

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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A year after explosion, the grassroots mobilizes

By Juan Lopez

The large protest August 3 at Richmond's Chevron refinery was the culmination of a summer cross-country trek for 350. org leader Bill McKibben and his wife Sue, aimed to boost local struggles and the involvement of local communities in the worldwide movement for climate justice.

The protest began with a march that grew to 3,000 once it reached the gates of the Chevron refinery, and 209 were subsequently arrested in a sit-down act of non-violent civil disobedience. It marked the first anniversary of a refinery explosion and fire that sent 15,000 residents to area hospitals with respiratory and other problems on August 6, 2012.

The potential for people-to-people solidarity was in dramatic display at the rally when Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin read a full-page ad appearing that morning in the local newspaper:

"In the fight against Chevron, the people of Ecuador and the people of Richmond can deploy the most devastating weapon ever invented. The truth."

And what is the truth?

For two decades Chevron has been fighting a suit filed on behalf of 30,000 Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest residents.

The suit charges the company with deliberate-



ly dumping 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into estuaries and rivers, spilling 17 million gallons of crude oil, and leaving hazardous waste in hundreds of open pits dug out of the forest floor.

(Chevron did nothing to mitigate the effects of this ecological nightmare after acquiring Texaco, the original perpetrator of the disaster, in 2001).

Chevron's attitude has been appropriately summarized by one of its own company officials

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who in 2009 said, "We're going to fight this until hell freezes over. And then we'll fight it out on the ice."

Meanwhile, the day before the Richmond protest, the City Council, the mayor and their attorneys filed litigation against Chevron in connec-

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tion with the August 6, 2012, fire after negotiations between the city and Chevron fell through.

The lawsuit alleges the explosion and blaze at the Richmond refinery resulted from “years of neglect, lax oversight and corporate indifference to necessary safety inspection and repairs.”

The civil lawsuit seeks financial compensation for economic damage to the city, including the costs of emergency response, fire-fighting, environmental cleanup, alleviating harm to public health, and loss of value in city property.

Two days after the protest, in a separate legal case, Chevron agreed to pay \$2 million in fines and restitution after pleading no contest to six misdemeanor criminal charges stemming from last year’s fire at its Richmond refinery.

The penalties resulted from joint charges filed by California state Attorney General Kamala Harris and Contra Costa County District Attorney Mark Peterson.

Chevron attorneys accepted the terms, including 3-1/2 years of probation, \$1.28 million in fines, and more than \$720,000 in restitution payments to three different agencies.

However, Andres Soto, an activist with Communities for a Better Environment, told the Con-

tra Costa Times, “What is curious to me is how the city of Richmond seems to be cut out of any restitution.”

Frank Pitre, partner in the law firm that is suing Chevron on behalf of the city, said, “This is the same company that just last Friday issued a press statement calling Richmond’s (civil) lawsuit merit-less, yet at the same time was negotiating a settlement to resolve criminal charges against them.” He added, “The hypocrisy is astounding.”

In an email blast to supporters of 350.org within days of the Richmond protest, McKibben related his and his wife’s experience in their cross-country tour that included marches, rallies and civil disobedience in pursuit of climate justice and related local issues.

McKibben said, “We saw people - the beautiful face of a movement that’s growing, learning, coming together ... It’s incredibly diverse ... But no matter our differences, everywhere we share an adversary: a fossil fuel industry so focused on greed that they’re willing to rip apart the planet and its communities.



Juan Lopez writes for Peoplesworld.org.

Happy birthday Fidel!

By PW Editorial Board

Last week we celebrated the 87th birthday of Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro Ruz. It is very hard to think of a world leader that has played a comparable role. The contribution he has made to the world socialist movement, to Third World liberation and to social justice has been monumental.

At the current time, the Colombian government and leftist guerrillas are engaged in a peace process in Havana, in large part due to Fidel’s efforts. As Nelson Mandela himself has acknowledged, South Africa is free from apartheid in no small measure due to Fidel’s leadership in militarily aiding the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, especially in Angola and Namibia. The ELAM (Latin American Medical School) in Cuba, which trains doctors from all around the world, but particularly from poor countries, was Fidel’s brainchild. Today, 70 countries from around the world benefit from Cuba’s medical internationalism, including Haiti where Cuban doctors have been at the forefront of the fight against cholera. Again,

this type of internationalism is greatly attributable to the ideas and commitment of Fidel Castro.

According to Hugo Chavez, when he came to power in Venezuela in 1999, “the only light on the house at that time was Cuba,” meaning that Cuba was the only country in the region free of U.S. imperial domination. Thanks to the perseverance of Fidel and the Cuban people, now much of Latin America has been freed from the bonds of the U.S. Empire.

That Cuba not only stands nearly 25 years after the collapse of the USSR, but indeed prospers and remains as a beacon to other countries, is a living testament.

Indeed Castro’s very life at this point - one that the U.S. has tried to extinguish on literally hundreds of occasions - itself constitutes an act of brave deviance against wealth, power and imperialist aggression. We therefore honor Fidel Castro Ruz on his birthday, and hope that he continues to live and to lead for many more years to come.

That Cuba remains a beacon to other countries is a testament to Fidel’s legacy.

Petition demands Detroit emergency manager quit

By John Rummel

Much of Detroit's dysfunction is also due to simple complacency. For a long time the city was dumb, lazy, happy and rich." Those comments made by Kevyn Orr, Detroit's appointed emergency manager, in a recent Wall Street Journal interview have rightfully started a firestorm. An online petition, supported by the Detroit branch of the NAACP, is now calling on Orr to resign.

