

TABLOID DRAMA

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LINDSEY, Gilbert

How the 'Emperor' lost his shirt

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*Trial of Gilbert Lindsay's Companion
Makes for Civic Soap Opera*

by Steven Wolf

With the media spotlight focused on Rodney King, another trial has gone virtually unnoticed: the circus playing out in Superior Court to determine whether the assets of deceased Councilman Gilbert Lindsay were purloined by his youthful companion, Juanda Chauncie.

Neither Lindsay's stepson Herbert Howard, who contends he was cheated out of his inheritance, nor

the councilman's 39-year-old sweetheart have been dogged by the media during the 10-day trial.

It's been an eerie silence for a case that has tugged the political establishment's protective veil off the final, woeful days of the self-styled "emperor" of the Ninth District.

Tales of a powerful city leader's encroaching senility and emotional enslavement to a woman who one of his former

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TABLOID DRAMA

A Secret Embarrassment at City Hall

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aides said had seven different aliases and connections to a gangster in Watts would be the very lifeblood of tabloids if Los Angeles had something like the New York Post to splash headlines.

Lost Noodles

Admittedly, some of the bite was taken out of the trial mid-stream by Judge F. Ray Bennett, who dismissed charges that Chauncie, her mother and her sister conspired to defraud Lindsay of his approximately \$400,000 estate. Left standing, however, was the claim that Chauncie alone "unduly influenced" Lindsay in the final years of his life in an effort to procure his assets.

All that was left of Lindsay's estate, according to his friends, was the house he had shared with his deceased wife Theresa.

"It's a step in the right direction," said



Juanda Chauncie, Lindsay's fiancée, is said to have had seven different aliases and gangster connections, yet her lawyer was relentless in establishing that Lindsay was aware of his actions at the time.

photo by Aldo Panziera

Lindsay's stepson Howard contends Chauncie cast a spell over the councilman, whose weakness for beautiful young women was well known and only intensified after he suffered a stroke in 1988.

Howard contends Chauncie cast a spell over Lindsay, whose weakness for beautiful young women was well known and only intensified after the 1988 stroke that rendered him partially paralyzed and sub-

Ject to memory loss.

Geraldine Green, Chauncie's lawyer of the judge's dismissal. "Fraud and conspiracy are harsh words. Undue influence, that's a much less serious charge."

Carl Douglas, representing Howard, confessed surprise at the dismissal, but said hopefully, "It doesn't matter how much spaghetti you throw at the wall, you only need one noodle to stick."

Howard asked for \$266,000 dollars

plus gifts from Chauncy—money that was obtained from Lindsay after his stroke in 1988—on the grounds that the aging councilman never "intended" Chauncie to have them.

Chauncie seized on the widowed councilman's need for physical and emotional support, Howard contends, and "coerced" him into coughing up his assets



the relationship as a kind and gentle one that "never cooled" off even after Lindsay entered the hospital for the final time after his second stroke in September, 1990. Outside the courtroom, Chauncey spoke through tears of not being "allowed to mourn the death of Gilbert Lindsay," adding as a testament of her love, "I'm still single, you know."

Deterioration Point

Fears that the case would reflect negatively on the workings of City Council proved largely unfounded, although Council president John

Ferraro was forced to concede that Lindsay had deteriorated to the point where he was incapable of doing his job while still

The affair, as well as Lindsay's deterioration, was common knowledge around City Hall, although few people talked

Lindsay's chauffeur testified that Chauncie treated the councilman cruelly, refusing to sit in the back of the car with him for fear the octogenarian would wet his pants.

a sitting councilman. Until he entered the hospital following his second official stroke, Lindsay was still voting on crucial city legislation.

openly about it while the councilman lived.

As the first black man ever to sit on the City Council, Lindsay had been

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photo by Aldo Panzani

Lindsay's step son Herbert Howard, filed the complaint alleging that Juanda Chauncie defrauded the powerful councilman of his estate.

by threatening to leave him or withhold her affections. Aided by his cane, Lindsay walked in a fog through the whole thing, says the plaintiff.

One Lindsay aide, Sal Altamirano, testified that the councilman wasn't aware that some of his

property had even changed hands. Another aide, Bob Gay, said Lindsay wasn't aware that Chauncie was trying to sell one of the parcels they co-owned.

Lindsay's chauffeur testified that Chauncie treated the councilman

cruelly, refusing to sit in the back of the car with him for fear the octogenarian would wet his pants. And Chauncie has at times been unable to account for large sums of money yielded from the sale of Lindsay's assets.

But Chauncie portrayed

Longtime Lindsay Support Shows Signs of Weakening

by Steven Wolf

As it becomes less likely that Councilman Gilbert Lindsay will recover from his third and most debilitating stroke, a rift in the community's near monolithic support for him appears to have opened.

Community leaders have begun publicly challenging the 90-year-old councilman's authority for the first time since he was overwhelmingly re-elected in 1988.

