

## *Chinatown*, Part Two? The 'Internationalization' of Downtown Los Angeles

JAKE GITTES: How much are you worth?

NOAH CROSS: I have no idea. How much do you want?

GITTES: I want to know what you're worth—over ten million?

CROSS: Oh, my, yes.

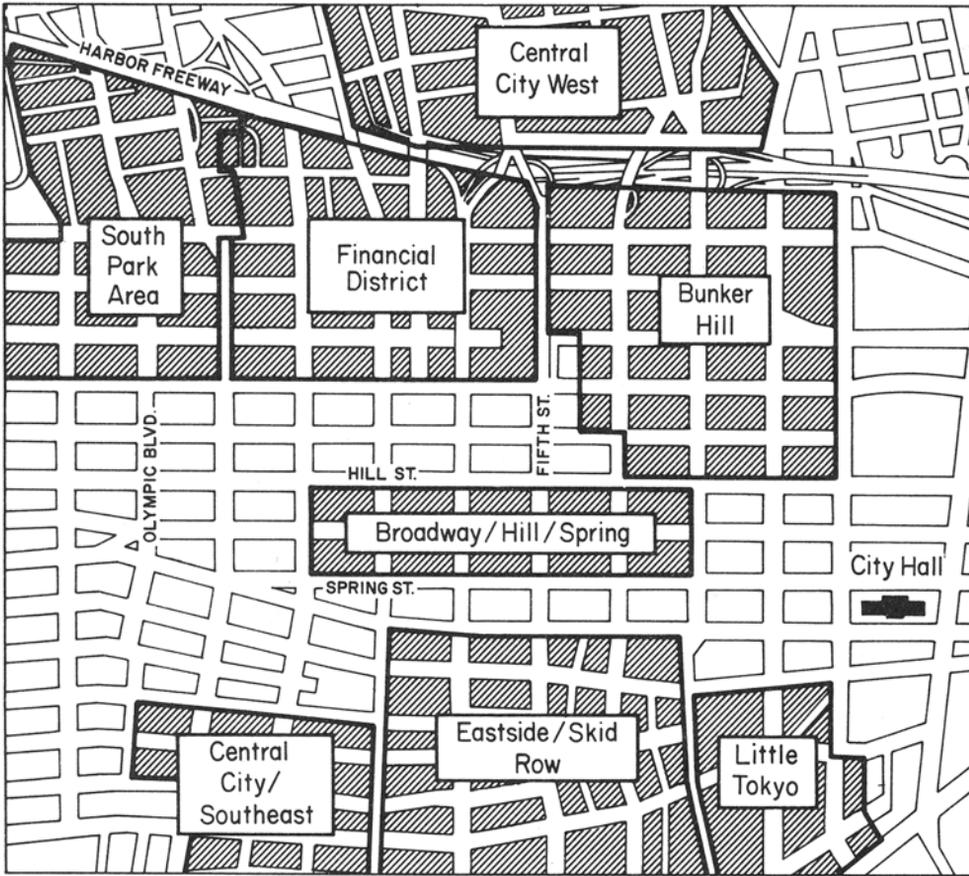
GITTES: Then why are you doing it? How much better can you eat?  
What can you buy that you can't already afford?

CROSS: The future, Mr Gittes, the future. . .

Robert Towne, *Chinatown* script

The shortest route between Heaven and Hell in contemporary America is probably Fifth Street in Downtown L.A.\* West of the refurbished Biltmore Hotel, and spilling across the moat of the Harbor Freeway, a post-1970 glass and steel skyscape advertises the landrush of Pacific Rim capital to the central city. Here, Japanese mega-developers, transnational bankers and billionaire corporate raiders plot the restructuring of the California economy.<sup>1</sup> A few blocks east, across the no-man's-land of Pershing Square, Fifth Street metamorphoses into the 'Nickel': the notorious half-mile strip of blood-and-vomit-spewn concrete where several thousand homeless people—themselves trapped in the inner circle of Dante's inferno—have become pawns in a vast local power struggle. Intersecting these extremes of greed and immiseration is the

## MAP ONE



### Downtown Los Angeles: Redevelopment Zones

axis of a third reality: *el gran Broadway*, the reverberant commercial centre of a burgeoning Spanish-speaking city-within-a-city, whose *barrios* (interpenetrating the ghetto to the south) now form a dense ring around the central business district. (See map one.) A ten-minute walk down Fifth Street thus passes through abrupt existential and class divides, a micro-tour of social polarization in the late-Reaganite era. Moreover this landscape—whether we recognize the location or not—has insinuated itself into the contemporary imagination. Because the Downtown skycity is so recent, and because of its proximity to the media factories of Hollywood, it figures prominently as a representation of the early twenty-first-century urbanism that is now emerging. It has become *de rigueur* for passing theorists and image-mongers, whether as critics or celebrants, to stop and comment on the architectural order and social topography that are coalescing out of the lava of development around Fifth Street.

---

\* For Ed and Diane.

For Fredric Jameson, in a seminal essay, the built environment of Los Angeles, especially its 'downtown renaissance', is a paradigm of the 'post-modern' city where architecture and electronic image have fused into a single hyperspace.<sup>2</sup> For the well-known urban designer James Sanders, director of the Bryant Park Project in Manhattan, the 'intense—even poetic—verticality' of Fifth and Grand is an expression of Los Angeles imperialism: "The 'new' downtown Los Angeles is pulling away international banking and finance, establishing a centre of great radiating lines of communication and trade for the Pacific Rim. As on the East Coast, where New York is grabbing the remaining marbles of the Atlantic economy community, so Los Angeles is setting itself up as the Pacific's economic capital. The two cities seem intent on carving the world into two great economic entities, with themselves as the centres."<sup>3</sup>

Hollywood, meanwhile, has reached for different hyperboles. Younger directors have relentlessly exploited the social extremes of Downtown as a nightmare stage, a ground zero, for such contemporary apocalypses as *Repo Man*, *The Terminator*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, and so on. This dystopian figuration acquires a dark grandeur in Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* with its images of mile-high towers, ruled by interplanetary genetic-engineering conglomerates, rising above the poisonous congealed smog that drips acid rain upon thirty million inhabitants. None of the theories or visions on offer (with the partial exception of the racist 'yellow hordes' of *Bladerunner*), however, registers the presence, probably epochal, of an enlarged low-wage working class, living and working in the central city, and creating its own spatialized social world: networks of recreation, piety, reproduction and, ultimately, struggle. They fail to capture the growing tension—relayed through various mediations to the traditional L.A. working and middle classes—between international capital and international labour migration in the contested terrain of the inner city. For if L.A.'s Downtown is in any sense paradigmatic, it is because it condenses the intended and unintended spatial consequences of the political economy of *post-Fordism*: that is to say, the rise of new, globalized circuits of finance and luxury consumption amid the decline of much of the old mass-consumption and high-wage industrial economy. But there is no single, master logic of restructuring, rather the complex intersection of two separate macro-processes: one based on the overaccumulation of bank and real-estate capital (most recently, from the recycling of the East Asian trade surplus to California); the other arising from the reflux of low-wage manufacturing and labour-intensive

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Jeffries' trading room at Fifth and Figueroa Streets in Downtown L.A. is just the kind of intense, fast-paced environment that attracts ambitious, wealth-driven kids. Spurred by a banner that reads "Positive People with the Competitive Edge", with buy-and-sell orders booming over a loudspeaker, young traders work night and day in plush purple chairs that rock and roll before Quotron terminals and keyboards. Phones crooked in their necks, they exploit their eighteen-hour edge on the N.Y. Stock Exchange to trade billion-dollar blocks of stock in Hong Kong, New York, London or Amarillo for anonymous buyers identified only by numbers.' (Moira Johnston, 'The Takeover Wars', *California Magazine*, May 1987, p. 57.) Boyd Jeffries—tanned, rich and handsome role model for the new crop of MBA's—has pleaded guilty to a 1986 conspiracy to manipulate the price of a securities offering by American Express; he has also confessed to 'parking stock' for Ivan Boesky.

