

By Joel Bleifuss

Chernobyl in every bite

One year ago Skip Brack of the Center for Biological Monitoring in Hulls Cove, Maine, began filing freedom-of-information requests with the Food And Drug Administration (FDA), asking for the results of an FDA survey on radioactive contamination of imported foods. Brack, an amateur scientist who has spent years collecting information on radioactive pollution, eventually received some information that has not before been publicly released. In the 32 months following the April 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, the FDA tested samples of foods imported from Europe for radioactive isotopes, including cesium 137, a radioactive element with a 30-year half-life. According to the FDA report, between Feb. 1, 1987, and Oct. 5, 1987, the agency tested 411 samples of food—such as pasta, spices, mushrooms, nuts, tea, juice concentrates and cheese. Of those 411 samples taken by the FDA (only a miniscule portion of all European food imported during that period), 44 percent contained above-normal levels of cesium 137, and 20 percent contained levels of cesium 137 above 1000 picocuries per kilogram. That level of cesium 137 is much more than humans usually consume in their food. In 1985 in Denmark, for example, the average annual intake per person of cesium 137 was only 2,200 picocuries. The FDA says it did block 20 shipments of food that were found to exceed the agency's 1982 cesium 137 "action level"—the level of contamination permitted before the FDA intervenes—of 10,000 picocuries per kilogram.

In you for life: Dr. Judith Johnsrud, director of the Environmental Coalition on Nuclear Power, a Pennsylvania-based organization, told *In These Times* that although eating cesium-contaminated food does not pose an immediate health danger, it does have long-term health risks. Said Johnsrud, "Cesium incorporates into the body tissues, muscles and bones, where it constitutes an internal emitter of radiation. So as the cesium decays over time, the energy released passes through the cell where it may initiate a malignancy. But because the latency period between the initiation of the damage and the clinical appearance of a tumor or leukemia is so long, it is very difficult to identify the cause and effect." Dr. Richard Piccioni, the senior staff scientist for Accord Research, a New York City-based environmental group, says that what "is significant about [the cesium-contaminated food] is how high that allowable limit of [10,000 picocuries per kilogram] is. Below that limit the FDA does nothing. The reason, of course, why they have such high allowable levels is so that domestic reactor accidents like Three Mile Island can take place without having to alert the public to real dangers."

