

Prop. 13 causes feeling of uselessness

(This story first appeared in the June 26 Oregon Statesman, Salem's morning daily and a member of the Gannett newspaper chain.)

By ERIC BRAZIL
Gannett News Service

OAKLAND -- Proposition 13 did more overnight to drain strength from Local 2428 of the East Bay Regional Park Workers Union, AFL-CIO, than a decade of abrasive dealings with management, and some employees say they're hurt that voters consider their jobs "meaningless."

Local 2428 is a small, feisty union representing naturalists, maintenance and craftspeople, gardeners and utility workers of East Bay Regional Park District.

In 1975, it battled the two-county, 39-park district in a 60-day strike in which the principal issue was union security.

The one kind of security it was unable to win for its members, however, was against a cataclysm like Proposition 13, which sheared away 60 percent of California's property tax revenue.

Property taxes pay most of the salaries of Local 2428 and supply 82 percent of East Bay Regional Park District's general fund budget.

Nearly half of the union's 130 members received layoff notices, effective July 15, with their paychecks last Thursday.

Anne Jenks, 36, mother of a 7-year-old son, a park worker and Local 2428 member for the past four years, faces layoff.

She said Proposition 13 blindsided her when it surfaced as a public issue.

"I'd just bought a \$40,000 house in Berkeley, and I thought 'oh boy, lower taxes.' But then I realized 'this means me.'"

Now the repercussions of Proposition 13's passage have her demoralized, and she admitted: "I don't think I've even started dealing with the loss. This job is a big part of my identity."

"It has made me quite angry.

It said my job is meaningless to a lot of people. They were saying they didn't believe us and that they didn't care."

As a park worker, Jenks, a wiry, firm-handed five-footer with penetrating blue eyes, does everything from trail building to arc welding.

It's what would in years past be thought of strictly as "man's work" but she's fit enough for it.

"I want to make the job meaningful, and to be told that in some way it's not meaningful, a luxury not amounting to anything, is something that is very hard to hear," she said.

"This job has meant a great deal to me. I was on welfare

before I took it. Now my friends are proud of me and I'm proud of myself."

Jenks, a Pittsburgh, Pa., native and graduate of Kent State University, earns \$1,187 a month as a park worker in the district's 2,000 Redwood Park in the Oakland Hills.

She recalls that during the 1975 strike against the district, the union's image with the public was generally favorable. "We don't fit into their image of a union," she said. "We are such a small union people felt sorry for us, but we work together real well."

Favorable image or not, Local 2428 took the same kind of election-day beating from

Proposition 13 that every other property tax-dependent institution did.

Jenks said wistfully: "I don't know who they were mad at, if they're mad at me or not. I thought they'd be mad at people with useless jobs, not 'hands-on' work. But mine is not a useless job."

She said she retained hope for a miracle - or some creative, practical solution - before July 15, and that she is looking to the union, which has been resourceful in tight spots before, for help.

Job-sharing is a possibility, she believes, and, like other district employees, she wishes the district could legally tap into the earmarked fund raised for land acquisition by property taxation to pay salaries.

The sweep and finality of Proposition 13 took the union by surprise, though. "No one foresaw massive layoffs," she said.

Peter Volin, 32, another park worker, is farther from the ejection seat than Jenks, because of his nine year's seniority. He received a layoff notice nevertheless.

Among his big worries is that the district's board of directors will come down harder in making layoffs on Local 2428 members than on public safety workers and administrators, because of the adversary, burr-under-the-saddle blanket role the union has played.

Given its track record, the union is not going to take disproportionate layoffs silently. It will go public, he said, "and if the public isn't outraged, there's not a lot more we can do," he said.

"I really dispute the notion that we don't do a good job," he said. "By and large we run an efficient park district. It's a complicated task. Proposition 13 will simply decrease our efficiency."

Park district directors have responded to the financial uncertainties of the Proposition 13 crisis by making plans to close 18 of their 39 parks and reducing visitor hours in the others.

They also have enacted an ordinance defining a new crime, one specifically attributable to Proposition 13: trespassing in a public park, a misdemeanor; \$10 fine upon conviction.

'Cooperation' can mean many things

Cooperation, like beauty, sometimes is in the eye of the beholder. In the Highway Division, until the problem was corrected by OSEA Employee Representative Peter De Luca, all the "cooperating" was done by the employees.

The Division's "cooperative work effort," which appeared to be a way for Highway to avoid paying per diem to its employees, has now been abolished, but it took the cooperation of the Personnel Division and grievance coordinator George Sanders when Highway wouldn't cooperate.

The "cooperative work effort" came into play when employees from separate maintenance sections would gather to do work at one spot, such as a gravel pit, shared by several sections. Under the conditions of this policy, no per diem was paid to the employees even though they may have traveled more than 25 miles to get to the location of the "cooperative work effort."

This policy eventually was expanded to include any time a

person from one Highway crew was assigned to do work with someone from another crew.

Grievances, arbitration are topics

Grievance administration and arbitration will be the major topics of discussion at a four-day workshop sponsored by the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) July 30 through Aug. 2. The event is planned as a residential workshop and is being held at the University of Oregon with lodging and meals provided at the dormitories.

Participants in the program will come from the U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C.; the Oregon Employment Relations Board; the Oregon Department of Education; the Labor Education and Research Center staff; and a number of the public employe unions in the state.

Registration fee for the workshop will be \$50 which includes lodging and meals at the U.O. dormitories and all materials. Two hours of graduate credit may be obtained through the Division of Continuing Education if desired. There is an additional charge of \$30 for this.

Representatives from most of the faculty and classified staffs of the 13 Oregon community colleges are expected.

Registration should be sent in by July 17, 1978 to the Labor Education & Research Center, 154 Prince Lucien Campbell Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, 97403, or phone 686-5054 to reserve a place.

Resolution 'hotline' operating

A Resolution Hotline now is in operation so that General Council resolution writers can find out whether someone else has written a resolution on a similar subject or what current OSEA policy, if any, is on the subject.

To get the Hotline, simply call the Salem headquarters and ask for the "Resolution Hotline."

Headquarters phone numbers are 581-1505 (Salem), 223-1569 (Portland) and 800-452-9118 for the rest of the state.

The OSEA News dates listed

The OSEA News will be published nine more times between now and the end of the year. Basically, The OSEA News is published every three weeks on Thursdays.

Here are the remaining publication dates:

July 20	October 12
August 10	November 2
August 31	November 23
September 21	December 14.



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