

## I'm Not Crazy, They **Are** Out to Get Us

### A "Connecting the Dots" Essay

By

Carl Imboden

Postal workers who suspect they have a persecution complex should consider the possibility that they are, in fact, correct. As members of the postal community, the APWU, and the ever-shrinking middle class, we are triply threatened by social and political forces determined to make our lives miserable. If you aren't certain you should believe me, just look at some recent events.

Our second cousins, Federal employees, received a Presidential smackdown in May, when President Donald Trump signed three executive orders regarding their treatment. The first made it easier to fire them, the second required their employee agencies to renegotiate contracts with their unions to "reduce waste" (we all know what that means) and the third reduced on-the-clock union representation time. A person couldn't help wondering if Washington would come for us next.

And sure enough, they did. As I write this, we have a "new" plan to privatize us hanging over our heads, courtesy of the White House. It's not really new—same old chop it up, sell off the good parts and ignore the citizens who need universal delivery—but this time, the threat is real. With both the

Legislative and Executive Branches of our government under conservative control, there's no one to protect us. Our Union will post the details as it receives them, along with an excellent obituary notice if we do nothing to protect ourselves.

Are you hoping that the Supreme Court might save the day, as it did with the Affordable Care Act? Abandon that hope, immediately. With Justice Anthony Kennedy leaving as the frequent "swing vote" between the conservative and liberal sides of the court, it will be packed with a solid conservative majority for the first time since before the New Deal. Not that unions or the middle class were receiving much justice from the Supremes, anyway. In May, the court used the Federal Arbitration Act of 1925 in *Epic Systems v. Lewis* to force several individuals seeking a class action to arbitrate their cases individually (at considerable expense) and in June, in *Janus v. AFSCME* it provided Governor Scott Walker a back door to transform Wisconsin into a right-to-work State.

*Janus* is worth considering a moment. *AFSCME* in Wisconsin offered an excellent accommodation to employees it represented who did not agree with the political candidates the union supported. These members paid reduced dues exclusively directed to the union's representation of them; their dues directed no money to political support. This was not good enough for the Supreme Court, which ruled that, in such instances, membership had to be voluntary. Proof once again

that, to the conservative mind, anything weakening union membership is a good idea.

The most optimistic among us might hope that business ethics will offer us some relief, some common decency from the haves to the have-nots, from the managers to the managed. But business ethics have fallen to a new low in this country, gripped by a rot starting at the bottom and going all the way up to our most powerful government executive. Its chief symptom? “Leaders” who feel that the rules apply to everyone except them. We see it on the workroom floor when supervisors violate our contract and do our jobs. We see it when upper management short-staffs the same supervisors until the supervisors have no option except to violate the contract. Or we can look outside the USPS and find other truly heinous examples. Toys R Us awarded its executives eight million dollars in bonuses one week before declaring bankruptcy, then offered no severance pay for its 30,000 employees. Airlines for America, a trade group including American Airlines, United Continental, FedEx and UPS, along with CSX Corp. have initiated test cases exempting them from State sick leave laws, because of the transient nature of flight and train crews. Since the U.S. is the only industrialized country without a national requirement for companies to provide workers with paid sick leave, if the test cases win, train and airline crews will be guaranteed . . . nothing.

It is clear we have no one to turn to; the only group who can save us is us. How shall we protect our nation, our economic class, our union, and ourselves? APWU Palm Beach Area Local 749 President Gary Hamrick said it best: **“We need our membership involved in both contract negotiations support and political activism upholding candidates who understand Labor and the benefits of a unionized workforce.”**

Alas, the beaten path of wisdom regarding such activism offers few attractions (it’s not, as public relations people say, “sexy”): support your union; attend union meetings; know who your Congressperson is and write them regularly; vote for candidates who support Labor. These tried-and-true methods do build pressure on those who rule us, but it does so quietly and slowly.

We are an aggrieved social class blessed with Union strength, therefore, I suspect there’s something we can do as Local 749 members to make it easier to grind out those old basic approaches, and perhaps even go beyond them. But what? I do not know the answer, and I long to hear it from another sister or brother at the next General Meeting or through someone’s response to our “mailbag” section at [pbal749.org](http://pbal749.org).