

Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics*
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press and the M.I.T.
Press, 1963).

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CITY POLITICS

EDWARD C. BANFIELD
JAMES Q. WILSON

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AND THE M.I.T. PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

1963

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CAMBRIDGE 38, MASSACHUSETTS

We have made extensive use of the approximately thirty reports of the politics of particular cities that have been published in mimeographed form by the Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. References to these reports appear here and there in the text, but our reliance upon them has been more extensive than the footnotes indicate. We wish to acknowledge a general debt to the authors of these reports and to the Joint Center, which sponsored them and aided us as well. Martin Meyerson, its director until July 1963, was both a lively critic and a patient friend.

We wish to acknowledge also the assistance of the following friends and colleagues who read parts of the manuscript: V. O. Key of Harvard University; Peter H. Rossi and Duncan MacRae of the University of Chicago; Alan Altshuler of Cornell University; Scott Greer of Northwestern University; Oliver P. Williams and Charles Liebman of the University of Pennsylvania; Lloyd Rodwin of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; T. J. Kent of the University of California; David Greenstone of the Brookings Institution; and Saul Alinsky, Ben Bagdikian, Peter B. Clark, Martha Derthick, John Dinklespiel, Anthony Downs, and Wayne E. Thompson. Professor Charles Gilbert of Swarthmore College made certain data on city elections available to us.

We owe a special debt to Max Hall of the Harvard University Press, whose skill and care as an editor went far beyond the call of duty; to Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, whose book, *Governing New York City*, proved to be an invaluable resource; and to Roberta Wilson, who prepared the index.

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INTRODUCTION · A POLITICAL APPROACH TO URBAN GOVERNMENT

THIS BOOK is based on the view that the day-to-day workings of city government in the United States are best understood by looking at the differences of opinion and interest that exist within the cities, at the issues that arise out of these differences, and at the ways institutions function to resolve (or fail to resolve) them. It is based, in short, upon a view of city government as a political process.

This is not the usual approach to the subject. City government is usually treated more as a matter of "administration" than of "politics." Those who write about it are, as a rule, more concerned with legal arrangements than with the informal devices by which things are actually done, more with the activities of appointed officials (bureaucrats) than with those of elected ones (politicians), and more with the procedures by which routines are carried on than with the large forces that determine the content of policy.

We have reversed the usual emphasis because we think the nature of American government requires it. In many other countries, it might be possible to identify some sphere—often a large one—that is almost purely "administrative," in the sense that matters are decided, as Max Weber said, according to rule and without regard to persons. But in the United States there is no such sphere. Our government is permeated with politics. This is because our constitutional structure and our traditions afford individuals manifold opportunities not only to bring their special interests to the attention of public officials but also—and this is the important thing—to compel officials to bargain and to make compromises. The nature of the governmental system gives private interests such good opportunities to participate in the making of public decisions that there is virtually no sphere of "administration" apart from politics.

To say that the government of American cities is to a high degree political does not necessarily mean that decisions are made on partisan grounds or by people who are called, or who think of themselves as, politicians. To be sure, many decisions *are* political in the rather nar-

row sense. But many equally important ones are made without regard to party or to electoral considerations and are made by people who are professional administrators. These decisions are nevertheless political. The governmental system affords special interests the opportunity to impose checks on administrators in much the same way that they impose them on politicians; and therefore administrators, even those of them who regard "politics" with abhorrence, are normally obliged to be responsive to the demands of special interests.

If the governments of American cities are political, so are the problems of the cities, and this, we think, is another reason for approaching the study of city government by way of politics. To the extent that social evils like crime, racial hatred, and poverty are problems susceptible to solution, the obstacles in the way of their solution are mostly political. It is not for lack of information that the problems remain unsolved. Nor is it because organizational arrangements are defective. Rather it is because people have differing opinions and interests, and therefore opposing ideas about what should be done.

In the United States, the connection between local and national politics is peculiarly close. This is a further reason why the study of city politics is important. The national parties, except for a few months every four years when they come alive to elect a President and Vice-President, are hardly more than loose congeries of local parties. Congressmen and Senators are essentially local politicians, and those of them who forget it soon cease to be politicians at all. One cannot understand the national political system without knowing something about how it works locally.

Another reason for studying city politics is that it affords exceptional opportunities to generalize about American political culture, American democracy, and democracy in general. The most important questions—the question of peace or war, for example—do not arise in city politics, to be sure. That city politics is never played for the highest stakes makes it in some ways an entirely different game. Nevertheless, the similarities are great enough so that one can learn something about the greater game from studying the lesser, and the large number of cities affords unique opportunities for comparison. There are only a few democratic nations, and all of them differ radically in culture. But there are several hundred democratic cities in the United States, and their culture is, broadly speaking, the same.

To say that city politics is worth studying for these reasons is not

to imply, however, that the spread of knowledge about city politics is likely to lead to the solution of local or national problems. Knowledge about politics may indeed help one side of a controversy to gain an advantage over its opponents, but there is no presumption that from a social standpoint this will make any improvement in the situation. To increase equally the knowledge of *all* sides would put the competition on a somewhat different basis without changing the structure of the situation essentially.

The kind of knowledge about politics that might give one side an advantage over the others, it must be added, can seldom be got from books. Moreover, it is not a kind of knowledge that is intellectually worthwhile; it consists not of general propositions but of facts about particular circumstances of time and place (e.g., that the alderman of the tenth ward will switch his vote on the park proposition if the mayor applies pressure) and of a mysterious faculty for making good guesses.

The reason why knowledge about politics (whether in the form of general propositions or as practical wisdom) will not lead to better solutions of social problems is that the impediments to such solutions are a result of disagreement, not lack of knowledge. Knowing how disagreements arise, how the parties to them act vis-à-vis each other, and the rules and practices by which certain institutions mediate them is not likely to be of use either in preventing disagreements from arising or in bringing them to quicker or more satisfactory resolution. Thinking that a general increase in the level of knowledge about politics will promote better and faster solutions of social problems is something like thinking that a general increase in the skill of chess players will lead to shorter games or to a "solution of the problem of chess."

At least two important practical purposes may be served by a wider diffusion of knowledge about politics, however.

First, young men and women who enter the civil service may, if they understand the setting in which they work and the constraints that the system imposes upon them, work more effectively and with less strain to themselves. A city planner, for example, may learn from the study of city politics to be more aware of the limitations upon him and more tolerant of them. This may help him to make plans that are more likely to be carried into effect.

