

State, workers win with pay contract

State and union officials claimed victory Saturday when negotiators from the state and the Oregon Public Employees Union came to a tentative agreement on salary increases over the next two years.

The agreement calls for a 5 percent wage increase in July, followed by a 2 percent increase in 1997. The agreement must still be ratified by union members and the Oregon Legislature before it becomes official.

The agreement is evidence that the workers' strike was effective in prompting a favorable settlement to the salary dispute. It's highly unlikely that the state would have agreed to as large a raise if the union simply begged and pleaded for it. The strike was necessary to demonstrate the resolve of the union and show that they were serious about wanting a raise — and were willing to stake their livelihoods on it. Employees who were on strike during the work stoppage, many of whom don't earn large salaries to begin with, lost hundreds of dollars of wages.

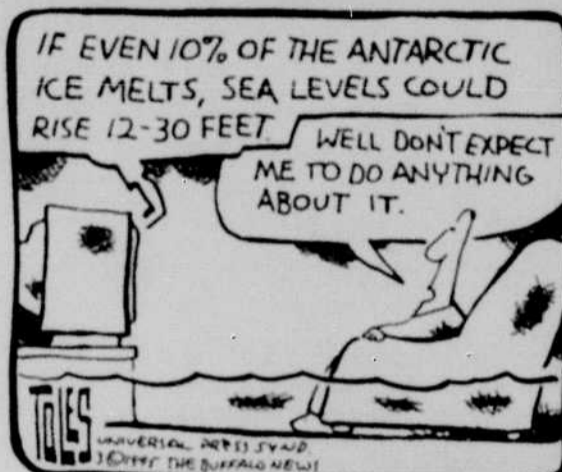
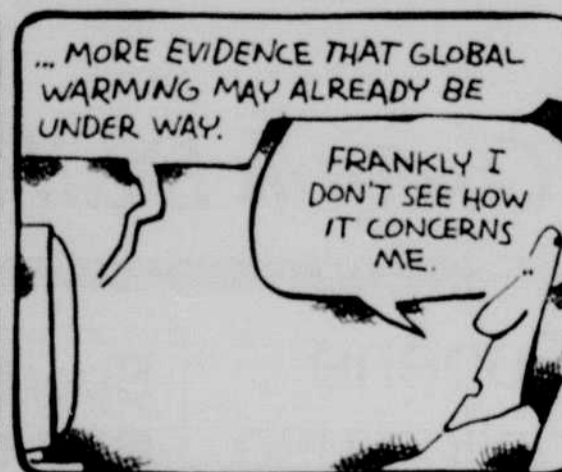
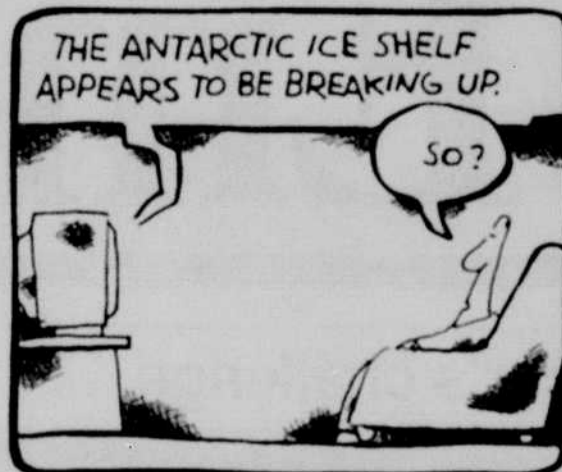
Although the union should be given credit for standing up for its beliefs, the state must also be given credit for being willing to negotiate and to help settle the strike. It is unfortunate that a strike was needed to convince state administrators that union workers were serious about their demands, but the state eventually did work to use budget forecasts to the benefit of state workers — a commendable action.

During the strike, it was often everyday Oregonians who complained about the lack of state services available. However, those Oregonians were the people responsible for passing Measure 8, which mandates that public employees contribute 6 percent of their wages to their pensions, last November. Citizens should have known there would have been resistance from state employees who were forced to give up 6 percent of their already, in some cases, meager paychecks.

The strike was instrumental in demonstrating to Oregonians that public employees play a bigger part in their lives than they previously knew. Whether residents need to renew a driver's license at DMV or pay tuition at Oregon Hall, chances are that the person who assists them is a public employee. The public should know when public employees are hurt, the state and its services to residents will suffer. The strike vividly demonstrated that fact.

State employees serve Oregonians daily in more ways than most citizens realize. If anything positive can come out of the week-long work stoppage and lengthy negotiations, it would be that citizens are aware that public employees are not nameless, faceless individuals who can be counted on to give up money whenever the state has a budget crunch. Public employees deserve to earn a competitive salary and get respect from Oregonians — both in the Legislature and throughout the state.

Because of the settlement, both the state and many of its workers can get back to the business of serving Oregonians. With the settlement, everyone comes out a winner.



COMMENTARY

Strike peaceful, legal form of protest

Chris Brady and Matt Kertesz

Now that the Oregon Public Employee's Union (OPEU) strike has ended, for the time being, we in the campus community have an opportunity to take stock of what we can learn from the workers' action. Sentiment toward the workers' actions remains in large part shaped by apathy and misinformation. Many are left asking, "What was this all for?"

