



Riot police monitor Occupy Wall Street protesters in Portland on Nov. 13, 2011.

REUTERS/STEVE DIPAOLA

experience with unions composed of police officers is that they're ambiguous institutions, sharing much in common with many other unions and yet decidedly different. Their relation to labor is both touchy and problematic.

M.G.: *And they're under scrutiny in many cities right now. But let's start with a little local history. The Portland Metropolitan Police Force was formed in 1870, with six patrolmen, a lieutenant and a chief. This is from the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) website, by the way. Their first contract was 1942.*

N.D.: No, not a contract with the city. 1942 is when they organized, which makes the Portland Police Association the longest continuously functioning police union in the country. That year they received a charter from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), a national union. But, they did not succeed in winning a contract with the city until 1970.

Even lacking a contract, but as an AFSCME affiliate, they participated with other unions in the State Federation of Labor and the local Central Labor Council. When they pushed for a pension plan in the late 1940s along with the firefighters, their speakers were welcomed by nearly every union meeting in town and their outreach won them strong labor backing. They owe their first contract, as well, to the support of other unions. Specifically the ILWU and Teamsters, who shut down the Port of

Portland for three days until the city agreed to recognize the police union.

Then, after winning that first contract, the PPA disaffiliated from AFSCME. Other than a brief attempt to create a national union of police officers, the PPA has stayed independent since 1970. By and large they've gone their own way, not identifying with other unions unless they needed something.

In the early 1980s, I used to have regular meetings with representatives of the PPA to encourage their labor identification. For a while their offices were in the same building on Southeast Morrison Street as the Northwest Labor Press, and Gene Klare, editor of the Labor Press, hosted monthly lunches for me and Jeff Barker, editor of the PPA's newsletter *The Rap Sheet*, who later became PPA president. Occasionally Stan Peters, their president at that time, would join us.

M.G.: *Full disclosure, Norm: I was a deputy sheriff for Marion County, in Salem, back in the '70s. And looking at your deep past, I know that back in 1988, you and Bill Bigelow wrote that wonderful high school and adult education text, *The Power in our Hands*.*

Your handbook includes this introductory list of what unions do: negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions; set up committees to strive for worker health and safety; promote legislation favorable to workers; represent and defend workers in disciplinary proceedings within workplaces; likewise, represent and defend them when workers have

grievances against arbitrary authority or contract violation by management.

As I look over the current (2013-17) labor agreement between the PPA and the city of Portland, I see the majority of the articles deal with precisely those kinds of issues: seniority, vacations, leave for sickness, death, education and military service; compensation; hazard premium; allowances for clothing and equipment; insurance; legal fees; funeral expenses; safety and performance evaluations. Clearly the police need these assurances.

N.D.: And some of those provisions were hard-won; clothing and weapons, for instance. Initially, police had to provide their own. It took collective pressure by them, along with mobilization of community and labor support, to win the provision that's now part of their contract.

Another notable issue early on was the union, wanting to protect its members, saying: If any of our members commits an act subject to discipline, we want them to have union representation. That's reasonable. Their claim was, cops have to have the same rights as anybody else in society.

But then, with successive contracts, they extended those rights beyond anything the rest of us have. Now, in the event of a shooting, you can't question a police officer until two days have passed.

M.G.: *Who can't?*

N.D.: Their superiors can't. The district attorney's office can't. And that's part of the labor contract. So they have a chance to meet with other officers involved in the shooting to get their stories straight and go over everything with their lawyers. And then, after two days, they can bring back what becomes the official version. It's a real distortion of what was initially a valid concern to gain equal rights.

M.G.: *OK, I see we're talking about Article 61.2.1.3: "Whenever delay in conducting the interview will not jeopardize the successful accomplishment of the investigation or when criminal culpability is not at issue, advance notice shall be given the officer not less than forty-eight (48) hours before the initial interview commences or written reports are required from the officer. The advance notice shall include whether the officer is a witness or a suspect, the location, date and time of the incident, the complainant's name, and the nature of the allegation against the officer."*

N.D.: What we see historically is the police functioning first as a union with many similarities to other public sector unions, and then increasingly narrowly-focused and becoming a powerful political force in Portland. But what's important in understanding the PPA or any police union is not in their contract.

M.G.: *One step at a time. Are they a real union?*

N.D.: So first, we need to talk about what unions are. The term represents a vast range of existing types of organizations. Within that range many are hierarchical, narrowly self-interested and also politically active. In those respects, police unions fall within the normal range, albeit having won some concessions beyond what other unions

Upcoming events on race, police and reform

There are five events this week, including City Club's Friday Forum, to gather in community to talk about race and policing, and to observe these last few days of Black History Month.

Saturday, Feb. 21: Oregon Humanities Community Discussion on Race and Policing, Conversation leader: Veronica Dujon, PSU sociology professor and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Center for Intercultural Organizing, 700 N Killingsworth St., 1:30-3 p.m.; public welcome, no charge.

Monday, Feb. 23: Arresting Power, 90-minute, locally made documentary. Hollywood Theatre, 7 p.m. Tickets available online and (while they last) at the door: \$6-8.

Tuesday, Feb. 24: Oregon Humanities Community Discussion on Race and Policing, conversation leader: Adam Davis, executive director of Oregon Humanities. Mount Hood Community College Student Union, 26000 SE Stark St., Room 1051, Gresham; 5:30-7 p.m.; public welcome, no charge.

Friday, Feb. 27: "Can Portland's Police Really Change?" City Club's Friday Forum, 614 SW 11th Avenue, doors open 11:30 a.m. for 12:15 p.m. program. Advance registration required; \$30 admission for non-members includes lunch.

Saturday, Feb. 28: Oregon Humanities Community Discussion on Race and Policing, Conversation leader: Wendy Willis, executive director of the Policy Consensus Initiative. Rockwood Library, 17917 SE Stark St.; public welcome, no charge.

have, that may even be thought of as worker control issues, such as their resistance to civilian oversight.

M.G.: *That resistance is evident in press releases issued by Daryl Turner, who is currently president of the PPA. In his statement from Oct. 23, 2013, for example, where he is pushing back against proposed expanded powers of the Independent Police Review's regarding disciplinary investigations.*

"IPR's proposed code changes trigger a number of collective bargaining issues that must be addressed before the City can implement the code changes," Turner writes. "These mandatory subjects of bargaining include, but are not limited to, discipline, job security, and minimum fairness. Our collective bargaining agreement also contains a number of provisions regarding the discipline process. IPR's proposed changes will also impact those contract rights."

N.D.: Right. He's reminding us that this