

“...to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment...”

EJ TIMES

The Environmental Justice Newsletter from Sierra Club
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Welcome Once Again!

As the year rolls to its end, we are pleased to have completed this fourth issue of EJ Times. We're excited about communicating with our readers on a wide scope of EJ issues: that's one of the ways in which we can honor our mission and contribute to important discussions within the Club.

The Committee has accomplished several items of note in recent months. We provided input to the Grazing Policy revision, and are pleased to report that EJ language has been incorporated into the final policy. This is the first time such explicit EJ language has been a part of Club policy. We are proud of the Club for supporting this effort. We also provided feedback to the Environmental Protection Agency regarding their dismal guidance to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in permitting decisions. Additionally, we continue to support the work of the EJ Organizers and their partner communities and we are in frequent communication. It is our hope to be able to bring you, on a regular basis, updates on their efforts and insights. Finally, late in January we will be sending a broadcast call to Club members as we seek to fill a vacancy on the Committee. Please keep your eyes open for this announcement, and encourage anyone with a strong interest in promoting EJ within the Club and the environmental movement in general to apply.

In our next issue we'll take a look at touring - in a different light. From "Toxic Tours" to "Tour de Sprawl", these events increase awareness, mobilize activists, and bring a sense of reality and urgency to their issues like no meeting or slide show can.

In this issue, we begin to explore the reinvigorated relationship between labor and environmental groups, linking together labor rights, environmental protection and democratic values. That renewal was highlighted in the past several months by the unity shown in the streets of Seattle and Washington DC. There, thousands of union members and environmentalists marched side by side, in joint and vigorous denunciation of the role of WTO, the World Bank and the IMF as lackeys to multinational corporations and accomplices in their exploitation of workers and the environment. Alongside these successful and very visible events, there have been many smaller scale instances of solidarity between union folks and enviros which provide evidence to the accomplishments and even more so the possibilities of a blue-green alliance.

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Seattle's Legacy

By Carl Pope, Executive Director of the Sierra Club

Standing under the Sierra Club's banner that soggy Tuesday already a year ago in Seattle amidst Teamsters, Steelworkers, and Farmworkers, Joan Holtz, a Sierra Club volunteer leader from Los Angeles turned to Dan Seligman, the Club's trade director.

"This is the happiest day of my life," Joan said, "except for my wedding day. I've never been with so many people who think and feel just like I do." As the commercial used to say, we've come a long way baby.

The Seattle Summit was more than a major defeat for the corporate free trade agenda. And it was more than a good old-fashioned, throat-clearing demonstration. It was also a celebration of the brother- and sister-hood of the diverse people who recognized a common bond in their fight against a corporate free trade agenda poised to rain ruin on our most deeply held values.

Economists love to talk about the "invisible hand" - the "magic" power of free markets to increase the wealth of nations. In Seattle, citizens tore away the curtains hiding the "invisible hand" - the corporations who think they have the power and the right to define the rules of our global economy. In Seattle, we the people showed the corporate bosses that they don't have the right to define the rules - and they sure as hell don't have the power - if we stand together.

The pundits say that this extraordinary alliance of environmentalists, trade unionists, and family farmer is a passing fad. That it has no staying power. We can't underestimate the pitfalls in our road ahead. We have been divided before. Yet take a look at all that binds us.

(cont'd. next page)

(Welcome, from p.1)

It's important to recognize that the alliance needs nurturing - it's still frail. Some of the issues on which agreement needs to be reached have thorny implications. For example, many trade unionists worry that environmental protections will cost jobs. Even if the total number and quality of jobs may in fact increase, as several economists argue, some jobs will in fact end as a result of environmental regulations. Thus, one indispensable ingredient of any environmental action which affects jobs should be to make workers "whole", or in blue-green parlance, to provide for "just transition." As pointed out by David Moberg "the real problem is not environmental policies but corporate irresponsibility and the failure of public policy in the U.S. to provide income security for all displaced workers."

Until next time,
Lydia Fischer

First, we are united by our love for democracy. The power of environmentalists, trade unionists, and family farmers all rests in the power of organized people. The power of corporations rests in the power of money to influence the small handful at the top. Our alliance will stick together because our individual movements believe in, in fact depend on, democracy. If we do not stick together, democracy itself may die. And that would suit the corporate elites just fine.

Second, we are united by our common love of community, family and place. If that sounds simplistic, just think for a second what drives each of us: the environmentalist fights to save the forest over the next ridge - his children's natural heritage. The Steelworker fights to save her jobs from moving to Mexico - and her neighborhood from disintegrating if the mill moves south. The family farmer fights to save the land that feeds his kids and has rooted his family for generations.

Though our different movements may start with a different sense of community, we all love community in our own way. And we increasingly know how vulnerable our communities have become in the face of cutthroat corporate globalization.

