

ENVIRONMENT

Oil and Atlantic waters don't mix

By Karl Grossman

SAG HARBOR, N.Y.

ALITTLE OVER A MONTH after Texaco announced it had struck gas under the ocean floor about 100 miles from Atlantic City, N.J., President Carter signed into law a bill that overhauls the Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1953.

The legislation is expected to spur oil and gas development on the Atlantic shelf, an extension of the continent that stretches up to 200 miles from shore. While exploration and the expansion of drilling has moved in recent years from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic, the Department of Interior (DOI) has been under pressure to realistically assess the environmental impact of such activity.

In response to a lawsuit that successfully blocked drilling for over two years, the DOI has produced a statement far more graphic and candid than earlier ones regarding the consequences of petroleum production off the environmentally sensitive and highly populated Atlantic coastline.

"Recovery of the affected [ocean] area from a large spill will be slow, probably requiring a minimum of ten years," says the DOI. It is now forecasting for the 20 to 25-year lives of the fields, four large oil spills of over 1,000 barrels, 58 spills of 50-1,000 barrels and 3,340 of up to 50 barrels on the 529,446 Mid-Atlantic acres it leased in 1976 for \$1.1 billion to the oil industry for drilling, and the additional 774,273 acres it wants to lease in the same area in February.

And that's "assuming that pipelines will be used to transport the petroleum to shore," a questionable assumption. Tanker transport will increase spillage.

Leasing the continental shelf.

The first exploratory well was leased to Exxon in the mid-Atlantic on March 29 of this year. The DOI is now moving to "open up" what it defines as the south Atlantic to oil drilling, accepting \$100 million in April from oil companies to lease 244,807 acres off North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Only a new lawsuit is blocking the Interior's plan to promote oil drilling in the North Atlantic. The agency is seeking to immediately lease 882,443 acres on the George's Bank, one of the globe's foremost fishing grounds. Charged in the action with failing to protect fishing resources, Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus—as aggressive as his predecessors in "accelerating" U.S. offshore oil and gas drilling leases—declared: "All areas of the country must share in the urgent task of helping to meet our need to find new domestic sources of oil and gas."

