Continuing from last week, here is the second part of Ralph Nader's suite of proposals for strengthening our democracy. Nader can be contacted at the Center for Study of Responsive Law, P.O. Box 19367, Washington, DC 20036.

SEVENTH, the new democracy tool box for working people contains rights of bringing one's conscience to work without having the risk of being unfairly fired or demoted. Ethical whistle-blowers have alerted Americans to numerous abuses in the workplace that damage workers' health and safety, contaminate the environment, and defraud consumers, taxpayers, and shareholders. However, they often pay the penalty with the loss of their jobs. The exercise of conscience needs simple, effective legal protections which will build inside the corporation, government, or other large bureaucracies the incentives for care, prudence, and accountability that foresee or forestall larger harms.

EIGHTH, working people, who own over $3 trillion in pension monies, need a reasonable measure of control over where these monies are invested. Presently, a handful of banks and insurance companies control and make these decisions. During the 1980s the use of pension monies for corporate mergers, acquisitions, leveraged buyouts and other empire-building maneuvers showed what does happen when ownership is so separated from control. Control by the few often left economic wreckage behind in many communities, and such capital draining takeovers did not produce employment or new wealth.

Pension monies are gigantic capital pools that can be used productively to meet community needs, but not when their owners are excluded from any organized participation or even the right to know and review what has been decided.

NINTH, the new democracy tool box applies to recognizing shareholder democracy as well. Whether large, small or institutional shareholders (such as pension or other trust funds), the separation of ownership (of the company) from control has been documented impressively, starting with the celebrated study by Berle and Means fifty years ago. [See Adolph A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means, THE MODERN CORPORATION AND PRIVATE PROPERTY (N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1933.) The business press is filled with reports of executives of large corporations repeatedly abusing shareholder assets and worker morale with huge salaries, bonuses, greenmail, and golden parachutes (untied to company performance), self-perpetuating boards of directors, the stifling of the proxy voting system and blocking other shareholder voting reforms such as cumulative voting powers and access to relevant shareholder lists and information. The owners of corporations should be able to prevent their hired executives from engaging in what BUSINESS WEEK called casino capitalism that often ends with mass layoffs, loyal shareholder losses and communities undermined.

TENTH, the new democracy tool box needs to be taught in its historic context and present relevance as part of an engrossing civic curriculum for our country's schoolchildren. Involving all students during their later elementary and secondary school education in practical civics experience so as to develop both their citizen skills and the desire to use them, under the rule of law, can enrich students, teachers, and communities alike. Where teachers have made such efforts, the children have responded responsibly and excitedly, to the frequent surprise and respect of their elders. Schooling for informed and experienced participation in democratic processes is a major reservoir of future democracy and a profound human resource to be nurtured. [Nader has subsequently published a first-rate textbook: Katherine Isaac, RALPH NADER PRESENTS CIVICS FOR DEMOCRACY: A JOURNEY FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS (Washington, D.C.: Center for Study of Responsive Law, 1992); $17.50 from Essential Books, P.O. Box 19405, Washington, DC 20036.]

In conclusion, these tools for democracy have fairly common characteristics. They are universally accessible, can reduce government and other deficits, and are voluntary to use or band together around. It matters not whether people are Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. It matters only that Americans desire to secure and use these facilities or tools.

Without this reconstruction of our democracy through such facilities for informed civic participation, as noted above, even the most well-intentioned politicians campaigning for your vote cannot deliver, if elected. Nor can your worries about poverty, discrimination, joblessness, the troubled conditions of education, environment, crime and suite crime, budget deficits, costly and inadequate health care, and energy boondoggles, to list a few, be addressed constructively and enduringly. Developing these democratic tools to strengthen citizens in their distinct roles as voters, taxpayers, consumers, workers, shareholders, and students should be very high on the list of any candidate's commitments to you. Unless, that is, they just want your vote, but would rather not have you looking over their shoulder from a position of knowledge, strength and wisdom.

