

Seven arrested at postal privatization protest in Portland

One protester allegedly is kicked and bloodied by a postal inspector

Seven protesters were arrested Oct. 29 at the Main Post Office in downtown Portland while attempting to negotiate a meeting with U.S. Postal Service District Manager Erica Brix.

One of the arrestees, Bennett Poe, 62, allegedly was kicked by a non-uniformed postal inspector and he cut his hand. After being released from jail, Poe sought medical attention for internal bleeding at an emergency room.

The group behind the protest — Portland Communities and Postal Workers United (PCPWU) — said they have video of the assault.

Jamie Partridge, 64, a retired Letter Carrier and activist with PCPWU, said the group is not releasing the video to the media at this time.

According to Partridge, who also was arrested, 15 “postal protectors” had gathered in the third floor lobby of the Post Office at 715 NW Hoyt St. holding signs protesting the privatization of postal jobs and asking to meet with Brix. They also wanted to hand-deliver a petition with over a thousand signatures of citizens outraged by the destruction of family wage, union jobs and the growing delay of mail.

Partridge said they were waiting for a response from Brix when four people in plain clothes, but wearing postal I.D. lanyards, walked out of an elevator and asked what was going on.

Rev. John Schwiebert, 75, told them the group was seeking a meeting with Brix.

“The man, who never identified himself, said ‘that’s not going to happen, you need to get out of here,’” Partridge told the Labor Press. “Rev. Schwiebert said ‘that’s not going to happen’ and the man grabbed him.”

Partridge said Schwiebert fell to the floor and, immediately, other postal inspectors grabbed protesters, who also fell to the ground.

“There was blood on the floor and on the wall,” Partridge said.

Protesters Donna Daniels and Trudy Cooper called 9-1-1. After police arrived, Partridge said officers began a “promising mediation” to set up a meeting with Brix.

“An officer told us she was willing to meet, just not at this time,” Partridge said. “We asked for him to get it in writing.”

That’s when the police abruptly cut off talks and arrested seven people.

Partridge, Schwiebert, Poe, John Herbert, 71; Michael Colvin, 69; Kent Spring, 68; and Michael Meo, 66, face charges of second-degree criminal trespassing.

American Postal Workers Union installs new leader

Mark Dimondstein has been elected international president of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). He defeated incumbent Cliff Guffey in a hotly-contested race that ended Oct. 7.

Twenty-four offices were contested.

Running on Dimondstein’s “Members First” slate and winning were: Debby Szeredy for Executive Vice President; Tony McKinnon for Industrial Relations Director; John Marcotte for Legislative/Political Director; Anna Smith for Organization Director; Kenneth Beasley for Southern Region Coordinator; and Clint Burelson for Clerk Division Director.

Incumbent Secretary-Treasurer Liz Powell was re-elected in a three-way race, and William Kaczor was re-elected Health Plan Director.

The union mailed 195,509 ballots to union members; 48,909 envelopes were returned.

“I hope everyone will get behind the new administration,” said outgoing President Cliff Guffey. “We have tough times ahead and we’re going to need unity.”

In an interview with the Washington Post, Dimondstein said: “The APWU membership has spoken decisively for a new direction in our union as we face the challenges of protecting our jobs, our retirement and our public postal service from the postal privatiz-

ers on Wall Street, in Congress and even in postal headquarters.”

Asked how the union’s relationship with management will change under his leadership, Dimondstein, a 30-year veteran of the Postal Service from Greensboro, N.C., said: “We’ll have to see. We’re going to have lines in the sand that we’re not willing to cross. We would expect from management that they stop these [postal] plant closings.

“We’re not afraid to march, we’re not afraid to sit in if we got to, and we think we need to work with all the other postal unions. While we’re not calling today for the resignation of the PMG [postmaster general], if the postmaster general doesn’t respond to the message our union sent, then we’ll also have to deal with that question.”

Dimondstein told the newspaper he wants to build a “grand alliance” with other unions, the AFL-CIO, citizens of the country, and organizations that represent seniors, civil rights, veterans, business, and folks in small towns “to defend our national treasure.

“People in this country still really support the post office. It’s part of our community. It’s part of our neighborhoods. We think given the opportunity, that people will step up and defend their right to a public postal service.”

The newly-elected officers began three-year terms Nov. 12.



Postal inspector Dennis Fernald (center) grabs peaceful protesters waiting for meeting with Portland Postal Service district manager. From left are Jamie Partridge, Charles Nims (with sign), Jack Herbert, Rev. John Schwiebert (back to camera), and two unidentified postal inspectors. (Photo by Michael Hastie.)

A hearing is set for Nov. 14, at which time the seven will plead not guilty and request a jury trial.

PCPWU also will file a complaint with the Postal Service.

Portland Communities and Postal Workers United and postal union presidents have been trying for months to get a meeting with senior postal managers to talk about contracting out. They have been rejected six times.

PCPWU has been fighting cuts and closures to the postal service for the past year. In May of 2012, 10 activists were arrested occupying Portland’s University Station post office, which has since been closed. Last April, five protesters went to jail for a civil disobedience action at the Salem mail plant, which has now been dismantled with mail processing machines moving to Portland. The same group was arrested

in July for occupying the Matheson Flight Extender corporation in Portland. The company is doing mail processing work once done in Salem. The group also has blockaded Dill Star Route trucks multiple times. The private trucking company has been moving mail while Portland postal truckers are being put on standby.

In the past year, the Postmaster General has closed 45 percent of mail processing plants nationwide, reduced hours by 25 to 75 percent in a third of the post offices, put 10 percent of post offices up for sale, subcontracted trucking and mail handling, eliminated tens of thousands of family-wage postal jobs, and delayed mail delivery.

“This privatization and union-busting is being carried out in the name of a phony financial emergency,” Rev. Schwiebert said.

Since 2006, the USPS has been forced by Congress to spend nearly 10 percent of its budget pre-funding retiree health benefits 75 years in advance. No other U.S. agency or private business faces such a crushing financial burden. Not only would the postal service have been profitable without the mandate, the USPS has also overpaid tens of billions into two pension funds.

Springfield postal rally slated Dec. 16

SPRINGFIELD, Ore. — Postal workers and their allies will hold a rally Monday, Dec. 16 — the busiest postal day of the year — to protest the closure of the Eugene Processing & Distribution Facility.

The mail processing plant, which is located at the Gateway Mall in Springfield, is one of 55 mail processing plants scheduled for closure in February 2014.

The rally, which begins at noon, is sponsored by the American Postal Workers Union, the Rural Organizing Project, and the Eugene-Springfield Solidarity Network.

Immediately, following the rally, Communities and Postal Workers United will lead a civil disobedience action at the plant — a sit-in expected to lead to the arrest of dozens of activists — in an attempt to pressure the postal service into abandoning its consolidation plans.

With the shutdown of the Eugene Processing & Distribution Facility, mail from Lane County area ZIP codes will be hauled to Portland for sorting, then trucked back to Lane County for delivery.

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