

UNION ORGANIZING

At Reed College, students are unionizing

It will be one America's youngest union locals.

By Don McIntosh

A new union at Reed College may have among the youngest membership of any union in America: On March 22, a group of 52 resident advisors who live and work in the dorms at Reed College voted 34 to 14 to unionize as Local 1 of a newly formed independent union, the Student Workers Coalition. All are Reed sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and few if any are over 22.

At Reed, they're known as Housing Advisers, and they help the college manage student life in the dorms. Each housing adviser is responsible for the well-being of about 20 fellow students and for duties that take up three to 15 hours a week following a week-long training. They used to perform those services in exchange for free room and board, but for legal reasons, the college reclassified them as employees starting in September 2016. That effectively resulted in a cut to compensation because they now must pay payroll tax and income tax withholding out of their stipend — \$13,670 gross for the current academic year. Union supporter



Supporters of Reed College's new union of residential advisors: From left, Julia Todhunter, Zoë Gregozek, Arek Rein-Jungswirth, and Chae Park.

Zoë Gregozek says that was one factor motivating the student employees to unionize.

Reed College has the most liberal student body in America, according to the Princeton Review. But the Reed administration didn't rejoice at the news of a union. Represented by the Barran Liebman law firm, Reed argued to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB): first, that the housing advisers were not employees after all, but stu-

dents; and second, if they were employees, hundreds more student employees ought to be in their bargaining unit.

The student union supporters had neither money nor lawyers, but they prevailed after a nine-hour hearing attended by four Reed administrators and two lawyers. The NLRB's Seattle regional director Ronald Hooks rejected Reed's arguments, in accord with NLRB's current interpretation of federal labor law.

Reed then appealed to the NLRB to delay the election or impound the ballots, which the agency also rejected.

Then, leading up to the vote, college administrators held voluntary "information sessions" and sent emails to house advisers warning that the collective bargaining process might result in their compensation "decreasing," and that having a union could harm their relationships with their supervisors.

"Most [housing advisers] have close friendly relationships with their resident directors, so that was a scare tactic," Gregorek said.

Administrators also appealed to their altruism, asking them to think about the new crop of housing advisers who will begin in September — who wouldn't get to have a say about whether to have a union. That's quite a nifty argument from a college that rejected the housing advisers' request for voluntary recognition last October — accompanied by signed authorization cards from more than two-thirds of the group — and insisted on the delay of a secret ballot election, trying to postpone it still more with legal maneuvers.

Up to now, except for janitors

represented by SEIU Local 49, no other Reed College workers have been union-represented. Student Workers Coalition spokesperson Seth Douglas says the housing advisers campaign is only the first of what is seen as a larger campus-wide effort to unionize student workers.

It's also a response to worsening circumstances. Tuition has risen from about \$36,000 a year a decade ago to \$54,200 this year. While some of the college's 1,400 students receive financial aid, it's not uncommon for students to graduate heavily in debt.

Students who voted to unionize are hoping to win improved compensation, the security of "just cause" discipline and a contract that the administration can't unilaterally change, an end to seemingly arbitrary disciplinary practices, and the basic union right to have a co-worker present during disciplinary meetings.

Will Reed accept the union vote result and get busy negotiating an agreement? Kevin Myers, Reed College communications director, said Reed administration will wait for the vote count to be officially certified by the NLRB before making any comment.

CULTURE

I am 2018: AFSCME remembers MLK

It's now been 50 years since Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee, where he'd come to support a strike by 1,300 AFSCME-represented sanitation workers. This spring, to honor King and carry forward his agenda of racial and economic justice, AFSCME joined with the Church of God in Christ to launch a campaign called I AM 2018. The campaign's name comes from the iconic "I am a man" placards worn by the strikers as a way to assert their basic dignity as human beings.

The campaign began with a nationwide moment of silence Feb. 1 to remember the sanitation workers whose death in Memphis precipitated the strike. Echol Cole and Robert Walker sought refuge from a storm in the back of their garbage truck. Faulty equipment led to the truck's compactor kicking in, crushing them to death.

The overwhelmingly black workforce struck for two months demanding union recognition, drawing support from AFSCME's national leadership and allies including King, who marched in solidarity. On the evening of April 3 at the historic Mason Temple, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) International Headquarters, Dr. King delivered his famous "Mountaintop" speech. He was shot the following day, April 4.

This year, on April 2 and 3, AFSCME and the Church of God in Christ sponsored a series of events, speakers and performances in Memphis. And on April 4, they marched from the AFSCME Local 1733 hall to Mason Temple where they held a concert and rally for justice. Four Oregon AFSCME leaders were there: executive director Stacy Chamberlain, AFSCME Local 88 president Percy Winters, Jr. and vice president Raymond De Silva, and Oregon AFSCME staff representative Micaela Shapiro-Shellaby.



Raymond Thomas



James Coon



THOMAS, COON, NEWTON & FROST

PORTLAND LAW FIRM SINCE 1980

Beware of "nurse case managers" in a workers' compensation claim. You do not have to allow a nurse case manager to accompany you to your doctor's appointments.

Workers' Compensation

Construction Injuries

Death Claims

Personal Injury & Product Liability

Medical Malpractice

Social Security Disability

Mesothelioma

503-228-5222

Straight answers.
No cost for consultation.

820 SW Second Ave., Suite 200,
Portland, OR 97204

www.tcnf.legal



Cynthia Newton



Chris Frost



Melissa Haggerty



Sydney Montanaro



Scott Sell



Chris Thomas