanseatic league, the cities of the Netherlands and finally London. Against the clergy, the army, the monarchy and the nobility, the burghers, the bourgeois, the traders tenaciously fought their way to compromises. So long as defence was stronger than attack the walled city became the oasis of freedom but with the invention of gun powder attack became stronger than defence and the city was dominated by nationalism and centralization. On the continent the traditions of the Roman empire persisted in Roman law and the strength of the army. In English speaking countries the common law and the strength of the navy permitted the city to become the centre of commerce and finance. "Under Roman law the citizen exists for the benefit of the state. Under English law the state exists for the benefit of the citizen. Under Roman law the affairs of the people are an active concern of government. Under English law the affairs of government are an active concern of the people. Roman law is an institution of imperialism. English law is an institution of democracy. The best modern example of government under Roman law is Prussia. . . . These two conflicting systems cannot be permanently reconciled. . . .<sup>1</sup>

London and New York as the great centres of Anglo-Saxon civilization supported by naval strength have become the great rulers in the interest of commerce and peace. A large number of cities have grown up in their tradition and western civilization finds its great bulwark in them. The dangers of democracy can be illustrated in their problems. London suffered because of its centralization of trade, and government. New centres became jealous and the rivalries of Europe, Paris of which Courier said "only Paris has laws" and in which the problem of centralization in Europe has always been acute, Berlin, Rome, and before the last war Vienna, as the centres of courts, created the atmosphere of new wars. New centres were created after the last war to offset the large centres of the continent including Prague, Buda-Pest, Warsaw. Leningrad and Moscow emerged farther east.

In the new world the jealousy of cities favoured the growth of federalism. Washington, Ottawa, Canberra were chosen at points distant from the large centres and each has built up its type of control over larger cities. The comment of an Australian that a fifth freedom should be added "Freedom from Canberra" will be echoed in the United States and Canada. The jealousies have brought their own problems including the growth of the political machine in large centres as a means of linking them up with the capitals. New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, illustrated what Lincoln Steffens called in his series of muckraking articles "The shame of the cities." I shall carefully avoid any reference to Canadian cities at least to machines in Canadian cities.

The power of cities in federal systems can however be shown very clearly in Canada. Montreal through the Bank of Montreal, took an active interest in the construction of the Canadian Pacific railway — the first transcontinental railway. Toronto through the Canadian Bank of Commerce became actively concerned in the construction of a rival system the Canadian Northern, and Quebec City, with the support of Sir Wilfred Laurier, in the construction of the National Transcontinental and the Grand Trunk Pacific. Halifax has contested with St. John for a larger share of terminal traffic. In the new cities Winnipeg fought a valiant battle against Toronto, and in turn Regina and Saskatoon in the wheat pool

days opposed the Winnipeg press and the Winnipeg grain trade. Calgary and Edmonton fostered the great revolt which broke out in social credit. Vancouver, without the initial independence of San Francisco, has been active in demanding such things as more favourable freight rates. The political divisiveness of Canada has been in part a result of the growth of new cities. I understand a questionnaire has been sent out asking why Toronto is hated. The answer in part is the same as why Winnipeg is hated and why each centre hates the other. But all these hatreds are somehow focussed on Toronto. New areas strenuously endeavour to enhance their strength by exploiting grievances against Toronto and grievances persist so long as they are a vested interest and capable of exploiting.

The political problem of the modern city is the problem of democracy. Jealousy between cities enables central power groups to play one off against the other and to dominate. Divide and rule. Nationalism has become a great threat to the city and whether a solution can be found at San Francisco in the international field remains to be seen. With nationalism has come centralized military power and whether the problems of the army and the navy and air force, the problems of continents, oceans and air can be solved remains also for a solution at San Francisco. How far an enthusiasm for an international order can be expected to offset the fanaticism of nationalism remains to be seen. The fundamental problem of government is essentially that of law, order and freedom and in this specialized groups have their limitations. The lawyer plays an important part in government but his limitations are obvious.

