

Local Governance, Property and People

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide some food for thought relating to our discussions this afternoon on the law, local government, governance of residents association and future issues. It is my belief that residents associations may have a critical role to play in the development of local democracy if they are willing to accept the challenge this involves.

I therefore want to talk about the structure of democracy as it has developed over the last 250 years. In this presentation I will advance the proposition that Western Liberal Democracy is not perfect. There is what some have referred to as a “Democratic Deficit” and this deficit is a consequence of the very way in which democratic governments were constructed in the eighteenth century. These limitations have been understood from the time of the establishment of the first democratic governments in the United States and France. Action to redress the “democratic deficit” led to the development of citizens organisations which I will refer to as civil society organisations.

The foundations of civil society organisations are contemporaneous with the development of the democratic state. Fair and free elections, representative government, adherence to the rule of law are essential to democracy but they are not enough. For democracy to be meaningful in the every day life of a people requires active citizenship, the ability to organise and to pursue just causes on behalf of the community and the nation as a whole. This is why civil society organisations have been an essential component of western democracy since its inception.

Foundations of Western Liberal Democracy

The foundations of western liberal democracy were laid in France in the establishment of the French Republic in 1789. The American Republic was established earlier in 1776 but it is the French model which has been most widely adopted.

The eighteenth century was a time of enormous revolutionary turmoil both politically and in terms of the emergence of industrialism and the demise of agriculture economies. Industrialisation was driven by the property owning middle class who found their endeavours frustrated by the restrictions of feudal society and the arbitrary rules and laws of authoritarian monarchies. The result was the overthrow of the government and its replacement by democratic states.

Prior to the revolutions power was concentrated in the hands of approximately 3% of the population consisting of the aristocracy and the church hierarchy. With the revolutions power was transferred to about 20% of the population and government was dominated by white middle class males. The business of government became the governance of business. Governments became preoccupied with industry, commerce, finance, banking and all those matters seen as essential to advancing the interests of the propertied classes.

The role of the military became one of securing and protecting resources and markets for industry.

Democratic power certainly was not equitably distributed across the population. Democratic rights did not extend to women who of course represented about half the population. Women were excluded precisely because they had no property rights. Members of dissenting religions and other minorities were also excluded from participation in the democratic process. In America Black people were also excluded from participation in democracy as they were enslaved and treated as property.

However in ceasing power the middle classes had to rely on the support, or at least a lack of resistance, of the wider population. Therefore in establishing democratic governments promises were made which constituted a commitment to, not simply the advancement of the interests of the propertied classes, but also to the majority of the population in terms of social justice, equality and fundamental rights and freedoms. These promises were contained in the founding documents of both the United States and France.

The US Declaration of Independence of July 4th 1776 contains these famous words:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”

In France the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which was approved by the National Assembly on August 26th, 1789 included these Articles:

- 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.*
- 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.*
- 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.*
- 6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.*

The importance of commerce and property rights is reflected in the American Declaration which refers to the right of free and Independent states to “establish Commerce” and in the French Declaration Article 17 states:

“Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.”

While both the American and French Declarations clearly committed democratic governments to freedom and equality for all, the institutions of democratic government excluded women and minorities and placed the power of the state in the hands of men of property, the bourgeois middle class. But those who were excluded never accepted their inferior status. They believed in the promises of democracy and sought from the outset to challenge the new democratic order.

Indeed in France in October 1789, just 3 months after the Declaration a hungry mob of 7,000 largely working-class women decided to march on the Versailles, taking with them pieces of cannon and other weaponry. This action was followed in November by the “Women’s Petition to the National Assembly” which sought “the abolishment of male privilege throughout France.”. They insisted upon the “Admittance of the feminine sex to the district and departmental assemblies and elevated to municipal responsibilities and even as deputies to the National Assembly the consultative and deliberative voices of women.”

The petition stated:

“You have broken the sceptre of despotism, you have pronounced the beautiful axiom [that] ... the French are a free people. Yet still you allow thirteen million slaves shamefully to wear the irons of thirteen million despots! You have divined the true equality of rights—and you still unjustly withhold them from the sweetest and most interesting half among you!”

