

## CULTURE

# Oregon's logger union fighters come alive in a novel reply to Ken Kesey's scab heros

By Marcus Widenor

For years I've told people that Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* is "The Great Oregon Novel." But that recommendation came with a caveat: Remember that the heroes of *Notion* (the Stamper family) are scabs, who try to break a logger's strike on the Oregon coast!

Karl Marlantes historical novel *Deep River* provides a welcome counterpoint to this. Instead of Kesey's libertarian treatise on tough, logger individualism, we are offered a story of the collective efforts of immigrant workers to improve their lives.

Marlantes grew up on the Oregon Coast and is of Finnish ancestry. *Deep River* is his 3rd book, after the widely acclaimed *Matterhorn*, a novel that chronicled his experience as a Marine in Vietnam.

The novel traces the story of Aino Koski, who emigrates with her two brothers from Finland to the mouth of the Columbia River in the early days of the 20th century. They are loggers and fisherman, sometimes bootleggers and small entrepreneurs.

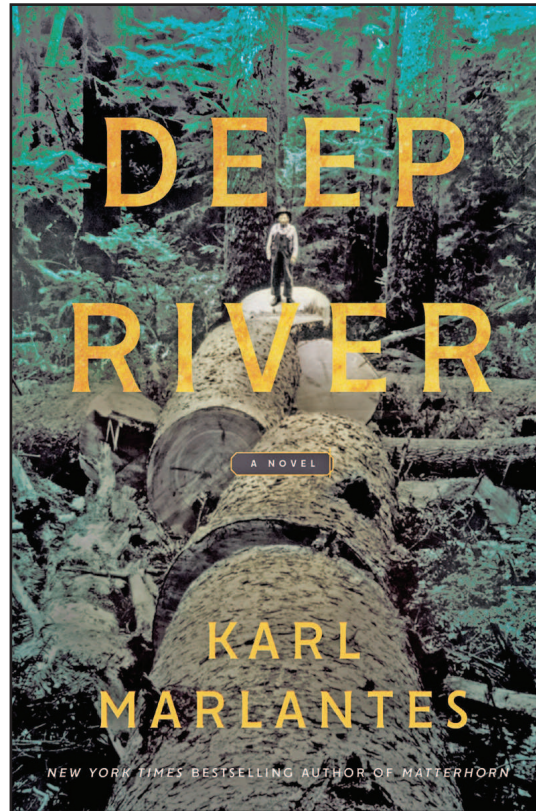
Many historians have noted Finnish American's proclivity for radicalism and Aino is no exception. She is a firebrand of a Wobbly. "Our Pacific Northwest Rebel Girl," as one character describes here.

*Deep River* is set on the Nasalle, just north of the mouth of the Columbia on the Washington side. Readers will find many familiar Washington and Oregon locations, including the burgeoning Finnish immigrant community of Astoria, some small towns that no longer exist, and others that Marlantes has renamed.

Aino arrives in Washington as a skilled midwife, but soon takes a job as a cook in a logging camp, giving her wide access to the workers she seeks to organize. She struggles to maintain a semblance of a family life while traveling between logging camps and mills throughout Washington and Oregon, organizing for the IWW. The narrative includes accounts of numerous famous labor events, including the massacre at Everett in 1916, the 1919 lynching of Wesley Everett in Centralia, and the Palmer Raids that decimated the IWW following World War II. Aino even has a brief dalliance with Joe Hillström (Hill), the legendary IWW activist and songwriter.

Marlantes has done his historical homework here. He offers a nuanced view of the development of the Astoria workers cooperative movement, and the political divisions within the Finnish community, between "reds" and "whites."

*Deep River* is suffused in the details of the cultural the Finns brought with them to the Pacific Northwest—the folk tunes that fuel the weekend dances in the logging communities, even the distinctive baked goods the women turn out for the loggers in the camps. Our heroine Aino epitomizes what the Finns call *Sisu*—an almost metaphysical concept of strength, self-determination and endurance. She stands up to the brutal environment of life in a logging camp, she stands up to the bosses, and she stands up to her husband who wants her to stay home rather than traipse around the northwest organizing. Another inter-



esting character in the novel is Vasutäti, a Chinook shaman who seems to combine the philosophy of *Sisu* with her own cultures spiritual traditions.

