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Talks stall over City's push to end outsourcing protections

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The City of Portland is pushing to make it easier to outsource the jobs of its union workers. In negotiations with the seven-union 1,600-employee coalition known as the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU), the City is proposing to eliminate a protection against contracting out that has been in the union collective bargaining agreement since the 1980s.

Article 6 of the City's collective bargaining agreement with DCTU says that the City may not outsource work that is done by bargaining unit members — unless doing so saves taxpayer money. And, crucially, those savings can't come from paying lower wages and benefits to the workers who do the work. Article 6 also says the City has to notify the unions if it's considering contracting out, and it says no bargaining unit member will lose employment as a result of contracting out.

DCTU leaders say eliminating those protections would grease the skids for greater privatization of City services. Not only would that reduce job security for City workers, but it would signal a turn away from the notion of the City should be a living-wage employer. It would also eliminate a brake on corruption and waste, since City managers would be able to contract out without having to show that doing so would save money.

DCTU members do much of the city's most tangible work. They are blue-collar workers who maintain water and sewer systems, parks and roads, and white-collar clerical workers in Police and other bureaus. They are members of AFSCME Local 189, Electrical Workers Local 48, Laborers Local 483, Machinists Local 1005, Operating Engineers Local 701, Painters Local 10, and Plumbers and Fitters Local 290.



Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman (on stage) announced at the Labor Day picnic that he'll run for re-election. But as symbolized by the sign held by union retiree Willard Valentine, there's a cloud hanging over his relationship with organized labor: A City push to make it easier to outsource workers, in bargaining with the seven-union 1,600 employee coalition known as DCTU.

"We have eyes on the ground," said Laborers Local 483 Field Rep Lon Holston. "We're the best watchdog a citizen could have."

Article 6 puts unions in the position of guarding against waste, since the City must show cost savings before it can outsource union members' jobs.

"No citizen is going to come in off the street and ask them if they're saving money through contracting out," said Painters union member Mike Keebaugh, a shop steward and member of the DCTU bargaining team. "Unions are the last line of defense of accountability."

Contract bargaining has been under way since February, and the two sides have agreed on most items. The City's proposal to undo restrictions on outsourcing is now the sticking point preventing agreement on a new contract.

"There's no reason to change this rule," said Northwest Oregon Labor Council Executive Board member Sam Gillispie. Gillispie — now grievance director of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 — was an AFSCME business representative in the 1980s, and helped get Article 6 into the DCTU contract. Gillispie likens Article 6 to the "Davis-Bacon" requirement to pay the prevailing wage on construction jobs, because it sets a standard that government, as a purchaser of labor, won't use its buying power to push down wages and benefits.

"It's worked well," Gillispie said. "The City is still able to contract something out, if they can show savings that don't come from lower wages and benefits."

Dana Haynes, spokesperson for Mayor Charlie Hales, declined to offer any explanation or justification for the City's proposal on Article 6, saying it wouldn't be appropriate to comment on specifics of

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Unions, allies, march for jobs on 50th anniversary of March on Washington



A large contingent of members from IBEW Local 48 were among several thousand gathered in Portland Aug. 24 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Among them were Ettione Dixon, Desiree Dixon, Christina Valentine and Andre Lawrence.

Echoing the themes they marched to 50 years ago, tens of thousands of unionists and their civil rights allies marched to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 24 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and to re-commit themselves to continue the fight for social and economic justice — regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or place of birth.

Similar rallies were held simultaneously around the country, including Portland, where an estimated 2,000 people marched through the streets.

More than a dozen unions were represented in Washington, D.C., and in Portland.

The Portland event was sponsored by Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice & Police Reform, the Urban League of Portland, NAACP of Portland, ACLU of Portland, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and several labor and community-based organizations. Speakers included John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State

Building and Construction Trades Council. Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley participated in the march.



Union banners were scattered among some 2,000 people marching from Terry Schunk Plaza to South Waterfront Park in Portland.

The actual anniversary of the March on Washington is Aug. 28. On that day in 1963 the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic "I Have a Dream" speech, which accelerated passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

It's little known that AFL-CIO vice president and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters A. Philip Randolph, along with labor and civil rights activist Bayard Rustin and United Auto Workers (UAW) President Walter Reuther conceptualized and called for the march.

"It's the same fight for the same principles" that Dr. King stood for, UAW President Bob King told Press Associates Union News Service in Washington, D.C. That fight includes workers' rights (to join a union) and the right to vote.

"This march was just the start," King said.

There was no shortage of causes to rally behind in both D.C. (where the crowd was estimated at over 100,000)

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