

“THE DARLING OF THE TOWN’S NEO-FASCISTS”

The Bombastic Political Career of Councilman Ed J. Davenport

by Don Parson

From his election on a liberal platform in 1945 until his death in the midst of a right-wing dementia in 1953, Ed J. Davenport’s tenure on the Los Angeles City Council can be seen as a reflection of the city’s politics during the Cold War. At the end of World War II, Los Angeles’ political trajectory was, as was that of Davenport, definitely oriented leftward. The city’s burgeoning conservatism, manifest in the attack on the welfare state, redbaiting, and the shouting-down of political alternatives—all in which Davenport was intimately involved—would culminate in the election of a new mayor shortly before the councilman’s death. The new municipal administration attempted to reconcile liberals and conservatives to implement the vision of a Modern Los Angeles. In so doing, the divisiveness, polarity, and bombasticity that had marked Davenport’s career were notably absent from the politics of Modernism.

FROM LIBERAL TO CONSERVATIVE

Ed J. Davenport was born on February 9, 1899 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He studied business administration at the University of Pittsburgh and, from 1920 to 1926, was engaged in department store advertising and merchandising in Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and New York. In 1926 Davenport became the general manager of Robert Fraser, Inc., a department store in Utica, New

York, which he left in 1928 to open his own business as advertising and merchandising counsel to newspapers. His most prominent client was Colonel Frank Knox of Hearst Publications. Relocating to Los Angeles in 1935, Davenport established his own public relations and advertising business at 555 South Flower Street, serving clients in the fields of retailing, newspaper publishing, and finance. Married in 1935 to Harriett Goodman, he studied law at Southwestern University and was involved, during World War II, as the War Production Fund Coordinator of the National Safety Council. Registered as a Democrat, Davenport's first encounter as a political candidate was in the Los Angeles municipal elections of 1945.¹

¹ "Ed. J. Davenport," California Biography File (hereinafter CBF), Municipal Reference Collection, History Department, Los Angeles Public Library; "Press Fact Sheet—Ed. J. Davenport, Candidate for City Council," Ed and Ruth Lybeck Collection, Box 2, Folder 9, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

According to the unknown source quoted in Appendix C, Davenport was expelled from University of Pittsburgh in his sophomore year; and his marriage to Harriett was his second, the first having ended in divorce. "Davenport," n.d., Ed and Ruth Lybeck Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, Special Collections, UCLA. I can find no mention of Davenport receiving any academic degree.



Davenport in Action, April 1950.
*Courtesy University of Southern California
Regional History Center.*

Davenport sought the 12th (Westlake) District seat in the City Council which had been represented for six terms by the retiring John Baumgartner. His 1945 campaign was directed by Ed and Ruth Lybeck, veteran managers of Helen Gahagan Douglas' successful 1944 congressional bid. The candidate's ten-point platform stressed the expansion and protection of the Department of Water and Power, a municipally-owned transportation system, slum clearance combined with low-cost housing, expansion of the sewage system, a free-trade zone at the harbor, conversion planning for the wartime Los Angeles economy with "fair and full employment," more parks and playgrounds, and a "Full respect for the rights of Labor." If elected, Ed promised to hold open meetings in the 12th District every 30 days. Among those who endorsed Davenport were the CIO, the Railroad Brotherhoods, the Municipal League, Carey McWilliams, Marshall Stimson, Judge Isaac Pacht, Mary Workman, and the County Democratic Committee.²

The *People's World*, the west-coast newspaper of the Communist Party, touted Davenport as a "unity candidate" and gushed that, of the nine candidates vying to represent the district, Davenport "has come to the front with a sound, progressive program and the backing of both business and labor. The word began to go around that 'you ought to see this guy Davenport'." The choice of the liberal *Daily News*, Davenport was described as "a hardhitting, socially enlightened businessman with . . . considerable talents and progressive thinking . . ." The *Watchman* informed the public the left-wing Democratic "machine" was behind Davenport's election bid. "A collaboration of left-wing Democratic—C.I.O. forces here are trying to steamroller a candidate into the office" of the 12th councilmanic district, warned the *Times* in its primary endorsements. "Just why they picked Ed Davenport to bear their banner is something of a mystery." In the April 3 primary, Davenport and Richard Newton received the largest pluralities, sending them to a run-off in the general election.³

The scathing conservative denouncement of Davenport matched the intensity of his proponents' gusto-filled support. Davenport was a candidate of the

² "Ed J. Davenport—12th District Councilman" (brochure), Ed and Ruth Lybeck Collection, Box 2, Folder 9, Special Collections, UCLA, "Davenport Leading Race for Council," *Citizens' Council* (brochure), *ibid.*, Box 2, Folder 8. Clockwise from the north, the 12th District was roughly bounded by Santa Monica Blvd., Sunset Blvd., Glendale Blvd., Figueroa St., 11th St., Hoover St., Wilshire Blvd., and Vermont Ave.

³ "12th District Race: 'You Ought to See This Guy Davenport'," *People's World*, March 14, 1945, p. 3; The *Watchman*, "Council Aspirant Backed by Democratic Machine," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1945, Pt. II: 3; Frank Observer, "Daily News concludes its city primary endorsements," *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 30, 1945, pp. 3, 5; Frank Observer, "Ed Davenport wins united backing in council race," *ibid.*, April 24, 1945, p. 4; "New City Council to Rule on Vital Postwar Plans," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1945, Pt. II: 1, 2.

Davenport in a 1945
publicity photo.
Courtesy *Herald Examiner*
Collection/Los Angeles
Public Library.



ultra-liberals and “nothing more than a stooge of the C.I.O. Political Action Committee,” Republican leader William D. Campbell told a meeting of the conservative faithful at the Elks Club. The *Times* final endorsement appeared more anti-Davenport than pro-Newton: “During the campaign he has attended many left-wing gatherings and verbally at least has set out to please the ultra-liberals. Whatever may be his feelings on political ideologies there is no question that he is intensely interested in Davenport—and Davenport wants to be City Councilman.” On May 1 the semi-official returns indicated that Davenport inched out his rival with less than 200 votes. A recount, requested by Newton, determined that Davenport had only a 93-vote majority. The final election “gave Los Angeles probably the best city council it has ever had,” rejoiced the CIO’s *Labor Herald*. “Articulate, alert, [Davenport] may be floor leader of Bowron supporters in the council.”⁴

Davenport apparently carried no grudge against the *Times* for their opposition in the 1945 municipal elections. He quickly made overtures to smooth any feathers that might have been ruffled. The horrendous postwar housing shortage—an issue of concern to both the liberal/left as well as the conserva-

⁴ The Watchman, “P.A.C. Activity Charged in City Council Race,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1945, Pt. II: 5; “Election to Decide Vital Local Issues,” *ibid.*, April 29, 1945, Pt. II: 1, 2; “Election Gives L.A. Best City Council in History,” *Labor Herald*, May 4, 1945, pp. 1, 7; “Council to certify two race winners,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, May 10, 1945, p. 13.

tive *Times*—was used by Davenport to create political capital on both sides of the political divide. While waving a copy of the *Times* in Council Chambers, he declared to his fellow councilmen: “When a great newspaper like this devotes almost all of one page to housing news despite the shortage of newsprint, I think the situation is critical.” On December 10, 1945, the councilman voted to appropriate \$100,000 for temporary veterans’ shelter, resulting in the construction of the 1,500-unit veterans’ housing project of Rodger Young Village in April of the next year.⁵

At the beginning of October 1946, John S. Wood and Ernie Adamson of the House Committee on Un-American Affairs, working with the concurrent hearings of Jack Tenney’s Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities in California, brought to the attention of Mayor Fletcher Bowron reports of a “known communist” who had been assigned a quonset hut in Rodger Young Village. Sidney Burke, Los Angeles editor of the *People’s World*, was found to be ineligible to live in that housing project as he was a “non-veteran,” though he had over three years of wartime service in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters with the merchant marines and had received a combat bar for direct action. Sidney Burke, his wife Libby, and their two small children were asked to leave Rodger Young Village by the City Housing Authority (CHA) on the behest of Mayor Bowron. The CHA then offered the Burke family an apartment in the Channel Heights project, from which the Council, on October 16, called for their eviction. “I object strenuously,” stated Councilman Leonard Timberlake, “to housing the Burkes in any place built by taxpayers’ money.”⁶

Though Davenport was not the initial instigator of redbaiting in the Burke incident, he nonetheless made moves to consolidate the anti-Communism that was generated into what would become his political calling card. The councilman introduced, at the end of October, a resolution that \$2,500 be appropriated by the City Council’s public health and welfare committee to

⁵ “Council Votes \$100,000 for Housing Aid,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1945, Pt. I: 1, 19; also see Council File #21653, Los Angeles City Archives, Piper Technical Center, 555 Ramirez Street, Los Angeles (hereinafter City Archives).

⁶ California Legislature. Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, *Third Report* (Sacramento: California State Senate, 1947), pp. 74–75; “Tenney Given Data on Reds At Rodger Young,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 4, 1946, p. 13; “Tenney comes to L.A.,” *People’s World*, October 5, 1946, p. 3; “Quonset Pair to be Ousted,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1946, Pt. II: 1; Resolution by L.E. Timberlake, October 16, 1946, Council File #25298, City Archives; City Clerk to CHA, October 16, 1946, *ibid.*; “Evict Leftist, Council Tells Housing Authority,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1946, Pt. I: 2; “Timberlake Leads Fight,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 17, 1946 in the *Examiner* morgue at the University of Southern California Regional History Center (hereinafter RHC).

thoroughly investigate both the Burke incident as well as "the promotion of Communism in Public Housing projects." The Burke case, read Davenport's resolution, "has heightened the conviction of many citizens, whose money builds Federal Housing, that projects are targets of Communistic propaganda and fertile fields for cultivating support by the subversive groups who would change the American way of life to that of the Communism of Russia . . ." He subsequently announced his intention of writing a resolution calling for a probe into Rodger Young Village by the California Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities. Davenport's demeanor in the Burke incident helped set the stage for the municipal elections of the coming spring, laying the groundwork for what the *People's World* called "a pre-election red-baiting drive."⁷

In Council chambers on March 13, 1947, Davenport charged that the Communists were seeking to acquire city offices for themselves in the upcoming municipal election. The following day, the Council unanimously adopted a resolution, fathered by Davenport, authorizing the support of federal proposals to outlaw the Communist Party. The councilman's resolution asked the Committee of State, County and Federal Affairs to keep the Council informed of congressional legislation so that the city "whose government is already a target of invasion by the Communist Party might act officially in support of an Act of Congress to outlaw the Communist Party . . ." The Los Angeles County Committee of the Communist Party accused Davenport of attempting to introduce a red scare into the city's electoral politics, driving a wedge between labor and progressives, and "thus secure the reelection of himself and his reactionary colleagues and candidates." All Communist clubs were instructed to redouble their campaign efforts on behalf of progressive candidates.⁸

The 1947 municipal election marked the last major attempt by the left to garner widespread political influence by fielding their own candidates. Speaking to a group of Republican women at the Elks' Club on March 20, Davenport told, as reported by the *Herald and Express*, "the inside story of the Communist plot to win seats in the School District and the City Council."

