



NORTHWEST

LABOR
PRESSVolume 112
Number 16
August 19, 2011
Portland

Gov. Kitzhaber signs top labor bill

A top priority bill of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council was signed into law by Gov. John Kitzhaber at a special ceremony Aug. 2 at Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 in Tualatin. House Bill 2700-B, also known as the “linear projects” bill, simplifies the permitting process for large-scale linear construction projects. The bill received bipartisan support, passing in the House 40-18 and in the Senate 20-9. “This is a huge victory, a monstrous victory for the building trades,” said OSBCTC Executive Secretary John Mohlis. Mohlis and other supporters of the bill say the measure will bring much-needed jobs to Oregon by allowing stalled infrastructure projects to move forward. Typical linear projects include streets, roads, and highways; railroad and light rail lines; gas, water and sewer pipelines; and communications and transmission lines.



Washington AFL-CIO convenes in SeaTac for jam-packed convention

SEATAC — This year’s convention of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC), AFL-CIO, drew 530 delegates and guests Aug. 4-6 to the SeaTac DoubleTree Hotel near SeaTac International Airport. Many of them came away with the energy that comes from being embattled.

WSLC — the state-level labor federation, channels the political efforts of 500 union organizations with 400,000 rank-and-file members.

Washington isn’t Wisconsin, where a Republican governor and Legislature stripped public employees of their right to a union for all intents and purposes. But WSLC has found in recent sessions of the Washington Legislature

that the state’s majority Democrats can’t be relied on to favor workers’ interests over business interests. WSLC’s eight-page report on the 2011 legislative session — distributed on Day Two of the convention — wasn’t cheery.

A majority of Democratic state senators — 15 of 27 — scored 60 percent or less in the federation’s rankings, based on votes they cast on issues that affect unions and working people.

The rankings this year were weighted: WSLC waged an all-out campaign to oppose two pieces of legislation, and lawmakers’ votes on those counted for 50 percent of their rating, while votes on eight to 10 other bills made up the remainder. The two pieces

of legislation were: a law that weakens the state’s workers’ compensation system by allowing lump-sum buyouts to injured workers, in which they are paid less than what they would otherwise receive; and a law that consolidates four state agencies into a Department of Enterprise Services, promotes privatization of the new agency’s services and explicitly prohibits state employees from competing to maintain their work.

Nevertheless, the labor movement does have allies in elected office, and WSLC honored three of them with its 2011 Legislators of the Year Awards: Sen. Steve Conway (D-Tacoma), and

(Turn to Page 7)

IBEW #125 prepares to strike Pacific Power

Members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 125 voted Aug. 10 to reject a second tentative agreement with Pacific Power. They expect to go on strike or be locked out the day after Labor Day if no further agreement is reached before then.

Local 125 represents over 400 Pacific Power employees — linemen and other classifications — who work in a region that extends from Astoria, Oregon to Walla Walla, Washington.

Pacific Power serves over 700,000 customers as the electricity distribution division of PacifiCorp for Oregon, Washington and California. PacifiCorp is owned by Mid-American Energy Holdings Company, which is controlled by Berkshire Hathaway. Berkshire Hathaway’s primary shareholder is Warren Buffett, one of the world’s richest people.

Pacific Power, a regulated monopoly, has a built-in rate of profit that is

overseen by the Oregon Public Utility Commission. Yet the company is seeking concessions from its union workforce.

The tentative agreement Local 125 members voted to reject would have allowed the company to terminate its defined benefit pension plan, which had already been frozen. New hires are enrolled only in the company’s “defined contribution” 401(k) plan, but about 100 Local 125 members age 55 and older remain in the traditional pension. The agreement would also have taken away three days of family sick leave. It contained wage increases of 1, 1.5, and 2 percent, but the first increase was not retroactive.

The most recent contract expired Jan. 26, but was extended by mutual agreement. On July 8 the union negotiating committee gave 60-day notice of its intent to terminate. Thus the agreement’s last day will be Sept. 5, Labor Day 2011.

Xerox workers call on CEO to save the American Dream

Xerox workers at the Wilsonville campus in Oregon held a funeral for the death of the American Dream during a visit Aug. 11 by CEO Ursula Burns.

About 150 employees who put together ink jet cartridges have been working without a contract since July. They are members of Service Employees International Union Local 49.

According to the union, management is attempting to eliminate workers’ sick days, reduce pay for long-term employees by up to 50 percent, and roll back retirement benefits. Over the last several years Xerox also has increased its temporary workforce to 30 percent, and is looking to increase it to 50 percent.

“It’s really hard not knowing that any day your job can be turned into a temporary position or sent overseas” said Beverly Robinson, a 31-year Xerox employee. “It creates insecurity when their doesn’t have to be. Ms. Burns could make a different choice for all of us and our families.”

According to SEIU Local 49 spokesperson Maggie Long, workers at the Wilsonville plant accepted pay freezes and reduced work hours in 2009 to keep Xerox’s American operations profitable. Since 2010, the company has seen a 56 percent increase in profits (\$606 million in profit last year on sales of \$21.6 billion). Burns’ pay jumped from \$11.2 million in 2009 to \$13.2 million last year.

“This is the same story we have seen over the last two decades,” said 15-year-employee Chris Singrey. “Even when corporations in America are doing well they feel no loyalty to their longtime workforce and the communities they operate in — it’s just about shareholder profits.”

Meg Niemi president of SEIU Local 49, said the union’s hope is that Xerox “can chose a different way and that Ms. Burns sees that we are all committed to having good jobs in local Oregon communities.”

Xerox acquired the Wilsonville color printer facility from Tektronix in 2000. It has about 1,500 employees locally and 130,000 worldwide.