



Local governments in intermediate cities in Colombia; municipal administration: for whom?⁽¹⁾

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I. INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT YEARS, there have been major changes in Colombia in regard to the roles and responsibilities of municipal governments. There has been an administrative decentralization and a redistribution of public revenues in favour of local government. Municipal governments are now responsible for areas such as sanitation, education, health, transport, public works and urban and rural development and their revenue base has been strengthened. There have also been important political changes - most notably the fact that the mayors who head each municipal government are now elected rather than appointed by provincial governors. This paper reviews these changes and the social and political context within which they have taken place. It concentrates on the impact of these changes on municipal government in two cities: Cartagena (with 530,000 inhabitants in 1985) and Santander de Quilichao (with 54,000 inhabitants in this same year). It also describes the factors which limit the effectiveness of the municipal reforms. Box 1 defines some of the terms used in the paper which are not easily translated from Spanish or which may be unfamiliar to non-Latin American readers.

Municipal administration in Colombia should be understood within the context of this process of local government reform, underway since 1986. The reforms were the result of a coming together of extremely varied (and sometimes antagonistic) forces. Despite their diversity, their own self-interests and their interpretation of what was happening within the nation made them agree on the need to open certain areas of government to citizen involvement as a means of helping to resolve the social and institutional crisis. Local governments provided an appropriate arena for political reform, since the results of the crisis were concentrated in municipal life. In addition, during the last decade, the municipality had been the most important location for popular-civic struggles.⁽²⁾

The local government reforms included the election of mayors, municipal referenda, administrative decentralization, fiscal redistribution and greater citizen participation. These have two possible implications. First, it implies a change in the relationship between local and national government with municipal government coming to take

1. This article uses some results from a study on local governments and intermediate sized cities in Colombia, carried out under the auspices of *Fundación Foro Nacional* for Colombia and funded by the International Development Research Centre (Canada). The sociologists Rosalia Carrera de Lourido and Esperanza Gonzalez Rodriguez and the economist Jeanny Posso Quiceno also took part in the study. The ideas expressed here are exclusively those of the author.

2. Santana, Pedro (1986), "Crisis municipal, movimientos sociales y reforma política en Colombia" in *Revista Foro*, No. 1, September; and Velasquez, Fabio (1986), "Crisis, municipal y participación ciudadana en Colombia" in *Revista Foro*, No 1, September.

Box 1: Some Terms and Definitions

CLIENTELISM: Used in this paper in the sense of the existence of patron-client relationships between politicians and citizens. The implication is that a political system in which poorer groups, their organizations and their leaders have to become clients of politicians to obtain any benefits from government is one in which these people have in effect lost democratic rights. Clients lose their right as citizens to basic services; they have to provide electoral support and perhaps meet other obligations for their patrons in return for which they may receive some favours.

GOVERNORS: Provincial (*departamento*) governors in Colombia are not elected - but appointed by the President. Prior to the municipal reform, the governors appointed the mayors who head the municipal governments in their province; as a result of the reforms, all mayors are now elected for a term of two years.

JUNTAS: These are local representative organizations below the level of a municipality. They were established by the constitutional reform of 1968 but were not implemented until Law number 11 of 1986. In urban areas, juntas represent the interests of a commune (in rural areas they represent a *corregimiento*). These juntas have neither decision making capacity nor an administrative role but are meant to monitor local authority actions and decisions.

POBLADORES: General term used to mean those living in low-income areas in cities.

TRADITIONAL PARTIES: Two political parties in Colombia, the Conservative and the Liberal parties, are referred to as the traditional parties since these have essentially monopolized the political process in recent decades, to the exclusion of other parties. This monopoly of power was formalized when the two parties made an electoral pact in 1957 which meant that between 1960 and 1976, a coalition of the two parties (the National Front) shared power with the presidency alternating between the parties and ministerial and other government jobs shared between their supporters.

on a more prominent and effective role in addressing local needs and in promoting collective welfare. Secondly, the reforms democratized the local political regimes because it created new institutional channels for citizen participation which could stimulate the growth of new social and political forces, and bring the ordinary citizen closer to their own municipal administration.

