

How the Progressives Won in Santa Monica

by Derek Shearer

It might have been the final scene from an inspirational Frank Capra movie of the 1940s: a motley group of tired campaign workers seated together on folding chairs in the WPA-built city hall at five-thirty in the morning, waiting for the final campaign results to see whether they had defeated the Big Money crowd and won a victory for the People.

Title it *You Can Fight and Win*. Central casting sends over the perfect mix of characters to play the insurgent candidates: a middle-aged widow, mother of four, who works for a local union; a liberal Methodist minister who looks like a cross between Alain Delon and Groucho Marx; an intense, intellectual community organizer, son of a retired steel worker; a friendly, witty probation officer, a "people's cop"; and a good-looking woman in her thirties, an expert in low-cost housing.

Give the film an upbeat theme: people's need for housing and control over their own city versus the real-estate speculators and banks. Make certain the screenplay has plenty of drama: crowd-filled rallies at city hall, demonstrations by angry tenants against rapacious landlords, confrontations between the people's candidates and the front men for the chamber of commerce.

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If the film could be made in today's Hollywood, would it sell? Populist films with a progressive message are not "in" these days. The conventional marketing wisdom is that audiences want escapism: science fiction, horror, vigilante movies. The country is supposedly moving to the right.

Yet, the imagined film is political reality. On April 14, 1981, the progressive slate of candidates for the city council in Santa Monica, Calif., won majority control of the city government in a landslide victory over a conservative slate of candidates fielded by local chamber of commerce/real-estate Republican forces. *The Village Voice* hailed it as "A Victory in Reagan's Backyard," and the national press—the *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*—and international press—the *Manchester Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Information*—all printed major stories on the selection.

Of course, *any* victory by New Left forces in the year of the Reagan sweep would be national news. Does the victory in Santa Monica hold more than curiosity value for activists in other parts of the country?

THE SETTING

"All politics in the U.S. is local," House Speaker Tip O'Neill has observed. It is necessary to understand the local context of the Santa Monica victory to appreciate the possible lessons that it holds for other cities

and states. While Santa Monica is not prototypical, it is also not unique; it is not some mellow land of quiche eaters, joggers, and roller skaters whose brains have been affected by the sun or their hot tubs.

Santa Monica is an incorporated city of approximately 90,000, surrounded on three sides by the city of Los Angeles and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. It is not a city of upper-middle-class professionals nor a city of minority poor. Almost 70 percent of the population is of moderate income. The medium household income in 1975 was \$11,088, close to the national average. Almost three-quarters of the households are renters. The population is a relatively balanced mix of seniors (16 percent), families with children (23 percent), Hispanics (13 percent), Blacks (4 percent), and Asians (4 percent).

The city has been called "sleepy," an Oshkosh by the Sea. Throughout the fifties and sixties the town was dominated by Republican homeowners, the chamber of commerce, and the local conservative newspaper, the *Evening Outlook*. Working-class homes filled the southeastern end of the city near a large Douglas aircraft plant. In the southwest, near the beach, working-class renters, many of them retired Jewish workers from the Los Angeles garment industry, lived in the Ocean Park section, once billed as "the Coney Island of the West."

The awakening of sleepy Santa

Monica was a gradual process, which began in the late 1960s when the old bungalows in Ocean Park were razed to make way for Miami Beach-style high-rise developments. It was a classic case of post World War II urban renewal: a so-called lower-income "blighted" area was demolished and lower-income residents displaced. In 1966, a new freeway was completed that connected the city "more efficiently" to greater Los Angeles, making more intensive land use economically feasible. Hundreds of small bungalows in the southern section of town were demolished and replaced with apartment buildings.

Renters as a group tend to be more Democratic and less well-off than homeowners, and by the early seventies the city was voting Democratic in national elections. In 1972 George McGovern carried Santa Monica in the Presidential election—but participation in local elections, which were held in the spring, one week after Los Angeles held its municipal elections, remained a meager 20 percent. Many renters assumed that they lived in Los Angeles, if they thought about local government at all.

