



Striking ironworkers at Instafab tell their story to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (right). With them is Robert Camarillo (second from right), a business agent for Iron Workers Local 29.

**UNION ORGANIZING**

# Crew of nonunion ironworkers goes on unfair labor practice strike at Instafab

A group of young nonunion ironworkers has launched an unfair labor practice strike against their employer, Instafab Company, a steel fabrication and erection company based in Vancouver, Wash.

The workers decided to take a stand against their employer after years of feeling ignored and disrespected. On Feb. 27, five employees—a job superintendent with eight years at the company, a foreman, and three field ironworkers—approached their boss with a list of demands. They asked for drinking water and a dry shack on every job site, consistent meal and rest breaks, safety equipment and training, a company-paid medical plan, retirement benefits, area standard wages, and overtime pay when applicable.

When the owner refused to listen, the men issued a strike notice. When they followed through with the walkout, they were fired.

Two more ironworkers joined the strike a couple weeks later, and they too were terminated.

Another worker came on board in April, bringing the count to eight striking workers (in a crew of 13). They range in age from 20 to 38. Two are veterans, with service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Together they have reached out to the community for support. They also approached Iron Workers Local 29 seeking representation. The union filed unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board on their behalf, alleging

the employer retaliated against them for engaging in protected concerted activity. The case is pending.

And because Instafab is a primary subcontractor for Anderson Construction and Skanska USA Building on “union” jobsites, the striking ironworkers are asking for support from other building trades members.

“A lot of the other trades don’t know that Instafab is non-union,” said Robert Camarillo, a Local 29 union rep.

Since the strike began, picketing and leafletting have taken place at Block 67—the Burnside Bridgehead apartment project in Portland; at an apartment project in the Pearl District’s Block 17; at The Landing Drive Project in Southwest Portland; and at the Pringle Square project in Salem. [Skanska contracted with Instafab to fabricate and erect steel for the new Banfield Pet Hospital headquarters building/campus in Vancouver.]

Several religious organizations have sent letters to the general contractors asking them to look into the labor practices of Instafab. And last month, several ironworkers were able to tell their story to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley.

The striking ironworkers told the Labor Press they are paid anywhere from \$13.25 (new hires) to \$25 an hour. They don’t have a pension plan, and the employer doesn’t match 401(k) contributions. One employee showed a pay stub in which pay was deducted for a safety harness. They also pay a majority

of their monthly health insurance premium on a plan that carries a \$20,000 deductible.

“This company has exploited these workers for a very long time, and they’ve had enough, Camarillo said. “The workers are demanding from the owner that he treat them fairly, with respect, and acknowledge their desire to be represented by the Iron Workers.”



Ironworkers picket Block 17 in Portland’s Pearl District.



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