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Section: Porkopolis

Janitorial Wages and Other Cruel Realities

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Article Text:

A mentally impaired woman repeatedly subjected to a Taser by Cincinnati Police died eight days later of natural causes, according to the Hamilton County Coroner's office. Dr. Cynthia Gardner, who performed the autopsy, found that Shirley Andrews died in the County Justice Center of pulmonary thromboembolism, a blood clot. Her inactivity and obesity were contributing factors, but the police Taser was not. A report by Assistant Police Chief Richard Janke quotes Gardner saying, "There cannot be a delayed death due to TASER usage."

Andrews, a 5-foot-7-inch black female, weighed about 270 pounds. On Feb. 24 police responded to a group home on Colerain Avenue, where Andrews was assaulting staff and destroying property. One of the two officers was trained as part of the new police Mental Health Response Team. After Andrews refused warnings and threw a plastic case at them, officers pulled out their Tasers. They struck Andrews with about six barbs, administering multiple five-second cycles of 50,000 volts.

"The officers' continued requests and commands, coupled with some perceived pain from the TASER, eventually caused compliance," Janke wrote.

Andrews removed three of the barbs during the tussle. Three more were removed by doctors at University Hospital, where police took her because of "her mental impairment -- she was incoherent," according to Janke.

The Rev. James Orange, one of the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s first field organizers, came straight from a reenactment of the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., to stand with Cincinnati's janitors in their union organizing campaign. Orange appeared March 8 with the Justice for Janitors movement and the Cincinnati AFL-CIO outside the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to mark the release of a report called "Good Jobs, A Healthy Cincinnati: Building a Brighter Future for Cincinnati's Janitors."

The Cincinnati metropolitan area gained 5,400 jobs in the year ending November 2004, according to the report, released by Service Employees International Union. But without the 8,400 new jobs created in the service sector, the area would actually have suffered a net loss. Yet those service jobs are nearly unlivable, especially janitorial gigs. Most janitors earn \$6 to \$8 an hour for part-time work, and almost none receive health or other benefits. Because the cleaning business is so competitive, individual cleaning companies and the building owners employing them could find themselves at a competitive disadvantage or out of business altogether if they're the only companies paying workers more. That's why Justice for Janitors has been trying to unionize local janitors (see "Dirty Little Secret," issue of July 21-27, 2004). A Cincinnati janitor would have to work 95 hours a week to support a family of four without government assistance, the report says.

Lambs to the Slaughter, Smokers Across the River

What could be sexier than kindness to animals? An activist with People for the Ethical

Treatment of Animals (PETA) dressed up March 4 as Little Bo Peep, decked out in high heels and a miniskirt, to lead a protest outside Benetton's store at the Kenwood Towne Centre. Peep waved a sign saying, "Benetton Is Baaad to Sheep," criticizing the retail chain's use of Australian wool. Using a portable body screen, supporters showed a video, United Cruelty of Benetton, that portrays the flaying of sheep in a technique called "mulesing." PETA wants Benetton to ban garments made with Australian wool until the procedure is banned.

"Mulesing" is a painful mutilation in which farmers use gardening shears to cut skin and flesh from lambs' backsides to reduce maggot infestation, even though humane control methods exist," according to PETA.

"The 'united colors' of Benetton are turning blood red," says Matt Prescott, PETA's campaign coordinator. "If Benetton doesn't want to have the blood of millions of lambs and their mothers on its hands, it should refuse to sell clothes made from Australian wool."

Benetton competitors Abercrombie & Fitch and J. Crew have joined the boycott of Australian wool, PETA says.

A new coalition of about 200 companies comprised mostly of local restaurants, bars and businesses that support them has asked Cincinnati City Council to hold off on making any decisions about a citywide smoking ban (see "Butt Out," issue of Feb. 23-March 2). The Greater Cincinnati Hospitality Coalition (GCHC) sent city officials information from Jacob Evans of the Ohio Licensed Beverage Association saying an organization called the Ohio Council for Reasonable Business Policy plans to propose state legislation that "provides reasonable compromises so that those hospitality establishments that cater to an adult crowd or a smoking clientele can make a business choice between smoking and non-smoking."

But if a smoking ban is inevitable, business owners argue that a statewide ban would be preferable to one that extended only to city limits, which would chase patrons to nearby municipalities such as Norwood, Blue Ash and Saint Bernard as well as across the river into Kentucky.

"I hope you will keep this proposed state-wide legislation in mind before you make any decisions on the local level," says a March 7 letter by Tom Ford, president of GCHC.

Porkopolis TIP LINES: 513-665-4700 (ext. 138)

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