

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

IN THIS ISSUE

SAVE SCABBY THE RAT! A Trump appointee wants to ban labor's popular inflatable protester. | Page 3

A FLAG FOR CONSTRUCTION? A "thin green line" flag proposed to commemorate construction workers. | Page 5

Meeting Notices p.4 On the job with the plasterers p.8

VOLUME 120, NUMBER 4

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 15, 2019

Are we bringing the strike back?

Back from rock bottom, strikes exploded in number last year

In 2018, an estimated 485,000 workers took part in 20 large-scale work stoppages of over 1,000 workers, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Feb. 8. That's more U.S. workers striking than at any time since 1986, and 19 times as many workers as went on strike in 2017. The largest were by teachers, including 123,000 in North Carolina, 81,000 in Arizona, 63,000 in Colorado, 45,000 in Oklahoma, 35,000 in West Virginia, and 26,000 in Kentucky. Other notable strikes included 53,000 workers at University of California hospitals, and 5,000 members of Operating Engineers Local 302 in Western Washington. The longest-running large strike is at Charter Communications in NY/NJ, where 1,800 members of IBEW Local 3 have been out since March 28, 2017.

A heart to heart with Jeff Merkley

Oregon millworkers son Jeff Merkley has been a U.S. senator 10 years, but hasn't forgotten where he's from. He's one of labor's most reliable champions, with a near-perfect labor voting record. Labor Press reporter Don McIntosh visited his office to talk labor policy — and whether he's running for president.

The debate over the shutdown is about whether we should put up a wall to stop immigrants. What's the right approach to immigration? Trump's presentation was that murderers and rapists are swarming the border. And that is a big lie. What you have is a much lower level of people coming to the border than came in years past. We're at less than a third of what came across in the year 2000. And mostly now we have instead of individual men seeking work we have a lot more families fleeing persecution, fleeing the

drug gangs, fleeing death threats and assault and a whole host of horrible situations. So there IS a crisis, but it's a humanitarian crisis the Trump administration has created by the mistreatment of migrants seeking the opportunity to have an asylum hearing. We want to treat people in the tradition of our country, a country in which most of us are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, with decency and respect. There's no reason to deliberately inflict injury. And so much has been aimed at children, and that's just really horrific. There's a piece of the Republican leadership that wants to sustain a broken immigration system in order to use it as a political tool. In 2013, when the Senate worked really hard to do a bipartisan bill that addressed all aspects of border security, people overstaying their visas, deportations, border guards, revising the visas, it was the Republican House that blocked the fix.

Turn to Page 7



A union-busting billionaire mulls a run for president

A Seattle-area unionist has bitter memories of the Starbucks CEO

By Don McIntosh

Former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz is horrified at a proposal to return to 70 percent taxes on him and his fellow billionaires. He thinks Medicare for All is un-American. He'd prefer billionaires were referred to as "people of means." He told MSNBC that "unions are not the answer" to the problem of growing inequality. Since he tweeted his presidential aspirations last month, his mostly-foam platform has gone over so poorly that in Indiana he had to ask his invitation-only audience to clap, and one poll showed him the lowest-rated of any potential candidate tested. Yet CBS, Fox, and CNN have given the "thinking about it" independent candidate for president copious free air time to share his "vision for the country."



Howard Schultz: Plutocrat for president? Billionaires own America. Shouldn't we govern it too?

All that makes Kent, Washington, union member Jeff Alexander a little bit sick.

Today, Alexander, 60, is a union rep with Operating Engineers Local 286. But in the late 1990s, he worked at the Starbucks roasting plant in Kent, Washington, part of a 22-person maintenance crew. The crew's job was to keep eight Italian-made roasting machines and three packaging lines running, in one of the most automated coffee roasting plants in the world.

Alexander was bent over working on an electrical problem at the loading dock the first time he met the Starbucks CEO.

"Someone said, 'Here's Howard Schultz!' I looked up, my hands all dirty and said, 'Hey, Howie, how's it going?' He just looked back down at me and walked away."

Alexander, a divorced single dad taking care of four kids, had been working graveyard and swing shift at a meatpacking plant when he heard that a brand-new Starbucks roastery was hiring for day shift. Day shift was a prime reason he took the job. So when managers started changing employee schedules and took away overtime pay for holiday work, Alexander and others at the plant were steamed. Several co-workers went to talk to Operating Engineers Local 286, and came back having signed union cards. Alexander wasn't one of them, but he'd earlier been a member of the union at Oscar

Mayer in Los Angeles.

"I filled out the card. We went through the plant and talked to everyone we could. Of course it went straight to management. And boom, we were in captive audience meetings... They shut the whole plant down to talk about the union."

Word got out that Howard Schultz himself would be addressing workers at one of the management-led anti-union meetings. Alexander, who drove a 1985 Suburban in those days, remembers looking out the window to see Schultz arrive in a brand-new Jaguar.

"He was making millions a year," Alexander said. "I was making 24 bucks an hour."

At the meeting, Schultz told workers they didn't need to go union, and should just trust him. Anti-union rhetoric flowed forth from the front of the room. The co-workers who'd started the union campaign stayed silent. Alexander spoke up.

"All of a sudden, I was the poster boy."

He overheard a manager say he'd just cooked his own goose.

"It was 'game on' after that. They just come after you," Alexander said. "It became very hostile in the plant, with management following you. We were trying to stick together, wearing our union hats."

On Nov. 17, 1999, the vote took place. Despite the anti-union blitz, workers won a union 14 to 8. That's when the real odyssey began — getting the thoroughly anti-union company to agree to a union contract.

"All we wanted was a pension," Alexander recalls. "And we were paying \$600 a month for family medical — back in the '90s! We didn't want to pay for medical, and we wanted a union pension."

Starbucks dragged out contract negotiations. After a year,

Turn to Page 5