Certain groups within national government promoted the reforms. This was largely the result of their urgent need to reinforce their political ascendancy - an ascendancy which was increasingly devoid of legitimacy and social support. For these groups, the municipal reforms had as the key objective the modernization of local government

3. Velasquez, Fabio (1988), "Los movimientos populares y la reforma municipal" in Nora Segura (compilator), *Colombia: Democracia y Sociedad*, CIDSE-FESCOL, Bogotá, pp. 79-95.

4. Santana, Pedro (1988), "Los movimientos cívicos: el nuevo fenómeno electoral" in *Revista Foro*, No. 6, June 1988, pp. 47-61; and Velasquez (1988) see reference 3.

rather than increased participation. Such "modernization" was given much more prominence than democratization. By contrast, democratization was taken up much more by popular organizations and by progressive political forces, as much from the left as from the traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative - see Box 1).

For this reason, the development of the reforms, especially during the government of President Barco (1986-90), has been constrained by two factors. The first is the existence of what is known in Spanish as *la ley del embudo* - literally a "funnel law". This means that the spirit of the municipal reform was both bold and comprehensive but, in practice, its implementation has been very limited. The second factor has been a tight political control of citizen participation.⁽³⁾ In both cases, the intention was to limit the extent of the change and to prevent the reforms from increasing the power of subordinate classes and their social and political representative organizations.

As a result, the municipal reforms have developed slowly, beset by innumerable obstacles placed in their path by regressive forces (civil, military or paramilitary). Such obstacles have either been to prevent them coming into force, or to limit their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the reforms have produced a new local political phenomenon. The popular election of mayors has allowed new forces to compete in the electoral arena; in some cases this has led to significant victories against the traditional bi-party control of municipal elections.⁽⁴⁾

In the few cities where the local administrations (the *juntas* or district councils) have been regulated and elected, there is a noticeable (if slow) change in relations between the municipal administration and the inhabitants, particularly for low-income groups. The existence of the *juntas* has changed relations between social and political forces and has introduced a new participant into the regular, closed and often corrupt relations between the mayor and the municipal council.

The reforms have re-established the political capacity of municipal government and thus the potential for undertaking new projects, for the expression of citizens' demands within municipal government and for the development of alternative solutions to local problems. The traditional parties, while seeking to appropriate the process and to control it for their own benefit, have also been obliged to modify their political strategies and even to incorporate the language of participation into their vocabulary. The popular organizations and left wing parties, some of whom were unwilling, at first, to consider the democratic possibilities of the reform process, increasingly see it as a valid alternative and a "not-to-be-underestimated" means of pacifying the country. The citizens, surrounded by misinformation from the outset, have gradually realized the possibility of local participation and are beginning to interest themselves in their own future and in that of their locality.

Of course, decentralization, fiscal redistribution and increased participation have drastically changed the dimensions of municipal administration - for instance in terms of administrative efficiency, the rationalization of public spending and the clarity and openness of decision making. Some key questions are the extent to which these changes are operational, under what conditions and within what set of political relations.

These questions acquire a special significance for intermediate sized cities because of their present role within the national urban context. Three features characterize the role of these centres. The first is their increasing share in national population. Their populations are

5. Lopez, William (1987), "La protesta urbana en Colombia" in *Revista Foro*, No. 3, July, pp. 81-93.

6. Velasquez, Fabio, Rosalia Corra de Lourido, Esperanza Gonzalez Rodriguez and Jeanny Posso (1989), "Gobiernos locales en ciudades intermedias de Colombia", IDRC (Canada), Cali, May.

