

MAINLINE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF AFSCME LOCAL 444

JAN/FEB 2012

Management continues to try to contract out work and we continue to fight them on it, especially landscaping gardeners and janitorial. Some issues have also come up concerning electrical work. If you see work in your area being contracted out, are aware of attempts by the District to contract your work or have questions about that, contact the Contracting-out Committee.

On the up-side, some hiring has been taking place in the Wastewater department for Operators, Mechanics, Instrument Techs and Electricians; HEO's and Plumbers have been recruiting as well.

Management continues to complain of projected budget shortfalls due to a lack of new construction hook-ups and the appearance of another drought and potential water rationing on the horizon. They hope to remedy this by hiring more engineers (pray for rain).

Safety issues around trench plate moving and hauling continue to be an issue we are trying to resolve. Work smart, use PPE and refuse to do unsafe work. Our every busy and overworked and unpaid Chief Steward is working on a workmans comp/job injury informational package – be on the look out for it, but don't do things that will make you read it!

We have seen the passing of 2 wastewater operators: Ray Floyd and Isaacs Rodriguez - our hearts go out to them and their families. Brother Reggie Moore, who has served the union diligently is suffering a serious illness. Any cards of well-wishes can be sent directly to the union hall (to Reggie Moore, c/o AFSCME local 444, 8400 Enterprise Way ste 101, Oakland, CA. 94621)

American made/Union made Local 444 Tee-shirts are available at the Union Hall – come to the next meeting to pick yours up – one per member only, please.

From the 1st V.P. – M=The Meet & Confer process regarding Heavy Transport Operators reassignment from Oakport to Equipment Support are working on a “Successor Letter of Understanding”. The representatives drafting and negotiating the Letter are: John Bricino (1st V.P.), Dan Guaralia (2nd V.P.), Cheryl Franklin (Chief Steward), Jim Porter (E.S.S. HTO), Paula Valle (Oakport HTO) and Randy Powers (Pipeline HTO). And questions or concerns regarding proposals or terms of the agreement should be directed to them.

The current Contracting-out Committee members are: John Bricino (E.S.S.), Dan Guaralia (North) and Eric Larsen (Wastewater). We still have no voice from Pipeline which represents a large portion of 444 related contracts. The committee will meet with any work-units to address any concerns about contracting out. Please contact the John Bricino, Committee co-chair.

The web-site and calendar are now being managed by the Member Relations Secretary. If you have anything you would like to have added please contact him at AFSCME444@gmail.com. Also remember to hit the “refresh” button when visiting the website as the cache in your computer may not bring up the most current updates.

CALPERA Conference: A Gathering of the Fooled

By Danny Gauraglia

I had the (dis)pleasure of attending the CALPERA Conference in Monterey at the behest of the Union. This conference, which is held annually, is mainly for Administrators, Human Resource Analysts, Elected Politicians, Supervisors, Managers, Bargaining Negotiators and their ilk, of Cities, Counties, State, Municipalities, and other Public Agencies to meet, plan, scheme, and brainstorm numerous unethical, immoral, and heinous ways take away benefits and lower salaries of rank and file employees who make these agencies work despite the mismanagement of the aforementioned officials.

I was amused by the fact that the theme of the conference this year was the “Roaring Twenties”; a time in this country’s history when deregulation or lack of regulation at all, coupled with Corporate and Wall Street greed, ignored by an out of touch Republican administration caused the first Great Depression and brought this country to its knees. This mostly benefited the extremely rich (1%) and left the rest of the nation in soup lines. I was further amused that at the gala held on the last night of the conference they had a “speakeasy” set up on a floor above the party where in order to gain entrance you needed to know the password and this password happened to be “pension reform”. The irony of these facts seemed so apparent to me that I couldn’t understand why nobody else saw or even made mention of them. It seemed like a group of ostriches carrying on, unaware of the surrounding group of crocodiles ready to pounce.

In my three days at the conference I attended six classes and one debate. Five of the classes I attended were mainly structured to show and give examples of how to gain takeaways from employees as emphasized by their titles:

- 1). Negotiating Changes in Pensions/Retiree Medical.
- 2). Defined Contribution Solutions to Reduce Retiree Medical Liabilities.
- 3). Public Pension Programs/ Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) Liabilities Under Scrutiny.
- 4). Employment Benefit Cost Containment Strategies
- 5). Fact Based Bargaining in a Concession Bargaining Environment.

