

Let me say this about that

...Lengthy research

(From Page 2)

while he was behind bars in Utah, lived in Portland from 1926 to 1936, Munk said in “The Red Guide.” He wrote that “Both before and after those years, she was a leader in national radical politics.” He also said: “Her life in Portland was sedentary because of poor health. She lived at the home of a Portland radical, Dr. Marie D. Equi, whose address was 1423 SW Hall St., Munk reported.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER, who later became the head of the U.S. Communist Party, lived in Portland from 1901 to 1907, Munk says, adding, “He worked in lumber camps, laid railroad track along the Columbia River ... and shoveled heavy green railroad ties on the Portland docks, where he joined the Longshoremen’s Union.

Munk’s book said Foster shipped out as a seaman on a freighter for a time. The author also reported Foster frequented saloons in the city’s Skid Road area and sold Socialist newspapers in the streets. Foster and a brother-in law filed a homestead claim to 320 acres in the Mosier area, which Munk quotes Foster as calling:

“A wild country, heavily timbered and full of fish and game, back of the famous Hood River apple district ... south of the great Columbia River ... in the background loomed magnificent Mount Hood.” Munk went on: “After three summers, he gave up the land and ended what he called ‘the first and last time in my life that I ever attempted to gather together property.’”

FLYNN AND FOSTER returned to Portland at separate times to make speeches in their later roles as national radical leaders.

John Reed is described in Red Guide as “Probably the best known of Portland radicals.” Munk called him “the writer, poet and revolutionary.” Reed covered the Russian Revolution and wrote a famous book about it, “Ten Days That Shook The World.” Born in Portland of wealthy parents in 1886, Reed died of typhus in the Soviet Union in 1920 and was buried near the Kremlin. His wife was “the celebrated radical writer Louise Bryant,” who left her husband to run off with Reed and later married him in New York City. They both hated Portland. She died in Paris in 1936.

Munk calls union attorney Burl (B.A.) Green “courageous.” He said Green “chaired a December 1937 meeting at the Multnomah County Courthouse that exposed the illegal operations of the Police Red Squad. For his efforts, the Red Squad listed him as an ‘active Communist sympathizer.’”

RED GUIDE contains considerable information about the “Portland Police Bureau’s infamous Red Squad” and “its hostile spying on radicals, labor organizers, and civil rights and peace activists from the 1920s to the 1970s.” Munk reported that the Red Squad even compiled a dossier on former Oregon House Speaker and former Mayor Vera Katz back in the days before she was an elected official, but was a Democratic Party activist who supported the Farm Workers Union’s boycott of California grapes by picketing supermarkets. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, activist Katz also lobbied the Oregon Legislature at Salem on behalf of farm laborers.

“The outstanding Portland event of the 1930s,” said Red Guide, “was the maritime strike of 1934. The event climaxed when police shot and wounded four striking longshoremen at St. Johns Terminal Four...” Munk said that Portland business leaders contributed to violence against strikers by demanding that Mayor Joe Carson break the strike. Munk reports further on the strike and killings of strikers in San Francisco and said, “Every year since 1934, on Bloody Thursday, the ILWU commemorates the strike in every port on the Pacific Coast.”

MUNK’S BOOK also harks back to other strikes and lists among its historic sites the old red brick building at 1714 NW Overton St. that housed the Portland Reporter, the tabloid newspaper started by Oregonian and Journal strikers and their unions, which published from February 1960 until Sept. 30, 1964. The management-provoked strike, which did not keep the scab-hiring papers from publishing, began in November 1959 and the picketing ended in April 1965.

One of those in Red Guide’s pantheon of heroes is Benjamin Linder, a 27-year-old Portland man whom Munk said “was assassinated by U.S.-state-sponsored terrorists in 1987 while building water projects in Nicaragua for the benefit of poor rural residents.” The Reagan Administration-backed Contras killed Linder. There have been a number of memorials to Linder, an engineering graduate of Oregon State University. The latest was last week, on April 27, the 20th anniversary of his death, held at a Portland church.

(This column touches on a few of the subjects in The Red Guide. The book takes a couple of readings to absorb all of the information that Michael Munk has compiled.)

★★★

WILLIAM FAST, a retired Portland port agent for the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association. (MEBA), asks the support of Labor Press readers for U.S. House Resolution 23, which he said would provide a \$1,000 a month pension to those who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II. If the veteran is deceased, Fast said the pension would go to the survivor. Years of eligibility are from 1941 to 1946.

Fast said HR 23 was introduced early this year with 84 U.S. representatives as co-sponsors. None of the U.S. representatives from Oregon and Washington have signed on as co-sponsors.

Many of those who served in the Merchant Marine were members of the MEBA union. Other maritime unions also represented wartime mariners.

