

Inside

MEETING NOTICES

See  
Page 4

NORTHWEST

LABOR  
PRESSVolume 110  
Number 9  
May 1, 2009  
Portland

## DePaul workers learn how hard it is to unionize in America

*At a food packaging plant in North Portland, a group of workers learn what can happen when they try to assert their right to join a union*

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

Before April 2008, Frito-Lay snack packs sold in local stores were put together by unionized workers earning \$16.96 an hour, plus health, retirement, and vacation benefits. Then the unionized Frito-Lay bakery in Vancouver, Washington outsourced its variety pack assembly line. As many as 30 positions were eliminated. Leaders of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 364 thought maybe they should find out where the work went, to see if workers would want to join the union.

Frito-Lay managers wouldn't tell them where the chips were going, but the company's Teamsters-represented drivers would — they were being trucked to a non-descript warehouse in a Hayden Island industrial park just



**Joe Crane, an organizer for Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Local 364 found a receptive workforce at DePaul Industries.**

off I-5, with a sign for "DePaul Industries" on the front door.

DePaul Industries is registered as a non-profit charity. Started in 1972 as a sheltered workshop for people with disabilities, today it describes itself as

"the Northwest's most comprehensive outsourcing specialist." DePaul has 500 employees and earns \$20 million a year — tax-exempt — selling security services, staffing services, manufacturing and assembly, document im-

aging, and food and consumer goods packaging to companies and government agencies.

DePaul Industries employee Jeffrey Taylor was on break in the parking lot when BCTGM International Representative Eric Anderson drove by the Hayden Island plant in late August. Anderson introduced himself as a union organizer and handed him a business card.

"What took you guys so long?" Taylor asked.

Taylor had learned from a Frito-Lay manager sent to train DePaul assembly line workers that outsourcing to DePaul was saving Frito-Lay a lot of money: \$8-an-hour DePaul packers had replaced Frito-Lay's \$17-an-hour union workers.

The Frito-Lay union wages sounded a lot better to Taylor, 43, who earned \$13 an hour as a machine operator. Plus, Taylor — who is black — was still smoldering over the company's response to his complaints about racist pranks: The month before, Taylor said, a supervisor had thrown a noose at him, and another yelled out that he sold crack cocaine. The two had been scolded, but nothing more.

Taylor called Anderson, who put

him in touch with Local 364 President Cameron Taylor (no relation) and Executive Board member Joe Crane. Crane, 28, is the kind of union member who puts the "movement" back into the labor movement — a workplace steward, bargaining committee member, and in his free time, a volunteer union organizer.

To spark a union drive, Taylor turned out to be an ideal first contact: He was the one who drove the company van to pick up workers at the Jantzen Beach Mall bus stop. That gave him a chance to talk about the union away from the eyes of company managers. Workers would fill out union authorization cards on the way to work. The campaign spread rapidly as other workers got involved.

One was Claudel Pierre, 41. Pierre had been a political activist in Haiti until a coup made that a dangerous occupation. Now he was a \$12-an-hour quality assurance inspector at DePaul. He saw the union as a chance to win human rights on the job.

Pierre's job required walking around and interacting with other workers, so talking about the union

(Turn to Page 2)

## Fred Meyer remodels stores nonunion, stymies UFCW in The Dalles

Fred Meyer, at one time a reliable employer of union labor, has been using nonunion contractors in remodeling projects at Portland-area stores. Meanwhile, some workers on the inside — represented by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 — are having trouble getting a first union contract.

Parent company Kroger has continued to be profitable during the recession, even paying dividends. But it is cutting corners when it comes to a store-by-store remodeling project, say local building trades union representatives. Fred Meyer merged with Cincinnati-headquartered Kroger in 1999.

"We don't even have a chance to bid," said Bob Childers, an international representative of the Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons International Association.

Members of Portland-based Cement Masons Local 555 would have had lots of work on the remodels:

The company is moving from linoleum tile to polished concrete, with as many as 250 locations slated for remodel. The work involves removing tile and adhesive, grinding concrete, adding densifier, and finishing with fine-grain sanding and staining. But Kroger signed a nationwide re-flooring deal with a nonunion contractor that is using \$12-an-hour Craigslist recruits, Childers said. The going rate for union members to do that work would have been \$30 an hour plus \$13 an hour in benefits.

OPCMIA top leadership met in Cincinnati with Kroger and offered a break on the union rate, but didn't come away with a deal.

The shut-out burns local cement masons, Childers says, because the union's health and welfare trust contracts with Kroger as a pharmacy benefit manager. Union members get a deal on prescription drugs, but agree to buy them only at Fred



**Members of UFCW Local 555 march along the streets of The Dalles April 23 to protest slow progress in attaining a first contract for non-food workers at the Fred Meyer store there. Workers voted to unionize in November 2007.**

Meyer pharmacies (where, incidentally, pharmacists are also union-represented.)

"They've got union health trust money going in their door, and they turn around and hire nonunion con-

tractors that don't even provide health benefits to their workers," said John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council.

To deliver that message, Mohlis joined Tim Foster and Cliff Davis of Electrical Workers Local 48 at a March 18 meeting with several Kroger representatives — one local manager in charge of construction and a Kroger official from Cincinnati from the pharmacy benefit management division.

"Every hour one of our members works is money in Fred Meyer's pocket, so I don't understand why they're not using us," said Foster, who is assistant business manager at Local 48.

Through the union-affiliated Harrison Health and Welfare Trust, Local 48 members spent almost \$800,000 last year at Fred Meyer pharmacies, but union electrical contractors aren't being considered for work on the remodel. Foster said union-signatory contractors bid on 10 large remodeling projects, even using union market recovery funds

(Turn to Page 8)