Third, unity is its own reward; it reveals a common humanity. The autoworker who hunts or fishes on the weekend may know the value of the woods as well as any Sierra Clubber. And the Sierra Clubber who goes to work on Monday morning has first hand knowledge of how we all are "working harder for less." It's not that hard to look past the stereotypes to see a fellow citizen.

Fourth, unity is a winning strategy. By themselves, labor, farmers, and greens would have no chance at all to bring their democratic values to the global economy. None. Together, we have achieved what all the pundits said could not be done. We beat Fast Track trade negotiating authority in 1997 and 1998. We stopped the expansion of NAFTA. And, together, in Seattle, we stood the World Trade Organization on its ear. Together, we have to the power to hold globalization hostage to equity. Alone, we are nothing.

So what's next? As wonderful as Seattle was, our alliance is only at the beginning of a long struggle.

We must continue to build our movement toward the American mainstream. Poll after poll shows that most Americans support trade - and even support the WTO. Fortunately, our fellow citizens also want trade treaties to protect the environment and working people. To continue winning, we must do a better job explaining that we are not against trade, but that we are for trade that is clean, green and fair.

We must build momentum behind a campaign to "fix or nix" the WTO. Right now, WTO rules are being used to undermine legitimate environmental health and safety standards in the name of free trade. WTO rules give new property rights to corporations, but do nothing to guarantee human, labor or environmental rights. We must forge a common agenda to fix the WTO; and if the world's leaders will not listen, then we must be prepared to "nix" the WTO.

Lastly, to bring basic ethics to the cutthroat global economy, let's export American justice along with our capital and our products. The United States government should require the foreign operations of U.S. companies to guarantee a basic "right to know" for their workers and the surrounding communities. These foreign operations should be required by law to share with communities the same "toxic release" data that they provide here in the United States. These companies should also inform their workers of their obligation to respect core labor standards and human rights. If a company does not fulfill these commitments, foreign workers and communities should then be able to sue the company for compensation in the U.S. courts.

Some day your grandchildren might ask, "Tell me about Seattle?" If we stick together, you will be able to explain how Seattle launched the movement that tamed the raging global economy for the planet and its people.

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**FIGHT IN THE FIELDS:
A growing coalition that includes environmental
and labor activists fights for justice
in North Carolina.**

By Steve Steele

The skeletal human remains found under the pecan tree had been gnawed by field animals, leaving them barely recognizable. So little was left of the body that a full autopsy was impossible. The coroner was unable to determine an official cause of death. Only the scraps of clothing and distinctive sandals found nearby identified the unfortunate victim, standing witness to the ignominious end of Raymundo Hernandez.

Raymundo was a migrant farmworker from the mountains of Mexico, brought to the fields of North Carolina through the U.S. Dept. of Labor “H2A Guestworker” program administered in the state by the North Carolina Growers’ Association. This gave him some job guarantees but few options. And according to sworn affidavits from two of his fellow workers, Raymundo had fallen ill after being directly exposed to pesticides sprayed in tobacco fields he was working. The last they saw of him was when the grower loaded him into the bed of his truck, nauseous and noticeably disoriented, and drove off.

The plight and ultimate tragedy of Raymundo



photo courtesy of FLOC

Hernandez is only an extreme example of the deplorable working conditions suffered all too frequently by migrant farmworkers. The EPA estimates that pesticide exposure causes as many as 300,000 illnesses and 1,000 deaths each year (Rothenberg 50; Smith-Nonini 13). And chronic effects may be the worst and most intractable. Many pesticides are stored in the body’s fat tissue and thus build up over years of exposure. This long-term exposure is associated with liver and kidney problems, nervous system disorders, leukemia, and other life-threatening diseases. There are federal regulations governing pesticide application and controlling the waiting period after application before workers may enter fields. But according to *With These Hands* by researcher Daniel Rothenberg, “the enforcement of existing pesticide application laws is sporadic, fines against employers are rare, and few workers are aware of the grave dangers presented by exposure to these chemicals (50).” The end result is that the average life expectancy for migrant farmworkers is 25 years lower than the average American’s.

Conditions in North Carolina provide a case in point. Twenty-six thousand North Carolina growers are certified to apply “restricted-use” pesticides. In 1999 there were seven inspectors, none of whom were bilingual, to inspect those farms. According to the report “Uprooting Injustice” by researcher Sandy Smith-Nonini, at the current inspection rate “it will take 43 years for state inspectors to visit all North Carolina growers certified as pesticide users (15).” A relatively new program of the North Carolina Department of Labor promising 24-hour response to complaints of exposure resulted in “198 complaints with 61 write-ups for non-compliance and 41 fines” in 1996. But the average fine was \$371. In fact, “while commercial users and homeowners face a maximum fine of \$5000” for

pesticide misuse, North Carolina growers, “who wield far more clout in the legislature (15),” can only be fined a maximum of \$500.

