Labor 100 Years Ago — July 1, 1916

A look back at the front page stories of the Oregon Labor Press July 1, 1916. A digital version of the front page can be seen at www.nwlaborpress.org/100yearsago

*Open Letter to Chamber of Commerce Members

The Central Labor Council, mindful of the large numbers of liberal and broad-minded men and women holding membership in the Portland Chamber of Commerce, has for obvious reasons decided to lay its case and the cause it represents before them individually, rather than through the usual official channels.

This Council wishes to register with you in your capacity as a member of the Chamber a most emphatic protest against the action of the board of directors in declaring by resolution for the so-called "open shop."

Not that all proponents of the "open-shop" are labor-haters, but that all labor-haters are proponents of the "open-shop" is our reason for withdrawal of membership.

You will find in every city a Chamber of Commerce, a Central Labor Council and of late years, an Employers' Association, the latter organized and maintained for the sole purpose of promoting what its members please to term the "open-shop" policy.

The first-mentioned organizations have attained the dignity of institutions, and all broadminded men and women having any correct knowledge of them admit this.

The antithesis of the "open-shop" policy is the "union shop" policy, or what the enemies of union labor originally termed the "closed shop," and this term is now generally applied by writers and others in describing the union shop.

Every Central Labor Council in the United States is committed to the policy of the union shop. Why? Because experience has proved it furthers organization of the workers and as a result more nearly equitable wages and bettered conditions of employment are obtained.

A Chamber of Commerce, as we understand it, is supposed to function so as to promote the best interests of a community as such, and it functions best when those interests are promoted without injustice to any particular set or class of individuals in the community.

The Portland Chamber of Commerce, as reorganized, promised to do. It adopted and still retains as a slogan: "All for one and one for all." With this slogan as a watchword, the various interests of Portland were invited and urged to come into the new Chamber at $50 per year dues, and the officials of one concern, the Portland Railway, Light & Power Company, became so enthused they took out some 70 memberships at a trifling cost of $3,500 or so, per year.

This generous application for memberships passed without any public comment, but when the Central Labor Council, the Waterfront Federation, the Building Trades Council, the Stationery Engineers Union and the Oregon Labor Press each took out a membership, the public press commented on the fact favorably and prominent members and officials of the Chamber were quoted as being well pleased with our action.

Never on any occasion did any representative of union labor seek to use the Chamber for the promotion of the interests of union labor as such. But scarcely had the Chamber been formally organized, than did the paid representative of the Employers' Association wait up the officials of the Chamber and solicit its support in a movement to have the City Commissioners refer to the people a vote on an ordinance prohibiting this council or its unions from picketing or putting on the streets a boycott banner, and as a result as committee of the Chamber waited on our Mayor and urged that he change his vote on the matter.

When this came to the attention of this Council, a committee was provided to wait upon the Mayor. Mayor Albee suggested that representatives of the Chamber and this Council meet in his office with him. This was agreed to.

At this conference it was suggested by representatives of this Council to the committee from the Chamber, that if it wished to do something of real and lasting benefit that the Chamber join with us in a movement to form a joint board that would hear both sides of any industrial controversy and attempt to adjust same. As a result, such a board was formed with jurisdiction over any industrial dispute "between employer and employee."

Please bear in mind the representatives of the Chamber were intent on doing something that would cause the disappearance of the boycott banner, and bear in mind further, that all boycott banners are occasioned by either a strike or lockout or where the union believes workers are being underpaid or overworked.

Time passed and the meatcutters went on strike for a ten-hour day. The union asked the advice of the Central Labor Council. The Council advised that it place its grievance before the Joint Conciliation Board. The meatcutters did so. The employers were so notified by the officials of the Board. Coincident with this the representative of the Employers' Association of Oregon wrote each member of the Board (from the Chamber of Commerce) a letter saying the Board had no jurisdiction over the case as the men on strike were no longer employees. The Board took up this interpretation and finally decided to lay the matter on the table until they could submit an amendment to the rules governing the Board to the Chamber and to the Council.

The amendment extended the jurisdiction of the Board to cover strikes, lockouts and boycotts, and the full Board without a dissenting member, recommended the adoption of the amendment by both Chamber and Council. The Council adopted the ammendment and the board of directors of the Chamber rejected it. As a result, the Board was powerless to act as a conciliator.

The entire Coast is now affected by a longshoremen's strike, and a strike of river steamboat men is on in Portland. Had not your board of directors laid down the order of the Employers' Association of Oregon, long ere this the Joint Conciliation Board of the Chamber of Commerce and the Central Labor Council would have given to the public the facts in each strike.

The longshoremen of this port are on strike to force a parity of rates between this port and those of San Francisco and Seattle, our competitors. Your Chamber of Commerce has been demanding this. What is its answer to the strikers? The "open shop."

The following explains our aversion to these answers: The theory of the "open shop" (according to 320 witnesses representing employers) is that the workers are employed without reference to their membership or non-membership in trade unions. While as a matter of fact it was found upon investigation that these employers did not willingly or knowingly employ union men. Page 438 in a separate report made by representatives of the employers on the Commission says: "We frankly say if we were wage-earners we would be unionists, and as unionists we should feel the keen responsibility of giving the same attention to our trade union duties as to our civic duties."

Is it possible that the Employers' Association of Oregon is in such disrepute that it is forced to hide behind you as a member of the Chamber of Commerce when advocating its policies?

Last year, $300,000 and more was spent by the Chamber of Commerce. Three hundred thousand dollars ought to build quite an organization. If it is to be used for the benefit of Portland and Oregon, the investment is a good one. If merely to function as an auxillary to the Employers' Association, it is not.

This Council would be pleased to hear from you on this matter, either orally or by letter.

By order of Central Labor Council of Portland and Vicinity.

EUGENE F. SMITH, Pres. E.J. STACK, Sec.

The Labor Press should appeal to advertisers as a medium for getting business because it bears a distinction not had by other papers, in that it is the journal of a class organized of the wage-earners—without whose expenditures there would be a marked decrease in all business. Merchants, when fixing appropriations for advertising, should remember the Labor Press.

Oregon Labor Press

Formerly The Portland Labor Press. Owned and Controlled by Organized Labor.

Volume XVI. Number 11 Portland, Oregon, Saturday, July 1, 1916 Whole Number 856

Nothing contributes more to the upbuilding of a prosperous community than the patronage of Home Industries and Home Merchants. Money sent to out-of-town mail-order houses never comes back.

The Labor Press urges its readers to patronize home merchants, and especially our advertisers.

*Open Letter To Chamber Of Commerce Members

OUR NATAL DAY

CARPENTERS OF LOCAL No. 226.

Owing to the next regular meeting, Tuesday, July 4th, being a holiday, there will be no meeting on that date, making Tuesday, July 11th, the next meeting. On that date the newly elected officers will be installed.

W. A. WEAVER, Rec. Sec.
June 27th, 1916.

LAND AND LOAN LAW PETITIONS ARE FILE