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146, July–August 1984.

<sup>3</sup> 'Look at Downtown, the New Los Angeles', *Los Angeles Times* (henceforth, LAT), 16 February 1986, V2, p. 3.

services in the wake of unprecedented mass immigration from Mexico and Central America.

Within the larger systems of metropolitan Los Angeles and Southern California (separately, the ninth largest economy in the world), Downtown has become the privileged crucible where apparently infinite foreign capital and low-wage immigrant labour are first transformed into assets for the regional boom. But because Downtown is simultaneously a portal for capital and for immigration, and because the two functions remain concentrated in the same inner core of land development and infrastructure, there are growing contradictions. The yen-fueled momentum of highrise development cuts into the crowded work and residential spaces of the inner-city working poor: commercial overbuilding produces rampant underhousing. At the same time the uncoordinated dynamics of redevelopment and immigration, without investment in radically expanded welfare and physical infrastructures, are making powerful, if differential, impacts upon the living standards and residential positions of older working-class and middle-strata neighbourhoods from Boyle Heights to Venice and the San Fernando Valley. The political consequence is a far-reaching electoral realignment, excluding the working poor, as the old pro-development coalition under the figurehead of Mayor Bradley is attacked by a populist homeowners' rebellion orchestrated by his former Democratic allies on the white Westside. This is a complicated scenario, with sweeping assertions; a plot, perhaps, for *Chinatown, Part Two*. In the meantime, let me sketch, in bold outlines, the major action.

## I. What Jake Discovers about Downtown

The crisis of Downtown L.A. began in the same period in which Polanski's brilliant historical film noir is set, immediately after the great highrise building boom of 1923–24 that constructed the skyline as it remained until the 1960s. Commercial life in the centre began to wither as precocious automobilization (on a scale not achieved in Europe until the 1970s) gridlocked the Downtown traffic flow while the oil–rubber–paving lobby sabotaged the recapitalization of the city's once superb fixed-rail systems. A middle-class exodus to the Westside was followed by relocation of the large department stores and retail trade outward along Wilshire Boulevard. Depression and war filled Downtown tenements with an increasingly impoverished and shifting population; once aristocratic Bunker Hill near the civic centre became Raymond Chandler's notorious 'lost town, shabby town, crook town' with 'women with faces like stale beer . . . men with pulled-down hats'.<sup>4</sup>

The New Deal hopes of local progressives and trade unionists that Downtown might be revived with model public housing were vanquished in 1950 after a vicious, red-baiting mayoral campaign led by the *Los Angeles Times* and the traditional Downtown ruling circle. With a pliant city hall under Mayor Poulson, the *Times* and the Downtown Businessmen's Association, ventriloquizing their interests through the publicly unaccountable Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), were

---

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Chandler, *The High Window*, New York 1945, pp. 45–46.

able to ratify a masterplan (first conceived in 1931) to evict the nine thousand residents of Bunker Hill to make way for the first phase of ambitious commercial renewal.<sup>5</sup> Redevelopment, however, was easier to fantasize about in the smoking rooms of the elite Jonathan Club than to implement in practice; it took almost a decade to clear Bunker Hill. Apart from the rearguard resistance of expropriated Downtown slumlords and the sporadic hostility of Valley taxpayers to costly improvements in the inner city (deftly exploited by the *poujadiste* demagoguery of Poulson's successor, Sam Yorty), the major obstacle to a vigorous recentralization of commercial development was the fragmentation of ruling-class interests in the L.A. Basin. Gone were the days when the Merchants and Manufacturers Association could mobilize the para-military unity of local business behind the Open Shop (invented in L.A. in the 1890s).

The first break in elite ranks had occurred in 1926 when the Hollywood movie moguls seceded from the Open Shop to establish their own sweetheart-union labour-relations system (the famous Studio Basic Agreement). Repelled by the country-club anti-semitism of L.A.'s WASP old money, and dealing with a different calculus of labour costs, the predominantly Jewish management of the entertainment industry evolved into a world apart. They endowed the state university system's UCLA not the private University of Southern California (USC); generally contributed to the national Democrats not Republicans; and focused their speculative energies on the development of Beverly Hills and the greater Westside. Meanwhile, the crucial aerospace industry—closely integrated, like Hollywood, with Wall Street—was even less historically entangled with the old inner city; its regional interests were defined by the great airport-and-manufacturing complexes outside the city limits. Finally, at the turn of the sixties, the Downtown renewal strategy was frontally challenged by Alcoa's (i.e., the Mellon Family's) announcement that it was building a huge highrise centre for the Westside on Twentieth Century Fox's old backlot in what is now Century City.

Ironically the CRA's Downtown plan was saved by the explosion of the local Black working class. The Watts Rebellion was, amongst other things, a protest against the racist 'Cotton Curtain' that excluded Blacks from the higher-wage jobs in the industrial belt east of Alameda Street, as well as against rampant police brutality, rackrenting and petty usury. The crisis of 1965, which continued to resonate through waves of inner-city unrest and white backlash for almost a decade, was instrumentalized by redevelopment interests in two decisive ways. First and immediately, by raising the spectre of Downtown and USC engulfed by a militant Black population, the traditional corporate patrons of the CRA were able to galvanize broader ruling-class support for the renovation of Downtown, through the emergency Committee of 25 (later, the 'Com-

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Don Parsons, 'LA's "Headline-Happy" Public Housing Wars', *Southern California Quarterly*, LXV, 3 (Fall 1983); and Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times*, New York 1978, pp. 260–63. A 1953 amendment to the California constitution required voter approval for any further funding of public housing—a measure which effectively terminated construction.

munity Committee') and an expanded Central City Association.<sup>6</sup> The Community Committee, in particular, was the closest thing to an 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie' which Southern California had seen since the class wars of the 1930s. It broke precedent by including Jewish entertainment sector leaders (like Lew Wasserman of MCA), the CEOs of major aerospace corporations (like Roy Anderson of Lockheed and Tom Jones of Northrup), and a visible quotient of prominent Democrats.<sup>7</sup> (USC and its alumni meanwhile used the crisis, with official city support, to evict poor households and impose a *cordon sanitaire*—parking lots, administrative buildings, shopping centres—between campus and the surrounding Black–Latino community.)

### The Growth Coalition

The second aftermath of the Watts uprising was the consolidation of a multiracial coalition, based on Jewish (10 per cent of the electorate) and Black votes under the dispensation of Downtown boosters led by Otis Chandler's 'liberalized' *Los Angeles Times*. After six years of blistering warfare against Mayor Yorty's white backlash the new coalition installed Thomas Bradley, a Black ex-cop and city councilman, as mayor in 1973. Bradley's regime, which over the years has drawn support from such landed powers as BankAmerica, the Irvine Ranch, and ARCO, enlarged the CRA mandate to encompass all of Downtown, opening a real-estate bonanza to commercial developers. At the same time his fourteen-year reign has been little short of catastrophic for inner-city residents. As I will elaborate in a moment, Black Southcentral Los Angeles has been reduced to a deindustrialized twilight zone, while Eastside Chicano–Latino neighbourhoods, unrepresented on the city council between 1963 and 1985, have been locked out of power.<sup>8</sup> The key Bradley constituencies have been pacified with largely symbolic goods: for Blacks, a few celebrity politicians; for Jews, city hall's craven solicitation of Israel. The development interests, on the other hand, have received a plush welfare state all their own.

