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Two Sections

Bus strike looms on the horizon



(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

by Robert Lothian

Tri-Met bus driver Patty Thomas says she doesn't want to go on strike, but she'll stick with her "brothers and sisters" in Transit Union Local 757.

Thomas, a driver for nine years, operates the Number Eight 15th Avenue bus. She is the sole supporter for herself and several family members. "I bring home the bacon," she said.

Either way, said Thomas, with a strike or with Tri-Met contract offers, it looks like drivers and mechanics will be forced to make a sacrifice.

"It's just a lot of pressure they're putting us under," said Thomas. "After nine years," she said, "I don't want to see everything I've worked for crumble."

Tri-Met management remains firm

in its resolve to cut labor costs. In his August report, general manager Jim Cowan said it is time for Tri-Met's union employees "to take their fair share of cutbacks."

"For the last three years," said Cowan, "Tri-Met's management employees and riders have shouldered the burden of shrinking revenues. Service has been cut by 15 percent, management salaries have been frozen this year and reduced, and 48 management positions have been eliminated."

The company still needs additional dollars just to maintain present service levels, Cowan said, and that's why the drivers and mechanics are being asked to bite the bullet. There are teeth in Tri-Met's resolve — the company has said it will use non-union employees to fill in for strikers.

The 1,400 member union local rejected the company's first contract offer in July, by a vote of 1,081 to 52. That offer included a 2 percent wage cut and cost-saving changes in many things the union won in previous bargaining — overtime procedures, holidays, shifts, pay differentials and other benefits. The company also wanted to contract out less profitable routes to private bus companies, and increase part-time drivers from 14 percent to 30 percent of the workforce. *Oregonian* labor writer Stan Federman called this contract "a shot through the union's heart" that could cause its destruction.

Tri-Met's second offer in August scrapped the benefit and work rule changes in lieu of an across-the-board 9.5 percent pay cut over the next 18 months. The union rejected that offer by a vote of 1,041 to 43.

The company says it will now come back to the union with its original offer, possibly as early as Sunday. A

strike vote would occur within 48 hours, raising the possibility of a strike on the first day of school, Sept. 3rd.

Even though the second offer might have been better than the first, the 9.5 percent wage cut it contained meant a loss of over \$200 a month to employees. "Twenty-five hundred dollars a year, that's asking too much," said Thomas.

Driver Bob Jühr, who was filling in on the Number Nine Broadway bus for a vacationing driver, said he could live with the 2 percent wage cut of the original offer, but not the other changes, especially in seniority and overtime.

Many drivers routinely are behind the wheel 14 hours a day, getting tired, but at least they get paid for overtime after eight hours, said Jühr. The company wants to pay overtime only after 40 hours — drivers could work long shifts without getting paid overtime, he said. On the seniority question, "What they want to do is lay off full-time drivers before they lay off part-time drivers," he said. Tri-Met saves with the part-timers, who receive no overtime pay or benefits and who work only peak shifts.

Meanwhile, financially-troubled Tri-Met continues to look for other bail-outs. The Tri-Met board of directors voted recently to raise fares by 10 cents to 85 cents. At its August 26th meeting, the board considered an ordinance that would impose a 1 percent tax on certain petroleum products imported into the county. Taxes on service stations, motor vehicle dealers and parking lots are also being considered.

A source inside Tri-Met headquarters said that the company's scrambling for funds as it cuts services, raises fares, and forces wage cuts, indicates grave mismanagement.

An example of mismanagement, and also of disregard for employees and taxpayers, say the drivers, are the 5 percent merit pay increases awarded to top management who make between \$45,000 - \$75,000 a year. The average driver earns \$27,000 annually.

"We haven't got enough money to go around. We want you to take less, we'll take more," is management's attitude, according to Jühr.

"We don't get bonuses," said Thomas. She said she has trouble even getting days off that are owed to her.

Inevitable rumors are floating around that Tri-Met is out to break the union, following a pattern that has destroyed locals of the machinists, marine trades and lumber workers' unions.

But Thomas and Jühr say they are

willing to take the risk. "Send up a prayer for us," said Thomas. Her advice to riders: "Watch the news, so you can see what's going on and so you'll have a way to work."

If there's a strike:

Tri-Met will operate 15-minute service weekdays from 6 to 11 a.m. and from 2 to 7 p.m. on the following routes:

No. 14—Hawthorne/Sandy; No. 20—Burnside combined with No. 53—23rd Avenue; No. 57—Forest Grove; No. 5—Interstate/Barbur; No. 33—McLoughlin; No. 35—Oregon City; No. 75—39th Ave.; No. 72—82nd Avenue; and No. 8—15th Avenue/Jackson Park.



Senator Bill McCoy was among the speakers who addressed about 150 people who gathered at Oregon State Grange headquarters in S.E. Portland, Saturday. The rally was to protest the sales tax and offer a home-stead exemption as an alternative. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Sides drawn on sales tax measure

by Jerry Garner

The Sales Tax Ballot Measure Committee recommended to the City Club to approve State Measure No. 1. The ballot measure calls for a single stage retail sales tax on goods, which is constitutionally limited to 5 percent. The Committee Report was presented last Friday to the City Club Sales Tax Ballot Measure Committee. The committee was formed to evaluate the sales tax package written by the 1985 legislature to determine whether it was close enough to the "model sales tax" proposal adopted by the City Club in February 1985 to justify City Club support.

