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VOTERS AGAIN REJECT BERLIN WAIL

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Between April 1991 and April, 2007, voters have soundly rejected Carolyn and Phil Berlin, or their favored candidates and causes, in all but two elections.

Of the two exceptions, one council member was elected more than a decade ago, and he had a falling out with the Berlins in the weeks before the election. But they rebuilt a relationship just in time for his reelection race, at which time he was trounced. The other is today little more than a year into his first term, and he seems to remain on good terms with the Berlins – taking their advice and counsel via text messages throughout council meetings.

On April 10, voters once again said “no, thank you,” this time directly to both Berlins. THE question around town today is, “Will they listen this time?” I suspect the answer is, “No.”

Not even when supermodel Elle McPherson sent her security crew with a restraining order to politely but firmly ask that I stop calling her home to repeatedly propose have I seen overtures rejected more consistently and firmly. And Elle only put up with it for a few weeks before she called in the muscle. Burbank has been subjected to the Berlins for 16 years.

The Berlins and their followers have a remarkable record for insisting they speak for and represent most Burbankers, while ignoring the tangible election results covering well over a decade that say otherwise.

Their cliques have an astounding turnover rate. But every two years the pair rounds up another posse with the help of stragglers from the last, and together they dash through town, hair afire, wailing to all that a horrible fate is about to befall the city, one only they or their minions can see clearly, and one only they can stop.



Phil & Carolyn Berlin. Won't take "NO" for an answer.

Days before Burbank's recent all-mail balloting came to a close my wife and I walked our dogs on the Chandler bike path. A cheerful man on a bicycle pedaled up and asked, "Are you registered voters in Burbank?" Having seen the scenario many times, my wife rolled her eyes and kept walking. The man carried campaign literature on his handlebars, and I wanted to hear what he had to say.

"You know that new child care center on Verdugo?" he asked. I said I'm familiar with the Mary Alice O'Connor Family Center, recently opened in what was once the Buena Vista branch of Burbank's library system.

"Four of the current city council members raised every resident's electric rates last year to pay for that," the man said. "The same four have been building low-income housing in the middle of R-1 single family areas all over town. It's the Los Angelization of Burbank!" he said. The solution to this madness, he assured me, was electing the Berlins to the city council.

In fact, the child care center was paid for with redevelopment funds. Utility rates had nothing to do with it. The council has approved razing several dilapidated multi-family buildings in deeply troubled neighborhoods, and replaced them with sparkling new multi-family buildings – including units reserved for low-income tenants like those living in the original structures. Save for a recent debacle that saw a rapacious developer score a huge profit flipping a property, the program has been wildly successful and dramatically improved neighborhoods. But it hasn't added even one low-income unit to R-1 single family streets.

The previously chipper campaign worker turned dark and stormy when I refuted what he said were the Berlins' complaints. And though I returned to my walk with a polite goodbye and a smile for the fellow, my wife and I could hear him berating us at the top of his lungs for quite a distance, though we couldn't make out his angry words.

It was, in a single episode, the embodiment of every campaign the Berlins have been connected to in 16 years.

Before hitting on the "Los Angelization" theme, the Berlins warned rampant expansion of the local airport terminal was an imminent certainty. "A new LAX!" they cried, and "the bulldozers are on the way!" Council members pledged to block any such efforts, but the Berlins assured us the devious bastards were lying, and had likely been bribed.

Before that, it was the alleged dual desires of entertainment studios to expand into neighborhoods around them, and to build a forest of 30 story office towers on each lot.

And so it has gone for 16 years. The promised horrors have never come to pass. If they existed at all, they were squelched by council members who live here, too. But that record has never made the Berlins shy about following up with new predictions, calamities from which only the Berlins and their latest crop of dupes can save us.

On election night there were those who celebrated the Berlins' resounding defeat like New Year's Eve, as if Gary Bric and Anja Reinke winning twice as many votes as the Berlins somehow erased the months of smears and accusations. There was glee over the fact that, despite spending tens of thousands of dollars, between the primary election and the run-off, and with three fewer candidates, Carolyn Berlin picked up less than 50 new votes.

