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DCTU STRIKE VOTE — At the March 18 launch of a week-long vote, AFSCME Local 189 President Mark Gipson voted to reject the City of Portland’s “final” contract offer and authorize a strike. Fellow District Council of Trades Unions members in Laborers Local 483 approved a strike authorization by a 95 percent margin March 14. City workers say they are tired of being asked to make concessions. The City is pushing to eliminate protections against contracting out, while offering a first-year wage increase equal to half the rate of inflation.

City of Portland ordered to proceed with union election

City obstructed and delayed for a year, but now park rangers get to join DCTU

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Portland’s park rangers, who patrol the City’s approximately 200 parks, are a tight-knit crew. They wear the same uniforms, work under the same manager, get the same state security officer training, and do the same outdoor work. Most earn \$11 to \$13 an hour, receive no benefits, and get laid off after 1,400 hours for budget reasons. They want to join Laborers Local 483, which represents other Parks Bureau employees, and they want to be covered under the City of Portland contract with the

seven-union coalition known as District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU).

In 2012, when mayoral candidate Charlie Hales was out looking for labor endorsements, he declared his support for the right of workers to unionize. But in 2013, when Mayor Hales was asked point blank by the 15 park rangers to recognize their union, he declined — though he had the authority to grant their request. The official line was that he’d prefer they certify union support through a “secret ballot” election supervised by the state Employment Relations Board (ERB).

So on April 17, 2013, the park rangers filed with ERB to do that. The City attorney’s office, which is under Hales’ direction, answered their petition with six pages of legal objections to their definition of the proposed bargaining unit.

That’s actually what anti-union employers do in the private sector. “Union avoidance” consultants advise employers never to voluntarily recognize a union; instead, they make the union request a government-administered election, and then they file technical legal objections to delay the election.

The City objected that the park rangers aren’t a “logical, cohesive” group to add to the DCTU. See if you can follow the mishmash of supporting arguments put forth by Deputy City Attorney Matthew Farley. They shouldn’t be in the same unit, because they have different classifications: Only three park rangers are classified by the City as park rangers; 11 others are “community service aids” [sic], and one is a “community outreach and information assistant” because he also designs

(Turn to Page 5)

Portland State University professors authorize strike

AAUP says they’re ready to walk out to promote greater stability and defend faculty role in governance

College professors at Portland State University (PSU) voted overwhelmingly March 11-12 to authorize a strike, and could walk off the job as early as April 4 if no further progress is made in negotiations over a new contract.

The PSU chapter of American Association of University Professors (PSU-AAUP) represents about 950 full-time faculty at the school, which has about 30,000 students. It’s the first time PSU-AAUP has ever authorized a strike, and if they do walk out, it would be the first-ever strike by state university professors in Oregon.

AAUP spokesperson David Osborn said the strike authorization was supported by 94 percent of those voting, and turnout was an overwhelming “super-super-majority” — though he wouldn’t say the exact number.

PSU-AAUP President Mary King, a professor of economics, said members aren’t willing to accept concessions demanded by the university administration, particularly when the union went into bargaining seeking improvements.

King said agreement is being hindered by three bargaining stances taken by the university administration:

1) Its rejection of a cost-neutral proposal for greater job security. About 600 PSU-AAUP members are tenure-track or tenured, meaning they can’t be removed except for gross misconduct or dereliction of duty. But about 400 others are on one- or two-year contracts, and their number is increasing. King said every December, about two-thirds of them receive a letter informing them their contract has been “non-renewed,” meaning there’s no guarantee they’ll be hired back to teach classes the next academic year. Most end up later being renewed, but the feeling of never being a permanent employee creates an intolerable amount of stress, King said, and makes it hard for the university to keep talented faculty when they get offers elsewhere. “The rest of us cannot build

a program around people the university won’t commit to. Students can’t be sure they will get letters of recommendation or advising, or take classes from them in the future.”

King said she knows one instructor

who’s been on one-year contracts for 25 years.

“I was chair of my department for six years,” King said, “and I used to implore the dean to let me give multi-year contracts to people who I knew

were well qualified, doing a good job in the classroom and were absolutely going to be needed the following year to help us keep them. And I was told, ‘no, this is the policy. Everyone has to be non-renewed. We need the flexibility.’”

King said PSU-AAUP wants what University of Oregon professors won last year in their first-ever union contract — a guarantee of multi-year contracts after serving four one-year contracts.

2) Its insistence on diminishing PSU-AAUP’s role in university governance. At PSU and at most universities, rules on faculty evaluation, promotion, merit pay, tenure, and post-tenure review are created and established by an elected faculty senate, using model language developed by the AAUP nationally. Since 1979, the PSU-AAUP contract has had a clause saying that if the PSU administration wants to overrule the faculty senate and change those policies, it has to get the agreement of AAUP. Now the PSU administration is proposing to eliminate that clause.

3) Its wage offer, which wouldn’t

(Turn to Page 7)



About 500 Portland State University students stood with their teachers Feb. 27, many of them walking out of class to join a picket and rally for a fair contract for members of American Association of University Professors.