

Via teaches labor

A "healthy and varied labor climate" is one of the inducements which brought Emery Via, 53, from Georgia to the head of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon.

Added to that was a desire "to get back into the mainstream of labor education" and Oregon was "the best opening in the field."

Via takes up his new job right at the first anniversary of the LERC, a product of the 1977 legislative session. For the past year LERC has been headed by Steven Deutsch, sociology professor at the Eugene university.

Via has chosen the role of labor educator because he believes "that what labor unions do is important and one of those things is to educate its members. Most unions want their members to have a broader perspective and certainly the university does."

"Most people (in the labor movement) I respect want both," a broad education from the university affiliation and the basic education in unionism.

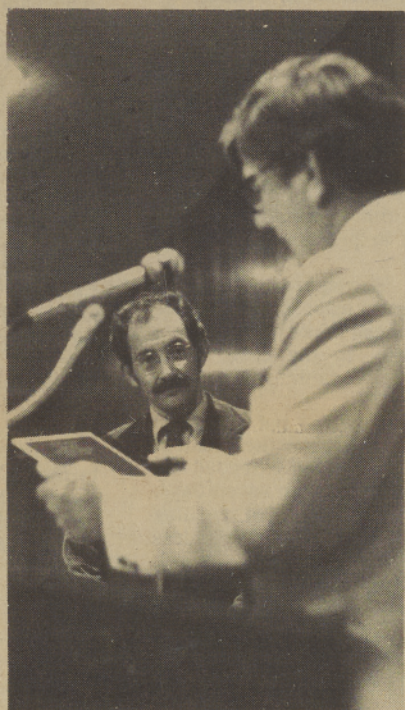
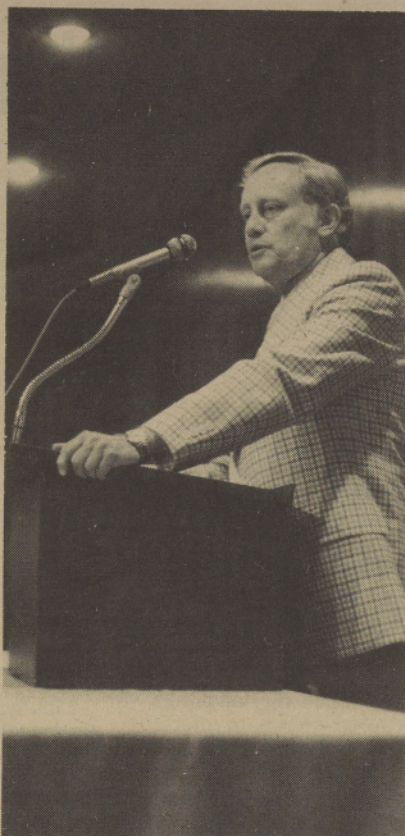
As an example of the latter, Via cites the courses in shop steward training that LERC has offered during the past year. "It's awfully important because it gets right at the roots . . . that people at the work site understand their rights and know how to exercise them," he said.

In addition to basic labor education, Via hopes to lead LERC into programs of broader education of union leaders and workers. Some topics he plans to take up include:

- Jobs and the environment;
- The importance of women in the workforce;
- Better protection of employee rights.

Eventually, Via would like to see

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EMERY VIA (top)
STEVEN DEUTSCH (bottom)

LERC created to right wrong

EUGENE -- In some respects the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) was created to right a wrong: Public education in Oregon trains lawyers, architects, physicians, public administrators, newspaper reporters and even management labor relations representatives. It was thought that it now is time to do something for the working man and woman.

"The real question is why this educational need was left unmet for such a long time," said president William Boyd of the University of Oregon where LERC is headquartered. ("Located" hardly seems the word since LERC staffers have shown a tremendous willingness to travel almost anywhere to put on their classes.)

"It's hardly surprising that working people have been indifferent in the past to universities," Boyd continues. "Universities have looked to them like playpens for the children of privileged people."

The oldest currently operating labor education program is the University of Wisconsin's School for Workers which was begun in 1924. Most university-based programs began after World War II and there now are some 70 in North America. Oregon's is the first north of Berkeley and west of Denver.

OSEA and several other unions in the state have been the prime movers in the establishment of LERC. Former OSEA Faculty Representative Dan Dorritie started as the Association's representative on a committee within the State System of Higher Education. OSEA lobbyist Bill Wyatt worked with the rest of the labor lobby moving the proposal through the 1977 legislature. Now OSEA Education and Research Director John Lund sits on LERC's Labor Advisory Committee. Irvin Fletcher, the executive secretary of the Lane County Labor Council, director of the Employment Division's apprenticeship public information center in Eugene and a member of OSEA's Eulane Chapt. 40, and Pat Randall, in his sixth term as secretary-treasurer of the Oregon AFL-CIO, also were instrumental in the Center's development.

However, Eugene's central location helps LERC serve its statewide constituency.

It is being modeled on agricultural extension services to go directly into the communities where the workers are. LERC courses such as "Basic Unionism" have been held in The Dalles, Coos Bay and Bend.