--Ralph Nader, Feb. 1, 1992

INVESTIGATION FINDS MORE THAN 100 ASSAULTS ON ENVIRONMENTALISTS HAVE OCCURRED SINCE 1988

A study by the Center for Investigative Reporting in San Francisco [1] concludes that there has been "a wave of recent attacks" against environmental activists. In late 1992 the Center reported that a four-month investigation had "uncovered a pattern of death threats, firebombings, shootings and assaults targeting 'green' activists across the nation." The Center has confirmed more than 100 reports of attacks and harassment since 1988 and has investigated 54 of them in detail.

The Center says, "The incidents read like an Amnesty International report, but instead of accounts of terror in some distant land, these attacks are being planned and executed in places like Portland, Oregon; Junction City, Georgia; and Mobile, Alabama." Amnesty International is an independent organization that monitors torture and other abuses of human rights around the world.

Environmentalists have received death threats in at least 9 states. Wilderness advocate Scott Groene returned to his Moab, Utah home to find a death threat taped to his porch: "Paper and wood products are no longer available: wipe your ass on a spotted owl. Southern Utah will have harmony when Scott has a FATAL accident in the environment!

Betty Ball at the Mendocino Environmental Center (Ukiah, Calif.) received a letter calling her a "sleazy dike [sic]" and promising to "hunt down each and every member like the lesbians you really are.

Shots have been fired at environmentalists in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Texas and West Virginia. In Hedgesville, W.V., Hilda Kettering was fighting a landfill that threatened her drinking water supply. In July, 1990, someone fired a shotgun into a pickup truck driven by her 25-year-old son, Steve. He was struck by 8 pellets; his passenger, Holly Folden, 18, received 30 pellets in her face and ears.

In January, 1992, a suspicious fire, which authorities call a likely arson, totally destroyed the home of environmentalist Michael Vernon in Solon, Maine. Vernon's home and environmental library were a total loss. We have previously reported (RHWN #233) that the Arkansas home of Pat Costner, director of research for the Greenpeace toxics campaign, was torched in March, 1991, by an arsonist who left behind a gasoline can. Costner lost 30 years' worth of books, papers and computer files, along with everything else she owned. Suspicous fires have destroyed the homes of green activists in Arkansas, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and New York.

Bruce Hamilton of the Sierra Club believes much of the violence is...
being fostered by the heads of corporations who pit neighbor against neighbor by "blackmailing" workers with scare tactics. [For a discussion of this tactic, see Richard Kazis and Richard L. Grossman, FEAR AT WORK; JOB BLACKMAIL, LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1991).] Former logger Gene Lawhorn describes mandatory anti-environmental workshops given to workers at his mill. "It scared the hell out of you," he says, "For an hour they made you sit while they described environmentalists as preservationists, as tree-hugging pagans trying to overthrow Christianity. They said the preservationists were going to take your job."

The Center for Investigative Reporting says "The sharp increase in attacks against environmentalists parallels the growth of the pro-development coalition known as the Wise Use Movement." Ron Arnold, a leader of the Wise Use anti-environmental movement says he is committed to non-violence, but he speaks of "destroying" environmentalists and organizing "to kill the bastards." Arnold calls Charles Cushman, another Wise Use leader [see RHWN #335], "our top bomb thrower" and says Barry Commoner should be "utterly destroyed."

Stephanie McGuire runs a fishing camp on the Fenholloway River in Florida. For years Proctor and Gamble [P&G] legally dumped 50 million gallons of dioxin-contaminated water into the Fenholloway each day. In 1991 McGuire became active with a local group, Help Our Polluted Environment, and petitioned P&G to reduce their toxic discharges. McGuire received a chilling phone call: "Keep talking," a man's voice warned, "and we'll cut your tongue out."

On April 7, 1992, several weeks after P&G announced it was selling the plant, three men arrived at McGuire's camp dressed in fatigues and proceeded to torture her. Two of the men wore masks. They held McGuire down and burned her chest with a cigar. When she broke loose and punched one in the mouth, he stomped on her hand, crushing it. They then held her down and cut her face and throat with a straight razor--not deep enough to kill her, just deep enough to leave permanent scars, and nightmares.

--Peter Montague

[1] Jonathan Franklin, "First They Kill Your Dog," MUCKRAKER (Fall, 1992), pgs. 1, 7-10. MUCKRAKER is the quarterly journal of the Center for Investigative Reporting, 530 Howard Street, 2nd floor, San Francisco, CA 94105-3007; phone (415) 543-1200.

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