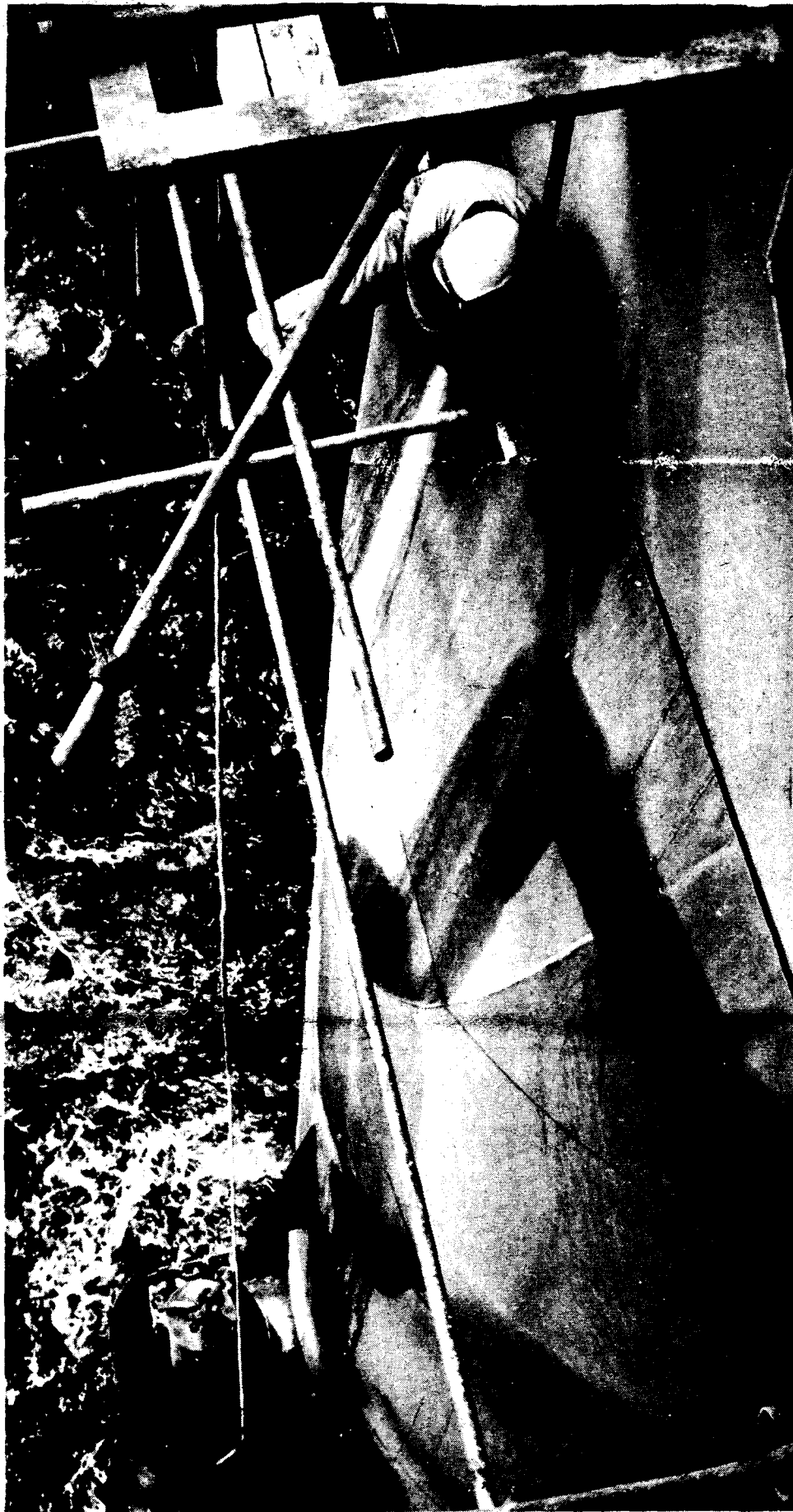
"This is the first tangible proof that there are hydrocarbons out there," Frank Basile, manager of the DOI's 27-member Manhattan office, set up in 1973 to supervise leasing for and development of oil drilling in the mid and north Atlantic tracts, was saying of Texaco's discovery. "I'm encouraged."

It would take additional wells, he added, to determine whether "there's enough for commercial production," but, he went on, "only one in ten wells usually come up with finds in a rank wildcat area."

Basile stressed that gas poses a far smaller environmental risk than oil when produced offshore. "If there's a problem it just bubbles to the surface," he said. But gas and oil commonly run in separate stratas in the same field, "although not always," Basile said.

Onshore activity along the Atlantic in anticipation of success in the operations has stepped up, while deep concern remains over the threat oil spills pose to beaches, wetlands, marine life and the region's extensive marine and resort industries.

The failure to contain the oil spilled by the *Argo Merchant* last year off Nantucket, when 7.5 million gallons of oil gushed



Oil exploration, on offshore Atlantic rigs like this, is a booming business.

Cameraworks

The Atlantic Coast is a unique collection of back bays and barrier beaches, estuaries and fragile wetlands, the spawning grounds for marine life. It can absorb spilled oil like a sop rag.

into the sea, underscores the difficulty of cleaning up spills. Despite slick advertising of oil companies, booms—or curtains used in attempts to contain spilled oil—won't work in high Atlantic seas.

John V.N. Klein, the executive of Suffolk County, which with 1.3 million people comprises the eastern portion of Long Island, said after the disaster, "For years the oil industry claimed that the likelihood of an offshore well blow-out was nil. Then we had the North Sea disaster. And for years they claimed a spill was containable; then we had the *Argo Merchant* sending millions of gallons into the Atlantic and they couldn't contain it. So here you have it: the likelihood of blow-outs sending oil onto our waters, and no way to contain the spills."

Absorbing oil like a sponge.

