

Statehood for Cities: The Impossible Dream

What would happen if our largest urban centers were allowed to go it alone?
The prospects are not especially reassuring.

by RICHARD REEVES

One symptom of the desperation of American cities is that just about the only thing growing faster than urban problems is the rhetoric of urban solutions. And even the solutions themselves seem to be escalating. It's no longer enough to talk about such old faithfuls as "regional planning" or "metropolitan government"; now they're talking about city-states.

The idea of a modern city-state isn't new—New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago have discussed going it alone off and on for forty years—but it is new as a serious political issue. Only two years ago, Norman Mailer and his "fifty-first state" campaign in New York City gave the city-state more publicity than anyone since Plato, but a lot of that was for laughs. No one's laughing now; there could be a real city-state debate in the 1970s.

The debate has already begun in New York, where Mayor John V. Lindsay has appointed a committee to study city-state relations and has an eight-page staff memo that begins: "The current session of the state legislature has made one fact painfully clear: New York City can no longer depend on a body of upstate legislators, who are out of touch with urban problems, to respond to the city's crucial needs. . . . Statehood is not an unrealistic possibility; indeed, it may well be the only sensible approach to governing New York City."

Indeed. Athens. Florence. New York. Chicago. Los Angeles. Newark. Why not? American cities have been getting the short end from the Republic ever since Thomas Jefferson wrote little

notes to James Madison while they worked on the Constitution. One of the notes said: "I think our governments will remain virtuous for centuries as long as they are chiefly agricultural, and this will continue as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America. When they get piled upon one another in large cities as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe."

They, the people, are piled upon one another in our cities and have been for a long time. And whatever their collective virtue, they're desperate after 200 years of exploitation by the good Jeffersonians of the federal and state governments. "FREE New York City" buttons are being worn by the 100 Congressmen and other elected officials circulating petitions for a November referendum as the first step toward trying to establish a fifty-first state. In Manhattan it's the greatest thing since 1861, when Mayor Fernando Wood wanted the city to secede from the Union and join the Confederacy.

Wood obviously wasn't much of a military prophet, but he was on to something about the attitudes of the U.S.A. This is an anti-urban country, fostered by gentlemen-farmers, raised in the Log Cabin tradition. In America there is something suspect about anyone born on the Lower East Side of anywhere. The first important public policy in the Republic—the Northwest Ordinance of 1787—provided free land for rural settlers and free land for their public schools. The children of New York City and Philadelphia didn't have public schools for another fifty years, and they waited 100 years more for any federal assistance in building them.

And anti-urbanism didn't end when the West was won. Federal legislation of the twentieth century, whatever it

was designed to do, has helped to destroy our older cities. The agricultural recovery acts of the 1930s mechanized our farms and started pushing an unskilled rural under class onto the welfare rolls of northern cities. The Federal Housing Acts of the 1940s guaranteed the mortgaging of the suburbs, subsidizing the exodus of the tax-paying middle class out of the cities. The National Defense Highway Acts of the 1960s not only saved us from the Russians but provided a \$60-billion suburban transportation system so that commerce and industry could follow workers into the greener pastures. It was an expensive business, financed by taxes paid in the cities—New York, for one, sent anywhere from \$10 to \$20 in income taxes to Washington for every dollar that came back in federal aid.

For all those years, the cities, which had no status under the Constitution, were orphans, or hostages, of rural-minded state legislatures carefully apportioned to keep cities in their place. It was in New York that George Washington Plunkitt, the sage of Tammany, complained in 1900 that his city was "ruled entirely by hayseed legislators at Albany," but it was in Los Angeles in 1962 that six million people had the same number of California state Senators—the number was one—as rural counties with a population of 40,000. The 162,000 residents of Hartford sent two representatives to the Connecticut legislature that year, the same number elected by the 1,400 virtuous citizens of a town called Barkhamstead. Not incidentally, New York, Philadelphia, and Hartford did not get much state help during the 175 American years before the Supreme Court's landmark "one man, one vote" ruling of the 1960s.

But the 1960s were too late. The

population balance of most states had shifted from city to suburb. The lesson New York learned this year was that the suburbanites who control the state legislature are the same kind of domestic isolationists as Plunkitt's hayseeds. So now the Committee to Make New York City a State wants its own legislature, and other cities will probably soon have their own committees.

It's a lousy idea whose time seems to have come. At this point in their history, the nation's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cities are in no shape to go it alone. The new cities, the Western cities, might conceivably make it—for example, Houston, which is still in the process of annexing relatively undeveloped suburbs (it's where New York was in 1898). But there are no wide open spaces around the old cities. They did their annexing (and had their golden economic ages) when Chicago, Philadelphia, and New Orleans were each less than two miles square, and when Manhattan was annexing Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. That happened fifty to 100 years ago.

