

# FABIAN SOCIETY

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## REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

‘REGIONALITER’

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# REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

By

‘ REGIONALITER ’

*‘ For the right moment you must wait . . .  
But when the time comes you must strike  
hard, as Fabius did.’*

Fabian Tract No. 1

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NOTE    *This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.*

*The Fabian Society has already published much material on Local Government. The present pamphlet is the Society's first publication in recent years on the problem of Regionalism—a major problem of post-war reconstruction, and one not easily solved. The Society here presents, therefore, as a contribution to current thought and discussion, one of several views on future Regional development. Later Fabian publications will, it is hoped, continue to explore this subject, approaching it from various points of view.*

March, 1942.



## REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

At last we have established regionalism, in a tentative and embryonic form, after much discussion and excessive delay. But the experiment in regional government represented by the Regional Commissioners is utterly different from the kind of institution which was the subject of so much advocacy and controversy during the past three or four decades.

As each year passed, the obsolete and inefficient character of our local government organisation became increasingly obvious. Every extension of the scope of the functions which local authorities were required or permitted to discharge emphasised the hopeless inadequacy of the existing system of areas. Far larger units of administration were needed not only for relatively new services such as town and country planning, housing, electricity supply, road passenger transport, higher and technical education, but also for the older functions such as police, highways, and sewage disposal. The expansion in the area of daily movement of the people for economic, social and political purposes, consequent upon improved methods of transport and communication, has for long necessitated a corresponding extension in the units of local government; for no principle of political organisation is more firmly established than the maxim that the areas of public administration should approximate to the areas of diurnal movement.

Above all, the dichotomy between town and country which is implicit in the rigid separation of county councils and county borough councils became manifestly absurd when vast numbers of persons who work and earn their living in cities were enabled to live in semi-rural or suburban dormitories situated at considerable distances outside their boundaries.

An enlargement of local government areas on the one hand, and an integration of town and country authorities on the other, thus became insistent needs which no amount of obtuseness or resistance to reform on the part of local councils or their associations could overcome. The facts were too eloquent to be silenced.

The imperative demand for a radical improvement in the structure of local government nevertheless met with a solid wall of opposition from the local authorities concerned, and a pitiful evasion of the issue on the part of successive Ministers of Health. Year by year the large towns attempted, sometimes successfully and sometimes in vain, to enlarge their boundaries. Such attempts invariably met with bitter opposition from the county councils from whose domain it was proposed to take territory, population

and rateable value. Even the most ambitious of such efforts were, in any case, drops in the ocean compared with what was needed. Expansion on a larger scale was achieved in certain places in regard to particular services. Thus, regional town planning committees (sometimes without executive powers), land drainage schemes covering an entire catchment area, joint sewage boards and hospital authorities serving large territories, have occasionally revealed a spirit of enterprise and a willingness to recognise plain needs.

In the main, however, local authorities and their Associations have persistently refused to recognise the imperative necessity for change, despite the unanswerable case made out by disinterested experts and students of government. No sacrilegious hand has ever been permitted to revise in a general way the absurd boundaries of the administrative counties since the time when the county councils were first established by Parliament in 1888; and it is apparently the opinion of the County Councils Association that they should continue for all eternity in their present form. The Association of Municipal Corporations, and the organs of the smaller bodies, such as the Urban District Councils Association and the Association of Rural District Councils, are equally rigid in their outlook.

## THE AGE OF THE PROBLEM

An indication of the age of the problem is given by a glance at some of the older Fabian Tracts. The Fabian Society commenced to publish, as far back as 1905, a series of pamphlets under the general title *The New Heptarchy*. The original Heptarchy was, of course, the seven kingdoms of Angles and Saxons in Britain; and the idea underlying the series was the establishment of a similar number of large provincial authorities to supersede the existing mass of small bodies.

The first tract of the series (No. 125) was entitled *Municipalization by Provinces* by W. Stephen Sanders, L C C, who later became the General Secretary of the Society. It is an excellent piece of work, surprisingly modern and far-sighted as a statement of the case for regionalism. 'The great towns of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Nottingham, Leeds, etc.,' declared the author, 'must be considered as centres, and not as self-contained units for all local government purposes' (p. 5).

In regard to such services as transport, electricity and water supply, it will be necessary, in endeavouring to devise new authorities and new areas for their administration, to drop the idea that they should remain municipal services in the narrowest sense of the term



municipal. They should not become even county, but provincial services. . . . But whether seven or more provincial water boards, and seven or more transit and electricity boards are formed is immaterial, provided the provincial principle is applied to those areas where narrow municipal boundaries are cramping the growth of the collective control of industry (p. 8).

The members of these provincial functional boards were to be elected by the local authorities within their areas.

The provinces of the New Heptarchy were clearly intended to be super-local authorities, although it was thought necessary to constitute them by the method of indirect election. The idea attracted the attention of many prominent men at the time, including Mr H. G. Wells (who dealt with it in *Anticipations*) and Mr Winston Churchill. The same general idea was given much fuller and more mature expression, and worked out in diverse practical forms by C. B. Fawcett in *The Provinces of England* (1919), by G. D. H. Cole in his *Future of Local Government* (1921), and by W. A. Robson in *The Development of Local Government* (1931) and *The Government and Misgovernment of London* (1939). Thus from the opening years of the twentieth century until the outbreak of the present war the need for regionalising local government was demonstrated continually by disinterested reformers.

Similar conclusions were reached by numerous Royal Commissions and committees set up to investigate general or particular aspects of the matter. Among these may be mentioned the Ullswater Commission on London Government (1923), the Hadow Committee on the Qualifications, Recruitment, Training and Promotion of Local Government Officers (1934), the Report on Greater London Drainage (1935), and the Royal Commission on Local Government in the Tyneside Area (1937). There are many others.

