

Transit Union dispute with TriMet may not settle until spring 2012

A labor dispute between Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 and TriMet may not get settled until spring of 2012, if not later.

The union contract at TriMet — which covers 2,000 bus and rail operators, mechanics, and support staff — expired Nov. 30, 2009. After bargaining over a required 150-day time period, an impasse was declared in July 2010. Under Oregon law, transit workers are prohibited from striking, and any contract dispute must be settled through binding arbitration. However, when the sides submitted their “last, best and final” offers to the arbitrator, TriMet’s proposal contained issues that the union alleges were never raised at the bargaining table. Local 757 filed an unfair labor practice (ULP) complaint with the Oregon Employment Relations Board accusing TriMet of bad-

faith bargaining.

A few months later the union filed a second ULP, this time charging TriMet with retaliation. The union alleges the transit agency unilaterally implemented new conditions to the extended contract in retaliation for the union filing the first ULP. The new conditions, effective Jan. 1, 2011, suspended all bargaining unit cost-of-living wage increases and began charging active and retired employees for a portion of their health insurance premiums. Under the extended agreement, TriMet paid all premiums.

The Oregon Employment Relations Board will hear the retaliation complaint May 16-17, followed by the bad-faith bargaining complaint May 18.

A decision on the retaliation charge could take up to six months, Jon Hunt, president of ATU Local 757, told TriMet’s Executive Board at its

monthly meeting April 27.

A final ruling on the bad-faith bargaining charge will be issued no later than mid-August, Hunt said.

Either party can appeal the outcome, causing further delays.

“Absent any appeals, it is logical to assume that the interest arbitrator’s de-

cision will come no earlier than March 2012,” said Hunt, noting that the longer the dispute continues, the more it could cost if TriMet loses.

“As we have said all along, this dispute can be resolved. We’re willing to sit down, meet and negotiate.”

At presstime, no talks are scheduled.

Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 ratifies new three-year contract

Members of United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 290 ratified a new three-year contract with the Oregon chapter of the Plumbing and Mechanical Contractors Association.

The deal provides for increases of \$1.75 the first year, \$2 the second year, and \$2.25 the third year. As is typical in construction bargaining, a certain amount of money is agreed upon and workers decide how to divvy it up — whether it be in wages, pension contributions, or for health insurance.

At the ratification vote April 23, members decided to put 69 cents toward health and welfare, 6 cents to the pension, and \$1 on the check.

This was the third contract vote since the previous two-year agreement expired March 31. The first offer rejected contained hourly increases of 75 cents

the first year, \$1 the second year, and \$1.25 the third year. Employers came back with a quarter more the first year only. Members rejected that as well — but this time with strike authorization and refusing to work overtime.

Then, starting April 7, the union deployed roving pickets, hitting shops in McMinnville, Eugene, and Portland for two and three days at a time.

“That really got their attention,” said Local 290 Business Manager John Endicott.

Before the month was over the sides were back at the table and a contract was ratified.

“With work finally starting to pick up, we’re glad to have it settled,” Endicott said. “We look forward to a productive next three years.”



ATU Local 757 stages an informational picket before every TriMet board meeting to call attention to the dispute and demand a return to the bargaining table. The last picket was held April 27 at the downtown Portland Building.

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