

How San Francisco and California became the Wuhan Lab of far-left extremism: STEVE HILTON pinpoints the moment the state was derailed by socialism and self-interest

By STEVE HILTON

We all grew up in the **California** century. Hollywood, the Beach Boys, California Dreaming...sunshine, natural wonders, the land of opportunity.

There was nothing California couldn't do. We beat the French at making wine! Invented the **iPhone** and start-up culture. There was even a time when everybody loved 'Big Tech'. The Golden State once exported dreams. But now, it seems, it's mainly nightmares.

What do people see when they think of California today? Apocalyptic fires menacing the City of Angels, residents desperately trying to extinguish the flames with buckets of water because the fire hydrants ran dry.

Dystopian scenes of urban squalor and decay, drug-addicted **homeless** people shuffling around like zombies. Marauding gangs cleaning out retail stores with total impunity, resulting in the humiliating farce of law-abiding shoppers forced to contend with aisle after aisle of locked-up plastic cabinets for such 'luxury' items as toothpaste and deodorant.

The state that once **symbolized the very best of America** ended up the worst on every measure that matters. The highest rate of poverty, lowest income growth, highest unemployment, most expensive housing, gas, electricity, water...

And, of course, the worst homelessness, by far. California **has just over 10% of America's population but nearly 50 per cent of the unsheltered homeless.**

How did this happen?



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What do people see when they think of California today? Apocalyptic fires menacing the City of Angels, residents desperately trying to extinguish the flames with buckets of water because the fire hydrants ran dry.

That's the question I tried to answer in my new book, '[Califailure - Reversing the Ruin of America's Worst Run State.](#)'

Ironically, it all goes back to what some remember as California's golden age.

In 1966, Ronald Reagan was elected to his first term as governor, and in 1968, the Meyers Milias Brown Act was enacted. It gave public employees collective bargaining rights, the first step down a road which has ended with government unions effectively controlling the state.

Of course that was not what Reagan intended. His initial move focused on police and firefighters, with a desire to be supportive at a time when law enforcement was under assault from the radical left.

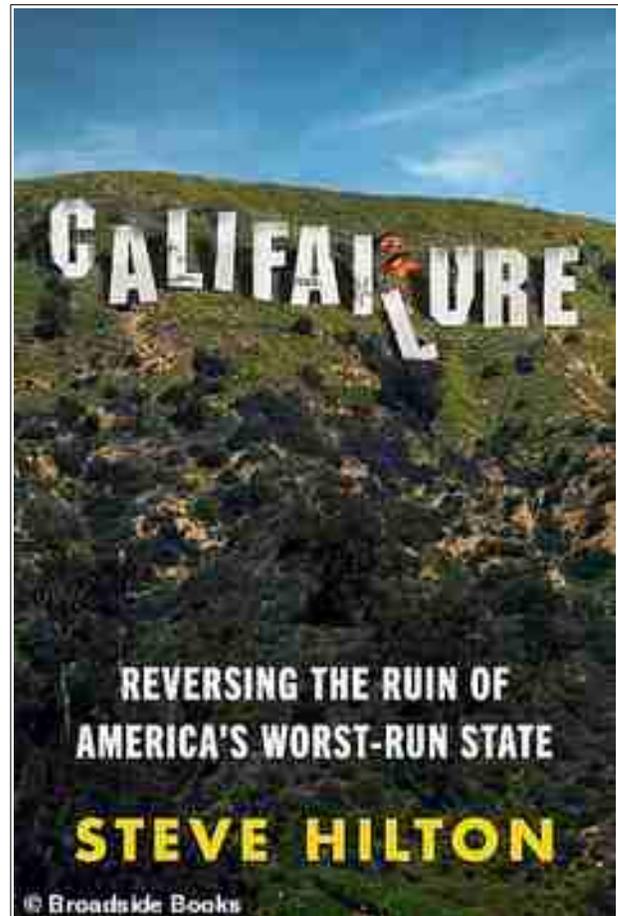
But the dam was breached, and bit by bit, especially under Democrat governor Jerry Brown, unions gained a stranglehold on state government.

Here's how it works: the unions, with taxpayer money, fund the election campaigns of the politicians they then 'negotiate' with, getting sweetheart pension deals and their chosen policy outcomes in return for their bribes - sorry, 'political donations'.

