

# WEEK 10: Government and Politics continues Continues; Federal, Unitary and Local Government and Legislatures

7 SUBNATIONAL POLITICS

## Centralisation or decentralisation?

All modern states are divided on a territorial basis between central (national) and peripheral (regional, provincial or local) institutions. The nature of such divisions varies enormously, however. These differences include the constitutional framework within which centre-periphery relationships are conducted, the distribution of functions and responsibilities between the levels of government, administrative functions and personnel are appointed and recruited, the political, economic, administrative and other powers that the centre can use to control the periphery, and the independence that peripheral bodies enjoy. What is clear, however, is that neither central nor peripheral bodies can be dispensed with altogether.

In the absence of central government, a state would simply not be able to function as an actor on the international or world stage. It would possess no machinery for entering into strategic alliances, negotiating trade agreements, gaining representation at international summit meetings, or becoming a member of a state's external relations. This is why central government is invariably responsible for a state's external relations, as demonstrated by its control of foreign, diplomatic and defence policy.

Moreover, some form of central government is necessary to mediate between peripheral bodies to ensure cooperation in areas of mutual interest. In most cases, this means that central government assumes overall control of the state's economic life, and supervises matters such as internal trade, transport and communications. There are, however, powerful reasons for further strengthening central government at the expense of peripheral institutions.

The case for centralisation includes the following:

- National unity.** Central government alone articulates the interests of the whole rather than the various parts, that is, the interests of the nation rather than those of sectional, ethnic or regional groups. A strong centre ensures that the government addresses the common interests of the entire community, a weak centre leads to rivalry and disharmony.
- Uniformity.** Central government alone can establish uniform laws and public services which help people to move more easily from one part of the country to another. Geographical mobility is likely to be restricted when there are differing tax regimes and differing legal, educational and social-security systems throughout a country.
- Equality.** Decentralisation has the disadvantage that it forces peripheral institutions to rely on the resources available in their locality or region. Only central government can remedy inequalities that arise from the fact that the areas with the greatest social needs are invariably those with the least potential for raising revenue.
- Prosperity.** Economic development and centralisation invariably go hand in hand. Only central government, for instance, can manage a single currency, control tax and spending policies with a view to ensuring sustainable growth, and, if necessary, provide an infrastructure in the form of roads, railways, airports and so on.

On the other hand, there are limits to the amount of centralisation that is possible or desirable. Indeed, the notion of a modern state comprising tens or even hundreds of millions of citizens being entirely governed from the centre is simply absurd for

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example, if all the services and functions of modern government were to be administered from the centre, the result would be hopeless inefficiency and bureaucratic responsibilities vested in peripheral institutions are those that are 'domestic' in the sense that they primarily address the needs of the domestic population, for example, education, health, social welfare, and planning. The pressure to shift other responsibilities and decision-making power from central to peripheral bodies is, however, considerable.

The case for decentralisation includes the following:

- Participation.** Local or regional government is certainly more effective than central government in providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the political life of their community. The benefits of widening the scope of political participation include the fact that it helps to create a better educated and more informed citizenry.
- Responsiveness.** Peripheral institutions are usually 'closer' to the people and more sensitive to their needs. This both strengthens democratic accountability and ensures that government responds not merely to the overall interests of society, but also to the specific needs of particular communities.
- Legitimacy.** Physical distance from government affects the acceptability or righteousness of its decisions. Decisions made at a 'local' level are more likely to be seen as intelligible and therefore legitimate (see p. 193). In contrast, central government may appear remote, both geographically and politically.
- Liberty.** As power tends to corrupt, centralisation threatens to turn government into a tyranny against the individual. Decentralisation protects liberty by dispersing government power, thereby creating a network of checks and balances. Peripheral bodies check central government as well as each other.

## Centre-periphery relationships

The balance between centralisation and decentralisation within a state is shaped by a wide range of historical, cultural, geographical, economic and political factors. The most prominent of these is the constitutional structure of the state, particularly the location of sovereignty (see p. 143) in the political system. Although modified by other factors, the constitutional structure provides, as a minimum, the framework within which centre-periphery relationships are conducted. The two most common forms of territorial organisation found in the modern world are federal and unitary systems. A third form, confederation, has generally passed to be unsustainable. As confederations establish only the loosest and most decentralised type of political union by vesting sovereign power in peripheral bodies, it is not surprising that their principal advocates have been anarchists such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (see p. 124). The confederal principle is, in fact, most commonly applied in the form of intergovernmentalism (see p. 154) as embodied in international organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Commonwealth of Nations. Examination of confederations at the nation-state level, however, is rare. The USA was originally a confederation, first in the form of the Continental Congresses

