

Chapter VI

PRINCIPLES OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL ACTION

Advocates of metropolitan reorganization and of other efforts to strengthen governments in metropolitan areas place great emphasis on local action. Reform movements to improve the capacity of local governments to deal with metropolitan problems usually arise from within the metropolitan area itself. Various problems perceived at the local level—inadequate water supply, stream pollution, traffic congestion—often stimulate citizen groups and public officials to take a fresh look at the governmental arrangements available to them, and to propose whatever changes seem appropriate for getting on with the job at hand.

Yet the State government necessarily becomes involved in local reform efforts, since it must provide authorization for local government action. As the cases of water supply and relocation make clear, State participation may go well beyond the role of authorizing local arrangements. In addition, Federal programs have a significant impact on the conduct of government in metropolitan areas. Governments within metropolitan areas are in fact linked by financial, legal, and administrative ties to the States and the Federal Government, and public services and policies in urban areas are strongly influenced by the actions of higher levels of government.

Within the federal system of the United States, the States and the Federal Government can use their powers and resources in many ways to cope with metropolitan area problems. Although local government reorganization has received most attention in the literature dealing with urban problems, the use of the federal system is an equally valid approach and has been highly effective in practice. The Commission has studied the metropolitan impact of State and Federal policies and has recommended a series of intergovernmental measures to meet metropolitan needs. An important part of this work has been the development of a philosophy of intergovernmental action rooted in the basic concepts of the American federal system. This chapter will review the principles that the Commission has put forward as a basis for intergovernmental relations in metropolitan areas; the following chapter will summarize the Commission's recommendations to the States and the Federal Government.

GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

The division of powers between the Federal Government and the States is a direct expression of the political philosophy of federalism in the Constitution. It reflects the conviction that a territorial division of authority, as well as a series of checks and balances in the National Government, offers protection for individual liberties. The principles of federalism may be regarded as a historical heritage, but