The petition failed to win the support of the Assembly. A further inconsistency apparent in the new democracies was the failure to extend individual freedom and equal rights to those people, predominantly African people, who had been sold into slavery. Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams one of the leaders of the American Revolution, wrote in respect to the continuation of slavery that: “it always appeared to me a most iniquitous scheme ...to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.” But slavery like the subjugation of women retained its legitimacy in both the United States and France under democratic governments.

Structural Inequality

In the context of today’s discussions the point I wish to make is that the structural inequality established in the eighteenth century remains in evidence in western liberal democracies today. Women continue to be underrepresented in legislatures and in positions of power within both government and industry and their rates of pay are also less than that paid to their male counterparts. Racial inequality also persists. The inferior position of African Americans in the United States today is attributable to the denial of their rights from the founding of the American Democracy. To this list of those who are underrepresented we can add youth, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. This is the democratic deficit.

Eighteenth century Western liberal democracies exemplified a belief in “rational utility-maximizing individuals”. That the greatest good for the greatest number could be achieved by allowing each individual to pursue their own self interest through the market. To achieve this they sought to throw off the restrictions of feudal society and to replace the authoritarian power of the monarch with compliance with the rule of law. Individual rights provided the philosophical basis for industrial and commercial expansion under a policy of laissez faire which sought to minimize the interference of the state in the operations of the market.

Civil Society and the Anti-Slavery movement

Eighteenth century liberalism could be said to promote democracy based on “negative freedoms”, that is freedom from the restrictions of the state, culture and tradition. There was however at the time an alternative view of democracy which is referred to as the promotion of positive freedoms. This perspective regarded the democratic state as being an instrument for creating the conditions to enable everyone to exercise their rights, to participate in decision making, and to pursue their own wellbeing.

This perspective of democracy led to what Charles Taylor has described as: “...the arrival of a quiet new phenomenon which has become almost banal in our contemporary world: the mobilizing of a large scale citizen’s movement around a moral issue, with the intent of effecting political change.”

He describes how the eighteenth century gave rise to the promise of a new age:

“The new age would be one of reason and benevolence, of freedom and humanitarianism, of equality and justice and self-rule. And of course these ideas of freedom and dignity, in association with the promotion of ordinary life, have steadily eroded hierarchy and promoted equality- and that in all sorts of dimensions, between social classes, races, ethnic and cultural groups, and the sexes.” (Taylor p. 387-395)

The movement for the abolition of slavery marks the beginnings of this quiet revolution based on Universal Justice. The enormity of the task undertaken by this movement is difficult for us to appreciate today precisely because we now regard slavery as entirely, morally reprehensible. This is the critical achievement of this movement.

During the eighteenth century it is estimated that 5.8 million African people were shipped to the New World as slaves. Between 1662 and 1807 (when the trade was outlawed) 3.4 million African people were enslaved by British slave traders. This was 3-4 times the number of voluntary British settlers in the New World (Jay, p. 239).

“Imagine being torn from your weeping family...forced to walk hundreds of miles until you reach the sea on the West African side of the Atlantic Ocean. You are stripped of your name, your identity, of every right a human being deserves. The European ship that you are forced to board,... (contains) A multitude of black people of every description chained together, with scarcely room to turn, travelling for months, seasick, surrounded by the filth of vomit-filled tubs, into which children often fell, some suffocating. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying renders the whole scene of horror almost inconceivable. Death and disease are all around and only one in six will survive this journey and the brutal, backbreaking labour that follows..”

The transatlantic slave trade persisted for four centuries (www.recoveredhistories.org). In 1999 it was estimated that the cost of compensation relating to the slave trade and exploitation of Africa during this period as being in the order of \$777 trillion.

My purpose in describing the slave trade is to indicate the enormous task those who set out to abolish this trade set themselves. To achieve their objectives they had to challenge governments, commercial interests and established religions all of whom condoned and participated in the slave trade. Further, given that they were largely people excluded from the formal political process, they were forced to invent a new form of democracy. They took democracy into their own hands and established the first civil society organisations.

