

By David Moberg

THE SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES OF THE '50S were right after all. There really are aliens among us, resembling humans and other animals, but with a tiny, deadly difference. Stealthily they sneak into their Earth victims' bodies, take up permanent residence and then wreak havoc on their unsuspecting hosts.

But these aliens aren't from outer space. They're kin to Frankenstein, monsters from a terrestrial laboratory that veered out of control. After years of fighting them one by one, many defenders of the Earth are now convinced that there is only one solution: banish them all from the face of the planet.

These real-life intruders are a vast class of chemicals—organochlorines, or chlorinated hydrocarbons, ranging from some everyday plastics, like polyvinyl chloride (PVC), to exotic ultra-toxics like the dioxins and furans.

Chlorine, which does not exist in nature in its elemental form, was first created as the unwanted by-product of a century-old salt-splitting process intended to produce alkali. Scientists soon discovered that chlorine, when combined with various organic building blocks, formed a broad new range of organochlorines, compounds that occur rarely in nature. For a while, organochlorines remained a chemical curiosity, but with the petrochemical industry's post-war boom, the commercial production of organochlorines also took off.

Fooling Mother Nature: Many of these compounds are highly toxic—associated with various cancers, birth defects, reproductive disorders, and immune system deficiencies—and are extremely persistent in the environment. Even when chlorinated compounds do break down, they often produce a complex array of by-products that are even more toxic and persistent than the original chemical.

And manufactured organochlorines resemble natural substances so closely that they are readily incorporated into the internal chemistry of living organisms, accumulating in higher concentrations at the top of the food chain—where humans reside.

Barry Commoner, the noted environmentalist who directs the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems at Queens College, says, "Chlorinated compounds are largely responsible for the toxic effects of the chemical industry." Commoner, who offered the "alien" analogy at the beginning of this article, argues that organochlorines are "the worst actors among toxic chemicals."

Some organochlorines are particularly notorious: among them DDT, ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), mirex, dieldrin, chlordane and heptachlor. The U.S. government has banned or tightly restricted these organochlorines, acknowledging their hazards to animals, humans and the global environment. But a great number remain unregulated.

This summer, Greenpeace, the international environmental group, is launching a campaign to ban the production of elemental chlorine and all organochlorines. Greenpeace, along with several leading researchers, rejects the standard approach of reviewing each chemical individually and prohibiting it only when there is a clear association of the chemical with a specific tumor



Chlorine compounds: unsafe for any need?

or illness. This approach ignores the pattern of evidence that indicts the whole class of chemicals, and fails to take into account the complex environmental impact of organochlorines.

There are more than 11,000 organochlorines with varied effects, "but there are no organochlorines that are not toxic," argues Joe Thornton, author of a new Greenpeace report, "The Product is the Poison." According to Thornton, even organochlorines that are only mildly toxic at one stage in their life cycle can be transformed into much more dangerous compounds during production, decomposition or incineration. Given such evidence, Commoner says, "Chlorinated organic compounds should be regarded as guilty until proven innocent."

Bomb the ban: Not surprisingly, the Chlorine Institute, a trade organization, believes the proposed ban is unscientific and unworkable. Chlorine "is intrinsic to human society," argues spokesman Joseph Walker, "and we're not all dropping like flies."

Whatever its environmental impact, chlorine's economic impact is enormous. According to the Chlorine Institute, chlorine production is a \$5 billion a year business, employing more than 30,000 Americans. And the 12 million tons of organochlorines produced annually in the U.S. are used to manufacture a diverse array of products including bleached paper, most pesticides, plastics (primarily PVC, much of it used in construction), solvents (from auto body degreasers to dry cleaning fluids) and purified water.

But even if chlorine has become part of daily life, it is not irreplaceable. There are substitutes available for almost every chlorinated product, with the possible exception of a few pharmaceuticals.

In some cases, replacing organochlorines would require minimal disruption. Alternative methods of paper bleaching, a process that currently discharges tons of chlorinated compounds into lakes and streams, could be instituted with relative ease. In other cases—America's chemical-intensive agriculturalists come to mind—the shift would require a wrenching change of deeply embedded practices. But the growth in organic agriculture among U.S. farmers, the world's most pesticide dependent, shows that even

this industry is capable of rethinking its use of chlorine compounds.

