

CHAPTER 1

Clearing the Air: What the Times Called for in 1947

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Nowadays, we think that good journalism means separating the editorial page from news reporting. Editorials are by their nature opinion pieces, although they are usually based on news items. News reporting, in contrast, is supposed to be “neutral.” Indeed, modern day journalists – while often soliciting opinions of experts and pundits – will go out of their way to find someone with a contrary view and will attempt to reflect both sides of any question. Even when exposing some social wrong, the emphasis in reporting is on laying out facts and letting readers draw their conclusions. That’s the ideal, anyway.

Of course, it is sometimes argued that there is no true neutrality and that news reports inevitably contain slants on covered events, even if the intent is neutrality. However, if we go back in time, the notion of neutrality and separation of editorial from news reporting as the key to good journalism was not so firmly ensconced. In particular, for decades after its founding, the *Los Angeles Times* in both opinion and reporting represented the (generally conservative) views of its owners – the Chandler family – and their designated family-member/publisher.¹

Given the impact of the Internet on newspaper publishing, it may be hard for contemporary readers of this chapter to appreciate that the *Times*’ mix of blended reporting and opinion was highly influential in local and state politics back in the day. Although the *Times* did not always get its way on public issues, its endorsements of candidates and legislation mattered a great deal. The *Times* represented the positions of a downtown business elite in Los Angeles that had its view of the way things should be done and run.

An important element in *Times*’ policy was promoting economic development of the Los Angeles area, i.e., boosterism. While boosterism might not be seen as good journalism today, the popular movements for “slow growth” that emerged in the 1970s and beyond in Los Angeles were not much in evidence before that decade. Boosting the local economy was a normal thing for newspapers to do, not just in LA.

Growth and development were naturally hindered by the Great Depression of the 1930s, so anything that might aid the local economy back then would likely have been viewed as a Good Thing by most readers. World War II produced economic advance in the LA area and throughout California in the early 1940s at a pace that could hardly have been imagined just a few years before. But when the War came to an end, there were fears that the Depression would re-emerge. In 1947, although the Depression had not returned, there was still residual nervousness about the economy. Children in that year were listening to a newly-released MGM phonograph record about “*Irving, the Unemployed Horse*” and how he eventually landed a job with Santa Claus.

At the state level, the postwar period posed challenges to California in terms of infrastructure, education, health care, and social welfare spending. Then-Governor Earl Warren in 1947 championed a fiscal blueprint for the soon-to-be-developed freeway system. He also pushed for

¹Bill Boyarsky, *Inventing L.A.: The Chandlers and Their Times* (Santa Monica, CA: Angel City Press, 2009).

a kind of state-level universal health care.² Ultimately, he got his roads but not his health program. But while roads and health care might seem to be a full agenda for public policy, there were other issues on the table in 1947, too.

One of these issues was smog. Smog, however, was seen as a local and regional issue centered in the Los Angeles area about which the state's governor could not be expected to take the lead. But what should be done about smog was clearly an issue on which the *LA Times* could be expected to have a position since the bad air was a major concern in its marketing area. Even if smog was not something directly felt in Sacramento, *Times* readers were experiencing it on a daily basis.

An interesting question is what you might have expected the *Times'* position on smog abatement to have been. Obviously, no one would favor having smoggy air. So would the *Times* favor aggressive regulation and controls, an approach often seen as interfering with business? Aggressive regulation, you might think, would not be the choice of the *Times*. If there was to be some form of regulation, would the *Times* favor doing something about smog on as local a level as possible as opposed to empowering some broader regional authority? Again, one might have guessed that local (mainly municipal) control rather than some broader regulatory authority would have been favored as a more conservative approach.

But if you chose both guesses, plausible though they may seem as the *Times'* likely positions, you would be wrong. The surprising answer is that the *Times* management – once it decided that smog had to be dealt with – favored an aggressive regulatory approach and one based on a regional, not a local, basis. Indeed, as will be described below, the *Times* in 1946-1947 engineered a *successful* campaign to create a county-wide regulatory authority with broad power. It was a campaign that required action by the legislature to pass a bill and the governor to sign it.

In undertaking the campaign, the *Times* made little distinction between its news reporting and its editorial position; one history of smog abatement in LA refers to the campaign waged by the *Times* politely as “patchy reporting.”³ With hindsight, we know that the *Times'* burst of journalistic activism didn't end smog in LA by any means. The smog crisis – not too strong a phrase – characterized the LA area for decades thereafter until major progress was finally made. But the *Times'* campaign did represent what has to be regarded as a major first step toward strong, regional regulation to clean up the air. Indeed, the agency that was created at the *Times'* behest in 1947 is a parent of the current South Coast Air Quality Management District.

²Daniel J.B. Mitchell, “Earl Warren’s Fight for California’s Freeways: Setting a Path for the Nation,” *Southern California Quarterly*, Summer 2006, pp. 205-238, and Daniel J.B. Mitchell, “Impeding Earl Warren: California’s “Health Insurance Plan That Wasn’t and What Might Have Been,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law*, December 2002, pp. 947-976.

³Chip Jacobs and William J. Kelly, *Smogtown: The Lung-Burning History of Pollution in Los Angeles* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008), p. 29.

As to why the *Times* took on the smog issue in the way that it did, we can only speculate. Norman Chandler, the third in the series of family patriarchs who ran the *Times*, took over as publisher in 1941 at a time when the paper faced financial difficulties and was slipping in circulation relative to its rivals. However, no one liked breathing smog including readers and potential readers. Perhaps he thought that a campaign against smog would boost sales. Or maybe he just didn't like looking across the street from the *Times*' headquarters building at City Hall and barely being able to make out its smog-obscured outline. Norman later gave his wife the credit for goading him into the anti-smog campaign.⁴ In the end, all we can do is describe the *Times*' actions, whatever the motivation behind them.

