



# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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Mascots of McDonald's and Walmart called on their respective companies to pay their workers \$15 an hour during a Oregon Needs a Raise rally Jan. 24 at the State Capitol in Salem. The rally drew large support from labor unions.

## Unions join rally for \$15 minimum wage

SALEM — Union members were among the several hundred workers rallying at the State Capitol Jan. 24 for a \$15 state minimum wage. The event was organized by 15 Now Oregon, but it had strong backing from more than a dozen unions.

The Oregon AFL-CIO and most labor unions in the state have endorsed the push to make Oregon the first state to enact a \$15 minimum wage.

Democrats who control the

Oregon Legislature (and the governor's office) will consider several bills that would gradually raise the minimum wage, which currently is \$9.25 an hour. One bill would increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018. Another bill would raise it to \$12.20 by 2017, then adjust it for inflation after that. Also on the docket is a bill to repeal the preemption law that prevents cities and

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## NW Labor Press gets a makeover

With this issue, the Northwest Labor Press is launching a new page design. We value tradition, but we also felt overdue for a new look. The previous design had been in place with only minor changes since 1993.

We think the new design makes better use of our space, has a more internally consistent look, and is more engaging visually. We've also increased the point size slightly, and we think you'll find it easier to read.

In case there are any journeyman design nerds reading this: The new design uses the Myriad font family for display elements, and Times, the old standby, for body text (at 10 pt size, with 11 pt leading).

The paper conforms to tabloid dimensions (11"x14") and is printed on recycled paper using soy-based inks by members of Graphic Communications Conference/Teamsters Local 747-M at Rotary Offset Press in Kent, Washington.

We hope you like the new look. And we welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Drop us a line at [editor@nwlaborpress.org](mailto:editor@nwlaborpress.org).

## Big change to law on union pensions

Pensioners could share the pain under a new law that lets trustees cut benefits to make plans solvent

By Don McIntosh  
Associate Editor

A new law passed by Congress in December could affect more than one million union workers and retirees who are covered by union-sponsored multi-employer pension plans. The law, which is now in effect, allows the trustees of severely distressed pension plans to reduce benefits for current and future retirees — if doing so can save the plan from future insolvency.

Plans that are allowed to cut benefits are those that are forecasted to run out of money

within 15 years (or 20 years if they have more than twice as many retirees as active workers). There are restrictions on the cuts: Benefits can't be cut at all for retirees aged 80 or over, or who are receiving a disability pension, and retirees ages 75 to 79 are subject to smaller cuts than those under 75. And when trustees reduce benefits, they are required to do so first for those whose employers went out of business or otherwise withdrew from the plan without paying all of their obligations, before they reduce the benefits of any other plan participants.

Trustees can't cut benefits more than the amount needed to prevent insolvency. And no benefits can be cut below 110 percent of the amount guaranteed

by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), the self-funded federal agency that insures pensions. That amount is pretty low to begin with. When PBGC gets involved in an insolvent multi-employer pension plan, its maximum benefit, for a retiree with 30 years of service, is only \$1,072.50 a month, or \$12,870 a year.

Before trustees can reduce promised benefits, they have to inform all plan members, and hold a vote. The proposed cuts can be rejected, but only by a "no" vote of a majority of plan participants (active, inactive vested, and retired), not just a majority of those voting. And even if a majority of participants

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## THE DISAPPEARING STRIKE

2014 had the second fewest strikes since record-keeping began in 1947

By Don McIntosh  
Associate Editor

Nine. That's the total number of work stoppages last year that involved over 1,000 U.S. workers. It's the second-lowest level ever recorded since the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) began keeping track in 1947. The record — thus far — was set in 2009, when just five work stoppages of over 1,000 workers took place.

Looking back over the last 67 years, this data set tells a story — of the near total disappearance of the strike. In the 1950s, there were an average of 352 large-scale work stoppages a year. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rate slowed only slightly — to an average of 286 a year. The peak was 1952, when 2.7 million workers took part in 470 large-scale work stoppages.



But the last truly big strike year was 1974, and you can see the numbers plummet after 1981. That's the year President Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 air traffic controllers for violating a prohibition on strikes by federal employees. Since 1981, there have never been more than

100 large work stoppages a year, and the number continues to ratchet down. Since 1989, there have been fewer than 50 work stoppages a year; since 2000, fewer than 30; and since 2007, fewer than 20. BLS uses the term "work stoppages" to include both strikes by workers and

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