

WHEN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE GOES SILENT



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT
By Barry Cassidy

When I graduated from college with a BA in Political Science, my father helped me get an appointment as an intern for the AFL-CIO in the Industrial Union Department (Old CIO). I was excited to start a career and was assigned to work on an education program explaining the new *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1971*.

I did what they wanted but was disliked by my boss, and I found myself at the Xerox machine making copies of the course material all day. Luckily, the office manager guy decided that it would be better to send the copying to a printer, and I spent my time reviewing the federal register for updates on the Act.

Updates came occasionally, and I sat there at my desk doing nothing. When there were updates, I copied them and sent them out to the national union presidents. Once, about halfway through my internship, the threshold values (tlv) of toxic

substances list were published as a final rule. More substances were listed than in the interim rule, and I sought to find what was new on the list. What I found was that new substances had been added, but more importantly, what was deleted was the entire Benzene Suite of chemicals.

I knew this was big and reported it to my boss. He took credit and diminished my diligence. However, in EPA, the higher-ups were impressed with whoever found this out. I was invited to lunch (at Trader Vic's) with the under-secretary and told that "sometimes people in positions of influence make mistakes in their assumptions, and someone made the assumption you did not exist." Everyone at the table laughed. I did not understand but laughed. I got a 10-dollar-a-week raise and started getting invited to parties where the movers and shakers were.

Much of my success can be traced back to that incident. Never take something for granted; the people in authority like to write their own rules. In that case, everyone went silent about how the Benzene suite of chemicals disappeared.

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I learned to pour over the rules, read the laws, read the regulations, and if I could argue, I could end up doing what I wanted because it is allowed under the law. Combined with my street presence (thug life), I was able to work in some of the worst neighborhoods in America and apply my skills of providing transfer payments and structural grants to the underserved.

The other day, I thought about this incident and how the Undersecretary held his fork backward and told me I silenced them. In 1971, these people were people of influence, but now we know them as the administrative elite. They interpret regulations and seek administrative remedies. Recently, the administrative elite executed a beloved internet sensation, P'nut the Squirrel, because he and "Fred the Raccoon" lived with a family instead of in the wild.

Recently, I started reviewing the demolition of the A. Samuel Bicking Dam, which caused flooding and toxic chemicals in the Brandywine. I reported this to the contracting agency and am still waiting to hear back; otherwise, they are working on it.

So, last month, I sent a right-to-know request to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection regarding some

of the issues related to the administrative approvals for the breaching of the dam.

I asked for two specific documents needed to breach the dam. Alas, it appears neither exists. When you do this kind of investigation if the fish are swimming in the barrel, ordinary people come clean, but the administrative elite remains silent.

I was told people are afraid of being sued. I learned something when I got fired on South Street because I would not "join the team"; hiring an attorney cuts off all conversation.

It is best to call for public hearings and conduct them through the Downingtown Resilience Fund to resolve this administratively. I have tried to be friendly and cooperative. I was not looking for blood from career employees but instead looking for Environmental Justice. There is no need for a lawsuit as we seek damages. We have already experienced the damages, and we need the issue to be rectified. It will be the very agencies that created the problem that will need to fund and fix the problem.

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