The Changing Face of City Politics in Canada, 1954-1985: Structural and Economic Determinants of Political Change: A Paper Prepared for Presentation at the Canadian Urban Studies Conference, University of Winnipeg, August 15, 1985

_____

by Donald Higgins
1985

_____

The Institute of Urban Studies

INSTITUTE OF
URBAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

THE CHANGING FACE OF CITY POLITICS IN CANADA, 1954-1985: STRUCTURAL AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL CHANGE: A PAPER PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION AT THE CANADIAN URBAN STUDIES CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG, AUGUST 15, 1985
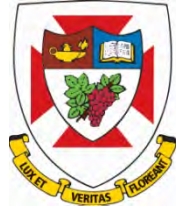
The Changing Face of City Politics in Canada, 1954-1985: Structural and Economic Determinants of Political Change

a paper prepared for presentation at the
Canadian Urban Studies Conference
University of Winnipeg, August 15, 1985

Donald Higgins
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Introduction

That political life is variable over time with regard to style and content is obvious to even the most uninformed. The variability of political life is certainly obvious to those people who have been observers or participants in Canadian local politics over the past twenty or so years. The <u>conduct</u> of political behaviour has been altered dramatically in terms of the activity of both official and unofficial actors. The <u>structural nature</u> of local politics in much of Canada is somewhat different than it had been, with the striking tendency toward regionalized/centralized governmental structures in almost all provinces (with the notable exceptions of Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island, and the possible exceptions of Alberta and New Brunswick), and with that same tendency being reflected in altered provincial-local relations regarding both the allocation of jurisdiction (eg planning) and finances. Further, the <u>substantive nature</u> of local political has also altered significantly over the past generation so that for most people in most localities in Canada the issue agenda of the early 1980s was quite different from that of the mid to late 1960s. Whether all, or any, of these changes - in conduct, structure and substance - are 'significant' depends to some extent on the particular locality and to a large extent on the perspective of the observer/analyst.

Regarding the first caveat, it should be recognized that notwithstanding a general trend toward regionalization/centralization in Canadian politics, there still remains a fundamentally 'local' character to local politics.

1

For example, events do not necessarily occur in <u>all</u> localities at the same time, in the same way, or for the same reasons. (C.f. Higgins, 1981, <u>passim</u>) Regarding the second caveat, there is the common neo-Marxist line of argument which holds that changes made to local politics in terms of conduct and/or structures are not significant because the key substantive issue remains unchanged and unresolved. That issue is usually identified as the (mal)distribution of effective political and economic power in an advanced capitalist society. (E.g. Goldrick, 1978: and Schecter, 1978)

Two instances of analyses that, by and large, argue along the lines of the second caveat are articles by Matthew Kiernan and David Walker, and Lloyd Axworthy. Both articles focus on Winnipeg and the effects of the structural reorganization that occurred in 1971. The creation then of Unicity Winnipeg was applauded by numerous academic and other observers as one of Canada's few real innovations in local government and this country's only conscious and serious attempt to redistribute local political power. Yet Kiernan and Walker state that "major institutional reform has not even been attempted in Winnipeg. However, the reforms are probably as radical as any that the Canadian political culture is capable of digesting." (Kiernan and Walker, 1983, p. 234) In a similar vein, Axworthy has commented that with regard to the lessons one can learn from the Winnipeg experience, "...it is obvious that too much is expected of institutional reform. ...This provincial tinkering with the machinery of local government seems to be thought preferable to undertaking major political action on

2

[such urban ills as] land use, transportation, tax reform, and planning." (Axworthy, 1980, p. 42)

These two appraisals of Unicity Winnipeg raise some interesting and important questions about the utility and possibility of structural/institutional change having any real effect anywhere on anything or anyone at all. It was a footnote in the Kiernan and Walker article that raised the issue directly and thus occasioned this paper:

> This debate is one of the most central and persistent in the literature on Canadian urban politics. Supporting the contention that the structures of local governmentr determine political outcomes are such traditional schol- ars as Rowat and Plunkett. Their perspective has more recently received support from contributions by Higgins and, in an indirect way, Lightbody. The writers of the Canadian 'reform' group, led by James Lorimer, have argued that what is important is the ideologies and interests of the actors who control the structures. (Kiernan and Walker, 1983, footnote 35, p. 251)

Several things struck me about that comment. The 'central and persistent' debate was one new to me; I had not under- stood that I was a party to it; Kiernan and Walker's con- tention seems promising for exploring the causes of polit- ical change in terms of outcomes and behaviour; and, such a debate and exploration would seem to have applicability to Canadian politics at all levels - not just the urban/local one - because of a Canadian penchant for structural/instit- utional description and analysis (for example the long- dominant traditional stream of writing in Canadian political science) and for structural/institutional prescription and alteration (eg the now 121-year effort to complete the rewriting of the Canadian Constitution and its Charter of Rights and Freedoms is still not finished). In other words, Canadians seem to devote a perhaps unusually large amount of time and energy to analyzing and revising politicsal struct-

3

ures, in the presumed belief that political structures do in fact matter. Kiernan and Walker challenge that presumption, and do so in a way that convinced me, upon reflection, that the issue _is_ central and persistent, even though the 'debate' had escaped the notice of me and perhaps a few others.

The issue is central because what Kiernan and Walker are really asking, it seems to me, is "why does political change occur?" They do not, of course, use the term "political _change_" - they refer instead to 'political outcomes'. But one presumes that the political outcomes that involve some amount of movement from the status quo are more interesting in their causation than are outcomes that involve no change. Posed the way I posed it, the question of why political change occurs implies that one who attempts to answer it will take into account the instances and patterns of political _behaviour_ that had a bearing on the timing, direction and specific content of the change. Thus I have now modified Kiernan and Walker's implied central question somewhat: is it mainly governmental structures that affect people's behaviour and produce political change (in terms of behaviour and outcomes) if the structures themselves change, or is it mainly the political behaviour and (ideological) motivation of elites that effect changes in political outcomes (including changes to governmental structures) and other people's behaviour?

