

...Burgerville union calls for boycott

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The union's chief demands are a \$5 an hour raise and affordable health benefits.

It also seeks the reinstatement of as many as six pro-union workers who were terminated by the company on trivial pretexts. The most recent was Canaan Schlesinger, fired Jan. 31 from the MLK store less than two months after he was hired. The official reason: Theft, for having put a dollop of SoftServe ice cream in his coffee instead of cream. The real reason, he says: "They identified me as a union agitator."

It wasn't that he wore union buttons like some of his co-workers, Schlesinger said, but that he asked questions and showed independence. For instance, asked by a manager to sign an acknowledgement that he'd read and would agree to the rules in the employee handbook, he declined to sign until after he'd read the rules.

Schlesinger said his firing came just one day after a pro-union drive-through worker was fired at the same store, just weeks after becoming a father — ostensibly for smelling of cannabis, which he uses to treat epilepsy. The recent firings of two union supporters at the Gladstone store contributed to the decision of workers there to join the strike.

Firing a worker for supporting a union is a violation of federal labor law, known as an "unfair labor practice." At least 18 separate unfair labor practice charges have been filed by the union with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) since the campaign began. Six are still pending investigation. Ten have been withdrawn or dismissed, including the charge concerning Jordan Vaandering, who was fired ostensibly for failing to pay for a bagel.

In two cases, the NLRB found the company broke the law, but Burgerville settled the charges and agreed to post a notice pledging not to do the things it was accused of doing.

In those cases, a manager at the Vancouver Plaza location told employees who were distributing "Burgerville Workers Need a Raise!" leaflets outside the store that they could not be on the property; after that, all employees received notice of a rule prohibiting employees from loitering on the property before



Iron Workers Local 29 president Shane Nehls joined a contingent of union iron workers for a lunch hour strike solidarity picket Feb. 1. No cars were seen to cross their picket line set up by the store's drive-through entrance.

and after their work shifts. A federal administrative law judge found that both the rule, and the manager's conduct, broke federal labor law.

The union says as many as 42 workers at the four stores took part in the strike.

Burgerville Workers Union is affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). So that the minimum wage workers could afford to take part in the strike, the union spent months fundraising to build a strike fund. Not all workers walked off the job at the four locations, and the stores remained open, though business was slower than normal during the picketing.

The Burgerville Workers Union campaign has been endorsed by the state and local AFL-CIO, and strike pickets at both locations were joined by contingents from several unions: Members of Iron Workers Local 29 in hard hats and work clothes



FIRED FOR USING SOFTSERVE AS CREAMER, OR FOR SUPPORTING THE UNION? Union supporter Canaan Schlesinger walked a strike picket line Feb. 1 outside the Burgerville store where he was fired the day before — ostensibly for using Soft-Serve as creamer in his coffee.

blocked the drive-through during lunch hour Feb. 1, and a similar group of Carpenters Local 1503 showed up during dinner along with a large inflatable pig. The Feb. 2 Powell walkout on 25th and Powell was joined by a purple-clad group from Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49, the health care and building services union whose headquarters is just across the street.

"We're down here to support the workers who are trying to make a fair wage," said Iron Worker Matt Momb.

Burgerville Workers Union reports the boycott has so far been endorsed by 11 local unions: American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, American Postal Workers Union Local 128, Carpenters Local 1503, Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, Portland Association of Teachers, SEIU Locals 49 and 503, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, American Association of University Professors at Portland State University, and New Seasons Workers Union.

Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland) has endorsed the boycott. And State Rep. Tawna Sanchez (D-Portland) spoke at a Feb. 2 support rally, after which she and Pastor Mark Knutson of Augustana Lutheran Church tried to present a letter to managers at the MLK store, but they refused to accept it.

"The fact of the matter is: People can't afford to live here any more if they can't make a decent wage," Sanchez said. "Corporations have a responsibility to make sure their workers can afford to live a decent life, and it's not okay for them to keep poor people poor."

Inslee rejects Vancouver oil terminal

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Jan. 29 rejected a proposed oil shipping terminal at the Port of Vancouver. The Tesoro Savage project (also known as Vancouver Energy) would have been the largest oil terminal in North America, shipping over 131 million barrels of oil per year down the Columbia River. The \$210 million terminal was endorsed by state building trades councils in Washington and Oregon. The trades had signed a letter of understanding for the terminal to be built with 100 percent union labor. It was projected to generate more than 320 full-time jobs during construction.

Inslee said the state Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, which earlier denied Tesoro the necessary permits to build the facility "has determined that it is not possible to adequately mitigate the risks, or eliminate the adverse impacts of the facility,

to an acceptable level. "When weighing all of the factors considered against the need for and potential benefits of the facility at this location, I believe the record reflects substantial evidence that the project does not meet the broad public interest standard necessary for the Council to recommend site certification."

In its report, the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council cited unavoidable catastrophic risks from earthquakes, oil spills in the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean, and the threat of fire or explosion at the facility.

In the November 2017 election, voters elected a new commissioner to the Port of Vancouver who opposed the oil terminal. One of the commission's first acts in 2018 was to cancel the Port's lease with Vancouver Energy.

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