Despite the growing recognition that some organochlorines are clearly persistent and hazardous, many still assume that common organochlorines, such as the major solvents used in industry, quickly break down into harmless by-products or dissipate into the upper atmosphere. But in a new Greenpeace study, chemist and toxicologist Robert Ginsburg calculated that at least 6.8 million pounds of persistent toxics are pumped annually into the Great Lakes Basin. Although the solvents themselves quickly evaporate, they break down into new, dangerous and long-lasting compounds that enter the lake systems as contaminated rain.

Greenpeace has focused increasing attention on the Great Lakes Basin—which contains more than 20 percent of the world's surface fresh water—warning that the surrounding industries have turned the basin into an organochlorine sink. But Theo Colborn, a pharmacologist with the W. Alton Jones Foundation and author of *Great Lakes. Great Legacy* argues that the Great Lakes are no worse than average. "There's no individual on Earth without measureable levels of [organochlorine] contamination," she says. Colborn, who supports a ban, says organochlorine pollution "is really a global problem."

Chlorine's canaries: Even if a chlorine ban were enacted today, problems associated with the disposal of existing organochlorines would persist. Also, even if overall levels of discharge dropped, the concentration of the most dangerous organochlorines—often the breakdown products—would remain high for many years.

One of the challenges in making the case against organochlorines is that there are so many different organochlorines spread throughout the environment, and each one is capable of acting alone or interacting with another. Thus, tracing individual effects outside the laboratory is extremely difficult. According to Colborn, even "a breath" of the most toxic substances—measured in parts per trillion or less—has been associated with serious organic damage, especially if the molecules are present during fetal development.

Although scientists are still debating exactly how organochlorines harm humans and animals, numerous studies have linked organochlorines to the rapidly declining numbers of lake trout, bald eagles and other wildlife in the Great Lakes. These animals, with their shorter reproductive cycle, may well be the proverbial "canaries in the mine" warning of human risks.

The only major study of organochlorine effects on humans in the Great Lakes—comparing mothers who ate Lake Michigan fish with those who didn't—showed that the children of fish-eating mothers were born earlier, weighed less, had smaller heads, showed a wide range of behavioral problems and exhibited learning disabilities.

According to Jack Vallentyne, co-chair of the Great Lakes Science Advisory Board, an official U.S.-Canadian body that has recommended phasing out organochlorines and related chemicals, the greatest risk from organochlorines may not be to those who ingest them but to fetuses and future generations. In the past, Colborn says, researchers looked primarily for cancers, neglecting to analyze exposed infants for signs of increased mental dullness and other less obvious effects.

As usual, workers are also "canaries" for the rest of us, since they're exposed to much higher levels of these chemicals on the job. Earlier this year a study from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that a high-risk group of workers exposed to dioxin suffered a 40 percent higher level of cancer overall and about nine times the normal rate of soft tissue sarcoma. Greenpeace has linked up with workers in its campaign, joining the International Paper Workers in fighting the International Paper Company, a major polluter in the Great Lakes and elsewhere. It is also advocating the taxation of chlorine to create a "workers' superfund" to help displaced chemical workers.

Sooner or later, the production of chlorine and organochlorines results in high risk of pervasive problems, from organically damaged future generations to destruction of the ozone layer. Yet there are effective alternatives available for everything chlorine does. Pollution prevention, argues Greenpeace, is the only solution to the dangers of a chlorinated world.

By Joel Bleifuss

Calling this planet to order

Though we should all rejoice at the good fortune of the Soviet people to be free at last, it has been their misfortune to be released into a world where corporate capitalism reigns triumphant.

When Mikhail Gorbachov traveled to London last month to ask the G-7 leaders for financial support, the U.S. press described his journey as that of a mendicant, cup rattler, etc. The *New York Times*' R.W. "Johnny" Apple, in a summit wrap-up, analyzed the meeting between the "Bolshevik beggar" and the "Board of Directors of Planet Earth." According to Apple, "Western leaders" hope to "link the Soviet bureaucracy with those of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the G-7 treasuries" in order to turn "a failed command economy into a thriving market economy." Pack up your troubles. Stike up the band...

and thrive, thrive, thrive: Let's examine a few of the effects of a "thriving market economy" here in the U.S.

Last month the Centers for Disease Control reported that black Americans can, on average, expect to thrive 6.4 years less than whites. In fact, due to a variety of poverty-related factors, African-American life expectancy has dropped for the third year in a row. It now stands at 69.2 years. On the other hand, whites live longer as their life expectancy continues to rise to a present record of 75.6 years. Consider this extrapolation: the 30 million blacks in the U.S. would enjoy an additional 192 million years on Planet Earth if poverty didn't prevent them from enjoying the same life expectancy as whites.

