



Susquehanna

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Keeping Democracy Off the Ballot

by Ben Price

Earlier this year, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund began working with a community group in Cheltenham Township, Pennsylvania, called We the People of Cheltenham. The group’s mission is to assert the “right of the people in our communities to determine the future livability and sustainability of Cheltenham.”

Facing unwanted development and recognizing their inability to stop it under current law, the group reached out to the Legal Defense Fund to help.

From a series of meetings, the group developed a modest “Bill of Rights” to amend their local Home Rule Charter to bring self-governing authority to the community. This summer, the group circulated a petition to put the Bill of Rights on the November ballot. (democracy ~ pg.6)

Support the Legal Defense Fund: Your Contribution Matched 100%

We are very pleased to announce that we recently received a generous matching grant from the CS Fund. Thus every dollar you give will be matched 100% – doubling your contribution – up to \$25,000 in total contributions. Today, we need your support more than ever, as more and more communities contact us seeking help. (support ~ pg.8)

Building sustainable communities by assisting people to assert their right to local self-government and the rights of nature.

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Editor's Corner

Happy Fall!

We have, of course, made a lot of changes to our Newsletter. We hope you enjoy the new design and find it more informative. We would like to hear your thoughts about the changes we have made to our newsletter. Please send your comments by emailing info@celdf.org, calling 717-709-0457, or writing to P.O. Box 2016, Chambersburg, PA 17201.

The changes will continue with the introduction of our redesigned website in November. We have added many new sections, including how to get involved and a search engine.

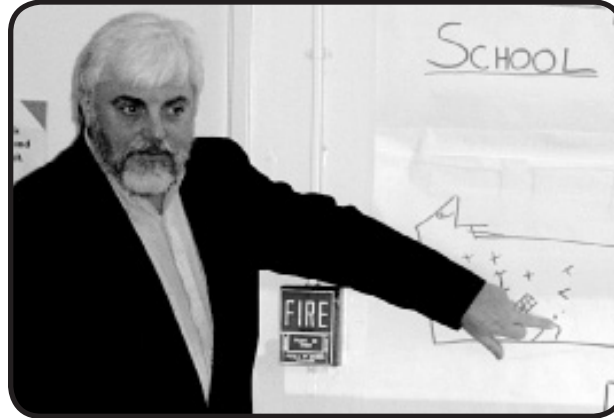
We are also excited about the opportunity to raise money that will be matched dollar for dollar, up to \$25,000, by the CS Fund. To donate, please fill out the enclosed remittance form and mail it back in the envelope provided or visit our website at www.celdf.org.

Thank you for your support,

Stacey Schmader,
Managing Editor

Organizing Not Just for Today

By Ben Price



Ben Price speaking to a community

In our work, we tell communities in which we organize that the present corporate assault confronting them is not the real issue; rather it is a symptom of a more fundamental problem: the denial of the right to self-determination as a community. And we tell them that it is this root cause, not the

symptoms, that must be addressed if the single-issue of concern is to be resolved with finality, and without compromising rights.

We at the Legal Defense Fund want results now, no less than the community that wants to stop corporate water withdrawals or gas drilling, or waste dumping, now. Yet, saving our communities from ever being used as resource colonies and sacrifice zones means establishing rights and governing authority that will survive into the future. If we act only for today, people who will come after us will wish that we had been less shortsighted and more wise.

J. Allen Smith offers some relevant thoughts on these ideas in his *Growth and Decadence of Constitutional Government* (pp 82-84):

"The real issues often, in fact generally, lie far below the surface of political controversy and are either unsuspected by the people or but vaguely apprehended. It requires exceptional intelligence to see more than the direct and immediate effects of political causes, although such effects may be of slight importance in comparison with the indirect and ultimate consequences..."

"Only those who see far ahead, who understand ultimate consequences as well as immediate effects, are likely to have an appreciable influence in determining the direction of political development... Effective control of the state means much more than the dependence of public officials on popular approval for continuance in office..."

"But few people possess the political intelligence and capacity for sustained cooperative effort required in those who influence the course of public affairs. The interest of the ordinary person in politics is largely confined to the pres-

ent and immediate future... Popular interest is focused on that part of the political field which yields immediate results, but in which present control is least effective, leaving the evolution of the state to chance, or to the guidance of interested minorities."

