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400 parks closed by government shutdown

By Blake Deppe



House Republicans pushed the nation into a federal government shutdown following their inability to ram through a list of right-wing demands including destruction of the Affordable Health Care Act.

Among the 800,000 federal workers having to stay home today are nine out of 10 of the Environmental Protection Administration's employees - a potentially devastating blow to the environment.

The environment is taking an extra hit, however, from the decision to continue in those very same parks activities that are harmful to it. While the people are banned from the more than 400 shuttered national parks, big oil and gas companies will have no trouble getting in.

While the oil and gas industries continue to use the parks to rake in their profits, the tourism and recreation industries will take blows as rangers are put out of work.

And though, outside of the parks, the Bureau of Land Management will not process new drilling permits, fracking operations at existing sites will still go on. As for inspections and oversight? "Only minimal agency personnel will be on duty," according to Think Progress. Many will undoubtedly feel that this is a recipe for disaster.

"This means we'll have to dress like oil executives if we want to visit our national parks and monuments," said Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune in a statement. He said the situation is the result of "House Republicans refusing to pass routine legislation to fulfill the most basic aspect of their job: keeping the government open and working for American families. This means that Republicans who couldn't achieve their reckless agenda through elections or legislation are

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willing to sacrifice the health of our families and our communities to simply score political points."

The American people," he added, must now "pay the cost in lost jobs and polluted air and water. House Republicans need to ditch the political posturing and get back to work."

While drilling companies get free reign, 93 percent of the EPA's 16,205 workers will be furloughed.

While drilling companies get free reign, 93 percent of the EPA's 16,205 workers will be furloughed. Other federal services that are vital to environmental health and safety, and which will be forced to endure cuts and furloughs, include:

- * the Center for Disease Control (68 percent of employees will be put on temporary leave)

- * the National Science Foundation, which will stop making payments to scientists

- * the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which will stop nearly all work on offshore clean energy production

- * the U.S. Forest Service, which will close its offices and furlough most of its staff, save for a small number of firefighting and law enforcement personnel

- * the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, which will see 37 of its 40 workers furloughed, and will cease all investigations of industrial chemical spills and accidents, including its ongoing investigation of the tragic fertilizer plant explosion in West, Texas

- * the Department of Agriculture; though meat and grain inspectors will continue to work, the USDA will not issue any further economic or

statistical reports, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, which provides healthy food for low-income consumers, will cease operations in most states

This, for the most part, leaves the country stripped bare in terms of oversight and protections against potential hazards to human health and the environment. It also means that many, many federal workers will be forced out of work. And with the national parks' doors barred to all but oil and gas companies, that includes workers with the Association of National Park Rangers.

In a statement, the union remarked, "Our national parks have been a way of American life for over 141 years, and the National Park Service has withstood the test of time and fluctuating budgets. Our parks will be there when this crisis is over. Still, it is a sad day when Congress acts in such a self-serving way; when a small handful of members manufacture a budget crisis and are willing to shut the entire federal government down despite the damage it will cause."



Blake Deppe writes for Peoplesworld.org.

A new day in the house of labor

By PW Editorial Board

Coming out of the AFL-CIO convention unionists and their allies are wasting no time carrying out the decisions of what was a trail-blazing convention.

The AFL-CIO announced last week that it has entered a new national partnership with the college-based United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), which will make the campaign to organize T-Mobile workers into the Communication Workers of America (CWA) a priority.

Not in the news but also significant, the federation's recent convention revealed that thousands of union members at T-Mobile and Deutsche Telekom in Germany have taken up their U.S. counterparts' cause and are protesting their company's treatment of them.

This is but one example of the far-reaching initiatives the AFL-CIO and several affiliates have begun to take in recent years to strengthen international labor cooperation. Indeed, the AFL-CIO convention projected an agenda and a vision aimed to transform the labor movement, its part-

ners and allies into a formidable 21st century people's force for economic justice and democracy. The convention mapped out a modern-day agenda akin to wall-to-wall organizing of the 1930s CIO that resulted in the unionization of the nation's industrial base during a decade of powerful popular upsurge that saw the enactment of the then-progressive National Labor Relations Act, Social Security and Unemployment insurance.

The convention agreed to step up efforts to organize all workers whether covered by collective bargaining agreements or not, whether protected by labor and social laws or not.

These include undocumented workers, taxi drivers, and domestic workers.

The convention launched Working America, previously tested successfully in a few states, as a national formation. Anyone not belonging to a union can join whether employed or not and for a small fee be entitled to modest benefits. With these exciting new changes, it's clearly going to be a new day in America!

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New York City Opera files for bankruptcy

By Marilyn Bechtel

With the Oct. 3 announcement that New York City Opera is filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, the city and the entire country are losing a major cultural institution.

When the company was founded nearly 70 years ago, then-Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia promised it would provide “cultural entertainment at moderate prices,” in contrast to the Metropolitan Opera, which served a predominantly upper class audience.

And though it often faced financial difficulties, the company lived up to that role, offering innovative performances and providing launching pads for some of the finest U.S. opera singers, including soprano Beverly Sills and tenor Placido Domingo.

In recent years the opera’s difficulties had become especially acute, resulting in a season once featuring as many as 130 performances slashed to just 16 last year.