At the same time that the forces of urban development were changing the demography of the city, many sixties activists found their way to the Ocean Park section of Santa Monica in search of a pleasant and inexpensive place to live. They began to build a "community" for themselves, utilizing such "alternative" institutions as a food cooperative, a community newspaper, and a community-oriented church—and, most important, they turned their organizing skills to local political issues, particularly the protection of the coastal environment and the maintenance of affordable housing. Using the legal redress provided by the state's Coastal Commission (established by statewide referendum in 1972), Ocean Park activists fought against high-rise, expensive development of their beach neighborhood. Activists waged a successful referendum battle in 1973 to "Save the Pier," which was threatened by a city council plan to turn the municipal pier into an island of condominium towers.

As the Vietnam War wound down,

local activists turned their attention to electoral politics at the local level as a way of bringing about social change. Most Santa Monica activists did not view electoral politics and community organizing as mutually exclusive. Their experience with an insensitive business-oriented local government convinced them that progressives could not leave the area of government to their opponents.

In 1976 Santa Monica was the statewide headquarters for the Hayden for Senate challenge against John Tunney in the Democratic primary. The following year many Hayden campaign workers joined in a hard-fought battle for the state assembly seat, representing Santa Monica and neighbor-

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ing Venice and West Los Angeles. Although the candidate, a progressive consumer advocate named Ruth Yannatta Goldway, narrowly lost the Democratic primary to a wealthy lawyer supported by the party establishment, the campaign was a turning point in local politics. During the campaign, Santa Monica activists learned firsthand the technology of modern electoral politics: computer-aided voter targeting, direct-mail literature appeals, and intensive Big League fundraising. These skills were combined with the activists' existing knowledge of Alinsky-style community organizing and sixties protest politics.

The nearly successful assembly race demonstrated that New Left activists could translate a progressive theme

(democratic control over economic decision-making) into a viable campaign effort—but the time was not yet right for winning a majority victory.

RENT CONTROL AS AN ISSUE

The political breakthrough for Santa Monica progressives did not come from a startling theoretical insight but from practice. In 1978 a small group of senior citizens, angered and worried over rising rents in the city, organized a petition drive to place a rent-control referendum on the June ballot. Belatedly, younger activists endorsed the effort, but did not wholeheartedly involve themselves in the campaign. The local measure was defeated in the same statewide election in which Howard Jarvis's tax-reduction initiative, Proposition 13, passed by a substantial majority. Santa Monica real-estate interests spent over \$250,000, compared with \$25,000 by the rent control advocates. Anti-rent-control literature mailed to voters claimed that rent control would fast make Santa Monica another South Bronx.

During the Prop 13 campaign, Jarvis had publicly promised renters that if they supported his property-tax-reduction scheme, then apartment owners would pass some of the savings on to them in the form of lower rents. However, rents in Santa Monica jumped following the June election, and conversion of apartment buildings to condos pushed an increasing number of middle-income tenants out of their homes. Between 1977 and 1979, over 2,000 units of rental housing in Santa Monica were demolished or converted to condominiums.

Local activists decided to place rent control on the ballot for the April 1979 municipal elections. A tough law that included controls on condominium conversions and "just cause" eviction conditions was drafted by Robert Myers, an attorney with Legal Aid, and a city-wide political coalition was formed under the banner of Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights (SMRR).

SMRR was established in the fall of 1978 as an electoral coalition of three groups: the Santa Monica Democratic Club, affiliated with the liberal wing of the state Democratic party through

the California Democratic Council; the Santa Monica chapter of the Campaign for Economic Democracy, a statewide organization of younger activists founded by Tom Hayden after his unsuccessful Senate race in 1976; and the Santa Monica Fair Housing Alliance, a local organization of housing activists, many of whom are senior citizens whose primary concern is affordable housing. Together, these three organizations provided a core group of 45 to 100 activists, most of whom had participated in previously unsuccessful electoral efforts.

SMRR sought out possible candidates for the city council to run on a ticket with the rent-control initiative. After an interview process, SMRR endorsed two candidates for the possible three open seats, therefore implicitly supporting an incumbent, a liberal Republican woman and environmentalist, for the third seat. The two SMRR candidates were consumer advocate Ruth Yannatta Goldway and William Jennings, a liberal lawyer and past president of the Santa Monica Democratic Club. Both candidates pledged to support rent control. The campaign for the council seats and for the initiative was run as a cohesive, unified effort, with a single campaign structure and a sharing of all funds.

