

Gavin Newsom: A California governor groomed by the financial aristocracy

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With the California governor's race entering its final two weeks, recent polling shows Democratic candidate Gavin Newsom with a commanding lead over his Republican opponent, John Cox. A poll released by USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* on Wednesday found Newsom leading Cox by 54 percent to 31 percent among likely voters. The two held their first and only debate last week, a radio broadcast which aired for only one hour.

The winner will assume office on January 7, 2019 replacing Democrat Jerry Brown, the only four-term governor in state history, including eight years from 1975 to 1983, followed much later by his current eight-year tenure, which began in January 2011. Newsom has been Brown's lieutenant governor for the past eight years, after a career in San Francisco city politics as a member of the board of supervisors and then mayor.

The 63-year-old Cox, by contrast, has never held elected office, spending most of his life as a financial and legal adviser in the Chicago area, while hosting right-wing radio talk shows. The main value of his campaign for the Republican Party was to avoid having two Democrats on the November ballot under California's "jungle primary" format, as is the case in the contest for the US Senate seat.

Congressional Republican leaders and the Trump White House were concerned that the absence of a Republican statewide candidate for either governor or senator might depress Republican turnout and cost several incumbent House members their seats. Cox succeeded in placing second in the June primary, ensuring a spot on the November ballot, after which the Republican Party effectively abandoned his campaign to the obscurity it deserves.

The prospective landslide victory for Newsom is not a demonstration of great personal popularity. It is doubtful that most Californians could pick him out of a line-up, let alone say what he stands for politically. It is an expression of traditional Democratic loyalties in the state, and even more of the deep and abiding hatred of the Trump administration. More than two-thirds of likely voters in the most recent poll expressed strong disapproval of Trump, and most said this was "a major driver" in their vote for governor as well.

Newsom is not, however, an accidental beneficiary of the popular revulsion against Trump. The US ruling elite proceeds quite carefully in the selection of the chief administrator of the most populous US state, with the fifth largest economy in the world, larger than that of Great Britain. Gavin Newsom is the product of a selection process in which some of the wealthiest

families in the entire country have been involved from his earliest engagement in politics.

As documented by the *Los Angeles Times*, using campaign finance records, Newsom has long been bankrolled by eight of San Francisco's "first families," who raised millions for the future governor from the time he first sought elective office at the local level in San Francisco.

These include the Gettys, heirs to the Getty oil fortune, the Fishers, who founded the Gap clothing store empire and the KIPP Foundation—a leading sponsor of charter schools—and the Pritzkers, the West Coast branch of the family that owns the Hyatt chain of hotels. The Chicago branch of the Pritzkers groomed Barack Obama like the San Francisco branch sponsored Newsom. They count among their numbers a former US commerce secretary, Penny Pritzker, and J.B. Pritzker, the current Democratic candidate for governor of Illinois.

Billionaire George Marcus, founder of Marcus and Millichap, one of the largest real estate companies in the country, donated \$172,000 to Newsom when the latter was beginning his political career. Marcus and Millichap closed nearly 9,000 real estate transactions valued at \$42.3 billion in 2016 alone. George Marcus until recently held a position at the University of California Board of Regents, the governing body of the University of California campus system. Last year, reports emerged that the board of regents, headed by former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, used school funds to host lavish dinners and parties while at the same time advocating tuition and fee increases for UC students. Marcus' net worth currently stands at \$1.3 billion according to *Forbes* magazine.

Also among Newsom's benefactors was Susie Tompkins Buell, co-founder of the Esprit and North Face clothing brands. In addition to donating more than \$70,000 to Newsom, Buell is a close friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton and a top fundraiser for the latter's 2016 presidential campaign in the San Francisco Bay area. Some Clinton cronies describe Buell as Hillary's "soul mate." In 2016, Buell donated \$500,000 to the law firm of lawyer Lisa Bloom, daughter of celebrity attorney Gloria Allred, who represented women who came forward with sexual harassment and assault claims against then presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Newsom's closest relationship was with the Getty family. His father Bill Newsom was instrumental in managing the financial affairs of the Gettys and had personally delivered the ransom money to Italy in the infamous kidnapping of J. Paul Getty's

grandson in early 1973. Gordon Getty, son of the founder J. Paul Getty, treated Gavin Newsom like a son, taking him on African safaris, ski vacations, and otherwise introducing him to a world of fabulous wealth and privilege. Newsom's father Bill opened a winery in partnership with Gordon Getty and restaurants with Billy Getty, Gordon's son.