"Of law-bred statesmen (if they have had practice at the bar) the peculiar merit is a more strenuous application of their minds to business than is often to be found in others. But they labour under no light counterpoise of peculiar demerit. It is a truth, though it may seem at first sight like a paradox, that in the affairs of life the reason may pervert the judgment. The straightforward view of things may be lost by considering them too closely and too curiously. When a naturally acute faculty of reasoning has had that high cultivation which the study and practice of the law affords, the wisdom of political, as well as of common life, will be to know how to lay it aside, and on proper occasions to arrive at conclusions by a grasp; substituting for a chain of arguments that almost unconscious process by which persons of strong natural understanding get right upon questions of common life, however in the art of reasoning unexercised.

"The fault of a law-bred mind lies commonly in seeing too much of the question, not seeing its parts in their due proportions, and not knowing how much of material to throw overboard in order to bring a subject within the compass of human judgment. In large matters largely entertained, the symmetry and perspective in which they should be presented to the judgment requires that some considerations should be as if unseen by reason of their smallness and that some distant bearings should dwindle into nothing. A lawyer will frequently be found busy in much pinching of a case and no embracing of it — in rooting and grunting and tearing up the soil to get at a grain of the subject; — in short, he will often aim at a degree of completeness and exactness which is excellent in itself, but altogether disproportionate to the dimensions of political affairs, or at least to those of certain classes of them."<sup>1</sup> The merchant is timid and by virtue of his training slow to see the broad implications of the problems of government and civilization.

<sup>1</sup>Heaton, John L. *The Story of a Page* (New York & London, 1913).

<sup>1</sup>Taylor, Sir Henry, *Notes From Life — The Statesman* (Author's edition, p. 385.)



One has only to note the shortsighted, stupid, suicidal attitudes of some business men to party organization and to universities to realize how limited they are in the fields of government. Perhaps one is compelled to recognize the saying of Count Oxenstiern, "My son you little know with what little wisdom the world is governed." In such organizations as we have represented before us wisdom and rationality can be applied and the fanaticisms which dominate political problems can be checked. The support of citizens to these organizations tempers their own fanaticism. It was Talleyrand who said "Above all — no zeal." The fanaticism of party, religion, race, professions, nationalism, and militarism must somehow be met in the government of the city first and last and after that little is left of world problems. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings."

## II. THE PLACE OF MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS IN A DEMOCRACY

Address Before 43rd Annual Meeting of the Ontario Municipal Association.

By J. A. CORRY, LL.B., B.C.L., F.R.S.C.

Professor of Political Science, Queen's University

The theme on which I have been asked to speak is not a new one. It used to be a commonplace that local self-government through municipal institutions was a necessary foundation for the practice of democracy. It is scarcely a commonplace today because a large number of highly vocal people seem to have concluded that democracy can only be preserved by continual expansion of the powers of central governments at the expense of local governments and other unregulated sectors of life. They complain of the failure of local governments to make substantial improvements in social conditions without which the people perish. They insist that most local governments are unprogressive — they stand rooted in the ancient ways. Many of them are condemned to impotence through financial weakness. They cannot — or will not — employ the expert administrative and scientific personnel so necessary for the conduct of government today. They cannot deal with many pressing problems because these are not local but national in character and thus demand action by the national government.

Many of these charges are, I fear, only too true. I am not concerned with that question at all at present. I am rather concerned to point out that the weakness of municipal governments in dealing with urgent problems is no proof at all that the ills of our time can be cured by wholesale reliance on central governments, provincial or Dominion. It is no argument at all to say that because John Smith is poorly equipped to do a job, Henry Brown can do it much better. Before we sack Smith we should look at Brown's character and capacities for the job at hand as well as considering whether Smith can be "rehabilitated." That is to say, the place of local self-government in a democracy cannot be fully appreciated without considering at the same time what wholesale reliance on central government may involve.

### Rise in Dominance of Central Governments

This is far from an academic discussion. A remarkable set of powerful forces have been adding to the powers of central governments all over the world year by year since the dawn of the present century. The two great wars of our time

accelerated but did not originate them. Many people who do not like the development seem to be hypnotized by it. They assume that it must and will continue just as when the stock market is rising we find it hard to believe that it will ever turn into a decline and vice versa. Then there are growing groups of people who look for salvation from the national disturbances of depression and economic dislocation and from the international disturbances of war through centralized planning of social and economic life.