Said the President's Council on Environmental Quality in 1974: "A major spill along the beaches of Cape Cod, Long Island or the Middle or South Atlantic states

could devastate the areas affected, the Atlantic is a hostile environment for oil and gas operations. Storm and seismic conditions may be more severe than in either the North Sea or the Gulf of Mexico. Recreational industries could be hurt, especially where the character of the communities is one of isolation, historic preservation or natural beauty. Outer continental shelf oil and gas production will result in onshore development of huge refineries, petrochemical complexes, gas processing facilities.

The Atlantic Coast is made up of a unique collection of back bays and barrier beaches, estuaries and miles upon miles of fragile wetlands, the spawning and feeding grounds for the Atlantic chain of marine life. It's a "soft" coast that can absorb spilled oil like a sop rag. And there's no way to clean oil from wetlands, no way to get it off the bottoms of bays that are the nation's major sources of shellfish.

The Interior's Environmental Impact

Statement projects 6 percent possibility of spilled oil on the Atlantic hitting shore and speaks of "oil spills, chronic and acute." Indeed, the DOI has recorded 5,587 spills totalling 51,421 barrels in fields in the Gulf of Mexico between 1971 and 1975.

The EIS report warns that "the adverse effects on commercial fisheries that will be encountered" will include "smothering of shellfish.... Finfish and shellfish will suffer mortality from oil spills and flavor may change because of tainting."

"When oil is spilled into the environment we lose control over it," warned the late Dr. Blumer, of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Countermeasures are "effective only if all the oil is recovered immediately after the spill. The technology to achieve this goal does not exist."

There are jobs down there.

But to Craig Baker, a young man from Buffalo looking for work as an underwater welder, what's most important is a "job offshore," he said before gurgling down in a hard hat outfit at the Coastal Diving Academy on Long Island.

It's been a boom business at the school in the past few years, an effect "of oil exploration here off our coast," according to its director, Bob Shourot. Shourot has been under oil rigs off Norway, in the Gulf and off California, and been in the middle of several major spills, looking for the source. "I've worked spills all over," he said, noting that "oil in the marine environment is a very lethal thing in large quantities. It's absolutely devastating to the marine life, animals that are light and live on and fly over the water and animals that live in it, under it." But he's convinced that offshore drilling can be conducted with a "minimum" of hazards. Meanwhile, unions including the Operating Engineers and Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers are sending people to his school.

Rep. William J. Hughes of New Jersey, at a hearing in late June in Atlantic City on Interior's planned new leasing of mid-Atlantic ocean bottom, questioned whether the government's "accelerated" offshore "leasing, at a feverish pace, is really going to bring new resources on line, or are we simply increasing the real estate portfolios of the oil industry."

"On the West Coast," he declared, "our efforts to accelerate development have resulted in an oil glut. Although we are in the midst of an energy crisis, and we have a staggering balance of trade deficit due to oil imports, we have just approved a plan to export millions of barrels of fuel to Japan. It just doesn't make sense."

How much is out there off the Atlantic Coast, anyway? The U.S. Geological Survey has calculated "undiscovered recoverable resources" of petroleum in the Atlantic at 10-20 billion barrels, with gas 55 to 110 trillion cubic feet. Mobil Oil has put the figures at six billion barrels of oil, 31 trillion feet of gas.

"If we accept the high estimates, the oil reserves would last the U.S. three years at most.... If we accept Mobil's lower figure, the Atlantic Shelf reserves would provide us with somewhat less than one year's supply," testified Lorna Salzman, mid-Atlantic representative of Friends of the Earth, at an Interior hearing on Atlantic oil drilling. "We are being asked to possibly sacrifice the entire marine-based economy of the East Coast—its commercial and sports fishing industries, shellfishing, recreation and tourism, and all the spin-off industries—to provide fuel for one year, most of which will go out the exhaust pipes of Detroit guzzlers. One could hardly find a more depressing example of misplaced priorities."

Karl Grossman was for 13 years the environmental reporter for the Long Island Press.

ELECTIONS

Briggs brings Bryant to California

By Larry Remer

SAN DIEGO

AS THE LIMOUSINE PULLED into view, the crowd of demonstrators who'd gathered at the entrance to San Diego's Town and Country Hotel began shouting and jeering.