A grass roots meeting in South Central two weeks ago was attended by about 150 people wanting to discuss the quality of representation in the Ninth District. What emerged was a growing discontentment with the current leadership, or lack of it, and the posturing of future candidates who want Lindsay's seat.

"We all have respect for the councilman," said Richard Jones, who works on senior citizen issues for Gov. George Deukmejian. "He has done a great job. But now he cannot function anymore, and it is time to move on."

Noting South Central's many social, psychological and economic problems, one would-be candidate said a break in the silence was long overdue.

"What we're seeing here," said S. Deacon Alexander, pointing to a roomful of shouting people, "is an organized civic rebellion. Ten years of Lindsay is the cause. The first 15 or so were somewhat progressive. The last 10 years

were absolute neglect."

Recall Effort?

At the meeting, held in the Upper Room Christian Church on 49th Street and Vermont Avenue—just several blocks from Lindsay's home—a survey was circulated, asking whether constituents preferred a special appointment to replace Lindsay or a general election, among other questions. Results were unavailable, but the meeting's organizer, Beverly Blake, said, "With the exception of one or two, everybody wanted someone sitting in that seat. Everybody agreed that we didn't know enough about what was happening in the district.

"The power really rests with us and always has," Blake said. "I think we are awakening from this lethargy. I see us becoming a lot more pro-active. That may sound naive but I think it's real."

The word "recall" was bandied about the room several times, and representatives of Lindsay's staff, who have been running the office since the councilman's first stroke in 1986, were booed.

"I'm tired of being run by the inner circle of Downtown," said Marva Smith, who is active in district affairs.

Lindsay Support

But Lindsay retains strong support. Despite having already suffered one stroke when he ran in 1988, the councilman received 9,500 out of about



Councilman Gilbert Lindsay

14,000 votes, after running a minimal campaign. There was no will to oppose him. Rather, there was a will to humor and protect him, a will that still has a powerful attraction over many.

Several ministers and community activists visited with Council President John Ferraro and City Attorney James Hahn recently to say they were upset over an attempt in the Council to declare Lindsay's seat vacant.

The leaders said they feared losing Lindsay, the first black man to sit on the Los Angeles City Council, as a community hero. Lindsay has played a pivotal role in the development of Downtown and the City as a whole, in his

27 years on the Council, and they don't want to see his legacy damaged.

"Black people all too often have their leaders ripped off and torn down," said John Mack, president of the Los Angeles Urban League, and one of those who attended the meeting. "We need to have the rest of our society know that they cannot destroy our leadership. We are increasingly finding that every time we have a person of color either elected or projected into a position of leadership or prominence, as Gil Lindsay was... they are attacked."

Criticism of Lindsay is also perceived as dangerous, because of his illness.

"Nobody wants to criti-

cize a man who can't defend himself," said Michael Preston, professor of urban and black politics at USC. "But I do think people are concerned about adequate representation."

mand elected representative expressed a desire to incorporate portions of Downtown into his district. That would leave the poorer residential half by itself. The Ninth District councilmember, who-

The question now is how protective to be of the councilman and how critical.

Important Issues

The question, now, for community leaders and voters alike, is how protective to be of the councilman and how critical. There are important issues at stake for the Ninth District that decision. One of them is redistricting, scheduled to take place next year.

The Ninth District encompasses the wealth of Downtown with the poverty of South Central. At least one councilman has

ever it is, would have less authority to bring money and projects to the district.

"I think the community has to come to grips with the fact that they should distinguish between the realities that exist now, and what Gil means to them," said Charles Belcher, pastor of the Upper Room Christian Church. "There are some potential realities that have to be dealt with, and they cannot be dealt with piecemeal."

Lindsay Amendment

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did not contemplate an absence caused by a military leave and relied upon the general policy for "the filling of vacancies in upholding temporary appointments," Hahn wrote.

Mayor Tom Bradley, however, violently disagreed, penning a scathing letter to Hahn denouncing the idea, declaring it "both gratuitous and wholly unsup-

ported by law."

In conversations with me and others during the past year," wrote Bradley, "[Lindsay] made it clear that he has had no intention of retiring before his term is up or of selecting someone to be appointed in his place. For the Council to act contrary to that expressed will would do violence to the dignity with which Gilbert Lindsay has served."

Clock Ticks Away on Lindsay

*Behind-the-Scenes
Effort to Replace
Ailing Councilman*

by Steven Wolf

Is there a clock ticking away the final days of Councilman Gilbert Lindsay's long and storied political career?

Many political insiders think so, but few are willing to discuss it publicly.

A little known law, Section 9 of the City charter, gives City Council the right to declare a seat vacant if a councilman is away from the City of Los Angeles for more than 60 consecutive days.

Council President John Ferraro, it appears, is considering the charter provision as a way to discreetly dislodge Lindsay. The 90-year-old black patriarch, known by some as the emperor of Downtown, has been confined to an Inglewood hospital room since Sept. 2—well beyond the 60 days—after suffering his third and most debilitating stroke in four years.

Since Lindsay's absence began, the Council has been passing motions put forth by Nate Holden to excuse the absences. But late last October, Ferraro refused to act on a Holden motion, prompting speculation.