The Developing Perception of Smog

The word "smog" is an amalgamation of "smoke" and "fög" and is often thought to have originated in the coal-related air pollution of London in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁵ American cities, particularly where there was heavy industry and coal burning for energy and heating were also prone to smog problems in that older sense of the word. There was a strong association in the minds of the public and civic authorities between smoky emissions that could be easily seen and smog problems that produced burning eyes and respiratory distress in southern California. The villains in smog were therefore emitters of visible smoke and the solution was to force them to clean up their emissions.

When it comes to Los Angeles today, however, we tend to associate smog with automobiles. Under modern regulations, autos must be periodically checked at smog stations and control devices such as catalytic converters are required. But car exhaust is generally not black and smoky, even if unfiltered. So the kind of air pollution caused by automobiles in the Los Angeles area results from a complicated chemical reaction related to climate and geographical conditions in southern California. But since there is typically no black smoke to be seen in LA's "photochemical smog," the link between autos and smog was not initially understood and remained a matter of debate.

The automobile connection was also obscured by contemporary events. Smog became a major issue in the LA area during World War II as wartime factory production increased rapidly. So there was at least a correlation between the onset of smog and the new and expanded factories. At the same time, driving was curtailed by wartime gasoline rationing. The still-extensive public transit system (mainly streetcars) – which had been in decline – experienced a temporary increase in ridership. So the link to auto emissions was not obvious. (And, of course, stationary sources such as factories *were* an important component of bad air.)

⁴Bill Boyarsky, *Inventing L.A.: The Chandlers and Their Times* (Santa Monica, CA: Angel City Press, 2009), p.106.

⁵This section is based heavily on the transcribed interview with Frank M. Stead which appears in "Earl Warren and the State Department of Public Health," a volume of the Earl Warren oral history project, and available at http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/ew_pub_health.pdf.

It was also unclear once smog became a perceived problem whether it was just an annoyance or a public health issue. And even if smog were seen as unhealthful, it was unclear *who* should do something about it. There were public health officials in LA County in the 1940s, but their traditional role at that time involved combatting diseases. No known smog diseases existed. The burning eye sensation was unpleasant but it wasn't a disease; it would go away when the smog lifted. And unlike, say, tuberculosis, whatever was the cause of smog, it wasn't germs. For that reason, public health officials tended to view smog as outside their jurisdiction. They didn't see themselves as being responsible for controlling smog or even doing research on its effects.⁶

Despite this tendency in the public health community, there were some precedents in the field of industrial hygiene that did involve public health. Various adverse health effects from chemical exposures through fumes *within* the workplace had been studied. So if the same fumes were escaping into the general atmosphere that caused health problems within the workplace, similar health issues might potentially arise for the general public.

As noted, once the U.S. entered World War II – and even just before during the period of military preparedness - there was a huge buildup of industrial activity in the LA area. The aircraft (later aerospace) industry began to flourish, but so did many other ancillary industries. Concerns about chemical exposure rose with the rapid industrialization. So maybe smog was more than an annoyance. And maybe it could be studied outdoors in the same way that industrial exposure had been studied indoors. These ideas began to meet a more receptive response as the smog problem grew.

There was also a parallel with water pollution. The dumping of raw sewage into the ocean was known to be a hazard for swimmers and, of course, bacteria – a traditional public health concern – were involved in that type of pollution. So there were controls gradually imposed by the state – not without resistance – requiring local authorities to treat sewage. Controls were extended to the dumping of industrial waste, too, including dumping that affected ground water (which might be consumed by the public as drinking water). If it was wrong to dump into water, and if such dumping was seen as a threat to public health, the idea of “dumping” into the air could also be seen as an activity that needed to be controlled.

The War Years: 1940-1945

Generally, histories of smog in LA report the first major smog attacks – not too strong a word – as occurring in the World War II period.⁷ Before that, periodic problems of smoke in the air

⁶Examination of topics under “Public Health” in the Earl Warren Papers of the California State Archives reinforces this assertion. Typical subjects of internal documents involve tuberculosis, polio, cancer, pest control, venereal disease, maternal health, hospital construction, handicapped children, and sewage treatment. Air pollution is rarely mentioned; water pollution is somewhat more frequently referenced. Individual citizens from the LA area did write letters complaining of smog to Governor Warren and received polite letters of acknowledgment or referrals to local authorities.

⁷Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 259-261.

were reported going back into the 19th century and early 20th century but nothing on the scale that began during the war.⁸ As a result, there were some local ordinances enacted aimed at excessive smoke emissions in the prewar period but enforcement was limited and sporadic. Smog was not an ongoing event and tended to be viewed as a freak occurrence when it appeared before World War II. In any event, air pollution does not stay neatly within city lines so local (municipal) controls from the prewar area were bound to be ineffective when confronted with area-wide wartime production and population increase.

The U.S. did not enter World War II formally until the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941. But production was ramping up before as part of the Lend Lease program to aid Britain and increased American preparedness. Congress enacted the draft in September 1940. But two months before that enactment, a short item appeared on the back pages of the *LA Times* that a problem of “mystery fumes” producing a burning sensation of the eyes was reported in the Civic Center. An investigation was promised by city authorities.⁹ [July 10, 1940] Apparently, however, the problem cleared up quickly and disappeared from public attention.

