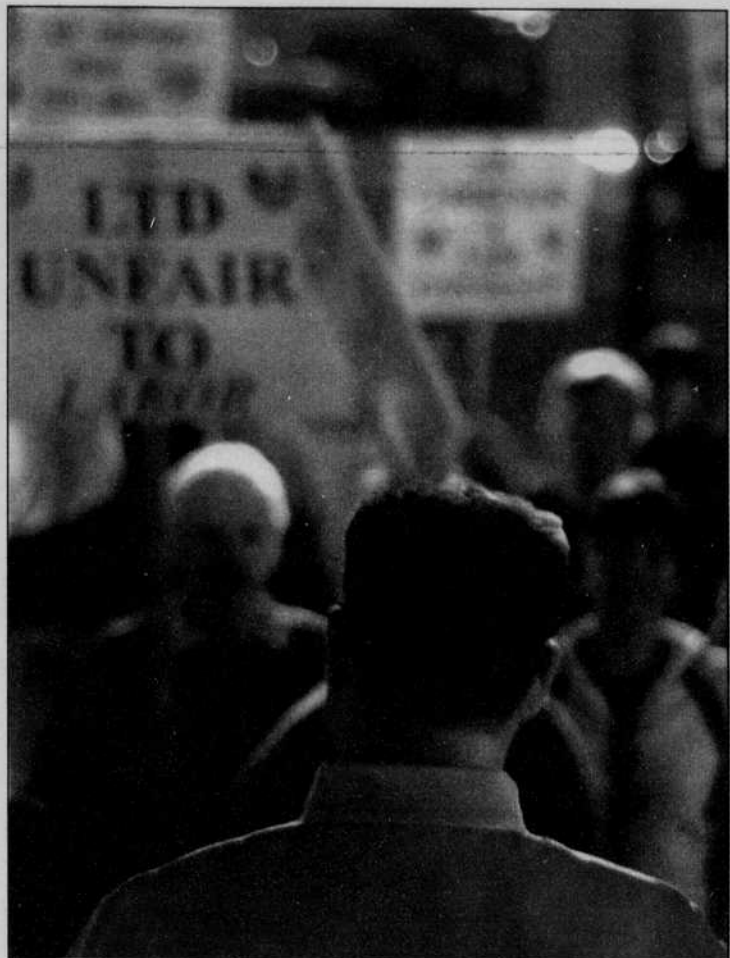


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TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Clockwise from left: Jonathan Hunt, Amalgamated Transit Union Division 757 vice president, rallies Lane Transit District strikers to look for LTD General Manager Ken Hamm at the SELCO 69th Annual Membership Meeting at the Hilton Eugene Hotel; Gaia Perinchieff, a Service Employees International Union organizer, shows support for ATU; Bus rider Ken Kickman joins LTD strikers at the LTD downtown station Monday night.

Weekend conference explores law, environment

This year's theme was "Living as if nature mattered" and addressed both local and global challenges

BY EVA SYLWESTER
NEWS REPORTER

Speakers from around the country and beyond emphasized the global nature of environmental law issues this past weekend at the University's 23rd annual Public Interest Environmental Law Conference. The conference, which ran from Thursday, March 3 to Sunday, March 6, was organized by the student environmental law organization Land Air Water.

This year's conference theme was "Living as if nature mattered," and was taken from the title of the book "Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered" by Bill Devall.

"It's what's missing in decision-making in government and society these days," conference Co-director Zack Mazer said. "We don't really regard nature when we're trying to decide what to do as a culture, and we're trying to change that."

Devall, a professor emeritus at Humboldt State University in California, spoke at the conference Thursday night.

University law professor John Bonine helped initiate the conference 22 years ago.

"We decided, students and I and professor Mike Axline ... that we wanted to bring together lawyers, law students and activists," Bonine said. "The idea was that the law students could maybe find a job, the lawyers could maybe find a client, and the activists could help the lawyers and remind them why they went to law school."

Bonine said the conference this year included 200 speakers and several thousand participants.

Speakers shared different messages of environmental challenges and their local and global impact.

"All over the world, we find that minorities and the poor bear the burdens of our highly technical society," said Beverly Wright, founder and director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Xavier University in Louisiana. To illustrate how similar situations occur in different countries, Wright displayed nearly identical photographs of chemical plants located next to playgrounds in a black neighborhood in Louisiana and a black neighborhood in South Africa.

"A fight for environmental justice is really a fight for the protection of all of us," Wright said. "Pollution doesn't stop at a particular street. The air blows everywhere."

