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U.S. House passes labor law reform

The PRO Act would restore the power of workers to unionize, bargain collectively, and strike.

By Don McIntosh

The most far-reaching pro-union labor law reform in 85 years passed the U.S. House Feb. 6 on a 224-194 vote. Known as the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, HB 2474 would crack down on unlawful anti-union tactics by employers, make it easier and quicker for workers to unionize and get a first contract, and eliminate so-called “right to work” laws on the books in 27 states that are intended to keep unions weak.

The PRO Act had the support of five Republicans and all but seven Democrats, but it’s not expected to get a vote in the Republican-led Senate, and even if it did pass the Senate, President Donald Trump would veto it, according to a White



THE DAY OF THE VOTE “In more than 40% of all union organizing drives, employers simply break the law,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said at a Feb. 6 press event with Congressional allies. “They lie, they coerce, in some cases they fire union supporters. Workers are forced to attend mandatory meetings with one item on the agenda, and that’s to make people afraid to exercise our right to form a union. ... That’s how you end up with an economy where over 60 million people say they would vote to join a union today, but only one in 10 actually have one.”

House statement on the bill.

Still, backers say the vote sends a message, shows voters what side members of Congress are on, and is a possible sign of what Democrats could do if they retake the Senate.

The PRO Act has been the national AFL-CIO’s top priority. Leading up to the vote, HB 2474 had 218 co-sponsors, including two Republicans.

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Judge could lower ILWU jury award

By Don McIntosh

The fate of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is in the hands of a judge. Last November, a jury ruled that the 38,000-member West Coast longshore union and its Portland Local 8 must pay \$93.6 million in damages for orchestrating an on-the-job slowdown that harmed ICTSI, the

Philippine-owned company that operated Port of Portland Terminal 6. That’s more than 10 times the union’s total assets, and ILWU has let members know that bankruptcy is possible as a result. On Feb. 14, ILWU attorneys asked U.S. District Judge Michael Simon to reduce that amount.

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ANALYSIS

Nationwide strike wave continued in 2019

The strike wave that began in 2018 continued in 2019, according to the annual work stoppages report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), released Feb. 11.

BLS has tracked “large” work stoppages involving over 1,000 workers since 1947. Judging by the agency’s figures, strikes were a basic feature of collective bargaining from the 1950s to the 1970s, with hundreds of large strikes a year, but strikes fell off dramatically in the 1980s, becoming nearly extinct by 2009, when there were just five strikes nationwide of over 1,000 workers, and 2017, when there were seven.

Then in 2018, BLS reported 20 large strikes involving an estimated 485,000 American workers, the most in 33 years. The strike wave continued in 2019, with 25 major work stoppages involving 425,000 work-

THE TEN BIGGEST STRIKES OF 2019

92,700	North Carolina Association of Educators vs. NC Legislature	1 day
46,000	United Auto Workers vs. General Motors	29 days
36,400	West Virginia Education Association vs. W.V. Legislature	2 days
33,000	United Teachers Los Angeles vs. LA Unified School District	6 days
32,000	Chicago Teachers Union vs. Chicago Public Schools	11 days
31,000	UFCW vs. Stop & Shop Supermarket in Mass., Conn. and R.I.	7 days
25,000	AFSCME Local 3299 vs. University of California	3 days
20,400	Oregon Education Association vs. Oregon Legislature	1 day
20,000	CWA vs. AT&T in nine southern states	2 days
18,900	South Carolina Association of Educators vs. SC Legislature	1 day

ers.

The strike wave started with West Virginia teachers in February 2018, and teachers unions led the way again in 2019, with 13 large strikes involving 270,000 teachers in North Carolina, West Virginia (again), Los Angeles, Chicago, Oregon, South Carolina, Kentucky, Denver, Oakland, Sacramento, and Kennewick, Washington. The year’s largest strike involved 92,700 teachers in

North Carolina. The largest private sector strike was by United Auto Workers at General Motors, with 46,000 workers out for 29 days.

One large strike continued in 2019 and is still under way: 1,800 members of IBEW Local 3 walked off the job March 28, 2017 at Charter Communications in New York and New Jersey and have been on strike for 1,060 days since then.

Machinists and electricians get raises of up to \$10,000 at Nabisco

Bargaining dragged on and on. Then workers got ready to strike.

By Don McIntosh

After two years of negotiations, only when 32 union machinists and 10 electricians at Mondelez’ Portland Nabisco bakery started preparing for a strike did the company give them an acceptable offer. On Feb. 2, members of Machinists Local Lodge 63 and IBEW Local 48 ratified a pair of union contracts that raise wages \$6,000 to \$10,000 year or more.

Members of the two unions work together to maintain and repair the machines that turn flour and sugar into Oreos and Ritz crackers. Their unions also negotiate together. But for the longest time, it wasn’t going well: Mondelez pushed proposals that members wanted no part of, like a shift to a workweek of three 12-hour days.



“In terms of the duration and the amount of effort it took to get a contract, it was like nothing I’ve experienced,” said Local 48 business representative Mike Bridges, a union negotiator since 2011. Six union members and staff met with six company negotiators 41 times over more than two years. So high was Mondelez management

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