A political mentor of Newsom, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, described the relationship between the future governor and his wealthy benefactors in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*: "He came from their world, and that's why they embraced him without hesitancy and over and above everybody else. They didn't need to interview him. They knew what he stood for."

If nothing else, such support demonstrates a nexus between the state and the ultra-wealthy so intimate that the dividing line between the two entirely ceases to exist. Newsom is supported not simply by people with a lot of money, but by people who use such massive wealth to decide who gets to run for political office, what policies they will enact, who gets to serve on which boards and in which boardrooms and how the capitalist state in general can be used to make them richer.

Newsom will not only dutifully serve their interests upon reaching the governor's office, he will be more than happy to do so as he himself is cut from the same cloth. These are, after all, the families whom the would-be governor once referred to as the "DNA of San Francisco."

There is also a historical significance to support from such ruling-class families. Far from its present-day image of liberalism and tolerance, San Francisco has a long history of major class battles, going back to the general strike sparked by longshoremen in 1934, in which the capitalist elite resorted to deadly violence against the working class.

This, in fact, is the real "DNA" of San Francisco and California politics, and this history will emerge even more openly in the coming period, and likely while Newsom holds the governorship.

Despite his carefully cultivated image as a liberal, based mostly on his identification with the issue of gay marriage, Newsom has always described himself as a "fiscal watchdog," famously sponsoring the "Care Not Cash" ballot initiative which drastically reduced cash aid for the homeless in exchange for a minimal level of drug treatment, behavioral and other services. His tenure in the mayor's office coincided with further gentrification of the city, with median rent in the city increasing to the highest level of any city in the world, currently standing at \$3,500 per month.

For his current run for governor, Newsom has said that while he doesn't support the death penalty on moral grounds, he and his advisers are currently in the process of reviewing several legal challenges to the state's death penalty proceedings according to which the process should become more streamlined. When asked recently on the campaign trail if he still opposed the death penalty, Newsom responded, "I'm not prepared to answer that question but I'm preparing myself to answer that question."

The California gubernatorial election arises in the midst of an immense growth of the class struggle internationally which is beginning to find expression within the state of California itself. The state of California is the largest in the country by population,

with some 38 million people living within its borders. It is also home to a massive and increasingly restive working class. More than 330,000 registered nurses work there, and have been engaged in protests and one-day strikes on a nearly constant basis. More than 266,000 public school teachers also work in the state, with the possibility of a strike by more than 36,000 teachers in the city of Los Angeles on the horizon—delayed by the union until after the election in order not to disrupt the coronation of Newsom as governor.

While the various trade unions operating across the state have been heretofore able to keep expressions of working class opposition isolated, that period is rapidly drawing to a close. As the unions, which have almost unanimously supported Newsom's run for governor, find themselves unable to sufficiently contain the growth of working class struggle, responsibility for suppressing the class struggle will depend ever more openly on the direct violence of the state. There can be no doubt that a Newsom administration will wholeheartedly embrace this role. It was, after all, the current Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, who joined forces with Trump by dispatching California National Guard troops to the border with Mexico.

Some of Newsom's most recent campaign advertisements revolve around the slogan of "renewing the California dream." In them, Newsom promises to provide quality pre-natal care for all expectant mothers, after-school programs and meaningful job training and work opportunities for all high school and college graduates. Newsom has also advocated a single payer health care model for the state, knowing full well that such a measure would have no chance of passing the state legislature.

Reformist hot air from a capitalist politician sponsored by the wealthiest families in the state, combined with the preparations for violent attacks on workers' rights—that is the essence of the Newsom campaign and the Democratic Party as a whole.



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