

Contractor fires pro-union Bend bus driver

BEND — A popular bus driver who was instrumental in organizing a union at Bend Area Transit (BAT) was fired from his job April 11.

Russ Evans was terminated by Paratransit Services — an out-of-state contractor that runs Bend's transit system — just nine days after he had appeared before the Bend City Council to ask for political help in getting the company to recognize the union.

On Jan. 29, BAT employees voted 19-15 to join Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 in an election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). There are 40 drivers in the bargaining unit.

It was a bruising election campaign, with the company conducting mandatory anti-union meetings and sending letters to workers' homes. Shortly after the union filed for the election in late 2006, the company responded by sending employees a four-page letter outlining its opposition. Pro-union workers were excluded from the mandatory meetings, where workers reportedly were told that they might lose their jobs if they voted the union in.

Paratransit Services then challenged the election outcome. An NLRB hearings officer overruled the challenge and certified the union. But the company still is refusing to recognize Local 757 and will not bargain a contract.

At a Bend City Council meeting April 4, commissioners voted 4-3 to



RUSS EVANS

write a letter to Paratransit Services encouraging the contractor to recognize the union.

"On behalf of the Bend City Council, I am writing to encourage Paratransit Services to drop its efforts to appeal the decision of the NLRB regarding the establishment of a union among the Paratransit workers in Bend," wrote Mayor Bruce Abernethy in a letter dated April 19. "A majority of the City Council encourages Paratransit to accept the ruling of the NLRB and terminate any efforts to appeal ..."

Evans, an elected leader of the BAT unit of Local 757 and a shop steward, was fired after driving an unfamiliar route at the direction of Paratransit Operations Supervisor Ronnie Burnett. Burnett, who has previously singled

out other pro-union drivers for disciplinary action, rode on board the bus with Evans and took notes.

BAT employees who support the union contend that Evans was targeted by Paratransit management in retaliation for his leadership in the union, because he spoke at the City Council meeting, and because he testified at the State Legislature in support of a bill that would ban anti-union tactics by employers (similar to those used by Paratransit) in union campaigns.

"We believe it's retaliation, pure and simple," said Jon Hunt, president of ATU Local 757. The union has filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the NLRB.

Evans acknowledges that he made some errors in judgment while driving on April 11 (he apparently missed a stop and turned around). But he and other drivers say that he did nothing illegal, nor anything that damaged BAT property or compromised the safety of any passengers.

"I made a couple of poor choices under intense pressure," Evans said.

Hunt told the NW Labor Press that other drivers have had accidents where they were at fault, and made considerably worse errors than Evans did — without being fired — or disciplined.

In Evans' case, Paratransit Manager Kathy Ostrom and Burnett took the extra step of filing their charges with the company's corporate office in Bremer-

ton, Wash., rather than simply dealing with it on a local basis. Burnett's report repeatedly claimed that Evans "deliberately" and "willfully" broke the law, as well as company rules.

Evans strongly disputes those claims, noting that he "loves his job," and has had a perfect driving record since being hired five months ago.

He has asked why Burnett chose to remain absolutely silent on the route rather than speaking up, if Burnett thought safety was being compromised. Evans pointed out that Burnett, as a supervisor, could have offered warning, direction or advice in the spirit of the "teamwork" Paratransit Services continually promotes.

Paratransit has spent an estimated \$25,000 appealing the union election. Paratransit Services receives between \$95,000 and \$101,000 a month from the city to run BAT, according to the city Finance Department.

A **SOLIDARITY RALLY** for Evans and the BAT bus drivers will be held from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 12 at Juniper Park in Bend. State Sen. Ben Westlund is tentatively scheduled to attend, along with Bend City Councilor Linda Johnson, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain and ATU Local 757 President Jon Hunt.

Rally participants are encouraged to take BAT to the Hawthorne Street bus terminal and walk the two blocks to Juniper Park.

PDC staffers vote to join AFSCME

Non-supervisory staffers at the Portland Development Commission voted May 1 to join the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The election was conducted by the Oregon Employment Relations Board for the 132 eligible employees. The vote to unionize was xx to xx.

PDC is the quasi-independent development arm of the City of Portland. Its executive director is Bruce Warner, a former Oregon Department of Transportation bureaucrat who was appointed to the post a year-and-a-half ago by Mayor Tom Potter.

said AFSCME Organizing Director Sue Lee-Allen.

PDC's annual budget of more than \$200 million is funded by tax dollars.

NOLC supports two challengers for School Board

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council has endorsed two challengers running for school board seats at Portland Public Schools.

The council supports neighborhood activist Ruth Adkins in Zone 1 and social worker Michele Schultz in Zone 2. Adkins is running against incumbent Doug Morgan, while Schultz is challenging incumbent David Wynde.

Schultz holds a master's degree in social work from Boston College. She has two children at Winterhaven K-8 school in inner Southeast Portland. She is a past PTA president and an active volunteer.

"We've been through a lot of turmoil," she told the NOLC Executive Board. "I got mad enough to run for office."

Shultz said she was "appalled" when school custodial jobs were contracted out. "What was touted as a money-saver will end up costing the district a lot of money," she said.

Adkins, founder of the Neighborhood Schools Alliance group, also opposes contracting out and is happy to see the regular custodians coming back.

A graduate of Yale University who works as a market research analyst, Adkins lives in the Hillsdale neighborhood of Southwest Portland and has three children in the Portland School District.

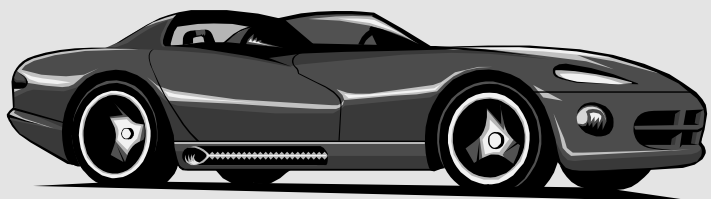
Adkins said citizens in the community, teachers and other school employees are feeling disenfranchised. "They feel they're not being heard in a lot of the decision-making," she said.

Both candidates say they want to involve the community more and improve communications of the board.



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