

SEIU Local 140 Newsletter 4.20.23

Take Action!

- Portland Youth Climate Strike [Friday 4/21, meet at 10am at the Oregon Convention Center, march from Convention Center to Pioneer Square 11am-12pm](#)
- Upcoming bargaining dates (All are welcome to attend as your schedule allows)
[Friday 4/21 from 1 - 5pm at SEIU 503, 525 NE Oregon St.](#)
- Join Portland labor, environmental and community members, along with Chhorpesal Chhom, a Cambodian garment worker and labor activist, to rally outside the Sustainable Fashion Forum over Adidas stealing the wages of hundreds of workers. [Saturday, 4/22 6pm at 907 NW Irving St.](#)
- Petition delivery at the school board meeting, wear purple to show solidarity!
[Tuesday 4/25 at 6 pm, Prophet Education Center 501 N Dixon St.](#)

Union Updates

Upcoming Bargaining and Board Meeting

The bargaining team meets with management this Friday to share additional proposals regarding changes to our [contract](#). We are curious to see whether the district will also come prepared to offer proposals or respond to any of our proposals from our last session. The bargaining team met on Monday and read through and discussed the first 13 articles in our contract. We have made changes to some articles and will bring these to management on Friday. We have not yet proposed changes to our wages, but this will be one of our top priorities and we will continue to keep everyone updated on the bargaining process.

The next School Board meeting is Tuesday 4/25 at 6pm at PEC (501 N Dixon St.) Chris Walters will be speaking on behalf of SEIU and will present the board with our petition of over 750 signatures for higher wages and better staffing. He will also speak on the issue of custodians being denied disaster pay during the snowstorm in February. If you are able, and not at work, please attend the meeting and show your support by wearing purple! You can also watch virtually on the district's YouTube [channel](#).

What is the Custodial Civil Service Law?

The [Custodians' Civil Service Law](#) was first enacted in Oregon in 1937. It created the Custodial Civil Service Board (CCSB) to oversee the appointment of custodians in the Portland Public School district. Originally, the law was created to prevent nepotistic hiring practices and set hiring qualifications and examinations for custodians. There is a similar law that applies to other civil servants like firefighters.

SEIU Local 140 custodians are the only custodians in the state of Oregon covered by this law since it only applies to school districts that include 300,000 residents or more. The CCSB is composed of 3 members who establish hiring qualifications and examinations for custodians. The multiple choice test you took as part of your hiring process was the “examination” required by the Civil Service Law. The CCSB meets twice a month to approve hiring lists and to discuss other business related to examinations, hiring, and promotions of custodians. You can find past CCSB meeting minutes [here](#).

If you ask any custodian who experienced the [mass layoff](#) of Local 140 custodians in 2002, they will tell you the Civil Service Law is the reason they were eventually able to get their jobs back. Over 300 custodians lost their jobs and careers when the district decided to save money by laying off all the custodians represented by SEIU 140. In their place, the district contracted their jobs out to Portland Habilitation Center (PHC) whose workers are represented by SEIU Local 49. This saved the district money because PHC (now Relay Resources) paid their workers less and offered substandard benefits and retirement compared to Local 140 custodians.

Many former custodians were forced to sell their homes or cash out their retirement in order to get by after losing their jobs and healthcare. Although it took over 4 years, the Oregon Supreme Court eventually [ruled](#) that PPS had violated the Civil Service Law and ordered PPS to reinstate SEIU 140 custodians.

Currently, PPS is pursuing changes to the Civil Service Law that would increase the population threshold to require a Civil Service Board, change “examination” to “assessment” and allow anyone in Oregon to be appointed to the CCSB. David Ramos, SEIU 503 political strategist, provided [testimony](#) to the House Committee on Business and Labor. He also shared this recap of the proposed changes:

- “PPS introduced the bill. We testified sharing reservations about replacing the examination with an assessment *and* about allowing folks from anywhere in Oregon to qualify for appointment to the Board.
- Legislators met with opposition and with general hesitance to keep the bill in statute since it only applies to one school district and to them it just seemed more logical to bargain this locally.
- I made clear to all stakeholders that repealing the bill is a non-starter for us, and had conversations with folks on our end about the climate indicating that we need to back off and let PPS pass this amendment or risk the statute being repealed entirely -- so we did in order to preserve as much of this law as possible.
- The bill passed out of committee with one additional amendment (increasing the threshold needed to qualify for Civil Service Law from 300k to 475k -- PPS is at 617k) and was voted on in the House on 4/13 -- passed.
- The bill is now in the Senate Committee on Education, but we have had conversations with both PPS' lobbyist (who has agreed to not pursue further amendments to the bill) and the chair of the Senate Committee on Business & Labor who agreed not to let any amendments move forward *in the off chance* that PPS *did* pursue more amendments.

