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 deliberately 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 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-
tion with the August 6, 2012, fire after negoti-
tations between the city and Chevron fell through.

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

The civil lawsuit seeks financial compensa-
tion 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 le-
gal 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, in-
cluding 3-1/2 years of probation, $1.28 million in
fines, and more than $720,000 in restitution pay-
ments to three different agencies.

However, Andres Soto, an activist with Com-
munities 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 su-
ing 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 experi-
ence 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 beau-
tiful face of a movement that’s growing, learn-
ing, coming together ... It’s incredibly diverse ...
But no matter our differences, everywhere we
share an adversary: a fossil fuel industry so fo-
cused 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

L
ast week we celebrated the 87th birth-
day of Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel
Castro Ruz. It is very hard to think of a
world leader that has played a compa-
rable role. The contribution he has made to the
world socialist movement, to Third World libera-
tion and to social justice has been monumental.

At the current time, the Colombian govern-
ment and leftist guerillas are engaged in a peace
process in Havana, in large part due to Fidel’s
efforts. As Nelson Mandela himself has acknowl-
dged, South Africa is free from apartheid in no
small measure due to Fidel’s leadership in military-
ly aiding the liberation struggles in Southern Af-
rica, especially in Angola and Namibia. The ELAM
(Latin American Medical School) in Cuba, which
trains doctors from all around the world, but par-
icularly from poor countries, was Fidel’s brain-
child. Today, 70 countries from around the world
benefit from Cuba’s medical internationalism, in-
cluding Haiti where Cuban doctors have been at
the forefront of the fight against cholera. Again,
this type of internationalism is greatly attribut-
able 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. im-
perial 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 af-
fter 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 deviation against wealth, power and imperi-
alist 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.

The potential for
people-to-people
solidarity was in
dramatic display.

www.peoplesworld.org
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.
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 asfixiante 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 oponente 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 traer 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.”