

No Human Being Is Illegal

Solidarity with Immigrant Workers Makes Us Stronger

Here in Eugene and across the country union members, religious leaders and community activists are standing in solidarity with immigrant workers as hundreds of thousands rally for justice. These people recognize that immigrant workers, whether “documented” or not face the same challenges as all workers in their fight for fair treatment. While the draconian Sensenbrenner bill with its provisions to make criminals out of immigrant workers and those who give them aid was the original flash point for the mass demonstrations, now immigrant rights advocates are looking to build on this grassroots power. May 1st, International Workers Day was chosen as a national day of action calling on immigrant workers to demonstrate their contribution to our economy by staying away from work and spending no money.

Immigrant workers, especially those without legal status are subject to the worst kinds of employer abuse. They work long hours often for below minimum wage without proper training or equipment or worker’s compensation protections. Employers withhold their pay, threaten them with deportation, subject them to sexual harassment knowing that these workers have no recourse, no protections. As advocates for worker’s rights, ESSN/Jobs with Justice calls on all workers to stand with immigrants in their fight for justice. Our current system has created an underground workforce whose vulnerable status puts all workers at risk. These workers cannot organize to join a union or fight workplace abuses without jeopardizing their families. Here in Eugene an immigration raid three years ago left young children abandoned when their parents were rounded up at work and put on buses for the border.

Free trade deals like NAFTA and CAFTA have been major factors in creating the economic hardships that has driven people to find work in our country. We must hold our representatives responsible for supporting these deals that give unprecedented power to corporations and undermine the economies and democratic institutions of the U.S. and other countries. Beyond that we must recognize that people have the right to seek a better life for themselves and their children. We must find ways to bring all workers out of the shadows of “illegal” status and into the light of justice. Join ESSN/Job with Justice in supporting of fair, comprehensive immigration reform that provides a path to citizenship, unifies families, and fights the criminalization of immigrants.

Sustainable Businesses; Keeping Our Eye on the Green – Dollars, that is.

Mayor Piercy’s 16-member Task Force on Sustainable Business Initiative has completed the “Discovery” phase of its work which involved holding round table discussions and public forums that engaged hundreds of community members, and has moved swiftly into the “Dream” phase. This means setting out a vision for what our economy and community could look like with a vibrant cluster of sustainable businesses, and crafting specific policy recommendations for achieving that vision. As originally conceived the essential principles of sustainable business call for businesses to be economically viable, ecologically conscious and employee empowering. The Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon, and ESSN/Jobs with Justice have been conducting focus groups with workers and businesses owners to explore that piece of sustainability that deals with workers and community called social equity. Almost 50 individuals participated in focus groups that asked, “What would be some of most important characteristics of a good job?” and “What are some of the things businesses could do to enhance the community’s well-being?” While the final report of this research is still being drafted some key things stood out for all the worker focus groups in answering these questions. Paying a living wage, providing health care, and paid vacation were consistently cited as things sustainable businesses should be expected to provide. In fact when asked how could a business support the well-being of the community beyond its own workforce “Pay a living wage” was again the answer we heard – making the connection between the ability of people to support themselves and the overall economic health of the community. Another reoccurring theme was that businesses should be paying their fair share of taxes and

have either local ownership or local investments in the community. And many participants pointed out that union representation is the best way to insure fair treatment of workers.

LERC and ESSN/Jobs with Justice will issue a final report on this research to share with the Mayor's Task Force and others. This is when the real work will begin to move these findings from the page and into policy. We hope to provide you with more opportunities to help us make the case that real sustainability includes providing living wages and fair treatment for workers as well as giving back to the community. As might be expected many in the business community are less than supportive of the idea that they be held to a wage standard in order to be considered "sustainable." This word is being used by many businesses that have moved toward more environmentally friendly practices but have not addressed wages and other workplace issues. In order to be truly sustainable businesses will need to be held to a higher "green" standard in terms of how their dollars are spent not just where the recycling bins are placed.

DHL Postcards sent via UPS Over 200 signed postcards protesting the December firing of 15 local temporary DHL workers in Eugene were shipped via UPS to John Mullen, US based CEO of DHL Express on Friday April 28th. The postcards, which were signed by residents from around the state, called upon DHL to end its practice of using third party subcontractors and temporary agencies to staff its facilities in Eugene and other communities. ESSN/JwJ sent a letter along with the postcards as well as a copy of DHL's corporate policy on employee treatment including reminders of the various international labor agreements that DHL has signed. Many of these agreements are part of their standard corporate practices in Europe where the European Union and International Labor Organization hold employers to a higher standard than does the United States.

Locally the Lane County Central Labor Council is considering putting DHL on the AFL-CIO "Do Not Patronize" list in Lane and other Oregon counties in which they use subcontractors. The Graduate Student Teaching Fellows Federation Local 3544 is leading this effort, which will involve seeking action from those labor councils covering Linn, Benton, Douglas, and Coos counties. Meanwhile ESSN/JwJ encourages its members to continue to find ways to refuse doing business with DHL. Asking business you patronize to choose another shipper such as unionized UPS or the United State Post Office offers an opportunity to educate them about the exploitation of temporary workers and its effect on our local economy.

Labor Notes

State workers at the Oregon Lottery are fighting to join SEIU 503 and gain the rights and protections only a union contract can give them. On Thursday April 27, over 200 people rallied at the Lottery offices in Salem in support of this effort. More than 300 workers are employed at the Oregon Lottery which is one of the largest state agencies where workers do not enjoy union protections.

EWEB Line Workers Ask the Public Utility to Honor our Veterans. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 659 held educational pickets outside EWEB Friday April 28th and Monday May 1st to draw attention to their stalled negotiations. With state mediation scheduled for May 4th these brothers and sisters wanted to get the word out that they are taking a stand for improved health care coverage that doesn't continue to shift costs to workers and offers them greater say in their choice of plans. In addition they are asking EWEB to designate Veterans Day as a paid holiday. This issue has special significance since a number of these workers are veterans themselves. In spite of the fact that the union has offered to exchange other paid time off for the holiday EWEB has still refused to move off their position. If mediation fails to bring about a settlement the workers will be considering whether or not to strike as part of their effort to win a fair contract.

Universal Living Wage Rally- Raising the Federal Floor. ESSN/JwJ held a small but enthusiastic Universal Living Wage rally at the downtown Post Office in Eugene on Tax Day to draw attention to this national effort to index the federal minimum wage to local housing costs. The Universal Living Wage campaign, based in Austin Texas, calculated that if their formula was adopted over 1 million people could be

moved out of poverty and homelessness. You can learn more about this effort at their website www.universallivingwage.org and sign on to the national petition.

Nursing Home Care Stake Holders Forum Wednesday May 24 5:30 p.m. First United Methodist Church
1376 Olive, Eugene. SEIU Local 503 will convene a panel of community members, including doctors, public officials and disability activists to consider patient care and worker protection issues at Eugene nursing homes.