

## Chicago corruption includes CTU elections

By Al Korach

The great Chicago Teachers Union retiree delegate election of 2006 is over and the results are in. Much to my surprise, I was again reelected. The election results have been announced, despite a number of stupid procedural errors in the way it was conducted.

I must say that as a first test of the "New UPC" (United Progressive Caucus) and the new Rules and Election Committee, they did not pass the competency test. It may be time for CTU President Marilyn Stewart to take both the chairperson of Rules Elections and Mark A. Ochoa (the CTU Financial Secretary) into her office for that long talk. After all isn't it the duty of highly paid personnel not only to do a competent job, but to protect the president from unwarranted criticism?

A few months ago, Marilyn Stewart purged the Rules-Elections Committee of almost everyone who had served on that committee in previous years. This included the committee chair (Lee White), the committee secretary (George Schmidt, who has also been denied the right to be a member of the union), more than a dozen committee members (including this reporter) and even Lou Pyster, who had served on the Rules-Elections Committee since before some people in the "New UPC" were born! Although Rules-Elections was not the only committee that was purged (a number of committees that had done important jobs for the membership — such as Testing and Leadership Training — were completely abolished), the impact on the credibility of the union when elections are run shoddily is great.

Well, Chicago isn't the only major city experiencing strange policies.

I was amazed to hear that the Dallas Texas school board is trying to find ways to circumvent the law. They wish to hire hundreds of illegal aliens to teach the thousands of non-English speaking students in their public school system. They find that their salary system does not attract certified bilingual teachers. When board members were asked why they do not raise the salary level, they remained mute on the subject.

Corruption and Chicago have always found a way to get together, to the point where the words are almost synonyms. I find it most interesting to note the problems surrounding our mayor and his office. Here we have a man that in essence is in control of our city school system. Since 1995 he has appointed all the members of the Chicago Board of Education and the "Chief Executive Officer" (CEO) of the Chicago Public Schools ("CPS"). While Mayor Daley claims he is attempting to bring some order to the schools, his administration is beset with wholesale corruption just about everywhere else. Not a day goes by without some new revelation, indictment, or the resignation of some key personnel. It seems that in his many press conferences, he is unable to find the word corruption in his vocabulary.

With the resignation of City Clerk James Laski, the total of at least 11 members from the Daley cabinet have resigned or have been fired. I believe that there has not been a department that has not come under some kind of federal scrutiny — except the Chicago Board of Education. I believe that this is only the beginning. It appears that with the attorneys it has become "Let's make a deal" time. It seems that party loyalty always stops at the prison's door.

Chicago teachers regularly read about violence in the schools, but nasty violence isn't limited to Chicago. After spending a lifetime with children as an educator, things still occur that confound and cause me deep concern. As a parent, these occurrences also cause me to stop and think. The thought of three teenage Florida boys going out early in the morning with a baseball bat, a golf club and a paintball gun to beat some defenseless human being to death seems improbable.

This happened just a short distance from where I reside. The boys — although high school dropouts — seemed to come from good families and had no police records. So, why the mayhem? They have been charged with murder and psychologists will have a field day trying to explain why.

There have been a number of questions over the years regarding public video surveillance and the right of the public to privacy. This issue may come up during the trial of these three individuals. These young men were caught and identified because their mayhem was done under the eyes of video surveillance cameras. They did their crime and later millions watched. Will the boy's attorneys claim that it was illegal to video their mayhem. Or! Do people have a right to be beaten to death in private?

Those of us that have been in education for many years have seen an increase in the amount of serious crimes perpetrated by juveniles. Some of these serious crimes have occurred in or near our schools. Many teachers have cited unsafe conditions as one of the reasons that caused them to leave education for other endeavors. Others will not take assignment in certain areas.

Of course it's getting near Chicago teacher's contract time. How do I know it down here in Florida? Chicago's CEO is announcing he's broke again. So what's new? The only problem in this is the thought that he may ask for a deferment to pay into the pension fund.

On a more serious note not only to the trade union movement but also to the nation is the announcement by the Ford Motor Company. Ford told the press that it plans to cut 25,000 to 30,000 hourly jobs by 2012 and close seven assembly plants. There are many reasons for this. The best reason I heard was from Bill Ford Jr. — "Selling what you have rather than what consumers want doesn't make sense."

If you think this will have no impact for those in the educational field guess again. Marlene and I went car shopping using the newspaper's advertisements as a guide. That ultra cheap model is there but when you add the necessary equipment you are now about \$6,000.00 over the papers' advertised price. I have a 2002 Jeep with over 60,000 miles on it. It runs well, so I'll just stay out of hock and run it.

It wasn't long after Ford that GM made a similar announcement. The retirees should be heartened by GM's chairman and CEO, Rick Wagoner's announcement. He will voluntarily reduce his salary to about \$1.1 million. It will be interesting to note if many public pension funds carry GM and Ford stock. GM announced that it is cutting its dividend in half. GM health care reductions will affect 100,000 retirees.

I hear Walgreen's and Publix are thinking about opening in-store clinics. They got you with the pharmaceuticals and soon they may have you also with the medical bills before you get out of the store.

I just received a telephone call from Chicago congratulating me on my reelection to the Chicago Teachers Union House of Delegates. It does not take a genius to realize the next years will be critical for active as well as retired teachers. There is no doubt that there will be a concerted effort to relieve both the board and the state of their pension responsibilities. Will the current leadership of the CTU while beating their breasts cooperate with the dismantling of the pension fund? Will the head of the retirees finally get up in the House of Delegates and say something. Anything!

One has only to read the papers and listen to the news. Over and over we hear of corporations trying to pass their pension obligations over to others or to just turn the retirees loose on their own. If you think this could not happen to you guess again. I just had a funny thought. Will any Illinois legislator vote against pension protection and then receive a plaque at the next Legislators Appreciation Dinner?

I'm going to end this month's article with a warning. There have been pages and pages of advertisement regarding the government's pharmaceutical plan. My advice is to please know what you are signing up for. So far it seems the best choice is to stick with plans proposed by the Teachers Pension Fund.

As usual I'd like to inform Chicago area retirees where for some reason fuel is cheaper. If you travel south to the Florida Keys you will have no problem purchasing unleaded regular at \$2.29 a gallon. While you are paying \$2.29 you should note that Exxon Mobil Corporation fourth quarter profit rose 27%. Their earnings for all of 2005 jumped to \$36.1 billion. It seems that all oil companies posted record earnings.