

# ...Grocery strike

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employer offer does too little to reduce a serious gender gap in wages. Earlier this year, the union dug into data provided by Fred Meyer and found that male journeyman grocery workers outearn women by \$1.31 an hour on average. The disparity comes chiefly from the fact that managers are assigning women applicants twice as often as men to jobs in a lower-paid wage scale known as Schedule B that covers work in the bakery and deli departments.

A research study commissioned by Local 555 found that the wage scale gap in local union contracts dates back as far as 1937. Back then, it was perfectly legal to pay women less than men. As late as the 1960s and 1970s, grocery union contracts in Oregon and Washington referred to Schedule B workers as “bakery and delicatessen girls” or “sales girls.” Those gendered references were removed from union contracts by the 1980s, but the pay gap it-

self persisted.

“We’re not accusing anybody of conscious discrimination,” says Burch-Wolski, “but now that it’s been brought to their attention that there’s a problem... we’re asking that they partner with us to do something about it.”

The most recent employer offer would raise wages 30 cents an hour each year for Schedule A and 40 cents an hour for Schedule B. At that rate, it would take more than three decades for Fred Meyer, Safeway and Albertsons to achieve gender pay equity.

Local 555 is getting outside support in its campaign for gender justice. At least 28 Oregon legislators have made public statements in support of Local 555’s gender pay equity campaign. And the Oregon AFL-CIO, the state labor federation that Local 555 is an affiliate of, has been waging its own independent gender pay equity campaign, targeting Fred Meyer. The labor federation has converted three box trucks into roving billboards. Driving around Fred Meyer stores, the trucks



**FIX THE GAP, FRED MEYER!** Organized by the group Oregon Women Labor Leaders, dozens of women unionists delivered a petition to the Portland headquarters of Fred Meyer Aug. 23. Signed by thousands, it demands fair pay for women employees. The campaign held

demonstrations the same day at Fred Meyer stores in Bend, Medford, and Eugene. “Women deserve equal pay and opportunity, and that is not what is happening at Fred Meyer,” said NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon Executive Director Grayson Dempsey at a rally outside the offices.

say, “Shop somewhere else! Fred Meyer pays women less than men.” The AFL-CIO has also organized an ongoing series of protests outside Fred Meyer stores.

At an Aug. 29 bargaining ses-

sion — after Local 555 announced that its members approved strike authorization by 94% — employers improved their offer slightly. But the two sides are still far apart.

“There is a high likelihood

that we will see an economic action taken against stores in the near future,” said Local 555 President Dan Clay in an Aug. 30 press statement. “We will release details by Tuesday, Sept. 10.”



In partnership with Oregon AFL-CIO, Portland Diamond Project has committed to allow employees working at Portland’s future ballpark to organize and join a union. The agreement is the first of its kind for sports arenas in Oregon. Join us as we work together to create good jobs and bring MLB to PDX.

**SIGN THE PETITION**

[PortlandDiamondProject.com/LaborAgreement](http://PortlandDiamondProject.com/LaborAgreement)

