

...Beetle retires as business manager of Laborers #483

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involved in the struggle around the war, and was a sponge: I soaked up a lot of information and really got my education that way.”

Beetle married Myra Silverman, a native New Yorker, and the two moved to Missouri, where he went to work at a paper bag printing plant, and tried to get coworkers to join the Typographical Union. The union campaign lost narrowly, a victim of employer tactics — a 25-cent raise, and threats of plant closure if they were to unionize. Beetle was fired for his union activism, and later won a backpay settlement brokered by the National Labor Relations Board.

Then an organizer with the union told Beetle about a new program to train operators to run wastewater treat-

ment equipment. The Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, was forcing cities to introduce a new treatment process. That meant not only cleaner water, but opportunities for skilled jobs. The government established a training school in Neosho, and Beetle graduated from it in 1974, and went to work in Plano, Texas. His wife hated it there, and they moved to Portland instead, where he went to work as a wastewater treatment technician for the City of Portland.

It was Beetle's first time working in a union-represented job, and he got involved in Laborers Local 483 right away. In 1981, he helped organize the AFL-CIO's 1,500-strong march in downtown Portland to protest President Ronald Reagan's firing of striking air traffic controllers. And alongside letter carriers union activist Jamie Partridge, he helped found a labor committee to oppose Reagan's covert war against the Nicaraguan Sandinista government and its support for a repressive military junta in El Salvador.

Beetle was appointed secretary-treasurer in 1990 and served in that position until 2005, when he won election as business manager.

The first two decades of his union involvement, Beetle recalls, were a time of relative labor peace. Before the time of public sector budget austerity, union contract language rolled over year after year, and the only fight was over how big the cost-of-living increase would be.

“Politicians were willing to buy labor peace, and there was never any talk of strike,” Beetle said.

Recent times have been more con-

flict-ridden. Public employers increased the use of low-wage no-benefit nonunion temps and seasonal workers, or contracted out the work altogether. And in contract negotiations, they began demanding concessions. In 2001, DCTU members went on strike for six hours. In the last two negotiations, City management has taken aim at a cherished clause that limits the City's ability to outsource members' jobs.

Beetle and Local 483 campaigned to unionize the low-wage contingent workers, while opposing efforts by the City of Portland and Metro to use temps, contract workers, and prison labor to do things that they should be doing with union employees at a living wage.

“We're going after the people who need unions the most,” Beetle said. “Because our attitude is: They either become our gravediggers or our best champions.”

So far, Local 483 has had several successes, including unionizing seasonal maintenance workers in the Portland Parks Bureau and fast food workers at the Zoo.

“[Most workers] get hired into their union,” Beetle said. “These people fought for theirs. So they're proud as punch of it. They're marginalized contingent workers, paid at the very lowest scale, hired and fired on a whim. If they say a word about anything, their hours are reduced to zero. These people are the most vulnerable, and yet they're the most heroic you've ever seen.”

Beetle said as business manager he worked to implement a vision of a membership-centered union, one where

leaders stood up for coworkers in the workplace. If he leaves a legacy, he hopes it's an active membership that's not afraid to fight — and that continues to reach out to nonunion workers.

Beetle said in retirement, he'll also spend more time with his wife of 40 years. Their daughter, Kara Gundersen, is a case worker at Multnomah

County and a member of AFSCME Local 88. Their son, Justin, is a apprentice carpenter with Carpenters Local 156.

Beetle said he plans to continue to be involved as a retiree. That includes plans working to oppose a ballot measure that would turn the City water system over to a volunteer board.

...PSU professors take strike vote

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keep up with inflation, much less narrow the gap with faculty at similar universities. PSU is offering two 1.5 percent raises effective January 2014 and January 2015 — or two 2 percent raises if AAUP agrees to give up its say in university governance. King said it would take 2.8 percent raises just to keep up with inflation. AAUP is proposing two raises ranging from 3.25 to 5.5 percent, with the bigger raises going to the lower-paid faculty. King described wages as the least important of the three sticking points, and said the issue was less the money itself than about equity with administrator pay and increasing stability by reducing turnover.

“We are seeing big investments in administration and especially upper administration, at a time when this faculty is consistently uncompetitively paid, and we suffer major challenges of recruitment and retention because of it,” King said.

At a March 14 mediation session,

little progress was made. Both sides are making preparations for a walkout. With 10 days notice, PSU-AAUP may now call a strike anytime after April 3, when the legally-mandated 30-day cooling off period ends.

The administration released a statement saying it's developing plans to maintain classes in the event of a strike, with details will be announced soon.

Meanwhile, AAUP is reaching out to instructors at community colleges in the area asking them not to work as strikebreakers — teaching the classes of striking professors. And they're calling on members of their sister union representing PSU's part-time faculty — American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — to hold classes outside or on the picket line to show solidarity in the event of a strike. AFT and Service Employees International Union Local 503, which represents support staff, do not have a contract provision that says they may refuse to cross picket lines, so members could legally be disciplined for honoring the strike.

A group called the PSU Student Union has also been organizing students to support AAUP. Undergraduate English major Cameron Frank, one of the group's founders, has sat in on bargaining sessions, and helped organize a Feb. 27 walkout by students to show support for professors. About 500 students took part.

Unionists to bowl for Muscular Dystrophy Association on April 13

The 25th annual Labor Bowl Challenge for the Muscular Dystrophy Association will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, April 13, at Sunset Lanes, 12770 SW Walker Road, Beaverton. Since its inception, union members have raised \$351,025.75 for MDA.

The Labor Bowl Challenge consists of four-person teams that compete for prizes. Money is raised through pledges and from a silent auction.

To sign up, call Jim Falvey at 503-493-5903 or Debby Burbank at 971-404-5384.



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