

**AN OUTLINE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
AND LOCAL TAXATION IN ENGLAND  
AND WALES (EXCLUDING THE  
METROPOLIS) TOGETHER WITH SOME  
CONSIDERATIONS FOR AMENDMENT**

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An Outline of Local Government and Local Taxation in England and Wales (Excluding the Metropolis) Together with Some Considerations for Amendment by R. S. Wright & Henry Hobhouse

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OF  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND  
LOCAL TAXATION

IN  
ENGLAND AND WALES.

1884.

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*SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR AMENDMENT.*

BY

R. S. WRIGHT,  
OF THE INNER TEMPLE,

AND

HENRY HOBHOUSE,  
OF LINCOLN'S INN,

BARRISTERS-AT-LAW.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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1. THE Government having announced in the Queen's Speech, that they have in preparation measures for the reform and improvement of Local Government and Taxation, it becomes of great importance that accurate information on these intricate subjects should be diffused as widely as possible.

It is hoped that the present work (which is founded on two memoranda privately circulated by us among members of Parliament in the year 1877) may be of use as an outline of Local Government as it at present exists, and as an index of the various areas, bodies and purposes which will have to be considered in any Scheme which may be adopted.

It also contains references to the Statutes and original authorities on the subject, which should make it useful to any student of Local Government and Taxation.

The original memoranda of 1877 were drawn from more than 500 public general Acts of Parliament, from decisions of Courts of Law, and various Blue Books,\* and were revised by gentlemen of great local experience in different parts of

\* A list of the most important of these Blue Books, and of the recent debates on Local Government, will be found at p. 117 below.

the country. They have now been further revised, amplified, and brought down to date in the present work.

2. We think that it must be apparent that the existing local organization is in many of its parts complicated and unequal to present requirements. The increase in population and in the requirements of the time has outgrown the capacity of local machinery created for more limited objects. The greatly increased duties thrown upon local bodies, and their powers to tax and incur debt, make it necessary that the local organization should be simplified and strengthened. In particular, the amount of local indebtedness has during the past ten or fifteen years assumed alarming proportions; it is annually growing at a rate which is out of proportion to the rate of growth of the property on which it is imposed; and, if much longer continued, it may result in an oppressive burden.

3. The main cause of the defectiveness of the existing organization seems to be the complication of the areas into which the country is subdivided for the different purposes of administration. This complication operates injuriously in two ways.

In the *first* place, it involves the concurrent existence of a number of distinct governing bodies independent of each other and conflicting sometimes in interest or policy, even when having to some extent the same area of jurisdiction. If one simple unit of local government were adopted for all purposes, there would be a single governing body, elected at one time and in one manner, and by one constituency; and this body, by itself or by its committees, would manage all the affairs of the locality on consistent principles; its proceedings



would be subject to effective control by the ratepayers ; and last, though not least, it would have one budget of expenditure and debt of the whole locality. At present the affairs of a country parish are for some purposes administered by overseers, appointed in one way. For other purposes it is part of a union, the affairs of which are administered by guardians, elected or appointed in another way. For other purposes it may have its school board, elected in a different way from the guardians. For other purposes it may be part of a highway district, differing in limits from the parish, union, or school district, and administered by a fourth distinct body. For other purposes, again, such as cemeteries or drainage, it may be apportioned among other distinct areas, with different governing bodies ; while as regards police, licensing, asylums and other county affairs, it is governed by the justices. Under such circumstances, the man most anxious and competent to serve his locality with effect cannot do so. He has, in truth, no one locality. He is in different districts, with different populations, for different purposes.

In the *second* place, the same cause prevents the ratepayer from seeing or controlling the total of the indebtedness by which he may be affected. Parliament may see the growth of the local indebtedness of the country as a whole, but they cannot control it. The ratepayer alone could control its growth as it proceeds, but he cannot see it. The various debts which affect him—for county and borough buildings, for workhouses, for sanitary purposes, for cemeteries, for schools, for highways, &c., &c.—are contracted by different authorities for areas which are not conterminous. Even if it were possible to ascertain the aggregate of the amounts which affect himself, he does not in fact know it ; for there is no one to state it to him. Nor, if he

did know it, could he do anything effectual to control it. He cannot all at once bring pressure to bear upon the various governing bodies of the various districts in which he lives. If, on the other hand, his district were the same for all purposes and governed by one body, he would know its total debt in good time. He would jealously watch its growth. He would know the reason for every increase. In this way alone can economy be expected. The evil of growing indebtedness must be dealt with locally; but it cannot be dealt with locally until its existence and its probable results have been brought home to the ratepayer; and they cannot be brought home to the ratepayer without a simplification of areas and of governing bodies. This seems to be the first condition of improvement.

4. It is not unimportant to observe that the defectiveness of the existing local organization at once overwhelms the Local Government Board with details which ought to be locally settled, and makes its interposition less effectual. "As the local authorities are strengthened and the impediments to their good working removed, the necessity for interference by the central authority will be diminished, at the same time that the use and value of its supervision and of the information which it could communicate will be greatly increased. The existing confusion of things at once creates a necessity for perpetual interference, and makes the interference ineffectual."

5. It is now generally admitted that the whole subject of Local Government and Taxation ought to be considered with a view to certain lines being laid down for dealing with it systematically. No doubt any general measures will involve some disturbance of existing burdens and some interference

with individual interests; but there is as little doubt that the necessary disturbance of burdens will become greater and more difficult the longer improvement is postponed, or that the benefits to be expected will be sufficiently important and permanent to justify liberality in dealing with interests which may be affected.

SAM. WHITBREAD, M.P.

WM. RATHBONE, M.P.

7th April, 1884.