Indeed planning is now so respectable that anyone who does not believe that it is the solution to all the ills the flesh is heir to, has to stop and explain that he is not opposed to all planning but only to particular kinds or degrees of planning. So, I say at once that I, too, believe in planning. Much thought and planning lies behind any social system which works. I believe there was a good deal of planning of a skillful and highly successful nature in the British and American political systems which provided, among other things, a large sphere of local self-government. Neither one was just a happy accident. So it is not entirely silly to believe in a kind of planning which provides for decentralization as well as for centralization. But I scarcely need say that most present-day plans are for drastic centralization, and regard municipal institutions as outmoded or unimportant.

Much time might be spent profitably discussing the reasons for the decline of the belief in local freedom and the rise in the belief in the dominance of the central government. At present, I want to draw attention to one of these reasons only. In spite of the frequent assertions that local self-government is essential to democracy we have lost sight of the real reasons why this is so. And when we lose sight of the reasons for our opinions, the opinions themselves lose much of their vitality.

### Some Reasons Advanced for Local Government

Let us look at the two stock arguments which, as far as my recollection goes, have been used to show that local self-government is vital to democracy. First, the responsibilities of local office provide a training ground for statesmen and politicians. By being faithful in small things, the municipal councillor learns to handle great affairs when he is called by the electorate to service in the provincial or national sphere. Second, the mass of citizens get an indispensable political education through discussion of live local issues and participation in frequent local elections. They are thus enabled to grasp national issues and to exercise their franchise wisely in national politics.

I do not wish to deny the importance of these arguments. But to my mind, they are far from being the main reasons why municipal institutions are vital to democracy. Indeed, they obscure the main reasons by assuming that it is national or provincial politics alone which really matter in a democracy and that local politics are merely a training ground — not even a bush league! This mistaken assumption has a great deal to do with the now common belief that the only democratic processes which matter take place on the national or provincial level. We have a weakness for big things. The newspapers, which generally give us the kind of news we want, give us exciting front-page accounts of the dramatic events of provincial, national and international politics, while the tiresome wrangles of local politicians are decently buried under small headings on an inside page. We do not want to turn on the radio to hear John Smith discuss some issue of local politics. Rather we want to listen to Winston Churchill, President Roosevelt and



Mr. Mackenzie King to hear what the big men are doing about big things. It has been easy for us to lose sight of the real place of municipal institutions in a democracy.

#### **Why Is Local Self-Government Important?**

I will now state what I think that place is. Democracy, in the full sense, can be a reality at the local level, but it becomes less and less real as we move from the municipal to the provincial and from the provincial to the national sphere. Democracy in the full sense of which I am speaking means intelligent responsible participation in the choice of those who govern and in the approval of the policies by which we are governed. Intelligent participation means that the citizen is able to judge the character and the qualifications of those who seek his vote and to understand the programs or platforms he is asked to support or reject. Responsible participation means that the citizen, as he votes, realizes that his vote affects his own and the public welfare, that he and the public welfare will suffer the consequences of his errors in judgment and that, therefore, he must constantly watch his elected representatives and the working out of programs and policies in practice, so as to rectify errors at the earliest possible moment.

I do not say that this ideal of democracy is fully realized in practice in local self-government. If it were, the elected municipal politicians in this audience ought to be quaking in their shoes. It is not as good — or as bad — as all that. But some approach to this ideal of intelligent responsible participation is made in all municipalities where self-government is not a sham. The citizen sees with his own eyes how the men he has elected behave. He can — again with his own eyes or through the eyes of his friends and neighbors, the value of whose judgment he can estimate — decide whether the policies being followed by his local government work well or ill. Many of us fail to do it — yet it is possible, even while we go about our own jobs, to keep track of our local government.

