
Neighborhood Government in Chicago's 44th Ward

George Anastaplo

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BOOK REVIEW

NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNMENT IN CHICAGO'S 44TH WARD by
Dick Simpson, Judy Stevens and Rick Kohnen. Champaign, Illinois: Stipes
Publishing Co., 1979. Pp. 247. \$5.60.

George Anastaplo*

*Furthermore, with respect to pleasure also, it's beyond saying how much
difference it makes to regard something as one's own.*

ARISTOTLE, POLITICS 1263a40

I.

This book is devoted, for the most part, to accounts of experiments in neighborhood government conducted in Chicago's 44th Ward between 1971 and 1978. Critical to these instructive experiments, we are told, was the establishment of a Ward Assembly:

Four major purposes for the Assembly are listed in its Charter. They are: (1) to direct and advise the Alderman as to what new legislation he shall sponsor in the City Council; (2) to direct and advise the Alderman as to how he shall cast his vote in the City Council; (3) to establish priorities for programs to be undertaken by the Alderman for the benefit of the Ward; and (4) to make possible free and responsible debate on all the issues that affect the welfare of the residents of the Ward. Not listed explicitly as a purpose in the Charter, but implicit in much of the effort and discussion of the Assembly's leaders, is the desire to bring together representatives of the diverse ethnic and socio-economic groups living in the Ward and to "help create a sense of community *where little existed before.*"¹

And so it can be celebrated,

[w]hen a project, even if it looks like a simple task, is carried out by volunteers, their sense of accomplishment takes on added dimensions not easily describable in words. While efficiency and speed may dictate doing it alone, *it is a much sweeter feeling* to accomplish it as a group.²

Critical, in turn, to the establishment of the Ward Assembly³ were the election of Dick Simpson to the post of Alderman and (it is said) his voluntary "contract" thereupon with the Assembly established under his sponsorship

* A.B., J.D., Ph.D., The University of Chicago; Professor of Law, Loyola University of Chicago; Lecturer in the Liberal Arts, The University of Chicago; Professor of Political Science and of Philosophy, Rosary College.

1. D. SIMPSON, J. STEVENS, & R. KOHNEN, NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNMENT IN CHICAGO'S 44TH WARD 41 (1979) (emphasis added) [hereinafter cited as SIMPSON].

2. *Id.* at 95-96 (emphasis added). See also ARISTOTLE, POLITICS 1278b25-29. The quotation from Aristotle's *Politics* which is used as the epigraph to this review has been taken from the remarkably accurate translation of the *Politics* recently completed by Laurence Berns of St. John's College.

3. The Ward Assembly is made up of delegates from each of the 46 precincts and from some 40 organizations in the Ward. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 41.

and guidance.⁴ "His thinking and approach to politics," it is also said, "combine the focus on community and participatory politics characteristic of the new left" with "the pragmatism of the practical politician."⁵ "As a political leader," it is further said, "he sees himself as an educator who offers the opportunity for citizens to develop a perspective beyond that of their short-term interests."⁶

It is evident that the personal "style" and dedication of Mr. Simpson (who is Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle) had much to do with bringing and keeping together the many volunteers upon which this kind of neighborhood government depends.⁷

II.

No one should want to quarrel with (but rather should try to institute in other urban neighborhoods) the many productive innovations of Alderman Simpson and his colleagues in the 44th Ward. But perhaps issue can be taken on this occasion with the arrangement entered into between the Alderman and his Ward Assembly whereby the Assembly could bind the Alderman with respect to how he would vote and what legislation he would introduce in the City Council.⁸ This arrangement, which is referred to more than two dozen times in the book, is said by the Alderman himself to have been vital to his success in the Ward: people would not have participated as they did in

4. *Id.* at 64-65.

5. *Id.* at 34.

6. *Id.* at 37. The following books are related publications by Mr. Simpson: (1) WHO RULES? INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF POLITICS (1973); (2) WINNING ELECTIONS: A HANDBOOK IN PARTICIPATORY POLITICS (1974); (3) STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE: HOW TO MAKE THE AMERICAN POLITICAL DREAM WORK (1976) (with George Beam). See also D. Simpson, *Chicago Is Ready For Neighborhood Government*, Chicago Tribune, July 20, 1980, § 3, at 1, col. 1.

