

# Climate justice group goes antiunion

By Noah Wass

When workers at the Center for Sustainable Economy (CSE) went public with their union, the last thing they expected was for the progressive think tank to hire a union-busting law firm and threaten to fire one of their own. But that's exactly what happened after all five staff members at the Portland-based climate justice think tank announced their plan to join Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901 at a June 24 staff meeting.

CSE management responded two days later, saying they can't recognize the union because one of the union supporters, staff attorney Nick Caleb, is a supervisor and thus can't legally be included in the bargaining unit.

Management then suspended Caleb until further notice, threatened to fire him if he talks with co-workers or the public about the union, and warned him they may file an ethics complaint against him with the Oregon State Bar. All that's according to a June 30

unfair labor practice charge CWA Local 7901 filed with the National Labor Relations Board.

CSE also hired Bullard Law, which is infamous in Portland labor circles as a law firm specializing in union avoidance.

None of that sat well with CSE board member Jeri Jimenez, a former union organizer and current board member of Portland Jobs with Justice. Jimenez says that during a board conference call, board members had agreed to send a letter formally recognizing the union. The next time they heard from senior management, board members were instructed not to speak to anyone about the union, and were notified that CSE had paid \$7,500 to retain Bullard Law.

Hearing that, Jimenez resigned from the board June 30.

"I don't know how we got from voluntarily accepting the union to not supporting them," Jimenez wrote in her resignation letter ... You operated out of fear instead of trust."

CSE Director Daphne Wysham said in an email that CSE respects its employees' rights to form a union, "if that is what they choose."

"The law sets forth a process for that to happen, and it is our understanding that in this case the correct legal process was not followed. Those issues are currently being litigated in front of the NLRB, and we will abide by the outcome of that process."

"Whether they actually believe that or whether it's a convenient legal argument, I don't know," said Local 7901 President A.J. Mendoza. "But that is not a response indicative of a 'high road' employer."

An online petition signed by community supporters called on CSE to drop Bullard Law and recognize the union.

The bad publicity may have had some effect. Wysham told the Labor Press by phone July 13 that CSE has dropped Bullard Law and will be seeking new legal counsel that is not anti-union.

## UNIONIZATION → MAY-JUNE 2020

The following are Oregon and SW Washington workplaces where workers have decided whether to be union-represented. The thumbs-up symbol means workers will be union-represented. The info comes from the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Union election results

Employer (Location) Union	Yes-No	
<b>PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Hospital</b> (Springfield) Ore. Nurses Assn.	3-0	👍
■ 5 hospitalist nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists at RiverBend and University District		
<b>Asplundh Tree Expert</b> (Sherwood) IBEW Local 125	1-0	👍
■ 1 permission/planner employee who works on the property of Pacific Power		

## Furloughed workers tighten belts waiting for WorkShare benefits

It seemed like a win-win when unions approved the furloughs, but benefits are slow to arrive.

Reagan said. "We have a lot of single mothers working as education assistants at very low salaries."

When Portland Federation of School Professionals Local 111 President Belinda Reagan first heard about the Work Share program, she saw it as a win-win. Her fellow union members — support workers at Portland Public Schools — would be furloughed one day a week starting May 4 and save the district money at a time of looming budget cuts, and in return would collect a day's worth of weekly unemployment insurance plus the \$600 weekly COVID unemployment bonus. At the time, they were told unemployment checks would start in two weeks.

Two months later, she wishes she'd known that members would face belt-tightening before the promised aid would arrive. When unemployment checks still hadn't arrived at the beginning of July, Reagan says she heard from at least 65 members.

Their hardship is real. "For people who are living on \$14, \$16 an hour, to lose that money on furlough, it's devastating,"

Still, Reagan said she doesn't regret agreeing to the furlough: The union's executive board had just a few days to decide, and members will come out ahead in the end. They'll still get everything they were promised once Employment Department employees get through the backlog. The tardy payments aren't arriving in one lump sum. The first checks began to arrive the second week of July.

Workers at the City of Portland are in similar straits: Furloughs cut their pay at the beginning of June, and the City has been submitting claims to the Employment Department, but workers were still waiting for unemployment checks as of mid-July.

"Nobody has any benefits yet," said Rob Martineau, president of AFSCME Local 189, the largest union at the City of Portland. "There's definitely frustration."

"We kind of expect people will be done with their furloughs before they see any unemployment benefits," Martineau said.

**"WHAT DOES LABOR WANT? WE WANT MORE SCHOOLHOUSES AND LESS JAILS, MORE BOOKS AND LESS ARSENALS, MORE LEARNING AND LESS VICE, MORE CONSTANT WORK AND LESS CRIME, MORE LEISURE AND LESS GREED, MORE JUSTICE AND LESS REVENGE."**  
— AFL FOUNDER SAMUEL GOMPERS, 1893



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