The Change.org petition says Orr cannot effectively restructure Detroit while showing such "disrespect and vile contempt for the citizens of Detroit," calling his comments "vile and callous."

The petition says Orr's outrageous statement misrepresented Detroit's history and its diverse communities - White, African American, Arab, Jew, Latino, Asian and others, including workers and retirees - with a negative attitude about the many hard working citizens of Detroit.

Orr's comments regarding the city have rendered him "morally unfit to both manage the City of Detroit and represent the Governor of the State in the capacity of Emergency Manager," the petition says. "It is therefore beneficial and unifying for the Citizens of Detroit that you resign from your duties."

Detroit deserves better, many here are saying. The news today that Philadelphia had to borrow



states, cities, and many rural and suburban communities.

Detroit's problems have not happened in a vacuum, "absent an economic crisis," said Detroit NAACP President Reverend Dr. Wendell Anthony in an earlier press release. Auto restructuring resulted in the loss of 90 percent of the city's jobs, he noted.

Anthony said Orr statement clearly demonstrate two different world views of the same condition. The NAACP leader said Orr's comments were "callous, insensitive, disrespectful, stereotypical, and most disdainful of not only the African American citizens in the City of Detroit but in particular thousands of blue collar workers who have given their sweat and blood in building this city."

He added, "Mr. Orr, neither the citizens of Detroit nor its leaders are dumb, lazy, happy with current circumstances and very few, if any, are rich."

Detroit residents are outraged at Orr's statements.

Woman, 92, sues North Carolina for stealing vote

By John Wojcik

Less than an hour after North Carolina's Republican governor Pat McCrory signed the nation's most draconian voter ID measure into law Rosanell Eaton, a 92-year-old African-American who has voted for 70 years sued the state for violating her constitutional rights.

The bill the governor signed requires voters to present a government-issued ID, cuts early voting days -- including the Sunday before Election Day when 80 percent of the African American vote traditionally turns out, ends same-day registration, ends "straight-ticket" party voting, cuts most students off the rolls and gives poll watchers almost unlimited power to challenge voters.

The lawsuit, officially filed by the NAACP, says, "Mrs. Eaton, who was born at home, has a current North Carolina driver's license but the name on her birth certificate does not match the name on her driver's license or the name on her voter registration card. Mrs. Eaton will incur substantial time and expense to correct her identification documents to match the voter registration record in order to meet the new requirements."

North Carolina is the first state to adopt a discriminatory voting law since the Supreme Court struck down the key parts of the Voting Rights Act in June.

By signing the new law, the Republican governor essentially replaced one of the best voting laws in the country with one that is arguably now the worst..

Sierra & Tierra: Echando Sal a la Herida

Por Javier Sierra

Ya llueve sobre mojado en Manchester, el barrio más contaminado de Houston, una de las ciudades más contaminadas del país.

Esta comunidad 90% hispana está literalmente rodeada de instalaciones petroquímicas que emiten al aire al menos ocho sustancias cancerígenas. Los niveles de una de ellas, el benceno, son tan altos que vivir en Manchester equivale a estar atrapado en un atasco de tráfico las 24 horas del día.

Harris County, donde se encuentra Manchester, es el mayor emisor de sustancias cancerígenas industriales en Estados Unidos.

Y por si esta asfijante situación fuera poco, la industria petrolera planea construir en Manchester la terminal del oleoducto Keystone XL, el cual transportaría crudo bituminoso —el más tóxico del planeta— desde Alberta, Canadá, a este barrio hispano.

"Las refinerías de Manchester ya están equipadas para procesar el bitumen", advierte Juan Parras, director ejecutivo del T.E.J.A.S. (Texas Environmental Justice and Advocate Services) un grupo defensor de la justicia medioambiental. "Hemos estado muy activos protestando contra la construcción de este terminal".

Para Yudith Nieto, activista del Tar Sands Blockaders, otro grupo opuesto a la construcción del terminal, el proyecto significa echar sal a una herida especialmente dolorosa.

"El bitumen que transportará el Keystone XL será refinado por instalaciones que ya violan regulaciones medioambientales federales", dice.

"Me opongo al Keystone XL porque trae sufrimiento a todas las personas cercanas a este monstruo".

Pese a que este proyecto de TransCanada Corp. es todavía una propuesta, el transporte de bitumen ya se ha confirmado como algo extremadamente peligroso.

En 2010, un oleoducto que transportaba bitumen reventó cerca de Marshall, Michigan, vertiendo 840,000 galones de crudo al río Kalamazoo, el peor desastre de su tipo en la historia del país. Tres años y \$1,000 millones en costos de limpieza más tarde, todavía quedan cerca de 200,000 galones de crudo en el río. Resulta que el bitumen es muy difícil de limpiar y recuperar porque se hunde y adhiere al fondo de ríos y océanos.

En marzo, otro oleoducto bituminoso propiedad de Exxon Mobil se quebró en Mayflower, Arkansas, causando la evacuación de decenas de residentes que vieron sus calles convertidas en ríos de crudo. Hoy, Mayflower sigue prácticamente desierto y las labores de limpieza continúan.

Además, en Manchester, LyondellBasell, una de las refinerías contratadas para procesar el bitumen del Keystone XL, ya ha sido multada con \$4,700 millones por violaciones de salud pública en varias de sus instalaciones en el país.

"¿Por qué se debe normalizar esta opresión?" se pregunta Yudith. "Si el Presidente Obama tiene intenciones sinceras de combatir el cambio climático, no permitirá que se construya el oleoducto Keystone XL".

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