The "thriving market economy" has also done quite a number on American children. According to 1991's *Green Book*, the informal title of a bulky economic report released each spring by the House Ways and Means Committee, about 20.4 percent of American children live in poverty. How does this compare to Western Europe? According to *Green Book* statistics, 4.7 percent of French children live in poverty, 4 percent of Dutch children, 3.3 percent of British children, 2.8 percent of West German children and .9 percent of Swedish children. Isaac Shapiro and Robert Greenstein write in a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: "The private economy in the U.S. generates more relative poverty among children than the private economies of many other Western, industrialized nations—and the U.S. then does far less than the other nations to address this problem."

Not everyone would agree with the tenor of these observations. Free-market optimists might criticize them as liberal naysaying, preferring to take the view that a child's stomach is half full, rather than half empty.

Of course, if you count yourself among America's richest 1 percent you have reason for optimism. You are truly thriving. According to the *Green Book*, between 1977 and 1988, adjusting for inflation, the after-tax income of this richest 1 percent rose 122 percent—from \$203,000 in 1977 to \$451,000 in 1988. During the same period the poorest 20 percent of U.S. households saw their average after-tax income fall by 10 percent.

The *Green Book* statistics further indicate that for the first time since the end of World War II, the total after-tax income for the wealthiest 20 percent of Americans equaled the after-tax income of the other 80 percent of the population.

Rather than enroll the Soviets in a World Bank tutorial, Bush might sign himself up for a few lessons in Western European social democracy. And while Bush is off taking a lesson in unalienable rights, let's register him in a refresher course on the environment.

During the G-7 summit Bush, the CEO of Planet Earth, as *Times* Apple might say, opposed European plans to curb CO₂ emissions, the principal cause of the greenhouse effect and the resulting global warming. Bush, however, doesn't believe there is a problem, and this year, like last year, he blocked attempts by other G-7 members to curtail the production of greenhouse gases. EEC Director General for the Environment Laurens Binkhorst commented that the U.S. "emits twice as much carbon dioxide per capita as anyone except the Eastern European countries."

The whole world in his hands: On July 23, a week after Bush derailed efforts to curb CO₂ emissions, the CEO of Planet Earth appointed 25 men and women to the President's Commission on Environmental Quality. The White House hopes that the commission can devise ways to reduce both pollution and the money polluting industries will spend conforming to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations. As the White House statement announcing the commission's formation put it: "The



Joan Conrow

Noa Emmett Aluli: holistic islander

By Joan Conrow

It was 7:15 on a recent Sunday evening, and Dr. Noa Emmett Aluli was pissed, in his low-key sort of way. While he was off on another island rallying native Hawaiians to participate in an upcoming public hearing, someone had stolen the tape deck and siphoned all the gas from his light blue VW bug. Still, he was philosophical about his loss at the airport parking lot, attributing it to the changing times on Molokai, the small, rural island where he makes his home.

Those changing times and a deeply held concern about how they are affecting his fellow native Hawaiians have combined to make Aluli one of Hawaii's most indefatigable and visible political organizers. For 15 years he has served on the front lines in all the major battles—the military's bombing of Kaho'olawe island, the geothermal development in a Big Island rain forest, the mass excavation of ancient burials on Maui, recognition of traditional religions and land-access rights, creation of a sovereign nation—and fought numerous smaller skirmishes over land use on Molokai.

Aluli, a gentle, soft-spoken man with a ready smile, would question the use of those militaristic metaphors to describe his work for the Hawaiian people. He believes in direct confrontation, peaceful demonstration and civil disobedience, but couldn't see himself resorting to monkey-wrenching, much less armed revolution. Although his is a level of commitment usually reserved for professionals, Aluli says his activism is more lifestyle than occupation. His real job, he will tell you, is country doctor.

Yet even in his role as a general practitioner, Aluli is driven by his commitment to native Hawaiians. As one of seven doctors serving the 6,000-plus residents of Molokai, where two-thirds of the population are part or pure Hawaiian, he is the only physician at the Molokai Family Health Center

who will treat welfare recipients. They comprise half his client load, which may consist of 30 to 35 patients in a typical 10-hour day. They are often difficult cases—requiring extra follow-up and education, less likely to follow doctor's orders, more likely to sue—but they are also the people who need him the most.

