

Nancy Lieber

In the twilight of capitalism

Reflections of Prop. 13 in France



Departing California at the end of June for a year of research and writing in Europe, we left the highly politicized climate of a society just beginning to suffer the repercussions of its recent electoral folly, Prop. 13. Arriving in Paris, we found the opposite—a society sensibly preparing for its summer shut-down, *les grandes vacances* of July and August. In France, more than anywhere else, not only does much production literally come to a summer halt, but *politics* consciously ceases. This is only temporary. In September comes *la grande rentrée*, the return—not only to home, but, with spirit renewed, to politics. Yet, while in terms of political climate Davis and Paris momentarily seem worlds apart, there is a thread of continuity that reminds us daily of Davis and Prop. 13—it concerns social services.

First, Davis. Shedding its traditional real estate domination for a “new left” majority, the Davis City Council became known in the 1970s for its commitment to over-all planning (growth, environmental), energy conservation (bikeways, solar pioneering), and social services (Senior Citizens, recreation, child-care). Specifically for us, it meant our two sons spent the past few summers either going to half-day summer “school,” full-day Migrant Daycamp (open to seasonal farmworkers’ children and Davis residents’ children), or a series of classes offered by the City of Davis Life Enrichment Program (art, music, sports). The first two programs were free, the latter charged only nominal fees.

Then came Prop. 13. Much more than a

mandate for property tax relief or a protest against Jerry Brown and Company’s cynical hoarding of state funds, Prop. 13 was a conscious onslaught on the public sector and, therefore, a vehicle of class and racial division. What Prop. 13 voters really wanted, the polls told us, were vast cuts in the welfare budget. Yet those voters consistently failed to consider the consequences of the loaded Prop. 13 (not to mention the fact that two-thirds of the tax cut went to corporations and commercial property). An example was supplied by our family dentist in the neighboring town of Dixon. As a member of his district school board, he warned his constituents that their children’s summer school would surely be cut if Prop. 13 passed. It seemed they were willing to have this happen, because what they really wanted was to cut off funding to the Migrant Children’s Daycamp/Summer School Program. Prop. 13 passed and, as predicted, Dixon middle class kids are spending the summer in the streets. The migrant kids, however, have their program intact—it is *federally financed*. An initial reaction is: “Serves the Dixon voters right,” but that doesn’t help diminish the racial division that such Prop. 13 incidents create. In Davis, the purposefully integrated migrant daycamp was required this summer to exclude all of the non-migrant children. In addition, all music, art and sports programs have been eliminated from the Davis school curriculum.

We already know what happens when public services are cut back—private concerns move in. Gov. Reagan believed (and he acted budgetarily on the principle) that

the University of California should be a university of last resort, that if someone wanted a really fine education, he should go to Stanford. Thus, in the Sacramento area (and I assume throughout the state), newspaper ads began to appear just after June 6 for private summer schools. Most were religious (fundamentalist) establishments at that. Similarly, many recreational services such as those offered by Davis’ imaginative Life Enrichment Program will now have to be sought elsewhere. Is it possible we are heading back to the Country Club era?

Which brings me back to Paris and one activity that does not shut down in July or August—the City of Paris Daycamp. This summer our two sons are among the thousands of Paris children who are bused daily to various recreational centers in the surrounding suburban forests. From 8:30 to 6:00 p.m. they run wild, do organized activities, swim in nearby community pools, play soccer, lie on the hay on the floor of their tents. The program has no charge, no advance sign-ups, no wait-lists, no compulsory attendance (to qualify for state funds, as in the U.S.), no paperwork (aside from a \$1 insurance receipt issued on the first day)—in short, no hassle. It is true the meals are not free (though they are subsidized for those who need it), but the five-course lunch, including things like artichoke hearts and Camembert cheese, offers considerably more—both in taste and nutrition—than the sloppy joes/applesauce/brownie school menus in Davis. The program, continuing until school resumes in mid-September, obviously provides an essential service for

working parents and working class/immigrant worker families who simply cannot afford to vacation away from home.

To our minds, the Paris Daycamp is the functional equivalent of the Davis Migrant Program. Yet, for whatever reasons (the right of children to fresh air, recreation, and healthy food? or traditional French government policies encouraging large families?) it would be unthinkable for any French government to terminate this program. It is a necessary service, not open to budgetary cuts or the electorate’s whims. And in fact, its principle was established in 1871, when free public education for all French children—including pre-schools, nurseries, and day-care centers—was mandated by the new Third French Republic.

I realize the centralized, bureaucratic, standardized nature of many European social services raises difficult questions for socialists interested in decentralization and direct democracy. (Here it is interesting to note that Davis was one of few communities to vote overwhelmingly *against* Prop. 13. A major reason, I think, is that its city services were seen as necessary, efficient, welcome. Above all, they were considered responsive and controllable due to extensive voluntary participation by citizens on various city commissions.) But, of course, all these being serious political questions, I will have to wait for the September *rentrée* to consider them.

Nancy Lieber, a member of the National Board of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, is in France doing research on Eurosocialism.

