

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



The bloody shirt

“THIS BLOOD is on your hands, Joel!”

That exclamation was shouted at Portland Mayor Joe Carson by strike leader Matt Meehan as he threw a blood-soaked shirt on Carson's desk at City Hall on July 11, 1934.

The shirt belonged to one of four striking longshoremen who were wounded that day by the police in a fusillade of gunfire at Terminal 4 in North Portland.

THE STRIKE on Portland's docks was part of a waterfront walkout at West Coast Ports in July 1934. The number of workers involved is reported in a recent two-page feature on California labor history in the *Los Angeles Firefighter*. The award-winning union newspaper said: “In 1934, 15,000 longshoremen along the West Coast struck when the owners refused to recognize their union or negotiate a contract.

“Soon, some 6,000 members of the seafaring unions joined the strike.”

Portland unionists held Mayor Carson responsible for the police chief ordering his men to shoot at the strikers. Carson was acting at the behest of waterfront employers and other business leaders who were determined to keep the Portland longshoremen from unionizing under the banner of the International Longshore Association, which represented stevedores at ports on the East Coast. In the aftermath of the bloodshed at Terminal 4, the police chief was fired and Carson failed to achieve his ambition to occupy the governor's chair in the state Capitol in Salem. The wounding of strikers in Portland occurred on Wednesday, July 11, a day that was sometimes called “Bloody Wednesday.” It followed by six days the killings of two strikers and the wounding of 109 strikers in a battle with police and strikebreakers in San Francisco on Thursday, July 5, a day that became known as “Bloody Thursday” and also “Bloody July 5.”

MATT MEEHAN was 37 years old when he confronted the mayor but had already been a workingman for 23 years. He had started working at age 14 in a textile mill in his native state of Rhode Island. At age 18 he ran away to sea as a member of the Sailors Union. He traveled the world in the Merchant Marine until 1928 when his ship docked on the Columbia River at Portland. Looking at the Rose City, he decided to leave the sea for a job on the docks, where he became a stevedore — a longshoreman.

In its account of the 1934 dock strike, *The Los Angeles Firefighter* reported that after Bloody Thursday, the California governor sent in the National Guard. “Soon, 25,000 workers participated in a silent funeral march up Market Street. This display of solidarity led to a four-day general strike that involved over 100,000 workers, with the endorsement of 63 unions,” the union newspaper reported.

WITHIN DAYS of the Terminal 4 shootings, Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-NY) to Portland to assess the situation. However, the auto Wagner was riding in was fired upon, but he was not hit. In his book, *The Portland Red Guide*, historian Michael Munk said: “Although the incident was presumed a mistake, this time the fault was in the hands of the special police.” Sen. Wagner was a leader in the enactment by Congress of pro-worker and pro-union legislation in the 1930s.

Munk said that after Wagner was here, “The strike ended in victory for the longshoremen a few days later and led to the formation of today's ILWU.”

THE INTERNATIONAL Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union — to represent Pacific Coast workers — was formed in a 1937 convention in Aberdeen, Washington.

Harry Bridges of San Francisco sparked the formation of ILWU and served as its president until retiring in 1997 at age 76. Bridges had led the San Francisco local out of the ILA, based in New York, because its leadership opposed the 1934 strike at Pacific Coast ports. When the ILWU was formally organized at the Aberdeen convention, Matt Meehan was elected as its first secretary-treasurer. Within a short time, Bridges led the ILWU out of the American Federation of Labor and into the newly-formed Congress of Industrial Organizations. More re-

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Maintenance workers ratify new pact with Portland Schools by one vote

By a vote of 40 to 39, maintenance and construction workers on Aug. 29 ratified a new four-year contract at Portland Public Schools.

The unit of roughly 100 trades workers from more than a dozen different unions bargain jointly as the District Council of Unions (DCU). The maintenance and construction crew had been working under a management-implemented contract since June 11. That contract contained no wage increases and higher out-of-pocket health insurance costs; it eliminated retiree health insurance altogether, stripped workers of two holidays, and it had no expiration date.

In April, DCU members rejected the district's implemented proposal by a margin of 80 percent, and by a similar margin authorized a strike — the first such authorization in DCU history. After a failed attempt at mediation and a 30-day “cooling off” period, the district implemented its own terms.

As union officials pondered their next step, some of the workers attended a July 9 school board meeting to let school officials know what was

happening.

“We got some help from some school board members to break through this mess,” said Jerry Moss, chief spokesman for the DCU and a business rep for Plumbers and Fitters Local 290. “The school board pushed the district to talk to us and to come up with something reasonable,” he said.

Before the implemented contract, DCU members were working under a contract that expired Jan. 1, 2006. That contract had also been unilaterally implemented by the school district and contained no wage increases.

“Our people haven't had a raise in a long, long time,” Moss said.

Following the contract implementation June 11, Moss said discussions were held “off line.” The two sides came up with a package that members narrowly accepted. Had they rejected the contract, a 10-day notice to strike would have moved forward.

The four-year contract provides all DCU members a lump-sum payment of \$1,000 in October 2007 and another check for \$1,120 in January 2008.

Wages will increase 1 percent in January 2009 and 2 percent in January 2010. Pay scales range from \$18 to about \$30 an hour, depending on the craft.

Employer-paid health insurance premiums will be capped at \$779 a month, which means that out-of-pocket costs could increase, depending on which health plan a worker chooses. The previous cap was \$764.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day was added as a holiday.

The biggest takeaway, Moss said, was elimination of the employer-paid retiree health insurance plan. That will sunset on June 30, 2014.

DCU members with 15 years' service can retire at age 60 and be covered under the school district's health insurance plan for five years — or until they become eligible for Medicare.

Moss estimates that one-third of the maintenance crew will retire in the next two years. A skilled workforce that once numbered 400 to 500 members, it's now a skeleton crew employed primarily to do emergency repairs.

The DCU is comprised of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, Teamsters, Machinists District Lodge 24, Sheet Metal Workers Local 16, Electrical Workers Local 48, Glaziers Local 740, Laborers Local 296, Cement Masons Local 555, Bricklayers Local 1, Painters Local 10, Floor Coverers Local 1236, Roofers Local 49, Plasterers Local 82 and Carpenters.

Two unions that used to belong to the DCU left last year and are bargaining separately. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, which represents about 85 school bus drivers, says the school district is dragging its feet with them. A sub-group of members of the Portland Federation of Teachers and Classified Employees Local 111 representing campus monitors, occupational and physical therapists and community agents, was transferred into the main PFTCE contract, which at presstime appeared to be headed for mediation.



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(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)
Established in 1900 at Portland, Oregon
as a voice of the labor movement.

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Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co., Inc., a non-profit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and SW Washington. Subscriptions \$13.75 per year for union members.

Group rates available to trade union organizations.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID
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