"I used to like birthing more than anything else," he says. When asked why, he answers, simply, "New life." But he had to stop delivering babies when his malpractice insurance premiums skyrocketed to \$17,000 a year. He still cares for the newborns, along with the grandparents who are ready to die and all the family members in between. He enjoys his practice, but, like everything else on Molokai, it's going through a transition.

"My patients used to give me fish and vegetables, whatever they could afford," he says. "That's how I used to make it when I first got started, and it made medicine so meaningful." Although he occasionally still gets fish, the state Department of Human Services now picks up the tab for many of his less affluent patients. As a result, he says, "their expectations have changed because someone else is paying for it. They think, 'I can get sloppy about my health because someone else is gonna take care of me.'"

That's an attitude Aluli is trying to change through his presidency of Na Pu'uwai, a non-profit organization responsible for implementing the federally funded Native Hawaiian Health Care System on Molokai and Lanai. He envisions the program "taking a holistic approach, acknowledging the importance of *ohana* (family) as an integral part of an individual's overall health and respecting traditional native Hawaiian health-care practices and beliefs.

Aluli has studied *la'au lapa'au* (traditional herbal medicine) and conducted medical research in an effort to understand why Hawaiians have more health problems than any other ethnic group in the state. His studies on the decline in chronic disease when native Hawaiians return to their traditional

diet and the causes of obesity and cardiovascular risk factors for adults have been widely recognized. Science aside, for Aluli there's no ignoring the direct connection between native Hawaiians' health problems, the steady loss of their land and the decline of their culture. For him, medicine and politics are inextricably linked. One interest drives the other.

Not surprisingly, Aluli's professional and personal choices have prevented him from achieving the material successes enjoyed by most doctors. He lives alone in a modestly comfortable house he and his four brothers recently built on Hawaiian Homes Lands in Hoolehua, a place where the ancients had 19 names for the different winds that blow. The house belongs to younger brother Hayden; Aluli has not decided if he will keep his house on a Big Island homestead. Boxes filled with files are pushed against the walls of the living room and stacks of paperwork overwhelm several tables. A computer, fax machine and three telephones installed at strategic locations both upstairs and down offer additional proof that his bright and airy home does double-duty as an office. But he enjoys his simple surroundings and marvels at the luxury of having hot water and a washer-dryer for the first time since moving to Molokai in 1975.

"I never had those desires—country clubs, BMWs," says the 47-year-old doctor. "Maybe it's because I thought I'd never make it. It's very hard to make it materially in Hawaii. It could also be because of the people I identify with and get along with. I don't know anybody who's rich that I'd like to hang around with."

Hawaiian roots: Aluli describes his own upbringing as "upper class for a Hawaiian, but for everybody else, real middle class." His father was a house painter, his mother stayed home. Surrounded by his own large *ohana* (family), with 24 of his 104 first cousins living on the same street, Aluli was insulated from the Kaneohe Marine Base families who resided near him in suburban Kailua on the island of Oahu. Through songs and traditional foods, bedtime stories steeped in Hawaiian legends, conversations with his grandparents and carefree summers with his cousins in the mountains and at the beach, he developed a strong sense of his Hawaiian culture. His parents were proud of being Hawaiian. They also instilled in him "a sense of responsibility for Hawaiians who weren't making it," he says. "I was aware of that at a very early age."

But he also remembers feeling self-conscious about looking different—darker—than the other kids in the Catholic schools he attended. He and his brothers felt the need to prove themselves, "to fight, and we competed and excelled in surfing, sports and academics." Upon graduation, he still had to fight, but this time it was with his parents, who wanted him to join the Army to further his education. Aluli had other ideas. He won a scholarship to Marquette University in Wisconsin and left Hawaii for the first time in his life. He returned after graduation—"this is my home"—and in 1975 was a member of the first graduating class of the University of Hawaii School of Medicine.

It was upon moving to Molokai, however, that the second phase of Aluli's education began. Although he had been politically aware for some time and had operated on the fringe of the Hawaiian movement, he didn't commit himself to politics until he first visited Kahoolawe at the age of 30. Kahoolawe, a small island off the coast of Maui, had been used for target practice by the military since World War II and was off-limits to civilians. For him, the island was the subject of numerous childhood stories and endless fascination. It was also becoming a focal point for Hawaiians who wanted to reclaim their land. Aluli was among the first Hawaiians to visit the island after it fell under military control, and he and his companions were stunned and moved by what they saw.

