

WORKERS RIGHTS

ATU fights to save apprenticeship, and win back the right to strike

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 is asking the Oregon Legislature to give public transit workers the right to strike again. Under Oregon's public employee collective bargaining law, they used to have that right, but in 2007 at the union's urging lawmakers moved transit workers into the same public safety category as police and firefighters. Forbidden to strike, they have their contracts decided by a neutral arbitrator if union and employer can't agree.

"What we've seen since then is that it wasn't a perfect fit," says Local 757 Executive Board member Bill Bradley. A Lane Transit District maintenance worker, Bradley is taking a leave of absence to lobby for SB 690, a bill introduced by State Sen. Chris Gorsek (D-Troutdale) that would restore the right to strike.

TriMet, the state's biggest transit agency, is the only

agency where a contract has been decided by arbitration. For Local 757, that was a bitter loss: In 2012, arbitrator David Gaba sided with TriMet, eliminating pension benefits for future hires and increasing what workers pay for health insurance.

Now TriMet and Local 757 are heading to arbitration again. This time the main sticking point is TriMet's proposal to get rid of its much-prized apprenticeship training program for bus and light rail mechanics. Arbitrator Norman Brand is scheduled to hear arguments from both sides on April 12. Bargaining has been under way since October 2019.

"I do believe the strike would resolve contract disputes in a quicker fashion and allow us to get our issues in front of the community," Bradley said. "And I believe the community will be on our side."

PEOPLE

A dedicated volunteer retires

Ellen Ino, a tenacious union volunteer and political campaigner, retired recently for health reasons. Ino, 55, has served the labor movement for decades, most recently as sergeant-at-arms of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, executive board member of Laborers Local 483, and as a longtime union steward at Oregon Zoo, where she worked as a ticket seller.

Ino grew up in Honolulu, and earned a degree in political science from Willamette University in Salem in 1987. She became a union activist in 1990 with Service Employees International Union Local 503 when she went to work for the University of Oregon library. It was there she got active politically with the Eugene Springfield Solidarity Network. At Local 503 she became chief steward and district director, and was tireless in registering fellow union members to vote.

In 2004, she moved to Portland and went to work at the Zoo, where she got involved in Local 483 and helped organize and win improvements for her fellow seasonal employees. After helping Amanda Fritz win her race for Portland City Council in 2008, Ino founded a political consulting firm, Forward Support, with her partner Jim



Ellen Ino

Robison. The firm was meant to be an affordable way to help candidates get campaigns up and running, and Ino worked for numerous electoral campaigns.

She took early retirement after being hospitalized for anaphylactic shock on Sept. 30. Ino has a severe allergy to alcohol, and suffered a reaction at work after being exposed to the sanitizer that's become everpresent in response to COVID-19.

Ino says if there's one thing she learned in her activism, it's that people don't care what you know until they know that you care. Unionism, in other words, starts with caring for co-workers.

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