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Florida's wildlife and environment endangered by the governor

By Joshua Leclair

Since his first year as governor, Republican Rick Scott's environmental track record has been a natural disaster.

The state of Florida, under Democratic and Republican Governors, has had a steady five-decade accumulation of positive environmental policy and enforcement (not without hiccups) that has led to the purchase of millions of acres of natural preserves, protecting the Everglades and many waterway clean-up projects. Now, under Gov. Scott's tenure, that progress has halted and even deteriorated.

Since taking office, Scott has watered down environmental protection law, cut funding for conservation and clean water, appointed development/energy industry friendly department heads, ordered Department of Environmental Protection and other state workers to not acknowledge climate change and laid off DEP investigators, and all while championing himself as an environmentalist at election time.

The governor's investment in the French energy company Schlumberger is in the six-figures. At the same time, it is Gov. Scott and his Cabinet that oversee the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and are tasked to regulate oil drilling in Florida. This is obviously a conflict of interest if the governor has investments in



businesses that should be regulated by DEP and other state agencies.”

In a report released this July by the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), statistics show an 85 percent drop in environmental enforcement. According to the PEER report, “Scott’s tenure has coincided with a dramatic drop in enforcement for every pollutant type - air, water, waste, etc. - and in every one of the five Department of Environmental Protection

T H I S W E E K :

- Florida's governor endangers wildlife and environment
- Federal judge upholds NLRB union election rules
- The importance of “Jimmie Higgins” work underlined
- Puerto Rico, la colonia económica de EE.UU.
- The story behind little Elizabeth's Nazi salute

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districts across the state.” The PEER report continued, stating:

- In 2014, there were 234 enforcement cases opened, whereas in 2010, the year before Scott, there were 1,587.
- Of those 234 cases opened, DEP assessed

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penalties in only 144 - a rate of 62 percent. Four years earlier, penalties were assessed in 1,318 of 1587 cases opened - a rate of 83 percent.

- Although there was a miniscule increase in the number of assessments in 2014 from a year earlier, the dollar value of assessments still declined from the disastrous 2013 levels. And in terms of money actually collected, total collections reached an all-time low.

Jerry Phillips, the Florida PEER director and a former DEP enforcement attorney, recently stated that, "environmental enforcement in Florida now resembles that of a corrupt third world nation. Consequently, little is being done to clean up our air and our water, while Scott's administration continues to hand out what amounts to welfare for corporations across the state."

Not only has Scott stacked the DEP with pro-industry and development appointees, but, according to Mark Ferrulo of Progress Florida, "Gov. Scott, his administration, and his allies in the legislature have declared war on wildlife." Ferrulo continued saying that in 2012 the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission removed the Flori-

da black bear from the threatened species list and "despite substantial public outcry and no scientific evidence is needed, the Wildlife Commission (packed with Gov. Scott's appointees) approved a hunt on Florida black bears."

Ferrulo went on to say that the Wildlife Commission this June made it clear that the vulnerable Florida panther is next. And now Gov. Scott's supposed wildlife protection agency is "looking to persuade the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to delist the Florida panther from the endangered species list and take over management of the panther population."

Floridians have three more years of Scott's horrid environmental policies to look forward to. Hopefully public outcry will begin to be heard by the governor and his cabinet before more damage can be done to our state's fragile ecosystem.



Joshua Leclair is a public sector union organizer.

Federal judge upholds NLRB union election rules

By Mark Gruenberg

A federal district judge in D.C. has upheld the National Labor Relations Board's new union election rules, tossing out big business lobbies' challenges to them. So has another in West Texas, dismissing a complaint from anti-union contractors.

In her July 30 decision, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson dismissed and denounced the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's case against the NLRB. Chamber allies included the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Retail Federation - whose members employ millions of the most-exploited workers in the U.S.

Judge Jackson said the Chamber and its acolytes used selective quotes for their complaint, and that it didn't add constitutionally. The Texas challenge came from the Associated Builders and Contractors, another anti-worker lobby.

AFL-CIO Counsel Lynn Rhinehart cheered the ruling. When the board issued the rules late last year, over business screams, federation President Richard Trumka applauded them, even

though they do not eliminate all the delays, denials and labor law-breaking business engages in during organizing drives.

But the rules helped reduce the time available to businesses and their right wing allies and union-busting "consultants" and law firms to illegally intimidate, spy on, harass and fire workers for exercising their rights. The rules also consolidated all challenges to voters and election units into one post-election hearing, when needed.

"So far every judge to consider a challenge to the rules has rejected the challenge and found the rules are legal and within the NLRB's authority," Rhinehart e-mailed Press Associates during the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting in nearby Silver Spring, Md.

The chamber and its allies "mount a broad attack on the rule as a whole, claiming it 'makes sweeping changes to the election process' and that it 'sharply curtails' employers' statutory, due process, and constitutional rights," Judge Jackson wrote.

U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson dismissed and denounced the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's case against the NLRB.

The importance of “Jimmie Higgins” work underlined

By Nicholas James

Not long ago, a good friend and fellow organizer made the statement, “Sadly, most people that align themselves with the movement are not interested in doing the Jimmie Higgins work.”

“What in the hell is Jimmie Higgins work,” I asked? He replied, “You know, the unromantic side of organizing.”

I did some research and found an obscure book by Upton Sinclair from 1919 titled “Jimmie Higgins.” Comrade Jimmie Higgins, the protagonist, is a member of the Socialist party. He works various working-class jobs, struggling to keep his family out of poverty. He understands the value of effort, especially the seemingly mundane.

