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Third union activist fired at non-profit call center

Two dozen workers at the Fund for the Public Interest call center in Southeast Portland walked off the job for an hour at the start of their shift June 29 to protest the firing of nine-year employee Cortina Robinson.

Cortina is the third person to be terminated since October 2011, when workers voted to join Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901. The other two — Kris Humbird and Mike Schultz — were fired in December. All three were active in the union organizing drive and all three were on the contract bargaining team.

Fund for the Public Interest is a national non-profit organization that raises funds for the consumer group OSPIRG. The Fund runs PIRG canvass operations in multiple states, and telephone outreach call centers in Boston, Sacramento and Portland.

Robinson told the Labor Press she was fired June 29 for missing a

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ULTIMATUM IS A CROC: Cortina Robinson and David Neel march in front of the Fund for the Public Interest, 1536 SE 11th Ave., Portland, to protest her termination, purportedly for missing a fundraising “ultimatum” by \$47. Workers are negotiating a first contract at the call center and Robinson is on the bargaining committee. Two other bargaining committee members have been fired since workers voted to join CWA Local 7901 in October 2011.

Labor cheers high court’s ruling on health care act

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Union leaders cheered the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision June 28 upholding the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare.

The 5-4 Court majority upheld the key section of the law that requires people to have insurance or, if they refuse, to pay an extra tax, via the Internal Revenue Service. The law does not flatly force people to buy insurance, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the Court majority. But the practical effect of the law and the Court’s decision is that given the choice between buying insurance or paying extra to the IRS, a majority will buy insurance. One expert estimated only 4 million people would decline.

Union leaders hailed the either-or choice, and the Court’s reaffirmation of the law, as the way to expand health insurance coverage for millions.

The ruling “means we can continue moving full speed ahead to implement and build upon” the law, said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. “We have no illusion the destination has been reached, and we are more committed

than ever to the hard work necessary to achieve our dream of quality health care for all.”

He particularly praised the court for letting 105 million people benefit from the law’s elimination of lifetime limits on insurance coverage, its elimination of the “doughnut hole” in seniors’ prescription drug coverage, and its decision that “insurance companies will not be able to deny coverage due to pre-existing conditions, charge women more or drop coverage for those who get sick.”

Then he suggested something else: “A simple indisputably constitutional solution is to allow Americans of all ages to buy into an improved Medicare program. We believe every baby in America — whether rich or poor — deserves the same standard of quality care, and we will keep moving forward until we make this a reality.”

“We are definitely celebrating this decision,” said National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel. “NEA members know how a child’s education can be affected by illness or lack of regular medical or dental care. We worked closely with the Obama Ad-

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Amalgamated Transit Union members elect new leadership

Bruce Hansen takes office amid a protracted dispute with TriMet, Local 757’s largest employer

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 has a new president. In mail ballots counted June 15, members picked TriMet bus operator Bruce Hansen over longtime former president Ron Heintzman, who for a short time in 2010 was president of the 190,000-member ATU international.

Local 757, headquartered in Portland, represents 4,200 workers, including vehicle operators and mechanics at TriMet and eight other Oregon transit districts, plus C-TRAN in Vancouver, and several units of school bus and paratransit workers.

To win the top post, Hansen outpolled Heintzman and two other candidates: Hansen received 1,344 votes, Heintzman 1,102, Tom Horton 68, and Stephen Subject 43. Turnout was high, with 2,557 members (60 percent) casting ballots for

president, and 71 members in all seeking union office.

It was Hansen’s second run for Local 757 president. Three years ago, he lost to Jon Hunt, when Hunt won a second term. This year, Hunt chose to run for vice president on a slate with Heintzman for president and Mary Longoria for financial secretary-treasurer. Hunt won a plurality in a six-way race, and Longoria outpolled incumbent Evette Farra and Anna Hicks.

All three offices are full-time salaried positions: President serves as business manager of the local, and vice president serves as assistant business manager. Financial secretary-treasurer is in charge of the local’s finances and serves as recording secretary. Also elected were 14 members of the Executive Board, and 22 liaison officers to the Board from sub-units and smaller bargaining units. All the newly elected leaders began their three-year terms on July 1.

Hansen, 43, is a 20-year TriMet driver and a former Local 757 Executive Board member. In 2007, he was named TriMet bus operator of the year.



Bruce Hansen, newly elected president of ATU Local 757, stands by the plaque of Mel Schoppert adorning the entrance to the union hall. Schoppert, a longtime ATU leader, helped to pass the Oregon law that enabled the creation of TriMet, the Portland-area mass transit system.

He lives in Hillsboro with his wife and two sons. His brother also works at TriMet.

A 1988 graduate of Marshall High School, Hansen says he was unfamiliar with unions growing up. But he says he got a union education at the hands of fellow driver Sam Schwarz, a union officer who retired at the end of June as Local 757 vice president.

Hansen says his priorities will include building communication, training union officers, and tightening the local’s budget. He takes office at a time when the union is in a protracted contract dispute with TriMet, its largest employer. Local 757 members’ benefits — and their right to binding arbitration of contract disputes — have been the subject of repeat attacks by The Oregonian editorial board. An arbitrator is expected to pick one side’s final offer sometime this summer.

As for Heintzman, he served five terms as Local 757 president from 1988 until 2002, when he went to work as international vice president. In 2009 he moved to Washington, D.C., to become ATU’s ex-

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