The causes of political change

In my view there are several problems with Kiernan and Walker's identification of the debate. First, single-cause explanations of political and other kinds of social phenom-

4

ena are rarely compelling, including any propositions of the sort that political change in terms of outcomes is caused by either structures or ideologies. The achievement of ideologically-rooted outcomes in policy decisions and/or patterns of political behaviour may well necessitate changes to governmental structures. Instead of searching for the causal variable, the quest should be for causal variables and the contribution that each of them makes to the resulting phenomenon/outcome. Secondly, the last sentence of the above quotation from Kiernan and Walker seems to allow no room for, or cognizance of, change to governmental structures. Instead, the structures of government seem to be assumed to be given and stable. Any changes to them appear to be assumed to be either irrelevant or largely a waste of time and effort. Yet large numbers of Canadian political scientists and public officials constantly review governmental structures, and change them with some frequency. One presumes that actual or proposed structural change is directed to some intended and expected end other than structural change for its own sake - that changing such structures will or might have some desirable effect on political outcomes and/or behaviour. Whether or note, and to what extent, those expectations are realistic and capable of being fulfilled is another question. The third problem is a kind of variant of the first - there are more than just the two possible causal variables which Kiernan and Walker identify. In addition to the two they cite (governmental structures, and the ideologies and interests of those political actors who control the structures) are at least four others which come to my mind:

5

1) the prevailing political culture, particularly with regard to changes in the public's willingness to accept political decisions (for example seatbelt legislation, use of cannabis, and bilingualism);

2) natural and manmade catastrophies (such as drought, flood, famine, chemical pollution and highjacking);

3) technological development (for example satellite broadcasting, mass production of the automobile, and the invention of the telephone and elevator); and,

4) real or anticipated changes in economic circumstances (such as rates of inflation, unemployment and foreign exchange).

Kiernan and Walker need make no apologies for having identified the debate in the manner they did, for their comments about it took the form of a mere footnote in an article on another subject. Instead, the very fact that they identified such a debate at all is, in my view, a matter for some congratulation. I suspect that one should not interpret their comments to mean that structural change has no effect whatsoever on political outcomes and behaviour. Nonetheless, their reference to the "...bankruptcy of institutional reform as an agent of political change" (Kiernan and Walker, 1983, p. 234) indicates that the authors are obviously highly sceptical about the utility of structural/institutional change.

Axworthy's judgment is somewhat less sceptical, but he too perceives limits to the utility of structural change. While he wrote that too much is expected of institutional reform, he also wrote that

this is not to suggest that institutional change should

be ignored, as it has played a major role in influencing the division of political power. While the basic social and political forces are not changed by the institutional system, their form of expression is channelled differently by new institutional frameworks, and this has a strong impact on the city's policy choices. ...

Another area in which institutional arrangements can be important but little attention is paid to them is in the design of structures for dealing with the city's intergovernmental arrangements. ...institutional reorganization plays an important role in overcoming the growing estrangement between individual citizens and government. (Axworthy, 1980, p. 42)

There is a surprisingly sparse general theoretical literature on the causes (and consequences) of political change. Most of the existing literature seems to define political change as political 'modernization' or 'development', phrases which have normative connotations that I do not accept as either necessary or appropriate, unless one is a believer in the determinedly optimistic Victorian notion that "every day in every way the world is getting better and better"; in other words, that all change is for the better. For example, despite the promising title of his book (Political Continuity and Change), Merkl appears to equate political change with 'modernization', and the latter word with 'democratization'. (Merkl, 1972, pp 353-360 and chapter 12) It is also clear that Merkl is dealing with 'nations' and the movement of them from traditional to modern/developed/democratic societies. (Merkl, pp 367-74) In that sense, Merkl's writing echos that of the political culture/political development school. (C.f. Almond and Powell, 1966, especially Chapter XI; and Almond and Verba, 1965, especially Chapters I and XIII) None of this literature provides much help in exploring linkages at any level of political life, especially the local one, between political or governmental structures on the one hand and their effects

7

on political behaviour and outcomes. Nor does this liter-
ature contribute much to understanding links between polit-
ical behaviour and outcomes on the one hand and such other
variables as economic conditions and technological develop-
ment.

The rest of this paper involves a consideration of the
causes of changes that have become evident over the past
thirty years in the nature and conduct of local politics in
Canada. Because of Kiernan and Walker's contention (sup-
ported in a moderate fashion by Axworthy) that structur-
al/institution change is "bankrupt", the following explores
it not only as a cause of change but also in terms of its
consequences - is structural/institutional change really
irrelevant and a waste of time? My contention is that
governmental structures matter rather more than Axworthy and
Kiernan and Walker suggest. I also contend that although
the ideological perspectives of elites do matter, it is the
nature of governmental structures and political processes
that enable certain elites' ideological perspectives to
prevail. Changing the structures changes (heightens or
lowers) the extent to which the elites' ideological per-
spectives continue to prevail. That is not only to say,
however, that structures affect prevailing ideologies - gov-
ernmental structures are prone to being changed by prevail-
ing ideological elites in order to protect and advance their
dominant position. For example, the electoral system can be
altered by dominant elites in ways that dissuade viable
electoral opposition, and creating new government depart-

ments is an obvious and frequently used way in which the ideological interests of dominant elites are promoted. Further, the retention of obsolete governmental structures (such as a non-elective upper house with an effective veto over legislation) is also a structural manifestation and protector of ideological elites' domination.

As well as focusing on the causal/consequencial significance of governmental structures, what follows also explores another of the list of causes of political change cited above - changes (real or anticipated) in economic circumstances. Thus rather than being an attempt to explore all the possible causes of political change and the effects of them on local governmental structures (and vice versa), this paper concentrates on the significance of just two determinants of changes in local/regional political outcomes and behaviour - formal institutions of local (and regional) government, and real or anticipated economic circumstances.

Structural/institutional change: causes and consequences

In what remains probably the most comprehensive examination of attempts to restructure local/regional government in Canada and of the effects of those attempts, Tindal undertook a comparative analysis of efforts to achieve structural change in six provinces. (Tindal, 1977) Those efforts included New Brunswick's sweeping changes of 1967 under the rubric of the 'Program for Equal Opportunity'; the introduction of two-tiered regional government in Ontario; the series of attempts to restructure local government in Winnipeg, including the Unicity experiment; the creation of regional districts in British Columbia; Quebec's creation of second-tier metropolitan councils in Montreal, Quebec and Hull-Outaouais and the 'regroupement' program of municipal amalgamations; and, the Graham Royal Commission's proposals of 1974 to overhaul virtually every aspect of local government (and provincial-local relations) in Nova Scotia.

In most cases he found a shortfall between the hopes for the changes and the results actually achieved. It is worth noting briefly some of his conclusions about the attempts to restructure local government. Regarding New Brunswick's attempts, he wrote "it may be concluded...that the attempt to abandon local government in the rural areas of the province was anything but successful" because direct provision of services by the province eventually gave rise to other problems such as citizen dissatisfaction with the lack of a voice in planning, and because of disparaties in taxation between non-incorporated areas and municipalities. (p. 20) Ontario's program of creating two-tier regional governments was found wanting because of rural areas being