And few complaints come from farmworkers themselves, those most directly at risk from pesticide misuse. A Pacifica News report by David Potorti from August 2000 noted that farmworkers “may legitimately fear reprisal (2),” especially those working under the auspices of the H2A program (HRW 147). This federal program offers guarantees like inspected housing, but also ties migrant workers to a specific grower, making them less likely to speak out since they have only one option: submit or go home. This helps control labor costs and thus is popular among growers. Indeed, there are over 10,000 H2A workers in North Carolina, making it #1 in the U.S. in H2A population (HRW 148). North Carolina Commissioner of Labor Harry Payne admits that these workers avoid making complaints because they fear they won’t get hired the following year. This is a real fear in North Carolina, where only one institution (the Growers’ Association) administers the program providing H2A workers to growers (Potorti 2). An additional factor is that many other workers are undocumented, causing them to fear deportation and thus endure rather than call attention to substandard conditions.

These facts culminate in an overall system of oppression and exploitation that inevitably produces stories like that of Raymundo Hernandez. Farmworkers who work the land have little say over the management and use of that land. Even worse, the growers themselves may relinquish many land use decisions, including pesticide use, to contracts with food processing corporations who purchase their crop. These contracts often dictate “favored agricultural practices (Smith-Nonini 19)” and give the companies enormous economic leverage dictating grower decisions. Yet these same corporations typically disavow any responsibility for the horrid conditions that end in gradual or sudden farmworker tragedies.

People of conscience have come to understand that the current system controlling agricultural practice in places like North Carolina is inherently flawed. Government agencies are overworked and under-

staffed, there are strong incentives and too many opportunities to break regulations, growers are economically strapped and large corporations refuse responsibility, while farmworkers themselves are disempowered to make change. This systemic flaw is an issue of economic and environmental justice, as the corporations who ultimately dictate and benefit from deplorable and tragic conditions distance themselves from those who bear the risks of those conditions.

But an effective strategy to confront and change that system has been forged by the Farm labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), AFL-CIO in coalition with concerned supporters, including environmental justice advocates, from across the United States. FLOC is an organization of current and former farmworkers formed in the late 1960’s to improve farmworker conditions. FLOC’s earliest strategy was to strike individual growers. But by the 1970’s FLOC recognized the systemic nature of the problem and decided to fight to rearrange the economic priorities by targeting large food processing corporations. A boycott against Campbell Soup in the 1980’s resulted in the first multi-party labor contract, covering workers, growers, and the corporation. The contract guarantees corporate endorsement and investment in needed improvements and grievance procedures whereby workers can report problems without fear of reprisal.

Now FLOC is organizing migrant farmworkers in North Carolina. The current focus is on the largest pickle company in the South, Mt. Olive Pickle Co. The majority of H2A workers in North Carolina pick cucumbers for Mt. Olive (HRW 151). President Bill Bryan argues that growers employ the farmworkers and are therefore responsible for their conditions. FLOC President Baldemar Velasquez counters that it will take “an infusion of money” to improve conditions, and the only available source of that money is “the deep pockets of industry (Potorti 2).” He concludes that “a formula has to be created” whereby money from Mt. Olive Pickles serves directly to improve conditions for farmworkers (3). Bill Bryan disagrees, so FLOC called a national boycott of Mt. Olive Pickles in March 1999.

(cont’d next page)

Advocates of environmental justice have been in the forefront of support for FLOC's fight. For example, the group Ohio Citizen Action endorsed the boycott early on and has been active in FLOC's campaign. Northwest Ohio OCA Director Sarah Ogdahl believes that "[t]he fight for farmworkers' rights is pinnacle to Citizen Action's battle to eliminate harmful herbicides and pesticides from the environ-



photo courtesy of FLOC

ment. Farm laborers are at the greatest risk of overexposure to these dangerous chemicals. As long as corporations like Mt. Olive continue to benefit from the exploitation of human beings, environmental degradation will continue as well." And labor support has also been strong. The FLOC campaign has implications for globalization because the Mt. Olive Pickle Co. buys cucumbers from Third World growers in addition to those in North Carolina, causing downward pressure on wages and other conditions for workers. It is also a fight for the rights of undocumented workers, for corporate accountability, and for human rights and dignity, all of which are important to the working class. Bringing the environmental justice issues of the campaign into this mix helps focus labor issues for environmentalists and emphasize the importance of environmental integrity for labor organizers to the benefit of each. More importantly, this dynamic milieu of issues in one campaign serves to illustrate the interconnections within a system of oppression, with a variety of types of exploitation accruing benefits to one corporate player. Such is typically the nature of environmental justice struggles.

The "Blue-Green" connection in the FLOC boycott fight thus provides a good model for galvanizing labor and environmental activists, together with religious and community organizations. And with ultimate success it will end the system that produced the horrific end of Raymundo Hernandez.