Even Athens and Florence thrived only as long as they dominated the countryside and held a credible threat of conquest over the smaller rivals surrounding them. Florence could attack Siena and Pisa to destroy their markets, but New York City, even as a state, couldn't invade the 775 separate governments surrounding it—even if it might be fun to march into Greenwich, Connecticut, and bring PepsiCo and American Can Company back to Manhattan to pay taxes.

The statehood arguments are exciting, but they're as flawed for New York as they would be for other older cities where the debate may begin. The statehood committee, headed by Congresswoman Bella S. Abzug, and the memo to Mayor Lindsay have both focused on five arguments—which are quoted here from a full-page committee advertisement in *The New York Times*:

1) "If we kept all the tax money we now pay the state, we would have a net gain of almost \$1-billion."

If we kept all the tax money we now pay the state, we'd end up losing money. It would cost a fortune to unravel the city and state—things like bringing convicts back to town from state prisons and taking back control of such fiscal disasters as the subway system, which is now run by a state agency—and it would cost another fortune to set up new institutions to duplicate existing state services, the appeals court system, for example.

2) "And as a separate state, that's not all we'd gain. We'd also be able to levy our own taxes—such as the proposed tax on commuters, who have been freeloading on us for years."

And as a separate state, what could

we tax that isn't being taxed already? One of the latest taxes proposed in New York (and Baltimore) is a tax on advertising that is almost identical to the Stamp Tax that led to the Boston Tea Party. Sure, the commuters have been freeloading for years, but clobbering them with taxes now is no way to get even—their jobs are already moving out of the city, and heavier taxes would speed up that inevitable exodus. The suburbs are now a separate, bigger, and more prosperous circular city. All roads don't lead to Rome anymore. Look at Interstate Route 287. It winds north through New Jersey's outer suburbs, cuts across Rockland County, crosses the Hudson River to Westchester, and may eventually be linked to Long Island by a bridge across Long Island Sound. That's the future—beltways that encircle, but never touch, the central cities.

3) "We would get a direct and larger share of federal revenues."

We would, but it wouldn't be enough. A city-state of New York would do better in Washington—for one thing, many federal programs limit a single state's share of financial aid to 10 or 12.5 per cent, and New York City and other big cities usually get only half their state's share. But, very relatively speaking, that's peanuts. The big problem for the cities is that Washington redistributes wealth from such "have" areas as the Northeast to "have-nots" such as the South—New York, city or state, is going to get about \$1 back

from every \$10 it sends to Washington until the day comes when the nation cares enough to send its very best to its troubled cities.

4) "We would gain two U.S. Senators and strengthen our city's Congressional delegation in Washington."

We would probably end up with nothing more than heavier representation on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. New York is an international, issue-oriented city, and its representatives have always pleased the home folks by concentrating on Vietnam and Israel while less sophisticated Congressmen from such places as Chicago and Fargo, North Dakota, have done boring little things such as the committee work that gets money back to their districts. Sen. Jacob K. Javits is the latest New Yorker to abandon a committee dealing with housing to get on Foreign Relations and make more speeches about the Common Market.

5) "And best of all, we would get our own Governor and legislature. To look after our own special problems."

And worst of all, we would get our own government, the most polarized government in the nation. Our city-state would be a bloody political battleground. It would be the 1969 mayoral campaign between John Lindsay and Mario Procaccino and the fight over a review board to consider complaints about policemen—West Side liberals and the minorities against white ethnics; Manhattan versus the outer boroughs. New York is two cities, con-



stantly trying to tear each other apart over issues like "police brutality" versus "tying the cops' hands," and sometimes those issues can be most peaceably resolved by passing them to a higher, if somewhat alien, authority such as Albany. It was the *detached* hayseeds who settled the great sanitation strike, cut the lucrative pension agreements with unions City Hall did not have the power or the guts to deal with, and ended rent control, which city officials wanted to do, but couldn't in a city with two million voting tenants. Our own legislature would also have the right to decide such things as where to locate power plants; they couldn't put them up the Hudson River in Westchester County anymore, and it would be only a matter of time before a legislator from Queens suggested that Lincoln Center or Central Park would be a nice spot for that new generating station or incinerator.