This stream of progressive thought fell on deaf ears so far as local authorities were concerned. The more insistent the case for reform, the more obtuse became the spokesmen of the *status quo*. Indifferent to the emerging interests of local government as a whole, they defended with fierce passion the divine right of things as they are. Much breath has been expended on denouncing the vested financial interests of property owners and business men. Attention might well be paid to the recalcitrant attitude of councillors and officers who defend with blind partisanship the vested administrative and political interests of established local authorities, for this is a phenomenon of immense importance in obstructing progress. It must not be assumed that their motives are tainted with jobbery or corruption. The strongest incentive



has been a mere clinging to office and power, an irrational loyalty to the existing order regardless of its merits, a timid reluctance to embark on new and untried courses.

These forces conspired to defeat all attempts to bring the local government structure into conformity with the needs of our time. A large share of the blame must fall on the apathy and lack of courage of successive Ministers of Health belonging to all political parties. Some part of it is attributable to the ignorance and indifference of Parliament in matters of local government. The late Neville Chamberlain was supposed to have been conspicuously successful as Minister of Health; yet he made no attempt whatever to regionalise local government. The Local Government Act, 1929, of which he was the principal architect, recognised the need for larger units of administration by abolishing the Boards of Guardians, and transferring their poor law powers to the county and county borough councils, but it left the county councils and county boroughs exactly where they were and merely provided for the review of county districts. Mr Arthur Greenwood did not even make a speech on the subject when he was Minister of Health, 1929-30; nor did Mr Wheatley when he held that office in the first Labour Government in 1924.

## ENTER THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONERS

The world of thought was thus far in advance of the world of action in regard to this important matter. Even as late as 1938, regionalism would have appeared to an enquiring neophyte to be, not a dead political issue, but rather one which had never come alive.

Less than a year later, however, the country had been divided into Regions; Regional Commissioners had been appointed in all of them; Regional offices had been opened; and official staffs allocated to the Commissioners. All this was an essential part of the Government's war organisation.

This dramatic innovation is a striking illustration of the manner in which necessary social and political changes force their way in at the back entrance when they are shut out of the front door. It has happened again and again in the history of public administration that institutions which have resisted adaptation too successfully have suddenly been confronted with an alternative solution which, while avoiding the source of conflict and thus evading opposition, by-passes the old institutions and in effect leaves them stranded. In such circumstances it is true to say that nothing fails like success. An apparently irrelevant solution

may thus deal a mortal blow to the organs which have withstood all attempts at adaptation.

This is what has happened in the present instance. At one stroke there has been installed a system of regional government which, while leaving the local authorities apparently untouched, offers a formidable challenge to their future existence and status.

The Civil Defence Regions<sup>1</sup> are twelve in number. The list on page 9 gives particulars of the areas into which Great Britain is divided for the purpose, and the names of the Commissioners at present (March 1942) holding office.

It will be seen that in most cases a region has been constituted out of entire (or almost entire) counties and county boroughs. The chief exception to this is the London region, which takes the quite inadequate Metropolitan Police District (created in 1839) as its area.

Much could be said concerning the merits and demerits of the particular areas which have been given to the Regional Commissioners, but this tract is concerned principally with the nature of the institution rather than with the details of territorial jurisdiction. Such a discussion would tend to divert attention from the main question, and is therefore omitted.

## THEIR FUNCTIONS

The fundamental purpose of the Regional Commissioners would seem to be threefold. First, to act as the eyes, ears and mouth of the central government in the region. Second, to be responsible for seeing that the Government's Civil Defence and A R P measures are carried out in the region. Third, in case of a breakdown in communications, to take the place of the central government in the region. It must be admitted, however, that these purposes are nowhere clearly stated in terms of powers and duties; nor, so far as is known, are they embodied in any authorising instrument. The actual status of the Commissioners is therefore somewhat nebulous.

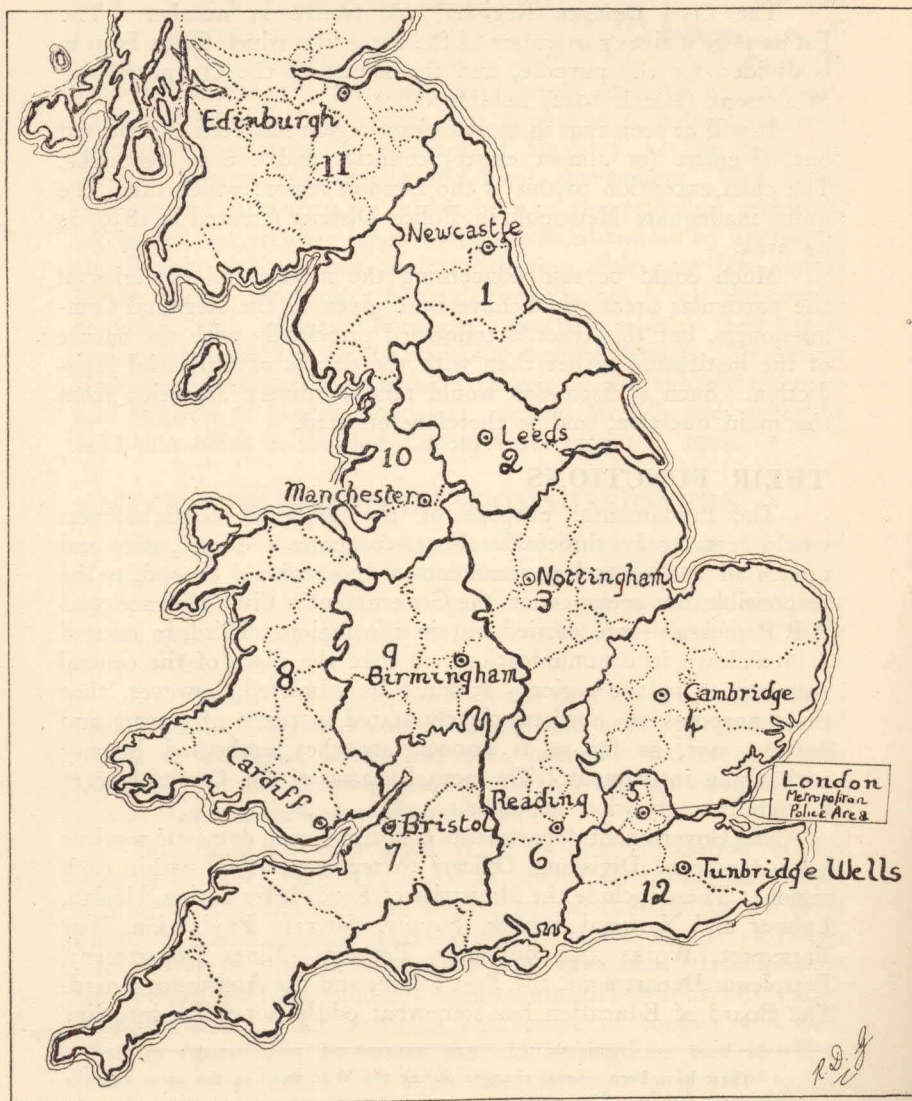
The Government departments concerned with domestic services have appointed Divisional Officers to represent them within each region. These include the Ministries of Food, Information, Health, Labour and National Service, Supply, Aircraft Production, War Transport, Works and Buildings, Pensions, Mines Department, Petroleum Department, the Post Office, and the Assistance Board. The Board of Education has somewhat oddly not fallen into line

