



San Francisco 2015 Election

SIGN O'THE TIMES

Left Party Statement

As of fall 2015, life in San Francisco has become very nearly intolerable for anyone who makes less than about \$80,000 a year. The displacement of San Francisco's workers, immigrants, and poor people features in local news media on a nearly daily basis, with coverage of the loss of housing and the inability to find new places to live amounting to an incessant chorus demanding poor people get out of town. Meanwhile, San Francisco has also become a wasteland for progressive politics. Apparently, 2003, when Green Party candidate Matt Gonzalez ran for Mayor, garnered mass support from San Francisco's workers, immigrants, youth, communities of color, local artists, etc., and then lost to establishment candidate Gavin Newsom, was some kind of final statement of progressive resistance to the corruption of the San Francisco Democratic Party Political Machine.

Even though nationally the Democratic Party poses as the liberal alternative to the ultra-reactionary Republican Party, the truth is that they are partners in enacting and implementing policies that hurt workers and disenfranchised groups and communities. Here in San Francisco, the Democratic Party has controlled local government for as long as anyone can remember. Therefore, we should understand the Democratic Party to be the real enemy, the political organization of the financial, real estate, and technological firms that are behind the increase in property values that is making it so none of us can live here anymore. The void of a left alternative independent of the Democratic Party remains a key reason why the 2015 elections offer no real possibility of rolling back the obscene process of gentrification now entering some absurd final stage in which San Francisco will be full of towers of luxury apartments in which no one lives because they are all owned by wealthy out-of-towners as vacation homes and investment property.

IS GETTING RID OF MAYOR ED LEE ALL THAT MATTERS?

The lack of an independent alternative for the seat is why the mainstream press can basically get away with claiming that Mayor Ed Lee is running for re-election unopposed. In reality, the closest thing to an organized opposition to Lee's blissful state of thrall to real estate and tech interests exists in the form of the «Vote 1-2-3 to Replace Ed Lee» campaign, a bloc of three candidates including Amy Farah Weiss, Stuart Schuffman, and Francisco Herrera calling for voters to vote for them in any order on their ranked-choice ballots to insure that Lee will not be re-elected. All of them appear to imagine themselves as heirs to Gonzalez's historic defeat, anti-establishment candidates running against displacement and in favor of preserving San Francisco's «unique and diverse community.» However, none of them have much to offer besides support for a few tepid, defensive ballot measures aimed at stemming displacement and preserving some small gains from the past.

For instance, Herrera makes a point of calling for the preservation of the San Francisco's largely symbolic Sanctuary City ordinance—the law that prohibits City employees from cooperating with federal immigration authorities—without mentioning that Sanctuary City

does nothing to help the immigrants without basic rights who continue to be picked up at their homes by the Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and taken to deportation centers, although he does make some vague point about “permanent status for immigrants” that could be a call for papers, we can't be sure. In any case, unlike Gonzalez, for these three, independence from the Political Machine does not seem to include independence from the local Democratic Party, as the three candidates make the rounds of the City's Democratic Clubs seeking endorsements while campaigning for Democratic candidate for District 3 Supervisor, Aaron Peskin, as though he is the man to save the City from gentrification despite the fact that the process actually accelerated while he was on the Board of Supervisors.

DOWN WITH THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The office of County Sheriff is a responsible for running the jails and evicting people from their houses. It doesn't matter who runs it, it should be dismantled.

Meanwhile, speaking of disgusting things, the office of County Sheriff is a shameful position responsible for running the jails and evicting people from their houses. In the Sheriff's race, we are treated to the bizarre spectacle of Ross Mirkarimi trying to hold on to both this office and his progressive credentials despite having pleaded guilty to domestic violence charges at the beginning of his first term. His main challenger is Vicki Hennessy, a former deputy whose policies are more or less identical to Mirkarimi's. In fact, the chief difference seems to be that the ranks of the Sheriff's Department don't like Mirkarimi. When we consider that some of these deputies were busted for the despicable act of forcing inmates to fight one another for the deputies' entertainment, we don't think we would boast of their endorsement the way that Hennessy does. The truth is none of these candidates should be sheriff because the Office of Locking People in Cages and Throwing Them Out of Their Homes shouldn't even exist.

CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO IN DESPAIR

One seat on the Board of Trustees for City College of San Francisco is available to be filled this election. This is the same board that was stripped of its power in favor of a «special trustee» during the highly publicized battle for accreditation that had nothing to do with academics and everything to do with an attempt to force CCSF to become a conveyor belt for four-year institutions at the expense of its adult education and remedial programs.

