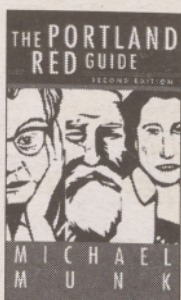


Our radical past gets an update in the new Portland Red Guide



The Portland Red Guide, Second Edition. by Michael Munk; Oligan Press.

Norm Diamond was President of Pacific Northwest Labor College and is a Trustee of the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association. Presently writing a book on labor and community organizing, he was at W. Burnside and 10th on MayDay, 2000, when the ILWU marched in 400-strong.

(S)tones and bricks ... never lie to you. They will, if you let them, tell you all the aspirations of the people. They will name their rulers and their gods and tell you of their defeats and their victories.

— MARY HEATON VORSE

BY NORM DIAMOND
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For the high school students attending a Portland labor history conference, Old Town was a revelation. They all had been here many times, but now were seeing their surroundings with fresh eyes. That undistinguished storefront had once been a revolutionary bookstore. On this noisy corner, orators fired up Depression-era crowds of unemployed workers. That slick nightclub was once a gathering place for radicals and agitators, men and women with a vision of an economic system based on cooperation rather than greed.

It was the same for the young people in a juvenile lockdown facility, released for a few hours to visit historical sites all over the city. For both the girls and the boys, touring with me on separate days as part of a social justice curriculum, a favorite spot was Pier Park, just outside Terminal Four. To engage them in the history, their task was to figure out how longshoremen were able to block a train carrying strikebreakers during the successful 1934 strike that formed the ILWU of today. The kids were in this facility as part of drug diversion programs and as an alternative to jail, and thought they already knew the city. They were intrigued and sometimes moved as they discovered the history that had been hidden from them. For some, the simple act of walking the streets won't ever be the same again.

Likewise, Portland author Michael Munk is on to something. Our memory attaches to places. Our surroundings and how we understand them influence us in subtle ways. Munk has written a book that challenges the most prominent public monuments in Portland, the statues,

squares and street names that evoke support for war and celebrate the land speculators, Indian-killers, and swindlers who were Portland's founding fathers. He offers, instead, a street guide to the persons and events suppressed by elite versions of our history, the activists and conflicts that created our rights and opened space locally for our own civic efforts.

His "Portland Red Guide" offers many candidates for intriguing discoveries. In North Portland, for instance, it enriches our sense of the neighborhood to know that the principal of Kenton Elementary School skipped school one time to travel to The Hague and help found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. On the other side of town, when we think of Catlin-Gabel School and its wealth, we now can think also of Ruth Catlin, its founder, smeared as a communist by the Portland Police for championing workers' rights. Downtown, at the Rose Festival, can you imagine floats featuring not only princesses and local businesses but sarcastically costumed representatives of the unemployed? It not only happened (there's a photo in the book) but may suggest ideas for creative tactics now.

"The Portland Red Guide" details a rich history of popular struggle that will surprise many readers. The author's writing is often vivid, doing justice to the conflicts he chronicles. To an unexpected and completely appropriate extent he incorporates poetry, ranging from known Portland writers to the published verse of a six-year-old supporting paperworkers on strike. The extensive photos are well-chosen and integral to the book's mission of enabling us to re-see and re-think. Munk's own reflections on why he has written and how he has chosen the entries are thought-provoking.

The new edition offers 194 entries, a number of the new ones suggested by readers of the first edition. As in the first, the entries are divided into six historical

periods, with each coded for a place on one of the many maps, each period having its own succinct introduction. The index has been reworked and is considerably more useful. A valuable new feature consolidates walking tours throughout the city, bringing together the different historical periods into accessible neighborhood units.

Unfortunately, some of the inaccuracies and mistakes of the first edition have not been corrected. For example, the big May Day confrontation with a militarized police force was in 2000, not 2001 (p 196). This is significant because the resurrection of May 1 marches in Portland followed from the Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in 1999 and because it made possible the joyous MayDay celebrations that began in 2001 and have followed annually. For another example, the Pacific Northwest Labor College of the 1970s and 80s was not called the Portland Labor College (which was a 1920s institution). Headquartered at Marylhurst and then in Portland, PNLC held classes in a seven state area. Nor was it begun under my direction (p 189).

Coverage of the most recent period (Identities & Protests: 1974 – Present) is the weakest. Central America solidarity work in Portland in the 1980s was exemplary and worthy of notice beyond the reference to Ben Linder. (p 194) A balanced account would also offer greater recognition of Portland's environmental activism. And surely Street Roots deserves at least a mention.

All in all, however, this is an inspiring book, written by someone who is not only a detective and storyteller tracking down the sites most evocative for a politically and culturally alert audience, but also a thoughtful historian. We suffer from a collective lapse of memory as well as a myopia about our surroundings. For Portlanders, this book is the corrective lens.

Even More Little Riddles

By Chase Frinein

The elixir of life, fraternal sister of Love
The core of all motivation, yes, Progress's hub!
The reason for living, the essence of Faith
To the optimist's heart, its buttered bread on their plate!

The temporal constant, some's slave and some's master
Achievement's Equalizer, the one ne'er enraptured!
The calm and the steady, yet the urgent and pressing
The most consistent thing in life each moment it's cursing or blessing!

The eternal quiet, the dynamic rest
The natural narcotic to all sages, no less!
The soul's grand goal, the heart's ultimate mode
The springboard of all virtue—a sort of pond o'erflow'd!

These are some more riddles for your enjoyment
For your fancy or whim, for you brain's full employment!
'Happy Solvation' & I'll write some more later
So, for more, please continue supporting your Street Roots paper.

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