Second, the spread of knowledge about politics may also reduce the amount of well-meant but often harmful interference by citizens in the workings of political institutions. A public which understands the na-

ture and necessity of politics may perhaps be more willing than one that does not to allow politicians to do their work without obstruction. Such a public may be more appreciative of the social value of the results of this work (but not necessarily more respectful of the motives of the people who do it; that is another matter). And it may be more aware of the risks it runs of damaging, or perhaps even of destroying, a tolerable system by attempting reforms the full effects of which cannot be foreseen.

The ultimate justification for the study of city politics, however, is certainly not a practical one. Perhaps the most intrinsically satisfying of man's activities is trying to understand the world he lives in. Politics, being one of the most difficult things to understand, is therefore particularly challenging. Responding to the challenge is, we think, its own justification and reward.

PART I
THE NATURE OF CITY POLITICS

CHAPTER I · THE CITY AS A SETTING FOR POLITICS

POLITICS arises out of conflicts, and it consists of the activities—for example, reasonable discussion, impassioned oratory, balloting, and street fighting—by which conflict is carried on. In the foreground of a study of city politics, then, belong the issues in dispute, the cleavages which give rise to them and nourish them, the forces tending toward consensus, and the laws, institutions, habits, and traditions which regulate conflict. But these cannot be understood without some account of the factors conditioning them. The city is an arrangement of people in space. Certain developmental tendencies are inherent in it, and it is subject to external pressures as well. The nature of the arrangement (and of the pressures and tendencies) fixes in a general way the form and content of the conflict that goes on within the city.

To speak of "the American city" generically may strike the reader as implausible, even though it is only general features that we propose to discuss. To most Americans the differences among cities, especially the larger ones, are probably more conspicuous than the similarities. Boston, so it seems, could hardly be more different from Houston, or Atlanta, or even Cincinnati. Chicago is a world apart from Philadelphia and another world apart from Los Angeles. Everyone knows that New York is *sui generis*—a world city.

The differences are, indeed, striking. Nevertheless there are enough important underlying similarities to make discussion of a typical situation and a typical set of problems worthwhile. It must be kept in mind, however, that what is true of the "typical" city may not be true of a particular one and certainly will not be the *whole* truth about any city.

The typical city exists within a metropolitan area. The Census in 1960 defined 212 such areas in the United States for statistical purposes, ranging in size from the New York area with almost 600 local governments and 10,694,633 people to the Meriden, Connecticut, area with few local governments and 51,850 people. For our present purposes, a metropolitan area consists of a central city, several suburban cities (residential or industrial or both, and of various sizes) and, in the

interstices between the cities, villages and unincorporated places. The metropolitan area is often coextensive with a county, but it may include parts of two or three (in a few cases even more) counties. What makes it a unity, to the extent that it is one, is a common orientation—cultural and political, perhaps, but mainly economic—toward the central city. The central city is called “central” because it is the object of this common orientation. Where there is a discontinuity in the pattern of settlement, it is this that usually fixes the boundaries of the metropolitan area: beyond a certain point urban settlement ceases and there is a gap of many miles to the next urban settlement. In some cases, however, there is no discontinuity: settlements extend without interruption, some being oriented toward one large city and some toward another. Rather arbitrarily in such cases (for the orientation of the cities is usually ambiguous and the line of demarcation between them is not clear), it is said that one part of the contiguous bloc of settlement constitutes one metropolitan area and another part constitutes a second.

No metropolitan area has a general-purpose government serving the whole of it. There are in many places governments which perform one or two functions (e.g., sewage disposal) for the whole of a metropolitan area, and there are two or three general-purpose governments (e.g., Dade County, Florida) that serve a considerable part of the metropolitan area. But one cannot at present speak of “metropolitan government” as a thing that exists in the United States. Government in the metropolitan area (not “of” it, for there is no government of it as such) consists of municipal corporations of various kinds. The most common are city governments, school districts and similar bodies organized to perform special functions, and counties.

DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY¹

As a rule, the central city is the oldest part of the metropolitan area. It is apt to be on a river or a well-protected harbor. Every sizable city requires a large flow of water to carry away its waste products (this is true even if the waste is nothing more than the effluent of a modern sewage disposal plant), and this would be a sufficient reason for cities to be located close to rivers, lakes, and oceans. But there is an additional reason why the larger cities are near water: most of them were

¹ For this account we owe a general debt to Raymond Vernon, *The Myth and Reality of Our Urban Problems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1962).

founded before there were railroads, and transportation was then mainly by water.

The oldest part of the central city, the point from which its expansion began, is closest to the river or harbor. This is where the core of the city is likely to be now. The central business district—“downtown”—the place where office buildings, banks, theaters, and restaurants are thickest and at which all transportation lines converge—is, if not the exact site of the first settlement, at least adjacent to it.

When the central cities were laid out, people traveled on foot. Accordingly, everyone—factory hands, clerks, and merchants—lived close to the center of things. Although there was limitless space to be had outside the city, the city was built at a very high density. Streets were narrow, lots were small, and houses were crowded together. The rich lived on the hills, a few minutes by carriage from their places of business. The poor were crowded together in the mudflats along the river front, close to their work, or in whatever open spaces they could find around warehouses and breweries. The middle class, perforce, lived on the edges of the city, a safe distance from the noise, confusion, and immorality of the waterfront.

Late in the nineteenth century, changes in transportation changed the form of the city. People began to travel on electric trolleys or trains rather than by foot. This meant that their residences could be farther away from their places of work. The growth of the railroads tended also to cause the city to spread out. Taking advantage of rail transportation, many industries left the waterfronts and located beyond what were then the city boundaries. Meanwhile central business districts were growing. The skyscraper was invented (following the invention of structural steel and of the electric elevator), and as great insurance, banking, and industrial empires came into being, the centers of the cities filled with offices and office workers. In its essential elements, however, the structure of the city remained as it had been. The rich and the poor continued to occupy the core (the rich in the desirable and the poor in the undesirable locations) and the middle class settled the outskirts.

The city's rapid growth required raising large sums in taxes. The burden was by no means intolerable, however, because it could spread over the real estate of the thriving central business district and the property of solid citizens in the outlying residential neighborhoods. Furthermore, municipal boundaries were flexible. The city annexed outlying neighborhoods as fast as they were populated; the residents

of these neighborhoods were anxious to be annexed because they depended on the central city for services.