Of votes cast for candidates in the primary, 42.7% went to candidates who didn't survive. In the run-off, virtually all those votes went to candidates who weren't named Berlin. After all the times the Berlins told endorsement interview committees, "take both of us, or neither," the overwhelming majority of voters took them up on the offer.

After recent elections Carolyn Berlin and some of her flying monkey gadflies have been fond of contorting ballot and registration figures to lambaste winners, confronting them at public meetings to charge the victors were actually opposed by most of the city. Applying the same formula they used, today one would say 93.4% of Burbank's registered voters didn't want her on the council. Phil Berlin did slightly worse, with 93.5% of the city's voters "opposing" him.

On election night those victimized by such tactics in the past were joyful at the prospect of hoisting the Berlins by their own petard... again.

Frankly, I wasn't all that damned happy. I can't help but wonder which potential candidates might have run in this election, or the last one, or many before that one, if interested, capable and well-qualified members of the community hadn't begged off because they didn't want to be put through the misery the Berlins and their pack of jackals have made candidacy, council service and even service on committees.

According to campaign finance reports covering all but the last two weeks of the campaign, each Berlin reported receiving just \$575 from supporters in what is typically the period of heaviest contributions. But they invested more than \$41,000 of their own money in their joint campaign. It's the only facet of the results that pleases me.

I like to consider that \$41,000 – a figure that may grow when reports covering the final weeks are filed this summer – as a cash fine for the damage the Berlins have inflicted on the community. They spent \$41,000 and got absolutely nothing for it.

It's unfortunate so much went to vendors outside the city.

Of course, they had at least one helper who remains unidentified. We're no closer today to knowing who put out the "hit piece" campaign mail sent in late March attacking Bric and Reinke, and likely won't have more clues until the next round of state campaign finance reports are due in late July. (Please see "IT'S THE "LOS ANGELIZATION" OF BURBANK ELECTIONS!" March 23, below.)

Though the "No Married Couples for City Council" signs springing up all over town irked the Berlins, it appears those qualified as an "independent expenditure," an effort that cost less than \$1,000.

Under the law, whoever produced them apparently isn't obligated to reveal themselves. Despite the Berlin's hilarious howls that the signs were somehow "illegal or discriminatory," they were neither.

Considering how many voters obviously agreed to put the signs in their yard, often two at a time, one wonders if the Berlins realized that each time they alleged the signs constituted a shameful sentiment they were insulting even more voters.

After Bric and Reinke scored endorsements from every city employee labor group, it was no surprise a handful of statewide political action committees aligned with labor groups were also willing to invest in positive literature touting the pair.

Bric had such an easy time building a campaign war chest – he loaned his campaign \$4,800 and received another \$15,000 in contributions – in the final weeks he turned down contributions saying he didn't need them. On election night he told me he has \$1,800 left over that he'll divide between four charities in the city. Reinke's finances were similar to Bric's, and she ended up spending \$300 more than Bric.



Councilmember-elect Anja Reinke. In for a four year term, not two years.



Councilman-elect Gary Bric. He stopped taking contributions.

Even if the general election results did once again support those who argue Burbank's two-step system is an expensive waste of time, (primary election front runners routinely hold their places through the run-off), election night did provide some surprises.

I was talking with council member-elect Anja Reinke when her husband Charlie stepped up to say he'd just learned something across the room.

“Somebody just told me this [a council term] is a four year deal,” he said. “I thought it was two years.”

In my experience, it's a good idea for the spouses of council members to stay as ignorant as possible of what goes on in City Hall, and to avoid reading letters to the editor until a trusted friend has vetted them for accusations of criminal conduct. But one hopes that, believing his wife would be available, Charlie Reinke didn't pay a big deposit on a long, expensive cruise in late 2009.

Another surprise was my own when I came across Howard Rothenbach at the same event. He was wearing a Bric campaign t-shirt.