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## Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65)

French anarchist. A largely self-educated philosopher, Proudhon was drawn into radical politics in Lyons before settling in Paris in 1847. As a member of the 1848 Constituent Assembly, Proudhon favoured a constitution based on the principle of decentralisation. He was later imprisoned with three years, after which, disillusioned with political life, he concentrated on writing and theorising. His best known work, What is Property? (1840/1970), developed the first systematic argument for anarchism, based on the 'mutualist' principle. He also published Federal Principles (1855), in which he argued for a federalist system of self-governing communities, in effect, confederalism.

(1774-81), and then under the Articles of Confederation (1781-89). The most important modern example of a confederal state is the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which in 1991 formally replaced the USSR. The CIS was established by 11 of the 15 former Soviet republics (only Georgia and the three Baltic states refused to join). However, it lacks executive authority, and therefore constitutes little more than an occasional forum for debate and arbitration. Indeed, the evidence is that, in the absence of an effective central body, confederations either, as in the USA, transform themselves into federal states, or succumb to centrifugal pressures and disintegrate altogether, as has more or less occurred in the case of the CIS.

## Federal systems

Federal systems of government have been more common than confederal systems. Over a third of the world's population is governed by states that have some kind of federal structure. These states include the USA, Brazil, Pakistan, Australia, Mexico, Switzerland, Nigeria, Malaysia and Canada. Although no two federal structures are identical, the central feature of each is a sharing of sovereignty between central and peripheral institutions. This ensures, at least in theory, that neither level of government can encroach on the powers of the other. In this sense, a federation is an intermediate form of political organisation that lies somewhere between a confederation (which vests sovereign power in peripheral bodies) and a unitary state (in which power is located in central institutions). Federal systems are based upon a compromise between unity and regional diversity, between the need for an effective central power and the need for checks or constraints on that power.

## Why federalism?

When a list of federal states (or states exhibiting federal-type features) is examined, certain common characteristics can be observed. This suggests that the federal principle is more applicable to some states than to others. In the first place, historical similarities can be identified. For example, federations have often been formed by the coming together of a number of established political communities which need the less clearly applied in the case of the world's first federal state, the USA. Although the 13 former British colonies in America quickly recognised the expediency of confederal organisation, each possessed a distinctive political identity and a tradition that

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the growing tendency for local politics to be 'politicised', in the sense that national parties have increasingly dominated local politics, has usually brought with it greater centralisation. In the absence of the kind of constitutional framework that federalism provides, the preservation of local autonomy relies, to a crucial extent, on self-restraint by the centre. This tends to mean that the degree of decentralisation in unitary systems varies significantly, both over time and from country to country. This can be illustrated by the contrasting experiences of the UK and France.

The UK traditionally possessed a relatively decentralised local government system, with local authorities exercising significant discretion within a legal framework laid down by Parliament. Indeed, respect for local democracy was long seen as a feature of the UK's unwritten constitution. Following J. S. Mill (see p. 44), central authorities usually granted local government as both a check on central power and a means through which popular participation, and thus political education, could be broadened. The expansion of the state's economic and social role in the post-1945 period, however, meant that local authorities were increasingly charged with responsibility for delivering public services on behalf of central government. This partnership approach to local-central relationships was abruptly abandoned by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s, which saw local government, in common with other intermediary agencies, as an obstacle to the implementation of their radical market-oriented policies.

The introduction in 1984 of 'rate capping' robbed local government of its most important power, the ability to control local tax levels and so determine its own spending policies. Local authorities that challenged the centre, such as the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county borough councils, were abolished, their functions being devolved to smaller districts and borough councils and a variety of newly created quangos. The responsibilities of local government were also restricted through, for example, the introduction of a national curriculum for schools and legislation that permitted schools to opt out from local authority control. The ultimate aim of these policies was fundamentally to remodel local government by the provision of services by private bodies through a system of contracting-out and privatisation. Such policies have widely been interpreted as an attack on local democracy. On the one hand, power has been transferred from local to central government, and on the other, local authorities have been subjected to intensified market pressures from members of the local community in their new roles as 'customers' and 'clients'.

