



# **VICTORIES & MOMENTUM** **on the FRONTLINES:**

## **The Chevron Refinery Campaign in Richmond, California**

By Bill Gallegos

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## Victories and Momentum on the Frontlines Series

**A**cross the country frontline communities are waging inspiring struggles for healthy communities, economic justice, and the right to control development processes that impact their communities. Often severely under-resourced, grassroots leaders have won major environmental and climate justice victories that have yet to be fully appreciated by the broader public. To amplify the history and groundbreaking work performed by the grassroots organizing sector, the Building Equity and Alignment Initiative has launched the Victories and Momentum on the Frontlines case study series. Each case study in the series reveals the environmental assaults faced by frontline communities that are often inhabited by people of color and low income families. The series also showcases the ways that grassroots organizations and allies have overcome immense political challenges precisely through their transformative commitment to the communities they serve, and to principled forms of solidarity. Due to these principles of alignment and the lessons learned over decades of organizing, grassroots leaders have shut down polluting factories, anchored the passage of historic pieces of legislation, held regulatory agencies accountable to vulnerable communities, and provided compelling visions of a new economy and political culture. The Victories and Momentum on the Frontlines case study series ensures that the stories of grassroots victories receive proper attention thus contributing to a more holistic understanding of grassroots power and community organizing.

Series Editors,

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# The Challenge of Building Power in 2018

As we are in the second year of the current federal administration these may indeed be the worst of times. The new administration took hold by launching a seemingly endless roll-out of anti-immigrant, anti-women, anti-Muslim, anti-labor, anti-environment, militarist, and pro-corporate policies that appear to be the first salvos of a new class, race, and gender war. Despite the reeling nature of the news each day, we must not be distracted by the chaos that seems to be engulfing and swirling out of the White House. Chaos for sure, but underneath the rubble of Cabinet choices coming and going, members of the inner circle cycling in-and-out, and the endless tweet storms, is an agenda that threatens to demolish the fragments of the democracy we yearn for and have fought to liberate over generations. Indeed, the administration is widening the economic inequality between the 1% and the rest of us, exacerbating racial oppression, increasing the dangers of war, and ultimately threatening the very survival of our planet. A particularly dangerous element of this new political landscape resides in the new-found power of a resurgent nationalist, reactionary, racist and misogynist right wing that controls the presidency, both houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, and a great majority of state houses and governorships.

Given these extremely unfavorable political conditions in the Beltway, our collective strategy for proactive change must (1) focus on building our vision and power at local, trans-local and statewide levels; and (2) invest in building actionable relationships and shared analysis across states to leverage our power in the communities we all call home, and at the national level when conditions are most favorable.

Fortunately, we have recent examples that offer important lessons on how we can build and activate power at this crucial moment. Indeed, in the face of tremendous corporate power, a declining and extractive economy, with environment and basic dignity under threat, grassroots leaders have developed strategies and waged inspiring campaigns that are instructive to our current political moment. One of these impactful grassroots led campaigns started in 2007 when residents of Richmond, California began a four-year campaign against the Chevron Oil Company, which proposed to undertake a massive expansion of their nearly 3,000-acre oil refinery that sits like a pollution-belching colossus within the city's limits.

The Richmond refinery campaign was a very complex and intense campaign that pitted mostly African American, Latina, and Laotian women (who were the majority active in the campaign) against the wealth, power, and political influence of the 12th largest corporation in the world. These grassroots forces had to engage with Chevron in social and political arenas largely shaped and long-controlled by corporate power.

The issues in this campaign were those of racial justice, democratic participation, public health, and the climate crisis. There are important lessons from this campaign that have meaning for the larger effort to address the environmental and climate crisis, for expanding democracy, and for building a transformative movement for equity, social justice, and democracy.

Based on deep participant observation at crucial phases of the campaign, this case study offers the story of the successful movement-building that took place in Richmond, California to invite critical reflection on the importance of grassroots leadership. Aimed at leaders in philanthropy and other allies of the Grassroots environmental justice movement, this campaign analysis provides a historical overview of the struggle and highlights the following key lessons that can help guide our collective efforts to shift resources, challenge corporate power, and address long-standing racial disparities that have recently intensified across the country.





