

Secession Is the City's Only Hope



The council fights democracy, even though each district would be among the biggest cities in U.S.

By BOB SCOTT

Los Angeles' two charter reform commissions have failed to develop a consensus on any meaningful improvement to the city's bloated bureaucracy or dysfunctional City Council. What will appear on next year's ballot is nothing less than a fraud. The commissioners are attempting to earn their way into the history books by creating important-sounding structures and gratuitous processes that ultimately end up accomplishing none of what charter reform advertised.

After spending millions of dollars of taxpayer money, there will be no decentralization; there will be no localization of services, budgets and planning, and there will be no opportunity for the type of local control that neighboring cities enjoy. The voters will foot the bill for a sham election and be given nothing but plain vanilla choices.

In recent years, the City Council members have cast themselves as the sole protectors of their subjects and as supreme dictators of local governance.

But there is little or no connection between the needs of Sylmar and the leadership of San Pedro or between the goals of South-Central and the champions of the Westside. L.A.'s diverse communities are denied a full hearing before a council that has a firsthand awareness of their plans and priorities.

Each existing council district has a

population exceeding 230,000. If each became a separate city, all 15 would be among the 100 largest cities in the U.S. The notion that each of these would-be cities should be dominated by a single benevolent dictator is an affront to democracy and an insult to L.A.'s communities.

Americans do not fear democracy, and we hold the right of self-determination to be sacred. We spend billions around the world proping up governments and chastising those who would colonize and enslave others. Our entire culture is permeated with references to freedom, liberty and democracy.

Yet, let one, much less 1.5 million of Los Angeles' citizens even raise the question of forming a city from a portion of the existing city, and the demagogues cry foul. The localists are charged with trying to balkanize and fragment the region.

New cities are incorporated every day without the type of hostility that has emerged in the debate over a new city for the San Fernando Valley. The difference is that virtually all new cities are incorporated out of existing county territory. Counties have come to expect these incorporations and take them more or less in stride. Not so with the city of Los Angeles.

The city has the power and resources to fight democracy every step of the way. The City Council members and bureaucrats have shown that they will stop at nothing to prevent reform. The city fathers seem unwilling to even

consider a broader view of what is best for our residents and businesses.

Is secession the answer? It may well be that the only way to save Los Angeles is to reconstruct it. L.A.'s strength has always been its people, not its boundaries or its governing structure. It is difficult to support a moral imperative to preserve Los Angeles as a monolithic megalopolis. Management of any complex entity depends upon the identification and comprehension of its respective components. As government is brought closer to the governed, it becomes more open. Elective office becomes more attainable and officials are more likely to share the vision of the local community.

What seemed like a good idea in 1781 when Los Angeles was first incorporated may not work for Angelenos in 1998. To facilitate matters, there is a state-mandated formation process that allows for meaningful evaluation, thoughtful consideration and equitable transition. The Local Agency Formation Commission of Los Angeles County is charged with this task upon the successful qualification of an initiative petition for incorporation.

It is hard to understand why any area of Los Angeles should be denied the opportunity to establish democratic self-rule. In Los Angeles, past resource grabs have been called "annexations." In revolutionary America, it was called colonization.

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