generally growing faster than the national urban average - a fact linked to the economic transformation of these centres and their surrounding areas. Data from the 1985 census show that, although Colombia's four largest cities continue to have the greatest concentrations of population (27.6 per cent), cities of between 100,000 and 600,000 inhabitants have increased their share of the national population (from 13.1 per cent in 1951 to 20 per cent in 1985) and have average growth rates greater than those of the large cities. The second characteristic is the fact that this growth has meant a considerable increase in the demand for urban land, housing, public services and social facilities, public spaces and recreation areas; these demands have not been adequately met by the local governments in these intermediate cities. This is either because of political negligence or inherent administrative, technical and financial limitations. What is clear is that the level of poverty is greater in these intermediate cities than in the country's four main cities. In 1985, 25.6 per cent of the population in the four major cities had unmet basic needs; in this same year, 30.4 per cent of the population in cities with a population of between 100,000 and 200,000 had unmet basic needs. The acute nature of the urban crisis in these centres has raised the level of urban protest. Between 1970 and 1985, cities with between 350,000 and 600,000 inhabitants were responsible for 20.8 per cent of civil strikes, 40.7 per cent of "sit-ins" (ie. the occupation of government offices by citizens), 39 per cent of such occupations in public areas, and 42.8 per cent of protests by *pobladores* (inhabitants of low-income areas).⁽⁵⁾

The research on which this article is based⁽⁶⁾ examined municipal government in two intermediate sized cities, Cartagena and Santander de Quilichao. These are very different cities in terms of their location, population, history, economic activity, and regional and national roles. Cartagena, with 530,000 inhabitants in 1985, is the largest intermediate city in the country. Located on the north coast of Colombia, it has a diversified economic base (primarily tourism, manufacturing industries and commerce), a certain degree of urban consolidation, and problems particularly in housing, services and environmental pollution which have developed as a result of its role as a maritime port and industrial centre, as well as its rapid transformation into a national and international tourist centre. The Liberal party has dominated political elections, except for some brief periods in which the Conservative party achieved a majority in the municipal council. In spite of this domination, competition between the factions of the traditional parties has been relatively open.

Santander de Quilichao, in contrast, is a relatively small city (54,000 inhabitants in 1985) in the south-west of Colombia, in the Department of Cauca. It is currently undergoing a process of economic modernization and urbanization, whose social consequences are beginning to be felt in shortages in housing, and public and social services. The city is a regional centre for trade in agricultural and manufactured products and has some regional influence, although this is limited by the extent of economic activities in Cali, the nearest major city. As in Cartagena, the Liberal party has maintained an electoral monopoly, headed by a regional leader, Senator Humberto Pelaez, who has considerable influence in the north Cauca region. But political competition has been much less open than in Cartagena, and there is a substantial amount of patrimonial management in the municipal administration by the political groups who support Sena-

tor Pelaez. Both cities share the problem of inadequate public services - both in terms of the numbers of people served and of the quality. Insufficient water supplies have brought considerable sanitation problems (especially in Cartagena), and the cost of solutions puts them well beyond the economic capacity of both cities. This is a problem which both municipal governments have to face and which, if not dealt with, will widen the rift between low-income groups and the rest of the population.

Three aspects of the municipal administration in these cities will be examined: possible solutions to the provision of infrastructure and services to meet collective needs; the availability of financial resources; and the relationship between local government and social and political participants.

II. THE ADMINISTRATION OF LOCAL NEEDS

UNTIL 1986, MUNICIPAL governments had a marginal role in the state structure of Colombia. Measures in the 1886 Constitution gradually eroded the functions and resources of the local administrations. This level of government ended up simply as an instrument of political control in local life and an area for the reproduction of the traditional parties operating at national level. Patron-client networks were established as the mechanisms to deal with social demands. This facilitated the integration of large sectors of the population into a system of domination; it also reduced (at least temporarily) levels of local conflict. Local governments lost their significance both as an area of political struggle and as bodies which promoted the collective well-being of their locality. Thus, the meeting of local needs was relegated to second place, since what concerned the parties in power was maintaining their local ascendancy.

The municipal reforms have devolved certain responsibilities to the municipal governments in the areas of basic sanitation, education, health, transport, public works, and urban and rural development. They also included a series of provisions for intergovernmental transfers of resources. The intention was to invest in the municipalities a capacity for action which gave priority to the needs of the local population.

Municipal administration can promote development through three kinds of action, each on a different geographic scale. The first is what might be termed macro-projects - ie. those projects directed towards solving the problems of the city as a whole. These projects require large-scale investments (service networks, infrastructure, facilities). The second kind of action can be termed micro-projects; these are more limited in coverage and require a lower level of resources with which to respond to the needs of specific groups in small areas. Finally, there are isolated actions which are not the result of an initiative by the municipal administration but which reflect people's demands and pressure.

