

# Fundraising group fires all but one member of bargaining team

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

Job security was the number one reason workers unionized last October at a Southeast Portland call center affiliated with state PIRGs like OSPIRG and groups like Environment Oregon. So it's ironic that in 10 months of union contract bargaining, the non-profit Fund for the Public Interest has fired five of the workers who've volunteered to serve on the union bargaining team.

Their union, Communications Workers of America Local 7901, protested the firings to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). But the federal agency has declined to press charges, because the union has no "smoking gun" evidence that union sup-

porters were singled out for worse treatment. In other words, Local 7901 president Madelyn Elder says, the NLRB concluded that the Fund for the Public Interest treats all its employees that way. The Fund is a high-turnover workplace where firings are routine.

It has canvass operations in multiple states and telephone outreach call centers in Boston, Sacramento and Portland. Canvassers recruit members door-to-door or in public places, and telephone outreach workers call members to renew or make additional donations.

The Fund's call center workers have no control over the call lists they're given. Nor do they have any say over a weekly quota they're expected to meet.

But if the workers miss the quota for a week, they're placed on "ultimatum," and if they miss it for a second week, they're terminated — even if they've been stellar fundraisers for years.

Workers' other big complaint is unpredictable paychecks. Callers start at \$9.50 an hour, and can get \$0.50-an-hour raises every 20 shifts based on how much money they raise, up to \$14.50 an hour. But they are demoted back to \$9.50 an hour if the amount they raise drops by a certain amount for two weeks. And the dollar amounts are based, not on how much money is pledged, but on how much is actually collected within three weeks of the pledge.

So a below-par two weeks can cut a

caller's pay to \$9.50 an hour. And a very bad two weeks can end in termination.

"It's certainly not a pleasant way to live," says telephone outreach worker David Neel, a 35-year-old single parent of two boys — and the only remaining member who's been on the bargaining team since talks began Nov. 4, 2011.

CWA represents workers at call centers around the country, and Elder, the Local 7901 president, says the Fund's policies are "draconian."

"What other call center, honest to god, fires you within two weeks for not making your quota," Elder said. "Non-union commercial call centers don't even do that. If you were a new hire, I could see that, but somebody who's been there nine years, and they're short \$47 on the second week, and you're going to fire them? That's ludicrous. This person has made you all kinds of money for years."

Elder is convinced the Fund is using existing policies to get rid of its Portland call center workers across the board, because they voted to unionize.

"They can make you successful or not successful depending on what list they are feeding your automatic caller," Elder. "They can give you a list of people who haven't donated in five years."

Until last week, the Fund call center was in the same building and right next door to the offices of OSPIRG and Environment Oregon; the call center is being relocated temporarily during a

building remodel.

OSPIRG executive director David Rosenfeld would not comment about labor practices of the group that raises his salary and nearly all of the funds for his group's educational and advocacy efforts — and instead referred questions to Pat Wood, Boston-based director of the Fund's national telephone outreach program. The Labor Press was unable to reach Wood by the time this issue went to press.

It's a funny position for OSPIRG, a public interest non-profit whose slogan is "standing up to powerful interests," particularly when even Apple Computer has accepted some responsibility for conditions at its contractors.

The Fund is an independent non-profit, but it's overseen by a board consisting of representatives of a number of state Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) and the statewide environmental groups, such as Environment Oregon and Environment Colorado, that spun off from the PIRGs several years ago. Rosenfeld said he's not a member of that board.

Unions have collaborated with OSPIRG on political campaigns in the Oregon Legislature, but OSPIRG's standaside stance on Fund labor practices may be alienating some of its allies in organized labor. Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain wrote a letter to Rosenfeld asking him to inter-

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## ...AFSCME #328 ratifies pact at OHSU

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a payment equal to 5 percent of wages for vested participants and 6 percent for those not yet vested. In July 2014 that payment drops to 3 percent for vested and 4 percent for non-vested.

After all that back and forth, wages for UPP participants will have increased the full 7.5 percent by the contract's end, compared to 4.5 percent for vested PERS participants. Union negotiators proposed that wages simply be raised 6 percent to compensate for the PERS deductions, but Lovell said OHSU insisted on the "differential" terminology, maybe because it seems more temporary; she expects OHSU will propose reducing or eliminating the subsidy in future negotiations.

Meanwhile, health coverage mostly

stays the same in the new contract. OHSU pays the whole premium for employee-only health coverage, and 88 percent of the premium for family coverage. OHSU dropped a proposal to reduce its contribution to 83 percent of family coverage. OHSU also proposed that workers pay any annual increase in health insurance premiums after the first 5 percent, but in the end agreed to pay premium increases of up to 10 percent. The increases in recent years have hovered around 2 percent, Lovell said.

OHSU is itself a hospital as well as an educational and research facility, and workers can choose to get health care at work through an OHSU Preferred Provider Organization that has a richer benefit structure than the other options.

The union agreed to reduce differential pay for working nights and weekends for about 100 workers in several classifications.

OHSU backed off of a proposal to move about 400 hourly employees to salaried status, including pharmacists and medical technologists who are working lots of overtime. The employees would have been given a 5 percent raise over their current average earnings, but not be paid extra for working longer hours.

Lovell said the union also won improvements on other priorities members identified, including better contract language on training, working out of classification, grievance procedures, and attendance policy.

The negotiations, including mediation, took five months.

## Local Motion

### August 2012

A list of Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces deciding whether to be union-represented — as reported by the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Voting in union elections

Date	Workplace (Location) Union	Yes	No
8/24	Ashland Food Cooperative (Ashland) UFCW Local 555	42	75

### Unionizing by majority sign-up

Date	Workplace (Location) Union	Number of workers in unit
8/1	City of Newberg Public Works employees (Newberg) Oregon AFSCME	25
8/8	Umpqua Community College faculty (Roseburg) Oregon Education Association	175

### Requesting a union election

Workplace (Location) Union	Number of workers in unit
Providence Health medical advice line RNs (Portland) Oregon Nurses Association	31
OPEIU Local 11 (Vancouver) Clerical and Field Service Representatives	3
General Distributors (Oregon City) Teamsters Local 162 <b>DECERT</b>	60

#### LEGEND

: workers will be union-represented : workers will be on their own  
**DECERT** : A decertification election occurs when some union-represented workers declare that the union no longer has majority support. A 'yes' vote is a vote for the union.



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