

The Dirty Little Secret Behind At-Large Representation

Kevin Carson

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Michael Bates of Batesline lists the twenty members of a group in favor of at-large election of aldermen in Tulsa, along with their addresses. Of the twenty listed by Bates,

with four exceptions, everyone lives in District 9 or in the same square mile as Southern Hills Country Club, which is in District 2.

Back in the 1990s, when at-large representation was a divisive issue between the Fayetteville Cockroach Caucus and the citizens' movement, somebody made a similar observation: all the at-large directors lived within a few blocks of each other in the same white-bread neighborhood in northwest Fayetteville.

When Dan Coody, then a maverick in local politics, pointed out this inconvenient fact, director Ann Henry (leading Cockroach and later Soccer Mom/New Democrat candidate for the Third District congressional seat) squealed "Class warfare! Class warfare!" See, as Clausewitz pointed out two centuries ago, a war doesn't start when an army crosses a national frontier—the invader would like nothing better than a peaceful walkover. It starts with the first shot fired by the army of the invaded country. And class warfare only begins when we start fighting back. Until then, it's just "progress."

The bastards always justify at-large representation in terms of "civic spirit" and "unity," and other high-sounding twaddle. But the real purpose is to make sure the same little clique can run things without any interference from below. And they know it damned well. So when they affect moral outrage, just spit in their fucking faces.

Addendum. In the comment thread on his original post, Michael Bates puts the size of Tulsa's wards in perspective. The anti-federalists complained two hundred years ago that the large Congressional districts (just over 30,000) under the new Constitution would make it prohibitively costly for any representatives of the mercantile and moneyed interests to run. Bates points out that the average Tulsa ward is half again as large as one of those "large" districts. So even an electorate of 50-odd thousand, apparently, isn't big enough to keep the riff-raff out.

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