It is important to recall that public enthusiasm for the War was intense after Pearl Harbor and the *Times* would have seen its patriotic duty as supporting the war effort. As long as the problem of “fumes” was sporadic, and to the extent it was seen as connected to military production, fussing about an occasional unpleasantness would not have been seen as the thing to do. You were initially more likely to find basic news stories about the War itself or items seen as supporting the War than complaints about air pollution. A little over half a year into the War, for example, the *Times* provided helpful hints on how to look pretty for women who had been pulled into non-traditional factory work. As the *Times* put it, the “Molly Pitchers of 1942” did not have to give up their pursuit of “good looks.” [June 28, 1942]

By 1943, however, reluctance to criticize polluters was fading, particularly when a specific villain could be found. Southern California Gas, the big utility, was operating a plant producing synthetic rubber that came to be seen as the source of irritating fumes. (Sources of natural rubber had been cut off by the war; the imposition of wartime gasoline rationing was seen as an indirect way of reducing demand for rubber tires.) The production was taking place under federal government supervision and an official was called from Washington to investigate. He gave assurances that the problem would be resolved and that, in any case, no health danger was involved. [September 15, 1943] The LA City Council became involved and its members were given assurances that there would be “an effort to keep existing nuisances at a practical minimum, consistent with the best interests of the citizens of Los Angeles and the war effort.” [September 23, 1943]

⁸James E. Krier and Edmund Ursin, *Pollution and Policy: A Case Essay on California and Federal Experience with Motor Vehicle Air Pollution, 1940-1975* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 45-46.

⁹When particular *LA Times* articles are cited after this point, the date will be shown in the text in brackets []. Interested readers can access the articles using the dates shown through the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.

Shortly thereafter, however, the plant temporarily shut down after a "new fume outbreak" occurred. [October 1, 1943] And soon after that event, a Grand Jury called in the mayor of LA and the city council president to hear about attempts to control the "menace." But there began to be suspicion that the rubber plant was not the sole cause of the "acrid fumes and smoke" that was distressing the public. Perhaps, it was suggested, the problem had to do with other factories using oil for boilers rather than natural gas. [October 8, 1943] No one was quite sure.

Nonetheless, the focus remained on the rubber plant and the LA city attorney filed for an injunction to stop production there. Federal officials continued to focus on the need for the plant to operate as part of the war effort, an assertion that LA Mayor Fletcher Bowron questioned. [October 18, 1943] For a time, the plant apparently started and stopped production in response to wind conditions; when it was thought winds would blow its emissions away, production was increased. [October 23, 1943]

At the time of the rubber plant controversy, the *Times* took the position that in view of the war effort and promises by plant officials to install cleaner equipment, the City's lawsuit should be dropped (and it was). [October 28, 1943] Attention began to turn to other sources of air pollution. Public buses, then in private hands, were said to be burning low quality diesel fuel because of wartime diversions. The bus operator pushed for better quality fuel to be made available "in the interests of maintaining essential public transportation." [December 6, 1943]

By 1944, inter-area conflict was reported. A property owners group in Altadena complained to the County Board of Supervisors about what the *Times* called "gas and fumes attacks." [July 20, 1944] The complaints led to the County district attorney holding a meeting with the Altadena group and other officials and promising to sue unnamed polluters. A County health official who attended the meeting, however, noted that participants were filling the room with noxious cigarette smoke that was worse than whatever was outside. Since cigarette smoking was far more prevalent than it is today, the implication was that the complaints about the outside air were exaggerated.

In any case, it was not clear who would be sued, although garbage dumps that burned refuse were mentioned. [August 31, 1944] It might be noted that at the time, it was common for both garbage dumps and local homeowners to burn their refuse in incinerators. The County Board of Supervisors directed the district attorney to sue producers "permitting obnoxious smoke and gaseous fumes to escape from smokestacks." It was unclear, however, whether the County had any authority other than in unincorporated areas that were not part of some municipality.

An outside expert complained that the County Health Officer, H.O. Swartout, was not qualified to deal with the smog issue. The expert stated that Swartout was neglecting the role of gasoline-powered automobiles and argued that there should be mandated installation of smoke-abating devices on polluting industries. Swartout denied that he had neglected automobiles but he attributed whatever problems they were causing to low-quality wartime fuel. [September 15, 1944] When the War ended, the fuel problem would presumably vanish.

Meanwhile, within its boundaries, LA City singled out some local firms for suit. [September 13, 1944] But at the same time, Mayor Bowron told radio listeners that the City "can never go back to the old days where the air was clean and pure and sweet and scented with orange blossoms." Nonetheless, a new city ordinance "with teeth" was needed to deal with polluters. Later, he and other city officials went for an airplane tour and it was noted that the plane had to climb to 4,500 feet to go above the "haze." [October 12, 1944]

It appears that by the late summer and fall of 1944, the smog debate was fully engaged. The *Times* began to use the word "smog" (along with "fumes" and "smoke") and fretted that LA was becoming "a second Pittsburgh." (Pittsburgh, then a steelmaking center, was noted for its bad air.) [September 18, 1944] There were calls for a city "smoke czar" to be appointed. [September 22, 1944] Similarly, the County also proposed a czar (for unincorporated areas). Experts reported. Action plans were prepared. But there were more and more reports of smog attacks. Meanwhile, the Altadena group continued to agitate and rail against inadequate measures: "Cannot the Board of Supervisors realize that this menacing air pollution is with us now for two years and immediate action for relief is being demanded by a large number of taxpayers and voters?" [October 6, 1944]

The *Times* began looking for success stories from other cities that had reduced smog and it found St. Louis. There, the *Times* reported, the problem was found to be due to coal burned for home heat, railway locomotives, and industrial purposes. Coal burning was not a big issue in Los Angeles, but perhaps LA could use the St. Louis method of researching the problem and then reducing the source through a combination of pressure on polluters and regulation. [September 25, 1944] Just as St. Louis had controlled use of its coal, LA would need to control its fuels. [October 19, 1944] The *Times* quoted a chemist who asserted that "there is no fume in an industrial plant that is not controllable." [November 28, 1944] The implication was clear; what could be done inside could be done outside.

