A NEW URBAN CONSERVATISM:
The Case of Hartford, Connecticut

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ABSTRACT: A new urban conservatism has developed in Hartford, Connecticut, one of the US' poorest cities. Over one-quarter of its population lives below the poverty level, and every modern urban problem exists within the city. Since 1993, the local government has been controlled by a bipartisan coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats that has set a distinctive tone in local governance, responding heavily to business elements over the poor. Three controversies that illustrate this conservatism are analyzed: (1) an attempt at private management of the school system; (2) the utilization of zoning to curtail social services in the city; and (3) the limiting of public participation and oversight of city council activities. These developments suggest that a new type of urban conservative regime may be developing, stemming from a new ethos of privatism and the emerging global economy.

Hartford, Connecticut, is often described as “a tale of two cities”—one, a powerful corporate center for finance, real estate, and insurance sectors, and the other, a city of impoverished neighborhoods inhabited largely by African-Americans and Puerto Ricans who constituted the eighth poorest urban population in the United States in the 1990 Census. Downtown, Aetna-U.S. Healthcare, Travelers. and other firms play veritable monopoly—merging, selling off divisions and subsidiaries, downsizing, and rewarding executives with outlandish salaries and bonuses. In the neighborhoods, schools are in crisis, having the lowest achievements levels in Connecticut; gang violence periodically erupts, igniting retribution and community outcry; and homelessness and drug abuse plague the streets.

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Three-fourths of the city's public school children are eligible for free meals. Connecticut's 21-month welfare time limit, enacted in 1995 for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients, is beginning to impact poor families in the city. Every modern urban dilemma can be found in Hartford—from inadequate health care to disinvestment and municipal fiscal stress.

Given these conditions, one might expect that local government leadership would be in the vanguard of advocating for national attention to urban problems or perhaps would be aggressively pursuing poverty-reduction and redistributive strategies. Yet, since 1993, Hartford's local government has been controlled by a bipartisan conservative coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats that has set a distinctive tone of local governance, relying on such policy options as privatization, utilizing zoning to limit social services within the city, catering heavily to business interests, and enacting other conservative measures. Moreover, a tone of hostility on the part of the city council members toward public oversight and public participation, bolstered by local media and business interests supportive of the policy thrust of this governing coalition, contribute to a demobilized and fragmented electorate. Racial divisions simmer, voter turnout decreases with each election, and the social conditions for the vast majority of Hartford residents continue to deteriorate.

This article analyzes this shift in local political culture, details the local context, and assesses the debate over several specific policy options and the implications of these local events in Hartford and then discusses these issues in terms of the urban regime framework. Three specific examples of controversies that illustrate the particular nature of this municipal conservatism will be analyzed: (1) the attempt to privatize the management of the school system in Hartford by hiring the firm Educational Alternatives, Inc.; (2) the utilization of zoning as a mechanism to curtail social services in the city; and (3) limiting public participation and public oversight of city council activities through violations of Connecticut Freedom of Information provisions, dismantling mechanisms for public comment at city council meetings, and gutting a local ethics ordinance.

The first two issues have attracted national attention and generated significant interest among urban scholars and analysts. The latter issues provide deeper insight into the temperament of those who favor curtailing social services for the poor and opt for risky privatization schemes. In fairness and candor, it is important to note that this author has been heavily involved in local political developments in Hartford, including serving a term on the city council with an activist local third party. Accordingly, the account of what has transpired in Hartford in recent years is based on my grave concerns for the future of the city, especially its residents most in need.

**HOW TO IDENTIFY URBAN CONSERVATISM**

In order to frame this discussion so that the term "urban conservatism" is not simply an ad hoc supposition, I want to identify several sources that help build an appropriate conception of urban conservatism. Essentially, I use the term to incorporate at least three basic elements that represent a synthesis of both market and cultural conservatism with a punitive posture toward those most impoverished: first, what is viewed as a fairly standard component of conservative ideology, faith in the market and aversion to government intervention in the market; second, the more recent developments around the growing "private world"
as Fisher and Karger (1997) elaborate, encompassing an ethos of "the private" that includes but reaches beyond the trend toward privatization; and third, the punitive "mean spiritedness" that has become a hallmark of conservative social policy, especially toward the poor and most markedly toward those who receive public assistance. As I will argue later, in the local Hartford case, this temperament spills over into the more routine conduct of government and reveals itself in a generalized hostility toward public participation and oversight of government. Moreover, whether or not these ideas or behaviors are necessarily novel, in this case what is interesting—and for many, alarming—is how they specifically combine in pursuit of a conservative agenda on a local scene.

**The Supremacy of the Market and the New Private World**

One departure point for a discussion of conservative ideology and urban politics is Gordon's edited volume, *Problems in Political Economy: An Urban Perspective* (1971, 1977), a work that remains quite relevant. In contrasting conservative ideology with radical and liberal approaches, he identifies belief in the limited role of the state and faith in the "efficiency and optimality" of the market as essential elements of a conservative perspective. Government action is characterized as both inefficient and a potential infringement on personal liberties. Gordon offers Friedman's (1962) essay, "The Role of Government in a Free Society," as an illustration of this perspective, with its emphasis on government as a rule maker and umpire rather than a participant or player.

Within both Warner's (1968) historical analysis of "the private city," which uses the example of Philadelphia, and Squires' (1991) notion of "privatism and the city" in assessing contemporary urban political economy, emphasis is on the manner in which American urban politics has facilitated private sector growth. Yet, what is currently unfolding takes on a new, more pronounced quality of acquiescence to private sector imperatives and portends deeper consequences in terms of the well-being of urban populations.

Recent work by Fisher and Karger (1997) analyzes the development of the new "private world" and serves as a cogent portrayal of the backdrop for developments in this case study of Hartford. They elaborate an increasing privatization of life and society with three facets: private individuals, private spaces, and private institutions. Several elements are involved. First is a retreat from the social world and concern for others and into the realm of the personal, a process in which Americans, in particular, are becoming obsessively self-absorbed. Second, this is accompanied spatially by the decline of public space and the rise of gated communities, malls, tunnels, and elevated walkways. Third, these in turn reinforce a delegitimation of the social welfare state and a reorientation toward corporate needs, values, and goals. While America has always been an individualistic society, "the new privatization of life ... is occurring with faster speed and wider scope than ever before" (p. 4).

Fisher and Karger employ the term "privatization" to refer to more than the specific policy of transferring government functions to the private sector. It also encompasses "reorientation of political, social, economic and cultural institutions" (p. 11) to serve the imperatives of private capital:

The argument is that in the new global economy, nations cannot afford costly social programs. The intent of "privatization" is to dismantle the state as much as possible to reduce "social costs" on the corporate sector and the affluent, those, in theory, respon-
sible for stimulating the economy .... The context of privatization forces almost all social and political agendas away from social welfare conceptualizations toward laissez-faire, capitalist ones .... This strategy for "survival in the global economy" has swept across the globe, dominating not only national policy but local, urban options as well ... Accordingly, neoconservative policies and, to a somewhat lesser extent, neoliberal agendas seek to return cities to a "golden age of free enterprise." Social problems are ignored as much as possible as new business agendas of unfettered capitalism come to dominate global, national and local decision-making. Cities ... reprivatize by cutting public programs, turning public programs over to for-profit, private interests, and by ignoring festering social needs (Fisher & Kling, 1994). The problem of worsening poverty in the United States, for example, is deemed unsolvable; it is labeled the product of an "underclass" subculture and blamed on the victims of poverty and government programs (pp. 10–11).