For more information on the FLOC boycott check <<http://www.floc.com>>. To get involved in the FLOC struggle, contact: FLOC, 1221 Broadway, Toledo OH 43609, or call (419) 243-3456 or email <info@floc.com>.

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Steve Steele is National Communications Director and Boycott Organizer for FLOC. He develops and implements strategies for expanding the Mt. Olive Boycott nationwide and uses print and graphic communications as well as press and media contacts to further the missions and campaigns of FLOC.

Coalition Action in the Era of Corporate Globalization: The Case of Breed Technologies' Maquila Plants in Mexico

By Lydia Fischer, National E.J. Committee

Maquiladoras - the wrong type of economic development

Maquiladoras — foreign-owned assembly plants mostly clustered along the US-Mexico border — were established in Mexico over 30 years ago. They are another manifestation of the global trend which has multinational corporations, mainly U.S.-based, running to areas with an abundant supply of low-wage labor and weak government regulatory pressure, while leaving closed plants, jobless workers and limping communities behind. Maquilas spring from a bilateral tariff regime which allows businesses to import into Mexico, tax free, the materials, components, machinery and equipment necessary to assemble a product in Mexico and re-export the finished good back to the U.S. subject to very low taxes. Maquila facilities have grown into a key sector of the Mexican economy because of the export volume they generate and the number of jobs they provide. As of last count maquila facilities numbered over 3,500 and employed almost one and a quarter million workers.

While the new jobs have been welcome by desperately poor people, they have typically offered substandard working and living conditions. In their report for the Environmental Health Coalition, researchers with the Pollution Prevention Education and Research Center of Occidental College identify maquiladoras as “posing significant environmental threats to the workers, their communities and to the long term economic health of the entire US-Mexican border region.” Maquiladora communities, which reap few financial benefits from the usually tax-exempt facilities, have failed to build the most basic infrastructure necessary to support essential services for the rapid influx of workers and their families. Maquila towns have been turned into virtual cesspools and breeding grounds for infectious diseases, while the

proliferation of electronic, chemical and furniture plants has greatly increased the amount of industrial solvents polluting the environment. In short, the border area has become an environmental nightmare.

Despite the law, health and safety abuses abound

Inside the plants, workers voice constant fears about their safety on the job. In some of the maquilas, the workforce is routinely exposed to substances demonstrated to cause cancer, reproductive problems, skin diseases, vision problems, respiratory difficulties and gastrointestinal and nervous disorders. Injuries to fingers, hands and feet, headaches, fatigue and stress-related ailments are also widespread.

The background for these extreme conditions is not an absence of formal protections: Mexico has one of the strongest labor codes in the world. The trouble is, enforcement of all labor laws is extremely lax. According to Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network Coordinator Garrett Brown, “The rule of law is in crisis in the maquiladora zones. Legal efforts of maquila workers to select their own unions and to seek Mexican government enforcement of its own health and safety regulations are being obstructed by local governments and US based employers in the same fashion that George Wallace once stood in the schoolhouse door to keep out African-American students in the segregated American South.”

Breed Technologies, focus of campaign

One of the more egregiously anti-worker rights employers is Breed Technologies, headquartered in Lakeland, FL., which runs two auto parts plants on the border, Auto Trim in Valle Hermoso and Custom Trim in Matamoros. Formerly owned by a Canadian firm, the plants manufacture leather-covered steering wheels and gear shift knobs for General Motors, DaimlerChrysler, BMW and Mazda automobiles. Workers at the two maquila locations report widespread health problems, including adverse respiratory, skin, neurological and reproductive system health effects as well as

cumulative trauma disorders of the upper extremities. These are some of the workers' voices:

"I worked at Auto Trim for 9 years. I was not provided with any type of safety equipment, with the exception of a dust mask. I have serious respiratory problems. I have been coughing up blood since 1995."

-NAO

Complaint, Affidavit Q

"There are no air extractors near me, and I need to be as far as possible from the finishing area because I feel awful. I feel like I can't breathe and that I am suffocating. The vapors from the chemicals also cause me to become dizzy. I feel like dying."

-NAO Complaint, Affidavit C

"I have worked at Auto Trim since 1993. I was exposed to glue and solvents continuously. The smell of chemicals was overwhelming. I have constant sinus pain in my nose and head. I have also pain in my left arm and hand."

-NAO

complaint, Interview D

In addition, workers have complained that, despite being required by Mexican law, there is a lack of hazard communication training and the joint worker-management health and safety committee is all but ineffective.

No help from the government, but cross-border coalition steps in

For over two years, Breed workers have tried to get the Mexican equivalent of OSHA - the Secretaria de Trabajo y Prevision Social or STPS - to conduct an inspection of the plant and enforce Mexican regulations against the chemical and ergonomic hazards that they face. Workers have sent delegations to the distant state capital asking the STPS to do its job. No matter - if the STPS has conducted any inspections of the plants in response, it will neither confirm it nor provide the workers with any inspection reports (again in violation of Mexican regulations) about identified hazards and corrective actions required by the agency.

