

...Avowed Communist Once Received 600,000 California Votes

Here's how California voters – in the middle of the anticommunist “Red Scare” in 1950, no less – cast more than 600,000 votes for an avowed Marxist campaigning for state superintendent of public instruction.

As United Press correspondent J. F. McLaughlin put it: Were the hundreds of thousands of Californians who voted for Bernadette Doyle really Communists? “Or ‘dumb clucks’ or merely careless?”

California's election for state schools chief is nonpartisan, so Doyle didn't appear on the ballot as a Communist. But she never kept her political beliefs a secret. When she filed her candidacy papers with the secretary of state, she gave her occupation as “chairman and education director of the Communist Party of San Diego.” But her designation on the ballot was “organizer and educator.” Doubtless, many voters assumed she organized for the California Teachers Association in San Diego.

California newspapers at the time told readers about her affiliation, and the CTA “drummed hard on it during the pre-election campaign,” according to a 1950 election post-mortem in the *Los Angeles Times*. But this wasn't a political contest that made the front pages – most of the political attention focused on races for governor and the US Senate.

Once all the votes were counted, Roy E. Simpson won the election with 1.7 million votes. But Doyle's showing shocked everyone. According to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, fewer than 7,000 Communists lived in California. Governor Earl Warren took pains to say that the results “in no sense represents Communist strength in California.”

After the election, newspaper editors weighed in. The *Hanford Daily Sentinel* wondered “what would have happened to education in California had Doyle been successful?” The *Long Beach Press-Telegram* warned that the “people should give more attention to the less spectacular contests,” noting that “not more than a handful of Californians would intentionally turn the leadership of the state's educational system to a known Communist.”

The *Sacramento Bee* put it bluntly: “Thousands upon thousands of Californians were tricked by their own carelessness.”

Sources: *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1950; *San Rafael Independent Journal*, June 22, 1950; *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1950

