URBAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

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This book is designed for use as a text in an introductory course in urban government and politics. The frame of reference used and the materials included were chosen to help the college student who wants to know more about how cities are governed and who may think he would like to do further study and research in the politics of urban and metropolitan areas. A conscious effort is made to relate the substantative and descriptive materials to what the author understands to be the nature of the discipline of political science.

No attempt is made to set forth value premises about city politics or to beat the drums for reforms in city government. Throughout the book the student is urged to understand politics as competition among groups seeking different results from the political process. Attention is focused on the nature of conflicts that arise in urban societies and on the manner in which existing institutions and legal systems make it easier for some groups and harder for others to control decisions flowing from the system. The book does not instruct the student as to what is *good* and what is *bad* about governmental institutions and policies, for what is good for some groups may very well be bad for others. It assumes that existing institutions and legal systems are never neutral; they operate to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others. Therefore, city political institutions are described as dynamic, with

interest groups constantly seeking changes they think will produce decisions more nearly in congruence with their values and desires.

Although the book was prepared primarily for college students, citizens interested in urban government may find the approach useful in understanding why politicians behave as they do and why numerous so-called reforms fall by the way as they are processed through the political system. The author has had a number of years of experience as a teacher of municipal government and politics, as a technical consultant to city-charter commissions, and as a city official, and he is convinced that the approach to the subject taken in this text is far more practical than would be an attempt to argue for specific governmental forms or processes so often offered as remedies to cure the ills of cities or to explain how city functions can be administered more efficiently.

During the process of teaching local politics over a number of years, the author has read numerous textbooks, analytical essays, and research reports. All these have most certainly added to his knowledge and understanding of the subject and have influenced the substance and the method of presentation of the material in this book. Where specific references are made to material from other sources, the author has sought to give proper credit, but at this point he wishes, in a general way, to acknowledge the contributions of the many students of local government and politics whose works have helped make the book possible but for whom no specific credit lines are included.

Carl A. McCandless

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to present a description and analysis of one of the levels of government in which significant decisions are made in the American political system. The specific unit for study is the municipal corporation or, as it is more commonly referred to, the city. Although attention will be primarily concentrated on the city as a political arena in which important kinds of decisions are made, the relationships between the city and other local units of government, the state, and the nation will also be examined.

The systematic examination of any governmental unit requires that some frame of reference be established which will provide organization and unity to the entire study. The assumption is made in this text that the municipal corporation as a political institution plays a role or performs a function within the total political system of which it is a part and that the best way to learn about city politics is to center attention upon this role or function. Such seemingly diverse subjects as municipal taxation, land-use planning, waste collection and disposal, and law enforcement can be tied together if they are examined in relation to the accomplishment of a major function which the city is created to perform.

Certainly, students of politics are not in agreement on a single scheme of analysis which serves best as an orienting concept around which all facets of city government can be made to revolve, but most of them will agree that

clarity and unity require that one of several possible alternatives be adopted. Obviously, the adoption of a single unifying concept about the function of the city places certain limits on the kinds of material that are relevant and on the manner in which it can be presented, but such a limitation is not as serious a handicap as would be the inclusion of a wide variety of descriptive material about cities without supplying any central theme which would give unity to the entire work.

THE CITY AS A SERVICE INSTITUTION

One possible approach is to view the city as a service institution created and utilized to supply certain services to its inhabitants which are unlikely to be performed by any other governmental agency or by private utility corporations. If this vision of the city is to be the focal point of analysis, attention will be centered on problems related to police administration, fire protection, mass transit, local public health, and similar activities commonly accepted as functions of cities. This concept of the function of cities dominated most of the literature of reform during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and it still is often an implied assumption in books whose major concern is municipal administration. This approach to the study of cities suggests that, as in private corporations, operating efficiency is the ultimate goal for which to strive. The implication is clear that the major outputs of city operation can be measured in terms of units of service rendered to the citizens and that inputs consist of units of money and manpower required to produce the services. The major problems, then, relate to ways and means of maximizing services and minimizing expenditures of manpower and money.

A FOURFOLD CLASSIFICATION

Williams and Adrian, in their study of four cities, identified four types of cities based on the function or role of the city as perceived by dominant groups within it. The assumption is made that the operations of a city government will be determined by the image the policy makers have of the purpose for which the city exists. Their classification, based on the purposes of cities, is (1) promoting economic growth, (2) providing life's amenities, (3) maintaining traditional services, and (4) arbitrating among conflicting interests.[1] Items (2) and (3) are not far different from the functional approach

[1] Oliver P. Williams and Charles R. Adrian, *Four Cities,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1963, pp. 21–39.

just described, and item (4) comes close to reflecting the view which will be used in this text and will be discussed at greater length later.

