

METROPOLIS MAYORS DO NOT KNOW THEIR OWN CITIES

Barry Wiseberg



BARRY WISEBERG

is an American publicist, urbanist, human rights activist, and a reviewer of the public radio of Chicago. He is the General Director of the 'Violence Prevention Peace Promotion Strategy' organisation (VPPPS), an invited expert of UNESCO, and was one of the organisers of the first anti-war meetings in the US against the war in Vietnam

There are problems that are common to all big cities. The most important of them, which has not been fully realised by anyone, is the fact that **nobody knows how to create an effective municipal bureaucracy in a metropolitan area with 15, 20, or 30 million people**. For instance, should municipal structures be created for 50 thousand, 100 thousand, or 500 thousand inhabitants? What level of municipal government is best suited to the needs of the people?

The other problem of a large city is also of the same range — at what level of municipal governance will separate city units be sufficiently sustainable and eco-

nomically viable? What about in a housing unit of 50 thousand, 20 thousand, or even 5 thousand people? I mean a conditional unit, within which there is fully renewable energy and complete recycling of the waste it produces. Right now there are no answers to these questions, and the questions are not even being asked properly.

What do citizens deal with, instead of setting these tasks? They deal with clumsy municipal bureaucracies that are perpetually growing and engaging almost solely in their own competitive survival. **This system is unsustainable and a threat to public stability.** If you talk to the mayors of San Paulo, Mumbai, or Jakarta, you will quickly realise that these people have not even sat in a helicopter to look at the city that they govern. They don't know how the city water systems run, they don't know how much garbage is collected and where it is processed. They actually don't know their city at all.

Food is imported to London from at least 80 different countries of the world. But the mayor's office of the British capital simply does not have comprehensive data gathered or processed on the subject. Indeed, it is very hard to maintain a bureaucracy at such a level, and common citizens are simply unable to use its services.

It is traditionally believed that 'there will emerge some political movement that will serve as the vanguard of fighting for the daily needs of citizens.' But, as it turns out, this is not a very realistic understanding of what is going on.

In New York, for example, human rights activists are actively fighting for the housing rights of city dwellers. In almost all of the largest cities in the world there exists every possible move-



'Violence Prevention Peace Promotion Strategy' (VPPPS) is an international non-government public organisation with its headquarters in Chicago. It was established in 2000 by Barry Wiseberg to fight social inequalities and to prevent violence in the four most poor districts of Chicago. Today, VPPPS is active not only in the US, but internationally.

ment protecting the rights of city inhabitants. But in no city have these movements demonstrated the political will required for such a change in the overall life of a city. **These movements need to think how to change their cities structurally, instead of striking bargains with the mayor's office over insignificant issues. The citizens need to understand what must be done in order to take the financial and fiscal resources of municipalities under their own control.**

Even today, municipal authorities play a much more significant role in the lives of citizens, both from the economic and the political point of view, than the federal authorities, who, according to some estimates, possess only around 10% of influence on a city's inhabitants. The municipal authorities of China, for example, have more political and economic power than municipal authorities of most other cities anywhere in the world.

That's exactly why the traditional search for a political vanguard in a large city is a search in the wrong direction. All movements, including political ones, need to be united in a fight for the right of citizens to govern their own city. ■

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