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Jim Hightower opens new front in fight to save postal service

By Mark Gruenberg



Progressive broadcaster Jim Hightower is opening a new front in the multi-union, multi-organization fight to save the U.S. Postal Service from its privatizing management and Wall Street interests.

In a March 24 nationwide conference call with activists, Hightower and Postal Workers President Mark Dimondstein outlined avenues people can use to save the embattled agency and the union jobs-of Postal Workers, Letter Carriers, Mail Handlers and Rural Letter Carriers-threatened by shutdowns and the privatization push.

The new avenues include starting a petition to the White House, where 100,000 signatures will force President Barack Obama to address the issue and joining the 70- organization effort, to fight for better, expanded service, not cuts.

“Get to your city councils and your mayors- and not just in places where post offices are closing-to say what the post office means to you,” Hightower said.

“To get a letter to the middle of nowhere costs 49 cents. As soon as we get into the privatization-profit model, it could cost \$5 -- or maybe not get sent there at all. And if you write down the wrong address, they send it back, for free. Where else can you get all that?”

“The Postal Service takes in \$68 billion a year

in revenue and Wall Street wants it,” Dimondstein added. “Postal management has been playing along.”

The campaign comes as Congress’ ruling Republicans, with some Democratic help, prepare to renew legislation to close local post offices, eliminate Saturday services, kill door-to-door service for new customers and replace well-paying unionized postal employees with low-paid part-time no-benefits, non-union workers, especially using

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Staples stores.

USPS management claims it needs to make those moves, on top of mail distribution center closings that began in January-and that eliminated overnight delivery even within major cities-to close a multi-billion-dollar yearly deficit.

If Saturday service is eliminated, it would cost 80,000 middle-class jobs.

Hightower and Dimondstein pointed out that USPS actually ran a \$1.4 billion surplus on operations for the year that ended Sept. 30 and another \$1.4 billion surplus for the first three months of the current fiscal year, through last Dec. 31.

The deficit comes from a \$5.5 billion yearly pre-payment of future retirees' health care costs that USPS must fund under a 2006 postal "reform" law pushed through a lame-duck GOP Congress and signed by then-President George W. Bush, the two noted.

The unions have been lobbying for elimination of the pre-paid health care, but lawmakers have so far turned a deaf ear. As Hightower also pointed out, activists and citizens should join another union campaign-to allow the nation's 31,000 post offices to become banks for underserved and unserved urban and rural areas.

Doing so would provide competition for the big banks, who hate that, he said. It would also provide banking services for the 38 percent of the U.S. zip codes, covering more than a quarter of the population, with no bank branches.

"The post office is well set-up to bring in

more revenue" that way, Dimondstein said.

The campaign for post-offices-as-banks and to eliminate the health care prepayment is part of an overall postal reform package that the Letter Carriers, the Postal Workers and other postal unions have been pushing for several years. They also would let post offices serve as notaries and ship alcoholic beverages, among other revenue-raising measures.

More immediately, Hightower and the union leader also urged listeners to support a measure, House Resolution 54, a non-binding measure that says lawmakers want to keep 6-day service. The unions calculate that eliminating Saturday pickups and deliveries could cost approximately 80,000 middle-class jobs.



Mark Gruenberg is editor of Press Associates Inc.

Court stops CTA attempt to gag Garcia supporters in Chicago

Special to Peoplesworld.org

An enthusiastic crowd of young trade unionists and allies from more than 40 states and Puerto Rico cheered as Danny Glover came on stage at the AFL-CIO's 2015 Next Up Summit.

A federal judge granted a temporary restraining order against the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), dealing an embarrassing blow to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel in advance of runoff election. Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Locals 241 and 308 filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the CTA, whose President is a political appointee and longtime ally of Emanuel, sought to ban political speech among transit workers because they support Emanuel's opponent, Cook County Commissioner Jesus "Chuy" Garcia.

"Justice has been served in Chicago, despite Mayor Emanuel's best efforts," declared ATU International President Larry Hanley.

"When Rahm took office four years ago, he swore to uphold the Constitution of the U. S. But when transit workers stood up to exercise their

First Amendment rights in support of Chuy Garcia, Rahm's appointees at the CTA illegally told them to sit down and shut up," Hanley continued.

Emanuel has demonstrated disregard for the First Amendment before. During a speech at the Bloomberg Business Summit in 2011, the Mayor made this infamous remark: "I used to tell President Clinton. When it comes to the American press, the First Amendment is highly overrated."

"Rahm uses piles of cash he collects from out of town billionaires, including Republicans, to drown out the voices of regular Chicagoans, but that wasn't enough," Hanley said. "He told public workers they could not even talk to each other at work about their concerns and this campaign. The Constitution of the United States appears to disagree."

Hanley said volunteers and organizers would be back in bus garages and train terminals to ensure members know about the TRO and feel confident in exercising their First Amendment and voting rights.

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Communist Party USA says no sanctions against Venezuela

By Communist Party USA

The Communist Party USA views with consternation President Obama's statement wherein he called the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela an "extraordinary threat to US interests and foreign policy" meriting sanctions against individual members of the Venezuelan government.

The president's statement came after the recent arrest in Venezuela of a small number of far right-wing politicians and activists who have been accused of various crimes including fomenting violent riots and plotting a coup d'etat against the legally elected government of President Nicolas Maduro.