7. Mr. Simpson chose not to run for a third term as Alderman. The demands upon his time and energy must have been considerable, as is evident from the accounts in this book of the many activities in which he participated. For example, he attended each of the precinct meetings held annually to choose a delegate to the Ward Assembly. See note 17 *infra*. It remains to be seen whether anyone else will, as Alderman in the 44th Ward, continue both to preach and to practice what Mr. Simpson has, and (if he should practice it) whether this kind of neighborhood government can continue to "work" with him as well as it did with the gifted Dick Simpson. The man who had Mr. Simpson's support as his successor resigned (for "personal reasons") not long after he was elected in 1979. The alderman elected by the ward in February 1981 does not seem inclined to conduct himself as did Mr. Simpson.

On the troubled fortunes of the 44th Ward since Mr. Simpson left office, see Chicago Reader, Feb. 20, 1981, at 3, col. 1; Chicago Sun-Times, Feb. 22, 1981, at 14, col. 1; *id.*, Feb. 17, 1981, at 35, col. 1; *id.*, Feb. 9, 1981, at 9, col. 1; *id.*, Dec. 7, 1980, Views, at 5, col. 1; *id.*, Nov. 20, 1980, at 14, col. 1; Chicago Tribune, Feb. 25, 1981, § 1, at 3, col. 1; *id.*, Feb. 16, 1981, § 5, at 2, col. 1; *id.*, Feb. 9, 1981, § 4, at 1, col. 1; *id.*, Jan. 18, 1981, § 1, at 8, col. 3; *id.*, Jan. 17, 1981, § 1, at 2, col. 3; *id.*, Dec. 23, 1980, § 1, at 7, col. 5; *id.*, Dec. 17, 1980, § 1, at 3, col. 1, § 6, at 2, col. 1; *id.*, Dec. 16, 1980, § 1, at 1, col. 3; *id.*, Dec. 6, 1980, § 1, at 1, col. 1; *id.*, Dec. 5, 1980, § 1, at 1, col. 5; *id.*, Oct. 27, 1980, § 5, at 3, col. 2; *id.*, Aug. 28, 1980, § 6, at 7, col. 1.

8. The Alderman is bound to vote on legislation in the City Council as the Ward Assembly directs only if the Assembly approves by a two-thirds vote, "provided that a majority of the voting members are present." SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 62.

the Assembly, and worked as they did in the Ward, he insists, without the unprecedented control he ceded them over his City Council conduct. In any event, we are told,

Simpson rejects the Burkean view of representation, and argues that the elected official should represent the interests of his constituents as they see them and not as he interprets them. "The most dangerous flaw that any public official can develop is the arrogance to believe that he knows what is better for people in every case than the people do themselves."⁹

I myself wonder whether people should not be satisfied (so far as their alderman's conduct *in the City Council* is concerned) with a representative who is obviously dedicated to their interests and who takes seriously the advice given him. Be that as it may, the 44th Ward arrangement is said to lead to a mutual increase in powers: the people respond to their increased responsibility by increased interest and effort, and this in turn provides an alderman with help and researched information he would not otherwise have. This kind of mobilization of energies may be far more important—with consequences for all kinds of projects *within* a ward—than anything an independent alderman, with "minimal" power, can do in a city council dominated by the Democratic Party Organization.¹⁰ But if a city council should become a deliberative body, would it not be rather dubious to have all its participants bound by the determinations of organizations in their respective wards? I am concerned here, therefore, not with the *practice* of Alderman Simpson but with the *theory* of my fellow political scientist, Professor Simpson. It should be of some interest to consider (if only briefly here) what a repudiation of "the Burkean view of representation"¹¹ could mean if applied generally.

Edmund Burke, it will be remembered, argued (in a 1780 speech to his Bristol constituency) for the right and duty of each elected representative to his own judgment and vote in the deliberations of Parliament. It was on that occasion that he took a position which may be seen among our Founding Fathers as well:

I did not obey your instructions: No. I conformed to the instructions of truth and nature, and maintained your interest, against your opinions, with a constancy that became me. A representative worthy of you ought to be a person of stability. I am to look, indeed, to your opinions; but to such opinions as you and I *must* have five years hence. I was not to look to the flash of the day. I knew that you chose me, in my place, along with others, to be a pillar of the state, and not a weather-cock on the top of the edifice, exalted for my levity and versatility, and of no use but to indicate the shiftings of every fashionable gale.¹²

9. *Id.* at 36-37.

10. *Id.* at 42.

11. *Id.* at 36.