Edward Gold

Ollman’s Maryland struggle is no game

The University of Maryland’s College Park campus, politically dormant since the late 1960s, burst into widespread debate this month when new president John Toll rejected the appointment of Bertell Ollman, a Marxist, as chairman of the Government and Politics Department.

Ollman, an associate professor at NYU, had been nominated by a faculty search committee (which began with 140 candidates) and had been approved by the G&P faculty, the divisional provost, and the campus chancellor. Final authority, however, rests with the university president.

Throughout the spring, outgoing president Wilson Elkins refused to act on the appointment, as public pressure against Ollman mounted. Acting Maryland governor Blair Lee, considered the front-runner in this year’s gubernatorial race, publicly opposed the appointment of a Marxist. Lee was supported by several state legislators, at least two members of the university’s Board of Regents, and senior members of the G&P department, long considered one of the most conservative departments on the College Park campus.

Elkins refused to make a decision, departing from his long-standing tradition of never denying a faculty recommendation. Instead, he went ahead with retirement plans, allowing the matter to stand for over three months. The decision rested with incoming president Toll, former president of SUNY at Stony Brook, who took over the reins of the Maryland system on July 1.

Many faculty members and students have attacked Elkins for postponing the issue until the summer months, when the number of people on the College Park campus is only a fraction of its spring and fall population. The administration appeared to have learned some hard lessons from the large-scale demonstrations of

the late ’60s and early ’70s, when students and faculty by the thousands struck in April and May.

Toll, in his third week in office, rejected Ollman’s appointment, claiming that Ollman was not “the best qualified” person available. He denied that Ollman’s political beliefs played any part in the decision. Toll also cited an informal poll of

legedly did not wish to alienate the guardians of the school’s funds.

The third approach is the one that Toll hopes will gain wide acceptance. He claims that he resisted pressure from the right and left, instead opting for a purely administrative decision that would clearly be consistent with his goals in the area of “faculty development.” Ollman, Toll

The inventor of *Class Struggle* loses appointment as head of Maryland University Government Department.

the G&P faculty, which he claimed favored the appointment two-to-one, but showed strong opposition to Ollman from certain unnamed senior faculty members.

For his part, Ollman retained the services of one of Washington’s most prestigious law firms, Arnold and Porter, who filed suit against the Board of Regents, Elkins and Toll, demanding that Toll’s decision be reversed and that \$300,000 be awarded Ollman.

Controversy around the incident breaks down into three clearly discernible points of view, interpreting Toll’s decision as (1) anti-Marxist, (2) purely pragmatic, or (3) consistent with Toll’s philosophy on faculty development.

The most popular interpretation is the first. A large number of students and faculty members maintain that the university administration simply refused to hire a Marxist.

The pragmatic interpretation roughly follows the lines that although Toll personally has no objections to hiring a Marxist, he submitted to thinly-veiled budgetary blackmail at the hands of the current governor and many state legislators. In his first month of office, Toll al-

claims, is not the person to lead the department to the upper regions of academic prestige.

Toll points to his record at Stony Brook to support his position. Unlike Elkins, Toll turned down 21 out of 58 faculty recommendations during his SUNY tenure. He told a group of students that he promoted at least one Marxist and that he was active in the anti-war movement.

“I am firmly committed to making the University of Maryland a forum where all points of view can be freely presented and examined,” he stated after the decision. “But we don’t have to alter our normal standards of appointment to make clear our toleration of various political opinions.”

Ollman doesn’t buy it. He alleges in his suit that his academic qualifications played no part in the decision. The rejection, he claims, represents a knuckling-under to pressure from on and off campus against his political beliefs.

The suit alleges that Toll, Elkins and the Board of Regents used Toll’s apparent objectivity as the new president of the university as a pretext “to conceal their unlawful decision not to approve the ap-

pointment on the grounds of [Ollman’s] political beliefs.”

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) called on Toll to reveal the specific reasons for the rejection. Jordan Kurland, associate general secretary, urged Toll in a telegram to abide by AAUP guidelines, which state that administrators should not deny chairmanships “without compelling reasons.”

“Our position,” said Kurland, “is that the president simply hasn’t issued compelling reasons in detail.” The AAUP threatened an investigation, which could result in a censure of Toll.

Toll has steadfastly refused to discuss his specific reasons for vetoing the recommendation. He cites both the suit and his desire to protect the confidentiality of sources of advice he received.

The only pocket of student opposition to Toll springs from a loose coalition of the university food co-op (a student-run organization) and members of the Revolutionary Students Brigade. A group of students was ejected from the Board of Regents meeting at which Toll announced his decision, when they attempted to address the board.

In a meeting later that day with Toll, the ejected students accused Toll of political suppression. They were particularly rankled by the three-month delay in the decision, which minimized student reaction.

The decision-making process in the academic world is rarely open to public scrutiny. In the absence of any specifics from Toll, observers are left to speculate whether Toll acted as an honest administrator (resisting pressure from both the left and the right) or as a knave who covered up questionable behavior with able administration.

