

authorities have constitutional protection from interference by higher levels of government?

Second, do the elected local authorities have a range of substantial tax-raising powers?

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 fails both these fundamental tests.

Rather the government appears to want to decentralise blame, nicely ahead of time, for the truly massive spending cuts that the government plans to impose on local government in the next four years.

### A progressive way forward

It is wise for local leaders in the UK to look abroad to countries where meaningful devolution is well established. For example, in Germany, Sweden and the USA elected local authorities are entirely free to do things differently.

There is no question of the central state imposing specific requirements on particular elected local authorities or telling them how much tax they can raise locally, still less picking off

individual groups of local authorities in a centralised deal making process.

International experience points to three key lessons for the debate about the future of local governance in England.

First, to talk of 'devolution deals' is entirely the wrong language. The idea that the agreement of citizens to the way they wish to be governed is to be reduced to a process of secretive 'devolution deals' is offensive. Rather ministers should state openly and clearly the principles that they believe should guide the re-negotiation of local/central relations in England. These should be debated, agreed and then be applied in an even handed way to all areas of the country.

Second, it is essential that English local government should have constitutional protection from an increasingly autocratic central state. Sir Charles Carter, in his imaginative synthesis of a major programme of research, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, on local/central relations in the UK, showed that UK local authorities, if they are to mean anything, must have the

'freedom to do things differently'. This fundamental insight must underpin any sound system of elected local democracy. In other countries this freedom enables public innovation to flourish.

### Constitutional convention

Third, the evidence presented in my book shows that no other democratic country is pursuing a policy of centralisation on steroids. If England is to prosper we need a constitutional convention – one that takes account of the voices of civil society, local government and the regions, as well as the political parties. In this way we can construct a fair system of local/central relations, one that enjoys wide support and promotes a culture of innovation in local governance.

### Reference

*Carter C. (1996) Members one of another: The problems of local corporate action. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.*

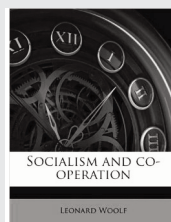
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## OUR HISTORY - 67

### Leonard Woolf - Socialism and Cooperation (1921)

**W**oolf was a civil servant and a member of the Fabian Society. He wrote for radical journals including the Nation and the Manchester Guardian. In 1916 he wrote a book on International Government for the Fabian Society, which became one of the blueprints for the post-war League of Nations. He was an authority on international affairs and in 1920 wrote Economic Imperialism and Empire and Commerce in Africa. Woolf was a friend of Margaret Llewellyn Davies of the Cooperative Women's Guild and wrote Socialism and Cooperation for the ILP as well as a pamphlet on International Co-operative Trade for the Fabian Society. Together with his wife Virginia, he ran the Hogarth Press. In the interwar period Woolf was an active member of the Labour Party's advisory committees on international and colonial affairs. After the Second World War he published three volumes on political science, focusing on the mass psychology of war. He published five volumes of autobiography, surviving until 1969.

"As against the capitalist and capitalism, I would go as far, probably, as the most extreme Guild Socialist or Red Communist in the demand for



emancipation of the worker. But socialism itself implies that what is true against capitalism is untrue against the community of consumers. My suggestions...will be seen to be all directed to establishing joint control and a balance of power within the framework of industry between the organised consumers and the organised producers. I believe that joint control and balance of power to be essential to the transition stage to pure socialism, for without it there will be exploitation of one class by the other and the growth of a rational psychology of consumption and production will be impossible. And, as a matter of fact, if the capitalist were eliminated, there would obviously be a far greater danger of the consumers being exploited by strong organisations of producers than of the consumers exploiting the organised producer. ... So long as the psychology of capitalism remains, all power of exploitation is dangerous to the community, and in the transition period I wish to see it neither in the hands of the consumers nor co-operators, nor in the hands of the workers and producers. That is why I believe that the immediate object of the socialist should be to eliminate the capitalist and establish a balance of power between producer and consumer."