The candidates for this board seem duly chastened, with the most radical proposal having to do with outreach programs to boost enrollment. No talk of CCSF's role in the larger economy by teaching immigrants English and/or providing a wide range of job training for disenfranchised citizens. No program to address the 26% cuts to programs mandated, nor even to deal with the still-looming accreditation battle to be rejoined over the next year as the January 2017 deadline to meet the accreditation requirements.

CITY ATTORNEY, DISTRICT ATTORNEY, & TREASURER

DO WE REALLY HAVE A CHOICE?

No. Dennis Herrera is running unopposed for his fourth term as City Attorney; George Gascón, ex-Chief of Police, is running unopposed for his second term as District Attorney after having been appointed by Gavin Newsom in 2011; and José Cisneros is running for his third term as Treasurer after having been appointed by Gavin Newsom in 2004. In other words, in these key offices, we can expect more of the same flying under the radar while nothing is done to stem the displacement of San Francisco's workers and poor people.

THE FALL OUT

This election season, the essential continuity of the City's Democratic Party Machine politics carries over into the ballot initiatives, which would be dreadfully boring were it not for the fact that the problems that they pretend to address desperately need solutions right away.

Proposition A

Affordable Housing Deal with the Devil—NO!

This measure would allow the City of San Francisco to adopt the regressive taxation strategy of selling General Obligation Bonds, thereby borrowing up to \$310 million dollars against its future property tax revenues to develop the 33% affordable housing for San Francisco in Ed Lee's housing plan. Apparently, they do not expect to have any trouble finding someone to pay for the 67% market-rate housing mandated by Lee's plan. Proposition A, like all bond measures, allows the City to raise property taxes in order to pay the interest on this money if necessary and allows landlords to raise rents to cover up to 50% of their increased property tax bill. The City, for its part, is confident it can manage its borrowing in such a way to prevent any increases in property taxes.

As for us, we are opposed in principle to bond measures, which in this case allow for raising the rents and/or raising taxes of workers to pay for housing for other workers or disenfranchised residents. This measure will also require that the City partner with a developer to build the housing, a developer that will be burnishing its reputation as a provider for the poor while also taking control of a project that is ultimately against its true interest in developing market-rate housing, which is why affordable housing projects seldom provide as much as they really could, and why we think it would be far more efficient if the City went into the business of developing housing itself. We can also point out that the City has a large number of obscenely profitable businesses in it, including tech firms, for sure, but also financial institutions and real estate concerned that could afford to pay a higher rate of taxes to fund these services, and that is who the City should be taxing to pay for affordable housing.

Furthermore, bond measures actually increase the City's dependence upon big banks by increasing its debt load and giving them additional leverage against the City taking measures to develop the infrastructure it needs on its own. With our 'no' vote on Prop A, we take a small step towards financial independence

with the larger goal of developing a Bank of San Francisco to manage its own money for the interests of those who need it most.

We are also against this perennial strategy of the Democratic Party Political Machine—to let a desperately needed resource decay almost to nothing and then demand that workers pay for it. If it isn't the Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center and its services for seniors, then it's MUNI, or City College, or SFUSD, or San Francisco General Hospital being held for ransom. We reject the political machine's bullying and blackmail in the most strident terms by voting «No!» on Proposition A.

Proposition B

Paid Parental Leave for City Employees (and EVERYONE!)—Yes!

This wonderful policy extends maximum parental leave to both parents if they are city employees, for births, foster parenting, and adoption, and let them keep all of their benefits! It should be the standard for the whole city, and the whole world, even. Vote yes on Proposition B.

As an aside to SEIU Local 1021, the union that represents employees of the City and County of San Francisco: in the future, how about fighting for gains like this during contract negotiations for your members as well as for all San Francisco workers, without needing to wait for elections time.

Proposition C

Designates Grassroots Activists as Expenditure Lobbyists—NO!

This measure designates anyone who spends more than \$2500 in a calendar month to indirectly influence government policy, perhaps by organizing a mailing to mobilize people to public meetings, as an «expenditure lobbyist» subject to a \$500 annual fee and monthly reporting on their activity.

Clearly, this is a no. \$2500 is a very low threshold. \$500 per year and monthly reports represent very little to the Big Wheels in the Machine, but a lot of money and a lot of extra busy-work for activists working at our scale. We are against additional restrictions for grassroots and working class electoral participation. Vote no on Proposition C!

Proposition D

SF Giants Develop Mission Rock—NO!

Technically, this measure increases the height limit and sets open space requirements in Mission Rock to clear the way for housing developments of a minimum of 33% low-to-moderate income housing. In other words, up to 67% market rate housing.

