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Portland*SEIU's Andy Stern attends protest rally*

## Portland Public Schools sticks to draconian offers

The honeymoon is over. Unions at Portland Public Schools (PPS) had high hopes last October that a new superintendent, Carole Smith, might steer the district away from years of harsh labor relations stances toward the least-paid workers.

By now it's clear that hasn't happened.

In drawn-out bargaining with three separate unions, the district hasn't shifted much from the proposals it had before Smith was appointed: for some, savage wage cuts of up to one quarter; for others, wage increases that will account for just half the rate of inflation. And district labor negotiators are insisting that union employees pay the same monthly cost as much higher-paid non-represented administrators. In other words, \$11-an-hour cafeteria workers, \$14-an-hour custodians, \$15-an-hour school bus drivers, and \$16-an-hour secretaries could pay the same couple hundred dollars per month that \$100,000-a-year principals and central office higher-ups pay.

Unions are taking to the streets in protest, and appealing to the school



SEIU President Andy Stern addresses nearly 200 Portland Public School custodians, nutrition workers and their allies during a rally Jan. 28.

board to change course.

For an hour before the Jan. 28 PPS school board meeting, a crowd of about 200 rallied outside district's 501 North Dixon Street headquarters to focus attention on the district's plans for about 500 custodians and cafeteria workers — who are part of 43,000-member Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503.

Earlier in the day, the SEIU bargaining team walked out of mediation after getting the district's latest offer, which was worse than the previous one. Under the latest PPS proposal, the highest-paid custodians — head custodians overseeing half a dozen subordinates at the district's biggest high schools — would have their pay cut \$4.11 an hour, from \$23.62 to \$19.51. Head custodians at smaller schools, many with 10 or 20 years of experience at the district, would go from \$18.80 an hour to \$14.92 — a \$3.88-an-hour pay cut. Rank-and-file custodial helpers — who make up the bulk of the district's 300-strong bare-bones custodial crew — would go from \$14 an hour to \$11.43, a \$2.57-an-hour cut. And starting wages would drop from \$13.25 to \$11.15 an hour.

Meanwhile, the district's mostly part-time cafeteria workers, paid wages of \$12.70 an hour, are being offered a 1.5 percent annual increase. Inflation has been about 3 percent a year for the last five years, so cafeteria workers could expect to lose purchasing power each year. And that's before the in-

creased monthly premiums for health care.

The district is proposing to raise its health insurance contribution cap — for all workers — from \$779 to \$800.

The district also proposed to split the bargaining unit in two: cafeteria workers would have one contract, and custodians another. SEIU said no to that.

SEIU's next mediated negotiating session is scheduled for Feb. 5.

SEIU's rally drew powerful supporters, including Oregon Senate Majority Leader (and Oregon Secretary of State candidate) Kate Brown; Oregon House Speaker (and U.S. Senate candidate) Jeff Merkley, plus Steve Novick, his rival for the Democratic U.S. Senate nomination; Oregon State Sen. (and candidate for State Treasurer) Ben Westlund; Oregon House Speaker Pro Tem Diane Rosenbaum; and at least four other candidates for Oregon Attorney General, Portland City Council, and Oregon House.

Portland Association of Teachers President Jeff Miller was also there to show support. In March, the teachers will start their own negotiations with the district.

And SEIU's top brass was in attendance, including Local 503 Executive Director (and international vice president) Leslie Frane, her counterpart Alice Dale from SEIU Local 49, and SEIU's national president Andy Stern.

Stern, who was in Portland as a

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## Union membership on the rise Oregon adds 16,000; Washington 30,000

The unionized share of the labor market went up a bit nationwide in 2007, and in Oregon and Washington, according to the most recent annual report by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Nationally, 12.1 percent of employed wage and salary workers were members of a union in 2007, compared to 12 percent in 2006. Since the work force grew in number, that meant 311,000 more workers were union members, bringing total U.S. union membership to 15.7 million.

According to an analysis by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), a nonpartisan think tank, that one-tenth-of-a-percent increase is small, and may reflect statistical variation rather than an actual increase in the union membership share. Still, CEPR said, the uptick is striking because it is the first time since the

BLS began collecting annual union membership rates in 1983 that the union share has increased.

In Oregon, union membership rose to 14.3 percent in 2007, from 13.8 percent in 2006, BLS reported. That meant 227,000 union members, 16,000 more than in 2006. And Washington union membership was the nation's fourth highest, overtaking New Jersey, which was number four the previous year. Washington union membership was 20.2 percent in 2007, a slight increase from 19.8 percent in 2006. Total union membership in Washington rose 30,000 in 2007, to 579,000.

The estimates are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, a nationwide monthly survey of a statistical sample of about 60,000 households. The union membership data comes from one-quarter of the sample and is reported as a percentage

of wage and salary workers; unemployed and self-employed workers are excluded.

According to the BLS report, unionization was highest among public-sector workers, black men and older workers.

Public-sector workers had a union membership rate (35.9 percent) nearly five times that of private sector employees (7.5 percent). Within the public sector, local government workers had the highest union membership rate, 41.8 percent. And among occupational categories, education occupations had among the highest unionization of any, at 37.2 percent.

Within the private sector, the industries with the highest unionization rates were transportation and utilities (22.1 percent), telecommunications (19.7 percent), and construction (13.9

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## Welcome, Laborers #320

The Northwest Labor Press would like to welcome Laborers Local 320 as its newest subscribing union.

The Portland-based local represents approximately 1,100 workers in heavy and highway construction (roads, bridges, tunnels), at industrial plants, as well as in the public sector. Its jurisdiction is widespread, extending from Portland South to the Santiam River in Marion County in Salem; East to Arlington covering Sherman, Wasco, and part of Gilliam counties; and West to the North Coast

in Tillamook and Clatsop counties, said Business Manager/Secretary-Treasurer Dave Tischer.

Local 320 members can find their official Meeting Notice on Page 6, and the free Bargain Counter classified ads section on Page 10 of this issue. To submit a free classified ad, e-mail it to [Michael492@comcast.net](mailto:Michael492@comcast.net) or mail it P.O. Box 13150, Portland, OR 97213.

The Labor Press covers union-related stories in Oregon and Southwest Washington and on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.