C.O. labor organizations support BAT Driversâ€™ union efforts

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Four labor organizations representing over 6,000 workers in Central Oregon are supporting the efforts of Bend Area Transit (BAT) bus drivers and dispatchers to win union representation with Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Division 757. The union election will be held Monday, January 29, at the workplace.

The Central Oregon Labor Council, Central Oregon Building Trades Council, Oregon School Employees Association, and Central Oregon Jobs with Justice issued a statement of â€œsolidarityâ€• with BAT employees January 10. In addition, several dozen Jobs with Justice members have e-mailed messages of solidarity in support of the organizing drive.

â€œWe fully support the efforts of BAT employees to win union representation in collective bargaining and in the workplace,â€• said Michael Funke, organizer for Central Oregon Jobs with Justice, a labor-community coalition of 19 organizations and 250 members. â€œThe bus drivers deserve to be treated the same as the Bend police, firefighters, and city employees who have union representation,â€• Funke said.

Fernando Gapasin, president of the Central Oregon Labor Council, stressed that â€œOrganizing into unions strengthens the entire community by raising the community wage and spurring more non-union workers to the initiative to organize. We need more living wage jobs in Central Oregon and the best way to get them is to organize.â€•

â€œBus drivers in the Bend-LaPine School District work for a living wage with good benefits because they have the strength of our union behind them,â€• noted Bob Bradetich, field representative for the Oregon School Employees Association. â€œBend bus drivers deserve the same opportunity to bargain for better wages and benefits and other workplace improvements.â€•

â€œAll workers benefit when any group of workers organizes a union to improve their living standards and working conditions,â€• added Alan Mills, business agent with the Plumbers and steamfitters Local 290 and president of the Central Oregon Building Trades Council. â€œWe applaud the efforts of BAT employees and encourage employer neutrality in this campaign so that workers can participate in the union election without interference.â€•

All four organizations stress that a level playing field during the union campaign can best be achieved through card-check recognition of the union or, short of that, employer neutrality.

â€œParatransit management and city staff should remain neutral during this campaign so that workers

donâ€™t feel intimidated in the workplace,â€• said Funke. â€œNeutrality will allow workers to democratically decide if they want a union and lessen employee-employers tensions.â€•

The organizations represent a combined total of more than 6,000 Central Oregon unionized workers employed in construction industry trades, public schools, private and public health care facilities, retail grocery stores, and in federal, state, county and municipal governments.

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