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Portland

Corporate excess runs amok

Labor takes to the streets of major cities, including Portland, to protest

Corporate excess was the target of two downtown Portland labor protests March 19.

First, two busloads of local Service Employees International Union (SEIU) staff joined members of other labor organizations for a short demonstration at downtown Portland's World Trade Center, site of U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's office. SEIU said similar demonstrations were held in 35 states.

Protesters expressed outrage against bonuses paid to insurance company executives at American International Group (AIG) after tax dollars were used to rescue the company from bankruptcy. As the official demonstration flier put it: "Banks get billion-dollar bailouts, CEOs get millions in pay and bonuses, and working families get foreclosures, layoffs, stagnant pay, and unaffordable healthcare." Protesters called for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, health care for all, and banking reform.

Merkley was in Washington, D.C., and had no official response



to the protest, but his deputy state director, former SEIU staff person Maribeth Healey, greeted demonstrators. Merkley spokesman Marc Siegel said the senator would likely agree with the protest message.

Next, a sub-group of demonstrators marched to a nearby Key Bank branch [above], where staff from Portland Jobs With Justice closed the group's bank account. Key Bank, a recipient of bailout funds,

has been targeted by labor for its role as lender to Oak Harbor Freight Lines, a trucking company that appears bent on busting the Teamsters. About 600 Teamsters struck for 157 days, and are no closer to a union contract now that they're back to work. Oak Harbor suspended 13 union supporters, stopped contributing to the union-trusted pension plan, and enrolled workers in a sub-standard company health care plan.

Schism is wide between labor, Washington Dems

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

OLYMPIA — The once strong working relationship between organized labor and three top state Democrats has chilled so much, it's hard to say if Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire, House Speaker Frank Chopp and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown can any longer be called "friends of labor."

Back in 2008, all three politicians told the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) on video that they would help pass its top priority legislation — a bill called the Worker Privacy Act. Machinists District Lodge 751 Political Director Larry Brown still has a voice-mail from the governor with that promise. The bill would bar employers from disciplining workers who refuse to attend workplace meetings called for the sake of bashing unions.

But after Boeing came out in a big way against the relatively modest labor rights reform, the three Democratic leaders announced March 11 they had decided to kill the bill — and call the police about a WSLC e-mail that threatened to halt campaign contributions for Democrats. Gregoire, Chopp and Brown said the e-mail crossed a line by linking campaign contributions to action on a particular bill. The e-mail, from WSLC special assistant Jeff Johnson, was a summary of a strategy conference call about the Worker Privacy Act. One bullet point said union leaders would

"send the message, 'not another dime from labor' until the governor signs the Worker Privacy Act."

On March 17, the Washington State Patrol issued a statement announcing the result of its investigation: "Detectives were quickly able to determine the e-mail did not violate criminal statutes."

Cleared of wrongdoing, WSLC President Rick Bender issued his own official statement: "Referring the matter for possible criminal prosecution was a gross overreaction and never should have happened."

"An honest mistake occurred in copying this e-mail to some legislators who already supported our legislation, so to characterize this internal e-mail as some kind of threat to legislative leaders — or a possible crime — is absurd," Bender said. "It was very obviously intended to be an internal labor e-mail, one that began with the salutation 'Brothers and Sisters,' which is never how we would address a state legislator."

Meanwhile, another e-mail surfaced following a public records request from Associated Press correspondent Curt Woodward. Dated March 6, it is from Boeing lobbyist Trent House to Bill McSherry, Gregoire's special liaison to Boeing. House said he'd counted votes: Most legislators would side with labor if the Worker Privacy Act came up for a vote.

"This bill must not come up for a vote, or it will pass with a large margin," House wrote to the governor's aide. "I don't believe that Senate and House leadership can make this call on their own. I think they need and expect the governor to share the responsibility."

It would appear the three Democratic leaders stuck to the Boeing lobbyist's script. Except that — instead of candidly saying they would renege on their pledge to organized labor in order to please the politically powerful aerospace giant — the three Democratic leaders hid behind a found e-mail. None of them contacted the labor council for an explanation of the e-mail before referring the matter to the Washington State Patrol.

As Everett Herald columnist Jerry Cornfield put it, Chopp, Brown and Gregoire "needed a way out because [they]

In Salem on April 28

Governor to dedicate new Fallen Workers Memorial

SALEM — The Oregon AFL-CIO will hold a memorial service at the new Fallen Workers Memorial at noon Tuesday, April 28 — Workers Memorial Day.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski will speak and dedicate the permanent memorial located near the main entrance of the Labor and Industries Building, 350 Winter St. NE, Salem.

The memorial service will include the reading of the names of the 61 Oregon workers killed on the job in 2008, as well as Oregon soldiers killed in military service last year. The Oregon AFL-CIO also is asking union members to make arrangements with their employers to observe a moment of silence that day.

Workers Memorial Day was enacted by the AFL-CIO in 1989 to remember workers killed or injured

on the job. April 28 was chosen because it is the anniversary of the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the day of a similar remembrance in Canada.

The Oregon AFL-CIO's Safety and Health Committee has been working for four years (finding a location, securing permits, and raising cash) to erect a memorial in Oregon. The idea started in 2005 with a resolution passed at the state labor federation's convention. Labor unions have played a role in helping construct more than 100 permanent memorials nationwide.

Ground finally was broken in Salem the week of Feb. 23. The memorial consists of a large boulder within a landscaped sitting area in front of the L&I

building. The boulder has a union-made bronze plaque attached to it with the inscription:

*"In memory of Oregon's working men and women who suffered injury or loss of life on the job.
MOURN FOR THE DEAD,
FIGHT FOR THE LIVING
Workers Memorial Day, April 28.
Donated to the State of Oregon by the working men and women of the Oregon AFL-CIO"*

To date, \$37,500 of the \$49,765 cost has been collected for the Fallen Workers Memorial. Donations can be sent to: Oregon AFL-CIO, Worker Memorial Fund 2110 State St. Salem, OR 97301.

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