The Attack on the Vulnerable and Their Supports

During the 1980s, as the globalization of capital and the privatization described above unfolded and the weight of economic and political change fell increasingly on poor and working-class segments of American society, progressive social analysis outlined the parameters of a new attack on the welfare state, buttressed by a growing vengeance toward the poor. The goal was, and continues to be, simply to strengthen the position of business through an overall attack against labor, rendering the working class too weak and frightened for effective response to the assault (Block, Cloward, Ehrenreich, & Piven, 1987). The state is both a battleground and, increasingly, a more potent instrument of this social philosophy:

(The business community) has launched a broad-scale attack on working-class standards of living, including intensified union-busting, demands for concessions in wages and benefits, and the imposition of a greater tax burden on the poor and the middle class relative to the rich .... The current attack on the welfare state is of a piece with the overall business offensive against labor. While employers have been pressing for concessions from their workers, business interests have supported an administration that is openly hostile to the welfare state .... The need for an expanded and reformed welfare state has perhaps never been greater, but the ideological opposition to the welfare state has never been so intense, so well organized, and so powerfully represented (pp. xii–xiii).

This mean-spiritedness also encompasses a retreat from racial justice (Steinberg, 1995); an attack on the gains of people of color and women; an anti-immigrant frenzy; and hostility toward language minorities, the rights of the disabled, gays, and lesbians, and affirmative action more generally. Attacks on the entire notion of a contemporary welfare state (Murray, 1984) and recycled, biologically rooted explanations of racial inequality, notably Herrnstein and Murray's The Bell Curve (1994), surface and form an academic backdrop for broad policy shifts in welfare and entitlements. What has developed is a politics of backlash, scapegoating, and divisiveness, all too familiar in various initiatives and propositions from California to Colorado to Maine and elsewhere. Thus, as American society becomes increasingly polarized economically and socially (Harrison & Bluestone, 1988), and as racial segregation continues to burden people of color and clouds the perceptions of
European Americans, many public policy responses mirror these developments rather than ameliorate them. An emphasis on punishment and prison construction has replaced the safety net and education (Davey, 1995).

Criticism and resistance to these developments generally focus on the national and state levels. Critical struggles over such issues as welfare entitlements or affirmative action are necessarily waged in a national arena, particularly focused on the Congress, the executive branch, or the federal courts. Parallel struggles often develop at state-level counterparts. Yet, there is also a local dimension to these problems in which issues are played out within the terms of municipal policy debates and municipal government action.

**Urban Regimes**

Within the literature on urban politics, typologies of urban political regimes are offered to help analyze the character of urban governance and particular constellations of political forces within cities who come into local office and who constitute the “regime.” The struggle over urban economic development—the inherent controversies over who benefits from particular development patterns—are depicted as the significant struggles of contemporary urban politics and governance (Stone, 1987; Stone, Orr & Imbroscio, 1991). Sites (1997) urges a more thorough incorporation of both the role of social movements and community mobilization, as well as the larger political and economic constraints faced by local political actors, into analysis of local politics and the literature on urban regimes. He traces successive mayoral administrations in New York City and argues that even reform-oriented officeholders such as David Dinkins and other “progressives” often fail to overcome the imperatives of a pro-growth agenda. In essence, while attempting progressive governance through largely symbolic actions, these regimes are so constrained that they can do little more than the standard pro-growth or caretaker regimes they often seek to replace.

Stone (1987) and Stone et al. (1991) distinguish among several types of American urban regimes: the corporate, the caretaker, the middle-class progressive, and the lower-class opportunity expansion. Varying from place to place, in general, the latter two emphasize middle- and low-income constituencies’ demands—expanded amenities and service delivery capacity, and opportunities for lower income groups. Corporate regimes emphasize the interests of downtown corporate sectors, promoting development that maximizes private business expansion through public support. Caretaker regimes generally consist of small business and homeowner populations, threatened simultaneously by displacement associated with growth and by higher taxes associated with progressive or redistributive measures. Generally, it is much more feasible to assemble a regime or governing coalition focused on development issues than on human resource needs.

Ramsay (1996) refers to the dominance of business interests as the “privileged narrative” but cautions not to underestimate the salience of local culture and traditions in the analysis of local political economies. Reed’s (1988) notion of the Black Urban Regime, also used by Bennett (1993) to analyze Harold Washington’s tenure in Chicago, encompasses the constraints and opportunities encountered by African-American mayors, including the economic distress and disinvestment in those communities from which African-Americans ascend into urban political leadership, severe fiscal constraints, and large “dependent” populations. African-American mayors face huge temptations to latch onto traditional growth coalitions in order to legitimize their administrations and reward supporters.
Kantar, Savitch, and Haddock (1997) enlarge the discussion of urban regimes in a comparative analysis, emphasizing the impact of structural and market factors on the different "bargaining environments" in which regimes function and how these factors, in combination with local and national political tradition, circumscribe the policy choices available to specific regimes. Within their framework, one category is termed "Dependent Private Bargaining," that is, an urban regime that is in a weak bargaining position with respect to the private market and in which mechanisms of popular control are not strongly developed. Detroit and Liverpool are highlighted as two regime types that correspond to these dependent conditions, with Detroit characterized as a "vendor regime" variant and Liverpool as a "radical regime" variant. Within the typology, the Hartford example probably more closely resembles the Detroit "vendor" model than any other, a variant in which the local government essentially "sell(s) the city's wares at bargain prices" (p. 358) at great advantage to private capital willing to locate there. Moreover, vendor regimes have "low voter turnout, weak popular control, and limited public accountability" (p. 358). These conditions exist within Hartford, but with an additional ideological dimension that incorporates a particularly punitive stance toward the poor, as will be demonstrated.

While the municipal government level is highly constrained in its ability to mitigate the national political economy (see, for example, Gottdiener, 1987; and Clarke & Kirby, 1990, in response), significant policy options remain at this level. It is within the political boundaries of cities where huge social issues of race, class, gender, inequality, and social policy converge and where the outcomes of struggles over political or economic change translate into daily reality: Local government action can significantly impact the manner in which these changes are experienced by those most affected. What city governments do in the areas of education, local welfare programs, treatment of indigent and marginalized populations, youth development, and police-community relations involves choices that seriously affect the quality of everyday living. Therefore, when municipal government in a city with the social conditions of Hartford takes on a distinctly conservative tone and adopts policies accordingly, these actions place an even greater burden on those in greatest need in the city.

