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**REGIONAL GOVERNMENTAL DILEMMAS**

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**Introduction**

My remarks are not prefaced by a continuation of eulogies of Mr. Camp. Those who have preceded me in this lectureship have done well and accurately by him. If I were to continue this process, Mr. Camp would be the first to rise up in wrath and demand that we proceed with the business of the day. This risk does not bar me, however, from recording my profound appreciation of being chosen to deliver this lecture in a continuing honor to a distinguished engineer, a scholarly practitioner and a devoted public servant.

The topic I choose is almost a necessary offshoot of our times, when growth in general, and urban growth in particular, are current topics at all levels of our society. The rapid increase of urban populations since World War II is a global phenomenon, in developing as well as in so-called developed countries. The fact of urbanization is not new. The rate of change is only an accelerated one, because "spill over" from central cities began more than half a century ago.

Nomenclature for the phenomenon differs from country to country, e.g. the metropolitan areas of the United States, the conurbations of England, the agglomerations of India, or the popular, but fictitious, megalopolis of many countries. Similarly, the very nature of the populations living in these complex entities differ from country to country. The suburban well-to-do in the United States has little in common with the favelas in Brazil, the villas miserere in the Argentine, or the bustees of Calcutta. Their location, their economic status, their culture and ideology, are as wide apart as the poles.

The one characteristic in common is the reason for this paper — they all lack or need a managerial structure to provide and to operate all the facilities required for their existence in a healthy and safe environment. The vicissitudes accompanying the creation of such institutions and, in fact, pursuing them for the rest of their lives, are the concerns of engineers, economists, political scientists, politicians and citizens. Some of these concerns I share with you today, largely because they have not yet been resolved to the satisfaction of either the public or the theoretician.

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“Regional government”, as used herein, is an autonomous unit, representative of local political units, having the functions of planning, implementing and operating facilities. It should be distinguished from an agency designed largely to couple federal-local relationships and to capture central government funds for local units (the popular indoor sport of the last five to ten years).

### **The Past Record**

The problem of regional governance, either in limited functions or across the board of meeting society's needs, is not new. As a matter of fact, in this very region in which I speak, some of the earliest devices for regional management were created by imaginative officials and citizens. In some ways, those were happier days for such steps, because “vox populi” or public confrontation was not yet the assumed salvation of the people. Constituency support was sought, but not in grand circuses of thousands of conscientious, militant adversaries, all motivated for the “common good” but too frequently resistant to change.

Because the route was somewhat easier for the creation of single or multiple purpose regional governments, such units were developed in the growing metropolitan areas of the United States. They are still viable, for example, in the areas surrounding New York City, Boston, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Seattle, Denver, New Orleans, and many other smaller entities. These continuing struggles toward intelligent and logical management date back, in some cases, to well over a century. The devices often used were annexations and consolidations now frowned upon by those who might be annexed. As problems grew, more elaborate regional institutions were conjured up — always moving power of action further and further away from the electorate.

The creation of special metropolitan authorities needs particular mention because they proliferated in relatively large numbers in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They were dominated largely by the expanding requirements for water and sewerage facilities of burgeoning populations outside of central cities. Simultaneously, problems of transit forced the creation of such forms as the Port of New York Authority in 1921. The structure and powers of these specialized authorities need not be elaborated here, except to re-emphasize the fact that local political units were necessarily increasingly stripped of their autonomy and responsibility, always with the tacit hypothesis that this transfer was wise, logical and for the greater good.

A rising public suspicion of regional government is clear. That it should be so obvious in 1975, was predicted in 1930, in a remarkable volume\*

\*The Government of Metropolitan Areas in the United States. National Municipal League, New York. 1930.

published by a Committee on Metropolitan Government of the National Municipal League. The words, from that document, were prophetic:

"Generally speaking, the special metropolitan authorities have not been effective in the important function of consolidating the public opinion of a metropolitan area . . . , the term 'district' as expressing a political entity has failed to stir public imagination or the sense of loyalty as the words 'city', 'state' or even 'county' do. In a word, the 'district' does not express the average citizen's idea of a community. Whatever the explanation, the significant fact about these organizations is that in most cases the public opinion of the territory under their jurisdiction consists of as many separate political cubicles as before they were established." p. 338. And furthermore: "in the last analysis, the government of metropolitan areas constitutes a sturdy challenge to American political ingenuity." p. 390.

