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Union leader seeks to halt postal privatization scheme

By Mark Gruenberg



As far as Mark Dimondstein is concerned, the members of the Postal Workers are going to be out in the streets even more than they already are.

Their causes? Increasing revenues for the Postal Service, stopping its creeping privatization, via Staples stores, by the Postmaster General, keeping well-paid middle-class union jobs, and enacting a plan - back to the future - that could earn the USPS almost \$9 billion yearly by letting its branches be postal savings banks.

Dimondstein and his slate unseated incumbent APWU President Cliff Guffey and his allies in a contested election last year. Key issues in the vote included Guffey's management and ineffective APWU lobbying on postal "reform" legislation.

But for Dimondstein, there's a third threat: The agency's scheme to staff post offices in Staples stores, using low-paid Staples workers, and not well-paid USPS workers. "The secret Staples deal is at the expense of the people of this country," Dimondstein declares. "It's privatization, piece by piece.

"If you put post offices in Staples stores and pay the workers \$8 or \$9 an hour, it'll lead to closing post offices and a shift to non-union poverty-wage jobs from living-wage union jobs," he told

Press Associates Union News Service in an extensive interview.

APWU's new activism against the Staples shift, which the Postal Service has described as a "pilot program" for cooperation with other retailers, has already begun. Protests in Florida, Northern California, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and elsewhere drew high-profile media attention and shone a spotlight on the USPS plan.

"The idea is to have ongoing sustained pro-

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tests everywhere, capped by a National Day of Action" on the privatization issue, Dimondstein adds. The events, he hopes, "will create a grand alliance" between APWU, its members and all Americans.

The postmaster general justifies the Staples

The postmaster plans to staff post offices in Staples stores, using low-paid Staples workers.

deal as one way to cut USPS personnel costs, and reduce its red ink. Though the USPS has been running a profit on first-class mail for more than a year, it's also run billions of dollars in the red overall.

That's because the Republican-run Congress in 2006 imposed a \$5.5 billion yearly payment requirement on USPS for a decade, forcing it to pre-fund future retirees' health care for the next 75 years. Lawmakers also refused to let the USPS recoup past pension overpayments, worth billions more, deposited in federal accounts.

The APWU, the Letter Carriers, the Mail Handlers (a Laborers sector) and the Rural Letter Carriers are all lobbying for total repeal of the health care pre-funding. USPS health care is now overfunded. But lawmakers have been cool to their pleas. Even the latest postal "reform" legislation, S1486, only reduces the pre-funding. That's one reason the unions oppose the bill. There are others, Dimondstein adds.

"S1486 pushes privatization by inference," he says. "If you talk about doing away with six-day

pickup and delivery and eliminate private sidewalk service" to individual mailboxes, that lower service "will drive customers into" private package delivery.

Nevertheless, the unions realize USPS must both adapt to the Internet age and make money. They back alternative legislation, by Sen. Bernie Sanders, Ind.-Vt., to open new lines of business for USPS, such as housing notary public offices, issuing fishing and hunting licenses and shipping goods now barred from the mails.

Sanders would also end the healthcare pre-funding and let USPS recoup the pension overpayments. Based on a recent USPS Inspector General's report, Dimondstein adds another idea: Let the USPS run a postal savings bank.

When USPS was still the federally run Post Office, it ran a postal savings system through the early 1960s. Such a system would extend banking services to underserved rural areas and inner cities and would bring in \$8.9 billion yearly, the IG says.



Mark Gruenberg edits Press Associates Inc.

Saber rattling over Ukraine needs to stop!

By PW Editorial Board

Much of Washington and the corporate media are outdoing one another with their saber rattling over the crisis in the Ukraine. Columnists and U.S. senators alike have called upon the Obama administration to come up with billions of dollars to bolster an unelected government in Kiev that is led by various stripes of ultra rightists, including fascists. Not surprising, but Fox News commentators have even called for the dispatch of a U.S. naval armada into the Black Sea.

Although President Obama has thankfully shown no inclination to carry out any such armed intervention, the administration has found common cause with neo-conservatives and Cold War warriors on this crisis. Secretary of State John Kerry's pronouncements about how wrong it is to invade a sovereign country on "phony" pretexts ring hollow on many counts, including the United States' own inclination to invade and/or bomb countries on pretexts that turned out to be phony

and destabilizing. (Invasions and bombings in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya; drones in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia; regime change in Honduras and attempts in Venezuela, just to name a few places.) Ukraine receives its energy from Russia and conducts 60 percent of its trade with that country. Western attempts to tear it out of that relationship and make it subservient to the International Monetary Fund, NATO and the EU were in the interests - not of the Ukrainian people but of the corporate 1 percent. Yanukovich's rejection of the EU austerity deal while Russia offered a \$15 billion aid package seems understandable.

The geo-political goals of U.S. imperialism remain the plundering of this resource rich region. As Americans, our interests lie in a reduction of these dangerous tensions and a peaceful, democratic resolution. We all stand to benefit from cooperation between Ukraine and Russia and all the countries of that region, as well as U.S.-Russian cooperation.

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Is Los Angeles poised to ban fracking?

By Blake Deppe

Last year, environmental peril seemed imminent as legislation was passed greenlighting fracking in California. On Feb. 20 this year, state senators Holly Mitchell, D.-Los Angeles, and Mark Leno, D.-San Francisco, took the first step toward undoing some of that damage. They introduced the bill SB 1132, which if passed would impose a moratorium on the natural gas drilling practice in LA.

Specifically, it would halt all forms of “extreme well stimulation,” including fracking, and require that an independent multi-agency study be conducted exploring the economic, environmental, and health impacts of such drilling operations. The senators face an uphill battle in the midst of California Gov. Jerry Brown’s push for not only continuing, but expanding fracking operations throughout the state. Brown’s stance is seen as particularly frustrating given his prior pro-environment record.

