

Geography and Regional Administration

By T. W. FREEMAN [HUTCHINSON & Co., LONDON, 1968, p. 200]

When sociologists first suggested that there was a rural-urban continuum,^[1] it was old news to planners, geographers, demographers and local government administrators. It had generally been believed that incorporation of boroughs and autonomy in the administration of local government was an historical anomaly, not suited to the problems of twentieth century municipal administration. Mr. Freeman takes the reader through an historical excursion into the creation of boroughs, counties and county boroughs and related problems of establishing the dichotomy between town and country in the nineteenth century. His point, at its simplest, is that the basis for the dichotomy no longer exists, geographically or otherwise, and consequently administrative areas of local government must be redefined.

The historical excursion seems quite sound, if only by the sheer weight of statistics and kindred mapping. The first chapter entitled "Aspects of Local Government" takes the reader on what might be a motor trip through the British countryside, indicating the physical and spatial interrelationship of towns and rural areas. A sample passage will establish the point: "Except for the special element of holiday trade on the coast, most of Lincolnshire is rural; its life focused through its country towns with, at its heart, the great cathedral-dominated city of Lincoln. If one continues into East Anglia through the Fernlands . . ." [2] Chapter 6 provides a similar district by district tour through the Greater London area.

The reader must have faith in the author for he is asked to accept, without discussion of any consequence, that the rural-urban dichotomy no longer exists for the purposes of deciding the boundaries of local government administration. For example: "A city region should ideally include rural and urban areas, and the lack of wisdom in making any rigid separation between town and country is now widely recognized . . . In short, the two are inseparably intertwined in commercial and social life, always have been and presumably always will be." [3]

Can it be that a rural agricultural area will gladly accept the amenities of paved roads, shopping centres and the like? Will a quiet seaside resort be acquiescent if the residents of the neighbouring town want to

1 The earliest work on the subject was probably, P. Sorokin and C. C. Zimmerman, *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology* (1929), followed by L. Wirth, *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938), 41 *American Journal of Sociology*.

2 p. 24.

3 p. 23.

erect shanties on the "exclusive side" of their beach? Probably not, and arguments like these centreing around a desire for exclusivity have been the subject matter of zoning and planning litigation throughout the Western world. Regional administration may bring the rural inhabitants gifts of various value, but may not be palatable whatever the advantages.

It has been suggested that a primary factor in the historical incorporation of boroughs was the desire for exclusivity⁴ and this factor should not be dismissed in considerations of reform of local government units. It always strikes one after reading an argument for reform as to what course events would take if the author's suggestions were never accepted. In the case of local government administration one could foresee that a gradual breakdown of rural areas into "minor" urban units will result in the formation of larger towns and boroughs with an emphasis on extended use of annexation and severance provisions in local government legislation. Perhaps the same result but by a different method.

Reform of local government administration has now been the subject of numerous books, articles and Royal Commissions. In Chapter 5 the author gives a detailed account of the findings of the Local Government Commission of 1958, pointing out, however, that the Commission was acting under a limited term of reference. It is unfortunate (and was perhaps chronologically impossible) that the author did not also review the Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland (Wheatley Report) or at least the important advances towards regionalization in other jurisdictions, notably the Ontario Local Government Reviews. Although the Commissions have really said nothing that was not said in one form or another before, they would have at least substantiated the claim that reform of local government administration is desired throughout the Commonwealth and is undoubtedly the direction that local government structural reform will take.

There is a point where the literature produced in support of one specific proposition becomes redundant and begins to reduce the proposition to where it is no longer discussed for fear that the reader will become bored, if not disgusted. This work is still within the bounds of being topical but perhaps represents the last attempt at justifying the eventuality of regionalism.

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4 For instance, see: M. Weinbaum, *The Incorporation of Boroughs* (1937), pp. 97-99.

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