Gary Hinkle, a committee member, said the committee found seven areas where the two proposals differ, however, only two are major differences. The first is the spending limit imposed on state government and school districts. The City Club's plan called for a constitutional restriction on spending levels to be increased or decreased only by changes in per capita income or population within the state. The legislature's plan is less restrictive. It calls for a "constitutional limit on the amount of revenue received by school districts and community colleges from property taxes, and a constitutional requirement that the legislature enact a statutory limit on state government spending other than spending for schools, community colleges, and bonded indebtedness.

The other principal difference between the two plans is the extent to which the tax burden is shifted from

business towards the individual taxpayer. The City Club proposal recommended a \$20,000 property tax exemption for homesteads, but the legislature's plan does not include such an exemption. In spite of the legislature's failure to include the City Club's recommendations, Hinkle said the tax measure is the most progressive one in the nation. The City Club will vote August 30 on whether to support the Sales Tax Ballot Measure Report's recommendations.

In other news related to State Measure No. 1, the Oregon AFL-CIO voted last Friday to oppose the 5 percent sales tax despite a plea from Governor Vic Atiyeh to not fight against the "one ray of hope we in Oregon have for jobs." The final vote by AFL-CIO delegates was 170-51, more than the two-thirds of majority needed. Irv Fletcher, President of Oregon AFL-CIO, stated: "If they had talked about only taxing yachts, alligator shoes, Audis and things like that, we would have supported it."

Last Thursday, the Portland School Board unanimously endorsed passage of the 5 percent sales tax package.

There will be a "Stop Sales Tax" campaign rally, sponsored by Oregon Fair Share, Friday, Sept. 6, 7:00 p.m. at the Pine Street Theatre, 221 S.E. 9th, with music by Compton, Doherty & Einhorn, and the Gresham Senior Hot Shots (Jug Band). Speakers will include Senators Jan Wyers and Ed Fadeley, and Ron Herndon of the Black United Front.

Voters will vote on the tax measure on September 17th.



Representatives at press conference question policies of Oregon Investment Council. The OIC oversees

\$7 billion in retirement funds.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Representatives question Investment Council

by Nathaniel Scott

In response to the escalation of violence in South Africa, 13 members of the Oregon Senate and House of Representatives has requested a meeting with the Oregon Investment Council (OIC), which oversees \$7 billion in state retirement funds.

The legislators are concerned about Oregon's investments in South Africa. In a letter to the OIC dated Aug. 16, the legislators asked five questions:

- How the OIC evaluates the risk factors and applies the prudent person factor to investments in companies with business subsidiaries in South Africa.
- What alternative kinds of invest-

ments the OIC is considering, should the prudence of South Africa investments prove too risky.

- What contingency plans the OIC has, if the holdings fail significantly, thus affecting the pension income of many elderly Oregonians.

- What policies and procedures the OIC has to inform the public and the legislature of its monitoring of these issues, as an investment factor.

- How does the OIC work with the Public Employees Retirement System in considering investments related to South Africa.

The legislators' concerns came to light Monday, August 26, in a news

conference held at the King Neighborhood Facility.

Representatives Mike Burton, Margaret Carter and Ron Cease, Districts 17, 18 and 19 respectively, and Rep. Tom Mason attended the news conference.

The legislators are focusing their attention on the OIC because there is virtually no hope of overriding the governor's veto of HB 2001, which called for divestiture of Oregon funds from companies doing business with South Africa.

"The governor's veto is one of the saddest things to happen," Rep. Mason said, adding, "Vic Atiyeh came

down on the side of the South African government."

The escalation of violence in South Africa gets worse every day, Rep. Mason said. "The country is on its way to a revolution."

We need to seriously look at what's happening in South Africa, Rep. Carter said. "Seventy-seven percent of the Black people in South Africa say we do want divestment."

She added, "Over 600 people have been killed during the last year and the South African government is not considering pressure from any country. We need to look at how we are condoning [apartheid]," she said.

Rep. Mason said he was not going to be on the side of Jerry Falwell and Rep. Carter called Falwell "blatantly racist."

Rep. Cease maintained that the public has a right to know what OIC is doing. "I would like more public information," he said. "I would like for them to say this what we are doing."

The representatives also called for public pressure on OIC and said if they didn't meet with OIC as a group, they would meet with them individually.

In their letter to OIC, the representatives maintained: "The Botha government, in refusing to move towards reconciliation or negotiation with the Black majority, is opening the door to continued violence and, potentially, civil war. Countries doing business in South Africa are now at greater risk than ever before. Realizing this, seven states, 30 cities, one territory, and four foreign countries — including Canada, France, Japan and Sweden — have enacted divestment legislation and banned the sale of gold Kruggerands. Similar legislation is pending in the U.S. Senate."