

Stop the Privatization of the Postal Service

Build Classwide Unity Among Low Wage Workers

Support Staples Low Wage Workers - Boycott Staples!

The low wage struggle is currently centered mostly in fast food restaurants, but workers are paid poverty wages in mom & pop storefronts, supermarkets, offices, parks and recreation, large box stores such as BJ's, Walmart and Staples, transportation, construction and countless other businesses and industries, making up more than half of all workers. Women, African American, Latino/a, Asian and Native American workers take home less than \$15 an hour out of proportion to their actual numbers in the population.

Any of these worksites and workers can be part of this growing movement. Millions of additional workers who are unionized but are being threatened by anti-labor privatization campaigns work for local, state and federal governments, such as teachers, transit workers, postal workers and many more. The main goal of these privatization efforts are profits largely gained through lower wages and benefits, increased exploitation and cuts in services.

Where is the postal struggle in the context of the growing low wage resistance movement?

Closing and selling thousands of post offices; sub-contracting trucking; eliminating over 300,000 postal jobs; increasing the work load of mail carriers, clerks, mail handlers and rural carriers; slowing down mail delivery standards; reducing window personnel and post office hours; replacing door-to-door delivery with cluster boxes -- despite all these ongoing deliberate cutbacks designed to increase public dissatisfaction with the postal service, the USPS made a profit of over \$1 billion last year (if the annual \$5.5 billion for 75 years into the future is ignored).

The last few years of the postal workers struggle to stop privatization has been centered on the legislative arena - trying to get Congress to pass laws doing away with the mandate forcing the USPS to pay for pension health care benefits 75 years in advance, for example. That legislative avenue has proven to be a dead end. While union pressure has been successful in helping to forestall Congressional anti-worker postal bills, USPS management has gone ahead with dismantling and privatizing the postal service bit by bit.

The NALC called for community involvement in opposing the elimination of Saturday mail delivery. Their rallies at hundreds of locations in 2012 largely consisted of NALC members; nevertheless, the street protests were significant because it was an effort to go beyond the lobbying campaigns of recent years.

Recognizing that the contract to move postal counters into Staples stores is a major step toward privatization, the APWU has called for a boycott of Staples, a major step away from appealing to politicians and instead appealing to all workers for support. How the APWU

and NALC enforce that boycott is sure to be discussed at the national union conventions July 21-25 in Philadelphia and Chicago.

So far, the APWU's campaign has centered on getting other unions to support the boycott, especially teachers unions, since one third of all Staples sales are linked to teachers and school districts. In May, American Federation of Teachers chapters in California, New Hampshire and Michigan adopted resolutions to boycott Staples stores for teachers' back-to-school shopping. The AFL-CIO nationally and statewide in New York and New Hampshire have added Staples to their boycott lists.

What does a boycott mean for Staples workers?

-The postal unions have said very little about the underpaid workers at Staples, whose average sales associate makes \$8.53 an hour.

-Staples has had to pay \$42 million in fines for violations to wage theft regulations. It's also been accused of limiting workers' hours to less than 32 hours per week in order to disqualify them for the ACA, which may be illegal if it can be proven.

-Staples workers and Postal workers both have legitimate grievances against this office products chain. There may be ways we can help make the Staples boycott and the low wage movement work together in a common struggle.

-A look at the list of Staples executives and Board of Directors is helpful to understand how. (www.nndb.com)

Staples Board member Robert Sulentic is a member of the CB Richard Ellis Group, the firm hired by the postal service in a no-bid sweetheart contract to sell billions of dollars of postal property. That seems like a conflict of interest, in which the Staples/USPS deal will cause the closing of more postal facilities, benefiting Sulentic's firm to the detriment of our communities.

The conflicts don't end there however.

Leo Kahn, who co-founded Staples in 1985 and helped start the age of "big box" retail stores, also founded Fresh Fields and Nature's Heartland, which Whole Foods bought in 1999. Kahn was put in his own box and buried in 2011; Tom Stemberg, the co-founder and still CEO of Staples, is also on the board of Carmax and Petsmart.; Ron Sargent, also one of Staples CEO's, is on the board of Mattel, Kroger, Yankee Candle and ARAMARK.

