

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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VOLUME 122, NUMBER 23

PORTLAND, OREGON

DECEMBER 5, 2021

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

UFCW Local 555 to hold strike votes at Fred Meyer, QFC

Workers at many Fred Meyer and QFC stores in Oregon will soon be voting on whether to authorize a strike. United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 is holding meetings in Portland, Tigard, Bend, and Klamath Falls starting Dec. 10 to discuss and vote on that question.

Both grocery chains are owned by Kroger. Many of its contracts with the union expired in August, and workers under those expired contracts are the ones voting. The agreements were reached two years ago, six days into a union boycott of Fred Meyer.

Kroger representatives last met with the Local 555 negotiating team Nov. 10-11, the fourth time the two sides had met. Local 555 is proposing to restore time-and-a-half holiday pay for all employees, elimi-

nating an existing two-tier arrangement. It's also proposing that Kroger guarantee that a minimum proportion of positions be full time, above the current ratio.

The two sides did reach tentative agreement on one item, the right of store-level safety committees to escalate issues to a new master safety committee between Kroger and the union. Local 555 says recent violent acts near some stores—including an active shooter incident—have highlighted the need for better safety policies.

The two sides are next scheduled to meet Dec. 6 and 7.

In past contracts, Kroger has bargained together with the other big grocery chain, Safeway/Albertsons, but this year the employers chose to bargain separately. —DM

Shakeup in Teamsters leadership

Hoffa Jr. is retiring at age 80, and his chosen successor just lost a leadership vote in a landslide.

By Don McIntosh

One of America's most storied unions may be heading for a left turn. Teamsters General President Jimmy Hoffa, Jr., is stepping down at age 80, and on Nov. 18, final votes were counted to determine who will next lead the 1.2-million member union. It wasn't close. Long-time Boston Local 25 president Sean O'Brien beat Hoffa's preferred candidate Steve Vairma by more than two-to-one.

O'Brien ran at the head of a national leadership reform slate called Teamsters United, while Vairma topped a slate called Teamster Power. All 24 candidates in Teamsters United won, including Portland Local 162 president Mark Davison and O'Brien's running mate Fred Zuckerman, who was elected



Sean O'Brien, a fourth-generation Teamster and head of Boston Local 25, will begin as general president of the 1.2-million-member Teamsters in March.

secretary-treasurer. Zuckerman is president of Teamsters Local 89 in Louisville, Kentucky, challenged Hoffa, Jr., in 2016, and came just 6,024 votes short of defeating him. All told, 173,585 Teamsters voted this time.

O'Brien and Zuckerman say the status quo has failed, and they want to rebuild the Teamsters as a militant, fighting union

from bottom to top.

International Brotherhood of Teamsters is one of just a few U.S. unions that elect top leadership by direct member vote. Most top union leaders are elected at conventions by delegates who are elected at each local.

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ILWU launches union campaign at NORPAC paper mill in Longview

Since a private equity firm bought it, the mill has cut wages and halted retirement contributions.

By Don McIntosh

The sun hadn't yet come up Monday Nov. 29 when a group of workers entered the NORPAC paper mill in Longview, Washington, to deliver an announcement to management: We're unionizing. Later that day, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 21 filed a petition asking the National Labor Relations Board to hold an election for about 160 papermakers at the mill.

Weyerhaeuser sold the NORPAC mill in 2016 to One Rock Capital Partners, a private equity firm headquartered in New York. Workers at NORPAC operate three gigantic paper machines 24 hours a day to produce over 750,000 tons of paper a year, including newsprint, brown paper used in cardboard and paper bags, and white book and copy paper. Business appears to be solid.

ILWU organizer Ryan Takas, on leave from Powell's Books, says the union or-



WE WANT A UNION At dawn Nov. 29, a delegation of Norpac paper mill workers gathered to tell management they're joining a union.

ganizing committee set up at the nearby Regent Chinese Restaurant and over the course of three days, a majority of the pa-

permakers dropped by to sign union cards. The committee had been laying the groundwork since April. ILWU is also

working to organize roughly 220 other workers at the mill who work in maintenance, warehouse, fiberline and flexpool.

A member of the organizing committee who spoke with the *Northwest Labor Press* said he and others want to unionize in order to protect what they have. After NORPAC took over the plant, it reduced staff, cut wages 10%, and halted the employer match to the 401(k) retirement plan. Because they had no union, workers had no say in those changes. They've also had no cost-of-living increases lately ... except that on Nov. 26, just as the union signature blitz got under way, the company announced forthcoming 2.5% raise.

Local 21 represents workers at nearby export terminals in the Port of Longview, but ILWU hasn't represented paper mill workers up to now. Most of the unionized paper mill workers in the region are represented by Association of Western Pulp and Paper Worker (AWPPW) or by the United Steel Workers. AWPPW has attempted several times to organize the Norpac mill, but the efforts never got to the vote stage.