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Book Review

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son that a lawyer would counsel a client not to depend on law for the layman books, this "checklist" should not be relied on too heavily. This section seems to be nothing more than padding and not characteristic of the careful scholarship that is otherwise found in this volume.

In general, "Understanding Law and Psychiatry" is a useful handbook and readable to an extent not generally true of psychiatric works.

*Reviewed by Arnold H. Sutin**

NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNMENT: THE LOCAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL LIFE, by Milton Kotler. Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis and New York (1969) 105 pp.

While our politicians, in their frantic counter-responses to urban and social deterioration continue to bow down in besotted worship to the fetish of more and better social programs and services, largely centrally administered, one finds little in these many and varied *ad hoc* legislative contrivances, either singularly or collectively, that has proven to be anything more than a palliative in the urban crisis.

The accelerated increase in recent years of violence and social alienation within the inner-city are believed by many to be but the spasms and death throes of this dying social organism. Continued tinkering with externals, as many of these programs do, with this or that symptom of organic social disease, may defer but not reverse what appears to be the ultimate or inevitable dissolution.

Yet there are the voices of men and women, urbanologists, theoretical and practical, whose radical rhetoric persist in bringing some hope to the general malaise. Milton Kotler is one such voice. In his short volume, *Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life*, he has sought to traverse the chasm between futile political promises of urban salvation on the one hand and substantial realization on the other in one great leap vis-a-vis his theme and controlling principle, namely, *political autonomy for urban neighborhoods*.

Kotler begins his political credo—for that is what it is—by tracing the nature and historical foundations of the "neighborhood" and its later absorption as an inconsequential political subdivision of the greater city. In its pristine state, the "neighborhood" is a definite geographical and political sovereignty, perhaps a small town or village replete with tradition and history; then comes the sweep of the 19th century industrialization bringing in its wake the enormous mushrooming of urban centers through their insatiable political appetite for expansion. The original city now emerges as the political nucleus of the so-called "Downtown"

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metropolises of the country, the economic and political imperium of the large modern city. The proud independence has given way to vassalage; the seeds of conflict have been sown.

The origin of the social disease having been isolated, the author proceeds meticulously to search for a viable concept of neighborhood organization to return that which was taken away and concludes through some analysis that the two objectives of the neighborhood concept must include substantial political autonomy and meaningful representation with the greater urban political framework of government. Kotler proceeds to translate these objectives into concrete terms through the emerging neighborhood corporate device as the legal framework for achieving these ends. It is in and through the neighborhood corporate device that the many and varied social and political programs eventually develop seeking to achieve the same ends as they do in government, that is the building of political strength and serving the welfare of its inhabitants. The neighborhood vehicle he pontificates, under its corporate authority is, of necessity, to have a large degree of control over its internal destiny, otherwise political viability would be lost.

The author throughout cautions us to the practical problems that are entailed in the attempt to develop neighborhood government. The definition of the neighborhood; the nature and scope of powers; the presence of numerous difficulties in effecting the transfer of authority from the municipal administration to the people in the neighborhood; the requisite changes in Federal and State Constitutions—all should follow as a minima, as well as the task of educating the neighborhood citizen to assume responsibilities in self government, for the development of a high level of internal political leadership, the absence of the latter alone would clearly preclude success.

While the reader may look with jaundiced eyes at the author's belief that implementation is possible in the face of these many difficulties, yet the undeniable fact of urban life has been and is the rampant and irrepressible presence of political, economic and social alienation between the neighborhood and the municipal governing authorities which cries out for solution. Clearly in response to this pregnant fact no glib-tongued politician can vault over nor business leader veil the urgency to consider all alternatives. Decidedly one feels that at the very least, Mr. Kotler has in this short work touched upon the essence of the urban dilemma. In any event, we all agree with Mr. Kotler that time is out of joint for the cities—that meaningful local political control in some form from within the neighborhood not only is credible but vital to the success of any urban restoration. The real question for us all, is how to most practically achieve local control under the terms of the present political setting. It seems to me that he like many before him would have us look unto ourselves and cry out like Hamlet,

“Oh cursed spite that ever we were born to set it right,” which unfortunately provides little tangible direction. The question which modern man everywhere relentlessly pursues is this—are we prepared to forsake the pernicious habit of considering all political arrangements as largely immutable, and reach out for new vistas? I submit that the answer to this lies at the beginning and at the end of the matter.