

# The Days of Los Angeles Are Numbered—and They Ought to Be

■ **Governance:** The megalopolis should be divided, the city down-sized into the communities from which it was originally constituted.

By David Glidden

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Supporters of the Maastricht Treaty realize the nation-state is obsolete. Many urban planners suspect the same is true of city-states.

The European Community's proposed treaty would superimpose a ruling international bureaucracy onto its member nations, distancing those who govern from those governed, in the interest of efficiency. City reformers would replace central city government with smaller, more neighborly cities, on the one hand, and with regional administrations, on the other, interlocking counties into regions. The people of Los Angeles, for example, would be far better served with down-sized cities and inter-county government than with the City Council and county Board of Supervisors.

The more diverse ethnic and neighborhood interests are, the less likely that one large city government can adequately serve them. The quality of urban life, from Watts to Westwood, suffers when some citizens perceive government as serving others' interests instead of their's. Similarly, it should come as no surprise when urban crime is on the rise in such a climate of division, just as there is little mystery to the civil strife in parts of Eastern Europe and in former republics of the Soviet Union, when firefights continually erupt over controlling a single, central government. The real evil of Balkanization is not subdivision. Rather,

it is anti-democratic sentiments leading to one group subjugating another.

To be sure, officials in separate, smaller cities cannot by themselves solve regional issues of education, social services and environmental pollution. These are problems without borders, spreading across the Los Angeles Basin, from Irvine to Arcadia, Santa Monica to Riverside. To fill this governing gap, regional authority is called for, to regulate, say, sewage and trash disposal across the region, instead of one county dumping on another. Left to its own devices, Orange County would locate its prisons and its garbage as close to Riverside as it could get away with; Los Angeles would ship its solid waste to Eagle Mountain.

Indisputably, the current arrangement isn't working. L.A. County supervisors are unable—or unwilling—to coordinate their policies with Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. The Department of Water and Power goes about its business, from Los Angeles to Mono Lake, as if it were an autonomous republic. Entire regions of Los Angeles—from Eagle Rock to South Central, San Pedro to Hollywood—cannot identify with City Hall. Ethnic groups, particularly at the lower end of the income scale, are at each other's throats. The range of ethnic groups and immigrants has expanded geometrically, eroding community identity and exposing the illusion of living in a single city. Basin dwellers are Los Angelenos in name only. We might as well be Yugoslavians.

In short, the heyday of the megalopolis is over. The days of Los Angeles are numbered—and they ought to be. Something must replace it, something more suburban and less urban, more sensitive to individual differences and needs. Until such changes come, we all will suffer from a steady erosion of our quality of life.



MATT MAHURIN / for The Times

subdivisions of a sprawling megalopolis: the pocket cities that compose it now are more easily ignored in favor of lobbyist and special interests who spend their time downtown. And what was once a governable city has become a tar pit to snare taxpayers.

The empire should be divided, the city of Los Angeles down-sized into the dozens of communities from which it was originally constituted, just as the Soviet Union has recently been reorganized into a commonwealth.

Imagine life in a dismantled Los Angeles, with each city possessing the authority to govern local issues locally. Smaller towns have fewer problems. Neighborhoods can generate better decisions than those imposed on neighborhoods by politicians occupying a distant City Hall. Once government proves responsive, the people prove responsible.

Also imagine what it would be like if there were a master plan of transportation that truly governed urban Southern California, from Moreno Valley to Encinitas. Imagine that a similar approach to policing, pollution and social services were reality.

Far from producing a radical change in the way we do things in Southern California, moving in this direction would retain—indeed, renew—the vision that created the Californian dream, the land of opportunity where each could do his own thing and have his own place in the sun.

Down-sizing Los Angeles reflects the philosophical conviction that government ought to be of, for and by the people. But this means turning power over to the neighborhoods, letting them take an active role in governing themselves. It also means explicitly accepting that counties are mutually dependent on each other. Something like a local Maastricht Treaty is certainly preferable to more civil war.