#### **Democracy in the Wider Sphere**

It is vastly more difficult in provincial and national politics. Most voters do not know the candidates between whom they must choose. This is often true in municipal politics also, particularly in large urban municipalities, but it is not nearly so general as it is in provincial or national politics. Moreover — and more important — many of the problems in these latter fields are abstract to the average citizen — they do not arise out of things which come concretely to his attention and about which he has knowledge. He does not understand the jugglery by which the budget is balanced, he does not understand the cases for and against free trade. I do not go so far as to say that he cannot understand these matters, but I admit frankly that these and many others are mysteries to me. I do not think I overstate the case when I guess that most people are like me in this respect — they are wearied by the parade of statistics bearing on the success or failure of some policy of the provincial or national government and bewildered by the seemingly unanswerable, yet contradictory, arguments put up by the political parties. The best proof that I am right is to be found in the behaviour of the political parties. They do not want to bore the citizen by fighting elections on statistics, hard facts and logical arguments. They try to help him to make up his mind easily by finding some simple issue which appeals to his likes and dislikes. Hence, provincial and national elections always tend, much more than municipal elections, to be a registration of emotions which can scarcely be defined as the intelligent responsible participation which I have suggested is the essence of democracy.

I am not urging that provincial and national elections are at the present time solely a registration of emotions. There are some tests of a government's claim to support which the voter can apply fairly easily. Not uncommonly, some moral issue is at stake and on it the average man's judgment is as good as anyone's. But no one can have failed to note the important part played by emotionalism in provincial and national politics. And there can be little doubt that the greater the powers exercised by central governments, the more various and complex the issues become, the less the voter is able to understand and the more he is thrown back on his emotions. When the government is conducting operations of great magnitude and complexity, how is the voter to know whether it deserves to be supported in the next election — whether it is doing well or ill. For the most part, its policies cannot be judged by the results they bring in the life of the particular voter or his neighborhood. They are to be judged by the way they work all across the country — statistics again. For these statistics, the voter is at the mercy of the politicians, the speakers on the radio, the writers in the newspapers, about whose bona fides and capacity for judgment he generally knows little.

#### **An Illustration of This Problem**

Let us take an illustration from present-day national politics. The voters chose Mr. King to organize the country for total war in 1940. How does the average citizen know whether it is being done well or badly? Both points of view are and will be maintained with mountains of figures and stacks of arguments. What he knows for certain is that the government's policy bears heavily on him and that disposes him to think the job has been done badly. So I suspect he will decide to turn the government out when he gets a chance, as he has always turned out governments which have had to fight wars or struggle against depressions.

This is not a criticism of the average citizen nor is it a criticism of the national and provincial political parties. It is a criticism of the view that municipal institutions are just a training ground for democracy which is to be practised elsewhere. It is an assertion that the intelligent responsible citizenship which is essential to democracy must continue to find its best and most effective expression in local self-government.

It is also a criticism of the view now commonly held that we need not fear wholesale centralization as long as the voter with his vote remains in control. The trouble is that this control is none too good at present and it is certain to become less effective as centralization proceeds. In fact, in provincial and national politics we rely very heavily on the two-party system which provides an alternative government always ready and eager to take over the reins. It is of first importance in a democracy to be able to turn out one lot of politicians and experiment with another lot, thus keeping both lots on tenter-hooks lest they abuse their power and get thrown out sooner than would otherwise happen. I shall suggest reasons for thinking that thorough-going centralization at the expense of municipal institutions is likely to break down the two-party system.

#### **Local Problems Need Local Handling**

Another important function of municipal institutions is their contribution to general stability and national unity. As long as local governments have the final word on a wide range of matters, most of the conflicts which inevitably arise in every community have to be settled at the local level and they are settled by some