Corporate minorities regularly retool the processes of governance to protect and enhance minority privileges, while ordinary people try their best to get what they need by pulling the levers on the booby trapped mechanisms of governance. Little wonder that they end up falling through one trap door after another. Our work is not to build a new political machine. Rather, our work is to show ordinary people a mirror and help them to see in that reflection the opportunity to participate in the creation of a community protected by rights, and governed by the collective wisdom of its people.

Spokane Bill of Rights Appears on Ballot

by Mari Margil



Kai Huschke promoting proposition 4

In the City of Spokane located in eastern Washington, we spent the past two years building a coalition called "Envision Spokane." The coalition is made up of labor union locals including the Iron Workers and United Food and Commercial Workers; the Sierra Club; the Spokane Homeless Coalition; neighborhood councils; and other community-based organizations.

Together, they drafted and gathered over 5,000 signatures to qualify a "Community Bill of Rights" for the November 2009 General Election. The Bill of Rights would amend the Spokane Home Rule Charter—a charter is akin to a local constitution and is the city's governing framework.

The Bill of Rights will put in place new and expanded rights for residents, workers, neighborhoods, and nature. It includes enforcement mechanisms which prohibit corporations from using their corporate constitutional "rights" to override any of the rights in the Bill of Rights. And, if adopted, Spokane would be the first city in the U.S. to recognize Rights of Nature.

To learn more, check out the campaign website at: www.envisionspokane.org.

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Our Language is Powerful



Gloria Saberlin, Vicki Smedley, and Judy and Fran Calverase attending Democracy School

by Eme Lybarger

In Democracy School, we talk a lot about language. Words—these typed things on the page in front of you now that most of us take for granted—get much of our attention when we are teaching. Words have a lot of power: Corporations and government agencies use them to affect how we perceive things. That is why we focus on them a good bit. When folks take something for granted, like words, a lot can be missed—like not having the right to decide what happens, where we live. And so, we talk about those words.

What kind of words? Words like “bio-solids,” “advanced farming,” and “efficiency.” You see, those seemingly innocuous combination of letters are loaded with assumptions. Bio-solids are safe—I mean, look, it has the word “bio” in it, right? And if something is “advanced” and “efficient,” then it must be good, right?

Not exactly. Let’s unpack those words. What exactly are bio-solids and, perhaps more importantly for our purpose, how did we get the term “bio-solid”?

Bio-solids are sewage sludge. But the Environmental Protection Agency and the Water Environment Federation—the sewage industry’s main trade, lobby and public relations organization—know that “sewage sludge” sounds icky. Who wants sewage sludge on their crops? So the government agency that was supposedly created to protect us (the EPA) joined forces with a consortium of sewage corporate interests (the Water Environment Federation) and came up with a Name Change Task Force. They decided that sewage sludge was no longer sewage sludge: It was bio-solids. Once decided by some folks who

wanted to influence public opinion and behavior, the word was disseminated and today we are hard-pressed to find a newspaper that calls sewage sludge by its real name.

What happens when most of us read the word “bio-solids” in an article? I know the first time I read it, I didn’t blink. I didn’t even think. I read “bio-solids” and assumed all was safe and well. After all, it had the word had “bio” in it. So it must be just fine. Hardly! The EPA—our environmental protector—tweaked “Part 503” of their regulations on the application of sewage sludge. Sludge that was once under the category of hazardous waste was now called bio-solids and recategorized as “Class A” fertilizer—perfectly acceptable to spread on our farmlands. Who benefited? All of those corporations in the sewage industry.

And what about “advanced farming” and “efficiency”? Well, those are the words used by people in organizations like PennAg Industries to lull us into supporting factory farms and the mass production of food as not just necessary to our survival, but actually good for us. Because most of us think of anything that is technologically advanced and efficient must be inherently good. Right? Well, maybe not. That’s where the unpacking of these words comes in. We assume technology and efficiency are inherently positive qualities. Our assumptions are leveraged by corporations and government to get us to go along with what they want to do, which is to decide what farming looks like where we live (not them) and not hear a whimper from us. In fact, not only do many folks not whimper—they fully support it in part because of the assumptions held in words like “advanced farming” and “efficiency.” Who benefits from the proliferation of these factory farms? Corporations in the agricultural industry.

