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LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND DIRECTLY-ELECTED MAYORS

Introduction

The issue of directly-elected mayors (DEMs) raises important questions about local democratic accountability, leadership, and local service provision, all of which lie at the heart of local democracy in England. In this special Local Work, CLES provides a forum in which two leading protagonists in the debate discuss the story of DEMs in England to date and assess their future.

Peter Latham from the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government and Anna Randle of the New Local Government Network both submitted a paper outlining their thoughts on directly-elected mayors. They then responded to each other's initial paper. To conclude, CLES Director Neil McInroy and Researcher Chris Mawdsley summarise the arguments and emphasise the need for a greater sensitivity to local political cultures.

The Case For: A lesson in strong leadership and accountability

Anna Randle is Head of Organisation at the New Local Government Network (NLGN) and runs the Mayoral Forum, through which NLGN and the Improvement and Development Agency monitor the progress of the UK's directly-elected mayors.

Introduction

The directly-elected mayor model has been one of the most controversial elements of the local government reform agenda. With the first elected mayors now in post, the debate about the relative merits and demerits of the model shows no signs of abating as the 'mayoral experiment' continues to attract strong interest – and strong feelings – within the local government community. It would not be exaggerating to say that the elected mayor idea is almost universally unpopular within local government.

In order to consider the qualities of the model at this stage in its development, it is important to recall why the Government saw it as an attractive option in the first place.

The need for a new approach

Local government is not understood or regarded as important by the vast majority of the electorate. Turnouts in local elections are low and generally declining. On average less than 5% of people can name their council leader, still less their own councillor. Fairly or not, local government is regarded by most as a monolithic and unaccountable bureaucracy that exists to deliver central government policy, and it is often argued that local elections are largely a comment on the performance of central government. These problems amount to a significant democratic deficit at the local level, at a time when central government is slowly beginning to acknowledge that the steep changes it has promised in public services can only be delivered in partnership with strong, credible and able local institutions.

The elected mayor model was therefore designed to engage people in new ways,

Local democracy and directly-elected mayors

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'The Case Against' written by Dr Peter Latham, Secretary, LCOLG

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by injecting accountability, new faces, and real competition into the equation. Unlike council leaders, DEMs:

- Set their own budgets
- Appoint their own cabinets
- Pursue their own manifesto commitments
- Represent the public face of the council

Enthusiasm for the model by central government was borne of a recognition that effective, high profile, and legitimate local leadership is essential to delivering high quality local public services. Policy makers looked abroad to the internationally renowned DEMs of cities such as Barcelona, New York and Sydney, and hoped that some of the same magic might be injected into the governance of our own towns and cities.

The No Campaign

Perhaps what wasn't anticipated however, was the strength of opposition such an initiative would face from local political establishments within the UK. Perceived – quite accurately – as a threat to the old ways of working, 'no' campaigns both formal and informal sprang up around the country and the counter arguments were made:

- Too much power in one person's hands would lead to corruption;
- DEMs would strike deals with the private sector and outsource public services;

DEMs would be less democratic because the decision-making powers are held by one person and DEMs would be harder to get rid of because of their four-year terms in office.

It would not be unfair to say that in many cases the idea never had a chance, in the face of a general lack of balance to the arguments which surrounded it.

Interpreting the results

So where is the mayoral model today? In the last two years approximately one third of mayoral referenda have resulted in endorsement of the model, and in the last 12 months eleven local authority mayors have been elected. The mayoral elections themselves produced many surprises, resulting in a change of political control in four places and a change of leadership in five. Local political hegemonies were challenged, with successful independent candidates in traditional Labour heartlands such as Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Stoke on Trent, and a Conservative winning in North Tyneside, although Labour candidates retained control in all three London boroughs. Certainly on a simplistic level a public appetite for change was delivered in many places.

The unusual nature of these results has often been used by detractors of the model as proof that the mayoral model is somehow the illegitimate child within the local government family. However, it must be remembered that they are the result of democratic processes, and many positive lessons in terms of the new dynamics at play can be drawn from the election results.

