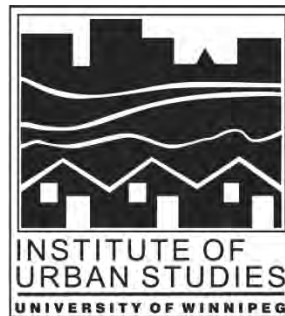


A Discussion Paper on Urban Populism and Urban Policy-Making

**By Lloyd Axworthy & Donald Epstein
1974**

The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

FOR INFORMATION:

The Institute of Urban Studies

The University of Winnipeg
599 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg
phone: 204.982.1140
fax: 204.943.4695
general email: ius@uwinnipeg.ca

Mailing Address:

The Institute of Urban Studies

The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9

A DISCUSSION PAPER ON URBAN POPULISM AND URBAN POLICY-MAKING

Published 1974 by the Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg

© THE INSTITUTE OF URBAN STUDIES

Note: The cover page and this information page are new replacements, 2015.

The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

A DISCUSSION PAPER ON
URBAN POPULISM AND URBAN POLICY-MAKING

a paper for presentation at the
Conference on the Canadian Urban Experience
Toronto, May 30, 1974

Lloyd Axworthy
and
Donald Epstein

Institute of Urban Studies
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba

A DISCUSSION PAPER ON
URBAN POPULISM AND URBAN POLICY-MAKING

Introduction

Urban populism is a term that can be used to express the major movement of citizen reform or self-help activity that has emerged in Canadian cities over the past six to seven years. At the root of the urban populist movement is a serious frustration at the way cities have been governed. It has been a reaction against city politics dominated by developer interests; against plans and programs devised by administrators with little concern with the views of citizens; against city programs in transportation, housing and renewal that despoil the environment and ignore the interests of lower income, inner city residents.

Urban populism has several expressions. It may be the working class citizen group organizing in an effort to gain some control over their neighbourhood, usually through the inspiration of some young community organizer.¹ It may be a group of middle class and professional citizens organized to fight against the intrusion of a freeway plan or high-rise development.² It could take the form of citizens engaged in a

-
1. Graham Fraser, Fighting Back, Hakkert, Toronto, 1972.
 2. David and Nadin Nowlen, The Bad Trip: The Untold Story of the Spadina Expressway, House of Anansi, Toronto, 1970; and Terry Partridge, Transportation Advocacy Planning: The Case of Cost, Institute of Urban Studies, November 1973.

form of self-help activity to gain job training or better housing.³ Or, it could be a political movement that backs a reform state of candidates.⁴

In part, the strength of this movement can be seen in the hundreds of new civic groups that have grown up in various Canadian cities. Where city politics was once a placid backwater, it is increasingly the arena for an intense form of citizen activism, and a whole new agenda of demands. A network of urban populist groups is taking shape in each city, armed with their own brigade of organizers, publicists, advocate planners, and intellectual interpreters. A new breed of populist hero or heroine has emerged to speak for this new movement and some even get elected to office.

At the heart of urban populism is a set of clear propositions:

1. that people should have a say in decisions that affect them, and
2. that those decisions will be more closely in tune with the interests of the ordinary citizens.

In other words, one basic aim underlying the activity of citizen groups is to change the way public policy was made in the belief that more involvement by citizens will result in better policies, or at least policies closer in accord with their wishes.

-
3. See Eric J. Barker, Carl J. Blanchaer, Donald Epstein, "Limited House Rehabilitation and Job Training: The Winnipeg Home Improvement Project" and Terry J. Partridge, Lloyd Axworthy, "Administration and Financing of Non-Profit Housing: The People's Committee for a Better Neighbourhood, Inc." in Donald Epstein, editor, Housing Innovation & Neighbourhood Improvement, Institute of Urban Studies, March 1974.
 4. Paul Tennant, "The Rise and ??? of Citizen Participation in Vancouver", unpublished paper delivered at conference on "Alternate Forms of City Government", Banff, Alberta, May 16, 1974.

Granted, there may have been more radical or revolutionary aims by some of the younger community organizing types who initially thought of turning over the whole system.⁵ But, in the main, the objective was not to overturn the system, but to make it work more equitably and democratically.

