

SEIU Local 140 Newsletter 5.12.23

Take Action!

- General meeting for **SEIU Local 140** Saturday 5/13 from 10am-12pm at the SEIU office
- PPS worker meetup at Peninsula Park on Saturday 5/27 from 1-4pm
- **The next bargaining session** is Friday 5/19 from 1-5pm at the SEIU office, 525 NE Oregon St.

Union Updates

Disaster Pay Campaign

Superintendent's Safety and Security Task Force

On Tuesday, Chief of Staff Jonathan Garcia (salary of \$198,600 in 2022) [shared](#) the “safety and security task force’s” [recommendations](#) for addressing gun violence and other school safety issues. Among their proposals was partnering with Portland Police Bureau and increasing police presence “near” schools. Other aspects included more campus safety associates, “[community walking patrols](#)” in which community members would be paid to patrol neighborhoods near schools, increased surveillance cameras, “weapons detections systems,” and mandatory ID badges for all students.

During his presentation, Garcia never offered any explanation for the increased gun violence and it is unclear if the proposed solutions are actually proven to be effective. If PPS were truly interested in promoting a safer school environment, they would hire more teachers, counselors, and support staff who provide the stability and support students need. The District might also consider how gun violence is often a symptom of [economic inequality](#), which has dramatically worsened since the pandemic.

Addressing the real needs of students and families in Portland including guaranteeing the right to housing, food, medicine, and quality education would go a long way to reducing violence in our city. Indeed, the District’s proposal completely ignores the violence many students face everyday due to a lack of permanent housing, sufficient food, as well as the persistent [racism](#), homophobia, transphobia, and ableism which often goes unaddressed at PPS.

Labor News

Child Labor on the Rise

Child labor is on the rise, and instead of enacting legislation to protect children, many states are rolling back long-established [child labor laws](#). Numerous reports have highlighted the rise of child labor in dangerous industries such as meatpacking, construction, and [manufacturing](#). In the field of [agriculture](#), child labor is particularly rampant, although rarely reported and federal protections are notoriously weak. Recently, more than [300 children](#) were found to be working in McDonald's locations in and around Kentucky. Last week, the [Iowa legislature](#) passed a bill increasing the hours teens can work, permitting children as young as 14 to be employed in roofing, construction, and demolition, and allowing those as young as 16 to serve alcohol.

Rather than increase wages and benefits to address the current “labor shortage” many companies are instead turning to exploiting child labor, especially [migrant children](#) who are forced to perform some of the most dangerous, grueling, and underpaid work which enrich large corporations like Cheerios, Cheetos, and Ford. This only demonstrates the extreme greed of large corporations and the need for strong solidarity between workers in all industries and regardless of whether a workplace is union or not. We should also understand the increased exploitation of child labor in the context of increasing cuts to social services and especially public education. Children deserve a comprehensive and supportive education and should not be forced to sell their labor in order to get their basic needs met.

Local Solidarity

Labor Notes Troublemakers School

This last Saturday unionists and labor agitators from across Portland and from other cities in Oregon converged at McDaniel High School for the Labor Notes Troublemakers School. I only made it there for the afternoon workshops, and chose to go to one called “Class Struggle Unionism in the Public Sector” with panelists from the Portland Association of Teachers, PROTEC Local 17, Reynolds Education Association, and a Clackamas Community College Associate Faculty member. The facilitator asked questions of the panelists to start the discussion, but rather than simply the panelists speaking, the workshop turned into a broader discussion with audience members sharing their experiences and wisdom on various topics:

- The significance of educating our fellow workers about why things are the way they are.
- As workers in the public sector our needs are sometimes pitted against the needs of the broader community, with an example given of TriMet and their proposed fare increases.
- Importance of pushing back on the austerity narrative that there is a scarcity of money.
- An audience member brought up the need to make international connections, as well as how we can get police out of various public spaces while also kicking them out of our unions. One panelist returned to education as far as the history of policing as an institution.
- The history of the split between the NEA and AFT and how this has divided District workers.
- Criticism of labor laws as potential tools but also how they’ve evolved over time to take away the power of the workers.
- How to prioritize lower paid folks within a union in the bargaining process.
- Talking with people who are new to the union and sharing how you’ve put yourself out there if they are afraid of retaliation. Having ongoing relationships with new members.
- Who are our bosses in the public sector? Answers included the “Phil Knights of the world” as well as the Democratic Party who enable the owning and employing classes.
- Framing strikes in a positive light, talking about their history as part of working class struggles instead of seeing them as something that’s only a last resort.
- The necessity of constantly maintaining an anti-racist lens.

Rise in Violence Against the Poor and Unhoused

An atrocious hate crime occurred last week on a subway in NYC. Jordan Neely, a Black, houseless street performer, was sitting and loudly talking about how sick he was of being poor and hungry. This man was sitting, touching no one, yelling in distress about his severe struggle in a system that deprives humans of their most basic needs such as housing. As Neely vocalized his struggle, Daniel Penny, a

white former marine, attacked him, then strangled him to death for over 15 minutes, while bystanders cheered him on or assisted the murderer. Thus far, Penny has faced no charges from police. However this is not that surprising, given that the police themselves enforce the criminalisation of homelessness and uphold white supremacy, so they took no issue with a murder that followed suit.

This incident has received national attention, but, unfortunately, this brutality against poor people is all too common. I have met many houseless residents in the Portland area whose homes have been intentionally run over by vehicles or set on fire by housed residents. A group of wealthy, housed moms in Laurelhurst were caught threatening a camp in their neighborhood with baseball bats and machetes in 2021. The hate and violence is extreme and constant. I believe a large reason people are so terrified of our houseless neighbors is because we ourselves aren't far from this fate; but instead of confronting this reality, it's more comfortable to dehumanize houseless people.

Last week's murder can be seen as the ultimate result of the dehumanization of houseless people. Houselessness and extreme poverty are often viewed as a moral failing. Houselessness is not a moral failing, it is economic violence where people get priced out of housing due to skyrocketing rent, unemployment, or other unpredictable financial crises such as medical bills: all things that could and do happen to many of us as working people.

People who have already been made houseless are then discriminated against when trying to find work or opportunities, making it a terrifying downward spiral to be in. At PPS, workers are hired only to be informed that our pay is monthly, forcing them to either find a new or second job that pays more frequently, or risk being unable to pay bills for upwards of 2 months. I have met several new custodians who are in this position, living in their cars or out of hotels and trying to just make it to that first paycheck to survive. There is really no reason for PPS to perpetuate this hardship with the pay schedule. Not to mention the many possibilities there are where we can fight houselessness, such as some form of housing assistance that could be lifesaving for several employees. As workers we need to seriously contend with the reality of houselessness for others and ourselves, and combat the violence of dehumanization that is so widespread and yet against all of our well-being.

Zenith Energy

Look for an article in next week's newsletter covering the history of Zenith Energy's operations in Portland as well as how the City has enabled their environmentally harmful operations that disproportionately impact certain communities. In the meantime, here's an article from the [Portland Mercury](#) that lays out some of the background to this fight.