Because the city has avoided even the desultory levels of social service and patronage that have elsewhere been necessary supports of Black-led crisis-management, it has had still greater fiscal resources to subsidize urban renewal. The prime mechanism is 'tax increment financing', which

---

<sup>6</sup> The biggest Downtown-headquartered firms are ARCO, UNOCAL (Union Oil), Security Pacific Bank, First Interstate Bank, Carter Hawley Hale, Pacific Lighting, Transamerica, and Times Mirror.

<sup>7</sup> *The Economist* (3 April 1982, pp. 65–66) described the Community Committee as a 'more significant' local power-centre than Reagan's L.A. 'kitchen cabinet', but Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley (*Empires in the Sun*, New York 1981, pp. 116–17) point out that 'despite its apparent clout . . . it never functioned as a policy-setting organization. Its members largely reacted to the events rather than initiated long-term and even international orientations.' In recent years the Committee has been closely bonded to the powerful California Business Roundtable through the overlapping chairmanships of Edward Carter, anti-divestment University of California regent and head of the multinational department store chain, Carter Hawley Hale.

<sup>8</sup> It required a lawsuit by Reagan's Justice Department invoking the 1965 Voting Rights Act to force a reapportionment of the city council to increase Latino representation. Los Angeles is currently about 30 per cent Latino, 17 per cent Black and almost 7 per cent Asian. The impact of electoral gerrymandering has traditionally been reinforced by municipal fragmentation: an integral Chicano/Latino city-within-a-city of two million people is broken into more than a dozen jurisdictions between the City of Los Angeles, the County (East Los Angeles), and smaller incorporated cities.

allows the CRA to function as an unelected, sovereign power, confiscating the tax increases from new development (the 'increment') to subsidize further development. As Black small businesses have been 'red-lined' out of existence by discriminatory bank credit practices, and as East L.A. continues to pay more taxes than it receives in services,<sup>9</sup> Downtown redevelopers reap special low-interest loans, free infrastructural modernization, tax abatements and, above all, discounted prime land.

This is where we pick up the plot of Polanski's *Chinatown*: for the last twenty years big developers could be confident that their subsidized parcels—made available by the CRA at half the cost of land in Century City or downtown San Francisco—would triple or quadruple in market-value within a few years of construction; the resulting tax increment being sluiced off for the next stage of land development.<sup>10</sup> The CRA has quietly municipalized land speculation—just as in the early-twentieth-century aqueduct conspiracy upon which *Chinatown* was based, except on a vaster scale, with dirt and increments instead of dirt and water as the magic formula for super-profits.<sup>11</sup>

With the majority of the city council routinely approving every request of the developers' lobby (or abdicating power to the CRA and the City Planning Department), it was not surprising that almost \$2.5 billion of new investment flowed into Downtown in the decade after Bradley's election. Where there were just five new highrises above the old earthquake limit of thirteen floors in 1976, there are now forty-five. Increasingly the CRA operated a casino as players moved in and out of speculative positions, nearly a third of Downtown exchanging hands between 1976 and 1982. Ironically, as the ante has inexorably risen, many of the original champions of Downtown renewal, including large regional banks and oil companies with troubled cashflows, have had to cash in their equity and withdraw to the sidelines. As Volckerism first created a super-dollar and then weakened it, the volatile commercial real-estate markets around the country have favoured highly liquid investors and foreign capital. In 1979 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a quarter of Downtown's major properties were foreign-owned; six years later the figure was revised to 75 per cent (one authority claims

---

<sup>9</sup> For estimates of the deficit, see LAT, 13 April 1980, II, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the CRA bought sixteen rundown parcels at Fourth and Flower streets in the early 1960s for \$3 million; in the early 1970s, despite the explosion in property values, it discounted the combined parcel to Security Pacific for a mere \$5.4 million. By 1975 the land alone was worth over \$100 million. In another instance, Richard Riordan, a prominent local speculator, bought property in 1969 at Ninth and Figueroa for \$8 per square foot; within a decade it had soared to \$225 per square foot. Cf. LAT, 13 April 1980, VI, p. 2; John Brohman, *Urban Restructuring in Downtown Los Angeles*, unpublished MA thesis, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA 1983, p. 111; and Joel Friedman, *The Political Economy of Urban Renewal: Changes in Land Ownership in Bunker Hill*, unpublished MA thesis, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA 1978, p. 261.

<sup>11</sup> The CRA has been able to withdraw more than \$1 billion in property taxes from the general revenue for these purposes: a massive redistribution from the city's underprivileged to transnational capital. Moreover, since the fiscal restrictions of Proposition 13 in 1978 (the famous Jarvis tax initiative), affluent suburban cities have rushed to form redevelopment agencies in order to hoard tax revenue. Wealthy Palm Springs, for example, subsidized a \$9 million expansion of Saks Fifth Avenue through 'redevelopment' transfers from county revenue.

90 per cent).<sup>12</sup> The first wave of foreign investment in Downtown in the late 1970s, as in Manhattan, was led by Canadian real-estate capital, epitomized by Toronto-based Olympia and York. The Reichman clan who own Olympia and York collect skyscrapers like the mere rich collect rare stamps or Louis XIV furniture. Yet since 1984 they, along with the New York insurance companies and the British banks, have been swamped by a tsunami of East Asian finance and flight capital.

### 'Zaitech'

What the Japanese call *zaitech*, the strategy of using financial technologies to shift cashflow from production to speculation, has radically restructured Downtown's investment portfolios and given a new impetus to sagging office construction. The liquid resources of other investors have been simply dwarfed by the sheer mass of the Japanese trade surplus which is rapidly finding its way from US Treasury bonds to prime real estate. The current super-yen puts the skyscrapers along Figueroa's 'Gold Coast' at a rummage-sale discount: a virtually unknown condominium developer from Tokyo, Shuwa Company Ltd., bought nearly \$1 billion of L.A.'s new skyline, including the twin-towered Arco Plaza, in a single two-and-half-month shopping spree last year. Moreover, as local real estate analysts complain, 'the major Japanese companies are borrowing at very cheap rates, usually 5 per cent or less. They borrow in Japan [in Shuwa's case, through ten L.A. branches of Japanese banks], deduct it from their taxes in Japan and convert it to dollars, invest in dollars in the United States.'<sup>13</sup>

The Japanese surge into Downtown real estate is coordinated with the wild stockmarket and property booms within Japan itself that are causing increasing alarm about the future of the Pacific Rim economy.<sup>14</sup> As the super-yen and foreign protectionism depress industrial investment, most of the big Japanese corporations and trading firms are resorting to *zaitech* to keep themselves in the black. At the same time soaring stock values and a 100 per cent annual rate of property appreciation in central Tokyo are inflating portfolios and pension trusts which seek new outlets overseas. One result is the impressive lineup of Mitsui Fudosan, Sumitomo, Dai-Ichi Life, Mitsubishi and a dozen other major Japanese players in a race to grab new Downtown development sites. Together with more shadowy Kuomintang capital from Hongkong and the ASEAN region, they are positioning themselves to help push the frontiers of commercial speculation into the Spanish-speaking neighbourhoods west of the Harbor Freeway, as well as lobbying for the redevelopment of Skidrow as part of Little Tokyo.

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dick Turpin in LAT, 21 September 1986, pp. 1,7—confirmed by *The National Real Estate Investor* (December 1986, p. 102); the higher estimate is from Howard Sadowski, LAT, 17 June 1984, VII, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Weiner of Bear Stearns quoted in the *National Real Estate Investor*, December 1986, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Gregory Clark, on the business faculty of Sophia University in Tokyo, has recently argued that the current out-of-control stock and land booms are taking Japan to the brink of its worst postwar recession. (See 'Land and Stock Boom Take up the Slack', *International Herald Tribune*, 22 June 1987, p. 13.)