Questions in Search of Answers

If this has been the objective, then it is about time that an assessment be made of how well the objective has been served. The question is -- has it made a difference to our cities? Has there been as yet any demonstrable change in the conduct and product of the governing system of our cities as a result of all this activity? Has there been significant progress towards the re-making of urban policy decisions and decision-making structures, or has the impact of this new urban force been minimal? These questions require answers because those answers are of great importance for the future nature of urban decision-making. Managing urban problems in the years ahead will be a difficult task. Some authors don't think it can be done without imposing very strict controls over human freedom, perhaps resorting to very authoritarian management systems.⁶ If the urban populist movement results in a more democratic and effective approach to urban policy-making, then it deserves added support. If, on the other hand,

5. Marjaleena Repo, "The Fallacy of Community Control", Transformation 1, No. 1, January-February 1972.

6. Robert Heilbroner, What is the Human Prospect, N.Y. Review of Books, Volume XX, Numbers 21 & 22, January 24, 1974.

"citizen participation" is simply another distraction, a further overloading of policy-making circuits, then its usefulness can and will be increasingly questioned.

A different set of questions might also be posed in terms of the efficacy of the different forms of urban activism. Which kind yields which results? Does confrontation with the system yield better results than involvement in electoral politics or in self-help activities, or vice versa? Have policy makers become more sensitive to citizen demands or have more traditional politicians been forced to give way to a new breed of leader? Have there been new structures designed to provide and legitimize community control and what have been their relative degrees of success? Have urban policies become more attuned to the populist concerns?

Answers to the various questions are skimpy. There have been some popular treatment of the subject, based on case material or individual impressions.⁷ The problem with most of these is that they are based on the Toronto situation, which while important, does not tell enough about the situation across Canada.

Academic writing on the subject has also been slender, and again based primarily on the Toronto scene. It is often constructed as well in terms of the various hypotheses related to citizen participation as opposed to empirical work describing its impact or even relationship to urban policy-making. Thus, there is a serious need to begin looking at the role of the

7. See James F. Lorimer, A Citizen's Guide to City Politics, James Lewis and Samuel, Toronto, 1972; and Boyce Richardson, The Future of Canadian Cities, new press, Toronto, 1972. Also, a particularly good reference is Graham Fraser, Fighting Back, op.cit.

populist movement in urban decision-making to see in what ways it works and has brought about change, and whether its role has had an impact in altering the nature of urban decision-making itself.

The purpose of this paper then is to open for discussion some of the issues related to the role of urban populism and urban policy-making, drawing upon the results of studies that have been conducted in Winnipeg and analyses of emerging legislative requirements. Within the past four years the city of Winnipeg has experienced changes in government organization, program development in neighbourhood renewal and the application of a new legal instrument requiring impact studies. Each have been based to some extent on principles of citizen involvement. Each has brought about different results.

Amalgamation and Decentralization in Winnipeg

One example of a policy response to the urban populist movement occurred in the re-organization of local government in Winnipeg. The NDP, upon taking power in 1969, set about to fulfill a campaign commitment to reform Winnipeg's local government. In late 1970, a white paper was released setting forth a proposal for amalgamating the thirteen municipalities into one Unicity, but also incorporating structures into local government that would improve access for the citizens, and thereby create a more democratic form of government.

The means of achieving this was to decentralize the political or representational part of the system by dividing the city into fifty wards based on a 10,000 population formula, the theory being that smaller wards

would lean to closer contact between the elected representatives and the electors. Thirteen community committees were also established, composed of councillors of three to five wards, exercising powers of "supervision" over local matters. Finally, a form of local community council called a resident advisory group was attached to each community committee, where private citizens elected annually from the community would meet with the councillors and advise them on policy and program.⁸

When this scheme was introduced it was heralded as a major innovation in local government, particularly in terms of providing an institutional form on the community level to provide for citizen participation.⁹ But, thus far, the implementation of that thesis has been difficult.

To begin with, the legislation that set up the new city scheme in Winnipeg, while very detailed in most respects, was generally vague concerning the powers and responsibilities of the community committees and resident advisory groups.¹⁰ In fact, where the word "supervise" was used in the legislation in respect to the powers of the community committees, the provincial government clarified that to mean not operative control but advisory functions.

