

Higher Education Bargaining

Campus Actions Turn Up Heat On OSSHE

For the past six months, OPEU higher education workers have been turning up the heat on OSSHE board members, state legislators, university presidents, and campus financial officers. While OSSHE remains far from the mark for a fair contract and state legislators continue to drag their feet on full funding for higher education, considerable progress has been made in large part by our militancy on and off campus. The most important gain made in this campaign so far is the winning of broad community support for our issues. Several recent actions have

demonstrated that support. At the University of Oregon, for example, two rallies were staged over the past six weeks – each event drawing more than 250 workers, students and community members. Portland State University workers have been joined by community members at various actions on that campus and tangible community support has been present on every other campus as well.

As the higher education bargaining unit moves into this critical stage, maintaining that community support and the support of OPEU sisters and brothers will be essential to winning a fair contract in 1997.



Clockwise from left: Higher ed workers send message to OSSHE; Spokesperson Seekatz and District 1 Director Marc Nisenfeld inspect "board of education;" Seekatz addresses PSU rally.



Higher Ed Bargaining Conference June 28, 1997

Higher education bargaining unit delegates, members of the higher education statewide strategy committee and higher education bargaining unit leaders will be meeting on June 28, 1997 in Salem (location TBA). Conference attendees will review and assess the most recent round of bargaining with OSSHE and help develop our Union's next step in this important fight.

If you are a delegate or an interested worker inside or outside the higher education bargaining unit, contact your worksite organizer about attending this important event.

Higher Ed Workers Cast Votes for Strike Preparation

On June 13, 1997, OPEU's higher education bargaining unit voted overwhelmingly to reject the most recent offer made by the Oregon State System of Higher Education (OSSHE) and to authorize our Union to begin strike preparations. When all ballots were counted from the State's seven higher education campuses, the results showed 92% of higher education workers supporting strike preparation while only 8% opposed that step. The earliest possible date that higher education workers could strike is August 4, 1997. A strike will not take place until there is a vote of the bargaining unit.

The decision to make this significant move came following six months of frustration with OSSHE negotiators. Like their sisters and

brothers in the state bargaining unit, higher education workers are facing four years without a raise and the possibility of losing the current health benefits program due to rising insurance premiums. While the OPEU/DAS settlement earlier this year included significant raises addressing the compensation gap and crafted an arrangement to ensure additional funds would be available to maintain fully paid family health benefits. No such proposals have been forthcoming from OSSHE negotiators.

Instead, OSSHE continues to propose no increases in insurance premiums, resulting in workers paying up to \$108 per month out of pocket for family medical benefits. OSSHE has offered a 2% wage increase delayed to 1% on January

1, 1998 and 1% on January 1, 1999. The six-month delays in each increase actually reduces the real value of each increase by 50%. OSSHE has offered very few selective salary increases for classes behind market.

Unlike DAS, OSSHE has indicated they are willing to follow the lead of the Republican budget which treats higher education workers as a secondary commodity.

We know that Oregon can't have a first class higher education system by treating its workers like second class citizens. Now we have to teach OSSHE that lesson.

What We Can Do to Help Our Higher Ed Sisters and Brothers

1. Call, write, fax or e-mail OSSHE Chancellor Joe Cox (see below) and ask him to stop treating higher ed workers like second class citizens. Urge him to put a fair wage increase and protected, fully paid benefits on the table!
2. Call, write, fax or e-mail your elected state representatives and urge them to support returning the \$2.9 million roll-up back to the budget. Also urge them to ensure higher education receives adequate overall funding to ensure that higher education receives a fair contract.

3. Contact your worksite organizer about participating in higher education actions on a campus near you during the week of June 23.

How to Contact Joseph Cox

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