In a bitter and hard-fought campaign, local and state real-estate and financial interests spent over \$250,000 against the initiative. Right-wing anti-rent-control candidates for the city council spent an additional \$50,000 in their own behalf. The SMRR coalition won a solid victory, with the rent-control proposition passing by a 54.3 percent to 45.6 percent margin and the two SMRR council candidates easily winning in a crowded field. The third council seat was narrowly taken by the liberal Republican incumbent who had run as an independent and neither opposed nor supported rent control.

SMRR had learned some lessons from the previous rent-control battle. This time the pro-rent-control forces simplified the electoral message by focusing on the issue of human needs and by personifying rent control through the lives of Santa Monica renters. One SMRR postcard sent out



The Ocean Park Perspective

to voters displayed a picture of an elderly couple with the word EVICTED stamped across their chests. On the back of the card, there was a message from the couple's son, who said that although he was a Goldwater Republican, he was now voting for rent control because his parents had been evicted and couldn't find an apartment they could afford. Another piece of SMRR campaign literature featured a reprint of a newspaper article headlined "Man

Dying of Cancer," in which a terminally ill tenant explained that he had been evicted and vowed to vote for rent control before he died.

Utilizing the periodic campaign-reporting statements required by California law, SMRR reprinted the list of the hundreds of real-estate brokers, developers, bankers, and landlords and the amounts they had contributed to fight rent control, and asked voters, "Is Santa Monica for sale?"

SMRR's aggressive campaign tactics offset the vigorous "red baiting" attack by the opposition's professional campaign firm, whose approach was to conjure up the specter of a city on the verge of being seized by Jane Fonda and turned into a Stalinist concentration camp.

The SMRR campaign made use of its grounding in Alinsky tactics by holding a well-covered press conference in front of the bank where the incumbent Mayor worked to highlight the existing council's bias toward real-estate development.

Passage of the rent-control amendment and election of two candidates in April 1979 ended the "resistance" phase of the Santa Monica movement. SMRR simultaneously now had to build a parallel power structure by operating inside the city government as a minority on the council and to defend its victory outside in the community by maintaining and broadening its base.

BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE

The Santa Monica rent-control charter amendment established an *elected* rent-control board, the only such body in the country. Elections for the five seats were held in June. Again, the SMRR coalition recruited and interviewed possible candidates. The coalition's leadership made a decision to broaden the electoral alliance by including progressive labor locals. Two of the five candidates selected for the rent board race had labor backgrounds: Jerry Goldman—a labor lawyer who represented the United Auto Workers, United Farm Workers, and many other local unions—and Dolores Press—a medical benefits specialist with the local Retail Clerks union. The other SMRR candidates were: René Gould, a liberal, middle-class homeowner and former city planning commissioner; Bill Allen, an architect who specialized in housing; and Neil Stone, a former VISTA and civil-rights organizer turned low-income-housing developer.

The real-estate industry put forward its own opposition slate of five candidates—but the SMRR team won all five seats.

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Over the summer of 1979, hundreds of law suits were filed against the law. Initial decisions by judges failed in halting the city from enforcing the law, so in the fall the real-estate industry qualified its own ballot initiative—an anti-rent-control measure deceptively titled the Fair Rent ordinance—and formed a front organization, the Fair Rent Alliance, to support the initiative on the November ballot.

Due to illness, one of the conservative incumbents on the council resigned, and the filling of an open council seat was also at issue in the fall election. SMRR selected Cheryl Rhoden, a single parent and longtime community organizer, as its candidate, and again ran a combined campaign effort. Although once more outspent by a ratio of ten to one, SMRR defeated the real-estate industry's ballot measure and elected Rhoden to the council, giving SMRR three of seven seats on the city council. SMRR's labor outreach efforts paid off in contributions from a number of unions and in the endorsement of Rhoden by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor.

In the postelection reorganization of Santa Monica's council-manager form of government, the three SMRR council members supported a moderate Republican for the Mayor's position (the Mayor is elected from among the council members as the leader of the council) in return for his vote to make SMRR council member Ruth Goldway Mayor pro tem. The working alliance with the moderate Republican Mayor provided SMRR with a fourth vote on many issues in the months that followed. Although in the minority, the SMRR council members managed to pass some legislation: a fair-housing law, which banned "Adults

Only" buildings (except for senior citizen projects); a consumer law requiring that stores show the price on all items, even if the store installs an electronic scanner at the check-out stand; increased funding for paramedics; increased funding for social-service agencies; a new city-sponsored recycling center; and a consumer affairs staff in the city attorney's office. Most important, the city voted funds to operate the rent-control administration and to defend the law in court.