over-represented on the regional councils, questions of accountability and responsiveness of local government were left in doubt because of the indirectly elected nature of the upper-tier councils, too little attention was paid to the matter of citizen access to local government and the appropriate distribution of provincial and municipal responsibilities, and there was a failure to deal with problems of municipal finance. (pp 21-22) Regarding British Columbia's 'regional district' restructuring, Tindal commented that there was a lack of public input and discussion of the proposed changes (p. 14), and that there was uncertainty about the relationship between the municipal councils and the regional district boards. (p. 24) Quebec's approaches to restructuring local/regional government were described by Tindal as "...sporadic, of limited effectiveness and devoid of any apparent philosophy of local government", particularly with regard to the 'representative' role of local government. (p. 17. See also p. 26) Since the Graham Royal Commission's recommendations had not begun to be implemented by the time Tindal was writing, he offered no comment on them. Regarding the Unicity Winnipeg restructuring, Tindal basically restricted himself to noting the Taraska Review Committee's comments concerning shortcomings. (pp 31-38) However, Tindal added that "...conceptual and operational problems were experienced with certain features of the legislation. ...However, the evaulation of the operating experience points up the difficulties inherent in bringing about a major change in the concept of the role of local government and developing the structures and processes necessary

to support a new role. " (p. 41) Parenthetically, Tindal's description of the Unicity experiment as involving "major change" stands in sharp contrast with Kiernan and Walker's analysis that "major institutional reform has not even been attempted in Winnipeg (Kiernan and Walker, 1983, p. 234), and with Axworthy's description of Unicity as a matter of provincial "tinkering" with the machinery of local government. (Axworthy, 1980, p. 42)

It is important to understand that Tindal gauged the relative success or failure of attempted structural changes not according to the intended effect's of the changes attempted but according to his own idealized model. (Tindal, 1977, p. 42. See also his pages 2-4 for a description of that model) The point is that assessing the effectiveness or success of attempted structural change can be done from either of two perspectives; according to the analyst's personal model or conception of what the ideal structure should look like and how it should function, and according to the intent or expectations of the architects/implementers of the structural change. It would appear that Kiernan and Walker, and Axworthy too, have assessed the effectiveness of the Unicity Winnipeg structural changes on the same basis as Tindal; that is, according to what they personally perceive as an ideal, rather than according to the explicit or implicit objectives of those who designed and implemented the changes.

In his conclusion, however, Tindal went beyond comparing the various attempts to restructure local government with his idealized model, and offered another basis for finding those attempts wanting in their effects/effective-

12

change (however far-reaching or modest it may be), and to design and implement the change accordingly. (For the moment, I am accepting the general wisdom or assumption that it is indeed provincial governments - rather than local governments themselves - that initiate and implement structural change.) But there are really very few instances of explicit and publically stated provincial objectives for structural change. That suggests to me that the relatively unsuccessful changes are unsuccessful not because structural change can have no (improving) effect but because the change has not been sufficiently thought through in design and implementation. To illustrate that consciously conceived and well executed structural change can have effect, a couple of instances are now explored.

a) Metro Toronto

The contemporary era of local government in Canada can be described as beginning with the creation in 1954 of Metropolitan Toronto. Hindsight suggests that the only thing that was innovative about Metro Toronto was the application in an urban/metropolitan setting of a two-tiered county structure that for over a century had characterized the rural Ontario and some other provinces. Nonetheless, at the time of its creation Metro Toronto was widely seen at the time in Canada and elsewhere as a novel experiment.

Two individuals stand out as the principal architects of Metro Toronto; Lorne Cumming (then Chairman of the Ontario Municipal Board), and Frederick Gardiner (the first Chairman of Metro Toronto). When the Ontario Municipal Board rendered its decision on the City of Toronto's 1950 application to amalgamate the City and the twelve suburban

municipalities and on the Town of Mimico's concurrent application to create an area-wide special-purpose body, the OMB/Cumming not only rejected both applications but prescribed the creation of what became (by provincial legislation) Metro Toronto. (Ontario, 1953) The Cumming Report, as the OMB's decision has become known, offered an explanation of the objectives its recommended structural reorganization was designed to meet, and a rationale of them. (Ontario, 1953, pp 43-47) The perceived need for and cause of structural reorganization is seen in the Cumming Report's comments that

> ...it can hardly be denied that the principle of local autonomy has been of the very essence of the Ontario municipal system. When local municipalities which have been permitted, and in fact encouraged to develop under this system, find that they have become integral parts of a modern metropolitan area where <u>social and economic forces beyond their control seriously affect both their development and the local resources available to finance new and pressing needs for municipal services</u>, the traditional concept of local autonomy comes into direct conflict with <u>an ever increasing need for collective municipal action in the interests of the entire area.</u> (Ontario, 1953, pp 43-44. Emphasis added)

The Report noted, however, that it attempted to "...exclude purely theoretical siderations and to confine its attention to the actual situation of the municipalities in the Toronto area as disclosed in the evidence, and the special problems which concern them and them alone at their present stage of development." (p. 47) In other words, the Cumming Report relied on pragmatic considerations rather than the kind of clear philosophy that Tindal found generally lacking, so Tindal would, one presumes, fault the Cumming Report on that basis as well. However, it is clear from a reading of it that the Cumming Report did have a clear idea of (pragmatic)

15

objectives, and designed the new Metro Toronto structure according to it.

The other main architect and driving force behind the creation of Metro Toronto was Frederick Gardiner. A former reeve of the suburban Village of Forest Hill and a former warden of York County, Gardiner was one of nine people appointed to the Toronto and Suburban Planning Board which was created by the Ontario government in 1946 with responsibility for preparing an official land use plan for the City and the twelve surrounding municipalities. Colton has indicated that almost immediately upon his appointment to that Planning Board Gardiner became a convert to and advocate of some new political structure to facilitate development in the Toronto area but without interfering with the existence or degree of autonomy that the existing municipalities possessed. (Colton, 1980, pp 59-65) Gardiner was very much pro-development, and saw in creation of the new Metro Toronto structure of local government a vehicle that made possible development of a kind that could not be achieved under the pre-1954 structure. More specifically, Gardiner saw transportation in terms of expressways and subways as both 'developments' in their own right and as prerequisites to large scale building construction projects in the downtown core core as well as in the residential suburbs. The politically fragmented structure of local government that existed up to 1954 made it well nigh impossible to build the series of expressways he considered necessary and desirable. Creating the Metro Toronto structure, with upper-tier responsibility for major roads, capital borrowing, and area-wide planning, made expressway and subway construction poss-

ible. While Gardiner's own objectives underlying his desire for structural change were somewhat different from Cumming's, the two sets were certainly compatible.