As well, when the new city began operation, there was no provision from any level of government to assist in the launching of the resident advisory system. Because the transition period between the passage of the

8. Government of Manitoba, "Proposals for Urban Reorganization in the Greater Winnipeg Area", December 1970.

9. Meyer Brownstone, Lionel Feldman, "Innovation and City Government Winnipeg 1972", Canadian Forum, May 1972.

10. For a full discussion, see Lloyd Axworthy, Jim Cassidy, Unicity: The Transition, Institute of Urban Studies, 1974, Section 3 E & D.

legislation and the new system coming into operation was less than six months, little time was given to explain the system to the populace, the civic administrators, or the city politicians. As a result, this new vehicle was little understood, nor were there any guidelines as to how it should operate. Also, there were no resources provided in the way of staff, facilities or money to enable the resident advisors to organize, acquire some expertise or launch any communication ventures in the community.¹¹

Even with these limitations, the first period of resident advisory operations showed signs that they were becoming an important new adjunct to local government. Over four hundred people were active in the initial thirteen resident advisory groups with membership ranging in each from about twenty to over two hundred in one. They organized themselves usually into committees corresponding to the committees on Council, i.e., works and operations, environment, finance, and several undertook special tasks related to specific neighbourhood concerns. Most of the resident advisors were people who had been community activists previously and who now directed their concerns through the RAG vehicle.

The basic restraint, however, was one of resources. In a few cases, the Company of Young Canadians provided full time volunteers to individual RAGs and in these cases, the increased level of activity was obvious. But, even in these cases there was not enough basic professional and technical help and a number of problems were encountered.

To give one example, the City had prepared a fairly long and complicated report on personnel re-organization. This was sent to RAGs for comment. But, no effort was made to help decipher the report, explain

11. Ibid.

It or raise alternatives, and the time given for review was very short. As a consequence, the opinions coming back from the resident advisors were not very impressive, and it developed into a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby civic politicians and administrators could say that the RAGs really didn't do their job, even though it was the lack of support that caused the poor response.

These obvious defects gave rise to efforts by some resident advisors to form an association to seek funds to provide various resources to the RAGs. A steering committee representing ten of the resident advisory groups developed a proposal for hiring researchers that was submitted to the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. It was considered by the tri-level group in Manitoba over a period of six months and at this writing is still not decided. It appears that one of the stumbling blocks is adverse reactions by city councillors which were communicated to the Minister in Ottawa.

This is indicative of the generally unenthusiastic attitude by most city councillors and administrators towards RAGs. In a survey conducted among councillors, when asked if RAGs should be given additional support, 50% said no, and 34% said yes.¹² Furthermore, there has never been any serious discussion on Council over the role of RAGs or citizen involvement generally. It appears that they are viewed in the main as apart from the normal governing process.

In part, this view is deserved. The RAG members themselves admit that they have not been very successful in communicating with their

12. Ibid., p. 117.

respective communities, nor in involving many citizens. As well, because the RAGs tend often to be composed of citizen activists with a strong orientation toward issues they often find themselves in a combative relationship with councillors, and this impedes the development of trusting relationships between the elected representatives and their citizen advisors. There is also a tendency for RAG members to become cliquish and closed in their meetings, thus discouraging active participation of others.¹³

Even despite these self-imposed drawbacks, it is clear that city officials, elected and non-elected, have neither adopted nor accepted the RAG system. Perhaps the most significant development that shows this negative attitude toward the community committee-RAG system is the move toward a six-district administrative arrangement. Beginning first with the public works department, followed recently by fire and soon by police, the city has been organized into six administrative areas which have absolutely no correspondence with the political jurisdictions of the community committees or RAGs. This can only be interpreted as a way of having the administration avoid any accountability to the community committee level, using the central Council committees as their only reference.

However, even with a generally ambivalent attitude by councillors and administrators toward the community committee-RAG system, there has been some impact on the policy program of city government -- though one can't call it as yet a major force. The priorities of the city, for example, are still highly pro-development, just as they were prior to the

13. Ibid., p. 120.

coming of Unicity.¹⁴ But, there has been some restraint on the actions of City Council in this respect.