In Cartagena and Santander de Quilichao, the administrative model has been comparable, although with different emphases. In Cartagena, municipal action has generally been directed towards micro-projects although, because of the magnitude of the city's problems, macro-projects have recently come to be considered as of growing importance. The city has had a development plan since 1978. Isolated actions have continued, enabling the maintenance of a link between the administration and the poor population through political

7. For example, giving local schools video equipment when the centres do not have the basic infrastructure to operate.

8. This aspect is much more noticeable in Santander de Quilichao.

intermediaries. Municipal councillors take a central role in this, allocating expenditure on "assistance".

In Santander de Quilichao, there has only been one macro-project - to improve and extend the water supply. The administration has concentrated on micro-projects and, above all, on isolated projects which guarantee an electoral return.⁽⁷⁾ The city does not have a development plan to date, and this suggests a lack of rational criteria for investment decisions. Political control by the dominant group in the municipality is so strong that it can carry through its own initiatives without hindrance from the opposition or from peoples' organizations.

In this respect, the prevailing tendency in both cities is the maintenance of a traditional model of local administration, ie. the use by the two traditional parties of the municipal apparatus to retain political control and to reproduce a patron-client model of government. The two traditional parties continue to dominate local politics. Public investment programmes, where they exist, relegate the collective needs of the most needy sectors of the population to second place. Meanwhile, the new municipal powers have yet to be reflected in government actions and the provincial governors do not seem to want to change their traditional conduct substantially, above all where the mechanisms for citizen participation are concerned.⁽⁸⁾

However, this model operates in a different manner in the two cities. This is evident in both the development plans and in the administrative reorganization of the two municipalities. Whilst Cartagena has had a plan since 1978, and is preparing to approve a new one, in Santander de Quilichao they only recently began work on formulating a plan. Of course, the existence of a plan need not imply a change in the model of municipal administration. Urban plans can also be used to address particular interests and may also serve as instruments to serve patron-client relationships. Nevertheless, their formulation requires a collective examination and identification of priorities for action which are independent of the whim of the provincial governor.

In both cities, a reorganization of the local administration has taken place, but at a different pace and with different motives. In Cartagena, the reforms were effected in 1987 and sought both to prepare the municipal government for the new powers arising from the decentralization process, and to allow citizen participation. There was a clear modernizing objective - although this was not altogether effective, given that many functions were concentrated in a few bodies (such as public companies and the department for social welfare) and the distribution of positions placed more emphasis on politically directed bodies (the municipal councils, the government department) than on the more technical departments (for example the Planning Department).

In Santander de Quilichao, the administrative reforms have been less organic and more determined by the need to adapt to the municipality's changing circumstances. The Planning Office was set up in 1983 and, in 1987, also the Public Services Companies. In 1987, a new organizational programme was approved with the aim of changing what had been a simple, hierarchical administrative structure dominated by the provincial governor. But, unlike Cartagena, this change had little to do with the new decentralization laws. It was the result of the aims of modernization and the urgent need to preserve local patrimonial domination. Despite the reforms, municipal admini-

stration does not seem to have changed in these cities. Local governments continue to act as they did prior to 1986 which suggests that the reforms have not provided qualitative changes in the running of the municipality. Traditional political interests are one barrier but they are not the only factor responsible. A lack of resources available to government at this municipal level has also been important, as discussed below.

III. THE GAP BETWEEN NEEDS AND RESOURCES

SINCE THE BEGINNING of the 1980s, the national government has had a policy of strengthening municipal finances. Law No. 14 of 1983 and Law No. 12 of 1986 were the most notable instruments of this policy. The first was directed towards strengthening the municipality's revenue base, especially taxation. The second included a modified value added tax (which the central government traditionally passed onto the municipalities) by creating an additional tax for municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants. The law also rectified certain inequalities which had arisen as a result of the previous legislation where the quotas for the transfer of funds were based on population size and this strongly benefited large cities and marginalized smaller settlements.