## 2. The Decline of Black Los Angeles

At this point the forces of international capital encounter those of international labour migration. But before introducing the working classes into the plot, it is necessary to attempt a capsule characterization of the larger-scale restructuring of which the internationalization of Downtown redevelopment is only a particular instance.

(a) Since 1978 the branch-plant, metal-banging sector of the California economy, concentrated since the 1920s in the East Bay and East L.A. manufacturing belts, has been largely shut down. The economic linkages with the US industrial heartland which these 'Fordist' branch plants embodied have been supplanted by new dependencies upon East Asian consumer durables and fabricated metal. To give just two examples: half of the new car market in California is Japanese, while much of the structural steel for skyscraper construction is imported from Korea.

(b) This substitution of Asian imports for national integration has sponsored the rise of a vast Pacific trade and product services complex in the L.A. Harbor area which, along with Japanese direct investment, stimulates the movement of offshore bank and pension fund capital to Southern California.

(c) The molecular action of the mass immigration of Korean and Chinese middle-classes also contributes to the formation of capital in Southern California. The highly entrepreneurial enclave of 'Koreatown' near Downtown L.A. has absorbed 200,000 immigrants and formed 3,000 small businesses since the early 1970s. Immigrant small business and family self-exploitation have also been the foundation for piratical real-estate speculation: witness the 4,000 'mini-malls' (street-corner shopping centres) which blight L.A. County.

(d) Income and demand in the white suburbs have been sustained by the boom in military spending; a large net subsidy from the rest of the USA, especially the 'Rustbelt', to Southern California. The Los Angeles area receives about 17 per cent of total defence spending, and the local association of prime contractors likes to boast that the Southern California aerospace-electronics complex is a larger economy than India's.<sup>15</sup>

(e) The power-structure of California, almost completely reshaped by mergers and foreign trade, has shifted from San Francisco to Los Angeles, now the second largest financial centre (and third corporate headquarters) in the United States. This has stimulated Downtown office development while also sharpening the rivalries with other Southern California 'central places', especially Century City and the Orange County 'Golden Triangle'.

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Golden State Report*, July 1986, p. 36; the survey of Julien Studley Co. in *LAT*, 29 January 1984, VII, p. 27; and the testimony of Maureen Frisch, chairperson of the California Aerospace Alliance, to the California Assembly Economic Development and New Technologies Committee, 4 December 1984.

(f) The continued expansion of the Southern California economy has become a major 'pull' factor in the disarticulation of the economies of Mexico and Central America. Most of the Salvadorean 'foot people' whom President Duarte recently begged Reagan to keep in the United States live within sight of L.A.'s city hall. Paradoxically, as high-productivity manufacturing in Los Angeles has collapsed, sweated and labour-intensive production has boomed.<sup>16</sup> This is explained by the emergence of a 'third world' sector within the regional economy, based on the minimum-wage labour of immigrants without citizen rights.

Black Los Angeles has been especially marginalized by this internationalization of the metropolitan economy. The 1978–82 wave of deindustrialization, which shuttered ten of the twelve largest non-aerospace plants in the region and displaced more than 50,000 blue-collar workers, erased ephemeral Black (and Chicano) occupational gains won in the late 1960s. An investigating committee of the California Legislative in 1982 confirmed a dismal pattern of benign neglect and economic devastation in Southcentral neighbourhoods. Unemployment has risen by nearly fifty per cent since the early 1970s while purchasing power in the community has fallen by a third. Where local warehouses and factories have not folded altogether, they have fled to the South Bay or northern Orange County areas, leaving behind a wasteland of derelict factories and abandoned industrial sites.<sup>17</sup>

Black retail business, meanwhile, has been driven into virtual extinction by discriminatory credit practices and the competition of regional shopping malls. The CRA has played a mephistophelean role in fomenting disinvestment in Southcentral L.A. Its sole project in the ghetto, a small shopping complex near Watts' 1965 'Charcoal Alley', languished through fifteen years of 'planning'. More insidiously, the CRA helped destroy the leading retail district in the Black community, the Crenshaw Shopping Center, by providing redevelopment subsidies to the wealthy promoters of the Fox Hills Plaza on the ghetto's periphery. As a critic put it: 'The CRA labeled one area blighted, which it wasn't, in order to create a development that blighted existing centres.'<sup>18</sup>

Unlike some other large cities, Los Angeles makes no contribution from the general city revenue for social programmes for the poor, and relies, at Mayor Bradley's insistence, entirely upon federal aid or county intervention. But as the Legislature found to its dismay, the sprawling Southcentral districts of the city, with the largest concentrations of poverty, have received merely twelve cents on the dollar of federal revenue-sharing and block grants. The city council has diverted most federal aid to Downtown—USC redevelopment, or deployed it to win

---

<sup>16</sup> For a brilliant analysis of this phenomenon, see Edward Soja, 'LA's the Place: Economic Restructuring and the Internationalization of the Los Angeles Region', paper, Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Antonio 1984 (to appear as a chapter in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in the Social Sciences*, Verso, London, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> California, Joint Committee on the State's Economy and the Senate Committee on Government Organization, *Problems and Opportunities for Job Development in Urban Areas of Persistent High Unemployment*, Sacramento 1982, pp. 29, 50, 58, 94, 108, 111, 115.

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with Edward Soja, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA.

votes amongst middle-class homeowners.<sup>19</sup> With 78,000 unemployed youth in the Watts–Willowbrook area, it is not surprising that there are now 145 branches of the rival Crips and Bloods gangs in south L.A., or that the jobless resort to the opportunities of the burgeoning ‘Crack’ economy.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, employed Black workers, as well as many Chicanos, are beginning to feel the competitive pressures of the ‘third world’ sector in local services, construction and manufacture. For example, Service Employees Local 399, which organized the primarily Black custodial workers in the Downtown highrises, has been smashed by contractors using undocumented, minimum-wage labour. Nearly 2,000 janitors have lost their jobs and wages have fallen from \$13 to \$3.50 per hour.<sup>21</sup> Similarly Blacks in Downtown hotels have been displaced by lower-wage workers.<sup>22</sup> Even where Blacks, or Chicanos, are willing, in desperation, to enter the low-wage labour market, they are usually prevented (according to testimony to the Legislature) by employer preferences for non-citizen labour—a discrimination re-doubled by the racism that excludes most Black males from retail or ‘public visibility’ jobs outside the Black community. Although redevelopment has been defended by Bradley and the building trades as a new source of compensatory high-wage employment, the job benefits have been overwhelmingly appropriated by white commuters. By concentrating public resources on the highrise and financial-services boom, and by confiscating the tax increment, renewal has only accelerated the deterioration of socio-economic conditions for citizen workers of colour.

### 3. Third World, Second City

Workers without citizen rights, on the other hand, have become the raw material for a major revival of absolute surplus extraction. Although their labour is essential to every locality and level of the Southern California economy, it is most visibly concentrated in the inner city. Mexican or Central American labour wipes the plates, mops the floors, empties the garbage, and, generally, performs every menial task in the Downtown service sector. At the same time 200,000 immigrant workers, including many East Asians, have been conscripted into the low-wage manufactures that have replaced the ‘Fordist’ auto, tire and steel plants as the second largest sector of the local industrial economy. Much of the declining industrial belt east of Alameda Street has been recycled

---

<sup>19</sup> California, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Also see LAT, 22 September 1985, II, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Los Angeles has surpassed Detroit to become the most dangerous city in the First World; its annual homicides have increased from 301 in 1964 to 1,372 in 1985. Martin Luther King, Jr. Hospital in the Watts area treats two thousand cases of gunshot trauma every year—the highest reported in the world and largely attributable to gang violence. See Robert Conot, ‘Watts New Faces, Fresh Frustration’, LAT, 11 August 1985, IV, pp. 1–2.

