

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



## Presses keep rolling

**THERE WILL BE 107 CANDLES** on the birthday cake for this newspaper, the Labor Press, on the upcoming Labor Day Monday, Sept. 3, 2007. The first issue was published in time for Labor Day 1900, and the presses are still rolling 107 years later.

The Portland Labor Press was this paper's name in 1900. A decade and a half later our name was changed to Oregon Labor Press at the request of the Oregon State Federation of Labor, which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Sam Gompers was the AFL's president. Two decades ago, this newspaper's name was expanded to Northwest Labor Press.

**THIS NEWSPAPER** was started as a weekly by local unions affiliated with the Portland Federated Trades Assembly, which was the Rose City's central labor council in 1900. The union founders set it up as a labor-owned non-profit corporation, which is what it still is 107 years later. Now named the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Company, it publishes the Northwest Labor Press on a twice-a-month frequency. Today's Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, is the successor to 1900's Portland Federated Trades Assembly of the AFL. The city's central labor council went through name changes that included Portland Labor Council and Multnomah County Labor Council before its geographic expansion to the NOLC two-and-a-half decades ago.

The Labor Press was started to provide unions and their members with a voice because the commercial papers were biased against the interests of workers and their unions. One newspaper, the Oregonian, was even against a state Labor Day when it was established by the Oregon Legislature and the governor in 1887. Today's commercial media generally perpetuate an anti-labor bias or a corporate disregard toward workers and their unions.

"**THE MOST IMPORTANT** single event of the year 1900..." was the assessment of the birth of the Labor Press by historian Jack E. Triplett Jr., author of "History of the Oregon Labor Movement Prior to the New Deal," which he wrote in the late 1950s for his master's thesis at the University of California at Berkeley. Triplett, who grew up in the Coos Bay area, was the son of a member of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union, which is now the Carpenters Industrial Council, headquartered in Portland. After college, Triplett worked for the Oregon AFL-CIO, then was an economist at the national AFL-CIO before going on to a career with the U. S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In spelling out their purpose in starting the Labor Press, the founders in 1900 said that "The trade unions of this city have organized the Portland Labor Press Association ... in order to educate the wage-workers upon the various phases of the modern labor movement, as well as to strengthen, protect and promote their interests ... its object is to publish a weekly paper ... and to give the wage-workers of this city and state reliable information concerning the local as well as the international labor movement."

**THE LABOR PRESS** was published weekly from 1900 until the last part of 1982 when the Reagan Administration and U.S. Postal Service's Board of Governors doubled the postal rates for labor publications. Delegates from shareholding and subscribing labor organizations held a meeting in September 1982 and decided that the Labor Press's frequency of publication should be changed to twice monthly because they could not afford to pay the increased cost of continuing to publish weekly. Unions and their members at that time were hard-hit by the Reagan Recession and also by the anti-union policies of the Republican president.

**POSTAL INCREASES**, plus higher printing and paper costs caused most labor papers to reduce their frequency of publication. Weeklies went to twice-monthly or monthly and many monthly papers switched to either six or four issues a year. As time went by, quite a few union papers died prematurely.

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# National AFL-CIO holds off on presidential endorsement

CHICAGO (PAI) — The national AFL-CIO Executive Council turned its affiliated unions loose to make presidential primary endorsements, saying the federation "decided not to proceed with a decision process that would lead to support for a single candidate at this time."

In a statement approved by the council on Aug. 8 in Chicago, the day after it hosted a debate between seven Democratic hopefuls at Soldier Field, the federation praised all the contenders and said "trade unionists met with the next president of the United States and six other candidates."

But it didn't say who that "next president" would be among Senators Hillary Clinton of New York, Joseph Biden of Delaware, Barack Obama of Illinois and Chris Dodd of Connecticut, Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico, Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio and former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina.

"There is no consensus," federation Political Director Karen Ackerman

told reporters. She added there may not be one until after the huge round of primaries on Feb. 5.

Instead, the council said "the candidates competing for the nomination of the Democratic Party are far more likely to advocate positions in support of working families than are the candidates seeking the nomination of the Republican Party."

No Republican candidates were invited to the debate, because none answered the federation's questionnaire.

"The Democratic candidates are strong on issues most central to working people's lives" but still need "continued engagement" from unions and their members "to promote (candidates') full understanding of workers' difficulties and dreams," the council said.

Though the statement did not say so, the federation named its policy director, Thea Lee, as liaison to all the campaigns, to give them constant and intensive briefings.

But "it is equally clear that our

members support a number of the candidates. Many of our members told us all the candidates are impressive," the council added.

"For this reason, the AFL-CIO has decided not to proceed with a decision process that would lead to support for a single candidate at this time," it declared.

After encouraging its 54 member unions to continue to educate and mobilize their members, it added that "every national union affiliate may decide for itself if it wishes to support a candidate in the primaries, and that different unions will be ready to make decisions at different times." That effectively turns them loose to do so.

Ackerman said she did not know of looming endorsements.

## Portland City Council mulls 2 ordinances

Portland City Council will consider two city ordinances Aug. 29 — both sponsored by Commissioner Sam Adams and each the product of over a year of meetings with labor groups.

One resolution would make the City of Portland "sweat-free" by looking at city purchases to determine if they were made in sweatshops — factories that violate workers' rights.

The other would require contractors who do construction work for the City or the Portland Development Commission (PDC) to either provide full family health insurance to their workers, or pay into a county-administered fund to do so. The Aug. 3 Labor Press reported a hearing on that ordinance was set for Aug. 8, but it was rescheduled.

Language of both ordinances was still being finalized as of the time this issue went to press.



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