It is certainly true that the elections introduced new faces, many of whom readily admit they would not have become involved under the previous system. A significant number of the DEMs do not have local government backgrounds, and they are a diverse group in comparison to the standard local government demographic – for example two of the mayors elected were under 35 years old. Although turnouts in some mayoral elections were no higher than in traditional council elections, where there was strong competition between candidates they often rose significantly – for example to 41% in Middlesbrough and to 42% in North Tyneside. The level of political debate and interest, for example in the local media, was also much higher in many places than in traditional local elections.

In terms of the election results, there is also evidence that people voted in a more 'localist' way than is often the case in local elections, with abandonment of traditional party political loyalties in favour of individual candidates' local manifestos. It was also arguably true that in some cases the political parties, long accustomed to winning elections with little or no competition, suffered in the face of independent candidates who were partly seen as un-encumbered by the values, ideologies and inward-looking political concerns of party candidates. These are first round effects, and it will be interesting to see what will happen when the mayors are up for re-election in three years.

Analysing the achievements

With eleven DEMs in place we can now move on to the next stage: an analysis of what those mayors are actually achieving in post. NLGN and the IDeA have been running a 'Mayoral Forum', involving regular meetings of the DEMs to learn and understand the lessons which are emerging – what problems DEMs can solve and what they can create, and what difference the system can make.

It is worth remembering in any analysis of the mayoral model that it is still very early days. Mayors are elected for four years and all of the first eleven are a year or less into their first terms. Many mayors in this early period have had their attentions on more internal concerns, for example the inheritance of budget deficits, cultural resistance and lack of understanding of the model among colleagues and councillors and the establishment of a mayoral office. This can make analysis of what the model can offer to the community slightly premature. However, there are a number of areas where consensus is emerging about the problems – and possibilities – of the model.

Many of the challenging areas for DEMs can be seen as the result of institutional resistance to the idea, especially where a mayor was elected who was not of the majority political party. There is evidence that in some cases council constitutions have been designed to check mayoral power, for example in limiting the mayor's influence over key senior appointments, or in setting the budget. There is also evidence of scrutiny being used politically, which may hinder the mayor's ability to progress policies and effect change.

Another key area where the model is being tested is the communications question of whether a council can promote the DEM as an individual. As is often the case, this is being interpreted differently according to the particular politics and background of each authority. Some legal teams are advising

that the DEM and his or her policies cannot be personally promoted by the council, and this is clearly a potential problem in terms of the public's understanding of what is different under the mayoral model and what each particular DEM has actually achieved. This situation, along with some of the others mentioned here, is currently being monitored by the ODPM. It will take time for constitutions and understanding of the model in practice to evolve, to get the legislation right, and for culture change to embed.

Positive signs

However, there is also evidence of a new, more mature and consensual political culture emerging in some authorities, even where there is an independent or 'opposition' mayor. It has been argued that real progress can be made where a DEM in a potentially difficult political situation in the early stages prioritises the development of a new working culture above all else. Cross-party cabinets can work together and 'back-bench' councillors can find themselves liberated to create a new, more community-focussed role. Although this emergence of a new political culture is not yet the norm for all mayoral authorities, it does indicate a positive way forward.

There are also a number of areas of consensus about the benefits which the model can offer. The most consistent and strikingly positive arguments made by DEMs, officers and councillors – and even local partner organisations – are about improved accountability, clarity and speed of decision-making. DEMs offer strong leadership, and it is undoubtedly the case that in all mayor-led councils it is now better recognised where the decisions are coming from. Problems are resolved faster, and this is seen as immensely beneficial to council business and to the authority's ability to work with its local partners.

In the majority of cases this increased accountability also appears to be resonating with the public. Despite the uncertainty over communication I highlighted above, there is evidence that mayoral name recognition among the public is increasing, even in areas where the DEM was the previous council leader. The numbers obviously vary, and different mayors are taking different approaches to their public profile, but with name recognition approaching 97% in Middlesbrough, it is hard to deny that the perception of the council as a faceless, unaccountable bureaucracy is changing.

A new style of leadership

The style of leadership offered by an elected mayor is therefore very different from a traditional council leader. In post for four years, mayors offer greater stability and are more outward-facing. In many cases the first months of office have been characterised by a realisation that mayoral politics only work with a high degree of personalisation. DEMs see themselves as leaders of the local area, not the local authority – a key difference in terms of their perceptions of their roles and remit compared to a council leader. Initiatives such as regular public question times with mayors offer new ways of building relationships with the public.