In 1775 The Society for the relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage was established. In 1787 the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed. In 1791 there was a slave revolt which eventually resulted in the founding of Haiti. In 1795 in France, the Declaration of the Rights of Man included the abolition of slavery. In 1807 the British Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act effectively outlawing but not abolishing slavery. Britain abolished slavery in 1838 and other countries followed.

Josiah Wedgewood produced perhaps the first campaign button which depicted a black person on a white background and bearing the motto “Am I not a man and a brother?”

In a statement of 1823, the recently founded Liverpool Society for the Abolition of Slavery attributed its unprecedented success in achieving moral “improvement” to “the practice of combining society itself in intellectual masses, for the purpose of attaining some certain, defined, and acknowledged good, which is generally allowed to be essential to the well-being of the whole.” (Taylor pp395-396).

The “combining of society” for the purpose of achieving “acknowledged good” and “essential to the well-being of the whole” constitutes the basis of civil society organisations. Characteristics of the anti-slavery movement which continue to characterise civil society today include:

- **Non Hierarchical** The anti slavery movement was based on equality and inclusion. The movement included African people themselves in leadership roles. Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, both African people, were among the most prominent people involved in the movement;
- **Bottom-up** Ordinary people, hence ‘civil’ society, organised themselves rather than relying on the good will of the rich and powerful or the consent of government;
- **Participatory** The movement established small local committees, held community meetings and lectures, distributed pamphlets and submitted petitions all of which enabled the participation of the public including those otherwise excluded from the political process. These are all familiar methods of organisation today but were very revolutionary at the time;
- **Rights Based** Universal rights were seen as extending to all people based on our shared humanity rather than on privilege or property;
- **Anti-establishment** This movement challenged the state, commercial interests and established moral authority; the churches. These challenges were on moral grounds and were not an attempt to replace the politicians, nor destroy commercial

enterprise. What they sought to do was to change the laws and commercial practices based on a vision of the good which required the recognition in law and in the market of universal rights.

The Anti-Slavery movement therefore provided the foundations over time of the human rights and civil rights movements, the women's movement, the movement of people with disabilities and the promotion of gay and lesbians rights. Human rights legislation, anti discrimination laws, universal suffrage, consumer protection measures, are all attributable to the work of civil society organisations through their demands that elected governments give affect to and uphold the principals of democracy.

A similar story can be elucidated in respect of the eighteenth century Romantic Movement and the subsequent development of the environmental and conservation movements. Traditionally man was seen to have dominion over all he surveyed and the right of men to exploit the resources of nature for his own ends. The romantic movement however placed man within nature and saw nature as having inherent value and therefore worthy of respect and a duty of stewardship. From this movement comes the garden city movement, parks, animal protection, environmental protection measures, departments of conversation and so on.

Universal Justice, environmental consciousness and charity are the pillars of modern civil society. They constitute – along with material well being – the requirements of the ‘good life’ in a moral sense.

Within a democracy people are themselves able to articulate, discuss and debate the requirements of a good life within their community. What is right or wrong, good or bad are not determined by those on high be it church or state. What constitutes the good is contestable and through democratic practices we “negotiate” in order to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. Reliance on the market remains the preference of neo liberals but they are constrained by civil society organisations for whom the good life requires equality, justice and freedom for all.

Indeed the freedom to participate in critical evaluation and in the process of value formation is among the most crucial freedoms of social existence. The choice of social values cannot be settled merely by the pronouncements of those in authority who control the levers of government.

“The relevant freedoms include the liberty of acting as citizens who matter and whose voices count, rather than living as well-fed well clothed and well entertained vassals. Restrain the worst excesses of self interest by means of regulation (the state) and by internalized shared values (community).” (Sen, 1999)

This has become the fundamental role of civil society. To articulate our beliefs, moral principals and vision of the good society and to constantly and persistently challenge the status quo and those interests who most benefit from our collective failure to address the issues of poverty, injustice and the environmental degradation of the planet upon which we all depend.

