

13 Arrested at Spectra Rally

by Gusti Bogok

"Which side are you on? Which side are you on?"

These words from the famous Labor Rights anthem rang out on Saturday, November 2, 2013, as activists from grassroots groups Sane Energy Project and Occupy the Pipeline held a rally against the Spectra pipeline in Manhattan's West Village.

Other groups supporting and attending the rally included United for Action, 350.org, Coalition Against the Rockaway Pipeline, and New York City Friend's of Clearwater. Members of Reverend Billy's Church of Stop Shopping Choir sang the spirited "River Song," written specifically in opposition to the Spectra pipeline, and singer/songwriter Bryan Cahall also performed.

The rally reached a crescendo when several activists put their bodies on the line to block traffic on the busy Westside Highway, adjacent to the Spectra site, holding a long yellow banner across the lanes in both directions and singing, "Which side are you on? Which side are you on?" Thirteen protesters were arrested, including New York City Councilmember-elect Corey Johnson, RJ Jordan, his soon-to-be chief of staff, and two other future Johnson staffers.

In addition to Corey Johnson, speakers included State Assemblymembers Linda Rosenthal and Richard Gottfried, and Manhattan Borough President-elect Gail Brewer. Activists and public officials alike spoke passionately about the dangers of the Spectra pipeline and the need to shift from dirty fossil fuels to clean renewable energy sources. All expressed concern about the pipeline, and the health impact of exposure to increased levels of radon in the gas.

State Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, has sponsored a Radon bill mandating that any gas delivered by utilities be tested prior to delivery to customers to insure that radon in the gas is maintained at safe levels. Gail Brewer is also working on a resolution related to the radon bill within the New York City Council.

Another notable speaker was Tim De Christopher, who gained notoriety when he was convicted for falsely bidding on public land in Colorado to prevent it from being leased for gas drilling. De Christopher spent two years in jail for his act of conscience and is the subject of the documentary film *Bidder 70*. Currently attending Harvard Divinity School, De Christopher encourages people of conscience to continuously challenge immoral laws and decisions within the most powerful echelons of the United States government.

De Christopher cited the Spectra pipeline as yet another example of a dangerous trend in which political leaders, prominent groups and NGOs express callous disregard for public welfare by permitting the destruction of our precious water bodies and ecosystems, our health, our lives and our future for the sake of profit, as evidence of a society that has become "spiritually bankrupt."

Indeed, the Spectra pipeline is only one of a growing number of proposed or active natural gas infrastructure projects across New York State: the natural gas compressor stations in Minisink and Hancock, NY, the Constitution pipeline traversing New York's Southern Tier counties, the LNG (liquefied natural gas) storage facility at Seneca Lake, and the Port Ambrose LNG terminal in Long Island, to name just a few. The full-scale gas infrastructure build-out represents a monumental assault on the safety, health and livelihoods of a great many communities statewide which rely upon clean air, land, water and an uncontaminated foodshed to survive.

The Spectra pipeline is currently delivering gas carrying a potential mix of radioactive, radon-laced gas from Pennsylvania's drill sites into New York City's stoves and boilers. All of Pennsylvania's gas is extracted by hydraulic fracturing, also known as "fracking," the toxic and destructive process of methane mining that has aroused much controversy and that has gained increased public opposition in recent years.

Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale layer contains high levels of uranium and radium. Scientists have confirmed that the natural gas (methane) currently being removed from the Marcellus Shale will indeed carry high levels of the element radon. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.

Despite the serious risks posed by the Spectra Pipeline, as well as hazards inherent to the myriad other gas-related projects dotted throughout communities across the state, these issues have not been widely publicized. Were it not for the countless hours spent by a small army of volunteer activists, keeping abreast of critical issues to alert and educate the public, while demanding accountability from public officials, these sorts of issues would remain almost entirely under the radar. Unfortunately for the vast majority of New Yorkers, these are still among the best kept secrets.

No doubt, if everyone fully understood the grim realities behind America's current fracked gas frenzy, they'd have no trouble answering the question, "Which side are you on?"

View video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eagcBOpAm2k> (Preview)

