



NORTHWEST

LABOR
PRESSVolume 108
Number 12
June 15, 2007
Portland

Carpenters Unions' drywall workers strike

Some 1,300 members of Exterior and Interior Specialists Local 2154 in Portland, and Carpenters Local 1715 in Vancouver, 1065 in Salem, and 1273 in Eugene went on strike June 1. The major issue is money.

The Locals are affiliated with the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters and represent drywall hangers, acoustic ceiling and lather specialists in Oregon and SW Washington. They negotiate a master agreement with Associated Wall & Ceiling Contractors of Oregon and SW Washington Inc. The association represents 11 drywall and ceiling contractors in the area. Another 69 independent contractors typically sign off on whatever the association agrees to.

Since the strike began, 11 contractors have signed interim agreements with the Carpenters. Only one of the 11 is from the contractors association — Pacific Construction Systems. PCS is one of the largest drywall contractors in the Pacific Northwest. Its largest project in Oregon is the Peace Health Hospital in Eugene. Contractors signed to interim agreements are dispatching employees to work.

The drywallers are seeking a settlement similar to that in Washington State, where the Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association agreed to a new pact that increases compensation 6 percent in each of the next two



Members of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters' Exterior and Interior Specialists Local 2154 walk a picket line and blow noisemakers at a construction site in downtown Portland June 8. Drywall hangers and ceiling installers walked out June 1 in a dispute over increases in wages and benefits.

years. Union members ratified the contract last month on a vote of 407-256.

According to Doug Tweedy, executive secretary treasurer of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, the last offer submitted in Portland was a 4.3 percent raise each year for two years — only 70.4 percent of the increase ratified in Seattle.

Currently, drywall hangers and ceiling specialists in Oregon and Southwest Washington have a wage and benefit package totalling \$40.82 an hour. Of that, \$29.33 goes to wages.

For the same work in Western Washington, craftsmen and women now receive \$43.79 an hour, with \$32.53 of that paid in wages. They will get a 6 percent raise next June.

"The sheetrock is just as heavy in Portland as it is in Seattle," said Erik Franklin, spokesman for the Regional Council of Carpenters. Franklin said raises in the last drywall contract were eaten up by medical inflation.

In addition to the wall and ceiling contract in Washington, other non-drywall locals affiliated with the Carpenters ratified a new three-year deal with Associated General Contractors of Washington that increases wages and benefits \$7.20 an hour over the life of the agreement.

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Major bargaining under way this summer in Oregon

For more than 45,000 Oregon workers, it's contract season. At least 42,000 workers have union contracts expiring on a single day — June 30.

FREIGHTLINER — At Freightliner, about 900 members of four unions are facing a June 30 expiration of their three-year contract. The four unions — Machinists Local 1005 (about 670 members), Painters Local 1094 (about 100), Teamsters Local 305 (about 100), and Service Employees Local 49 (24) — bargain separately over work rules, and then together over wages and benefits. They've been in contract bargaining since mid-May, and the two sides expected to exchange economic proposals the week of June 18-22. The current Machinist contract gave workers \$2.50 an hour in wage increases and 40 cents an hour in pension contribution increases over its three-year term. But those increases failed to make up for the \$3 an hour workers gave up in 2001 when the company was losing money, and the current contract passed by just three votes in 2004. Though Machinists have authorized a strike if they don't get a new contract by June 30, unions at two Freightliner plants in North Carolina extended their contract past expiration while bargaining continued. To avert a strike, it's possible a similar deal could be reached in Portland.

GROCERY WORKERS — A unit of about 1,100 grocery and retail workers represented by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 in Lane County has been in bargaining over a new five-year contract since March. The unit's last contract expired Feb. 14. Jeff McDonald, Local 555 secretary-treasurer, says there has been progress toward an agreement with the Big Three — Fred Meyer, Safeway and Super Value (Albertsons) — and the two sides are still negotiating. Thus far, the employers have agreed to reduce the monthly employee contributions for health insurance, and improve dental benefits. But the employer group is also asking for dozens of economic and contractual concessions. As detailed on a union Website, groceryworkersunited555.org, the proposals include the right to pay as little as minimum wage in certain cases; the current contract requires that entry-level employees make at least 10 cents above minimum. By mutual agreement, the expired contract continues in force while bargaining continues. During the previous negotiations, it took until November, nine months after expiration, to seal a new deal, at which point employees got retroactive pay increases. UFCW will face the same employers in bargaining for the much bigger Portland-area contract next year.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEES — June 30 is the end of the State of Oregon fiscal year, and most state worker union contracts are synchronized to expire then. The contracts run in two-year increments to coincide with the state's biennial budget. That means Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 is in bargaining for 90 percent of the 44,000 workers it represents. Local 503 has two large units of state employees — the Department of Administrative Services unit (about 18,000 employees) and the Oregon University System unit (3,600 employees). The two units bargain separately over work rules and together on wages and benefits.

DAS is the central administrative agency of state government; among other things, it handles labor relations for the state's 32 executive branch agencies. The OUS unit consists of state university support staff.

For both units, SEIU wants continuation of fully-paid health insurance premiums for full-time workers, and no increase in monthly premiums for part-time workers. The union is also proposing a 4 percent wage increase each July 1, or inflation, whichever is greater, up to 6 percent.

The DAS offer is 2 percent raises Jan. 1 of 2008 and 2009, and

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