In another speech, cancer researcher Dr. Samuel Epstein described industries' reckless practices with toxic chemicals as "a violation of human rights and white-collar crime."

Epstein blamed these practices for rising cancer rates, and said incidence of all cancers in the United States has increased 23 percent from 1973 to 1999. Currently, one in two men and one in three women will get cancer at some point in their lifetimes, he said.

"If that isn't the kind of thing that's going to touch 100 percent of Americans, I could step out and start selling newspapers," Epstein said.

Former FOX Television news reporters Jane Akre and Steve Wilson spoke after Epstein. Akre and Wilson were fired for refusing to distort information in a news story on rBGH, a growth hormone-injected into cows at many American dairies.

"Sam (Epstein) said the truth shall set you free," Wilson said. "It set us free of our home and most of our life savings. It set us free, all right."

Other speakers also showed how environmental changes have impacted them personally.

CONFERENCE, page 8

Union bus drivers picket, march

With both sides unwilling to budge, Monday's rally may be the beginning of a long process

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF
SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

Bus-free streets and stations lined with picketers marked the first day of a county-wide Lane Transit District driver strike Monday, as the Amalgamated Transit Union Division 757 protested LTD's handling of ongoing contract negotiations. This is the first driver strike in LTD history.

There's no telling how long the strike will last, but a mediation session has been scheduled for Thursday at the Hilton Eugene Hotel.

Both ATU and LTD representatives said they have pushed as far as they can go and it is up to the other side to settle the 10-month dispute.

"We'll be there to talk, but we are not in a position to stretch any further than where we were in mediation (last Friday)," LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora said.

Carol Allred, an LTD driver and executive board officer for ATU Division 757, said the union is not looking to make any different contract offers than it has in the past and is prepared to stay out on strike as long as it will take for LTD workers to get a fair contract.

"It would have been much easier to keep us in the door in the first place than to get us back in the door," Allred said at a union rally Monday night at the LTD downtown station.

Lane County Commissioner Peter Sorenson joined more than 100 union supporters at the rally, and said it is important for elected officials to get involved in issues like the strike because they are representative of nationwide problems.

"Having a contract that is given to or forced on the worker, that's something community leaders need to be concerned about," Sorenson said, referring to LTD's Feb. 1 implementation of a portion of the disputed contract.

Sorenson said such "unilateral implementation" is not respectful of the definition of a contract, which requires both parties to agree.

"Obviously, we don't have agreement here," Sorenson said.

After the rally, about 40 people walked to the

SELCO 69th Annual Membership Meeting at the Hilton Eugene Hotel, where LTD General Manager Ken Hamm was rumored to be in attendance seeking election to the credit union's Board of Directors.

ATU Division 757 Vice President Jonathan Hunt said the intent behind going to the meeting was to express the union's disapproval of Hamm's handling of the contract negotiations and to voice concerns about the possibility of him being elected to the SELCO board.

Hamm was not in attendance and did not win the board position he was seeking. However, Hunt said the union's presence was not a waste because Hamm will surely hear about the visit, and the importance of the contract negotiations to the union members will be reiterated to him.

University senior Stacy Borke joined picketers at the LTD downtown station Monday afternoon to show support for the union cause.

"Workers have rights that aren't being paid attention to," Borke said, emphasizing the need for community members to get involved in labor issues. "People depend so much on

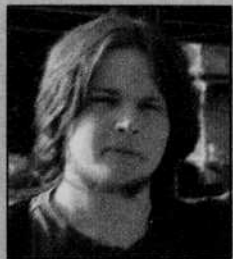
LTD, page 4

HOW ARE YOU ADJUSTING TO THE LTD STRIKE?



AMY STEIN | freshman

"It makes it really hard to get off campus. I don't drive and (there's) no other transportation besides the bus."



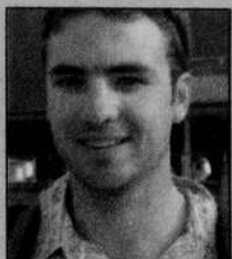
MIKE PAYNE | senior

"I'm looking for a friend to get a ride from right now. I didn't know about the strike but found out on the front page today."



BRITANY MOSS | freshman

"I had a job interview today. I got a ride but had to go an hour and a half early, and my friend had to leave class to pick me up. It made me look really bad because the bus is my main source of transportation and it's really unreliable right now."



NICK GILLESPIE | junior

"I had to ride my bike because of the strike. I wanted to ride the bus and went to the station, but it was desolate. I had to go back and borrow my roomie's bike."