

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



Names from the past

AS WAS NOTED in the previous issue of the Northwest Labor Press, this space is giving some attention to leaders of labor organizations of bygone years who are not eligible for the Labor Hall of Fame, which honors living retirees for their contributions to their local unions and to the rest of the labor movement. The Labor Hall of Fame is sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Retirees Council, which is affiliated with the Portland-based Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Early-day women union leaders who merit being listed on a Labor Honor Roll were mentioned in the last issue of the Labor Press. In this issue are mentioned men unionists whose names belong on a Labor Honor Roll.

In the year 1900, this newspaper began publication with the name Portland Labor Press. The Labor Press was established with a Labor Day issue with H.B. Metcalf as the editor.

Union leaders making up the paper's board of directors were J. A. Bushman of the Millworkers, E. Edwards of the Cigar Makers, J. A. Goldrainer of the Barbers, B. Hesselberg of the Typographers, George M. Orton of the Pressmen, Frank Allert of the Machinists, C. H. Weber of the Clerks, W. H. Robertson of the Letter Carriers, John Beigi of the Brewers and August Eachie of the Beer Drivers.

MILLWORKER BUSHMAN was president of the Portland Federated Trades Assembly, which sponsored the start-up of the Labor Press. The early-day central labor council came into being in 1883 when national labor leader Samuel Gompers traveled by train from the East Coast to Portland to meet with Rose City union leaders to establish the Federated Trades Assembly. Gompers, a Cigar Maker by trade, was president and founder of the American Federation of Labor. Gompers returned to Portland two years later to revive the assembly after it had collapsed due to a political split over whether to support Republican or Democrat candidates. A later leader of the pioneer labor council was Captain John O'Brien, a printer.

Printer Hesselberg was a member of Multnomah Typographical Union No. 58, which was chartered in 1882 and took its name from the county in which much of Portland is situated. Local 58 was a descendant of the Oregon & Washington Typographical Society, which was formed in Portland in 1853.

G.Y. HARRY, of Portland Sheet Metal Workers Local 16, led a campaign that succeeded in creating the Oregon State Federation of Labor in 1902 as an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. Harry, a man with a large handlebar mustache, was elected as the first president of the state federation. Others elected with him were: Secretary, William H. Barry, a Portland printer; treasurer, Charles Mickley, a Portland tailor; and these vice presidents: J.F. Welch, Astoria fisherman; George Hornby, Portland longshoreman; G. F. Johnson of Baker (now Baker City), employed in the county assessor's office; William E. Miller of Salem, a member of an AFL directly-chartered union; and Fred Langever, Pendleton painter.

Harry declined to seek a second year as president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor at its second convention in 1903 at La Grande in Eastern Oregon. Harry, active in the Democratic Party, was succeeded as president by Charles H. Gram, a member of the Teamsters who was a Republican. Gram, of Portland, served five years as labor federation president and later was elected as state labor commissioner, an office he held from 1919 to 1943.

E.J. STACK, a leader of Portland Cigar Makers Local 202, was secretary-treasurer of the city's labor council in the early 1900s and later was executive secretary-treasurer of the Oregon State Federation of Labor. Stack helped guide the Labor Press as a member of the nonprofit newspaper's board of directors from 1915 until his death in 1950.

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...ATU points to record of successes

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having belonged to the Machinists Union two years prior.

"We don't go out and solicit," Colcord said. "We just answer the phone."

That's what happened in the Portland-based ATU unit, Colcord said.

The Portland unit had formed its own independent association before, in 1996. But after 18 months in which the new association was unable to get an acceptable contract, a majority of members voted to rejoin ATU.

As NEMSA got under way in California, ATU critics within the Portland unit found out about it online, and began a drive to switch unions. On Jan. 19, they filed a request for a union election to see which union the members prefer.

AMR paramedic Carl Lemmon, a NEMSA supporter, says ATU saved his job once when he was facing termination. And while wages, benefits and working conditions have improved steadily in ATU, Lemmon thinks they could improve more. He compares Portland-area compensation to that of North-eastern California.

Lemmon is not alone. The last contract ATU negotiated contained a 30 percent wage increase over three years — and still passed by only five votes.

Will NEMSA, with a fledgling staff and fewer resources, be able to do better? Ron Heintzman, an international rep for ATU who has been assigned to bargain the unit's next contract, doesn't think so. Heintzman agrees that EMTs and paramedics are underpaid. Paramedics make \$55,000 a year after 13 years, but EMTs still start at less than \$30,000 a year under the current con-

tract, which expires in May.

Winning labor concessions from giant corporations is no picnic. As longtime president of Local 757, Heintzman developed a reputation as a skillful strategist and aggressive bargainer. ATU often resorted to the courtroom or ballot box when companies balked at the bargaining table, and amassed an enviable record. AMR wasn't paying for training; ATU won a reversal, and back pay. AMR wasn't giving adequate rest time; ATU applied political pressure and AMR changed its policy. It was a felony to assault fire or police officers, but not paramedics; ATU got a law passed in Salem to add EMS workers.

Still, Heintzman says, there was always a group within the unit that felt emergency medical services workers should have their own union.

That's NEMSA's chief selling point, repeated over and over in the new union's appeals. And it's true that most Local 757 members are bus operators.

It's a strategic debate — not over whether EMS workers need a union, but over what kind of union.

In conversations and on the unit Web site, www.atuems.com, pro-ATU workers and staff say NEMSA compares unfavorably to ATU. ATU Local 757 owns its own office, has the backing of its 180,000-member parent union, and as an AFL-CIO affiliate, is part of a labor community that can offer political and economic support. NEMSA is an untested stand-alone union. It's a go-it-alone union whose national headquarters consists of a borrowed suite in a Sacramento law office. And, by raiding already unionized units rather than start-

ing with workers that don't yet have a union, NEMSA has made enemies of other unions.

NEMSA president Colcord says EMS workers need a union that understands their specialty. He says he understands EMS issues because he has worked as a paramedic.

Local 757 attorney Susan Stoner counters that the AMR unit already elects officers from among the ranks — and those EMS workers participate in bargaining their contracts, helped by Heintzman and others with full time union expertise.

"When you actually sit and look at the issues, it's always the same," Stoner said. "When you fight with management, you fight the same battle over and over. It doesn't matter what arena you're in — it's all about control, and it's all about money."

"It's the EMS professionals themselves who decide what they want in their contract," Stoner said. "What they need is an 800-pound gorilla on their side, and it doesn't really matter what the gorilla's name is."



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