

The following article was written by the Basic Needs Electoral Committee of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America.

When We Fight, We Win - Progressive Surge Rocks LA Establishment – ver 1a

Thirty years after the Rodney King rebellion, the June elections in LA signified the emergence of a whole new level of organization and political awareness for the millions of workers that are rejected by today's corporate capitalist economy. Back in 1992, the rebellion marked the first expression of mass resistance by displaced, "de-industrialized" American workers, and as a result, it shook up the entire country. The electoral rebellion of 2022 was less sensational, but it demonstrated a new process of mass politicization that is even more significant, although largely hidden by the national media.

All across both the County and City of LA, a massive surge of voters decisively elected progressive anti-corporate and even abolitionist "defund the police" candidates, or sent them into the November runoffs with commanding leads. It was a stark reminder that the American ruling class is on the defensive in 2022. Democratic socialist community organizer Eunisses Hernandez won outright in an East LA City Council district with over 60% of the vote, defeating three-time incumbent Gil Cedillo. Hernandez ran openly as an abolitionist candidate, advocating dismantling the prison system and funneling funds into mental health care and housing the unhoused.

LA Democratic Socialists of America leader Hugo Soto-Martinez has a 9-point lead over the pro-real estate, anti-homeless incumbent Councilman Mitch Farrell as they head into the November runoff. City Controller candidate Kenneth Mejia has a 20-point lead over 13-year City Councilman Paul Koretz.

In the Mayor's race, longtime community leader Karen Bass has a 7- point lead over anti-homeless, law-and-order candidate Rick Caruso. Bass's results reflected the progressive surge, but they also benefitted from popular disdain and rejection of the billionaire Caruso's creepy attempt to buy the election with \$40 million from his fortune.

REVOLUTION RISING

All these victories were made possible by a coalition of hundreds of grass roots organizations: Democratic Socialists of America, Progressive Democrats of America, California Progressive Alliance, Working Families Party, LA Tenants Union, SEIU, and more. Although the mobilization for progressive candidates was intentional, well planned, and coordinated, what actually made it possible was a massive, underlying upsurge of primarily young workers with no ties and no loyalty to the system. Artificial intelligence, automation, and financialization have created a society where workers are literally no longer needed and are being abandoned by the ruling class. These workers were the driving force behind the LA victories. They have no use for a system based on private profit instead of common good. A revolution is rising and nothing can stop it.

This upsurge broke out into the open after the primary, when unhoused people and their supporters shut down the LA City Council three times in July and August. Before newly-elected Councilmembers could be seated, it was trying to pass the extension of Municipal Ordinance 41.18 to outlaw homelessness in almost 25% of the City's area.

LA CAN organizer Pete White explained what was causing the rebellion. "Los Angeles does not have currently, or never has had, a real housing plan to address the needs of poor Angelenos," he told *Democracy Now*. "What we continue to see in Los Angeles is the march towards criminalization. That is the strategy. And Los Angeles, it's an anywhere-but-here strategy. It's an out-of-sight, out-of-mind strategy. It's a funding of the police department to solve a social crisis. What we saw in City Hall ... was the voices of houseless people, the voices of civil rights organizations and tenants' organizations, saying, "Enough is enough...."

The key issues in LA are the demand to house the people, especially the unhoused, and the post-George Floyd demand to defund and abolish the police. These are what inspired so many new leaders to run for office. Contrary to the national media narrative, these demands won decisive victories over candidates who doubled down on historic policies of criminalization and incarceration.

Open vilification of the unhoused and glorification of everything police actually caused City Councilman's Joe Buscaino's campaign for mayor to finish dead last. LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva, a frequent tough-on-crime guest of Fox News, was forced into a runoff. Community anger was further fueled by new revelations in the Torrance PD racist texting scandal. Not one but two attempts to recall progressive District Attorney George Gascon failed to collect enough signatures to even qualify for the ballot.

As Homeless Capital of the country, LA's failure to deal with its housing crisis has become a key issue. Mejia won based on his record of tirelessly serving the unhoused and fighting for tenant rights. A recent UCLA report on housing documented how politics in LA has been dominated by developers and speculators. Their policy has been to build luxury apartments, redevelop the areas around the Skid Row area, and essentially do nothing to house the masses living in the streets.

POLITICIZATION

The revolution proceeds in zigzags and bursts, and includes compromises and/or direct actions wherever needed to move it forward. In earlier, non-revolutionary periods, compromises were generally practiced by opportunist leaders to secure advantages for themselves or some limited constituency. Today, now that the opportunity to win real victories exists, compromises can be and are being made when necessary to move forward the movement as a whole. This is demonstrated by the remarkable leap in political sophistication among the workers involved in the various campaigns.

In the first place, millions of people have begun to understand the importance of running candidates and voting in elections, in a way that just did not happen before 2016 and 2020. They learned to rally around corporate-free, basic needs candidates who come from and represent their struggles to survive. On the other hand, they are wise enough to avoid a purist approach and also sometimes vote for centrists like Karen Bass, who may not really speak for them, but who are in a position to block fascistic, openly corporate politicians like Caruso. They have learned to work within the Democratic Party, not as a strategy for ultimate social change, but as a tactic to drive forward its accelerating polarization from the inside. They separate out the fighters for a new society from the corporate agents and apologists that are trying to block and suppress the movement.

They are gradually learning how to overcome their various ideological differences in pursuit of common basic needs demands. Many are learning to think strategically, and understand our immediate struggles as stepping stones toward a new society based on human rights instead of corporate cash.

As Richard Moya of ACCE (Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment) explained, "For me, the key is to remember that policy reforms are meant as a way for us to also focus and grow the movement. That is something we sometimes get backwards. Sometimes, we think the policy is the thing we are trying to achieve, when really we are using this as an organizing component to win bigger things."

The Democratic Party in California holds the office of Governor and both houses. A viable challenge to the party leadership is emerging all across the state, and it is coming largely from within the party itself. The increasingly unified working class demands for housing, education, healthcare, and defunding the police have intensified in the course of the 2022 elections. Established Democrats are losing to a wave of challengers.

Karen Bass's endorsers, donors, and the entire Democratic Party machine --- all the way up to Biden -- supported her, not because they are afraid of Caruso, but because they are afraid of the progressive wave that is challenging incumbents. They see Bass's credibility in the community as the best way to neutralize its demands -- but workers can use the Bass campaign to elevate their demands instead, every bit as much if not more than the ruling class does.

REAL SOLUTIONS

While the reproductive freedom movement may not seem as important in blue state California, the relationship is vital because, on the one hand, a national victory by anti-abortion politicians may well lead

to a national ban on abortions. On the other hand, the national reproductive freedom movement, in order to win, needs to unite with the larger movement for basic needs like the one driving the electoral revolution in LA.

In LA and the nation we do not really have a homelessness and housing insecurity problem – what we really have is a billionaires problem. The survival of our people ultimately requires us to abolish billionaires and construct a cooperative society explicitly committed and organized to meeting all the physical, emotional, spiritual, and ecological needs of the people.

As Pete White expressed it, “Instead of the criminalization of the houseless community, we are calling for housing preservation.... We are calling for city-owned and government-owned properties to be turned back over to community trusts, and for those buildings and that land to be converted into housing for houseless people. We are calling for leadership that recognizes houselessness is a byproduct of a failed housing system, or a lack of a housing policy, and poverty.,,, We're calling for housing for all, housing that's affordable at the lowest levels of affordability.”