SMRR council members also successfully redirected Community Development Block Grant funds to neighborhood organizations in the city's poorer and minority sections. Previous councils had ignored HUD regulations on the use of CDBG funds—which SMRR exposed—and the council was pressured to redress past funding inequities. City funding for neighborhood-based organizations is an important element in SMRR's overall goal of democratizing urban life and empowering citizens to participate in decisions that affect their own lives.

On the rent-control front, the state real-estate industry took the Fair Rent ordinance and qualified it for the statewide June 1980 ballot by hiring students to gather signatures, often on campus where potential signators were deceptively told that this was a rent-control initiative. Santa Monica activists played key roles in the statewide effort that defeated the Fair Rent initiative by an overwhelming margin of almost two to one. The victory was impressive, given that the state's real-estate industry spent \$5.5 million against the renters' rights advocates' \$160,000—an overkill ratio of 40 to one. Vital to the progressive victory were television commercials that exposed the duplicity of the Fair Rent Alliance. These were prepared by Bill Zimmerman and his associates at Loudspeaker, one of the few progressive campaign firms in the country. Zimmerman, a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Chicago who gave up his academic career for the antiwar movement, learned his trade as campaign manager for the Hayden for Senate effort and later as media director for a statewide initiative sponsored by the United Farm Workers.

The rent-control forces were aided in their media efforts by public-interest lawyers who specialize in communications law, and who used equal-time regulations to win \$400,000 in free air time for Zimmerman's commercials.

The statewide victory against the anti-rent-control forces demonstrated how objective circumstances (inflation) and subjective action (the leadership from activists in Santa Monica and other housing organizers around the state) could dramatically alter public opinion about an economic issue. In only three years, between 1977 and 1980, public opinion in California shifted from two-thirds opposed to rent control to two-thirds supporting rent control and supporting the general proposition that affordable housing was a basic right that the government should help ensure.

THE 1981 VICTORY

After having successfully defended rent control in the statewide elections, SMRR activists began in the fall to prepare for the coming spring municipal elections when a majority of the council seats would be up for a vote.

In December SMRR convened an issues conference to debate programs

and platform for the council race. Position papers on housing, crime, neighborhood planning, women's issues, and economic development were presented and discussed, and a set of "Principles of Unity" was adopted to which council candidates would commit themselves.

Over Christmas, while the policy discussions were underway, SMRR received a sudden shock. One of SMRR's three council members, lawyer Bill Jennings, abruptly resigned as co-chair of the coalition and denounced SMRR to the local press as an authoritarian organization that demanded "ideological purity" from its elected representatives. Jennings's position was attributed to his growing corporate law practice and to his own "macho" personality. "Bill couldn't stand going to meetings and having to discuss issues with the grass-roots organizers," commented one SMRR activist. "He also couldn't stand being overshadowed by two strong women, Ruth [Goldway] and Cheryl [Rhoden], on the council."

Jennings's action was a timely reminder of the importance of picking trustworthy candidates for the coming election battle. To gain a two-thirds

majority on the seven-member council, SMRR had to win all four seats up for election.

After the interview process, SMRR selected four candidates for the council: James Conn, a Methodist minister and longtime organizer of community-based organizations; Ken Edwards, a probation officer and leader of the local Democratic Club; Dolores Press, a Retail Clerk union employee and chair of the Rent-Control Board; and Dennis Zane, a key organizer and manager of previous rent-control campaigns and a leader in the local chapter of the Campaign for Economic Democracy. For the one open seat on the Rent-Control Board, SMRR endorsed Leslie Lambert, an urban planner and housing expert with the state's Housing and Community Development Department.

SMRR began its campaign organizing early. A mailing went out over Christmas to previous SMRR supporters and raised over \$5,000 to get the campaign rolling. A canvass operation was organized in which five full-time paid workers went door-to-door every evening and solicited contributions from renters for SMRR. During the campaign, the canvass produced a net



From the left, James Conn, Ruth Yannatta Goldway, Dolores Press, Leslie Lambert, Dennis Zane

profit of over \$10,000. As in previous campaigns, an official campaign structure was adopted with campaign management, field operations, fund-raising, volunteer coordination, and press all being handled by full-time, experienced, but low-paid people. A professional poll was commissioned to test SMRR's stands on issues, including voters' perceptions of rent control and their opinion of various candidates and public figures.