It has been argued by DEMs that this type of personal leadership can also be beneficial in terms of building relationships with potential local investors and employers, as well as local partners. They appreciate the personal articulation of a vision for a whole area, and the role the DEM can play in building local consensus around this. The mayoral model can therefore be seen to help facilitate the community leadership role, which is increasingly a priority for local authorities. A recent 'mayoral conference' in Doncaster brought together a wide range of stakeholders for two days to consider the future of the town. Those attending included all political groups, council officers, and local partners such as health and police. This is not to say that a council leader cannot do something similar, but it was argued that the DEM in this instance provided the necessary focus on a new agenda for change.

Finally, in these relatively early stages, there is also evidence that service initiatives in accordance with a DEM's priorities are driven forward and achieved more quickly. This is in addition to the realisation of specific mayoral manifesto pledges such as Mayor Ray Mallon's pledge to cut crime by 15% using community wardens in Middlesbrough which has already been exceeded, and quickly realised commitments in Doncaster and Newham to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets.

Conclusion

Although it is early days to be evaluating the success or failure of the mayoral model in delivering change for local communities, it has certainly delivered a fascinating new agenda to watch and learn from. The future development of the model will depend on the performance of the first eleven DEMs, and so it is crucial that constitutional barriers are addressed in order for the model to be tested effectively. It is also important that we progress the debate beyond the theoretical or reactionary arguments, and really try to understand the lessons emerging from the mayoral authorities as they progress over the next three years. Understanding what the mayoral model, together with other executive structures, can offer in different situations and circumstances will enable evidence-based policy making as we seek to strengthen, develop and rejuvenate local government in the future.

The Case Against: A review in the context of the neo-liberal global agenda

Dr Peter Latham is a sociologist and former researcher at the London School of Economics. Since September 1999, as Secretary of the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government, he has both campaigned and written from a socialist perspective on all aspects of the Local Government Act 2000.

Introduction

This paper analyses the English local authority mayoral referenda, elections and post-election developments in the

context of the globalisation debate. A comparative approach – with special reference to Germany, which introduced directly-elected local authority mayors over ten years ago – is used to speculate about the likely future impact of such mayors in England. The paper concludes with a discussion of the prospects for a socialist alternative to the neo-liberal global agenda in local government.

Making the connection: The neo-liberal global context and directly-elected mayors

In *The Captive Local State* I argue that the 'predominant interest of the owners of capital in the most advanced industrial countries has shifted from the manufacturing of goods to the provision of services'; and that this 'shift is reflected in the planned extension' of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) 'to apply to all levels of the state, including the local state, which could lead to the privatisation of virtually all national and local state services'.[1] Moreover, the Godfather of GATS is the US Coalition of Service Industries (USCSI) – 'undoubtedly the most influential services lobby group in the world. Its origins date back to the 1970s'; and it 'considered the inclusion of "trade in services" in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the World Trade Organisation [WTO] precursor) as a good tool…to force open…what were at that time heavily regulated markets outside the US'.[2]

On Monday June 10th 2002 *The Times* newspaper carried the banner headline: MANDELSON TELLS LABOUR: WE ARE ALL THATCHERITES NOW. Peter Mandelson amplified this with an article inside, giving the message coming out of a conference of Blairites the previous weekend. Among the attendees at this Mandelson-organised conference were Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Peter Mandelson's thesis is that globalisation has removed any alternative to the business dominance of politics – or as Margaret Thatcher tellingly put it, There is No Alternative.

However, Peter Burnham rejects this familiar claim that states have lost power to global markets and argues that the national state plays a crucial role in the international restructuring occurring today. The concentration of capital has led to new forms of political regulation at the international (e.g. the WTO and GATS), national (e.g. Task Forces and quangos) and local level (e.g. directly-elected mayors). But he acknowledges that whilst there has been no overall erosion of state capacities, there has been a 'de-politicisation' of the state.[3] That is, key state activities are now shielded from effective monitoring by increased outsourcing and privatisation.

It is within this context that I view directly-elected mayors. Clearly the Local Government Act 2000 opened the door to new forms of political regulation, advocacy, executive mayors and cabinets. Furthermore, it opened up the local state to greater involvement of privatised contractors in the delivery of public services.[4] The question is therefore, how penetrative have directly-elected mayors been to date, and what affect have they had on the local democratic landscape?