<sup>21</sup> From testimony of labour expert Richard Mines, in California, Assembly Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, *Undocumented Mexican Immigration*, Sacramento 1985, pp. 64–65. Union density has declined more rapidly in California than in the nation, and more sharply in L.A. than in the remainder of the state. According to the Los Angeles Labor Council (‘Immigration and Jobs in Los Angeles County’, June 1985) unionization since 1971 has fallen from nearly a third to less than a fifth of the labour force.

<sup>22</sup> Example given in Judith Cummings, ‘Changing Demographics, and Politics, in Los Angeles’, *New York Times*, 24 August 1986.

by new or 'born-again' (deunionized) low-wage factories, including foundries, furniture and plastic plants, and some aerospace sub-contracting. But the epicentre of low-wage industry remains L.A.'s apparel sector, the nation's second largest, with at least 120,000 workers, of whom only a few thousand are unionized despite a half-century of struggle.

By creating union-free, third-world conditions of labour within its speciality niche of women's sportswear production, the local garment industry has been able almost to double its workforce during a decade when other US apparel centres, like Manhattan, have been shrinking in the face of off-shore competition. This 'comparative advantage' in labour-intensive production explains part of the puzzle of how the L.A. metropolitan economy was capable of adding more net manufacturing jobs than any other region at the same time that its high-wage, non-defence industries were stricken.<sup>23</sup> (The military aerospace boom under Reagan obviously explains the other part.) The garment industry, depending on a propinquity of sub-contracting and 'homework' to final assembly and wholesale marketing, has been a powerful magnet concentrating immigration in the interstices and peripheries of Downtown. Other centralizing forces include Downtown's demand for menial service labour; its traditional function as an ethnic centre for Hispanics, Filipinos and Asians; centrality to the bus system; and, implacably, the racist and segmented rental markets which funnel the Spanish-speaking poor into the overcrowded districts of dilapidated housing that surround the redevelopment zones.

A million immigrants over the last decade have been crammed into older Black and Chicano areas, forming a dense, continuous ring of slum housing around Downtown, with filaments and tentacles reaching out to Hollywood and the eastern San Fernando Valley in the north, the San Gabriel Valley as far as La Puente to the east, and Lynwood in the south. There has been no housing planning or social policy to accommodate this on-rush of new low-wage residents. Since 1981 federal housing assistance has been slashed by seventy per cent without compensatory support from state or city authorities. Los Angeles has not built a unit of public housing since the controversies of the McCarthy period, and the existing stock of older rental property is being systematically depleted by redevelopment and condominium conversion. In the near future rents in some 60,000 units will rise sharply as federal restrictions expire on subsidized housing, and as other private apartment owners pass on the costs of upgrading to earthquake safety standards. Simultaneously Reagan's Department of Housing and Urban Development is crusading for the mass eviction of 'illegal aliens' from publicly subsidized developments. The cheapest family units in the city, in the

---

<sup>23</sup> An Urban Institute study of the L.A. attributes the dynamism of the area's low-wage manufactures to a widening wage gap between regions, and, within Southern California, between non-union and union jobs. '... relative average wages of unskilled workers in the Los Angeles manufacturing sector have declined dramatically—from 2 percent *above* the US metropolitan average in 1969 and 1970 to 12 percent *below* the average a decade later. . . . In contrast, wages for skilled workers in Los Angeles in predominantly unionized industries . . . grew at about the national average.' See Thomas Muller, et. al., *The Fourth Wave: California's Newest Immigrants*, Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 110.

most dilapidated neighbourhoods, now cost about seventy per cent of the income of a minimum-wage worker.<sup>24</sup>

The result has been universal overcrowding as two or three, sometimes even four, immigrant families are forced to occupy a single family dwelling or apartment. As this tenement strategy has reached its supersaturation point, families have spilled over into a burgeoning black market in housing. In a city where thousands of luxury condominiums stand unoccupied, at least two hundred thousand immigrants from Mexico and Central America are living in illegal garage conversions, typically without plumbing or heat.<sup>25</sup> Although many of the inner city's squalid apartment blocs are owned by Encino dentists and other caricaturable yuppie landlords, a large sector of rackrenting and housing exploitation is conducted by the citizen working class or *arriviste* immigrants. Amid such an acute crisis of affordable housing, the labour-market fragmentation of the L.A. working class between privileged and oppressed strata is redoubled by these relations of mass homelessness and mass landlordism. Some see the spectre of a creeping 'Brazilianization' of the city's social structure: 'What kind of city will Los Angeles be in the year 2000 if we fail to provide needed housing? A city segregated into regions of affluence and poverty, like Rio de Janeiro? A city of gated communities and wandering groups of homeless, like the millions of street children in Brazil? Will we see children sleeping on street corners, forced to survive through pan-handling and petty theft?'<sup>26</sup>

### The Latino Urban Culture

Yet the immigrant working class does not simply submit to the city for the purposes of capital, it is not merely the collective victim of 'urban crisis'; it also strives to transform and create the city, its praxis is a material force, however unrecognized or invisible in most accounts of contemporary Los Angeles. Though superficially the new ethnic mosaic of the inner city fits into the classical 'Chicago School' model of the ghettoized North American city, the cultural thrust of immigration has changed. Like the enclave Asian boomtowns in the region (Koreatown, old Chinatown, 'new Chinatown' in Alhambra–Monterey Park, and Westminster's Little Saigon), the Spanish-speaking neighbourhoods of L.A. are more than melting pots for eventual assimilation to some hyphenated ethnicity. Together with their integral worlds of work and itineraries of movement, these residential environments comprise a virtually parallel urban structure—a second city.

Even in the face of strident nativism, exemplified by the recent success of the statewide 'English as Official Language' initiative, Spanish-

---

<sup>24</sup> See Neal Richman and Ruth Schwartz, 'Housing Homeless Families: Why L.A. Lags Behind', LAT, 24 May 1987, Op Ed, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephanie Chavez and James Quinn, 'Garages: Immigrants In, Cars Out', LAT, 24 May 1987, I, pp. 1, 3, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Richman and Schwartz, op. cit. Friedman calls Los Angeles 'the most highly ghettoized city in the country' (op. cit.), a distinction which probably could only be contested by Chicago. In a recent investigation, *Los Angeles Times* reporters encountered a 60 per cent rate of discrimination against non-white apartment seekers. (See Carol McGraw, 'Housing Bias Remains Rampant', 3 May 1984, p. 16.)

speaking Los Angeles—the second-largest Mexican, Guatemalan and Salvadorean city in the hemisphere—has far in excess of the necessary critical mass of institutions and media to define its own distinctive urbanity: a different, more ‘classical’ way of living in the city based on gregarious, communitarian uses of markets, boulevards, parks, and so on. The great Latino shopping streets—Broadway in Downtown and Brooklyn in Boyle Heights—have more in common with the early-twentieth-century city, with the culture of Ragtime, than they do with a deathwish ‘postmodernity’. In contrast to the Yiddish East Side of 1920, however, the Spanish-speaking city has increasing, amplified connections with the mother culture(s): indeed it is a direct, continuous extension of it, a vector of ‘Americanization’ in the authentic sense of the term.

