
Interview: Robert J. D'Anniballe, Sr.

'Clean Air' could defeat Bush in 1992

Robert J. D'Anniballe is a small businessman in Steubenville, Ohio. In early April, he led a local delegation of a dozen labor union officials and community leaders to Washington D.C., to lobby against Senate passage of the Clean Air Bill. The group has since constituted itself as Save Our Families.

The following is excerpted from an interview conducted April 12 by Andrew Rotstein.

EIR: What is the current condition of the economy in your area?

D'Anniballe: We never really recovered from the deep recession of the early 1980s. For example, very recently, we had a steel mill that was going to hire 75 people. Over 2,000 got in line, starting at 4:00 a.m., just to file an application.

EIR: What provisions of the bill threaten industry there?

D'Anniballe: First of all, there's a Midwest Cap, which would limit power plant emissions to those of 1985. You're capped forever at that level. As I mentioned, we're still trying to recover from the early 1980s recession, so this bill would freeze us, permanently, in a depressed economy. If anyone ever builds a new power plant, the emissions must be at net zero. That is, an old power plant must be shut down. It means no growth—no growth!

There's another provision in the bill that would force a reduction of power plant emissions like SO₂ by 10 million tons a year, from 23 million estimated now. Everyone in Washington insisted that this 10 million figure is fixed in granite, cannot be changed.

From what we can tell, there would be a significant job saving if the reductions are only 7 or 8 million, if the deadline could be stretched from the year 2000 to 2005. Such a compromise, we're told, could reduce the utility rate increases by 40 or 50%.

EIR: What is the estimate of job loss under the bill?

D'Anniballe: In this area, up and down the Ohio River 100 miles in either direction, you're talking about a loss of around 100,000 jobs. In the state of Ohio as a whole, one study puts it at 326,000 jobs eliminated. For the Midwest as a whole,

anywhere from 1.3 to 3 million jobs. What's that going to do to our budget deficit? What are we going to do with 2 or 3 million more people out of work?

We have one company, Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel, that's in bankruptcy, and presently trying to come out of bankruptcy. This company cannot afford high increases in its utility cost that the bill will cause. The workers have given concessions, and are presently negotiating a contract. So all the sacrifices by these workers would be in vain.

Across the Ohio River, in Weirton, West Virginia, you have the Weirton Steel Company, which was a part of the old National Steel Corporation. When National was going to shut it down, the employees bought this mill, and this is one of the largest ESOPs [Employee Stock Ownership Plans] in the country. Now, these people sacrificed a great deal. With their sacrifices, they are trying to build a continuous caster in this mill. This company, too, would be in serious jeopardy under higher electric power rates.

Up and down the river, we have an Ormet, an aluminum company that's heavily reliant on electric power in the manufacturing process, you have Titanium, other corporations that face real disaster.

In addition, small businesses—local dry cleaners, guys with a small shop who paint a few cars, the printing establishments, the little bakeries—these people won't be able to afford to comply with this law, and they'll go under.

EIR: What are your group's plans?

D'Anniballe: We've had some people from the coal miners come in. We had a lot of press here the other day; we have some educators joining in. We plan to reach out more.

Now, we don't want to make this into a political issue, or a partisan one, but I will say this. I'm a conservative Democrat. There's no doubt in my mind: *If this bill passes, and puts 3 million people in the Midwest out of work, George Bush is going to be defeated in '92.* So, we're taking on each politician, regardless of party.

EIR: Speaking personally, as a Democrat, since the Democratic Party used to identify with working people, what do you think the current situation says about the state of the Democrats these days?

D'Anniballe: Well, I'm not sure it says anything different about the Democratic Party. It tells me something about the Republican Party. The Republican Party in recent presidential elections has embraced the conservative Democrat. Now, today, we don't have that person in the White House. This Republican Party looks at us, they figure they can't pronounce our name, and we didn't go to Yale.

Now, the conservative Democrats feel we were used. I could see this group going back to the Democratic Party, and asking for a conservative Democratic candidate. Now, if that happens, you're going to see the whole political structure of this country change.