From the poll results, it was clear to the SMRR campaign staff that the candidates could not and should not run solely on rent control. Crime was heating up as an issue in the city, fueled by a few particularly violent crimes in the homeowner area of town and by excessive media coverage of violent crime all over Los Angeles county. The media's tendency to highlight crime was intensified by the end-of-the-year ratings sweep and their desire for an increased audience share.

A right-wing group in the city called Santa Monicans Against Crime (SMAC), which had been agitating for increased police protection in the R-1 residential areas, decided to place a strong law-and-order initiative on the April ballot. It appeared that SMAC's head, Pat Geffner, a twice-defeated conservative candidate for city council, intended to "ride" the crime initiative to victory in the election.

Early in the New Year, the conservative organization, the Santa Monica Citizens Congress, which had been formed the previous year in opposition to SMRR, endorsed a slate of four candidates for city council and adopted a strong anticrime position. Anti-rent-control forces lined up behind the Citizens Congress's law-and-order slate.

While SMRR shares a radical analysis of the root causes of crime, it also understood that fear of crime is a reality in American society and that progressives must face up to it and not let the right exploit the issue as their exclusive property. There are ways that communities can tackle crime in a nonracist, community-oriented fashion; the key is to involve the community through a broad-based neighborhood effort at crime control.

The SMRR council members agreed to place a counter-crime initiative on

the ballot to give SMRR its own anti-crime measure to campaign for while fighting against the right-wing measure. Both initiatives allowed increased city spending for police over the limitations imposed on local spending by the statewide Gann initiative (passed the previous November). However, the right-wing initiative included a property-tax break for apartment owners, placed the police chief above the city council in his authority over the police budget, and called for the city to sell off "unprofitable" municipal enterprises to raise money for the police.

The SMRR initiative simply called for increased spending for protective services. In SMRR campaign literature, the coalition argued for a balanced, community-based approach to crime prevention that included better street lighting, safer physical design of streets and buildings, neighborhood watch programs and stronger locks and doors on apartments, as well as more police on the streets. The SMRR mailings to voters on crime were not hysterical in tone nor defensive; the material was straightforward and practical. One SMRR piece consisted of a crime prevention guide that detailed helpful hints on burglary protection (taken from a guide prepared by the police department for the local Rotary Club) and that explained the city's existing crime prevention program such as Operation Identification and Ride-Along. At campaign forums, the SMRR candidates—led by Ken Edwards, an expert on juvenile crime, and Jim Conn, who had organized a neighborhood-based anticrime program in Ocean Park—explained SMRR's anticrime program and attacked the right-wing rhetoric of the opposition as fear-mongering and counterproductive.

The Citizens Congress ran a single-issue campaign, utilizing slick mailings that charged that SMRR was "soft" on crime and wouldn't protect citizens from criminals. One Citizen Congress mailing featured Ronald Reagan and linked the attempt on his life in Washington, D.C., to the alleged crime wave in Santa Monica.

SMRR knew from its door-to-door canvass and from its telephone outreach program that while voters were concerned about crime, they were also

concerned about housing costs and about environmental issues such as toxic pollution and high-rise development in the city.

On crime, SMRR met the right's attack and neutralized it with a positive program, not a defensive response. In other issues, SMRR went "out front" early to define issues for voters. Using photos of new high-rise office buildings under construction in downtown Santa Monica, SMRR sent out a giant-size postcard calling for public control over helter skelter commercial development to preserve the city's human-scale character. Another postcard to voters featured a young boy getting a drink of water from the kitchen tap, and asked: "Is this water safe?" On



the back, SMRR candidates pledged to pass a local toxics disclosure ordinance—an issue of concern after traces of cancer-causing substances were discovered in the city water supply a few months before.

SMRR candidates promised to defend rent control against the continued attack in the courts by real-estate-initiated law suits, while the Citizens Congress maintained that rent control was "not an issue in the campaign." SMRR's position gained added impact during the campaign when a local judge, in one of the many suits against the rent-control law, offered a "tentative" opinion that parts of the rent-control law were unfair to investors and therefore unconstitutional. The

judge asked the city and rent board to respond within three months to his opinion, making the composition of the council an even more crucial issue to renters. A council majority hostile to rent control could have refused the rent board attorneys the resources necessary to appeal an adverse judgment from the court in the case, and such a majority could have hired a city attorney who would compromise the rent board's efforts to enforce the law.