To begin with, the community committee level is the jurisdiction where zoning variances and subdivision applications are first considered, before being sent to the environment committee of Council. At this level there has been significant activity in challenging submissions and a good deal of veto power exercised by local residents, so much so that local developers credit this as one main reason for the major shortfall in housing construction in Winnipeg over the past year.¹⁵ In addition, there have been cases where city planners have given local residents, working out of resident advisory groups, the incentive to begin developing district area plans and have provided city planners to assist them. The outcome of these initiatives is still too early to determine.

On major development issues there is one case where the existence of the community committees and resident advisors played a role in altering a city policy. In 1972 the City, Province and Federal Government unveiled plans for a major railway relocation in the city.¹⁶ At first glance, it appeared a beneficial move, but second reading proved differently. Several suburban areas learned that the new location of rail lines would cut through well established residential areas. In the downtown area it became clear that the removal of railway yards and lines would only end up in their replacement by a previously proposed freeway system. An ad hoc group of citizens organizations banded together to oppose the plan

14. Ibid., pp. 137 - 146.

15. The UMA Group, Building Sites: A Prime Component of Housing, Winnipeg, November 1973.

16. For a full account, see Terry Partridge, Transportation Advocacy Planning, Institute of Urban Studies, November 1973.

and they used the forums provided by the RAGs to express their opposition. Sufficient adverse opinion was stimulated that the plan went back to the drawing board, with instruction by Council to consider new options.

There has been, therefore, some evidence that the existence of the community committee-resident advisory group structure as part of the City of Winnipeg scheme has influenced in some way the direction of planning and development activity. It has certainly not touched the major thrust of downtown development plans, but on the community level there has been the waylaying of certain developments and the initiation of a few community based planning ventures.

The RAGs have also provided a forum wherein local and city wide issues could be discussed, and where at a minimum of once a month there would be face-to-face contact between local politicians and citizens. While this function of providing an airing of issues and some direct contact may not appear too remarkable, it is certainly an improvement over the old city system where there were very few institutional requirements for "open" government and most decisions were taken behind closed doors.

Where the community committee-resident advisory structure may have its strongest impact, however, is in providing a breeding ground for reform politics in the city. Already, there is a new reform coalition organizing to do battle in the forthcoming election, and many of their recruits come from the resident advisory groups. The experience of being a resident advisor has served to heighten awareness of city issues, gain some access to information about what the city is doing, focus frustration on the political power centers, and observe the failings of the system. Thus, the ultimate

Impact of the resident advisory system may be in the way it streams into local government a new group of urban activists. As a vehicle for widespread citizen involvement, it has not worked. Most people simply do not know of the existence of RAGs or care much.¹⁷ They have been used, though, as a form of expressing opposition. And, they may act as a spawning ground for a new urban political movement -- if they are not put out of business first.

Political Structures and the Urban Neighbourhood

The effort in Winnipeg to achieve a degree of citizen involvement through institutional engineering demonstrates the limitation of this kind of approach. An attempt to impose a new governmental structure can be frustrated by the underlying social and political realities. In Winnipeg the tradition, as in most cities, has been one of city government based on the representative system, involving little of the notion of direct citizen participation.

Analysis of Winnipeg's political and administrative structure indicates it to be an amalgam of competing principles and values lacking a clear rationale. What Jane Jacobs refers to as the "street neighbourhood"¹⁸ is unrepresented. Few organizations or resources are available to assist street "neighbouring", in Suzanne Keller's phrase,¹⁹ to develop. No clear access or encouragement is provided to the residents of street or block

17. Lloyd Axworthy, Jim Cassidy, Unicity: The Transition, op. cit.

18. Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York, Random House, 1961.

19. Suzanne Keller, The Urban Neighbourhood, New York, Random House, 1968.

neighbourhoods for controlling their local environment and requiring municipal implementation of acceptable plans and programs.

At the larger and institutionalized RAG and community committee levels, such tangible powers and resources are also absent, which makes the participants in these newly formed organizational groupings all the more frustrated.

While physically akin to Jacobs' "district neighbourhood", a Winnipeg district is an administrative rather than a political or representational power center. Rather than being controlled by a district council of some sort, the administrative functioning of city departments at that level is, in the main, controlled by the board of commissioners, and the corresponding committees of City Council. The decentralization and public participation promised in the white paper and in legislative debate has not, therefore, been translated into functional or decision-making reality.