⁷ Resolution by Ed J. Davenport, October 30, 1946, in Council File #25551, City Archives; "City May Seek 'Red' Probe in Housing Project," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, December 11, 1946, p. 3; "Councilmen 'see red,'" *People's World*, December 12, 1946, p. 3.

⁸ "Councilman Charges Reds Seek to Grab City Offices," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 13, 1947, p. A-2; "Council to aid in outlawing of Red Party," *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 14, 1947, p. 2; March 14, 1947 resolution by Ed J. Davenport, in Council File #27449, City Archives; "Our Answer to Councilman Davenport and Secretary Schwellenbach/To All Communist Clubs in Los Angeles County," *Party Builder Bulletin*, March 30, 1947, p. 1, uncataloged item at the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

“One good term deserves another”—
1947 publicity photo.
Courtesy U.S.C. Regional History Center.



In Council chambers the councilman urged that all voters go to the polls on April 1 to defeat the Communist electoral menace. Leftist candidates included LaRue McCormick for the Board of Education, and Elsie Monjar, Jonathan L. Caston and Douglas D. Behrend for City Council—all of whom were thoroughly repudiated at the primaries. Davenport's redbaiting helped drive a wedge between liberals and the left—not a lost lesson in the ensuing municipal policy debates.⁹

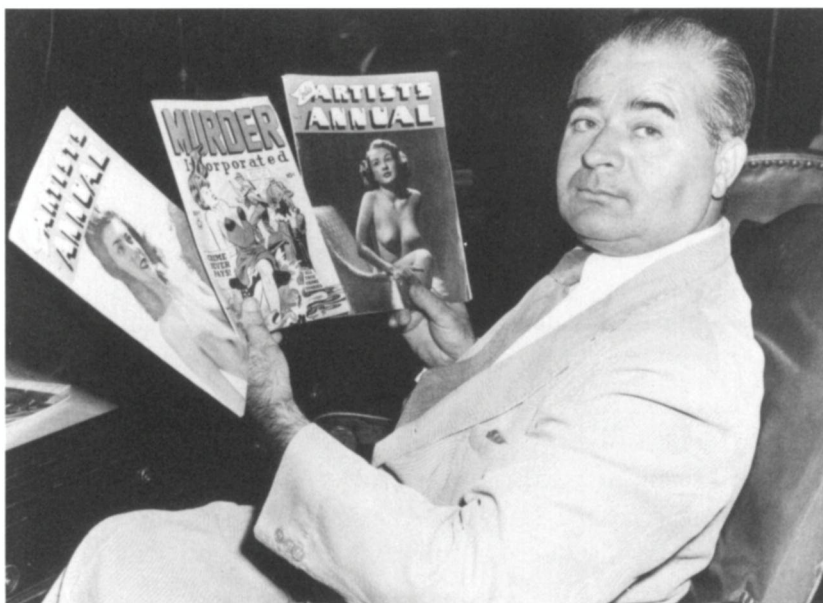
Davenport's 1947 campaign strategy was primarily one of redbaiting his erstwhile supporters. The slogan for his reelection was "One Good Term Deserves Another." "More appropriate," wryly noted the *People's World*, "might be the highway department's S-shaped marker indicating 'Dangerous Curves Ahead'." Douglas Behrend, a veteran and CIO member endorsed by the CIO and the Progressive Citizens of America to oppose the incumbent, quipped that "One Bad Term Deserves Retirement." "My re-election is being opposed by radical groups, Communists and their fellow travelers," said Davenport in a statement to his constituents. "I accept their challenge, I welcome the test! . . . I will never surrender, no matter how they attack me." In contrast to 1945 Davenport, with his platform of "Down with taxes and Communism," now received the *Times* whole-hearted endorsement. The AFL and the Republican Party likewise stood firmly with the incumbent. Reelected in

⁹ "Political Activities," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 17, 1947, p. A-11; "Urges All Voters Go To Polls," *ibid.*, March 31, 1947, p. A-2; "Citizens Snow Under Left-Wing Candidates," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1947, Pt. II: 1,2.

the primary, Davenport received more than twice the votes of his three challengers combined total.¹⁰

By the end of his second term on the Council, Davenport's political style had earned him the wrath of the left and the approval of the right. He had performed his councilmanic duties ably and enthusiastically, establishing himself as a fiscal conservative—a member of the Council's "economy bloc." He had fought for a special census in 1946 from which the city received additional federal money, to establish a free-trade zone at the harbor, and to reduce the city budget. The councilman protested strongly when street car lines through his district were abandoned and his constituents were disaffected; used the council to pressure Washington for a greater share of Colorado River water; and lobbied for state aid to complete the Hyperion sewage plant modernization. Davenport sponsored a Board of Public Works plan in 1949 that would allocate \$3,880,000 of improvements to his district. He man-

¹⁰ "The Election Ads: Signs of the Times—And Money," *People's World*, March 6, 1947, p. 3; "Be sure and vote, Church Federation urges," *ibid.*, March 24, 1947, p. 3; "Political Activities," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 26, 1947, p. A-7; "Daily News endorsements made in City Council election on April 1," *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 26, 1947, pp. 13, 32; "Council Choices Up to Voters," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1947, Pt. II: 1,2.



Ed reveals some bare facts, August 18, 1948.

Courtesy Herald Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

aged to remain newsworthy and photogenic, calling for city loyalty oaths or opposing the sale of nudist or “artist and models” publications.¹¹

In the April 5, 1949 primary, he was opposed by Isaac Kushner, a progressive Democrat. Interviewed by Virginia Gardner of the *People's World*, Davenport asserted “I’m just as liberal as I ever was,” yet hinted it was not his fault if his erstwhile supporters believed him to be more progressive than he was. Davenport’s successful campaign strategy was to emphasize his achievements in office while, secondarily, underscoring this record with his well-deserved reputation of being a foe of the reds. In this vein he received the resounding endorsement of the *Times*: “One of [the Council’s] most aggressive and best informed members, he has given his district first-class representation. More than that, he has taken a leading part in matters of general interest to the whole city and is responsible for the passage of considerable progressive legislation.” “Complete opposition to incumbent Ed Davenport” was recommended to voters by Los Angeles CIO Council, endorsing, by default it would seem, Kushner. Ed easily outdistanced his opponent by a margin of more than 3 to 1.¹²

In his 3rd and 4th terms, Davenport was confronted on a number of issues by Edward R. Roybal, elected in 1949 as councilman from the 9th (East-side) District. Davenport, recalled Roybal, was an excellent orator, well-read and well-informed on the issues, and a very amiable person when not drinking. Unfortunately, this was not often. Davenport was an alcoholic—consuming perhaps a quart of vodka per day. The Council’s sergeant-at-arms would get calls to fetch an inebriated Davenport from the downtown bars. The alcohol transformed his gentlemanly demeanor into one that was abrasive and abusive. Left with no real allies on the council, Davenport dominated his colleagues though fear and intimidation. Davenport, recalled fellow-councilman Kenneth Hahn, had a remarkable ability for mobilizing publicity and was very knowledgeable, but he was “just mean.” His close ties to the press allowed him to broadcast insinuations of Communism, leftism, and

¹¹ The special census for which Davenport was praised was: United States. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census., *Special Census of Los Angeles, California, Population by Age, Race, And Sex, by Census Tract: January 28, 1946, Series P-SC, No. 186* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 29 October, 1946); “Another witch hunt?,” *People's World*, August 28, 1947, p. 3; “Council Begins Inquiry Into Some Bare Facts,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1948, Pt. I: 2; Fred Arnold, “Doings in Politics,” *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 2, 1949, p. B-3.

¹² “CIO council recommends 10 for L.A. city election,” *Labor Herald*, March 8, 1949, p. 5; “Doings in Politics: Davenport Backers Point to Record,” *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 23, 1949, p. B-32; Virginia Gardner, “Interview With a Councilmanic Candidate: Davenport talks on cold wars, free speech, rent laws,” *People's World*, March 29, 1949, p. 3; “Few Voter Choices in Council Entries,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1949, Pt. II: 1, 3.

un-Americanism against those who did not fall in line with his thinking. During his final four years on the Council, much of Davenport's wrath would be directed at the most liberal councilman—Edward Roybal.¹³

THE FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES COMMISSION

Emerging from a joint committee (public health and welfare/ personnel) that was co-chaired by Edward Roybal and Davenport, the City Council scheduled a full public hearing on an ordinance to prohibit discrimination in the workplace on the basis on color, race, religion, or national origin or ancestry. To investigate and rectify charges of such discrimination, a seven-person Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) would be established. Non-compliance with the commission could result in prosecution by the city attorney, with penalties of a \$500 fine or 6 months in jail. "It is impossible to put our ideals of democracy into practice," wrote Ruth H. Adamson to the Council in favor of the FEPC, "if equality of opportunity is not granted to all individuals . . ." S.J. Coffey expressed his opposition to "a communist scheme originating in Russia . . . Mr. Roybal was elected solely on his promise to put this ordinance over on your body—he represents all these BACKWARD groups . . . If the Spanish citizens were in control of this city, it would still be a pueblo—they are naturally unprogressive." "The proposed ordinance," editorialized the *Mirror* without irony, "merely makes decency and tolerance the official rather than the unofficial credo of a city . . ." The hearing was scheduled for September 27, 1949.¹⁴

Opponents to the FEPC, wrote Jack Young, "could not have had a better front man than Councilman Ed J. Davenport." Ed had been sent on a \$700 junket to Washington, D.C., in order to study FEPC ordinances that already operated in eastern cities. Despite extensive information he had gathered, particularly on the cities of Philadelphia and Chicago, the councilman refused, on September 14, to make a written report to the Council that could be "picked to pieces" by FEPC supporters. Davenport, charging that the com-

¹³ Interview with Edward R. Roybal, October 10, 1996, taped copy in possession of the author; interview with Kenneth Hahn, April 27, 1997, taped copy in possession of the author; phone conversation with Gordon Hahn, May 1, 1997. For a discussion of the Roybal Davenport clashes from the perspective of Roybal and the 9th District, see Katherine Underwood, "Process and Politics: Multiracial Electoral Coalition Building and Representation in Los Angeles' Ninth District, 1949-1962" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1992). Clockwise from the northwest, the 9th District was roughly bounded by Figueroa St., Indiana St., the city of Vernon, Central Ave. and 9th St.