Although these measures have been criticized,⁽⁹⁾ it is clear that the first effect of this policy in the cities which have been studied was an increase in their actual revenue.⁽¹⁰⁾ The transfers of value added tax have had a positive impact in the cities receiving additional transfers (such as Santander de Quilichao). However, the impact of enlarged municipal budgets must be considered in the light of the new powers and responsibilities assigned by the reforms to local government and in the context of each city's problems. In the case of the new powers and responsibilities, little can be concluded, as the transfer of powers is a progressive one and will only be completed in 1992. Nevertheless, reports from officials in both cities point to a unanimous view: the new resources are not proportional to the new responsibilities assigned to local governments, and will result in chronic deficits if the fiscal powers of municipalities are not increased. This has given rise to a debate between those who believe that the solution to this imbalance lies in reducing municipal responsibilities and those who believe that there should be an increase in transfers from national government. The first group, not surprisingly, look with favour on a slowing down of decentralization and a return of some of the responsibilities transferred to municipal bodies back to national government. The second appear to believe that the capacity for municipal expenditure is in direct relation to the growth in transfers from the central government. In both cases, the agent of the solution seems to be the central government, not the local administrations.

In regard to each city's problems, resources are equally limited. In Cartagena, for example, the investment needed to deal with its environmental problems is far beyond the revenues available to the municipal administration. A comparable gap between revenues and investment needs exists in Santander de Quilichao and, in addition, the city has a very high debt burden.

This limitation on financial resources creates and reinforces a vicious circle, particularly for low-income groups. Large demands require large investments. Scarce resources mean that investments

9. See the critique of the fiscal decentralization policy in *Revista Economía Colombiana* Nos. 197-198, September-October 1987.

10. The index of growth in municipal revenue in Cartagena (1980 = 100) went from 109.3 in 1982 to 157.1 in 1986 and to 218.0 in 1987. In Santander de Quilichao the same index rose from 115.0 to 182.9 and 249.9.

are not made and as the backlog in the failure to make investments grows, so too does the scale of unfulfilled needs. Clientelism and some social investments made by the municipalities have managed to temporarily reduce the effects of this vicious circle. However, they will become an increasing source of conflict, as requirements grow at a greater rate than the administration's ability to meet them, and the clientelist networks are unable to respond to people's demands. In Santander de Quilichao, for example, public services have been the cause of three civic strikes and other collective actions in the last 15 years.

This vicious circle is also influenced by the distribution of expenditure. The shortage of resources means that current expenditure is prioritized over investment. In Cartagena, current expenditure averages 78.8 per cent of total expenditure while in Santander de Quilichao, the figure is 82.1 per cent. One explanation for this is the scale of public employment since employment in the municipal administration is used to repay political favours.

The second feature is the allocation of investment. These decisions are influenced by various commitments and political interests. In Santander de Quilichao, spending is fragmented because of the commitments that the municipal civil servants and councillors have to their electors, independent of priorities for spending and any rational scheme for the use of public funds. In Cartagena, there is an even more notable bias in the allocation of priorities towards reinforcing the tourist industry in the city, as against the needs of the poor.

All these elements suggest that in these cities, although revenue has increased, it is still inadequate in relation to municipal obligations and responsibilities - and to the magnitude of the population's demands. Furthermore, the ill-considered use of these resources exacerbates still further the shortages and the failures to meet the needs of the population. This gap between needs and resources is tending to widen.

IV. LOCAL ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPANTS

THIS WIDENING GAP between needs and resources has roots which are essentially political, in as much as the investment decisions are taken by political agents. In Colombia, the two traditional political parties have exercised a near-absolute control of the municipal political apparatus for more than a century. Until about 50 years ago, the points of reference in disputes between Liberals and Conservatives were ideological. Today, circumstances have changed considerably. The two traditional parties' ideological profiles have faded and the boundaries between them have become blurred. Furthermore, whereas in previous decades Colombians had a strong sense of belonging to one of these parties, now this sense has weakened. As a result of this political vacuum, which no other political force has managed to fill, political leaders have defined alternative forms of relationships with their social bases. Within this, patron-client relationships have come to occupy a central position.