## KEY LESSONS FROM THE CAMPAIGN:

- Local campaigns protect community health and ecosystems in a local area, and also have the potential, when resourced, to prevent corporate precedent setting for dirtier practice across states and the country.
- Communities of color are an essential force for challenging fossil fuel industries and effecting a just transition to an equitable, democratic, and genuinely clean energy economy.
- Well-resourced grassroots organizations protect local community health and ecosystems, safeguard environmental regulations and build democratic power. To be effective, these organizations and coalitions must have the resources and capacity they need.
- The Richmond refinery campaign highlighted relevant issues of social justice and racial equity that succeeded in securing strong public and policymaker support for environmental policy changes and regulation that has stayed strong.
- Local grassroots organizations, when resourced well, not only built their own capacity and power to create environmental health and justice, they led a movement building process which created a strong foundation for future progressive campaigns.
- The campaign required struggle in the electoral process, which has resulted in multi-issue victories.
- A savvy communications strategy and resources are essential to achieving campaign success as well as re-shaping the market-based political narrative that currently dominates most discussions of the climate crisis.
- Until cities like Richmond embrace a broad, diverse, equitable, and sustainable economic alternative, companies such as Chevron will continue to politically dominate and harm our communities.
- The struggle for democracy is an essential element of the environmental justice movement, and this is its strength and deep contribution.

# II

## Chevron's Corporate Domination of Richmond

Since 1905, Richmond was a virtual Chevron plantation where economic, political, and social domination by the firm seemed complete and invulnerable. Chevron is one of the largest corporations in the world, and its refinery in Richmond is one of eleven refineries owned by various fossil fuel corporations in the state, making California the third largest refinery state in the US. Chevron's political domination of Richmond was replicated at the statewide level, with outsized influence in the state legislature, as well as at the state's primary environmental agency related to concerns due to refineries - the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

For decades a pro-Chevron majority controlled the Richmond City Council, and for many years, even dominated the local school board and community culture (the local public high school team is called "The Oilers"). This control had allowed Chevron to become the largest industrial polluter in California and the state's largest single industrial emitter of greenhouse gases. Chevron's control was so complete that for many years they were provided a favorable tax rate by city council.

All of this began to change in the new millennium. One of the first indications of this change was the passage of a local ballot initiative entitled Measure T, that significantly increased Chevron's taxes to the city of Richmond. This measure passed despite strenuous and costly opposition from Chevron and its business allies and was in indication that a new day was indeed dawning in the city that had been the original home to "Rosie the Riveter". This defeat was largely the result of important changes that had occurred in Richmond. The most important of these was the emergence of a new demography in Richmond and the persistent organization of local grassroots organizations.



Historically, Richmond was a mostly white working class city but with a significant African American population as well. By the beginning of the new millennium, whites had become a minority in the city, and the new majority was Latino/x, Asian, and African American.

That said, demography is not destiny, even as it did provide an important opportunity for change. Accompanying this change was the consistent organizing of these communities by grassroots environmental justice organizations including Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), and the West County Toxics Coalition (WCTC), as well as other community groups like ACCE (Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment), and Richmond Progressive Alliance, a progressive electoral coalition. The central elements of their organizing work are developing a strong cadre of leaders from frontline communities, building a broad base of support for their efforts, and building city-wide movements that included labor, public health, community organizations, green groups, progressive electoral coalitions, academics, among others.



# III

## Chevron Throws Down the Gauntlet. The Community Picks It Up

In response to community pressure, in 2007, Chevron offered a refinery proposal to the City of Richmond that promised to make their operations cleaner and more efficient. In reality, the company's intent was to build infrastructure for refining dirtier grades of crude oil, a process that would generate massive new amounts of immediately toxic emissions including volatile organic compounds, benzene, mercury and others, and to release more than a million tons annually of greenhouse gas emissions. When CBE's technical experts reviewed Chevron's proposal to the city, they recognized that the company's plans represented a major health threat to the Latino/x, Laotian, and African American residents who lived nearest to the refinery, but also a significant threat to California's efforts to address climate change and to reduce carbon emissions.