So in June 2000 the workers filed a health and safety complaint with the National Administrative Office (NAO) of the U.S. Department of Labor. They were joined by the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and 22 additional labor, religious and human rights organizations in Canada, Mexico and the U.S., including the United Auto Workers (UAW), the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), the AFL-CIO and two U.S. law school clinics. The complaint documents the failure of the Mexican government to enforce its own health and safety laws, despite repeated effort by workers to call attention to severe workplace health hazards.

Unsurprisingly, the company did not sit on its hands. In July, workers began having a series of intimidating, mandatory plant-wide meetings and police inspections of workers' lockers. Families of the workers began receiving threatening visits by carloads of men who would not identify themselves.

Will NAFTA Help?

The complaint was filed under the terms of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation, a side accord to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Agreement allows each NAFTA signatory to receive and investigate complaints of labor law violations in the territory of other signatories.

The complaint is the first exclusively health and safety complaint filed under NAFTA, although two prior NAO complaints raised health and safety issues.

It's worth pointing out that meeting the workers' concerns is not an out-sized order for Breed Technologies. The adoption of common sense, low-cost measures could significantly reduce the ongoing harm they are experiencing. These would include: substitution of non-toxic materials for toxic substances currently used in the production process; proper storage and handling of hazardous chemicals; moderation of production quotas; and the redesign of tools and work stations.

What relief is sought in the complaint to the NAO?

In their written complaint and again at the U.S.

Department of Labor hearing on December 12, workers at Auto Trim and Custom Trim and their co-petitioners are seeking remedies provided for under the terms of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation NAALC. These include: an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor of health and safety abuses at Auto Trim and Custom Trim; consultation with Mexican authorities; establishment of a fact-finding mission with members from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, with the goal of issuing a public report on conditions at Auto Trim and Custom Trim; and the establishment of an inspection commission, to insure that Auto Trim and Custom Trim comply with Mexican health and safety laws. The review should be completed in 120 days.

If the above actions are not successful in rectifying the ongoing health hazards at these plants, the petitioners have requested that the U.S. Department of Labor call for an arbitration panel to determine appropriate fines against the government of Mexico for failure to enforce its own laws, as provided for by the terms of the NAALC. The maximum fine in this matter would be 20 million U.S. dollars.

The Importance of Coalition Building

Although the U.S. and Mexican governments affirm their commitment to environmental protection and labor rights, they fail to provide adequate resources to implement existing policies. Further, only those initiatives that do not hinder the pace of trade are capable of garnering official support. Sustained lobbying by a newly-invigorated environmental, labor and human rights coalition failed to stop NAFTA in 1994, but won an environmental side agreement, the North American Agreement on

Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) and the labor side agreements, NAALC, under which the coalition in support of the Auto Trim and Custom Trim/Breed workers filed its submission to NAO. In the case of both NAAEC and NAALC, structural problems limit the efficacy of the side agreement. It would be far more effective for environmental and labor rights to be an integral part of the treaty rather than its sidebars. The absence of such mechanism was the chief reason for the environmental and labor coalition opposition to the fast track proposal that was ultimately defeated in Congress in 1998. The push for expansion of NAFTA-type agreements has resumed. Global corporations will not stop in their attempts to destroy any barriers standing in the way of their exploitation of labor and the environment. Global problems demand global answers: coalition building must involve a wide scope of publicly minded groups and embrace them across borders.

Sources:

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The Maquiladora Reader, American Friends Service Committee, 1999.

“Ten Years of Cross-Border Organizing,” by Larry Weiss, Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, June 1999.

Twin Plant News, El Paso, TX, November 2000

The same grant that funds the EJ Program Organizers also provided for a Special Projects Discretionary Fund. This funded small proposals (up to \$5000) to enhance the work of Sierra Club entities in partnership campaigns with EJ communities. The Committee participated in the review and approval process for these proposals, and are thrilled with the results. We were able to provide funds to around a dozen different campaigns, including the development of materials to aid communities in Pennsylvania waging a war against destructive mining practices; assisting the community of Norco in their relocation efforts; development of the Club's EJ Resource Guide; organizing Native communities opposed to a rail expansion through the Pine Ridge reservation of South Dakota; assisting the Wando/Cainho communities of South Carolina in their struggle against port expansion... and many others. Look to the EJ Times for updates on these campaigns and (hopefully) for an announcement of the continuation of this Special Projects Fund!

Profile: Jessy Cadenas
Los Angeles, California

This is the fourth installment in our series of interviews with the EJ Program Grassroots Organizers.

Tell us a little about your background and how you were drawn to community organizing. I started as a member of SEIU/Healthcare Workers Union. I got to meet some long-time activists who reinforced my inclination towards social justice activism, not knowing that many years later I would be utilizing those same skills and the same experience in the environmental justice movement. Community organizing was not something I had thought about working at but rather something that crossed my path.