This approach, regulatory mandates, it might be noted, was not in accord with the position at that time of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce which called instead for "voluntary" efforts. [October 24, 1944] The Chamber pointed to the success of Firestone Tire in South Gate which had voluntarily installed control devices after complaints about emissions had been received. [November 4, 1944] However, the City and County persisted in trying to come up with new laws. But both jurisdictions ran into problems of conflicts with state laws which regulated such activities as agricultural burning and burning for forest fire control. A federal study of the "almost unbearable" smog situation was urged by state officials noting that the multitude of jurisdictions in the LA area made a local study difficult. [November 21, 1944]

The County set up a Smoke and Fumes Commission to draft an ordinance. But there was bickering within the Commission and an unsuccessful attempt to oust its chairman. [January 24, 1945] The Board of Supervisors settled the discord by disbanding the Commission entirely. [January 25, 1945] But the basic issue was unresolved. As 1945 wore on, there continued to be calls for new ordinances at the County and City levels. A partial eclipse of the Sun, the *Times*

noted, could not be seen except from the peak of Mt. Wilson, due to smog. [July 10, 1945] It wasn't just eclipses that couldn't be seen; the *Times* regularly ran photos of smoggy conditions along with its smog-related articles.¹⁰ And there continued to be *ad hoc* suggestions. Caltech should do a study. [July 20, 1945] Perhaps cities should burn their rubbish in places where it wouldn't cause so much pollution. [August 17, 1945]

The Immediate Postwar Situation

Once the War was over, the *Times* began to show impatience. It derided many of the suggestions that were being made for clearing the air (such as not beating rugs) as silly. It noted that after the big fuss over the rubber plant, when the plant's emissions were finally controlled, the smog situation remained as bad as it was. "Maybe we can't cure it at all," opined the *Times*, but we can make a better try than this." [September 13, 1945]

One thing the *Times* did do was designate a reporter, Ed Ainsworth, to focus on the smog issue. Ainsworth wrote a combination of humorous and standard news pieces dealing with the smog problem on a regular basis. And the County, after a year of effort, finally passed an anti-smog ordinance – but just for the unincorporated areas where it had clear jurisdiction. [September 19, 1945]

The inadequacy of local ordinances for a problem that crossed city lines remained. Local city officials from various jurisdictions met and vented their frustrations. [September 20, 1945] The idea of a definitive study took hold although the *Times* complained that the City had "passed the buck to Caltech" and declared that at the current pace of action "we will have smog until doomsday." [September 28, 1945]

Nonetheless, an idea began to form – apparently as an outgrowth of a conference of local officials in Pasadena. There should be a regional "smoke control district" created. Otherwise, smog would harm postwar tourism in LA. [October 10, 1945] Local cities began to push for the County Board of Supervisors and the LA City Council to give support to establishing a regional smog authority. [November 21, 1945] The *Times* ran a story of a residents' protest at a smoky garbage dump. Even though the County had jurisdiction in that case, apparently different County agencies couldn't agree which one was responsible for dealing with the dump. [January 26, 1946] It appeared that some new regulatory entity was needed, as the local cities had been arguing, to deal with the smog problem.

But like everything else when it came to smog, progress was slow. In May 1946, the *Times* noted that some local cities were agitating for a regional authority, but this time the newspaper endorsed the idea. Smog couldn't be controlled by any one jurisdiction. The same rules had to

¹⁰Although the Los Angeles Public Library has an online collection of photos from the *LA Times*, most of the smog photos are not included and may not exist except as poor reproductions on microfilm and digitized versions of the microfilm.

apply everywhere. [May 19, 1946] With that realization and endorsement, a campaign had begun.

The Initial Campaign

In July 1946, the County provided small sums to USC and UCLA to study the smog problem. [July 15, 1946] The *Times*, however, in an editorial “explained” the cause of smog in terms of the traditional (at that time) view that it was basically smoke mixed with fog that resulted when certain wind conditions produced the combination. Various cities and the County should coordinate their anti-smog efforts but if that didn’t work, the matter might be taken to the state legislature. The legislature, if necessary, could compel cooperation from recalcitrant jurisdictions. [July 20, 1946]

With hindsight, this editorial can be seen as laying the framework for what would become the *Times*’ campaign to leverage the legislature on behalf of local smog control. A small subsequent item in the *Times* reported that only four of the (then) 45 cities within the County had signed cooperative air pollution agreements with the County. [August 8, 1946] So the idea that inter-jurisdiction cooperation could solve the problem, absent compulsion from some higher authority, seemed farfetched.