"It made us kind of cry to see this land that was barren and had no people on it, no water," he said. "It was devastated, eroded, covered with ordnance. I'd never experienced land crying, complaining, asking for help. I felt some sort of presence, some specialness about it. It obligated me, got me thinking, 'You'd better start paying attention to land, looking at how come land is so significant.'"

Aluli returned to occupy the island three times and was arrested once for trespassing, a charge he beat on the grounds of religious freedom. The experience marked a new direction for Aluli's life and set a precedent for allowing Hawaiians access to the island. The military has now stopped the bombing, and Aluli recently was appointed to the Kahoolawe Island Conveyance Commission, a panel charged with overseeing the return of the island to the state of Hawaii.

Letting the dead rest: His organization also has prompted other breakthroughs. Huge native protests against the excavation of more than 2,000 ancient human remains to make way for the Ritz Carlton on Maui led him to organize island burial councils that are now recognized by the state and charged with monitoring issues involving Hawaiian burials. He also helped found the Pele Defense Fund, a group that has gained international support for its efforts to stop geothermal development in a Big Island rain forest. In that case, too, he has attempted to force Western courts to recognize traditional Hawaiian religious and access rights. Although the lawsuits have been unsuccessful, Aluli feels vindicated because they helped make Hawaiians more aware of the intricate relationship between their land and their culture and religion.

"The land is the religion, the land is the culture," he says. "People have got to know that. Otherwise, it just becomes this academic thing. It's all about protecting the resources, honoring them, respecting them as god-forces and having those places that were recognized as sacred places continue on."

Closest to home, Aluli is very active in Molokai issues, working to limit resort development, to keep rural families on their land on the island's scenic east end, to create economic alternatives to tourism and to protect access rights to the shoreline. Hawaiians are progressing, he says, but their culture will not survive without a land base. The push now is toward self-determination and direct control over the vast land holdings that the state and various trusts have been administering since the U.S. overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1883.

A land base: "The kids nowadays need to feel that there are some victories, that culture isn't just speaking Hawaiian and that hula isn't just a dance," he says. "It's the relationship to the land—and feeling like that land base will be around in the future to influence the culture."

There's still a lot of work to be done, but Aluli says his role is winding down. "I've been consistent. I've been persistent. I've shown that I'm not just some fly-by-night politician trying to use Hawaiian claims to better my own practice and lead me to a more lucrative job. I've hung in there with the grass-roots, trying to find a solution. But I see it all peaking in about two years. I've done enough."

Looking ahead, he envisions himself moving to the sidelines, letting the younger generation take over the political work, maybe finally raising a family and starting a quieter practice in another rural area of Hawaii. But it is unlikely Aluli will ever be able to pull back completely as long as his medical practice continues to serve native Hawaiians. "You can solve their health problems, but the other issues are more deep-seated because they involve economics, culture, family dynamics," he says. "For me, I guess, that's the drive—to make it happen, to put it all into a wholeness." □

Joan Conrow is a journalist based in Hanelei, Hawaii.

costs of the traditional regulatory regime are substantial and many issues do not lend themselves to regulatory solutions." Sound suspicious? It gets worse. What follows is a partial list of the 25 people on the Commission on Environmental Quality who will shape U.S. and world environmental policies for the Bush administration.

1. Michael Deland, chairman of White House Council on Environmental Quality and commission chairman. He once headed EPA Region 1 (New England) where he was known for delaying the cleanup of Superfund sites.

2. William Ruckelshaus, CEO of Browning-Ferris Industries, commission vice chairman. Ruckelshaus is paid \$1 million plus to head Browning-Ferris, the nation's second largest garbage enterprise. The company has a long criminal record including felony convictions for violating anti-trust laws, dumping toxic wastes in the Ohio River and a substantial record of fines for violating environmental regulations. Connections to the mob are alleged. Ruckelshaus headed the EPA under both Nixon and Reagan. He left the Reagan EPA to set up a consulting agency that pioneered an effort to bring together corporate polluters and their insurance companies in an effort to skirt environmental cleanup costs. From there he went on to establish the Coalition on Superfund, a group whose purpose was to destroy Superfund liability provisions. To that end he enlisted Conservation Foundation head Bill Reilly to get other environmental groups involved. The Coalition issued a report claiming that Superfund wasn't working. But the National Resources Defense Council discovered the scam and the coalition fell apart. Ruckelshaus, an old hand at trying to co-opt the environmental movement, reportedly urged Bush to appoint the Conservation Foundation's Reilly to head the EPA.

