Right-wing Democrat wins in California gubernatorial election

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California's highly publicized and heavily-funded gubernatorial race was a contest between two reactionary big business candidates, neither of whom addressed the needs and concerns of the state's large and increasingly destitute working class. The race concluded with the victory of right-wing Democrat Jerry Brown, amid mass abstention from the polls, especially by young people.

Brown, twice already the governor of the state (1975-1983), secured roughly 4 million votes. Republican Meg Whitman, an ex-CEO who spent unprecedented sums of her own money on her election campaign, secured 3.1 million.

Neither candidate was able to attract an enthusiastic following. Out of a total state population of 37 million, about 22 million are eligible to vote. In other words, a mere third of the state's voting population voted in favor of either of the big business candidates for governor.

The turnout was particularly low among young people. The *Washington Post* reported, "In California, one of every five voters in 2008 was between the ages of 18 and 29, compared with about one in 10 on Tuesday."

The election centered on who was best qualified to impose further austerity measures. Both candidates, backed to the hilt by corporate money, agreed that the cost of the economic crisis must be imposed on the working class.

Brown's campaign exemplifies the dramatic rightward shift of the Democratic Party over the recent period. Brown stressed repeatedly his promise to cut pensions and other "wasteful spending." (See, "Right-wing consensus in California gubernatorial elections")

"The current pension system costs too much and needs to be changed," Brown wrote in an 8-page plan for California released by his campaign. "Fixing government is not simply about cutting state employees or expenses," Brown added, but also includes removing regulations on big business.

In his first visit to Sacramento after being elected, Brown said on Thursday that the budget deficit was "very daunting." He said his administration would work closely with Democrats and Republicans in enforcing cuts. "The big problem is not just getting a majority to approve the budget," he said. "It's dealing with all the cuts that have to be taken into account."

In one of the more reactionary moments of the Brown campaign, Brown answered a question about California's employment of the death penalty by exclaiming last month, "I've defended literally hundreds and hundreds of executions."

Brown also appealed to anti-immigrant bigotry in his campaign, pledging to develop further draconian measures against undocumented immigrants. "If they are found to be here illegally, they get deported," he promised.

Under these conditions, Brown's victory can be attributed to widespread public disgust with his Republican opponent, Meg Whitman, whose only qualification for governor appears to have been that she had amassed huge piles of cash over the course of her business career. Whitman, the former CEO of eBay, set a record for personal spending on an election campaign at $140 million.

Whitman ran a campaign that promised to bring a "corporate perspective" to the governor's office.

Another fixture of California elections are the ballot referenda, always featuring illusory "reforms" and heavily manipulated by corporate cash. Proposition 19, which would have legalized marijuana, did not pass.

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Proposition 24, which would have slightly increased the tax obligations of corporations in order to raise revenue, was defeated. Proposition 25, a measure backed by the unions that relaxes the legislative procedure for passing a budget, passed. Proposition 26, which tightens the legislative procedure for imposing fees on businesses, also passed. (See, “California ballot propositions: Corporate money and the illusion of reform”)

None of these propositions addressed in any significant way the fundamental problems afflicting humanity in general, or California in particular.

Both in terms of the turnout and the character of the political campaigns, the election in California was representative of a nation-wide trend. Workers and young people in California and across the US turned out in record numbers to vote for Obama and the Democratic Party in 2008, hoping for a reversal of the policies of the Bush administration. Instead, these policies were only further entrenched under Obama and the Democrats. The result was mass disaffection.

The political campaigns themselves consisted of nauseatingly endless mudslinging, self-promotion, and exchanges of emotionally-charged sound bites concerning minor or trivial issues. In an election in which the population took little interest, banks and corporations expended record sums (over $4 billion nationally) promoting their candidates of choice.

None of the most important issues confronting the vast majority of the population were raised in the elections nationwide. On all of the urgent questions—war, poverty, foreclosures, joblessness, debt, education, democratic rights—the candidates from both corporate parties were silent. The mass opposition to virtually every aspect of official policy did not find any substantial expression in the debates or speeches of the candidates.

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