Californians express growing opposition to energy companies

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After a year of rolling blackouts, the draining of funds from the state treasury and record utility bills, the vast majority of Californians believe the energy crisis has been manufactured by the power generators to boost profits, according to a recent *Los Angeles Times* poll.

The poll, which queried 1,541 Californians over four days in June, found that 74 percent strongly agree and 12 percent agree, but not strongly, that "independent power companies have manipulated the electricity market in California in order to make a higher profit." Almost two-thirds were opposed to the state's deregulation scheme and many blame public officials, energy company executives and regulators for causing the crisis.

The poll also found that the energy crisis—which in the minds of many now overshadows all other problems confronting the state, including education and crime—is causing less people to believe that the state's economy is doing well. Seven in ten believe a recession is likely in California next year, with the energy crisis most often cited as the likely cause.

The *WSWS* interviewed several people in Santa Ana and Irvine in southern California about the energy crisis.

Jane Kinsley, a daycare teacher at the University of California at Irvine, said, "I feel government and big business have a tendency of being self-serving instead of serving the public. I believe there's a lot of corruption. The companies just jack up the prices and take advantage of the people. I'm not so sure about [Governor Gray] Davis, but Bush has left us high and dry. I'm very disappointed in him. If the state of California goes, we're going to pull the whole country with us. He's so shortsighted, he can't see that."

Wilson Silva does legal research in Santa Ana. "My wife is an assistant manager at an apartment complex with over 100 units. The other day there was a blackout, affecting over 400 people who live there.

"I would say that Davis should have done something about this way before now. Then he called on Bush to help, but it seems like it's too late. They should have been taking steps to solve the problem, and I don't think telling people to conserve will solve the problem either.

"I'm from Brazil, where the energy crisis is worse. It has even affected our night soccer games. Now the president is saying no more night games because of the electricity problem. That order came from the top. I think the government needs to act. Maybe the people in California need to call up their representatives and tell them to solve the problem."

Albert Curiel is a young worker at Circuit City: "Where I work, the power went out for three hours, putting out all the computers, TVs, stereos and everything. We couldn't do anything. The company lost a lot of money in revenue, also from having to pay all the employees in the store, warehouses, customer service.

"About three months ago, the power went out for an hour at our house. I live with my parents and four other siblings. My dad was pretty upset at the last bill. We used to pay $30 a month; now it's over $80.

"We can't live without electricity. I think the governor should just take care of the problem. I don't think he's doing his job right. I don't like the way we're being made to pay for this crisis. It's not our fault. Maybe we should all decide not to pay the power companies."

Joey Torres works in retail. He said, "Electricity is a resource that should be provided to all of us so that it's affordable. I think it's like gas and all the natural

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resources in the country—they should be regulated. We should not be dependent on all these different power companies.

“Personally our monthly bill used to be $25. It’s gone up about 40 percent, depending on how hot it is. The problem is if you rent an apartment, electricity is not included. Our money should be going to our baby, instead of to these big power companies.”

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