It is often alleged that public participation at the local level can only be meaningful if feelings of community exist among the citizens. Thus, structural reform, such as the RAG and community committee system in Winnipeg, are limited at best if they are not based upon pre-existing or potential communities. Particularly, in today's larger metropolitan areas, politically defined communities rarely are sociologically or functionally defined communities as well.

To expect, therefore, that most community committees or resident advisory groups contain the degree of social cohesion and collective resources required to solve local problems is generally naive. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that the neighbourhood or community concept

played any part in the original determination of wards or community committee areas, except in so far as previously existing municipalities were also functioning communities, e.g., St. James. Further evidence was provided in 1974, when the Boundaries Commission first recommended a further weakening of even those ties formed during the first two years of Unicity. Ward boundaries were to be altered in accordance with a loose one-man, one-vote principle with little or no attention given to the difficult settling-in process just undergone. As a result of the ensuing reactions, the provincial government requested the Boundaries Commission to re-evaluate the situation, urging it not to disrupt existing boundaries where possible. One suspects, however, that the reasons for such a request were less of a social than a political nature, although the two are not mutually exclusive. In any event, the Commission recently reversed itself and recommended no change in the number or composition of wards at the present time.

This separation between political and neighbourhood jurisdictions is one of the basic difficulties faced by urban populists and others in their attempt to implement desirable "public policy". Nowhere has this problem been more apparent than in questions of urban renewal and neighbourhood improvement.

From Urban Renewal to Neighbourhood Improvement

In 1968 the Federal Government launched a Task Force under the direction of the Honourable Paul Hellyer to look into various aspects of housing and urban development in Canada. During the course of the Task Force travels across Canada, the signs of citizen unrest and unhappiness

with the then federal policies in housing and urban development surfaced. As noted in the Task Force Report, citizens were against the bulldozer approach to urban renewal, the social stigma of public housing, and the aloofness of government officials.²⁰

As a consequence, the Federal Government stopped all urban renewal activity and undertook a major review of all policies. These studies concluded that there should be a major shift away from centralized policy-making, and a higher degree of involvement by citizens in the planning and development of their own environment with the emphasis on non-profit and co-operative housing, and citizen involvement in neighbourhood renewal.²¹ In between time, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation began to support a number of demonstration projects in cities such as Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg and Toronto, which included elements of citizen involvement in planning of neighbourhoods, indicating a willingness at least to venture into a different policy approach. The policy culmination of this was the passage of the National Housing Act amendments of 1973, which contained measures designed to give incentives for citizen self-help efforts in the housing field and a replacement for the old urban renewal policy, called the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP). NIP, among other things, included a provision for citizen involvement in planning.

Against this situation must be viewed the opposite picture of municipal and provincial opposition to federal efforts to support citizen involvement. There had been particularly strong reaction from the municipalities and provinces to avoid federal OFY and LIP programs. This

20. Report of the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, Queen's Printer, January 1969.

21. Michael Dennis and Susan Fish, Programs in Search of a Policy: Low Income Housing in Canada, Hakkert, Toronto, 1972.

reaction cooled federal ardour towards generating additional self-help activities. In the urban field, municipal politicians through the vehicle of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities were voicing opposition towards what appeared to be federal efforts to short circuit the elected representatives and existing channels of local government. This opposition was given further voice once the federal government, through the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, initiated the tri-level meetings with provincial and municipal officials to discuss urban issues. This was a purely governmental consultative process, excluding any other actors and again the message from the provincial and municipal levels was clear -- if the federal government expected its new policies to work, then they were going to have to rely upon the co-operation of the other two levels, and that co-operation would be exacted at a price. A downplaying of citizen involvement was a part of that price.

The inner cities have always been threatened by public policies and private initiatives that offered either too little too late, or too much too soon. Either old neighbourhoods have been left to decay through inaction or been threatened with demolition to accommodate the great new downtowns of the nation. And, through it all, they have been offered the rhetoric of renewal.