In California, public sector unions like those representing teachers and prison guards are now the most significant funder of Democrats - at the latest count, over \$1 billion a year. They have created a formidable political machine that has entrenched the Democratic Party's power, and within the party, the power of the pro-union far left.

This was taken one step further in 2010 with the passage of Proposition 25, which reduced the threshold for the state legislature to pass a budget, from two thirds to a simple majority. It meant that Democrats could implement their plans with zero input from Republicans.

That's not all. In 2008, voters approved a measure sold as 'independent redistricting' for legislative districts. Sounds fair. But the process was hijacked by the left, producing a wildly gerrymandered electoral map, and a Democrat 'supermajority' in both houses of the state legislature.



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For the last two decades, Republicans have won around 40 percent of the vote in statewide elections, but thanks to this gerrymandering have controlled just 20 to 25 percent of the seats in the legislature.

All this adds up to the fundamental cause of 'Califailure': one-party rule by people with really bad ideas.

That's what happens when there's no effective political competition. Parties respond not to the voters, but to the special interests that control them: in this case, unions and far left activists.



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The result has been the triumph of ideology over practicality, and that's what I really wanted to explore in my new book.

For the past decade or so, Democrats turned California into the Wuhan Lab of far-left extremism, running an ideological experiment without any constraints, or any concern for the practical effects.

It was all about looking virtuous to fellow members of the condescending, sanctimonious ruling elite. You can see this narcissism on display in their endless self-congratulatory boasts about 'leading the nation' on every conceivable leftist obsession: 'climate', race, gender, 'equity', you name it.

But, of course, there was nothing virtuous about it.

Their 'climate' dogma pulled them into the utterly incoherent madness of progressively shutting down California's oil and gas industry, only to massively increase oil imports from countries like Iraq - in giant supertankers using bunker fuel - cheap and dirty oil with the consistency of tar - the most polluting form of transportation on the planet.

Yes, they actually increased carbon emissions in the name of 'climate' just so they could pat themselves on the back for their 'war on fossil fuel'.

It would be funny if it weren't for the real world harm: working class communities in California's Kern County devastated as energy jobs disappeared; families and businesses across the state hit by escalating costs; the ludicrous spectacle of America's wealthiest state telling its residents not to use their appliances between 4pm and 9pm on summer days because the increasingly wind-and-solar-dependent electricity grid can't cope.

As with so many of the negative consequences of Califailure, it has been working class hit the hardest.

Banning gas cars, stoves, garden equipment...it all sounds marvelous to the elites in wealthy enclaves who now make up the Democrat base. But it makes life impossible for the workers forced to travel increasingly long distances to clean their pools and mow their lawns.

You see the same elitism at work when it comes to business. The endless rules, regulations, fees, permits and bureaucracy spewing from the maw of the vast, bloated monstrosity that California's government has become may be something that Silicon Valley's giant tech monopolies can take in their stride.



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California has created a formidable political machine that has entrenched the Democratic Party's power, and within the party, the power of the pro-union far left. (Pictured: California Governor Gavin Newsom).

But to the owner of a local restaurant or a small manufacturing firm it is a soul-crushing burden.

Even some big businesses are buckling under the Democrats' onslaught. California's world-beating agriculture industry is being systematically undermined by restrictions on water supply that could easily be avoided if the government had built the water storage systems that voters actually approved over a decade ago in a bond measure.

No wonder California has had the worst business climate in America, ten years in a row, according to an annual survey by Chief Executive magazine.

Worst business climate! What an absolute travesty. California should represent the ultimate in American enterprise and can-do hustle.

Innovation, energy, optimism, adventure, the free spirit: that's what California is all about - or should be. The home of dreamers and doers, creators and builders.

When that inspiring idea of California fades, as it has done these last few years, it's not just the state itself that loses out. So does America, and the world too. Because California means to America what America means to the world.

That's why we can't give up on California. We must not let the Golden State slip into sclerosis and decline as the pioneers and rebels choose to make their stand someplace else.

It's time to fight back against the one-party rule, the ideological extremism, the elitism and the narcissism, the climatism and the socialism.

It's time to replace Califailure with a bright new Califuture - and the signs are there that it's starting to happen.

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