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WITHOUT THESE FEDERAL WORKERS, NO PLANES CAN TAKE OFF OR LAND Portland members of National Air Traffic Controllers Association were among several dozen union members at a Jan. 18 airport protest against work without pay. From left: Amanda Crumbly, Richard Kennington, Chris Gamelgaard, Jenn Domoslawski, Malcolm Latvala, Corrie Conrad, Chris Delaney, Elizabeth Hoke, and Josh Hoke.

Shutting down the shutdown

In the end, it was action by aviation workers that led Trump to end the shutdown.

By Don McIntosh

It's illegal for federal workers to strike. That's why you'll never hear federal worker union leaders publicly calling for one. The last group of federal workers to strike was air traffic controllers in 1981, and President Ronald Reagan fired all 11,000 of them. But as days stretched to weeks in the partial government shutdown, "essential" federal workers got so sick of working without pay that they began to call out "sick" in increasing numbers. Attendance was down among Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers, air traffic controllers, and others. Of the 30,000 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) workers President Donald Trump ordered back to work without pay three weeks into the shutdown, only 16,000 showed up.

At a Jan. 20 Martin Luther King Jr. event, Association of Flight Attendants President Sara Nelson called for union leaders to organize a "general



NOT CHARITY — SOLIDARITY

The boxes said it all: "An injury to one is an injury to all." Portland-based Labor's Community Service Agency worked with the food bank nonprofit Sunshine Division to assemble relief boxes for union members affected by the shutdown. All told, about two dozen volunteers from a dozen unions boxed up and distributed 10,000 pounds of food in the last two weeks of the shutdown.

strike" to end the shutdown.

"We need to follow Dr. King's lead and think big," Nelson said. "Almost a million workers are locked out or being forced to work without pay. Others are going to work when our workspace is increasingly unsafe. What is the Labor Movement waiting for?"

The turning point came on Day 34, Jan. 25 — the second missed payday — when at New York's LaGuardia Airport, so few air traffic controllers showed up to work that the Federal Aviation Administration had to temporarily halt flights. The closure led to a ripple effect of flight delays at air-

ports throughout the East Coast. Within hours, Trump agreed to sign a spending bill to end the longest government shutdown in U.S. history.

The 800,000 federal workers who returned to work Jan. 28 may have those "sick" air traffic controllers to thank. Such is the power of the strike, by whatever name. And it's not just federal workers and contractors who owe them gratitude, but farmers applying for loans, national park visitors, taxpayers needing IRS advice, Americans who rely on food stamps ... the list goes on.



READY TO WALK: Vancouver School District settled with 700 school secretaries and special ed teachers just hours before their strike was to begin.

Teacher strike wave continues

Los Angeles

Los Angeles teachers could have accepted management's offer and spent the next few years complaining about it. Instead, they went on strike, all 32,000 of them. After six days of packed picketlines and mid-day marches to City Hall, they returned to work Jan. 30 having won a stunning series of concessions, including:

- 6 percent retroactive pay increases
- lower class sizes
- commitments to hire 300 more full-time school nurses, 82 more full-time teacher librarians, and 17 more counselors
- a joint committee to come up with a plan to reduce the number of standardized tests by 50 percent
- a joint task force to look for ways to turn asphalt lots and unused school buildings into community green spaces
- an end to random drug and weapon searches in 28 middle and high schools

The strike, at America's second largest school district, was the result of years of preparation, during which LA teachers built community relationships, got organized internally, and approved a 30 percent dues increase to strengthen their union. For inspiration they brought teacher strike leaders from Arizona and West Virginia to speak at rallies. Trained by their union to talk to parents, teachers educated their communities about how charter schools are now draining almost \$600 million a year from LA public schools, and how California came to have the nation's

third largest class sizes, seventh lowest per-pupil spending, and just one school counselor for every 945 students. They also incorporated community input on student searches and green spaces into their bargaining demands. So when they struck, public support was overwhelming: Roughly four out of five students stayed out of school, and many, with their parents, joined teachers on pickets and marches. And that's how — after two years of bargaining with a hostile charter-school-friendly school board and a millionaire former investment banker superintendent — six days of striking got the goods.

Vancouver

In Vancouver, Washington, paraeducators and school secretaries were the latest to don red T-shirts, take up picket signs, and march on school district headquarters. Just hours before the Jan. 25 scheduled start of a strike by 700 paraeducators, secretaries, clerks and other classified staff, Vancouver Public Schools changed its offer and reached a deal with the Vancouver Association of Educational Support Professionals. Their new three-year contract raises wages 17.5 percent: 11.4 percent in year one (retroactive to September 2018), followed by raises of 3 and 3.1 percent.

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