Will the new National Housing Act be just another stage of rhetoric while legitimizing another round of too little, too late? The writers of the legislation appear to have had the experience of the past in mind and have attempted to provide some protective principles missing in previous renewal attempts. The site clearance provisions are not intended "as a

means to assemble land for redevelopment purposes". The legislation requires municipal demonstration of "the availability of alternative accommodations within the means of persons displaced by site clearance projects". It declares "rehabilitation of existing dwellings (to be) a primary federal objective". And it sees "participation of the residents in the program for the neighbourhood...as a very important factor".²² But in the reality of policy implementation, it remains to be seen if the transition from renewal to improvement will offer more than just a rhetorical shift.

Citizen Participation and Neighbourhood Improvement²³

"The purpose of NIP is to encourage and support efforts of municipalities in concert with neighbourhood residents".²⁴ The legislation requires that the province, in its agreement with the Federal Government, "advise the Corporation of the manner in which the province or municipality proposes to obtain the participation of the residents of that neighbourhood in planning and carrying out the project for which assistance is sought".²⁵ While CMHC must be informed of these intentions, "it is provincial and local authorities who determine the most effective means for ensuring such participation".²⁶

22. CMHC, "New National Housing Act Programs: Neighbourhood Improvement Program", August 1973.

23. For an expanded discussion of the 1973 NHA amendments focusing on neighbourhood improvement and related topics, see Donald Epstein, "Toward Neighbourhood Improvement: Policy Development and Program Recommendations", in Donald Epstein, editor, Housing Innovation and Neighbourhood Improvement, op. cit.

24. Ibid. (Author's Italics).

25. NHA, Part III.1, 27.1 (2) (c). (Author's Italics).

26. CMHC, op. cit.

Unfortunately, no guidelines for acceptable forms or standards of participation exist in the NIP legislation. If, for whatever reason, resident involvement is in fact not achieved, presumably the program can still proceed and funds acquired without it. Afterwards, in any event, neighbourhood residents are to have the opportunity for evaluation:

The success of any Neighbourhood Improvement Program will be assessed in terms of the benefits resulting for residents of the neighbourhood and the way in which they regard its achievement of their community aspirations.²⁷

The danger of course is that an assessment of damages after the fact does nothing to prevent it. Moreover, those that are most adversely affected will probably no longer be available for comment.

Consistent with the terms of the legislation and the subsequent federal-provincial agreements, municipalities around the country are preparing for the use of NIP funds. In Winnipeg, the City's Department of Environmental Planning is charged with the responsibility. In its first report on the subject, it recommends the "formation of some kind of resident association to provide a basis for involvement in policy-making, program forming and implementation".²⁸ The Neighbourhood Improvement Committee, as this association is termed, "could be comprised of representation from existing neighbourhood organizations and/or citizens at large". Its "specific organization" and "operating procedures will be determined by interested citizens". These citizens will be assisted by a

27. Ibid.

28. NIP 1974, Department of Environmental Planning, City of Winnipeg, 1974, p. 69.

staff of civic employees located at a site office in the neighbourhood Improvement area. Membership on the committee "would be open to all area residents", and emphasis placed on maximizing neighbourhood support to ensure a "cross-section of the local population".²⁹

To provide the political linkage between the Neighbourhood Improvement Committee and the Community Committee and City Council, the Planning Department proposes the establishment of a Program Liaison Committee. This committee, to be composed of "no less than six citizen representatives", "members of the Neighbourhood Improvement Committee" (It is not clear as to the distinction if any), the local councillor(s) (three in one NIP area; one in the other), and two members of Council's Committee on Environmental Planning.

In addition to this basic political structure, the City planners are presently advocating an organizing strategy that minimizes the input of "existing neighbourhood organizations". Their argument is essentially that those organizations are generally led by one or a few dominant and sometimes self-serving individuals, have very small memberships and hence little committed support in the neighbourhood, are single-issue, vested-interest groups, and represent a divisive force in the area due to their infighting and division of turf. In addition, there appears to be negative reaction on the part of civic operatives to some of the personalities involved in local group leadership and their use of confrontation tactics on occasion. Thus, the conclusion is that a federation of existing groups would comprise a Neighbourhood Improvement Committee of a most unrepresentative and difficult type.

