

CHRONICLES OF CATASTROPHIC DEVELOPMENT

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If we take a close look at the social life of big cities in America, such as New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, or Chicago, it becomes evident that **at present, citizens virtually have no participation in the governance of their cities.** It is clear that the level of social participation of citizens in city life has seen a sharp decrease during the last years. For example, in 1993 there were 900 thousand more people who participated in the New York mayoral elections than in 2009. And this is despite the fact that the city population has certainly increased since 1993.

Today, big business has almost no relation to the governance of a city, because it has widened its scope both nationally and internationally during the last decade, with a significant decrease in its participation in the local municipal government. Ultimately, cities are governed by the political elite, who are closely related to professional unions and other public movements, leaving little room for private sector employees. These people have become a dominating force in all large American cities.

Bureaucracy includes both those who govern it and those who actually do the bureaucratic work. It plays a huge role in the process of big city governance. As a result, a very dangerous situation has emerged where the people who work for the government also shape the direction of its policies. City councillors have always spent more than they received from taxes, and it became evident a long time ago that those who govern large cities abuse their power. It is sufficient to look at the roads of some New York suburbs, and at the repair of roads and bridges in general. In this regard, New York spends more than any other US state per capita. And it is not difficult to imagine that somewhere all of this money actually remains in someone else's pockets.

Town hall meetings have become a rare occurrence in large US cities. Periodically, there are meetings organised that look like town hall meetings, but they do not, as a rule, invoke any policy changes. **Modern American cities have become extremely centralised in their governance, coming to resemble the system that exists in France.** Only big political players, for whom politics is the major type of activity, can somehow influence the situation in large cities. It is becoming a

serious problem for the United States. Most New York inhabitants, for example, believe that there is no way they can influence the governance of their city. Mayor Michael Bloomberg has given so much money to charities and people of influence that right now nobody wants to interfere with his policies for the city. Perhaps owing to his philanthropy, Bloomberg scrambled along and somehow managed to win the recent elections.

Another similar example can be seen in the mayoral elections in Los Angeles, where the winner, Antonio Villaraigosa, had almost no competitors. The complexity of the current situation stems from the fact that there is not enough support from the current mayors and their teams to ensure effective municipal governance. Unfortunately, **the promotion of a worthy alternative has virtually been blocked; there are no candidates so there is no opportunity for citizens to voice their discontent with the governance of big cities.**

I would say that currently in the US there is only one group of citizens that has an active civil position. It primarily includes white Protestants, who, as a rule, don't live in big cities. But the influence of these white Protestants on the city policies of New York or Chicago is limited.

Recently, massive protests of the 'Boston tea party brigades' have gained popularity and have become a rather significant American phenomenon. The pivotal subject for the participants of this movement is the growth of the national debt and other similar issues, which they intend to solve in the spirit of fiscal conservatism. Nevertheless, the people behind this movement are not from large cities. ■

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