**HARTFORD'S INFATUATION WITH URBAN CONSERVATISM**

The 1993 municipal election in Hartford introduced a distinctly different tone of government than had existed in recent years and presaged the unforeseen ideological currents in the 104th Congress. Over several election cycles, from the mid-1980s until 1993, the local political pendulum swung from a more typical pro-growth Democratic Party-controlled local government to a more redistributive inclination, particularly embodied in Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry and elements of the 1991–1993 city council.

**Recent Political History**

The city's recent political history reflects the growing political influence, organization, and, at times, political disarray of the city's African-American and Puerto Rican communities, as well as the increasing needs and claims of the population on a fragmented city government. Since city charter revisions of the 1940s and 1960s, Hartford's city government structure has included a nine-member city council, elected at large, that functions as the city's policy-making body with the power to hire (and fire) the city manager. A largely
ceremonial but very visible position of mayor has been retained, although without voting or executive authority in the city government. On the council, a minimum of three seats are reserved for a minority party based on a state statute guaranteeing minority party representation. Given the overwhelming number of registered Democrats in the city, Democrats routinely take six of the nine seats, and internal Democratic Party primaries often generate the city’s most heated electoral contests. Those who win in Democratic primaries usually are assured victory in general elections.

Through the mid-1980s, Republicans held the three council seats reserved for a minority party effectively by default. But in 1987, a local third party, People for Change (PFC), formed as an activist progressive electoral coalition and ran three candidates for the minority party seats, capturing two of the three spots (Cruz, 1998; Fitzgerald & Simmons, 1991; Simmons, 1994). Similar results occurred in 1989. In 1991, People for Change finally won all three seats, when this author captured the seat previously held by a lone Republican. This was done in alliance with a slate of novice insurgent Democrats, headed by incumbent Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry, that had ousted all of the incumbent Democratic council members in an earlier Democratic primary. In 1993, PFC lost all three seats, and it did not mount a slate in 1995 when Republicans reassumed control of the seats.

Carrie Saxon Perry, a several term state representative and African-American woman, was first elected mayor in 1987, succeeding the city’s first African-American mayor, Thirman Milner (1981 to 1987), who had urged her to seek the office. Despite lack of authority in the position, the mayor is very visible within the community and envisioned as the city’s policy leader. Yet, most individuals elected to the post in recent decades have been frustrated by its city charter-specified limitations. By 1991, Perry was ready to forge an alliance with PFC and other political forces to mount a slate to replace all of the incumbents on the city council. Their platforms promised a greater role for the mayor and more accessible city government. An important component of the coalition, PFC emphasized progressive, redistributive policies and had strong ties to popular movements, particularly labor.

From 1991 to 1993, Hartford’s city council more accurately than ever before reflected the city’s demographics: There were three African-Americans, three Puerto Ricans, and three whites (previous councils had only two Puerto Ricans and four whites). The mayor was an African-American woman, an African-American man became city manager, and the corporation counsel’s position was filled by a Puerto Rican. These developments demonstrated the increasingly important role of the Puerto Rican community in Hartford politics, but also intimated the challenges of a tenuous multiracial coalition approach to government (see Simmons, 1996b, 1996c).

After a fitful two years of attempting progressive governing (Simmons, 1996b, 1996c), the tables turned. By the middle of the term, the coalition had disintegrated and the atmosphere at city hall was extremely contentious. The media and downtown forces that were not particularly cordial to the entire coalition, in combination with many traditional Democratic Party actors, coalesced to take back city hall. By the end of the 1993 election season (the September primary and the November general election) the fallout included: (1) the defeat of incumbent Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry; (2) the wresting of three minority party seats from People for Change by a reinvigorated local Republican Party; (3) the formation of a “fusion” ticket among the two anti-Perry Democrats who survived the September primary with the three Republican council candidates in the November election; and (4) a suc-
cessful independent bid for mayor by defeated Democratic primary mayoral candidate, Michael Peters, a white political operative from the southern part of the city.

The turnabout produced a conservative majority on the city council and a supportive voice in the mayor’s office. Immediately after the November election, in a gesture of conservative bipartisanship and to ensure that the four Democratic allies of former Mayor Perry who were elected could not control the council by virtue of controlling its majority party, the position of majority leader was assumed by a Republican council member, and the position of deputy mayor was given to one of the two anti-Perry Democrats. The bloc of five (which became a bloc of six after the mid-term resignation and replacement of one of the four Democrats in the council minority) became an entrenched voting bloc. So began Hartford’s journey into conservative municipal governance.

The local popular media hailed the changes in Hartford City Hall as being more attuned to the needs of business. The new regime represented not only a shift in policy direction, but also a type of local realignment in which white South End interests reasserted dominance, despite the fact that Hartford is clearly a “majority minority” city in terms of demographics. Moreover, the composition of the city council itself shifted to five whites, three African-Americans, one Puerto Rican (later an additional Puerto Rican joined the group to fill a vacancy) and a white male mayor (still in office). From 1995 through 1999, the council will have been composed of four whites, three African-Americans and two Puerto Ricans. This balance is important not merely for symbolism, but also as either potential or actual political rallying points for the segments that may perceive themselves at a power disadvantage.

The “Magician of Hartford”

The election of Mike Peters as mayor was greeted with gleeful enthusiasm by the downtown business community. Much was done to assure Peters instant popularity. Simultaneously, Carrie Perry was essentially vilified in the pre- and post-election media commentary so that Peters would realize early high approval. An outpouring of editorial support from The Hartford Courant, advice from officials of business groups such as the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce, and public support from influential business leaders such as Aetna’s former CEO, Ronald Compton, and other quarters ensued. Peters’ supporters developed a brilliant public relations strategy for the newly elected mayor. For example, individuals involved in the private company that manages the city’s Section 8 Program developed “Mayor Mike’s Companies for Kids,” a program in which businesses would give contributions to various service organizations for their youth-related activities and projects. TCI’s local cable franchise granted free airtime on its channels for public service-type promotions entitled “Mayor Mike’s Minutes” in which Peters is filmed at different Hartford locations promoting attractions and special neighborhood features. During the 1993 election cycle, Aetna’s Compton had launched a broadside attack at city hall, claiming it was anti-business and better get its act together if corporations were to stay in Hartford; in 1994, after Peters had been in office a year, Compton declared that the problems of city hall were solved.

Any liabilities or dubious qualities of Peters were transformed into assets: His lack of in-depth knowledge on issues and his use of wisecracks rather than substantive comments were heralded as a down-to-earth approach, spiced with humor. Abundant time spent at
local bars was translated into the mayor making the rounds in the neighborhoods and keeping up with varied constituencies (Puleo, 1997). His popularity has become so entrenched that even constituencies that might disagree with his positions on such issues as municipal layoffs or privatizing the management of the school system separate their grievances from Peters. He is viewed separately from the positions and policies he espouses, even those with which segments of his support base disagree or, in some instances, suffer loss or disadvantage.