29. Ibid.

Both this strategy and the formal organizational framework proposed for neighbourhood improvement programming pose serious problems with respect to effective citizen participation and programmatic results. While the principle of representation for the "silent majority" in the neighbourhood is admirable, the strategy of non-recognition and avoidance of established groups in the community is almost certain to produce opposition, resentment, delay and inexperience. Groups that have worked hard over recent years to establish themselves and achieve some degree of service performance can only view such a strategy with suspicion, although it seems fair to assume that many of their leaders or members would emerge as individual members of the Neighbourhood Improvement Committee. The attempted breakdown of an emerging network of local groupings, however, is probably destructive in the long run of the social and organizational infrastructure so needed in continuing self-help and neighbourhood improvement efforts.

As municipal control devices, however, the strategy and organization chart are clever and probably effective. The establishment of both a NIC and the PLC, in the middle between the RAG and community committee, places the councillors and city planning staff in key positions to control the process. The burdens of at least two different committee meetings, mounds of paper work, reporting back to the RAG, negotiating with politicians and officials, meeting with local organizations, and, above all, attempting to "make policy, form programs and implement" them (the stated roles of the NIC) would be extraordinary for the seasonal full time professional, not to mention a lay citizen with another full time job and/or family. The typical results of such demands are a decline or rejection of participation by citizens, extremely slow deliberations and decision-making, rubber stamp

committees, and rising negativism spawned by distrust and frustration. Since it could be anticipated that the bulk of the final membership on the committees would be composed of previously active leaders of neighbourhood groups anyway, the strategy and structure would appear to be counter productive.

NIP is essentially a municipal program. Control is placed squarely in the hands of city authorities or those they designate. As such, NIP potentially weakens the hands of the numerous self-help groups and non-profit corporations working in deteriorated, low-income areas of the city. Once an area is designated as a NIP area, efforts of all those working in the area must logically be co-ordinated within the program. That the participation requirements of the legislation are strong enough to protect self-help activity is doubtful.

In the best cases, non-profit and citizen group activity will gain in impact as part of a larger effort. But in the worst cases, certain municipalities can use the program, as they did urban renewal, to starve them of funds, to supervise more closely their activities, or all but drive them out of business. What is clear, at any rate, is that the Neighbourhood Improvement Program places the municipality between non-profit groups and the federal government in designated NIP areas, whereas before the program, such groups could go directly to regional offices or Ottawa for assistance.

NIP is a treatment program, not a preventative or anticipatory one. Its focus is in "seriously deteriorated neighbourhoods", not deteriorating

ones or those in danger of deterioration. As such, NIP applies itself to the same areas as did the old and discredited urban renewal program with those added "protections" regarding relocation, public participation, and emphasis on rehabilitation. It remains to be seen whether such statements are transformed into the effective mechanisms by which the program can become a true alternative to old style urban renewal. If the program does live up to that expectation, it will be most valuable to know whether it was the quality of the legislation, the skill and standards used in its implementation, or rather the "new politics" of the cities that was mainly responsible.

Environmental Impact Review: The Secret Weapon

Potentially the most potent weapon now in the hands of urban populists in Winnipeg is the Environmental Impact Review, as contained in Section 653(1) of The City of Winnipeg Act. This brief and until recently little noticed provision requires that the Executive Policy Committee, the power center of City Council,

review every proposal for the undertaking by the city of a public work which may significantly affect the quality of the human environment and shall report to the council before such work is recommended to council on,

- (a) the environmental impact of the proposed work;
- (b) any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the work be undertaken; and
- (c) alternatives to the proposed action.³⁰

This requirement, enshrined in the basic law of the city, is unique among all political jurisdictions in Canada. As such, there is no body of legal precedent, no judicial determination as to the substantive nature of an environmental impact review, no decision with respect to the legal standing of plaintiffs on such questions in Canadian courts. While precedents and judicial decisions on such matters abound in U.S. courts, cases on the basis of Section 653(1) of The City of Winnipeg Act will break new ground in Canadian jurisprudence.