The campaign against Chevron's dirty crude refinery project was led by working class residents who were members of Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), and the West County Toxics Coalition (WCTC), mostly from the Latino/x, African American, and Laotian communities. The majority of the grassroots leaders were women. After four years of intense struggle in all of these arenas, the community prevailed in 2011 when Chevron withdrew its expansion proposal entirely. This was a major victory that prevented the annual emission of up to one million tons of GHG's and thousands of pounds of toxins such as mercury, benzene, volatile organic compounds, nitrous oxides, and fine particulate matter.



The Richmond campaign required incredible strategic foresight and tactical flexibility on the part of the grassroots, because it had to be waged in multiple arenas of contest, each of which was enormously complex and challenging. Grassroots leadership was present at the Richmond Planning Commission and City Council, at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and in the local media. Community leaders also

shaped the development of extensive technical comments, participated in the judicial arena, and were active at the state legislature when Chevron explored legislation that would allow them to circumvent state regulatory requirements and gain the go-ahead for their expansion project. CBE, APEN, and WCTC also participated in extensive mediation efforts convened by State legislative leaders to try and resolve the dispute between the community and Chevron.

## IV Impacts of Fostering Local Leadership and Investing in Organizing

Ultimately, what impact did this work led by local residents have? And what can we learn that has relevance to our current efforts to build an effective resistance to Trump and the Right? For one, an entire community and region's health was safeguarded and a tremendous amount of new GHG emissions was stopped. What other lessons did we collectively learn?

*Local campaigns protect community health and ecosystems in a local area, and also have the potential, when resourced, to prevent corporate precedent setting for dirtier practice across states and the country.*

The Richmond refinery campaign victory was intrinsically significant in safeguarding the health of local residents, but it also has much larger implications.

The local organizing campaign prevented Chevron from establishing a new industry standard for refining dirtier grades of crude oil, including tar sands. By drawing this line-in-the-sand in Richmond, CBE and its allies precluded the State's other 13 major oil refineries from going all out to refiner dirty crude, a model that could then have become the pattern for the industry nationwide. The state's refineries are already refining some dirtier grades of crude oil, but have not yet made this the standard industry practice. Had Chevron succeeded with its proposed project, it could have resulted in just such a practice.

In June 2017, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (AQMD) adopted new strict rules to restrict the refining of dirty crude and tar sands. These rules offer a springboard and example for stronger statewide standards and create a model for the refinery industry nationwide. Strict rules in local communities, one by one, prevent the emissions of tens of millions of tons of GHGs, and make extractive industries much more costly and less feasible. Victory by victory, we could promote the transition from fossil fuels if oil companies are prohibited from refining tar sands and dirty crude. The Richmond refinery campaign undoubtedly provided impetus for this broader policy effort. It was also a factor in later electoral campaigns in which a progressive majority won control of the City Council.

***Communities of color are an essential force for challenging fossil fuel industries and effecting a just transition to an equitable, democratic, and genuinely clean energy economy.***

Poorer communities and communities of color are often on the frontlines of industry as well as philanthropic disinvestment and neglect by larger environmental organizations, organizations that tend to focus much of their work on paid media, lobbying, and litigation. But as the Richmond campaign demonstrates, communities of color are quite capable of achieving victories even when facing the most powerful fossil fuel corporations. The Richmond victory is not an anomaly, it is representative of many, many such successful campaigns taking place in Indigenous communities, and communities of color throughout the US.

Chevron has been operating its refinery in Richmond for more than a century, but it is only in the last decade that they have faced a real challenge. In fact, Chevron has been on the losing end of several important battles: Measure T, the 2007 refinery upgrade project, the 2010 City Council elections, and the 2014 City Council elections in which a pro-environment majority was elected despite Chevron spending millions to install their own candidates.

Several recent polls indicate that African Americans and Latinos have a greater concern about environmental and climate problems than does the white population. They also indicate that these communities are more likely to support policies that address these problems. These results are not because Black and Brown populations have a special “environmental gene” but because far too often they suffer directly from the impacts of oil, coal, and gas operations, freeway and diesel traffic, port traffic, etc. And they are assisted in their efforts to resist and transform this reality by the thousands of grassroots environmental justice organizations that help these communities to organize, groups very much like CBE, APEN, and WCTC.

