



NORTHWEST

LABOR
PRESSVolume 113
Number 3
Feb. 3, 2012
Portland, Oregon

Union to TriMet: Cut managers, not drivers

ATU under siege as labor ally Lynn Lehrbach slated for replacement on the TriMet board

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The union that represents bus and train operators and other TriMet workers picketed the transit agency's Jan. 25 Board meeting — after TriMet called its own employees pay and benefits “out-of-line” in a Dec. 15 e-mail to the public.

TriMet forecast a \$12-17 million budget shortfall in the e-mail, and asked for public input on fare increases and service cuts, explaining that those measures were necessary because the “union leadership” had “refused to consider reasonable changes to wage increases and benefits.”

But Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 President Jon Hunt dismissed those projections at the

Board meeting, saying TriMet's “oh, we are so broke” campaign is “merely a ruse to point fingers at TriMet union workers who TriMet claims are over-paid.”

Hunt told the Board that TriMet can avoid the proposed fare hikes and service cuts by adopting other money-saving measures. TriMet could save up to \$5 million a year by thinning management ranks down to the levels they were five years ago, Hunt said, and another \$7 million a year by canceling contracted-out paratransit service and doing the work in-house.

Currently, TriMet pays a contractor — United Kingdom-headquartered First Transit — to run its paratransit service, known as TriMet Lift. TriMet Lift provides point-to-point transportation, by reservation, to elderly and disabled people who are unable to ride regular bus and rail transit. Hunt said his cost estimate was based on a 2008 study the union and TriMet commissioned.

Hunt's statement got no response from the Board or from TriMet General Manager Neil McFarlane. But TriMet spokesperson Mary Fetsch disputes



Jon Hunt (right), president of ATU Local 757, chats with TriMet Board member Lynn Lehrbach at a rally prior to a Jan. 25 transit agency board meeting. Lehrbach, a Teamsters official — and Local 757's strongest ally — is slated for replacement after serving one term on the governor-appointed TriMet Board of Directors.

both claims. Drawing from data in the same study, Fetsch says bringing Lift in-house would *increase* costs \$7.5 million. And Fetsch says TriMet's ratio

of nonunion to union workers is lower in the current fiscal year than three years prior — in the Operations Division.

Hunt's Board testimony was a rare face-to-face with General Manager McFarlane. Local 757 picketed McFarlane's West Hills home Nov. 19. Hunt says McFarlane has refused to meet with him, instead referring him to Randy Stedman, who was hired Nov. 14 as TriMet executive director of Labor Relations and Human Resources.

Stedman's background is as a labor relations consultant. He takes credit on his web site for defeating a union organizing campaign. In 2011 he represented Mt. Hood Community College, where he won concessions from faculty after a near-strike.

Local 757 has picketed and testified at the TriMet Board for months, but hasn't persuaded the Board to intervene in its long-running contract dispute. And now the union may be about to lose its one reliable Board ally, Lynn Lehrbach. Lehrbach — political director for Teamsters Joint Council No. 37 and first vice president of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council — was appointed by former governor Ted Kulongoski to a term that expired Jan. 5.

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Union membership grows in Oregon

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Union membership in Oregon grew last year, adding 25,000 new members, according to new U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data released Jan. 27. That brings the total union membership in the state to 270,000, or 17.1 of the workforce.

At the same time, the state of Washington lost union members, going from 552,000 in 2010 to 517,000 in 2011. The Evergreen State's union density also dropped from 19.4 percent of the workforce to 19 percent.

Nationwide, union membership increased by 49,000 from 2010 to 2011, the BLS reported. An increase of 110,000 in the private sector was partially offset by a decline of 61,000 in the public sector, making the rate of union membership essentially unchanged at 11.8 percent, with some

14.8 million U.S. workers union members.

In 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and there were 17.7 million union workers.

Public-sector union density increased from 36.2 percent to 37 percent through November 2011. Private-sector union membership remains at 6.9 percent. The largest increases in union membership were in construction, health care services, retail trade, primary metals and fabricated metal products, hospitals, transportation and warehousing.

The data show that among full-time wage and salary workers, the median weekly earnings of union members were \$938, compared to \$729 for

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Gov. Gregoire brokers deal that ends year-long dispute at Port of Longview

LONGVIEW, Wash. — A whirlwind week of negotiations Jan. 23-27 appears to have ended a year-long dispute between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and EGT at the Port of Longview's new \$200 million grain export facility.

On Monday, Jan. 23, Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire announced that she had brokered a deal between the two parties that settled pending legal issues, unfair labor practice charges, and fines. That announcement came a few hours before an administrative law judge was set to open hearings on unfair labor practice charges filed by the National Labor Relations Board against the ILWU for illegal picketing and other activities. During the course of the year, ILWU blocked trains from delivering grain and members clashed with police, leading to several hundred arrests. In August, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting members of ILWU from mass picketing at the facility.

“I asked EGT and ILWU to come together in a good faith effort to overcome their differences,” Gregoire said in a press release. “Both parties should be commended for their willingness to work together and compromise.

This framework reflects considerable effort to put the interests of the Longview community and the entire Columbia River basin first. I am confident an agreement can be reached that will satisfy both parties and allow the new grain terminal to become fully operational.”

The following day, Jan. 24, members of ILWU Local 21 ratified the settlement agreement. Then, on Friday, Jan. 27, Port of Longview's board of commissioners approved the settlement agreement before approving an amendment to its lease with EGT.

The ILWU protests centered on a decision by EGT to use an outside union contractor instead of ILWU members to staff the grain terminal. ILWU filed a lawsuit, arguing that its contract with the Port required EGT to hire longshore workers. The sides were awaiting a federal judge's ruling when the governor said a settlement had been reached.

Gregoire's announcement came as a surprise to Operating Engineers Local 701, which represents workers at General Construction — the contractor hired by EGT to staff the grain terminal. Local 701 asserts that ILWU

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