Beginning in the 1920's, another change in the technology of transportation accelerated the dispersion of the city. Widespread use of the automobile enabled the middle class to move outside the city. During the preceding decades this class, growing in numbers and income, had built new homes within the city. These were mostly three- and four-story row houses and single dwellings on very small lots, located along the lines of the electric railways. The density of population in these middle-class neighborhoods was high. The freedom of movement that the automobile gave encouraged the middle class to begin almost at once to leave the "crowded city" for the suburban countryside, where one could have "a place of one's own." Around the city "dormitory suburbs" sprang up, the populations of which commuted to the central business district of the city. This "flight to the suburbs" still continues.

To some extent the movement out of the central city expressed (and expresses) the desire of offspring of immigrant parents to cut themselves off both from the slum or semi-slum, and from status attributes that it more or less symbolized. To some extent, too, it expressed the desire for more living space and for the satisfactions of rural life. There was also an economic factor at work. It was more costly to create the kind of houses and neighborhoods that were wanted in the central city, where lots were too small and houses had to be rebuilt, than to start afresh in a new suburb. Central-city neighborhoods that were only twenty or thirty years old were, by the standards of the more prosperous 1940's and 1950's, obsolete. Nothing, therefore, could prevent the mass migration of the middle class from the central city and its abandonment of most of the housing built in the first decades of the century.

From the New Deal on, the flight to the suburbs was encouraged, although inadvertently, by the federal government. The Federal Housing Administration (created in 1934) and, since World War II, the Veterans Administration, have insured (and hence subsidized) loans for the purchase of houses. Because both agencies were concerned about the soundness of the loans they guaranteed, they virtually limited them to the financing of *new* homes, which meant, for all practical purposes, homes in the new suburbs. By 1959 the FHA had "helped to make it possible for three out of every five American families to own their own homes."²

² U.S. Federal Housing Administration, "The FHA Story in Summary, 1934-1959" (FHA 375).

The movement to the suburbs began long before expressways were built to make automobile travel convenient. No matter how congested the roads, there were plenty of people ready to commute. The heavy subsidization of expressway construction by the state and federal governments was intended in part to bring new life to the downtown business districts of the central cities. The cities tore themselves open to make way for new superhighways in order to attract shoppers back to their big department stores. The improvement in transportation, however, had the unintended effect of encouraging even more people to live outside the city while working in it, or—in more and more cases—to live *and* work outside it.³

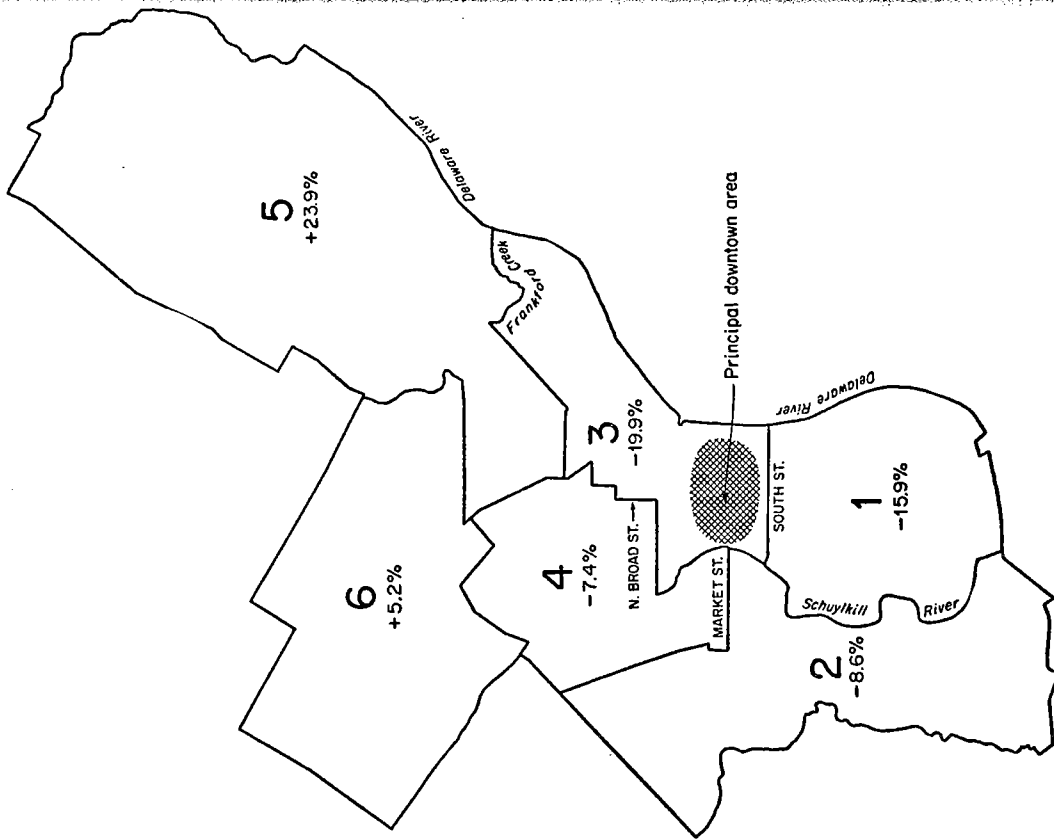
The central-city housing left by the middle class has been taken over by the poor. The densest slums in the center of the city have lost population and the better neighborhoods in the outlying sections have gained it. This has been going on for many years, but the rate has been dramatic in the last decade or so. In Philadelphia, for example, a district between the two rivers, the oldest, poorest, and most overcrowded part of the city, lost almost 20 percent of its population between 1950 and 1960 and now contains 72 percent fewer people than it did a hundred years ago. Figure 1 shows the Philadelphia trend in the 1950's. A similar trend could be shown for many large American cities.

This rapid spreading out has made the slum increasingly visible in recent years and has given many middle-class people the impression that there is a new and growing "slum problem." Actually, the cities have fewer slum dwellers now than ever before. The difference is that the slums are now less dense and less centralized. From the standpoint of the poor, this is a very good thing. A family that used to live in a decaying tenement with fifty or a hundred other families thinks itself (and is) much better off in a place that is merely dilapidated and that is lived in by only two or three other families. But to those middle-class people who are not yet ready to move out of the transitional neighborhoods or who look back nostalgically from the suburbs at the "nice" neighborhoods where they grew up, the "invasion" of the slum dwellers seems a catastrophe.