A comparison can be made of the Liberal State and Civil Society in terms of the focus or orientation of each. These comparative factors exist along a continuum and are not entirely absent one from the other. For example governments do attempt to encourage

citizen participation and civil society organisations may seek to represent sectors of the community. Social values are incorporated in legislation and some civil society organisations will engage in commercial enterprises. The Table below should be read as representing the tendencies of the State and Civil Society organisations rather than as opposing concepts.

COMPARATIVE FEATURES OF THE LIBERAL STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The Liberal State	Civil Society Organisations
Property	People
Representation	Participation
Freedom From	Freedom To
The primacy of Self Interest	The primacy of Common Interests
Ideology	Moral Purpose
Market Values	Social Values

Local government

Local government in New Zealand was established on firm liberal principals. Its focus was clearly on property interests. The electoral franchise was property based, one vote per property. Local government revenue was based primarily on a land tax or rates. The functions of local government were prescribed by central government as relating principally to services to property.

Local government representation has also reflected the inequalities associated with eighteenth century liberal democracies. Women, Maori and other ethnic groups, youth and people with disabilities have all been underrepresented throughout the history of local government in New Zealand.(Massey p.26)

The most recent figures I have available are for 1998 at which time 28% of elected local government members were women. In other words there were 3 times as many men on Councils as women.

In 1998 93% of local body candidates were NZ European, 5.5% Maori and 1.5% other) and 94% were aged over 40.

The local government reforms of 2002 attempted to shift local government away from a focus on property and towards community wellbeing and more inclusive, participatory decision making. It is worth noting I think that the Minister of Local Government responsible for the 2002 Act was both a woman and Maori, the Honourable Sandra Lee.

The Local Government Act 2002 describes the purpose of local government in Part 2 Section 10, as:

- (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities: and
- (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of communities, in the present and for the future.

Section 14 of the Act describes the principles relating to local authorities and states:

- (b) a local authority should make itself aware of, and should have regard to, the views of all of its communities; and
- (c) when making a decision, a local authority should take account of-
 - (i) the diversity of the community, and the community's interests, within its district or region; and
 - (ii) the interests of future as well as current communities; and
 - (iii) the likely impact of any decision on each aspect of well-being referred to in section 10.
- (d) a local authority should provide opportunities for Maori to contribute to its decision-making processes.

The Local Government Act 2002 delivered real, tangible benefits to my community, Pukerua Bay in Porirua. The Porirua City Council embraced the reforms and developed, among other things, a village planning programme which exemplified both a commitment to community wellbeing and local democratic decision making and action. Issues which had been unresolved for years were finally addressed. A skate park that had been neglected for 30 years was redeveloped to the benefit of our youth. Attention was given to footpaths and walkways which increased accessibility and safety within our community. Our plan addressed issues beyond the responsibility of the local Council but the Council supported us and where appropriate provided technical assistance.

Virtually all of these very local matters involve questions of equity and fairness and are best resolved through participatory processes involving genuine negotiation and compromise in the interests of the whole community.

Current Reforms

However, the reforms currently underway as exemplified by the Auckland Super City legislation appears to be once again firmly in the eighteenth century tradition and will be less democratic and contribute to growing inequality in the region.

In respect of representation it will inevitably be less representative and there is clearly no intention to address the issue of equity. Dr Pita Sharples has put the issue in very clear terms in an interview on National Radio.

Dr. Sharples said on Radio New Zealand's Morning report programme:

"There is a democratic process but it's not working for Maori, they are outside of that system ... the principal of one person one vote will not give Maori representation.

"Unless we find some ways for them to be more involved, that is user friendly to their culture, then we have to do something else and I believe seats for Maori is the answer,"

Dr. Sharples went on to state that the essence of democracy is not one person one vote, which he describes as an "artificial political concoction" but "goals towards equity ... and inclusiveness" (Stuff.co.nz). He was of course attacked for "muddled thinking" by media commentators and some MPs.

There are currently 254 elected councillors in the Auckland region. These will be replaced by 146 elected representatives, a 40 % reduction in representation. However of these 146 representatives only 21, the Auckland Mayor and 20 Councillors will have regulatory powers. A reduction of 90% in the number of elected representatives with real power.