This is part of the propaganda techniques we explore in Democracy School.

Without seeing clearly how our words and assumptions are used by corporations and their partners in governmental agencies to get what they want, we will be seriously hampered in our efforts to create a rights-based movement. Words ...are ... powerful.

Democracy Schools

The Daniel Pennock Democracy Schools are two day trainings for activists, municipal officials, and community members that teach a new organizing strategy for communities by uncovering the hidden history of the usurpation of people’s decision making authority.

October 16-18
New England
Contact: Gail Darrell at
geodarrell@yahoo.com
or 603-269-8542

October 19
(one day school)
Bioneers Conference -
San Rafael, California
Contact: www.bioneers.org/conference

November 7
(one day school)
San Francisco,
California
Contact: Shannon Biggs
at 415-575-5540 or
shannon@
globalexchange.org

...and for a longer list, visit our website at www.celdf.org. If interested in hosting a school, contact Stacey Schmader at stacey@celdf.org or 717-709-0457.

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(democracy from pg.1)

The proposed Bill of Rights addresses root causes of the problem identified by the people of Cheltenham as the denial of their right to make decisions about the future livability and sustainability of their community.

If adopted, the amendment would recognize the right of the people to local self-government, subordinate corporations to the residents of the Township, assert that corporations do not have the same rights as people, and recognize the right of residents to approve or reject certain corporate land development plans.

Residents gathered over 3,000 signatures to qualify the Bill of Rights for the ballot. They had more than enough valid signatures, but on August 19, 2009, the Montgomery County Board of Elections stepped in to try and stop the measure from going on the ballot.

Continuing the long tradition of official denial of people's right to govern in their own communities, the Board of Elections acted despite the fact that no challenges had been filed to the petitions or the petition signatures under provisions of the Elections Code during the challenge period. Nor were any deficiencies found in the signature gathering or petition process.

Instead, the County Commissioners acted on the belief that We the People of Cheltenham had no right to offer the residents of their community an opportunity to amend their Charter to allow the people affected by governing decisions to make them.

In response, We the People of Cheltenham filed a Motion for Peremptory Judgment in the Court of Common Pleas in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, to try and put the Bill of Rights on the ballot.

Represented by the Legal Defense Fund, the group argued in its Motion that the Board of Elections had no authority to block a citizen petition to amend a Home Rule Charter from the ballot. Oral arguments were heard before the court and on September 16 the Court ruled in favor of the group, issuing a decision which stated that the Board of Elections had exceeded its authority. Cheltenham residents will now have the opportunity to vote on the Bill of Rights this November.

Legal Defense Fund at Bioneers ~

October 2009

We're excited to be a part of the 2009 Bioneers Conference in San Rafael, California. The conference is being held from October 16-18.

We'll be speaking on several panels and Associate Director Mari Margil will be delivering a plenary talk on the Rights of Nature. The panels will focus on our work in Spokane, Washington, assisting residents to amend the city's Home Rule Charter with a Community Bill of Rights, as well as on the Democracy Schools and Rights of Nature.

We're also holding a Democracy School at the conference. The Democracy School – on Monday, October 19th – is open to all. To find out more and to register, visit the Bioneers website at www.bioneers.org/conference.

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PA 17201

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(support from pg.1)

From coal country in Western Pennsylvania, to Spokane, Washington, where the city's river is one of the most polluted in the country, to rural New England where corporations are seeking to siphon off hundreds of thousands of gallons of water a day from local aquifers – the Legal Defense Fund is there.

We're working directly with communities, helping them draft and adopt laws to protect their local environment and economy, small and family farms, and quality of life, and drive long term change to ensure communities are given the power to decide what happens in their own community.

Please make your contribution today to support our work with the growing number of communities seeking our help.

Your support makes this happen, and you have an opportunity to double your contribution by making a donation today. Contributions are tax-deductible.

It's easy – you can give on-line at www.celdf.org, by phone at 717-709-0457, or by mail: P.O. Box 2016, Chambersburg, PA, 17201. We have also enclosed a form to fill out and mail to us. Please make your check payable to CELDF.

Thank you!



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