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<sup>1</sup> There have been several changes during the War, both in the areas and the Commissioners holding office.



**MAP AND TABLE**  
**SHOWING CIVIL DEFENCE REGIONS**  
(March, 1942)





Regions	Regional Commissioners	Dep. Regional Commissioners	Counties Covered
<i>Newcastle</i> No. 1 <i>Northern Region</i>	Sir Arthur Lambert, M C	J. J. Lawson, M P Col. C. J. Pickering, C M G, D S O	Durham, North Riding
<i>Leeds</i> No. 2 <i>North Eastern Region</i>	Gen. Sir W. Bartholomew, G C B, C M G, D S O	O. G. Willey Gen. Sir J. E. S. Brind, K C B, K B E, C M G, D S O	East Riding, West Riding
<i>Nottingham</i> No. 3 <i>North Midland Region</i>	The Lord Trent	H. A. S. Wortley C. R. Keene	Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton, Notts, Rutland
<i>Cambridge</i> No. 4 <i>Eastern Region</i>	Sir Will Spens, C B E	The Earl of Cranbrook Maj. Gen. A. C. Fuller, C B E	Beds, Cambridge, Essex, Herts, Hunts, Norfolk, Suffolk
<i>London</i> No. 5	<i>Senior</i> Sir Ernest Gowers, K C B, K B E <i>Joint Commissioners</i> Admiral Sir E. Evans, K C B, D S O Alderman C. W. Key, M P	Lt-Gen. M. G. H. Barker, C B, D S O <i>Special Commissioners</i> Sir Warren Fisher, G C B, G C V O H. U. Willink, K C, M P	Area approximating to the Metropolitan Police District, including counties of London and Middlesex
<i>Reading</i> No. 6 <i>Southern Region</i>	Sir H. Graham-Haig, K C S I, C I E	Maj. Gen. R. J. Collins, C B, C M G, D S O Alderman W. Asbury, J P	Berks, Bucks, Dorset, Hants, Isle of Wight, Oxford
<i>Bristol</i> No. 7 <i>South</i> <i>Western Region</i>	Gen. Sir H. Elles, K C B, K C M G, K C V O, D S O	Maj. Gen. G. M. Lindsay, C B, C M G, D S O H. M. Medland	Cornwall, Devon, Glou- cester, Somerset, Wilts
<i>Cardiff</i> No. 8 <i>Welsb Region</i>	<i>Joint Commissioners</i> <i>Senior</i> Col. Sir G. T. Bruce, K C B, C M G, D S O R. Richards, M P	P. Morris Miss E. Owen	Anglesey, Brecknock, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Carnarvon, Denbigh, Flint, Glamorgan, Merioneth Monmouth, Montgomery Pembroke, Radnor
<i>Birmingham</i> No. 9 <i>Midland Region</i>	The Earl of Dudley, M C	Major G. Dennison George Archibald	Hereford, Salop, Stafford, Warwick, Worcester
<i>Manchester</i> No. 10 <i>North Western Region</i>	Sir Auckland Geddes, G C M G, K C B	Col. T. Blatherwick, C B, D S O, M C, T D F. Hindle	Cheshire, Cumberland, Lancashire, Westmorland
<i>Edinburgh</i> No. 11 <i>Scotland Region</i>	The Earl of Rosebery, D S O, M C	W. Quin, J P	<sup>1</sup> See below
<i>Tunbridge Wells</i> No. 12 <i>South Eastern Region</i>	Rt Hon. Viscount Monsell, G B E	A. G. Bottomley, O B E H. W. Shawcross, K C	Kent, Surrey, Sussex

<sup>1</sup> Scotland is divided into 5 sub-regions, with H Q at Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, and Glasgow.

with its local organisation, but in an emergency its Divisional Inspectors are instructed to act as Regional Education Officers. These officers continue to receive instructions from their respective departments in the normal way while maintaining close contact with the Regional Commissioners. In the event of a breakdown of communications a Regional Commissioner would assume supreme control of his area; the Divisional Officers would look to him instead of to their respective departments; and the Regional Commissioner would operate as a miniature Central Government within the region.

Pending the arrival—which may never come—of this final stage, in which supreme authority is assumed, the more able and energetic Regional Commissioners are in the meantime able to exert an enormous influence over the conduct of affairs. This is particularly the case in regard to Civil Defence matters, because in this sphere the Regional Commissioner acts on behalf of the Minister of Home Security, who pays a very high grant to local authorities in aid of their expenditure on these services. The Regional Commissioners have attached to them as personal assistants a number of leading officials of the Ministry of Home Security in charge of various aspects of Civil Defence and Home Security work.

Outside this special field the Commissioners are able to exercise a powerful and often decisive influence over other branches of administration. The novelty of the institution, the critical military situation, the prestige of the office and the personal eminence of some of the Commissioners result in their authority often exceeding their powers. This is noticeably so in London, where the municipal structure is especially weak—a mere patchwork quilt—and the Regional Commission especially strong. Except in Wales, the Commissions elsewhere consist of a single member with one or two deputies. In the Metropolis two Commissioners were originally appointed, but the number was gradually increased to five.

