

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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4th of July!



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## Construction unions call for action after noose incident

By Don McIntosh

About 7:30 a.m. May 20, a first year apprentice plumber on COVID safety duty was roving around a construction site wiping down high-touch surfaces with bleach rags when she saw something that gave her a jolt.

On the second floor between two construction elevator doors, someone had hung a thin 30-inch long rope from some wires, tied in the shape of a noose.

"It was shocking," she later told the *Labor Press*. "Why would somebody do that?"

Co-workers on the Southwest Fourth and Montgomery site know who she is, but the apprentice asked that her name not be used in this story. This is her second job in a career she's excited about, and she doesn't want this encounter to follow her around on the Internet for eternity.

But seeing the noose brought

up a lot of emotions, she says. Though she's light-skinned and says she often passes for white, she describes herself as Black biracial. Her great grandparents were sharecroppers. Her grandfather and uncle, both plumbers, left Mississippi to get away from the racial hostility. Growing up she heard her uncle's stories of nooses hung in their old neighborhood.

But she herself had never seen a noose before. Up to then, she had found the Fourth and Montgomery Building site to be a great working environment. Learning to solder pipes as an apprentice plumber at mechanical contractor TCM Corp. she'd encountered a friendly and collaborative workplace culture, both with fellow United Association of Plumbers and Fitters

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## Wages rise over \$3 an hour in new Painters contracts

The July 1 raises are the culmination of a ready-to-strike strategy the union set in motion in 2017.

By Don McIntosh

Members of Painters Local 10 have just won immediate raises of as much as \$4.27 an hour in two new master agreements—following an eight-month campaign to catch up to the compensation of other building trades. Both agreements took effect July 1 and spell out wages, benefits and conditions for union painters when they work in Oregon and Southwest Washington for contractors in either of two employer groups.

One is a new agreement with the Signatory Painting Contractors Organization (SPCO). Ratified June 28, it replaces a previous contract that expired March 31. New hourly wages for journeymen will be \$26.56 for commercial and residential

work (a \$2.62 increase); \$28.36 for industrial work (a \$3.22 increase) and \$34.23 for bridge work (a \$4.27 increase). [Registered apprentices make 70% to 95% of the journeyman rate, while leadmen, foremen and general foremen make wages above the journeyman rate.] The contract also spells out \$13.84 an hour in total contributions to union-sponsored funds for health, pension, and training benefits and labor management partnership and promotion. And members got a \$300 signing bonus. The new agreement runs through March 31, 2023, and leaves wage increases for the second and third years up to negotiation, given current economic uncertainty.

The other master agreement is a first-ever contract with the Associated Wall and Ceiling

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International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) closed down ports along the West Coast June 19 in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. In Oakland, ILWU members joined a massive march outside the port.

## Police unions come in for questioning

Police unions have almost always been an awkward fit in the House of Labor.

By Don McIntosh

A week into worldwide protests over the police killing of George Floyd, half a dozen national union leaders gave an address about racial justice in a live June 3 Facebook event organized by the national AFL-CIO. In the livestream watched by over 51,000 people, *Bloomberg* labor reporter Ian Kullgren brought up a point that Facebook commenters had been making throughout the event: The AFL-CIO and its affiliates include police unions, and in the current moment, police unions have come to be regarded as the biggest obstacle to police reform, and the biggest defender of officers accused of misconduct.

In the weeks that followed, hundreds of rank-and-file

union members, labor-adjacent activists, and newly involved citizens with little knowledge of organized labor pushed on social media and in local union meetings for the AFL-CIO to end its affiliation with police unions. Six thousand signed an online petition; 350 joined a newly created "Drop the Cops" Facebook group. Two national unions—50,000-member Association of Flight Attendants (a division of Communications Workers of America) and 7,000-member Writers Guild of America East—called for the national AFL-CIO to end its only official police-only union affiliation, the 23,000-member International Union of Police Associations (IUPA).

In response, the national AFL-CIO General Board issued the closest thing to a consensus answer by labor officialdom June 9. "We are proud to join the calls for policing and criminal justice reform by

Black Lives Matter and the broader civil rights movement," the Board said in the statement. "But we respectfully take a different view when it comes to the call for the AFL-CIO to cut ties with IUPA. First and foremost, we believe police officers, and everyone who works for a living, have the right to collective bargaining. We have a dozen affiliate unions who represent law enforcement in some form. ... We believe the best way to use our influence on the issue of police brutality is to engage our police affiliates rather than isolate them."

Along those lines, the AFL-CIO pledged to convene a meeting of affiliate unions that have law enforcement units to talk about developing a code of excellence "to create systemic change from within organized labor, including a monitoring

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A UNION GUIDE TO  
**WASHINGTON'S AUGUST 4 PRIMARY**

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