"I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse" is among the most recognizable movie lines of all time. It is synonymous with the criminal underworld and the unwritten stark rules that govern it.

The same stark underground rules apply to construction permits in California and the Central Valley. Behind the seemingly transparent workings of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), labor unions are making offers that corporations can't refuse.

Since the late 1980s, unions have manipulated the state's environmental laws to delay commercial and industrial projects until the owners agree to build their projects or operate their facilities exclusively with unionized workers. People in the business of approving permits for construction projects often call the practice "greenmail" because it is extortion using environmental laws.

A few years ago, Big West/Flying J endured greenmail from construction unions as it sought approval for expansion of its Bakersfield refinery. In the late 1990s, owners of proposed merchant power plants in Kern County surrendered to greenmail inflicted by California Unions for Reliable Energy, a phony environmental organization that unions use as leverage to delay energy infrastructure projects at the California Energy Commission until they win union monopolies on construction and maintenance.

Now we see the Teamsters Joint Council 7 union filing an environmental lawsuit in state Superior Court to stop construction of Madison Dearborn's VWR International Laboratory Equipment Distribution Facility in Visalia. Yes, truck drivers in the Teamsters union have developed an intense concern about the fumes coming from trucks that would enter and leave the facility.

According to the Teamsters union, these trucks could contribute to global warming. One can picture a group of truck drivers, concerned about the planet, taking up a collection.
at the union hall to fund this lawsuit to save the Maldives islands from being inundated by the sea.

Likewise, one can picture nurses in an emergency room pooling their spare change to fund the environmental lawsuit filed by the California Nurses Association in 2009 to block construction of a proposed hospital in Castro Valley. We can imagine grocery store employees desperately working through their United Food and Commercial Workers Union to stop the environmental devastation that would be wrought by the construction of Walmart stores in Stockton and Gilroy.

Even the proposed Beacon Solar Energy Project in Kern County is a threat to the environment, according to construction unions that have tried to save the planet by obstructing approval of this proposed power plant, which would generate power using the dirty rays of the noxious sun.

How can we as ordinary Californians stop this nonsense? The California State Legislature can amend CEQA to restrict the use of this law to attain objectives unrelated to environmental protection.

Bills were introduced in the state Senate in 2005 and 2008 to rein in the abuse, but both bills were defeated in committee on party-line votes: Republicans in support, Democrats opposed. Have economic circumstances changed enough so that Democrats will reconsider their position on CEQA abuse and eliminate greenmail?

> Russell Johnson is director of government affairs for the Associate Builders and Contractors, Central California chapter. E-mail him at rjohnson@abccentralcal.org.

**Comments (8)**

**Russell Johnson: Action opposing VWR plan is extortion**

**M_artyH**

5:44 AM on February 8, 2011

Amen, Mr. Johnson! These "environmental" lobbies are a significant threat to California's competitiveness nationally and globally. Most of us support responsible use of resources, but that is not what these groups are about, as your piece so clearly illustrates. . .

**HolidayDoc**
6:18 AM on February 8, 2011

The Unions caring about the environmental impact is a joke.

_Thankful4all_

6:46 AM on February 8, 2011

Well done! The Unions would not be filing this action if the employees were Union. Does the Union care about the Environment? Only if the employees are non union or the construction workers are non-union. The Legislature needs to wake up to this ongoing charade and change CEQA - or the unemployed public will wake up and recognize the real reason they are unemployed. Business is tired of the bureaucracy.

_cleanfreak_

6:51 AM on February 8, 2011

Well written article, Mr. Johnson. The unions are becoming job killers.

9:15 AM on February 8, 2011

_This comment was left by a user who has been blocked by our staff._

12:07 PM on February 8, 2011

_This comment was left by a user who has been blocked by our staff._

_JackCayman_

12:22 AM on February 9, 2011

Thanks for getting these issues out into the public. These unions are a cancer... they stop a nothing to force their will.

Employees need advocates for their interest and their rights but these Unions go way beyond what is needed.

Before California, the nation or Tulare County gets healthy, the Union’s neck will have to be broke.

The judge should have enough sense to throw the case out.

_tcfarmkid_

12:21 PM on February 9, 2011
Well said and I agree with the posters above. Unions need to go away... especially public employee and teacher unions.

I was recently out in Reno and the news carried an interview with the head of the teacher's union for Nevada. For once, I heard an honest quote from a union leader. She said "I am not here to improve the conditions in classrooms... I am here to get better benefits and wages for teachers".

Until public unions start to remember who they work for and what their real jobs are, they need to go away. They are not dealing with harsh or dangerous conditions.