The important lesson is that policy makers, green groups, the media, and the philanthropic community should all direct more attention and support to fence line communities of color and lower wealth white communities, if we hope to effectively confront the environmental and climate crises. It also points to the fact that we must solve these crises in close connection with resolving our nation’s longstanding condition of racism and racist inequality. The effort to achieve a just transition from fossil fuels to a truly clean energy economy provides us with an incredible opportunity to do so, by advocating that the myriad economic and environmental benefits from this emerging new economy are equitably distributed to those communities that have suffered most from the dirty energy system.

***Well-resourced grassroots organizations protect local community health and ecosystems, safeguard environmental regulations and build democratic power. To be effective, these organizations must have the resources and capacity they need.***

CBE was able to successfully lead the Richmond refinery campaign because it had the organizing, legal, and technical capacity to do so. As this case study has illustrated, very often campaigns against powerful corporate opposition are fought out in a myriad of arenas. Like most environmental justice organizations, CBE has years of experience in organizing, fighting for beneficial policies, building alliances, etc. But without sufficient resources it is extremely difficult to wage these campaigns. It is usually the case of environmental justice organizations having to use pitchforks and hoes to try and “storm heaven.” Given how sparse are their resources it is remarkable how successful they have been.

Far too often grassroots organizations have to wage them with insufficient legal or



technical or communications capacity, and must either do without, or are forced to rely on the assistance of green groups that have a history of co-opting these campaigns, or in exerting inappropriate influence on them to advance their own policy agendas. While there has been some improvement in the relationships between some of the major green groups and the grassroots sector, the problem still remains.

The broader environmental movement (grassroots, green groups, foundations academics) should view the historical disinvestment in grassroots organizing as a common problem. It is, as the saying goes a matter of strategy, not charity. A strong grassroots movement is essential to effecting a just transition from fossil fuels to clean energy and doing it in a way that can expand democracy, local control, and equity. So it is completely in the interest of greens, and environmental funders to devote considerably more resources toward the grassroots sector, and together to seriously address the glaring funding disparity between the greens and the grassroots environmental organizations.

Fortunately, there are collaborative efforts to change this situation, such as the

Building Equity and Alignment for Impact initiative (BEA). The BEA is a partnership between grassroots organizations, green groups, and members of the funding community to help direct more resources to the grassroots sector and to build a truly principled partnership between the three sectors to strengthen the overall movement. The BEA provides fora for reckoning, remediating harm, and a building amuch stronger movement as a result. It is very significant that several of the major national environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, the National Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace, 350.org, and the Union of Concerned Scientists, among others, are actively participating and supporting this initiative.

But funders need not wait for the work of the BEA or any other effort to begin changing their funding pattern to allocate more money to the grassroots sector so that results like those accomplished in the Richmond refinery campaign become more commonplace and a truly connected, effective and nationwide movement is developed.

***The Richmond refinery campaign highlighted relevant issues of social justice and racial equity that succeeded in securing strong public and policymaker support for environmental policy changes and regulation that has stayed strong.***

During the Richmond refinery campaign, CBE, APEN, and WCTC highlighted the issues of social justice and equity. They consistently pointed out that the overwhelming majority of the victims from the toxic emissions from Chevron's refinery were poorer African Americans, Latinos, and Laotians and that the campaign was not only about environmental policies, but also involve social justice and equity. These messages had strong resonance with the fence line communities, as well as with the broader Richmond population, and progressive members of the Richmond Planning Commission and the City Council. And they also had an impact on key staff members from the State Attorney General's office, and members of the state legislature whom Chevron was trying to convince to introduce CEQA exemption legislation.

There have been occasions when some organizations have been reluctant to highlight the problem of racial inequality in environmental policy campaigns. The thinking is that emphasizing environmental racism can be seen as "divisive" or "narrow", and that focus should instead be placed solely on issues of pollution, or greenhouse gas emissions that allegedly appeal to a broader public.