Meanwhile, there continued to be regular reports of smog problems, articles about burning dumps, letters to the editor decrying the smog situation, and photos showing officials using special equipment to sample the air and illustrating smog-caused low visibility. One photo and related article showed the LA County District Attorney staring into the smog. The District Attorney declared that “during the war, factory owners hid behind war production efforts as a screen for their failure to do something about Los Angeles’ atmospheric mess.” [September 24, 1946]

Sadly, the *Times* noted in a subsequent editorial, the District Attorney had jurisdiction mainly in unincorporated areas and had only limited legal remedies elsewhere in the County. [September 26, 1946] According to the editorial, LA needed to adopt the aggressive approach of St. Louis where “aid of civic organizations was enlisted, engineers were hired to establish the cause of the evil, and the smog soon vanished.” But in contrast, as the *Times* continued to report regularly, in LA there was inter-city finger pointing and ongoing smog.¹¹

Long articles by reporter Ainsworth appeared documenting “much talk, but fumes continue” and “county-wide co-operation lacking.” [October 13 and 14, 1946] Profiles of litigation efforts

¹¹The *Times* singled out “the heavily industrialized areas of Vernon, South Gate, Torrance, El Segundo, and adjacent factory communities” which seemed to be beyond the reach of LA County efforts to control air pollution. [September 26, 1946] Vernon up to the present has had a reputation as an out-of-control and corrupt artificial “city” with only a few city employees and their families as residents. TV viewers of the HBO series “*True Detective*” will recognize the fictional city of “Vinci” in that program’s 2015 season as an unsubtle stand-in for Vernon. An attempt in the state legislature to disincorporate Vernon in 2011 after a scandal there was ultimately defeated.

to deal with smog were provided. But LA smog seemed to be mysteriously different from smog in other cities, notably because it contained a mystery component that caused eye burning; no one knew what it was or why it occurred. Readers were invited to write or phone the *Times* with tips on sources of smoky emissions. [October 15, 1946] Ainsworth accompanied County smog inspectors on their searches for smog villains. [October 17, 1946] In dramatic language, he described "every street (as) a poison tunnel." [October 18, 1946] Ainsworth profiled the diligence of the LA City official in charge of the smog issue who "is staying on the job past his retirement age" because he wanted to restore the air to what it was when he was a boy. [October 19, 1946]

In his stories, Ainsworth listed the known causes of smog (industrial smoke, oil refineries, burning dumps, etc.) but automobiles were not included at the outset. [October 20, 1946] As noted earlier, although autos were sometimes suspected of playing some role, they didn't emit the kind of black smoke that could be spotted coming from a smokestack. *Times* readers did send in the reports of specific polluters as the newspaper had requested. "Smog Complaints Pour in for Official Investigation," headlined one Ainsworth piece. [October 21, 1946] But who would report that he or she saw anything as ordinary as a car going by emitting normal exhaust? So it's not surprising that the ongoing Ainsworth stories initially omitted that source except for "old smoky cars." [November 5, 1946] But he did report on some interesting findings about gases found in the downtown Second Street automobile tunnel and that there was some indication that perhaps those gases, combined with sunlight, might be a cause of smog. [November 7, 1946]

Still, Ainsworth mainly concluded that what was needed was creation of a unified "smog abatement district" in the County. [October 25, 1946] This idea unnerved Mayor Bowron who feared that an autonomous district would preclude municipal control. [November 8, 1946] But Ainsworth reported that there would be a move in the state legislature to enable creation of such a district. [November 20, 1946] In the interim, Ainsworth reported on residents demanding that dumps be closed. [November 2, 1946] He pointed out that the synthetic rubber plant on which blame had been heaped during the War had been cleaned up; if that plant could be fixed, he reasoned, so could the other smog sources. [November 4, 1946]

Ainsworth reported that the LA Chamber of Commerce preferred to rely on voluntary cooperation of industry. But, he also noted that in St. Louis – the success story – cooperation didn't work; a regulatory framework that "clamped down" on polluters turned out to be needed there. [November 5, 1946] Indeed, Ainsworth reported that folks in St. Louis were snickering that they had cleaned up their air while Los Angeles had become "smog town." [November 8, 1946]

In one report, Ainsworth told of the appointment in St. Louis of a fellow named Raymond Tucker as a kind of smog czar who then implemented the cleanup of the air in that city. Tucker was an engineer and an academic who was now back teaching at Washington University in St. Louis. [November 9, 1946] That article introduced Tucker to *Times* readers and laid the ground

for his importation by the *Times* to LA. A few weeks later, Ainsworth reported that "the *Times*, at its own expense, will bring to Los Angeles... one of the leading smoke-and-fumes experts of the United States for a detailed survey of the smog situation..." The expert was none other than Raymond Tucker. [December 1, 1946]

Los Angeles could now breathlessly (literally) await the arrival of the *Times'* expert. While LA waited, Ainsworth announced, there would be more smog articles which would be "climaxed" by a special report in the *Times*. That report, in turn, would be a "prelude" to a survey of LA's problem to be conducted by Tucker. [December 4, 1946] The paper reported that it was being "lauded" for bringing Tucker and that praise was being received from officials for its "public-spirited step." [December 3, 1946]

Of course, the prospective arrival of Tucker did not cause local smog to abate. The *Times* ran a story of foreign war heroes whose plane had trouble landing in LA due to smog-impaired visibility. [December 5, 1946] Ainsworth continued to write about smoky oil refineries and diesel trucks. [December 5 and 6, 1946] But there were periodic reminders of Tucker's impending study while the *Times* posed a question to its readers: "Either we can take the menace seriously, and fight it seriously, or we can sit and weep in the gloom. Which shall it be?" [December 8, 1946] And, to leave no doubt as to the proper answer, the paper announced the next day that Tucker had arrived! A photo showed him standing atop the Federal Building and looking at the surrounding haze. [December 9, 1946]

Waiting for the Report

With Tucker's arrival on the scene, the *Times* continued its campaign. Officials were quoted as endorsing the need to clean up the air; Tucker was shown being briefed by local officials and looking at a steam locomotive in a rail yard. Ainsworth and Tucker appeared together on a local radio program. [December 10, 1946] The *Times* soon reported that the LA Chamber of Commerce had joined its fight against smog. [December 13, 1946] It appears, however, that the LA Chamber, while naturally against smog, had not yet actually endorsed the direction the *Times* was going, i.e., a system of mandatory controls administered county-wide.