"Two, four, six, three. Welcome the queers from USCIB!"

"This twice as good as straight!"

"I wouldn't want Briggs teaching my children!"

The car pulls up and John Briggs, the lock-jawed crew-cut state senator from Orange County, steps out.

Suddenly, a slender young man wearing nail polish and an earring breaks through the line of hotel security to confront Briggs face-to-face. The protestor is immediately arrested, but not before exchanging epithets with Briggs.

Three gays were arrested in the confrontation between Briggs and gays who oppose his anti-gay initiative that is on the November ballot. Briggs' personal crusade against gays—inspired by fundamentalist religion and fueled by conservative dollars—has become one of the hottest issues in the upcoming November election here in California.

Called the Briggs Initiative after its author, and listed as Proposition 6, the measure Briggs has placed on the ballot would require school boards to fire any educational employee, gay or straight, who publicly supported the right of people to engage in homosexual activity.

In a California version of Anita Bryant's successful Florida campaign, the proponents of Prop. 6 have argued in a fund-raising letter written by the Butcher-Ford agency—the same agency that ran the Prop. 13 tax cut campaign—that since the rest of the country looks to California for everything from hair styles to tax reform, we're going to show them that morality is back in style.

Ever since Anita Bryant spearheaded efforts to overturn legislation protecting gay rights in Dade County, Florida, similar campaigns have been instigated by the self-styled guardians of community morals in dozens of American cities. And—in every case—gay rights activists have been dealt crushing defeats—in Wichita, Kan., St. Paul, Minn., and Eugene, Ore.

While it appears that Prop. 6 has an excellent chance of passing in California, the gay community and its allies are determined to reverse the trend. The No on 6 Committee plans to mount a formidable media and grass roots effort, but they will have to contend with a formidable array of forces.

The church gets into the act.

Briggs, who claims to have had a personal experience with Jesus Christ, has been in the forefront of anti-gay efforts since he served as a volunteer in Anita Bryant's Dade County crusade.

The more than 1000 evangelical and fundamentalist churches in California form the backbone of his support. Their parishioners believe that homosexuality runs contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Churches and church members have contributed money and have organized political support for the Briggs Initiative.

Not since the '50s have church groups—including the Catholic church and organized Protestant denominations—been powerful enough to challenge legislative efforts to liberalize gambling, divorce, abortion, or sex statutes.

California's many small fundamentalist and evangelical churches, located primarily in rural areas, have long formed the backbone of the state's right-wing anti-communist movements. They are the people who support the anti-gun control, liberty lobby, anti-FRA and anti-abortion movements. And, in the leadership of the anti-gay movement, they have declared that passage of Prop. 6 is as vital to the moral fiber of society as the Ten Commandments.



(L. to R.) State Sen. John Briggs, moderator Ed Skoog, and S.F. Supervisor Harvey Milk debate Briggs' anti-gay proposition.

Briggs' initiative, Prop. 6, would prohibit teachers from drinking in a gay bar or having gay friends.

To counter this impression in the public mind, the anti-6 forces have lined up an impressive array of mainstream churches like the United Church of Christ and the United Presbyterian Church to oppose 6.

The right wing constituency.

John Briggs stands at the nexus of several other components of organized far right power. Hailing from Orange County, he hoped to parlay it all into a bid for governor.

Last year, Briggs entered the Republican gubernatorial primary with strong backing from several Orange County businessmen, including Carl Krushe, who owns the Carl's Jr. hamburger chain. Krushe has since been targeted by gay groups for picketing and a boycott.

To buttress his name identification, Briggs started two petition drives to qualify measures for the ballot. The first was the anti-homosexuality measure, the second, a measure that expanded the number of crimes that would carry the death penalty in California, is Prop. 7 on the November ballot.

Through a committee called Californians to Defend Our Children, Briggs spent \$1 million to hire a professional campaign firm to collect signatures at a rate of 50¢ per signature. He generated the money for the campaign by utilizing a sophisticated computer direct mail list for soliciting right-wing sympathizers nationwide.