The city-state talk is fine as a tactic to dramatize what's happening to our cities and to squeeze a few more bucks or more home-rule power from a state legislature—most American cities have so little home rule that they must get permission from their states to change street names, let alone change their tax structures. But the New York statehood people claim that they're beyond limited goals; they want to go all the way. The danger is that one of these days states that see their central cities as aged financial and social liabilities might just go along with secession plans and send them to Congress for final approval. That's all a Detroit or a Newark would need: They could be poor black cities officially independent from white suburbs, white states. Apartheid.

Like it or not, the suburbs now outnumber and outproduce the cities; the old "parasite" arguments are irrelevant. The suburbs are the future, and the cities need them as much as they need the cities. What used to be New York City has dispersed and decentralized into a thriving 100-mile metropolitan ring. What used to be small towns and bedroom suburbs is a new circular metropolis of ten million people and more jobs than workers. It's sad, but the functions of the central city have changed. New York, the most central, is still the international center and market place on the surface, but below that it's just a giant switchboard for the area and, worse, has become a concentration camp for the poor and a dormitory for lower-middle-income workers who reverse-commute to jobs in suburbs where they can't afford to live because of restrictive and discriminatory zoning. Employment studies still in preparation are going to shock the big town—they will show that every

county around New York has more lower- and middle-income jobs than residents, and that the difference is made up by a relatively unskilled working force of 500,000 men and women living in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

The old cities have lost. Arthur Natfalin, the former Mayor of Minneapolis, argues that the time has come to admit that the "future belongs to the suburbs" and for the cities "to throw themselves upon the mercy of their adversaries, the suburbs, the legislatures, and Washington [and to] claim the entitlement of any vanquished foe, which in their case is to be rescued and rehabilitated by their adversaries." Surrender—maybe they'll have a Marshall Plan for us; but this is no time to declare war.

Sure, the way the cities lost was unfair. Washington was unfair. Malapportionment was unfair. The property tax was and is unfair—it was designed in the seventeenth century to provide fire protection and garbage collection for property owners; now the cities are expected to use it to pay the social overhead of a nation's health, education, and welfare. It was unfair to underwrite ten million FHA homes out there and let the five-story apartments in a hundred cities decay into an incredible housing crisis that will end up costing the country more than the Vietnam War. It was unfair to build highways and leave hapless city people with fifty-year-old subways and no buses. It's no wonder the city-statehood game is played every ten years: Philadelphia in 1938, Chicago ten years later, and New York in 1959, when the City Council voted, 23 to 1, to study statehood.

"They are robbing us," called the council majority leader as that vote began. He was right, of course—the city then provided 63 per cent of the state's tax revenues and received only 38 per cent of the state aid to localities; the city then had a majority of the state's population but was given only 42 per cent of the seats in the legislature; each student in a city school received \$167 in state aid while children in the rest of the state each got \$273.

But the past is just tragic prologue. The pioneers of the fifty-first state pretend that nothing has changed. It has. The cities are in worse shape, and the states have responded, however reluctantly. State aid to cities has more than doubled everywhere since 1959, and in New York it has quadrupled. The last independent study of the fiscal relationship between city and state was for the year 1967, when the Citizens Budget Commission calculated that the city, with 47 per cent of the state's population, received 45 per cent of aid to localities and about 33 per cent of other monies spent by state government—fewer city students, for example, attend the state university.

The petitions circulating in New York would be the first step toward statehood—45,000 signatures of enrolled voters are enough to schedule a citywide referendum calling for a convention to write a constitution for the new state—and the procedures would be the same in any city. The new constitution would then have to be approved by a majority vote of the state legislature and by Congress.

There you are, the city reborn. Norman Mailer, when he was talking fifty-first state two years ago, argued that the convention would mark the spiritual rebirth of New York. That may have been answered 200 years ago by Robert Crowley, writing of sixteenth-century city-states and using the word "meed" to mean "profit."

And this is a city
 In name, but in deed
 It is a pack of people
 That seek after meed.
 For officers and all
 Do seek their own gain,
 But for the wealth of the Commons
 Not one taketh pain.
 And hell without order
 I may it well call
 Where every man is for himself
 And no man for all.

American cities, too, have become packs of people, people walking with their heads down, taking no pains for the Commons, reacting to dirty density in the same way as white mice. It would be nice to think that making uncivil behavior a felony—Arrest a cabdriver today!—would help. Or that statehood would help. But it will take more than paper laws to return civility to a Times Square subway station at rush hour. Yet, there is that veneer of civilization at the same hour at Charing Cross Station in London.