¹⁴ "The Los Angeles Equal Opportunity Ordinance" draft, 10 pp., Council File #39092, City Archives; Ruth H. Adamson to City Council, September 22, 1949, *ibid.*; S.J. Coffey to City Council, September 23, 1949, *ibid.*; "Local Custom Favors Job Equality Law," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 27, 1949, p. 26.

mission would have a \$176,000 annual operating cost, proposed to attach a financial clause which would require a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority to approve the ordinance. Roybal denounced Davenport's motion as "unfair" while Councilman George Moore scored Davenport's political "trickery," after which Davenport withdrew his motion. His frequent accusations of Communism added fuel to the ordinance's conservative foes while accentuating the divisiveness of FEPC supporters. Headed by ex-Judge Isaac Pacht, the centrist-liberal "Council for Equality in Employment" (CEE) accused the "Fair Employment Practices Committee," chaired by Paul Major and backed by the left-liberal "California Legislative Conference" as being a vehicle for "communists who missed the boat for a popular move."¹⁵

More than 400 people jammed the council chambers on September 27, where hearings on the proposed ordinance lasted more than five hours. CEE representatives—Pacht, AFL Attorney Robert Gilbert, Frank Chuman of the Japanese American Citizens' League, Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin of the Los Angeles Jewish Community Council, Rev. Joseph V. Kearney of the Catholic Welfare Bureau, University of Southern California Professor Harvey D. Seifert, and Alfred Lunceford of the CIO—spoke for an hour favoring the FEPC and made much, according to the *Labor Herald* "of their own dislike of communism and hastily disassociated their organization, motivation and measure from communism." Pushed away from the mike twice by CEE supporters, Paul Major was allowed to speak for two minutes, reading a telegram covering FEPC experiences in Philadelphia. Randolph Van Ostrand, press agent for the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, marshaled the FEPC opponents as they took the floor. "From then on," wrote Jack Young, "the council chambers became a shooting gallery, with everyone favoring the FEP[C] the clay pigeons."¹⁶

Frank P. Doherty, former-president of the Chamber of Commerce, described the FEPC as "un-American and Communist," the adoption of which would be a step toward the "stateism" of Europe. Following several more speakers expressing similar sentiments, the opposition then began to

¹⁵ "Council sets hearing on FEP code," *People's World*, September 15, 1949, p. 2; "High Cost Figured for City FEPC," *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1949, Pt. II: 1; Jack Young, "Ultra-Slick Politicking—A La Ed J. Davenport," *People's World*, September 26, 1949, p. 3; James Bassett, "Rival L.A. Groups Fight Over 'FEPC'," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 26, 1949, p. 12.

¹⁶ Minutes of the City Council, September 27, 1949, Council File #39092, City Archives; "'Hiring' Plan Hotly Debated," *Los Angeles Examiner*, September 28, 1949, Pt. I: 3; "L.A. body kills FEP proposal," *People's World*, September 28, 1949, p. 1; "Plan For FEPC Here Defeated in City Council," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1949, Pt. I: 1; Jack Young, "And Gerald L.K. Smith called the tune," *People's World*, September 29, 1949, p. 3; "Smoothies and hate-peddlers join to kill L.A. fair employment law," *Labor Herald*, October 4, 1949, p. 5.

fall back on its white supremacist underpinnings. "Why do you play with these people?" yelled Earl C. Craig of the Public Affairs Forum. "Kick 'em out of the backdoor of this country. They're all treasonous!" "This is a white man's country," screamed Alfred E. Herbert of the Christian Nationalists, "and [we] will keep it that way. . . . white Christians will not tolerate any n—r or Jew or any other minority getting preferences in jobs, housing or anything else." Over the objections of Davenport and Davies, the Council allowed the Rev. Clayton D. Russell of the Independent Church of Christ to answer the supremacists. He emphasized that discrimination, not Communism, was the issue at hand. Voted down 8–6, the ordinance was opposed by Councilmen Davenport, J. Win Austin, George P. Cronk, Lloyd G. Davis, John C. Holland, Leonard Timberlake, Leland S. Washburton; and favored by Councilmen Roybal, Kenneth Hahn, Don A. Allen, G. Vernon Bennett, Harold Harby, and George H. Moore.¹⁷

¹⁷ Minutes of the City Council, September 27, 1949, Council File #39092, City Archives; "L.A. body kills FEP proposal," *People's World*, September 28, 1949, p. 1; "Plan For FEPC Here Defeated in City Council," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1949, Pt. I: 1; Jack Young, "And Gerald L.K. Smith called the tune," *People's World*, September 29, 1949, p. 3; "Racial Bigotry Flared at City Hall to Defeat FEPC," *California Eagle*, September 29, 1949, pp. 1, 2.



Davenport speaking at the Communist Registration Ordinance hearing, August 29, 1950.
Los Angeles Times Archives, courtesy Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles.

THE COMMUNIST REGISTRATION ORDINANCES

With the outbreak of the Korean War fueling a fear of domestic Communism, Davenport submitted, on July 6, 1950, a resolution to the Council asking the City Attorney to draft an ordinance requiring members of the Communist Party residing or entering in Los Angeles to register with the Chief of Police, "the same as criminals," read the resolution, "who have been convicted of a felony . . ." Within a week, the Los Angeles Communist Party issued a press release vowing non-compliance with such a resolution. "Today, a Davenport calls for registration of members of the Communist Party; tomorrow that definition will be broadened . . . Give the Davenports of our country one inch, and tomorrow under attack will be those who defend the civil liberties of minorities and the rights of labor." Failing adoption by a vote of 8-6, the ordinance was referred to the Police and Fire Commission. In the meantime, the County Board of Supervisors adopted three emergency ordinances on August 22 requiring the registration of Communists in unincorporated Los Angeles County.¹⁸

Davenport then asked for a general hearing on his ordinance as, without a comparable city law, Los Angeles County Communists would be able to escape persecution merely by transversing political boundaries to the safe haven of Los Angeles City. On August 28 he read a statement to the Council that he had "been the target of a vicious attack by Communists and their fellow travelers . . . [which] included personal slander, character assassination and daily abuse through the People's Daily World." He claimed that sound trucks were picketing his apartment and his phone lines were jammed with threatening calls in a "war of nerves" to weaken his resolve to push through the Communist Registration Ordinance. "[T]hreats of physical violence . . . have inspired professional security officers to urge me to accept personal security protection, which up to now I have spurned . . ." Davenport dared Communists, their apologists, and fellow travelers to come to the August 29 Council hearing on the proposed ordinance: "Let us see how bold they will be out in the open before the Council's public microphones tomorrow morning . . ."¹⁹

¹⁸ Resolution by Ed J. Davenport, July 6, 1950, Council File #43923, City Archives; Los Angeles Communist Party press release, July 12, 1950, in Communist Party, USA Collection, 1950 folder, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research; Philip M. Connelly, "Little Mundt bills sneaked across in LA," *People's World*, August 23, 1950, pp. 1, 12.

¹⁹ "Communication to the Council from Councilman Davenport," August 28, 1950, Council File #43923, City Archives; "Urges city force Reds to register," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 28, 1950, p. 17; "Councilman Dares Reds to Debate Registration," *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 28, 1950, p. 2; "Stormy Scenes Likely Over Red Sign-up Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1950.

His dare was accepted as a crowd of about 1,000 people filled the Council chamber and overflowed in the City Hall corridors, carrying placards that read "Stop Thought Control" and "No Police State." A verbal duel between Dorothy Healey, chair of the County Communist Party, and State Senator Jack Tenney, former chairman of the California Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities, brought applause to the former and boos and catcalls to the latter. Mrs. Healey termed Davenport "a two-bit Fuehrer" and urged support of the Constitution. The result was, according to the *People's World*, "one of the most uproarious sessions of recent years." Davenport moved to suspend parliamentary rules in order to allow the ordinance's immediate adoption before the text had been prepared by the city attorney: "If we delay, we lose—and the Communists will have won a great victory." But the Council, with a vote of 7-7, refused to suspend parliamentary rules to approve the unprepared legislation, instructing the city attorney to draft three ordinances based on those adopted by the county. Davenport, editorialized the *Herald and Express*, "fumed at the delay caused by Tuesday's [August 29] pussyfooting . . ." ²⁰

With the text now prepared, the City Council met again on September 6 to discuss the ordinance. Its approval was opposed by Councilman Edward Roybal, who felt that he needed more time to study and consider the ordinance. Davenport and Roybal, wrote the *Daily News*, "dueled noisily amidst cries for order by council president Harold Henry . . ." Accused by Davenport of having left-wing sympathies comparable to that of New York Congressman Vito Marcantonio, Roybal ably defended himself, defying Davenport to further question Roybal's patriotism. "A Communist-hating crowd," reported the *Mirror*, "heard Davenport almost shriek contempt of his lone opponent, Roybal." Despite the pleas of fellow councilmen and the wrath of Davenport, Roybal's sole opposition delayed adoption of the ordinance as council rules require that ordinances not receiving unanimous approval on their first reading be held over for one week. ²¹

²⁰ Minutes of the City Council, August 29, 1950, Council File #43923, City Archives; John Hunt and George Geter, "Pro-Red Howls Rock City Hall," *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 29, 1950, p. A-12; "City orders ordinance," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 29, 1950, pp. 2, 12; "Turmoil Grips Red Hearing," *Los Angeles Examiner*, August 30, 1950, clipping RHC; "Tie vote stalls 'little Mundt'," *People's World*, August 30, 1950, pp. 3, 10; "Red Sign-up Measure Stirs Row in Council," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1950, Pt. I: 1, 7; "LA. Council Should Act Immediately on Anti-Red Ordinance," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, August 31, 1950 clipping RHC.

²¹ Minutes of the City Council, September 6, 1950, Council File #43923; "City council row delays vote on Red law one week," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 6, 1950, pp. 2, 44; John Hunt and Dan Swinton, "Battle Holds Up City Ordinance to Register Commies," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 6, 1950, p. 4; "Roybal Blocks Action On Red Registration," *Los Angeles Examiner*, September 7, 1950, clipping RHC; "Roybal Attacked by Davenport," *California Eagle*, September 8, 1950, p. 1.



Davenport with State Senator Jack Tenney, examining a copy of *People's World*, at the September 6 Communist Registration Ordinance hearing. Courtesy *Herald Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library*.