Democratic decision making is further reduced by the establishment of Council Controlled Organisations (CCO's) which will have control of Council Investments, Economic Development, Tourism, Events, Major Regional Facilities, Property Holdings, Waterfront development and Auckland Transport.

An Auckland Transition Authority discussion documents states that:

“CCO's are focused on achieving a constrained set of business objectives. Local Boards can represent the interest of their communities by providing input to the Governing Body (i.e. Council) as to the development of the Statement of Intent for each CCO. ...The public will also have opportunities to comment on the service delivery of CCO's either through the Governing Body or Local Boards.”

Therefore a very large proportion of the activities of local government in Auckland will be free from the restrictions of democratic accountability and able to focus on commercial objectives which will it is hoped deliver the greatest good for the greatest number. This market model of provision of public goods and services shifts the emphasis from the community to the individual consistent with liberal ideology. It also increases the likelihood of further inequality in service provision.

Inequality and Local Governance

Is inequality an issue for local government let alone Residents Associations? It is held that New Zealanders regard this country as egalitarian, a place where everyone gets a fair go. However as both the Ministry of Social Development and The New Zealand Institute have reported since the 1980's New Zealand has become a less equal society.

Neo-Liberal reforms with which we are all familiar have contributed to this growth in inequality for reasons which have been identified since the eighteenth century. The further extension of reforms, based on the same ideology, to local government will also contribute to increased inequality.

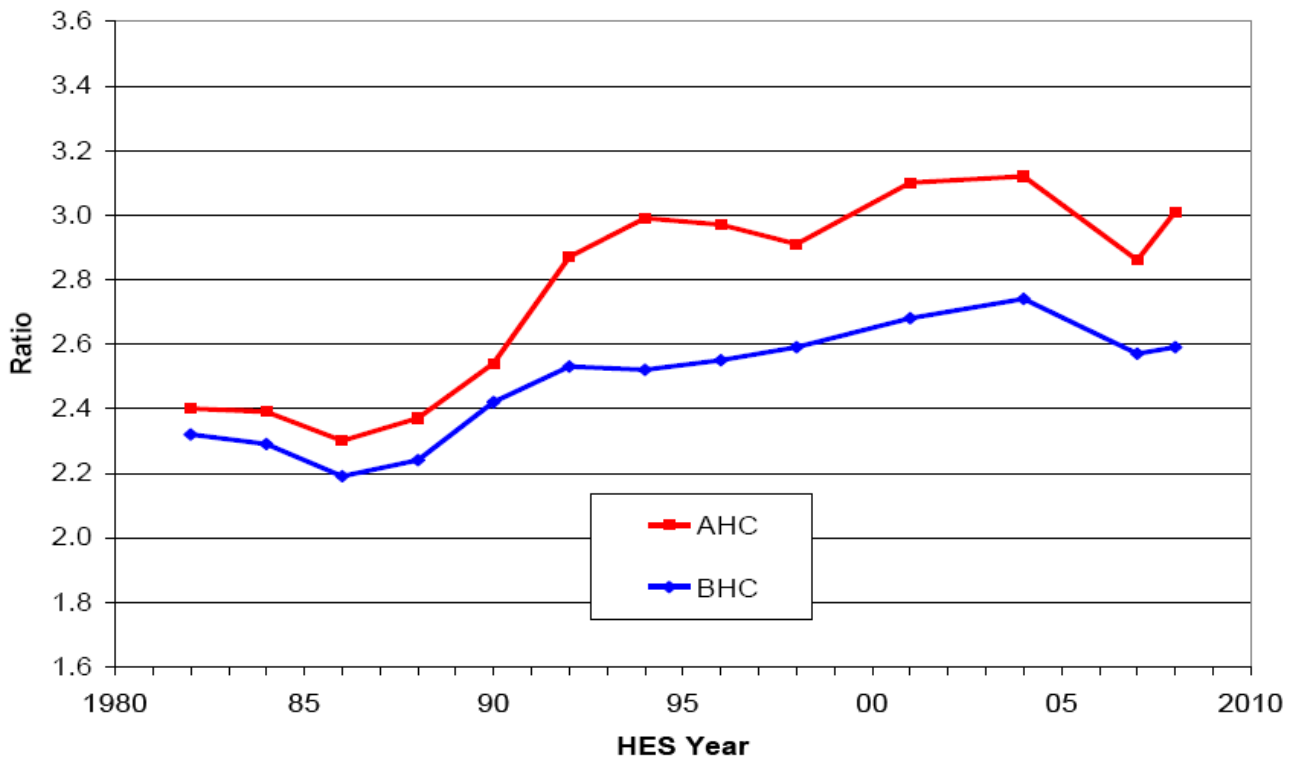
Evidence of inequality from a MSD Report include the following:

