

# AFSCME #328 reaches new contract at OHSU

AFSCME Local 328 has reached a tentative agreement at Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU).

Local 328 represents some 4,000 employees at OHSU located in Southwest Portland who work in a variety of professional and technical positions, including administrative assistants, housekeepers, pharmacists, groundskeepers and information technology specialists.

The union was on the verge of declaring impasse on July 30 when OHSU moved off some of its demands to reduce health insurance coverage.

The old contract expired June 30.

The tentative three-year deal calls for a one-time signing bonus of 1 percent of each employee's 2008 gross pay, plus 2.5 percent raises in July 2010 and July 2011.

If approved, there will be a change in the step system for wages starting in October 2009. Steps 1 through 4 will remain the same; employees will advance by half steps each year for steps 5 through 7, effectively creating a 10-step system and adding three years to reach the top step. But it also includes the addition of a 3 percent longevity

step for all employees who have been at the top step, either under the current plan or new plan for five years, effective July 2010.

Employees in the OHSU health plan will continue to receive 100 percent of their medical insurance premiums paid. OHSU will pick up 88 percent of the premium for family coverage.

OHSU will maintain its 6 percent contribution to the University Pension Plan, and the union also was able to get improvements in severance language regarding contracting out.

"Thanks to our members' activism and willingness to take a stand, the union bargaining team was able to reach a successful conclusion to this year's negotiations," said Local 328 Bargaining Committee Chair Philip Curtis. "There is no doubt that OHSU officials and executives took notice of the successful petition drive, bargaining update meetings and other union activities staged in support of this contract."

The union bargaining team is recommending ratification of the agreement. An online voting process began Aug. 3.



## Ceremonial signing of Worker Freedom Act

Union leaders and labor legislators gather with Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski July 23 for a ceremonial signing of SB 519, also known as the "Worker Freedom Act." The measure, labor's top priority last session, allows employees to freely opt out of captive audience meetings with employers if those meetings are about religion, politics or union organizing campaigns. Oregon is one of the first states to enact such comprehensive protections for workers. Kulongoski actually signed the bill with no announcement on July 13, which disappointed union officials who had lobbied for it. Special arrangements were made for ceremonial signing. Joining the governor from left at the table are first-year Rep. Michael Dembrow, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, and first-year Sen. Diane Rosenbaum. Rosenbaum, a member of Communications Workers of America Local 7901, carried the bill in the Senate. Dembrow, a member of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, spearheaded it through the House. In the back row are Jack Dempsey of the Oregon Nurses Association, Ralph Groener of AFSCME Council 75, Oregon AFL-CIO Political Organizer Graham Trainor, Tricia Smith, government relations specialist, Oregon School Employees Association, and Oregon AFL-CIO Communications Director Elana Guiney. Additionally, on July 14, national AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka telephoned Kulongoski to thank him for signing the bill. SB 519 goes into effect Jan 1, 2010. (Photo by Don Loving)

## Steelworkers Local 8378 fights back

# Mill announces worker call-back, cancels it, blames union

McMINNVILLE — Bosses at Cascade Steel Rolling Mills are trying to blame Steelworkers Local 8378 for blowing up a planned recall of 41 workers who have been out of work since April.

On July 14, the company notified the union and laid-off workers that it would bring them back to work starting July 24. A week later the company canceled the recall, implying in a letter to the 41 impacted workers that the plan was scrapped because their union wouldn't agree to a rotating shift schedule.

The sequence of events stunned union officials.

Local 8378 President Joe Munger told the NW Labor Press that, yes, the union balked at implementation of a rotating shift without any reason, but insisted there was never a conversation about pulling the plug on the recall if the union didn't adhere to the plan.

The first scenario presented by the company was to go to a rotating 12-hour shift after the recall, working four days on with four days off. The "rotation" involves having to work day shift one week, and then night shift the next.

Currently, the work schedule at the mill is eight-hour shifts, although many employees put in more hours than that because of forced overtime.

The union contract itself is based on eight-hour language and is very explicit that there must be mutual consent and benefit to implement a rotating shift schedule.

