

## "But Who Can We Support?"

# The Good Guys In Green

**O**ver the past couple of years CounterPunch has laid waste most of the mainstream environmental movement and one consequence has been a steady stream of enquiries from readers eager to do the right thing but unsure about what organizations are worth giving to. We approach this matter of the truly deserving in a cautious spirit. Today's lean defender of nature can easily turn into tomorrow's sell-out scion of the Environmental Grantmakers Association. So if you need an update before writing a check, give us a call.

Let's start with environmental justice groups. As so often happens in the enviro sphere, there's a lot more talk than action. By "environmental justice" we mean groups responding to the way poor and minority communities end up as involuntary hosts to toxic waste dumps, incinerators and polluting industries such as pulp mills, chemical plants and sludge fields.

In 1987 the United Church of Christ put out a report called "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States". It found that predominantly black communities were two to three times more likely to be targeted for toxic waste dumps than middle class white areas. No surprise here for the black communities, but the news electrified the large national green organizations which had long been denounced for indifference to the environmental afflictions of the poor. Grants from Rockefeller, Ford and Pew (foundations whose corporate progenitors have ably assisted in providing the pollution under review) were quickly doled out to biggies such as the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

It's unclear what — beyond organizing conferences and composing position papers — NWF and National Audubon did with their money (over a million dollars each since 1990). The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (which has recently changed its name to Earth Justice) promised that it was going to launch a host of legal suits against the polluters, using the Civil Rights Act as a battering ram. Few

of the suits materialized and Veronica Eady, the black woman attorney hired to run the environmental justice division at the firm's San Francisco office, quit last year, saying that SCLDF had used her and the environmental justice issue mainly to raise money and get the group good press.

SCLDF knew it was on to a good thing and so did the Clinton White House. In 1994 the "environmental justice" bandwagon got a shove when Clinton signed an executive order requiring all federal agencies to take issues of environmental justice into consideration in all their activities. On the eve of the 1996 Democratic Convention in Chicago the theme

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of environmental justice got more air-time when Clinton ordered the EPA to accelerate the clean-up of toxic "brown-field" sites. (Typically these would be old industrial areas not quite poisonous enough to fall within the purview of Superfund.) Federal clean-up funds have been provided and have fulfilled the predictable mission of turning abandoned lots — often on canal or river frontage — into desirable sites for middle-class condominiums, which is perhaps just as well since Clinton has agreed to cut funding for low-income housing in the interest of a balanced budget.

Much environmental justice work is wheel-spinning by academics, grantmakers and liberal politicians. So why not help:

- **People for Responsible Communities**, a group started by Hazel Johnson in southeast Chicago. Johnson calls her neighborhood "the toxic doughnut — because our community is all black, surrounded by landfills, steel mills, chemical plants, illegal dumps and incinerators." PRC has been the bane of many a Chicago politician and industry execu-

tive. Most recently Johnson's group has fought off plans by Waste Management to expand its toxic waste facility near Altgeld Gardens. (PRC, 13116 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, Illinois, 60627 (773) 468-1645)

- **Southwest Organizing Project**, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Jean Gauno and Michael Leon-Guerrero lead a group that helps poor rural and urban Hispanics in northern New Mexico who have been victims of environmental injustices for at least the past century. One big current battle waged by the project is against Intel, the computer chip giant which has opened a vast plant west of Albuquerque. The chip plant's feverish appetite for water puts intolerable pressure on the scanty resources available to irrigate the ranches and plots of Hispanic farmers. The impact of Intel on New Mexico has been dire. Land prices have surged and the poor have been pushed from the northern part of the state. Watch for Bill Clinton's next summer vacation on the Ted Turner ranch up near Chama. (Southwest Organizing Project 211 10th Street, SW Albuquerque, NM, 87102)

Now for wilderness, a word that rarely sounds these days in the spacious office suites of outfits such as the Wilderness Society, over a third of whose annual budget pays for the lease on its sumptuous hq in northwest Washington, DC. Wilderness as an issue for the big green organizations went out of vogue more or less at the time Bill Clinton came to Washington.

