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## Upton Sinclair And Epic Plan

In 1934, Upton Sinclair used his Democratic party nomination for governor to promote his plan to “End Poverty in California” and gain material for the selling of his books. As an internationally known author and socialist, Upton Sinclair preyed on the hopes of the residents of California, both unemployed and part of the working class, to try to be elected as governor and change things from the “inside”. At this point in history, Californians had endured four, long, difficult years of economic depression and were looking for a savior. For most people, Sinclair wanted to be that hero, but it was all based in theory of whether or not his plan would work. The biggest criticisms of EPIC were the details of the plan, along with the timing of “fake news”, the Dust Bowl, and the modernist label of socialism.

One reason that EPIC failed was because the “heart of the platform was an elaborate project that mainstream economists and orthodox Socialists alike would denounce as unworkable and conservatives would charge was more than dangerous (Gregory).” The United States was facing the greatest economic crisis in history and people were afraid of change. Sinclair wanted “production for use” and for more people to become self-sustaining by using broken-down factories. The idea was for no factory or land to sit idle, and each worker would be paid a fair wage. This challenged too much of the economy and American ideals for people to accept it and encourage its trial. Sinclair’s promise to restore California’s economy and put residents back to work was ingenious in theory, but there were too many unanswerable questions for voters.

“We are by no means convinced that Mr. Sinclair can carry all his program into effect... but we are convinced of his sincerity (Socialism, 1169).” Not only did EPIC reshuffle the electorate, but it also resurrected the politics of class and fear. It wasn’t solely that people didn’t believe him or believe in Sinclair, but more so, that too many people felt that they had too much to lose, too much to fear. As Professor Gonzalez mentioned in a lecture, one in four Americans were unemployed in 1932 (07NOV2019). That meant that seventy-five percent of Americans still had a job and feared their status would change with the election of Sinclair and the implementation of EPIC. People with jobs were scared of losing them and people with money were scared of losing it. The Christian Century mentioned that the political devices in place would be tested and the future of our nation depended on whether or not an old order would persist, or a new order would rise to power, which ended up proving Sinclair’s argument in the end (Socialism, 1168).

Overall EPIC did support the idea of free labor. “Thus he set up his appealing equations: that cooperation was more efficient than competition; that capitalism begot overproduction which in turn begot unemployment; that putting people to work made more sense than giving them handouts; that state management and planning would balance production and consumption; that ‘production for use’ would end the Depression (Gregory).” His plan allowed for hard work and self-reliance to succeed in a democratic society. Upton Sinclair believed that United States citizens, not just Californians, are all equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. He knew that they just needed a system in place that gave them such chances.

However, Sinclair seemed a little troubled by the criticisms of his plan and had made a few modifications to the original program. Some of the issues people had with EPIC surrounded how

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much the plan will cost and how it will be funded. Sinclair didn't state who would manage the workers or how owners of factories would be compensated. The tax reform measures were disapproved, not because it would raise millions, but because steep taxes would be placed on large incomes and wealthy estates (Immediate). At first, Sinclair mentioned the idea of confiscating idle factories and farmland but eventually changed it to renting them out by the state. Changes were needed, but these provisions caused people to second guess the creator of the plan and risking the trial of EPIC. "Naturally, our proposals have been revised in many details, and we know that the Plan is a sounder and wiser thing than it was a year ago (Immediate)."

Another issue was the fear of the "Dust Bowl". Between 1930 and 1950, one million people moved to California (07NOV2019). Californians dreaded how the migration of so many people would affect their employment rates and ability to end the depression. Sinclair ultimately didn't settle their minds when it came to this problem and it hurt his odds of winning.

His opponent, Governor Frank Merriam, was a member of the Republican party and because of Sinclair's radicalism, he gained more support than anticipated. Merriam also turned to an aggressive negative campaign. Merriam was backed by Whitaker and Baxter, whom pioneered media and knew how to get people to vote a certain way based on television. They used "fake news", or deep fake technology, to spread disinformation. Upton Sinclair came into this political race with already existing enemies because of his prior literary works and journalism against corruption in capitalism (12NOV2019). After his campaign, Sinclair took the narrative as the victim and wrote about how he was the focus of malicious slander. "He may have lost the election but through I, Candidate he won the battle for history, insuring the EPIC would be remembered by future generations less for what it tried to do than for what was done to it, insuring that his opponents would be remembered as the architects of modern American 'dirty' politics (Gregory)."

It was unfortunate that the election played out the way it did, because Upton Sinclair seemed to truly have California's best interests at heart. He expressed his belief that it is the moral obligation of every citizen to ensure no one starves to death. Sinclair considered education to be accessible and the right of every person. His ideas weren't extreme in any way, but once people saw it as socialist or even communist, they denied it. Sinclair said, "the American public still feared the term socialism and remained stubbornly wedded to its two old political parties."

Upton Sinclair joined the Democratic party because he thought it was his best chance to put his plan into effect. According to "Immediate EPIC," Sinclair designed the program out of earlier radical strategies, took the idea to invade an old party was taken from the radical Non-Partisan Leagues, and some inspiration came from the Technocracy movement of 1932 and 1933. He was still a socialist in all aspects, but simply because he joined another party, he became an outcast. The reality of the situation was the Socialist party was still making a comeback. It almost disappeared in the 1920s and was shattered by the split that generated the Communist party and resulted in a lingering climate of anti-radicalism. The issue is in the title of Do Socialists Want Socialism? Sinclair simply made a smart political strategy and instead was "being fought by conservatives in this campaign largely on the basis of his socialism – yet who is now being excoriated and anathematized by those who have in the past called themselves his socialist comrades (Socialist, 1168)." His goal wasn't to create a socialist country, but instead believe that he could implement an "Americanized" version of socialism that fit our economy and politics.

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After he lost the election, Sinclair was still impressed with the support and dedication of his believers in the EPIC Plan. He so deeply believed in EPIC's effectiveness that he thought that it was time to take the message of "production for use" outside of California. Sinclair was the right person to do this as well, because some of his strengths included storytelling, being able to build drama into any scene, and pedagogy, turning a scene into a lesson in radical politics. Because of his background, Sinclair knew how to attract publicity and how to directly address the working-class audience. His goal was to replace the old economy of "production for profit" as workers, farmers, and even businessmen realized the efficiency and numerous personal and social advantages of cooperation (Gregory). Upton Sinclair was the hero that California didn't realize it needed. His plan may not have been perfect, but as a country, the United States would have been able to reconstruct EPIC and figure out the issues. Sinclair stated, "it will be regarded as a vital platform – a genuine proposal for immediate, concrete, understandable action – and men everywhere will react vitally to it (Socialism, 1168)." Maybe with better timing, more support, a willingness to take a chance, and better campaigning, Upton Sinclair would have been able to make his dream become a reality, but we will never know if the United States, or at least California, would have restabilized its economy with EPIC.

## Sources

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3. Professor Gonzalez, Lectures from November 7, 2019 and November 12, 2019.
4. Sinclair, Upton. *Immediate Epic: The Final Statement of the Plan*. End Poverty League, 1935.