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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Providence Milwaukie signs first contract

Providence fought against the union of housekeepers and CNAs at every stage.

By Don McIntosh

A group of 170 hospital support workers at Providence Milwaukie Hospital ratified their first-ever union contract May 7. It's a three-year agreement, and it took almost three years to get it. It was June 14, 2018 when workers there voted 92-54 to join Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49. The unit includes housekeepers, food service workers, certified nursing assistants, phlebotomists, and patient admission representatives at Providence Milwaukie, a 77-bed acute care hospital.

Julie Schafer, health unit coordinator in the Providence Milwaukie medical surgical unit, says the union didn't get an acceptable offer from Providence until after members voted to au-



The union bargaining team was all jazz hands after a final 20-hour negotiation session resulted in a first-ever union contract for support workers at Providence Milwaukie Hospital. From left: Charlene Cox, Julie Schafer, Tyler Bush, Michelle Hitchcock, Melissa O'Neil, and SEIU 49 President Meg Niemi.

thorize a strike April 20-21. A 12-year employee of the hospital, Schafer and the other volunteer members of the union bargaining team endured 32 negotiating sessions before the deal was reached, including a final 20-hour marathon session that lasted

from 8 a.m. May 3 to 5 a.m. the next morning. Schafer said they didn't move to strike sooner because workers did not want to strike during the pandemic.

The unit's first collective bar-

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NATIONAL

Biden's new trade enforcers

The Biden Administration continues to name union figures to top positions in the federal government. On May 10, the U.S. Labor Department announced the appointment of **Thea Lee** to head its International Labor Affairs Bureau. Lee has long been a fierce critic of the NAFTA-style trade deals that make it easier for U.S. companies to offshore jobs. Now she'll be the deputy undersecretary overseeing enforcement of the labor provisions of U.S. trade agreements, including the labor rights commitments Mexico made in the 2020 trade agreement the Trump administration negotiated. The same day Lee's appointment was announced, the AFL-CIO and SEIU filed the first test case under that agreement, charging that Mexico isn't living up to the labor rights commitments it made. An international trade economist,

Lee spent 20 years at the national AFL-CIO as a trade policy expert and deputy chief of staff. Since 2017 she had led the Economic Policy Institute, a pro-labor think tank.

Meanwhile, Lee's former employee at the AFL-CIO, **Celeste Drake**, will be the first-ever "Made in America" director at the White House Office of Management and Budget. President Joe Biden created that position in a late January executive order. Her job will be to crack down on waivers that federal agencies ask for whenever they want to get out of "Buy American" requirements in purchasing steel and other goods. Drake was trade policy specialist for eight years at the AFL-CIO, and left in 2019 to serve as head of government relations for the Directors Guild of America, the union representing TV and film directors. —DM

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Union-busting bakery pays \$580k to settle overtime case

Workers sometimes win when they raise the union banner, even when they lose the union.

By Don McIntosh

In the next 90 days, checks will be mailed out to 176 current and former workers at an industrial bakery in Gresham.

Portland Specialty Baking (PSB) is paying \$580,000 to settle a class-action lawsuit over systematically shorting overtime pay. The company didn't admit to wrongdoing, but did agree to pay up to \$90,000 in attorney fees, and \$30,000 to a settlement administrator, and \$460,000 to the workers. Checks will go out to 176 workers who responded to the lawsuit settlement notice, out of 581 who worked there August 2014 to July 2017 and were

contacted by the court. Checks will range from \$100 to \$4,800, and most will be about \$750.

The settlement also commits the company to let workers leave the production line to take bathroom breaks, and to translate information on their paid sick time rights into their native languages. PSB's workforce consists overwhelmingly of immigrants and refugees and they speak at least a dozen languages. They make pretzels, cakes, donuts, bagels, and muffins for Starbucks, Jamba Juice, Walmart, Costco and Winco.

Working conditions and wages near the legal minimum have contributed to high turn-over at Portland Specialty baking; it took at least six months to locate former workers so they could be paid what they were owed.



MARCH ON THE BOSS January 11, 2016: Two dozen workers tell Portland Specialty Baking president Josh Richardson they intend to unionize, accompanied by then Bakers Local 114 business manager Terry Lansing, then state rep Chris Gorsek, and then Oregon AFL-CIO president Tom Chamberlain. The company hired a union-busting consultant and the union campaign was defeated.

Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Kathleen Dailey approved the settlement in a drama-free online hearing May 17, saying it was the longest case she'd had, where nothing would happen for long periods of time. The basic terms were agreed to by January 2020, but settlement was delayed when a court-appointed administrator died.

Workers found out about the violation at the beginning of 2016, during a union campaign by Bakers Local 114. An Oregon law requires manufacturers to pay time and a half after employees work over 10 hours in any 24 hour period. PSB was treating shifts as separate days even when they overlapped a 24-hour period.

"The Bakers union made this lawsuit happen," said Northwest Workers Justice Project director Corinna Spencer-Scheurich, the lead attorney for plaintiffs on the case. Spencer-Scheurich said the lawsuit was only possible because of the union's detailed understanding of the workplace.

The union campaign itself ended in defeat. The company brought in a professional union buster, and scheduled almost daily anti-union meetings in the workplace, as well as one-on-one meetings with managers. Workers rejected the union 123-to-38, just three weeks after a 60% majority of the workers had signaled support for the union by signing authorization cards.

But the campaign had an afterlife in the form of a lawsuit filed August 2016 on workers' behalf by attorneys for the non-profit Northwest Workers Justice Project.

Now workers are getting a little long-delayed justice.