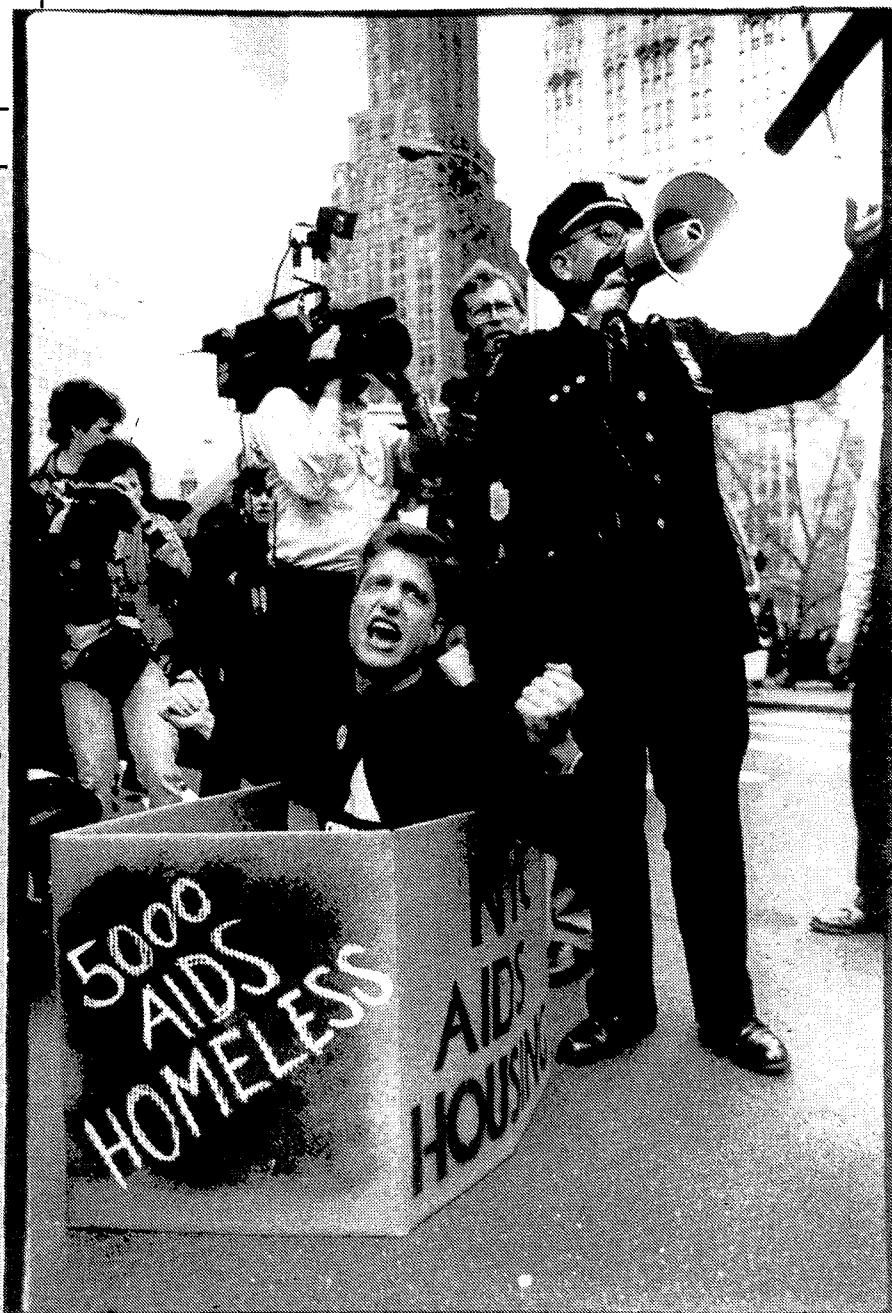
Lettuce is no. 5

The Food and Drug Administration's lackadaisical attitude toward protecting the public from contaminated food is nothing new. One of the In These Times articles most often requested by readers is an "In Short" item that appeared Oct. 7, 1987 under the title "Bon appetit." It is reprinted here in its entirety.

FDA testing has detected pesticide residues in 48 percent of the samples of the 26 most popular fruits and vegetables, according to an investigation by the Washington, D.C.-based Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). "This figure is probably an understatement," NRDC scientist Lawrie Mott told *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. "The FDA's routine monitoring methods can detect only half of the chemicals put on food." The Environmental Protection Agency has identified nine of the 25 most commonly found pesticide residues discovered by the FDA as carcinogens. And although most of the residues are within legal limits, the NRDC maintains that those limits do not necessarily denote safety, especially when the pesticide is carcinogenic. The domestic fruits and vegetables that the FDA found to contain pesticide residues more than 40 percent of the time are, from top to bottom: celery, cherries, strawberries, grapefruit, lettuce, peaches, apples, carrots, spinach and pears. As for imported produce, add to that list: bell peppers, cucumbers, cantaloupe, tomatoes, cabbage, oranges, green beans and grapes.

At the trough

Arms exports played an integral part in the Reagan administration's foreign policy. According to a 1981 presidential foreign policy directive, "The U.S. ...views the transfer of conventional arms and other defense articles and services as an essential element of its global defense posture and an indispensable component of its



Hear ye, Hear ye: On March 28, about 3,000 people gathered outside a cordoned-off New York City Hall to protest what demonstrators characterize as the Koch administration's "blatant negligence, disregard and mismanagement" of the AIDS crisis. The demonstration, sponsored by New York City AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), succeeded for a time in blocking traffic on the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge. About 500 police arrested 211 people. Above, awaiting arrest is a member of the Box Tops, an ACT-UP affinity group that focuses on the problems of New York City's homeless citizens who have AIDS or are infected with the AIDS virus. The Partnership for the Homeless, a New York City advocacy group, estimates that the city streets are home to 90,000 people, 8,000 to 11,000 of whom have AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses. But the city's Human Resources Administration has set aside only 74 beds for people with AIDS. Mayor Ed Koch has promised that by 1991 the city will provide an additional 838 beds, at which time the Partnership for the Homeless estimates that New York City will have 25,000 to 31,000 homeless with AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses.

