

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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As chronicled in 24 issues of the Northwest Labor Press, the Year 2015 can be remembered for two labor fights that will have impacts for years to come. Nationally, the fight was over Fast

Track: Labor went all in to defeat it, but it passed Congress anyway, paving the way for easier passage of more trade agreements that will send jobs overseas.

But in Oregon, 2015 will be remembered as the year workers won the right to sick leave: Starting Jan. 1, 2016, they'll get 40 hours of sick leave per year

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## Beer hauler moves to bust Teamsters union

By Don McIntosh  
Associate editor

Teamsters Local 162 is facing what more and more looks like a union-busting effort by General Distributors Inc.—a regional distributor of beer, wine, cider, and water based in Oregon City.

When truck drivers, warehouse workers, and sales employees learned that the profitable company would seek \$1.5 million a year in concessions from them in their next union contract, they voted 59 to 5 to strike, and about 80 members of Teamsters Local 162 walked off the job Nov. 17. In response, the company threatened to permanently replace them.

“If we do not hear from you or if you do not report to work at your regularly scheduled time, unfortunately you will be subject to being permanently replaced as an employee of General Distributors, Inc. without further notice,” wrote general manager Steve “Tiny” Irwin in a Nov. 19 letter to strikers.

The threats were real, and they took a toll: About 20 union members crossed the picket line

and returned to work, alongside about 30 replacement workers hired by the company.

For 16 days, the remaining strikers held out, inspired by support from customers, community members, and other unions. Alameda Brewing owner Matt Schumacher delivered 14 dozen chicken wings to the picketline. Others heard about the strike on the news and brought coffee and donuts. And other Teamster locals showed support: Local 305 delivered a pickup full of food, Local 206 gave \$25 gift cards to each picketer, and Local 324 members drove from Salem to walk the line. One Local 162 trustee, Coca-Cola driver Joe Simon, even took a week of vacation to join the picket line. By week two, strikers were also receiving \$400 a week from Local and international union strike funds.

But the company was giving every indication that it intended to permanently replace the strikers. When the two sides met Dec. 2 to negotiate with the assistance of a federal mediator,

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## Giving Back

### Members of IBEW Local 48 donate warm clothes and blankets to Union Gospel Mission

A group of young union members — part of IBEW Local 48's Reach out and Energize Next-gen Electrical Workers, or RENEW—spent the last two months collecting warm clothes and

blankets from fellow union members. On Dec. 19, a half dozen members of RENEW delivered two van-loads of items to the Union Gospel Mission in downtown Portland. The evening before, they washed and dried all the clothes at a local laundry. At the Mission, the electricians, many of them apprentices, sorted the clothes by gender and racked them by size. Later, they helped the Mission serve a warm lunch to the homeless. IBEW volunteers were Brett Letourneau, Samer Obeid, Kennitha Wade, Kim Cole, Terry Reigle, Aaron B. Strong, and his girlfriend Kapuanani Foster, who works at the City of Portland. RENEW was established in 2011 to inspire the next generation of IBEW members to become active in their local union by focusing on issues important to younger workers. The Local 48 group meets monthly at the union hall.



(TOP) Local 48 Organizer Aaron B. Strong sorts through clothes at Union Gospel Mission. (ABOVE) Business Rep Terry Reigle and apprentice Samer Obeid, left, unload a van stuffed with clothes and blankets donated by IBEW members. (RIGHT) Apprentice Kennitha Wade dishes up food for Portland's homeless.



## Congress delays Cadillac tax

Labor has two more years to kill the tax on costly health plans — Obamacare's most hated feature

Congress voted Dec. 18 to delay the beginning of the so-called “Cadillac tax” by two years — to 2020. The Cadillac tax, which is part of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, is a 40 percent excise tax on the amount of employer health care premiums above \$10,200 a year for individual coverage or \$27,500 for family coverage. It was scheduled to take effect in 2018. In theory, it's supposed to force employers to restrain health insurance cost increases, but unions argued all along that it would cause employers to shift costs to workers

through higher co-pays and deductibles. Employer surveys from the Kaiser Family Foundation confirm that employers are already doing that in order to avoid triggering the tax.

Now, the AFL-CIO and other critics of the tax will have two more years to fight for its permanent repeal in Congress.

The Obama Administration opposed the delay, but it passed as part of a much larger bill that funds much of the federal government and also makes a variety of tax credits permanent, including credits for wind and solar development. The bill also placed a two-year moratorium on Obamacare's existing 2.3 percent tax on medical devices.