

Section 28b

**Regional Government Would Trample People's Freedom
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COMMENTARY

Regional government would trample people's freedom

By Bill Baker

From Bucharest to Berlin to Managua, people are rejecting time-worn and debilitated central controls in favor of free elections and local choice.

Apparently oblivious to these dramatic political transformations, Democrats in Sacramento are moving in the opposite direction.

Incredibly, they are introducing legislation to gut the authority of Bay Area local governments by transferring municipal and county decision-making powers to a colossal new regional supergovernment.



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Specifically, they propose the creation of an 11-member "superagency" that would deal with everything from smog controls, annexations and building permits to dump sites, low-income housing and the location of new jails. This bureaucratic monolith would take the place of scores of city and county governments and supplant, too, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Association of Bay Area Governments, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Regional Water Quality Control Board and eight local agency formulation commissions.

What is more, only six of the Frankenstein agency's directors would be directly elected — the remainder consisting of two county supervisors chosen by other supervisors, two city council members, selected by their peers, one special district representative and three non-voting advisory members picked by the governor, the speaker of the Assembly and the Senate president pro tem.

Stripped of authority to deal with the major ques-



CONFLICTS OVER DUMP sites, such as the Kirker Pass site proposed in central Contra Costa County, might be resolved by an 11-member regional "superagency" under legislation proposed by Assembly Speaker Willie Brown.

ions affecting their constituents, city fathers would be reduced to figureheads, their functions merely ceremonial. In the process, government will become more remote and less responsive to voters.

Yet the move to centralize power in a "superagency" has not met the kind of resistance in Sacramento that it would find in today's Warsaw or Budapest.

This is because the idea of a bureaucratic elite who will grapple with growth problems on a broader

scale has some superficial appeal.

Too often, local governments have behaved selfishly, refusing to issue enough residential permits to meet regional growth demands, for example, or rejecting plans for jails or waste dumps "in our back yard." As a consequence, some communities have walled themselves off, pulling up the draw bridges, in effect, to new families and leaving waste disposal and inmate problems to neighboring communities.

To admit that this is a serious problem, however, does not mean that we have to scrap the system of local rule that has served the nation since the inception of our federal system, and replace it with a commissariat-style government accountable to no one.

True, nothing in our republican form of government allows that city fathers and county elected officials will govern wisely or in the broad public interest.

But to obliterate local prerogatives is not the solution to unwise local decision-making. Abuse of the local police power — by exclusionary or anti-growth zoning, for instance — is best addressed in the courts. Already, un-fair growth controls are under legal assault on a variety of constitutional grounds.

Preparing the way for future generations requires voluntary cooperation between our cities and counties, not coercion. How, for instance, would the superagency rule on the question of building Gateway Boulevard? What impact would Orinda or Moraga have on that decision made by a county regional government? Where would this "metro" giant site our garbage dumps? Would BART ever get to Pittsburg-Antioch, or would heavily populated San Jose dominate the expansion plans of BART?

And there is no assurance that a "superagency" will function any more quickly, fairly or efficiently than answerable to the voters, it would engage in raw majoritarian politics, serving heavily-populated urban cores at the expense of more sparsely populated fringe areas. Sure, a jail, dump or homeless shelter site might be more speedily dictated — but at the expense of cities too small or politically impotent to prevent the loss of their autonomy.

The Bay Area needs a "superagency" like Romania needed the Securitate.

Assemblyman Baker is a Danville Republican.