In contrast to the previous sessions, the second reading of the ordinance on September 13 was quiet and orderly. Roybal bitterly denounced Communism but pointed that the Council should not attempt to “fight Communism [by] sacrifice[ing] our Democracy.” The city’s Communist Registration Ordinance was part of “a great tide of terror creeping across the nation leaving in its wake a near-chaos of hysteria and paralysis of moral principle.” Though perhaps insignificant and certainly unpopular—Roybal called his dissent his “own [political] death warrant”—his opposition “must be taken while time and civil liberties remain.” Communist registration was approved 13–1, with Roybal still in opposition. Davenport was gracious in his victory, possibly moved by Roybal’s impassioned speech. He assured Roybal that he would support Roybal’s right to dissent and oppose any attempted political reprisals that would penalize Roybal for his opinion. Two days later, “Frank Observer” of the *Daily News* lauded Roybal’s stand against the ordinance and commended Davenport for allowing dissent: “It is to Davenport’s credit that he did this.” Though the three ordinances were signed by Mayor Bowron that afternoon, they were never enforced. The county ordinance was found unconstitutional by the Superior Court in February 1951.²²

²² Minutes of the City Council, September 13, 1950, Council File #43923, City Archives; “Councilmen vote Red registration,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 13, 1950, pp. 1, 4; Roybal’s comments to the City Council, September 13, 1950, “A week ago today . . .,” 5 pp., in Edward Roybal Collection, Box 8, Special Collections, UCLA, also in Council File #43923, City Archives; “Red Sign-up Ordered by City Council,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1950, Pt. I: p. 1; Frank Observer, “Lauds Roybal’s courage for voting against Red Proposal,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 15, 1950, p. 13; Ordinances 97018, 97019, and 97020, in Edward Roybal Collection, Box 8, Special Collections, UCLA, also in Council File #43923, City Archives; “County’s Red Register Law Held Illegal,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1951.

RENT CONTROL, RECALL ATTEMPT, AND REELECTION

In January 1950, the Los Angeles Tenants Council was formed in order to maintain the federal rent controls that had been in effect since 1942. Its constituent organizations were the AFL Central Labor Council, the Greater Los Angeles CIO Council, the International Association of Machinists, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Community Services Organization, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Los Angeles County Club of Adult Blind, and the Retail Clerks Local 770. The Tenants Council was a labor-liberal coalition in which the unions played a central and dominate role. "It's Labor Unions like yours," wrote "A C.I.O. Rent Payer" to Albert Luncford of the CIO, "and men of your ilk . . . that will bring on a TAX STRIKE of owners—then get out *your* hammer & sickle flags and pictures of Joe!"²³

At a February 6, 1950 City Council meeting, Burton E. Edwards of the Apartment Owners Association argued that rent controls were "un-American," Davenport, according to the *People's World*, "caught the 'un-American'

²³ "Brief History of the Los Angeles Tenants Council," no date, in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, Record Group 2, [Box 24], Housing File #2, Urban Archives, California State University at Northridge (hereinafter CSUN); "A C.I.O. Rent Payer" to Albert Luncford, filed April 28, 1950, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, *ibid*.



Davenport receives a letter from his constituents asking for his support to retain rent control, c. Christmas 1949. *Los Angeles Daily News*, courtesy Special Collections, U.C.L.A.

phrase like a parched man reaching for a drink." He had, during the previous days, voiced his opposition to decontrol, but now he was an advocate: "I would vote to decontrol right now." On February 9 the City Council appropriated \$25,000 to undertake a housing vacancy survey which, when completed in April, found a very tight 2.6% vacancy rate. Landlords, quibbling over survey methodology, argued that there was actually a non-critical 4.2% rate. On this basis, it was requested that a general hearing on rent decontrol be held by the Council.²⁴

Such a hearing took place on July 28, 1950, attended by more than 2,500 people. The advocates of decontrol had as their theme the un-Americanism of rent regulation while tenants emphasized that, with the Korean War and the possibility of World War III, controls must be maintained. When Naval Captain J.Y. Dannenberg offered testimony in support of the latter, an irate Davenport demanded to see the captain's credentials! Near the conclusion of the four-hour session, George Cronk moved, seconded by Davenport, that the city attorney prepare "forthwith" a resolution seeking decontrol. Ed Roybal's vigorous opposition to decontrol was dismissed by Davenport as the result of Roybal's multi-ethnic and working class 9th District being a "difficult area." By a vote of 10 (Davenport, Allen, Austin, Cronk, Davies, Debs, Holland, Timberlake, Warburton, and Henry) to 4 (Roybal, Hahn, Bennett, and Moore) margin, the Council adopted a resolution declaring that a housing shortage no longer existed in the rental market. The Federal Housing Expediter now had the ultimate authority to lift controls.²⁵

Addressing the City Council on August 14, Federal Housing Expediter Tighe Woods suggested a modification to an abrupt termination of rent control in Los Angeles. "Tighe Woods attempt to circumvent the legislative action of the City Council's 10 to 4 vote to decontrol rents," stated Davenport, ". . . is a revolting revelation of just how bold and brash a Bureaucrat can be." Woods said that, despite his reservations, he would sign the decontrol order upon his return to Washington, D.C. The focus of Los Angeles' rent decontrol battle then moved to the federal courts of the nation's capital. Maxwell

²⁴ Jack Young, "Bowron put on rent lid spot," *People's World*, February 6, 1950, p. 3; Peacock Research Associates, Housing Occupancy Survey, commissioned by the City Council, Los Angeles, 10 April, 1950, in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, Record Group 2, [Box 24], Housing File #2, Urban Archives, CSUN; "Comments on Results of Peacock Research Associates Housing Occupancy Survey," n.d., Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, *ibid.*; "Landlords cry for rent decontrol," *People's World*, April 12, 1950, p. 1.

²⁵ Minutes of the City Council, July 28, 1950, Council File #40909 (sup. 1), City Archives; "Taxpayers: They Revolt Both Ways," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, July 28, 1950, pp. A-1-3; "LA. Rent Control Lifted by 10-4 City Council Vote," *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 29, 1950, p. 1; "City Council Votes Decontrol of Rents," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1950, Pt. I: 1, 2; Virginia Gardner, "LA decontrol now up to Tighe Woods," *People's World*, July 31, 1950, pp. 3, 10.

Miller and the Los Angeles Tenants' Council brought suit to enjoin Woods from signing the City Council's rent decontrol resolution. The consequent temporary restraining order was dissolved by Federal Judge Burnita Matthews on August 28 and then reinstated on September 1 as the U.S. Court of Appeals issued a temporary injunction against Woods. On October 12 yet another injunction restraining Woods was issued in Washington, D.C. municipal court. Los Angeles landlord, Frank W. Babcock, then brought suit against Woods to force him to sign the decontrol resolution. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Babcock's favor on November 16, following which Babcock notified his tenants to expect an at least 90% increase in their rents. This ruling proved short-lived as, on November 24, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed *Babcock v. Woods*.²⁶

Through all legal proceedings, Housing Expediter Tighe Woods had steadfastly refused to sanction the Council's resolution. He reiterated his position in a letter to City Council president, Harold Henry, revealed on Octo-

²⁶ "Rent Control in L.A. to End Thursday," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, August 14, 1950, pp. A-1, 5; "Statement by Councilman Ed. J. Davenport," August 14, 1950, Council File # 40909 (sup. 5), City Archives; "L.A. Tenants Lose Decontrol Battle," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 28, 1950, pp. 1, 42; *Miller v. Woods*, 185 F.2d 499, October 6, 1950; "U.S. Court Order Halts L.A.'s Rent Decontrol," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 1, 1950, pp. B-21; *Babcock v. Woods*, 93 Fed. Supp. 830 (November 6, 1950); "Order Rent Lid Lifted Nov. 24," *Los Angeles Mirror*, November 17, 1950, p. 4; *Woods v. Babcock*, 185 F.2d 508, November 24, 1950; "Rent Control Stays in L.A.," *Los Angeles Mirror*, November 24, 1950, p. A.



Davenport confronts Max Miller in Council Chambers, November 15, 1950.

Courtesy *Herald Examiner*
Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.



Davenport responds to Tighe Woods letter, October 24, 1950.
Courtesy Herald Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

ber 24, accusing the City Council of not conducting a proper public hearing on rent control. In response, Davenport moved that the U.S. Attorney General investigate Woods for “the usurpation of the powers of Congress.” Rent control would remain in Los Angeles until December 20, 1950, when President Truman signed an act of Congress that, while continuing national rent controls for three more months, specifically sanctioned the resolution of the Los Angeles City Council. “It is my sincere hope,” said Woods, expressing his distaste for the task of signing the decontrol order, “that the landlords of Los Angeles will show more consideration for their tenants than the City Council has shown for the welfare of the people of Los Angeles.” From a somewhat different perspective, Davenport declared: “The signing of the rent decontrol measure is an emancipation act for the small property owners just as important as was the Emancipation Act of 1863.”²⁷

Seeking to electorally punish the recalcitrant City Fathers, the Tenant’s Council had called a meeting on August 2 in order to instigate a recall movement against decontrol-leaders Davenport and Don Allen. More than 1,000

²⁷ “Rent Control Stays; L.A. Council Rapped,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, October 24, 1950, p. 2; “Near Riot Erupts in L.A. Council,” *ibid.*; handwritten motion by Ed. J. Davenport, October 24, 1950, Council File #40909 (sup. 1), City Archives; Richard Baisden, “Labor Unions in Los Angeles Politics” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1958), p. 345; “Rent Control Ended in L.A. by Expediter,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1950, Pt. I: 1; “‘Closed’ Sign Hangs On Control Office,” *ibid.*

people met at the Retail Clerks' Union Hall at 225 North Vermont Avenue. About 300 people overflowed into the banquet hall and finally onto the sidewalk, where they listened to the proceedings on loudspeakers. "I welcome this challenge to my right to vote my conscience as an American," responded Davenport in Council chambers. "I don't want to stay in office if I have to bow to the voices of fellow travelers . . ." "No communists in this organization," retorted Max Miller, "no politicians." Refusing to be quoted as they feared "Davenport's vituperation" on the Council floor, several councilmen opined to the *Mirror*, off the record, that Davenport's bluster during the concurrent Communist Registration hearings was an attempt to take the heat off the recall movement. "If recall is the price I have to pay for not knuckling to the Commies," responded Davenport to Harry Steinberg, legislative analyst of the Communist Party in southern California, who made the same accusations in Council chambers, "well then, that's all right with me." In November Davenport lashed back at the instigators of his recall by moving that the Grand Jury be asked to investigate possible violations of the Federal Security Act by officers of the Tenants' Council.²⁸

On August 17 Davenport declared that, as part of a "vilification campaign," officers of the Tenants' Council had claimed that the pro-decontrol city councilmen had been paid for their votes at the price of \$10,000 each. He accused the officers of the Tenants' Council, particularly Maxwell Miller, of behaving suspiciously like Communists. Having heard rumors of such allegations of bribery, Councilman Ernest E. Debs asked the County Grand Jury and the district attorney to investigate the charges. On September 16 *Daily News* columnist Drew Pearson reported that Mayor Bowron, at a private breakfast with a housing official in Washington, D.C., told the official that he suspected that some councilmen of receiving bribes in connection with the rent decontrol vote. The mayor requested the official to ask the U.S. Attorney General to order a federal grand jury investigation. "In all my 20 years in public life," Bowron was quoted by Pearson, "I have never seen a city council like this one." Davenport retorted that the mayor had "sneakily slandered" the Council and asserted collusion between Bowron and Tighe Woods to block rent decontrol.²⁹

²⁸ "Tenants Start Recall Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1950, Pt. I: 8; "Decontrol Foes Hit as 'Racketeers'," *ibid.*; "L.A. Rent Row Gets Confused," *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 3, 1950, p. 3; "Recall of realty stooges pushed," *People's World*, August 21, 1950, p. 3; "Reds Riot in L.A. Over Registration," *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 31, 1950, pp. 2, 12; "City council row delays vote on Red law one week," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 6, 1950, pp. 2, 44; John Hunt, "Davenport Demands U.S. Probe of L.A. Tenants' Council 'Taping'," *Los Angeles Mirror*, November 15, 1950, p. 2.