Perhaps London is something of a model of a decent and perhaps attainable future for American cities; it is a kind of modern city-state that almost works. It starts with advantages over our cities: It has only a miniature race problem, and it has a well-developed sense of Commons, a community, an order that is probably related to both the British character and the common experience of surviving the worst, the Blitz. But even taking those things into account, there are lessons across the Atlantic that we could study:

- London has allowed its population to decline, from 8.3 million in 1938 to 7.7 million today, while most American cities, particularly New York, which is twice as dense as London or any other American city, still see population growth as a banner of civic pride and economic viability. National planning and leadership are des-

perately needed in the United States—probably through federal moves against unreasonable suburban zoning and economic encouragement of new satellite city developments—to weed out of American cities all the people who really don't want to live in them anyway.

- It has effectively decentralized its government into thirty-two boroughs—the number is significant because New York's five boroughs are too few and too powerless; Chicago's fifty wards would be a better decentralization grid. There are some signs that American metropolitan areas are beginning to understand two-level government with decentralized units, boroughs or towns, for instance, collecting garbage, and an umbrella regional unit handling garbage disposal—the Metropolitan Council of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Area, with authority over highways and sewerage, is one example.

- Since the Thirties London has planned a greenbelt of farms and parks around its perimeter to control growth and make the place seem more livable. Obviously, it's too late for a greenbelt around Boston or New York, but it's not too late for Houston and the new cities, unless they want to become the New Yorks and Chicagos of tomorrow.

- The citizens of London do not pay directly for welfare, health, and other essentially national services that are financed by national taxes. In the United States, local government must pay many bills for the whole country—the people of New York pay almost \$1.5-billion in city and state taxes for welfare, partly because the farms of South Carolina have replaced workers with machinery and because Americans educated in Puerto Rico never learned enough English to hold a decent job.

- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, London is a part of England, as Stockholm is a part of Sweden, in a way that no American city has really ever been part of our federal republic. Not only does London have one-sixth of Britain's population, but it has always had a direct relationship with the British government, while the word "city" never appears in the United States Constitution, and no federal funds ever went directly to a city until the Works Progress Administration and the first minuscule public housing acts of the late 1930s.

Interestingly, all the older, more troubled cities of the United States add up to London. The united cities of America would make up about one-sixth of the country. The cities could be organized this year—without super-rhetoric,

without statehood referendums, without the Constitutional amendment needed for such proposals as Mayor Lindsay's to charter "national cities" independent of states—they could be organized into a national lobby to match agriculture or defense. The core of a united cities league already exists in the Legislative Action Committee of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, a committee of seventeen big-city mayors who have become comrades-in-arms, traveling the country together pleading for more federal money.

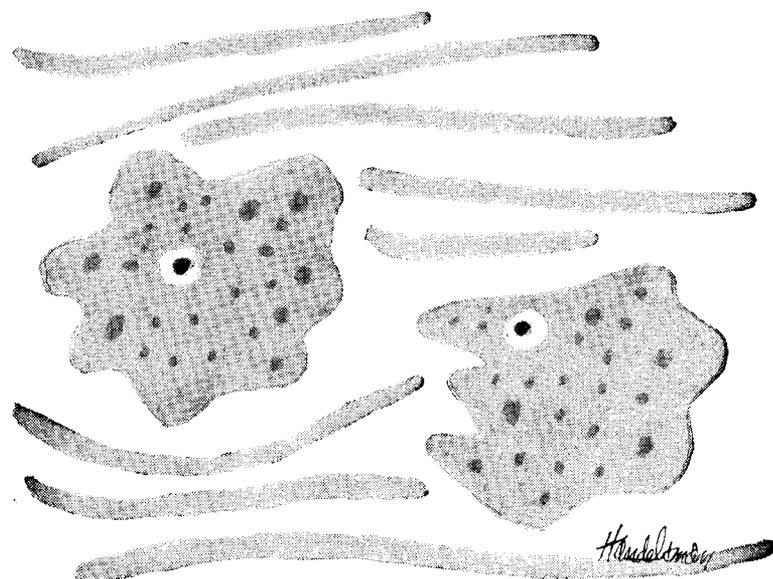
Obviously, ambitious Democrats, Republicans, and independents in such a group are not going to agree on everything, but the mayors already agree on a lot—federal revenue sharing for one thing, because every city needs money and the only way to get it is to link urban problems to national prosperity, to get their hands into the federal income tax. The mayors could start by organizing themselves and by publicly rating city Congressmen in much the same way that Americans for Democratic Action does. They could get some real control over a bloc of maybe 100 Congressmen by playing with the threat of using poor scores with the folks back home at election time.

