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Unions protest anti-union moves by KGW

Three local unions held a public rally April 25 in Pioneer Courthouse Square to publicize their growing dispute with Portland's KGW television station.

KGW is owned by the media chain Gannett, which is proposing to eliminate union jurisdiction in contract bargaining with International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 600, and Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA). Eliminating union jurisdiction would mean that union contract terms would apply only to current union members, and the company could hire new employees to do the same work under different terms.

Dave Twedell, business representative for IATSE Local 600, said the jurisdiction proposal would pave the way for the station to diminish the quality of news by using work from non-professionals. Twedell said Gannett's business moves could also have wider consequences: Corporate raider Carl Icahn owns a chunk of Gannett stock, and may



push for the company to sell off rights to some TV broadcast frequencies to cell phone providers.

"Our members don't want to lose their jobs," Twedell said, "but more importantly, this community cannot afford to lose this station. It's not an asset that belongs to Carl Icahn. It belongs to all of us."

Gannett announced April 22 that it's spinning off its broadcast division into a new company under the name Tegna, which includes letters from the name Gannett.

"Basically they laid off two

letters [in the new name], and they haven't been able to find work yet," quipped State Rep. Lew Frederick (D-Portland), one of three local elected officials who spoke in support of workers at the rally. Frederick was himself a KGW employee for 17 years, and a board member of AFTRA for 15. When he was a broadcast journalist, Frederick said, all four local network-affiliated TV stations had on-air employees in AFTRA; today only one does.

Rally-goers also heard from Lory Olson, a television news

videographer at KOIN-TV. Workers there are members of the National Association of Broadcast Employees & Technicians (NABET), a division of the Communications Workers of America (CWA), but they've been without a union contract since their last one expired in mid-2013.

State Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), and Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack also spoke at the rally, and union blues musician Norman Sylvester and his band—members of Musicians Local 99—performed.

Multnomah County Chair Deb Kafoury said she couldn't be at the rally, but said in a letter that she supports their effort to hold Gannett to community standards.

Duane Hansen, SAG-AFTRA local president, said the tough negotiations come in a broader context of an employer war on workers.

"If we're going to have a middle class 10 years from now," Hansen said. "It's going to be because people like me and you stand up and do what's right."

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