kind of tolerable compromise which recognizes the realities of the situation because there is an alert local public opinion which knows the facts and demands a settlement under some minimum conditions of fair play. If a row develops over the scale of relief, the municipal council must take the responsibility for decision. On the other hand, if this matter has to be decided by the central government, the interests most directly affected must organize to bring pressure on the government. The result is likely to be a national ratepayers' association and a national association of unemployed, both of which establish powerful lobbies in the capital. Behind each of these associations are thousands of determined people who insist, not on a settlement but on the triumph of their particular interest. The leaders of these pressure groups must be, above all else, champions of the interests they represent. The glare of publicity which beats on national affairs makes it difficult to climb down without losing prestige. Accordingly, if we multiply greatly the number of formerly local issues which have to be decided by the central government, we need not be surprised if the powerful and contradictory pressures thus generated result in violent rocking of the ship of state. We can expect the splintering of the great political parties under the impact of pressures arising from all parts of the country. If the central government has all the time to be taking decisions which reach deep into the heart of each community, the members of Parliament, who after all come from these communities, will be constantly distracted from broad questions of the national interest. They, too, will be forced to become champions of their local, regional or class interest. The differing views which they take on these matters will bring to an end the simple alignment into two great political parties. To take an extreme example, if education were centralized under the control of the Dominion Government, a great impetus would be given to the new national party which is threatening to appear in Quebec as a champion of Quebec interests. Perhaps the clearest illustration now before our eyes is one which does not involve the powers of local government. The Dominion Government now fixes the price of wheat, which is the basic and all-important factor in the community life of prairie Canada. Does anyone doubt that if the Government continues indefinitely to fix the price of wheat the political labels of Liberal, Progressive Conservative and C.C.F. will become almost meaningless on the prairies and that a new party devoted to maintaining this vital interest is likely to emerge?

#### **Local Self-Government Assures Stability and Unity**

A wide area of local self-government thus contributes greatly to political stability and national unity. If the two great parties broke into a dozen factions and national politics were beset by scores of powerful lobbies representing particular interests, we would live constantly under the threat of deadlock and paralysis in national politics, i.e., we would be torn by disunity. This state of affairs can rapidly degenerate into a great national emergency with its call for a supreme leader who will override selfish factions and special interests — in short, the pattern of events out of which dictatorship is born.

In reflecting on this argument, the collapse of the French Republic in 1940 is of special interest. It has been explained to us many times that the French people were torn by disunity. French governments lasted three months on the average, no vigorous policy either for peace or war was possible because of the existence of almost a dozen different political parties with different views of the public interest. There were, of course, many reasons for the existence of these

splinter parties. One of the most important of them is rarely mentioned. It is the comparative lack of municipal self-government in the French Republic. Practically everything which we would regard as a proper matter for municipal decision from the hiring of a teacher to the buying of benches for the loafers in front of the town hall had to be decided in the Department of the Interior in Paris or by one of its subordinate officials in the field. Municipal councils existed, but they had little power and few important functions. Thus the main job of each member of Parliament was to lobby ceaselessly at the Ministry of the Interior in the interests of his locality. This so occupied his time that frequently he had no interest in broad principles relating to the national interest. And even when he did, he found that the distraction of local issues prevented him from finding common ground with others for a nation-wide political party. Excessive centralization imperils national unity and tends to splinter the two-party system.

In Germany and Italy as well, even in the days of parliamentary rule, local self-government was always much more sharply limited than in Britain or North America. In each country there was a Department of the Interior directing many aspects of the local government, and in each case the control of this department was the great prize for which the Nazi and Fascist parties contended when they were struggling for power. The first government in which Hitler participated in Germany was a coalition with the Nationalist party, each getting half the posts in the cabinet. But in that cabinet Goering and Frick got control of the Ministry of the Interior. That gave them leverage on the institutions of local government and control of the police across the entire country. This enabled them to fasten their grip on the country in an incredibly short time and explains more perhaps than any other factor why the Nazis, who never got 40 per cent of the total vote in a free election, were able to carry through a revolution without firing a shot — except, of course, the shots of the local police acting under their orders.

#### **Local Self-Government Checks Power with Power**

One of the indispensable functions of municipal institutions is to act as a counterpoise or balance to the central government. It is of extraordinary importance at a time when the powers of central governments are expanding rapidly and despite our best efforts, will remain much greater than ever before in our history, to have active, energetic local centres of political life which resist the natural aggrandising tendencies which central governments, like all other forms of human organization, exhibit. As long as there are independent local governments with wide powers, communities will want to go on governing themselves, and many men of modest ambition will find an outlet for their energies and their desires for public service in the conduct of local government. Together they will resist the attempts of central governments to encroach upon them. Indeed they may resist too much, clinging doggedly to powers they can no longer exercise effectively. But we must reckon with the bad which the good often carries with it. The point is that the central government — or the bureaucracy as we call it in moments of bitterness — is kept in its place not only by Parliament and by the electorate controlling Parliament through elections, but also by the quite independent powers of the municipalities checking and resisting it. The most effective way to control a heavy concentration of power is to balance against it independent centres of power because this check operates almost automatically.