Howard Rothenbach: Former Berlin soldier who backed Gary Bric.

For those who don't know or remember, Rothenbach has been a candidate for council himself, and for years traveled in the Berlins' circle, and was one of their soldiers. I'd noticed a Bric finance report listing a contribution from him, but forgot all about it.



David Gordon-Rothenbach stepped aside to improve Gordon's chances.

For years Rothenbach was the public face relaying or echoing the Berlin's accusations. It was Rothenbach and his mentor, the late former councilman Ted McConkey, who wrote and promoted Measure A in 2001, an effort to prevent the airport terminal expansion they and the Berlins insisted was imminent. After overwhelming approval by voters, and as was predicted by virtually every attorney who reviewed the measure before the vote, Measure A was killed in court when it was found to violate the state and U.S. constitutions.

Rothenbach told me he'd planned to run for council in the 2006 special election to fill a seat vacated when councilwoman Stacey Murphy was forced to resign, a plan blessed by the Berlins. But he was surprised to return from an out of town trip and find that David Gordon had announced his candidacy, with the Berlins running his campaign.

Rothenbach says he met with Gordon and agreed both of them running would split the votes of those unwilling to support the establishment's candidate, Bill

Wiggins. Rothenbach says he agreed to support Gordon, with the understanding he'd run in 2007, and with the Berlins promising him their "behind the scenes support."

Of course, that last bit is a suspect claim. Remember, the Berlins' campaign literature dismissed as false rumors any accusations they have been behind the scenes "political operatives."

Gordon won in 2006, and Rothenbach thought things looked good for his 2007 candidacy. Among those he talked to about his candidacy over subsequent months was former Mayor and council member Mary Lou Howard.

Though she hasn't held office for more than a decade, Howard remains at the center of social circles in the city, and is active in regional Democratic party and labor politics.

Rothenbach told me he was later talking with Carolyn Berlin about matters unrelated to politics when she surprised him by asking if it was true he'd met with Howard. Rothenbach said it was.

According to Rothenbach, Berlin told him that was cause for concern. Mary Lou Howard is also associated with retired Burbank police Lt. Don Brown, currently a city council appointee representing Burbank on the Airport Authority, the panel overseeing the airport for Burbank, Glendale and Pasadena.

"She said Mary Lou and Don Brown are "airport expansionists"," Rothenbach said. "Carolyn told me she can't support me because I'm with airport expansionists, and that makes me an airport expansionist!"

Rothenbach's astonishment is understandable. He's dedicated 10 years to opposing airport expansion – even when all credible evidence indicated expansion was a dead issue.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "Me? An airport expansionist? I wrote measure A!" It was as if Vice President Dick Cheney were criticized for failing to support the war in Iraq.

"I reminded them what I did with Measure A, and the attitude really was "Yeah, well what have you done for me lately?"" Rothenbach said.

Welcome to the world the rest of us have lived in for years, Rothenbach.

A short time later, Rothenbach says, he received another call from Carolyn Berlin. She was excited to announce she and Phil Berlin would run for council. That's when Rothenbach decided to work for Bric.

I've heard a lot of stories about why one believer or another has finally grown fed up with the Berlins and moved on, some in a depressed funk, and others in a fit of rage. But pegging Rothenbach as an airport expansionist is the most amazing yet.

There was one other unusual development on election night. For years winning candidates have marveled that, while the Berlins obviously worked against them behind the scenes throughout the campaigns – always using a familiar band to circulate accusations and effectively anonymous literature – the Berlins have never failed to call or turn up at election night celebrations with unconvincing smiles and offering insincere congratulations, as if they'd supported the candidate all along, or at least remained neutral.

This year, even through today, neither of the winners have heard from the Berlins.

Some are speculating the Berlins have finally gotten the message. I see no reason to believe that. After all, they didn't care what the voters said in 1991, or in 1993, or in 1997, or in 1999 or in...



Sign of contempt? Vandals cut up Berlin campaign signs, added horns & posted these around town.