The poor progress of the directly-elected mayoral agenda

The New Local Government Network (NLGN) has been a leading advocate of directly-elected mayors.[5] Speaking in 1998, Professor Gerry Stoker – NLGN Chair – said: "We have the prospect of many, if not most, of our major cities being run by a DEM by the next election – whether the incumbents like it or not. I do not think this movement of opinion can be stopped."[6] However, evidence to date reveals this view to be somewhat over-optimistic. No major city has yet endorsed the idea of executive mayors; it has in fact been defeated in 19 of the 30 referendums to date.[7] 48.3% (434,393) have voted for executive mayors whilst 51.7% (465,483) have voted against. Most devastating for the government's optimism, however, is the fact that – despite 75% of respondents favouring directly-elected mayors in their 2001 survey[8] – the overall average yes vote from all 30 referendums is only 12.9%. This ranges from 28.6% of the total electorate voting yes in Middlesbrough to only 3.5% in Kirklees and Southwark. Watford and Redditch - where 12.7% and 12.5% respectively of the total electorate voted yes – were in the middle of the range. Local petition campaigns have successfully triggered mayoral referenda in only seven areas: Berwick-upon-Tweed, Bedford, Mansfield, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Corby and Ealing.

The 11 successful mayoral referendums

All the successful yes votes (except in Watford which lacked a serious No Campaign) occurred after 11 September 2001 and the 'Giuliani' factor, so-called after the New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Five of these were held within five weeks of the World Trade Centre attack. However, in the subsequent six referendums, the 'Giuliani' factor appears to have had no influence. Moreover, in the first five votes the 'Giuliani' factor was compounded by specific local factors – namely the history of corruption in Doncaster; the presence of a maverick potential candidate with popular appeal in Middlesbrough which split Labour; the divisions within the Labour Party in North Tyneside and Lewisham; and the previous defection of a number of Labour councillors to the Liberal Democrats plus financial difficulties in Hackney. In Stoke-on-Trent in the May 2002 local elections Labour lost nine seats (including that of the Leader and Deputy Leader who both campaigned against the proposal for the council to be run by a directly-elected mayor with a council manager) and overall control of the council. The No Campaign in Stoke was defeated probably because – as in Lewisham and unlike in Brighton and Hove – despite strong cross-party, trade union and community support, it was started too late and lacked the resources available to the Yes Campaign.

11 mayoral elections so far – an unmitigated disaster for New Labour

Of the 74 mayoral candidates that stood for election on May 2 and October 17 2002, there were 11 Labour, 11 Conservative, 10 Liberal Democrat, six Green, four Socialist Alliance, two British National Party, and 30 Independent. Only 23 of these were councillors (nine Labour, seven Liberal Democrat, four Conservative and three Independent).

Out of the 11 Labour candidates in the contests, only four were already in power as Leaders of their councils (Martin Winter in Doncaster MBC, Sir Robin Wales in Newham LBC, Vince Muspratt in Watford and Jules Pipe in Hackney LBC) and whilst three of these were elected and managed to hold on to power, Vince Muspratt was defeated by the Liberal Democrat's candidate. None of the remaining seven Labour candidates were current Leaders and of these only one – Steve Bullock in Lewisham – was successfully elected.

These subsequent seven mayoral elections were in Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, North Tyneside, Lewisham, Stoke, Bedford and Mansfield. In Middlesbrough Labour's candidate Sylvia Connolly, the Deputy Council Leader and Teesside University law lecturer was massively defeated by former police superintendent Ray Mallon. In Hartlepool the Independent DEM Stuart Drummond has already asked the Electoral Commission's Boundary Committee to cut the number of councillors from 47 to 33. In North Tyneside a Conservative Chris Morgan won due to the bitterness generated by the contest to decide Labour's candidate, which resulted in Deputy Leader Eddie Darke trumping the Labour Leader Rita Stringfellow by one vote. In Lewisham similar divisions resulted in NLGN Executive Committee member Steve Bullock beating Labour's Leader Dave Sullivan to the candidacy. In Stoke the BNP got 18.67% of the votes cast and the Independent Mike Wolfe – who was the only candidate there to produce an election manifesto – defeated Labour MP George Stevenson who had proposed to continue as an MP and run the city from Westminster. In Bedford, Labour's candidate Apu Bagchi was defeated by the Independent Francis Branston and finally in Mansfield DC, Lorna Carter was defeated by Tony Egginton, an Independent candidate.