"There's obviously something going on," said one City Hall source. "But it's very delicate. Any publicity could make it difficult for the council to act."

In an interview last week, Ferraro didn't deny that the charter provision was being explored as a way of removing Lindsay, nor did he embrace it. Uncomfortable talking about replacing his colleague of 27 years, the council president tried to discourage speculation about the future of Lindsay, who has resisted stepping down despite losing his grip on the office.

"The Council can excuse Lindsay [of his absences] on any day before
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Lindsay Gilbert

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Clock Ticking Away on Lindsay's Career

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the time is up," said Ferraro, indicating that Lindsay could remain in office for some time even if he doesn't make it back the mile or so to the Los Angeles city limits before the deadline.

Stuck in Inglewood

Whether Lindsay can muster the strength to return to the City remains a question. Until recently, the first black man to hold political office in Los Angeles was hooked up to a respirator. Last week, his stepson Herbie Howard would say only that he was in stable condition. Lindsay's doctors wouldn't comment on the councilman's health. However, other sources close to Lindsay indicate he is still unable to speak and is paralyzed from the waist down.

It is unclear if he can be moved to another hospital, or if someone would come forward who wants to move him.

Lindsay's new 60-day interval began Nov. 1,

making Jan. 1 the deadline. Sources close to City Hall say many councilmembers think this date will provide a good opportunity to quietly and gracefully unseat Lindsay. It leaves time, they



Is Council President John Ferraro looking for ways to gracefully remove ailing Councilman Gilbert Lindsay?

say, for potential candidates in the Ninth District to prepare for a vote in April, when other councilmembers are up for reelection. If the Council postpones a decision be-

yond January, and Lindsay dies before his term is over in 1993, there might have to be a special election, which would cost the City substantially more money.

"The expectation is that nothing will happen until April," said another source who didn't want to be named. "To do that, someone has to make a

decision by Jan. 14 [so potential candidates have time to file]. I don't think any member of City Council is going to encourage anything until that time."

Nonetheless, William McCarley, the City's Chief Legislative Analyst who is overseeing Lindsay's office while the councilman remains absent, also warned against speculation.

"I don't think this provision in the charter has ever been used before," said McCarley, who acknowledged the City Hall gossip. "I wouldn't read as much into this as other people have."

Public Pressure

Councilmembers, including Ferraro, have been very protective of Lindsay as he has aged over the years. They have gotten even more protective since he entered the hospital last September. Lindsay has made many friends during his 27 years in City Hall and few will say anything controversial about him these days. Some said even a news story about the situation would be damaging to him and to the Council's ability to deal with him.

Mounting pressure, however, from community interest groups who complain they have no elected representation has forced the issue into semi-public discussion. Ferraro's office acknowledged last week receiving phone calls from groups complaining. McCarley said he is meeting this week with various interest groups to try to compensate for Lindsay's absence.

"I'm not a councilman, and I never will be," said McCarley, "but we're trying to provide representation in the Council for people in the district."

The word from community groups, albeit anonymously, is that something more needs to be done.

Even before the last stroke, Lindsay wasn't really at the helm of the Ninth District, and other councilmembers have taken advantage of the power vacuum.

Lindsay's two powerful deputies, Bob Gay and Sal Altamorano, have run the office since Lindsay's first stroke in 1987, but constituents insist the authority of a powerful elected official is missing.

Even so, Ferraro said he would comply with the Council's wish, if it were to excuse Lindsay's absence, and perpetuate his regime.

"I don't think it would be unusual for the Council to excuse [Lindsay of his absences]," said Ferraro.



Councilman Nate Holden has supported keeping Lindsay's fragile reign alive.

Most councilmembers are said to be in favor of quietly removing Lindsay, but Councilman Nate Holden is reported to still be pushing for an extension of Lindsay's tenure. Speculators suggest he either wants to protect Lindsay's legacy, or that he is trying to improve the political fortunes of Brad Pye, assistant chief deputy to County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn. Pye

is reportedly planning a run for the seat; however, he would neither confirm nor deny it. Holden, who also came from Hahn's office, couldn't be reached for comment.

Office Grappling

Meanwhile, since McCarley began overseeing Lindsay's office, there have been reports of infighting between McCarley and Gay, who plans to run for Lindsay's seat. Gay wouldn't comment on any issue involving Lindsay or the office.

McCarley also reportedly ruffled office feathers by requiring that time-keeping by office employees be improved, that hours worked be more ac-

curately reported and that a management committee including himself and several staff members meet once a week.

"That's not correct," said McCarley when asked about squabbles with Gay. "I've known Bob for as long as he's been there. He's an aspirant to office, and I'm sure he'll continue to handle himself in the appropriate manner."



'Man of Year'

City Councilman Gil Lindsay, center, accepts plaque proclaiming him "Los Angeles Convention Man of the Year" from Richard Degnan, right, director of sales for the Biltmore Hotel, and Patrick MacFarland, sales manager for the Bonaventure Hotel.

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