The present Commission for London consists of Sir Ernest Gowers (Senior Commissioner) and Admiral Evans, who are charged with general duties; Alderman Charles Key, M.P., in charge of shelters; Mr H. Willink, K.C., M.P., Special Commissioner for rehousing the homeless; Sir Warren Fisher, Special Commissioner entrusted with demolition and repairs to houses, highways and public utilities, and Lt-Gen. M. G. H. Barker. To the extent that these vital tasks have passed into the hands of the Regional Commissioners, the scope and significance of the position occupied by the local authorities in London has been diminished, and their stature reduced.



## A BASIS FOR THE FUTURE?

The Regional Commissioners were established to fill an aching void in our system of government caused by the absence of a coherent and systematic form of regional organisation. In the war emergency we now confront they are without doubt a necessary and perhaps indispensable addition to the machinery of the State. This should not blind us to the fact that they represent a complete break in our constitutional tradition.

The Commissioners cannot be regarded as politically responsible in any genuine sense of the term. The Minister of Home Security answers for them in the House of Commons, and they can be dismissed by the Government. But the position occupied by men of this calibre filling positions of unique authority cannot be assimilated to that of Civil Servants, and no one can seriously imagine that the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility is applicable to them. Moreover, at the time of the fullest exercise of their powers they will be cut off from all contact with the Cabinet, the Minister of Home Security and Parliament. The fact that two or three of the Commissioners happen to be Members of Parliament is presumably an accident, and such an incidental connection with the legislature is not an adequate safeguard of their accountability.

An attempt is being made to arrange meetings between the Commissioners and the Members of Parliament representing constituencies within their respective Regions. This expedient cannot be regarded as an adequate safeguard of democracy, since the Commissioners are not answerable to the M P's, and their statements cannot even be quoted in the House of Commons. In any case it is not the proper method of dealing with the problem.

No less sharp is the contrast afforded between the Regional Commissioners and the system of democratically-elected local authorities. The Commissioners represent, indeed, a clear example of that dangerous trend in our political development which may be described as 'Government by Commission'. By this is meant some form of appointed board or officer exercising large administrative powers without direct responsibility to an elective body. They are the apotheosis of a movement which can be traced in the establishment of such bodies as the Area Traffic Commissioners, the London Passenger Transport Board, and the Central Electricity Board.

Most important of all is the certainty that, whether they desire it or not, and regardless of their good intentions, the Commissioners must inevitably offer a serious menace to the future of local government. Our local authorities have many serious



defects which are deserving of criticism and censure; but as instruments of democracy they possess merits of supreme value. The democratic process has been largely developed in and through the local council. The town hall and the council chamber is the first and indispensable link in the chain of our democratic institutions, the place in which the civic spirit is evoked and bodied forth in democratic shape. If these centres of local democracy are overshadowed and reduced to insignificance by the Regional Commissioners created by the central government, the ultimate effect will be to weaken and undermine democratic government at the national and Imperial level.

It is difficult to propose an immediate remedy at this stage of affairs. The war makes it impracticable to replace the Regional Commissioners by elected councils; and the method of indirect election is undesirable at the best of times. It would be entirely mistaken today, when the local authorities have themselves been losing contact with the citizens owing to the suspension of elections.

Some writers who favour regionalism object fundamentally to the idea of attempting to construct a system of regional self-government out of the present Regional Commissioners.<sup>1</sup> The Commissioners, they argue, are essentially instruments for devolving the powers of the central government. The areas which have been selected for the purpose are quite different from, and much larger than, those which would be suitable for a regional system of local government. They consider that the regional administration of central government functions has nothing in common with the administration of local government services on a regional basis. The two developments are in their view quite distinct and must remain so.

This argument is based on correct premises, but may lead to a false conclusion. As I have already pointed out, the Regional Commissioners are the offspring of the central government and not of the local authorities. The latter, indeed, have persistently refused to countenance any effective kind of regional development during the past thirty years, and it is unlikely that even the shock of war has produced or will produce any noticeable change in the Blimp-like obtuseness of such bodies as the County Councils Associations and the Association of Municipal Corporations. Why should we expect it to do so, when the City of London Corporation's parochial outlook and antiquated egocentric mania has survived

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<sup>1</sup> See especially an article in *The New Statesman and Nation*, June 7th, 1941, entitled 'What is Regionalism?'

the destruction by bombing of the Guildhall and the wiping out of much of the square mile of the City?

If we could be reasonably sure that local authorities and their Associations would be willing after the war to cooperate wholeheartedly in the adoption of an intelligent scheme of regional government, in which areas and authorities would be worked out solely with a view to obtaining the best possible organisation of local government, it would then be worth while to abandon the Civil Defence regions and start with a clean slate. But unfortunately we cannot entertain any such expectation. Our past and present experience leads us to suppose that the opposition of narrow views and vested municipal interests is likely to remain stubbornly obstructive to the introduction of sweeping changes.

In consequence, if we ignore the most conspicuous manifestation of regionalism which actually exists, and refuse to consider it as a basis for reforming local government, on the ground that it was not designed for that purpose and is admittedly not ideally suited for it, we run a grave risk of forsaking the substance for the shadow, of being left without anything more solid on which to found our hopes than a number of general ideas which have been floating around for several decades without at any time meeting with widespread acceptance. In these circumstances it is better to try to build with the materials that we have, even if they are somewhat defective, rather than to defer the attempt indefinitely until the perfect bricks and mortar come to hand—if ever they do.

There is another and more important reason, derived from political psychology, which may be advanced in favour of transforming the Regional Commissioners into organs which can be worked into the fabric of our local government system.

No one who is at all conversant with public affairs in Britain can have failed to notice the deep impression which has been made on public opinion by the Regional Commissioners. It is as though the floodgates of popular feeling have burst after thirty years of repression and frustration. People have become suddenly aware of the need for regional government. They have become region-minded in what would have seemed, had it not been for the war, an incredibly short space of time.