How much to emphasize issues of racial justice has long been a divisive issue in many social movements, including the environmental, labor, and women's movements. And its history goes back to the Abolitionist, Suffrage, and Populist movements as well. It



has been far too often a bitter lesson that the fear and failure of these movements, or sectors of these movements has made them weaker and often resulted in the failure of their efforts.

It was not so many years ago that the national Sierra Club held a strong anti-immigrant position, one that placed a great deal of blame on Mexican immigrants for the serious environmental problems plaguing the United States. In response to the enormous outrage from the Chicano and Latino communities, as well as other progressive sectors, and in response to stiff internal opposition, the Sierra Club abandoned this position, but the fact that it was even considered is evidence that we must consistently and openly address issues of racial inequality if we are to achieve the short and long term environmental goals that are held in common by the movement.

***Local grassroots organizations, when resourced well, not only built their own capacity and power to create environmental health and justice, they led a movement building process which created a strong foundation for future progressive campaigns.***

CBE and APEN closely collaborated to lead the refinery campaign. Both contributed several staff members, at times including their executive directors, the activism of their bases and network of allies, and the rich and diverse political experience each organization had amassed over the years. This relationship included developing the overall strategy for the campaign, determining its central messages and frames, tactical consultation, sharing resources, and coordinating negotiations strategy. According to Nile Malloy, CBE's Northern California Program Director, "between CBE and APEN, we were able to build a multi-racial alliance of Latinos, African Americans and Laotians. Both groups do intergenerational work. We get along primarily because we share a similar goal and vision for the community, and have a lot of political alignment – just transition, community power, clean energy. We divided up a lot of the work, and having a common analysis made everything else easy to work out." The West County Toxic Coalition, although much smaller than CBE and APEN also made major contributions to the campaign.

The refinery campaign could not have been successful, however, without a movement that included grassroots organizations and leadership, support from a major green organization, labor support, philanthropic support, and support from local elected officials. The grassroots organizations pulled together the coalition. Partly as a result of the relationship that was developed through this campaign, CBE and APEN are now developing a joint "Community Resiliency" strategy for Richmond, one aimed at a comprehensive just transition from Chevron's political and economic



domination, to a democratic, equitable, and robust green economy, with community power at its center.

But the support of other organizations was just as crucial to the success of the refinery campaign, the political support of SEIU Local 1021 not only strengthened the community voice, but helped CBE and APEN to “push back” against the negative role played by the Contra Costa Building Trades. The legal cases and the defeat of Chevron’s effort to get a CEQA exemption from the state legislature would not have been possible without the resources and support of Earthjustice. The Goldman Foundation provided critical financial support for CBE’s work in Richmond for many years. And the Richmond Progressive Alliance was indispensable in leading the work in the electoral arena.

Of course, as in any campaign, there were sometimes differences and conflicts, but the campaign demonstrated that as long as everyone kept the larger picture in mind, and were accountable to the grassroots communities, they could work out those differences and move forward. The campaign shows that the critical elements of movement building are: defining clear common interests, goals and objectives; understanding the interests of each collaborator and respecting non-common interests; having a good mechanism for resolving conflicts; and most of all agreeing on the important matters of decision-making, acknowledgement/credit, and allocation of resources.

In the final analysis, the victory over Chevron was only possible because all of these sectors were able to work together. And this effort has helped to establish the basis for the ongoing Just Transition Movement that will ultimately transform the City of Richmond. Similar movement building efforts can be replicated at the local, level, and should be expanded to regional and statewide levels. Ultimately these efforts can help to develop the national climate justice movement necessary to achieve federal climate and energy policy and to advance a national Just Transition vision.

***The campaign required struggle in the electoral process, which has resulted in multi-issue victories.***

The experience in Richmond demonstrates that even where corporate domination of the elections was longstanding and nearly unbroken over the years, it could be effectively challenged. The Richmond experience also demonstrates that grassroots communities can achieve significant benefits if they have elected leaders who are accountable to their needs and concerns.