Indeed, shortly after the 1992 election and not long before he was nominated as assistant secretary of the Interior, George Frampton, president of the Wilderness Society, came to Eugene, Oregon, and told a conference there that the great days of adding new lands to the wilderness system were now over and the coming task was to protect and spruce up the hard-won gains of yesteryear. There are no major campaigns being waged by the big green outfits. Nor does Frampton's call for protection and restoration have much to say for itself, as the Clinton administration has relentlessly reprogrammed already meager wilderness management budgets for road construction, salvage timber sales and kindred destructive activities.

The great hope had been for 5.7 million acres of Utah north of the Grand Canyon to be designated as wilderness.

Instead, Clinton and Babbitt claimed to save about 1.6 million of those acres under the nebulous "national monument" status, meaning no new curbs on cattle grazing, off-road vehicles and firewood gathering. The move also did nothing to stop the biggest threats to the area, mineral exploration and oil and gas drilling. Indeed, Conoco recently announced its intention to start drilling inside the new monument. As Babbitt conceded, hope for protecting these lands as "wilderness" will now have to be postponed for "generations".

So, not a dime to the Wilderness Society or the National Parks and Conservation Association or the Sierra Club. Better to help:

• **The Alliance for the Wild Rockies**, the Missoula-based group run by Mike Bader. Since 1989 the Alliance has developed and promoted the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, which would set aside 16 million acres of wild lands in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming — the largest swath of roadless land in the lower 48. Bader and his associates have fought against malevolent opposition to its bill by the Sierra Club, Audubon and the Wilderness Society, which had already brokered a deal with Senator Max Baucus, the Montana Democrat, to designate 2 million acres as wilderness, while ceding 99 per cent of the commercially exploitable forest land within the ecosystem to timber companies. The Baucus measure was a typical rocks-and-ice deal, abandoning everything else to the corporations. (Alliance for the Wild Rockies, POB 8731 Missoula, MT 59807 (406-721-5420).

• **The Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks**. For years the big green organizations have raised millions of dollar with clamorous appeals to "save" the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. And of course photographs, such as that found on the latest Sierra Club fundraising appeal featuring the Porcupine caribou herd against the backdrop of the Brooks Range, have a predictable effect as well-meaning donors dip into their pockets. The one thing the Sierra Club and the other big groups have never seriously fought for is the designation that would put the Refuge forever out of bounds to Arco, BP and Chevron. Wilderness status would do this instantly.

Now Babbitt is deliberating whether to open for oil company exploitation the largest unprotected wilderness area in

the United States: the Alaska National Petroleum Reserve, which covers 25 million acres of mountains and tundra about 100 miles from the Refuge. The plan is to test environmentally sensitive drilling techniques (i.e., see if anyone raises a stink) before applying these sensitive techniques to the Refuge itself.

The Northern Alaska Environmental Center is headed by Sylvia Ward, one of the few women to lead an environmental group, particularly one that deals with public lands issues. Aside from the demanding task of fighting off the oil companies in a state where every citizen receives an annual \$1,500 cheque from the consortium, the Center takes the view that the best strategy is a good offense. "Let's get these areas designated as wil-

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derness", Ward says, "and then go home". This approach violates the cardinal principle of professional environmentalism: never turn off a spigot from which another dollar might trickle. (Northern Alaska Environmental Center, 218 Driveway Street, Fairbanks, AK 99701-2875)

Back in the 1950s Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was a milestone in making the environmental movement more than just a campaign for the conservation of wild nature. Carson exposed the baneful impact of the chemical industry. In the wake of this attention Congress speedily passed the Delaney Clause banning all carcinogens from processed food. Well, last year the Delaney Clause was dropped at the urging of the Clinton administration and with the unanimous support of both houses of Congress and the approval of all mainstream enviro groups.