The *Times* announced it was forming a "citizens' committee" to assist Tucker in preparing his report. [December 15, 1946] Tucker's progress in traveling around the area to look at possible smog emitters was regularly reported. Civic leaders held a meeting with Tucker in the exclusive California Club "to map smog war plans." [December 18, 1946] A chair of the citizens' committee – now dubbed the "Times Smog Advisory Committee" – was selected at a luncheon hosted by publisher Norman Chandler. The committee was composed mainly of businessmen plus two women – one described as a prominent clubwoman and the other as a South Pasadena civic leader. Also included was the past president of Caltech and the mayor of Glendale.

The chairman of the new committee was William Jeffers, a retired president of the Union Pacific Railroad. Tucker reported to the group on his success in St. Louis and stressed that enforcement must be “continuing and relentless” if progress was to be made. [December 20, 1946] He soon returned by train to St. Louis to put together his report. But now the *Times* had Jeffers as its anti-smog personality. Tucker had been the respected expert; Jeffers would be the salesman. The *Times* praised itself for its careful and prudent campaign and its choice of expert Tucker. It had avoided “yellow journalism” in its approach, the *Times* noted in an editorial by not singling out villains. Nonetheless, smog control, the *Times* said, would require legislation to identify and control the villains once the Tucker report was in. [December 24, 1946]

Jeffers was a glad-handing individual whose task would be to enlist the local elite in support of the legislation sought by the *Times*. The legislation would create a county-wide smog control district. What remained to be found was a legislator to introduce the bill. The *Times* found its candidate in Republican Assemblyman Albert I. Stewart of Pasadena – a former mayor of that city - who thereafter received positive publicity in the newspaper for his anti-smog activity.¹² [January 29, 1947] The battle would be tough and not for the “faint of heart,” according to the *Times*, but “the weapons for the battle have been forged.” [January 30, 1947] It was arranged that the bill – formally known as the Air Pollution Control Act – would receive eye-catching numerical label “Assembly Bill No. 1.” [January 9, 1947]

Meanwhile, as a prelude to the legislative battle, the *Times* continued gathering support and publicizing its successes in doing so. The LA County Medical Association was persuaded to join the fight. [January 5, 1947] Human interest stories were published; one such story involved parents who took their infant up in an airplane to avoid having to breathe the smog down below. [January 5, 1947] Smoggy photos continued to appear. The southern California branch of the state Chamber of Commerce was enlisted to support the needed legislation. [January 8, 1947] LA school children would be recruited to teach their parents the proper way to utilize backyard incinerators. [January 14, 1947] The *Times* also indicated that perhaps there shouldn’t even be burning of trash in public dumps; maybe rubbish should be buried rather than burned. [January 15, 1947]

As the date for Tucker’s smog study approached, the *Times* indicated in advance that the study’s text would soon appear in its pages. The Tucker report then appeared in the January 19, 1947 edition on page 1. Tucker’s report blamed the usual suspects: smoky emissions from dumps and industry. While automobiles might contribute to smog, Tucker cautioned against putting too much of the blame on cars. But burning in dumps should be halted.

The Tucker report endorsed the idea of a unified smog control authority for the county. Jeffers’ committee – now sometimes dubbed the *Citizens’ Smog Committee* and sometimes the *Times*

¹²Local Democrats in Pasadena a few weeks earlier “at a mass meeting” had condemned Stewart for having “utterly failed to recognize (the smog) menace.” Letter sent to Governor Earl Warren dated October 17, 1946. Earl Warren Papers in California State Archives, Administrative Files F3640:3240.

Smog Advisory Committee – immediately met to plan for implementation of the report’s recommendations. [January 20, 1947] The committee, the *Times* reported, “plunged with characteristic Jeffers vigor into the fight to whip smoke and fumes in Los Angeles.” [January 24, 1947]

Commendations to the *Times* for sponsoring the report by the county Board of Supervisors and the LA City Council were noted by Ainsworth. [January 21, 1947] Local industries pledged to reduce emissions. Smoky diesel trucks were ticketed. But, the *Times* editorialized, “neither the (Tucker) report nor the committee’s work can mean anything without the genuine and continuing support of the residents of metropolitan Los Angeles.” [January 26, 1947] In pursuit of that support, Ainsworth was sent out to talk to local civic groups. [January 28, 1947]

The Campaign Escalates

By early February 1947, Jeffers’ committee had recruited legal talent to aid Assemblyman Stewart in refining his bill. [February 2 and 5, 1947] Meanwhile, comedian Groucho Marx penned a humorous letter to the *Times* noting that although the Tucker reported recommended halting backyard trash burning by homeowners, local garbage collectors refused to take away his paper trash. [February 3, 1947] What was a homeowner to do?

More seriously, the *Times* reported that smog was likely to increase the incidence of childhood rheumatic fever. [February 6 and 9, 1947] In response, a “militant group of mothers” demanded the closure of various dumps. [February 13, 1947] The County Board of Supervisors appropriated funds for a new incinerator to replace the dumps, but, the *Times* reported, they were faced with public demands that rubbish be buried instead. [February 18, 1947] Generally, dumps remained ongoing culprits in the pages of the *Times* throughout the legislative campaign. Photographs of dump smoke and headlines about dumps being shut down or cited were regular features.