The provincial legislation that created Metro Toronto in 1954 followed closely almost all the recommendations of Mr. Cumming. The legislation also specified that a review of the new structure's performance was to be conducted within five years. In appointing Lorne Cumming to conduct that review, the provincial government signified, in effect, its general satisfaction with the new structures. And, not surprisingly, Cumming's review report of 1958 hailed the Metro structures as an overwhelming success and recommented no fundamental changes to it. (Ontario, 1958) Change in the political behaviour of elected and appointed officials and in political outcomes had occurred (witness the mammoth program of expressway and subway construction), and I think it can soundly be argued that that behaviour and those outcomes were indeed a consequence of the structural changes. Numerous academic and other analysts have expressed serious criticism of the Metro Toronto structure. And the Goldenberg and Robarts review commissions' reports of 1965 and 1977 respectively) have criticized aspects of the 1954 structure and subsequent modifications to it. But those criticisms do not detract from the fact that the structural changes did affect political behaviour and outcomes, and those effects have tended to be in the direction intended and desired by Cumming and Gardiner.

b) Unicity Winnipeg

Whether the Unicity Winnipeg experiment of 1971 is judged to have been the "major change" that Tindal found it to be, or a matter of "tinkering" as Axworthy maintained, it certainly was a significant innovation in the history of Canadian local government. And it has received almost as much published attention - both acclaim and criticism - as the Metro Toronto structure has received.

Of all the reports and statements of intent published by provincial governments before beginning to restructure local government, the Manitoba government's White Paper of late 1970 stands out as being by far the most explicit, comprehensive, and detailed statement of philosophical explanation of intent/objectives. (Manitoba, 1970) Although a book has been published (Brownstone and Plunkett, 1983) which documents in much detail the process involving in preparing the White Paper and the discussions between provincial cabinet ministers and the consultants who were engaged to design the new structure, the source of inspiration for some of the major ideas incorporated into the White paper remain obscure. Certainly there were no Canadian precedents for a Unicity-like structure, and only very loose connections can be made to any developments in Britain or the United States. The best guess is that the Italian city of Bologna was the inspiration.

As is well known, the basic characteristic of the Unicity Winnipeg structure in 1971 was the coupling of administrative centralization (via complete amalgamation of all the area municipalities into one huge new one) with political decentralization (via the creation of "community

18

committees" as standing committees of city council, and their companion "resident advisory groups"). The purpose of administrative centralization was to resolve a number of problems by rationalizing and making more efficient the provision of services throughout Winnipeg, to standardize levels of services, to establish a single tax base and tax structure, to end competition among the existing municipalities, and to unify civic administration. It was the attempt to structure political decentralization that was novel, and that then became problematic and a main source of criticism.

The nature of the intended political decentralization and the reason why it was thought to be desirable and important are revealed in a memorandum that Brownstone wrote to the provincial cabinet in 1970:

> ...the political (participatory) aspects are highly unsatisfactory at present and...any reorganized form will need to include a meaningful attack on this problem. ...it will be necessary to design an effective, acceptable, political decentralization providing for involvement of citizens on a scale and intensity which exceeds by far that which is in existence at present. ...
> What is assumed here has more to do with community organization, animation, control and advocacy, all of which require not only policies but supportive resources. (quoted in Brownstone and Plunkett, 1983, p. 39)

The community committees and resident advisory groups were the twin mechanisms designed for this end. The former were to have the role of both providing detailed administrative control of those services peculiarly local in character, and serving as a general contact between city council as a whole and citizens over the whole range of city functions and services. Depending on ones perspective, the White Paper was either rather vague or provided considerable flexibility about the RAGs, for little was specified about the compos-

ition, basis for selection, or functions of them. It is clear that the RAGs were intended to foster grass-roots participation between civic elections, and the RAGs were also intended to "assist" generally the community committees. The designers of the new structure were, seemingly, aware that the structure they designed had some limitations, noting that the combination of community committees and RAGs "...will lead to a relationship between councillors and citizens which should include a high level of participation and a high level of citizen control. [But] it should be noted parenthetically that participation and control do not flow automatically from this structural arrangement but will require special attention." (Brownstone and Plunkett, 1983, p. 45) How right they were, for more published criticism has since been leveled at this aspect of the Unicity restructuring than at any other.

Beyond the two thrusts of administrative centralization and political decentralization, there was a third major objective, although it seems to have been a hidden agenda item for it went unacknowledged in the White Paper. That was to make the ground in Winnipeg fertile to the development of a party system and more specifically, one presumes, to improve the civic electoral prospects of NDP candidates to city council. The structural aspects designed toward that end included a council that would be unusually large by Canadian standards so as to allow the formation of government and opposition blocs of councillors, the provision that the mayor would be selected by the largest bloc of councillors after each election rather than being directly elected,

and creating a powerful Executive Policy Committee that would be analogous to a cabinet.

For a time after Unicity came into full operation in 1972, there were changes in political behaviour, and probably in political outcomes too. The first series of meetings to select members of the resident advisory groups brought out many hundreds of citizens, at least some of whom must have been newcomers to citizen group activity. However, scepticism expressed by a number of observers (eg Axworthy, 1972) about the prognosis was well founded, for the levels of public participation waned quite dramatically over time. (c.f. Wichern, 1975) During a month of research in Winnipeg in 1979, I found very little evidence indeed of even a continued existence of the RAGs, let alone any sign of their wielding effective citizen control.

In accordance with the provincial legislation that created the Unicity structure, a review of its functioning was begun in 1975 and reported in 1976. (Manitoba, 1976) The Taraska Report generally found the Unicity structure to be working well with regard to the objective of administrative centralization, particularly noting the unified administration, single tax base, and standardized municipal services. But deficiencies were also found, including a lack of leadership, lack of accountability, confusion of roles and responsibilities, low staff morale, complicated and cumbersome approval processes, narrow parochialism among the councillors, and neglect of large-scale citywide policies by council. (Manitoba, 1976, p. 134) Two of the most important changes recommended by the Taraska committee - to have the mayor selected by and from among elected councillors, and to

strengthen the executive policy committee and the mayor's control over it - were what Brownstone and his fellow designers had designed in the first place.

In recommending a reduction in the size of city council from fifty-one members to thirty-nine, the Taraska Report was limiting the possibility of the development of the party/parliamentary system that was originally intended, but even a council of thirty-nine would be large by Canadian standards and would be sufficiently large to enable government and opposition blocs of councillors to form. It is probably fair to say that the thrust of Unicity which the Taraska committee found weakest was that of political decentralization (to encourage citizen participation). The Report recommended cutting in half (from twelve to six) the number of community committees and resident advisory groups, and thereby doubling their size. Additionally, it was recommended that the community committees and RAGs be strengthened by making them responsible primarily for preparing and amending district plans. Parenthically, there seems a certain irony in both cutting the number of community committees and RAGs in half, and at the same time giving them something significant to do; the former would tend to inhibit citizen participation, while the latter would tend to make participation more worthwhile.

Subsequent to the Taraska Report, the provincial government did modify the Unicity structure but not entirely in the ways that had been recommended. The number of community committees and RAGs was indeed cut in half, but instead of granting them some power the provincial government reduced

their role even further. As in 1971, the provincial govern-
ment failed to require that the mayor be selected by and
from among the elected councillors, a failure which effect-
ively doomed the prospects for achieving the party/parlia-
mentary objective. The achievement of that objective, as
well as the objective of political decentralization, was
made even less possible by the provincial government's dec-
ision to cut down the size of city council to not just the
thirty-nine recommended by the Taraska Committee but even
more - to only twenty-nine.