As the 1951 municipal elections approached, displeasure with both Davenport as well as the City Council had been expressed from the left, liberals, and labor unions. "It is my sincere wish," wrote the service officer of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to Roybal, offering his support in the upcoming election, "that the ten councilmen that VOTE for decontrol suffer the torments of the damned before they pass out of this life." Yet the recall attempts against Davenport and Allen had fizzled due both to personal and political squabbling among the constituents of the Tenants' Council as well as its top-heavy organizational structure. "The Los Angeles labor movement," wrote Richard Baisden, "exercising to the fullest its democratic right to cudgel itself into impotency, completely bungled the political aspects of the rent control fight."³⁰

"So far the dislike has been expressed in a lot of talk and little action," observed Jack Young of the mood of the 12th District in the 1951 municipal primaries. "If the anti-Davenport forces get together behind one candidate, however, they can give the councilman a rough ride." Davenport was opposed by three candidates: Richard L. Newton, Wayne McFarland, and John Payne. Newton, the strongest contender, was an active Republican though an advocate of rent control, the FEPC, and public housing. He had the endorsement of the AFL Voters League as well as the Greater Los Angeles CIO Council—though they contributed only token material support in the campaign—while the AFL Teamsters, the municipal workers, and the firemen broke organized labor's ranks and recommended Davenport. Being an opponent of rent control had won Davenport the backing of the Small Property Owners League which, as he publicly acknowledged, substantially supported his reelection. His campaign emphasized both his positive contributions to the city as well as a willingness to immerse himself in redbaiting.³¹

²⁹ "Minutes of the City Council," August 17, 1950, Council File #40909 (sup. 1), City Archives; "Statement made by Councilman Ed. J. Davenport on the Council Floor," August 17 1950, *ibid.* (sup. 5); "Debs Hits Rent Decontrol Bribe Rumors," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, August 17, 1950, p. B-1; Drew Pearson, "'Bribe' hinted in Washington housing talk," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 16, 1950, pp. 1, 8; "Davenport Hurls Charges at Bowron in Rent Row," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 18, 1950, pp. A-9.

³⁰ Arthur J. Maher to Roybal, March 2, 1951, Edward Roybal Collection, Box 16, Special Collections, UCLA; Baisden, "Labor Unions in Los Angeles Politics," p. 249.

³¹ Jack Young, "Free-for-all looms in LA municipal elections," *People's World*, January 8, 1951, p. 5; Frank Observer, "CIO backs 4 City Council incumbents," *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 12, 1951, p. 14; Henry Santiestevan, CIO Political Action Committee, to Richard L. Newton, March 14, 1951, in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, Record Group 1, Box 11, Folder 22, Urban Archives, CSUN; Santiestevan to Davenport, March 15, 1951, *ibid.*; John Hunt, *The Watchman*, "Davenport Almost Perpetual Motion," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1951, Pt. I: 38; "Davenport, Debs Face Hot Fights," *Los Angeles Mirror*, March 26, 1951, p. 26; Jack Young, "Pro-fascists busy muddying LA election issues," *People's World*, March 28, 1951, p. 10; Baisden, "Labor Unions in Los Angeles Politics," pp. 354-356; "Labor Group Pushes Newton For Council in 12th District," *Los Angeles Citizen*, March 30, 1951, p. 10; "Labor Units Indorse Davenport," *Los Angeles Examiner*, undated clipping, March 1951, RHC.

Amidst a light voter turnout, Davenport was easily re-elected at the April 3 primary. His foes on the left diffused their energy, attacking the incumbent but not uniting in favor of one particular candidate. Davenport epitomized the conservative Council of 1951. Both he and his fellow councilmen had found that they could repudiate liberals and the left by voting down the FEPC and voting for Communist Registration. With rent decontrol, they found that they could do so without fear of effective sanctions, thus setting the stage for the ensuing public housing war. The results of the 1951 municipal elections, bemoaned the CIO, "meant no victory for organized labor." Assessing the configuration of the newly-elected Council, Jack Young of *People's World* wrote that "with 'Red Rider' Davenport in the saddle, you can expect an eruption of novel, if not new, witch hunting techniques."³²

PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE SLANDERING OF ROYBAL

Despite his exploitation of the 1946 Sidney Burke incident, Davenport had been a staunch proponent of public housing. He had, in 1945, expressed interest in an appointment to the National Housing Authority and, in August 1949, accompanied Mayor Bowron to Washington, D.C. in order to confirm the city's 10,000 unit contract obtained under the Housing Act of 1949. "I don't like public housing," Davenport asserted, "but there are a lot of basic things that the government has to do to improve conditions." At the time of the City Housing Authority's (CHA) project site acquisition approval by the City Council in November 1950, the *Times* reported that Councilmen Hahn and Davenport "appeared as two of those most vociferously in favor of the public housing deal." CHA-employees Frank Wilkinson and Ed Lybeck would author pro-public housing speeches for Davenport as well as other sympathetic councilmen. Questioned as to his attitude toward public housing by the CIO as part of their political assessment of the 1951 municipal candidates, Davenport responded that he had "done everything to promote & protect our \$100,000,000 Public Housing program, . . . & have appeared as a speaker before many opposing groups to sell the Public Housing program."³³

³² "12 of 15 City Councilmen re-elected," *Los Angeles Daily News*, April 3, 1951, p. 4; "Leftist Vote Fails to Oust Davenport," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, April 4, 1951, p. A-3; "Two Contests Loom for Council Seats," *Los Angeles Mirror*, April 4, 1951, pp. 3, 14; "L.A. election no victory for labor," *Labor Herald*, June 5, 1951, p. 6; Jack Young, "A look (ugh!) at the new LA council," *People's World*, July 9, 1951, p. 6.

³³ Davenport to Ed and Ruth Lybeck, May 29, 1945, in Ed and Ruth Lybeck Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, Special Collections, UCLA; "Council Votes 12-1 for Public Housing," *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1950, Pt. I: 2; "Councilmen Block Housing Study Site," *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1950, Pt. I: 2; Interview with Frank Wilkinson, June 26, 1996, taped copy in possession of the author; "Questionnaire for Candidates for City Council in the Los Angeles Municipal Election: Councilman Ed J. Davenport," no date, in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, Record Group 1, Box 11, Folder 22, Urban Archives, CSUN.



Panel from a *Daily News* political cartoon, "Public Housing in One Easy Lesson," illustrating Ed's new-found anti-public housing stance. Reprinted in the *Los Angeles Citizen*, April 18, 1952. (His conversion was actually in November, not December.)

In November 1951, Davenport underwent a sudden and total reposturing making, wrote John Rossmore in *Frontier*, "the farfetched claim the [public housing] projects would actually cost \$301 million." The councilman abruptly terminated his support of the program to become its most rabid opponent. His "noisy, vacuous statesmanship has done much to make the city's legislative body a laughing stock," complained Rossmore. "Public Housing is a big step in the direction of Socialism and that is one of the things we are trying to stay away from these days," wrote E.R. Thrapp, executive vice-president of the Southern California Building and Loan Association, to Davenport, commending the councilman's new-found anti-housing position. "I hope to see you at George Worster's party," he added. H. Bock wrote to Davenport: "Keep up the wonderful good work, to help fight and win this battle against this Russian Communistic Socialistic Housing Project, which is trying to destroy our freedom, liberty, and our free enterprise system."³⁴

The AFL saw Davenport as "Two-Sides Eddie," doing a soft-shoe dance

³⁴ John R. Rossmore, "Los Angeles Betrayed," *Frontier*, 3 (February 1952): 25; E.R. Thrapp to Davenport, December 11, 1951, in Council File #30966 (attachments), City Archives; H. Bock to Davenport, December 15, 1951, *ibid.*

"to the tune of Big Business." Organized labor was angered, though not overly surprised, at the councilman's dubious about-face. "Davenport has often been on each side of a controversy," declared the CHA's Frank Wilkinson to the Central Labor Council, "and frequently on both sides." The motivation for the sudden reversal of his public housing advocacy was regarded with skepticism. "It was the general consensus," wrote Richard Baisden, "that Davenport's change of heart had not been based entirely on principle." The Council's eight-member anti-public housing bloc—the "Davenport group"—voted on December 26 to adopt a resolution in which the 1949 federal public housing contract was "rejected, rescinded, canceled and annulled."³⁵

The CHA filed a petition for a writ of mandate with the California State Supreme Court in order to force the City Council to comply with the provisions of the 1949 agreement. On April 28, 1952, the Court did so, ruling that the city "had no right or power to rescind the approval of the project or to cancel or abrogate the agreements." With the "Davenport group" constituting the majority, the Council still refused to undertake the tasks required for the construction of the projects. On August 5 the CHA filed a brief with the court, asking that the Council, by refusing to obey the writ of mandate, be judged in contempt of court and fined and imprisoned. Worse things could happen to a public official, stated Davenport, "rather than cravenly surrender to the browbeating of a bureaucracy [CHA] bent upon breaking down individual freedom and substituting national socialism for the American way of life."³⁶

It was during the city's public housing war that the bombastic redbaiting of Davenport would reach its zenith. In August 1952, he asserted that Communists had infiltrated the CHA and were "committed to a campaign of terrorism against all councilmen opposing the Socialistic project." They had even, revealed Davenport, "threatened my poor ailing mother back in McKeesport, Pa." Following the refusal of the CHA's Frank Wilkinson—testify-

³⁵ "'Two-Sides Eddie' Does Soft-Shoe Glide—You Pay," *Los Angeles Citizen*, December, 21, 1951, p. 1; Baisden, "Labor Unions in Los Angeles Politics," p. 363; City Clerk to Mayor Bowron, December 26, 1951, in Council File #39066, sup. 1, City Archives; City Clerk to CHA, December 26, 1951, *ibid*.