Custodial Labor Management Committee Update

LMC reps Jim D’Arcy, Matt Resnick, and Dave Vecsi met with management recently to continue the ongoing conversation about a potential district-wide audit to determine the appropriate number of custodial positions needed to be fully staffed. Frank Leavitt has agreed to move forward with an APPA audit for 12 schools which would help determine the current levels of cleanliness and make recommendations for the number of positions needed to meet a certain base level of cleanliness. We should expect to know of the outcome of this audit by July or August. Frank also reported that there are 8 full time and 7 part time custodial positions still unfilled according to the number of positions the district has budgeted for.

Local Solidarity

Portland Youth Climate Strike

The Portland Youth Climate Strike is connected to other regional and global struggles for climate justice. With our recent fight for hazard pay on peoples’ minds, it’s important to remember that although snow days present some of the most obvious problems, we are also facing other disasters like forest fire smoke and extreme heat that will be made worse by the climate crisis. The event on Friday will be a march followed by tabling from a range of local groups organizing for social and environmental justice. An excerpt from a statement issued by those planning the demonstration explains some of their demands: “We demand that Gov. Kotek join senators Merkley and Wyden and Governor Inslee in condemning any and all plans surrounding the expansion of the Gas Transmission Northwest (GTN) XPress pipeline through Oregon” They also mention that “in regards to the Critical Energy Infrastructure (CEI) Hub in Portland, we demand that Gov. Kotek and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality deny Zenith Energy their Air Contaminant Discharge Permit, as Zenith’s operations negatively impact the greater Portland Metro Area” The [GTN XPress pipeline](#) and the ongoing harm caused by [Zenith Energy](#) are both local environmental justice struggles to follow.

Labor History

May Day

Many people in the United States (US) have never heard of May Day, or if they have they likely associate it with maypoles, spring, or some of the other pagan traditions that all form one side of what the day has meant historically. Around the world, the holiday is celebrated as a day to commemorate the fights taken up by workers throughout history. Why is a holiday that has its origins in the labor struggles of the US not celebrated here? To understand what happened around May Day, and speculate about why the day isn’t recognized by the establishment, we need to examine the late 1800s when the labor movements of the US were in the midst of bitter conflicts with capital in an age of monopolists and oligarchs.

In the period between the Civil War and 1900, industrial advances led to vastly increased levels of production in agriculture, manufacturing, resource extraction and other industries. Railroads lobbied Washington in order to receive free land that has remained in their control to this day. Men like J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie became extravagantly wealthy while the working class saw only a little bit of this abundance. In the 1880s and 1890s more and more immigrants began entering the US from Europe, many from countries like Italy, Russia, Greece and other nations of Eastern Europe. Chinese immigrants arrived in California to work on the railroads. Unions such as the Knights of Labor represented workers in a variety of industries including women who worked in textile mills.

At the start of 1886 a strike spread throughout the Southwest, sparked by the firing of a leader in the Knights of Labor by the Texas & Pacific Railroad. By April, in East St. Louis, strikers clashed with police. After seven workers were killed, acts of sabotage led the governor to bring in National Guardsmen. The American Federation of Labor issued a call for strikes across the nation on May 1 wherever the eight hour day was thwarted. Workers in places like Detroit, New York and Chicago all walked out. In Chicago things were particularly tense, with railroads as well as stockyards totally shut down. Albert Parsons and August Spies were two prominent figures in the thrust for working class emancipation, and both were under scrutiny for their organizing activities. On May 3 at the McCormick Harvester Works, police fired into a crowd of strikers killing four and injuring several more. A gathering was called for at Haymarket Square on the evening of May 4.

In the next edition of our newsletter, there will be a piece discussing the events that occurred on that day and the aftermath, and how May Day has become recognized by people around the world as International Workers Day.