While municipal governments must, in the first place, attend to and respond to the demands of local society, the provincial governors have been the most appropriate avenue for the development of clientelist networks. They interpret the needs of the population in

terms of what is politically feasible (given the configuration of local power) and privatize public funds to serve their own personal political ambitions. They can be seen as an instrument of control which seeks to lower levels of conflict and to divide the population by individualizing its demands and subordinating collective initiatives to the will of the political chief.

The fact that local political life is based on clientelism has influenced relations between local government and society. More to the point for this paper, it has also set limits on the municipal administration. One of the most notable effects has been a crisis in local representation (traditionally the municipal council and, since 1988, the mayor). For example, in the cities studied, the proportion of the electorate who actually vote in municipal elections was as low as 35 per cent. This crisis in local representation is also apparent in the separation between electors and their representatives. Contact is sporadic and generally only occurs at election time.

Municipal councils have tended to represent the interests of the local dominant classes and have become a decisive instrument in the political reproduction of the traditional parties. The disputes, contradictions and alliances between councillors occur more because they are members of a party than because of their role as representatives of local citizens. Their initiatives in the area of collective welfare have been very few in both cities, in part because this role has been transferred to the mayor. He/she proposes action which the council undertakes. Relations between the mayor and council are flexible, and the initiatives of the mayor are generally carried out, as long as bureaucratic constraints and the councillors' electoral interests are respected. The municipal council's work is confined to the routine approval of the annual budget, changing administrative posts and welcoming distinguished people in local and national society.

In 1986, the municipal reforms introduced another means of representation: an elected mayor. In Cartagena, as in Santander de Quilichao, the Liberals won the March 1988 elections. In both cases, the successful candidates received the support of the poorest groups. In Cartagena, the present mayor managed to win the support of most of the organizations representing low-income groups because of an attractive proposal for citizen participation. In Santander de Quilichao, the means of electoral success was more traditional: a secular bi-party interest operated through clientelist machinery and control by the Pelaist group (the group that supports Senator Pelaez) of a significant sector of the electorate.

But once elected, both mayors rapidly established a distance between themselves and their electorate. The participatory discourse of the mayor of Cartagena gradually disappeared; it became a piece of rhetoric with little genuine content. The participation which had been promised was reduced to a rather unsystematic dialogue with the representatives of the local administrative *juntas*. The municipal administration favours the interests of groups connected to the tourist industry.

In Santander de Quilichao, the separation between the mayor and the electorate is much more evident. Although the mayor, on his inauguration, opened an informal dialogue with the population, there has never been the means for its realization. On the contrary, the administration has been closely bound to its regional political leader. In this respect, it is worth noting that until now, the local *juntas* have been neither elected nor accountable, even though this was one of the institutional mechanisms for participation decreed by the municipal

11. These have not yet been regulated or elected in Santander de Quilichao.

reforms. This increasing distance between the electors (particularly low-income groups) and their representatives in the municipal administration reflects the interests represented in decision making. An examination of the process of decision making is a useful means of understanding the relations between social participants and the local government, especially the extent to which local government is open to the interests of different sectors. In this respect, the situation does not appear to be very different in the two cities. Business associations have maintained a continuous presence, while community organizations and citizens' representative groups, particularly local *juntas*,⁽¹¹⁾ have to exercise strong pressure in order to gain access to political decision making.

This model operates in a different way in each city. In Cartagena, the business associations have developed their own initiative to a considerable extent and have put a series of proposals to the mayor and to the council which was subsequently adopted as policies for the city. These initiatives aim to transform Cartagena into a productive tourist centre of great importance. Although relations between government and business have not been completely fluid, there has been a constant dialogue. For instance, the mayor has invited them to participate in a committee to evaluate the administration and the municipal council has invited them to discuss the city's development plan. There is, moreover, a degree of mobility between the public and private sector; some business directors have been mayors and others take part in the local *juntas*.

In Santander de Quilichao, there is less evidence of business initiatives. The mayor is interested in involving business in the development of the municipality, not just in promoting their own particular interests. But it is the particular interests of businesses which have predominated in the conduct of business groups and have been channelled by the municipal council and local political directives. Hence, relations between economic power and political power are not as open as they are in Cartagena and operate mainly through the party.