³⁶ "Slum Clearance Dispute goes to Supreme Court Today," *Los Angeles Citizen*, January 11, 1952, pp. 1, 5; *Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles v. City of Los Angeles* (38 C.2d 853; 243 P.2d 515), April 1952; Art White, "Contempt Order Faces Council in Housing Fight," *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 8, 1952, pp. 2, 14. In April 1953, the Supreme Court of California ordered the Council to comply with the writ of mandate though no fines were imposed on the councilmen for their previous noncompliance. Justice Carter concurred with the majority's reasoning and ruling, yet he believed that punishment should be imposed on the Council for refusal to obey the writ. "The record of this case presents a sordid picture of political intrigue and chicanery . . .," he wrote, "[to] obstruct, delay and defeat the housing project contemplated by said contract." *Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles v. City of Los Angeles* (40 Cal.2d 682; 256 P.2d 4), April 1953, p. 11.



Ed rants and raves in vacated Council Chambers, September 4, 1952.
Los Angeles Times, courtesy Special Collections, U.C.L.A.

ing in Los Angeles County Superior Court on August 29 during condemnation proceedings for the proposed public housing project in Chavez Ravine—to divulge his membership in political organizations, Davenport introduced a resolution, voted for 10–0, to have the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigate the CHA. Later in September, Davenport warned of a Communist invasion of City Hall.³⁷

On September 3, 1952, Councilman Davenport attempted to introduce a resolution calling on the city attorney to advise the Council as to means and ways to combat the public housing program modification of the past August. The resolution named Mayor Bowron and CHA executive director Howard Holtzendorff as “co-conspirators.” When the wording of the resolution was questioned, with the suggestion that it be toned-down, Davenport became extremely agitated. Councilman Kenneth Hahn asked the sergeant-at-arms to keep an eye on Davenport, remarking “I think he is going berserk.” Coun-

³⁷ Don Parson, “Los Angeles’ Headline-Happy Public Housing War,” *Southern California Quarterly*, 65 (Fall 1983): 251–285; “Commies Infiltrate L.A. Housing Authority,” *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, August 6, 1952, p. A-2; “Housing War Death Threat Told,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 6, 1952, p. 12; “L.A. Housing Aide Suspended as Council Demands Red Quiz,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, August 30, 1952, pp. 1, 5; “Red Probe Asked as Housing Man Shuns L.A. Quiz,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, August 30, 1952, pp. 3, 10; September 2, 1952 Council Resolution, in Council File #54917, City Archives.

cilman Edward Roybal took the floor and stated that Davenport's resolution was not based on fact. "I resent that!" Davenport retorted, jumping to his feet. Council President Henry then instructed Davenport to take his seat. "If the gentleman will give me permission," Roybal volunteered to Henry, "I'll set him down for you." "He's been threatening me with physical violence," charged Davenport with an allusion to stereotypical Mexican comportment, "even to the point of a knife." In a 1997 interview, Kenneth Hahn said that Davenport's slander was "the most vicious attack against a fellow councilman" that he had seen.³⁸

The next day the Council received a letter from the Mexican Chamber of Commerce protesting "the vile, false, and defamatory statement" that had been directed to Roybal, a Mexican American, "in these tawdry remarks of a political demagogue . . ." Davenport leaped erect, screaming about the letter. "It looks like I am going to stand alone on the housing issue," he shouted as the rest of the councilmen walked out of the chambers. Davenport then incoherently raved for thirty-five minutes on the general subject of public housing and subversives. Continually booing him, Davenport accused the audience of spectators of being a "bunch of lefties." "The man is evidently blowing his top," said Councilman Don Allen, "and I'm going to call for the psycho ward." Police Chief William Parker and two City Health Department doctors subsequently confronted Davenport in Council chambers. The *Daily News* editorialized that Davenport's antics were a disgrace to the City Council, to the voters of the 12th District, and to the community: "He should be removed from office immediately so that the serious and important business of running the third largest city in America may proceed in an orderly fashion unhampered by sophomoric clowning." The conservative *Herald and Express* urged its readers to dismiss Davenport's antics in the Council as a "frame-up" by a "stacked deck of leftists."³⁹

³⁸ Art White and Bob Johnson, "City Dad Throws Wild Tantrum," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 3, 1952, pp. 3, 23; Carlton E. Williams, "Mayor Bowron Called As Housing Witness," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1952, Pt. I: 1, 4; Magner White, "Knifing Threat Charge In Hot Council Row," *Los Angeles Examiner*, September 4, 1952, pp. 1, 10; "Roybal Refuta un Cargo del Concejal Davenport," *La Opinion*, September 4, 1952, p. 8; Edward R. Roybal interview, October 10, 1996; Kenneth Hahn interview, April 27, 1997.

³⁹ Armando G. Torrez, Mexican Chamber of Commerce, to City Council, September 3, 1952, in Council File #54956, City Archives; Art White and Bob Johnson, "Davenport Goes Wild at Council Session," *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 4, 1952, pp. 2, 28; "City Council 'Flees' As Davenport Rages," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 4, 1952, pp. 1, 4; "Davenport Hurls 'Gestapo' Charges," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, September 5, 1952, p. A-2; "Defiende a Roybal la Cámara de Comercio," *La Opinion*, September 5, 1952, p. 8; "Davenport Dice Que Defiende a los Mexicanos," *ibid.*, September 6, 1952, p. 7; "Davenport disgraces Council, community," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 5, 1952, p. 46; "The Davenport Incident," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, September 6, 1952, p. B-2.

On September 8, in a lengthy letter to the editors of all Los Angeles newspapers, Davenport turned to the press in order to explain his actions of September 4. Despite the polarity of his and Councilman Roybal's political philosophies on issues such as public housing, rent control, FEPC and registration of Communists, Davenport asserted that this "did not destroy a mutual admiration for each other and a measure of friendship." Their antagonistic relationship was due to the fact that Roybal's district encompassed "large blocks of various racial and religious minorities that offer fertile fields for the sowing of seeds of dissension by Communists . . ." Davenport was puzzled by the letter from the Mexican Chamber of Commerce demanding his censure because "I am fighting . . . [to save] the homes of Mexican Americans in Chavez Ravine." He could not forgive Councilman Allen for calling the doctors and unduly worrying Davenport's wife. Concern over his health was unwarranted as he was "following a strict regime of diet, exercise and rest under the supervision of my personal physician, Dr. D.V. Moore, who checks me every week. It is similar to the routine Judge Medina followed to keep at top physical and mental form in the long grueling trial of the 11 top Communists." Finally, the councilman asserted that the entire episode had been framed by the CHA and public housing proponents to make him "the target of the oldest smear attack in the Communist functionaries' arsenal of poisonous darts."⁴⁰

Davenport's accusations of knife-wielding on the part of fellow-councilman Ed Roybal aired the racial divisiveness of the city. His slur constituted "the most vile kind of race baiting by a public official of our City," asserted Julie T. Green: ". . . I demand his immediate resignation." The Asociación Nacional México-Americana wrote to the Council that "a councilman that conducts himself in such a manner has no business representing the people of Los Angeles. His lying and malicious statements . . . are a direct insult to the entire Mexican colony residing in this city." The International Ladies Garment Workers Union felt that Davenport's "ravings and ragings" against Roybal indicated "the bigotry and hatred that has warped his mind. . . . Perhaps if enough of us protest these assaults against public decency, it could become known that the people of Los Angeles do not care for Mr. Davenport's unconscionable cavorting and that he has the support only of that lunatic fringe for whom he

⁴⁰ Ed J. Davenport, "An open letter to the editors of all Los Angeles newspapers" (9 pp.), September 8, 1952, in the Los Angeles Examiner Morgue, USC Regional History Center. Harold Medina, to whom Davenport referred, was the U.S. District Court Trial Judge in whose courtroom was held the 1949 prosecution of 11 members of the CPUSA's National Committee for violation of the Smith Act. For an account of this trial, the interested reader may wish to see Peter L. Steinberg, *The Great "Red Menace": United States Prosecution of American Communists, 1947-1952* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), Chapter 8.

appears to be the solitary spokesman." Mrs. M.E. Marcus wrote that, as a citizen of Los Angeles, she was ashamed of Davenport's antics in the Council: "This is a case of a man desperately needing mental treatment. He is not mentally fit to sit on the Council." "I think it a shame that we have a dirty stinker on the Council," wrote Lee Roy A. Hoffman. "This guy DAVENPORT should apologize to Roybal and the Mexican people" and the Council should ask for his "immediate resignation for the betterment of the people of Los Angeles." Davenport, the *Daily News* wryly observed, "is the man most likely not to be voted Mr. Popularity of 1952."⁴¹

Davenport's electoral popularity was certainly on the wane. In the municipal elections of the following Spring, he was vigorously opposed by Ransom Callicott. A co-owner of Cliftons Cafeteria and a member of the municipal Civil Service Commission, Callicott was considered to be a political conservative and thus of little appeal to liberals, the left, or organized labor other than the fact he was not Davenport. "A VOTE FOR CALLICOTT IS A VOTE AGAINST DAVENPORT!" the Independent Progressive Party broadsided the electorate. "A VOTE AGAINST DAVENPORT IS A VOTE AGAINST HIGH-HANDED CONTEMPT FOR THE PEOPLE'S NEEDS!" The *Daily News* urged the election of Callicott—"a candidate who offers the city so much in the way of an improvement over the incumbent"—and reprinted their September 5, 1952 editorial (see above) which condemned Davenport's councilmanic behavior. The 12th District election was, according to the *Mirror*, a battle between Davenport's "rabid supporters and bitter enemies" in which Callicott "has made it plain he is after Davenport's hide and will spare no horses to defeat him." For his part, Davenport relied on the anti-Communism—now reaching frenzied proportions—that had served him so well in the previous three elections. Praise for his anti-Communism, along with endorsements, came from civic leaders, the Small Property Owners League, the Southern California Republican Women, Pro-America, the Teamsters, and the Veterans Political League.⁴²

⁴¹ Julie T Green to Councilman Henry, n.d., in Council File #54956, City Archives; Mauricio Terrazas, regional director, Asociación Nacional México-Americana to City Council, September 8, 1952, *ibid.*; International Ladies Garment Workers Union to Councilman Henry, September 17, 1952, *ibid.*; Mrs. M.E. Marcus to City Council, n.d., *ibid.*; Lee Roy A. Hoffman to City Council, September 26, 1952, *ibid.*; "Davenport 'Mr. Unpopularity of 1952' for mouthings," *Daily News*, September 12, 1952, clipping RHC.