By Peters’ second term, he began to gain national recognition based largely on the style with which he holds office. In a nationally syndicated column, George Will, drawing from the Peters experience, outlined an interesting theme for urban politics—that of exalting the politics of personality over politics of substance—and stated that “congeniality is Peters’ ideology, and with it he may be pioneering a new urban politics.” Since the mayor’s office in Hartford has little formal power,

Peters’ job is to set a cheerful tone for the town, and to make people feel as good as possible while waiting for good things to happen from events largely beyond his control— an economic boom, cultural regeneration, a fit of generosity from the state government (Will, 1996).

Although he was not listed as one of the 25 most dynamic mayors in America according to the November 11, 1996, issue of Newsweek, Peters did receive one of Governing magazine’s “Public Officials of the Year for 1996” awards. Earlier described as the “Magician of Hartford” (Gurwitt, 1996a), Peters was singled out in the magazine’s December 1996 issue (Gurwitt, 1996b) not for turning the city’s economy around—“poverty and joblessness, abandoned housing and neighborhood distress are still too prevalent … to boast of certain rejuvenation”—but rather for instilling a sense of confidence that reversing the decline is “possible” (p. 31). Despite the mayor’s lack of formal power in the local government, he was lauded for cutting the budget every year in office, driving hard bargains with public employee unions, and tackling “head-on Hartford’s role as a regional social-service reserve” (Gurwitt, 1996b, p. 31).

The Conservative Impulse

In terms of both their priorities in the private sector and their attitude toward the poor, the substantive direction of these officeholders began to be revealed in early 1994 shortly after they took office. The use of a downtown church for a soup kitchen was the first in a series of policy decisions that would culminate in enacting zoning ordinances to constrain social services, although such action was not then envisaged. The soup kitchen in question was operated by Catholic nuns in a location near the central business district and had outgrown its space. The nuns wanted to relocate into the basement of an elegant downtown Catholic church that is directly adjacent to the Hartford Civic Center. The Bishop of the Hartford archdiocese blocked the move, and the new mayor and council echoed agreement with this action as a means of preserving the downtown business environment. This issue provoked a storm of controversy both within the Catholic church and in the larger community, including vigils in front of a local cathedral, many letters to the editor in the local press, and wide discussion and comment. The soup kitchen eventually found alternative
quarters, but a bitter taste was left with some in the community over the stand taken by the new mayor and council.

This direction reemerged some months later when a developer considered purchasing a vacant downtown hotel building and wanted to reserve several floors as "sober floors," intermediate-term residences for those in recovery from substance abuse. Again, the council and mayor voiced opposition and vowed to block the sale. The hotel remains vacant.

In spring 1994, during budget deliberations for fiscal year 1995, the group's priorities began to be more fully revealed, particularly the first examples of its inclination toward privatization. A children's health clinic operated by the City's health department was given over to a private hospital. A public-private Job Training Partnership Act consortium for employment programs that had been administered by the City began to realign operations toward total private sector control, a move supported by the council majority and mayor.

**THREE CONTROVERSY: LOCAL CONSERVATISM IN HARTFORD**

Three areas that personify the thrust of local conservatism in Hartford are: (1) the abortive attempt to privatize the management of the school system; (2) the passage of zoning regulations to halt social service expansion; and (3) the scaling back of public participation and oversight into local government, including the gutting of an ethics ordinance. In analyzing each issue, the emphasis is on the forces involved in each controversy, the nature of the debate, and the eventual outcome. The opportunities for popular mobilization and the impact of this mobilization are also discussed. Moreover, although progressive activist forces and various community groups have inserted themselves into these issues, despite defeat, a space still exists to assert an alternative view or set of demands, an attempt to reconstruct the narrative (Ramsay, 1996). On occasion, these views and demands affect the outcomes, not necessarily in an immediate sense, but rather in setting the stage for later activity. Thus, while popular forces in Hartford continue to wage struggles around these seemingly hopeless causes, "fighting the good fight" is not totally futile: It can lay the groundwork for future, more potent resistance.

**School Privatization**

Hartford's abortive experiment with privatization involved several factors. First, there was a general predisposition among policy leaders to embrace privatization (see also Ascher, Fruchter & Berne, 1996; Richards, Shore, & Sawicky, 1996). Second, the teachers' union, the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT), had been repeatedly singled out as a key factor impeding educational reform by politicians and some community forces. Its contract was viewed as too costly, and teachers were depicted as lacking in accountability. Private management was envisioned as a means of disciplining the HFT. Numerous newspaper editorials reinforced these attitudes. Third, a feeling of desperation among vocal parent and community forces translated into a view of privatization as a kind of last-ditch solution to educational failure. Fourth, the division of labor between the board of education, which sets educational policy but lacks control over funding levels on the one hand, and the city council, which allocates the budget for education but lacks control over educational policy on the other, contributed to confusion and contention. Moreover, funding lev-
els for education in the city have always been inadequate to address the deep needs among Hartford’s students.

All of these issues are set against the backdrop of a crisis-ridden public education system in Hartford beset by low achievement levels. The local school system’s students are over 94% students of color, at least 50% of whom are Puerto Rican and Latino students and over 40% of whom are African-American and West Indian students, and many live near or below the poverty level. Most surrounding suburbs have school populations that are overwhelmingly white. Racial segregation and isolation have been the subjects of a major desegregation lawsuit in the state, *Sheff v. O’Neill*, whose claims were upheld by the Connecticut Supreme Court in 1996. An exceedingly slow process of educational change is unfolding in the state. In the spring of 1997, after the privatization experiment failed and after one of three local high schools was threatened with loss of accreditation, the Connecticut legislature voted to take over the Hartford school system and dismantle the local board of education for a period of at least five years. Simultaneously, the legislature enacted legislation to begin to address the *Sheff* decision. However, the plaintiffs were not satisfied with these efforts, so there will likely be future legal action. Privatization was pursued essentially as an alternative method of addressing the education crisis. This strategy began with a great deal of support in city hall, but the “experiment” ended as a colossal failure.

In the spring of 1994, the Hartford Board of Education began a process that culminated in the hiring of Educational Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), a for-profit company based in Minnesota, to manage the school system. After a period of public debate, followed by several months of protracted negotiations between the board, EAI, and city officials (including several city council members), the company was hired to run the schools.

The move to hire EAI received heavy support from the local business lobby, the same forces that are important supporters of Mayor Peters. One former board of education member who vigorously championed the effort is employed by the chamber of commerce in a leadership development program. The chamber collaborates closely with local businesses, especially the large insurance companies whose presence in the city lends Hartford much of its identity, and also with the city’s major media outlets, particularly the powerful single daily newspaper, *The Hartford Courant*. The newspaper emphatically supported hiring EAI and scolded the “obstructionists” at city hall in several editorials during the protracted negotiations between the board, EAI, and city hall. During the 1995 school board primary and the general election, EAI was the defining campaign issue. Candidates who favored EAI received significant backing from the paper, as well as from the downtown business community—notably the chamber. Additional support came from Mayor Peters, who used his popularity to sway those EAI skeptics among his own base. The goal in these elections was to preserve a majority of officeholders who would generally be supportive of privatization efforts, even if they had reservations about the job EAI was doing.