Civic organizations with a popular base have played a less important role. In Cartagena, where there is no recent tradition of popular struggle, the representative organizations have been used by the traditional parties and turned into strategic points within clientelist networks. They may even lose their original purpose and find themselves paralyzed in their subordination to local political leaders.

The exception in Cartagena, at least in some respects, is in the area of local *juntas*. They have a number of weaknesses. In some, political tyranny and authoritarianism still survive. In others, the political parties may influence their action. The *juntas* still lack sufficient judicial, institutional, economic and human resources for independent action. In addition, some have not established links with their population and local community organizations. But it should be recognized that the *juntas*, particularly those in low-income districts in the south-east, have had an impact in three ways. The first is by drafting a programme with the municipal government, in particular prioritizing work in each community and municipal district. The second is by offering opportunities and support to new civic leaders who are free of the influence of the traditional parties and their bipartisan politics and are keen to act in a participatory and democratic manner. The third is through the transformation of the low-income sector's relations with the municipal council, and by becoming agents

for the council with initiatives for action. Neither the mayor nor the municipal council are able to ignore them.

In Santander de Quilichao, the presence of community organizations is more significant as a result of a stronger tradition of popular organization and struggle. This is not so much in a sense of these organizations being participants in local government decisions, but as a source of opposition to the municipal administration and as a promoter of specific demands. The low-income groups have even managed to express themselves in political movements which offer alternatives to the traditional parties. These have succeeded in obtaining some representation on the municipal council. Nevertheless, this presence has not substantially influenced government decisions. The fact that these organizations struggle in opposition to government limits their ability to have long-term effects on government programmes.

V. MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION: FOR WHOM?

THE IMBALANCE IN the representation of different interests in municipal decision making is notable in both cities. Such decision making always favours the local dominant classes, be they land owners, commercial, industrial or contractor businesses, or the tourist industry. Their ability to gain access to decision making, local or national, is considerable, and their scope for action is not restricted by the "political class". In contrast, popular organizations and bodies representing subordinate classes must fight for access and must make great efforts to influence the decision making process. The only alternative to this is to use clientelist channels which means submitting themselves to the will of the political chiefs.

The continuation of the traditional administrative model means the consolidation of the dominant group's interests within the municipal structure. In this respect, the impact of the municipal reform is still limited in these cities. Perhaps the most important impact, from the point of view of these groups, has been the redefinition of strategies for political control, which range from measures to modernize local administrative organization, to the incorporation of a participatory discourse into their daily language. These measures have been introduced to maintain the control of decision making mechanisms and of the bureaucratic apparatus.

Nevertheless, their domination is not complete. The municipal reform has enabled the emergence of new forces, social as much as political, which have begun to change local life to a limited extent. Civic organizations, local *juntas*, and new political movements with a local and regional base, try to establish themselves as new focal points for opinion and action. They bring a different interpretation of the current situation and of municipal reform. This reform provides them with possibilities for creating alternatives to clientelism and the traditional parties' dominance of the municipal apparatus. It may be possible to develop democracy within the municipal administration - a change in which their intervention would be decisive.

Municipal administration advances between these two forces: one which extends the opportunities for democratic intervention by new participants previously marginalized from decision making; and the other which tries to maintain its traditional powers by a variety of means. The traditional powers, supported by more than a century of

liberal/conservative ascendancy, appear at the moment to have the balance weighted in their favour. For their part, the democratic side, in their attempt to gain ground in this confrontation, face a number of barriers. Some of these are related to the objective circumstances in which the struggle is developing: the restriction of liberties; clientelism; political violence; the fragmentation of popular organizations; the monopoly of the two traditional parties; and an authoritarian and anti-democratic social climate. Others are linked to the lack of subjective circumstances for strengthening democratic changes: little knowledge of the social and economic context, low level of political education and the absence of a democratic culture based on tolerance and participation.

The possibility of transforming local administrations and of the municipal reforms operating in favour of the poor depends on the composition of the new bodies - the bearers of a democratic culture to promote civic organization and to overcome opposition from current social and political forces. It is a long-term process, but not an impossible one. It can only be consolidated through the broadening and deepening of all participatory mechanisms, institutional and non-institutional.