The war itself has played a most important part in the process of converting public apathy into interest, and hastening the acceptance of regional government as an obvious necessity. Bombardment from the air on a widespread scale has accentuated the absurdity of the pettifogging local government boundaries. A still more potent factor has been the proved incapacity of the existing local



authorities to undertake civil defence or to provide the salvage and emergency services after a severe *Blitz*, on anything like the necessary scale. The Regional Commissioners are far from perfect as institutions, but they have literally saved the situation on numerous occasions. How they will turn out in the event of their being called upon in case of invasion to assume full responsibility as miniature central governments is at present a matter of conjecture. All one can say is that they stand a much better chance of success than the local authorities.

We are concerned here not with the present emergency but with the future after the war. In considering the future the wise course is surely to take into account the status and goodwill which the Regional Commissioners have been building up in the public mind, and to take advantage of the impetus which this wartime expedient has given to the regional idea.

We must not, however, be blind to the defects of the Civil Defence regions as areas of local government. Some of them are too large—the South-Western Region is a clear instance. Others, such as London, are too small. Many of them suffer from the fact that one of the principal factors in their design was the desire to compose them out of entire counties, though the counties are the most irrational and unscientific areas in our local government system.

There is a considerable difference of opinion among experts concerning the number of regions into which the country ought to be divided. One school of thought considers that a region should be little more than a Greater Birmingham, or an enlarged Bristol, or a group of contiguous rural areas. On this basis there would probably be 30 or 40 so-called regions. My own view is that the best division of the country for the purpose of the large-scale municipal services would produce no more than about 16 regions; or 20 at the most. We have always in the past made the mistake of taking far too small areas for local government purposes. It is essential that we should not once again fall into this habitual error.

These considerations indicate that the best course to adopt is to take the Civil Defence areas as the provisional basis of post-war regional government to begin with, but to regard them as no more than a first approximation. We should provide, in the legislation which establishes the constitutional authorities about to be described, for a review of the regional boundaries and of the number of regions, to be made by a prescribed authority at the end of a three-year trial period; and thereafter every five years.



## REGIONAL COUNCILS AND THEIR POWERS

Whatever else may be said, it is indisputable that regional administration must be democratised if this country is to remain a democracy. To permit the continuance of provincial administration in the hands of politically irresponsible nominated Commissioners after the war emergency has passed would be more than an anomaly: it would be a fundamental denial of the very principle for which we are fighting.

To convert the Commissioners into Regional advisers would weaken their powers and thereby destroy any chance of effective regional government, whereas our aim should be to strengthen and expand the embryonic seed of regionalism. To replace the present Commissioners with ordinary civil servants of high rank would give us a system closely resembling the Prefectures of France and other continental countries; it would not democratise our local government at the regional level. Moreover, the experience of the past twenty years shows that the Central Government Departments have been as slow to appreciate the need for effective regional government as the local authorities themselves—and a more deadly tribute to their lack of perception could scarcely be paid.

If Regional Government is to follow the lines of our sound democratic tradition it can mean only one thing: a directly-elected council within each region for the purpose of administering regional government within that area. Only by direct election shall we obtain the fullest measure of public interest in, and support for, the work of the Regional Government. Only by such a method shall we obtain for that task men and women imbued with a regional outlook.

What are the powers which should be exercised in time of peace by the regional organs?

First and foremost we may place regional planning and reconstruction. Town and country planners of all schools of thought are unanimously agreed that the organisation of planning has hitherto proceeded on entirely wrong lines. Up to the present the primary planning organs have been the smallest and weakest authorities, except in the case of county boroughs, and even the county councils were not statutory planning authorities prior to 1932. For large scale planning we have depended on the voluntary grouping of several local authorities. This has resulted in loosely-knit regional town planning committees being established in some parts of the country but not in others. It has led to many of the combined areas being far too small for planning purposes. Worst of all, it has produced numerous joint committees lacking

executive powers—an almost certain guarantee of futility. There has been no planning from the centre at all.

It is now recognised that this order should be reversed. Planning must start in the first instance on a national scale in regard to those matters which can only be dealt with properly in terms of the whole country: as, for example, national parks, trunk roads, coast reservation, ports and harbours, the location of industry as between different areas, main line railway development, major water supply developments, and so forth. The second stage is planning at the regional level. The third and last stage is planning at the town or country district level.

Regional planning consists, first, of applying the principles of the national plan to the regional area; second, of planning for the region all those matters which, while of insufficient magnitude or generality to fall within the scope of the national plan, are yet beyond the purely local scale.

On this plane would come the location of industry within the region; the provision of satellite towns and garden cities; the provision of large open spaces and green belts; major highways other than trunk roads; water supply; the siting of hospitals, clinics, libraries, swimming baths, secondary and technical schools, and many other municipal institutions. It must be emphasised that we are dealing here with planning and not with administration. There are many institutions and services that require to be planned on a regional basis but which can and should be provided and administered by local authorities of a much smaller type. The important aspects on which regional control is necessary will often be only location, design and standard of adequacy. Subject to these points being safeguarded, the actual provision and administration can be confided to local authorities.

On the other hand, there are services for which not only regional planning is required, but also direct regional administration. In the case of an institution such as swimming baths and wash-houses, or public libraries the regional council would be concerned only in ensuring that these services are provided wherever practicable, that the location is properly planned, and that the design and scale of provision are satisfactory.

But when we are dealing with a large main drainage scheme, or technical education, or lunacy and mental deficiency, or major hospitals, there are cogent reasons why the actual administration should be carried out by the regional organ. Large schemes of main drainage invariably exceed the areas of individual local authorities. They are therefore usually administered by a joint board or committee, or (as in the case of London) by the largest



authority which provides the system and 'admits' the sewage of neighbouring authorities to its drainage system. There are disadvantages in both of these methods. The proper course is to hand the job over to the regional authority.

Refuse disposal requires for its efficient and profitable treatment highly specialised recovery plants involving heavy capital outlay. They cannot be provided by small authorities. Therefore refuse disposal should be a regional service, though the collection of refuse can remain in the hands of local authorities.

Technical education demands specialised institutions and instructors for its full development, and these cannot be provided unless the students are drawn from a very wide area containing a large population. Similar considerations apply to specialised medical services, and in particular to those requiring institutional treatment.