⁴² "Davenport Must Go!", 1953 IPP circular, Records of the Independent Progressive Party and Californians for Liberal Representation, 1946-1975, Box 31, Folder 7, Special Collections, UCLA; "Davenport disgraced L.A.—elect Callicott!," *Los Angeles Daily News*, (March 16, 1952), p. 10; "Davenport: 'Welcomes Attack in IPP Circular,'" *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 18, 1953, p. A-16; Art White, "Incumbent, Foe Slug It Out In 12th District; 3 Vie In 13th," *Los Angeles Mirror*, March 20, 1953, p. 24; Fred Arnold, "Joseph Scott Urges Davenport Re-Election," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, March 24, 1953, p. A-12; "Davenport Attacks Hit," *ibid.*, April 4, 1953, p. A-9; "Hot Contests Mark City Council Races," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1953, Pt. II: 2.

Of more than 27,000 votes cast in the 12th District on April 7, 1953, Davenport was victorious by a margin of less than 400. With a choice between two conservatives, nearly half of the electorate voted against Davenport's red-baiting histrionics. Still, Davenport's reelection would mirror the fear of liberal and left politics in the municipal arena. UNESCO proponents for the Board of Education were defeated, pro-public housing Mayor Bowron ran second to Norris Poulson (and would be vanquished in May's general election), while the pro-public housing councilmen now numbered only four. "Last Tuesdays primary elections in Los Angeles left no doubt whatever," chortled the *Examiner*, "of a strong public revulsion against the infiltration of Socialistic tendencies in the official life of our city."⁴³

THE DEATH OF DAVENPORT

On June 23, 1953, Davenport had dinner with his friend Wally Schaefer, owner of an ambulance service, and they decided to attend the initiation of Mayor-elect Poulson into the Los Angeles Breakfast Club together early the next morning. Spending the night in the guest room of his friend's apartment, Davenport was found dead in bed by Schaefer at 7:30 the next morning, following a phone call from Mrs. Harriett Davenport inquiring about her husband. Ed was 54 years old and was to begin his fifth term on the Council on July 1. Alcoholism was doubtlessly the primary contributor to his demise though some of his friends maintained that the long fight against Communism had undermined the councilman's health. The week prior to his death he had surprised Paul V. Coates at lunch by ordering, instead of his usual straight liquor, a healthful glass of milk in which he mixed a shot of vodka while complaining of being tired and "just worn out." His autopsy revealed fluid in the brain and lungs (acute cerebral and pulmonary edema) due to fatty metamorphosis of the liver.⁴⁴

The City Council adjourned on June 24 after learning of Davenport's death and ordered City Hall flags to be flown at half staff. Councilmen and civic leaders paid tribute by remembering him as a dynamic champion of free enterprise and a colorful political figure. Mayor-elect Poulson praised Davenport as a vigorous fighter in the battle against public housing: "I hate to lose such a man from my team." Yet later in his memoirs, Poulson stated, though Davenport was

⁴³ "Angelenos Turn Right," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 9, 1953, clipping RHC.

⁴⁴ "Ed Davenport, Councilman, Dies In Sleep," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 24, 1953, pp. 2, 34; "Councilman Ed J. Davenport Passes Away while Asleep," *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, June 25, 1953, CBF; "Councilman Ed Davenport Dies in Sleep," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1953, Pt. I: 1, 4; Paul V. Coates, "Well, Medium and RARE," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 25, 1953, p. 18; "Davenport death cause released," *Los Angeles Daily News* July 10, 1953, CBF.



The coroner collects Ed's body, June 24, 1953.
Courtesy U.S.C. Regional History Center.



Davenport's funeral, Forest Lawn, Glendale.
Courtesy U.S.C. Regional History Center.

a vociferous partisan in his mayoral campaign, the councilman's dubious switch from a public housing proponent to opponent combined with reports that Poulson was receiving regarding Davenport's backers raised an "inner fear." Davenport's death, wrote Poulson, "removed that particular fear."⁴⁵

"Davenport will be mourned by some," observed the *Mirror's* Paul V. Coates. "And, even in death, he'll be scorned by others." Indeed. His untimely death, wrote the conservative *Examiner*, "has deprived Los Angeles of a valuable public servant." The paper remembered him as one "who was singularly gifted with courage, conviction, and an incisive intelligence." The *People's World*, on the other hand, acknowledged the councilman's "gifts as an orator, but he used them as a demagog [sic]." Davenport was recalled as the councilman "who deserted the liberal position on which he was first elected to become the darling of the town's neo-fascists." For newspapers, bemoaned Coates, Davenport was good copy: "The death of Councilman Ed Davenport leaves our city suddenly without any colorful politicians. It's a loss that will be keenly felt by columnists in search of a column."⁴⁶

Davenport's funeral services were held at the Church of the Recessional at Forest Lawn Memorial-Park on June 26. In attendance were more than 300 mourners, including Edward Roybal, Fletcher Bowron, Ransom Callicott, Mrs. Margaret Davenport, mother of the late councilman, and his brother, former Pennsylvania, Congressman Harry Davenport. He was eulogized as a foe of public housing, a defender of free enterprise, and a fallen warrior who had been engaged in the war on Communism. "The city has indeed lost a champion . . .," observed Councilman George Cronk in farewell. Davenport was "a fighter who made everyone thankful who happened to be on his side. . . . God, in His infinite wisdom, has taken him from our midst, but his deeds will never be erased." "I am not here to eulogize Mr. Davenport," reflected Dr. James W. Fifield, Jr. "He has written his own eulogy. . . . He gave his life to his country just the same as had he fallen on a Korean battlefield." "He probably deserves a Flag on his casket," Fifield was quoted by the *Times*, "as much as any soldier who has died on the battlefield."⁴⁷

POST-MORTEM POLITICS

Davenport's death, just a week prior to Poulson's 1953 mayoral inaugura-

⁴⁵ "Death Brings Adjournment of City Council," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1953, Pt. I: 4; Norris Poulson, "Who Would Have Ever Dreamed?," the memoirs of Norris Poulson, Special Collections, UCLA, 1966, p. 192.

⁴⁶ Paul V. Coates, "Well, Medium and RARE," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 25, 1953, p. 18; "Davenport Mourned," *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 25, 1953, RHC; "Davenport found dead in bed," *People's World*, June 25, 1953, pp. 3, 6.

⁴⁷ "Davenport Funeral Held," *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 27, 1953, RHC; "Eulogies Voiced For Ed Davenport," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1953, Pt. II: 1.

tion, had left the Council evenly divided between 7 conservative and 7 liberal members. With the scheduled election of Council president, conservatives sought the immediate appointment of someone to fill Davenport's vacant seat. The obvious choice was the runner-up in the 12th District race, Ransom Callicott, who had pledged his support to the reigning conservative Council president, Harold Henry. The conservatives appeared dominant with erstwhile liberal Gordon Hahn switching his support to Henry. With the Council slated to fill Davenport's seat on June 29, the six remaining liberals—Councilmen Debs, Allen, Roybal, Gibson, Timberlake and Warburton—went A.W.O.L., denying the Council a quorum and thus the ability to appoint a conservative successor to Davenport. President Henry issued a "call of the Council," ordering Police Chief William Parker to round up the truant councilmen, in what *People's World* called "the weirdest manhunt in Los Angeles city history as the feudin', fussin', fightin' city council engaged in civil war." Six police warrant officers were unsuccessful in locating their quarry by June 30 but, reported the *Mirror*, "they have been royally entertained by the wives of the missing members—with food and a comfortable place to sit."⁴⁸

With the seating of the new Council on July 1, the liberal bloc returned. A stormy Council session on July 2 set July 13 as the date to name Davenport's successor. Callicott appeared to be the front runner, but Harriett Davenport had announced that she would be willing to serve out her late husband's term due to the type of campaign that Callicott had waged the past April. The following day the Council broke its conservative-liberal deadlock by electing Councilman John S. Gibson, Jr. of the 15th District—a liberal—in a surprise "harmony" move suggested by Gordon Hahn. On July 7 Gibson announced liberal appointments to key positions. The election of a new Council president and the illness of Councilman Earle D. Baker appeared to place the issue of Davenport's successor on the back burner. The citizens of the 12th District, lacking Council representation for nearly two months, insisted that the Council take action. On September 1 the vacancy was finally filled by the appointment of Mrs. Davenport. Supported by women's clubs, veterans and civic organizations, as well as such groups as Pro-America and

⁴⁸ Art White, "Davenport's Death Poses City Puzzle," *Los Angeles Mirror*, (June 25, 1953), pp. 4, 27; Carlton Williams, "Davenport Death Stirs Politics in City Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1953, Pt. I: 4; Art White, "Council Splits on Successor to Davenport; Debs Boycotts," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 26, 1953, pp. 7, 22; "Council Slates Action to Fill Davenport Post," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1953, CBF; "Cops Hunt 'Truant' Councilmen," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 29, 1953, pp. 7, 43; "Missing: 6 LA city councilmen," *People's World*, June 30, 1953, p. 3; Art White, "City Councilmen's Hide and Seek Game Continues," *Los Angeles Mirror*, June 30, 1953, pp. 3, 23.



Mrs. Harriett Davenport is escorted to her Council seat by Councilmen Ernest Debs, Earle Baker, Gordon Hahn, Harold Harby, and Harold Henry, September 1, 1953.

Los Angeles Times Archives, Courtesy Special Collections.



Harriet Davenport is presented with a Council resolution in appreciation of her service by Council President John Gibson, Jr. and Councilman Harold Henry, July 1, 1955.

