

Santa Cruz Politic/David Arenson

## THE IRON MAIDEN AND THE CRUMMY BUMS

"... Her supporters laud Marilyn Liddicoat's outspokenness. But recall campaigners tell of her 'contempt,' 'innuendo' and 'abuse of power' ..."

**C**ALM beaches, quaint Victorian houses and splendid redwood groves are Santa Cruz County's claims to fame. But to people who live in and care about the place, they are a sort of camouflage. For the 440 square miles of this increasingly crowded county have become a battleground between those who want to stop further development and those who feel development is a birthright.

The battles are being fought with a weapon that Santa Cruz County didn't invent, but might as well have: the recall. Of the five persons who sat on the county board of supervisors in January, 1978, four have faced or are facing recall. The fifth died.

The 1978 recall campaigns, which unseated two growth-control supervisors, were, if not the dirtiest in county history, certainly the hardest fought. But they are beginning to look like well-mannered dart games compared to the current recall storm. At its center is Second District (Aptos) Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, a self-described "property rights advocate" whose supporters regard her as a local Margaret Thatcher—the iron maiden of Santa Cruz. Liddicoat, a wealthy lawyer who has been known to sing "America the Beautiful" at campaign dinners, has been an outspoken—and sometimes downright intemperate—critic of both big government and environmentalists. Her highly quotable rhetoric has made her the most controversial politician in the county and—perhaps—a contender for statewide office.

*David Arenson is a Santa Cruz free-lance writer and former editor of the UC Santa Cruz newspaper.*



**Recall target:** Marilyn Liddicoat, seen here at a board of supervisors' meeting, may be moving out and up.

Since taking office two and a half years ago, Liddicoat has become the central figure in the board's conservative faction. In the process, she has thrown frequent barbs at her detractors both at supervisors' meetings and on her local radio show. Liddicoat has upbraided environmentalist constituents with questions such as "How many members of the Sierra Club can dance on the head of a pin?"; denounced local high school teachers for teaching "socialist garbage"; and fired off an occasional letter to a constituent like the one in which she said, "Frankly, your comments sound like the ravings of a madwoman." In January of this year, Liddicoat said she'd been "harassed by crummy bums" into deciding not to run for re-election in 1980. (She later reconsidered.) Her opponents seized on the phrase, and buttons reading I'M A CRUMMY BUM began appearing on lapels throughout the county.

Liddicoat's brusqueries were part of the reason the county grand jury, in an unusual wrist-slapping gesture, concluded in June that "heated, rude arguments, name-calling, threats, attempted intimidation and infighting through the local media [by members of the board of supervisors] have become a source of em-

barrassment to county employees and many citizens."

Liddicoat calls her actions "cruel in a proper manner"; she believes herself to be one of the "kinder" people on the board. Her supporters laud Liddicoat's "outspokenness." But Recall Liddicoat Campaign co-coordinator Jackie Christeve, who owns a small farm in La Selva Beach and holds a master's degree in clinical psychology, charges that the supervisor "has treated her constituents with contempt. She shouts at them, walks out on them at meetings and writes them nasty letters." Christeve, who regrets having voted for Liddicoat in 1976, sees the supervisor's actions as less a matter of "discourtesy" than of "using fear tactics and innuendo reminiscent of the McCarthy era." She and the other recall coordinators have struck back by publishing a pamphlet, *Liddiquotes & Liddivotes*, in which some of Liddicoat's more disputable public statements are juxtaposed with unflattering cartoons of the supervisor.

Liddicoat's detractors again and again charge the Aptos supervisor with "abuse of power." The most serious example they cite involves an August, 1977, incident in which Liddicoat instructed an assistant to look through the confidential

welfare file of Ellen Gruys, a part-time aide to then-supervisor Phil Baldwin (a political foe of Liddicoat's). Liddicoat said she wanted to see if county employees were taking advantage of job-sharing to collect welfare "and lie around on the beach for half the day." The assistant county counsel told Liddicoat it was legal for her to look through Gruys's file. District Attorney Art Danner called Liddicoat's action "deplorable" and said: "If she did it again, we'd prosecute her—it would be an illegal act." Danner decided not to prosecute Liddicoat because of the county counsel's involvement in the case, but Liddicoat still faces a half-million-dollar civil suit filed by Gruys.

Liddicoat denies doing anything illegal; she says the recall campaign is "an attempt to get the liberal majority of the board back." She has also described the recall as a UC Santa Cruz "sociological experiment" and as an effort to cast a cloud over her political future. Christeve says the Recall Liddicoat movement is broad-based, and points out that many registered Republicans are active in the recall campaign.

**T**HE GUT ISSUE is Liddicoat's record on land use. Liddicoat has been the board's loudest voice in support of "property rights"—a term many environmentalists regard as synonymous with "development." Liddicoat explains: "My family was Jewish. For centuries our people could not own land. Jews should be in the forefront of property rights." She believes "there is lots of vastness left in Santa Cruz County."

Ethnic identities aside, there is less vastness in Santa Cruz County than there used to be. Since 1970, it has been the state's fastest-growing county with a population of more than 100,000: Its population has increased by more than 40 percent in nine years. The current population of 175,000 is expected to top 248,000 by 1990. And all these people are squeezing into what is, after San Francisco, the state's smallest county in land area. Those who own the land in Santa Cruz and those who want to develop it stand to make a sizable profit from this influx, and since the board of supervisors has the power to restrict development, control of that board is important to both developers and environmentalists.