When LERC still was only an idea, Steven Deutsch, a UO sociology professor who has been acting director for the past year, was trying it out in 1974 in a project called "Work and the Environment." The program was aimed at unskilled and semi-skilled workers and the idea was to deal with occupations concerned with environmental growth. "Most of these people had never dealt with the University. They were very suspicious. But we built some important trust, to the point of being able to respect each other and agree and disagree."

Deutsch, who has been succeeded by permanent director Emery Via, has achieved international status for his work in such areas as worker self-management. "When I came here in the mid-Sixties," he said, "I was impressed with how strange it was that Oregon had no dedication to lifelong learning and worker education."

However, once the special advisory committee had made its report to the chancellor's office, once the Portland-versus-Eugene issue had been settled, and despite a few other occasions when things fell between the cracks, LERC was established by the legislature and things happened fast. The center was opened Sept. 1, 1977. Such men as LERC instructor Scott Toby, administrative assistant Lou Johnson and Deutsch have been all over the state teaching classes and seeking ideas from union officers and the rank-and-file. In the past year, LERC conducted some 20 courses, workshops and seminars on some 13 different topics. The multi-week "Basic Unionism" course was held in Bend, Coos Bay and The Dalles. Steward training courses were held in Salem, Albany, and one especially for OSEA in Eugene in April; research in the local union classes have been held in several different cities. A workers' comp course was held in Roseburg in May, a labor and the media and women in unions conferences were held in Eugene in April and a course called an "Introduction to Municipal Finance for Public Employees" was held.

Half of Oregon women now in labor force

EUGENE -- Nearly half of the women in Oregon today have joined the labor force. But, contrary to popular conception, the status of women workers has improved little since 1940, according to a research study entitled "Women Workers in Oregon: A Portrait in Time" published recently by the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon.

"There are now more women doing the same jobs that women have always done," declare researchers Jan Newton, economist for the Lane Economic Development Council, and Sandy Gill, doctoral candidate in sociology at the U of O.

Newton and Gill point out that although a much larger proportion of Oregon's labor force is female now than in 1940, when only 23 per cent of Oregon workers were women, the movement of women into the labor force has not been accompanied by an equally dramatic diffusion through it, despite equal employment legislation of the '60s.

Sex segregation in specific Oregon jobs actually is intensifying over time -- a phenomenon not apparent at the level of general statistics used by most writers on this subject, according to Newton and Gill.

For instance, they say that 30 years ago just over half of all women workers in Oregon were employed in clerical or service work. By 1970, this concentration had increased to 57 per cent of all women workers.

Meanwhile, the percentage of women workers in traditionally male occupations has remained unchanged or even decreased: The same 11 per cent of all women workers were in blue collar jobs in 1940 and 1978, and the percentage of employed women who were managers and administrators dropped from seven per cent in 1940 to less than five per cent in 1970, according to Newton and Gill.

The LERC study says women's entry into blue collar jobs is an important corollary of their general progress in employment.

The 1960s has been cited as a decade when sex stereotyping

declined in the skilled trades. But the study says that in Oregon female blue collar workers are still typically employed as bakers, window decorators, tailoresses and typesetters, trades which have become more intensely female with each decade. Women hold only two percent of all jobs in the skilled trades, although in 1970 one of every eight employed Oregonians was working in a skilled trade.

An exception to the pattern is the job of mechanic. The percentage of mechanics who are female increased from 0.4 percent in 1940 to 1.7 percent in 1970.

Thirty percent of Oregon's female laborers are in sales and service-related jobs, most of which offer few opportunities for advancement and are among the most poorly paid in the state, the study says. In addition, two thirds of all female professional and technical workers are nurses and elementary and secondary school teachers. However, the study says that between 1940 and 1970, men moved into

professions which were traditionally mostly female, while movement in the opposite direction was not equivalent.

More women professionals and technicians may be forthcoming in Oregon, however, due to increasing female enrollments in schools of medicine, law, veterinary medicine and pharmacy, the study says.

The proportion of Oregon women who are managers and administrators has remained stable for more than 30 years and stood at 17.9 percent in 1970, the study says. More than half of these women are in four jobs: buyer, manager of a small retail store, manager of a shop providing services and bank officer. These women are victims of an especially large earnings gap, with median earnings only 52 percent of the men's median of \$11,196, according to the study.

Newton and Gill conclude that "the structure of occupations in America is permeated with sexism from top to bottom; in

each and every category of jobs, men are mostly at the top and women at the bottom. This fact of work life has changed little since the 1940s."

They predict, on the basis of state Employment Division projections, increased employment opportunities for women entering or re-entering the labor force, particularly in the areas of health services, health profession and in certain clerical occupations.

Newton and Gill, however, are not optimistic about the immediate outlook for women workers in Oregon. They point out, "Rough times are ahead for both men and women workers," and note that women are often the last hired and first fired and thus especially vulnerable to unemployment.

Copies of the monograph are available for \$1.50 each from the Labor Education and Research Center, 154 Prince Lucien Campbell Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.