Since progressives began winning seats on the Richmond City Council they have compelled Chevron to pay more than \$100 million in additional taxes, have passed eminent domain legislation that can protect working class homeowners facing eviction, have created a non-profit that can purchase “underwater” home loans, renegotiate the terms at current market value and make them available to residents facing foreclosure. They have also adopted public safety policies that have substantially reduced community violence, while significantly reducing instances of police brutality as well. The new pro-environment majority on the City Council also helped negotiate (along with CBE and other community organizations) a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with Chevron that requires the company to pay \$68 million into a fund for community projects, while also requiring mitigations on a new refinery project.

It would be wrong to equate community power solely with electing progressives to office. The political structures of all cities and state’s are still dominated by corporate power, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Electoral work is one important realm of building power, but it is important to build movements that can develop that power in all arenas – political, social, media, mass actions, civil disobedience, lobbying, legal advocacy, etc. In all of these arenas, progressives should become the champions of genuine democracy, of meaningful community control over the important decisions that affect their lives. But as long as millions of working class and people of color participate in the electoral arena, it must become an arena in which progressives organize, educate, and mobilize. Richmond provides an important lesson in how this can be done.



***A savvy communications strategy and resources are essential to achieving campaign success as well as re-shaping the market-based political narrative that currently dominates most discussions of the climate crisis.***

While CBE was able to do relatively well in the media arena in the refinery campaign, it was not able to take full advantage of this arena because of a lack of resources for this work.

This media is important because so many people, including elected officials, are influenced by it. And social media has been proven one of the most effective way to reach a younger audience. This area of work falls into the “hearts and minds” category, that is, helping people learn the truth about controversial issues, but also helping them to begin to see the systemic roots to larger problems like environmental racism and climate change. The larger green groups have the major resources to devote to this work, but that is decidedly untrue for most grassroots organizations. The green groups, while they can disseminate very positive messages, as has often been the case for Bill McGibben from 350.org for example, they have also often promoted wrong ideas and bad solutions that can be harmful to communities of color, such as the Environmental Defense Fund’s consistent advocacy of pollution trading programs.

Neither CBE nor APEN had a strong media and communications strategy during the campaign. And while CBE was ultimately able to achieve some success even with the mainstream media, they were unable to connect with the broad network of Spanish language media that could have helped them better reach the large Latino community in the Bay Area. This again points to the question of resources, and the need for the foundations to increase the resources they provide to the grassroots sector.

***Until cities like Richmond embrace a broad, diverse, equitable, and sustainable economic alternative, companies such as Chevron will continue to politically dominate and harm our communities.***

The grassroots victory in the refinery campaign was a very important accomplishment that has motivated a broader policy effort to restrict tar sands and dirty crude refining. However, despite Chevron’s defeat in this campaign it remains the dominant economic player in Richmond, mirroring the outsize influence of the fossil fuel industry in the US and globally.

This is an important lesson. While grassroots and environmental movements can win important victories over specific companies or even industry associations, the only way to really phase out of the fossil fuels that are killing our Mother Earth is to create an alternative energy (and economic) infrastructure. This is an endeavor that will probably achieve its initial progress at the local and regional level. But even there, it will require the development of a very broad movement that includes a broad range of grassroots organizations, green groups, labor organizations (unions and worker centers), civil rights organizations, the faith community, academic support, public health advocates, small and medium-sized green energy businesses, elected officials, the philanthropic community (individuals and foundations), and artists and cultural activists (to help reach young people and the broader community). As Miya Yoshitani, the Executive Director of APEN stated, “the vision for a just transition is not just about shutting down a refinery, but about the larger changes we want to see in the community – for affordable housing, labor rights, a truly clean environment, and equitable economic development. This comprehensive vision has enabled us to do deeper organizing beyond just regulatory approaches. Our us much more compelling to people than just an anti-pollution campaign.”

While this transition will necessarily focus initially on specific projects, such as local solar energy co-operatives, it should embrace a broad vision of a comprehensive “green economy”. An emerging economy requires an educational infrastructure, research and development capacity, a range of business support, a very broad and diverse mix of jobs, from blue collar to highly specialized and technical work, investment, etc. A just transition movement should have a vision that encompasses the entire continuum of this economy and work to assure that its benefits reach working class communities of color, poor rural and urban communities.

