

Opinion

Articles do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of The Portland Observer

Trucks, profit, and death wreaking havoc on our roads

By TIMOTHY LYNCH FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Every week in America over 100 people lose their lives—and hundreds more are mangled and crippled—in highway accidents involving trucks. Recently, a congressional subcommittee held a hearing to discuss this horrible fact. Yet, something absolutely crucial was not addressed: the fact that behind the wheel in nearly all of those accidents were non-union truck drivers. In an Associated Press report this February, a mother was quoted asking, "Why was the tired trucker who killed my son on the road after 16 hours?" It is urgent for the American people to know the cause of these deaths—which are increasing with every year—and what can stop them.

The great American educator Eli Siegel, founder of the philosophy Aesthetic Realism, explained that the terrible, huge number of work-related accidents, maimings, fatalities, and also industrial diseases, have arisen from the very basis of the profit system. He explained that this system is contempt for people. It's based on bosses and stockholders who don't do the work, taking the profits that other men and women worked hard and long to produce. I learned from Aesthetic Realism that unions have been the largest force on behalf of safety on the job, and also economic justice, in American history. As a union leader, I've seen vivid evidence for this fact. Unions have been the means of stopping an employer from using

a human being utterly as a mechanism to supply him with money.

Passenger car drivers are to blame for many car-truck collisions. However, what is the central reason for a trucker's driving while sleepy—which leads, for instance, to his running over a car and killing four passengers? Why does a trucker "cut corners" and rush to get the delivery made and the truck back for the next load? The reason is: a boss sees every truck, driver, and load in terms of profit for himself—and the quicker the delivery and the lower the wage he pays, the bigger the profit. Bosses make it clear to a trucker that if he wants to keep his job he'd better "deliver"—not giving a damn for what happens to that driver, and through him, to people on the road. Interstate trucking is not covered under the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, and therefore companies are not required to pay a driver overtime—so they often demand that the driver work 60 or more hours per week. Also, most interstate drivers are paid by the load or mile, not the hour, and are not paid for waiting time or time spent loading and unloading. So unless there is a union contract requiring respectful pay for a reasonable work week, if a driver is to eke out a living he finds speed and long hours desperately necessary.

Mr. Siegel explained that contempt—"the addition to self through the lessening of something else"—is the source of all injustice. I think his seeing this is one of the most important discoveries in world history. Contempt is what

has a person feel he is superior to people of another race, religion, or background. And contempt is what has an employer send out a truck knowing the clutch could give way, or its brakes are not in good shape. In my years as a union organizer, I've witnessed many of the horrific human results of our contemptuous economy, from broken backs to burned bodies, to workers driving dangerously overloaded trucks, often with balding tires. Workers put up with dangerous conditions because they are terrified of losing that needed paycheck; frantic over the fact that they might not be able to feed their family if they object.

Meanwhile, what is the reason for the increasing number of deaths caused by truck accidents? Why are drivers forced to drive even longer distances and at faster speeds? Beginning in May 1970, in a series of lectures, Mr. Siegel showed that the profit system, after hundreds of years, was no longer able to function successfully. He said: "The inefficiency of ill will in economics is now becoming apparent all over the world. There will be no economic recovery in the world until economics itself, the making of money, the having of jobs, becomes ethical; is based on good will rather than on the ill will which has been predominant for centuries." [Goodbye Profit System: Update, Definition Press, 1982, pp. 156, xxxiii] Today, despite the continuous, cruel assertions that our economy is "booming," it is a fact that the American middle class has been shrinking; tens of millions are working two or more jobs

just to survive. Forcing people to be poorer is the only way to keep big profits coming in for people who don't do the work. This is the reason corporate owners have closed thousands of American factories, costing millions of Americans their jobs. Owners then open overseas in nations where they can pay obscene wages, and where there are virtually no regulations that protect workers. But you can't have American trucking done in Guatemala or Indonesia. So instead, bosses increasingly force American truckers to put in unconscionable hours, under horrible conditions. And they increasingly try to wipe out what would stop them:

unions. One result is the increasing deaths on US roads. Are our citizens—who may be your children, your friends, you—worth sacrificing in behalf of personal profit?

America is desperate for an economy that is democratic and just. We will have such an economy when America proudly goes after the power that Ellen Reiss, the Class Chairman of Aesthetic Realism, describes in the international journal *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*: "The power of respect in economics... is the power of every person to be given his dignity; what used to be called the fruits of his labor; his fair share of the world's wealth... The power of respect is the power to feel we are working, not to be exploited by someone or to beat out someone, but because what we do can strengthen other people even as we feel we are being strengthened." [TRO 1359]

The Portland Observer

USPS 959-680
Established 1970

STAFF

PUBLISHER
Charles Washington

EDITOR
Larry J. Jackson, Sr.

COPY EDITOR
Joy Ramos

BUSINESS MANAGER
Gary Ann Taylor

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Shawn Strahan

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Portland, OR 97211
503-288-0033
Fax 503-288-0015
e-mail pdxobserv@aol.com

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
Portland Observer
PO Box 3137
Portland, OR 97208

Periodical Postage
paid in Portland, OR

Subscriptions are
\$60.00 per year

DEADLINES
FOR ALL SUBMITTED MATERIALS:

ARTICLES:
Monday by 5 P.M.

ADS:
Friday by noon

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 1996 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association—Serving Portland and Vancouver.

New TV movie predicts Y2K meltdown

By ROGER AUERBACH FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Y2K meltdown. That is the fictional prediction of an NBC made-for-TV movie scheduled for airing on Sunday, Nov. 21. The show reportedly features widespread power failure, instrument problems with commercial jets and bank ATMs that don't work.