I have argued then that the truest kind of political democracy possible in our day is that exercised in and through municipal institutions, that local self-govern-



ment contributes much to the maintenance of political stability, national unity and the two-party system and that through these means it contributes much to democratic control of our provincial and national governments. Finally, municipal institutions provide a means of checking power with power — one of the secrets of the maintenance of democracy and government by consent.

#### In Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to add only a few words. I am not opposed to all measures of centralization. There are some, particularly of a financial character, which I think we shall not be able to avoid if we are going to carry through large measures of social security. I repeat, what I said at the outset: many of the criticisms of municipal institutions heard nowadays are only too true. If the structure of local government is not substantially revised we are almost certain to suffer massive centralization of a dangerous, if not disastrous, character. In particular, I think, many units of local government are too small to be satisfactory units of administration for the emerging duties of government. Moreover, if municipal governments are to be equipped for the administrative tasks which they must either shoulder or relinquish to others in the reconstruction period, a substantial overhauling of municipal civil services is necessary. These comments do not come within my subject this morning. I add them because I do not want to be taken as thinking that the municipal institutions we inherited from the nineteenth century will serve us in the twentieth century without substantial modification. I hope I have given some reasons why we should try to keep them vigorous and independent even as we determine on modification and change.

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### III. LOCAL GOVERNMENT THE TRAINING GROUND FOR DEMOCRACY

In 1945 Year Book of the Citizens' Research Institute of Canada

By HORACE L. BRITAIN, M.A., Ph.D.

There are about 3,900 incorporated local municipalities in Canada. Although the too long delayed movement for reducing the number of local school authorities has had important results during the last few years, probably 18,000 or 20,000 local school authorities, mostly elected, still remain. Possibly from 60,000 to 75,000 men and women serve on these local bodies. Municipal and other local bodies are engaged in providing water, light, police protection, fire protection, streets, sidewalks, schools, health nurses, welfare services, etc., to the families and individuals dwelling in their various local communities. These services touch directly the lives of more than 11,000,000 people, in ways which they can see and feel. Possibly over 4,000,000 people can participate in the selection of these bodies which produce for them services which they need and want. Possibly 1,500,000 voters do actually use their local franchise.

The processes of local government go on under the direct observation of all citizens. They know, or may know, their representatives in local government. Directly or indirectly, they may determine local public issues. What the average person knows at first hand of government he or she learns of necessity at the

local level. His or her ability to judge men and measures and the efficiency of administration in provincial and federal government must rest on his or her experience in and knowledge of local government, as in this field alone has he or she any opportunity to acquire first hand experience. In the provincial and federal fields — unless he or she is directly concerned — first hand experience is apt to be very sketchy.

Just as local institutions are the laboratory for adult citizenship, they may provide the concrete basis of instruction in citizenship in the schools. Children can be informed about policemen, firemen, teachers, health nurses, street cleaners, scavengers, park workers, workers on streets and sidewalks, construction of sewers and sewage disposal plants, water works, etc. What better material for early training in citizenship?

Recently the tendency to centralization emphasized by the war, has obscured the importance of vigorous local institutions. These should be fostered, not suppressed or even regimented unless seriously at fault. They should, however, be able to get the best expert advice from provincial departments of municipal affairs. Ignorance is the cause of most weaknesses in local government. Municipal government is, moreover, not the only level of government which suffers from ignorance. As a matter of fact aside from the war activities the record shows that the efficiency of municipalities as a whole has not been inferior to that of senior governments. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. Hence regimentation of one level of government by another can not supply lasting efficiency. Only the raising of the general level of citizenship can bring that about and for this local government is best equipped as a laboratory for citizenship.



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