Former Richmond Mayor McLaughlin echoed this sentiment saying “just transition is the way to go, but might require a state mandate, or even federal level support. But in the meantime, we need to do what we can, creating local policies for environmentally healthy initiatives, like our green building ordinance, solar policies, and our climate change action plan.”

A truly just transition would look radically different from the hi-tech economy that developed in California’s Silicon Valley, an economy that received substantial public support but whose enormous profits were unevenly distributed, whose manufacturing sector exploited huge numbers of women of color, which generated major negative environmental impacts. And ultimately it produced little direct benefit for communities of color, once again missing an opportunity to achieve a substantive impact on our nation’s historical legacy of systemic racism and inequality. Hopefully, the lessons from the Richmond refinery campaigns and other such campaigns taking place throughout the US can inform and shape all future efforts to accomplish a just transition.

***The struggle for democracy is an essential element of the environmental justice movement, and this is its strength and deep contribution.***

As this study demonstrates, one of the very first challenges of any campaign is for the community be allowed to participate in the decision-making process. In other words, the first demand is “to let us in”. Once the grassroots organizations have a seat at the table, so to speak, that participation must be substantive, not symbolic or tokenistic. So the second demand is for access to relevant information, and a meaningful voice in deliberations and decision-making.

To give substantive meaning to democratic participation, organizations like CBE also advocate for services and accommodations that can allow poorer communities of color to participate in the process: holding hearing or meetings in the communities significantly impacted by whatever decision is made, holding meetings at times convenient to community members; providing interpretation and translation services for non-English speaking residents. Where possible transportation and childcare assistance should also be provided.

Every major arena of struggle in the Richmond Refinery Campaign was (and continues to be) dominated by corporate power: local governance, regulatory, legal, legislative, and the media. The campaign was successful largely because CBE and its allies were able to open democratic space for meaningful public engagement with the process. Of course, these were incremental openings, and genuine democracy continues to be extremely limited in all of these arenas (as well as others), so it is essential that the development of a democratic program continue to be a major priority of the movement.

# V

## Epilogue

On August 6, 2012 a powerful explosion rocked the Chevron refinery. Nineteen Chevron employees who had been operating the equipment that blew up had left the premises shortly before the explosion occurred. A matter of minutes saved their lives. Chevron had been informed by their workers several times that this equipment was eroding and could be dangerous. Chevron ignored their warnings. The fire that resulted from the explosion spread toxic smoke and emissions up into the San Francisco Bay. Ultimately, the fire caused more than 15,000 Richmond residents to seek medical care.

CBE, APEN and other organizations immediately began mobilizing community members, both to help them seek health care, as well as to inform them of what had taken place at the refinery. CBE then helped to organize a broad range of forces to assess the impact of the refinery fire, to hold Chevron accountable, and to develop proposals for refinery operations that would prevent future such tragedies

This new coalition included APEN, the National Resources Defense Council, United Steel Workers Union local 5 (representing workers at the refinery), and the UC Berkeley Labor program for Occupational Health and Safety. Governor Brown had convened a special commission to gather testimony about the fire as well as to gather recommendations for improving safety at refineries. The coalition presented a series of very strong recommendations to the commission, proposals that would significantly improve safety conditions at the refineries, benefitting refinery workers and fence line residents. This collaboration represented a new breakthrough in building “a blue-green alliance” between labor and environmental justice organizations. Chevron was compelled by community outrage to cover all medical costs resulting from the refinery accident, but they strongly opposed the measures proposed by the new coalition and the Bay Area AQMD did not compel their adoption. Chevron ultimately was fined \$1 million by the agency, the maximum under existing laws. As one CBE community member said, the fine was “chump change” to Chevron and told community residents just how much the company and regulators valued their health.