That the slum dwellers are mostly Negroes (and, in a few cities, Puerto Ricans) makes the spread of the slum all the more conspicuous,

³ For a summary of the effects of the highway program, see U.S. Department of Commerce, "Studies of the Economic and Social Effects of Highway Improvement," *Final Report of the Highway Cost Allocation Study*, part 6, House doc. 72, 87th Congress, 1st session, 1961.

FIGURE 1. Population changes in Philadelphia by Congressional district, 1950-1960



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Congressional District Data Book* (87th Congress), 1961.

and for some people, all the more horrifying. The existence of large stocks of both jobs and poor housing (poor by middle-class standards, that is) has enabled a great many Negroes to come to the central cities from the small towns of the South. As Table 1 illustrates, migration and a high rate of natural increase have dramatically increased the number and proportion of Negroes in many cities.

TABLE 1. Percentage of nonwhites in large cities, 1950 and 1960*

City	1950	1960	City	1950	1960
Boston	5.3	9.8	Milwaukee	3.6	8.9
Chicago	14.1	23.6	New York City	9.8	14.7
Cincinnati	15.6	21.8	Philadelphia	18.3	26.7
Cleveland	16.3	28.9	Pittsburgh	12.3	16.8
Dallas	13.2	19.3	Richmond	31.7	42.0
Detroit	16.4	29.2	San Francisco	10.5	18.4
Houston	21.1	23.2	St. Louis	10.0	28.8
Kansas City	12.3	17.7	Washington	35.4	54.8
Los Angeles	10.7	16.8			

* In most places, the number of nonwhites who are not Negro is insignificant. Source: 1960 Census of the Population, vol. PC (1)-1B.

Until recently, Negroes found it almost impossible to get housing outside of segregated slums. It was poor whites, not Negroes, who left the slums for the neighborhoods that the middle-class suburbanites vacated. Negroes got additional housing if they got it at all, by "taking over," sometimes at the risk of life and limb, one block after another on the perimeter of their slums. Late in the 1950's, however, the supply of housing caught up with the backlog of demand that had been generated by the war and by the large number of new families formed in the postwar period. Furthermore, the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1948 that "restrictive covenants" in property deeds could no longer be enforced to prevent the sale of homes to Negroes. White sellers then had both an incentive and an opportunity to sell to Negroes. Negroes have since been increasingly able to spread out into declining areas everywhere in the central cities and older suburbs.⁴

About half the jobs in an urban area exist to supply wants that arise because of the presence of the urban dwellers. As people move to sub-

⁴ See Davis MacEntire, *Residence and Race* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961).

urbs, many jobs therefore go with them. Industry also tends to move outward when the central city ceases to be the only source of a labor supply. The central business district then becomes more and more a place for such businesses as require frequent face-to-face communication with a large and varied clientele. A businessman, for example, may find it indispensable to be where he can talk face to face with bankers, public officials, and other businessmen. But the record-keeping departments of his firm may very well be decentralized to the suburbs where land is cheaper and where many typists, business machine operators, and accountants live.

All these changes have created acute problems for the central cities. Their tax bases have shrunk from the loss of industry, business, and middle-class homeowners. But demands for city services have not decreased. Indeed, the replacement of the middle class by the lower has necessitated increased expenditures for fire, police, welfare, education, and other services.

The departure of the middle class from the central city is important in other ways as well. The middle class supplies a social and political leavening in the life of a city. Middle-class people demand good schools and integrity in government. They support churches, lodges, parent-teacher associations, scout troops, better-housing committees, art galleries, and operas. It is the middle class, in short, that asserts a conception of the public interest. Now its activity is increasingly concentrated in the suburbs.

Living in the suburbs does not, however, prevent the owners and managers of the largest enterprises of the central city from participating actively in its affairs. To members of this elite, the central city—rather its central business district—is not only the locus of their wealth but also the center of their cultural lives and the symbol of values that they cherish. Although they continue as business and civic leaders, the members of this elite are as a rule disqualified by their residence in the suburbs for elective and appointive office in the city. For this reason, it is no longer easy to find wealthy and cultivated people to serve on boards of education, housing and redevelopment authorities, park boards, and the like.

The middle-class people whose stake in the central city was never so large—who do not own department stores or newspapers and are not trustees of its hospitals and museums—tend to lose all interest in it when they move to the suburbs. For many of them, it symbolizes a

social status they have transcended. It is a place where "undesirables" live, and it is run by "corrupt politicians." The suburbanite commonly feels no responsibility to contribute to the financial support of the central city.

What has happened to the central cities has happened to many of the older suburbs and small cities as well. These have also begun to decay at the center as residents of old neighborhoods have moved out in search of more spacious, convenient, aesthetically satisfying, and prestigious places to live. Lower-class and lower-middle-class people, including, of course, Negroes, wait watchfully for housing to be "downgraded." Poor whites (but not Negroes) tend to "leapfrog" the newer suburbs to take root near the centers of the older suburbs, and to convert these neighborhoods that are obsolete by the standards of the middle class into slums and semi-slums.

It is often assumed that the flight of the middle class to the suburbs, urban sprawl, poor housing, unsatisfactory race relations and other characteristically urban problems exist chiefly in the large cities, especially such great metropolitan centers as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Actually, as James G. Coke has shown with respect to Illinois, all of the same problems are to be found,⁵ often in more marked degree, in many small cities. The difference is that in the large cities there is lively concern and protest about conditions that go almost unnoticed in the small ones. This, Coke very convincingly argues, is to be explained largely by political factors—especially the existence in the large cities of a larger number of highly organized and articulate special-interest constituencies, a larger number of policy-oriented professionals, and voluntary associations devoted to some form of community problem-solving.

