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A national object lesson: California's air and coast, a buyer's market

By Rev. Jim Conn



While the media distract us with the shinier attractions of the presidential-candidate road shows, the dirty work of politics continues in the shadows. I do not mean to diminish the importance of who gets elected or even nominated, but the secret and behind-the-scenes work often makes for decisions that change public policy in favor of the rich and powerful. Those shifts have an impact on our lives in a big way, as two recent examples in California illustrate.

Most recently, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) upended its mission to clean our air. First, the old Democratic majority opposed its staff's recommendation for tougher rules that would govern the fossil-fuel industry. Then two months later, and with an even more pro-business Republican majority, the board went into closed session and fired its long-time executive officer. Praised by environmentalists, even though they often disagreed with him, he had faithfully pursued the AQMD's goals while balancing the impact on industry. That was, apparently, not good enough for the fossil-fuel lobby.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the looser rules benefiting oil companies that the AQMD adopted came from a two-page memo written by

the Western States Petroleum Association and other business groups. The new plan postpones the installation of expensive air cleaning devices and other efforts to control emissions.

In a parallel move, a few weeks earlier the California Coastal Commission fired its long-time executive director.

The Coastal Commission signaled its intention to terminate its director when it approved a controversial ridge-line development project in

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Malibu proposed by The Edge, the U2 guitarist. During the whole escapade, our "environmental governor" had no comment. Since he and the legislature appoint all the board's members, we can imagine that somebody knew what was up. How did this happen in this environmentally

Corruption taints democracy and, in these instances, hurts our environment and people.

conscious state? These decisions came thanks to political manipulation in the shadows.

The AQMD's governing board is chosen by state officials and governments of the district's four member counties. Last year Orange County leaders voted to dump their long-time representative and replace him with a Republican councilman who was outspokenly pro-business and anti-regulation. About the same time, cities in the Inland Empire decided to do the same. They dropped a clean air advocate in favor of the Republican mayor of Highland, who worries more about regulatory impacts on the economy than the air his constituents breathe. Suddenly, the board had a new majority, one that supported fossil fuels over clean air.

In a democracy, lobbyists should have access to decision-makers to present their case. Corruption occurs because these interests hold more wealth than most local elected officials have ever seen. It happens because a few perks - a round of golf at an elite country club, a small donation to a reelection campaign or a trip somewhere - feel good. It's harder to say no when you've been

schmoozed like that.

While not illegal, the kind of influence-peddling that occurs at the Coastal Commission and the AQMD takes place in the shadows, offstage where no one sees it. As Jungian psychologists teach, when the shadow side of the psyche remains unknown and unexplored, the bad behavior pokes up in unexpected places. When it happens in the political realm, it taints democracy and, in these instances, hurts our environment and people.

The shadows fall because the glare of media light focuses on the big newsmakers, like presidential candidates. Too often, the small actions sneaking around the edges get ignored. By the time we learn about it - if we learn about it at all - the change has happened and the damage has been done. That's why people, neighborhoods and advocates must constantly shine a light into the dark recesses of our public life. That's why the struggle for justice never ends.



Rev. Jim Conn is minister of Ocean Park Church.

African American history event recalls even King had doubts at times

By Joelle Fishman

Struggle, it never stops. It moves on. We make progress but we have to keep on fighting." declared Jarvis Tyner, chair of the New York Communist Party to a standing ovation in the packed auditorium at Troup School during the 42nd Annual People's World African American History Month Celebration.

Emphasizing the necessity for all-out unity to make sure Donald Trump does not become president, Tyner's impassioned remarks placed the 2016 elections in the context of the on-going African American freedom struggle from slavery to reconstruction, to the Civil Rights movement and the election of President Barack Obama.

Recalling how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began to doubt himself after his house was bombed during the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott in 1955, Tyner said that it was the people that inspired Dr. King to keep fighting. He concluded, "Leaders are wonderful but it's really the people that are the greatest leaders we have. The people

will lead the way."

Addressing the still pervasive structural racism in this country, Tyner singled out the water crisis in Flint, Michigan saying, "They can kill you with a gun and they can kill you with chemicals." He said the crisis goes beyond Flint and that "90 percent of coal refineries are near Black and Latino neighborhoods."

Pointing out that Republican presidential candidates deny climate change because of their ties to the fossil fuel industry, Tyner emphasized, "If the voters are inspired and mobilized, the right-wing extremists can't win!"

The winners of the People's World African American History Month High School Arts and Writing Competition read their poems and displayed their artwork centered around the question, "What Lessons from the Reconstruction Era for 2016?"

The events gave voice to the outrage at institutionalized racism, and offered hope and inspiration. "We've got to win this one and hand our children a beautiful future," concluded Tyner.

If the voters are inspired and mobilized, the right-wing extremists can't win!

Nabisco worker fears her middle class life will slip away



By Patrick Foote

Barb Cimbalista has been working at the Nabisco plant at 73rd and Kedzie for 32 years. Since Nabisco’s parent company Mondelez announced plans to lay off half of their workers last summer, her middle-class life is no longer a sure thing.

“I’m too young to retire, I can’t get Medicare, I can’t get Social Security. Nabisco is claiming that they’re not going to close up all the way,” she told the People’s World last week. She is hopeful that, unlike many of her coworkers, her seniority will allow her to hold onto her job. Given her experience with Mondelez, however, she has reason to be skeptical.

In 32 years, Cimbalista has seen the Nabisco Company change hands several times, but when Kraft’s snacks division changed its name to Mondelez in 2012 and spun off from Kraft’s grocery division, things changed for her and her co-workers.