The book also focuses on the human costs of logging and fishing, two of the most dangerous jobs in our country in any historical era: the choker setter's body cut by the whip of a snapped cable, the fisherman lost at the mouth of the Columbia trying to bring in his last gill nets as the storm closes in. These are the injustices Aino fights against as she tries to organize workers into the One Big Union.

Marlantes carefully chronicles how work changed in logging and fishing during the first third of the century. When Aino arrives in Washington logging is done by steam donkey's, hauling logs up the steep terrain of the Washington and Oregon coast. By the end of the story there is more mechanization—gas engines have replaced steam power, and new gas-powered chain saws are displacing the huge handsaws that loggers used to fell old growth fir.

The novel's narrative takes our heroine from her arrival in the Pacific Northwest in 1904, until 1932, when the 42-year old Aino and her husband have just prevailed in a fisherman's strike, using their cooperative to leverage the cannery owners into raising wages. By the end of our story Aino's "direct action" syndicalism has mellowed somewhat, and she is more accepting of the cooperative socialism espoused by some of her more conservative Finnish socialists. And she seems to have recovered her family, with her *Sisu* still intact.

*Deep River* stands right beside *Sometimes a Great Notion* as a work infused with the history and spirit of the Pacific Northwest. In an era when foreign born workers are under attack in our country it is a powerful reminder of what our labor movement owes to all our immigrant generations.

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## UNIONIZATION → JAN-FEB 2019

The following are Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces where workers have decided whether to be represented by a union. The thumbs-up symbol means workers will be union-represented. Thumbs-down means they'll be on their own. The information comes from the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Union election results

Employer (Location) Union	Yes-No	
<b>Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare</b> (Gresham/Tigard) Oregon AFSCME	8-1	👍
■ 20 registered nurses, counselors and others at two mental health crisis facilities		
<b>Swire Coca-Cola</b> (Wilsonville) Teamsters Local 162	22-32	👎
■ 55 production line employees at a Coca-Cola distribution facility		
<b>Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare</b> (Portland area) Oregon AFSCME	56-10	👍
■ 183 RNs, counselors, cooks, treatment specialists and others at 18 residential care facilities		
<b>Safeway.com</b> (Portland area) Teamsters Local 58	30-18	👍
■ 53 eCommerce home delivery drivers operating out of six Portland-area Safeway stores		

## Labor Council endorses Wheeler for mayor on second attempt

In a roll call vote at a packed Feb. 24 meeting of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council (NOLC), delegates from affiliated unions voted overwhelmingly to endorse Ted Wheeler for re-election as Portland mayor. Endorsement requires a two-thirds majority. The mayor's union supporters had been unable to get endorsement at the previous meeting Jan. 27 because some delegates disagreed, and officials didn't have affiliate membership numbers needed to conduct a roll call vote. Once they did, it wasn't unanimous, but it wasn't close

either: delegates representing 26,118 union members voted in favor, with 4,183 against.

"We're endorsing Ted because we're proud to support his record on labor so far, and we want continuity," said NOLC Executive Secretary Treasurer Bob Tackett in a press statement.

Wheeler has also been endorsed for re-election by Teamsters Joint Council 37 and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.

Wheeler faces 14 challengers in the May 19 primary.

## OHSU admits to trolling AFSCME, agrees to full investigation

AFSCME Local 328 and Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) have reached a settlement resolving an unfair labor practice charge the union filed over an outrageous social media trolling incident.

During contentious contract negotiations last year, two members of OHSU's management bargaining team created fake social media profiles, two of them with obscene names, and posed as union members while posting things they thought would put the union on the defensive. Union social media volunteers sleuthed out the guilty parties: OHSU HR director Dan Forbes and financial analyst Patrick Frenge. Forbes resigned. Frenge was removed from the bargaining team but remains employed by OHSU.

But the rancor lived on in the form of a case that was investigated by the Oregon Employ-

ment Relations Board. Deceptive anti-union conduct like that violates the law's requirement that public employers negotiate "in good faith."

As part of a settlement to the charges signed Feb. 20, OHSU agreed to have outside attorney Cathryn Dammel investigate whether any other member of the management bargaining team took part in the deceptive trolling. She'll interview 22 individuals in management and at least 11 union witnesses. In the settlement, OHSU also admits that the two managers engaged in social media trolling, and that it interfered with the rights of employees to engage in union activity. And OHSU will reimburse Local 328 the \$900 legal filing fees and take other measures. Both sides will issue statements announcing that they're now working together to create a collaborative relationship.