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Harlem blast due to crumbling infrastructure

By Blake Deppe



On Mar. 12, the East Harlem area of Manhattan was rocked by an explosion caused by a gas leak, collapsing two buildings and leaving eight dead. It's no coincidence that the buildings were served by a 127 year-old gas main, and those in the labor movement are feeling the unfortunate burden of vindication. They have long warned about the outdated gas pipes that wend their way beneath the streets of major cities, an example of the crippled and outdated infrastructure that is becoming a growing problem throughout the country.

According to a statement by the United Steelworkers, the problem of archaic, leaking pipes is a multi-faceted one: "A congressional report showed that in 2011, gas distribution companies leaked enough cubic feet of natural gas into the atmosphere to supply the state of Maine for almost a year. Companies have little incentive to fix the pipes given that they can pass on the cost of the leaked gas to consumers. From 2000-2011, that cost was at least \$20 billion. The gas was never used or accounted for."

Advocates of repair note that new pipelines installed would be far superior to those already servicing cities - most of which are made of cast-iron and date back to a time before the widespread use of cars and lightbulbs. Brigham McCown, con-

sultant and former administrator of the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, explained, "People used what they had at the time. By and large in most American cities, that's a cast iron-type product. It becomes brittle, it becomes harder, and it's more difficult to get a seal," which helps contribute to gas leakage.

Consider the fact that Con Edison, the giant utility company that oversees the gas mains in most of New York City, has 60 percent of its pipe-

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lines made of cast iron or unprotected steel, with a large portion of those dating back more than half a century. The company has also experienced a high leakage rate, with 83 gas leaks for every 100 miles of main in 2012. Con Edison claims it plans to continually upgrade its gas mains to those made

Most gas lines in the U.S. are owned and controlled by privately owned gas utilities.

of modern material, planning to replace 65 miles of main per year, at an annual cost of \$110 million. But at that pace, it would still take the utility more than 35 years to replace all the cast iron gas mains in New York City, according to federal data. It's anyone's guess how many more explosions like the one in East Harlem could occur during that time.

And New York isn't alone in its problems. Carl Wood, national director of regulatory affairs with the Utility Workers Union of America, and former California public utilities commissioner, spoke with the People's World on the issue. He remarked, "There have been other high profile gas incidents around the country, like the gas pipeline explosion in San Bruno, California, and the one in Allentown, Pennsylvania." And this is due to more than just ancient infrastructure, he added. "Dealing with this requires renewing and maintaining a skilled work force. But the big barrier to that is this industry culture that has devalued safety, even for workers." Gas mains aren't getting properly fixed, he said, in part because "that costs money and requires staff. Companies are reluc-

tant to spend money on that.

"And there's another dimension to this: When pipelines leak, methane is released. That's an extremely potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change."

According to the USW's statement, methane is "at least 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide." This makes it an environmental matter as well as a safety and labor issue.

"This is an issue that just cries out for major investment in renewing the infrastructure; you could rebuild it by starting a major jobs program," said Wood. "And most of those would be good union jobs! But right now, the problem is this all comes down to money. Most of the gas lines in the U.S. are owned and controlled by privately owned gas utilities."

Very few are publically owned. To start generating jobs, we need to create special federal and state programs to upgrade and repair gas systems throughout the country."



Blake Deppe writes for Peoplesworld.org.

Do we need public education?

By PW Editorial

The last two mayors of Chicago do not seem to think that we need public education. They have been busy privatizing education. Just weeks after Mayor Rahm Emanuel's appointed school board closed 50 public schools, they approved the opening of seven additional private charter schools. These charter schools are privately controlled but publicly funded. They are not supervised by any public agency. They report to no one other than their company's CEO. The public, which pays for charter schools through their taxes, has no input into any educational practices of the charter schools. Unlike Chicago public schools, where key decisions are made by an elected Local School Council, neither parents nor community control anything a charter school does.

In just a few years, many private charters have been opened and many public schools have been closed. Still it's not too late to save public education, although one has to agree with Diane

Ravitch that we are approaching a "tipping point," at least in our large cities. The first step in saving our schools is obvious. As demanded by the Chicago Teachers Union, stop opening any more new charter schools. Then we can plan the re-integration of charter schools as public schools. If a charter school claims to have developed any innovative features, those should be maintained.

It is obvious that the teachers' unions must play a central role in saving public education. And they are trying to do that. But it is also obvious that teachers cannot win without massive community support. That kind of support was growing around the 2012 Chicago Teachers Strike. The union could not have won without it. But it is not yet strong enough to stop the school privatizing privateers, nothing short of a mass social movement can build the strength needed to reverse privatization and build the public school system our children need. The time to act is now.

Nothing short of a mass social movement can build the strength needed to reverse privatization.

Ohio “Frackgate” raises concerns about regulators

By Anne Caruso

A Freedom of Information Act request in February by the Ohio chapter of the Sierra Club began a series of events raising concerns over the relationship of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and the oil and gas industry in Ohio which it is supposed to regulate.

The FOI request was prompted by Gov. John Kasich's failure to follow through on a 2011 law permitting fracking, a controversial form of drilling for natural gas, in Ohio's state parks.

At that time polls showed 70 percent of the public was not in favor of the bill. During the public testimony session 39 people testified against the bill with only one testifying in favor of it. That person was the then-director of the ODNR.

