

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



James T. Marr hailed

JAMES T. MARR was a man of integrity and more, as this article about the remarkable Jim Marr will elaborate upon. Marr richly deserves a place on the Labor Honor Roll started by this column to spotlight unionists of yesteryears.



JIM MARR

From 1944 until December 1965, Marr was the executive secretary-treasurer of the state labor federation—first the Oregon State Federation of Labor, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and later the Oregon AFL-CIO, elected in the 1956 merger convention of the state bodies of the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The merger in Oregon followed by a year the national merger.

JAMES THOMAS MARR was born in Prescott, Washington, on April 21, 1900. He lived his adult years in the Portland area. He was working for the city's parks bureau when he helped establish Municipal Employees Local 483 in 1928. Marr said that parks employees organized a

union because they were "dissatisfied with City Hall." Marr added: We wanted a 44-hour week instead of 48, twice-a-month paychecks instead of once a month, and we wanted a pension plan." A year later he was elected president of Local 483, an affiliate of the Laborers International Union. He served in that post until 1936 when he stepped down because he was appointed as a foreman. However, he maintained his union membership and was a delegate to the Portland Central Labor Council and the Oregon State Federation of Labor.

IN 1943, Marr was elected a vice president of the State Federation of Labor. In 1944, upon the death of D.E. Nickerson, the state federation's board elected Marr to succeed him as the organization's leader in the top post of executive secretary-treasurer. After that, Marr was elected on a continuous basis by convention delegates. Following his first election as executive secretary-treasurer of the merged state labor council, he served until his retirement at the constitutionally-mandated age of 65 in 1965.

Elected with Marr at the 1956 merger convention, held in Portland, were George Brown as director of politics and legislation, and J.D. (Rosy) McDonald as president, the organization's presiding officer, the same ceremonial post he'd held in the AFL state federation. "Rosy," so nicknamed because he usually wore a rosebud in his suit lapel, also had a job with Portland Meat Cutters Local 143. Brown had been the executive officer of Oregon State CIO Council. He had a reputation as a savvy political strategist and a canny lobbyist at the Oregon Legislature. Brown and McDonald also belong on the Labor Honor Roll; their careers will be covered in later columns.

JIM MARR was self-educated on the related subjects of labor law, labor relations and employee rights and benefits. There were many achievements for organized labor during Marr's long tenure at the top of the labor federation's leadership hierarchy.

Organized labor's lobbying efforts at the Oregon Legislature at the Capitol in Salem resulted in improvements in workers' compensation and unemployment insurance laws. Those laws, as Marr and Brown often pointed out, benefited all men and women workers — both union and nonunion.

Marr, Brown, and McDonald, who also lobbied at the Legislature under

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Vote-by-mail advocates push cause, tell states to go slow

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Advocates of voting by mail say switching to such a system would virtually eliminate voting fraud while raising voter participation. But they're telling states considering it to "go slow" in order to work out the kinks.

At a May 1 conference organized by People for the American Way, and backed by the National Association of Letter Carriers, the National Education Association, the Service Employees and other groups, the leading state in the process, Oregon, was held up as a model.

The national AFL-CIO passed a resolution in 2005 favoring vote by mail in all 50 states. That resolution originated in Oregon.

In the 2004 general election, Oregon had the nation's third-highest turnout — 70 percent — trailing only Minnesota and Wisconsin, both of which have Election Day registration.

In that election, 91 percent of union households voted.

Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, who runs the state's Elections Division — which is all vote-by-mail — said the system is cheaper than the traditional lines at polling places, people voting at individual machines, and individual precinct judges tallying votes and then sending them to county clerks.

That's because vote-counters in a county clerk's office, with many hours of training and testing beforehand,

could handle all the mailed ballots — rather than trusting the count to thousands of untrained, sometimes computer-illiterate amateurs hired at \$100 per person nationwide and given only minutes of training, the speakers explained.

Besides Oregon, vote-by-mail is catching on in Washington state — where 35 of 39 counties have approved it — parts of Colorado and Arizona and other Western states, the speakers said.

Before its adoption in Oregon, by a 71-29 percent margin in a 1998 ballot measure, first the Democrats and then the Republicans opposed it.

Democratic Governor John Kitzhaber vetoed it and an ensuing initiative petition and ballot measure reacted to that.

But as it turns out, Bradbury said, both Oregon parties came to support it: The Republicans because they felt they had a superior get-out-the-vote operation which they could translate to individuals' living rooms, and the Democrats when they saw Democratic U.S. Rep. Ron Wyden construct his get-out-the-vote campaign completely around mail balloting for a special U.S. Senate election, which he won.

The contrast between orderly vote-by-mail and chaos at the polling places was summed up by Texas economics professor James Galbraith, who volunteered to take voters to the polls in Columbus, Ohio, on Election Day

2004.

There he watched people in inner-city Columbus stand six hours in the rain and cold waiting to vote. He found out that was due to a deliberate decision by Republican Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell — President Bush's campaign chair who is this year's gubernatorial nominee — to put fewer voting machines in the central city and student precincts, to hold down Democratic turnout.

Hundreds of people, Galbraith said, gave up and went home. Bush carried Ohio.

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