Also supportive of EAI was Together We Can, a parent group spawned by Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART), one of the local grassroots, Alinsky-style neighborhood organizations, which had been active in lobbying the previous city council for increased educational funding. During the 1991–1993 council term, Together We Can was relentless in its pursuit of several million additional dollars for the education budget, disrupting budget deliberations and lobbying intensely. It eventually served as the springboard for a suc-
cessful board candidate who became an ardent proponent of EAI. It also singled out the teachers’ union as a key factor in educational deterioration in the city.

An array of forces within Hartford opposed the hiring of EAI, including the HFT and other education unions. Both the HFT and EAI sponsored trips to gather information in Baltimore where EAI had a contract to manage nine public schools. Several education unions filed lawsuits attempting to bar the board and the city from hiring EAI, but they were rejected in court. The unions also expressed apprehension about the quality of instruction associated with EAI’s methods and the implications of educational decision making based on profitability. They were concerned over issues such as the replacement of para-professionals with less skilled, more transitory interns—individuals defined by EAI as recent college graduates who would be brought in on a temporary basis.

Several parent groups and other elected officials opposed EAI, including a state senator and several state representatives. Large rallies took place during the debate to hire EAI and during its rocky tenure in the city.

Even among the Republican city council members who were generally enthusiastic about privatization schemes, skepticism developed about EAI, specifically the terms of the agreement shaped between EAI and the school board. Had EAI proceeded more judiciously, it would have found sufficient local political and community support to use advantageously in building its portfolio. EAI’s entire tenure in Hartford, however, was rocky and fraught with controversy. Surprisingly, for a firm involved in such a highly controversial and potentially groundbreaking undertaking, EAI seemed to approach its task in a careless and even reckless fashion. Given that the stakes were high in terms of both the firm’s future and the entire privatization movement, its conduct was particularly foolish.

A host of implementation issues ensued, including how the firm would realize profits. EAI had to extract its profits from savings it could identify, hence the incentive to cut costs. Yet, to many this belied educational sense. One controversy arose involving a reported deficit that would have necessitated layoffs and a hiring freeze, only to be later contradicted by conflicting and eventually verified figures confirming that no deficit existed. EAI detractors believed that the deficit would have been an excuse to trigger layoffs so that EAI could realize savings and extract its profit. Moreover, EAI spent several million dollars on start-up costs, including renting expensive office space, retaining a public relations firm, and incurring travel costs and other expenditures for which it requested reimbursement from funds within the board of education’s budget allocation. This triggered tremendous objection and protest. The City’s finance director maintained that sufficient savings had not been identified to enable payment for the charges.

Eventually, EAI and the board scaled down the firm’s activities to focus on four schools and one special program, specifically on physical improvements, the installation of new computer labs, and financial management activities for the entire system. EAI was also involved in contract negotiations between the board and the teachers’ union.

After a raucous primary and general election in 1995 in which pro-EAI forces narrowly held onto a majority on the board (a five/four split), in early 1996 the board and EAI negotiated on how to begin to settle outstanding billing issues. Yet, in mid-January 1996, as the issues involved in figuring out how Hartford could pay EAI became increasingly problematic, three of the five pro-EAI board members announced that they believed the time had come to end the arrangement with EAI and took formal action to that effect. The billing
issues, the contractual difficulties, and the problem of EAI’s necessity to turn a profit were not amenable to a solution. Despite the fact that these issues had constituted the essence of debate in the electoral campaign three months earlier and were raised by EAI opponents, it was only when the erstwhile EAI supporters decided that these constituted insurmountable obstacles that contract termination was discussed.

EAI then announced it would cease operations in Hartford but intended to sue the City, claiming a breach of contract, to recover its costs. An out-of-court settlement was reached in the summer of 1996 in which EAI was paid $6.3 million for computers and other expenses in exchange for agreeing not to pursue any lawsuits against the City. EAI left town, taking with it dashed hopes and hard feelings—as Republican Councilman John O’Connell described it, it had been “a rather expensive mistake.” One of the board members elected in November 1995 with the slate of EAI supporters, Donald Romanik, stated, “They are going to go away, never to come back” (Green, 1996).

This episode dealt the privatization movement an embarrassing blow. Yet, many in local government, as well as their support base in the business community and media, were so ideologically committed to privatization that they were willing to risk the odds and suffer great public embarrassment in order to pursue this agenda. Defending the strategy of privatization, rather than improving education, seemed to be the priority.

**Limiting Social Services: Zoning People**

The most punitive side of the new urban conservatism is evidenced in local government’s stance over social services for the poor. Those in government in Hartford are not merely interested in facilitating private sector initiatives such as privatization—they also have embraced the punitive stances described earlier.

After the 1995 municipal elections, as the second term of this regime began, all of the remaining liberal or progressive officeholders were replaced with conservative council members. In the twilight of the 1993–1995 council term, the body passed a moratorium on social service expansion for six months. In March 1996, the succeeding council extended this moratorium for six months and later the group enacted permanent zoning ordinances, making it difficult for social services to open or relocate in many areas of the city.

The proponents and opponents of these measures agreed that Hartford bears an inordinate regional social service burden and that suburban towns make little if any effort to address such needs. The disagreement was over whether the measures in question would address the inequities, how they would impact the city’s poorest residents who rely on the services, and whether the measures could accomplish the goals articulated by the proponents.

The six-month moratorium on social service expansion enacted in late 1995 was championed by then-Councilwoman and later Deputy Mayor Frances Sanchez, with solid support from Mayor Peters. In arguing for the moratorium, Sanchez continually referred to the concentration of social services in Hartford as “Poverty, Inc.” or a “Mecca” for the poor—images the city should shed. At the time of the first vote, the action was largely overlooked or unnoticed by human service providers and advocates. However, by the beginning of 1996, as new proposals emerged to broaden the moratorium to include additional types of services and activities and to lengthen its duration, community forces began to react and organize on the issue. Included in the list of services covered by the moratorium were half-
way houses, substance abuse centers, shelters, clubhouses, community centers, and a vaguely defined catch-all category, "other medical and health services."

The vote on the moratorium took place in March 1996, after several spirited public hearings on the proposal. By that time, a council member elected in November 1995, Attorney Art Feltman, vigorously joined Sanchez in her efforts and took particular interest in advocating for the moratorium. Feltman and Sanchez stated that during the moratorium the City would study the problem and then come up with recommendations for permanent zoning changes. They characterized potential changes in zoning as a means of keeping or attracting middle-class elements to the city and spurring economic development. In answer to concerns raised by civil liberties advocates that the moratorium and potential zoning changes might violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Feltman's response was "Because you can't discriminate against them, does that mean they should go everywhere?" (McIntire, 1995).