### **Has the Challenge Been Met in 1975?**

Has American political ingenuity come up with a form of government for regions satisfactory to the people? The answer to this question is definitely "NO", in spite of the library of volumes by official and private groups who have confronted themselves with the issue for the last half century. In general, all students of the problem have concluded that regional government should be the "wave of the future." The books gather dust, however, when implementation waits upon a recalcitrant public.

A glaring example of this resistance is in the great metro area surrounding the capitol of the United States and encompassing millions of people. For some decades, attempts to consolidate and coordinate regional functions via a single structure have been characterized by failure. The fierce local pride in the states of Maryland and Virginia, and their multiple subdivisions, coupled with the anomalous political status of the District of Columbia, have so far prevented the simplistic solution so attractive to the academic planner.

Even in this complex region, services have been continuously provided, albeit perhaps with less theoretical efficiency or least cost. This situation points up the other answer to the central question posed, namely, that regional governments, such as they are, have a long record of service even though their popularity has been on the wane for years.

An assessment of the life and times of a few regional structures, with which I have been identified for some years, is helpful. They are, in general, characteristic of many others in this country. They date from 1913 to the 1970's, and are, as follows:

- The Washington Suburban Sanitary District
- The Baltimore County Metropolitan District
- The Miami Conservancy District
- The Six County Metropolitan Area (Detroit Complex) of South-eastern Michigan
- The Middlesex County Sewerage District
- The Ocean County Sewerage District

Their creation was not without major travail, often without popular support, and sometimes with violent opposition. The Conservancy Law of Ohio, for example, of which the Miami Conservancy District is an offspring, was denounced in the newspapers some sixty years ago, in familiar present day terms, as follows:

“the most infamous in the history of the world, contains hidden wonders, more despotic and drastic than all the edicts of the czars that ever lived, subverts most rights of citizens and provides for power dams and reservoirs to destroy the peace of mind of the people of the valley, most damnable piece of legislation ever conceived, makes Troy mourn.”

All the entities I have listed have performed yeoman public service, several for more than half a century. And yet, most have been under serious public attack within the last ten years. Some are being threatened with actual dismemberment and reversion to the local morass of multiple political units, from which they were designed to escape many years ago. The underlying criticism, where it is vocal, is that the regional units are “undemocratic” — in many ways a reflection of the climate of today, but strangely enough a resurgence of attitude of many years ago.

In all fairness, and viewed objectively, it is unfortunately true that hierarchies of government, increasingly remote from the man on the street, take on the garment of omniscience, cloaked too often with arrogance. These are correctible vices of management, too often recognized after the damage to public relations has been done. The democratization of authorities, by whatever name, is possible. It is usually slow, often an afterthought, and, invariably introduces more and more political maneuvering in an institution theoretically above such earthy intrusions.

The successful operation of a regional management presupposes *total* participation of all local political units. In recent experiences, some important local units “want out”. Their ostensible reasons are the preservation of local autonomy, the inequities in the allocation of capital and operation costs, and differences as to technologic solutions to manifold urban problems.

Unfortunately, practitioners in this field have not come up with alternative governance mechanisms which would transcend the objections to existing machinery. The gap between the theoretical ideal and the realities of management is virtually as wide as it always was. Because of this misfortune, I search for some inkling as to why this should be so. Why is human behavior so tied to the City Hall or to the county seat?

The State of Maryland has twenty-three counties and the City of Baltimore. As chairman of the State Planning Commission in the late 1930's, I had an awareness that some counties were far too small to provide effective management and service. We employed the late Professor V. O. Key, then at the Hopkins and subsequently at Harvard, to study and report upon the government of the counties. As an astute political scientist, he recommended consolidation of counties into a smaller viable number. His report went to the Legislative Assembly with strong approval by the Commission.

It was received in an ambient temperature of below zero, was never allowed on the floor, and was placed on the proverbial shelf where it has rested for some forty years — unlikely to be disturbed for some time to come. Love for each county seat was dramatic and supreme. I confess, as time goes on, I am increasingly respectful of this public concern, even if not fully understanding of its subtle origins.

