

# EDITORIAL/OPINION

## Demand lead-free water

Portland's pure water is poisoning residents who have not been informed how to protect themselves from lead poisoning.

Connectors or pipes containing lead or copper pipes with lead solders can cause lead to leach into the water supply in homes, schools and other buildings. Although expensive alterations may be required in many buildings, a simple procedure will eliminate most of the lead intake. Let your tap water run long enough to flush out the pipes (about four to five minutes) before you take water for use.

It is the City of Portland's legal responsibility to insure that the water reaching the consumer's tap is pure, but the Portland Water Bureau has no policy of informing the consumers of the danger or of quickly making the

needed changes.

The individual citizen can contact the Water Bureau and have the building inspected to see if the City's or the individual's pipes contain lead and to test the tap water.

The identification and elimination of the city's lead-containing pipe and the identification of improper private plumbing should be taken on as an emergency campaign by the neighborhood associations. Only extreme political pressure will move the City to perform its obligations.

The public health and the development of our children is at stake. There should be no higher priority of city government than to protect its residents.



## Letters to the Editor

### Open letter to District 18 residents

The Nov. 5th Community Forum was the beginning of something good. It was an invitation to the Black community to become involved in the decision-making process of the State of Oregon.

The primary organizers of the forum, Herb Cawthorne, Ron Herndon, Marion Scott and Rev. John Garlington, developed and presented an opportunity for all residents of District 18 to hear Black candidates present their positions on six major issues and receive questions from the audience. Following the question and answer period, residents were asked to cast a vote as to which of the candidates they felt would best represent the concerns and needs of people in the district.

The organizers are to be commended for their diligence in developing and presenting the forum. The openness with which the meeting was begun and the organizers' willingness to openly review at the forum how major decisions were made, resolved the concerns for process integrity.

The forum was successful at focusing on the need for political unity in the Black community, a need so often expressed by Jesse Jackson. A case in point for the beginning of such political unity was demonstrated when Luther Strong, one of the

three candidates, immediately after the community vote offered his full support and endorsement of the community's choice, Margaret Carter.

Although the forum was a positive step for the Black community, it was only one step. It is now up to the community, the forum organizers and the 22 supporting organizations (as stated by the organizers) to carry the momentum forward.

For the first time in this community's history there is the beginning of a true political power base, the Black vote delivered as a block. But for this power to be realized the community must demonstrate its ability to vote as a block. It must act positively to realize the full potential of the forum's strategy.

However, a Black candidate can neither be elected by nor only represent Black voters when 56 percent of the electorate consists of whites, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians and others, as is the case in District 18. For this reason, any candidate selected by the Black community must seek and gain the support and involvement of all the people of the district. Although the block of Black votes is a powerful tool, the ability of legislators to secure pas-

sage of critical legislation is largely dependent upon broad district support as well as personal attributes.

The block vote and community unity are extremely important, but so is your involvement as a volunteer informing your neighbors on critical issues and motivating them to become involved in the political process. Equally vital is dollar contributions. The cost of printing materials and getting a message to all residents of the district is an expensive undertaking.

The block vote for Black people can become a reality in Oregon and the most diverse district in the state can be unified. But all residents must make the effort; they must vote, volunteer their time and help to pay costs. And the community's candidate must meet and work openly, accountably and responsibly with all the people of District 18.

Fred Milton

*The Observer welcomes Letters to the Editor. Letters should be short, and must contain the writer's name and address (addresses are not printed). The Observer reserves the right to edit for length.*

## High Tech for whom?

by Dr. Manning Marable

Corporations and politicians alike have been feeding us a heavy dose of "high technology propaganda" in recent years. Many leading Democrats, including neo-liberals like Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas and presidential aspirant Gary Hart, have claimed that the rapid expansion of high technological firms would resolve many of America's long-term economic problems. But let's try to separate the political rhetoric from the harsh realities.

How has the high technology and computer boom affected Black workers? Labor force statistics indicate, first, that most Blacks perform at low-skilled positions in high tech firms. Blacks are almost never hired as managers, but as low level operatives and clerical workers in such companies.

Second, racial and sexual segregation is already an organic part of high tech manufacture. Today, whites comprise over 96 percent of all professional and managerial positions in high tech-related firms, such as insurance, computers, and banking. Women and nonwhites total over 90 percent of the operatives and clerical workers in these companies. Despite industry claims that high tech could generate a huge demand for skilled workers, most political economists predict that high tech will create only 900,000 new jobs over the next ten years. And because the vast majority of these new positions will be clerical and operatives, Blacks and Hispanics now entering the field won't benefit materially.

Third, high technology is rapidly eliminating thousands of jobs every year which were "traditionally" the

employment sectors of Black, Hispanic and women workers. Several hundred thousand Black women are currently employed as bank tellers, clericals, keypunch operators, stenographers, etc. Employment in these vocations will drop by at least one-fifth during the next 10-15 years due to the expanded use of computers. Two disturbing illustrations of this dynamic can be cited. One major New York bank recently issued a statement telling depositors below a certain amount that they would not be permitted to see a teller for normal transactions. Instead, customers would transact their business via a bank card machine. This move meant that the number of tellers could conceivably be reduced. Since 1970, furthermore, the number of telephone operators has been cut 30 percent, primarily because of the use of computers. Corporate technology promises to slash more jobs in the future.

