

Riverside Unitarian Church: V.Valle

Thank you. It is an honor to be with you in your moment of struggle.

I want to spend the next ten minutes thinking about a long-term media strategy for supporting the efforts of groups like Warehouse Workers United, and, if possible, to take a page from their playbook – their May, 2009 occupation of the road leading in and out of the Mira Loma distribution hub. Later, I want to consider another kind of occupation that could help win supporters to the warehouse workers drive to organize the Mira Loma distribution hub, as well as other unrepresented logistics workers in the Inland Empire.

But first I want to send you greetings from Warren Buffet. He recently bought billions of dollars of BNSF stock saying that the railroad represents the next century of growth. Trucks have peaked, he says. He has bet his money on a century of increasing trade hauled by rail, growth that will require new investments in logistics infrastructure,

from rail spurs to warehouses to compliant politicians. He would have bought shares in that mega-railroad, Union Pacific and your neighbor, if his competitors had not already bid up the price to high.

What does Buffet's forecast mean for Riverside and San Bernardino counties? The logistics industry will come out of its slump sooner or later, and the development of warehouses and distribution centers and so forth will resume. We know that L.A. County is built out, and that only the Inland Empire can take up the slack.

Now, not let's get too excited about Buffet's vote of confidence. The logistics industry will continue to grow here, but that doesn't mean it will stop relying on armies of low paid temporary workers, or suddenly welcome unionization so that its workers can begin to earn wages and benefits comparable to their brothers and sisters in L.A.

I don't think, in other words, that Mr. Buffet is voting for your excellent work ethic alone. It's more like he is voting on your excellent productivity and the cheapness of your labor. That's what tickles his

dear little (it has to be tiny) capitalist soul: the long-term convergence of rebounding trade volumes and low-priced labor supported by public subsidies and tax breaks supplied by your local department of privatized government.

Well, we certainly don't have the stock portfolios to bet on his designs for the future. But we have something he has. We have the time, the same century he is looking ahead to, and the certainty that capital cannot float in the air forever, that it must touchdown somewhere to become productive again. The latest string of burst market bubbles make that abundantly clear. After all the schemes for speculating on the fickle future of money have failed, the only sure thing, at least for now, is the fight for extracting raw materials, to manufacture those materials into goods, and the movement of those goods to market. These certainties of production and distribution will continue to make the Inland Empire the middle of something; certainly not the American homeowner's dream. Too many abandoned homes

for that. No, Riverside sits in the middle of the struggle over the future of global trade, who will reap its rewards, and who will pay its penalties. We should anticipate this struggle, and plan for its duration in years and decades.

That's why I want to wrap up my talk by making a proposal. I would like to see the formation of an investigative corps similar to the Innocence Project at Northwestern University, the where students do the legal research to overturn wrongful convictions. Except that this will more like a Guilt Project modeled on SPOTUS.org, a kind of clearing house for investigators who solicit donations to investigate a mutually agreed upon target. Or maybe we can call it the People's Bureau of Investigation.

Seriously speaking, though, the point of the project would be to train a new generation to investigators to attack a target of lasting value in their locality. People would have to arrive at consensus about their target. For example, the bureau could relate the step-by-step

process through which privatized government made a place called Mira Loma. The team would go back to the beginning, not only retracing the genealogy of laws and politics that gave developers control of the county's development industry, but call out the individual developers, government technocrats, and elected officials responsible for permitting that privatization. The team could not tell this story by only focusing on money and politics, however. They would have to deconstruct the culture that made that privatization so seem natural and good that few bothered to complain about it when it was first proposed. They would have to identify, like so many strains of infectious bacteria, the narrative technologies with which they sold most people on the benefits of wall-to-wall warehousing. And eventually, when time came to share their results, the investigators would have to explain to everyday citizens, your would-be supporters, how corporate power and money made their political representatives

into the willing servants we have today, how it molded their winning personalities, in other words, from the seed or spore.

If what I am saying sounds farfetched, let me assure you, I am not that crazy. It is possible to do the kind of research that would allow us to take a penetrating x-ray of local power. I believe I did it in my latest book about your neighbor. It's called the City of Industry: Genealogies of Power in Southern California, and it lays out a prehistory of privatization in the far west. I don't have the time now to layout Industry's privatized pedigree, to tell how the railroads, developers and wily bureaucrats schemed to deprive the working class residents of the revenues and control over the La Puente Valley's industrial transportation corridor. Just take my word for it. Industry's privatization offered a kind of dress rehearsal for what happened in Mira Loma, and what we can do to prevent it from happening again.

And here's where the idea for occupation comes in. Students and professors should not be content to go on strike in hopes of shutting

their universities down. Students and professors should re-occupy their classes so that they can put them to better use. The day-to-day work in the classroom should be about making conceptual weapons, the kind warehouse workers, for example, can use to win broad support for their next actual occupation. I am not talking all the classes; just enough resources to sustain a multi-year effort of just one or two investigative methods classes tightly focused on the local political economy of the logistics industry. Investigative teams would learn how to make different kinds of public records requests, to use FOIA and the Brown Act, for example to obtain documents, and to re-purpose proprietary databases such as Co-star to undercover and map the political economy of warehouse redevelopment subsidies. The emphasis would be on learning and experimenting on field methods, and on learning how to best organize and preserve the results of each quarter's research for the next class.