THE CITY AS THE GUARDIAN OF ORDER

Henry Schmandt suggests that the city be conceptualized "as the guardian of order."[2] His contention is that the city functions as an institutional control to produce conformity of individual and group behavior to the culturally established norms of the community. The idea of maintenance of order in the metropolis also pervades Scott Greer's analysis in *Governing the Metropolis*, as he finds that "one basic export of the city is order"; his topic heads include, "The City as the Center of Societal Order," "The City as a Problem of Social Order," and "Solutions to the Problem of Order."[3] If this concept of the role of the city is accepted as a unifying theme for study, discussion will necessarily concentrate on forms of social control available to local policy makers whose aim is to discover and promulgate the cultural norms and to institutionalize means of ensuring maximum compliance with them. Since "order" is much less susceptible to quantification and measurement than are "units of service," the notion of efficiency in terms of maximum output in relation to costs will be less central to the discussion than it would be if the city were conceived of as a service institution.

THE CITY AS A SOURCE OF SELF-SATISFACTION

Schmandt also suggests that there is within the social system "the individual who perceives the local polity as a source for satisfying his personal esteem and self-actualization needs."[4] He suggests that the political behavior of emigrant groups, particularly the Irish, who viewed local political offices as symbolic rewards, can be understood in terms of the thesis that they considered local government as an avenue for self-realization and, therefore, established control over the decision-making machinery in Eastern cities. Adoption of this view of the function of the city might well explain the emergence and political power of big-city bosses in the late nineteenth century. This concept, if adopted, would lead the writer to place great emphasis

[2] Henry J. Schmandt, "Order in the Urban Community: The Role of Local Government," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Midwest Conference of Political Scientists, Bloomington, Ind., Apr. 22–24, 1965.

[3] Scott Greer, *Governing the Metropolis*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1962, pp. 4, 36, 37.

[4] Schmandt, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

on participation in politics, individual and group influence in elections, and political leadership, but it seems too narrow to include all the facets of city politics that should be presented in an introductory text.

THE CITY AS A POLITICAL ARENA

The central theme which will be utilized throughout this book is that the city may be viewed as an arena in which certain kinds of human conflicts arise, are debated, and are resolved through established political institutions under generally accepted rules and procedures. The adoption of this image of the major role of the city is prompted by the fact that the author wants to fit municipal politics into its proper place in the broad discipline of political science. If the author's purpose were to search out what is bad about cities and propose solutions for general reform, the approach adopted here would be entirely unsatisfactory. Since some readers will not have pursued a course of study which has provided them with a systematic analysis of the discipline of political science, a brief discussion of the author's concept of the discipline will make it easier for them to follow the presentation in the following chapters.

POLITICS AS CONFLICT

When the expression "political science" is used it implies two facts: first, that there are some kinds of phenomena that are political in character and, second, that such phenomena can be studied in a scientific way. Most students of politics will accept this statement, but not all will agree upon just what is to be considered *political* or what constitutes *scientific* analysis.

The essence of politics is conflict; therefore, the student of politics must be involved in analyzing conflicts. Human conflict arises when people who are in a position to react to each other disagree on some possible course of action. More often than not, the disagreement arises over the manner in which scarce resources are to be distributed within some kind of human association.[5] The behavior of persons involved in the conflict, the institutional arrangements available for its resolution, the generally accepted rules under

[5] This position is similar to that taken by David Easton when he describes political science as "the study of the authoritative allocation of values for a society" (David Easton, *The Political System,* Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1953, p. 129). See also Francis J. Sorauf, *Political Science, An Informed Overview,* Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., Columbus, Ohio, 1956, pp. 1–8; and Robert A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis,* Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963, chaps. 1, 2.

which the competition is carried on, and the nature of the settlement all are the substance of politics.

Although, as indicated above, Greer emphasizes the concept of order maintenance, he recognizes that conflict is central to the study of political institutions, when, in speaking of the political nature of order, he says:

> Its function is the adjustment of conflict among the corporate citizens and the social categories of the area. The conflict is real, the stakes may be very high, and the first question is no less than this: Who is a first class citizen, and whose interests shall prevail in this area? Such questions are not answered by simple administrative routine; they cannot be answered in a laboratory or with an electronic computer. They can be answered only through a political process which is accepted as legitimate, and which can make binding decisions enforceable by the police power and the public treasury of society.[6]

Many who study politics as defined here are willing to accept such a broad image of what is political and therefore of concern to the political scientist. They are, therefore, concerned with conflicts which arise within all kinds of social organizations. They may study conflicts arising within a church congregation over the selection of a new minister or over construction of a new church building in a new location. Conflicts within labor unions over jurisdictional issues or demands to be included in new contracts might very well be studied as political phenomena. In fact, some researchers are convinced that factors and forces producing conflicts within social organizations and variables affecting the manner in which they are resolved are very much the same in all human organizations and that what is learned in one setting is transferable to another.

A narrower view may also be taken as to the kind of conflicts which should be the primary concern of students of politics and this is the one adopted for use here.[7] Conflicts are political when they are presented for resolution within the political institutions of a society. Such institutions are distinguished from religious, educational, fraternal, and professional institutions in two respects: (1) Political institutions include within their clientele the whole of the society. Individuals may elect membership in most social organizations or they may elect to be nonmembers, but when a government is created within fixed boundaries, all persons within these boundaries are subject to institutional decisions whether they like it or not. (2) Political organizations have at their

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[6] Greer, op. cit., p. 41.
[7] See Haywood R. Alker, Jr., *Mathematics and Politics*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1965, p. 15.

command sanctions with which to ensure compliance that are not available to other forms of social organization.[8] Churches, fraternities, labor unions, educational institutions, and social clubs may expel members and refuse certain benefits generally available to members, but only political organizations can incarcerate offenders in penal institutions or exact the death penalty. The term "legitimacy" is often used to describe the concept of mass acceptability of the authority of political organizations.