3. Edwin Artzt, Proctor and Gamble. P&G, a big polluter, is a potentially responsible party at a number of Superfund sites. The company has gotten environmental mileage out of packaging fruit juice concentrate in small paper boxes.

4. Marguerite Ross Barnett, president of the University of Houston. The university is renowned for its strong basketball program and even stronger ties to the oil industry.

5. Riley Bechtel, Bechtel Group Inc. The Bechtel family is closely associated with the Reagan and Bush administrations. The company, the largest consulting engineering firm in the U.S., builds nuclear power plants and petrochemical plants.

6. Dean Buntrock, Waste Management Inc. According to Brian Lipsett of Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, "Buntrock's company has been convicted on numerous occasions for antitrust, bribery and price fixing—tactics clearly associated with organized crime. Its most frequent partner in crime has been Browning Ferris." Waste Management is also involved in the environmentally fraudulent practice known as "plastic recycling." As Father Joseph O'Brian of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Port Isabel, Texas, said, "Calling Dean Buntrock a recycler is like naming Jack the Ripper surgeon general."

7. Richard Clarke, Pacific Gas and Electric Company. The company has a vested interest in increased consumption of oil and gas and was a contributing polluter at three Superfund clean-up sites.

8. Kenneth Derr, Chevron Corporation. The company wants to open oil fields to off-shore oil drilling. Chevron is party to a suit against 29 cities that asks them to share in the clean-up cost of a Superfund site.

9. Robert Fri, president of Resources for the Future and its subsidiary, Center for Risk Management. This "environmental" organization is almost entirely funded by the petrochemical and garbage industry. The group's purpose is to manipulate public perception of the risks from industrial pollution through nonsensical analogies, like, it is more dangerous to drive than to live next to a Superfund site. The chairman of the center's advisory council is Ruckelshaus. The center receives money from Waste Management and Browning Ferris.

10. Kathryn Fuller, head of World Wildlife Fund and Conservation Foundation. Fuller took over these organizations when Reilly went off to head the EPA. The World Wildlife Fund and the Conservation Foundation can best be characterized as two of the three most "industry friendly" groups in the U.S. environmental movement. (You won't find representatives from "radical" environmental groups like the Sierra Club or the Audubon Society on Bush's commission.) Ruckelshaus is on the board of directors of both the fund and the foundation. Fuller is on the board of Waste Management. The two organizations are heavily funded by petrochemical and garbage money, including Chevron and Waste Management.

Next issue, the list continues.

Riding for reproductive freedom

Ten women and one man are cycling across the country to carry the message that if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, women will have to take it upon themselves to provide safe, illegal abortions. "Each and every one of us who have experienced 18 years of safe, legal abortions will not ever, ever, ever send our friends, sisters, daughters to the alleys," says one cyclist. "We will create reproductive freedoms for ourselves." The Reproductive Freedom Riders, predominantly from New York City, are distributing condoms and self-made suction abortion kits that, when administered "with care," can be used up to the seventh week of pregnancy. The riders plan to land in Seattle August 26 for Women's Equality Day, and are collecting signatures for a Women's Reproductive Bill of Rights that they plan to present to Congress at the end of their more than 4,000 mile journey.

A bleak crop

A massive labor glut, encroaching urbanization, a chronic water shortage and a plummeting standard of living are blocking the usual summer road to renewal for California's \$17 billion agricultural industry. And for the first time in decades, there is no coordinated, political voice to air the concerns and grievances of the Golden State's abundance of farmworkers, who are currently low in demand and must compete with a steady influx of low-paid Mexican migrants. Preservation of agricultural land—threatened by the state's burgeoning population, which has jumped by 7 million in the last decade—has become a popular cause, reports Diane Keaton of Pacific News Service. Five years of drought have forced farmers in some areas to cut crop production by 10 to 15 percent, while health and housing costs have soared. Says one local Salvation Army worker, "the people who feed the country have so little to live with."

Political hankies

Members of the Minnesota Business Partnership probably won't be spilling any tears into the hankies bestowed upon them by the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action (MAPA). The business partnership, representing 90 CEOs of the largest corporations in the state, helped underwrite a \$200,000 media campaign aimed at cutting state spending and countering proposals to increase income taxes on the wealthy. In protest, MAPA distributed hankies at the State Capitol building earlier this year reading "LOOK WHO'S CRYING!" and "We say: GIVE 'EM A HANKY!" The hankies also list eight of the partnership's board members—hailing from such corporations as Honeywell, Dayton Hudson and General Mills—along with their annual compensation, which ranges from \$1 million to \$3.4 million. Contact MAPA at (612) 338-1648.

