

11/04/98 OPINION
Los Angeles Daily News

Residents lose in latest elected charter panel sellout

So much for the hopes of genuine reform of Los Angeles City Hall.

The cry of the people that created the reform movement -- putting the mayor in charge, holding bureaucrats accountable and empowering the neighborhoods and people of Los Angeles -- has been sold out.

The entrenched power structure -- downtown corporations, most public employee unions, developers and the City Council they own -- is terrified of the people of Los Angeles and has brought both the elected and appointed reform commissions to their knees.

In the words of the chairman of Mayor Richard Riordan's elected reform commission chairman, Erwin Chemerinsky:

"I worry politically about taking on both business and labor."

So there you have it.

Reform has come to mean preserving the narrow power structure that is responsible for creating a vast and overpaid bureaucracy without any accountability, overdeveloping the city, without adequate roads and freeways, and allowing the streets, sidewalks and sewers to rot through neglect.

That means that the ordinary hard-working taxpaying citizens will remain outside the system, alienated and powerless.

Astonishingly, the elected commission has proposed allowing nonresidents of the city -- even noncitizens of the United States, even illegal immigrants -- to participate in city government, at least in paltry ways.

But the idea of actually allowing the ordinary citizens to have a real say in local land-use developments and local district spending has been dismissed as unthinkable.

That, of course, is understandable in a city where the basic principles of a democratic society have never taken hold, where those who have held power, as well as those who hold power today, regard the city and its billions of dollars in tax revenue as their own personal pocket change, not the public's.

Their dishonest and specious argument is that the people who live in the city cannot be trusted to make decisions about what is best for their neighborhoods and best for the city as a whole. Only the rich and powerful are qualified to know what's best.

Somehow, cocaine addicts and sticky-fingered finaglers and double talkers are regarded as having the best interests of the community at heart.

It should be clear from this sorry chapter of L.A. history that nothing short of an uprising of the neighborhoods will turn things around.

And that is exactly what is happening. More than a quarter of the voters in the San Fernando Valley have signed petitions to trigger the process of creating their own city.

Neighborhood leaders in Eagle Rock and San Pedro have started their own petition drives for studies of secession.

The tragedy of the reform commissions is that they knuckled under to the bully boys who have ruined the city. The commissions were intimidated out of doing what they knew to be the right thing.

What they have done is no laughing matter. In fact, it is a crying shame.

11/4/1998