

UNITE HERE Local 9 workers hit by Portland Hilton closures

Just months after Benson and Paramount sign union contracts, Portland's flagship hotel announces temporary partial shutdowns

The hotel industry is in a slump along with the rest of the economy. Still, the Aug. 25 announcement of a series of closures at the Portland Hilton Hotel and Executive Tower came as a surprise to workers, members of Portland-based UNITE HERE Local 9. The Portland Hilton consists of a 23-story hotel and a newer executive tower across the street. The older structure will close Nov. 23-29, Dec. 17-31, Jan. 2-10, and Jan. 22-28.

Local 9 leaders became media celebrities for a few days as local newspapers and television news programs took the closures to be a sign of the times — Oregon's largest hotel can't keep its doors open every night.

Local 9 was more concerned about what will happen to the workers, who will suffer temporary layoff by seniority. The fact that most of the closures are only a week long means workers won't be able to collect unemployment during that time because the Oregon Employment De-

partment requires a "waiting week" before benefits can be issued. The closures could also cause workers — many of whom have had their hours cut already — to drop below the 80 hours a month the contract requires for them to qualify for health benefits.

Local 9 staffer Eryn Slack said she respects that it's management's right to make the closure decision, but hopes that the two sides can negotiate a way to prevent workers from losing health coverage during those months.

Slack also wants to make it clear that the union is no longer boycotting the downtown Portland Hilton.

"We need your business," she said.

Last year, Slack helped coordinate a boycott of the hotel, which ended when the Hilton agreed to a union contract workers could support.

The boycott was so successful, it may have been a factor in getting contracts for Portland's other two union hotels, the Benson and the Paramount. Local 9 represents about 175 workers at the Benson and 30 at the Paramount. Their contracts had expired July 2008, but workers ratified new ones May 1, 2009.

Karly Edwards, UNITE HERE Local 9 deputy trustee, said union members at the Benson gained a

measure of security when the hotel agreed to a successorship clause, which would preserve the union and the union contract in the event of a sale. The Benson has been on the market, so that was a worry among members. The hotel also agreed that it won't contract out work done by members.

Unlike workers at most nonunion hotels, Benson and Paramount workers have full family health coverage and paid vacation and holidays, and can't be fired at will. Members agreed to a wage freeze in the first year of a three-year contract, with 20- and 25-cent raises in years two and three for non-tipped employees. Housekeeping wages will top out at \$10.38 an hour by the end of the contract, while line cooks will make \$12.20 tops. Tipped workers will make 50 cents above minimum wage.

The employers also agreed to contribute \$655 a month toward family health insurance coverage, while workers contribute \$35.

And the union was also able to get the Benson and Paramount contracts to end at about the same time as contracts with the Portland and Vancouver Hilton and several Seattle hotels — summer 2011. The union believes it will be in a better position strategically if it can mount a simultaneous contract campaign at all the hotels.

Local Motion

August 2009

Union certifications and decertifications in Oregon and Southwest Washington, as reported by the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Recognition elections

Name of employer	Date	Name of union	Location	Results:	
				Union Yes	Union No
Fred Meyer (decertification)	8/7	UFCW Local 555	Coos Bay	22	25

Recognition by card check

Name of employer	Date	Name of union	Location	Number of employees
Eugene Water & Electric Board (distribution engineers)	7/28	IBEW Local 659	Eugene	9

Requests for recognition election

Name of employer	Date	Name of union	Location	Number of employees
Fred Meyer (decertification)		United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555	Bend	50
Stimson Lumber Company (decertification)		IAM-Woodworkers Local Lodge W536	Clatskanie	48

IAM's Petroff to appear at jobs roundtable

Bob Petroff, directing business representative of Machinists Lodge 24 and president of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, will take part in a Sept. 24 panel discussion moderated by political consultant and former U.S. Senate candidate Steve Novick.

The event, organized by the Democratic Party of Multnomah County, is billed as "Employment in Today's Economy: Roundtable and Resource Fair." The panel will discuss where

stimulus money is going, whether it's helping the economy, and the employment outlook for Oregonians.

The panel will be followed by a "resource fair" that will enable attendees to plug into job counseling, small business mentoring, retraining programs, and union resources.

It takes place from 6 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 24 at David Douglas School District's Fir Ridge Campus, 11215 S.E. Market St., Portland.



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Raymond Thomas

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Kimberly Tucker

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