The section was first cited in 1973 in relation to the environmental impact of a new overpass for the CPR yards, a project that was intimately tied in with the municipality's proposed plans for a major metropolitan freeway system and the removal and relocation of large areas of railway

30. The City of Winnipeg Act, Section 653(1), p. 306.

trackage near the downtown center. Citizen groups opposing the nature of the project's design and its effects on their neighbourhoods demanded that the City produce statements as to environmental impact. As a result, the citizens achieved their long-requested goal of city expropriation of already affected properties, deteriorated as a result of the plan's existence and controversy. Subsequently, five to six such reviews were prepared on related works, as well as the Portage and Main concourse. In none of these cases, however, did the reviews contain discussion of "alternatives", as required in the Act.

In 1974, the first two suits under Section 653(1) were filed in The Court of Queen's Bench. The first case, filed on behalf of Winnipeg taxpayers, concerns the construction by the city of a car parking garage as part of a huge high-rise office and hotel project approved for the corner of Portage and Main. While the entire project, a basically private venture of the Trizec Corporation, has come under fire, the only legal basis on which opponents could bring suit was its public works component, i.e., the garage. A second suit filed contends that the City acted in violation of the Act by not preparing a suitable environmental impact review with respect to the use of mosquito fogging in the city. Both come up for hearing in June.

What is the impact of the environmental impact review provision likely to be? There is good reason to believe that American experience and case law will be an influential guide for this country's experience. Indeed, the Winnipeg provision was taken nearly verbatim from part of Section 102 of the National Environmental Protection Act in the United

States. With certain legal distinctions relative to particular aspects of Canadian Law regarding class actions, anticipated damages, and injunctive relief, plaintiffs at minimum could cause the city to:

1. disclose increasingly more detailed information and specific evidence otherwise held secret from the public;
2. acknowledge and document "any adverse environmental effects", not necessarily only "significant" effects, as contained in the preamble to the provision;
3. discuss and evaluate the environmental impact of alternatives to the City's own proposed actions, including the so-called "do-nothing" approach.

This legal tool could also become an increasingly important political weapon. Its use can tactically delay a proposed public work for the time necessary for citizen groups to mobilize their strength, acquire resource assistance from professionals and technicians, and conduct an intensive campaign for popular and political support. Because the provincial attorney general is the official responsible for the enforcement of the Act, the issue can legitimately and effectively be elevated to a higher level of government. And, if it turns out that legal and consultant fees and court costs are recoverable in successful actions, citizen groups can acquire normally unreachable talents free of charge.

Indeed, the potential impact of the environmental review in Canada, and especially in any of the nation's cities which like Winnipeg enacts such a requirement, is enormous. The City of Winnipeg itself has finally seen the implications of Section 653(1) and has established

a small task force with the Department of Environmental Planning to develop guidelines and criteria for its environmental review statements. A considerable political and legal battle is undoubtedly impending, one that every urban populist should be eagerly watching.

Conclusion

We have briefly discussed three major areas in which citizen involvement is expected to play a substantial part in succeeding years. Structural governmental reform has been seen to produce limited results thus far, especially when the new structure does not take into sufficient account the existing social and political culture of the city. New federal legislation is treating the concept of citizen participation with caution, as are the cities and provinces expected to do in implementation. The legal instrument of environmental impact review, while not expressly involving the public, reverses the burden of proof for the first time by requiring public bodies, not their populist opponents, to reveal adverse consequences of their plans and to discuss alternatives.

Whether these openings for citizen involvement will reap the first of more enlightened and responsive public policy is still too early to say. Certainly, they are hopeful signs, not only for the citizens themselves but also for a new breed of public officials, planners and professionals now entering the urban field. The victories thus far have been in stopping, blocking, delaying, or threatening action on public works. The need remains to be met for the generation of positive alternatives and citizen-backed proposals to deal with the continuing dilemmas of our cities.

Perhaps the real issue is whether the variety of citizen groups can now take full advantage of the opportunities that are there. Certainly there remains the wariness and at times outright opposition of elected and appointed officials, and still a good deal of indifference on the part of most urban citizens. Exponents of the new urban politics have experienced many frustrating experiences. While there is still much opposition, openings for serious advancement in altering the forms and substance of urban policies are at hand, if citizen groups can command the new skills required to make these new openings work for them. The test in the future, while not eliminating the need for confrontation, may increasingly be one of initiative and competence.