

Let me say this about that

...The past re-surfaces

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Shogan commented: “Within a generation, the hopes of the rebellious miners had been largely fulfilled as their government redeemed its part of the compact with its citizens who happened to be workers. Today’s workers have been spared the fear and desperation that haunted the miners who marched on Blair Mountain. They do not have to face eviction or jail, or the threat of violent death. And no one talks of rising up in arms.”

SHOGAN WENT ON to say: “But if much has changed, much remains the same. With all the gains made under the New Deal reforms, workers in post-industrial America have not come close to keeping pace with soaring corporate profits while the maldistribution of wealth accelerates. In the 21st century, as in the 20th, labor’s leaders are still on the defensive, battling to forestall further losses of political power and protections for their members. The bosses still hold all the high cards.”

★★★

A NEWS REPORT in Willamette Week last month told of the problems keeping in operation an elevator that sometimes is referred to as “the jail elevator” in the Multnomah County Courthouse, whose address is 1021 SW Fourth Ave., which of course, is in downtown Portland. The WW story said that “Elevator No. 5” carries inmates to the “courthouse jail” after they are brought to the building by bus for court appearances. That elevator is on the Southwest Fifth Avenue side of the Courthouse, which was built in 1914.

I can remember that back in the late 1950s, the steel-grille-faced jail elevator functioned adequately, although a bit noisily — unlike the sleek modern elevators in the Courthouse’s main lobby on the Southwest Fourth side. As the county beat reporter for the pre-strike Oregonian, I often used the Fifth Avenue jail elevator to get to the top floor of the building. In those halcyon days, where access was not monitored by armed guards and airport-type entryways, the jail elevator sometimes came down empty and I’d enter and push the “up” button. My departure was eyeballed by the deputy sheriff on duty as the jail boss. We’d exchange pleasantries and then I’d walk down a hallway to the offices of the uniformed and plain-clothes deputies — sometimes referred to as the county police. The sheriff himself back then had his office on the ground floor just a few marbled steps from the main entrance on the Southwest Fourth side of the Courthouse.

MATT DISHMAN was the chief deputy at the courthouse jail. Matt was a big man who’d been a boxer in his younger years. When Matt was on duty he’d come down in the elevator when he heard the ground floor buzzer. He’d usually invite me to have a cup of coffee with him at his jail office desk, an offer I’d accept because I liked Matt and he often passed along inside information about happenings in the sheriff’s department and elsewhere in the Courthouse. Matt knew I would not identify him as my news source.

The name of Matt Dishman is perpetuated by the City of Portland’s Matt Dishman Community Center at 77 NE Knott St.

★★★

BOB HAZEN’S recent death at age 88 recalled for me when I first met the executive of Benjamin Franklin Savings and Loan in 1966. We happened to be sitting at the same table at a civic luncheon in the Hilton Hotel in downtown Portland. After all eight of us at the table introduced ourselves, Hazen smilingly told me that he was a union member and regularly read the Labor Press of which I then was the editor. He said he was a member of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. I was not surprised that he was an AFTRA member because he had a morning radio disc jockey program on which he played records of popular music interspersed with commercials for Benjamin Franklin Savings & Loan. I told him that I often listened to his program and that I had a home mortgage loan with his company. Benj. Franklin was started by his father and Bob eventually succeeded him as president and chairman of the board.

★★★

LOWELL ASHBAUGH, a retired mediator for the Oregon Employment Relations Board and a former Portland union leader, died Sept. 27 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, after suffering a stroke. He was 81. A memorial service will take place at 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 25, at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, 2636 SE Jefferson in Milwaukie, one block east of McLoughlin Boulevard.

Lowell and his wife, Darlene, had been living in Baton Rouge to be near their daughter, Denese, and her husband, Rick, who are professors at Louisiana State University, and their family.

BEFORE ASHBAUGH became a state mediator he was vice president of Food and Drug Clerks Local 1092. Prior to that he was executive secretary-treasurer of Retail Clerks Local 1257, which represented employees of clothing, department, shoe, jewelry and variety stores, which merged with #1092.

Goldberg Mechanic Stuart Gibson labor law firm to close at year’s end

Goldberg Mechanic Stuart Gibson, a prominent union-side labor law firm, will dissolve at the end of the year, and its attorneys will go in separate directions.

Steve Goldberg and Gene Mechanic met in Salem in the 1970s, became friends, and founded a firm together in 1980. Diana Stuart and Giles Gibson joined the firm later. Over the years, the firm has represented many unions in disputes with employers, as well as injured workers and union benefit plans. The firm also represented the Northwest Labor Press.

With the firm’s seven-year office lease coming up for renewal Dec. 31, Goldberg, 59, decided it was time for a change in focus. Goldberg is active in the National Lawyers Guild, a progressive lawyers group, and wanted to devote more time to *pro bono* political cases, like several he’s recently worked on that challenge the Bush Administration’s assertions of executive authority in the so-called “war on terror.” Goldberg defended soldiers in Iraq who had their terms of enlistment extended without their consent, and is currently representing the Al Hara-main Islamic Foundation, a Central Oregon charity that is suing the Bush Administration over warrantless wire-tapping. Goldberg said cases like these are a return to the kind of idealism that drove him to practice law to begin with.

“Bush’s actions have had devastating effects on U.S. standing in the world ... and on working people,” Goldberg said.

Mechanic took Goldberg’s planned departure as a chance to consider his own options, and decided to take a job in Miami, Florida, working for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Starting Jan. 1, Mechanic, also 59, will be associate gen-

eral counsel for the international union, responsible for strategic planning for a 17-state region that includes all states east of California and south of the Mason-Dixon Line. SEIU is undertaking a major organizing campaign in the South, an area of the country that has traditionally resisted unionization. Mechanic said the new job will be a chance to be on the front lines in a union campaign of national significance. “It’s crucial to labor that we not just rely on states where unions are strong now,” Mechanic said. “We have to go into the ‘right-to-work’ states to get people to understand the importance of unionizing.”

Gibson, who entered the legal profession after a career as a union organizer and rep, admitted to having done some grieving over the firm’s dissolution, but said he has recovered. He will be joining the Carney Buckley Hays & Marsh firm as a full partner, meaning his name will be added to the end of the list. He’ll also continue offering training to union leaders as an adjunct faculty member with the Labor Educa-

tion and Research Center of the University of Oregon.

Stuart is weighing whether to embark on a solo practice or join another firm, but will continue to specialize in family law and civil litigation.

Associate attorney Jenny Marston has taken a position with a labor law firm in San Francisco. The closure will mean the layoff of five support staff, all members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.

Each of the firm’s four partners plan to continue doing at least some work for the clients of the existing firm, with Gibson expected to serve the bulk of the union clients at his new firm. In recent years, Gibson and Mechanic have done most of the union work. Goldberg will continue to represent the Operating Engineers Local 701 pension fund, which he serves as a legal adviser. Local 701 was the Goldberg Mechanic firm’s very first client.

“I think both Gene and I reached the same conclusion,” Goldberg said. “It was time to shake things up a bit and look for new challenges.”



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