The police forces also call for regional administration. At the time of the publication of the Desborough Report on the Police Service of England, Wales and Scotland (1920), there was a tendency in the Labour Party to insist on the necessity for maintaining small police authorities, on the ground that these alone are susceptible to democratic control. While there is everything to be said for avoiding a centralised semi-military police service on the model of most continental countries, there is little to be said for preserving scores of tiny and inefficient 'forces' of a parochial type at a time when law breakers of all kinds, and especially that large class of them which uses motor cars, are operating on a regional basis.

Fire brigades have in the past been one of the most neglected of all local government services. Prior to 1938 the central government took practically no interest in them and there was no inspection, no grant-in-aid from the Exchequer, and no central department responsible for their supervision. Now under the stress of war they have been nationalised. While this may be a necessary step under conditions of intense bombardment from the air, it will be highly desirable when peace comes for the fire brigades to be transferred to the regional councils.

There are a number of other administrative functions which the regions should exercise. These include large water supply schemes, and the establishment of regional personnel commissions for the recruitment of local government officers by competitive examination, in accordance with the recommendations of the Hadow Committee on Local Government Officers.

In the realm of finance, the region should be used for the purpose of spreading the rate burden incurred in respect of a number

of services more evenly over a wide area, thereby diminishing in some degree the anomalies and injustices which disfigure our system of local taxation.

A substantial part of this injustice arises from the fact that almost every large city is invaded each day by hordes of workers of all descriptions who live outside its boundaries but earn their living within its area. The city council has to provide a number of costly day services for these people, such as water supply, refuse collection, street cleansing and lighting, highway repair and construction, police forces, fire brigades and many others. These 'commuters' (as they are called in the United States) retreat in the evening to their residences beyond the city's border, and consequently make little or no contribution to the city's rates, which are nearly always substantially higher than those of surrounding residential districts. By charging some part of the financial burden of these services on the region the incidence of taxation would be widened so as to make it coincide more nearly with the area of benefit.

### COORDINATION OF SERVICES

The best feature of the present wartime experiment in regionalism is the creation of a single series of regional areas for all the purposes of the Central Government (with the strange exception of Education). Before the establishment of the Civil Defence Regions, almost every Department divided up the country in a different way for its own particular services. Now we have twelve divisions which are common to them all.

The principal advantage of this is that it renders possible the coordination within each region of the various related central services. It also facilitates the integration, where desirable, of central and local government services.

The services for which central government departments are or should be responsible frequently require coordination at the regional level. For example, housing and highways; health and education; labour and the location of industry. This is made difficult, if not impossible, where each central department administers its services in a different area. A general view of the situation by all the agencies engaged in public administration in any region is out of the question in such circumstances.

Where, as at present, almost every Government Department concerned with internal affairs has a responsible divisional officer in each region, there are great opportunities—by no means fully utilised so far—for intelligent coordinated action. Not only is a general regional council of all such departmental representatives



easy to arrange ; but a series of standing and *ad hoc* committees containing representatives of particular departments can also be achieved without difficulty. Numerous *ad hoc* and standing committees have been set up in the regions by the Regional Commissioners, and are now in operation.

## CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Of yet greater importance is the question of attaining a higher degree of coordination between central and local government.

The relations between central and local government in Britain are highly complex. There is not a single relation, but almost as many relationships as there are services. In fact, the various relationships have grown up empirically out of attempts to provide or improve particular services. Doctrines or principles have played little part in the matter.

It is, therefore, difficult to make dogmatic generalisations about the relations of central and local government which apply over the whole field. In regard to education, for instance, the central government has sought to foster and promote action by the local education authorities largely through the device of the grant-in-aid combined with an able and helpful Inspectorate. In the sphere of public assistance the central government has been restrictive and regulatory, acting through legal powers of the most peremptory kind. In regard to public health, the Ministry of Health has relied in part on the influence exerted by the research and statistical work of its medical staff, in part on the obligation of local authorities to obtain the Minister's approval for all manner of schemes and administrative acts ; in part on that most futile of all devices, the power of acting in default ; in part on the grant-in-aid. One could continue in this fashion to analyse the relations of central and local government through the entire list of services.

Despite all these divergencies, one fact that does emerge clearly is that in every case a service is administered *either* by a central department *or* by a local authority. In no case is there a joint responsibility for achieving a common end.

I venture to question the usefulness of this dichotomy, at any rate for the task of supreme importance which will confront the nation after the war : the planning and rebuilding of Britain.

The place which regional planning should occupy in the general scheme of planning has already been indicated in connection with the functions of regional authorities. We are now concerned not only with the making of plans, but also with the implementation of them.

The building of our devastated cities on new lines, and the repair of those parts of them which need less drastic treatment, will be a work of considerable magnitude. This applies both to the making of designs and to their execution. The central areas of certain towns have suffered so severely that a wonderful opportunity has at last been provided to make them over again almost as though we were starting with a clean slate. Broad boulevards, squares, civic centres, public gardens and parks, monuments, public libraries and museums, can be laid out in spacious settings to replace crowded shopping centres, the relics of mediæval alleyways, tall commercial buildings shutting out light and sunshine and air from narrow canyons of streets.

The greatness of the task both as regards the work of creative imagination and the effort of practical realisation has so far been gauged by few. We may hope that it will be a labour of love, of civic pride, and of inspiration. But we may also anticipate that to accomplish it at a high level of achievement will be beyond the unaided resources, whether intellectual or material, of individual local authorities. Both regional and national assistance will be required.

This is not a matter which can be profitably discussed in terms of narrow conceptions of local 'rights'. The planning and reconstruction of London or Birmingham is a matter which affects not merely the inhabitants of those cities, but also a vastly wider public throughout the country, and especially in the regions of which they are the respective focal points.

There is also the task of development, or redevelopment, arising from the immense dislocation of industry, commerce and habitation caused by the war. The evacuation of the great cities and the more vulnerable towns by millions of women and children, the sick and the aged; the removal of schools and many other institutions; the location of factories in remote places for military reasons; the transfer of government departments, banks, and commercial undertakings to large country houses and hotels in seaside or inland resorts: all this has set in motion a vast train of consequences of the most intricate kind.

