

Coors is no friend of working families

OPEN FORUM

To The Editor:

Hats off to Bob Tackett, his staff, and the volunteers of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council for the Labor Appreciation Dinner. It was my first time attending, and I really enjoyed the camaraderie and fellowship. It's always good when we recognize our brothers and sisters in the labor movement and thank them for the tireless work they have given on behalf of the cause.

I was, however, shocked by the amount of Coors beer consumed by at-

tendees. Some were union members, some were union representatives, some were representatives of our labor-friendly elected officials, and some were invited guests.

I'll admit that some of these folks may not know the history of how Coors broke the back of the Brewery Workers Union out of its Golden, Colorado brewery in 1977; how Coors moved its porcelain manufacturing facility to Brazil long before offshoring became popular among corporations to cut

wages and benefits; how Coors has fought every progressive movement to help society out of the dark ages in the past 35 years. The then-president of Coors Brewery, Joe Coors, was a well-known backer of right-wing causes such as the John Birch Society; a founder of a conservative think-tank, the Heritage Foundation; and a member of President Ronald Reagan's so-called "Kitchen Cabinet."

Yes, the boycott of Coors ended in 1987, but that has not stopped the

Coors political machine from marching onward. The Coors family, through its political operations, uses its share of the profits from beer sales to perpetuate and encourage regressive governmental and social policies, serving only the narrow interests of a handful of the very wealthy 1% in this country.

Ironically, the Coors family derives the bulk of its wealth from working middle-class people — like those attending the Labor Appreciation Night Dinner who purchased Coors beer products.

Some may ask, "Why was Coors even sold at this labor event?" The truth of the matter is that this was held at a private facility at a cash bar. This is

how a private enterprise makes money. It has a right to sell whatever beer it likes. We as labor, friends of labor, and labor representatives need to practice due diligence and not purchase it, regardless of where we are.

Please think twice next time you are ordering a beer. The money you spend is used against you when you purchase Coors. Let Coors make their money elsewhere, not at union functions.

Mark Warne
IBEW Local 48
Salem

To all union members in the Pacific NW — appreciate what you have

To The Editor:

My husband and I are longtime union members. My husband, Robert, is a retired member of Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 290. I was a member of the Portland Association of Teachers and my father was in the bus drivers' union. So you can see, we are very pro-union.

We read every issue of the Labor Press, and have noticed increasing negativity toward union membership. Maybe this is true in every area of the U.S., but it has got to be the worst in the South. We retired in Florida in 2003. We were shocked at the working condition of construction workers when we were having a house built in central Florida. The plumber we spoke with was from New York and said that he would be going back because foreign workers were taking over and undercutting wages in order to get jobs.

An article in The Orlando Sentinel, a right-wing leaning newspaper, tells the typical Southern political attitude toward unions.

Recently, the Florida House of Rep-

resentatives introduced an amendment to a bill that limited proposed tax breaks only to businesses that DO NOT employ union workers. Our governor, Rick Scott, ultimately signed the bill.

Workers do not make a living wage here as it is. Experienced welders make \$10 an hour. Teachers scrape by on very little, and most have second jobs if they can find them. But in spite of that, everyone in the South hates unions. They are not certain why, but they hate them.

This is a right-to-work, at-will employment state (sounds pretty good, doesn't it?). This means workers don't have to belong to a union, even if a majority of workers at a company vote for one, and that employers can fire any worker at any time, without provocation.

My neighbor works for the developer of a retirement community here. She worked with a real estate sales person who developed breast cancer. The woman had no sick leave, and as an independent agent selling real estate, no vacation time. She worked during her

chemo treatment, but when the developer decided she had missed too many days, she was fired. There she was with no insurance and no means of income. She died soon after.

Another neighbor, the wife of an East Coast pipefitter, worked for a very short time for Wynn-Dixie grocery. She mentioned union affiliation as a way to enjoy better wages and working conditions. Word got back to her supervisor, who told her she would be fired if she ever mentioned the word "union" again. She quit.

Every union member in the Pacific Northwest should be very appreciative that the political climate is pro-union, for the most part. They should also be thankful that they are able to earn a living wage and have benefits, which are non-existent in the South, for the most part.

I will continue reading and enjoying the Labor Press.