I've learned that everything happens for a reason; you might not understand why things happen, but the events that follow reveal a purpose.

How did your job as a union organizer prepare you for your current work in environmental justice?

Union organizing was vital in my preparing to tackle my current job. In essence, I understand that there are not many differences between organizing to bring people under the protection of a union contract and organizing to protect people from environmental injustice: we are all helping the same disadvantaged, underserved color communities to fight for their needs over corporate greed.

What was your perspective on the environmental movement and why were you interested in taking up the challenge of being a Sierra Club EJ Organizer?

Initially, I had no perspective on the environmental movement - I didn't even know there was one! Now that I'm a part of it I understand why I hadn't become aware it was there: the environmental movement doesn't not spend much of its time in outreach; rather, it recycles the same activists.

As I learned more about the work, I decided I wanted to become a Sierra Club EJ Organizer because I saw an opportunity to do great things in the environmental justice movement and also

wanted to take on the challenge of remaking the Sierra Club into a more progressive organization. I happen to think that we have a moral/environmental obligation to advocate for people's well-being regardless of color, religion, immigration status - the same way we advocate for our national treasures.

In your current EJ work, what do you find to be the greatest impediment? What is the strongest asset that either you or the Club bring into the picture?

My biggest impediment would be the Club's negative image among people of color, especially on account of the referendum on immigration placed on the Club's ballot a couple of years ago. I have received negative comments on some Club campaigns and how we are not careful or considerate of any negative impacts we might have on other communities.

The strongest asset that I bring into Sierra Club is my perseverance. And the Club's biggest asset in EJ work is its strong environmental advocacy history and its political clout.

What importance do you place on forging coalitions? What type of organizations are you looking to work together with and involve in your action?

As a newcomer, I try to be careful in forging coalitions. I don't want to get caught up in what I call "recycling" activists but rather work with

groups that prove to be dedicated, progressive, willing to do any work necessary and which have only one item on their agenda: a better environment. Communities for a Better Environment is one such group. Rather than try to involve them in my efforts, at this time I would prefer they take the lead, since they are the ones to have proven expertise on environmental justice issues. At this stage, I feel I must learn to yield to those with proven wisdom and leadership.

Tell us about one of your experiences as an EJ Organizer that represents the most hopeful sign for the success of EJ work in the future.

The most hopeful experience so far is that I have established trusting relationships with some community organizations, where my character and the purpose of the organization I represent are no longer questioned.

Where would you like us (the EJ movement in Sierra Club) to be in 10 years?

In ten years I would hope the Sierra Club would have taken the necessary steps, including the assignation of funds, to enhance the status of Environmental Justice so that it can be regarded as an integral part of its structure and programs. I would also hope that Sierra Club had succeeded in becoming a more diverse environmental organization.



If you have a personal hero/ine, who is he/she, and what do you most admire him/her for?

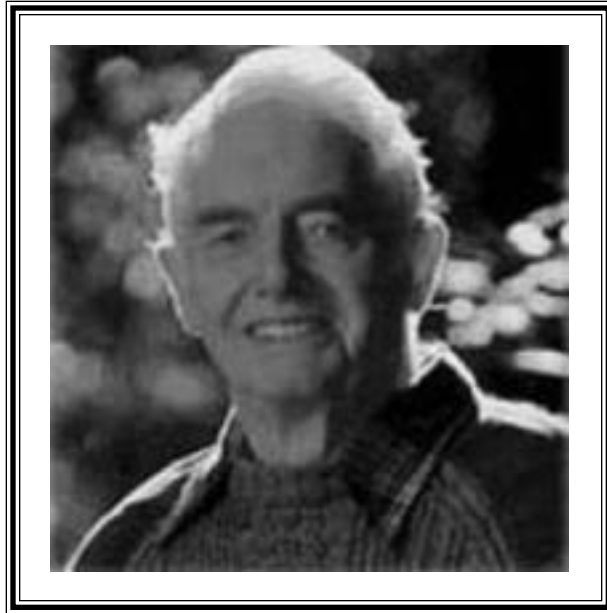
My personal hero would be Augusto Cesar Sandino. He was a humble but wise Nicaraguan farmer who struggled and fought for social and economic equality for his people during one of the most difficult times in Nicaraguan history.

Thanks, Jessy! Next issue, look for an interview with Julie Eisenhardt.



Previous page: Jessy Cadenas holds the microphone at a press conference for Belmont High School teacher and long-time community activist Rudy Chavez. Both pages: The demonstration and press conference featured in these photos were held to protest the LAUSD's decision to shut down construction of the new Belmont High School without doing a complete environmental assessment of the site. All photos courtesy of Jessy Cadenas.

David Brower, Environmental Hero 1912 - 2000



An inspiration and a leader of environmentalists during the last half of the 20th century, David Brower was one of the individuals most responsible for firmly planting the environment on the minds and the agenda of the American public.