In the same June, 1978, election when Santa Cruz voters narrowly recalled two liberal supervisors, they approved a growth-management ordinance, Measure J. It provided that growth be directed to urban areas, that 15 percent of all new building permits be reserved for low- and moderate-income housing, and that Santa Cruz accept only a "fair share" of each year's statewide growth. Liddicoat opposed J, and she has since voted with the board's conservative majority to approve developments such as Galleon

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“... Santa Cruz County, the state's second smallest in land area, has seen its population grow by more than 40 percent in nine years ...”

Heights, Trestle Beach, Canon del Sol and Aptos Seascape. The last-mentioned project has become a major issue in the current recall campaign.

In 1972, the board of supervisors had prevented the Aptos Seascape Corporation from building 100 homes on 70 acres of beachfront property in Rio del Mar. The supervisors rezoned the land, making it virtually undevelopable, and refused to let Seascape build the homes on adjoining property. Seascape went to court and won a \$4.5 million judgment against the county. Superior Court Judge Roland Hall told the county that it could avoid paying the \$4.5 million if it granted Seascape an additional 200 units over its “base density” on adjoining property.

But at the same time as the county was appealing Hall's decision, the board of supervisors opted to work out its own deal with Seascape. In a closed session in May of this year, the board signed an agreement with the developers that could give Seascape 175 building permits every year up to a total of 1,200 units. Because Measure J restricted the number of building permits available per year to approximately 900, the 175 available an-

nually to Seascape were seen by some as an example of the supervisors'—and especially Liddicoat's—“commitment to serving the moneyed interests in Santa Cruz county.” Liddicoat and the conservative majority were further attacked for holding the negotiations behind closed doors; public pressure finally forced the board to hold a public hearing on August 28. The results were inconclusive: The board refused either to withdraw or to publicly approve the agreement.

**L**IDDICOAT'S involvement with moneyed interests has been the subject of speculation since the 1978 recalls. Supervisors Phil Baldwin and Ed Borovatz, as members of the liberal majority, had taken a hard line on development, a stance that angered developers, realtors and doctors who owned land in the county. Liddicoat's husband, ophthalmologist Douglas Liddicoat, appealed to the medical community to help fund the 1978 recalls. More than 40 percent of the record \$90,000 spent to oust Baldwin and Borovatz came from doctors, realtors and developers. Marilyn Liddicoat took no public stand on those

recalls and denied any behind-the-scenes participation. She said she and her husband were too busy to be aware of one another's activities; they were, she said, “like ships passing in the night.”

During that campaign, it was also revealed that Liddicoat and her family had conducted \$200,000 worth of real estate transactions with Ronald Berry, a realtor who organized the recall move against Baldwin. At the time, Berry said it would be “absolutely wrong” to infer any political relationship between him and Liddicoat.

Nonetheless, recall backers point to Liddicoat's votes on land use and believe that developers will come to her aid in the current campaign. “We are aware that a recall is an uphill fight,” says Christeve. “We can expect that large-money interests will do everything they can to obscure the issues. Mrs. Liddicoat is willing to let money, not issues, determine elections.”

Liddicoat, for her part, believes, without citing evidence, that Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy will come to the aid of the recall movement. Her husband underlined that argument in a recent fund-raising letter to county physicians. Stating that “the ... recall

group will have the best campaign that Jane Fonda-Tom Hayden money can provide," Dr. Liddicoat urged each physician to contribute \$500. He also said that a Liddicoat recall would make Santa Cruz County "a showcase for their [C.E.D.] philosophy" with "no private practice allowed." Hayden did persuade Governor Brown to appoint yet another controversial Santa Cruz supervisor, convicted marijuana smuggler Chris Matthews, in January of this year. But Christeve denies any C.E.D. involvement in the current recall effort, says the campaign will accept no money from outside the county, and emphasizes that the recallers are not projecting an end to private medical practice.

Meanwhile, as the campaign intensifies, the normally bombastic supervisor has grown increasingly tight-lipped, refusing to debate or respond to specific charges leveled against her. Her campaign organization, Friends of Liddicoat, has hired a San Francisco-based political advertising firm to run her campaign.

Liddicoat, who was once "100 percent certain" that not enough signatures would be collected to put her recall on the ballot, says her political plans depend upon what happens in November. She has attracted the interest of some prominent backers of Senator S.I. Hayakawa, who urged her to run against Alan Cranston next year. She turned them down, however, saying, "You don't go from supervisor to senator." But she believes that she could have done well had she accepted. "Put money behind a political candidate," she says, "and you can sell ice to the Eskimos."

Liddicoat has expressed interest in running for the state senate seat being vacated in 1980 by Robert Nimmo (Republican, Atascadero), a job that would be more suitable than her current one as preparation for the U.S. Senate. But with the recall campaign threatening her political fortunes, Liddicoat now says she has stopped "thinking that far ahead." She is, however, reconsidering her decision not to run for re-election to the board of supervisors next year: "I won't rule it out and I won't rule it in." Though she doesn't think the recall will succeed, she says that if it does she won't run for anything next year.

The interest in Liddicoat as a statewide—or even national—political figure illustrates the high stakes in November's recall election. Pro-recall ads point out that "it's now or never." And Jeff Bossard, a local attorney, newspaper columnist and Liddicoat supporter, sees the recall as "a do-or-die election where Mrs. Liddicoat and those she really represents stand to lose it all." It promises to be the kind of showdown that the combative Marilyn Liddicoat, with her unerring bent for the extreme, will thoroughly relish.