



The union negotiating team (from left to right) IBEW International Rep David Myers; Administrative Assistant Kristi Straight; Siemens workers Nick Reed and Nick Miles; Local 48 rep Ray Lister; Siemens employee Chris Lap; Local 48 rep Scott Zadow; Siemens worker Greg Norman; and IBEW International Rep Rick Hite.

Workers join IBEW Local 48

At Siemens, solidarity got the goods

By Don McIntosh
Associate Editor

What can 20 workers spread over four states do to improve working conditions at a massive multinational? Maybe not much, on their own. But boosted by union brothers and sisters, a group of Northwest medical imaging technicians joined the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48 and got a first contract with big gains.

The workers maintain and repair MRI and CAT scan machines in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana for Siemens Medical Services USA, a subsidiary of the German conglomerate Siemens. Salaries for the highly-skilled work ranged from \$44,000 to \$112,000 a year, but workers wanted less arbitrary pay, more job security, and other improvements. With a little solidarity, they got those things.

Solidarity is the trade union principle of groups of workers supporting each other—standing strong together.

First, international solidarity helped the Siemens techs get a union: One day after a Siemens board member from the German union IG Metall complained, the company dropped a legal objection that was delaying a union election, and the workers voted 13 to 6 to unionize.

Then, in June, regional solidarity unclogged first-contract talks that were slowing to a crawl—letters from labor organizations made the difference, IBEW Local 48 organizer Ray Lister explains.

It took six years—and the defeat of an effort to vote out the union—before a similar Siemens tech group in Boston got its first union contract. Bargaining for the Northwest group got

off to a good start, Lister says, but bogged down after eight months when the two sides started talking about economic issues. Local 48 reached out to other labor organizations, and got letters of support from the Oregon AFL-CIO, Idaho AFL-CIO, Montana AFL-CIO—and from the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals Local 5017, two unions that represent over 16,000 nurses in total.

“We are ... very disappointed to hear that you have been meeting with resistance at the bargaining table from the employer,” wrote ONA executive Paul Goldberg June 26. “Please let our new brothers and sisters know that they have the full support of the Oregon Nurses Association. We will be pleased to help educate our membership about your struggle for representation and offer our support to your campaign in any way we can to assist in achieving a fair contract.”

The IBEW bargaining team presented the letters to their management counterparts on June 30, and the next day, the Siemens negotiators came back with an offer even better than what the union had last proposed. Ratified in ballots counted Aug. 1, the four-year contract gives workers a one-time \$2,000 bonus, a one-time pay bump of \$1,000 to \$6,000 a year for workers who are considered underpaid relative to their co-workers, annual merit pay raises of 2.75 to 3.75 percent, stand-by pay for being on-call, and pay for travel time in some cases. It also locks in existing benefits like medical insurance and a 401(k) match, and it provides an array of union rights

and benefits, including progressive discipline process, grievance and arbitration procedures, and a successor agreement so that union contract terms continue if the company is sold.

AFSCME, state of Oregon reach tentative agreement

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has reached a tentative agreement on a new two-year contract with the state of Oregon.

The sides came to terms at about 11 p.m. on July 7, following almost 14 hours of bargaining. Economic highlights of the proposed two-year agreement include:

- Cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) totaling 5 percent over the contract: 2.25 percent on Dec. 1, 2015, and 2.75 percent on Dec. 1, 2016.
- Health insurance plans with options of a 95-5 percent split for employees who choose the more expensive of the two plans, or 99-1 percent for those choosing the plan of less cost.

- The day after Thanksgiving as a paid holiday for AFSCME-represented state employees.

“This agreement makes particular advancements on health care issues and equitable wage increases,” said Ken Allen, executive director of Oregon AFSCME Council 75 and chief negotiator. “We will wholeheartedly recommend passage to our membership.”

The contract includes all AFSCME-represented state agencies except the Department of Corrections; negotiations with the DOC continue. The state contract covers over 3,000 AFSCME-represented workers; the DOC contract covers roughly another 3,000.

Union members will begin a ratification process this month.

Janus Youth Programs employees vote to join AFSCME

Residential treatment employees at Janus Youth Programs in Portland voted 26-12 July 21 to join Oregon AFSCME. There are 49 employees in the bargaining unit. They will join Local 1790, newly established for Basic Rights Oregon employees.

Janus Youth is a private nonprofit that operates around Portland. The clients range from age 13 to 21, with those 18 and older housed separately from the younger kids.

“Our new members are primarily case managers and skills trainers,” said Council 75 Organizer Doug Lantz, the lead

AFSCME staffer on the organizing campaign. “They work with the youth in treatment programs, teaching them a wide range of topics from basic life skills to job searching.”

Lantz said a group of Janus workers contacted AFSCME about six months ago expressing a desire to join the union. He says economics was a key issue, but not the only factor.

“A lot of these workers have college degrees, and this is the field they want to work in, making a difference in young people’s lives,” Lantz said. “But at Janus, many are barely above

minimum wage. So that is big factor, as they want to create new standards that will allow them to be able to afford to stay at Janus. And they’d like to see just better overall accountability for and from management.”

First contract negotiations will begin soon.

A separate group of five professionals at Janus voted 3-2 not to unionize with the bargaining unit.

Janus workers at the organization’s Street Light homeless shelter are represented by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Local 650.

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