Brownstone and Plunkett have criticized the changes
made in 1977 as greatly weakening the democratic/particip-
atory potential of the original system (Brownstone and Plun-
kett, 1983, p. 140), and Kiernan and Walker more damningly
maintain that "the 1977 amendments represent an abandonment
of the government's original objectives [to politicize local
government via decentralization and participation] in favour
of the more traditional goals of local government reorganiz-
ation: efficiency and rationalization." (Kiernan and Walk-
er, 1983, p. 239)

Responsibility for the relative failure subsequent to
1971 of two of the three thrusts - political decentraliz-
ation and a party/parliamentary form of government - can
only partially be laid at the feet of Brownstone and his
fellow designers of Unicity. Clearly, the design of the
resident advisory groups involved little of substance worth
their doing, and the design was certainly complex and thus
perhaps not easily understood by the public. Because the
RAGs were to have no clear and effective powers, they would
lack legitimacy in the minds of some civic bureaucrats and

Conceptually, I can think of four possible reasons why changes are made to structures or institutions of government at any level, including the local/regional one. They are:

1) to modernize archaic governmental structures so as to bring them into conformity with the evolving political culture, especially in terms of the general public's contemporary patterns of political behaviour and expectations concerning both the processes by which official decisions are made and the substantive content of those decisions;

2) to protect or entrench the power and influence of a dominant minority/elite interest, in the face of a real or anticipated challenge to its continued domination;

3) to encourage or foster new patterns of political behaviour by and/or expectations of the general public; and,

4) to facilitate or force the making of new political decisions by elected and/or appointed public officials.

Economic conditions as a determinant of political change

This part of the paper is necessarily short, primarily because of the considerable difficulty I encountered in obtaining reliable and useful indicators of economic conditions in Canadian cities over time, and partly because of the difficulty of analyzing the data I was able to obtain.

To my knowledge, no explicit and comprehensive analysis of the effects of economic conditions on Canadian local political behaviour and outcomes has been attempted in a way that parallels Tindal's examination of structural change. However, the existing literature does provide some hints, at least, that are worth further exploration. For example, with reference to the contemporary urban reform movement,

Goldrick has written that

> The real importance of reform in the 1960s and 1970s was that it occurred as a response to fundamental changes that were taking place in the profit-making or accumulation needs of finance capital; consequences that encroached upon the middle-class liberal values of those who dominated reform in the period. (Goldrick, 1978, p. 29)

and his premise was that

> ...the city is developed, redeveloped and moulded over time according to long-term cycles in how profits are made and investment decisions taken....City governments mediate the needs of finance capital by providing services and regulations which support its objectives. (Goldrick, 1978, p. 30)

The "fundamental changes" to which he referred had to do particularly with property development especially during booming economic times; in particular finance capital's needs for the supply (at public expense) of such infrastructure as roads and other transportation systems, sewers, water and power supplies, as well as planning and zoning regulations to support the (profit-centred) objectives of finance capital and its investment decisions. Goldrick also indicated that finance capital needed cities to prevent working-class areas adjacent to the central city from blighting the new investments being built, and that wholesale slum clearance, public housing and the enforcement of housing standard by-laws were consequential political outcomes. (1978, pp 30-32) In other words, Goldrick does posit a connection between economic conditions (in a capitalist society) on the one hand, and the political behaviour of public officials and their decision outcomes on the other.

Related to Goldrick's thesis is the quite large and influential body of literature that has traced the political

27

power and effects of the property development industry in Canada. (c.f. Lorimer, 1970, esp. Chapter Six; Lorimer, 1972, esp. Part II; Lorimer, 1978; Lorimer, 1981; and Gutstein, 1975) Put (too) simply, this literature demonstrates that the property development industry grew amazingly in size, profitability and political power between roughly the end of the Second World War and the late 1970s. It did so by virtue of the economic policies and strategies (especially regarding housing and the financing of construction) of a sympathetic and encouraging federal government, along with the provincial governments. As well, that industry succeeded in directing the building regulation and approval functions, and the budgetary processes of municipal councils across the whole country. Expressing awe about the property/land development industry, Lorimer described it as an "amazing and impressive success story", but, prophetically, he wrote

> Yet at the same time the development industry itself is now a threat to the properity and wealth of the country. It has got out of hand. Its success cannot – and should not – last. (Lorimer, 1978, p. 264)

Lorimer wrote that in 1978, shortly before the property development industry indeed fell on hard times. In 1981, Lorimer wrote that

> Canada's cities have entered a new period in their history. The era of the developers – of rapid urban growth, high-rise towers springing up everywhere, suburbs gobbling thousands of acres of farmland, shopping centres and expressways spreading over the countryside – is over. (Lorimer, 1981, p. 6)

and Lorimer identified changes in the basic structure of the Canadian economy as "the most fundamental" cause of the industry's dramatic decline. (1981, p. 7) The industry

28

certainly did decline in terms of its economic health, but it is by no means certain that its political power also declined.

Booming economic times, and economic recessions, are thought to have no only obvious effects on governmental outputs/outcomes and thus the political behaviour of public officials, but on the political behaviour of the public too. At the federal and provincial levels of politics, for example, "third" parties of political protest tend to emerge in times of economic depression/recession (eg Social Credit in Alberta and formation of the national CCF. both during the Great Depression of the 1930s). In local politics, booming and declining economic times are manifested by the amount of construction activity, and it is that activity (or the lack of it) that can be linked to the incidence of many neighbourhood groups. It is a truism to say that such groups typically emerge during period of economic boom, during which companies propose new development projects and municipalities undertake large-scale construction of such infrastructure as major roadways. Some of those projects are perceived as presenting social and economic threats to existing neighbourhoods, and the formation of community action groups to fight them is the normal response. During times of economic depression/recession, the threats are less frequent and thus neighbourhood groups tend to fade away. It is virtually self-evident, then, that the political behaviour of some portion of the public and of public officials, and local political outcomes too are a affected by economic conditions and changes in them over time.

How does one measure changes in economic conditions

29

over time? Particularly, what kind of indicators are there that enable one to analyze links between economic conditions and political behaviour and outcomes by city over time? Since economic conditions are not uniform in cities across the country at any one period of time (eg the last property development boom lasted somewhat longer in Calglary and Edmonton than it did in other cities), it is necessary to use economic indicators that enable one to compare cities at certain points in time, and that also cover a reasonably long span of time. Eventually, I had to settle on only one indicator, but am satisfied that it is a particularly good one. It is the value of building permits issued annually, and it proved possible (with much time and effort) to compile them on an annual basis for each metropolitan centre in Canada. Tables 1, 2 and 4 summarize the situation for fourteen metropolitan centres between 1966 and 1984 (but figures are not included for 1967 and 1969). I have plotted the figures on a series of graphs, of which three examples are appended. The three are Calgary (which shows extreme volatility), Halifax (which shows some volatility) and Toronto (which is less volatile).