Newburgh, New York, the city that broke into the national news in 1961 by defying the generally accepted standards for city welfare programs, is an example of a small place in the toils of these changes. Originally a whaling port on the Hudson River, it was long a predominantly middle-class trading center for the surrounding farm country. In recent years, prosperity and automobiles encouraged many of the better-off people to move out of town. This made it possible for less prosperous people to move into the places they had vacated. Eventually Negro

⁵ James G. Coke, "The Lesser Metropolitan Areas of Illinois," *Illinois Government*, no. 15, November 1962, published by the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.

migratory fruit pickers settled in four ancient waterfront slums. Suddenly Newburgh found itself with a serious financial problem. The assessed value of its central business district, an important part of the tax base, declined \$945,000 in three years. Meanwhile, welfare expenditures rose rapidly; in 1961 the city was spending about \$1,000,000, one third of its budget, for welfare (federal and state grants reimbursed it for 55 percent of this). Two thirds of the persons now on relief are Negroes. Some Newburghers blame the city's troubles on the Negroes, and it was against the Negro, of course, that the stringent welfare code was directed in 1961. That the poor must live somewhere and that they may be better off in Newburgh than they were in other places is not something which Newburgh, occupied as it is with its own troubles, is likely to consider.⁶

In 1960, most suburbs were still almost entirely white. Whereas in 1930 three percent of the suburban population of the twelve largest metropolitan areas was nonwhite, five percent was nonwhite in 1960. In seven of these twelve areas, there was in these thirty years only a slight increase in the proportion of nonwhite to white in the suburbs. In five areas—Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, Cleveland, and Baltimore—the proportion of nonwhites in the suburbs declined.⁷

The differences between the central city and suburban populations is of profound importance politically.⁸ The central-city populations, which are often heavily Catholic, Negro, and lower-class, tend to be Democratic and to tolerate or even favor the old-style machine politics of bosses. The newer residential suburbs (there are, of course, industrial suburbs as well) tend to be Republican, to favor high levels of public service, and to be devoted to "good government."⁹ The suburbanite is as anxious to turn his back on the tradition of the "boss" as on the old slum tenement. But not all suburbs have the same political composition, and all are subject to rapid change. As the middle class empties into the new suburbs and the lower class into the deteriorating

⁶ *Time*, June 29, 1961, p. 17, and *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1961, p. 64.

⁷ *New York Times*, May 7, 1961.

⁸ Central cities, industrial suburbs, and old suburbs belong in one category in opposition to all the rest of the metropolitan area, i.e., newer suburbs and unincorporated areas. See Leo F. Schnore and Robert R. Alford, "Forms of Government and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Suburbs," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, June 1963, pp. 1-17.

⁹ We have put "good government" in quotation marks here and elsewhere to indicate that we refer to the doctrines of the reform movement, not to what we ourselves regard as good government. The doctrines are discussed in Chapter 11.

portions of the older ones, the Republicanism of some suburbs is being diluted. In some cases this is at least partially offset by the tendency of those who leave the central city to be upwardly mobile individuals who adapt to the suburban environments by becoming Republican or "independent." Some suburbs will become Democratic, but others will become even more solidly Republican. The central cities, however, are likely to remain at least as Democratic as before. The relatively few people who move into them will be mostly lower-class whites, Negroes, and Puerto Ricans.

Even if these population differences did not exist, there still would be important political differences between the central cities and the suburbs. That some people live on one side of a boundary and some live on the other is enough in itself to make an important difference. Those who live in one place (say the suburbs) do not want to be taxed to support facilities and services in another place (say the central city).

The politics of almost every facet of urban government—of metropolitan organization, of housing, of race relations, of transportation, of finance—bears a close relation to the much larger question, which is often outside the view of the interests most actively concerned, of the future of the central city, and, indeed, of the structure and character of urban life. Not far below the surface in all of these matters lie the questions: Is the central city to become the possession of the lower class and of the minority groups or is it to be restored to the middle class? If it is to be restored to the middle class, where is the lower class to live? If it is not restored to the middle class, what will happen to the centers of economic and cultural life in the cores of the central cities? If these centers lose their vitality, how will the pre-eminent role that the central city has played in the creation and dissemination of culture be filled in the future?

CHAPTER 2 · THE POLITICAL FUNCTION

THE FUTURE of the city and the great forces affecting it are talked about in after-dinner speeches sometimes, but they rarely occupy the serious attention of practical men. The questions that *do* occupy their attention are usually of a more immediate and limited kind. Such questions may or may not matter to the community as a whole, but their importance to particular interests is usually great or even crucial, and it is this that brings them to the fore in a practical way. The questions that give rise to most city politics are the following: (1) Who is to be elected to office? (2) Where is some specific facility to be located? (Usually the struggle is between neighborhoods, each trying to *avoid* having the facility for fear that it will displace families, attract "undesirable" people, or depress local property values.) (3) How are taxes to be apportioned? (4) Which agency or official is to be in charge of a particular matter? (5) Is an existing policy or practice to be changed? (6) At what levels are certain services to be supported, and how is the budget to be distributed? (7) What is to be the bias of the police in its treatment of organized crime, labor disputes, and racial incidents?

MANAGING CONFLICT

A government serves two principal functions. One is that of supplying those goods and services—for example, police protection and garbage removal—which cannot be (or at any rate are not) supplied under private auspices. This is its "service function." The other function—the "political" one—is that of managing conflict in matters of public importance.

Since the two functions are performed at the same time by the same set of institutions, they are often concretely indistinguishable. A mayor who intervenes in a dispute about the location of a new public library manages a service at the same time that he settles a conflict, but he usually is thought of, and thinks of himself, as doing a single thing—"running the city government." One function may at times be much more conspicuous than the other. In some cities, the service func-

tion is decidedly subordinate to the political one; decisions generally turn on the struggle of politicians, parties, and interest groups for some advantage. In other cities, politics seems to be entirely absent; there are no conflicts and no struggles for power; matters are decided, at least seemingly, on purely technical grounds.

The city without politics is held up as a shining example by some writers on local government. Many people believe that politics in any sphere is pointless and wasteful, a pathological disturbance of social life.

This attitude may arise from a general distaste for conflict and a feeling that matters ought always to be decided reasonably and without contention. A writer on public school administration, for example, upholds this view in the following characteristic terms: "One criterion of how well a school board functions is the extent to which its members agree among themselves. If they are in fair agreement of what the school board should do and about what the duties of the superintendent should be, then, when it comes to making a decision, they will spend little time disagreeing about basic values, about what their jobs actually entail, and devote their energies to solving the problem at hand."