Very different policies were adopted in France during the same period. In a conscious attempt to transform the character of French society, and in particular the tradition of centralisation that the Fifth Republic inherited from the Jacobins and Napoleon, President Mitterrand embarked on a programme of political decentralisation that was implemented by the Minister for the Interior and Decentralisation, Gaston Defferre, between 1982 and 1986. Traditionally, central-local relationships in France were dominated by a system of strict administrative control that operated largely through prefects appointed by, and directly accountable to, the Ministry of the Interior, who were the chief executives of France's 96 departments. The established French system therefore worked very much as a hierarchical chain of command. As well as revitalising regional government, the Defferre reforms extended both the responsibilities and the powers of local government. In particular, the executive powers of the prefects were transferred to locally elected presidents.

Central power  
UK  
France  
Spain  
Catalan  
France  
Autonomy  
devolved

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and the prefects were replaced by Commissaires de la République, who are concerned essentially with economic planning. In addition, local authorities were absolved of the need to seek prior approval for administrative and spending decisions, these now being subject only to a posteriori legal and financial control. The net result of these reforms has been to give France a more decentralised state structure than it has had at any time since the 1789 revolution.

**Devolution** *Power to a lower level, especially by central government to local or regional authorities*  
Devolution, at least in its legislative form, establishes the greatest possible measure of decentralisation in a unitary system of government, short, that is, of its transformation into a federal system. Devolved assemblies have usually been created in response to increasing regional and sometimes nationalist pressures. Despite their lack of entrenched powers, once devolved assemblies have acquired a political identity of their own, and possess a measure of democratic legitimacy, they are very difficult to weaken and, in normal circumstances, impossible to abolish. Northern Ireland's Stormont Parliament was an exception. The Stormont Parliament was suspended in 1972 and replaced by direct rule from the Westminster Parliament, but only when it became apparent that its domination by predominantly Protestant Unionist parties prevented it from stemming the rising tide of communal violence in Northern Ireland that threatened to develop into civil war.

One of the oldest traditions of devolved government in Europe is found in Spain. Only it has been a unitary state since the 1570s. Spain is divided into 50 provinces, each of which exercises a measure of regional self-government. As part of the transition to democratic government following the death of General Franco in 1975, the devolution process was extended in 1979 with the creation of 17 autonomous communities. This new tier of regional government is based on elected assemblies invested with broad control of domestic policy. Although this reform was designed to meet long-standing demands for Catalan autonomy in the Basque area, it merely provoked a fresh wave of terrorism perpetrated by the separatist movement ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna). The French government has also used devolution as a means of responding to the persistence of regional identities, and at least in Brittany and Occitania, to the emergence of forms of ethnic nationalism. A key element in the Defferre reforms in France was the transition from administrative devolution to legislative devolution. As part of a strategy of 'functional regionalism', 22 regional public bodies were created in 1972 to enhance the administrative coordination of local investment and planning decisions. These, however, lacked a democratic basis and enjoyed only limited powers. In 1982, they were transformed into fully-fledged regional governments, each with a directly elected council. In an attempt to stem separatism and a growing tide of terrorism, Corsica was granted the special status of a Collective Territory, which effectively made the island self-governing.

In contrast, strains within the multinational UK state have led to a recurrent devolution debate. Devolution appeared on the political agenda in the late 1960s with the revival of Scottish and Welsh nationalism. By 1974, this had led to a parliamentary breakthrough for the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru. In an attempt to maintain the support of nationalist parties, the minority Labour government brought forward devolution proposals in 1978 and again in 1979. In 1978, these were defeated by opposition within the Labour Party, and in 1979 by a referendum defeat in Wales and the failure of the referendum in Scotland.

**Devolution**  
Devolution is the transfer of power from central government to subordinate regional authorities. It may mean the passing of duties down to a higher authority or to a lower one. Devolved bodies constitute an intermediate level of government between central and local governments. However, devolution differs from federalism in that, although their territorial jurisdiction may be similar, devolved bodies have no share in sovereignty, their responsibilities and powers are derived from, and controlled by, the central government. In its administrative devolution implies only regional institutions to implement policies decided by the central government. In its legislative devolution (sometimes called 'true devolution'), the establishment of elected regional assemblies invested with policy-making responsibilities and a measure of fiscal independence.

Central power  
UK  
France  
Spain  
Catalan  
France  
Autonomy  
devolved

Devolved -> Extracted from unitary form of govt.

