



Outside the Southeast Portland offices of OSPIRG and Environment Oregon, “phone canvassers” who raise money for those two groups rally during a two-hour strike. The strike marked the two-year anniversary of the vote by telephone fundraisers at the Fund for the Public Interest to join CWA Local 7901.

Strike at PIRG call center marks two-year union drive

Two years after voting to join Communications Workers of America Local 7901, the two dozen workers at a Portland call center run by the Fund for the Public Interest still have no union contract. But they’ve yet to give up, either. On Oct. 11, they engaged in a work stoppage marking the two-year point.

Fund for the Public Interest, based in Boston, is the fundraising wing of the national network that includes state Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) and state environmental groups like Environment Oregon. The Fund fires workers at an extraordinary rate for all kinds of infractions, especially missing quotas, which workers have no control over setting.

The Portland call center workers unionized chiefly to win at least slight improvements in job security.

But in two years of once-a-month bargaining with national Telephone Outreach Project director Pat Wood, the Fund hasn’t agreed to even basic union contract principles like “just

cause” (the requirement that an employer show a reason before firing you), and “union security” (an agreement that represented workers will pay dues.)

“They want to give us ‘open shop,’” said striking phone fundraiser Anya Dagnall. “We think if everybody’s going to have the same rights, that everyone should pay union dues.”

So at 4 p.m., all 12 callers who were working the Friday afternoon shift on Oct. 11 took a paid break, signed back into their computer stations, then got up, walked out, and left the building — two hours before the scheduled closing time. They marched to a nearby office that houses OSPIRG, Environment Oregon, and the Fund for the Public Interest door-to-door canvass operation. There they found lights on inside, but doors locked. No one at the OSPIRG office responded to the doorbell or to phone calls.

“We’re going to keep fighting,” Dagnall said. “We’re not going to be silenced.”

Strike on horizon at City of Portland

Both union and management appear to be preparing for a strike at the City of Portland, which could start in November. The seven-union 1,600-worker coalition known as the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) has tentatively scheduled a “ready to walk” rally for 4:30 p.m. Nov. 6, at a location to be determined. And on Sept. 26, City of Portland chief negotiator Julia Getchell told DCTU bargaining chair Rob Wheaton that she instructed City management to place all vacation requests on hold for November, December, and January — based on concern over a potential DCTU strike. That’s according to an unfair labor practice charge the DCTU filed Oct. 2 with the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

DCTU says the vacation hold was illegal, and argues that it’s part of a broader pattern by the City of refusal to abide by Oregon’s Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act.

In the charge, DCTU says the City of Portland has refused to bargain in good faith. When the two sides began negotiating a new contract Feb. 13, the City proposed rollbacks in virtually every area of the contract. Despite five months of weekly meetings and four sessions with a state-appointed mediator, the two sides have reached agreement on only two of 38 articles: the preamble and the clause covering health insurance. DCTU says the City failed to meaningfully negotiate during the 150-day period of contract bargaining mandated by law, and even refused to bargain over its own proposals. Further, DCTU says, the City has said that its fi-



AFSCME Local 189 members Bruce Bullick and Kevin Getner rally outside Portland City Hall Oct. 2 prior to a City Council meeting.

nal offer will be significantly worse than its final mediation proposal.

DCTU negotiators object most strongly to two items: A proposal to eliminate protections against contracting out union members’ work, and a proposed 0.9 percent cost-of-living increase, which the City has insisted won’t be retroactive to the June 30 expiration of the previous contract, as has previously been the custom.

DCTU includes AFSCME Local 189, Laborers Local 483, Operating Engineers Local 701, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48, Machinists District Lodge 24, Painters District Council 5, and Plumbers Local 290. They maintain water and sewer systems and parks and roads, and perform clerical functions in Police and other bureaus.

Oct. 2, the DCTU took its unhappiness directly to a meeting of City Council.

Painters Local 10 member Mike Keebaugh and Laborers Local 483 member Sam Sachs addressed City Council during time set aside for public comment, to cheers from scores of city workers in the gallery. DCTU plans to return to City Council at 9:30 a.m. Oct. 30, when five more members will speak.

Meanwhile, for the first time in at least 20 years, Portland’s 911 dispatchers rejected a tentative agreement with the City by nearly a two-to-one margin. The contract vote was held Oct. 5.

AFSCME Local 189-2 represents employees at the City’s Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC). The 93 employees in the bargaining unit answer all 911 and non-emergency calls for the city police and fire bureaus, as well as calls for Multnomah County. Under contract with the city, 911 and emergency dispatching services are provided to the police departments of Gresham, Troutdale, and Fairview, as well as the Multnomah County Sheriff’s office. They also handle calls for the Gresham, Corbett, and Sauvie Island fire departments, and dispatch American Medical Response ambulances contracted to Multnomah County Emergency Medical Services.

The dispatchers are part of the DCTU, but their contract and bargaining are separate because they cannot strike. The key issues they are facing are forced overtime and premium pay for backup training coaches.

A DCTU mediation session was scheduled Oct. 15, after this issue went to press.



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