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Unity march draws 500

The agenda being outlined by newly-elected President Donald Trump worries the ranks of workers, women, unions, people of color, and other minorities; so much so that more than 500 people gathered at Shemanski Park in Portland Jan. 21 for the "United Front Against the Trump Agenda" rally and march.

Union members and labor organizations made up a large portion of the crowd, but participants also included a wide range of community and faith-based groups such as Augustana Lutheran Church and the Community Alliance of Tenants.

"Now is the time for a labor-led mass mobilization to give our members and other workers the confidence and determination to unite and fight back," said rally organizer Jamie Partridge.

Rallygoers marched eight blocks to Waterfront Park, where they joined nearly 100,000 people at the Portland Women's March.

"Solidarity has never been more important," said Shannon Walker, president of the SW Washington Labor Council.



About 500 people at a union-backed unity rally parade down Salmon St. en route to Waterfront Park to join the Portland Women's March. Participants included members of construction trade unions (below) and the Portland Association of Teachers (right).



Trump withdraws U.S. from TPP, will re-open NAFTA

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI)—Quickly carrying out two campaign promises that brought him key votes from unionists in the industrial states around the Great Lakes, President Donald Trump formally withdrew the U.S. from the labor-opposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement, and said he will re-open the 23-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico.

The AFL-CIO cheered the announcement. Member unions had stitched together a wide coalition of community, worker, religious, civil rights, and civic groups to oppose the trade pact with 11 Pacific Rim nations. As a result of their pressure, former President Barack Obama said following the Nov. 8 election that he would not submit the TPP to Congress.

But he still left its ultimate fate up to Trump, who on Jan. 23 signed an executive order ending U.S. participation in the pact. Trump promised to negotiate more pro-U.S. bilateral trade pacts with the TPP nations.

"The U.S. withdrawing from TPP and seeking a reopening of NAFTA is an important first step toward a trade policy that works for working people," said national AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. "While these are necessary actions, they aren't enough. They are just the first in a series of necessary policy changes required to build a fair and just global economy."

The AFL-CIO and its congressional allies have introduced principles that every future trade pact must cover. They include enforceable worker rights, protection of Buy American provisions, bans on using trade pacts to undercut new U.S. "green" manufacturing, and making currency manipulation a violation of trade law. They also include abolition of a secret pro-corporate trade court — the Investor-State Dispute System, which is part of TPP and NAFTA.

TriMet bargaining off to a rough start once again

TriMet and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 began negotiations Jan. 9 over a new contract that covers 2,400 employees and about 1,200 retirees. If the past is any guide, bargaining will be contentious.

Last May, TriMet proposed to extend the existing contract for two years, adding 3 percent annual wage increases. After conferring with members, Local 757 leaders declined the offer.

Members may have soured on several contract concessions they agreed to in 2014. Bruce Hansen, who led those negotiations, lost re-election as union president the following year, and Shirley Block, Local 757's new president, has said the union gave away too much to TriMet. Union health insurance

concessions were slated to save TriMet \$50 million over two years. The contract increased workers' share of the insurance premium, and ended the promise of fully-paid retiree health insurance for new hires.

In bargaining, Local 757 is proposing to rescind the increase in the workers' share of the premium, and restore the former retiree health insurance benefits. TriMet meanwhile wants further concessions, including greater latitude to hire from the outside. Right now, part-time bus operators get dibs when new full-time operator positions become available. Block said most part-time operators joined TriMet with the expectation and promise that they'd later get an opportunity to be-

come full-time, so the idea that TriMet would pass them over and hire full-timers off the street would be a betrayal.

"We're not going to roll over," Block told the Labor Press. "We're going to fight them all the way."

Public transit workers are barred from striking, under a state law the union advocated for in 2007. Instead, like firefighters and police officers, public transit workers enter binding arbitration if union and management can't reach agreement after 150 days of bargaining. Because bargaining started on Jan. 9, the two sides will have to continue until at least June 8, at which point either side could initiate binding arbitration.

The way it works in Oregon,

if the contract is decided by binding arbitration, the arbitrator can't split the difference, but must pick one side's offer, whichever he or she considers most reasonable. That's how the 2010-2014 contract was settled: The arbitrator judged that existing union health benefits were too generous, and picked TriMet's proposal in its entirety. The current contract expired Nov. 30, 2016, but its terms will remain in force until a new contract replaces it. The contract covers bus and rail operators, mechanics, trainers, maintenance workers, dispatchers, and customer service representatives.

The two sides will next meet to negotiate on Feb. 16.