Another reason for disliking politics is that political decisions are often based on considerations entirely unrelated to the merits of the issue. Of course the politician *claims* that his decision is based solely on grounds of efficiency: for example, he favors a certain site for the library "because it will be most convenient to users." But the observer suspects that the *real* grounds of the decision are self-serving or party-serving—that the politician wants the library there because its being there would gain him votes.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that if a politician acts from self-interest he inevitably sacrifices the public interest. Nor is it necessarily true that the public interest is best served by treating the service function of government as more important or more worthy than the political one. It is entirely possible that in some circumstances it is more important to manage conflict than to make the most "efficient" use of resources. If the politician's self-interest leads him to put the library in what the contending interests regard as an acceptable compromise site, he may serve a more useful social function than he would if he

Neal Gross, *Who Runs Our Schools?* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), p. 85.

decided on purely disinterested grounds to put it where it would be most convenient. Many people's cast of mind is essentially unpolitical, however, and they find it hard to see how the politician's self-interest can serve the public or how any sacrifice of the service function can be justified by any gain in the political one.

City government especially, many people think, ought to be free of politics. In this view, the government of a city differs from other governments, or *should* differ from them, in that it exists solely for the sake of the service function. Cleaning streets, running schools, and collecting garbage ought to be no more controversial, and therefore no more political, than selling groceries. There will be politics in the city government (according to this view) only if it is "injected from the outside"; to prevent this, city government ought to be insulated from state and national government, which are bound to be affected with politics. This is the general idea behind nonpartisanship, and it is one which has greatly affected local government in the United States.

At least two good arguments can be made in support of this view. One is that because of the city's inferior position in the federal system (a matter to be discussed in Chapter 5), all conflicts of real importance must be settled at a higher level. The great questions of the day and for that matter, most that are not great, cannot fruitfully be discussed by the city council. Such questions as can usefully be discussed by it (for example, the location of the new library) ought to be decided on their merits, which means that considerations of efficiency (the service function) ought to be paramount.

The other argument that can be made is that there are ordinarily no inherent conflicts in the city—no conflicts, that is, which are not the result of politics rather than the cause of it. This is indeed sometimes the case in fairly small, middle-class cities. Where everybody is pretty much agreed on fundamentals, there is certainly much to be said for leaving the choice of means to technicians. In sizable cities, however, there is rarely this agreement on fundamentals. Moreover, even in those places, small or large, where matters are left to technicians, conflict may arise, for the technicians themselves have different and more or less incompatible professional ends. Park, school, and traffic technicians, for example, may disagree about street layouts; and in the end, politics—albeit generally not under that name—must decide.

Whether one likes it or not, politics, like sex, cannot be abolished. It can sometimes be repressed by denying people the opportunity to

practice it, but it cannot be done away with because it is the nature of man to disagree and to contend. We are not saying that politics arises solely from the selfish desire of some to have their way, although that is certainly one source of it. The fact is that even in a society of altruists or angels there would be politics, for some would conceive the common good in one way and some in another, and (assuming the uncertainties that prevail in this world) some would think one course of action more prudent and some would think another.²

Whether it is generally desirable to try to repress conflict may also be doubted. Civilized people have a distaste for it because in the ordinary personal relations of life it involves selfishness, deceit, and strong and unpleasant emotions like hate. On the wider stage of political life, however, it does not necessarily involve these. Political struggle is often noble and highminded. To repress it, moreover, is to discourage or prevent some people from asserting their needs, wants, and interests. One can imagine a political system in which there is no struggle because the people in disagreement know that their efforts to exercise influence would have no effect upon events. In such a case politics is absent, but so also are the conditions of progress.

Where there exists conflict that threatens the existence or the good health of the society, the political function should certainly take precedence over the service one. In some cities, race and class conflict has this dangerous character. To govern New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, for example, by the canons of efficiency—of efficiency *simply*—might lead to an accumulation of restlessness and tension that would eventually erupt in meaningless individual acts of violence, in some irrational mass movement, or perhaps in the slow and imperceptible weakening of the social bonds. Politics is, among other things, a way of converting the restless, hostile impulses of individuals into a fairly stable social product (albeit perhaps a revolutionary!) and, in doing so, of giving these impulses moral significance.

This suggests another reason why the management of conflict is a social function of the greatest importance. Political struggle, even the seemingly trivial kind that so often exists in the cities, is frequently a part of the rhetoric by which society discusses the nature of the common good and the meaning of justice and virtue. The location of a housing project may not be of much intrinsic importance. But such a question becomes endowed with very great importance when in the

² Yves R. Simon, *The Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), chap. i.

course of controversy larger issues are connected with it symbolically or ideologically; then the housing matter is the vehicle for the discussion of, say, racial justice and ultimately of justice itself. Society creates its ideals, as judges make laws, by deciding particular cases in the light of general principles. It is only as general principles are brought into contact with particular cases that the principles have meaning.

Finally, politics is a way by which politicians and others get the power they must have to govern. In the American political system, legal authority is so widely distributed that an official—say a mayor—usually lacks authority to do very much. By “playing politics” he in effect borrows additional authority and he also acquires other means of exercising influence. Part II of this book describes at length the process by which power (that is, legal authority plus other means of exercising influence) is assembled in the city. It will suffice here to point out that generating some of the power without which the authorities could not govern is an indispensable function of politics.

POLITICS AS PLAY

In America, perhaps more than anywhere else, politics is also a form of play—a game. *Play* is any activity that is enjoyed for itself and not as a means to some end. A *game* is play that is carried on under rules. Much of our city politics fits these definitions. The ends that are in conflict are often not “really” valued by the players: they are not valued, that is, except for the purposes of the game. To put it still another way, the players value the ends about which they contend *in order that* they may enjoy the game. Much local office seeking, for example, cannot be understood on any assumption other than that people are having fun.

The origins of Tammany Hall, the once powerful Democratic machine in New York City, illustrate the point very well. At the end of the Revolutionary War, certain troops serving under Washington discarded their patron saint, St. George, and adopted instead “St. Tammany.” Tammen had been a noted Indian chief who was supposed to have died at the age of 107 after making a great record as a statesman. The soldiers put on a big celebration to mark the change of patrons. They erected a liberty pole and dressed themselves as Indian warriors with feathers and bucktails. According to Matthew Breen: “From the huge wigwam, which was adorned as befitted the abode of a great chief, came forth the representative of St. Tammany, dressed

in the most artistic Indian fashion. To the assembled multitude, composed of civilians as well as soldiers, he gave a long talk on the duty of the hour, dilating upon the virtues of courage, justice, and freedom; after which the warriors danced and caroused far into the night.”³

Celebrations of this sort occurred in Pennsylvania and elsewhere for several years and then, in 1789, the Tammany Society was organized in New York City. It elected a presiding officer or Grand Sachem and twelve lesser sachems, adopted Indian ceremonies, divided the year into “moons,” and issued calls for meetings “one hour after the setting of the sun.”