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to back the proposals by the required 40 per cent of the total electorate. Nevertheless, the growing gulf in the 1980s and 1990s between the Conservative-dominated Westminster Parliament and an increasingly Labour-dominated Scotland and Wales revived support for devolution. Labour's 1997 election victory led to swift and successful devolution in Scotland and Wales, and a Northern Ireland Assembly was also set up in 1998 as part of the larger Northern Ireland peace process. Opposition to devolution is largely based on the fear that 'home rule' for Scotland and Wales in particular will strengthen nationalist sentiment and ultimately lead to the break-up of the UK. Its supporters, however, believe that devolution is the only solution to the territorial crisis of the UK state, in that it promises to restore legitimate government and stem the tide of rising nationalism.

Ethnic and community politics

**The rise of ethnic politics**  
The cause of political decentralisation and, in extreme cases, the phenomenon of political collapse have increasingly been fuelled by the emergence of a new style of politics: the politics of ethnic loyalty and regional identity. In some respects, the rise of ethnic politics in the late twentieth century parallels the emergence of nationalist politics in the nineteenth century, and may have similarly wide-ranging consequences. Whereas nationalism brought about a period of nation building and the destruction of multinational empires, ethnic politics may call the long-term survival of the nation itself into question. What accounts for the rise of this new style of politics, and what is its political character?

The growing importance of ethnic consciousness in the West is strictly a post-Second-World-War phenomenon; indeed, it can be traced back to the 1960s. The renewed importance of ethnicity in politics, however, came as a surprise to most commentators. This was because it had widely been assumed that modernity would bring about the dilution of ethnic distinctiveness, as the spread of liberal democratic values would mean the abandonment of tribal rivalries and communal solidarities. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, secessionist groups and forms of ethnic nationalism sprang up in many parts of western Europe and North America. This was most evident in Quebec in Canada, Scotland and Wales in Britain, Catalonia and the Basque area in Spain, Corsica in France, and Flanders in Belgium. It created pressure for political decentralisation, and sometimes precipitated major constitutional upheavals. In Italy, the process did not get under way until the 1990s, with the rise of the Northern League in Lombardy. There have been similar manifestations of ethnic assertiveness amongst the Native Americans in Canada and the USA, the aboriginal peoples in Australia, and the Maoris in New Zealand. In the latter two cases at least, this has brought about a major reassessment of national identity.

In many ways, the forerunner of, and possibly prototype for, this new style of politics was found in the emergence of black nationalism. The origins of the black consciousness movement date back to the early twentieth century and the emergence

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Policy

ETHNIC AND COMMUNITY POLITICS

Marcus Garvey (1887-1940)

Jamaican political thinker and activist, and an early advocate of black nationalism. Garvey was the founder in 1916 of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). He left Jamaica for New York in 1916, where his message of black pride and economic self-sufficiency gained him a growing following, particularly in ghettoes such as Harlem. Although his black business schemes failed, and his call for a return to Africa was largely ignored, Garvey's emphasis on establishing black

pride and his vision of Africa as a 'new birth of Africa' for the later Black Power movement. Rastafarianism is also largely based on his ideas. Garvey was imprisoned for eight months in 1923, and was later deported eventually dying in obscurity in London.

both the reformist and revolutionary wings of the movement. In its reformist guise, the movement took the form of a struggle for civil rights that reached national prominence in the USA under the leadership of Martin Luther King (1929-68) and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). The strategy of protest and nonviolent civil disobedience was nevertheless rejected by the emerging Black Power movement, which supported black separatism and, under the leadership of the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966, promoted the use of physical force and armed confrontation. Of more enduring significance in US politics, however, have been the Black Muslims, who advocate a separatist creed based on the idea that Black Muslims are descended from an ancient Muslim tribe. Founded in 1929, and they counted amongst their most prominent activists in the 1960s the militant black leader Malcolm X (1925-65). Renamed the Nation of Islam, the movement continues to exert influence in the USA under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan.

Black nationalism clearly highlights one of the sources of ethnic politics: the desire to challenge economic and social marginalisation, and sometimes racial oppression. In this sense, ethnic politics has been a vehicle for political liberation, its enemy being structural disadvantage and ingrained inequality. For blacks in North America and western Europe, the establishment of an ethnic identity has provided a means of confronting a dominant white culture that has traditionally emphasised their inferiority and demanded subservience. Resurgent regional loyalties have often sprung from a system of 'internal colonialism' in which 'peripheral' geographical areas are exploited by a 'core' or 'centre'. This nationalist sentiment in Scotland and Wales is derived in part from the economic subordination of these regions to England, and particularly south-east England. This is reflected in their traditional dependence upon 'heavy' industry, their higher unemployment levels, and their lower wage and salary levels. Very much the same can be said about areas such as Brittany in France and Catalonia and the Basque area in Spain. The tendency in such cases is for ethnic nationalism to have a left-wing character, and it is usually articulated by parties and movements that have a broadly socialist philosophy.