With some kind of formal City Hall-Capitol Hill alliance, the united cities could begin raising hell and trading votes for things they can reasonably hope to get: federal takeover of welfare costs and national welfare standards to get rid of the incentive to move from South Carolina to New York for more liberal relief checks, and federally financed research on how to make a city work. The country studies the guts out of boll weevils and missile guidance systems, but we still collect

garbage the way the Romans did, except that trucks are noisier than carts, and we still try to protect citizens from one another by giving some men blue uniforms and telling them to go around and catch bad guys in the act.

In the longer range, the cities together could push for federal establishment of national urban goals. What does America want from its cities now that their economic functions have dissipated along superhighways and telephone lines? The nation may be willing to accept New York and Boston as creative centers where the people who write books and sing songs could still come together in the Athenian sense, but the same nation may also see Newark the way it describes itself, in an application for federal funds, as "a basic training camp for the poor." But with a national urban policy, the cities would at last be an official part of America, and the nation would have to afford them as luxuries, like national parks. The alternative, it seems to me, is to let the cities drift along collecting the poor until they become unofficially nationalized, like Indian reservations or concentration camps.

The national goals may turn out to be very limited, but the future of the cities is limited. The United States does not need nineteenth-century ports of entry, it has jetports; it does not need centralized industrial and commercial centers, it has the suburbs and their shopping centers. The future may not go down well with the die-hards who want independent city-states now, but by then those people will probably have escalated their rhetorical dreams to statehood for Greenwich Village or an independent New York City seeking admission into the United Nations.



"Do you think I'm too anthropomorphic?"



A CURRICULUM FOR PEACE

If the methods of war can be taught, why not strategies for preventing it?

by HAROLD TAYLOR

HELSINKI.

Considered as a system for teaching the debasement of human values, war is the most powerful of all educational institutions. Its curriculum lies in the art and science of deceiving, killing, and destroying. Its most successful students learn to ruin whatever they touch. Its highest honors go to those who have produced the most dead most advantageously.

Although its most effective educational work is done in the course of massacres, bombings, and similar demonstrations, war also has its own colleges and military academies across the world where the theory and practice of rational and strategic killing can be studied and taught. During 1970 in the United States alone, nearly 16,000 foreign officers and enlisted men from forty-four countries were trained for war, some from countries that intended to fight one another, some from countries that use their armies for repressing social change and frustrating democracy. It is as if the Borgia family ran a school for poisoning with an open admissions policy.

But if there is an international war system with its war colleges—some of which graduate peace-keeping forces and antiwar colonels and generals—where is the peace system and its colleges? Where do politicians, scholars, diplomats, and citizens go to learn how

to prevent wars and stop them once they have started? Where do you find the contingency plans for peaceful settlement of international disputes and stand-by arrangements for aid to refugees? Where are the scenarios for a peace in Vietnam being written while the Pentagon creates the choreography of war?

The ready answer is that there have not been any peace scenarios, because the idea of using war to advance American interests in Asia had already seized the imagination of the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White House. Peace was to be won through war.

Now is exactly the time to stop short and announce again to the world that wars can and must be stopped, and that there is a strategy of peace-making and peace-building that can be taught and learned. It is also time once more to tell the skeptics who call peace strategies utopian and unworkable that war is unworkable and that all it does is kill people.

If the peacemakers have not beaten the war-makers at the war game, this does not mean that they never will. How long has the world been consciously trying? How many universities, for example, scientific institutes, and government agencies in any country have agreed to develop social strategies and principles for peace-making, to proclaim, teach, and apply them on a national and international scale?

From the end of World War II to 1969 there were ninety-seven wars with an estimated twenty to thirty million deaths and uncountable millions of

refugees. Nearly all of the wars have been actions to overthrow regimes, colonial or otherwise, with overt and covert intervention by outside powers who have supplied most of the weapons. In some cases—Nigeria, for example, and now Pakistan—no power on earth has seemed capable of stopping the killing until it has run its course. In only 18 per cent of these cases has it been possible for the United Nations or any other international agency to settle or prevent the war by mediation, negotiation, or non-violent solutions.

But that does not mean that we have to leave it that way. As of now, how many of the world's diplomats, politicians, scholars, educators, and citizens have joined together in a passionate effort to plan peace strategies and to make them work? The world's scholars and educators, whose primary business, surely, is to advance the cause of the human race, have been too busy with too many other things. Or they have joined the diplomats and crisis-managers in advancing various national interests, asking no questions, taking no action, while wars and threats of wars continue to increase.

At this stage in an era of social disasters, the scholars and educators, above all others, have the fullest chance to change their course of action. Some of them already have, more will. There are the pioneers among the Pugwash scientists, the peace research institutes; the planning staffs for U.N. emergency forces, world refugee workers, world congresses of scholars and scientists on everything from in-