This second city collides with the movement of international capital in the arena of Downtown redevelopment, where the expanding highrise frontier threatens to uproot poor neighbourhoods. Originally the CRA had envisaged that redevelopment would be directed primarily southward towards USC, and therefore designated the Pico Union district, west of the Convention Center, as a ‘service area’ for the planned office complexes and highrise condominiums of the South Park development. Pico Union, however, is the oldest, most densely networked, Central American neighbourhood in the city. Local resistance, supported by the city-wide Campaign for Economic Survival, forced the CRA to back down from its scheme of rezoning the area for light industry and parking. This has been virtually the only ‘popular’ victory in thirty-eight years of urban renewal.<sup>27</sup>

Pico Union’s success, moreover, was abetted by the developers’ greater interest in expanding *westward* across the Harbor Freeway from Bunker Hill into the Temple-Beaudry district, and down Wilshire Boulevard towards MacArthur Park, the entire zone of prospective development now dubbed the ‘Central City West’. This is also the poorest part of the city, the principal portal of entry for immigrants from Central America. Its population is severely overcrowded in an absentee-owned, nine-tenths dilapidated housing stock, with whole families compelled to ‘hot bed’ sleep in shifts.<sup>28</sup> The big developers, with credit lines to limitless offshore capital, are already building on Crown Hill, the summit of Temple-Beaudry, and have assembled huge parcels along Wilshire for further development. Although the extent of their acquisitions is a \$64,000 question, the threat to the communities is imminent. Dan Garcia, president of the Los Angeles Planning Commission, has warned that ‘we’re not the relocation conscience of the city. Displacement is

---

<sup>27</sup> ‘People United to Save Our Community’ was formed as a grassroots alternative to the Pico Union Neighborhood Corporation, which is one of the several ‘professionalized’ community development corporations which the CRA has created as satellites for its redevelopment programmes. See Gilda Haas and Allen Heskin, *Community Struggles in Los Angeles*, School of Architecture and Urban Planning Paper DP147, UCLA, 1982.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Friedman, 135–145; Brohman p. 154.

going to happen.’<sup>29</sup> The ultimate human costs of Central City West redevelopment—unless it is vigorously contested by grassroots mobilization with the support of local unions (most of whose headquarters are near MacArthur Park)—could be even greater than the original diaspora from Bunker Hill.

The other prime ‘soft spot’ that international developers are probing is Skidrow, the ‘Nickel’, whose blight blocks the expansion of Little Tokyo and a presumably massive inflow of Japanese capital. For a long time Councilman Gilbert Lindsay, the 85-year-old ‘Emperor of Downtown’, has advocated a final solution, based on the deportation of the street people to a poor farm outside the city limits in Saugus or, most recently, the Santa Monica Mountains.<sup>30</sup> Two years ago Mayor Bradley and CRA chairman Jim Woods (*homo diabolus* from the L.A. building trades) set up a taskforce to explore the options for introducing commercial redevelopment into the area. Last winter, after a number of people froze to death on the streets, Bradley—at the urging of the Central City East Association of businessmen—ordered police sweeps to destroy the makeshift sidewalk camps that the homeless had erected as protection against hypothermia. In a Kafkaesque vein, Chairman Woods explained that only the shelters were illegal, not sleeping naked on the street in 0°C weather. ‘The camping aspect is what we are trying to get at, the jumble of furniture on the street, the open fires. But no one is telling people they can’t sleep on the streets’.<sup>31</sup>

But even this final, pathetic freedom was repealed in May as Police Chief Gates, again backed by the mayor and goaded by the developers, declared that the homeless had a week to clear the streets or face mass arrest. Despite protests from Westside liberals on the city council, the anxieties of Bradley’s own advisers, and even the opposition of the district attorney—who tried to remind the police that homelessness was not actually a crime—Gates’s men duly carted off street people, their advocates, and even a few sympathetic onlookers.<sup>32</sup> Although Bradley must have understood that such Rambo-like bullying of the helpless would damage his image in the forthcoming elections (as he stands for an unprecedented fifth term), the lobbying of the Little Tokyo real-estate interests was irresistible. Organizers among the homeless, like the radical-pacifist Catholic Workers, have conceded that defence of the neighbourhood against a siege of international capital is probably a ‘losing battle’. ‘The forces we’re going up against are pretty monumental’.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview in *LA Architect*, April 1987. The Planning Commission is engaged in a power struggle to exclude the CRA from west-of-the-freeway development. The Urban Design Committee of the Los Angeles chapter of the American Institute of Architects has raised concern about community displacement and inadequate transport planning in the Central City West.

<sup>30</sup> ‘That would be a beautiful place for them.’ Quoted in *LAT*, 6 June 1987, II, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *LAT*, 19 February 1987, IV, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Gates said he did not have “one ounce of concern” for the “so-called homeless” . . . “the vast majority want to be on the streets because of a range of indulgences. They are there because they want to be.”’ (Quoted in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 29 May 1987, A, p. 12.) It is estimated that there are at least 50,000 homeless people in Los Angeles county, 10,000 of them children. See editorial, ‘The Scandal of the Streets’, *LAT*, 20 August 1984, I, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *LAT*, 5 August 1985, II, p. 3; and articles 29–30 May 1987.

#### 4. The Limits of Redevelopment

Even more monumental are the diseconomies which the forces of Downtown development are generating for the rest of the metropolis. A hundred thousand new jobs have been added to Downtown in the last twenty years without corresponding new investment in rapid transit or freeway construction, apart from a gerrybuilt bus lane on the San Bernardino Freeway. Rush-hour traffic speed in the Downtown freeway interchanges—the choke points for hundreds of thousands of suburban commuters—has been reduced by forty per cent, while surface street flow has returned to the nightmare 1924 (!) peak of congestion that caused the decline of Downtown in the first place. In a typical incident, Mayor Bradley was unable to reach a topping-off ceremony for the new Citicorp Plaza less than a mile from City Hall (mayors, like other middle-class Angelinos, do not walk). By 1990 the Downtown parking shortage will exceed 25,000 places, and Caltrans has warned of paralysing gridlock on the freeways as morning and afternoon traffic jams coalesce in a twelve-hour continuum. Meanwhile the city's expected schedule for meeting federal air quality control standards had to be postponed from 1982 until 2020; ozone levels are currently triple the official (lenient) safety maximum.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the worst popular fears of a generation ago about the consequences of market-driven overdevelopment in the Los Angeles Basin are punctually coming true. Decades of systematic under-investment in housing and urban infrastructure, combined with grotesque subsidies for speculators, permissive zoning for commercial development, the absence of effective regional planning, and ludicrously low property taxes for the wealthy have ensured an erosion of the quality of life for the suburban middle classes as well as for the inner-city poor. But the latter continue to bear the brunt of the crisis. The transportation problems of Downtown, to take one instance, will only further increase pressures on inner-city housing, as a chorus of business interests and politicians shouts for more peripheral parking, service areas, and new transport corridors. A complex political struggle, prefiguring the realignment of city politics as well as additional evictions of low-income residents, envelops the controversial \$3.5 billion plan to build a Downtown fixed-rail system.

Metro Rail was conceived initially, in the mid-1970s, less as a coherent transport design than as a hurried response by the Bradley regime to fears that the county supervisors were preemptively dipping into the federal mass transit porkbarrel.<sup>35</sup> Originally justified as a system to

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. LAT, 9 June 1983, IV, p. 2; 5 August, 1984, IX, p. 9; and series, 19–21 April 1987.