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Just say 'war'

In their war on drugs, U.S. officials look for success where they can find it. For example, in its recently released 1989 report on international drug control, the State Department praised Peru for last year's eradication of 12,500 acres of coca, the plant cocaine is made from. Not much compared to the 289,000 acres the report says are still under cultivation in Peru, but it was an improvement over 1987, when less than 900 acres of coca were destroyed.

How did the State Department win this skirmish in the drug war? Last year Peru's eradication teams were given gasoline-powered trimmers to cut down the coca bushes; in previous years they dug up the plants by hand. A seemingly obvious technological advance, except for the fact that coca plants, when pruned, grow back stronger.

State Department spokeswoman Catherine Shaw says that at least the bushes are temporarily out of production, long enough for the department's long-planned coca herbicide program to take out the coca plants (and all other vegetation) permanently. Or as some observers put it, long enough to raise the eradication statistics in the department's annual report to Congress. This bureaucratic shell game would be amusing if it weren't for the fact that the U.S. insistence on "getting the numbers up" is drawing the U.S. further into a

jungle war.

The State Department is a key player in that war. It channels most U.S. drug control funds to foreign governments. And to help those governments carry out drug control operations, the department has created a mini-Air Force—known as the Air Wing. Peru, for instance, has nine helicopters and a C-123 transport on loan from the Air Wing.

These aircraft, piloted by U.S. civilians, transport coca eradication teams and members of Peru's anti-drug police, a special unit that has been trained in jungle warfare by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

But who are they fighting? The official targets are drug traffickers, especially those who run the trade in Peru's Huallaga Valley, the largest coca-growing zone in the world. But there are few Miami Vice-style shoot-outs with designer-clothed drug lords.

The situation in Huallaga has been complicated by the growth of the Shining Path insurgency. These heavily armed guerrillas reportedly control some 90 percent of the valley, making them the de facto political power in many local communities. The group owes much of its success in the Huallaga to the U.S.-sponsored coca eradication program. Coca production is the only way many of the area's poor farmers can survive. To protect their livelihood, area residents have increasingly

turned to the insurgents.

Under such circumstances, the lines between counterinsurgency and drug control get easily blurred. One danger is that U.S. personnel will go to battle with the Shining Path and the conflict will escalate.

U.S. personnel and aircraft have come under attack. Last year a U.S. pilot was slightly wounded. The State Department says it's impossible to determine if guerrillas were responsible. Although the U.S. has publicly downplayed concerns about the guerrillas, earlier this year U.S. personnel were temporarily withdrawn from the Huallaga. According to spokeswoman Shaw, the U.S. is "in the process of re-evaluating the security situation."

But there's no sign that the U.S. intends to re-evaluate its crop eradication strategy. The State Department still plans, once the Peruvian government gives its final OK, to spray the valley with a potent herbicide. Many fear the resulting chemical deforestation could be a further catalyst to the Huallaga war.

U.S. politicians and a large part of the public are calling for the U.S. military to mobilize against the foreign drug lords. The downing of a U.S. crop-dusting plane or the death of a pilot could be all it would take to add a new statistic to the State Department's drug control reports—the body count of U.S. personnel.

—Jo Ann Kawell

Add crocodiles

SAN DIEGO—The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) plans to dig a ditch. The five-foot-deep, 14-foot-wide trench would stretch along the Mexican border east of San Diego and Tijuana. Critics liken the 4.5-mile ditch to an inverted Berlin Wall. Proponents argue that the \$2-million trench will thwart alien and contraband smuggling.

