

# WAITING UNPAID

## BODILY PROPER TO TAKE OFFICE



Bob Gay is considered the early, early frontrunner in the race for Gil Lindsay's job, after the aging councilman is gone from office.

by Steven Wolf

When Bob Gay first approached Gilbert Lindsay for a job, the councilman was 73 years old and had not a single male employee on his staff. But Gay, then an ambitious young activist from South Central, persuaded the councilman to hire him by appealing to Lindsay's sense of kinship.

"I said to him, if a black man can't get a job in this office, where *can* he get one," said Gay, recounting the meeting in a recent interview at City Hall.

Sixteen years have passed since that day, and except for a six-month "sabbatical" in 1984, Gay has loyally remained in Lindsay's hire. Throughout that time, he says he never hid the fact that he wanted someday to follow in Lindsay's shoes. But now, as the aging councilman nears the end of his career, Gay is taking a higher profile.

"Let me correct you," Gay said, after being asked if he wanted to run for councilman. "I will *be* the next councilman."

### Titular Chief

Such a precocious claim would draw a rebuke from most councilmen, but Lindsay is not most councilmen. At almost 90 years old, he has been reduced to being the titular leader of the ninth district, and at 37 years old, Gay has become the most visible force in the office. Since his stroke two years ago, Lindsay has lost some control of his hands and has had trouble writing. On the Council floor he has had moments of confusion, and been both humored and manipulated by the other councilmembers. Those who deal with him say that he has moments of tremendous clarity, but that he is largely removed from the day-to-day workings of the office.

"I think it's no secret that Gil's physical capabilities have been impaired somewhat since the stroke," said Gay. "He makes every effort to get into Council. There *are some days when that does not occur*. But then there are some days when councilmen who appear to be in better health than he don't get there. It's a relative sort of thing. It is no secret that we as staff assist him and attempt to help him understand issues, delineate issues and advise him on how to go. But other staffs assist their bosses. We may be a lot more visible about it than others and I may be a lot more visible than others."

### Extended Run

Triumphing over both age and infirmity "the boss," as Lindsay is known to his subordinates, continues to preside over what he calls the "great ninth district."

Continued on A-8

## After Years of Support, Gay Hopes to Get Lindsay's Job

*He'll Have a "Roomful" of Competitors*

**Continued from A-1**

Last November he ran unopposed and earned himself four more years on the Council. If he survives them all he will be 93 years old. Never has he spoken publicly about stepping down, or even not running in 1993.

Most people laugh happily when they talk about Lindsay's remarkable endurance. Gay is one of them, although his laughter is tinged ever so slightly with frustration.