The situation which will exist when peace comes will not be one which can be left to right itself. Indeed, the most difficult matter to decide will be what we are to regard as 'right' in this connection. Do we want to go back to the pre-war state of uncontrolled urban growth? Do we want to restore London to its elephantine proportions? Do we wish to promote a policy of planned decentralisation? Do we intend to continue with the wartime pattern of dispersal, or to design another one? What



is to be the basic agricultural plan on which so much else will ultimately turn ?

The central government will be concerned with these matters from so many angles that they cannot even be enumerated. It is, for example, clearly in the national interest that devastated areas should be rebuilt wisely and well, and with reasonable despatch. And since the wounds which have injured the cities are the results of causes affecting the nation as a whole, the healing of the wounds is equally a matter which affects the national welfare. Again, the building trade will undoubtedly be subject to strict public control for years after the war ; and the Government will certainly not be prepared to release building labour and materials for large-scale projects unless they have received the approval of the Ministry of Works and Planning. A third important aspect is that financial assistance, in the shape of loans or grants, will in most cases be required from the central government to enable the plans to pass from the drawing board to the stage of realisation. And financial aid amounting to hundreds or even thousands of millions of pounds will certainly not be granted without the central government scrutinising and approving the projects on which the money is to be spent.

## EVOLUTION AND DEVOLUTION

But scrutiny and approval are not sufficient. What is wanted is active participation by the central government in the actual process of planning and executing the plans within the region. The best way to effect this would be to set up a Planning Commission in each region. This might consist of, say, six or eight elected regional councillors nominated by the Regional Council, together with regional representatives of the central departments directly concerned, such as the Ministries of Health, Transport, Labour and National Service, the Boards of Trade and Education, and the Ministry of Works and Planning. This last-named Ministry might nominate the chairman of the Regional Planning Commission, who should give his full time to the task and be paid for it.

A similar method of integrating central and local government at the regional level might be employed in connection with other services. For example, the health committee of the Regional Council could include the regional representative of the Ministry of Health ; the regional police committee could include the regional representative of the Home Office, and so on.

In this way, duplication in the matter of supervising the local authorities within the region would be eliminated. We should avoid the disadvantage of introducing another tier or layer

of authorities in our system of government in the shape of the regional council. The regional council would become at one and the same time an organ of evolution from the standpoint of local government, and an organ of devolution from the standpoint of central government. Each of these developments is badly needed and long overdue.

The central departments concerned with local government are burdened with a vast load of detailed control over local authorities which in many cases they perform indifferently and which could be much better carried out on a regional basis. If they were freed from some of this burden at the centre the departments would be better able to devote themselves to large questions of policy which they are at present too distracted by routine supervisory work to consider.

The war has given a great impetus to regional devolution by the central government departments, mainly in consequence of the military exigencies which have led to the establishment of the Regional Commissioner, and the immense increase in the volume of work to be performed by all departments. This great expansion in the scope of public administration has compelled departments to decentralise their responsibilities owing to the sheer impossibility of attempting to conduct the whole mass of their affairs through the bottleneck of a headquarters office. Unfortunately, many departments have not appreciated the importance of appointing regional personnel of sufficiently high calibre or official status to achieve in a satisfactory manner the results at which they aim. But still the tendency towards decentralisation is there; and we may hope that it will become more pronounced and be more efficiently carried out after the war.

It will, however, be confusing and wasteful if no attempt is made to coordinate the regional self-government that derives from local government and which can best find expression in an elected regional council, with the regional administration which is an expression of central government and is technically known as deconcentration. Coordination does not necessarily imply that the same area shall be taken for the purposes of local government and of central government; but in practice it is much more likely to be achieved by that means.

Let us envisage the situation in concrete terms. The Ministry of Health, for example, has its regional officials exercising departmental powers within the Civil Defence regions. Those officers must remain responsible to the department which employs them (we are here ignoring the contingent relation of such officials to the Regional Commissioner during the war emergency, since we



assume the Regional Commission will be replaced by an elected regional council). The Regional Council will also have its own independent staff to deal (*inter alia*) with public health.

If the latter are to operate without any connection with the former, and if the local government regions are to be entirely different areas from the central government regions, we shall indeed have paid a heavy price for attaining regionalism. There will be a profusion of areas and authorities for what is essentially a single need. Such an unnecessary complexity of organisation at the regional level cannot be right: it looks meaningless and would be meaningless.

## TOWN AND COUNTRY COUNCILS

The greatest weakness of the present situation lies in the fact that the unscientific medley of local authorities and areas within each region has been left intact. The Regional Commissioners have been superimposed upon the pre-existing chaos.

No amount of regional superstructure can eliminate the need to reform the existing local government authorities. On the contrary, the creation of new regional councils will make an improvement of the rest of the structure even more necessary.

In the county boroughs, of which there are 83, the county borough council is the sole local authority for all municipal purposes. Elsewhere, there are at least two, and sometimes three, layers of local authorities between whom powers and responsibility are divided. There is, first, the county council; second, the county district council which may be a borough, an urban district council or a rural district council. In the case of a rural district, there is a third layer of authorities consisting of parish councils or meetings.

The organisation we envisage for the future will consist of a double-deck structure. The top deck will consist of the Regional Councils already described. The lower deck will consist of a simplified series of councils in town and country superseding the various types of local authorities which now exist.

The county boroughs will continue as they are at present except that in most cases the services requiring a larger scale of administration will be transferred to the Regional Councils. These include main drainage, technical education, lunacy and mental deficiency, major and specialised hospitals, refuse disposal, the police forces, fire brigades and regional planning. In a few of the largest cities, such as Manchester or Birmingham, where a case can be made out for leaving some or all of these services in the hands of the town council, on the ground that the county borough is sufficiently

large and endowed with adequate resources to attain a really high standard of achievement, there would be no object in transferring the services to the regional authorities unless it were necessary to do so in the interests of the rest of the region.