Taxing snacks

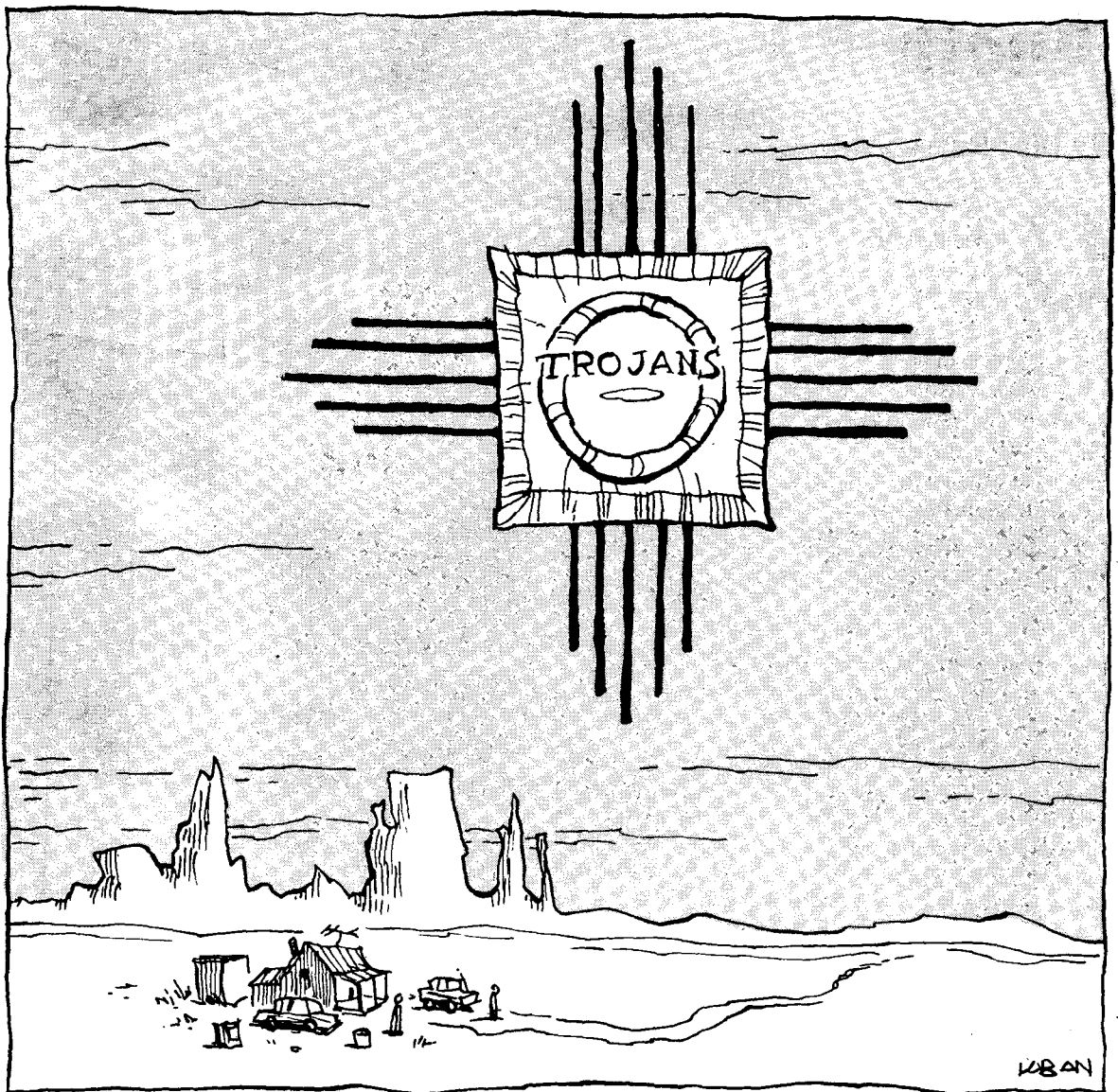
A snack is a snack is a snack, unless it's a soda cracker or a pork rind or an ice cream bar or a pastry. And unless it's in California. In the shadow of a \$14 billion deficit, the state legislature recently imposed a "snack tax," expected to garner \$200 million in revenue, reports National Public Radio's Linda Wertheimer. Californians will have to pay more for Twinkies, Fritos and Ho-Hos—snacks by any definition. But if you have to thaw it out or heat it up or substitute it for bread, well, in California, it's food. While the new law lets local bakeries off the hook, such "nutritional paternalism" has led to a lot of "nutritional nonsense," says the chairman of the state's Board of Equalization. "How do I explain to voters that ... a jelly doughnut is not a snack, but a cupcake is."

