

Taxing the Rich Wins in Oregon

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Victory! Thousands of Oregon workers fought valiantly over the past weeks to ensure that corporations and the rich will see their taxes raised, so that social services, health care, and education could be saved. Massive phone banking operations, door-to-door canvassing, and rallies were used by union and community members to educate the public about a progressive tax measure used to offset the state's dire budget situation.

The campaign was indisputably class war, and the corporations came out firing — virtually every newspaper in Oregon shed their alleged “objectivity” and exposed their subservience to the corporations. Oregon's largest newspaper, The Oregonian, displayed giant front page ads —daily — in order to defeat the measures (part of the ad showcased an article by Phil Knight —founder of Oregon company Nike — who spoke of corporate apocalypse if the tax measures passed). This, along with the countless false advertisements on TV and radio, shows the high level of understanding that workers in Oregon displayed in voting to pass the measures by a landslide.

The new taxes are hardly radical; if anything they are insufficient compared to Oregon's budget problems. Oregon's corporate minimum tax was raised from \$10 a year — no typo here — to \$150. Corporations with profits over \$250,000 a year will pay an additional 1.3 percent on profits over that amount.

Wealthy individuals — those making over \$125,000 or couples making \$250,000 will pay an additional 1.8 percent above those numbers. Most Oregonians — 97.5 percent — will see no tax increase. These minuscule tax increases caused Oregon's corporate elite to feverishly organize to defeat the bill. Their stranglehold over the media was no match for well-organized working-class Oregonians.

Originally, the tax increase was passed by Oregon's legislature, where the Democrats enjoy a supermajority. The Democrats were under immense pressure from Oregon's unions, who, commendably, advanced the “tax the rich” measure to the point where the Democrats had to act. Though the tax increases were small, they were nevertheless progressive, saving Oregon's budget \$733 million in cuts.

The corporations mobilized, and paid signature gatherers to collect enough signatures to put the tax increase to a voter referendum.

The ensuing campaign caught the attention of the nation, where precedent is now set in favor of all working people. Corporations and unions from out of state contributed funds to help sway Oregon's campaign, knowing that their fates were linked. Now, Oregon will hopefully serve as an example to other states experiencing budget crises and consequent cuts to education and social services.

Oregon's vote coincides with President Obama's national budget, where social services are being "frozen" — in reality reduced. Thus, Oregon gives inspiration for solutions to state and federal budget crises, where in both cases the working class has been carrying the brunt of the recession's effects.

Union and community groups everywhere must follow Oregon's example. Tax the rich and the corporations! No to cuts in education, health care, and social services!

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