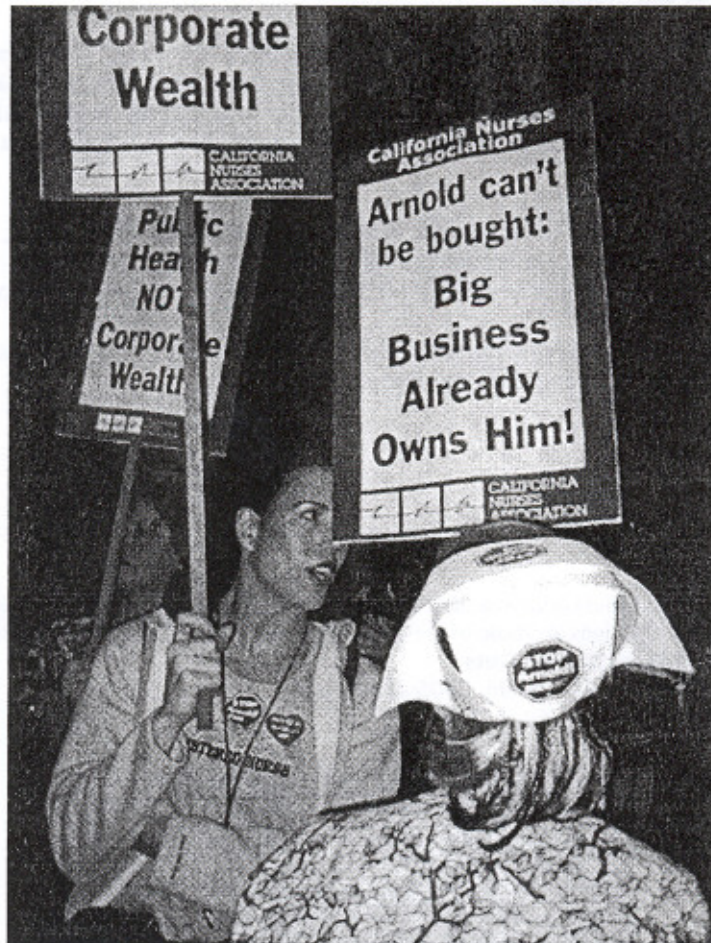


Thousands Protest Schwarzenegger in San Francisco

by Liz Highleyman *Wednesday, Apr. 06, 2005 at 9:02 AM*
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Several thousand protesters – including nurses, teachers, and firefighters – protested a San Francisco visit by California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on Tuesday, April 5.



big-biz-nurse-indy.jpg, image/jpeg, 350x467

The governor appeared at the downtown Ritz-Carlton Hotel to speak at an exclusive dinner to raise funds for his proposed ballot measures. Schwarzenegger wants to call a special election in the fall – expected to cost several million dollars – in order to bypass the legislature and bring his budget proposals directly before the state's voters.

Donors at the event, sponsored by Citizens to Save California, paid at least \$1,000 each – and some reportedly upwards of \$80,000 – to dine and schmooze with the governor.

Nearly 5,000 demonstrators converged at about 6 p.m. outside the hotel at California and Stockton Streets in the city's Chinatown neighborhood. The protesters, consisting largely of public sector employees, decried Schwarzenegger's plans to cut the state budget at the expense of workers and crucial public services. Activists spoke out against the governor's proposal to privatize state employee retirement pensions, his attempt to rescind court-ordered nurse-patient ratios in hospitals, and his proposed changes to school funding.

"Schwarzenegger is demeaning workers by labeling them a 'special interest,'" said Noe Valley resident Art Persyko. "He's trying to do the same kinds of things in California that Bush is trying to do nationally: increasing the gap between the wealthy and the rest of us. He's catering to his constituencies - big business and the wealthy - at the expense of workers and the poor. His policies are bad for public employees and their families, bad for nurses and patients, bad for teachers and students, and bad for California."

Tuesday's protest – described by Deputy Police Chief Greg Suhr as "not your usual First Amendment crowd" - brought together organizations such as the California Nurses Association, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Code Pink, and ANSWER.

The demonstration was loud and spirited but peaceful. Tension erupted at one point when the large crowd spilled out of police barricades to fill a block of Pine Street, as limousines arrived to drop off donors. Shouting and a few minor scuffles occurred as activists brushed shoulders with donors entering the hotel.

About an hour later, one group of protesters blocked the intersection of Grant and California Streets, while another group did the same up the hill at California and Stockton.

"I'm a single parent on welfare. I'm in school, I'm working, I'm playing by the rules," said Dawn, a member of Lifetime (Low-Income Families' Empowerment through Education), who came out with her daughter Akilah, age 9, to protest Schwarzenegger's proposal to cut the CalWORKS program. "We want to get off the welfare rolls and get out of poverty for good. If his cuts go through, what will happen to funding for childcare and for education? What will happen to our children? Children are our future."

Schwarzenegger reportedly arrived at the Ritz early in the afternoon and left late in the evening, avoiding any interaction with the demonstrators. He has faced similar protests throughout the state – and around the country - as he attempts to drum up support for his proposed budget cuts. Last week, some 2,500 demonstrators greeted the governor in San Jose.

A Schwarzenegger spokesman said that in order to solve the state's budget crisis, it is necessary to roll back "sweetheart deals" the unions had struck with former governor Gray Davis.

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