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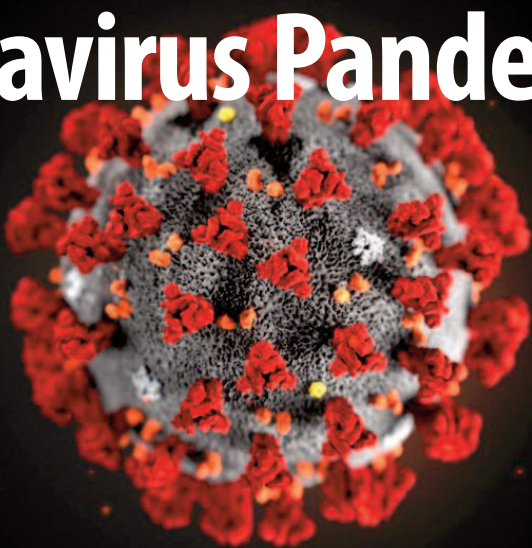
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Coronavirus Pandemic



By Don McIntosh

On March 11, 64 days after a deadly new strain of coronavirus was first identified in Wuhan, China, the World Health Organization declared it a global pandemic. The virus—and the response to it—are turning life upside down for working people globally. Locally, union nurses and grocery workers are on the front lines of the crisis. In the short term, the crisis has put untold numbers of workers out of work, from symphony musicians to restaurant workers, while requiring others to work over-

time, like delivery drivers. Long-term, the sudden drop in consumer spending and rise in unemployment is likely to send the economy into recession, and the financial market crash linked to the outbreak could put some already-stressed union pensions on the road to failure, while delivering another blow to public pension systems like Oregon's PERS. Below and on Page 3 we look at some of the impacts of the crisis on working people and union members in Oregon and Washington.

Union nurses say hospitals aren't ready for an influx

If there's one group of workers on the front lines of the crisis, it's registered nurses. But across the board, hospitals are seriously underprepared to handle an influx of coronavirus patients, say union officials at Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP). There haven't been enough test kits to test every patient who shows up at the emergency room with symptoms, or even to test nurses who are exposed to coronavirus patients to make sure they're not spreading the virus to other patients. The shortage means that only patients with multiple risk factors are being tested.

Patients with flu-like symptoms aren't being segregated from other emergency room patients. Personal protective equipment is in short supply, from N-95 respirators to eye

gear to scrubs. Most health providers haven't been trained since the 2016 Ebola outbreak on proper technique for donning and doffing the equipment, nor fitted for the masks, which must fit properly in order to work. Nor have they been drilled on protocols for dealing with an epidemic.

"In multiple facilities we've seen breaks in protocol, in how patients who are suspected of having coronavirus have been cared for, including breaks in protocol around quarantine," said ONA spokesperson Rachel Gumpert. "In one example, the patient was allowed contact with their family, and their family then broke quarantine by going into the cafeteria."

Since the pandemic was declared March 11, ONA has been meeting with administrators at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) to try to get the hospital to commit to an add-on to the union contract that would protect nurses and the public. ONA is asking OHSU to cancel all

elective surgeries to increase capacity; provide separate entrances for patients who could have the virus; and provide onsite laundering of scrubs so nurses don't put their families at risk. The union is also asking that members be allowed to volunteer for overtime before mandatory overtime is assigned. OHSU agreed verbally to some of those items March 13; if an agreement is signed it could be a template the union will press other health systems to agree to. OFNHP is meeting with PeaceHealth to ask for similar commitments.

OFNHP President Adrienne Enghouse says members have also had to contend with confusing, conflicting, and changing recommendations for what level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to wear. The question is whether the coronavirus is fully airborne or is spread only by droplets. If it's airborne, that requires much greater PPE. At first, the

Judge lowers ILWU jury award

Union to pay terminal operator \$19 million, not \$93.6 million.

By Don McIntosh

Federal district court judge Michael Simon says the evidence did not support a jury's finding that the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) caused \$93.6 million in damages to shipping terminal operator ICTSI. "\$19,061,248 is the maximum amount sustainable by the proof," Simon wrote in his March 5 decision.

The case dated back to 2012, when ILWU members began a slowdown at Portland Terminal 6. The National Labor Relations Board ruled that the slowdown was intended to pressure the Port of Portland to give ILWU jurisdiction over two jobs plugging and unplugging refrigerated containers, work that IBEW Local 48 members had done since 1974. That made the slowdown an illegal "secondary" action, and meant that terminal operator ICTSI could sue ILWU for damages.

But Simon determined that an

expert witness for ICTSI grossly inflated the slowdown's economic harm, by inflating ICTSI's baseline shipping volume, and assuming ICTSI would have been able to raise prices per container and increase shipping volume.

The final \$19 million in damages includes \$7.6 million in lost productivity and shipping volume while the slowdown was under way, plus \$11.5 million that ICTSI had to pay the Port when it broke its lease and ceased operations in 2017.

ICTSI can either accept the lower amount or be granted a new trial under Simon that would focus solely on determining the right amount of damages. The company had until March 19 (after this issue went to press) to decide. If it accepts the reduced amount, ILWU would have 30 days to decide whether to pay it, appeal the decision, or file for bankruptcy.

The \$19 million figure would be a heavy burden for ILWU. It's more than twice the union's current total assets of \$8 million, and would amount to \$494 for each of 38,450 members.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

OHSU grad workers win first contract

A year and a half after they announced they were joining AFSCME, graduate student researchers at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) have a first union contract. OHSU administrators at first challenged research assistants' right to unionize, saying they're students, not workers. They eventually dropped that case, but dragged their feet in negotiations. Most progress came in the final weeks of bargaining, after graduate researchers threatened to refuse to take part in OHSU's annual efforts to recruit new graduate students.

"It took them a long time to get used to the idea that they were going to have a union on the university side of OHSU," said Oregon AFSCME representative Dennis Ziemer.

Ratified in a unanimous vote as of March 11, the new agreement

runs through June 30, 2023. It covers about 300 graduate students in the schools of medicine, public health, and nursing who are paid an annual stipend of about \$30,000 to perform research and other tasks. The new contract for the first time makes them official "W-2" employees, something that was important to members. It also provides for an immediate \$80 a month increase plus three annual raises of 3% each July 1. It caps the hours they're expected to work at 40 a week. And it adds health insurance coverage for dependents, and lowers the plan's out-of-pocket maximums to \$3,000 (from \$6,000). It also ends a prohibition on nursing program Ph.D. candidates working outside the school; they may now work up to 20 hours/week outside the program.

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