

Rally: Union protests: Same work receives different pay

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Holmberg read a poem she wrote titled "Why the Pioneer Mother became a Member - a Poetic Tale," in which she portrayed the Pioneer Mother saying, "I'd heard the laments of classified, Through my many lively contract campaigns, I thought perhaps they're spoiled. They'd rally round from time to time — a purple mass embroidered. ...With parties stalled in mediation, and without any new TA's, The union was far from content. This was and is the honest truth — They need a settlement!!!!"

"We want to reach a tentative agreement at the bargaining table so we get what we deserve after waiting for two years," Holmberg said.

Rally attendants wrote comments and left them on the chancellor's desk as they marched through the office chanting "What do we want? A fair contract! When do we want it? Now!"

After two days of bargaining with OUS management, several issues have still not been settled. On the list of requests, SEIU workers asked for statewide, not regional selectives. This request is in response to OUS management's proposal to pay workers from different regions different wages, regardless of the type of work they do.

"We're looking for fairness for all workers and we want selectives across the state," Holmberg said. "We're tired of waiting."

Holmberg went on to explain that OUS has divided the union over the last 10 years, and this difference in wages for the same work would continue that trend.

"People with the same classification should get the same rates," she said.

Another issue on the table is the SEIU proposal to add a ninth step for Information Technology workers — people who maintain computer systems in each department. Holmberg explained that there are currently eight steps a classified worker goes through, and each step represents a pay raise calculated by inflation and the standard of living.

Currently, there are several long-term employees who have already reached their eighth step, making their salary range topped out, Holmberg said.

SEIU workers at the University are also requesting a "personal day," which other state workers have been granted, and the adoption of "bully-boss" language to describe unfair treatment and an inappropriate workplace.

SEIU President said after the rally that she is hopeful an agreement will be reached Friday, the next scheduled bargaining day.

"We're hoping they will come up with a settlement, and then we can vote to ratify our new contract," Yoshishige said. She said that because steps had been frozen over the last two years, a new agreement was necessary to compensate workers for their losses.

During the first two bargaining sessions the major economics were settled.

"We made an agreement (at the last meeting) to bring workers up to a market wage in their classification," Yoshishige said. "We settled on a three-step increase over the next two years, so that by the time we (renegotiate) our next contract, people will be somewhat compensated."

Bart Lewis, who works in business affairs and was a contract negotiator from 1997 to 2002, said his concern is ensuring the University service workers get treated the same as other workers around the state.

"Higher education is trying to have regional selectives, so people get paid differently in different schools. My concern is that we get the same increases that other state workers are getting, and IT workers in particular," Lewis said.

The next bargaining session is Friday in Portland and another date has not yet been set, as it may not be necessary. Holmberg encourages supporters to write letters with their concerns and send them to the chancellor's office in Campbell Hall.

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