Average turnout in the mayoral elections was only 29.1%, which was less than the national turnout of 35% in the May 2002 local elections, and below the average turnout of 30% in these 11 areas at the previous local elections. Only 32.8% of those who voted opted for Labour mayoral candidates; when non-voters are included, only 9.4% of electors in the 11 areas voted Labour. Hence the mayoral elections were an unmitigated disaster for New Labour whose candidates were successful in only four out of the 11 contests.

Independents won five of the mayoral contests; and a Conservative and Liberal Democrat each won in the other two contests.

The impact on local democracy

Five years later there is no empirical support whatsoever for Professor Gerry Stoker's 1998 prediction that most major cities would soon have a DEM. Yet, just before the resignation of Secretary of State for the Environment Stephen Byers in May 2002, Gerry Stoker was appointed to assess whether the Local Government Act 2000 Act is working.[9] The project is entitled 'Evaluating Local Governance: New Constitutions and Ethics'. ELG's first report is based on research during the summer of 2002.[10] Ominously the six mayoral councils included in the survey have organised decision-making in the following way: 'five out of the six have given exercise of functions to the executive; **five have given functions for the mayor to exercise alone**; four have given functions to members of the executive; two have given functions to committees of the executive; five have delegated functions to officers; **and none have delegated powers to area committees**'.[11] Hence, as Simon Parker concludes: 'The opinion that mayors would somehow transform the local political landscape does now seem rather naïve. Less than a year on from the first mayoral elections, their impact on the quality of services cannot be quantified. We will have to wait another three years until the next round of local elections to find out whether or not the mayors have reinvigorated local voters'.[12]

In addition, as Peter Keith-Lucas notes:

> The introduction of executive government has undoubtedly increased the potential for serious corruption. Direct election can produce mayors who have little experience or understanding of the public sector and are under intense pressure to produce results, to do the deal. Key democratic safeguards have been compromised [...]. The vaunted counter-balance of the scrutiny committee calling in executive decisions for reconsideration has proved ineffective, and a majority party can use its majority to neuter scrutiny.[13]

In the 1970s, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne – where the first council manager was introduced – it took the police over three years to obtain the necessary evidence to convict leader T Dan Smith of corruption.[14] The system now, however, is much more complex and the risk of corruption is compounded here – unlike in Germany – by the absence of a mayoral recall procedure.

Comparative Note: The case of Germany

Until the early 1990s only two Lander – located in the former American Occupation Zone – had directly-elected mayors. Lander in the British Occupation Zone had the committee system. Following unification directly-elected mayors were introduced in most German local authorities. Most – unlike here – have a recall procedure and the decision to start it lies solely with the local council except in three Lander (two in the former East Germany) where the local population have the right to initiate the recall procedure. In Brandenburg 10% of full-time directly-elected mayors have lost their positions due to recall referendums. Moreover, the recall right 'has led the local councils to be more attentive and responsive to local debates and minority concerns'.[15]

Since the early 1990s, the neo-liberal call in Germany for a "lean state" and the New Public Management promise to bring about an economically efficient administration finally attracted a growing attention across the political spectrum and on all levels of government as 'a panacea for coping with budget plight'.[16] KGSt, a municipally funded non-profit institution, played a key role. Their "New Steering Model" (NSM) proposed restricting the 'responsibilities and activities of local government essentially to an "enabling" function, while the delivery and provision of public services and of public facilities should be guided by "marketisation", "outsourcing" and "privatisation"'.[17] The application of NSM has 'cut costs' and 'the elected councils as well as the local citizens at large have been, to a significant extent, bypassed and left out in the New-Steering Model-related modernisation projects'.[18]

Hence Helmut Wollmann concludes that – despite the introduction of local

referenda and directly-elected mayors – the 'NPM-guided strategy to "outsource" and "privatise" the provision of public services and public facilities is likely to whittle away the…scope of politically decided local issues, thus "de-politicising" the local area and "hollowing out" the recent advances in local democracy'.[19] Moreover, although 'outsourcing and privatising local government activities…has, so far, been still quite moderate' in Germany and 'still far from the kind of "quangoisation" of local activities which the local government level has experienced in Britain…the "outsourcing" and "privatisation" movement seems to pick up momentum all the more as it has now been additionally pushed by EU deregulation policy'.[20]

The globalisation theorists upon whom Peter Mandelson implicitly relies argue that OECD countries will converge in pursuing such neo-liberal policies. Conversely, Wollmann predicts that "North Middle European" local government such as in Germany – in contrast to the "Anglo"-type e.g. Britain with a low political profile – will defend and expand its traditional multi-function model and strong political profile.