Pat and Robert Wilson
Portland Association of Teachers/
UA Local 290
The Villages, Florida

Thanks to all who supported labor agency at special dinner

To The Editor:

The labor movement builds strong communities, and there is no greater example of this than the Northwest Oregon Labor Council's annual Labor Appreciation and Recognition Night, a fundraiser for Labor's Community Service Agency on June 2.

The roaring standing ovations given to Verna Porter and Nellie Fox-Edwards as they were awarded the NOLC Heritage Award were heart pulling, along with the much deserving Lee and Kathy Duncan who received the Del Ricks Award for their tireless work with the Unions For Kids charity, a fundraiser for Doernbecher Children's Hospital. An additional 14 other awards were given to union members and staff for their dedication throughout the year. After the awards were given, a fun competitive spirit filled the room as raffle numbers were called out

for the dozens of donated items given to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council to help raise funds for Labor's Community Service Agency.

The evening raised over \$2,700 for the Helping Hands program due in no small part to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council and its affiliates. This money will go to union brothers and sisters in need to help pay rent, keep the lights on and feed their families.

I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the evening's planning committee, speakers, presenters, volunteers, raffle donors and members of our strong labor movement for contributing generously to Labor's Community Service Agency, Inc.

My sincerest thanks to all of you.

Vickie Burns
Executive Director, LCSA
Portland

Merkley co-sponsors FOREWARN Act in U. S. Senate

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), is co-sponsoring legislation that gives workers and communities advanced notice of mass layoffs or plant closings.

The Federal Oversight, Reform, and Enforcement of the WARN (FOREWARN) Act would strengthen enforcement of current law and close loopholes in the current Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, which became law in 1988.

The FOREWARN Act was originally introduced in June 2009 by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio). It died in committee without any action.

Brown reintroduced the bill June 14 with co-sponsors Merkley and Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.). The bill is S.3297.

"Too often over the last few decades workers have been sent home with

barely a moment's notice when their factory abruptly closed down," Merkley said. "We need to give both workers and communities advanced warning when they are at risk of mass layoffs. This bill will ensure that they have time to prepare and also that back pay gets to the worker in a timely manner. In Oregon, we know this problem all too well. The workers at the Blue Heron paper mill, laid off almost one and a half years ago, still have not seen a dime of their back pay. That is just wrong."

The Blue Heron paper mill closed in February 2011. The laid-off workers, members of the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers, have had to hire an attorney to fight for the back pay they are owed by law because Congress never provided the U.S. Department of Labor with enforcement re-

sponsibility.

Congress passed the WARN Act in 1988 to give workers and communities 60 days advance notice to adjust to an impending "plant closing" or "mass layoff." It has been demonstrated that retraining and other readjustment efforts have the greatest success when advance notice is provided.

But the WARN Act's effectiveness has been undermined by loopholes and weak enforcement. According to a 2003 General Accounting Office report that studied layoffs in 2001, only about 24 percent of mass layoffs and plant closures were covered by the statute. One reason the percentage is so low is that the WARN Act protections are only triggered when a "mass layoff" occurs if at least 33 percent of the employer's workforce — up to 499 work-

ers — is laid off. This means that a large employer can terminate 499 workers without providing any notice.

The report also found that employers failed to provide notice to employees in almost two-thirds of the layoffs and closures where the WARN Act otherwise would apply because of exceptions that employers can invoke. The WARN Act currently requires violating employers to pay an employee a day's pay for every day of notice not provided, but does not provide any agency with responsibility for enforcing workers' rights.

The new FOREWARN Act would give the U.S. Department of Labor the authority to investigate complaints and enforce the WARN Act when employers fail to comply with the law. The bill would also increase penalties from up

to 60 days' worth of back pay to up to 90 days' worth of double-back pay.

In addition, it would require mass layoffs of 25 or more employees to be covered by the statute and cover employers with 75 or more full-time workers. The bill would also lengthen the notification period from 60 to 90 days and require employers to provide written notification to the Department of Labor that includes the reason for the plant closing or mass layoff, whether the employer has jobs elsewhere, and a statement of each employee's right to wages and benefits.

The bill would also expand recipients of notification to the secretary of labor, elected officials, including the governor, members of Congress, and state representatives, and the appropriate labor unions when applicable.