First we'll take Connecticut

Saying all political dialogue in America has become "too narrowly conceived to make an impact on a vast body of American people," Rev. Jesse Jackson will lead a weeklong march this month through Connecticut to dramatize the plight of the poor, the privilege of the prosperous and the profanities of politics. Modeled after the civil rights marches of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the march is set to begin August 11 in Connecticut's bankrupt city, Bridgeport, and conclude August 17 at the state's capitol in Hartford. Marchers will pass through communities that reveal the state's worst pockets of poverty and best displays of affluence. "I would hope that the impact of the movement in Connecticut would be contagious," to become a model for the rest of the nation" Jackson explained.

Please send timely news about local activities, follow-ups on stories we've run or other interesting bits of information—including your address and phone number—to: Kira Jones, In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

IN SHORT



AIDS and myth-breaking on the reservation

Mingled with many timeless myths pervading Tohono O'odham Indian culture is a contemporary one that could prove deadly: that AIDS is someone else's headache.

Gloria Nez and Arlene Joaquin are working hard to dispel such notions. Traversing the tribe's huge Sells Reservation west of Tucson, Ariz., the O'odham women spread information among the 15,000 residents about a deadly—and colorblind—disease.

They've been pleasantly surprised by how many are willing to listen.

"When we first started going out, the response was, 'I don't want to hear about it. I'm not gay,'" Nez says. "They would simply turn the other way."

Now she says the AIDS Thuth Mu'a O'odham (AIDS Is Killing O'odham) Project, with only two employees, has become familiar to even the most remote villages dotting this parched, 5,000-square-mile reservation. The women's van, adorned with traditional O'odham symbols, often gets waved down on the road.

"They stop us and ask for condoms," Nez says. "They joke around when they see us, and they say, 'Oh, there goes the AIDS ladies.'"

The women joined the fray in 1989, signing up as volunteers for the tribe's AIDS Education Project.

Nez, 39, was a secretary caring for her ailing father; at 33, Joaquin had already been touched by the disease when it killed her former lover and father to her son.

"I wasn't aware of it at all before that," Joaquin says. "I didn't know how it was transmitted or how to protect yourself. No one told me anything."

With time, Joaquin says, she came to understand what AIDS could do to her people. "Once this virus hits the reservation, it will wipe out the whole nation," she says, citing alcoholism and intravenous drug use as heavy contributors to the potential crisis.

"It leads to promiscuous behavior, things that wouldn't happen if people were sober. It's the biggest problem on the reservation."

When the Thuth Mu'a project was created, sponsored by the Tucson-based social service agency La Frontera and a trial grant from the U.S. Congress of Mayors, Nez and Joaquin were hired as community educators. They were sent to Berkeley, Calif., for training in AIDS counseling and became certified to do anonymous testing.

Because they are also O'odham, they've been able to develop a community rapport that might have taken others years to develop. The women reserve two or three days for home visits and spend the rest of their week mailing condoms and pamphlets and speaking to schools and community groups. On Fridays they work out of La Frontera.

Nez says their greatest obstacle lies in convincing people that AIDS is everyone's problem. "That's what I try to stress to them. I tell them that this virus isn't going to say, 'I'm not going to go there because those people are native Americans.'"

"A lot of people leave the reservation to go work in cities. But they always come back, and it's very possible they could bring it with them."

To date, no O'odham have tested positive for HIV. But the women think some sort of outbreak is inevitable. But just as the project is gaining acceptance, it simultaneously faces dwindling funds as the Mayors' grant dries up. And O'odham tribal government has actively ignored the issue in the past, even failing to recognize the pair when they won a Tucson newspaper's yearly civic service award.

Following recent tribal elections, however, new Chairman Josiah Moore immediately created the O'odham Office on AIDS. He has also called on local county government to provide more than \$70,000 for the Thuth Mu'a Project, a request county officials are resisting.

Meanwhile, Nez and Joaquin just keep working, distributing condoms and information. But their sweat is not without reward.

"We don't see anybody else doing what we're doing," Nez says. "And I think we've made a difference. It used to be people didn't want to listen. Now they often take the first step and come to us."

—Tim Vanderpool