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A LOOK BACK AT LABOR STORIES IN 2009

New Year's Day at the Northwest Labor Press is a chance to look back on — and update — some of the stories we reported in 2009.

2009 was a difficult year, with unemployment topping 12 percent in Oregon, union pension funds cutting back extras, and local union workers agreeing to wage freezes or concessions in contract votes. Among local public sector unions, wage freezes began with 164 Vancouver firefighters two days before 2009 began, and continued with 230 City of Vancouver workers in four other unions. In March, 2,700 Multnomah County workers agreed to a wage freeze in order to minimize layoffs. And in July, the two largest state public employee unions in Oregon agreed to pay freezes and unpaid furlough days in new two-year contracts covering 21,500 workers. A new five-year contract approved in July for 700 workers at Northwest Natural Gas also had provisions for furloughs, though it contained annual raises of 1 to 3 percent. And in September, a contract covering up to 6,000 members of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters included a \$4.86 an hour wage cut on smaller privately funded construction projects, to shore up union contractors facing fierce competition in a major construction downturn.

At the Freightliner truck factory in Portland, it was a roller coaster year. Parent company Daimler announced in January that it would close the plant in June 2010 when the Machinists

union contract expires, but rescinded that plan in September.

In February, the Teamsters offered an unconditional return to work at Oak Harbor Freight Lines, where about 600 Teamster drivers and warehouse workers had been on strike since September 2008. But the company refused to return 13 workers it accused of picket line misconduct. Two other Oak Harbor union supporters were fired after the return to work. A wave of decertification attempts at different Oak Harbor locations was dismissed by the National Labor Relations Board in March, but since then the dispute has continued in a kind of legal limbo: The employer technically recognizes the union, but workers have been without a union contract since October 2007. Union-filed unfair labor practice charges continue to work their way through the NLRB's bureaucratic processes.

In March, perennial union foe Bill Sizemore was banned from any role in a tax-deductible non-profit charity by a judge's order. Then in October, he faced a new racketeering lawsuit filed by two teachers unions, with Nevada millionaire Loren Parks as co-defendant. And revelations in a still-unfinished 10-year-old racketeering lawsuit led the State of Oregon to indict him and his wife in November for felony tax evasion.

The dream of a memorial to workers killed on the job was realized in April with the official unveiling of the Fallen Workers Memorial on the Capitol Mall in Salem.

In April, Laurelhurst Village nursing home in Southeast Port-

land fired pro-union worker Elizabeth Lehr, days after she got involved in a union campaign by Service Employees International Union Local 503. But in July the company paid an undisclosed amount to settle her unfair labor practice charge, and by November, parent company Farmington Centers had agreed to recognize the union as representative of its 144 workers.

In July, Iron Workers Local 516 and Oregon Iron Works gained national attention when they unveiled the first streetcar made in America since 1951. With a resurgence of streetcars in the United States, the Clackamas-based company has orders to build more streetcars for cities throughout the country.

Fred Meyer, one of the area's largest union employers, came under increasing criticism both from its own employees' union, (United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555), and local building trades unions angered at being shut out of a major chain-wide remodeling project. From summer onward, building trades leaders led demonstrations outside Fred Meyer stores, even as a Spokane UFCW local blanketed Portland with lawn signs and bus bench ads taking aim at the company for firing cashiers for first-offense cash handling mistakes. In October, a manager at a Fred Meyer store in Hillsboro called police, and three UFCW Local 555 representatives, including union President Dan Clay, were arrested for trespass. Their

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Labor helps to bring holiday cheer

Glenn Shuck (back left), executive director of Labor's Community Service Agency, partakes in the festivities at the "Presents for Partners" holiday party Dec. 19 at Genesis Community Fellowship in Northeast Portland. Labor unions, members, and allies donated nearly 1,100 toys to make this year's party possible. Each of the 323 children at the party received two new toys, a visit with Santa Claus, a stuffed animal, and a candy cane. "This exceeded all expectations," said Shuck. "I've never seen families respond the way they did. They were overwhelmed with joy." This is the 13th year that Labor's Community Service Agency and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council have held the event. (Photo courtesy of Pat Philpott.)



Measures 66 & 67

Taxing the top tier

For the first time in a generation, Oregon voters will decide whether corporations and the rich should pay more

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

On Jan. 26, Oregon voters will decide a question of tax fairness: Should large and profitable corporations and very-high-income individuals pay a higher share of state taxes?

The Oregon Legislature answered yes to this question in June 2009, but business groups spent \$960,000 on a signature-gathering effort to put the tax increases before voters. In the depths of a severe recession, they seek to repeal very modest and mostly temporary increases in the income taxes paid by corporations and high-income individuals.

Measure 66 raises tax rates on the top 3 percent of income tax payers — and

lowers taxes on 15 percent of income tax payers — those who collected unemployment benefits in 2009. Measure 67 raises the corporate minimum tax, and increases the tax rate corporations pay on their declared profits.

The tax increases are forecasted to raise \$730 million in two years, helping fill a recession-caused hole in the state's General Fund. Because the money is already budgeted, for voters to reject either measure would force significant cuts in education, public safety, and social services.

"This is a very clear vote," says Chuck Sheketoff, executive director of Oregon Center for Public Policy, a non-profit group that researches tax and budget issues. "The only way to turn that around," Sheketoff said, "is to scare people or mislead them."

And that's exactly what the business-backed group Oregonians Against Job-Killing Taxes is doing, says Scott Moore, spokesperson for Vote Yes for

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