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IN THIS ISSUE

LABOR LOSES SEAT ON PORT COMMISSION Oregon Gov. Brown's appointments leave just one. | Page 5

MCMINNVILLE NURSES UNIONIZE Safety is a top concern at Willamette Valley Medical Center | Page 6

Meeting Notices p.4

Union gift guide p.3

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UNION ORGANIZING

Grand Central Bakery workers will vote on union

Workers at the company's Northwest Portland wholesale bakery want to join Bakers Local 114.

By Don McIntosh

Driven by concerns about safety, understaffing, sexual harassment, and compensation, workers at Grand Central Baking Company's Northwest Portland wholesale bakery are seeking to unionize.

A majority of the 45 bakers and dishwashers at the 2249 NW York St. plant signed cards seeking to join 1,170-member Bakery Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 114, and on Nov. 22, they petitioned the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to schedule a union election. That set the clock ticking for a union campaign at the busiest time of the year for the company.

The day after filing for an election, union supporters distributed an eight-page pamphlet to co-workers at all other locations in Portland and Seattle. The pamphlet—distributed in break rooms, on car windshields, and at service counters—lays out the specifics of why workers at the Portland wholesale bakery want to unionize, and calls on the company to welcome their decision.

"Unionized labor is workplace democracy that shows respect for the work we do and allows us to have more of a voice on issues affecting our livelihood," the pamphlet says.

Grand Central is owned by brother and sister Ben and Piper Davis and four others, but it's no tiny mom and pop. Founded in 1989 in Seattle, it's grown to 12 retail locations and two wholesale baking opera-



MADE BY UNION HANDS? The Grand Central Bakery bread sold at seven Portland-area cafes and on local grocery shelves is made by workers at a wholesale bakery in an industrial area in Northwest Portland. A majority of them have signed cards saying they're ready to join Bakers Local 114, and a vote is scheduled for December 12.

tions in Portland and Seattle, totaling about 400 employees company-wide. Its bread is sold at Fred Meyer, QFC, Whole Foods, New Seasons Market,

and other stores, and its buns are served at Burgerville.

That begins to put it in the same league as other large bak-

Turn to Page 2

WORKERS' RIGHTS

NLRB: Legacy must recognize union

Unity Center for Behavioral Health must recognize and bargain with the union representing its 200 nurses, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has ruled. Unity is Portland's only 24-hour psychiatric emergency facility. Nurses there voted 128 to 25 to join the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) on June 19, but Legacy Health, the parent entity of Unity Center, asked the NLRB to discard those results, arguing that Unity Center was part of a broader health system that includes Legacy Emanuel Hospital, and that because of that, nurses couldn't create a separate bargaining unit. Legacy may have been hoping the Trump-appointed Board would agree, but on Nov. 19 all three Trump appointees rejected its legal appeal.

ANALYSIS

The past, present, and future of American labor

For 19 years, journalist Steven Greenhouse wrote about labor for the *New York Times*. His new book—*Beaten Down, Worked Up*—looks at labor's rise, decline and possible rebirth. Labor Press reporter Don McIntosh interviewed him by phone.

Why are there so few labor journalists today? Newspapers got really smashed in the first decade of this century, and greatly reduced the size of the newsroom. And one of the first beats to go was labor. Editors don't think the labor beat is as sexy as covering the Seattle Mariners or Beyoncé. And unions are not as powerful and prominent as they used to be.

Why did you write this book? I think the bumper sticker, "Unions: the folks who brought you the weekend" is very true, and people don't appreciate that enough. So I wrote this book to

help educate a younger generation about what unions are and what they've accomplished, to inspire them. Workers are being shafted in many ways, and unions, though often flawed, can really help lift workers. Unfortunately union power and worker power in the U.S. is at the lowest level since World War Two. Because worker power is so weak and corporate power is so great, we're the only industrialized nation that doesn't guarantee paid parental leave. We're the only industrialized nation that doesn't guarantee all workers vacations. In the European Union, 28 nations, all workers are guaranteed four weeks paid vacation. The United States and South Korea are the only two industrialized nations that don't guarantee paid sick days. Our minimum wage is the lowest of any of the 36 OECD nations. So I try educating people about how the decline of unions has hurt the nation.

"I believe that unions are *the* most effective way to lift millions of workers. And I think that's almost an objective statement."

— Steven Greenhouse, former *New York Times* labor reporter



In mainstream journalism you're not supposed to take sides. But the tradition of organized labor is to ask "Which side are you on?" Did you feel like you took sides when you were at the *New York Times*? Do you take sides in this book? At the *New York Times* I tried very hard to write balanced stories, fair stories that gave equal say to both sides, and I very rarely got complaints about favoring one side or the other. I got lots of complaints from unions when I wrote about union corruption. But I also wrote lots of stories about Walmart and Target engaging in

wage theft, making people work off the clock. And Walmart and Target weren't happy with me writing these stories. Now since leaving the *New York Times*, I felt a little more freedom to express opinions. In the book I tried to make it fair to all sides. In writing about the air traffic controllers strike, I also give the views of Ronald Reagan. But I believe that unions are *the* most effective way to lift millions of workers. And I think that's almost an objective statement. When I say that unions can do good, I don't think I'm taking a side. I believe that a market economy can help lift millions

of people. I think unions can help lift millions of people.

Why has the union movement become smaller and weaker in the last 40 years? There are many reasons. A big one is the decline of manufacturing employment in the United States. It's gone from about 19.5 million to about 12.5 million, and manufacturing was long the core of labor strength in the nation. Manufacturing declined in large part because of offshoring. So much was moved to China and Vietnam and Bangladesh and Mexico. Another reason is that corporate America fights so hard against unions. In no other industrial nation do corporations fight so hard to beat back and quash unionization efforts. I was an economics reporter in Europe for five years for the *New York Times*. Corporations there see unions as legitimate institutions they've got to deal with and work with to create profits and prosperity, whereas in the United

Turn to Page 2