What next?

In Germany where local government is much stronger and privatisation has been much more limited than in England, directly-elected mayors were generally introduced over 10 years ago with democratic safeguards to ensure accountability. Hence Helmut Wollmann considers that Germany is much better placed to resist 'de-politicisation' of local state activities via outsourcing and privatisation. Conversely, in England directly-elected mayors have been introduced without such democratic safeguards in order to facilitate 'de-politicisation' and provide 'the optimum internal management arrangement for privatised local state services'.[21] The prospects for a similar challenge in England, therefore, appear slim at first sight. However, since the mid-1990s a growing band of academic analysts have challenged the assumption that the internationalisation of capital means there is very little space for national governments to adopt policies which run counter to the logic of international capital and have advanced the case for national left strategies.[22] Dexter Whitfield, moreover, provides a comprehensive new model of Public Service Management based on terminating the WTO's GATS agenda with with new forms of public ownership and in-house service provision.[23]

On February 13th 2003 an agreement between the unions and government was reached to end the two-tier work force.[24] The main reason for this government U-turn was probably the Labour Party leadership's need for increased union funding in the face of plummeting membership. A statutory *Code of practice on workforce matters in local authority service contracts* will create a level playing field for both ex-council staff and new starters employed by private contractors. The Code will limit their scope to cut labour costs but will probably increase business pressure to end national pay bargaining and substitute local pay rates. The amendments sought by LCOLG to the Local Government Act 2000 – namely allowing all councils the democratic right to have the Fourth Way enhanced committee system if their local communities so wish and repeal of the Secretary of State's power to impose mayoral referenda – are also now supported by the Local Government Select Committee, the Local Government Association and the Commission on Local Governance. Hence 'the challenge for the Left in the forthcoming period in relation to local democracy is how to achieve creative socialist autonomy as opposed to neo-liberal dependency', the 'essential precondition for which', as *New Labour's US-Style Executive Mayors* concludes, 'is success in the campaign to reinstate representative democracy in the Labour Party itself' in which the role of affiliated trade unions will be crucial.[25]

References

1 Latham, P. *The Captive Local State: Local Democracy under Siege*, Socialist Renewal new series, pamphlet No. 6, May 2001, p. 23

2 Wesselius, E. *Behind GATS 2000: Corporate Power at Work*, Transnational Institute, May 2002, p.6

3 Burnham, P. 'Globalisation, De-politicisation and "Modern" Economic Management' in *The Politics of Change: Ideology and Critique*, edited by W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis, Palgrave, 2000

4 Such contractors, moreover, are quite explicit about their motivation for supporting directly elected mayors. E.g. Capita considers it is 'easier to develop and negotiate effective leading edge…partnerships…where the council has a strong leader and effective Chief Executive'; and that it helps 'if the leader is able to commit the council and to have control over his/her group' (Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill, HL Paper 102-1, HC 542, TSO 27 July 1999, Appendix 10). i.e. they want to do business with one person only without discussion by backbench councillors.

5 Formed in 1996 by a small group of senior figures in local government, with significant support from private sector contractors involved in delivering public service, the NLGN's stated aim is 'to make local government more relevant and credible to local people'. I argue that ultimately they want to see a stronger shift toward the provision of local state services by privatised services.

6 Cited in Parker, S. 'Chains of office', *The Guardian*, 12 March 2003.

7 Latham, P. 2003, p. 21 and Appendix 4

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9 *Municipal Journal*, 17 May 2002

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14 According to LCOLG Steering Committee member Bernard Crofton.

