

Shame on the Surgeon General

THE U.S. SURGEON GENERAL'S Report, "The Health Consequences of Smoking—Cancer and Chronic Lung Disease in the Workplace" released in mid-December erects a "smoke screen" to hide the real issues and culprits in workplace safety and health. Surgeon General Everett Koop has thrown the weight of his office behind the reactionary forces in the Reagan Administration and the business community who seek to gut OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and avoid responsibility for cleaning up workplaces. The Surgeon General and irresponsible employers blame workers for the illnesses inflicted on them by employers through improper or inadequate safety and health measures. As trade unionists we find this outrageous.

The Report, which is an annual ritual, was widely hailed by anti-smoking groups and the "health" lobby (American Heart, Lung, and Cancer Societies, and the American Medical Association) and anti-smoking groups (ASH, GASP). They welcomed the Report and its false conclusions on worker safety and health because they hope to use it against the tobacco industry.

The AFL-CIO, however, attacked the Report, "because it will seriously set back efforts to protect the health of American workers. . . . The Report minimizes and misrepresents the risks posed by occupational hazards. The Report is filled with glaring inaccuracies . . . is scientifically unsound [and] omits important information on the risks of many occupational hazards."

"This report can only hurt workers by undermining efforts to control workplace hazards. It will lead to misdiagnosis of occupational disease. It will make it even more difficult for workers suffering job related diseases to secure compensation to which they are entitled. And those responsible for poisoning workers will use this report to avoid legal liability," the AFL-CIO concludes.

As representatives of workers in the tobacco industry we have come to expect the twisting of a supposedly scientific report into a shoddy political piece intended to further the single-issue agenda of the anti-tobacco lobby. But this time the anti-smoking activists in the Surgeon General's Office and U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services' Office on Smoking and Health have gone too far. In their zeal to destroy the tobacco industry they have allied themselves with the enemies of OSHA and the real polluters of the workplace. They have combined to rig the Surgeon General's Report and shift liability for occupational disease to workers.

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN? Because in pursuit of their single-issue crusade anti-smoking activists will subordinate the agenda and interests of any group, including labor's, to their own.

The Report was intended to help establish the concept of "shared liability" (i.e., a worker who smokes is responsible for the disease actually caused by occupational exposure and an employer's obligation to provide compensation is therefore limited). If this is accepted by legislatures and the courts, workers would be denied full compensation and be forced to sue the tobacco companies, increasing pressure on the industry. Employers would also be encouraged to force workers to stop smoking and fire or refuse to hire smokers rather than clean up their workplaces.

The Surgeon General's Office and the HHS went out of their way to avoid consulting groups which would disagree with their predetermined conclusions. The vast majority of contributing authors and reviewers of the Report had little or no safety and health background. Recognized experts in occupational safety and health from the AFL-CIO, the government and academic community were systematically excluded from preparing and reviewing the Report, and their objections ignored. Instead, the Surgeon General's office and HHS relied on the network of anti-tobacco researchers . . . and friends of the asbestos industry. The coordinator of the Report reportedly had links with that industry, while one of the key reviewers has been a star witness defending the asbestos industry in lawsuits brought by injured workers. Many of the Report's authors had ties with a medical society which reportedly received funds from the asbestos industry. "Scientists" who were actually anti-OSHA were authors of important sections of the Report.

AFTER FIVE YEARS of attacks on OSHA we expect an appointee of the Reagan Administration like Dr. Koop to try to further gut safety and health protections. But we are surprised that officials supposedly concerned with the public health should make common cause with industrial polluters. And we are appalled that the Lung, Heart and Cancer Societies, which have been quiet as OSHA has been crippled, should so vigorously applaud the report of that unholy alliance. The Surgeon General should retract his Report and we hope Congress will investigate the process which produced a political report aimed squarely at the rights of workers.



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Political Act

Political

This is a federal election year in U.S. Even as candidates for the Ho and Senate gear up their campaign there are rumblings around the presidential election in 1988. As the political season opens, here are some political "odds 'n ends" the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) assembled:

WHAT'S THAT NAME again? Kennedy? Oldest son of Robert Kennedy, Joseph P. III, enters crowd field, announces he'll seek Democratic nomination for House seat being vacated by Speaker Tip O'Neill. His announcement precedes by only a couple of weeks his uncle Ted's notice that he will not seek Presidency in '88. But that's not all. Yet another Kennedy may run for Congress in 1986, this Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, a daughter of Robert Kennedy. She's a sible entry into Maryland 2nd District race for seat now held by Helen Be (R), who won election in 1984 by 6,000 out of more than 200,000 cast.

TRADE FORGES to front as a concern of not only American workers but of many U.S. corporations. Recent survey shows it's top worry of 17 percent of firms with annual sales of billion-plus, 23 percent of those



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