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### Middle school girls have fun at Women in Trades Career Fair

Angie Couture (left) of Iron Workers Local 29 shows middle school girls from the Vancouver School District how to use a cutting torch at 19th annual Women in Trades Fair. The three-day fair May 12-14, sponsored by Oregon Tradeswomen Inc., provided an introduction to the many trades available to women. The first two days of the fair were designated for middle school and high school students, where the girls were able to talk to women who actually work in the trades and take part in hands-on workshops. Approximately 600 students, some from as far away as Tillamook, attended each day. "We hope to trigger their imagination on the exciting careers available to them — careers that pay good wages," said OTI Executive Director Connie Ashbrook. The third day was open to the public. More than 70 apprenticeship training programs, community colleges, and companies were represented at the fair.

## Clerics talk 'labor' with ATU Local 757

Faith traditions have something to say about labor. To find out what, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 invited several clerics to attend its May 9 general membership meeting, which coincidentally takes place at a Salvation Army building near the union hall.

Father Jack Mosbrucker, a retired Roman Catholic priest, and Rev. Eugene Ross of the United Church of Christ accepted the invitation. Labor lawyer Barbara Diamond, a member of Havurah Shalom synagogue, stood in for a rabbi who could not attend.

"In the Catholic Church, we have what they call 'Catholic Social Teaching,'" explained Mosbrucker, former pastor of St. Charles Borromeo and St. Therese parishes in Northeast Portland. "Some say it's one of the best-kept secrets of the Catholic Church: Nobody knows we have it."

Catholic Social Teaching is a body of doctrine, drawn from several papal pronouncements, that outlines the church position on social justice.

"[It] envisions a society where every person has dignity, a society that cares for every one of its members," Mosbrucker said. "For us, unions ought to exist because they give the people the possibility of working together and building themselves up."

Protestant denominations have similar pronouncements, Ross said, based on scripture.

"It's easy for us to think we live in the most unjust time, but if we look at scripture, we recognize that injustice has been around a long time," Ross said. "Our work as a faith community is to call people's attention to where there is injustice, and to work for justice."

Diamond, who introduced herself as a Jewish mother, spoke of her surprise, during preparations for her son's bar mitzvah, to see many analogies between the commandments of the Torah and modern-day workers' rights protections.

"There's nothing in religion that's against the union movement," Diamond said. "I think we've got a lot of good stuff in spiritual teachings that can help us get through to many of our members for whom faith is a daily force for enrichment."

Over half of the ATU members in attendance raised their hands when asked how many belong to a church of some kind. But only one hand went up when Mosbrucker asked how many had spoken to their cleric about the union.

"If you're a member of the congregation, you ought to be talking about the union with your church leaders," Mosbrucker said, "and if they don't know about it, educate them."

## Anti-union campaign causes private school closure

### Enrollment drops after Portland French School spends \$170,000 opposing efforts to join AFT

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

When seven teachers asked for union recognition March 22, 2010, Portland French School (PFS) administrator Elimane Mbengue threatened them: Unionizing would cause the school's closure, he said. The threat was repeated four days later at a mandatory employee meeting: Real estate investor Bob Scanlan, a member of the private school's board, told employees that unionization would cause closure within a year, because Mbengue and board members would resign, and

anti-union parents would remove their children — and annual tuition of \$13,000 per student — from the school.

It didn't happen exactly as Mbengue and Scanlan threatened, but close enough. A union vote will take place May 24. On May 31, PFS will close its doors permanently — squeezed between a severe drop-off in enrollment and a rapid run-up of expenses stemming from the anti-union campaign that school leaders waged.

The closure will mean disruption for pre-kindergarten through middle school students, job loss for nearly 40 employees, termination of a bilingual education program accredited by the French Ministry of Education, and the end of a unique community. Teachers who are in the United States on employment-related visas may have to leave the country. And Portland Public Schools will lose \$297,000 a year in revenue if no

other tenant steps forward to rent the former Terwilliger Elementary School at 6318 SW Corbett Ave.

It didn't have to happen this way. The school could have voluntarily recognized the union and begun bargaining a contract with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Teachers had ample reason to unionize: almost no job security protection, no real retirement benefit, and salaries starting in the mid-20s and topping out at around \$40,000 — far less than public school teachers.

Instead, Mbengue and several board members fought the union effort in ways that broke federal labor law and polarized the parent community. In individual and group meetings with employees, Mbengue and board members made illegal promises to remedy grievances if employees would withdraw the union petition; enforced a "no-complaining" rule; threatened to institute more severe

discipline; and made numerous threats and implied threats of job loss and school closure. Of the seven teachers on the union organizing committee, three had their employment contracts terminated at the end of the school year. [In one of the terminations — third grade teacher Patricia Raclot — the evidence for anti-union motive was strong enough that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) eventually asked for a federal court injunction, and was able to get the school to agree to reinstate her with back pay.]

Meanwhile, board member Scanlan fomented parent intervention in the union question with a March 31, 2010, e-mail to parents announcing his resignation from the board. In the letter, he urged teachers to vote against the union, predicting harm to the school if they unionized. "Parents in this income bracket are more likely to be anti-union than

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