The committee formed by the LA County Medical Association warned that smog was aggravating respiratory diseases in general. [February 8, 1947] Jeffers met with a group of engineers and enlisted their support. He warned that if the Stewart bill wasn’t passed, there would be a popular revolt and that in such cases, “the people always go too far.” [February 13, 1947] A few days later, as if to confirm the Jeffers prediction, the County Board of Supervisors found itself heckled “amid shouting disorder” by angry citizens. [February 19, 1947] Throughout this period, Jeffers spoke to local groups – Masonic lodges, Kiwanis Clubs, etc. – arguing that industries which currently discharged waste into the air could profitably recycle wasted materials instead.¹³ [March 12, 1947]

¹³The Altadena Lions Club sent a petition to Governor Earl Warren dated March 7, 1947 asking him to “take all necessary action to abate and control the matter of Smog at the earliest possible date.” Earl Warren Papers, California State Archives, Legislative Files, F3640:8818. Whether this petition resulted from a Jeffers presentation is unknown. A petition was also sent by the South Bay Garden Club dated April 28, 1947.

Some of the *LA Times'* articles looked at efforts in other cities to clean up smog. The *Times* noted, however, that in industrial eastern cities such as Pittsburgh smog was associated with coal burning and related soot. But there was something different about LA's smog: "the mysterious substance that causes eye-smarting." [March 2, 1947] Although the mystery had not been solved, the *Times* reported on positive developments in industries thought to be contributors to LA's unique problem. Railroads were complimented for converting to diesel locomotives instead of steam engines. (Note that Jeffers was an ex-railroad executive and still a member of Union Pacific Railway board.) [March 3, 1947] A local transit operator received favorable publicity for a plan to install electric trolley buses ("trackless trolleys" with no emissions using overhead wires) on one line. [February 20, 1947]

Still, there was a problem with LA's Mayor Fletcher Bowron. Bowron would complain about smog from other jurisdictions wafting into his city. But he initially appeared to be opposed to the Stewart bill since it would impose a county-wide control district that would presumably override LA City programs. [February 27, 1947] Bowron qualified his opposition, however, indicating that what he wanted was a mix of city and county representation on the board that would run the proposed smog district. [February 28, 1947] However, the bill being pushed by Jeffers put control only in the hands of the County Board of Supervisors.

In any case, there was other opposition. The *Times* reported that an anonymous group had "deluged" members of the legislature with unsigned letters opposing the bill on the grounds that innocent citizens would be arrested for backyard barbecuing. [March 7, 1947] However, the negative letters had to compete with poetry in the *Times*: [excerpt – March 15, 1947]

*...Joys of California sun
They have stolen one by one.
Incomplete the Decalogue;
Nothing in it speaks of smog...*

Eventually, the *Times'* campaign led Mayor Bowron to pledge support for whatever bill finally emerged from the legislature. The newspaper celebrated the mayor's conversion as one of being in the "spirit of unity." [March 19, 1947]

Working on the Legislature

By April 1947, the campaign for Assembly Bill No. 1 was fully engaged. Various amendments were added. But the key features of the bill were that 1) any county in California could establish a smog control district administered by its Board of Supervisors, 2) the district would be administered by a smog czar who would be outside existing county agencies, and 3) the district would measure smoke density and enforce standards of emission. [April 3, 1947] The full bill was published word-for-word in the *Times* on April 16. And in case readers had somehow

missed that edition, they could get a free copy mailed to them – along with a copy of the Tucker report – by request to the *Times*. [April 27 and May 4, 1947]

The *Times*, as legislative amendments were being added, kept pushing groups that were opposed, or hadn't endorsed the bill, to become supporters. Eventually, the LA Chamber of Commerce – which initially seemed reluctant to support more than voluntary controls and had set up its own smog panel of experts – agreed to support the bill.¹⁴ [April 6 and 25, 1947] With the LA Chamber in support, the state Chamber followed. [April 28, 1947] In addition, the LA City Council eventually unanimously followed the lead of the mayor and endorsed the bill. [April 30, 1947] Of course, Tucker, back in St. Louis, added his personal endorsement of the bill. [April 9, 1947]

Jeffers continued to hold up the specter of a populist revolt if the legislation wasn't enacted. With that warning and with all of that support that had been garnered, the Assembly Committee on Public Health voted 6-to-2 (with one abstention) to send the bill with a favorable recommendation to the full Assembly.¹⁵ [April 30, 1947] The *Times* praised "the splendid work" done by Assemblyman Stewart and the Assembly Committee chair Ernest Debs. [May 4, 1947] (Debs would later become a member of the LA County Board of Supervisors which would run the smog control district.)

Given the Assembly Committee's endorsement, the full Assembly approved the bill with a 73-to-1 vote. At least one of the legislators who had voted against the bill in committee – an assemblyman from Pomona – reversed his opposition after coming under pressure from his home district. [May 5 and 8, 1947] The *Times* declared that "the Assembly vote points to an era of clearer air for Los Angeles County." [May 8, 1947] But, of course, to become law, the bill would need a positive vote in the state senate. Aiding that effort was a new endorsement by the head of the California Fruit Exchange. [May 15, 1947] In that era, long before the Supreme Court's one-man/one-vote decision, the legislature was heavily tilted towards low-population rural agricultural districts. So farm interest support was important.

LA County Counsel Harold Kennedy – who had been instrumental in drafting the bill – visited Sacramento to push for Senate support. [May 16, 1947] Meanwhile, Ainsworth reported in the *Times* that special interests in oil and lumber were opposing the bill and supporting amendments that would weaken the bill. [May 17, 1947] As the *Times* put it, "selfish interests" were trying to impose "stifling amendments." [May 18, 1947]

Ainsworth further reported that Jeffers was urging members of the public to get in touch with their senators and urge passage of the Assembly's bill without "crippling amendments." [May 18, 1947] Apparently, the campaign was effective because the oil and lumber industries soon agreed to end their opposition. [May 20, 1947] The *Times* then praised the oil companies for

¹⁴As noted earlier, the *Times* had declared that the LA Chamber had joined its fight before it really had.

