

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Bargaining under way for 18,000 Oregon grocery workers

Large-scale bargaining over a new set of union contracts has been under way since June 19 between United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 and the big grocery employers, Fred Meyer and Safeway/Albertsons. The union calls them “Unity Negotiations” — a single set of negotiations that will set the terms of multiple contracts covering 18,000 workers in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

On one side, the union bargaining team consists of 37 members, plus officers and staff, led by Mike Marshall, executive director of collective bargaining. On the other side is management consultant Scott Klitzke Powers of Portland-based Allied Employers Inc., together with representatives of the nation’s largest and second largest grocery owners: publicly traded Kroger (which owns Fred

Meyer and QFC) and private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management, which owns Albertsons Companies Inc. [Albertsons bought Safeway in 2015 but continues to operate Safeway — and 15 other grocery subsidiaries — as separate brands.]

Last year Albertsons paid its CEO Robert Miller a \$2 million base salary, and Kroger paid its CEO Rodney McMullen \$11.5 million — 547 times the \$21,075 its median employee was paid. Will the two companies do right by their store-level employees?

Whatever Kroger and Safeway/Albertsons agree to will also set the standard for smaller local chains like Roth’s Fresh Markets in the Salem area, McKay’s Markets on the Oregon coast, Sherm’s Thunderbird in Southern Oregon, and Bales and Lambs Marketplace in Portland’s



To show support for union bargaining Local 555 members are wearing buttons that say “Stronger Contract, Stronger Community.”

west side suburbs.

Local 555 sees the unity negotiations as a next step toward the ultimate goal of a single multi-employer master agreement.

Currently there are separate contracts between each employer and groups of workers divided up by skill or department, with contracts covering grocery and meat, plus non-food retail and central checkout at the Fred Meyer stores. The separate contracts date back to the five locals of grocery clerks, retail clerks, and meat cutters that merged in 1985 to become Local 555.

Since April, Local 555 has encouraged its members to wear a series of orange buttons while at work. “Stronger Contract for a Stronger Community” says one of the buttons. “Fair hours now” says another.

Local 555 spokesperson Kelley McAllister said Local 555 isn’t publicly discussing its specific proposals. But broadly speaking, the union is pushing for significant wage increases, more full-time positions, more

consistent scheduling, and for workers to have a guarantee of a certain minimum number of hours.

“We’re looking to improve wages and benefits to improve our members lives so they can better live in communities that are facing constantly rising costs,” said Marshall, the union’s chief negotiator.

Grocery store owners, meanwhile, are pushing for take-aways, including scheduling workers for fewer hours per day and more days per week, eliminating premium pay for working nights and Sundays, reducing sick time accruals, and imposing a “use-it-or-lose-it” rule on accrued vacation.

The two sides met for the third time Aug. 6 and 7. Further negotiations are planned for September and October.

NATIONAL

New Elizabeth Warren bill would give workers seats on corporate boards

A new bill proposed by U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) would require that workers have representation on the boards of America’s biggest corporations. S. 3348, the Accountable Capitalism Act, announced Aug. 15, would require companies with more than \$1 billion in annual revenue to secure a charter from an Office of United States Corporations. Under that charter, workers would elect 40 percent of the board of directors. And in making decisions, the corporate boards would be required to consider the interests of all stakeholders — including workers and local communities — not just stockholders. And At least 75 percent of directors and shareholders would need to approve before a corporation could make any political expenditures.

“American corporations exist only because the American people grant them charters,” Warren explained in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. “Those charters confer valuable privileges - such as limited legal liability for their owners - that enable businesses to turn a profit. What do Americans get in return? What are the obligations of corporate citizenship in the U.S.? ... We should insist on a new deal.”



In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as ‘right-to-work.’ It provides no ‘rights’ and no ‘work.’ Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining ... We demand this fraud be stopped. The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

36
Officers
& Members
Celebrate
Labor Day!

Our labor unions are not narrow, self-seeking groups. They have raised wages, shortened hours, and provided supplemental benefits. Through collective bargaining and grievance procedures, they have brought justice and democracy to the shop floor.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

The only effective answer to organized greed is organized labor.

THOMAS R. DONAHUE

Nothing will work Unless You Do!

MAYA ANGELOU