

# ...Instafab owner says he's ready to meet with striking workers

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an email address. It's visible to the web administrator, but not to the reading public. And "Truth be told" listed the email address of ... company owner Bruce Perkins.

Using an online identity to speak about yourself while pretending to be another person is known as "sock-puppeting." The most famous example is Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, who was exposed in 2007 after he used an alias to post more than 1,100 entries on a Yahoo Finance bulletin board—praising Whole Foods for its brilliant management, and trashing his company's competition.

Still, I couldn't be 100 percent sure our sockpuppeteer was Bruce Perkins himself; it could have been someone close to him, or even an imposter listing his address.

Then Bruce Perkins emailed

me from the same address to complain that one of his comments hadn't been approved.

It put the Labor Press in an awkward position. As a newspaper, we can't collaborate in the deception of our readers. It was time to end the deception.

When I reached Perkins by phone Friday, June 19, he confessed to the sockpuppeting, and was apologetic. I suggested he could continue the online conversation—using his real name. We made plans for me to interview him the following week to hear his side of the story.

Then on Monday I got an email from him saying that on the advice of his attorney, he wouldn't be talking to the Labor Press after all.

The strikers were not so hesitant. Later Monday I met with five of them at a Southeast Portland cafe. Tall, proud, lean, tattooed, and tanned from the outdoor work, they seemed like

seriously hard workers, the kind of guys you'd be proud to call your co-workers or employees. And each had stories that would make you think twice about working at Instafab. Yet to a man, they said they're not out to destroy the business that treated them poorly. All they're asking for is a decent living, and a more respectful work environment.

Actually, you don't need me to tell you what they want, because they wrote it up themselves and presented it in person to Instafab general manager Will Filbeck on Feb. 27: "We the employees of Instafab hereby demand: Water on every job, dry shacks on every job, safety and other training, medical paid by Instafab, a retirement plan, and area standard wages." [Dry shacks are temporary structures on construction sites that allow workers to get out of the elements for a few minutes while they take their

breaks.]

It's gotta take some guts to walk into a boss's office with a list of demands. But these men did have some backup walking in with them: Robert Camarillo, who's not just a business rep at Iron Workers Local 29, but the president of the 20,000-strong Columbia-Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council.

Instafab didn't respond to the demands. That's when they—a group of nonunion workers—went on strike. They took up picket signs and went outside and picketed, at the office and at job sites.

And for that they were fired. Here's how one termination letter, written March 6 on Instafab letterhead, put it: "Instafab concludes that you have quit based on your no-show to work after Feb. 27, 2015. You have been terminated from employment as of Feb. 27 due to no-show."

Legally, that could be a prob-

lem for Instafab. A federal law known as the National Labor Relations Act declares it to be the policy of the United States to encourage the "practice and procedure of collective bargaining," and makes it a civil offense for an employer to discharge a worker simply for exercising their right to strike.

The fired Instafab strikers filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board, and the federal agency is considering seeking a federal court injunction ordering their reinstatement.

As "Truth be told," Perkins wanted to talk to the strikers. He reiterated that offer when he took me up on my suggestion to comment under his own name. And in an email to me, he said he's ready to meet with the strikers. Strikers say they're happy to meet with him. They can be reached, care of Iron Workers Local 29, at 503-774-0777.

## Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 re-elects Al Shropshire

Al Shropshire was re-elected to a second term as business manager/financial secretary-treasurer of United Association of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290.



Al Shropshire

Shropshire, 61, is a 40-year member of the union. He started his career as a pipefitter in 1973 working in ship repair at the Portland shipyards. In 1979 he passed the pipefitters exam for building trades construction and subsequently worked on commercial and industrial jobs. He worked for the union as a business agent for several years, starting in 1993. He also has served on Local 290's joint apprenticeship training committee and he's been a journeyman instructor at the training center.

In other Local 290 election results, Robert Porter was re-elected president, and Gil Freeland was re-elected vice president.

John Feeney was elected to a first term as recording secretary, and Melissa Nash was elected to a first term as inside guard.

Eight members ran for two seats on the local's Executive Board representing Region 1. The winners were incumbent Teresa

Neely, and Craig Weismann. In Region 2, Brad Archuleta defeated two other candidates, and Rick Two Bears was re-elected in Region 3.

Dave Hauth, Rick Hindman and Chris McNicholas were re-elected to the Finance Committee, in a six-person race.

Ramon Ramon and Randal Nelson, Jr. were elected to the Pipefitter Examining Board in a seven-person race.

Russell Hill and Rick Stauffer garnered the most votes for Plumber Examining Board.

Erv Garrison and Eric Fanning ran unopposed for ACR Examining Board.

Barry Sather and Peter Bakker were unopposed for Oil Burner Examining Board.

And Jim Eastman and Bill Duke ran unopposed for Metal Trades Examining Board.

Local 290 represents about 4,100 members working in all branches of the piping industry in construction, industrial, and at shipyards in Oregon, Southwest Washington, and four counties in Northern California.

All terms of office are for three years.

## NATIONAL

### Danger ahead for public sector unions

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case that asks whether it's constitutional for public sector unions to charge "fair share" fees to non-members to cover the costs of representation. Under a 1977 Supreme Court case known as *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Education*, such fees have been considered allowable. But that's be-

ing challenged in the case known as *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*.

### No more minimum wage managers

Heard about the employer scam where they make you a "manager" so they can work you long hours without paying you overtime? Incredibly, that's been legal as long they pay a salary of \$23,660 a year, a figure that has-

n't been updated since 1975. Now, the Department of Labor is proposing to raise it to \$50,440, with yearly raises after that. It's estimated that 5 million people could get a pay bump because of it: most because they convert to hourly and get paid overtime. It also could lead to additional hiring. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is furious. The new rule could take effect before President Obama leaves the White House.

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