• Among the few dissenters was **Rachel's Health and Environment Weekly**, an indispensable bulletin put out by Peter Montague and his colleagues. Over the years Rachel's has been an invaluable chronicle of the toxic threats to communities. Montague and his associates have been particularly good at demolishing corporate pseudoscience — with an effectiveness attested

to by a crackback lawsuit from Monsanto. (Environmental Research Foundation P.O. Box 5036, Annapolis, MD 21403)

• Equally combative is **Food & Water**, a group based in Walden, Vermont, and run by Michael Colby. Colby takes the view that almost all enviro lobbying in Washington is a waste of time and constitutes what he calls "activist malpractice". He and his group believe in anti-corporate campaigns, such as a successful effort to induce the Land O' Lakes dairy to decline milk from herds treated with the rBGH growth hormone. The group's latest campaign targets food irradiation, one of the last best hopes of the ailing nuclear industry. Food & Water's campaigns have been so successful that the group has now been threatened with a lawsuit from the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, under "food disparagement laws" now operative in thirty states. (Food & Water RR 1, Box 68D Walden, VT 05873 (802) 563-3300)

In the next edition of **CounterPunch** we'll continue this advisory, dealing with groups working on energy, forests, mining, native issues, international activities, whistleblowers inside the government and environmental groups, and environmental lawyers. ■

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(Budget, continued from p. 1)

ally, rising to \$215 annually for people with incomes of \$30,000 to \$40,000, then up to \$66,240 for people with incomes of \$200,000 or more.

**B**ob Pollin, professor of economics at UC Riverside, laid out the basics for us.

There are two grounds for a tax cut: first, fairness and distribution; and second, efficiency, the latter being the conservative rationale.

In terms of distribution, it's perfectly clear who will benefit from lowering capital gains and estate taxes and this comes in the midst of the greatest relative upward shift in wealth in modern US history, even greater than during the 1920s. "To talk about tax measures that will only accelerate this trend," Pollin says, "is indefensible."

Nor does the efficiency argument hold up. The basic right wing argument is that these tax cuts will stimulate savings and investment, therefore raising everybody's economic well being. Essentially this is a trickle-down argument. With regard to capital gains, Pollin points out that there's no evidence that a tax cut encourages productive investment. A capital gains cut rewards equally anything that pushes up the value of an existing asset, which could be merely an increase in a company's worth based on stock market valuation. So a capital gains tax cut will actually increase the sort of stock market speculation we've seen in the past few years.

If you really wanted to increase productive investments, Pollin says, why not

do it directly; for example, by offering firms that invest in productive equipment a tax break? Congress would of course never do this because most of its members aren't interested in generating new productive investment but only in shrinking government and shifting wealth further upwards.

Pollin rightly stresses that the whole balanced budget mania is nonsense. It is based on the argument that a balanced budget will lower interest rates, thereby increasing investment and producing higher growth. But this is not true. The budget deficit has been dropping dramatically and interest rates have not

dropped along with it. In any case, interest rates are not the prime factor in generating investment, it is demand for products. If you lower government spending you decrease overall demand, which will dampen growth, not produce it.

Just as the Clinton crowd hoped, the spotlight in the weeks to come will be on Archer and his Ways and Means Committee. As the money is ladled out to the very rich, the Democrats and perhaps even the great Commander-in-Chief will wave their rattles and perhaps indulge themselves in some mild populist posturings, but they know well enough who just got richer, and on the backs of whom. ■

## Powell: Make the Blood Flow

**T**he media's favorite political figure, Gen. Colin Powell, was the guest of honor at the April 26 "Summit for America's Future" in Philadelphia, which promised to "ignite a new level of volunteerism in the country". Donald Reed of NYNEX lauded Powell — "America's Chief Volunteer", as he was dubbed by *The Washington Post* — for his public spirit, saying that his involvement in the summit "makes the blood flow a little faster".

In a less noted public appearance, Powell himself came out in favor of making the blood flow faster in Indonesia. During a recent lecture swing through Asia, a trip sponsored by Citibank, Powell delivered a speech in Jakarta in which he called for the immediate sale of F-16s to the Suharto dictatorship. "Arms sales to Indonesia should be based on the entire agenda of issues between the United States and Indonesia, not on the single issue [of human rights]", Powell told his audience of business executives and government officials. Most of Indonesia's air force consists of US planes and the Clinton administration wants to sell another nine F-16s to Jakarta. The deal has thus far been blocked by Congress.

Powell also called for continued US economic and military aid to the Suharto regime, including training through the International Military Education Training (IMET) program for Indonesia officers. IMET for Indonesia was recently renewed after having been suspended in 1992 following the bloody crackdown in East Timor. ■

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