The non-county boroughs (of which there are 309) and the urban districts (which number 573) will have to be carefully examined to see which of them are qualified to become town councils under the new scheme. The position of such town councils will in fact be identical with that to be occupied by county borough councils (excluding the few largest cities). They will be responsible for higher as well as primary education, for all public health functions, other than major or specialised hospital services, for housing, for streets other than regional highways or trunk roads, bridges, libraries, swimming baths, and for an immense number of other functions.

Such responsibilities are more extensive than those falling on non-county boroughs and urban districts. Hence, only the more substantial, well-equipped and capable members of those categories will become town councils under the new scheme. The tiny obsolete boroughs, the small or poverty-stricken urban districts, could not be regarded as suitable for the purpose in their present form. They will have to be combined with neighbouring towns or merged in rural areas to form country councils.

The country councils will comprise the rest of Britain excluding the areas of the town councils. They will enjoy a status and powers similar to those possessed by town councils.

A country council will consist of a substantial rural or semi-rural area, containing perhaps a considerable group of villages and rural districts, and including country towns and urban districts unable to qualify for separate status as town councils on the grounds mentioned above.

The term 'country council' must necessarily be a flexible one. In some cases an administrative county, such as Suffolk, for example, or Berkshire, might be taken as a suitable area for this type of organ; but in most instances the county's boundaries will not be acceptable. We must recognise the indisputable fact that the administrative counties represent irrational historic survivals overlaid by statutory changes introduced in 1888 and modified by county borough encroachments at various intervals thereafter; that they are in many cases hopelessly unsuitable for local government purposes; and that no real improvement can be made unless they are revised.

It can be seen that under the scheme here proposed we shall have the regional councils, and below them a second tier of authorities



designated town councils or country councils as the case may be. These bodies will have separately elected councils and will be of substantial size and importance. The town councils will include every county borough or non-county borough worthy of the name, and all the larger urban districts; the country councils will comprise whole counties in some cases, and extensive parts of them in others. There will be no place in the scheme for separately elected local authorities exercising powers in the miserable, incompetent, poverty-stricken county districts which we know from experience to be incapable of providing the necessities of good municipal government, let alone the amenities and refinements of a decent social environment. The unsuitable counties will disappear as entities and be replaced by areas of better design.

There will everywhere be two, and only two, layers of local governing bodies: the regional council and the town or country council.

It would be a great disadvantage to have more than two tiers of local authorities. A third or fourth tier would add to the complexity of the system and dilute the civic interest of the voters among the many separate bodies.

## VILLAGE AND WARD COMMITTEES

Nevertheless, many people will feel that it is desirable to carry the local government process a stage further, in order to make provision for the village, the parish, the rural district in the country; the ward, precinct or neighbourhood in the city. The areas of local government which are substantial enough for the efficient administration of services required by modern standards are too large to enable the local authority to maintain a vital contact with the individual citizen, or to enable him or her to express his views or grievances effectively.

The proper solution of this problem is to work down to the smallest communities by means of village committees of the country council, or ward committees of the town council. These would consist of the councillors representing the village or ward on the local authority (i.e. the town or country council), sitting with persons elected by the locality for the purpose.

Such a local committee would not be an independent authority exercising autonomous powers as at present. It would have functions delegated to it by the town council or the country council. Such delegation could be either in general or specific terms, and it might include wide discretionary powers, embracing even the right to levy a purely local rate to pay for local amenities up to

a stated amount. But the ward or village committee would be responsible to the local authority and subject to its jurisdiction.

By this method we could obtain the kind of democratic intercourse in public affairs which is possible only when the vast impersonal aggregation of the large municipal unit is broken down to the smallest type of community, while at the same time avoiding the evils of granting autonomy to areas which are incapable of exercising it efficiently.

There is much confusion of thought on this aspect of the subject. Some social reformers see a conflict between 'democracy' and 'efficiency'. They regard the large, well-run municipality as a bureaucrat's paradise, but a democrat's nightmare.

This cannot be the correct view. There cannot be anything particularly valuable in the preservation of governmental institutions unless they produce results which are objectively satisfactory. One might as well seek to justify capitalism on the ground of the stimulating mental experience conferred on Company Directors by the give-and-take of board room discussions or shareholders' meetings as to defend the existence of inefficient local authorities solely in terms of the democratic effect of their proceedings. Democracy must be judged by its results as well as by its methods, and it must submit to the test of its achievements and failures. To preserve obsolete institutions on the ground that they are democratic is not to strengthen democratic government, but to weaken it. Democratic institutions must be continually improved and reformed to enable them to provide the services required by the people on an ever-improving standard. This is the aim which underlies the proposals here put forward.

## PERSONNEL

In conclusion a word may be said concerning personnel. For the discharge of the important planning and administrative duties which it is proposed to confer on the regional organs, it will be necessary for the Regional Councils and their planning Commissions to have considerable staffs. It is essential that these Councils should equip themselves with men of high ability, wide experience and broad outlook. Officers of small authorities should not be appointed to the regional staffs unless they have shown, or can show, unmistakable signs of possessing a regional outlook. The success of regionalism will depend at least as much on the professional staff as on the elected councillors.

The councillors should undoubtedly be paid for their services. It is already difficult for men and women without independent means to serve on county councils, and in consequence the field



of choice among candidates tends to be limited to the well-to-do, to party and Union officials, married women, and to retired pensioners of advanced age. The opportunity to participate in regional government can only be given to all if a salary of, say, £300 a year is paid to those who serve, together with travelling expenses and a pass giving free transportation throughout the region. This salary might be made conditional on attendance at a certain proportion of the meetings and committees. It must be remembered that in so large an area as a region a great deal of time will necessarily be occupied by travelling.

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to give a brief outline of a system of regional government which could and should be created in the first instance out of the existing Regional Commissions. The system envisaged would solve the main problems arising from the parochial character of our local government areas and their acknowledged inadequacy for the large scale municipal services. It would also do much to relieve the congestion in the central executive departments by encouraging the tendency towards devolution which the war has emphasised. It would retain the valuable features of the wartime experiments in regional administration, but it would replace the politically irresponsible Commissioners by directly elected Councils in line with our best democratic tradition. The scheme makes the fullest provision for post-war planning and reconstruction. For this and other purposes it introduces a new form of partnership between central and local government.

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