The task now is to try to connect the nature of economic conditions (and any changes in them) to individual cities/metropolitan areas. Before doing so, I have developed a number of hypotheses. The most obvious one is that the public's political behaviour in terms of citizen group activity and perhaps voting in civic elections varies directly with any changes in the annual value of building permits issued in a particular metropolitan centre. Thus if

economic conditions are volatile, so too will be the public's political behaviour. The second hypothesis to test is that aside from economic volatility, the relative wealth of a city (as measured by the per capital annual value of building permits issued) has a bearing on political activity, in that if political activity by citizens is the "luxury" it is sometimes thought to be, then it is citizens in the wealthier cities that can best afford the luxury and that will be politically active. Table 3 shows the per capital annual value of building permits issued in 1971 and 1981 for fourteen of the metropolitan centres.

(George Betts and Alan Artibise: please note
that this is as far as I got as of noon on
August 7)

Table 1
Value of building permits issued, by metro area, by year ($000)

City	1966	1968	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Calgary	114,637	183,964	180,910	193,335	219,844	240,484	273,373	391,313	447,817	804,081	1,052,743	1,103,037	1,394,374	2,445,479	1,051,459	410,622	398,415
Edmonton	140,656	181,723	134,226	223,997	241,228	254,684	316,024	394,968	618,533	744,143	938,166	985,886	1,269,933	1,374,132	919,515	688,588	378,760
Halifax	37,165	56,482	45,874	48,078	108,332	106,403	138,183	170,593	128,609	167,307	154,858	131,348	115,553	168,325	171,892	261,094	313,865
Hamilton	100,979	118,527	105,477	122,478	168,733	204,776	228,300	277,126	209,470	214,582	183,432	200,874	218,555	223,788	180,033	252,321	289,259
London	50,975	63,845	69,107	84,641	109,852	128,728	120,193	129,102	125,292	132,975	140,898	113,429	97,705	143,084	166,507	150,880	146,927
Montreal	452,536	551,303	428,225	516,808	640,218	886,643	986,751	1,109,303	1,427,874	1,142,981	869,904	1,001,065	1,159,378	1,577,058	1,244,772	1,564,279	1,875,840
Ottawa	151,930	162,373	276,180	247,527	285,066	336,071	324,119	304,543	305,330	342,856	329,241	268,489	264,686	415,714	446,148	633,203	889,759
St. John	10,137	20,299	25,482	48,603	30,136	42,785	47,082	74,789	65,625	38,193	43,165	79,245	56,328	64,850	28,288	87,926	78,577
St. John's	26,963	27,944	16,786	21,903	17,714	69,455	40,172	39,279	49,437	66,687	53,460	679,978	103,248	115,795	72,524	96,290	89,848
Toronto	697,809	730,451	926,834	1,141,412	1,328,843	1,924,634	1,618,794	1,835,372	1,566,326	1,659,256	1,770,014	1,861,782	2,288,250	2,901,731	2,118,919	2,729,239	3,052,924
Vancouver	195,762	273,680	253,469	404,384	440,967	638,445	582,082	702,950	846,855	850,533	809,838	1,065,222	1,462,725	1,597,103	1,247,841	1,340,000	1,284,510
Victoria	35,182	55,559	52,469	84,537	95,799	119,913	162,111	177,476	201,660	162,664	143,372	158,960	259,107	326,735	166,993	195,588	176,429
Windsor	60,051	69,451	81,386	81,662	85,429	81,622	116,591	82,446	92,250	128,047	177,903	242,623	146,321	66,170	52,627	93,792	83,907
Winnipeg	93,621	148,861	138,267	151,659	178,271	171,142	211,200	220,639	347,520	324,658	391,553	263,125	213,288	269,264	206,637	349,145	423,731
National	2,332,827	2,969,059	3,048,612	3,878,920	4,644,785	5,994,207	6,046,481	6,970,055	7,822,282	8,066,459	8,358,117	8,930,771	10,232,440	13,118,965	9,093,470	10,298,366	11,154,648

32

File: nat.percent

Table 2
Percentage of value of national metro area building permits
issued, by metro area, by year

City	'66	'68	'70	'71	'72	'73	'74	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84
Calgary	4.9	6.2	5.9	5.0	4.7	4.0	4.5	5.6	5.7	10.0	12.6	12.4	13.6	18.6	11.6	4.0	3.6
Edmonton	6.0	6.1	4.4	5.8	5.2	4.2	5.2	5.7	7.9	9.2	11.2	11.0	12.4	10.5	10.1	6.7	3.4
Halifax	1.6	1.9	1.5	1.2	2.3	1.8	2.3	2.4	1.6	2.1	1.9	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.9	2.5	2.8
Hamilton	4.3	4.0	3.5	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.8	4.0	2.7	2.7	2.2	2.2	2.1	1.7	2.0	2.5	2.6
London	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.8	1.5	1.3
Montreal	19.4	18.6	14.0	13.3	13.8	14.8	16.3	15.9	18.3	14.2	10.4	11.2	11.3	12.0	13.7	15.2	16.8
Ottawa	6.5	5.5	9.1	6.4	6.1	5.6	5.4	4.4	3.9	4.3	3.9	3.0	2.6	3.2	4.9	6.1	8.0
St. John	.4	.7	.8	1.3	.6	.7	.8	1.1	.8	.5	.5	.9	.6	.5	.3	.9	.7
St. John's	1.2	.9	.6	.6	.4	1.2	.7	.6	.6	.8	.6	.8	1.0	.9	.8	.9	.8
Toronto	29.9	24.6	30.4	29.4	28.6	32.1	26.8	26.3	20.0	20.6	21.2	20.8	22.4	22.1	23.3	26.5	27.4
Vancouver	8.4	9.2	8.3	10.4	9.5	10.7	9.6	10.1	10.8	10.5	9.7	11.9	14.3	12.2	13.7	13.0	11.5
Victoria	1.5	1.9	1.7	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.0	1.7	1.8	2.5	2.5	1.8	1.9	1.6
Windsor	2.6	2.3	2.7	2.1	1.8	1.4	1.9	1.2	1.2	1.6	2.1	2.7	1.4	.5	.6	.9	.8
Winnipeg	4.0	5.0	4.5	3.9	3.8	2.9	3.5	3.2	4.4	4.0	4.7	2.9	2.1	2.1	2.3	3.4	3.8
National	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

