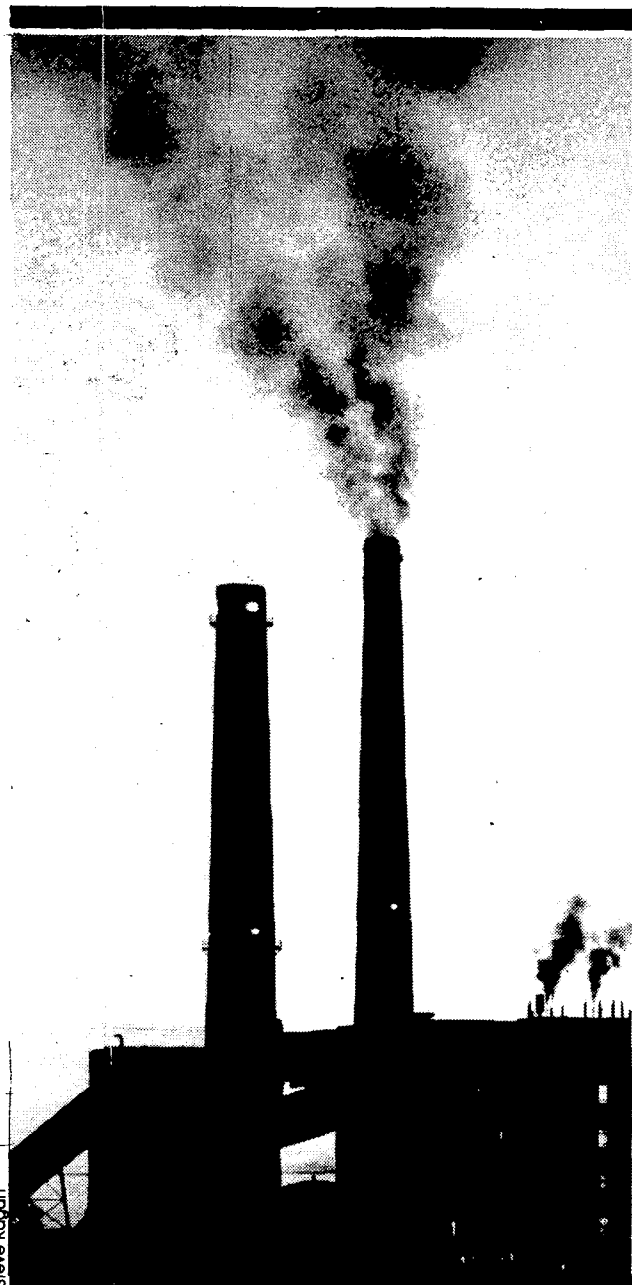


THE INSIDE STORY



Many unions don't buy the "smoke means jobs" line, but they don't consider clean air a frontline issue.

Unions are of three minds on clean air

By David Moberg

With a stagnant economy forming the backdrop to the conservative and corporate drive to weaken environmental protection, especially the Clean Air Act, the links formed in recent years between labor and environmentalists are being put to a test.

One sign of strength was the formation last February of the OSHA/Environmental Network by the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department and the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and the Wilderness Society. Now nearly doubled to 23 states, the network brings small lobbying groups to Washington for a White House vigil and Congressional arm-twisting on behalf of OSHA and the Clean Air Act by union members and environmental advocates.

"We've had some comments from Congresspeople saying they were surprised to see labor and environmental people together," network field director Bill Wilson said, "and at times they tried to meet with each group separately, but the delegations refused to be separated."

Labor, however, is divided within itself on the Clean Air Act—"like everything else, into three parts," says John Sheehan, Steelworkers legislative representative and the leading labor lobbyist on behalf of strong clean air legislation. One part wants strong governmental authority, he said. A second includes unions in low-polluting industries and unions "who see linkage with environmental health and don't want to get swept along in the 'smoke means jobs' stuff," but still don't see clean air as a frontline issue for them (public employees and clothing textile workers, for example).

