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YEAR IN REVIEW: Top labor stories of 2011

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2011 was Year Three of the Great Recession, but it may be remembered as Year One of the Great Fightback by working people.

On Feb. 15 — four days after peaceful demonstrations in Cairo toppled a dictator — an America uprising began, with mass protests at state capitols, starting in Madison, Wisconsin. On Sept. 17, the movement re-erupted, with an “Occupy Wall Street” protest in New York City that within two weeks had spread worldwide.

If the mood is surlier than ever, it may be because the economy isn’t working out for working people. In the United States, official unemployment was at 8.6 percent in November, down just 1.2 percentage points from a year before. Bankers binged on mortgage-backed securities, but workers have suffered the resulting hangover.

Continued U.S. joblessness is also brought on by a long-term offshoring of production. America’s trade deficit was topping \$540 billion by year’s end — \$40 billion more than 2010 — and polls say a majority of Americans think U.S. trade policy is broken. But Congress ratified three more NAFTA-style trade deals in October — with Korea, Panama, and Colombia. The treaties, negotiated in the Bush years, were pushed to a vote by President Obama.

Meanwhile, wages are stagnant, regular unleaded is selling for \$3.25 a gallon, and health care is more expensive



The “Spirit of Wisconsin” spread nationally, including this rally in Portland on Feb. 25, as workers fought to maintain their right to collective bargaining.

than ever: Average annual premiums for employer-provided full family health insurance passed the \$15,000 mark in 2011.

Still, for organized labor, 2011 was a vindication. In Wisconsin, teachers struck, Democratic legislators fled, and crowds of up to 100,000 turned out — all to oppose a Republican governor’s plan to strip public workers of their union rights. “Collective bargaining” might have seemed an unlikely cause a year before, but by the end of February, pollsters were finding that 77 percent of Americans think public employees should have the same union rights as

private sector workers. In a matter of weeks, the “Spirit of Wisconsin” spread to every state capitol, as Americans, mostly nonunion, turned out in solidarity with beleaguered unionists under the slogan “We are One” and “We are all Wisconsin.”

By late October, “I am the 99 percent” had replaced those slogans as the mantra of a popular movement, and even tiny Mosier, Oregon, population 421, had an “occupation.” Campers around the country were mostly roused by local police, but participants demonstrated a new appetite for disrupting
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Some of the more than three dozen volunteers at the Presents for Partners holiday party included from left to right: NOLC secretary Karen Carlson, LCSA Executive Director Vickie Burns, Santa Claus (played by Dave Williams of IBEW Local 48), Gina Whitlow of the IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union, and Thea Stayton and Becky Wright of the Portland Federation of School Professionals Local 111. The kids are Stirling and Vida Walker.

Labor’s ‘Presents from Partners’ brightens the holidays for hundreds

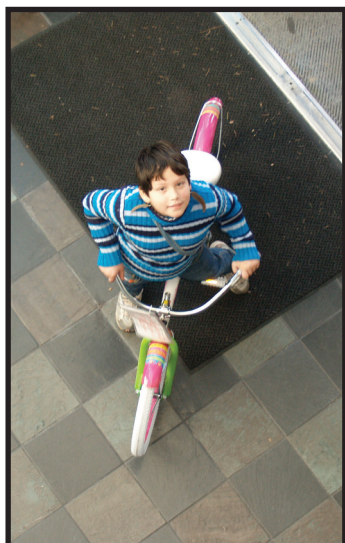
Labor’s Community Service Agency (LCSA) and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council held their annual “Presents from Partners” holiday party for children of out-of-work union members Dec. 17 at the Sheet Metal Workers union hall in Northeast Portland.

More than 300 kids — boys, girls, tweens, teens, and toddlers — participated, with each receiving four toys each, including some bicycles. Families also enjoyed a catered lunch and pictures with Santa Claus.

Union organizations, members, unionized businesses and professionals that work with unions donated toys and cash for the event, said LCSA Executive Director Vickie Burns.

“The outpouring of support this holiday season was a gift from and for working people and organized labor,” Burns said. “It was a display of solidarity, an inspiration, and a resounding success.”

Leftover toys were donated to Toy & Joy and went to out-of-work military families. Those arrangements were made through LCSA’s contacts with Hire Oregon Vets and Oregon National Guard.



Mayda Mosqueda, 8, gets ready to ride off on her new bicycle. She is the daughter of Javier Mosqueda, a member of Glass Workers Local 740.

AFL-CIO supports Bonamici in CD #1

Votes for early endorsement of Brad Avakian for labor commissioner

Suzanne Bonamici, Democratic nominee in the special election congressional race in Oregon’s 1st District, has added several labor organizations to her list of endorsers. The special election to succeed Democrat David Wu, who resigned mid-term, is Jan. 31.

Her opponent is tea party Republican Rob Cornilles.

Bonamici’s latest labor endorsement came Dec. 16 from the Oregon AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education (COPE). The state labor federation represents over 225,000 workers in Oregon, with 15,000 affiliated union members in the 1st District.

Bonamici, a state senator from Beaverton, was the top vote-getter in a special primary election held last month. Her primary opponents were State Rep. Brad Witt and Labor Com-

missioner Brad Avakian. Witt is a former secretary-treasurer of the Oregon AFL-CIO and current union rep for United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555. Both Brads have since endorsed Bonamici.

AFL-CIO unions backing Bonamici include the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council; Oregon Nurses Association; Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA)-American Federation of Teachers (AFT); Oregon AF-SCME Council 75; OSEA-AFT Local

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