The key word is "fictional." After investing untold millions to fix forecast computer glitches, leaders in business and government almost universally believe Year 2000 problems in the country will be minimal.

The greater problem is on a personal level: With fewer than 60 days left until Jan. 1, crooks are increasingly tempted to try to defraud anxious citizens.

Already, people posing as bank or credit-card officials have called customers asking for account numbers. (Hint: Bank and credit-card companies already know your account numbers.)

One senior reported a call from a "banker" who wanted to transfer her money to a special Y2K-safe account. Banks have reported that worried seniors have timed CD maturity dates so they can withdraw their money in December. One couple is reported to have lost cash they buried in coffee cans.

State agencies, AARP and others are advising seniors and others not to panic. Federal and state agencies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars reprogramming and testing their computers so they won't confuse year 2000 with 1900. Therefore, you should expect state and federal checks and benefits to continue as usual.

Likewise, businesses and utilities have a financial interest in preventing service interruptions.

But scam artists like especially to prey on elderly people because they are more likely to have money, to be trusting and to be isolated from others whom they might consult. In evaluating possible scams, here are three questions to ask yourself: Is it too good to be true? Am I being rushed to make a decision? Is a smooth-talking stranger asking me for money or personal information (such as bank, credit-card, Medicare or Social Security numbers)?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then don't get involved.

If you have Y2K concerns or wish to lodge a complaint, you may contact the Oregon Department of Justice in Salem toll free at (877) 877-9392. To request a brochure about Y2K and seniors, call my office toll free at (800) 232-3020. If you want to know what Oregon state government is doing about Y2K, and how you can prepare, then from Portland call (503) 225-5555 ext. 4500 or (888) 877-3044 from outside Portland.

Even though computers aren't expected to cause problems, it's still a good idea to prepare for New Year 2000 as you would be for a severe winter storm or natural disaster. Organizations such as AARP and the American Red Cross recommend:

- Don't withdraw large sums of money from the bank, where it is federally insured. Keeping large sums at home jeopardizes not only your money, but also your personal safety.
- Do keep financial statements for the last six months of 1999. For New Year's weekend, do with draw a small amount of cash and put it in a safe place.
- Do keep your car's gas tank at least half full at year's end. But don't risk your safety by storing large amounts of fuel.
- Store enough food, medications and water for two weeks, and remember to have a good manual can opener.
- Be sure your smoke alarms, radios and flashlights have fresh batteries.
- Have warm clothing and blankets available in case of power failure.

The threat of Y2K-related problems, while small, has had a benefit: more than ever before, Oregonians are thinking about general emergency readiness and are guarding themselves against scams.

By being wary, Oregonians also are helping to guarantee that the success of crooks and scam artists, like the troubles portrayed in the NBC movie, are purely fictional. To learn what the DHS is doing about Y2K, see www.hr.state.or.us/y2k on the Internet.

Letter to the editor

I am writing in response to the introduction of the ill-intentioned Agricultural Job Opportunity Benefit and Security Act of 1998 (AJOB) as a national bill by Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith. While the values and sentiments that the right-wing is promoting across the United States, its main purpose is to recreate an almost identical act used in the middle part of this century and commonly known as the "Bracero Programs." My family immigrated to this country under the misery of the Bracero Program. We toiled on this country's farms under subhuman working. And condition; Smith and Wyden on a new generation of migrant workers. It is farcical that Wyden and Smith on a new generation of migrant workers. It is farcical that Wyden and Smith claim to protect worker by loosening standards for living and working condition; these standard are already

so low that they are a national disgrace. This country does not need another Bracero Programs. It needs complete overhaul of the profit driven agribusiness industry, so rules mandating decent living, working conditions, and wages are enforced. So-called "illegal" immigration is not a problem in this country. U.S. bosses get rich to on low-cost immigrant labor while whipping up racist hostility against these workers. It is due to greed of controlling every resource in the world that this country needs immigrants for all areas of labor. The profits of their productivity stay in the hands of the U.S. ruling class and do not benefit the people! We need to demand improve conditions for all farmworkers, U.S. born and immigrants. We need to tell Wyden and Smith to drop their racist bill.

Sincerely, Eduardo Martínez Zapata, Freedom Socialist party Forest Grove



Letter To The Editor

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:
Editor: PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208



No strings attached. Anytime something knocks out the lights, we're ready. We're here to give you fast, responsive, dependable help. Our Customer Service Center is open 24 hours a day to answer your calls. Our crews work around the clock, too. And we have teams from all over our service area prepared to offer extra help wherever there's a major outage.

Lights out? We're on it.

Now here's what you can do if the lights go out:

- Be ready!** Keep in your house: a flashlight, battery-operated radio, battery-operated clock, bottled water, manual can opener and extra batteries. If someone in your home is on life support, be sure to have a backup system and an action plan in case of an outage.
- Before you call us, check your breakers** or fuse box to make sure you don't have a tripped breaker or blown fuse. Look for lights at your neighbors'.

- After you've checked, give us a call** at 1-877-548-3768 to report the outage. Have your account number handy to help us work more quickly.
- Turn off major appliances** and other electrical equipment to prevent over loading circuits once the power's back.
- Keep warm and safe.** Wear a hat and extra layers of clothing. Make sure propane or kerosene heaters have proper ventilation and **never** burn charcoal inside your house.
- Cover your freezer with a blanket and keep the door closed.** Food should stay frozen and safe for about two days.
- Turn your porch light and one inside light on.** That way you and our crews will know when power is back on.
- When your power returns, if your lights are dim or very bright, call again.** There may still be a problem.

If there's an outage, we don't kid around. We'll get the power back as fast as we can.

To report an outage, call 1-877-548-3768 (1-877-LITESOUT).

PACIFIC POWER
A PacifiCorp Company
Making it happen.