Since the law was passed, however, there has been very little action on fracking in the parks. The law calls for the governor to appoint a commission to oversee drilling on public lands, but those appointments have yet to be made. The Sierra Club wanted to find out why this was the case.

The FOI request uncovered a 2012 memo from officials at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Kasich administration officials calling for strategies to promote fracking in Ohio state parks. Included in the memo were lists of allies and opponents, strategies to discredit citizen groups that were concerned about the dangers of fracking, and plans for public relations efforts to convince the public to support fracking in the parks.

Listed among the allies were the giant oil engineering firm Halliburton, the Chamber of Commerce, some media outlets, as well the Ohio Oil



and Gas Association, a lobbying group.

Among the opponents listed were the Ohio Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Ohio legislators Rep. Nickie Antonio, D- Lakewood, and Rep. Robert Hagan, D-Youngstown.

In response to being named in the memo Reps. Antonio and Hagan held a press conference calling for an investigation into what Hagan termed “Frackgate.” The outcry over the memo prompted Kasich to announce he had abandoned plans to frack in the state parks because he believed the “regulatory structure is not yet mature enough.” It is unclear what motivated him to take this stand. There is no evidence that plans to engage in a PR program to promote fracking in the parks were carried out and the industry is not pressuring the governor to act according to the law.

“It is what it is, said Tom Steward, vice president of the Ohio Oil and Gas Association. “At this time, it is not a ripe issue. That is an issue for the governor.”

On Mar. 4 Food and Water Watch and other environmental groups sent a request to the Ohio Speaker of the House, Rep. Bill Batchelder, calling for an investigation into the “collusion” between the Kasich Administration and the oil and gas industry in Ohio.

70 percent of the public was not in favor of the fracking bill.

LOCAL NEWS

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"Truthful Tuesday" kicks off in South Carolina

By Harold Geddings III

With all the attention being given to the Moral Monday movements in North Carolina and Georgia, the Truthful Tuesday coalition in South Carolina has been almost entirely overlooked. Nevertheless, a broad grassroots coalition of labor and progressive groups, including the South Carolina AFL-CIO, the state NAACP, the S.C. Legislative Black Caucus, and the S.C. Christian Action Council, has come together to fight the regressive tea party agenda. And even in this deepest-red of red states, it is having an impact.

"A goal of our Truthful Tuesday protests was to get people talking, change the dialogue, and reduce the tea party influence on Republicans. That is happening," said Brett Bursey, director of the South Carolina Progressive Network.

Community activist Anastasia Moore echoed the need for action. "I hear so many people saying they are embarrassed by our state," she said. "Instead of hiding we need to stand together to fix it!"

The coalition's demands are as diverse as its members. Among its primary concerns are the expansion of Medicaid, ending cuts to public education and social services, and stopping voter-suppression efforts.

The movement kicked off with a rally on the steps of the statehouse to coincide with the first day of the legislative calendar on Jan. 14, which was attended by a raucous crowd of hundreds of activists from across the Palmetto State.

El camino una ventana al mundial para Laura de la Uz

Prensa Latina

La actriz cubana Laura de la Uz consideró hoy un orgullo estar entre las nominadas del primer Premio Platino, una ventana para el cine iberoamericano en diversos aspectos.

Será una posibilidad de equipararse con otros premios importantes del cine, y así colocarse con un mercado de distribución y así poder competir, afirmó la intérprete en rueda de prensa.

Protagonista de algunos filmes imprescindibles del cine cubano, como Madagascar y más recientemente La película de Ana, por la cual fue nominada, de la Uz aseguró sentirse doblemente emocionada.

"Me emocioné como actriz y como persona, pues me nominaron por la última película de Daniel Díaz Torres, alguien con cuyo trabajo me sentí siempre muy comprometida e implicada", dijo la actriz.

Ya por ese papel ganó el premio Coral de actuación femenina en el Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano en 2013, que reconoció su probada versatilidad como actriz.

Quizás la escena más memorable de esa cinta, y la que sin dudas convence a público y jurado de su poder histriónico, es un monólogo del personaje Ana, del cual la actriz improvisó una buena parte.

"Para mí era muy importante hablar de los años 1990, así que fue una especie de catarsis, una necesi-

dad de hablar de mi vida y la de todos los cubanos en aquellos duros tiempos", explicó.

Afirmó que para preparar sus papeles hace una investigación que va más allá de estudiarse el personaje o poseer una técnica depurada y curtida, pues solo así logra captar su evolución psicológica.

"Quizás ser madre me ha ayudado también como intérprete, pues la maternidad me ha enriquecido como mujer, y por ende como actriz", le aseguró de la Uz a Prensa Latina.

Se considera una actriz con suerte, pues recién trabajó para los realizadores Marilyn Solaya (Vestido de Novia) y Fernando Pérez, que se estrena en el cine independiente con La Pared.

Pérez es, sin dudas, el cineasta que consagró a De la Uz, quien la dirigió en "Hello, Hemingway", "Madagascar" y ahora en esta cinta íntima y desgarradora, en la que encarnó a una esquizofrénica.

Para preparar el papel investigó con pacientes psiquiátrico del convento San Juan de Dios y en el cuerpo de guardia del hospital Calixto García, y así construyó este personaje inédito en su obra.

Los Premios PLATINO del Cine Iberoamericano son promovidos por la Sociedad de Servicios para los Productores Audiovisuales (EGEDA) y la Federación Iberoamericana de Productores Cinematográficas (FIPCA).

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