At the hearings on the moratorium, the forces organized against the measure included African-American and Puerto Rican organizational leaders, the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, the Legal Aid Society, gay rights activists, homeless advocates, shelter staff members and other social service providers, and community activists from the ranks of the former People for Change network. Supporters of the moratorium were mainly elderly white South End forces, as well as several key activists and neighborhood clubs of the community organization Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART in its totality did not endorse the moratorium), a small business organization from the South End, and other individuals.


The Hartford Courant, in its first editorial on the issue, "The city needs a timeout" (February 16, 1996), came out in favor of the moratorium. Viewing the measure as a means to craft a rational approach to social service siting, the Courant stated:

Although the moratorium is defensible, it should be understood that such a move would be of a temporary nature. A far more effective solution would be regional cost-sharing of services or full state reimbursement for its tax exempt properties in Hartford... Social services advocates say it's Hartford's obligation to serve the poor and needy... But Hartford has met its obligation—and more—and will continue to do so. What it seeks now is to protect heavily impacted neighborhoods and its tax base by changing the zoning code.

As the controversy persisted, the local press began to scrutinize the issue more deeply. On the pages of The Hartford Courant, two local columnists took somewhat differing views, and several op-ed pieces were published. In response to an op-ed piece that I wrote (Simmons, 1996a) during the moratorium, in which I argued that social services might be
viewed as assets rather than as a drain on a community both in terms of employment and social cohesion, Courant columnist Tom Condon (1996) stated:

Former council member Louise B. Simmons of the UConn School of Social Work called the measure “a regressive step toward a less humane and more intolerant community ... punitive and divisive ... offered with little connection to the real needs of people who live in Hartford.” ... Simmons is consistent: she’s wrong on every point. The moratorium points exactly at the real needs of Hartford’s residents. There are several reasons to support it, aside from Simmons’ opposition .... Simmons and others say that the social services provide jobs and that area schools are training people for these jobs. The trick is not to provide more jobs for social workers, it is to provide jobs for clients. We must produce, not redistribute.... Hartford’s greatest need is more small factories, foundries, warehouses, distribution centers, machine shops and other places that put people to work. If we can’t get them, then government ought to create WPA-style jobs.

Condon did not understand that nothing would have pleased me more than WPA-style solutions.

Condon’s colleague, political columnist Don Noel, took a different stand in his April 3, 1996, column:

Cities are uniquely equipped to help needy people ... not just poor people; people of means also are beset by joblessness, family break-up, alcohol or drug addiction, AIDS... If (the council) hoped the moratorium would get the suburbs’ attention, they’ve so far failed, and they merely look mean-spirited. They’d better get busy looking for real solutions (The Hartford Courant, p. A19).

In late spring 1996, the council came forth with a set of proposed permanent changes to the City’s zoning code. Six categories of services would be affected: charitable services such as soup kitchens and foodbanks; club houses and social clubs; community centers; extended care residences and hospices; transient lodgings such as shelters and boarding houses; and rehabilitation homes and halfway houses. Existing facilities and organizations would be “grandfathered” into the zoning code and therefore not affected. However, new services and facilities would be covered.

Proposed zoning changes involved such issues as how many units within multiunit buildings could be inhabited by people in rehabilitation programs and the number of people who could live in group homes or halfway houses. Shelters could house a maximum of 100 people. Clubhouses and social clubs would no longer be allowed in residential areas or certain business districts. Minimum lot sizes for certain facilities would be changed. Restrictions on zones where certain facilities could be located would be enacted. Municipal licensing would be introduced for several types of services, subject to yearly review.

When the proposed zoning ordinances became public, the Courant began to look more closely at the proposals. In a lead editorial of June 24, 1996, entitled “A cosmetic solution at best,” the paper stated that:

The Hartford City Council may be giving new meaning to the phrase “out of sight, out of mind” with its proposal to consign many facilities for the poor to the city’s outlying areas. The motive behind the plan is sound. Hartford is a city in search of a middle class
... But in a city where half the population is on public assistance, it's unrealistic to think we can banish poor people to the borderlands (The Hartford Courant, p. A10).

The forces opposing the zoning changes coalesced during the summer of 1996. Generally, the Hartford City Council holds public hearings on proposed ordinance changes and then, by city charter, waits until the next meeting to take the vote. Over the summer, the council only held one meeting per month in July and August instead of the usual two. Opponents of the zoning changes assumed that there would be a public hearing on August 12, before the council meeting, and that the matter would be voted on in September. However, a few days before the August 12 hearing, it was made public that the council intended to vote the same evening on the entire package of zoning changes—some 15 separate ordinances, many with multiple sections. Therefore, any comments made by the public would effectively fall on deaf ears: There would be no time to draft changes and go through the formalities and procedures required to incorporate changes into the final version of the ordinances.

The night of the hearing, dozens of people filled the council chamber. Many gave eloquent testimony. One woman, born in South Africa, stated that she was incredulous that having survived apartheid, she now had to see this development in Hartford and sardonically suggested that the council "post sentries at the border" to keep poor people out. A former Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor stated that she had been home watching the hearing on the local cable station and was so concerned that she got up and got dressed again to come down to register her protest. A local minister stated that in a time when the private sector is being asked to assume more responsibility for the poor, it seemed "an absurd role" for government to restrict private organizations' ability to do so. Clients of a mental health program expressed their fears. Many urged the council to take time to incorporate the issues raised by those in attendance and to wait until September or such time when some of the technical problems with the ordinances could be resolved.

The Courant had written an editorial that morning, "Don't make a mockery of public hearing" (August 12, 1996) stating that "council members will have virtually no time to digest or act on any formation and objections presented at the hearing, regardless of how valid they may be. This has all the appearances of a setup ..... Gaveling the hearing closed and ramming through the ordinance would make a mockery of the proceedings."

That is exactly what happened. After a round of self-congratulatory speeches by council members on what a splendid job Sanchez and Feltman had done on such a complex problem, the council members voted. They were oblivious to the technical problems raised earlier in the evening. Ultimately, their deeper sentiments were declared by Councilman Feltman, a Democrat who would soon be elected to the state legislature and leave the council:

This is not about zoning and social services...This is about the direction of our city and our country. Republicans and thinking Democrats in this country have gotten away from the mentality that Big Brother is going to take care of everyone. (Puleo, 1996).

He continued that it was not the city's responsibility to provide three meals a day to the poor.

On this issue, there was not significant public involvement of downtown business forces, although the business community generally does support efforts to reduce the concentra-
tion of an impoverished population in Hartford. While such a position is not publicly heralded by business leaders, in some candid moments, these sentiments are revealed. For example, a weekly Hartford Courant column covering downtown business-oriented social events reported the following story:

Wilson Wilde, former Hartford Steam Boiler chairman, was recently honored by the Connecticut Long Rivers Council, part of the Boy Scouts of America. At the party he shared his ideas on how to improve the city ... "We need to depopulate the city and reduce the number of people who are basically in distress," Wilde said. "We need to bulldoze housing projects, plant grass and find a base in which decent people can find employment." Wilde suggested that the state provide financial incentives to encourage lower-income people in particular to start new lives in rural Connecticut, in towns like Enfield, Haddam and Goshen (Seremet, 1995).

