

AFSCME members at Metro in fight for fair contract, hold rally at Oregon Zoo

Members of the union that represents Metro employees, including many Oregon Zoo workers, staged an informational picket and rally July 30 at the zoo.

The event attracted union members, family, friends, and other supporters.

Local 3580 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) staged the rally at the zoo — Metro's most recognized facility — to demonstrate their support for a fair contract.

The union and Metro have been in contract talks since the first of the year, and despite major concessions offered

by Local 3580, which represents 375 Metro workers, Metro senior management has requested additional cuts to pensions and health care, as well as furlough days.

"This was a rally for a fair contract, as well as for preserving the continuation of the middle class," said Local 3580 President Matt Tracy. "We need to maintain the vital services the community has come to depend upon, like our recycling and hazardous waste disposal programs.

"It's fitting that we stage this event at the zoo, as we are urging Metro not to let the middle class become an en-

dangered species."

Tracy said Local 3580 members work hard to preserve and uphold Metro's philosophy and commitment to the people of the tri-county area "to create a vibrant and sustainable region for all."

"The union is calling upon Metro's management to honor their own doctrine and stop the double standard that cuts benefits for employees who serve the community," said Tracy.

Local 3580 and Metro have been bargaining since January; the group's current contract expired on June 30.



Janitors stage takeover of Metro HQ

For 15 minutes July 20, all work stopped at Metro headquarters in Northeast Portland as some 200 members and allies of Service Employees International Union Local 49 took over the building's central lobby and created a deafening racket with drums and chants. The occupation was in protest of the regional government's switch — 18 months ago — from a union-represented janitorial firm (Portland Habilitation Center) to nonunion Diversified Abilities. Under Oregon law, both firms get preference for government contracts because they employ workers who are categorized as disabled. Metro's switch, the union says, "sends a message to any other government entity that you can use nonunion contractors." It also threatens health care coverage for the families of roughly 1,200 union janitors that clean Class A commercial office buildings. Local 49's multi-employer janitorial master agreement contains trigger language: Once union market share reaches 75 percent (by square footage) of the Class A market, contractors must provide health insurance coverage to workers' dependents. Local 49 is asking that Metro re-bid the contract under its new "sustainable procurement policy," which requires that Metro consider worker pay and benefits when awarding contracts. A Metro spokesman said the agency will be having an internal conversation about that.

...Public employee unions reach deal with state

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Workers will also take 10 to 14 unpaid furlough days over the two year period. Workers earning below \$2,450 a month will take 10 furlough days; between \$2,450 and \$3,100 will take 12 days, and those earning more than \$3,100 will take 14 furlough days. Ten of those days will be full-scale closures for state agencies that can close without endangering public safety. The remainder of the furlough days will be worked out between workers and their managers. This is the second contract in a row to include the furloughs, but a

binding agreement commits the governor not to propose furloughs in his next two-year budget proposal.

Significantly, the state backed off a proposal to end its practice of paying workers' 6-percent-of-salary contribution to the Public Employee Retirement System.

Both agreements were reached after marathon bargaining sessions. SEIU settled shortly before midnight July 22, while AFSCME's deal was reached July 19 after 26 straight hours at the bargaining table. Allen said he remained awake throughout, though some members of the AFSCME bar-

gaining team were nodding off.

Ratification votes could stretch into mid-August. But both union bargaining teams are recommending passage.

"It's a tough settlement," Conroy said. "But we do believe that, given the times we're in, we were able to protect the lowest-wage workers in the contract, and we feel good about that."

"These were the hardest negotiations we ever had," Allen said. "We wanted our workers not to go backwards, to get into the plus column during these few years, and I think we've achieved that."



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