There is an abundance of monuments to Brower's drive to preserve Earth's remaining wilderness areas. Testimonies to his militancy, resourcefulness and visionary power include nine national parks and seashores, keeping dams out of the Grand Canyon and the Dinosaur National Monument, and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Brower was also an avid outdoorsman and rock climber. Among his no less than 70 first ascents in the Sierra ranges, he climbed Shiprock on the Navajo reservation, later lamenting that he felt badly about treading on a Navajo sacred site.

He held deep regret at having agreed to the flooding of Glen Canyon in exchange for keeping a dam out of Dinosaur National Monument - one of the reasons being that Glen Canyon had been

home for centuries to the Navajo and the Ute tribes.

Brower believed in building coalitions as well, including with labor. In connection with the 1999 demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle, he helped found the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, which brought together union workers and environmentalists. Around that time, he and a leader of the United Steelworkers worked out an agreement that read: "If you will promise to make sustainable jobs a product of environmental protections, we will promise to make environmental protection our most important job."

Just as he understood the interrelatedness of the Earth's ecosystem, Brower understood the connection between social justice and environmental protection.

His insight and eloquence, his humor, spirit and determination, will be missed. His legacy will be forever celebrated.

Environmental Justice and the Work Environment: A Case of “In My Backyard”

By Elizabeth Averill Samaras, RN, MSN

The quote, “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread...” by John Muir¹ in 1912 aptly serves as preamble to the Sierra Club’s Principles of Environmental Justice. While I am not sure which came first, it is evocative of a poem/song from that same year entitled “Bread and Roses” written by James Oppenheim about the 1912 Textile workers strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. One of the emblematic verses of the song is: “Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew. Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too!”. During that strike, thousands of women and children marched against brutal working conditions, long hours, and poor wages. In many ways, this song which captures the textile workers’ fundamental call for equity and quality of life has become a spiritual and ideological anthem for the American Labor Movement and working people around the world. I think the two quotes provide a good contextual framework for better understanding the inter-relationship between the struggle for the work environment and environmental justice.

Despite eighty-eight years and many victories, the struggle for environmental justice and justice for working people is alive and well in many U.S. communities, including my hometown of Pueblo, Colorado. Here the struggle is between a major Pueblo institution, CF&I Steel, LP - now operating as Rocky Mountain Steel Mills (RMSM) with majority ownership by Oregon Steel - versus the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) and the United Transportation Union (UTU), each representing a group of workers at the plant, and members of the community. It provides a classic illustration of ways in which the issues of the environment and health of the community-at-large are inextricably entwined with the health of workers. At stake are the jobs of over 1100 striking steelworkers (now illegally replaced), 35 additional workers (UTU members) fired for refusing to cross a picket line, and the health of the community.

Pueblo, a city of just over 100,000, is rich in diversity and Southwest tradition. It was home to ancestral Pueblo peoples and other Native Americans; it was later claimed by France, Spain, Mexico, and finally the United States. Approximately forty percent of Pueblo citizens are Latino, many with roots in this community for generations. Native Americans and descendants from immigrants around the world attracted to Pueblo in the early twentieth century to work in the steel plant, smelters, and railroads make up the majority of the balance. Today, Pueblo reflects this multi-racial, multi-cultural heritage.

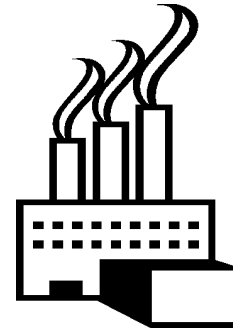
The current struggle in Pueblo is entrenched in its history as a major steel town. As the major employer in Pueblo for decades, the steel plant and its polluting stacks were tolerated for years as an economic necessity - “the devil we know”. Pueblo was stigmatized throughout Colorado for many years and was less-than-affectionately referred to as P.U. town because of the stench spewing from the then CF&I plant. Its citizens suffer the highest morbidity and mortality rates in the state from diseases that have been associated with pollution, such as COPD, lung cancer, heart disease, and pneumonia - much of the excess arguably attributable to emissions from the plant. In the early eighties, when so much of the U.S. steel industry collapsed, so too CF&I suffered a big set-back. The company cut back production, laid off workers, and the skies over Pueblo cleared somewhat - enough for a recent surge in new growth, establishment of “cleaner” industry, and prosperity in Pueblo. However, this new-found prosperity is noticeably absent around the steel mill where our poorer residents, often of color, live. Pollution still hovers over these neighborhoods, with nighttime (and therefore difficult to monitor) releases a common practice. This brings me to the current struggle for the soul and health of our city.

