

The October 2003 California Statewide Special Election

When Gray Davis narrowly kept his second term job of California Governor in the 2002 election with the largest spending in the history of American governor elections, his position became vulnerable. In Davis' own words, "Just days after the Governor's inauguration in [2003] January, however, a handful of rightwing politicians are attempting to overturn the voter's decision." "This effort is being led by the former Chairman of the State Republican Party." [1]

Within just months, more than one million California voters have signed a recall petition, which stated: "To the honorable Gray Davis: ...we intend to seek your recall and removal from the office of Governor of the State of California,The grounds for the recall are as follows: Gross mismanagement of California Finances by overspending taxpayers' money, threatening public safety by cutting funds to local governments, failing to account for the exorbitant cost of the energy fiasco, and failing in general to deal with the state's major problems until they get to the crisis stage. California should not have to be known as the state with poor schools, traffic jams, outrageous utility bills, and huge debts....all caused by gross mismanagement."

The statement, unfortunately, is mostly true, as being justified by the October 7th statewide election. It is worth to spend an additional \$20-40 million to remove an official who has lost voters' trust, even the same voters elected the same official just months before. The Democratic Party should learn from this lesson. The election also defeated State Proposition 54 which "Prohibits state and local governments from classifying any person by race, ethnicity, color, or national origin." [2]

However, compared with the President of the United States of America, the Governor of California is just a "little witch." "The Bush Administration has announced the federal deficit this year will be the biggest in history, \$304 BILLION." Why not to recall the President of the United States of America? To be fair, Davis did some good for California's working class by signing important bills to allow immigrants applying driver's license without much documental obstacle, to allow workers having better health insurance. He acted too late, though. If California is a more democratic state so all people (say, any adult living in California longer than one year) are not deprived the right to vote, Davis and his Democratic Party could receive 10-20% additional votes in any elections. Who in California dares to run Republican tickets? Which Republican candidate could enter the White House? California and America belong to all people living in this state and this country; no one has the right to determine who is "illegal"; no one is illegal in any land of the earth.

I agree with my respectful comrade Sandy Perry: The California recall election poses a grave danger for people's economic human rights. If Mr. Schwarzenegger, who cannot play magic in politics as he did in Hollywood, honors his pledge to not raise taxes and at the mean time to reduce the state deficit, he will have to propose massive cuts in affordable housing, Medi-Cal, education, and public safety net programs. More and more of society's wealth will be redistributed into the hands of the very rich; more and more workers' wages will be reduced to the poverty level.

In the last days of the special election, Davis was attacked as a "socialist." He was not. In 1934 the socialist Upton Sinclair run for the governor of California under Democratic

tickets. He got nearly one million votes, but failed on election due to Democratic Party's betrayal. The conservative *Los Angeles Times* even launched a campaign in which Sinclair was pictured as a supporter of free love and the nationalization of children. However, Sinclair and his supporters provided an alternative and a challenge to the established system. His movement eventually formed Democratic Party's foundation in California and paved the way for FDR's nationwide New Deal.

California needs a new Sinclair and a new New Deal, now.

Notes

[1] All citations in this essay are from _Sample Ballot & Voter Information Pamphlet_, Office of the Registrar of Voters, Santa Clara County.

[2] I participated the start of Santa Clara County Coalition for an Informed California <http://www.votenoonprop54.org/> which is part of Coalition for an Informed California, a statewide campaign to oppose Prop. 54 <http://www.informedcalifornia.org>. However, being prohibited from voting without "citizenship" (even though I have lived in California longer than six years), I had to leave the coalition's political election activity.

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