The use of the idea of conflict as the common element of political phenomena does not deny the fact that political institutions operating through their officers and employees do many things where there is no conflict or where any conflict that is present is of a very low order. City physicians in a municipally owned hospital go about their professional duties in much the same way as they would in a church-operated hospital. Professionals in many fields render public services as employees of political institutions, but since their tasks require the application of methods and techniques that are widely accepted as proper, their actions are not considered to be political. Research to improve surgical and engineering techniques may be sponsored and carried on in political institutions by public employees, but if no conflicts arise in such activity, it is not of general interest to the student of politics. At some point or another, however, even this activity is caught up in politics. One of the most universal conflicts that arises in a political organization concerns the allocation of public funds to the various activities of the organization. Hence, demands made for money to support research or to care for patients in a public hospital must compete with demands made by other units within the government which seek support for other activities. To this extent professionals must engage in the political process to secure financial support for their projects.

POLITICAL CONFLICT INVOLVES GROUPS

The kinds of conflict which merit the attention of political scientists are those in which groups of people with similar views seek to achieve some desired results through political institutions and are opposed by other groups which are not in sympathy with such demands. Although conflicts between individuals may shed some light on the nature of conflict, they are not likely to become political unless the participants are able to rally significant numbers

[8] Sorauf, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

of others to support their cause. An important part of the study of politics is, therefore, devoted to a study of the behavior of groups that participate actively in the political process.

The adoption of the concept of conflict as the focal point for the study of municipal politics does not imply that the established services performed by cities will not be subjects for discussion. The point to be remembered is that elements of conflict that arise in the determination of the range of services to be undertaken, the manner in which they will be financed, and the intensity with which they will be rendered are of primary concern to political scientists. A single illustration may clarify this point. If a given city has not supplied its householders with any kind of garbage and rubbish collection and disposal, the assumption is that private arrangements have been made between house-holders and some private persons to make collections at a fee stated in the contract. Each householder, however, is free to provide for his own disposal if he chooses to do so. Waste disposal becomes a political issue only when some householders, dissatisfied with the existing system, make demands upon city officials to include this service as a city responsibility. When this issue is on the agenda of a city council for debate, some citizens will appear to support the changes and others will insist on continuation of the existing system. But once the decision is made for the city to assume the collection function, other political conflicts arise. Shall this function be financed by a general tax on property or by service charges collected by the city from each householder? Shall collections be every day or twice each week? Shall house-holders be required to place kitchen refuse in one kind of container and rubbish in another? Various citizen groups want these questions decided in different ways. Therefore, in this text discussion of city functions will appear but attention will be centered on the nature of conflicts that arise in their performance, rather than upon the technical procedures required to perform the service.

SCIENCE AND THE STUDY OF POLITICS

If politics is viewed as groups of people competing with each other to secure decisions favorable to them through established political institutions, the student of politics must be interested in the end product of the conflict, the decision that is finally made, as well as in the procedure by which the final decision is arrived at. Can such a process be studied scientifically? On this issue there is no general agreement among those who profess to be political

scientists. There are those who believe that the study of politics is more philosophy than science.[9] Historically, writers about politics, from Plato down to the twentieth century, seemed to be concerned with discovering the essentials of the *good life* and with the construction of governmental institutions which would make such a good life possible. Although the study of political philosophy is still an important part of the curricula of most college departments of political science, there is a definite trend toward making the discipline more scientific. Although there is no general agreement on what the term "scientific" means when used in this context, two elements seem to occur regularly in the literature on the subject.

Scientific Attitude

Most researchers in the field of politics are agreed that one who observes the political process in order to describe it accurately and to analyze it needs to acquire what may be called a scientific attitude. This implies that he approach his subject intellectually rather than emotionally. He is trying to understand the process, rather than praise or condemn it. Observations are made objectively, and no attempt is made to screen out of the observations that which is objectionable and to play up prominently that which is pleasing to the observer. Description portrays "what is" in the political process, not what the observer thinks it "ought to be." In short, the scientific observer seeks to submerge his own values about the merits of competing groups in a political conflict and to explain, not pass judgment on, the process by which settlement was reached.

This discussion is not intended to imply that a political scientist does not or should not have his own set of values by which to judge right and wrong in political conflicts, but it is important that when he writes as a scientist, his own value premises not be permitted to color the analysis he propounds. Nor is it to be implied that political scientists cannot or should not participate actively in the political process, but it is important that political activity not be permitted to distort objectivity in description. Objectivity is often made difficult by the common use of such terms as the "public welfare," the "general welfare," the "public good," and, on a larger scale, the "national interest." These terms are used by all groups which seek to make the position they espouse prevail in the political process. They are often used to

[9] For a good presentation of this point of view, see Herbert J. Storing (ed.), *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1962.