Each chapter is nothing short of a parable on organizing, complete with parabolic titles like Jimmie Higgins Debates the Issue or Jimmie Higgins Faces the War.

For example, Sinclair writes, “He was not one of the speakers, of course - he would have been terrified at the idea of making a speech; but he was one of those whose labor made the speaking possible, and who reaped the harvest for the movement.”

Jimmie Higgins is a riveting window to a time in history - during World War I - when sadly nationalist sentiments divided the world’s socialist movement. It also paints an accurate description of labor

organizing before the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

As much as I enjoyed Sinclair’s book, within lies a truth abandoned by the socialist movement during the New Left years of the 1960s: that ‘Jimmie Higgins work’ is what truly wins victories in the struggle for democracy, equality, peace, jobs and socialism. No one likes phone banking or signature gathering or door knocking.

However, these tedious, non-romantic, mundane endeavors are the bedrock of building a movement. When we are young in the movement, many of us have starry-eyed dreams of addressing throngs of factory workers or entertain visions of sailors in study groups reading pamphlets, etc.

Michael Parenti, in his book “Black Shirts and Reds,” declares one of the most difficult struggles of Communist Parties in Eastern Europe was “convincing the next generation of workers that pushing a button in a factory was winning the revolution.”

However, in “Jimmie Higgins,” Sinclair makes an excellent case about how important allegorical button-pushing is to the overall movement.

The value of “Jimmie Higgins” rests not in the plot. Rather, it can act as a guide for activists - those who struggle to continue, who do the arduous thankless tasks that make our movement possible.

Jimmie Higgins work is what truly wins victories in the struggle for democracy, equality, peace, jobs and socialism.

The story behind little Elizabeth's Nazi salute

By Will Stone

The Queen was urged July 20 to make a personal statement regarding leaked footage showing her at aged six or seven performing a Nazi salute with her mother and her uncle Prince Edward (later King Edward VIII, who abdicated in 1936). The grainy footage shows the Queen as she played alongside her younger sister, Princess Margaret, then three years old.

Republic, which campaigns for a democratic alternative to the monarchy, said the palace should stop dodging responsibility. Chief executive officer Graham Smith told the Star: "Rather than playing the victim the Queen should make a personal statement to explain herself about the contents of the video. The footage is clearly in the public interest. It's a public record about our head of state and the public has every right to see it." Conservative John Whittingdale, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, said he understands why the palace is upset by the publication, but defended the right of the press to make editorial judgments.

It is understood that depending on the outcome of the investigation, the palace will be looking at issues of copyright and possible criminality. A Palace spokesman said: "It is disappointing that film, shot eight decades ago and apparently from Her Majesty's personal family archive, has been obtained and exploited in this manner."

Puerto Rico, la colonia económica de EE.UU.

TeleSur

Puerto Rico cuenta con un régimen político de Estado Libre Asociado con EE.UU. Llegando a ser una colonia de los EE. UU., aunque le llamen, desde 1952, "Estado Libre Asociado". Es un territorio con un autogobierno limitado que posee una constitución para el manejo de sus asuntos internos pero, Washington decide todo lo relacionado a su sistema financiero, las relaciones exteriores, la migración y el comercio.

Puerto Rico no puede hacer tratados comerciales con ningún país ni recibir en sus puertos barcos con otras banderas. Los puertorriqueños son ciudadanos estadounidenses y su moneda es el dólar. En la isla viven 3 millones 725 mil 789 ciudadanos (Censo 2010) mientras que en Estados Unidos viven 4 millones 623 mil 716 puertorriqueños. El Estado Libre Asociado está, en palabras de su gobernador Alejandro García Padilla, al borde del default, en la quiebra financiera, con una deuda que supera los 73 mil millones de dólares, tras "ocho años de crecimiento económico negativo".

Para los analistas financieros el país tendría que implementar las acostumbradas medidas neoliberales y reestructurar su deuda pública, disminuir la nómina estatal, reducir subsidios y gastos en electricidad y transporte y privatizar empresas públicas. Sin embargo, estas medidas no contemplan en ninguna parte que el Gobierno estadounidense permita la inyección de liquidez ni proteja su estructura financiera.

El analista internacional y miembro del Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales de PR, Dr. Lajos León Borjas, afirma que la alta competitividad de los comercios estadounidenses no dejan emerger a los locales puertorriqueños que representan las fuentes generadoras de ingresos.

"Puerto Rico es una colonia económica de Estados Unidos, los principales negocios de todo tipo son norteamericanos, los de puertorriqueños han cerrado por no poder competir con los negocios del norte como las Farmacias Walgreens, Tiendas Home Depot, Mc Donalds, en resumen,

Puerto Rico está colonizado por productos norteamericanos y ésta es una de las razones por las cuales a Estados Unidos no le conviene la independencia de la isla porque reduciría la posición privilegiada de sus compañías", señaló.

Esta deuda -consecuencia del mal uso de fondos, corrupción o el retiro de beneficios económicos que antes generaban riquezas y que ayudaban a mantener el presupuesto de la isla- ha generado una recesión, y todo esto ha ocurrido bajo la vigilancia de Washington. Así que el gran responsable de la deuda de Puerto Rico es la nación del norte -después de los malos gobiernos puertorriqueños-, por haber permitido que la isla perdiera fuentes de riqueza y no supervisar su endeudamiento, asevera León Borjas.

Sumido en este escenario, Puerto Rico no puede asumir decisiones soberanas que solucionen su crisis económica y social actual ni optar a los fondos de rescate. Por ello, el monto "impagable" de su deuda será cada vez mayor.

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