No need to go into the specifics of each of these classes because I’m sure you can get the gist of them from the titles but they mainly dealt with how to get more for less and make the employee feel thankful or better about it.

The last day of the conference was dedicated to what they called the “Great Debate: The Future of California Pensions and Retiree Medical Benefits”. The Panel Consisted of, on the “management side”; Chuck Reed, Mayor of San Jose; Miguel Santana, City Administrator Officer- City of Los Angeles; and Joe Nation, Professor Stanford University. On the side of labor only two panel members were allowed; Dave Low, Executive Director California State Employees Association (CSEA); and Christopher Platten, Labor Attorney of the Firm Wylie, McBride, Platten & Renner.

As the “management side” spouted their drivel about the doom and gloom of retiree and employee benefits; like how exorbitant pensions payouts are the norm. Dave Low of California State Employee Association pointed out that the average pension members from his union earn is less than \$3,000 a month; barely enough to live on in this state. Joe Nation made the comment that retiree pension and medical benefits were the cause of current fiscal failure in many agencies and in response Christopher Platten responded that the current fiscal problems encountered by these agencies were caused by the downfall of the Stock Market which was caused by Wall Street and the Banking Industry. But he also added that the Stock Market is cyclical and the Stock Market will rebound in time and the retirement funds will be healthy again and “if you don’t believe that then **you** are unpatriotic”. Nation rebutted that you can’t blame this economic downturn on Wall Street and the Banks, and to my surprise he received applause from the audience. This incident alone convinced me that most of the people in that conference have been fooled by the Corporate run media and Corporate owned politicians into thinking that Unions and Labor is the cause of all the financial problems we now face.

Overall most of the people I met at the conference were pleasant and amiable. I probably would have enjoyed conversing with a lot of them over small talk at a party or social event and I bet most would be good neighbors. But I can’t help feeling that they have accepted authority as the truth and not truth as the authority, hence the CALPERA Conference- A Gathering of the Fooled.

The Enigma of Occupy
By Ernie Schnyder

Late last summer a small group of young activists set up camp in downtown Manhattan. They called themselves Occupy Wall Street and declared, without any set of demands, that the current state of economic disparity is the source of our current social ill; that Wall Street corporate greed is fueling the disparity and that nothing will change this until big money corporate financing of politicians and politics in general is ended. They merely refused to leave, determined rather to occupy public space in protest. The idea of Occupy spread like no one expected, touching everyone who could identify with the social injustice of the 1% owning 37% of the wealth of the richest nation in the world; of the loss of the American promise that if you work hard and play fair you can succeed; seeing rather banker crooks who invent unscrupulous financial derivative products to bet against, and vicious corporate raiders who make fortunes by laying off workers, all while we loose our homes to foreclosures, school cut backs, and healthcare and pension take-backs.

Some six months later we have seen the myriad camps that sprang up in cities across the country to decry this injustice in its many manifestations, raided by the police, and shutdown by the cities and media (owned by the 1%). While the city government complained of nuisance or safety concerns (certainly there were rats in Oakland before Occupy, and violent crime in the area was down some 20% during the encampment), the true reason for the raids and closures was the effectiveness of the action – they weren't going home; they were organizing with people who have never been organized. Generally, sanctioned protests have an end – we go and march around with each other to protester the war, then we go home and nothing changes. Now we weren't going home, people were talking to each other, learning and educating one another, and the conversation was beginning to change. The Occupy movement has been effective at galvanizing the outrage of the working class because it has taken a visible and militant affront to the establishment in a more inclusive format than the isolated issues around contracts, working conditions and benefits. The movement has instead pointed at fundamental ills inn a system so entirely broken that approval of congress is 13%¹. This shook the establishment. Media from Fox news to the Wall Street Journal were taking notice and reporting. A concerted effort then ensued to shut Occupy down (this has been especially violent in Oakland). Police raided camps across the country from New York to Oakland, Denver, Detroit, Portland, Seattle, Miami, San Diego, LA, Huston, Salt Lake City, St. Louis, Chicago and the list goes on².