Though Briggs dropped out of the governor's race a few weeks before the June primary when the polls showed him fourth in a field of four, his two ballot measures qualified easily. Pledging to his followers that he would finish the work he started, Briggs has promised to raise and spend \$1 million to push the anti-gay measure through. It has been reported that he plans to hit hard with a media blitz in the last three weeks featuring shots of the boys who were killed in Houston by homosexual Dean Allen Corill and photos of victims of California's homosexual trash bag murders being dug up. Next to that, statistics showing that there is no correlation between sexual preference and murder seem to pale.

The wording of the Briggs Initiative is extremely vague. Under it, teachers could

lose their jobs for simply telling their students that Spartan Greece was a gay culture. It could effectively prohibit teachers from having a drink in a gay bar, having any gay friends, assigning books by gay authors, belonging to social clubs that include gay members, or even working to defeat the initiative.

As a consequence, people are scared. David Mixner, chairperson of the No on 6 campaign, reports receiving "a lot" of \$49 contributions from people who don't want to report to the Fair Political Practices Commission donations of \$50 or more, and don't want to be identified as opposing the initiative. On several occasions, when media have shown up to cover a No on 6 event, sizeable numbers of people in attendance either have refused to give their name or walked away from the camera. Privately many gay leaders fear that apathy and fear are hurting gay efforts.

The anti-Briggs coalition.

Because of the Briggs measure's potential for abuse, the No on 6 campaign has attracted the support of nearly the entire liberal establishment. The ACLU has condemned the initiative as a violation of the First Amendment. The California Teachers Association and the state AFL-CIO oppose 6 because of the potential impact on member workers. The gay strategy is to build the broadest possible coalition against 6, drawing in as many mainstream political figures and organizations as possible. They have corralled endorsements from Gov. Brown, Sen. Cranston, the L.A. City Council, San Diego mayor Pete Wilson, the Young Republicans, and a handful of Hollywood figures—Shirley MacLaine, Paul Newman, and Natalie Wood.

The No on 6 Committee is planning to match Briggs' media blitz with a \$1 million campaign of their own. The theme of TV commercials that are slated to be shot soon is, "It's Not Just Dumb—It's Dangerous," keying on the potential abuses that passage of the initiative could trigger.

In San Francisco, where the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club and other gay organizations have played a pivotal role in local politics for almost a decade, a broad-based effort is being mounted. Led

by Harvey Milk, an openly gay member of the Board of Supervisors, the San Francisco campaign encompasses nearly every progressive minority and labor group in the city.

In Los Angeles, like San Francisco, the anti-Briggs effort is built around gay professionals and gay bars and night spots. The gay Municipal Election Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA) has given donations to local candidates in the past. Together with New Age (New Alliance for Gay Equality), this is the backbone of the L.A. drive.

In San Diego, the pivot for No on 6 efforts is the Save Our Teachers Organization that, together with the San Diego Democratic Club, forms the basis for the local gay movement.

It could go either way.

Though the No on 6 forces are fighting an uphill battle, recent polls put the outcome of the election in doubt. The prestigious Field poll and a poll commissioned by CBS both showed Prop. 6 winning handily. But an L.A. Times poll and one by the Sacramento Bee give the No on 6 forces a small, but solid edge.

"California voters seem to be looking at 6 differently than drives to repeal Human Rights legislation," notes Sallie Fiske of No on 6. "There, the drive was to repeal special privileges afforded to gays. But the Briggs measure would single out a group and take away their existing constitutional rights. Too many people can see that and are saying, 'If they can do that to gays, blacks or Chicanos or Lutherans might be next.'"

"But you can't look at the race in conventional political terms," she continued. "Homosexuality is the last great taboo. And our poll data indicate a strange skewing of the electorate. Men, for example, seem more inclined to vote against us than women. Apparently men feel more threatened by it."

Win or lose, the gay movement has come of age in California. "We won't be gone on Nov. 8 if Briggs wins," declares Bob Lynn of the San Diego Democratic Club. "Gays all over California have been politicized by this, and win or lose, will keep on working."

Larry Remer is a correspondent for IN THESE TIMES in California.