At a July 17 meeting with management, the union argued that a rotating 12 schedule did nothing to lower overtime costs and that it circumvented seniority rights.

"There is no mutual benefit to anyone under this type of schedule," Munger said.

The company then proposed a "21-turn" schedule. A "21-turn" also involves rotating shifts

each week, but it eliminates paying overtime as all employees put in 40-hour weeks.

"We didn't like it. It's a punitive type, concessionary schedule," Munger told the Labor Press. "We let them know what our preferences were, but basically we just wanted to get our members back to work."

Munger said that at the conclusion of the meeting, company president Jeff Dyke told him he would contemplate over the weekend which shift to use.

"We left that meeting thinking that the mill probably would go on a 21-turn schedule after the recall," Munger said.

Munger said he talked to Dyke by phone on July 20, at which time the CEO told him the recall might be canceled altogether due to a lack of orders.

"He told me it didn't pencil out. He didn't say anything about a conflict with the union over scheduling," said Munger, pointing out that Dyke received a \$31,000 bonus in June, enough to hire back nine employees.

On July 21, Human Resources Director Mike Hereford sent the letter to laid-off employees canceling the recall. That was followed by a letter from Dyke, who also blamed the union.

"I regret to inform you that we were unable to reach an agreement with the union leadership regarding rotating shifts," Dyke wrote.

The cancellation caused hardship for the Steelworkers, some of whom, expecting to return to Cascade Steel, had given notice at jobs elsewhere.

The memos infuriated union officials, who countered with strongly-worded denials.

"Because of your reckless mismanagement, you have disrupted our laid-off members' and their families' lives," Munger wrote to Hereford. "I have

to question if you ever even intended to recall employees and had decided to blame the union from the outset.

"It seems more likely that you grossly overestimated the company's position or commitment, and are looking for someone to blame. One thing is for sure, if recalling would have had a positive enough impact on the bottom line, the 41 members would be recalled, regardless of the games you attempted to play."

[Mike Hereford is a former union president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555. He has been at Cascade Steel for nearly two decades.]

Steelworkers District 12 Representative Ernie Lamoureux sent a letter to union members describing management's reasoning as, "pure B.S.!!"

"The long and short of it was that we would not give up your seniority rights to select the shifts most important to you, and the company didn't like it so they played their little game by attempting to blame me and your union committee for the cancellation of the recall," Lamoureux wrote.

This isn't the union's first run-in with management at Cascade Steel.

During contract negotiations last year, Local 8378 had reached a tentative deal that already had been distributed to members with a date set to vote on ratification when management said it hadn't agreed on one item the union thought it had agreed to. The vote was held anyway, and members rejected it by a wide margin.

So, back to the table they went. This time, members picketed the plant and conducted a one-shift shutdown before the company sweetened its proposal and reinstated the language it initially said it hadn't agreed to.

"That cost them a few dollars," Munger said.

Local 8378 once represented nearly 400 workers at Cascade Steel, a division of Schnitzer Steel. In December 2008, 76 workers were laid off. The union negotiated a "rolling layoff" for the remaining 324 bargaining unit members. For three months most worked two weeks out of four, and the company continued to pay for health insurance during the time they collected unemployment benefits.

That deal ended March 28, 2009, and 70 more workers were let go.

Since then, the union has been earnestly trying to get people back to work.

Munger has numerous times raised concerns with Hereford over staffing levels, asserting that remaining crews were being overworked, causing unsafe conditions.

On one occasion, low water in a tank was discovered that could have caused "catastrophic failure at the furnace," wrote Munger. "Short-staffing has left millwrights hard-pressed to do their regular rounds and manually check the water in all tanks."

Munger is still confident a recall will happen, but he's just not sure when. "I know it's going to happen. It has to happen," he said.

The mill, which manufactures rebar, can handle about 36,000 tons a month, but has orders for 44,000 tons a month.

"They have to start bringing people back or start turning away orders," Munger said.

Currently only one of the two rolling mills is in operation, going 24 hours a day, six days a week.

"In these unprecedented times, what Cascade Steel has done to 41 of its 131 laid off employees is uncalled for," Munger said. "I am embarrassed my employer did this."