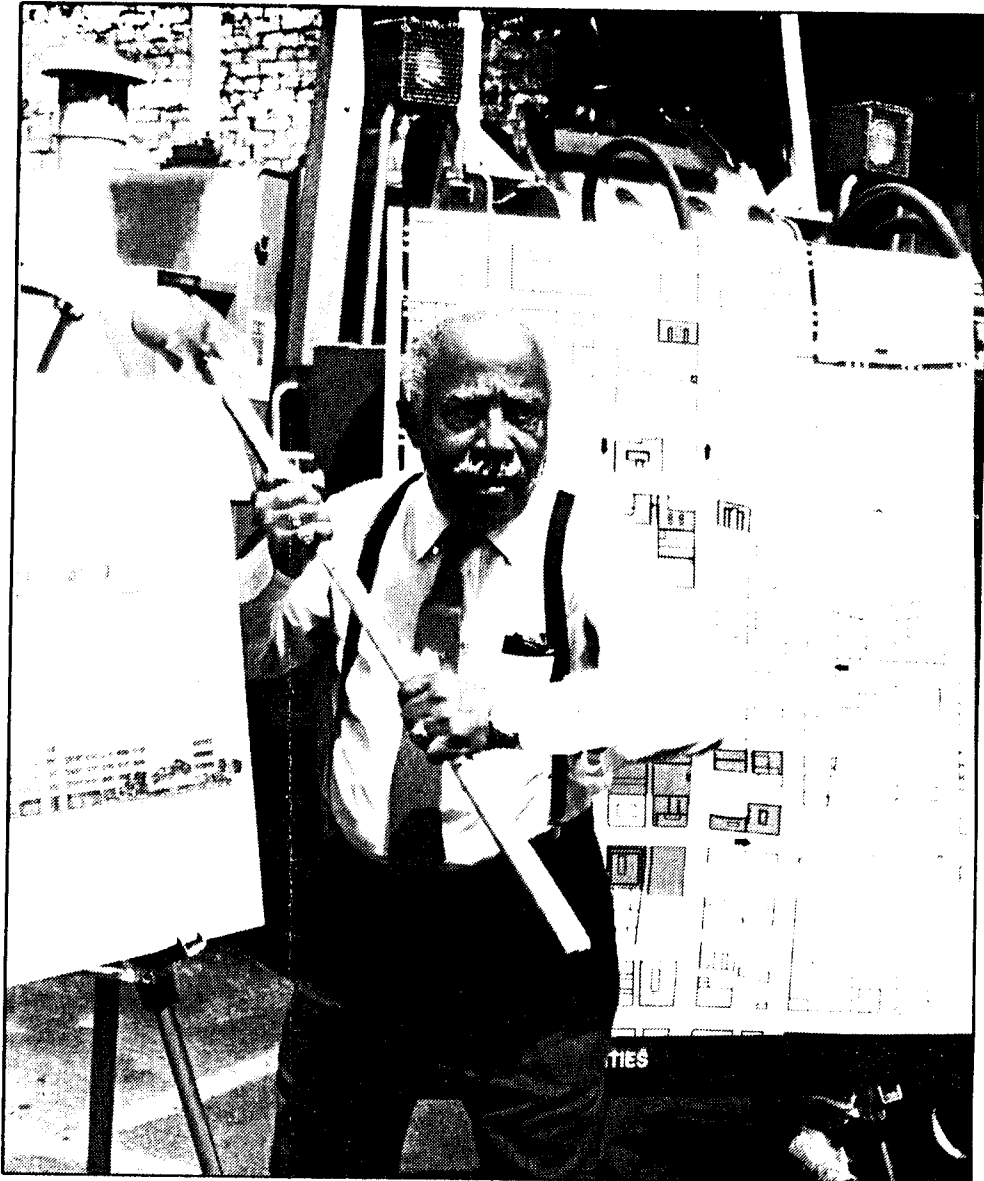
The Councilman did have a health setback recently, however, when Nelson Mandela visited City Hall. In all the excitement, Lindsay mistook his diabetes medication and collapsed. As of last week he was resting in the hospital. In a telephone interview he said he was "making great progress and "talking to the office two or three times a day." He also said he would be back in City Hall in two or three weeks but would curtail his schedule and "let the staff work. Let them earn

their paychecks. I earned mine."

That would be an understatement if he were being serious. Gay, along with Lindsay's other deputy, Sal Altamorano, have been running the office for some time. Altamorano, a face familiar to the halls of Council for more than 20 years, works more behind-the-scenes, while Gay can be seen shepherding Lindsay through council chambers, whispering in his ear and working the room on his behalf. Altamorano, who has been with Lindsay for the last seven years, said he was interested in running for office at one time, but no longer.

### Campaigning

Gay, on the contrary, has been busy building a public persona. As an elder of the Inner City Christian Church, (not one of south central's power churches he is careful to note), he will preach to three or four organizations on any given Sunday. And as a repre-



Councilman Gilbert Lindsay, sometimes called the "Emperor of Downtown," mugs for the camera at one of the numerous groundbreakings he has attended in the central city.

sentative of the Councilman, he attends neighborhood meetings in abundance and council

business when Lindsay cannot be there.

While Gay acknowledged that he never expected Lindsay to hold onto the job as long as he has, the deputy remains deferential, respectful and affectionate to his boss. After all, Lindsay is not just a councilman, he is an institution, beloved by his supporters. When he was appointed to the council in 1963 to fill a vacancy, he became the first black city councilman in the history of Los Angeles. He is a self-made man, who began his career in government as a janitor with the Department of Water and Power some 50 years ago. As the ninth district representative, he has been at the center of power and politics in the city and presided over the remarkable redevelopment of Downtown. With that kind of glory, observers

say they are not surprised he is reluctant to walk away from the past.

"He has made it very clear that it is his intention not to resign from office during his term," said Gay. "And I think anyone who speculates on when he's going to leave office is going to do just that. My own personal view is that Gilbert Lindsay is going to remain in office until his term is over or until he is no longer living."

"He's a little like a champion boxer who doesn't want to leave the ring," said one political commentator who insisted on anonymity.

### Power Politics

Most of the people interviewed for this story would not speak on the record because they did not want to be perceived as "picking on an old man." Others, however, disavowed quotation be-

cause they dreaded stepping into the vortex of Downtown power politics, which is expected to undergo serious change as it enters the post-Lindsay era. Under Lindsay, Los Angeles has witnessed the emergence of Downtown as a major metropolis. Throughout his career, the Councilman has been indefatigable in support of central city growth, and very proprietary about the projects. He will refer playfully to a new skyscraper as "my project," and to Downtown as the town that "I built." As he got older, though, power flowed away from him.