Our government, as well as the corporate controlled press and media, have belittled the claims about a coup plot. However, people in Latin America are very much aware of a history in which the U. S. has actively helped to foment such violent coups, as in Honduras in 2009, in Haiti in 2004, in Venezuela itself in 2002, and on many other occasions. So, Venezuela's fears are by no means unrealistic.

It is not proper for the U. S. to take action (in the form of sanctions) against the officials of a sovereign, independent state as a way of punishing them for carrying out their legally mandated duties.

Since the election of the late Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela in 1998, that country, a major



source of oil for the U. S. has greatly improved the lives of the majority of the Venezuelan people, as well as developing cooperative relationships beneficial to many poor countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and beyond. This is seen as a threat to the interests of voracious U.S. and multinational corporations, and therefore a geopolitical threat. That is the only "threat" Venezuela represents; it has never threatened the people of the U. S.

Currently Venezuela is undergoing economic difficulties. Possibly, the U. S. government hopes that this situation can be used to destabilize Venezuela, with a goal of regime change.

This is bad in and of itself, but the administration should understand, also, that by this kind of action it is wiping out in a stroke all the international goodwill that the recent opening to Cuba has created.

The CPUSA deplores the attack on Venezuela and rejects the idea that Venezuela represents a threat to the legitimate interests of the people of the U. S. We deplore the imposition of sanctions on Venezuela, and demand that they be lifted. We salute the governments of Latin American and other nations who have already denounced this escalation of U.S. intervention in a sovereign, independent state.

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Ferguson: Police settle lawsuit for using tear gas

By Riley Winters

As part of a lawsuit settlement with Ferguson activists, three police departments agreed to restrict the use of tear gas and other chemical agents during peaceful demonstrations.

"This victory rests on the shoulders of the courageous protestors who are tirelessly demonstrating in the streets of Ferguson, and it's a testament to the powerful movement they have fostered," said Thomas Harvey of Arch City Defenders. Harvey, along with Denise Lieberman of the Advancement Project, representing the seven named Ferguson plaintiffs who has agreed to dismiss their claims as part of the settlement.

Attorney's representing St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson, St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar, and Missouri Highway Patrol Capt. Ronald S. Johnson signed off on the court order, agreeing to pay \$2,500 in legal costs, and not use the threat of tear gas as a form of intimidation or punishment of individuals exercising their First Amendment Rights.

Noting in a joint statement, Lieberman explained that, "We had not seen this kind of excessive police force used against protestors since the civil rights movement of the 1960's," adding, "The use of tear gas in Ferguson has been a tactic to chill this movement, and today's consent decree will finally put a stop to those efforts."

EE.UU. no puede aislar a Venezuela

TeleSur

La subsecretaria de Estado de Estados Unidos para Latinoamérica, Roberta Jacobson, manifestó este viernes sentirse "decepcionada" por la reacción y el amplio apoyo de los países latinoamericanos al Gobierno de Venezuela ante las sanciones adoptadas por el presidente estadounidense Barack Obama, lo que evidencia el fracaso político de la agresión contra el país suramericano.

La declaración de la funcionaria estadounidense se dio al término de su participación en una conferencia en el centro de Estudios Brookings en Washington D.C., en la que abordó la próxima Cumbre de las Américas que se celebrará en Panamá el 10 y 11 de abril.

"Las palabras son importantes, y el tono que están usando ahora los líderes (latinoamericanos) demoniza a Estados Unidos como si fuera la fuente de los problemas de Venezuela, cuando no lo somos, y esto nos dificulta avanzar de una manera pragmática", sostuvo.

Asimismo, Jacobson evidenció el fracaso político de las sanciones y el decreto ejecutivo del Gobierno del presidente Barack Obama contra la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. "Me decepcionó que no hubiera más países que defendieran que (las sanciones) no eran para dañar a los venezolanos o al Gobierno venezolano en su conjunto", explicó la diplomática. La subsecretaria de Estado estadounidense argumentó que las sanciones "contra ciertos funcionarios venezolanos" han sido muy específicas y que la Administración Obama "se negó" a tomar cualquier medida mientras

hubo una esperanza de diálogo entre el Gobierno de Nicolás Maduro y la oposición.

"Pero llegó un momento en el que ya no podíamos argumentar que había algún tipo de diálogo. (...) Era difícil ver que hubiera un proceso externo o interno para lograr las soluciones dirigiéndose en la dirección correcta, al haber además aún más detenciones y ninguna liberación importante", aseveró.

Jacobson dijo que Estados Unidos no pretende hacer de la Cumbre de las Américas un espacio en el que la situación de Venezuela sea el tema protagonista, y subrayó la importancia de que se aborden asuntos de carácter regional e "interés común" en el continente.

En Contexto

El 9 de marzo de 2015, el presidente de Estados Unidos, Barack Obama, anunció la implementación de nuevas sanciones contra Venezuela por supuestas violaciones de derechos humanos y declaró una situación de "emergencia nacional" por el "riesgo extraordinario" que supone la situación en ese país para la seguridad de EE.UU.

Ante la acción catalogada por el presidente Nicolás Maduro como agresión a la soberanía nacional, éste pidió a la Casa Blanca derogar el decreto e inició la recolección de firmas en rechazo a la medida, que actualmente ronda los cinco millones, así como una campaña a través de las redes sociales.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org