According to social historian Amy Dru Stanley, "Computers and automated data processors have fragmented and simplified clerical and service work, multiplying the number of low-wage positions." Today over 97 percent of all office word processors are operated by women, Blacks and Hispanics. By 1990, according to Stanley, "50 to 75 percent of all service work will be computer-related." Secretaries, cashiers, bookkeepers and other low-income white collar employees will be affected.

Fourth, American banks have been largely responsible for subsidizing the high tech explosion abroad, which in turn has undermined U.S. jobs. Between 1960 and 1983, for instance, the sale of for-

eign made steel in the U.S. has expanded from 5 percent to 23 percent. Why? Examine the behavior of ten major banks—Citibank, Chemical Bank, Continental Illinois, Mellon, First Chicago, Wells Fargo, Western Bankcorp, Security Pacific, J.P. Morgan, and Rainier Bancorp. The pension funds of U.S. Steel and Bethlehem Steel had, as of the late 1970s, a total of \$133 million invested in the stock of these ten banks. Using the same deposits, plus those of other American workers, these banks loaned Japanese steel companies more than one billion, 165 million dollars. Japanese steel firms have taken U.S. workers' capital to develop high tech steel production, which in turn displaces the same steelworkers!

The aggressive export of high tech-oriented production facilities by U.S.-based multinationals, combined with the suppression of foreign workers' wages, has sent hundreds of thousands of Americans to unemployment lines. Small wonder that the percentage of foreign made electrical components in the past 23 years has soared from 1 percent to 26 percent; the percentage of consumer electronics, 6 percent to 95 percent; and the percentage of calculators, 5 percent to 45 percent.

High technology could be used to serve the interests of the labor movement, rather than the destructive prerogatives of the banks and the corporations. Technological advances must serve the public policy goal of a full employment economy at home, combined with the implementation of more effective affirmative action guarantees which advance the interests of Blacks, Latinos and women.

## Washington Hot Line

by Congressman Ron Wyden



For months, the battle to ensure affordable phone rates has been waged both here in the Capitol and across the country. Late last week, that battle finally came to a head in the House of Representatives and I'm glad to report that common sense won out.

At that time, the House of Representatives passed the Universal Telephone Service Preservation Act of 1983 bringing us a step closer to keeping millions of consumers from having to pay unjust and inequitable bills for their phone.

The legislation, as passed by the House, would exempt millions of small businesses and residential customers from paying the Federal Communications Commission's flat monthly "access charge."

This fee, which is a charge for access to long distance lines, was designed to replace the revenue which local phone companies would lose when AT&T splits away from the

local Bell companies.

But the fee was plainly unfair. Under the access charge decision, telephone customers would be charged a flat monthly fee of from \$2 to \$6 for access to long distance lines even if they never made a single long distance call.

In addition to removing this unfair charge for small businesses and residential customers, the House legislation would establish a fund, the "Universal Service Fund," which would guarantee that in rural areas and other areas of high cost phone service, the phone rates would not rise substantially above the national average.

The bill would also create a "life-line service," under which state public utilities commissions are directed to provide reduced rate local service for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps or Supplemental Security Income. State PUCs would also be di-

rected to take into account the needs of the elderly and other groups that would have trouble affording a phone when establishing their programs.

Taken together, these measures are a significant step toward keeping the phone a common utility, available to all. And I believe that is what we must do. I have said again and again that the value of a phone is linked to the universality of the whole phone system. In other words, it doesn't do me any good to have a phone if I want to call someone who doesn't have one because they can't afford it.

There is still much work to be done. The legislation must pass the Senate, be reconciled with the House version and, finally, be signed by the President. But, at least we are over the first big hurdle and that much closer to ensuring affordable phone service for all.

## Water carries lead poison

(Continued from page 1 column 6)

The City or private laboratories yzed, but the results can be altered by the sampling procedure. If samples are taken where the tap has been allowed to run and the pipes are flushed out, a minimum of lead will be found, so samples should be taken of stagnant water that has been standing in the pipes for several hours.

### Solution

Barring of lead solders will be considered by the Oregon Health Division at a public hearing Friday, November 18th but this will affect only future plumbing. The City has the responsibility to replace all

offending pipes on public property, but changes in internal plumbing are the responsibility of the owners.

A relatively simple and low-cost solution would be the addition of lime to the water to reduce its corrosivity and prevent it from absorbing lead.

Although Burt has attempted to influence the Water Bureau to take the threat of lead poisoning seriously, he has received little cooperation. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires that water services notify their customers when contamination exceeds allowable standards but the Portland Water Bureau has not complied. A small notification, suggesting flushing of pipes, appeared in the newsletter mailed with water bills but the item did not explain

why this is necessary.

Following publicity over the City of Seattle's corrosion problem, which causes millions of dollars worth of damage to water pipes, the Water Bureau commissioned a study of the results of Portland water corrosion but the 1982 study did not include health factors.

Burt continues his work, urging Portland residents to protect their own safety until the City is forced to act. This action could be hastened when the first diagnosed lead poisoned resident files suit against the City for violation of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Further information can be obtained from Citizens for a Lead Free Environment, PO Box 20696, Portland, OR 97230.

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