The Occupy movement is a movement building process; it is an idea that we can have a better society that does meet the needs of its citizens if we build it our selves rather than relying on others to do it, or believing we can't. It is an idea and a push to think outside of the box; to not accept that we are bankrupt, that because of deficits and because we live in an age of austerity that we cannot in the richest country in the world afford to feed and house our families or educate our children. Nor do we accept that the failures of our social system can be corrected “through the normal channels”. Rather, we are thinking of, discussing and putting into action new and creative ways to build a new paradigm for a forward thinking society that cares about the needs of its citizens – something that corporate greed and the profit motive can never in all of its efficiencies accomplish. Occupying public space and refusing to leave until change is affected is not new. It was Dr. Martin Luther King who in 1967 began the Poor People's Campaign seeking social justice and “genuine equality” and which, in the months following his death in 1968, resulted in the occupation of the Mall in Washington D.C.³. Often, unions use this tactic when on strike outside the employer's facility, and sometimes even occupying the facility itself in a sit-down strike i.e. Republic

¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/01/congress-hits-a-new-low-in-approval-obama-opens-election-year-under-50/>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Occupy_Wall_Street

³ http://mlk.kps01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclonadia/encyclonadia/enc_poor_peoples_campaign/

Window and Door Makers in 2011⁴ and when the AFSCME workers in Wisconsin took over the capital building⁵ also in 2011. We have learned that through collective action, when we are organized and purposeful we can be a catalyst, and even more so, we can be the change.

Now the establishment is waging a war against us. Brining police repression, brutality and violence to our activities; arresting, identifying, intimidating and incarcerating our organizers and activists; placing restraining orders and stay-away orders and holding charges in limbo as files pile up – tactics normally reserved for anti-gang policing – in order to disorganize, weaken and break the occupy movement. This has been especially brutal in Oakland, which not coincidentally has not ever accepted a non-violence policy but rather accepted a “diversity of tactics” when confronted with one of the most violent and notorious police forces in the country.

We are at a junction in society. A time when we are facing a crisis in capitalism when the exponential growth inevitably crashes on its own unsustainable weight; when retraction of the growth economy squeezes the kingdom and the kings subjects face suffering and loss while the court sits fat and high. And the people have a choice: to either accept their position as their lot and wallow in their sorrow, or to search out and build solutions; but for the later there are many views on the solutions and many more paths to get their. That is where the enigma of Occupy lies. Many people in America know there is a problem, but accept that it is inevitable – they have been thoroughly trained. Of the people who recognize that there is a problem, actual critical understanding of the problem, its roots and solutions range the gambit: from those that are unsure of anything except that the problem exists to those who think that complete destruction of the system is the only solution. The latter may take part in vandalism or property destruction. And while property destruction does not illicit support from the mainstream, it is not effective and does detract from the legitimacy of the movement, it cannot be regarded as purely illegitimate when faced with the violent police brutality many have suffered throughout their existence. That said, legitimate and effective organizing can take place for the working class at the level of unions and organized labor – galvanizing existing structures, then organizing students, unorganized workers and the unemployed.

So the Occupy movement has been more effective than the labor movement in galvanizing the masses because of its relevance, its inclusiveness and its unwillingness to be pigeon holed into some specific issue, demand or result. Because the labor movement has become straightjacketed by its politics (the Democrats), legislation and litigation – few have faith in it as an effective mechanism of social change. This is an unfortunate loss because the labor movement is one of the most powerful agents of social change, as seen in the 1930’s. If the labor movement can lend support and legitimacy to the Occupy movement, without trying to co-opt the movement for the benefit of the Democratic party or control the movement to its liking, an effective agent to gain real democratic control of our government and its institutions is possible, but Occupy has to come to terms with the necessity of strategy, discipline and accountability in regards to the “diversity of tactics” debate, without which the movement will continue to be easily infiltrated, subverted and marginalized by a few angry individuals with their own agenda.

One thing is for sure: “we can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”
-Albert Einstein 1879-1955.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_Windows_and_Doors

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Wisconsin_protests