INS representatives did not attend a March 22 hearing conducted by the California Senate Select Committee on Border Issues, Drug Trafficking and Contraband, where more than a dozen people testified against the plan. "I don't think they can defend [the ditch]," said Robert Martínez of the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego.

The INS had originally proposed the ditch as a solution to the contamination of Mexican drinking water by farm and construction runoff in the U.S. But according to environmentalists, the ditch could rob the nearby Otay Mesa of the natural rainwater pools it needs to sustain many species of plants and animals.

Mexican officials have denounced the project. They contend that the U.S., with a false show of concern for the Mexican environment, is deliberately misleading them as to the actual intent of the trench.

"We have to do something to take control of our own border," said Rep. Ron Packard (R-CA), "and a physical barrier is probably it."

Former U.S. Attorney Peter Nuñez of San Diego said the ditch is needed to stop vehicles carrying illegal immigrants and drugs. Nuñez is an advisory board member of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a xenophobic Washington, D.C.-based lobby that has released a 90-page study, "Ten Steps to Securing America's Borders." The group's report proposes fortification of U.S. borders with both Canada and Mexico.

FAIR spokesman Mark Krikorian says his group would go one step further than the government. FAIR is proposing a "sunken fence." Coming from Mexico, potential "border-hoppers" would encounter a downward slope that ends abruptly in a 12-foot vertical concrete wall. The obstacle

would be "invisible from a short distance away," says Krikorian.

According to Mexico's Foreign Minister Fernando Solana, "What interests Mexico is building bridges, not ditches." Krikorian dismisses such opposition as a ploy to co-opt Mexico's leftist opposition and thus prevent the National Democratic Front's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas from making the ditch a political issue.

"Basically, when we build the ditch, the ditch is built and they have to live with it," adds Krikorian.

After Mexico protested the project through formal diplomatic channels last February, the State Department replied that "new options are being considered for drainage problems in the Otay Mesa area.... The matter has not been decided either way."

A House subcommittee will hold hearings on the issue this spring, but both FAIR and the INS expect the ditch to be completed this summer. FAIR hopes the construction of this trench will set a precedent. As Krikorian told *In These Times*, "You have to get your feet wet before jumping into the pool."

—Kevin O'Donnell

Quayle's House seat captured by female Democrat

Ever since Dan Quayle was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1976, Indiana's 4th Congressional District has been a conservative Republican stronghold. But in a special election to fill the seat vacated when Quayle protégé Rep. Dan Coats was appointed to the Senate as the vice president's replacement, a Democrat bested her Republican opponent, Dan Heath, by 65,160 votes to 63,388.

Jill Long, the new Democratic representative, brings the number of women in Congress to 26 and increases the House Democratic majority to 259. Long's carefully crafted image of competence, moderation and business expertise attracted many voters who would not otherwise have voted for a woman. Eschewing feminist identification, Long projected herself as acceptable in mostly male terms to a largely conservative electorate.

But during the campaign she did develop a bond with women voters—a bond that was strengthened when a TV ad by Heath backfired. The spot featured a white motorcycle policeman hectoring candidate Long about alleged campaign misstatements. Her conservative stance apparently played well in the Hispanic communities, which gave her their votes. And the 4th District black community leadership was behind her from the beginning. However, neither constituency is numerically significant in the district.

A professor of business, statistics and finance at Ft. Wayne's Purdue University, Long also owns and operates an 80-acre farm. Voters saw Long's experience and expertise as applying not only to agriculture, but

also to industrial reconstruction. This was especially important in Ft. Wayne, which has been beset with major plant closings and economic downturns since the late '70s.

Republican opponent Heath had touted his government work experience in the prenomination caucuses, so Long held him accountable for the fact that Heath was chief of staff for Paul Helmke, Ft. Wayne's Republican mayor, who had promised no

tax raise and no new annexations to the city. Once in office Helmke raised taxes and was eager to annex a prosperous northern suburb.

Brad Senden, Long's political consultant and campaign director, describes his boss as a "a proud conservative Democrat with strong family ties." Her election, says Senden, validates his vision of a Democratic Party moving away from liberalism.