Last year, a previous fracking moratorium bill failed to pass through the legislature due to intense lobbying by the Western States Petroleum Association, which is the most powerful corporate lobbying organization in southern California, and also by various oil corporations. But the senators are not prepared to let those companies sicken the population of Los Angeles.

“There are a million Angelenos that live within a five-mile radius of the largest urban oil field in the country,” Mitchell remarked, referencing the 1,000-acre Inglewood Oil Field. “In my district, vulnerable neighborhoods lie adjacent to



drilling operations whose practices go largely unregulated. Complaints that residents are exposed to hazardous chemicals and toxic pollutants that cause all kinds of health symptoms have been ignored. When industrial operations like fracking disproportionately impact minority communities, environmental justice has been breached and needs to be restored. SB 1132 will do that.”

The senators noted that of the 750 chemicals used in fracking, at least 29 of them have been confirmed to be very harmful to human health. These include hydrofluoric acid and benzene, which have been linked to cancer, respiratory issues and developmental and neurological problems. Yet many drilling operations risk leaking these contaminants into public drinking water.

Leno said, “We are currently allowing fracking operations to expand in California despite the potential consequences on our water supply, including the potential for drinking contaminated water and the generation of billions of barrels of polluted water.”

The Center for Biological Diversity issued a statement in agreement with this assessment, noting, “Senate Bill SB 1132 seeks to safeguard California’s water supply from overuse and contamination from fracking as the state struggles with a devastating drought.”

One million Angelenos live within a five-mile radius of the largest urban oil field in the country.

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Housing group files complaint vs. Deutsche Bank

By Chelsea Wier

The National Fair Housing Alliance filed civil rights complaints Feb. 25 with the federal government against Deutsche Bank in Chicago, Memphis and Washington D.C., for failure to maintain foreclosed homes in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods. During its online news conference, the group charged that these properties, called REOs (real estate owned properties), are owned by Deutsche Bank and it is their responsibility to maintain. The complaint was filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The housing group has pending federal housing discrimination complaints against U.S. Bank in 40 cities and Bank of America in almost 50 cities. The group is investigating Deutsche Bank in other cities as well.

These investigations were prompted by a settlement in Los Angeles; Deutsche Bank was failing to maintain foreclosed properties in non-white neighborhoods while bank-owned homes in white communities were kept to standard.

NFHA and three member organizations (South Suburban Housing Center, Open Communities, and HOPE Fair Housing Center) conducted the investigations, which examined properties for deficiencies in three categories: curb appeal, structure and signage, and occupancy. Many of the properties in communities of color had no "for sale" signs or signage that was not easily visible.

In Chicago, more than half of the investigated homes in communities of color had substantial trash on the property.

Pueblo salvadoreño celebra triunfo del FMLN

Odalys Troya

El pueblo salvadoreño salió el 10 de marzo a festejar la victoria en segunda vuelta electoral del Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación.

El pueblo, en esta capital, Salvador Sánchez Cerén y Oscar Ortiz, la fórmula presidencial del Frente y virtuales presidente y vicepresidente, reiteraron su compromiso de trabajar y gobernar para todos los sectores.

"Los resultados del escrutinio preliminar dan una clara ventaja al FMLN", subrayó Sánchez Cerén, uno de los líderes históricos del partido de izquierda. Sánchez Cerén subrayó que "el pueblo salvadoreño ha vivido sacrificios, pero ha construido una nueva esperanza, un nuevo futuro y ahora este pueblo está construyendo un camino seguro para continuar esa obra que iniciamos en 2009". Cuando llegamos a la presidencia de este país comenzamos a caminar la ruta de favorecer a los más desposeídos, remarcó. Su gobierno, dijo, será fiel a la Constitución, respetará las leyes, y garantizará las libertades de los salvadoreños: religiosas, laborales, de prensa, empresarial y el derecho a la propiedad. Aseguró que abrirá las puertas de su administración para que toda la ciudadanía participe en la construcción de las políticas públicas. Subrayó que gobernará cumpliendo las promesas y construyendo un gran diálogo nacional.

Entre vítores, consignas, aplausos, Sánchez Cerén reconoció el trabajo realizado por el presidente Mauricio Funes que abrió el camino para

los cambios iniciados en El Salvador.

En otro acápite, pidió a la oposición a que esté tranquila y respete la voluntad del pueblo salvadoreño. Les pido calma, les pido que reflexionen, este pueblo ha seguido el camino de la paz, remarcó al referirse a las amenazas del partido perdedor de desconocer los resultados electorales. Aseguró que no copiarán ningún modelo extranjero para el desarrollo del país, pero sí buscarán la unión de Centroamérica y Latinoamérica y mantendrá las buenas relaciones con Estados Unidos. Este domingo se celebró en El Salvador la segunda vuelta para elegir al presidente y vicepresidente del país. Según, los resultados preliminares, el FMLN obtuvo el 50,11 por ciento de los votos y Arena, 49,89. A partir de hoy lunes comienza el conteo definitivo que se hará acta por acta, y cuyo resultado debe darse esta misma semana. El FMLN ganó los comicios del pasado 2 de febrero con 48,9 por ciento de los votos, 10 puntos por encima de Arena. Todas las encuestas vaticinaban el triunfo del partido de izquierda también con más de 10 puntos porcentuales. El presidente de Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, saludó al candidato del FMLN, Salvador Sánchez.

Como siempre, añadió, estamos unidos en la gran patria centroamericana, unidos con los sueños de Farabundo, de Sandino, y vamos a seguir unidos compartiendo esta tierra sagrada, luchas y sobre todo el ideal del bien común, que es lo que todos queremos.

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