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Postal unions prepare for joint April 24 actions

By Mark Gruenberg



The nation's postal unions - the Letter Carriers, the Postal Workers, the Mail Handlers and the Rural Letter Carriers - have signed what they call an historic joint cooperation pact. And they'll start putting it into effect with a combined "National Day of Action" on April 24.

And, as usual, the target will be schemes to cut postal services, end Saturday pickup and delivery, and fire or let go by attrition hundreds of thousands of workers.

Mark Dimondstein, the new Postal Workers (APWU) president, Letter Carriers (NALC) President Fredric Rolando, Rural Letter Carriers President Jeannette Dwyer and Mail Handlers President John Hegarty signed the pact. The Mail Handlers are a Laborers sector.

"A congressionally manufactured financial crisis drains the U.S. Postal Service of vital resources," the presidents' joint proclamation says. "Six-day delivery is under constant threat of elimination. Reduction of service standards and the elimination of half of the nation's mail processing centers has slowed service and wiped out tens of thousands of good jobs. Post offices in cities and small towns are being sold or closed or having their hours cut back.

"Corporate privatizers seek to gain control

over larger segments of postal operations - and to get their hands on the Postal Service's \$65 billion of annual revenue. The postmaster general's policies of subcontracting and degrading service are fueling the privatization drive.

"The four postal unions stand together to end the attack," it says. "We stand with the people of our country in defense of their right to a universal postal service operated in the public interest."

"We agreed to work together to defend a be-

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loved national treasure," said Dimondstein.

"Our efforts will benefit all postal employees and the people of this country who expect and deserve a vibrant, public Postal Service for generations to come."

"Americans value and deserve postal ser-

The protest will oppose the scheme to replace unionized postal service workers with non-union low-paid retail workers in Staples stores.

vices provided by highly trained, uniformed and accountable employees who work directly for the Postal Service, not for an office-supplies retail chain,” Rolando said. “Just as the members of the APWU stand with the NALC in our battle to preserve 6-day mail delivery service, so do Letter Carriers stand with our brothers and sisters in this fight against privatization.”

One goal is to derail S1486, the latest postal service “modernization” bill, which the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee approved early this year. Their April 24 action, led by APWU, will also oppose the postmaster general’s scheme to replace unionized middle-class Postal Service workers with non-union low-paid retail workers at USPS “branches” in Staples stores.

And S1486 would let the postmaster general kill Saturday service after two years, order re-opening of union contracts so management could slash benefits, and take postal workers out of a well-financed federal health benefits plan in favor of one USPS would run on its own, among other moves.

But the unions won’t be mobilizing just

against something. They also will campaign for an alternative measure by Sen. Bernie Sanders, Ind.-Vt., to let the USPS expand into new lines of business, for re-establishing a “postal savings bank” for individuals, and to end the yearly \$5.5 billion yearly USPS advance payment of future retirees’ health care costs.

That payment, which began after a Bush-era postal “reform” bill, accounts for the red ink the postmaster general cites as a reason for his cuts. The USPS is projected to earn \$1 billion this year on its operations, as it recovers from the Great Recession, but before the health care payment.

The joint agreement commits the four unions to campaigning for expanded USPS services, forming a common front for genuine postal reform bills, lobbying to below-cost rates to big profitable corporate mailers, joint actions on the local level and “maximum cooperation in the next round of contract negotiations” between the unions and management.



Mark Gruenberg edits Press Associates Inc.

Cuba’s doctors help cure the world

By PW Editorial

Solidarity is a way of life for the Cuban people and their elected government. Currently this solidarity is seen in the number of Cuban doctors and other medical professionals that are working in countries outside of Cuba. They number more than 50,000. They are providing services in 66 countries found in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. In Brazil there will be 11,430 by the end of March of this year. These medical personnel also serve to help the Cuban economy since they generate over \$6 billion a year for the Cuban people from the compensation paid for their services. This amount is more than twice the \$2.5 billion generated by tourism to the tropical island paradise.

One might think, “Well what about the medical needs in Cuba?” A fair question. Roberto Morales, the minister of health care in Cuba, assured the daily news paper Juventud Rebelde that people’s medical coverage in Cuba is not affected by the solidarity being provided overseas by Cuban

doctors and other medical professionals. In fact, by United Nations Standards, Cuban people have one of the best health care delivery systems in the world. Morales went on to say that there is no justification for deficiencies related to lack of cleanliness, providing of meals, bed clothing and worker discipline which can all tarnish the work of medical personnel in Cuba. The president of Cuba, Raul Castro, announced in February a pay increase scheduled for medical sector workers. Roberto Morales also spoke about the shortages in Cuba in “materials and technologies” in some hospitals, clinics and doctor’s offices and he announced for this year an investment of \$91 million to buy replacement items and equipment and to introduce new technologies to address these shortages.

An end to the blockade would no doubt ease these problems. President Obama has hinted at a change in U.S. policy. There’s not time like the present to take concrete steps. End the blockade now!

President Obama has hinted at a change in U.S. policy.

“America Needs A Raise” bus rolls into Maine

By Joelle Fishman

As the America Needs a Raise bus pulled into Portland for its second stop on a ten state tour, Mayor Michael Brennan stood at City Hall, flanked by local business owner Anne Rand and minimum wage earner Tabitha Weyland, to welcome the effort.

“I believe the people of Portland need a wage increase to make sure the people who are going to work here can live here,” he said. Nearby, one woman held a sign, “Can’t Survive on \$7.25.”

The 18-city tour began in Bangor that morning where Rep. Michael Michaud spoke on behalf of the raise exclaiming that hard working Mainers “should be able to make ends meet.”

According to a recent study, a family in Portland needs \$56,643 to be self sufficient. Full time workers earning the state minimum wage of \$7.50 an hour only bring home \$15,600.

Increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 would give a raise to 121,000 workers in Maine - the majority of them women - would generate over \$97.3 million in economic activity according to a new report released to coincide with the bus tour by the Center for American Progress Action Fund.

The report includes extensive research on the economic impact of raising the minimum wage, It shows that the increase would benefit the entire Maine economy by putting more money in the pockets of workers, who would spend it locally and create a greater demand resulting in businesses hiring more workers.

The Maine Restaurant Association disagrees, claiming that the wage increase, which includes an increase in wages for tipped workers, would lose thousands of jobs because owners would hire fewer people.

But the manager at Miguel’s Mexican Restaurant in Bangor, who raised the minimum wage for workers there to \$10.10 after President Obama’s State of the Union address, refuted that claim. “Our doors are still open,” said Sean Garceau. “We



and to act now.”

“For decades now, America’s middle class and working poor have lost tremendous ground due to a lopsided economy that works for the wealthy few,” said Lori Lodes, in issuing the Center for American Progress Action Fund report. “Raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour is a critical first step to giving hardworking Americans a better opportunity to get ahead while giving the economy a much-needed boost.”

A report released earlier this month by the Center for American Progress found that raising the minimum wage will not only benefit workers and the local economy, but also will reduce taxpayer costs. It is projected that raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 will save the federal government \$46 billion in 10 years by reducing participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A state-by-state analysis in the report found that 14,323 to 16,567 Mainers would no longer need SNAP if the minimum wage were increased, saving the federal government an estimated \$24.6 million.

The “Give America A Raise” bus tour will end in Washington, D.C., at an event outside the U.S. Capitol on April 3.

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Scores arrested in Albany budget protest

By Estevan Bassett-Nembhard

The chants of hundreds of advocates, representing everything from affordable housing and the Dream Act to anti-fracking and marijuana reform, echoed throughout the Albany Capitol building as protesters jam-packed the staircase and halls leading to Governor Cuomo's office. "Hey governor 1 percent, who do you represent?" they chanted in unison.

Tax cuts for the wealthy and public school funding brought protesters out. Jessica Wisneski an organizer with Citizen Action, one of the groups coordinating the day's events, said "People came to express a more broad dissatisfaction with the governor's proposals for further tax cuts for the wealthy and well connected while starving our public schools for the funding they need."

Iris DeLutro vice president of the Professional Staff Congress was one of the protesters arrested in the Governors Hall. She explained, "I'm angry about a budget that starves education. How can legislators explain tax breaks for the 200 wealthiest New Yorkers when there is no money for hospitals, schools and universities and nothing in the budget for the NYS Dream Act?"

Zakayia Ansari, Advocacy Director for the Alliance for Quality Education, recently wrote a petition calling on Gov. Cuomo to stop ignoring public schools. Within days the petition received nearly 15 thousand signatures that she delivered to Cuomo's office at the event.."

Fifty-nine leaders were arrested in the coordinated act of civil disobedience demanding a "New York that works for all".

La lucha contra deforestation en Guatemala

Prensa Latina

El Fondo de Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (Unesco) y ecologistas lanzaron un SOS al Gobierno y sociedad civil de Guatemala para que actúen ante la deforestación que afecta hoy a patrimonios mundiales del país.

La advertencia de los riesgos "es una llamada de atención no solo al Gobierno, a los expertos, la comunidad civil, sino para quienes están participando siempre en ese esfuerzo, incluida la cooperación internacional e intereses empresariales", indicó Pilar Álvarez, directora y representante de Multipaís de Unesco para Centroamérica y México.

El Estado guatemalteco es signatario de convenciones internacionales, y tiene una obligación legal que cumplir al respecto, sostuvo Álvarez en el cual se consultaron otros conocedores del tema. Tikal, Petén, Quiriguá e Izabal, están reconocidos por la Unesco como patrimonio de la Humanidad, y son los que más riesgo afrontan, principalmente por frentes de deforestación en zonas de amortiguamiento, adyacentes a los límites de las áreas naturales protegidas, señala el cotidiano.

A juicio del director de la Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza, Ernesto Kernil, se deben implementar acciones para evitar que esas áreas sean de nuevo evaluadas y puedan perder su calificación por incumplimiento con los cuidados a los que el país se ha comprometido.

Por su parte, el secretario ejecuti-

vo del Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, Benedicto Lucas, reconoció que hay amenazas, pero se han identificado en áreas de amortiguamiento y no en zonas núcleo en el Parque Nacional Tikal. También existen desafíos en Trifinio Montecristo Fraternidad, área que comparten Guatemala, Honduras y El Salvador; y la Sierra de las Minas (Izabal), reconocidas por la Unesco y amenazadas por ocupaciones ilegales y la expansión de monocultivos que han deforestado la zona, de acuerdo con el Conap. Según el último informe de cobertura forestal del Instituto Nacional de Bosques y las universidades guatemaltecas del Valle y Rafael Landívar, en el 2010, la cobertura boscosa nacional rebasaba los tres millones 700 mil hectáreas, con pérdida de 146 mil hectáreas. El nortero departamento de Petén cuenta con un millón 800 mil hectáreas boscosas, la mayoría ubicada dentro de la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, donde está el Parque Nacional Tikal y más de 10 corredores biológicos o jardines naturales. Gracias a Lachuá podrán implementarse proyectos de cacao en otras regiones de Guatemala. The minister and Mr Lopez Oliveros stated commitment to secure funds from the proposal submitted by FUNDALACHUA and drive program for the production of cocoa agroforestry systems nationwide, replicating the experience Lachuá in three priority areas : Alta Verapaz (where Lachuá is located) , Izabal and the south-western coast of the country.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
3339 S. Halsted Chicago, IL 60625
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org