Cimbalista characterized her working life at the plant as having turned into a dictatorship. Write-ups and firings increased.

Nothing, it seems, included the preservation of good middle-class jobs.

“So next Wednesday is the last day for 277 workers.”

The next round of layoffs is expected this sum-

mer. Workers with eight years or fewer seniority will see their livelihoods up-ended.

“They kept telling us ‘We’ll give you state of the art lines if you give us \$46 million in concessions’, from our wages and benefits. We said ‘hell no’. That would have put us at about \$10 an hour and I’m sure they wanted the insurance and the pensions too.”

The Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM), Local 300, represents workers at Nabisco plants across the country. They have begun a campaign to stop Nabisco from shipping the production of Oreos and other beloved snack foods to Mexico.

The petition on the union website (www.fightfor-americanjobs.org) reads, “As people of faith, conscience and social unity we call upon Mondelez/Nabisco to reverse its decision to send production to Mexico and keep these middle class jobs in Chicago.”

Last Wednesday, Cook County passed a resolution proposed by former mayoral candidate Jesus “Chuy” Garcia calling on Nabisco and its parent company Mondelez International to “continue its relationship with the south side of Chicago.”

The resolution cited the \$29 million in tax savings the state of Illinois has granted Nabisco in the past.

Next week, the city of Chicago will take up a similar resolution.

We made money for this company and this is the thanks we get.

Cubans look to U.S. example to fix racism? Not so fast

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

In his March 24 report on racial discrimination in Cuba, New York Times reporter Damien Cave suggests the visit of an African-descended U.S. president to the island could help end silence on an issue which persists, he claims, despite Cuba's pretensions of equality.

The reporter heard from a black academician in the United States who complained that Cuban leaders meeting with the President and audiences who heard him "were nearly all white," as were Cuban - Americans accompanying Obama to Cuba.

Cave cites the Afro-Cuban economist and author Esteban Morales, a lead authority in Cuba on race relations, who indicated that as of 2007 Cuban political leaders were 70 percent white and that "most scientists, technicians and university professors ... were white." From interviews, Cave learned that blacks were underrepresented in Cuba's tourism industry and as owners of new small businesses in Cuba.

Obama "urged Cubans to respect the power of protest to bring about equality," according to Cave. The president's "comments, and sincerity, instilled in many Cubans a new hope and offered a knowing vote of confidence."

He makes sure to note: "Some Afro-Cubans, like the hip-hop artist known as Soandry, linked the president [Obama] to 'what can be achieved in a capitalist system.'"

Thus, the New York Times returns to instinctive behavior. The remarkable phenomena of a U.S. African-descended president and a U.S. presidential visit to Cuba end up as context for casting Cuban socialism in a bad light.

EPA toma pasos para proteger a los trabajadores

EPA

La Agencia de Protección Ambiental de EE.UU. (EPA, por sus siglas en inglés) está proponiendo tomar pasos para poner fin a los envenenamientos ocasionados por la ingestión accidental del herbicida paraquat, los cuales también pueden ocasionar daños severos o la muerte por exposición en la piel y en los ojos.

"Estamos tomando pasos firmes para prevenir que la gente accidentalmente beba el paraquat y para asegurar que estas muertes trágicas se conviertan en algo del pasado", declaró Jim Jones, administrador adjunto de la Oficina de Seguridad Química y Prevención de la Contaminación. Jones añadió, "también estamos implementando medidas de seguridad para prevenir las lesiones a los trabajadores por motivo de exposición a este pesticida".

Desde el 2000, ha habido 17 muertes, incluyendo tres niños, ocasionados por la ingestión accidental del paraquat. Estos casos fueron resultado del hecho de que personas transfirieron el pesticida ilegalmente a envases de bebidas y luego erróneamente los mismos fueron identificados como refrescos y consumidos. Un simple trago puede ser fatal. Para prevenir estas tragedias, la EPA está proponiendo:

- Un nuevo sistema cerrado de envases está diseñado para imposibilitar la transferencia o remoción del plaguicida excepto de manera directa al equipo de aplicación apropiado.
- Capacitación especial para aplicadores certificados que usan paraquat para enfatizar que la sustancia química no debe ser transferida ni

almacenada a contenedores inadecuados; y

- Cambios en la etiqueta del plaguicida y materiales de advertencia que destacan la toxicidad y los riesgos asociados con el paraquat.

Además de las muertes por ingestión accidental, desde el 2000 ha habido tres muertes y muchas lesiones severas ocasionadas por el plaguicida por contacto directo en la piel o en los ojos de aquellos que trabajaban con el herbicida. Para reducir la exposición de los trabajadores que mezclan, cargan o aplican paraquat, la EPA está proponiendo

- Prohibir la aplicación de equipo transportado a la mano o en mochila, y

- Restringir el uso solamente a aplicadores de plaguicidas certificados (individuos que trabajan bajo la supervisión de un aplicador certificado estarían prohibidos de usar el paraquat).

El paraquat es uno de los herbicidas de más amplio uso en Estados Unidos para controlar las malas hierbas o maleza en muchos entornos agrícolas y no agrícolas y también es utilizado como un defoliante en cultivos como el algodón con anterioridad a la cosecha.

Las acciones sobre plaguicidas específicos son otra manera en la cual la EPA protege a los trabajadores de la exposición a pesticidas. El Estándar de la EPA para la Protección de los Trabajadores Agrícolas y la propuesta Norma de Certificación y Capacitación también protegerán a los trabajadores agrícolas y aplicadores de plaguicidas.

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