

Wall Street took over my mobile home park



By Francine Townsend

For the last 20 years, I have lived and thrived in a mobile home community. I loved where I live—right up until Wall Street bought the park and threatened the well-being of myself, my neighbors, and my family.

Mobile homes are a vital source of affordable housing for around three million households across 45,000 communities in the United States. These households have a median income of about \$36,000 and include vulnerable populations like seniors, the disabled, and immigrants.

Our mobile home community was the sort of place where every neighbor helped everybody. If my grass wasn't cut, the neighbor across the street would cut it. If their grass didn't get cut that week, I would take care of it. That's just how we were.

But things started to get harder in 2012, when RHP Properties—a corporation entwined with Brookfield Asset Management, a Toronto-based private equity firm—took ownership of our mobile home community in Spring Valley, N.Y.

Mobile home communities exist in part to give disadvantaged, lower income, or retired people like me the opportunity to have their own space. It's your own yard, with your own driveway.

But RHP properties saw only a profit opportunity. Soon after they took over, the money we were required to pay to have our home in the community,

called the land fee or lot rent, started going up. Way up. My land fee alone reached nearly \$1,400. But that wasn't all.

RHP also started charging for services that were once included in the rent, like water. Meanwhile the services we pay for got skimpier and skimpier. Potholes started developing in driveways and on roads, trees were collapsing across people's yards, and garbage began to pile up. Maintenance requests now go unanswered for months.

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The situation has been developing for some time. According to a report by Americans for Financial Reform and MH Action, an organization I work with, Wall Street's involvement in mobile home parks is a national phenomenon.

Corporate and private equity acquisitions of mobile

Mobile homes provide affordable housing for millions. But for private equity firms, they're just another asset to squeeze for profit.

home communities have left residents across the United States helpless. In some cases, they have jacked up prices by up to 60%, layering on school taxes, trash fees, and administrative charges on top of the rent—all new costs that weren't charged before.

Many also kicked out residents during the pandemic, despite federal rules against evictions. We need change, and we needed it yesterday.

At the state level, we can protect mobile home residents with laws to guard against excessive rent increases, and lay the legal groundwork for community-friendly ownership models that help residents preserve the family-like atmosphere that made my house a home.

At the national level, we need Congress to begin a fundamental restructuring of the predatory private equity industry by passing the Stop Wall Street Looting Act.

The law would make private equity executives personally liable if they cause damage and close

tax and regulatory loopholes that benefit wealthy executives.

These reforms would benefit far more than just mobile home residents. Across the country, private equity firms are price gouging people for many forms of housing, as well as shortening life expectancy in nursing homes, destroying retail jobs, and devastating local newspapers with ruthless cost-cutting.

The private equity industry, in short, is responsible for some of the most harmful business practices in the United States.

My neighbors and I love where we live, and we refuse to back down and abandon our homes. It's time for our elected officials to act.

Shuler, Abrams link worker rights to voting rights as showdown nears

By Mark Gruenberg

A FL-CIO President Liz Shuler and nationally notable voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams are linking worker rights on the job to voters' rights to cast their ballots and have them accepted and counted, as a Senate showdown on that issue looms.

The two traded comments back and forth on the two issues on an Oct. 14 evening telecast, posted on aflcio.tv. It came just after Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., announced motions would take a cloture vote on Oct. 20 to try to halt a threatened GOP filibuster against the Freedom To Vote Act. Cloture needs 60 votes to pass. "Your state was a laboratory where our enemies"—meaning labor's foes—"want to see disenfranchisement happen," Shuler told Abrams.

Abrams's voting rights organization registered and mobilized so many of her fellow Georgians that, energized by them and unionists, voters elected the needed last two of the Senate's 50 Democrats, Jon Ossoff and the Rev. Raphael Warnock.

But such gains are in danger from Republican voter repression laws nationwide—laws the Freedom To Vote Act is designed to halt in their tracks.

That wide-ranging legislation, also GOP filibuster-threatened, would vastly strengthen and expand the right to organize by banning bosses' tactics such as mandatory anti-union meetings, enacting card check recognition, forcing bosses to take illegally fired workers back immediately, and making union elections fair, along with mandatory arbitration if the two sides can't agree on a first contract, among other reforms.

It would also impose higher fines on labor law-breakers, including corporate boards and honchos, and force union-busters to disclose their activities.

Before Shuler and Abrams linked the two issues, Senate Democrats took to the floor to urge support for the Freedom To Vote Act, a stripped-down version of earlier House-passed legislation which a GOP filibuster also marooned

Warnock made the linkage, too. "Shame on us if we allow people's voices to be silenced in this chamber. Voting rights are preservative of all other rights. Right now our right to vote is under attack. Our democracy is in a 9-1-1 emergency. We must act now," the longtime preacher told his colleagues.

Senate showdown on voting rights looms just ahead.

No more workplace raids; immigration agents to target exploiting bosses instead



By Sophia Tareen

Federal immigration agents will end mass workplace arrests of immigrant employees suspected of living in the U.S. without legal permission, according to a memo issued Tuesday by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Instead, the focus will shift to pursuing “unscrupulous employers who exploit the vulnerability of undocumented workers” and emphasize fighting worker abuse, including paying substandard wages, unsafe working conditions, and human trafficking.

The three-page memo directs the heads of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection to draw up a plan within two months to increase employer penalties, encourage workers to report unscrupulous practices without fear, and coordinate with other agencies, such as the Department of Labor.

Mass worksite raids were common under former President Donald Trump, including a 2019 operation targeting Mississippi chicken plants, the largest such operation in over a decade. Trump and other Republican presidents defended raids as strong deterrents against illegal immigration, while workers groups called them unfair and discriminatory. For instance, most of the 680 workers arrested at chicken plants run by companies including Illinois-based Koch Foods were Latino.