First of all, given that the «market» is not only failing to provide housing for San Franciscans, it is also actively depriving long-term residents of their homes, we consider it inexcusable for anyone claiming progressive credentials to advocate for the development of market rate housing, when they should instead be advocating, for the development of 100% affordable housing that gives priority to homeless families and individuals as well as those in danger of being evicted. Since it is true that no developer will build anything here if they can't make a massive profit, the City should go into the business of developing affordable housing, and start by making it illegal in the city to charge anyone more than 20% of their income for rent.

In the meantime, we see Proposition D as a cynical attempt to use the shortage of low income housing in San Francisco as an excuse to shoehorn in a lot more market rate and luxury housing, while also setting the tone and tempo of development in Mission Bay. We also can't help noticing that nearly every «Paid Argument in Favor of Proposition D» was paid for by the San Francisco Giants, whose stadium is right next door to Mission Rock. We doubt the Giants are excited to have a bunch of low-income housing in their neighborhood. Vote no on Proposition D.

Proposition E

Techie Requirements for Public Meetings —No position.

This measure requires every public meeting of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Board of Education, and Community College Board to be broadcast over the Internet, and allows anyone anywhere to submit testimony in writing, in video, or in audio while requiring that testimony to be read into the record. Further, if Proposition E passes, it will let groups of fifty or more people set the time for preferred agenda topics at public meetings.

This one seems to allow for increased participation in the democratic process, which we like. However, the technical aspects of this measure immediately raise questions of access to the technology. As such, it also has an undercurrent of the influence of social media on local politics. The kind of media that produces this kind of testimony is expensive and not available to everyone.

There is also a high potential for abuse, such as well-resourced interests paying to produce lengthy documentaries, or somehow stacking the meetings with input from all over the world, or corporations organizing groups of their employees to schedule agenda topics at times favorable to them. Furthermore, we are Old School in that we prefer that activists mobilize their constituencies to public meetings.

For this, we say no position.

Proposition F

Short-Term Residential Rentals —Yes, but...It Settles Nothing!

This proposition limits short-term rentals in San Francisco, while also making the hosting platform, Airbnb, for instance, legally liable to interested parties.

We call for a yes vote on F, but must point out that although a measure like this could provide us with a tool to at least slow down the increased scarcity of housing due to the conversion of rooms for rent for residents into Airbnb rentals for tourists and other short term residents, we understand that there are also struggling home owners or renters that have been forced to participate in these actions in order to make ends meet. The gap in the economy still needs to be addressed, perhaps with a citywide policy to stop rent increases and build 100% affordable housing. We critically support Proposition F.

Proposition G

Manipulative Actions against Renewable Energy—NO!

This measure defines «renewable, greenhouse-gas free electricity» as electricity generated from renewable sources in California (but not rooftop solar panels in San Francisco) or power

from Hetch Hetchy dam (but not other hydroelectric facilities in California). It also requires CleanPowerSF—San Francisco's new public agency created to market renewable electricity to San Franciscans—to report what percentage of «renewable, greenhouse-gas free electricity» it plans to provide, while preventing CleanPowerSF from marketing its power as «clean» or «green» if it doesn't meet these new criterion.

Given that anthropogenic greenhouse emissions are causing climate change and pose a threat to all life on earth, the development of clean power is arguably the most important issue of our time. And yet, the point of this measure seems to be to make it so that CleanPowerSF cannot actually sell clean power, even if most would agree that the sources CleanPowerSF is using are, in fact, clean. This, in turn, would make CleanPowerSF subject to more stringent standards than PG&E, which is regulated at the state level, and can therefore package its nasty coal and nuclear generated power with renewable sources and market it as such, giving PG&E a competitive advantage over CleanPowerSF. The reason why it seems like it doesn't make sense is because it doesn't make sense. Proposition G is so stupid that it has even been disavowed by the PG&E hacks that had put it on the ballot. Vote no on Proposition G!

Proposition H

Adopting the State's Definition of Clean, Green, and Renewable Energy—YES!

This measure directly counters Prop G with the completely rational proposal that the City adopt the State of California's much broader definition of «eligible renewable energy resources» for the purposes of CleanPowerSF. Vote yes on Proposition H.

Proposition I

Suspension of Market-Rate Development in the Mission District—Yes, but... What About the Rest of the City?

This proposition would suspend the building of market-rate housing in the Mission for 18 months, while mandating that the City come up with legislation, policies, and money to stop displacement in the district. Of course we support it.

What we don't support is the billing of this measure as some kind of final battle for the soul of San Francisco. How much harder would it have been to make it apply citywide, as it needs to do? The Mission is not the only neighborhood affected by rampant displacement of long-time working class and poor residents.

Furthermore, it seems simple enough for developers to just...wait 18 months and then do what they were already going to do. We need to challenge the Democratic Party Machine responsible for the last twenty-five years of rampant gentrification by proposing a path that leads us to the kind of city we really want to have. We critically support Proposition I.