12. THE WORKS OF EDMUND BURKE III, at 13 (World Classics ed. 1930).

For Americans to abandon this position runs the risk of legitimating the growing reliance in this country upon public opinion polls and upon government by referendum.¹³

At the heart of Professor Simpson's theoretical position seems to be a deep suspicion of "elitism."¹⁴ He has proceeded in the faith "that people—given a chance to reason with each other—will ultimately make the right decision."¹⁵ He draws in various statements of his theory upon the political philosophy of the ancients. But does he not, by his approach, repudiate the considered opinion of the ancients that the obvious good intentions of the many are not enough, that only a few at a time can ever be developed into reliable servants of the common good?¹⁶

Indeed, Mr. Simpson's position may well reflect a much lower view of politics than that endorsed by, say, Plutarch's ancients. One may even wonder whether recourse to legislators bound by the instructions of their constituencies runs counter to that understanding of "a Republican Form of Government" upon which the Constitution of the United States depends. The reservations the Founders would have had about this aspect of the Alderman's theory suggest underlying differences as to what human nature is truly like.¹⁷

No doubt, Mr. Simpson is somewhat influenced in his approach to these matters by what he has seen of city government in "infamous Chicago"; he can even see the Chicago Democratic Machine as a "tyranny."¹⁸ It is difficult, however, for anyone who has seen genuine tyrannies close up not to regard such a judgment as distorted and hence as a distorting influence. It is also difficult to dismiss Mayor Daley and his aldermen as having been

13. See PLATO, CRITO 44c-d. See also Anastaplo, *Self-Government and the Mass Media: A Practical Man's Guide*, in *THE MASS MEDIA AND MODERN DEMOCRACY* 161 (H. Clor ed. 1974).

14. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 18, 200-01. Compare Anastaplo, *Race, Law and Civilization*, in *HUMAN BEING AND CITIZEN: ESSAYS ON VIRTUE, FREEDOM AND THE COMMON GOOD* 175 (1975) with Anastaplo, *Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, in *CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA* 421 (R. Collins ed. 1980). Mr. Simpson's review of *Human Being and Citizen: Essays on Virtue, Freedom and the Common Good* may be found in *FOCUS/Midwest*, May-June 1975, at 39-40.

15. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 73. Consider Machiavelli's observation: "For the end of the people is more honest than that of the great, the latter wanting to oppress, the former not to be oppressed." N. MACHIAVELLI, *THE PRINCE* 58 (L. DeAlvarez trans. 1980). Consider also PLATO, *APOLOGY* 20c-d (on the fairmindedness of the people); Royko, *Who Will Spend Our Cash? A Taxing Dilemma*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 1, 1981, at 2, col. 1.

16. See, e.g., PLATO, *REPUBLIC* 414b-415d. See also Anastaplo, *Human Being and Citizen: A Beginning to the Study of Plato's Apology of Socrates*, in *HUMAN BEING AND CITIZEN: ESSAYS ON VIRTUE, FREEDOM AND THE COMMON GOOD* 8 (1975).

17. See, e.g., Anastaplo, *Human Nature and the First Amendment*, 40 *U. PITT. L. REV.* 661, 715-45 (1979). No doubt, the risk of embarrassing differences between Alderman Simpson and his Ward Assembly was reduced considerably by his extensive participation in the processes leading up to Assembly meetings. See note 7 *supra*.

18. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 29, 188. On genuine tyrannies, see Anastaplo, *Dissent in Athens: An Invocation of First Principles*, in *HUMAN BEING AND CITIZEN: ESSAYS ON VIRTUE, FREEDOM AND THE COMMON GOOD* 3 (1975).

unresponsive to the opinions of their constituents. Rather, one could wish that such men were more "Burkean": do they not pay more attention than they should to the volatile opinions and dubious prejudices of their constituents?

Is it not salutary, if we are to have a healthy political order, to avoid exalting "the people" at the expense of the much-maligned professional politicians and career bureaucrats? Consider, in this respect, these remarks in 1777 by Edmund Burke:

I hope there are none of you corrupted with the doctrine taught by wicked men for the worst purposes, and received by the malignant credulity of envy and ignorance which is, that the men who act upon the public stage are all alike, all equally corrupt, all influenced by no other views than the sordid lure of salary and pension. The thing I know by experience to be false. Never expecting to find perfection in men, and not looking for divine attributes in created beings, in my commerce with my contemporaries, I have found much human virtue. I have seen not a little public spirit; a real subordination of interest to duty; and a decent and regulated sensibility to honest fame and reputation.¹⁹

Should not the same sentiments be applied to our local politicians?²⁰

III.

It is salutary to make as much as Alderman Simpson does of the uses to which neighborhood government can be put. Thus, the Preamble to the Charter of the 44th Ward Assembly announces: "We seek to restore a sense of trust and mutuality in public life."²¹ But it is prudent to recognize that effective neighborhood government does depend upon the condition and the cooperation of a much larger community, especially since a national industrial development is presupposed.²² It is also prudent to recognize, as is done (I believe) only once in this book, that what a neighborhood may insist upon can be simply bad.²³ It should be recognized as well that what one neighborhood may want can run counter to what another may want.²⁴

19. THE WORKS OF EDMUND BURKE II, at 283 (World Classics ed. 1930). This passage may be found in Burke's 1777 letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol.