Mayor Bradley, who has always supported the growth of Downtown, became more involved in the district; but as his foci and fortunes changed, so did the great ninth's. For a long time the commercial redevelopment of Downtown was the overbearing concern at City Hall. Now, as critics of commercial growth have gained a foothold, the focus is being expanded to include the development of services and affordable housing for the southern half of the district. Some of the poorest sections of Los Angeles are there.

The focus of attention is also moving to Skid Row, which Gay and others claim is awash with men and women who have come up from depressed south central. The oft-heard criticism of the Lindsay administration, especially in the last decade, is that the Councilman supported Downtown at the expense of the southern portion of his district.

"There were so many problems and the situation changed so fast—especially on Skid Row—that I don't think the Councilman could keep up with it," said one Downtown political figure who refused attribution. "Nobody expected crack cocaine to become an epidemic. Nobody expected there to be a homeless problem to the extent that there is."

Another insider who has been watching the scene said he thought the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) had become "the de facto councilman," and that the Agency's mandate focused redevelopment on the largely white section of Downtown.

"Downtown is a white-collar town," said the insider. "With the exception of the blue collar and the service jobs and the maintenance jobs there has not been a tremendous level of minority business participation. The mayor has had that as an objective, but it is the Councilman that needs to look after those things on a day-to-day basis."

Gay is not the only per-

son who wants to do that job, although it seems that he is the only one willing to go out on a limb and say so at this time. Most observers think other candidates are holding back out of deference to Lindsay, who ran unopposed in the last election. Martha Brown Hicks, who was approached several years ago as a possible candidate, said there will be much competition in the next election, given that Lindsay doesn't participate.

"I'll bet you the whole damn election office will be filled with candidates," Hicks said.

Jim Cleaver, a deputy in the office of Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, is one of the few people whose names are circulating in rumors around the central city. He said he was approached about running as recently as three weeks ago, but is unwilling to make a commitment.

"There was a time when I was interested," said Cleaver, who holds the job that Lindsay held before he was catapulted to the Council. "At this point, I'm undecided. I'm pretty content with the job I do now. I have the best boss in town."

One political consultant, carefully watching the district for his clients, said it was premature to speak of a front-runner, but that Gay was extremely well-situated.

"He's going to make a formidable candidate," said Howard Suskin, of Cerrell Associates. "He

*After his collapse on the day that Nelson Mandela came to visit City Hall, Lindsay said he will curtail his schedule. "Let my staff earn their paychecks," he said. "I earned mine."*

does a lot of charity work and he's a deeply religious man."

Another knowledgeable central city source used the word "certainty" to describe Gay's future as a councilman.

"I think it's very dangerous to speculate on future races," said the source. "But there is certainty in politics about some things. Ira Reiner was certain to be the next state attorney general. And John Van de Kamp was certain to be the next democratic nominee for governor."

#### Redistricting

There is yet another wild card in the ninth district, and that involves the possibility of redistricting. Councilman Richard Alatorre, whose district abuts Lindsay's, is rumored to be interested in taking a piece of Downtown. In an interview last week, he confirmed the rumors, but said he would



*Top: Bob Gay, now deputy to Councilman Gil Lindsay, wants to have his bosses' job after Lindsay is gone from office. Bottom: Councilman Richard Alatorre, third from left, is considering an attempt to redistrict part of Downtown in the post-Lindsay era. Also pictured are Lindsay (left), CRA Board Commissioner Jim Wood and Councilman Hal Bernson (right).*

not act until Lindsay was gone from office.

"I would never do anything that would have an impact on Gil Lindsay," said Alatorre. "But I obviously have an interest on Spring Street and Broadway and just making Los Angeles a 24-hour city."

The district may very well go through other changes as well. According to those familiar with its demographics, Latinos have been entering the ninth in large numbers, threatening the Black majority. However, most of them have not registered, so they remain an informal constituency. Alatorre, who is one of the City's premier Latino leaders, said talk of change would have to wait until the 1990 census results come in.

"I think south central has become more Hispan-

ic but we have to wait until the census is completed."

In any event, no one is likely to challenge Lindsay until he is ready to step down. And the district is likely to stumble forward until the big change comes. When it does, the past will be mourned and the future fought over.

"There are a lot of 'what ifs' right now," said Sunkin. "And I think everybody would like to represent Downtown. You don't have to be a genius to know it's a huge fundraising base."