Edward Gold teaches English at the University of Maryland.

LIFE IN THE U.S.

LABOR

Safeway computers run workers ragged

By David Talbot

RICHMOND, CALIF.

WHEN DENNIS FLORES comes to work each morning, he is told by a computer what to do and how quickly to do it. Flores, a warehouseman at Safeway Stores' huge distribution center here, is handed a computer print-out sheet which specifies the number and type of crates he must load onto his pallet truck within a 60-minute period. If he falls behind the pace set by the computer more than once, he will be suspended. If he lags behind three times, he will be fired.

Safeway installed the computerized production system in April 1977 to increase worker productivity in the Richmond warehouse. The system was devised by the supermarket chain's industrial engineers, who spent one year observing the activities of the warehouse workers. "Before they put the computer in," said Flores, "Safeway officials assured us that it would be flexible, that it would take into account the various ages and physical abilities of the workers. That was a lie. This system is inhuman."

Last week, Flores and his 1,100 co-workers walked out of the warehouse, vowing not to return until the computerized system is "either modified or elim-

inated." "The main issue of our strike is working conditions," declared Teamsters Local 315, which represents the warehouse employees. "Safeway is trying to force us to accept a speed-up which no human being can stand for very long."

According to Loren Thompson, secretary-treasurer of Local 315, the new production system has increased each person's workload by "at least 50 percent." As a result, he said, more than 80 workers have suffered disabling injuries, "primarily back and shoulder strains." More than 50 workers, said Thompson, have been fired or suspended for failing to meet the higher production standards.

Strikers estimate that each employee is now required to lift at least 30,000 pounds of goods a day. "When I was hired, I had to load 125 cases an hour," said a young warehouseman. "Now my load is between 175 and 250 cases an hour. You've got to run to keep up with the program. I come out of the warehouse sweating like a dog, and I work in the frozen food section! They say that the computer is reasonable, that we should trust it. But it's killing us."

Safeway seems determined to keep the computerized system intact. "This particular system has been used very successfully at our warehouse operations in Los Angeles and El Paso," said company spokesman William Gross. "Richmond is the only place we've encountered any



Teamster warehousemen strike Safeway distribution facility. They are protesting computer-directed production system.

"I come out of the warehouse sweating like a dog, and I work in the frozen food section!"

problems." Safeway has reinforced its security force at the sprawling distribution center, which services 198 stores throughout northern California and Hawaii, and brought in several hundred supervisory personnel and non-union workers to handle the goods that are piling up inside the center.

Safeway refuses to negotiate with Local 315 and has labeled the strike a "wildcat." Safeway officials said they are meeting with representatives from the Western Conference of Teamsters to work out a settlement. But Thompson admitted that the Western Conference has not sanctioned the strike and has urged Local 315 members to return to work.

Meanwhile, the strike is spreading. Most of the Safeway supermarkets in Contra Costa county and a few others in San Francisco and Napa counties are being picketed. "We've got to teach Safeway a lesson," one striker declared. "We're human beings, not robots."

David Talbot is a free-lance writer in Berkeley, Calif., who writes regularly for IN THESE TIMES

LAWRENCE HILL & CO.
Publishers, Inc.

BOOKS FROM LAWRENCE HILL PUBLISHERS:

THE ITALIAN ROAD TO SOCIALISM

Historian Eric Hobsbawm interviews Giorgio Napolitano, economic expert of the Italian Communist party. This book, which is attracting widespread attention in Italy and France, contains discussion of recent events in Europe, including the Italian and French elections. The increasing influence of the PCI in the Italian and European political scene makes these interviews important reading.

Translated by John Cammett and Victoria DeGrazia

\$3.95 paper

THE KISSINGER STUDY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA: National Security Study Memorandum 39 (SECRET)

Mohamed El-Khawas and Barry Cohen

Cloth \$6.95, Paper \$3.95

THE UNQUIET DEATH OF JULIUS AND ETHEL ROSENBERG

Alvin H. Goldstein

Cloth \$8.95, Paper \$4.95

EUGENE DEBS: American Socialist

Anne Terry White

Cloth \$6.95

**MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO LAWRENCE HILL & COMPANY
ADD 50¢ POSTAGE AND HANDLING**

Please send the following titles:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

SEND TO In These Times
1502 North Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622

DONALD SHAFFER ASSOCIATES, INC.

ALL FORMS OF INSURANCE

Specialists in Pension &
Employee Benefit Planning

11 GRACE AVENUE
Great Neck, N.Y. 11021
212-895-7005
516-466-4642

Peoples College of Law

Founded by: La Raza Law Students Association
Asian Law Collective, National Lawyers Guild
and National Conference of Black Lawyers

PCL's goals are:
to train peoples' lawyers and be a
Third World/Working Class school.

Its unaccredited, four-year evening program leads to a J.D. and the California Bar Exam. Tuition is \$350 per semester.

Admissions based primarily on the demonstrated commitment to the struggle for social change. Two years of college or equivalent also required.

2228 West Seventh Street
Los Angeles, CA 90057
213/388-8171