There was an element of seriousness in the Tammany Society, but this does not mean that it was not mostly horseplay. Play is boring, even for little children, unless it can be made serious. Anyone who is a member of a fraternity or lodge knows that exalted purposes are essential to sustain the nonsense.

The “game” and “work” elements of a political incident may therefore be difficult or impossible to separate in some instances, but the distinction is important for analysis nevertheless, because it helps to explain behavior which would be otherwise inexplicable. It also points to a possible danger for society. For although it may be safe to treat make-believe as real, it probably is not safe to treat what is real as make-believe; a politics which is an “interesting game” may in some circumstances be radically unsuited to serve the most important function of politics, the management of conflict that is *real*.

ACTORS IN CITY POLITICS

It is characteristic of the American political system that everyone has a right and even a positive obligation to “get in on the act” of running the government. As heirs to the Protestant tradition, a great many Americans believe that they owe a debt of service to the community; participating in public affairs is one of the ways in which these Americans discharge their obligation to “do good.” As heirs of the frontier and of Jacksonian democracy, they believe, too, that the ordinary citizen is qualified to decide any matter of public importance. And, as we have just seen, politics in America has always been a form of mass entertainment. For all these reasons and more, the public

³ Matthew P. Breen, *Thirty Years of New York Politics Up-To-Date* (Boston, 1899), p. 34.

business is everybody's business to an extent that would astonish other democratic peoples, even the English.

However, most participation in the affairs of the city is by groups and organizations rather than by individuals. Or, to put it properly, it is by individuals acting in group or organizational roles. The individual appears as a "person" on election day to choose between this candidate and that and sometimes to say "yes" or "no" to a few propositions on the ballot. At most other times, "persons" are of little account; groups and organizations are the principal actors.

An exception must be made to this in the case of towns and very small cities. Here formal organizations concerned with governmental affairs may not exist. Informal groupings—crowds, cliques, and circles formed around leading men—take the place of formal organizations to some extent. Whether by themselves or in cliques, individuals are relatively more important in the politics of smaller cities, or else—the two possibilities are by no means exclusive—the level of participation is lower.

Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman found this to be the case in a village (which they called Springdale) in upper New York State.⁴ Meetings of the village trustees are dull and almost meaningless. There is scarcely ever any new business, projects are rarely undertaken, and few decisions are made. The trustees do what they absolutely must, but avoid whatever they can. Far from seeking power, they seem to shun it. When the trustees act, it is always unanimously; no one ever dissents. Before the vote, however, the "debate" on the issue is long, rambling, uninformed, and inconclusive. No one wants to commit himself or to disagree with his colleagues.

Beneath the surface of Springdale, there are many matters about which some citizens feel concern. The tax assessments have never been reviewed, despite obvious inequities. Some homeowners and some farmers are disturbed about the lack of adequate roads and street lights, deficiencies in the removal of garbage and snow, and occasional failures in water pressure. Others want the town to try to attract industry, and still others are upset by certain school policies. These matters rarely develop into public issues, however, and they almost never lead to governmental action. The one opportunity effectively to challenge the system—the annual election of village trustees—is carefully controlled to prevent struggles for power. Local elections are held

⁴ Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town Politics in Mass. Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), chaps. v-viii.

at different times from state and national ones; this reduces turnout and keeps partisan issues from affecting village affairs. The polls are open for only four hours; this further discourages participation, particularly by the commuters who work during the day in nearby cities and may not entirely share the village ethos. Out of about four hundred who are eligible, no more than thirty-five vote, and on occasion as few as fifteen. Slates are made up after consultation with everyone "who counts" and are rarely opposed.

This pattern is characteristic of many small places. It can be explained on several grounds. For one thing, there is not much at stake in small-town politics; no large formal organizations are concerned in it and, since the governing body spends very little, citizens and taxpayers have little to gain or lose by what it does. For another thing, the leaders of the town depend for support upon personal associations and friendships and being "good fellows," not upon interest groups and organized constituencies. The most important consideration, however, is probably that the intimacy of small-town life makes harmony, or at least the appearance of it, almost indispensable. Where everyone is in frequent face-to-face contact with almost everyone else, it is essential that all be on good terms. People in such a town have learned from experience that controversies are particularly bitter when they involve "persons" as distinguished from "representatives of organizations." Nothing in small-town politics is as important to most people, consequently, as the preservation of peace and harmony and the maintenance of easy personal relations. The style of this politics therefore reflects this view of things. The tacitly accepted rule of unanimity and the rambling, pointless character of public discussion, for example, are both functional; they insure that no one will be put on the spot, as they probably would be if there were split votes, firm positions, and clear arguments. To put the matter more generally, the function of politics in the small towns is less to resolve issues than, by suppressing them, to enable people to get along with each other while living together in very close contact. In sizable cities, of course, this need does not exist. In a community which is relatively compact and homogeneous, the idea of a common good tends to be widely shared. Few citizens identify themselves with organizations having rival interests in community politics. There is little need for "interest balancing" and, in any case, it is considered wrong and even immoral. Since the maintenance of organizations is not at stake, there is more likely to be discussion of what is "best for the community." The views of people who are

especially disinterested, well-informed, and intelligent, and who represent in a marked degree the ethos of the community, are considered particularly relevant and those of people who speak for special interests are considered irrelevant or are given little weight. Even in the largest and most heterogeneous cities, of course, some issues may be decided largely on the basis of what is "best for the community," and even there some individuals (though usually not many) hold themselves aloof from organizational identifications in order to have the authority that goes with impartiality.⁵

From time to time the search for the common good under arrangements designed to suppress conflict breaks down. When this happens, politics in the small community tends to be more bitter, more divisive, and more explosive than politics in the large city. Issues, once they "break through" social restraints, are likely to polarize the community into hostile camps. James S. Coleman has described the impact of such issues as fluoridation, desegregation, and school policy on various small communities. There are few, if any, large impersonal organizations which seek to mitigate the conflict in order to preserve themselves. There are no established channels for the expression of disagreement. Since organized interests are not involved, issues tend to become ideological and their settlement imposes heavy strains on the social fabric.⁶ James G. Coke has noted that protests and calls for remedial civic action are "endemic in the large, but weak and episodic in the small" metropolitan centers; the larger the city, he says, the more likely it is to have its attention called to social problems and the more likely also to deal with problems by making rules rather than by treating cases individually; the application of rules, he thinks, is likely to lead to conflict.⁷

The participation of individuals in politics probably tends to be reduced where strong organizations exist, because organizations are apt to push individuals out and to pre-empt the field of controversy for themselves. This happens because organizations are impelled by a dynamic, immanent in the process of organization, to select and manage issues in ways that individuals do not.