W
W

Table 3

Value of building permits issued

per capita, by metro area, 1971 and 1981

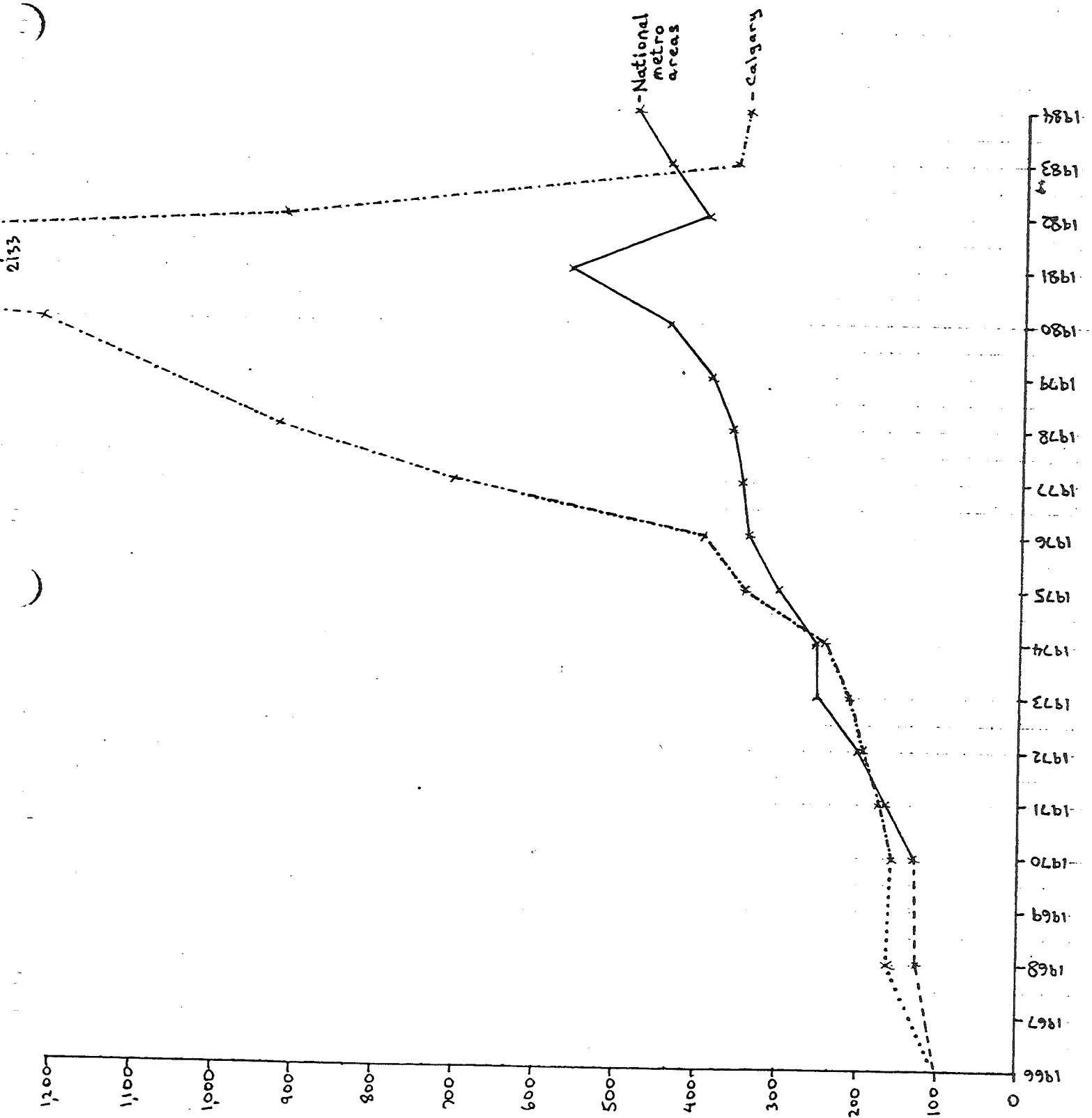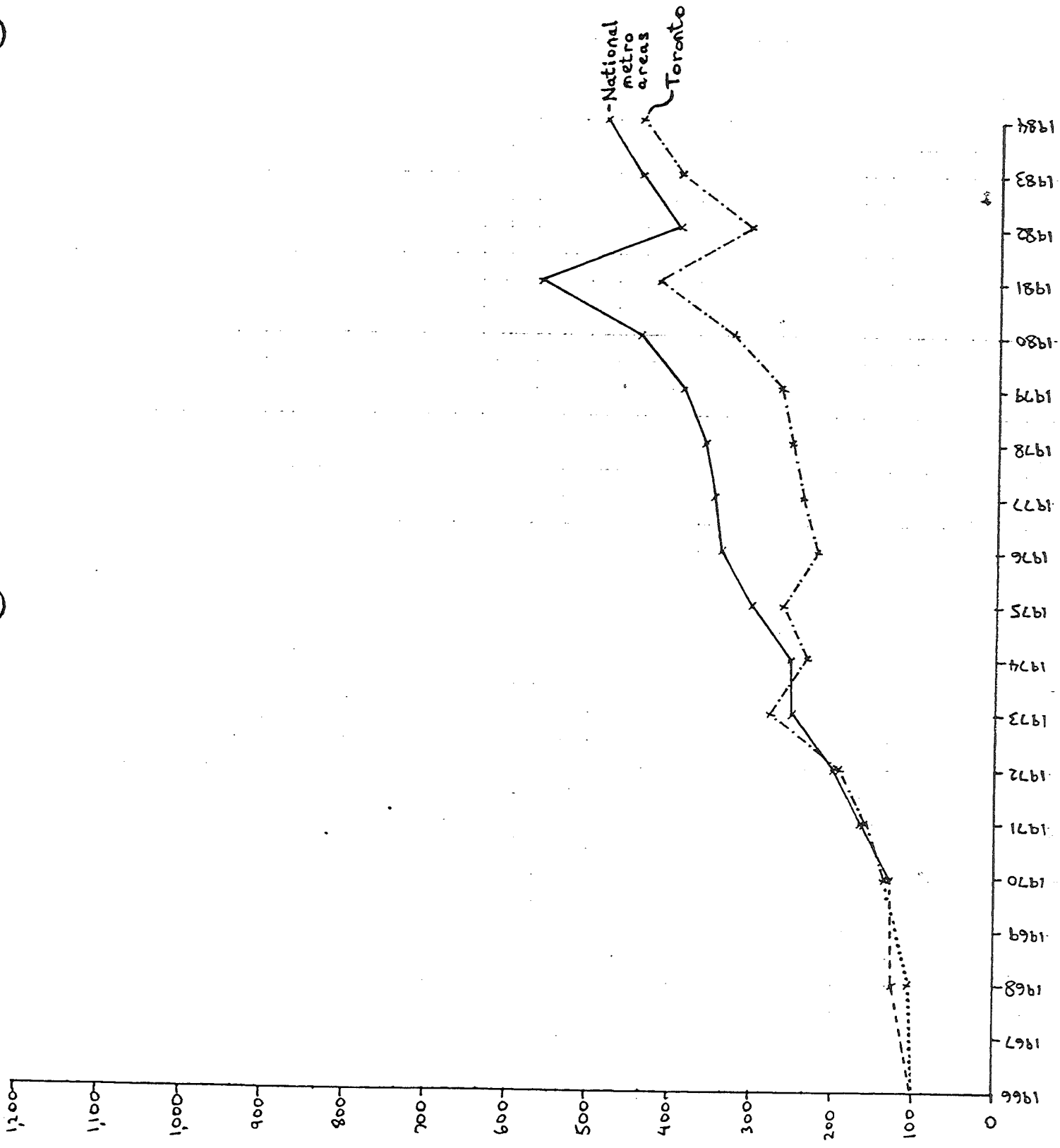| City	1971			1981		
	Value ($000)	Pop	$ Percap	Value ($000)	Pop	$ Percap
Calgary	193,335	403,300	479	2,445,479	592,700	4,126
Edmonton	223,997	495,700	452	1,374,132	657,100	2,091
Halifax	48,078	222,600	216	168,325	277,700	606
Hamilton	122,478	498,500	246	223,788	542,100	413
London	84,641	286,000	296	143,084	283,700	504
Montreal	516,808	2,743,200	188	1,577,058	2,828,300	558
Ottawa	247,527	602,500	411	415,714	718,000	579
St. John	48,603	106,700	456	64,850	114,000	569
St. John's	21,903	131,800	166	115,795	154,800	748
Toronto	1,141,412	2,628,000	434	2,901,731	2,998,900	968
Vancouver	404,384	1,082,300	374	1,597,103	1,268,200	1,259
Victoria	84,537	195,800	432	326,735	233,500	1,399
Windsor	81,662	258,600	316	66,170	246,100	269
Winnipeg	151,659	540,300	281	269,264	584,800	460
National	3,878,920	11,874,200	327	13,118,965	13,658,944	960