Since the enactment of these zoning ordinances, advocates have been unable to identify any specific organization that has yet been affected. Although dozens of social service organizations remain in Hartford, a test case has not been found to challenge the legality of the measures over such issues as violating the ADA. Perhaps because the resources to open new services are extremely limited or because existing organizations were indeed grandfathered into the ordinances, thus far the expected challenge has not been presented, although opponents of the ordinances await the opportunity to do so.

"Ethics-Shmetics, Public-Shmublic": Limiting Public Oversight and Participation in Local Government

While the EAI experience and zoning ordinances garnered national attention, several locally significant actions illustrate additional facets of the conservative thrust at Hartford City Hall. These actions serve to diminish popular expectations and participation in government—contracting the scope of the local state—and specifically reverse several measures adopted during the 1991–1993 council term to encourage public participation in council deliberations and strengthen public accountability through enacting a local ethics ordinance. Moreover, certain actions of this conservative council are clear violations of Connecticut Freedom of Information provisions.

Public Participation

Hartford City Council meetings are extremely formal, with specific procedures and protocols. The council chamber resembles a courtroom with a semi-circular raised dias and a wooden bar that separates the public from the officials. Once the meeting is gavelled to order by the mayor, only the mayor, the nine city council members, the city manager, the corporation counsel, and the town clerk may participate.

Before the council meetings formally begin, public hearings are scheduled on the agenda. Technically separate from the meetings, these hearings are mandated on zoning matters, pension issues, and a limited number of other matters. Public hearings may also be scheduled on the third Monday evening of the month, the Monday between the two regular meetings of the council. At these hearings, no other council business is heard and only five council members are required to attend. At the very end of the meetings on the third Mon-
day, there is an agenda item: Public Comment. This is the only formal opportunity the public has to comment on issues unrelated to the zoning or other matters that are typical of the council’s public hearings. Generally by that time, most of the council members have left the meeting.

The 1991 campaign for mayor and city council stressed opening up government to public participation and input. Early in the 1991–1993 term, the group established public comment sessions before each council meeting. Seven-thirty p.m. was established as the public comment period, and the goal was to start the formal meetings at the customary 8 p.m. However, an increasing number of organizations and individuals came to use these sessions to raise a myriad of issues or to take individual officeholders or the entire group to task about matters of concern. The public comment period grew more lengthy, and often meetings lasted until well after 10 or 11 p.m. Moreover, all officials took their share of criticism. Sometimes scores of people filled the council chamber: Children would do performances to lobby for recreation activities; police dogs would get medals of recognition for years of service; and during the most fractious times, prayer services were held in attempts to soothe the division. The Courant became impatient with the sessions, finding them too “circus-like.”

The decisions of the council members elected since 1993 began to attract critics to meetings to register grievances. The 1995–1997 council in particular had little stomach for public criticism. Individual council members would walk out when the subject of criticism. Certain feisty leaders in the African-American community particularly piqued the Republicans. To allay their discomfort with this scrutiny, council members first limited the public comment sessions to the first of the two regularly scheduled meetings each month and later abolished them completely. Now the only formal opportunity for public comment is once again at the end of the public hearings on the third Mondays.

**Freedom of Information**

Connecticut Freedom of Information provisions mandate that public bodies conduct their business in public. Therefore, the number of public officials from any public body who can meet together privately, outside of regular meetings or committee meetings, must be fewer than the number that constitutes a quorum for the body. Party caucuses are allowed, but only for elected officials: No staff or appointed officials can be present.

Common practice preceding and during the People for Change years was for the Democrats to meet in a caucus before the council meetings to discuss agenda items and for PFC (or Republicans) to meet separately. Since the Democrats numbered six, they were subject to Freedom of Information provisions. PFC could be more relaxed since their numbers did not constitute a quorum, and they took the opportunity to meet with PFC activists and others to go over the agenda. Before each meeting, one Democrat and one PFC council member would meet with the town clerk to discuss the mechanics of the agenda.

In 1994, before each meeting, the council began to meet as a whole in caucus, Democrats and Republicans together—a clear violation of Freedom of Information standards. During the 1991–1993 term, The Hartford Courant was severely critical of a meeting held with all nine newly elected council members and the mayor before taking office. The Courant continually referred to the meeting in its criticism of the work of that council, but it did not raise the actual illegality of the caucuses of the succeeding council until 1996, the group’s
second term. The 1993–1995 council leadership decided to leave the door open to the conference room in which the meetings were held in order to answer any criticism. In their next term, they reverted to separate caucuses after there had been substantial criticism by local Democratic Party activists for handing over so much power to Republicans and only after belated attention in the local press.

The Ethics Ordinance and Commission

During the 1991–1993 council term, much effort went into the establishment of an ethics ordinance. Several highly publicized conflict of interest problems among council members led to the passage of an ordinance with rigorous standards. One of its provisions called for the appointment of an ethics commission that would be available to hear complaints of alleged conflicts of interest on the part of public officials. Stringent financial reporting and disclosure provisions were spelled out. Due to excessive procrastination and maneuvering by a faction of council members, the ordinance finally was adopted in late summer 1993, just before the election period, and the actual naming of the commission members was left for the succeeding council.

One of the council members who served during both the 1991–1993 and 1993–1995 terms (and one of two Perry allies reelected in 1993), Elizabeth Horton Sheff, waged an intense effort to get the commission instated. The mayor was required to nominate individuals for the ethics commission and the council had to affirm their appointment. After months of foot-dragging by Mayor Peters, Horton Sheff filed suit against Peters to get him to submit the nominations. Yet, even after Mayor Peters finally named commissioners, the commission failed to meet until April 1996. Moreover, in late 1996, the city council passed a series of revisions to the original ordinance that exempted several public officials from compliance and weakened its financial disclosure requirements.

The city council also had to approve the rules and procedures of the ethics commission before it could actually begin work and hear complaints. These rules were shelved until March 1997 and adopted only after considerable prodding by The Hartford Courant. When finally adopting the rules with seven affirmative votes and two abstentions, statements by the council members revealed their irritation with the obligatory action:

"The mayor was concerned about getting the press off our backs. We decided to just move it and get it out of the way," (Councilman and Majority Leader John B.) Stewart confessed.

"I don't like big government, and this is just another layer," (Councilman Michael T.) McGary said. ("The dawn of ethics in Hartford," 1997, p. A8).