Those of you who are devotees of Mark Twain may find a clue to this behavior in the doings of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer — and to our own exposure to the mysteries of geography in elementary school. In a delightful essay\* on “Maps in Literature”, the Muehrckes, scholars in geography and in free lance writing, point out that “The disparity between the ‘map world’ and the ‘real world’ can be crucial in a problem-solving context: to substitute a map for reality can have serious consequences.” They go on to illustrate this by referring to Mark Twain’s recognition of this map-reading error in “Tom Sawyer Abroad”. When Tom and Huck take a trip in a baloon, Huck doubts that they have passed Illinois, although he thinks they should have. Tom asks Huck how he knows this.

“I know by the color. We’re right over Illinois yet. And you can see for yourself that Indiana ain’t in sight.”

“I wonder what’s the matter with you, Huck. You know by the *color*?”

“Yes, of course I do.”

“What’s the color got to do with it?”

“It’s got everything to do with it. Illinois is green, Indiana is pink. You show me any pink down here, if you can. No, sir; it’s green.”

“Indiana *pink*? Why, what a lie!”

“It ain’t no lie; I’ve seen it on the map, and it’s pink.”

You never see a person so aggravated and disgusted. He says:

“Well, if I was such a numskull as you, Huck Finn, I would jump over. Seen it on the map! Huck Finn, did you reckon the States was the same color out of doors as they are on the map?”

“Tom Sawyer, what’s a map for? Ain’t it to learn you facts?”

“Of course.”

“Well, then, how’s it going to do that if it tells lies? That’s what I want to know.”

“Shucks, you muggins! It don’t tell lies.”

“It don’t, don’t it?”

“No, it don’t.”

“All right, then; if it don’t, there ain’t no two States the same color. You git around *that*, if you can, Tom Sawyer.”

“He see I had him, and Jim see it too; and I tell you, I felt pretty good, for Tom Sawyer was always a hard person to git ahead of.”

Can it be, as the psychologists tell us, that we are fixed in our beliefs in

\*Maps in Literature. Phillip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke. The Geographical Review, Vol. LXIV, No. 3, July, 1974, pp. 317-338. New York, N.Y.

the first grade of school? Is the County Court House, as a symbol on a map, our lamp of light forever? It is inviolate, it should not be tampered with and it certainly should not be "coordinated or consolidated" with its neighbors!

### **What Do Other Countries Do?**

Some observers of the situation in the United States blithely suggest that all "we need is to change the whole system" or "we must change every social and economic institution in the country." In saying this so heroically, they cast an envious eye at some approaches in Canada and Great Britain. American reformers have long looked admiringly at the Toronto metropolitan government, created in 1953 with a wide spectrum of public functions. What is not underscored by these envious admirers is that it was created over the objections of most of the local governments concerned, by the Provincial Government on recommendation of the Ontario Municipal Board, a quasi-judicial body. The possibility of a referendum was never seriously discussed. Can you imagine such a procedure in the United States, where a single village of less than a thousand people might well have prevented such an overlying institution, notwithstanding its apparent successful operation in Toronto.

A more startling governmental reorganization took place in England and Wales in 1974. This step was described by an Englishman as the greatest change ever to take place in history in a government over a thousand years old. The substitution of ten new regional authorities, with multiple functions, for 29 river authorities, 160 water supply undertakings and 1200 sewerage and sewage disposal authorities, staggers the imagination. It followed some years of parliamentary inquiry, public discussion, and professional society intervention. Only the future can disclose how well the structural simplification will work. Can one imagine a similar reorganization in our own country, particularly if it were specifically spelled out as it was in England?

Even more attractive to some are the central government controls, particularly in water resources development, as exemplified in Israel and in Ceylon. Both countries are small and compact. In the first case, water is truly in short supply and, in the second, abundant. Both lend themselves, however, to manageable functions, superimposed upon local units of government and upon each individual. They both illustrate the decision to choose efficiency of management above local freedom of choice and perhaps of hazardous chaos. Again, it is doubtful that such complete centralization of power would be acceptable in our complex society of some 250 million individualists.

Political ideology is not always a guarantee of smooth administration. In India, with strong socialist bent, many variants of regional structure are at hand, with equally variable performance. The history of the governance of the Calcutta metropolitan area is replete with the problems once described by Bertrand Russell as contests of freedom versus organization. In the case of Calcutta we have the largest metro complex in all of India, with a pre-

sent population of 8.5 million. Of these, some 2.5 million are refugees and another million of squatters moving to urban centers for jobs, education, movies and relief from village boredom and subsistence living. By 1986, the region may have 12 million people. Let us trace the search for the best way to manage this congeries of people, with an urban heritage of more than a century and needing all the functional services for survival.