Defending the Santa Monica rent-control law was important to renters who—according to a UCLA study—had collectively saved \$54 million a year in potential rent increases, an average of \$126 a month per unit. In addition, the rash of demolitions and condo conversions in 1979 was still very much in renters' minds.

After taking their own poll—which showed majority support for rent control, for limits on high-rise development, and for controls on toxic substances—the Citizens Congress did a “me too” on these issues and announced that they were for “reasonable” environmental protection. In its campaign roundup story, the *Los Angeles Times* commented:

SMRR has become, through organization, hard work and political acumen, the dominant political force in the city. . . .

The group's opposition—the Santa Monica Citizens Congress, which is backing a four-member city council slate, is running more on antagonism to SMRR than on its own political program. . . .

Except for a proposal to add more police, the Citizens Congress candidates have reacted to avowed SMRR goals rather than developed an alternative philosophy of their own.

“In that sense,” acknowledged Russ Barnard, one of the candidates endorsed by the Citizens Congress, “The SMRR candidates have run the positive campaign, we the negative.”

As in past campaigns, SMRR sent voters a list of the opposition's campaign contributors, who raised more than \$250,000, and were mostly from real-estate and downtown business interests, and said to voters, “And now

they say they're for rent control. Who are they kidding? Santa Monica is still not for sale.”

SMRR candidates received the endorsement of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and many local unions, as well as support from many leading Democratic party leaders in southern California, even many who had mixed feelings about rent control as a strong party program. In addition to the direct mail and door-to-door fund-raising, SMRR organized fund-raising events featuring Ralph Nader, former Arkansas governor Bill Clinton (now an official of the Democratic National Committee), and television star Ed Asner. In particular, the Nader event was both a fund-raising operation and an effort to link the local battle in Santa Monica to similar progressive efforts around the country.

SMRR again used its organizing skills to fill city hall when anti-rent-control council members tried to weaken the city's legal stand on defending the rent-control law. And when a local newspaper revealed the existence of a secret business-sponsored “good government” committee, which was funneling money to the Citizens Congress, the SMRR campaign held a press conference in front of the committee chair's savings and loan and had a field day with the television press coverage.

By combining door-to-door voter preferencing with an active telephone operation, SMRR identified over 15,000 supporters, whose names and addresses were transferred by computer to individual door hangers that displayed the voter's polling place. At four a.m. on election day, Tuesday, April 14, over 100 SMRR volunteers were up at daybreak in the final get-out-the-vote effort. The Citizens Congress had to resort to hiring fraternity members from UCLA and local high school kids at \$50 each to remove SMRR's door hangers. Roving SMRR squads chased the hired hands off the streets and protected most of the SMRR literature.

Although once more outspent (\$250,000 or more to \$80,000), the SMRR coalition won an impressive 57 percent to 43 percent victory and elected all four of its council candi-

dates, its single rent board candidate, and the two candidates it endorsed for the school board late in the campaign. The SMRR-supported anticrime initiative passed overwhelmingly, while the right-wing law-and-order measure went down in defeat. It was a clean sweep for the progressive slate and program.

THE FIRST 100 DAYS

SMRR campaigned on the slogan of making Santa Monica “a city where people come first.” Beginning with its first night in office, the new progressive majority has attempted to make the slogan a reality. In its first 100 days in office it began the process of opening up city government to citizen participation, revised and revamped the city staff to carry out its new policies, and acted quickly in policy areas where law and economics allowed swift action.

Initial steps included:

- The new council selected incumbent Ruth Yannatta Goldway as Mayor and immediately named Legal Aid attorney Robert Myers, author of the rent-control charter amendment, as the new city attorney.

- Its second day in office, the council enacted an emergency six-month moratorium on construction, aimed at high-rise office development and condominiums. Three citizen task forces on the future growth of the city were named to consider new zoning requirements in the downtown district and in residential areas, and changes in the planning and permit process. These task forces began meeting twice a week over the summer.

- The council immediately appointed a citizens' task force on community crime prevention to come up with a comprehensive program for increased spending for protective services. Rank-and-file police were named to the task force along with public defenders, urban sociologists, and community organizers.