In 2011 Artistic Director George Steel moved the company out of its longtime home at Lincoln Center, a move intended to save money, but sharply criticized by the unions representing singers, instrumentalists, directors and stage managers as contributing to further deterioration in the company’s financial situation.

Tino Gagliardi, president of American Federation of Musicians Local 802, which represents NYCO’s orchestra musicians, blamed the move from Lincoln Center and the decision to slash the season for the company’s financial crash. He pointed out that though they strongly disagreed with the move, the “devoted musicians made great



sacrifices in wages and benefits to keep the Opera afloat,” including accepting replacement of the former 29-week guaranteed season with payment by rehearsal and performance.

“Lamentably,” Gagliardi said, “due to egregious mismanagement and a paucity of vision, instead of reaping the benefits of a strengthening economy, this most storied of cultural institutions now lies in ruin.”

Gail Krivand, assistant principal bass player with the opera’s orchestra and an ex-officio member of NYCO’s board, told the Village Voice that at Lincoln Center the company had “everything under one roof” - offices, rehearsal space, costume and wig shops as well as a theater - for \$4.5 million a year.

After the move, she said, “We have no home. We have no sets ... They were sold. Our music library was destroyed in the Superstorm Sandy flooding. The company has been systematically dismantled.”

Krivand said the opera musicians “look forward to playing opera together again,” though she did not know how that might be possible.

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Is capitalism working for you?

By Libero Della Piana

How's capitalism working for you?

That's the question a new interactive art installation will ask passersby in New York City's Times Square, October 6-9.

Sponsored by United for a Fair Economy (UFE), a national think tank concerned with issues of income inequality, the project is the brainchild of artist Steve Lambert. The presentation is part of the 2013 Crossing The Line Festival in conjunction with the Times Square Arts project.

The installation consists of a giant glitzy display stating "Capitalism works for me" with an electronic counter labeled "true" and "false." Participants are encouraged to think about the issue, vote one way or the other, and to discuss their answer. Volunteers will be on hand to encourage participation and to discuss issues of income inequality.

A UFE statement states, "Our country has fallen victim to historic levels of income and wealth inequality and is becoming a land of haves and have-nots. The question of which category you fall into is complex. But, most of us agree that inequality has gotten out of hand and needs to be addressed. The goal of this project is to more openly examine those complexities and bring the debate more into the public eye."

The project coincides with recent new data on the growing gap between rich and poor and the ongoing GOP-initiated government shutdown.

La convención de la AFL-CIO

Por AFL-CIO en español

El mes pasado concluyó en el centro de Los Ángeles la convención nacional cuatrienal "más hispana" en la historia de la AFL-CIO, comprometiéndose ésta, y sus sindicatos afiliados, a apoyar diversas causas de particular importancia para los trabajadores latinos de este país.

Al cabo de cuatro días de apasionados discursos por parte de decenas de delegados provenientes de sindicatos y centrales sindicales regionales de alrededor del país, fueron aprobadas por unanimidad diversas resoluciones a favor de causas como la asistencia a trabajadores inmigrantes para naturalizarse y votar; la inclusión en el movimiento laboral de más trabajadores provenientes de minorías étnicas; un fin a la privatización de centros penitenciarios, la cual afecta de manera desproporcionada a jóvenes latinos y negros; la liberación del preso político puertorriqueño Oscar López Rivera; la justicia para el sindicalista mexicano Santiago Rafael Cruz, asesinado en abril de 2007 en el estado mexicano de Nuevo León; y la fomentación de elecciones nacionales libres de amenazas, coacción e intimidación en Honduras.

La veintisieteava convención nacional de la AFL-CIO comenzó el domingo, 8 de septiembre con una conferencia dedicada a la diversidad étnica y la inclusión en el movimiento laboral estadounidense. Este evento contó con la participación de delegados de los 57 sindicatos nacio-

nales afiliados a la AFL-CIO. En esta ocasión, de los más de 600 delegados principales a la convención, un número récord –es decir, el 46 por ciento – de ellos fueron mujeres o miembros de minorías étnicas.

"Es el momento indicado para reflexionar a profundidad y realmente tener esas difíciles e importantes discusiones en torno a la inclusión, la raza, la orientación sexual y el prejuicio en nuestras comunidades para poder asegurar la justicia económica para cada uno de nosotros", declaró Richard Trumka, presidente de la AFL-CIO, durante la conferencia sobre la diversidad étnica y la inclusión. "Aceptamos la inclusión no porque resulte fácil hacerlo. Aceptamos la inclusión porque es el camino correcto, justo y decente a tomar".

Horas después, en la tarde del mismo día, la AFL-CIO concedió el Premio de Derechos Humanos George Meany-Lane Kirkland a la Red Internacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar (IDWN, por sus siglas en inglés) en reconocimiento a sus innovadores esfuerzos a nivel global por concientizar y hacer respetar el trabajo de las trabajadoras del hogar, por su éxito en la adopción de la Convención sobre el Trabajo Decente para las Trabajadoras del Hogar (C. 189) por parte de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo en el 2011 y por su compromiso a apoyar, expandir y construir un movimiento laboral global.

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