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"In the third camp there are those who have been swayed [by the argument] that jobs are being lost, those whose industries contribute to pollution and those operating the building trades who are being told that clean air stops construction jobs," Sheehan says. Besides the Building Trades, the Autoworkers fall in Sheehan's third camp. The only three unions in the Clean Air Coalition, the leading lobbying force for the act, are the Steelworkers, the Machinists and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers.

Yet not even the "third camp" unions portray their positions as hostile to the aim of the Clean Air Act. The Building Trades work with a roster of blue-chip major corporations, mainly from the oil and chemical industries, in the National Economic Development Association/Clean Air Act Project (NEDA/CAAP). By comparison with the Business Roundtable, which shares the Reagan/Watt philosophy of conservation that the only good tree is a dead tree, NEDA/CAAP corporations have money to pay for pollution abatement and want more moderate revisions. Those changes would, nevertheless, severely weaken the Act according to its defenders.

Gored ox.

NEDA/CAAP and the Building Trades seek four major changes in the Act that would affect both the requirements on technology and the restrictions on levels of pollution in the air, the two reinforcing aspects of Clean Air Act standards: 1) Eliminate the program of budgeted increments in pollution that are permitted in the 90 percent of the country where the air is still cleaner than the national standards allow and simply apply standards on the technology employed; 2) eliminate the requirement that new industry in dirty areas offset their new emissions with reductions elsewhere in the region that yield net progress toward clean air; 3) eliminate the existing maximal standard for "lowest achievable emission rate" in dirty areas and replace it with a weaker technology standard; and 4) permit more delays in deadlines for meeting the Act's requirements.

James Sheets, research director of the Laborers Union and a representative to NEDA/CAAP, argues that the overly complex legislation slows planning and construction, making corporations less willing even to consider chancy projects and costing construction workers jobs. He dismisses the different opinion of the industrial unions as reflecting limited experience.

"We represent people involved in new construction and plant development," he said. "The IUD represents people in existing facilities. The parts of the Act that would constrain their operation never went into effect. The difference in opinion between us is that our ox has been gored and theirs probably hasn't. As time goes by, I think their affection for the Act will diminish."

The National Commission on Air Quality doubted that any job ox had been gored by the Clean Air Act. Also, Japan and Western Europe, where air pollution standards are as strict or more so than in the U.S., haven't suffered a noticeable decline in jobs as a result. (Lack of government planning, high interest rates, corporate misallocation of capital and national differences in corporate investment perspective all weigh more heavily against new construction than any possible environmental effect.)

David Doniger of the Natural Resources Defense Council also notes that "the delays aren't all they're cracked up to be. The average permit goes through in less than a year. And very often longer delays are a result of giving the companies a chance to fix up grossly deficient applications."

Sheehan says that the Steelworkers recognized that

their industry couldn't compete with imports and was shutting down mills because it had failed to modernize. Forcing the industry to clean up the environment also forces it to modernize, and in the process pollution abatement becomes an insignificant part of rebuilding the mills. The union was part of a negotiated deal for a "stretch-out" of industry compliance that requires companies to put any dollars diverted from immediate abatement into modernization so that the industry will reach its mandated goals by 1985. "Through the Clean Air Act activity we're winning secure jobs and healthier jobs," Sheehan says.

Sheehan thinks that Steelworkers became committed to environmental protection because they realized that the pollution they could readily see in their communities was hurting them, just as noxious conditions in the plant were endangering their health. But members of building trades unions are "not necessarily the ones who stay behind and experience the health hazards of these plants," Sheehan says, and they consequently don't worry as much about air pollution threats.

Slipping suspenders.

The changes that the Building Trades favor would make it a little easier to build more plants in clean areas, which some industrial unions fear would hasten the decline of the old industrial heartland. Eliminating the increments or budgets for clean areas would discourage careful long-term planning and would also undermine the pressure towards more exacting technical standards, Doniger argues. "The increments are the suspenders that hold our technical standards up to our waist." The costs of offsets or "lowest achievable emission rate" standards in dirty areas are "trivial compared to total project costs," he says. And weakening of deadlines effectively means weakening standards.

