

# Port will consider a 'social equity' policy for airport workers

**PDX lags behind other West Coast airports in raising standards for low-wage service workers**

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Port of Portland managers say

they're working on a proposal to raise worker standards at Portland International Airport (PDX), but it won't come soon enough for a group of food service workers who are due to be laid off Dec. 31.

At Gustav's Pub and Grill, 48 newly-unionized workers got layoff notices in September, after their employer — airport food service company HMS

Host — lost its lease. The closure isn't because Gustav's isn't doing well. It's because of a restaurant reshuffling instigated by airport managers.

At least four other West Coast airports — Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and SeaTac — have "worker retention" policies. The policies require new vendors to hire old workers when concessions change hands. But PDX

lacks such a policy, notwithstanding months of appeals from the union UNITE HERE Local 8 at meetings of the Port of Portland Commission.

UNITE HERE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union) has worked to unionize airport food service workers around the United States, in tandem with efforts by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to unionize airport ramp workers, baggage handlers, jet fuelers, and cabin cleaners. In September, all 172 HMS Host workers at the Portland airport became members of UNITE HERE Local 8. Local 8 organizer Shellea Allen says the union represents over 10,000 HMS Host workers elsewhere.

At PDX, HMS Host operates three restaurants — Gustav's, Rose's Restaurant and Bakery, and Rogue Ales Public House — plus all Starbucks locations. When the airport failed to renew Gustav's lease — Bambuza Vietnam Bistro and MOD Pizza will go there instead — it meant the union had to negotiate layoff terms even before bargaining a first union contract for the unit. UNITE HERE was able to get HMS Host to agree to transfer some workers to its other airport restaurants, and give the rest a small severance payment.

Van Touch, who worked eight years as a cook at Gustav's, was one of the lucky ones, and will transfer. Vancouver resident Kevin Bell, a widower raising three boys, was not so lucky. With worry in his voice, he attended the Dec.

10 Port Commission meeting to plead for a policy that would prevent that kind of unnecessary stress in workers' lives.

Mass layoffs are a given when restaurants close. But Gustav's is closing (and more closures are coming) because of decisions made by a public body.

The Port of Portland — led by commissioners appointed by the governor — manages marine terminals, industrial property, and the airport. Its mission is economic development for the benefit of local residents.

At Los Angeles International Airport, a worker retention policy requires incoming operators to hire from a pool of workers laid off by outgoing businesses. LAX food service worker Elvira Fillet was one of several workers who flew to Portland to attend the Dec. 10 Port Commission meeting so she could speak to commissioners. Fillet said she's been through four changeovers since 1989, but the airport's retention policy made it possible for her to raise a family, buy a car, and live the "American Dream" while working at the airport.

UNITE HERE and SEIU have been showing up repeatedly to monthly meetings of the Port of Portland Commission, and their persistent appeals for pro-worker safeguards may be bearing fruit. At the Commission's Oct. 8 meeting, retiring Port executive director Bill Wyatt said retention would be part of a "social equity" policy he intends to propose. Commissioner Tom

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