- The council appointed progressives to open seats on all city commissions and boards.

- The council established a new Commission on the Status of Women and made plans, through citizen task forces, to consider establishment of a

municipal arts commission and a municipal health program.

- Under the leadership of the Mayor and city attorney, the city opposed a rate increase request by General Telephone that was put before the state public utility commission. To support the city's case, public opinion polls on phone service were placed in local newspapers, which drew thousands of responses from citizens and local businesses upset over poor service.

- The new council revised the already proposed 1981-82 city budget. While keeping within fiscal restraints, the council created new positions such as community liaison, public information officer, neighborhood planner, and a new office of Municipal Enterprise whose task was to improve revenues from existing municipal enterprises and consider new revenue-generating projects for the city.

- The council began a nationwide search for a progressive city manager, advertising the position in both the *Wall Street Journal* and *In These Times*.

- The city attorney informed Shell Oil, whose pipeline runs under city streets, that the fees in their expired contract had been raised from \$1,000 a year to \$50,000.

- The city organized and sponsored an open-air farmers' market on a downtown city street near the city's decaying mall. On its first day, the farmers' market was packed and drew more business than any other farmers' market in southern California. The project won the support of the small businessmen and -women with stores on the mall.

- Outstanding employee relations issues with the police stemming from a sick-out two years before were settled amicably, and the council removed a "hard-nosed" personnel director and pledged to move employee relations in the direction of greater worker participation and democratic management. The changed atmosphere encouraged one city janitor to send the Mayor a memo on how to improve maintenance at city hall.

- The council began to develop criteria for "Planning Agreements" with private developers in which the developers would agree to mixed-use

projects, which included affordable housing, community-oriented business facilities, and added concern for environmental factors in building design.

- The city planning commission began public hearings on innovative housing policies for the city, including city sponsorship of a Community Housing Development Corporation and city financing of tenant-managed housing. The city planning commission also opened public hearings on a new energy conservation ordinance and a new city sign ordinance.

- The council demonstrated its support for organized labor by adopting a policy of requiring union label printing for city stationery and publications and by publicly supporting strikes by probation workers and retail clerks.

City funding for neighborhood-based organizations is an important element in SMRR's overall goal of democratizing urban life and empowering citizens to participate in decisions that affect their own lives.

- The council also issued resolutions on El Salvador and on nuclear proliferation.

LESSONS FROM SANTA MONICA?

Is what happened in Santa Monica unique or exceptional—or can such progressive alliances be built and won in other cities?

In most cities, urban government is dominated by a land-based local elite consisting of real-estate developers, financial institutions, and downtown business interests. Together, these people and institutions make up what Harvey Molotch calls the Growth Machine. In some cities, they rule directly through chamber of commerce-picked

councils, and in others they dominate both liberal and conservative politicians through campaign contributions and elite policy-making task forces and advisory bodies. In older cities, they have co-opted the old Democratic machines by offering some share—some jobs and income—to unionized workers in return for uncritical support of Growth Machine policies.

The power of the land-based local elite is based on the politics of one dollar, one vote, rather than one person, one vote. It is most easily sustained in a period of real economic growth such as the fifties and sixties. In a period of inflation and urban fiscal crisis, the hold of the Growth Machine can be challenged by a well-organized grass-roots movement—what Dennis Kucinich called a "new urban populism."

A democratic movement, which argues that a city exists first for the needs of its citizens rather than for the needs of capital, has the potential of winning majority support in municipal elections.

The citizens who supported SMRR are not students nor upper-middle-class environmentalists. They are a mix of moderate-income individuals and families. Using the strategy of building a left-liberal electoral coalition as has been done successfully in Santa Monica and using some of the tactics tested in Santa Monica, progressives could build locally based progressive alliances in other cities across the country. The trick is to combine modern electoral techniques with the grass-roots base of community organizing and to infuse the effort with a clear progressive theme and ideology of economic democracy and citizen empowerment through neighborhood-based planning and organization. Local labor unions and at least the liberal wing of the Democratic party can be united in this new urban populist effort that finds its leadership from among the democratic left, not from the old urban growth elite. Such a new urban populism could be one of the building blocks of a truly progressive national movement that could pose a genuine and far-reaching alternative to Reaganism and the New Right in this decade and the next. ■