But when a union faces massive unemployment of its members, it is tempting to clutch at straws. Despite discomfort on the part of some of its staff, the UAW has endorsed the relaxation of carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide emission standards sought by the auto industry, although it struck a more cautionary note on some other industry-sponsored revisions, such as on enforcement. Insiders suspect that the union hopes its cooperation on clean air revisions may help its bargaining position with legislators like Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), who favors lowered emission standards, or with auto executives.

Not only is there substantial evidence of the health dangers involved in the rollback, but there are also reasons to believe that the change would provide minimal help to the auto industry and possibly even interfere with the push toward more advanced technology that would ultimately make auto jobs more secure (*In These Times*, Oct. 14).

Sheehan also worries that if Congress grants relief on mobile sources, then it will be under pressure to ease the responsibility of stationary sources, such as steel mills and utilities. (The Mineworkers have so far committed themselves to a strong Clean Air Act, and out of their own self-interest are particularly concerned that there should be uniform requirements of air pollution controls on all utilities so that low-sulfur western coal does not get a further advantage).

Divisions within labor—between the IUD and the Building Trades on "prevention of significant deterioration" or the Autoworkers on truck and car emissions—make it harder for the AFL-CIO to mobilize its forces on the issue. Nevertheless, Sheehan argues, "This time I'm afraid the Clean Air Act is going to be attacked so hard by the administration that you'll find the AFL-CIO will find it necessary to speak up."

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Cleveland's voters want a rest

By John Judis

CLEVELAND

DENNIS KUCINICH'S 1977 TO 1979 term as Cleveland's urban populist mayor has left two marks on the city's electorate. First, it has made them wary of hot shots and other fiscal favors to corporations—so much so that Kucinich's successor, George Voinovich, has largely forgone such tax concessions. But the Kucinich years, with their pitched battle between the mayor and the city's downtown establishment, which culminated in the December 1978 default, also made Clevelanders wary of "confrontation politics." That wariness was evident in last week's mayoral and city council elections.

As expected, Voinovich won an impressive 75 percent of the vote against token Democratic opposition. ("Inside Story," Nov. 9). But in the city council races, where Voinovich's opponents, led by Kucinich and the Ohio Public Interest Campaign (OPIC), had expected to make significant gains, Cleveland's left was also dealt a number of sharp defeats. OPIC's Jay Westbrook and Gary Kucinich, Dennis' brother, won re-election, but other stalwarts, including two incumbents, were defeated. "I am afraid the election was a victory of moderation over any kind of extremes or radicalism," Dan Marschall, a former Kucinich administration official, said. "People still haven't gotten over the chaos and the battles of the Kucinich years."

The drawbacks of the Kucinich legacy were most apparent in the defeat of 24-year-old former union militant and neighborhood organizer Richard Chudner. In the primary, Chudner led incumbent Dale Miller in his predominately middle class white ethnic ward, and was favored to win.

The legacy of confrontation.

Much of Chudner's political education came from his parents—his father was a founder of a United Auto Workers local in Cleveland and his mother has been a long-time neighborhood organizer. But he was deeply influenced by Kucinich, whose issues and combative style he adopted.

In his campaign, Chudner tried to portray himself as the champion of the neighborhoods against downtown business. He charged his moderate Democratic opponent with being a "puppet of George Forbes" (the black pro-business city council president) and with being an advocate of "forced busing" and public housing. During one press conference, he and his supporters' attacks reduced the mild-mannered Miller to tears.

Chudner defended his political style. "Nothing has ever been gained in this country without some kind of confrontation," he said.

But Miller, with Voinovich's backing, was able to make the election a referendum on confrontational politics, with predictable results—Miller got 65 percent of the vote.

