

Living Wage Resolution Expected at County

A resolution setting a wage and benefit floor of \$9 per hour, with a cost of living escalator, for contract workers is expected to pass the Multnomah County Commission on October 15th. The Living Wage Campaign, which has been agitating for over nine months for such a raise, claims there is a consensus for the resolution among the commissioners. Custodians and security guards will be the first to benefit. Food service workers and temporary clericals are expected to follow.

"All workers deserve a living wage" says County Chair Beverly Stein. Despite a sometime contentious relationship, the Chair and the Campaign have agreed to support the proposed policy while realizing that much more needs doing to bring county contract workers out of poverty.

The proposed draft resolution recognizes that "employees of non-profit social and human service agencies continue to experience low wages and a lack of benefits."

The County's ability to affect those wages is limited because the Oregon Legislature controls the funding for those contracts...Multnomah County will seek the support and cooperation of the living wage advocates and together with them will bring a strong request to the 1999 Oregon Legislature for a substantial increase in wages and benefits for the employees of contractors that provide social and human services." The Campaign has accepted the County's challenge to take the living wage struggle to the legislature.

"We're thrilled with the commissioners' response," says Jamie Partridge, chair of the Living Wage Cam-

paign. "The proposed policy improves not only wages and benefits but workers' job security and rights."

Contracts will be awarded based on a point system which rewards maximizing wages, accessible health coverage, sick leave, vacation and retirement benefits, and full-time work. New contractors would be required to notify and interview former employees displaced by a contract change. Contractors would have to post wage and benefit descriptions, inform employees of possible Earned Income Tax Credit eligibility, and allow County access to contractors' work sites and payroll and related documents.

"We are disappointed, however, that our proposed language improving workers' right to organize is not in the new policy," state Partridge. "We believe that the best anti-poverty policy is a union contract."

We will continue to press for the exclusion of contractors who use public funds to fight worker organizing, who refuse union organizers' access to worksites, who commit unfair labor practices, who refuse to allow worker grievances to be arbitrated by a neutral third party, and who refuse to recognize workers' choice of collective bargaining and the succession of collective bargaining agreements."

The draft Living Wage Policy for Multnomah county states that reducing the number of County residents living in poverty is an urgent benchmark for the County and that the County desires to set an example of responsibility and to raise the market level of wages for employees whose current earnings place them below the federal poverty level.

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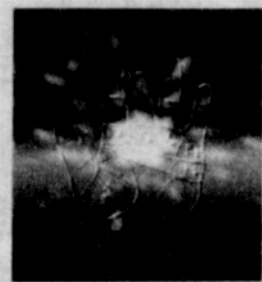
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