**Left
Party**

San Francisco

internationalleftreview.com
(415) 571-5741
leftpartyus@gmail.com

Proposition J

Legacy Bullshit Cronyism Preservation Fund —No!

Another measure aimed at «preserving the character» of San Francisco neighborhoods, whatever that means. It would create a fund to allow certain businesses designated as «legacy businesses,» to receive grants from the City of \$500/year/full time equivalent employees. It claims to be aimed at staying off displacement of local small businesses that have been here a long time.

Even if this measure did not leave open the question of how it is to be funded, and the machine could be trusted to fund it without taking even more money from the schools or other essential services, and even if the process of a Supervisor or the Mayor nominating a business for legacy status that would then have to be confirmed by the Small Business Commission did not amount to a blank check for the same bullshit cronyism we have become accustomed to, Proposition J still would have little effect on the problem of rooting businesses in San Francisco.

Think about it...if a business is twenty-one years old, and has five full-time equivalent employees, at the end of the successful completion of the process to become a legacy business, it would be eligible to receive a grant of \$2,500 per year. In a city without commercial rent control, where it is not unheard of for landlords leasing out commercial space to jack rents by 400-500% with very little notice, \$2,500 per year is not going to keep anyone from being displaced. What San Francisco needs instead is rent control for commercial spaces, which no one is proposing.

If, however, funds were going to come out of the Police Department or some other awful repressive agency, and if democratically elected councils of local residents run discussed and decided which «legacy businesses», for- and non-profits alike, would be receiving these grants, we might be willing to support such a measure. Vote no on Proposition J!

Proposition K

Selling Surplus Public Lands for Developers Use—Hell, NO!

This proposition changes the possible uses of «surplus» land owned by the City of San Francisco to include the development of affordable housing with some kind of okay parameters on whom the housing is for: from homeless people to people making 150% of the San Francisco median income. Like Proposition D, also mandates that 33% of housing developed on surplus land that the City has sold to developers, needs to be affordable, again, proposing up to 67% of housing on this land to be market-rate.

Also like with Proposition D, we feel some pressure to support it, because we are in a housing crisis and any reasonable possibility of additional affordable housing seems as though it must be fought for and held onto with both hands. But we again see the City planning to sell land to developers for market-rate housing, and, therefore, we think this measure is reflective of an overall conciliatory approach to dealing with the rapacious developers who are making it impossible to live here, which we oppose in the most strident terms.

Because this measure will create some affordable housing, it is difficult to say no, but because of how much City land it could potentially be turned over to create more of the same poorly-constructed expensive housing, we definitely won't support it, like

we are not supporting Proposition D. We urge San Francisco's residents who are most threatened by displacement to come together to work on and fight for a plan to address the housing crisis, and stop accepting these rotten compromises as real solutions. Vote no on Proposition K.

Summary of Alternatives

We are aware that we are in the ironic position of being affordable housing advocates who call for «no» votes or take «no position» on all of the affordable housing measures on the ballot this November. We think we have been clear in proposing what we think should be done instead, but just in case we haven't, let us revisit our points. We are for withdrawing all of the money for San Francisco's municipal budget and pension plans from big banks and using that capital to start a Municipal Bank of San Francisco. This bank would be mandated to invest in the development of infrastructure for San Francisco, with a clear priority set on the development of 100% affordable housing for San Francisco's homeless families and individuals as well as those in danger of displacement, as well as the maintenance and upgrading of existing affordable housing stock. When we say «affordable», what we mean is that no more than 20% of a household's income shall be spent on rent, and that will be enforced citywide. We see the advocacy of plans that allow for the development of market-rate housing to be inimical to this goal, and it is in service of this alternative and the building of an organization independent of the local Democratic Party Political Machine capable of implementing it, that we take all of these positions.

CLIP-OUT CRIB SHEET

- A** Affordable Housing Deal with the Devil—NO!
- B** Paid Parental Leave for City Employees (and EVERYONE!)—Yes!
- C** Designates Grassroots Activists as Expenditure Lobbyists—NO!
- D** SF Giants Develop Mission Rock—NO!
- E** Techie Requirements for Public Meetings—No position.
- F** Short-Term Residential Rentals—Yes, but...
- G** Manipulative Actions against Renewable Energy—NO!
- H** Adopting the State's Definition of Clean, Green, and Renewable Energy—YES!
- I** Suspension of Market-Rate Development in the Mission District—Yes, but...
- J** Legacy Bullshit Cronyism Preservation Fund—No!
- K** Selling Surplus Public Lands for Developers Use—Hell, NO!