⁵ Edward C. Banfield, *Political Influence* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 250.

⁶ James S. Coleman, *Community Conflict* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), p. 4.

⁷ James G. Coke, "The Lesser Metropolitan Areas of Illinois," *Illinois Government*, no. 15, November 1962, published by the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.

The organizations which participate in big-city politics are of two general sorts, permanent and *ad hoc*. The *ad hoc* ones are, of course, those that come into being to participate in a particular issue and then either dissolve or else convert themselves into permanent ones.

The permanent organizations which play continuing roles in city politics are of five general kinds: (1) the press; (2) other business firms, especially department stores and the owners and managers of real estate; (3) the city bureaucracies; (4) voluntary (or "civic") associations; and (5) labor unions. Each of these will be treated later in a separate chapter.

Except for the press, which concerns itself with the whole spectrum of civic activity, the permanent and *ad hoc* organizations which participate in city politics usually confine themselves to rather narrow ranges of subject matter. Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman classify nongovernmental groups in New York City by frequency of intervention and scope of influence.⁸ On their chart, the quadrant representing high frequency and broad scope is very sparsely populated, containing only the press, the League of Women Voters, and the Citizens' Union. That representing high frequency and narrow scope is heavily populated, and the organizations in it (concerned mainly with health, education, and welfare) tend to be permanent. That representing broad scope and low frequency is almost empty. The remaining quadrant, representing low frequency and narrow scope, is heavily populated with *ad hoc* bodies—letterhead organizations that quickly come and quickly go.

Any organization must offer a continuous stream of incentives to elicit the activities that it requires from its members or other "contributors" (taxpayers, customers, patrons). In large, permanent, formal organizations these incentives are largely pecuniary (e.g., salary) or at least material. But the maintenance of such organizations depends also upon their ability to offer certain nonmaterial incentives, such as prestige, association with pleasant or interesting people, and the opportunity to "do good." If it is to grow, or even to survive, every organization must offer a suitable mixture of such incentives—material, nonmaterial, or both—and it must offer them in sufficient quantity and without interruption.⁹

⁸ Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, *Governing New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), p. 79.

⁹ See Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938).

Voluntary associations (such as welfare organizations and housing and planning associations) rely mainly upon nonmaterial incentives, especially opportunities to "serve the community," to mix with "important people," to engage in activity which is "interesting." Because they must provide such incentives in order to survive, associations of this sort are always in search of "good program material," that is, topics or issues which will bring the right people together and arouse in them the enthusiasm needed to sustain the organization. The range of suitable program material is in the nature of the case limited.¹⁰

HOW ISSUES ARISE AND ARE HANDLED

These considerations help to explain how political issues arise in the city and how they are handled after they arise. Sometimes an issue is created by a politician in the course of his effort to get or keep office. Sometimes they arise because a voluntary association has put in motion certain legal machinery—as, for example, when a civic group gets enough signatures on a petition to compel the city to hold a referendum on a new city charter. More commonly, however, they arise in response to the maintenance and enhancement needs of large formal organizations. These are not, as a rule, voluntary associations. Typically they are organizations which offer mainly material rather than nonmaterial incentives (i.e., which must meet a payroll). The manager of such an organization sees some advantage in changing the status quo. He proposes changes. Other large formal organizations are threatened by the proposed changes. They oppose them, and a controversy which involves public authorities takes place.

One of the authors of this book found that the six city-wide controversies that occurred in Chicago in a two-year period could be analyzed in these terms.¹¹ In one case, a large private hospital felt threatened by heavy demands for service from low-income Negroes. Its managers proposed that the county build a public hospital nearby. This idea was opposed by the existing county hospital, a very large institution on the other side of the city. The two principal antagonists, both large organizations depending mainly upon material incentives, gathered about them various allies. The private hospital, for example, was supported by the Welfare Council, an association of organizations dealing with

¹⁰ Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955), pp. 144-145.

¹¹ Banfield, *Political Influence*; see especially chap. ix.

welfare matters; by a civic-minded millionaire; and by the newspapers. In the other Chicago cases, the prime-mover organizations were the city and county welfare departments, a university, a forest preserve district, a transit authority, a department store, and a newspaper.

Sometimes an issue is created, so to speak, out of thin air by an organization that is searching for program material. One of the Chicago cases, for example, arose when the *Chicago Tribune*, anxious to demonstrate its power and to memorialize its late editor and publisher, Colonel Robert R. McCormick, fought a long, hard, and successful battle to have an exhibition hall built under public auspices on the lake front. When the editor was asked why the paper had made such a fuss about the hall, he replied:

Why did we put so much time into this? Because it's good for the city. But partly from selfish motives too. We want to build a bigger Chicago and a bigger *Tribune*. We want more circulation and more advertising. We want to keep growing, and we want the city to keep growing so that we can keep growing.

We think the community respects a newspaper that can do things like that. People will go by that hall and say, "See that? The *Tribune* did that single-handed." That's good for us to have them say that.

If it hadn't come off—if those lawsuits had turned out wrong—it would not have been good. It's good that people should think that their newspaper is powerful. It's good that it be powerful.¹²

When a large organization is the prime mover in a civic controversy, the chief executive of the organization normally plays a crucial role in development of the controversy. In the struggle between the private and the public hospital in Chicago, the chief strategists on both sides were the medical superintendents of the hospitals. In the case of the exhibition hall the strategists were the editor of the *Tribune* and the owner of a private amphitheater which would be damaged by competition from the new hall.

The chief executives of the prime-moving organizations do not ordinarily appear in the matter conspicuously. They much prefer the background. They are used to doing things through subordinates. Unless they are newspaper executives they are reluctant, for reasons of public relations, to have their organizations involved openly in controversies. For example, when the University of Chicago decided to do something drastic about the spread of blight in its neighborhood, it set up the Southeast Commission. This was largely controlled by

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