In total, the list of other corporations linked to Staples through its Executive Board and Board of Directors includes: AMB Group LLC, Amscan Holdings, Inc., Avon, Bain & Company, Becton Dickinson, Campbell Soup, Carter's , CB Richard Ellis Group , Chico's FAS, Clareon Corporation, CRA International, Inc., Cubex Corporation, eFunds , Ernst & Young, Häagen-Dazs , Hasbro, Home Depot, Hormel , iDeal Partners, Intellivid, J. Sainsbury, Jewell Companies, Kraft Foods, Lululemon Athletica Inc., Moody's, NAK Enterprises LLC, NASDAQ, Nina McLemore, Inc., Office Depot, Orchid Partners, OSI Restaurant Partners LLC, Paine Webber , Pepsi, Pizza Hut, Procter & Gamble , Scott Paper, Shaw's Supermarkets , Stride Rite, Summer Infant, Inc, Tenet Healthcare , Texada Software, TJX, Toys R Us , Trammell

Crow , Wal-Mart, Virtusa Corporation, Western Union, Wright Express Corporation.

As you can see, many of these corporate representatives on Staples Boards are involved in low wage industries, including restaurants, grocery chains, food production, and so on.

If we went on to investigate each one of the listed companies and their Board of Directors, more links to other low wage companies would be revealed.

Just as corporate officials have many profitable motives to join each other's Boards, there are more significant reasons why workers should support each other's struggles for workers rights. The list of Staples board members helps expose how all workers share a common group of corporate exploiters. It can help increase solidarity between workers at seemingly unrelated corporations.

A Staples Campaign With a Wide Net

Boycott organizers could put pressure on some of the individual Staples Board members to oppose the privatization deal with the USPS.

It's also possible to make the Staples boycott a part of the rapidly growing movement to raise wages for millions of workers earning low incomes, because of who is on the list of Staples boards.

For instance, it can be pointed out to low wage ARAMARK workers, who cook and sell food at many of the sports stadiums, school cafeterias and prisons in the US, that Ron Sargent, one of the bosses who exploits them also exploits the low paid workforce at Staples. Even more, Sargent and other Staples bosses are involved in the privatization of the postal service, exploiting low wage Staples jobs to replace the jobs of post office clerks.

The same goes for workers exploited by Staples Board member Robert C. Nakasone, CEO of Toys-R-Us and member of the Board of Shaw's Supermarkets, which is part of Cerberus Capital Management, L.P, as are Albertson's, Acme , Jewel-Osco and Star Market grocery chains.

And ditto for Staples Board member Elizabeth Smith, who is the CEO of OSI Restaurant Partners, LLC, a company of restaurants that owns and operates Outback Steakhouse, Carrabba's Italian Grill, Roy's Restaurant, Bonefish Grill, Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, Lee Roy Selmon's, Cheeseburger in Paradise and Blue.

Staples Board of Directors member Carol M. Meyrowitz, CEO of TJX, which owns T.J. Maxx, Marshalls, HomeGoods, A.J. Wright and Bob's stores in the US; Winners and HomeSense stores in Canada; and T.K. Maxx stores in Europe.

It might be worthwhile to question Drew Gilpin Faust - President of Harvard University and on the Board of Directors at Staples - about Staples policies on postal privatization and on the low wages, hours and benefits of workers at Staples, at the same time questioning Harvard on its treatment of their campus workers.

Many of these corporations do business in most of the communities where we live and work. We can use this and other information to help link the issues of Staples, the postal service, and fast food and other low wage industries. These struggles are intrinsically united because these enterprises are all owned and run by a tiny group of people - the 1%.

The unity of these struggles would increase the numbers of workers backing the Staples boycott as well as strengthen the movement of workers fighting for a higher minimum wage.

By Joe Pietitte, retired postal worker, June 15, 2014