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Don't Mourn, ORGANIZE!

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The Two Faces Of Conservatism

The passage of Proposition 13 in California extends and further catalyzes the polarization process underway in U.S. society—a process which is the political companion-piece, here in the late 1970's, to government plans for indefinite economic austerity. Proposition 13 cuts property taxes by 60%, which means major savings for corporations and landlords (who stand to benefit the most). In its aftermath, the "tax revolt" is spreading to other parts of the country, with other states working to get similar initiatives in motion. California's Governor, Jerry Brown, has "donated" a \$5 billion state surplus to prevent major cuts at this time, but that donation will run out in a year. Then California will be faced with health centers and hospitals closing, welfare cuts, and a general deterioration of the living standard of poor and working people.

Conservative political elements are building a mass base among small home owners, whose standard of living is being reduced through exorbitant taxes while the so-called liberals seemingly do nothing! The liberals in California, headed by Governor Jerry Brown, weren't able to organize any effective resistance at all to the Proposition 13 campaign. They put together a No on 13, Yes on 8 Coalition (Prop. 8 would have cut home owners' taxes by 30% while leaving corporate and landlord taxes the same), consisting of elected officials, major newspapers, corporations like Bank of America and Southern Pacific Railroad, organized labor, and Third World and community groups. They were well

funded but relied mainly on a media campaign and did not do the hard work of organizing poor and working class people into their coalition to work with them. Indeed, they had not done that job for many years. As a result Proposition 13 passed 2 to 1.

The following day, Brown was on TV saying that 13 expressed his own sentiments and that the important thing was that 13 be implemented in a "human, sensitive and thoughtful manner." This "manner" has already resulted in state and city workers' wages being frozen, welfare recipients losing a cost of living raise, Medi-Cal abortions being cut by 85%, summer schools being closed, and adult education being cut. What needs to be understood is that the do-nothing liberal politicians want to make these cuts. Carter's brand of Trilateral liberal-conservatism is the order of the day for U.S. liberals. The Proposition 13 vote means that liberals in California no longer have to respond to their traditional constituency (labor, women, minorities and progressives) because "the people have spoken." Jerry Brown knows quite well that to get elected Governor in November (and presidential Democratic nominee in 1980?) he needs to appeal to those people who voted yes on 13. He presumes (a la Carter) that he has the votes of labor, minorities and women in his pocket because they have "nowhere else to go."

The point is that the current polarization of U.S. society is not understandable in terms of either the 19th century or 20th century meanings of conserva-

tism and liberalism. Today's conservatism has two forms—liberal-conservatism (Carter, Brown, Koch, Moynihan, etc.) and conservative-conservatism (Reagan, Ford, Russell Long, etc.). Both vie for one mass of people in the current U.S. polarization—an amalgam of middle class, organized working class, landowners, corporations, etc.—that is, the **organized!** The other mass in the polarization process—the unorganized—are by and large unled. Their potential leaders are either hopelessly tied to the Democratic Party or, enmeshed in ultra-left utopianism, have failed to mount any serious resistance in California. Many so-called leftists rationalized that passage of Proposition 13 would be good because it would force people to organize. This is, of course, an old and foolish gambit. Other so-called progressives assumed the unorganized masses would move spontaneously. They thereby objectively

gave the leadership of the anti-13 forces to Jerry Brown and the Democratic Party—who in fact represent one faction of the other side!

The tragedy of California's "tax revolt" is that, once again, big business interests have triumphed while the poor lose out. The poorest strata of the class—the unorganized—are totally unrepresented even by working class organizations and therefore their interests have been totally left at the mercy of the increasingly conservative Democratic Party.

With the Democrats and Republicans vying to win over the organized in order to implement a conservative politic in the face of indefinite economic austerity, it is absolutely critical that the millions of poor and working people, minorities, women and progressives be organized into a force with a voice and, more importantly, with power. Don't mourn Proposition 13, Bakke, anti-ERA, anti-abortion, anti-gay, and anti-labor legislation—**Organize the Unorganized!**

Freda Rosen, Coordinator

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