Tuesday’s move away from raids more closely resembles the approach by former President Barack

Obama, who avoided such operations, limiting workplace immigration efforts to low-profile audits.

Along with ending mass worksite arrests, Mayorkas said immigration authorities should also immediately start using “prosecutorial discretion” when it comes to encouraging workers to speak up about workplace exploitation and preventing employers from using retaliatory threats of deportation.

Workers rights groups applauded the move, saying immigrant workers, particularly those without legal permission to live in the U.S., are especially vulnerable. Industries such as meatpacking and chicken processing are particularly reliant on immigrant labor for backbreaking work often set in rural areas with limited access to attorneys.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic, Trump ordered meatpacking plants to remain open amid concerns about the nation’s food supply, even as COVID-19 outbreaks were closing plants.

Nadia Marin-Molina an executive director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network said in a statement, “Immigrant workers kept the lights on in this country during a pandemic, and they were essentially told by the government they should work to death without basic rights so that others could live.”

Large immigration raids were common under former President George W. Bush, including in 2006 when immigration agents swept Swift & Co. plants, netting about 1,300 immigrant worker arrests. It was the largest single-worksite raid in U.S. history.

Biden administration orders a shift toward pursuing “unscrupulous employers who exploit the vulnerability of undocumented workers” rather than mass arrests of immigrants.

LOCAL NEWS

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Thousands march in El Salvador demanding resignation of President Nayib Bukele

By Morning Star

Thousands marched in El Salvador on Sunday demanding the resignation of President Nayib Bukele, whom they brand a dictator, as he seeks a second term of office.

Local media estimated about 4,000 people took to the streets of the capital San Salvador, raising slogans reading: “Democracy is not up for negotiation, it is defended.”

Anger has risen against the 40-year-old president’s rule, which opponents say has become increasingly authoritarian in character.

They have raised objections to the adoption of the notoriously volatile bitcoin as legal tender, warning that it will plunge El Salvador’s flagging economy into an even deeper economic crisis.

And the sacking of supreme court judges from the constitutional chamber, paving the way for Mr Bukele to stand for a second-term of office, has provoked further outrage.

In August Mr Bukele rebranded himself “the world’s coolest dictator” and has consistently mocked those that oppose his rule.

He dismissed Sunday’s protests, saying: “The march is a failure and they know it ... nobody believes them here any more.”

18 mil trabajadores sindicalizados en cuidado de salud votan por autorizar huelga

By AFSCME EN ESPAÑOL

Más de 18 mil trabajadores sindicalizados en cuidado de salud en instalaciones de Kaiser Permanente en todo el Sur de California votaron por autorizar una huelga si su empleador no responde a sus llamados por soluciones a largo plazo a problemas de falta de personal y aumentos salariales.

Con 18,209 miembros de UNAC/UHCP (United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals), AFSCME, la votación en línea entre el 1 y 10 de octubre resultó en un 96% que apoyó el “sí” para autorizar una huelga en contra de su empleador si se vuelve necesario.

“De verdad hemos demostrado nuestro valor y nuestra dedicación a nuestros pacientes”, dijo Jenny Wong-Swanson, una enfermera y miembro de la unión quien votó a favor de la huelga. “A lo largo de los últimos dos años, hemos trabajado sin descansos, hemos trabajado sin almuerzos, hemos trabajado fuera de proporción, sin recursos y bajos de personal. Y siempre hemos cumplido con nuestro trabajo, a costa de nuestra propia salud a veces”.

El porcentaje de votantes elegibles que participó fue del 86%, es decir, de un total de 21 mil enfermeras, farmacéuticos, parteras, fisioterapeutas y otros profesionales en cuidado de salud en los hospitales y clínicas de Kaiser Permanente en el Sur de California.

“Estamos preocupados por el futuro del cuidado de salud y cómo reclutar y retener a enfermeras y otros profesionales en cuidado de salud para servir a nuestras comunidades por muchos años en adelante”, dijo De-

nise Duncan, enfermera quien ejerce como presidenta de UNAC/UHCP. “No podemos más quedarnos sentados y observar mientras el empleador sigue desmantelando el progreso que hemos logrado para mejorar el cuidado al paciente y el crecimiento de la membresía en el plan de salud”.

Miembros de UNAC/UHCP y la administración de Kaiser han estado en negociaciones desde abril. Miembros de la unión están enfocados en reclutar a enfermeras y trabajadores en cuidado de salud adicionales conforme la escasez de personal amenaza con poner en riesgo el cuidado al paciente. Para asegurar salarios justos y competitivos, la unión está pidiendo aumentos salariales del 4% cada año por los próximos tres años.

Del otro lado de la mesa, los ejecutivos de Kaiser Permanente, con \$44.5 mil millones en efectivo e inversiones, quieren recortar los salarios de las nuevas enfermeras y trabajadores en cuidado de salud, lo que a largo plazo reducirá los salarios de los trabajadores actuales. A pesar de afirmar que están bajo peligro por la expansión de clínicas y aplicaciones virtuales, la compañía tuvo más pacientes y ganó 2,2 mil millones en 2020 durante la pandemia del coronavirus.

Cualquier huelga potencial, después de una notificación 10 días por adelantado al empleador, como lo requiere la Ley Nacional de Relaciones Laborales, afectaría a centros médicos de Kaiser en Anaheim, Baldwin Park, Downey, Fontana, Irvine, Los Angeles, Ontario Vineyard, Panorama City, Riverside, San Diego, West Los Angeles y Woodland Hills, así como a numerosas clínicas y edificios médicos en todo el Sur de California.

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