Among local critics, these issues and comparable behavior came to be identified as the "ethics-shmhetics, public-shmublic syndrome," which revealed a tone that is not merely conservative or even mean-spirited, but also arrogant, belligerent, and disdainful of the very electorate who support these officeholders. Moreover, the tone is so inhospitable to public input and oversight that some forces that were once involved in local struggles have withdrawn, succumbing to pessimism and a sense of futility about local politics. Other reform forces still try to devise contained but realistic strategies for local resistance.
DISCUSSION

As these issues have unfolded in Hartford, the city’s social crisis has intensified. The education system has been taken over by the state. Large-scale property abandonment continues unabated. Social stress persists regarding education, youth development, unemployment, and the overall quality of life in the city. Economic development is at a snail’s pace. In comparison to other urban areas, both those that are thriving and those that are slowly rebuilding from decline, Hartford seems somehow enmeshed in a pattern of deterioration. Rusk (1993) refers to Hartford as one of the most “inelastic” cities in the US, a city with some of the most intractable problems of tax base erosion and social stress and a city unable to capture growth—one in which he would least want to be mayor or a policy maker.

What is transpiring in Hartford may signify one developing trend in urban governance, perhaps even a full-fledged new regime type. Perhaps not. Certainly, parallels exist with some dimensions of the Giuliani administration in New York City, particularly in terms of social welfare policy issues and intolerance of the survival strategies of the poor. Critiques of the urban regime literature as insufficiently incorporating the impact of popular mobilization on the fortunes of regimes notwithstanding (e.g., Sites, 1997), it is clear that vastly different approaches to urban governance do exist that embody the differing ideologies and social bases of officeholders. These distinctions yield huge variations in both the tone and substance of local governing. In terms of Stone et al.’s (1991) regime framework, those in local office in Hartford are less acquiescent or compliant than the caretaker regime and more mean-spirited than the pro-growth coalition. They are avid and even reckless in the pursuit of privatism and in diminishing local government’s role in helping those in need. They make themselves immune from public criticism or public participation and impervious to rational argument or debate. In Kantor et al.’s (1997) discussion of the bargaining environments of local regimes, it is difficult to locate another regime type that approximates the ideological intensity of Hartford. Accordingly, as many have asked, how does such a regime survive, given the tremendous needs of the population within the city? How is such a regime sustained and from whom does it draw support?

There are several strands of argument that offer some indications why such a regime enjoys its developing longevity. First, it receives immense support from the business community and is celebrated as setting a business-friendly tone, the “privileged narrative” in Ramsay’s (1996) terms. This translates into support from an influential local press that is extremely business-oriented, even despite the critical editorials cited in this article. The media characterization of the 1991–1993 city council as beset by bickering helped to deflate popular support and dampen expectations, so that when the current group in city hall is lauded for its more decorous, no-nonsense approach to government, such a positive public image is greeted by some elements in the city with a type of relief. Many residents, particularly those who participate in voting, conceivably want to be able to support local government and are desperate for what appears to be some type of solution to local problems. Although some residents are becoming more disaffected with local politics, others who remain involved rely on the local media to inform their decisions and are willing to chance support for officeholders who pursue such propositions as privatization.

The support for this group is strongest in the segment of the population that constitutes what remains of the white working class and middle class in Hartford, particularly its most
politically organized elements. These forces are fearful of falling property values, rising
taxes, and deteriorating services—especially education—and are afraid of racial succes-
sion in local politics. Many blame Hartford's problems on its poor: If the poor are dis-
persed and if the services that cater to them are curtailed, then, so the argument goes, the
city can regain its economic health. Community organizations that operate in these areas of
the city, even some that began in the Alinsky tradition of militant grassroots organizing,
have learned to bargain with this regime and extract organizational benefits while not chal-
 lenging its ideological predispositions. Moreover, there are a number of African-American
and Puerto Rican political leaders who lend their support to the regime and reap certain
benefits or advantages accordingly.

Those residents who disagree with the ideology and policy thrust of the current regime,
who feel that their communities (or sub-communities) are not incorporated into its patron-
age network, who suffer disadvantage, and who want something different from city gov-
ernment are either too demobilized and demoralized or too disorganized to effectively
puncture the local hegemony. The sufficient diversity of opinion in the local electorate
could be the basis for mobilization. Yet, the division that developed between African-
American and Puerto Rican political leadership during the 1991–1993 term contributed to
a dampened enthusiasm and level of participation and, moreover, splintered the type of
political alliance that is necessary to challenge the group now in power.

One current problem is that inexperienced, self-appointed political operatives are
attempting to fill the void that a retreat on the part of larger social movements has pro-
duced. Labor unions, whose participation in People for Change was critical to that coal-
tion's accomplishments, have also become disenchanted with local political machinations
in the city. Accordingly, moderate and conservative Democrats enjoy a much greater polit-
cal advantage for at least the time being. In comparison to New York City, the resistance
to Hartford's regime seems even weaker than resistance to Giuliani's measures, although
in both cities, the popular response is somewhat more muffled than might be expected
based on recent history.

Fisher and Karger's (1997) work, cited earlier concerning the role of cities in the new
private world, would suggest that this regime represents one adaptation to the imperatives
of worldwide privatization—a harsh example, but one form of "local structural adjust-
ment." Moreover, it may not be so important that privatization experiments such as EAI
fail, but rather that they are attempted. The episode can be useful to privatization pro-
nonents as an illustration of how not to implement privatization. However, whether city resi-
dents perceive the EAI experiment in these global terms is questionable: It is simply one
strategy (albeit a failed one) to deal with the education crisis of the city. The current strat-
 egy revolves around the state takeover of the school system with an appointed board of
trustees, and the city is awaiting results. City residents proceed along one track, the expe-
rience of living out an educational crisis, while the imperatives of global capital proceed
along an entirely different but related trajectory.

Fisher (1997, personal communication) has observed that in the three examples of local
conservatism, the government role is different but consistent with his and Karger's concep-
tion of government in the new private world. In the EAI situation, government is replaced;
in the social service zoning situation, government is coercive; and in limiting public input,
government is contracting its scope and withdrawing from the role of promoting demo-
cratic discourse. All three are strategic adaptations that fit within the contours of the new privatism and illustrate how government can be a partner with capital to clean up the city on the one hand, and an agent of dismantling the welfare state and dampening democratic participation on the other—all part of the same logic.

Whether this pattern is replicated in other localities warrants attention. If it is not the prototype of a new regime, it remains significant as one example—a unique case, perhaps—of how the new privatism can manifest itself in the behavior of the local state. If it does indeed represent a nascent regime type, then additional analysis is called for that incorporates specific attention to such variables as the ideological predisposition and behavior of regime participants. This may be especially important in an era when local governments increasingly experiment with new forms of privatization and experience the new contours of welfare policy and the resulting growing social needs. Additional inquiry and comparison are required to ascertain under what conditions local governments elsewhere replicate or approximate the features of the Hartford regime. This is not to equivocate; rather, the purpose here is to raise the possibility of the unfolding of a new regime type.

The new urban conservatism emerging in Hartford also warrants attention from those popular forces still committed to social reform through local politics and urban governance. The difficulties they face and the impact on the lives of the urban disposessed constitute the gravest challenges of all in the new private world.

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