On the other hand, when regional loyalties have intensified in 'core' areas confronted by the growing prominence of peripheral ones, ethnic politics has often assumed a more right-wing character. This has occurred, for instance, in Flanders in Belgium, when economic development in predominantly French-speaking Wallonia

movement by MLK  
Black Power movement  
Black Muslims  
Scotland and Wales  
derived from econ



Focus on

The core-periphery model

The core-periphery model is an explanatory framework that aims to demonstrate how and why regional imbalances within a state (as a theory of internal order) applied either to regional imbalances in the global economy (as a theory of colonialism), or to imbalances in the global economy between the two 'core' areas, for instance, are ones that are better integrated into the global economy. The core-periphery model emphasises a system of unequal exchange, in which the core region prospers and develops specifically through the exploitation of the periphery, pushing it into underdevelopment. The core is thus characterised by relatively high wages, advanced technology and a diversified production mix, and the periphery is characterised by low wages, more rudimentary technology and a simple production mix.

has precipitated growing support for neofascist movements. In the 1990s, the openly racist Flemish bloc, which calls for the mass deportation of immigrants, made electoral advances in industrial areas and especially in Antwerp. Similarly, the free-market philosophy of the Northern League in Lombardy in Italy in part reflects the desire of the economically advanced Italian North (so-called Padania) to disengage itself from the more rural and less prosperous South.

Nevertheless, structural inequalities and internal colonialism cannot in themselves explain the emergence of ethnic and regional politics. Why, for instance, have ethnic and regional identities become so important in the late twentieth century when the injustices that they seek to redress date back generations, if not centuries? The answer to this may lie in the phenomenon of postmodernism (see p. 61). Just as Gellner (1983) argued that nationalism arose to provide a source of cultural cohesion in modern, industrialised societies, ethnic consciousness may be a necessary integrative force in emerging postmodern ones. The problem of postmodernism is that it promotes diversity and weakens traditional social identities. For example, increased social mobility and the spread of market individualism have undermined both class solidarity and established political loyalties. At the same time, the capacity of the nation to establish a strong and stable social identity has been weakened by globalisation (see p. 140) in its economic, cultural and political forms. In such circumstances, ethnicity may replace nationality as the principal source of social integration, its virtue being that, whereas nations are bound together by 'civil' loyalties and ties, ethnic and regional groups are able to generate a deeper sense of 'organic' identity.

The rise of ethnic consciousness has by no means only occurred in the West. Although ethnic rivalry (often portrayed as 'tribalism') is sometimes seen as an endemic feature of African and Asian politics, it is better understood as a phenomenon heightened ethnic consciousness, which tended to be mobilised as a weapon of anti-colonialism. However, the divide-and-rule policies of the colonial period often bequeathed to many newly independent 'nations' a legacy of bitterness and resentment. In many cases, this was subsequently exacerbated by the attempt of majority

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Community

ethnic groups to consolidate their dominance under the guise of 'nation building'. Such tensions, for instance, resulted in the Biafran War in Nigeria in the 1960s, the long-running civil war in Sri Lanka. The worst recent example of ethnic bloodshed, however, occurred in Rwanda in 1994, where an estimated 1 000 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered in an uprising by militant Hutus.

The collapse of communism in eastern Europe has also created the spectre of ethnic rivalry and regional conflict. In the former USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for example, this has led to state collapse and the creation of a series of new nation states. The causes have been complex. In the first place, although communist regimes sought to resolve the 'nationalities problem' through the construction of 'socialist man', the evidence is that they merely fossilised ethnic and national loyalties by driving them underground. Secondly, ethnic and religious nationalism were undoubtedly vehicles for expressing anticommunism or anti-Sovietism. Thirdly, the political instability and economic uncertainty that the collapse of communism precipitated were a perfect breeding ground for a form of politics that offered an 'organic' sense of collective identity. Nevertheless, these newly created nations are themselves subject to deep ethnic rivalries and tensions. This has been demonstrated by the rebellion of the Chechens in Russia, and the fragmentation of the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia into 'ethnically pure' Muslim, Serb and Croat areas.

A politics of community?