In 1959, a World Health Organization Mission reviewed the situation on the site. Calcutta was then the seat of cholera transmission throughout the Far East. The disease was then on one of its epidemic rampages. Since cholera is essentially water-borne and due to insanitary conditions in general, the WHO interest was clear. The Mission recommended the creation of a region-wide water and sewerage authority, which, after long debate, reached reality in 1966, on October 2, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi.

During the period of 1967-1970, however, this agency was unable to function and no action was taken to implement the basic development plan. It was a period of political instability, decline in law and order, and economic recession. United Front Governments, essentially a series of communist parties, elected in 1967 and 1969, were unable to govern for long and soon gave way to a period of "President's Rule". Finally, the Central Government intervened in 1972, with the creation of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority. This agency has great "umbrella-like" powers to consolidate and coordinate a wide variety of public services, e.g. water supply, sewerage, drainage, traffic, transit, hospitals, schools, slum clearance, housing.

The evolution of this managerial entity over some 15 years, since the proposal by WHO, is recorded here primarily to emphasize the fact that people seem to behave the same way, regardless of political ideology. It is particularly interesting that the United Front Governments opposed the water and sewerage authority because it was undemocratic!

This rehearsal of personal experiences leads to the inevitable question: do we have any viable alternatives to either regional management and structure or central government take-over? A variant of the latter is, of course, take-over by the States.

### **Are There Alternatives to Regional Government?**

In the present climate of the United States, there is an increased resistance to another layer of government and a growing suspicion of political leaders. An amazing devotion to familiar political boundaries, accompanies a wariness of remote control and decision making, and with it all, massive, adversary public participation in all issues. Under these militant circumstances, can we offer a system of regional operations calculated to provide reasonably effective services?

Actually, we have been driven over the years to use, pragmatically, other devices. Regional planning and coordinating units have been set up, without implementation powers. Their composition has been varied. Where the membership has been predominantly elected officials the results have been good.

Contractual relationships between political units have served sound purposes, but have the disability of continuing adjustments as local conditions are rarely static. Flexibility has been the keynote to success in changing allocation of costs, benefits, and rate structures. Negotiation became an annual exercise.

Annexation of adjacent political units is rare. Decades ago it was frequent. The practice has many disabilities on both sides of the hypothetical fence.

Tax-base sharing has recently emerged as another deviant from regional management. The proposal is that compensation, in taxes, would be granted to localities (often the central city) which were bypassed by commercial and industrial expansion. Other areas also would be thus compensated, which have preserved open spaces and natural environmental assets by foregoing industrialization. These attempts stem from the desire to mitigate the effects of present inequitable and regressive local tax structures.

Similar purposes have been achieved by the tax on commuters. This device, frequently suggested, has not been widely applied, because of the strong objections of those living outside the city, but working within it.

The State, ever alert to expanding its functions, would undertake to manage many lagging local and regional services. Maryland is one of the leaders in this effort in its legislative sanction of a few years ago.

All of these alternatives to regional political units represent a continuation of the ancient desire to preserve local autonomy against increasing centralization of power, of maintaining freedom in a world requiring organized management, and of minimizing the inroads on democratic processes for the "common good". In our fragmented governmental system, it is probable that the search for substitutes for intermediate levels of government will continue. During these processes of trial and error, much would be gained, in both existing and proposed regional entities, by deliberate democratizing of these authorities. Their governing bodies should be chosen by the electorate, their proceedings should be publicly visible, citizen participation, troublesome as it is, should be available on major policy issues, and sensitive public relations should be a continuing responsibility. Perhaps, it can be demonstrated, if there is a will, that a bureaucracy can be both efficient and responsive to "grass roots" public desire, can be impersonal and objective, while alert to the hopes and aspirations of its citizens. Do we ask for a utopia? Or is it around the corner in the technological revolution in management? Will systems analysis and the computer rescue us from the mysteries of man's political behavior? The answers wait upon my successors' diligence and mounting expertise!

"Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the shadow."\*

\*The Hollow Men, T. S. Eliot, A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry: Publ. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. 1946. p. 295.