

# American Dream?

By **DAVID COOK**  
President



Corporate Greed is still alive and well in America whether or not you and I — Mr., Mrs. Ms. Average Worker — likes it or not.

How often have we heard that Unions are the problem with our economy? We're accused of driving up wages and demanding health care and pensions which is supposed to hurt companies and therefore, wreck the economy. Yes indeed, it's all our fault.

Really? Maybe there's another cause of this problem?

Last week Staples announced the buyout of its major competitor, Office Depot. No problem, it happens all the time. As a result:

- An estimated 500 Office Depots will close;
- Thousands of decent hard working men and women who showed up every day and helped make the company profitable will lose their jobs. The sale was not the result of anything they did, or didn't do.

And what about the impact on top management? Let's see:

- CEO and Chairman Roland C. Smith walks away with a golden parachute of \$47 MILLION, which is just over twice his annual salary of \$20 MILLION a year, according to *Bloomberg Business*. That should help tide him over till something else comes along, wouldn't you agree?

- Four other top executives who, like Mr. Smith sit in some pretty fancy chairs that I'll bet none of his workers could afford, will split \$38 MILLION, that \$9.5 MILLION each. Wow, hope they can exist on that for a little while! After all, times are tough for everyone.

Oh, one other small point: Mr. Smith has been CEO of Office Depot for 16 months. That's almost a \$3 MILLION a MONTH bonus. Not bad work if you can get it!

## AND THE WORKERS?

Oh yes, let's not forget the workers.

Let's see, they are not Union, so we can't blame any Office Depot problems on them. No scapegoat there.

Of course, I doubt if Office Depot is providing them with any severance (which they probably would have IF they had a Union contract). If the top boss gets two years payout (severance), why doesn't the company that's paying five top executives \$38 MILLION (severance), at least give their workers two years salary (severance) so that they too could survive, at least in the short term.

No, those workers will likely have to ap-

ply for unemployment benefits, food stamps and other public assistance programs just to survive.

Ah, but they will now be classified as free-loaders or people who feel they are entitled to something for nothing. Yes, we did find our convenient scapegoat!

## DIVIDE AND CONQUER

And is anyone complaining (except of course the thousands of Office Depot workers who are being screwed over)? Not really.

The Roland C. Smith's of the world have done a masterful job of the old "divide and conquer" technique. They have managed to convince workers that only want to earn a decent living so they can provide for their families, that anything that happens to someone other than them is OK. They want to make sure that America's workers don't unite...like in a Union!

I question how long workers, Union and non-union alike are going to allow the 1 percent like Roland C. Smith to control so much?

And while I'm not advocating taking to the streets, (at least not yet, but....) when are we as human beings - Union, Non-Union, Tea Party, liberal, conservative, male, female, Christian and non-Christian, etc. going to figure out that we should all be standing arm-in-arm and demand decent pay and working conditions for all, not just for the Roland C. Smith's of the world?

They say in America anything is possible if you just work hard. You know, "the American dream." I don't think for the average worker the American Dream is to become a millionaire because that's not realistic. However the 1 percent want us to believe we can become millionaires if it weren't for your lazy neighbor or co-worker. It's divide and conquer at its best.

## MY DREAM IS MUCH SIMPLER

My dream is that before I am gone, workers across America and around the globe will figure out how to peacefully demand decent pay and decent living standards for all.

I know that the workers at Office Depot do not deserve the blight they are about to receive just as surely as Mr. Smith does not deserve the insane reward for screwing his fellow workers who made his success possible.

My fear is that if we do not figure out how to peacefully and reasonably allow redistribution of the wealth of the 1 percent so that workers can earn a decent living and a little more, then the 1 percent will control everything in our lives.

God help us all if WE allow that to happen!

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## Straubs buys St. Charles' Midtowne Market



### Minimal changes expected

For almost three decades, Midtowne Market in St. Charles has been a place where neighbors meet and market clerks know customers by name.

Last month, Straubs Markets purchased the 30-year-old market, but not to worry, former owner Scott Kohrs says it's primarily a behind the scenes change.

"Midtowne will still be your favorite neighborhood grocery store. It's just that it will be owned by Straubs," said Kohrs who will stay on as store manager. "Straubs will make some tweaks and improvements as time goes on, but those changes will all be positive. With Straubs depth of experience, it's a great fit for us to become a part of their family, so to speak."

Straubs, a business that dates back to selling ice cream at the 1904 Worlds Fair, completed the purchase of the old town St. Charles neighborhood grocery in February, adding to its holdings in Clayton, the Central West End and Town and Country.

Midtowne IGA previously known as Mid-Towne IGA has undergone other changes since it opened in 1984. In 2013, Mid-Towne IGA changed its name to Midtowne Market

after owners swapped suppliers SUPERVALU Inc with Associated Wholesale Grocers in an effort to remain competitive.

Kohrs said Midtowne will still have the same great deli and bakery, wonderful meat cutters and store clerks—and 99 percent of our employees, Kohrs said. In turn, the employees have retained their Local 655 benefits and pay, he said.

"The whole idea was to make this store more viable in the long run," Kohrs said. "The Straubs purchase creates a much better formula for success rather than trying to make it alone in this environment, this day and age."

He says he's been impressed with how Straubs has thrown themselves into making Midtowne better.

"They've been pleasantly surprised at how well we do things, and we've been impressed with their abilities to help make things more efficient and competitive with other stores. In the long run it's going to be a win, win for us, and most importantly for the customers," Kohrs said.

"The recession has forced us to reinvent ourselves. We want to be here another 30 years from now."

Midtowne Market is located at 317 Hawthorn Ave., St. Charles.

## WANT WEEKENDS OFF?

Watch your Union bulletin board for more information on the VOP (Volunteer Organizing Program)

Contact David Cook at 636-736-2701

## Get your walking shoes ready... Join Local 655's Team

UFCW Local 655 is sponsoring a team in the Susan G. Komen Walk to be held Saturday, June 13 and is recruiting those who would like to help.

The Local will pay \$10 of the \$30 registration fee for



the first 50 members who register. The fee includes a Komen T-shirt and a Local 655 Union logo item.

For information or to register, contact Nancy Parker at 636-736-2763 or email [nparker@ufcw655.org](mailto:nparker@ufcw655.org).

REGISTRATION MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN MAY 20

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