When the strike began, the University administration sent memos to professors and Graduate Teaching Fellows to notify them of their obligation to hold classes as usual and to cross picket lines, stating that the strike was not against the University. The University took care to appear like it was functioning normally and thus ignored the valuable work done by its workers. The effect was to create an atmosphere antagonistic toward the strikers.

In reality, the University, an agent of the state, should have some interest in the well-being of its workers. So why did no memoranda go out in support of the workers, encouraging professors to take time to explain or even discuss why the workers were, indeed, forced to go on strike? For whatever reason, any approval remained tacit. Why did no administrators have the wherewithal to thank the workers publicly for their services?

One result of the lack of administrative support for its own workers is that students missed the opportunity to learn about labor action and the OPEU strike in particular. A strike is meant to be a nonviolent withholding of labor to make management wake up to reality and see how necessary a motivated workforce is to its operation. Workers do not want to destroy their employment; striking is merely a way to avoid being taken advantage of.

A picket line is both a protest and a way to guard against replacement workers (scabs) from betraying a legally-sanctioned boycott of work. If replacement workers can cross picket lines and take the jobs of picketers, workers here in the United States might just as well dissolve their unions and submit to the desires and demands of management.

Unfortunately, in a profit-driven society, striking or otherwise interrupting production in the name of people's rights can be portrayed as aggressive. The *Emerald* fell into the trap when it ran the headline "OPEU strike... comes to a peaceful end" (*ODE*, May 15). Historically, through hired thugs or provocation, management has been the instigator of labor violence. Administrations, in this case, the State of Oregon, benefit by making workers look like the bullies when they are victims.

So we must ask why the workers went on strike and why, if anyone is upset about loss of services, they are not the ones to focus anger toward. Two years ago, Oregon state workers (OPEU is the union for this group), agreed to delay wage increases until the state had a budget surplus because their state was in financial trouble; now they face a 6 percent pay cut due to last year's passage of Measure 8. This means that as of July 1, state workers' take-home

pay will revert to 1991 levels, while the cost of living has gone up about 3 percent each year.

Oregon now has a budget surplus of \$550 million. However, while Measure 5 from 1990 (a major cause of the financial trouble) was a windfall for corporations in this state, at least \$150 million of the state's budget surplus appears to be headed toward more breaks for corporations and the state workers are forgotten.

At this stage of the struggle (which, by the way, is not just OPEU's struggle but part of a resistance to legislative attacks on labor, including an Oregon bill that would lower the minimum wage in Oregon by 40 cents per hour), workers may feel demoralized. The media have paid more attention to OPEU members' dwindling finances than to the fundamental unfairness of the state which has caused it. In a country considered the bastion of world capitalism and Business First!, it is not hard to understand why so many people are ignorant of labor organization or its importance.

The OPEU workers bravely took the initiative in going on strike. We must follow their lead by educating ourselves and others about the struggle. If we all know the facts, we can act and we all can benefit.

Chris Brady is a history major and Matt Kertesz is an English major at the University.

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

Editor-in-Chief: Kaly Soto
Managing Editor: David Thom
Editorial Editor: Robbie Reeves
News Art Editor: Jeff Paslay
Freelance Editor: Lori Bettineski
News Editor: Rebecca Merritt
Sports Editor: Chris Metz
Supplements Editor: Trista Noel
Night Editor: Rebecca Merritt

Associate Editors: Amy Columbo, Student Government/Activities, Marcelene Edwards, Community, Colleen Pohlig, Higher Education/Administration

News Staff: Steve Asbury, Regina Brown, Melody Conroy, Amy L. Devenport, Primo Fontana, Gayle Forman, Matt Garton, Joe Harwood, Kris Henry, Trevor Kearney, Shannon Kilduff, Adam Kincher, Samantha Martin, Matt McBride, Mark McTyre, Patrick Minford, Ben Moebius, Natalie Montgomery, Anne Moser-Kornfeld, Sherry Rainey, Natasha Shepard, Paul Van Sickle, Sean Smith, Mathew Stiffer, Mara Stine, Jeremy Stinson, Kim Weiss, Brian Wornack, Les Zaczek

General Manager: Judy Riedl
Advertising Director: Mark Walter
Production Manager: Michele Ross

Advertising: Anne Amador, Anita Borgaes, Marco Ching, Tony Fox, Nicole Herzmark, Kelly Lyon, Jeremy Mason, Sarah Mitchell, Tom Mittelstaedt, Kelsey Wekell

Classified: Becky Merchant, Manager Kyle Davis, Joli Selten

Distribution: John Long, Ferenc Rakoczi, Graham Simpson

Business: Kathy Carbone, Supervisor Judy Connolly

Production: Dehila McCobb, Production Coordinator Shawna Abele, Tara Gaultney, Brad Joss, Molly McCanta, Jennifer Roland, Clayton Yee

Newsroom: 346-5511
Display Advertising: 346-3712

Business Office: 346-5512
Classified Advertising: 346-4343

LETTERS & COMMENTARY POLICY

The Oregon Daily Emerald welcomes letters and commentaries from the public concerning topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

Commentaries should be between 600 and 800 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the commentary is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.