¹⁵There were apparently initially three negative votes but one assemblyman reversed his opposition saying he hadn't fully understood the bill. [May 5, 1947]

dropping opposition and for their voluntary pollution controls. [May 21, 1947] By the end of May, the Senate Committee on Public Health had passed the bill unanimously. [May 28, 1947] The full Senate then passed the bill in early June, 29-to-0. [June 2, 1947]

There was no real doubt that Governor Earl Warren would sign the bill (and he did on June 10). That signature started a 90-day clock before the law would take effect. Warren's office issued only a cursory announcement:

*Governor Warren has signed A.B. 1... A.B. 1, by Stewart and others is Los Angeles County's smog control bill authorizing the establishment of air pollution districts. It was passed unanimously in both houses.*¹⁶

But despite the lack of fanfare at the governor's office, the *Times* celebrated its "full-fledged campaign of facts and education" and suggested that Tucker would make a fine first smog czar for LA. [June 4, 1947] Ainsworth picked up the theme of Tucker to head the new agency, saying that "many persons" were suggesting his name. [June 8, 1947] But other names were added to the list of possible candidates and Tucker stayed in St. Louis.

When the new district started operations in October 1947, Louis McCabe became head of the agency. Oddly, his background was in coal which was not a major fuel in Los Angeles. Unlike Tucker, McCabe was not a big name in the LA area. Ainsworth misspelled his name as "Luis" when he announced his arrival in LA to take the job. [September 24, 1947]

Although the campaign for legislation was over, Ainsworth and the *Times* continued to feature smog stories. Generally, the stories described particular polluters and/or technical steps that had been taken to abate emission. McCabe's early days on the job were described as he toured the area and visited pollution sources. After the new agency formally began operations, the *Times* editorialized that McCabe "must be given a free hand, and then be strictly accountable for results after a reasonable time. The smog must go. And now is the time for the real offensive." [October 15, 1947] But smog did not go away and McCabe eventually resigned after a beleaguered couple of years, sometimes charged with doing too much and sometimes too little. The criticisms of the district continued after his departure.¹⁷

Aftermath

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the passage of the Air Pollution Control Act, Assembly Bill No. 1, was not the end of smog in the Los Angeles area. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, the new law was not the beginning of the end, but it was the end of the beginning. Southern California remained afflicted with severe smog long after 1947. Nonetheless, smog –

¹⁶Earl Warren papers, California State Archives. Press Release, Bills Signed, June 10, 1947. F3640:1946. (press release files)

¹⁷James E. Krier and Edmund Ursin, *Pollution and Policy: A Case Essay on California and Federal Experience with Motor Vehicle Air Pollution, 1940-1975* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 66-72.

once seen in Sacramento as a local issue for the LA area – became something that governors could not ignore.¹⁸ The LA area was just too large and the smog protesters became too vocal for there to be political neglect.

Over time – and with resistance from such interest groups as automobile manufacturers – the chemical reactions in the atmosphere that produced smog became understood. A Caltech scientist – Arie Haagen-Smit – in 1953 figured out the process by which photochemical smog formed out of a combination of nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons and ultraviolet radiation. There was no doubt that cars were a major cause of smog. Public agitation and pressure grew and eventually controls on exhaust pipe emissions were required starting in 1961.

Haagen-Smit became the first chair of the statewide California Air Resources Board in 1968, appointed by then-Governor Ronald Reagan. Regulations generally became more extensive on other sources of emissions and more controls were added to automobile exhaust emissions. The multi-county South Coast Air Quality Management District for the southern California area was formed in 1976 out of the county boards that had been authorized by the 1947 law. Air quality gradually improved despite increasing population in southern California, but it took decades for true progress to be felt.¹⁹

The *Times* may have hoped for a Pulitzer Prize for its anti-smog work and for Ainsworth's reporting. But, if so, it didn't happen. Nonetheless, the newspaper continued to emphasize the smog issue long after 1947. But it seemed reluctant thereafter to point to its own role in passage of Assembly Bill No. 1. Perhaps there was a sense that progress on improving air quality in LA was not coming along as fast as had been hoped. Ainsworth died at age 66 in 1968 when smog was still a major problem in LA. A brief mention of his work on smog was included in his *Times* obituary which mainly focused on other aspects of his career. [June 17, 1968]

Raymond Tucker, the smog expert, became mayor of St. Louis. He died in 1970. The *Times'* obituary noted his work on cleaning up smog in St. Louis and added a sentence on his role in the newspaper's anti-smog campaign for LA. [November 25, 1970] Jeffers died in 1953. References to his death in the *Times* focused on other (non-smog) aspects of his career. [March 11, 1953] All of these names, and even the *Times'* anti-smog campaign activities in the 1940s, have largely been forgotten. But now you, dear reader, know about them.

So is the lesson of the *Times'* campaign that violation of what are now considered the standards of good journalism is what is needed to make progress on issues of the day? The *Times*, as we have documented, made little or no distinction between its editorial position and its reporting in pushing forward the first major California legislative attempt to deal with the smog that was

¹⁸Lieutenant Governor Goodwin "Goody" Knight, Earl Warren's successor when Warren went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953, found that LA smog was an issue he would have to confront as the 1954 gubernatorial election approached. See the interview with Malcolm H. Merrill in "Earl Warren and the Department of Public Health," http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/ew_pub_health.pdf.

¹⁹A summary of developments in the history of smog control from the California Air Resources Board can be found at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/html/brochure/history.htm>.

plaguing Los Angeles. Maybe the lesson is simply that good results can sometimes emerge from surprising sources. Perhaps we also learn that progress on dealing with big challenges can be disappointingly slow.

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