

WORKERS RIGHTS

Airport workers in Portland, worldwide launch day of protests

Airport workers around the world — including at Portland International Airport (PDX) — held a day of action Oct. 2 to call for better wages and working conditions. PDX workers want to see their wages catch up with those at other airports across the United States.

Stan Edwards, a personal service assistant at the Portland airport, is among the laborers who say the airport needs to raise its standards for workers. After five years there, Edwards makes \$12 an hour, doesn't have access to benefits and struggles to afford housing in

Portland. He said airport workers are asking to increase the minimum wage.

"You guys got to listen to us," Edwards said. "There is a reason why you guys are best airport for six years in a row — not six years, but six years in a row — and it's because of the people who's behind the scenes."

Airport workers in other parts of the country have recently been successful at raising wages. Last week, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey approved a \$19 per hour minimum wage for 40,000 workers at three airports that

serve New York City. In San Francisco, a proposal to increase airport contract workers' minimum wage to \$17 an hour made its way to the mayor's desk.

Jeremy Simer, researcher with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49, said his union represents about 450 workers on average at different companies at the airport. Simer said the Port of Portland, the public agency that manages the airport, has let it fall behind other port authorities across the country.

"That's why airport workers are calling on the Port of Port-

land to do their job as public servants and to manage the airport in a way that's good for the workers who work there and not just for airline profits," Simer said.

According to an Economic Roundtable study from 2017, nearly 30 percent of airport

workers in the U.S. must rely on public assistance for basics such as food, housing and health care.

Protests took place at 43 airports in 13 countries, including 11 major U.S. airports.

— Public News Service

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