The Voinovich forces tried to use similar tactics against Westbrook, who had led the council opposition to Voinovich's desegregation administrator.

Westbrook's easy win, with 68 percent of the vote, reflected his skill as a politician and a campaigner. "Westbrook combines radicalism with competence," one observer remarked. But the failure of Westbrook's allies to win will leave him and Gary Kucinich isolated on the city council and force Westbrook to postpone his attempt to replace Forbes as city council president.

The city council races also rekindled a fierce debate within Cleveland's left about what former Kucinich aide Bob Weissman called "race politics." The editor of the local newsletter, *Point of*

View, Roldo Bartimole, charged that both OPIC and Chudner were using their attacks on Forbes (rather than Voinovich) and on busing (which is not under city council jurisdiction) to play on white Clevelanders' racism. "OPIC has taken a course that brings it shame," Bartimole remarked. "They've got to understand that this is a city that is half black and half white."

Westbrook denies that "busing is a racial issue on the West Side or the East Side. While the majority don't like busing, what they see is an education system not working." He acknowledged that city council has no say over busing, but said that he gets "confronted by more complaints about busing of the schools

you're involved in council or city politics, there's no holds barred. Forbes uses racism to try to protect his base. White politicians who challenge Forbes correctly have to give it right back to him."

Style and substance.

The 1981 election raises an important question about the Kucinich years: Could the Kucinich administration have pursued its opposition to tax abatements and support for public enterprise without engaging in confrontation? When Clevelanders repudiate "confrontation politics," are they also repudiating Kucinich's urban populism?

Cleveland's left remains divided on this question. Former Kucinich planning director

Norman Krumholz thinks the Kucinich style undermined the substance of his program. Even among Kucinich's supporters in OPIC, one hears misgivings about some aspects of "confrontation politics," especially as it sometimes carried over to Kucinich's battles with neighborhood groups and other erstwhile allies.

But Kucinich and top aide Weissman remain convinced that urban populism and their style of confrontation are inextricably bound up with each other. "Those who pamper themselves by distinguishing between our program and our style reveal that they were not tough enough to win or to govern," Weissman said.



OPIC member Jan Westbrook (center) won re-election to the Cleveland city council, but most Kucinich supporters were defeated.

than any school board member."

Westbrook also denies that people's hatred of Forbes is based on Forbes' race. "It goes back to the tax abatement days. People have no problem with having a black leader at city hall—they just want someone they believe and trust."

Westbrook does acknowledge that in the absence of an anti-downtown white-black coalition, "race politics" will persist, but he denies Bartimole's argument that they undermine eventual unity. "Racial concepts are an ingrained part of people's lives," he explained. "What has to be done to change the quality of life has to be done objectively in the conditions of people's lives. Whether something you write reinforces or ignores people's conceptions has no real impact on the basic goal."

Kucinich's own perspective is similar. "If we're going to get beyond race politics, we're going to unite whites and blacks on economic issues," he said in an interview in his West Side home several days before the election. "But when

But New Yorkers have a new party

By Paul Du Brul

NEW YORK

DESPITE THE LOWEST VOTER turnout in a New York City general election in 20 years, incumbent Mayor Ed Koch—running as both the Democratic and Republican candidate—won re-election with a decisive 75 percent of the vote. Frank Barbaro, Koch's leading opponent in the Democratic primary, was runner-up with 13 percent of the vote as a candidate of the newly-formed Unity Party, a coalition of leftists, trade unions and minorities.

While Barbaro's final tally of 162,000 votes was actually 50,000 less than he garnered in the Democratic primary, the fledgling Unity Party convincingly elbowed aside the established Conservative, Liberal and Right-to-Life parties and seems determined to become a permanent factor in city and state politics. Barbaro tallied almost twice as many votes as all his other minor-party opponents combined, even though the Unity Party was tucked away on line "h" at the farthest margins of the voting machine.

The most surprising aspect of Koch's victory was his comfortable margin in the

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