Whereas ethnic politics has emerged from below as a populist (see p. 335) movement, community politics has usually been a concern of political elites. In other words, it has often been the preserve of politicians and academics, who have interpreted social breakdown and fragmentation as being part of a broader 'decline of community'. This theme has become increasingly prominent in western politics since the 1960s, reaching the point in the 1990s at which so-called 'communitarianism' (see p. 136) threatened to become an all-embracing political philosophy, making the old Left/Right political divide redundant. At the heart of the communitarian message is the assertion, first, that a sense of community is vital to a healthy society, and second, that in the modern period the bonds of community have been progressively weakened.

A concern with community politics and a rediscovery of 'the local' has advanced in line with the progress of globalisation, which is discussed in Chapter 8. In this sense, globalisation and localisation may be linked responses to the decline of the nation state. Insofar as the cause of community has an ideological heritage, this lies in the traditional anarchist emphasis on self-management and cooperation. Classical anarchists such as Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) and Gustav Landauer (1870-1934) extolled the virtues of small, decentralised communities, or communes, in which human beings can organise their lives spontaneously and resolve differences through face-to-face interaction. Similar goals also inspired the establishment of the kibbutz system in Israel. In the view of contemporary anarchists such as Murray Bookchin (1989), the need for such an emphasis on community is more pressing than it was in the nineteenth century, because of the bleak and depersonalised nature of modern city life. Bookchin's stress upon 'affinity groups' as the fundamental unit of the new society has increasingly influenced town planners, who

A community is every day language, the association of people in a given location, that is, a village, town, city or even country. As a social or political principle, however, the term 'community' suggests a social group that possesses a strong collective identity based on the bonds of comradeship, loyalty and duty. Ferdinand Tönnies (1854-1936) distinguished between 'Gemeinschaft', the community, typically found in traditional societies and industrialised societies, and 'Gesellschaft', the association, that is, the looser, artificial and contractual relationships typically found in urban and industrialised societies. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) emphasised the degree to which community is based on the maintenance of social and moral codes. If these are weakened, this induces 'anomie', that is, feelings of isolation, loneliness and meaninglessness.

Commune: A small-scale collective organisation based on the sharing of wealth and power, possibly also extended to personal and domestic arrangements.

Home

Concept

have moved away from the idea of sprawling estates and large-scale developments, and started to favour the construction of 'urban villages'. A similar message was preached by the German economist and environmental theorist Fritz Schumacher (see p. 177), whose pioneering *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973) advocated a shift towards 'human scale' economic and social organisation, based on smaller working units.

The idea of 'community' has also been taken up by academics such as Michael Sandel (1982) and Alisdair MacIntyre (1981), who have used it to highlight the failings of liberal individualism. Communitarians have argued that, in conceiving of the individual as logically prior to and 'outside' the community, liberalism has merely legitimised selfish and egoistical behaviour and downgraded the importance of the idea of the public good. Through the writings of Amitai Etzioni (1995), such views influenced the Clinton administration in the USA as well as the UK Labour and Conservative parties. Etzioni argued that social fragmentation and breakdown has largely been a result of individuals' obsession with rights and their refusal to acknowledge reciprocal duties and moral responsibilities. This is demonstrated by the so-called 'parenting deficit', that is, the abandonment of their own lifestyles and hood by fathers and mothers who are more concerned about their rights, communitarian careers. However, critics point out that, in existing duties over rights, communitarianism may represent a shift towards authority and away from individual liberty. Moreover, the concern with community commonly has conservative implications, since it tends to be associated with attempts to strengthen existing social institutions such as the family. In this form, communitarianism seeks to legitimise the status quo and, in the case of the family, to consolidate women's traditional role as housewives, mothers and carers.

Summary

- Centralisation and decentralisation both have advantages. The virtues of centralisation include the following. It allows the state to be an international actor, it enables economic life to be more efficiently organised, it helps to promote national unity, and it allows for regional inequalities to be countered. The attraction of decentralisation is that it broadens the scope of political participation, brings government 'closer' to the people, makes political decisions more intelligible, and fosters checks and balances within government.
- The most common forms of territorial organisation are federal and unitary systems. Federalism is based on the notion of shared sovereignty, in which power is distributed between the central and peripheral levels of government. Unitary systems, however, vest sovereign power in a single, national institution, which allows the centre to determine the territorial organisation of the state.
- Other factors affecting territorial divisions include the party system and political culture, the economic system and level of material development, the geographical size of the state, and the level of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. There has been a tendency towards centralisation in most, if not all, systems. This reflects, in

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