“The large increase in inequality from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, the steady continuing rise to 2004 and the decline due to WFF through to 2007 are robust findings.

“Without the WFF package, the New Zealand rate (of child poverty) would have been around 30% in 2008, higher than in any EU nation other than Turkey (based on 2006 EU figures).” (Ministry of Social Development, June 2009)

The table below shows that in 1982 (following the red line) incomes of the highest earners was 2.4 times the incomes of the lowest earners. By 2005 this had increased to 3.1 times the earnings of the lowest earners. This represents a 77% increase in the gap between the highest earners and the lowest.

Income inequality in New Zealand: the P80/P20 ratio, 1982 to 2008



From 1994 to 2008 both low and high income households experienced increased incomes however:

“The difference in growth rates ... between 1994 to 2008 is actually quite small, but the average 2.3% annual growth for those in the highest income decile resulted in an additional \$15,800 whereas the 2.1% growth rate for households in the lowest income decile provided only an additional \$3,600.”

The impact of inequality is shown by reference to life expectancy.

“On average people who earn the least, in the bottom decile of income, live 6-7 year shorter lives than those who are in the top income decile. Maori, on average, have life expectancies 8-9 years shorter than non-Maori. The differences are even greater for men. Life expectancy for male Maoris is only around 1 year above the global life expectancy of 69.” (NZ Institute, March 2010)

Why should Councils and Residents Associations be concerned with inequality, isn't this a central government responsibility?

As with the central government reforms of the 1980's and 90' Councils will be under pressure to keep taxes i.e. rates at the current levels or reduce them. To meet the predictable budget deficits they will introduce increases in fees and charges for services. Households are likely to see increases in the costs of library services, entry to pools and other recreation facilities, increased cost for rubbish removal, increased costs of public transport and so on. They are also likely to see a reduction in services as well.

Increase in fees and charges will be the same for everyone without regard to income and therefore the Liberal argues they are fair and equitable, everyone pays the same. However if we consider questions of equity and fairness the position is very different.

Lets assume every household in your community faces increased fees and charges for Council services of \$100.00 in a year:

If my net disposable income is \$50,000 that \$100 equals 2 tenths of 1% of my disposal income. However if my net disposable income is \$15,000 that same \$100 equals 7 tenths of 1% of my disposable income. Relatively inequality is increased by a factor of 3.5.

“In order to contain dissent, liberal democratic governments have been pressured to find ways to allow the public greater input. There have been two distinct ways of responding to this pressure: through increased privatisation of decision making and the use of markets to expand opportunities for choice, or through the expansion of opportunities for public involvement in public sector decision making.... Using the market place to provide government services shifts the emphasis of government from the community to the individual.” (Massey p.10-11)

Under the New Public Management, which has been part of the reforms since the 1980's, private sector management techniques are incorporated into public sector decision making with elected representatives becoming managers of managers rather than representatives of communities. Further the citizen is redefined as a consumer.

In a discussion document on the proposed Council Controlled Organisations the Auckland Transition Agency states:

“For the Auckland Council to plan and deliver the infrastructure and services to meet its requirements, it will need access to the best commercial and engineering expertise and resources. CCO structures and boards of directors can bring these required skills and expertise.