<sup>35</sup> See Adriana Gianturco, 'L.A. Has Lots of Weapons on Transit' LAT, 1 April 1986, II, p. 6. The five-person Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors ranks with New York's Board of Estimate as the most powerful, and least accountable, local governing body in the United States. The conservative L.A. County Supervisors, with their fabulous powers over land-use planning in the county's unincorporated 4,000 square miles, form a solid bloc with the twenty largest regional developers. According to an investigation by the *L.A. Weekly* (22–28 November 1985), each of the supervisors had received at least \$1 million in contributions from developers since 1980. (Cf. Daryl Kelley, 'Developer Donations Put Antonovich, Dana in the Driver's Seat', LAT, 27 April 1987, II, pp. 1, 3.) Further environmental regulation of building within L.A. city will undoubtedly only push commercial development deeper into county areas.

relieve congestion along the Wilshire corridor (a separate ‘people mover’ was designated for Downtown itself), Metro Rail has metamorphosed, through various crises and revisions, into yet another huge boondoggle for speculators (shades of the L.A. aqueduct), primarily directed towards the redevelopment of Hollywood. Planning for the original Wilshire route was redolent with scandal, leading to the resignation of the city’s planning director after the revelation of his intimate business ties with the key lobbyist for a more permissive zoning of the route.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, Wilshire Metro Rail fell afoul of the powerful Westside-Valley political organization headed by the Berman brothers and Henry Waxman—an omen, as we shall see, of the breakup of the Bradley coalition.

Congressman Waxman, a major power in the Democratic House, has won the appreciation of Westside homeowners and small businessmen by his denunciations of Metro Rail (and, by implication, more high-density development) as ‘an absurd waste of money’. For several years he held up construction by demanding safety checks of ‘hazardous gas pockets’ in the mid-Wilshire and Fairfax areas. Then, in early 1987, he used his amanuensis, Congressman Julian Dixon (‘I felt an obligation to Henry’), to veto altogether the Rapid Transit District’s compromise proposal for a Wilshire branch. Planning for a westward route (now in the hands of a new transport super-agency) has been adroitly deflected into a consideration of using other surface corridors—like Olympic or Washington—which run through the Black and Asian communities.<sup>37</sup>

Whatever the ultimate fate of Metro Rail west of Western Avenue, construction of the initial Union Station-to-MacArthur Park leg of the country’s most expensive transit system—ca. \$200 million per mile—is in full progress. At this point, the priority for future construction, largely unopposed by the Westside forces, is a Hollywood branch comprising an elevated line along Sunset Boulevard, through the heart of Hollywood, and a subway tunnel through the hills to North Hollywood and the Valley. This will neatly link up CRA’s Downtown empire with its new \$1 billion, thirty-year redevelopment project in Hollywood, creating attractive nodes of speculation and highrise development adjacent to the Metro Rail stations. As Hollywood becomes ripe for tourist and office-propelled revitalization (no doubt with offshore financing), many of its forty thousand immigrants and poor people will be pushed out.

As inner-city neighbourhoods are broken up by redevelopment, how does the city propose to cope with displacement and homelessness? In the medium run a strategic option is to set up a cheap commuting system to encourage dispersal of some of the low-income population to the south and southeast. City and county officials have been hurrying funding for a Light Rail line between Downtown and Long Beach, utilizing the old Pacific Electric right of way which runs down Alameda through Watts and Compton. At only one-sixth the per-mile cost of the baroque bamboozle of Metro Rail, Light Rail will not generate the

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf., LAT, 19 February 1984, VIII, pp. 1 passim; and 29 January 1984, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Rich Connell, ‘Dixon’s Objections May Block Wilshire Metro Rail Routing’, LAT, 28 April 1987.

same multi-billion-dollar real-estate fallout, but it could alleviate the critical overcrowding on buses serving Black and Latino southside neighbourhoods.

It is symptomatic of the historic fragmentation of L.A.'s power-centres, and of the sheer scale of their endeavour, that elements of such a strategy—envisioning coordinate speculative potentials along a truly metropolitan axis—have only recently emerged, partly because of the stimulus of foreign capital. But it is unclear whether Downtown-sponsored transit planning, even under the auspices of big regional developers and offshore capital, can reconcile the interests of investors in the other, traditionally competitive, metropolitan office markets. Despite the official hoopla about Downtown's resurgence—toasted in champagne at Bradley's recent \$90,000 groundbreaking party for Metro Rail—the Westside centres have actually built more new office space (27 million square feet versus 24 million).<sup>38</sup> Indeed the rampant expansion of commercial complexes, residential highrises and supermalls in west L.A. during the 1980s, without any provision for extra traffic or other social costs, has fueled a powerful homeowners' revolt against high-density growth which threatens, as well, the Downtown developers' tenure in city hall.

### The Slow-Growth Rebellion

As previously indicated, the Bradley alliance of soul and lox has been the electoral underpinning of unrestrained urban development. The first major challenge to his coalition came from the unreconstructed right in 1978–81, as former Yorty-ites, Jarvis tax protestors, and opponents of school busing regrouped in a coalition led by Bobbi Fiedler and Alan Robbins which succeeded in rolling back school desegregation and sabotaging the Downtown 'people mover'. The new right lacked the citywide electoral clout or business support to topple Bradley's multiracial coalition. However, in the wake of his unsuccessful bid for the California governorship in 1982 (disastrously repeated in 1986), the Berman–Waxman camp—which *New Republic* has heralded as the 'most powerful Democratic "machine" in the country'—began to break away from the mayor, embracing the new gospel of 'slow growth'.<sup>39</sup>

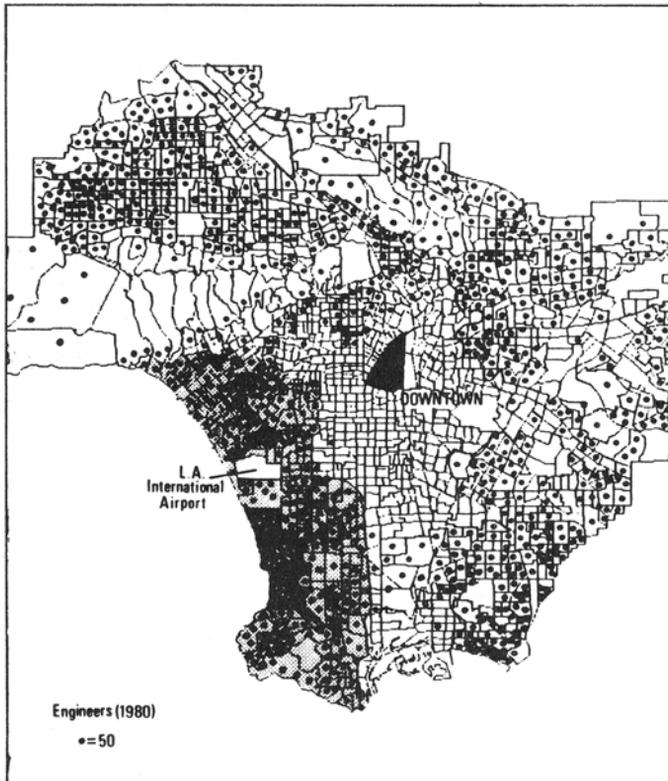
As the local political establishment immediately recognized, the Berman–Waxman shift is a tactic in a larger manoeuvre. They are bidding not only for hegemony in city hall, but above all to buttress their considerable influence in Sacramento and Washington. From their original base in the Jewish, liberal–Democratic districts of the Westside

---

<sup>38</sup> Grubb and Ellis figures from *The National Real Estate Investor*, December 1986, p. 112. Most significant of the new Westside developments will be the giant Howard Hughes Center with almost 3 million square feet of office space.

