

Multnomah Education SD strike averted

A strike was averted, and nearly 400 union workers at Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) got an agreement they can probably live with — thanks to the late-stage intervention of several elected MESD Board members.

MESD is one of 20 special regional education districts in Oregon, funded by the state to help local school districts with services like special education for students with disabilities. Workers at MESD, with offices in Northeast Portland, provide support services to seven Portland-area school districts. Depending on their job title and experience, they earn from \$11 to \$17 an hour and average \$26,000 a year. MESD workers have long belonged to Local 1995 of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Local 1995 was a sleepy affiliate of Oregon AFSCME until it came alive in the last year in response to aggressive management tactics.

In contract talks, MESD was represented by Salem attorney Bruce Zagar, whose take-it-or-leave-it bargaining style led to a strike in the Sandy, Ore. school district last year. It was not clear why a district which already has a superintendent, an assistant superintendent,

ent, a head of human resources and an in-house attorney felt the need to hire Zagar. But hire him it did, and for over a year, management offered a 1 percent raise and demanded a change to the definition of "full time" that would have resulted in the loss of health coverage to nearly half the bargaining unit.

The previous contract expired July 2005. MESD management wouldn't change anything in the dollars-and-cents part of its proposal, and insisted that no deal could be struck on non-economic issues until agreement was reached on economics. That stance changed when the two sides entered mediation in March, but the two sides still edged toward the brink.

On March 15, MESD sent a letter to all workers saying it planned to impose its offer on them whether the union agreed or not. When the union began informational picketing and threatening to strike, MESD hired security guards, confiscated the badges of union workers, ran a help wanted ad for strike-breakers in the March 19 Oregonian, and told workers to take their personal belongings home.

Those measures may have been meant to intimidate, said Council 75 staff representative Issa Simpson, but they ended up helping the unit get organized. Simpson said management's conduct toward union members was so disrespectful that by the end, even formerly apathetic union members wore union T-shirts and buttons and voted for

strike authorization.

Union members and supporters packed the MESD Board's March 21 meeting and a rally just prior. Supporters included Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, Oregon State Senator Kurt Schrader and City of Portland Commissioner Randy Leonard and a group of pro-union demonstrators summoned by Portland Jobs with Justice.

For weeks, union workers had made impassioned appeals to the MESD Board, which included former union stalwart and Portland Jobs with Justice staffperson Geri Washington.

Now a strike neared. Board members Washington, Harry Ainsworth, Ron Chinn and Ken Kissir sat in on bargaining March 23, and the management team changed its position enough to win union agreement.

Union workers felt deserted by one erstwhile ally on the board, however.

Sy Kornbrodt, an MESD board member since 1996, is a former president of AFSCME Local 1442, and a current delegate to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council. Kornbrodt ran for MESD Board with the endorsement of Oregon AFSCME. But as the MESD dispute intensified and Local 1995 looked to the board for sympathy, Kornbrodt declared that he would recuse himself from any union-related matters because he felt a conflict of interest.

Kornbrodt's position went well beyond any legal requirement, said AFSCME Council 75 spokesperson Don

Loving, who himself serves on the Chehalem Park and Recreation District in Newberg. Loving said Oregon law requires only that officeholders publicly announce that a conflict of interest exists before voting on matters in which they have a direct financial stake.

"It would make little sense for us to encourage our members and retirees to get elected to such boards and commissions if they had to turn around and abstain every time a labor-related issue came up," Loving wrote in an e-mail to Kornbrodt, a former probation officer.

The employer offer that ended the dispute included two 2 percent raises, and an agreement to increase employer contributions to health coverage by 16 percent over the two years. That means no additional out-of-pocket costs for employees. And management took off the table its plan to change the definition of full-time.

Workers will vote by mail on the contract, and the result will be announced April 15.

Most contract resolutions include a pledge to drop legal action, but this time, Simpson said, the union will continue to pursue "unfair labor practice" charges with the state labor board, the better to restrain management behavior next time around. Since it took a year to bargain the two year deal, bargaining will begin again in just over a year. Simpson said the unit will leave its strike planning committee in place.

Cafeteria workers at Portland School District declare impasse April 3

Nutrition Services workers at Portland Public Schools delivered an impasse notice to Superintendent Vickie Phillips April 3 following months of bargaining. The 262 school employees are represented by Service Employees Local 503.

Negotiations have stalled over wages and health care insurance.

"We earn 8 percent to 20 percent less than our peers in other Portland school districts," said Deanna Gathman, a cook in the Dixon Street Administrative offices. "With the proposed increase in health insurance premiums, we're looking at a cut in pay to continue doing our jobs."

Vickie Fisher, who serves children meals at Kellogg Middle School, added, "We're the lowest-paid workers in the district. We've been in limbo since our contract expired almost a year ago. There is definitely an impasse. We hope this leads to a fair contract."

Contract negotiations began in March 2005.

Both parties have seven days to present the Oregon Employment Relations Board and the other party with its final offer. That begins a 30-day "cooling-off" period. At the end of the 30 days, the employer can either implement its final proposal or the workers can strike.

Southgate Mobile & RV Park

7911 SE 82nd Ave.
Portland, Oregon
Spaces Available up to 35'
503-771-5262

Your Mileage Is Showing . . .

It's Time For New Wheels!

New – Used – Refinance
Same Low Rate!

As low as **5.74%** APR
Plus

A chance to win a \$100 VISA gift card*



9955 SE Washington, Portland Oregon 97216-2439
(503) 253-8193 • www.ibewuufcu.com

Call today at (503) 253-8193 ext. 340
or (800) 356-6507

Our 5.74% APR rate is a *Limited Time Only* rate and requires automatic payment from your account at the Credit Union. You must be a member of the Credit Union and qualify for this loan based upon your credit history. A total of five \$100 VISA gift cards will be randomly drawn from loans financed through this promotion. You will be contacted by a Credit Union loan officer, should you win a \$100 VISA gift card. Offer expires April 30, 2006.

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS GUIDE TO REAL ESTATE INVESTING

Palm Springs, June 2006
Portland, July 2006
Seattle, August 2006

Learn how to get in the game of pre-foreclosures, mobile homes, pretty houses and junkers.

\$99 ADMITS 1, \$129 FOR 2.
You must preregister at:
www.absolutebeginnersrealestate-training.com or 800-798-4493



(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)
Established in 1900 at Portland, Oregon
as a voice of the labor movement.

4275 NE Halsey St., P.O. Box 13150,
Portland, Ore. 97213
Telephone: (503) 288-3311
Fax Number: (503) 288-3320

Editor: Michael Gutwig
Staff: Don McIntosh, Cheri Rice

Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co. Inc., a non-profit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and SW Washington. Subscriptions \$13.75 per year for union members.

Group rates available to trade union organizations.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID
AT PORTLAND, OREGON.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS NOTICE: Three weeks are required for a change of address. When ordering a change, please give your old and new addresses and the name and number of your local union.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS, P.O. BOX 13150-0150,
PORTLAND, OR 97213