“In contrast to councils, CCOs are focussed on achieving a constrained set of business objectives. Local Boards can represent the interest of their communities by providing input to the Governing Body (i.e. Council) as to the development of the SOIs (Statement of Intent) for each CCO.

“The public will also have opportunities to comment on the service delivery of CCOs either through the Governing Body or Local Boards.” (ATA Discussion document)

The CCO's will be commercial enterprises with no requirements to operate in a manner which is neither democratic nor equitable. For these organisations the community will be invisible and there will be no access to these bodies by Residents Associations. They will operate as the “invisible hand” of local government. I am reminded of the words of that great neo-liberal reformer, Margaret Thatcher, who said “There is no such thing as Society”.

Residents Associations

What then is the role and responsibility of residents associations faced with the challenges arising out of the current reforms. Some Residents Association do not fit the

description of civil society organisations I have outlined here. Rather they function essentially as persistent irritants on the backside of local bodies. Their agendas are largely reactive to the actions of the local council rather than based on the aspirations of their communities.

Other Residents Associations however can be seen as seeking to advance the interests of their community through participatory processes (local surveys, community meetings, household newsletters, web sites) and creating opportunities for local people to engage with their Councils and local representatives consistent with the methods of civil society organisations over the past 250 years.

If local councils become less representative and less willing to engage with their communities and adopt increasingly commercial practices they will become increasingly isolated from residents and the issues that matter within our communities. If this were to occur it is entirely possible that Residents Associations would become less effective as spokespersons for their communities. The barriers to participation would simply be too great.

In the eighteenth century ordinary people faced with the challenge of exclusion from the democratic process took democracy in to their own hands. They talked, discussed and debated. They formed little committees, wrote letters, signed petitions, held public meetings, listened to guest speakers and mounted campaigns. So what has changed?

It is worth noting that over two and a half centuries civil society organisations have never established a central coordinating body, no head office, no central leadership or great messiah. There is no single unifying ideology but there is a consistent commitment to democratic principles. They have remained, with a few exceptions, relatively small scale, bottom up, non-hierarchical, participatory and inclusive. The best comparison I can think of is with the very modern internet.

I would therefore suggest that residents associations must strive to occupy the “civil society space”. The very existence of residents associations provides a vehicle which can be used by communities as required to address the issues and concerns they themselves identify. This may mean less focus on the Councils agenda and more on the aspirations of our communities including most importantly those who are most marginalised.

There is no requirement for Councils to engage with residents associations except as they choose. However there are also no barriers to the formation of residents associations other than the desire of residents to participate. How then do we make participation more relevant to more people? Simply knowing that our associations exist would be a start. Better use of the media and the internet not as a means of getting our names up in lights but as tools for educating the public as to what is possible through citizens acting as citizens together.

If there is more centralisation of local government a more coordinated approach to issues and concerns would be an appropriate response but retaining at the same time, a very bottom up small scale structure would also be appropriate. Larger structures could mean less involvement not more, which is the very issue we would be trying to address if representation at the Council level is reduced.

A good deal more could be done to educate ourselves and the public on the fundamental meaning of democracy and the values it represents. This is a need which is made apparent when one considers the reaction to Pita Sharples comments regarding

representation and equity. Using the language of democracy, words like social justice, equality, and human rights to frame issues of local concern may also be a more powerful tool rather than being dragged into debates over cost /benefit, financial accountability and similar corporate speak.

Story telling is a powerful tool and the internet provides a cost effective means of sharing our tales of battles lost and one. Also sharing of resource materials and organisational experiences can be very effective.

Finally I would wish to return to the issue of equality/inequality as it relates to the work of residents associations. Democracy is not about elections, it's about who gets what, and it's about privilege and equality. I would like to think that residents associations have the capacity to challenge those who would deny ordinary people the right to be involved in decisions which directly affect them and those who would increase the costs of public goods and services in a manner which contributes to increased inequality and divisiveness within our communities.

I would remind you again of the words of Amartya Sen:

“The relevant freedoms include the liberty of acting as citizens who matter and whose voices count, rather than living as well-fed well clothed and well entertained vassals.”

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