<sup>39</sup> *New Republic*, 7 July 1986, pp. 18–19. Slow-growth movements have also recently won victories in San Francisco and San Diego, heralds of a middle-class political revolution in California's coastal zone. As housing infill and increasing density become more politically difficult to achieve, home construction in California will shift even more radically to distant interior basins like the 'Inland Empire' of western Riverside and San Bernardino counties (the most rapidly urbanizing area in the United States) and the Central Valley fringes of the Bay Area.

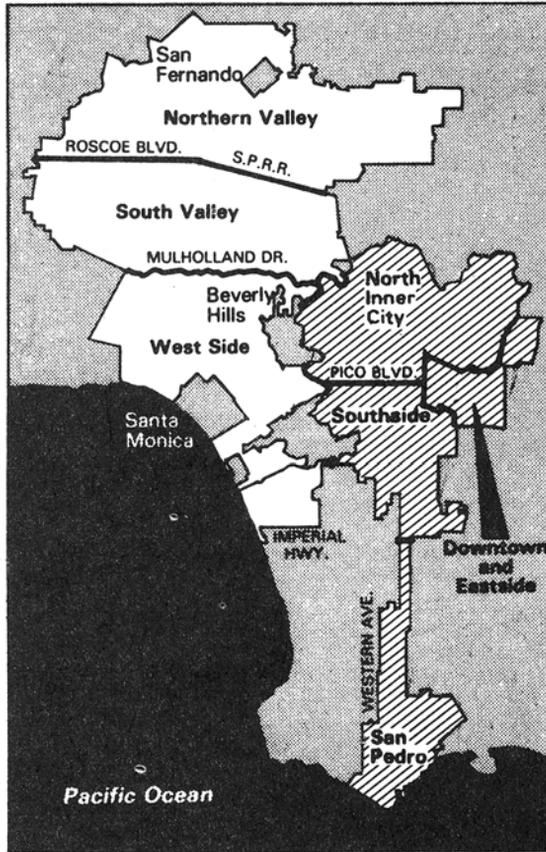
## Map Two



### Concentration of Engineers in Los Angeles

and the south San Fernando Valley, they have enlarged their influence over that neo-liberal 'dream constituency' of aerospace professionals, computer specialists, young entrepreneurs and the like, in the surf-urban corridor that runs from the South Bay west of the San Diego Freeway, through Santa Monica, into the western San Fernando Valley, and, ultimately, up to trendy Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. (See map two.) In this coastal demi-paradise the preservation of community amenities underwrites soaring property values, and high-density developers are almost as resented as poor people of colour. Moreover, as the Bermans and Waxman are intensely aware, Yuppie political power is increasing, despite massive non-Anglo immigration. As a detailed socio-electoral analysis conducted by Caltech for the *Los Angeles Times* concluded: 'In a city that thinks of itself as the nation's modern melting pot, the political controls rest securely in the middle class, with the number of white, affluent voters increasing at a greater rate than voters from the city's burgeoning nonwhite, immigrant population. . . . the majority of the voters (59 per cent) live in the city's whitest and wealthiest neighbourhoods on the Westside and in the San Fernando Valley, areas that contain less than half (48 per cent) of the city's population. These areas are 75 per cent white and include 88 per cent

### Map Three



Divided City: □ = Anglo majority; ▨ = Non-anglo majority

of the households in the city with incomes of \$50,000 or more.<sup>40</sup> (See map three.)

This discrepancy between population and electoral power is a result partly of working-class abstentionism, but still more of diminishing citizen-rights in the Latino working class. The once-pivotal Black vote has also become less important to Westside politicians as they reach out to incorporate parts of the electoral base of the new right in their white-neighbourhood-based revolt. Indeed the Berman–Waxman camp and its followers of the moment are zealously promoting Westside separatism,

<sup>40</sup> This study was conducted by Bruce Cain; see *LAT*, 5 April 1987, II., p. 1. The ethnic-cum-class spectrum of inequality in L.A. is indicated by the following comparison of per capita (household) income as a percentage of a 'moderate standard of living' in 1981 (as computed from Census, BLS, and survey data in Thomas Muller, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 153):

non-Hispanic Whites	180%
Asians	120%
Blacks	90%
Chicanos	80%
'new' Latinos	60%

emphasizing the divergent interests of the 'beach and borsch' belt vis-à-vis Downtown and the smog belt. They have brilliantly appropriated the lessons of the late 1970s tax rebellion by capturing, for their own strategic purposes, the antipathy of homeowners to further high-density development: totally obscuring in the process such questions of equity as affordable housing, job creation, or the plight of the immigrant working poor.

The schism in the Bradley coalition emerged vividly during the November 1986 elections as a populist movement under the banner of 'Not Yet New York', and with Waxman's avid support battled Bradley and the big developers. Recognizing the popularity of slow-growth Proposition U, which proposed to roll back commercial zoning in much of the Westside (although not, significantly, in Hollywood or Downtown) and to restrict highrise construction in residential areas, Bradley's council majority—led by President Pat Russell and urged on by Cadillac Fairview and other mega-developers—rushed through a questionable ordinance intended to exempt thirty pet projects. Galvanizing the slow-growth opposition was a key Berman–Waxman ally, Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, an indigenous facsimile of Mayor Koch who launched his career by making support of Ariel Sharon a 'local' issue.

Proposition U passed by a landslide—'a watershed' and 'the end of the boomtown mentality', according to a triumphant Yaroslavsky,<sup>41</sup> who promptly declared his official candidacy against Bradley as well as unveiling an even more drastic plan that would give the council veto-power over any new development bigger than 50,000 square feet. Meanwhile the mayor, clearly imitating Governor Jerry Brown's notorious *volte face* over anti-property-tax Proposition 13 in 1978, tried to recuperate slow-growth sentiment by pledging allegiance to Proposition U and offering the newly discovered panacea of community planning. But Bradley's sudden concern about mini-mall squalor and hillside despoliation (he predictably sidelined the fates of Central City West and Hollywood) came too late in the day to avoid the anti-development deluge in the June 1987 city council elections. The supposedly impregnable Russell, key strategist of the Bradley camp, was dramatically upset by Ruth Galanter, an urban planner from the Venice area with a New Left background and financial support from Henry Waxman. Galanter's victory, together with the loss of Bradley's nominee in his own old home district, has tilted the balance of power toward a realignment of the council majority.

It is significant, however, that the progressive Galanter, whom Russell tried to radical-bait because of her past association with Assemblyman Tom Hayden (another ardent Berman–Waxman supporter), won decisively in the traditionally conservative and white Westchester area while losing the liberal and Black Crenshaw district. The point certainly has not been lost on the supporters of higher-density development, who have made hay out of the slow-growth movement's racial and class biases. As Planning Commission President Dan Garcia put it: 'The old

---

<sup>41</sup> LAT, 4 June 1987, I, p. 26.

multiracial coalition that Bradley presided over is breaking down. This slow growth movement, or whatever you want to call it, is by any other name a movement of white, middle class, affluent people who are out for themselves and their own neighbourhoods.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the best efforts of some progressives, it is likely that the debate over the degradation of the urban environment in Los Angeles will stay focused on the needs of ascendant white homeowners, whose material interest is to maintain housing as 'unaffordable' as the market will bear. Meanwhile allies of juggernaut redevelopment will shed crocodile tears about the fate of the have-nots while preparing to evict them from their neighbourhoods. There is no public advocate of class consciousness, no Rainbow coalition, on the losing side of the current social polarization in Los Angeles. The working classes of the inner city, for all their potential power, are still a sleeping dragon: Blacks, declining in electoral influence and betrayed by city hall; Chicanos, gerrymandered and divided between rival Democratic clans; new immigrants, disfranchised and ignored. Whether this sleeper will awaken, or whether this remains 'just Chinatown', is, as always, *the* question.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.