Table 4
Growth/decline in value of building permits issued
by metro area, by year, relative to 1966 (1966 = 100)

City	'68/66	'70/66%	'71/66%	'72/66%	'73/66%	'74/66%	'75/66%	'76/66%	'77/66%	'78/66%	'79/66%	'80/66%	'81/66%	'82/66%	'83/66%	'84/66%
Calgary	160	158	169	192	210	238	341	391	701	918	962	1,216	2,133	917	358	348
Edmonton	129	95	159	172	181	225	281	440	529	667	701	903	977	654	490	269
Halifax	152	123	129	291	286	372	459	346	450	417	353	311	453	463	703	845
Hamilton	117	104	121	167	203	226	274	207	213	182	199	216	222	178	250	286
London	125	136	166	216	253	236	253	246	261	276	223	192	281	327	296	288
Montreal	122	95	114	141	196	218	245	316	253	192	221	256	348	275	346	415
Ottawa	107	182	163	188	221	213	200	201	226	217	177	174	274	294	417	586
St. John	200	251	479	297	422	464	738	647	377	426	782	556	640	279	867	775
St. John's	104	62	81	66	258	149	146	183	247	198	260	383	429	269	357	333
Toronto	105	133	164	190	276	232	263	224	238	254	267	328	416	304	391	438
Vancouver	140	129	207	225	326	297	359	433	434	414	544	747	816	637	685	656
Victoria	158	149	240	272	341	461	504	573	462	408	452	736	929	475	556	501
Windsor	116	136	136	142	136	194	137	154	213	296	404	244	110	88	156	140
Winnipeg	159	148	162	190	183	226	236	371	347	418	281	228	288	221	373	453
National	127	131	166	199	257	259	299	335	346	358	383	439	562	390	441	478

35

Halifax

x—National metro areas

1,200
1,100
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0

1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984

36

× — National metro areas

×·— Calgary

2133

1,200
1,100
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0

1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984

37

National
metro
areas

Toronto

1,200
1,100
1,000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0

1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984

References

Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966).

_____ and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).

Lloyd Axworthy, "Canada: Winnipeg", in Donald C. Rowat (ed.), International Handbook on Local Government Reorganization: Contemporary Developments (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980).

_____, "Winnipeg: An Experiment in Innovation," The Canadian Forum, May, 1972. This was reprinted in L. Axworthy and James M. Gillies (eds.), The City: Canada's Prospects, Canada's Problems (Toronto: Butterworth, 1973).

Meyer Brownstone and T.J. Plunkett, Metropolitan Winnipeg: Politics and Reform of Local Government (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Timothy J. Colton, Big Daddy: Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

Lionel D. Feldman, Ontario 1945-1973: The Municipal Dynamic (Toronto: Ontario Economic Council, January, 1974).

Michael Goldrick, "The anatomy of urban reform in Toronto," City Magazine, Vol. 3, no. 4 and 5 (May-June, 1978).

Donald Gutstein, "Vancouver," in Warren Magnusson and Andrew Sancton (eds.), City Politics in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

Donald Higgins, "Progressive city politics and the citizen movement: A status report," in James Lorimer and Carolyn MacGregor (eds.), After the Developers (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981). That volume was also published as City Magazine Annual 1981, Vol. V, number 1.

Matthew J. Kiernan and David C. Walker, "Winnipeg", in Warren Magnusson and Andrew Sancton (eds.), City Politics in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

James Lorimer, The Real World of City Politics (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1970).

_____, A Citizen's Guide to City Politics (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1972).

_____, The Developers (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1978).

_____, "Introduction: The post-developer era for Canada's cities begins," in James Lorimer and Carolyn MacGregor (eds.), After the Developers (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981).

Manitoba, Proposals for Urban Reorganization in the Greater Win-
nipeg Area (Winnipeg, December, 1970). This was a White Paper.

_____, Committee of Review, City of Winnipeg Act, Report and
Recommendations (October, 1976). This is known as the Taraska
Report.

Peter H. Merkl, Political Continuity and Change, revised edition
(New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

Ontario, Metropolitan Toronto Commission of Inquiry, Report (Tor-
onto, March 14, 1958).

_____, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto, Report (Toron-
to: June 10, 1965). This is the Goldenberg Report.

_____, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto, Report, 2 vols.
(Toronto, June 15, 1977). This is the Robarts Report.

Ontario Municipal Board, Decisions and Recommendations of the
Board (Toronto: Queen's Printer, January 20, 1953).

Stephen Schecter, "Strategies for Urban Socialism," Our Gener-
ation, Vol. 12, no. 4 (Fall, 1978).

Andrea B. Smith, "The CCF, NPA, and Civic Change: Provincial
Forces Behind Vancouver Politics 1930-1940," BC Studies, Number 53
(Spring, 1982).

C.R. Tindal, Structural Changes in Local Government: Government
for Urban Regions (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of
Canada, 1977).

P.H. Wichern, Jr., "Patterns of Public Participation in Canadian
Urban Policy Making: The Case of Winnipeg's Resident Advisory
Groups," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian
Political Science Association, 1975.