Courtesy U.S.C. Regional History Center.

the Small Property Owners League, she pledged "to stand where my husband stood and I will check his voting record as a guide."⁴⁹

Harriett Davenport did not seek reelection at the end of her appointed term in 1955 so that she could devote more time to her ailing sister. Her political career, in contrast to that of her husband, was quite placid and devoid of rabid anti-Communism. Cohorts Edward Roybal and Kenneth Hahn remembered her as a charming person and a very good councilperson who shared her husband's political knowledge and savvy but not his abrasiveness. Harriett was praised by a Council resolution for her able and conscientious service to the 12th District. Following the 1955 municipal elections, she was succeeded by Ransom Callicott. Harriett was appointed to the city's Pension Commission in July 1955, serving there until she retired in August 1961. She then moved back to her roots in Whatcom County, Washington, where she died on July 23, 1976. She was buried next to Ed at Forest Lawn, Glendale.⁵⁰

In December 1953, upon terminating her late-husband's joint tenancy, Mrs. Davenport had announced a \$57,570 inheritance contained in three bank accounts and a safe deposit box. The widow explained the magnitude of this sum as a result of thrift and hoarding. In a tax suit held at the Federal District Court in November 1955, the government charged the Davenports of failing to report their complete income. To the Internal Revenue Service, Harriett revealed that \$41,402 of the estate was to be accounted as "gifts of money" which she and her husband never reported, believing that such "gifts" did not constitute taxable income. Mrs. Davenport, according to the IRS, "well knew she had derived income in excess of that reported." "This money was received by Ed from July 1, 1949 until his death—\$14,861 in 1949, \$8,544 in 1950, \$11,706 in 1951, \$6,619 in 1952, and \$6,295 in 1953—though no specific donors were named. The IRS billed the Davenport estate for \$12,374 in back taxes.⁵¹

⁴⁹ "Hint Debs to Back Henry in Council," *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 3, 1953, pp. 1, 2; "L.A. Council Deadlock Ends; Gibson Elected," *Los Angeles Mirror*, July 3, 1953, pp. 3, 10; John Hunt, "Liberals' to Rule Key Committee Posts of Council," *ibid.* (July 7, 1953), p. 4; "Voters Urge Council Elect New Member," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, August 26, 1953, p. A-8; "Mrs. Davenport gets council job," *People's World*, September 2, 1953, p. 3; "Davenport Widow Gets Council Seat," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1953, CBF.

⁵⁰ "6 Councilmen to Run; Mrs. Davenport to Quit," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 14, 1954, CBF; "Mrs. Davenport Praised in Council Resolution," *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1955, CBF; Edward Roybal interview, October 10, 1986; Kenneth Hahn interview, April 27, 1997; MCLS to Thousand Oaks Public Library, Re: Harriett Davenport, December 8, 1997, in possession of Don Parson; Seattle Public Library to Don Parson, Re: Harriett Davenport, December 27, 1997, *ibid.*

⁵¹ "\$57,570 Left Widow," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, December 2, 1953, RHC; "Mrs. Davenport Asks \$57,570 Joint Tenancy Terminated," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 3, 1953, RHC; "U.S. settles Tax Claim on Ed Davenport Estate," *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, November 29, 1955, p. 10; "Tax suits airs 'money gifts' unreported by Davenport," *People's World*, November 30, 1955, p. 3.

Ed's fiscal impropriety would echo again in 1959 with the violent eviction of the Aréchiga family from their home in Chavez Ravine to make way for Dodger Stadium. On June 10, 1959, E.M. Cecer sent a photostat of a 1957 Drew Pearson column from the *Mirror-News* to Councilman Roybal, asking him to pass it on to the Aréchigas "in hopes it will keep them out of prison." The "gifts of money" which Davenport pocketed were, according to Pearson, nothing short of bribes from the real estate lobby. These bribes altered Davenport's formerly staunch support for the public housing program. With the subsequent demise of the program, the public housing project scheduled to be constructed in Chavez Ravine, Elysian Park Heights, was canceled. Thus the path was open to bulldoze Chavez Ravine homeowners, like the Aréchigas, for the sake of Walter O'Malley and the Brooklyn Dodgers.⁵²

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Following his 1945 election, Davenport forsook his liberal and leftist supporters by adopting a conservative posturing combined with a vicious and

⁵² E.M. Cecer to Roybal, with photostat of Drew Pearson, "Dodger Move Costly," June 10, 1959, Edward Roybal Collection, Box 6, Special Collections, UCLA.



The memorial tablet of Edward and Harriett Davenport marking their grave in Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale. *Reproduced courtesy of Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association, who also graciously provided the photograph.*

vocal redbaiting. From his reelection in 1949 until his death in 1953, Davenport's anti-Communism became more pronounced and intense. Perhaps not coincidentally, his income was, according to the IRS, amply supplemented during precisely this period. Major issues that would shape the direction of the city's policy—the FEPC, Communist registration, rent control, and public housing—were polarized between liberal and conservative antipodes with little common ground for either debate or consensus. Davenport's redbaiting was implicitly racist as well as political—not only was Edward Roybal, as a Mexican American, a personal target of Davenport's bombastic oratory, but Roybal's multi-ethnic Eastside district was seen as a natural spawning ground for Communism.

In 1953 Mayor-elect Poulson was inheriting a City Council that was deeply divided, especially in the wake of the city's public housing war, between liberals and conservatives. Instead of accepting these traditional political blocs, Poulson prided his "leadership of persuasion" and "personally worked closely with the liberals and used Carl[ton Williams, political editor of the *Times*] to exert his influence on the conservatives." Wooing them away from their class- and race-based constituencies, Poulson directed the Council toward the implementation of a Modern Los Angeles in which the interests of all citizens of the city would be served through the progress of an expanding urban economy. Such progress would be both attracted and reflected by a Modern city, where a redeveloped Bunker Hill, the realization of the freeway system, and a major league baseball team in Chavez Ravine would mesh the interests and efforts of business, industry, labor, and government to create, as Poulson would enthuse, "a downtown district unrivaled in the world." In the politics of Modernism, the divisiveness, polarity, and bombasticity of the rabid anti-Communism that had marked Davenport's political career had expired and, conveniently, so had Davenport.⁵³

⁵³ Poulson, "Who Would Have Ever Dreamed?," p. 214; Norris Poulson, "Renaissance of Downtown Los Angeles," speech (Los Angeles: Downtown Business Men's Association, June 29, 1956); Don Parson, "'This Modern Marvel': Bunker Hill, Chavez Ravine, and the Politics of Modernism in Los Angeles," *Southern California Quarterly*, 75 (Fall/Winter 1993): 333–350.

APPENDIX A:
COUNCILMANIC ENDORSEMENTS IN THE 12TH DISTRICT,
1945-1953

	1945	1947	1949	1951	1953
<i>Times</i>	Newton	Davenport	Davenport	Davenport	Davenport
<i>Daily News</i>	Davenport	Davenport	Davenport	Davenport	Callicott
CIO	Davenport	Behrend	Kushner	Newton	?*
AFL	Newton	Davenport	Davenport	Newton	Callicott

*The left-dominated California CIO Council had been at odds with the national CIO since the former had supported the third-party candidacy of Henry Wallace in 1948. The California CIO Council was labelled a "Communist Party front" by CIO president Phillip Murray in January 1950 and its affiliation with the national CIO revoked. The California CIO's *Labor Herald* made no endorsement in the 1951 municipal elections while the national CIO's Greater Los Angeles CIO Council endorsed Newton. The *Labor Herald* ceased publication in March 1953 and I could find no endorsement, from either faction, for the 1953 elections.

APPENDIX B:
ELECTION RESULTS IN THE 12TH DISTRICT, 1945-1953*

<u>April 3, 1945 Primary Election</u>		<u>April 5, 1949 Primary Election</u>	
Brown	2,034	Davenport	17,811
Campbell	1,479	Kushner	4,811
Davenport	4,301		
Kushner	874	<u>April 3, 1951 Primary Election</u>	
McFarland	1,171	Davenport	10,386
Merrill	1,980	McFarland	1,939
Newton	3,642	Newton	5,619
Pettis	216	Payne	2,419
Tierney	906		
<u>May 1, 1945 General Election</u>		<u>April 7, 1953 Primary Election</u>	
Davenport	7,835	Callicott	13,582
Newton	7,641	Davenport	14,025
<u>April 1, 1947 Primary Election</u>			
Behrend	4,436		
Davenport	13,555		
Gibbons	972		
Maxwell	1,225		

* Semi-official returns as reported in the metropolitan presses.

APPENDIX C: DIRTY ED?

In Box 2, Folder 7 of the Ed and Ruth Lybeck Collection in Special Collections at the University of California, Los Angeles, there is an amazing 9-page typed investigative report, titled "Davenport," which compiles numerous interviews by the investigator to present a not very flattering portrait of Ed. Unfortunately, the report is both unsigned and undated (from the content it seems to be written in mid-1951), rendering it a legal "hearsay"—thus the reader is accordingly advised.

The investigator seeks to document both the bribery and drunkenness on the part of Ed. As to the former, in return for his support in the rent decontrol fight, Davenport was alleged to have his expenses for trips, entertainment, etc., picked up by the Hotel Association. "[T]his is temporarily over," noted the investigator, "because on his last junket he is supposed to have put in an account for expenses of \$2,500 when he couldn't actually have spent more than \$500." Leon Clifton, a veteran of the rent control struggle, offered to indict Davenport for \$1,500 in expenses plus a bonus when the indictment was handed down. Jake Zeitlin opined to the investigator, after a chance meeting and conversation with Harriett Davenport on a Vancouver street, "that Ed actually has a place of his own in Canada and that is where some of the presumably ill-gotten gains are being sunk." Bureau of Reclamation employee Ralph Wertheimer approached Davenport on a routine flood control matter "and Davenport just reared back and asked, cold turkey, 'Well, what's there in this thing for me?'" The former manager of Davenport's residence—the Park Wilshire at 2424 Wilshire Blvd.—claimed to have seen Ed receiving money. The investigator concluded that "Davenport is on the chisel for anything that comes along and must pick up quite a bit of dough from day to day."

Davenport's abuse of alcohol were easily documented. "Many people have seen him drunk," writes the investigator, "some hopelessly so, and the thread of drunkenness runs all through his history. He also uses benzedrine to hype himself up. What he tells you one day, very importantly and confidentially with his eye-balls as big as saucers, he has no recollection of the next. I do not think this is entirely an act; I think a lot of his vaporings are just drug-born." Upon his relocation to L.A., Davenport worked in the advertising firm of Phil Meany. Meany fired Ed for drunkenness and unreliability,

claiming that Ed caused the death of a co-worker who died in a car collision after drinking with Ed. Working for the Long Beach *Press-Telegram* around 1933, Davenport “was fired when he collapsed in total drunkenness at a banquet at which he was supposed to make the principal speech.” Living at the Park Wilshire, Ed’s favorite watering hole was the near-by Vagabond House where “he often gets plastered and has to have somebody let him in when he gets to his apartment.” Milton Davis, who operated a grocery store in the basement of the Park Wilshire, “made loud noises about Davenport’s drunkenness and the women he was supposedly bringing up to his room via the elevator from the basement during Harriet[t]’s frequent absences.”

An exposé of Davenport, containing some of the above allegations (and others!), was to appear in the *Mirror*, which was owned by the powerful and pro-Davenport Chandler family. Les Wagner, a writer at the *Mirror*, reported that “the story had not been run on [Norman] Chandler’s [publisher of the *Times*] specific orders and that Chandler had ordered [Virgil] Pinkley [publisher of the *Mirror*] to support Davenport. This Pinkley had refused to do, but had ordered the story held.”