

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

Have a
Safe and
Happy
4th of July!



VOLUME 122, NUMBER 13

PORTLAND, OREGON

JULY 2, 2021



Painters strikes end with major wage wins

By Don McIntosh

After weeks of escalating strike action, Painters Local 10 reached a tentative agreement with Signatory Painting Contractors Organization (SPCO) that if ratified, will increase total compensation by \$3.50 to \$4 an hour in the next

12 months. Before the series of strikes that threatened to grow into a “summer of chaos,” the contractor group was offering just 25 cents.

Members were set to vote on the agreement July 1 (after this issue went to press), with the union bargaining committee recommending approval.

The agreement covers roughly 440 union members employed as commercial and industrial painters by the 10 contractors that

make up SPCO. Journeyman commercial painters were making \$26.56 an hour; that will rise to \$28 as of July 1, \$28.80 nine months later on April 1, 2022, and \$29.50 on July 1, 2022. Employers will also pay 56 cents an hour more for health, pension, and market recovery funds.

Meanwhile, industrial painters employed by SPCO will see wages rise from \$28.36 to \$30.05 an hour as of July 1, \$30.97 next April, and \$31.80 on July 1,

2022, and they’ll also get the additional 56 cents an hour toward benefits.

The work stoppages started up on May 21, targeting one site at a time, several times a week. By week five, workers were shutting down all job sites of Siegner and Company, a prominent SPCO member.

These raises are for years two and three of what’s shaping up to be a life-changing three-year contract for local union painters. The

first year’s raise was \$2.62 and \$3.22 an hour for commercial and industrial, respectively. That means altogether, wages will have risen \$5.56 or \$6.66 an hour (23% or 26%) in three years.

District Council 5 rep Scott Oldham has described the increases as long-overdue catch-up raises after several decades in which members lost ground to inflation and fell behind all other construction trades.

Nowhere to go but up: Vancouver workers win a union

Working hard for near minimum wage, a crew of Vancouver sheet metal workers vote to unionize.

By Don McIntosh

Low pay, long hours, unsafe conditions, high turnover: Everything about 360 Sheet Metal Products made workers there want a union. When votes were counted June 21, the tally was 12 to 9: The majority had voted “Union, Yes,” disregarding weeks of pleading from company owner Joseph W. Martin and a hired union-busting consultant.

Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 organizer Darrin Boyce says the union campaign began earlier this year when a 360 worker

making \$15 an hour was fired. A week later he was making \$10 more an hour, plus benefits, at a union sheet metal contractor, and he told his former coworkers about it. One of them made an appointment to meet with Boyce, shared that plan with others, and showed up with half the shop.

“We were all ready to just quit and go straight union right that day,” says Patrick Vader, who operates a spiral duct machine at 360. Vader—who makes \$14.50 an hour after nearly two years there—figures things can only get better.

“You know, I’m living in a 38-foot fifth wheel [trailer] on my girlfriend’s dad’s property,”

Vader said. “I’m living check to check to make my car payments, insurance payments, making sure my kid has what she needs. It’s hard.”

Local 16 could have just invited all the workers to apply to its apprenticeship program, but Boyce put another proposition to them.

“We sat down and said, ‘Instead of all you guys leaving for a union shop, you have the right to bring union to the shop.’”

Within days, practically everyone in the shop had signed union authorization cards, and on April 15, the union asked the National Labor Relations Board to hold an election. Nineteen



READY TO WIN THEMSELVES A UNION Meeting after work at Orchards Park in Vancouver, workers at 360 Sheet Metal planned, and pulled off, a successful union campaign. From left at their June 14 meeting: Daniel Rick, Ryan Arias, Tanner Womack, David Bain, Charles Jahn, Azzariah Lejano, and Patrick Vader.

Turn to Page 3