20. For an indication of what could be said on behalf of Chicago aldermen, who evidently consider themselves more as ward executives than as city legislators, see Mahin, *Aldermen Talk Back*, STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE, Autumn 1978, at 1. On the merits of local government and old-fashioned politics, see G. ANASTAPLO, THE CONSTITUTIONALIST: NOTES ON THE FIRST AMENDMENT ch. 7 (1971); Anastaplo, *Human Nature and the First Amendment*, 40 U. PITT. L. REV. 661, 666-78 (1979); Anastaplo, *The Virtue of Back Room Deals*, Chicago Tribune, May 19, 1976, § 3, at 4, col. 4; and Royko, *Uncivil Service*, Chicago Sun-Times, Jan. 16, 1981, at 2, col. 1.

21. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 227.

22. See, e.g., *id.* at 20, 25, 186.

23. *Id.* at 204.

24. Consider, for example, "the problem of the run-away factory." *Id.* at 197. Compare the proposal that a state pay unemployed persons cash bonuses to leave the state to try their luck elsewhere. Chicago Sun-Times, Jan. 16, 1981, at 3, col. 4. See G. ANASTAPLO, THE CONSTITU-

Even so, it is salutary that there be public places in Chicago where "free and responsible debate" is carried on. I recall "urban renewal" decisions in my own Chicago neighborhood, Hyde Park, which surely would not have been made if the public had been "involved" in the fashion that the 44th Ward Assembly and the 44th Ward Community Zoning Board have been. For example, the Harding Museum, with its wonderfully bizarre collection of medieval armor and artifacts, was uprooted and, in effect, destroyed merely because sociologists in the guise of "city planners" wanted a street straightened.²⁵ Public deliberation is needed at the level where decisions are to be made. But, to return to the principal question touched upon in this review, what should be the prerogatives (with a view to the common good) of the representatives we send to legislative councils? Consider, for example, what would happen to the valuable deliberations in the 44th Ward Assembly if each delegate to *it* should be bound as to how *he* should vote by instructions from the precinct or organization which sends him to the Assembly.

Or, to put my discussion of representative government and the instructed legislator still another way, it can be suggested that what is wrong with the Chicago City Council is its practice and that what is wrong with the 44th Ward Assembly is its theory. In the long run, I am afraid, mistaken theory (however altruistic) can be far more dangerous than selfish practice. One cannot always count, for the implementation of novel doctrines, upon public servants as moderate as Alderman Simpson—a "practical politician" who has been so fortunate in his career as to be able to assure his old-fashioned colleagues in the Chicago City Council, "I trust my fellow citizens and I have always found them worthy of trust."²⁶

TIONALIST: NOTES ON THE FIRST AMENDMENT 690 n.41 (1971); Rose-Ackerman, *Does Federalism Matter? Political Choice in a Federal Republic*, 89 J. POL. ECON. 152 (1981).

25. On the Harding Museum, see Chicago Tribune, June 14, 1980, § 1, at 4, col. 1 (Action Line). Prominent among these sociologists was Professor Morris Janowitz of the University of Chicago. See *Why Don't Things Work Anymore?: A Conversation with Morris Janowitz*, U. CHI. MAGAZINE, Winter 1981, at 18, 23.

26. SIMPSON, *supra* note 1, at 90. Consider D. KEARNS, LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE AMERICAN DREAM (1976):

It was this belief in universal values, combined with his confidence in his powers of persuasion, that led [President] Johnson to conclude that he need only arrange a meeting, face to face, in order to straighten out American disagreements with other countries. "I always believed," Johnson later said, "that as long as I could take someone into a room with me, I could make him my friend, and that included anybody, even Nikita Khrushchev. From the start of my Presidency I believed that if I handled him right, he would go along with me. *Deep down, hidden way below, he, too, wanted what was good*, but every now and then, this terrible urge for world domination would get into him and take control and then he'd go off on some crazy jag like putting those missiles in Cuba. I saw all that in him and I knew I could cope with it so long as he and I were in the same room."

Id. at 194-95 (emphasis added). Consider also the opening lines of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and of his *Politics*. Consider as well Sharp, *The Universe Has Its Good and Friendly Features*, BULL. ATOMIC SCIENTISTS, May 1981, at 1. See note 15 *supra*.