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16 Ibid., p. 11

17 Ibid., p. 12

18 Ibid., p. 13

19 Ibid., p. 18

20 Ibid., p. 19

21 Latham, P. *New Labour's US-Style Executive Mayors: The Private Contractors' Panacea*, GMB Public Services Section, the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government and Socialist Renewal, first edition October 2002, second edition revised and updated January 2003, p. 4

22 See the essays by Leo Panitch, Manfred Bienefeld and Arthur MacEwan in *Between Globalism and Nationalism*, *The Socialist Register 1994*, edited by R. Miliband and L. Panitch, Merlin Press, 1994; and Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics: Neo-liberal democracy and the Public Interest*, Verso, 2001

23 D. Whitfield, *Public Services or Corporate Welfare: Rethinking the Nation State in the Global Economy*, Pluto Press, 2001 Whitfield, 2001, p. 237 and Table 9.1, p. 256

24 *The Municipal Journal*, 20 February 2003

25 Latham, P. 2003, p. 32

Anna Randle's response to The Case Against

Dr Latham argues that directly-elected mayors are part of a wider global political agenda, characterised by the erosion of local autonomy and democracy and the privatisation of public services.

I suspect the voters of Stoke-on-Trent, Newham or Watford – or indeed London – would be immensely surprised to hear this. Having observed the campaigns and elections closely, I would argue that the motivation of at least some of those local people who supported a DEM was almost the direct opposite of this.

As Dr Latham himself points out, many referenda and elections took place against a background of difficult local circumstances and politics: corruption, financial difficulties, local industrial decline. The traditional parties suffered in some – but by no means all – places, but there were often divisions and failures among them. I would argue then that many people used the elections to vote for change. They often supported the candidates who offered an agenda with which they identified. Of course it is true that turnout was not as high as was hoped in many areas – precisely because people are disengaged from local politics. However this does not mean that the results can be dismissed. They were not imposed directly by central government: they were the result of a democratic process – however flawed.

Therefore I see no evidence for the argument that executive mayors are more likely to outsource local services. Essentially, a mayoral candidate who stands on an outsourcing ticket will be elected if this is what enough of the electorate want. However none of the mayors were elected on this type of proposal – and more importantly, none have taken this route since their election. I think Dr Latham will find far more outsourcing going on in authorities with conventional structures than in those with elected mayors. The evidence simply does not support this theory.

Dr Latham seems at times to be against strong local leadership per se, citing the decision-making arrangements of mayoral councils as 'ominous'. However, research into the new executive structures found that some Leader Cabinet executives are organised in very similar ways. Dr Latham is right that it remains to be seen whether strong leadership can make a difference to local democracy and services, but given the disassociation of people from local politics, it surely has to be worth offering different options to see if they can have any effect. The old committee system was simply not working on this level. It is surely incumbent on those of us who really care about democratic participation and the crucial role of locally based structures to try new ideas to promote them.

In addition there is evidence that name recognition and press interest regarding mayors is increasing, while council business is being resolved faster. Accountability is developing in new ways, partly because people understand who is taking decisions. These are surely not unhealthy trends.

No one would disagree that the mayoral agenda has not set the world of English local government alight as some hoped. But it has offered an alternative to communities where enough people felt that change was needed. The more unusual results were motivated by factors which are extremely important to comprehend when considering the broader future of local governance.

Certainly much remains to be seen about what mayors can and can't do for our communities and whether they will spread any further. But eleven places in England were prepared to try it, and we must understand the evidence emerging from these places before we deem it a success or failure.

Peter Latham's response to The Case For

Anna Randle's paper focuses on four aspects: why directly-elected mayors were introduced; the strength of the opposition (which 'wasn't anticipated'); the unintended results of the mayoral referenda and elections; and their assumed achievements. This response concentrates on the two areas where the differences between us are greatest – the motives for introducing such mayors and their alleged achievements.

Randle argues that the government's motive for giving such mayors the powers to set their own budgets, appoint their own cabinets, pursue their own

manifesto commitments, and represent the public face of the council was in order to address 'a significant democratic deficit at local level'. Yet, as Professor George Jones stated in *The Municipal Journal* last year: 'A single person cannot reflect the complex social, ethnic, economic, cultural and political diversity of our localities, especially our cities'. The New Local Government Network (NLGN), moreover, has consistently argued for the imposition of directly-elected mayors. Hence concentrating power – rather than diffusing it – has increased the democratic deficit. And the Local Government Act 2000 – by imposing one of the three executive models on most councils – denies their local communities the right to choose the fourth enhanced committee system option favoured by the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government (LCOLG).

Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair of the Local Government Association and a member of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee, describes NLGN as 'the provisional wing of the consulting and contracting sector'. The 2000 Act implemented NLGN's original agenda and I would argue that their ultimate aim – see *Towards a New Localism* (October 2000) – is to replace the direct provision of local state services with privatised services locally administered by executive mayors and cabinets without backbench councillors.

Randle also asserts that there is now a 'consensus' that directly-elected mayors have 'improved accountability, clarity and speed of decision–making'. The latter are illustrated by citing Ray Mallon's pledge to cut crime by 15% using community wardens – which 'has already been exceeded' – and the 'quickly realised commitments in Doncaster and Newham to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets'. These modest achievements, however, did not require a directly-elected mayor. For, as Heather Jamieson – Deputy Editor of *The Municipal Journal* and resident of Lewisham – recently stated: 'I can see no impact that my mayor, Steve Bullock, has made which he would not have done as leader of the council'.

Finally, as a democratic socialist, I disagree profoundly with Randle's view that the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister needs to act against those councils with constitutions 'designed to check mayoral power'. That is, the real 'constitutional barriers' to be addressed are those identified in my paper – namely the amendments to the 2000 Act sought by LCOLG allowing *all* councils the democratic right to have the enhanced committee system and the repeal of the Secretary of State's power to impose mayoral referenda.

Concluding summary

It is clear that the New Local Government Network (NLGN) and the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government (LCOLG) sit at opposite ends in this debate. While NLGN view the introduction of directly-elected mayors as a positive step, LCOLG believe directly-elected mayors are having, and will continue to have a negative impact on local democracy. However, this debate highlights a rich array of issues that go beyond a simple pro or anti dichotomy. Indeed, the broader framework to this debate spans the most fundamental issues surrounding local democracy and its ongoing modernisation.

Directly-elected mayors have the potential to relocate power and political control within a local authority. NLGN and LCOLG have clearly opposed perspectives on this issue. For NLGN, most importantly, mayors can take on a community leadership role, represent the community as its figurehead and achieve high levels of recognition. By acting as a focal point in this way, local cohesiveness can be enhanced. Randle also points out that DEMs can speed up the decision making process, thus making local authorities more responsive. Latham however views the shifting of political control into the hands of a single individual as an affront to local democracy and argues that this concentrates rather than diffuses power. This concentration can have severe repercussions for transparency and accountability, and goes against any notion of fair representation for all.

Initially there was a great optimism about the introduction of directly-elected mayors, to the extent that some saw them as the fill-up and energising force for local democracy. Now that the results are in we can see that DEMs have not dramatically increased the turnout in local elections, nor has overwhelming support for the mayoral model been forthcoming; indeed only a small number of areas have approved the idea. This does not present a rosy picture, but nor should it be the rally cry for their outright rejection.

It is an often forgotten truism that England's local democracy and local attitudes to it vary enormously across the country. National politicians, commentators and academics like to catalogue and stereotype local states and in doing so ignore the variations and nuances that are all too common. Whilst traditional political boundaries play a role, local political consciousness and the extent to which local people have empathy or antipathy for the local state is very varied. Local political culture is vitally important to this debate. On the one hand it explains why a majority of places have not decided to choose the mayoral option; for many it just didn't fit with local political culture and traditions. However on the other hand, it is already suiting some locations, and is seen to fit with the prevailing political culture.

For CLES it is evident that if the 'New Localism' advocated by NLGN has any future in Britain then it has to show a greater sensitivity to local political cultures. It must be appreciative of the local differences and realise that the changes must be driven in tandem with the will of the local people. In this, DEMs should not be seen as an aspect of modernisation, nor driven through with scant regard to local (and perhaps traditional) political cultures. Nor should it be offered as the carrot from which national benefits will flow. Instead, DEMs should be seen as an option that local decision makers and the local electorate have the opportunity to reject or accept. Traditional political values, strong local parties and a belief in local councillors should be allowed to exist and not be quashed by the pressure to embrace options which do not fit local political values and culture. Likewise, locations that feel that options such as DEM can assist local democracy should not be denied the choice. In this scenario it is likely that the existing heterogeneity within English local democracy will flourish. Indeed the debate in this Local Work serves to emphasise the way issues such as DEM assist in keeping discussions about local democracy vibrant and alive.