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National union seizes healthcare local

by Jonathan Brinckman, The Oregonian

Tuesday July 07, 2009, 7:18 PM

The health care division of the American Federation of Teachers seized control Tuesday of the union local representing about 3,000 workers at the Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center in Clackamas and other facilities of Kaiser Permanente NW in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

The action comes as Kaiser Permanente and the local, the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, prepare to begin negotiations on five contracts that expire in 2010. Officers of the local also were discussing breaking their affiliation with AFT, the national organization.

At 9 a.m. Tuesday, about two dozen people with the AFT walked into the local's Southeast Ankeny Street headquarters and took control of the union, said Jamie Horwitz, a spokesman for the AFT.

He said the AFT used a protective order to suspend the local's management team, including president Kathy Geroux. Altogether, 20 people were removed from power, including 4 officers and 16 board members.

Samantha Owens, the board secretary and one of those removed, said Tuesday evening she did not fully understand the situation. The ousted officers met Tuesday, but others could not be reached for comment.

"About a month ago, we decided to leave AFT," Owens said. "I just found out we were taken under trusteeship."

Horwitz said the local was set to hold a meeting Tuesday evening to discuss leaving the AFT. He said the local's bylaws prohibit July meetings, when many union members are on vacation.

"There was no other avenue left, so we acted," Horwitz said. "This is a rare circumstance triggered by a large number of local members contacting us and saying their local was out of control. The local has every right to leave the AFT, they just have to follow the rules."

He said this is the fourth time in the AFT's 93-year history that it has placed a local union under temporary administratorship, and that it would seek to quickly return control to local leadership.

A Kaiser Permanente spokesperson said his organization did not know what to make of Tuesday's development. "We just learned about this late today and are still gathering the facts," said Dave Northfield.

--Jonathan Brinckman, jbrinckman@news.oregonian.com

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if the local left the national union, then why does the national believe it has any rights or authority over the now independent local union? Sounds like the mob bosses decided that cannot be. in my dealings with unions in Washington, they are really about themselves, not the people they claim to represent. kinda like a ponzi scheme, but he people running it seem to be the ones making the money from dues. Hoffa would be proud of this group.....
i'm all for people standing together for what is right, but to do it as a part of a "union" as it exists today, no thanks. i just want to work and make a decent wage.....

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