...Employee Free Choice Act helps level playing field

(From Page 10)

are extremely sensitive to the need to make a good impression on their boss, and don’t need a threat to be spelled out for it to influence their behavior. Thus, federal law protects the ability of workers to make a political choice based on personal conscience rather than economic coercion.

But in NLRB elections, this kind of intimidation is completely legal. Standard employer behavior involves having mass meetings where upper management attacks the idea of unionization, and then having supervisors tell each of their subordinates personally that they should vote against the union. In this way, NLRB elections maximize exactly the kind of behavior that is banned in federal elections.

Free speech and equal access to media — Free speech is the cornerstone of American democracy. In election to public office, it is a bedrock principle that there is no such thing as a neighborhood, park or shopping mall that is accessible to one candidate but off-limits to the other. Radio and television stations are required to sell ad time on the same terms to competing candidates. Even private corporations are prohibited from inviting one candidate to address employees without giving equal opportunity to the opposition.

From the founders to the present, it has been understood that democracy requires free speech, equal access to the media, and robust debate.

Yet this most basic standard of freedom is ignored by the NLRB.

Management is allowed to plaster the workplace with anti-union leaflets, posters, and banners — while maintaining a ban on pro-union employees doing likewise.

In addition, anti-union managers are free to campaign against unionization all day long, anyplace in the workplace, while pro-union workers are banned from talking about unionization except on break times. As a result, research shows that in a typical campaign, most employees never even have a single conversation with a union representative.

The most extreme restriction on free speech is employers’ forcing workers

to attend mass anti-union meetings. Not only is the union given no equal time, but pro-union employees can be forced to attend with the condition that they don’t open their mouths. If they ask a question, they can be fired on the spot.

If, during the 2004 presidential election, the Bush campaign could have forced every voter in America to watch the Swiftboat Veterans for Truth movie, with no opportunity for response from the other side — or if the Democrats could have forced everyone to watch Fahrenheit 9/11 — they might well have seized the opportunity. But none of us would call this democracy.

HIGHER STANDARDS ABROAD THAN AT HOME

The truth is that we uphold higher standards for voters abroad than for American workers.

In 2002, the State Department condemned elections in Ukraine for failing to “ensure a level playing field,” because employees of state-owned enterprises were pressured to support the ruling party; faculty and students were instructed by their university to vote for specific candidates; and the governing party enjoyed one-sided media coverage, while the opposition was largely shut out of state-run television.

Every one of these practices is completely legal under the NLRB.

The sad fact is that right now, our government demands higher standards of democracy for voters in Ukraine than it does for Americans in workplaces across the country.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITY IN NLRB SYSTEM, COMPARED WITH FEC
The things I’ve described so far are legal. However, NLRB elections are also characterized by an extraordinary level of illegal activity.

Labor law is the only area of American employment law in which it is statutorily impossible to impose fines, prison, or any other punitive damage.

As a result, it is not just “rogue” employers who break the law. Any rational employer might decide it’s worth it to fire a few workers in order to scare

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hundreds more into abandoning their support for unionization.

In my research, I have measured the impact of illegal retaliation against union supporters by making the most conservative possible calculations. Nevertheless, the results are extremely troubling. One out of every 17 eligible voters in NLRB elections is fired, suspended, demoted or otherwise economically punished for supporting unionization.

If federal elections were run by NLRB standards, we would have seen 7.5 million Americans economically penalized for backing the “wrong” candidate in the last election cycle.

Imagine what this would mean. Every family in America would know someone who had been fired or suspended in retaliation for their political beliefs. Most citizens would quickly become too scared to participate in any public show of support for opposition candidates. If we continued to hold elections amidst such widespread repression, they would be sham elections. The outcome would not represent the popular will, but would simply reflect the fear that governed the country.

What I’m describing may sound like a bad science fiction movie. But it is the reality that workers face when they try to organize.

If we compare illegal activity per voter under the NLRB with that under the Federal Elections Commission (FEC), the data suggests that NLRB elections are 3,500 times dirtier than federal elections.

This number may sound incredible; but it’s true. But suppose my numbers are off by as much as an entire order of magnitude. Then the NLRB system would be only 350 times dirtier than federal elections.

Anyway you count it, the system is profoundly broken, profoundly undemocratic, and, I would say, profoundly un-American.

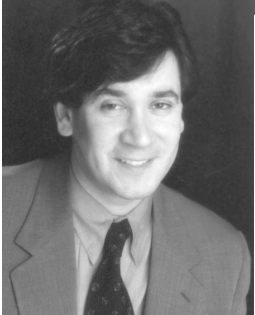
If we’re serious about having a truly democratic process for American workers, we must begin by fixing these problems.

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