—George Fish

Democrat Jill Long will fill Dan Quayle's old House seat.



Dean Musser, Journal Gazette

foreign policy." But are there other uses for arms, besides fighting wars? Jean Cobb and John Zindar write in *Common Cause Magazine* that some people in the defense industry believe that "foreign policy concerns soon may be overshadowed by arguments about the role arms exports can play in reducing the trade deficit and in shoring up America's defense industry during an era of stagnating domestic military budgets." Joel Johnson is one such person. He is the vice president of the American League for Export and Security Assistance, the organization that lobbies Congress for the 24 largest U.S. defense exporters. Johnson told *Common Cause*, "As defense procurement drops, it will become more apparent to the military that the only way to maintain an efficient rate of production will be to have exports fill part of that gap." That is, exports funded by the U.S. government.

Death merchants: According to U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency statistics, between 1973 and 1986 the U.S. military-industrial complex provided Third-World nations with more than 25,000 tanks, 12,000 surface-to-air missiles, 10,000 artillery pieces, 6,000 military aircraft and 400 armed boats. The countries paid for much of this military hardware with low-interest loans from the U.S. government. As a result, some 37 countries now owe the U.S. more than \$23 billion. Many of the countries that received the loans are now having trouble repaying. Consequently, in its 1990 budget the Bush administration is proposing (as the Reagan administration did during the 1989 budget process) that Congress approve, and then forgive, \$5 billion in loans to foreign nations for the purchase of military equipment from the U.S. defense industry. In effect, the loans will be grants. The administration argues that by giving away \$5 billion in arms, the U.S. will help "ease the [recipient] countries' debt burden." The administration does not mention that this in turn will ease the bad loan burden of American banks and fill the coffers of military contractors. As a congressional aide told *Common Cause Magazine*, "[T]he taxpayer is getting screwed."

Red-baited professor sees green

On Jan. 10, 1987, the *Bangor Daily News* published an article that described Howard Schonberger as a "self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist Communist who has worked against the U.S. for the past 25 years." Schonberger, a University of Maine history professor who was active in Central American solidarity work, wrote the paper protesting this description, as did 10 of his 14 department colleagues. The *Daily News* responded to the letters, saying that it stood by the story. Later that month, John Day, the paper's Washington correspondent, wrote in an opinion piece that if Schonberger was a "Marxist-Leninist Communist who has worked against the U.S. for the past 25 years," then he was guilty of treason. Day suggested that an investigation of Marxist influence at the University of Maine might be in order. At that point Schonberger decided to sue. Last month his case went to trial. He described the experience to *In These Times*.

Taking a stand: "When I was on the witness stand, the lawyer for the newspaper tried to red bait me, suggesting that the scholarly articles and newspaper opinion pieces I had written were like those of Communists and people who worked against the U.S. My lawyer and I had decided that I would talk about my being a democratic socialist... I explained what that meant, speaking in terms of cooperation and concern for the public welfare, and said that this sense of public well-being was undermined by the military-industrial complex.... The newspaper's lawyer tried to trick me up, asking what was the difference between a 'big c' and a 'small c' communist. He pulled out two posters, each containing statements from my deposition. One was one labeled "democratic socialist" and the other "communist," and he compared them. He had also gotten my personnel files from the school. The chairman of the department had written in one report that I was the adviser to such offbeat organizations as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). So the paper's lawyer started grilling me about SDS. I pointed out that this had been written in 1973-74, when SDS didn't even exist, and that my department chair was a historian, but he wasn't very accurate and what he probably had done was gotten SDS mixed up with Maine Peace Action Committee. The lawyer then took out the comic book *Marx for Beginners* and read from that book. He tried to fluster me, but it didn't work. In the end the jury voted in my favor, unanimously awarding me \$50,000 in personal damages and \$450,000 in punitive damages. If that judgment stands through the appeal to the Maine Supreme Court I will give the bulk of it to Nicaraguan hurricane relief."