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## Shadow over solar power in L.A.

Why the rush to put an initiative on the March 3 ballot? Politics, of course.

The Los Angeles City Council had better hurry up and put something called the Green Energy-Good Jobs Initiative on the March 3 ballot, or we will never, ever have solar power in this city. There's no time to see where the plan fits into an as-yet-unseen comprehensive solar plan. There's no time to wonder why its chief sponsors are labor unions. There's no time to ask why the leader of the city-owned Department of Water and Power took this initiative to the City Council over the heads of his commissioners.

At least that's the message that has emerged from council chambers over the last two weeks, after this initiative to install city-owned solar panels on Los Angeles rooftops materialized. Boosters argue that, for goodness' sake, we just have to get this thing on the ballot by today's artificial deadline, and then we'll have plenty of time to answer everyone's questions.

**This rush to the ballot has the scent of swindle about it.** Council members and a smattering of environmentalists speak about the plan with happy words, but through gritted teeth. That's because, just out of view, their arms are being twisted.

The plan put together by Working Californians -- headed by Brian D'Arcy, business manager of the union representing DWP electricians, and Marvin Kropke, business manager of another International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union that does a great deal of city contracting -- theoretically could form part of an acceptable proposal to expand Los Angeles' supply of solar power. Instead, it does little to advance energy supply and much to reveal who's pulling the strings in Los Angeles.

It stands the priority list for intelligent solar policy on its head. Increased electrical generation capacity and benefit for ratepayers fall to the bottom. They're replaced by secondary priorities, such as economic stimulus and job security for DWP workers, or even non-priorities (for L.A. residents, anyway), such as near-exclusive IBEW power over awarding solar-panel-installation jobs and union support for elected officials.

A comprehensive solar plan might well provide welcome job opportunities to Los Angeles residents and businesses. This one appears to be more about locking up those opportunities for its sponsors than opening them to potential competitors. Meanwhile, there are serious questions about the numbers being batted about the council chamber. The 400 megawatts the program would presumably produce by 2014 appear to have more to do with political marketing than with reality. The estimated increases in electricity rates seem similarly speculative.

Council members -- even those seven who are up for reelection March 3 and crave labor donations -- should sober up. If this really must come before voters, there will be plenty more opportunities in this city, where elections are more frequent than rainy days.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/editorials/la-ed-ballot7-2008nov07,0,5074050.story>