But the City Council elections of November 2014 displayed the growing power of the progressive community forces in the face of an all-out contest with Chevron. Four seats were up for grabs, and Chevron had devoted the year prior to the Council elections to unfolding a campaign to secure a pro-company majority. They erected billboards in and around Richmond with pro-Chevron messages, including testimonials from some well-known community leaders. They also specifically targeted Gayle McLaughlin, the Council’s most consistent progressive member. They accused her of being an absentee council representative because she had made a brief trip to Ecuador to visit

a community there that had been devastated by Chevron's pollution and had recently won a major court victory over the corporation. Chevron's billboards made it appear that this was a pleasure junket, and called on residents to call McLaughlin and tell her to "come home."

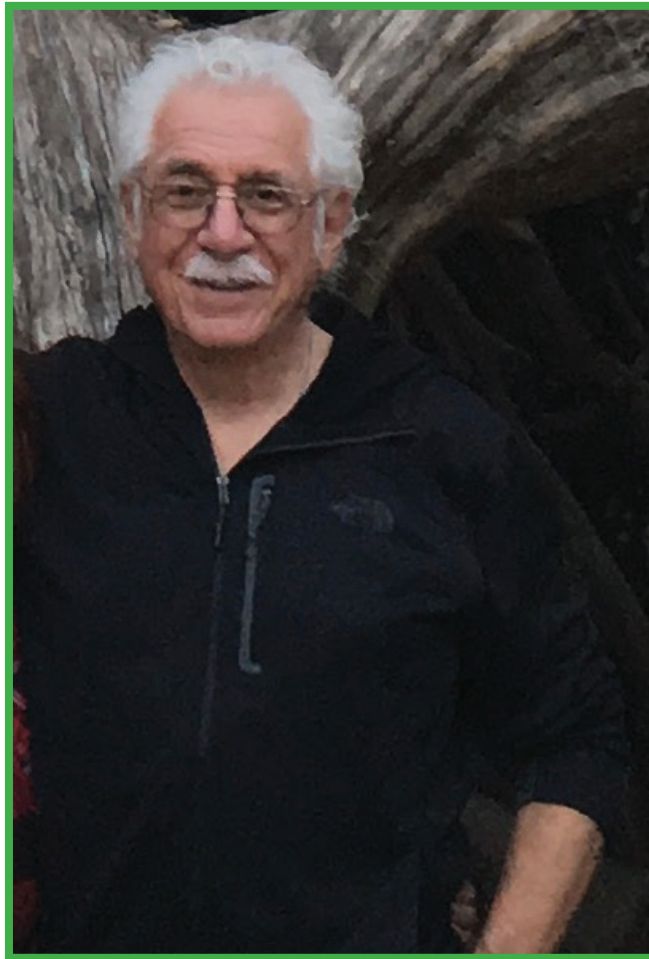
Chevron supported four pro-company candidates with expenditures of more than \$3 million, sending out a series of glossy mailers, and even hiring people for "grassroots" voter mobilization.

Despite Chevron's efforts, the progressive candidates, with McLaughlin the lead, won an overwhelming victory, securing all four open Council seats. This was a stunning victor that received nationwide attention, because Chevron had chosen to make this a high-profile contest. And it strengthened the conditions for ultimately making Richmond a national model for a just transition from fossil fuel energy and economy to a genuinely clean and sustainable green economy.

CBE and APEN are developing a comprehensive strategy for helping to achieve this transition and to build a truly resilient and equitable Richmond. "Divest and Invest" is the core of their campaign, to eliminate public investments in fossil fuel corporations such as Chevron, and to direct money and resources to expanding and improving essential health and social services, and to creating a new economic infrastructure.

A major component of this resiliency vision is building the democratic power of the City's working class and community of color majority, including a robust expansion of voter engagement and mobilization. CBE and APEN's successful refinery campaign of 2007-2011 helped to lay the foundation for this marvelous endeavor. Given the community bases they have established, the new majority on the City Council, the developing labor-community partnership, the growing electoral clout of communities of color, and the rich experiences they have acquired over the last decade, CBE and APEN's chances of success are quite good.

In the midst of the second year of the new federal administration the challenges to our communities and planet by powerful actors may seem insurmountable. Yet, in the story of the Richmond Chevron campaign, as in many other grassroots victories, are the inspirational lessons that can inform our collective strategies to protect communities and build power throughout the United States ■



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