One component of the struggle is being waged by former workers of the plant who are seeking justice in the workplace and safer working conditions. Shortly after Oregon Steel took a controlling interest in the mill, its management instituted a series of policies that the United Steelworkers of America felt were in violation of their collective bargaining contract and detrimental to the health of

their members. One of the major issues involved - "forced" or mandatory overtime. Management initially presented excessive overtime as a "rare occasion" to help during the transition; it became an everyday event. Workers were routinely scheduled for twelve hour shifts, six days a week; often working as much as sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. Management also ignored the contract's seniority system, claiming instead a free "right to assignment". This resulted in workers being assigned to jobs for which they had limited training or experience. This can be a highly risky practice in a dangerous facility like a steel plant where many positions are highly skilled jobs requiring specific training and experience in order to produce a quality product in relative safety. Amid these excessive hours and inappropriate assignments, workers were exposed to many hazardous substances such as lead, nickel, and cadmium, as well as increased stress, fatigue, and extremes of heat and cold. Regressive policies such as denial of sick time without twenty-four hours notice compounded an already "toxic" situation. Another issue of concern to the USWA was equitable pay: Pueblo steelworkers earned hourly wages well below the national average for steelworkers in comparable jobs and grade. Fair pensions were another concern of the Local; the unit is made up of an aging workforce and its pension fund had been grossly raided by previous owners leaving retirees, on average, with less than half of the retirement income they had earned. This intolerable climate laid the foundation for the strike of 1997.

Since October, 1997, 1100 steelworkers have been out of work. This situation persists despite the union's unconditional willingness to return to work after thirteen weeks of the strike. In a complaint issued in February, 1998, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) alleged over 100 unfair labor practices by RMSM during negotiations and the strike. The Board directed RMSM to reinstate the striking workers. At this writing, RMSM has brought back only a relatively small number of workers and has appealed the NLRB rulings. Thirty-five UTU members, who worked the rails at the mill, have similarly been out since October 1997, fired for failing to cross a picket line. Most of these transportation workers have been able to

get other jobs; otherwise, their situation would be similarly dire. On an optimistic note, if the NLRB's charges are upheld on appeal, the steelworkers will be entitled to back pay for the entire period of dispute. This three-year struggle has had a profound impact primarily upon the families involved; there have been divorces, suicides, and too many lean holidays. It has also had a searing and divisive impact upon the community,



On another front is the struggle for good air quality spearheaded recently by the USWA and the concerned citizens of Pueblo. This issue is coming again to a head now because there was a public hearing on September 21, 2000, regarding permits for one of the two major furnaces of the mill. The furnace is in gross violation of federal and state pollution laws. This furnace is fitted with a wholly inadequate and poorly maintained bag house. As early as 1995, the company self-reported to the state that they were grossly out of compliance with governing state regulations. They promised appropriate corrective action by 1998. To date, they have failed to take the appropriate steps to correct the situation. There are records, such as videos of gross opacity, and other evidence which documents their continued non-compliance. There are also numerous instances of the state relaxing their own dates and compliance requirements. The state's own Air Pollution Control Division stated that these violations "may pose a serious health risk to residents around the mill". Because this is occurring in a bitter strike climate, the authorities have trivialized concerns raised by the Steelworkers claiming that they are merely a strike ploy.

Despite efforts to discredit the USWA for raising community awareness about the furnace problems, there is mounting evidence to support the legiti-

macy of the USWA claims. Clearly, a health problem exists, one that transcends the politics of a brutal strike and that differentially and adversely affects the lower economic and minority members of our community. The good news is we are forming some precedent-setting alliances in Pueblo. The USWA and UTU are working with the Sierra Club, the Citizen's for Clean Air in Pueblo/Southern Colorado (CCAP), churches and other groups and individuals to take a common stand at the hearings and to compel the company and regulators to be accountable. Disparate groups are aligning "in my backyard" for bread, roses, and environmental justice.

E. Samaras is the Chair of the Work Environment Committee (Environmental Quality Strategy Team), of Sierra Club. In writing her article, she has benefitted from and is thankful for the generous assistance of Charles Skimore, Legislative Representative UTU Local #204 and "Roadwarrior" for USWA #2101 and #3267.



Resources for further exploration on the issue of labor, health and safety, trade and the environmental issues (not an exhaustive list):

Sierra Club Trade page:
www.sierraclub.org/trade/

AFL-CIO pages on Trade and Health And Safety at Work:
www.ALFCIO.org

United Auto Workers' page on Safer Work:
www.uaw.org/hs/

Migrant Farmworkers
www.floc.com
www.farmworkers.org

Health and Safety and Environment in the US Mexico border
www.igc.org/mhssn/news/htm
www.zianet.com/irc1/bordline
www.oxy.edu/departments/pperc

Institute for Policy Studies
www.igc.org/ips

Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment
www.asje.org

As always, we welcome your feedback and story suggestions. We have not totally succeeded in getting this newsletter out to you on a quarterly basis as originally intended. We apologize for this, and appreciate your patience. We are redoubling our efforts to get back onto a regular schedule.

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