

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Oregon unions distribute food to workers impacted by COVID-19 pandemic

As the entire nation has felt the grave impacts of COVID-19, workers across Oregon have seen lay-offs, furloughs, and more — all with serious concerns as to whether those jobs will return anytime soon.

Recognizing the growing need in the community, Oregon's unions joined together to create and host the Workers Helping Workers food drive and distribution program. The goal of the program is to host at least three Workers Helping Workers distributions in the Portland Metro Area over the next two months. The first distribution was held June 6, at Laborers Local 737 Training Center in Northeast Portland. Organizers boxed and distributed 1,000 boxes of food staples provided at a discount by Safeway. Franz Bakery donated 1,000 loafs of bread.

Nearly two dozen labor groups are participating, including the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, Oregon AFL-CIO, and Labor's Community Service Agency.

The next food distribution is tentatively set for Thursday, June 25, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, 7095 SW Sandburg Road, Tigard. You can pre-register for a designated pickup time at www.workershellingworkers.com. You don't have to be a union member or union family to get a food box. The distribution is open to anyone whose household has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.



... Labor confronts police brutality

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cally, union members as individuals have taken part in the protests or joined morning-after volunteer parties to help clean up the aftermath.

"The cause of labor has always been the cause of human solidarity, human dignity and justice and equality for all," said IBEW President Lonnie Stephenson in one of many national statements. "So the IBEW cannot afford to stay silent as our African-American brothers and sisters suffer in fear of violence at the hands of either the state or by private citizens like we saw with the case of Ahmaud Arbery. ... This is the time for all those who love America and care deeply about its values to speak out in the name of justice and against systemic racism."

Meanwhile, some unions have taken action — as unions.

Members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) held an 8 minute 46 second work stoppage June 9 (the length of time a police officer knelt on Floyd's neck). That was followed by the announcement of an eight-hour work stoppage in 29 West Coast ports June 19 to demand an end

to white supremacy and police terror.

Teachers unions in Seattle, Oakland, Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, Boston, Milwaukee, Madison, and Minneapolis have demanded the removal of police officers assigned to schools, with immediate success in some cases.

On June 4, the Oregon AFL-CIO general board approved a set of action steps aimed at rooting out racism internally inside the labor movement.

"We as progressive trade unionists have a responsibility to tackle any injustice, and that includes racial injustice," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Graham Trainor, who took part in a June 8 Black Lives Matter march that ended up occupying both sides of I-84. "We talk mostly about economic justice, but there's no way to disconnect the struggle for racial justice and economic justice."

Public support is overwhelming: A recent nationwide poll by the *Washington Post* found that 74% of Americans support the protests; 69% say Floyd's killing represents a broader problem within law enforcement, and just 29% say the killing is an isolated incident.

IATSE Local 28 recording secretary Jay Spottswood and his wife Liz Spottswood — also a Local 28 member — have attended several of the George Floyd protests in their Northeast Portland neighborhood.

"It feels like something you can't ignore," Liz Spottswood told the *Labor Press*. "It's a crime for us to ignore racial injustice any further."

The Spottswoods say it's personal for them: They once witnessed a squad car roll up and police jump out and tackle their neighbor's 12-year-old son, pinning the terrified African-American boy to the ground face down as he cried for his mother. He was released after police determined he wasn't the suspect they were looking for.

"I'm angry that we still have to keep doing this," Jay Spottswood added.

Other IATSE Local 28 members have supported the demonstrations by sewing face masks that are then distributed to protesters.

Oregon Nurses Association has turned out as a union for several daytime Black Lives Matter protests at Pioneer Courthouse Square and Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).



At the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D.C., boards covering windows are painted with statements supporting criminal justice reform and Black Lives Matter. The signs (and security guards) appeared after the AFL-CIO lobby was damaged May 31 by protesters who sprayed graffiti, broke windows, and set fires.

And graduate student union members at OHSU, part of Oregon AFSCME, have been operating a medical supplies tent in downtown Portland for protesters injured in nightly attacks in which police use tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets and batons. On June 13, Oregon AFSCME reports, police came for them too, ordering them to disperse immediately and leave their supplies behind. While complying with that order, union member and med student Michael Martinez was arrested. When union volunteers returned to retrieve their supplies, they were gone.

"Police officers were the only

people allowed anywhere near our tent and supplies, so the only explanation is that our medical supplies were stolen by the police," said Adrian Baris, a graduate student in the OHSU School of Medicine. Members of Graduate Researchers United plan to continue providing aid for protesters, and are inviting community supporters to contact organizer Michelle Ozaki at ozakim@ohsu.edu.

At press time, IBEW Local 48 was also organizing a mask-mandatory union-focused Black Lives Matter rally outside the Northwest Oregon Labor Council headquarters, set for June 18.