

AFL Group Outlines Its Stand In the Basin's Labor Situation

Editor's Note: The following article was submitted to this newspaper by the education committee of the Central Labor Council (AFL), for the purpose of informing the public of the AFL stand in the present labor situation in the basin.

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. (To the Editor)—We seldom make use of your paper in this fashion but conditions brought on by the recent developments in the lumber and sawmill industry causes us to address this letter to you and to the merchants of this city. If you can give us the space it will require to publish this letter we are sure it will be appreciated.

No one regrets the fact that there are two labor groups in the United States any more than we do, and as we shall attempt to show, there is only one organization to blame, and that one is the CIO. The American Federation of Labor, founded many years ago, has a duly adopted constitution and in that constitution provisions are made for amending it. First let us say that the American Federation of Labor came into being very similarly to the American government and is patterned a great deal like it, and, like our national constitution, the constitution of the American labor movement was set up as a guide. It can be amended and changed through the machinery set up within the constitution, and to make such changes the proper procedure must be adhered to. This, John L. Lewis and his associates, refused to do. However, in this one respect the American Federation of Labor differs from our national constitution. Our labor movement is a voluntary organization and it is possible to secede from the AFL. Could you picture Oregon, Washington and California seceding from the United States because they didn't like President Roosevelt and his cabinet? The South tried it and the Civil War resulted. However, John L. Lewis and his group seceded but no war resulted, except when the CIO attacked the AFL and raided our local unions for membership. No bitterness was felt until such time as the CIO invaded the fields already organized by the AFL unions. Had John L. Lewis remained within his mass production industries and left the craft unions alone there would have been no bitter struggles along the water fronts, paralyzing the shipping centers of the country. Had John L. Lewis, who knew the laws of the AFL, played the game as he should, he would have carried his point and would have had industrial unions within the AFL. It was not a question of organization of the unorganized that split the ranks of organized labor, but the question of method to be used during this said organization work.

The question of most interest to us here in the Klamath basin is what will happen here. There is no doubt in our minds but what we can expect the worst. Let us digress a little to explain what has happened in this community during the past 15 years and how we have come to be confronted with the problem that none of us wants to face.

Most of the "old timers" will remember the tough times in 1922 when the timber workers had the strike which practically stopped Klamath Falls dead in its tracks. The question of the nine-hour day brought that on, but regardless of who was to blame the result was the same. The union went broke and so did the merchants. Then came a period of reorganization. Most merchants feared that reorganization of the sawmill and timber workers would precipitate another strike and opposed and discouraged the organization of sawmill workers, but having had a taste of prosperous times and good wages, readily admitted that a union town was really a good town. No thinking Klamath merchant would admit that he'd rather have an open shop town, because he knew that good wages for the workers meant better business, not that he sold his merchandise any higher but that he sold more of it. So the reorganization of the labor groups started again in 1925, just about the time the Natron cut-out was started from Eugene. The building trades adopted better wage and working conditions. The chamber of commerce, with Lynn Sabin as secretary cooperated with the labor unions and the entire city prospered. Admitted there was

a boom on in the whole United States—but Ashland, Medford, Grants Pass and other valley towns did not make the conditions Klamath did. Organization did not succeed in those cities. Top wages, all during the best of times we of this generation have ever seen, did not exceed 90 cents per hour in those cities, while in Klamath Falls the building laborer and ditch diggers secured the \$6.00 per day minimum with a five-day week. Klamath was considered the best union town in the state. Our timber workers tried organization but were opposed by the lumber operators at every turn. The merchants took but little interest in the matter because of the fear of a concerted effort to upset the existing conditions. As a result it wasn't until after the crash of '29 that any result was seen in the timber workers. Sales fell off, work slackened up, then came the wage cuts. The workers in a desperate effort to save themselves formed temporary unions to resist wage cuts when the management decided to cut down on expenses. These were but half-hearted attempts. First the lumber pilers would get a notice of a small cut. Immediately there would be a meeting in the labor temple, a union formed, with the results that perhaps the cut would be called off or the group would vote to accept. In either case the union would disband and some other department would suffer a like treatment with the same procedure as before, form a union and then drop out until the trouble blew over. Until 1933 wages were so low that it was pitiful and the entire group was called together to form a permanent organization and negotiate an agreement in an attempt to save what little could be saved. Meetings were held and local unions were chartered by the AFL direct into what was termed federal charters. This continued all over the timber country in Washington and California as well as in Oregon until there were several thousand workers organized in the AFL unions.

This brought on the question of an international union of their own and the matter was submitted to the executive board of the American Federation of Labor who after considerable thought decided that the jurisdiction lay with the carpenters who used the materials that were manufactured by the sawmill and lumber workers. It was pointed out that much of the work previously done by hand by the craft carpenter was now being done by machines in the processing plants by sawmill workers. Charters that had been issued by the American Federation of Labor were reissued by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. This was true in the Klamath basin area. Chilquien, Sprague River, Klamath Falls and others formed the Klamath Basin district council and for a while operated very efficiently.

Under the Brotherhood of Carpenters the timber workers were organized to the point where 76,000 men were in unions.

About this time the NRA began its program of recovery. Efforts were made by the local union to increase pay rates, most workers being assured by the administration that to secure recognition they must be organized. Laws were passed outlawing the old 4-L as company unions. In general workers were urged to unionize themselves which the Klamath workers proceeded to do. Meetings were held at which enthusiasm ran high and the individual who could talk loudest and longest generally became the hero. What a set-up for the communist minded; a ready-built organization for the taking. The result of this culminated in a strike of the newly formed unions without sanction from headquarters, mass meetings with the doors thrown wide open, strike committees appointed from the rank and file with authority to pull the jobs, hundreds of non-members crowding in to give advice and urge the workers on.

Representatives of the American Federation of Labor advised the workers to hold off until negotiations could be completed. NRA had set wages and had allocated the amount of cut each plant should make. Details were lacking but the assurance had been given that adjustments would be made retroactive to certain dates. This was the stand taken by the late Ben T. Osborne, executive secretary of the state Federation of Labor, and by the local representative of the AFL, and when these men advised a return to work until the rulings handed down by the NRA could be put into effect they were accused of "selling out." These accusations were not grounded on facts. The real facts were that the representatives of labor had received instructions to urge the men back to work until such time as an official sanction could be granted or the NRA had established the wage scales to be paid. It later proved that the NRA granted the wage asked by the strikers. The representatives instead of "selling out" merely did their duty as representatives of the American Federation of Labor. To this day the "Rabble Rousers" still cite the case of "sell out" when there is no other plausible argument against the AFL. Let it be said here that the AFL does not tolerate imposition of radicalism within the ranks and it believes that strikes should be used only after all other means have failed. Had the sawmill workers

sat down and discussed this particular affair sanely and calmly and without the aid of communists, who "crashed" the meetings, there would have been no strike.

After that bitter quarrel the unions proceeded to build up the prejudice injected into the movement and with the aid of the CIO organizers sent into Klamath basin at that time, proceeded to loot the AFL out of all the existing unions the lumber and sawmill workers had. It is a matter of record that the votes taken at the time the sawmill workers went into the CIO was so small that it was pitiful. Most of the workers refused to vote and as a result the CIO carried the vote to go CIO. Out of all the thousands of workers in the Klamath basin as near as we can remember less than 400 voted to go CIO.

If this is organization of the unorganized then we have been working under a handicap these last 15 years.

Since then Klamath basin has had some peace because the AFL representatives have tried to remain silent and to allow the worker time to adjust himself to the new order of the CIO and to learn just what his new union would do for him, if anything. Again we will state that after the CIO had appropriated the unions built up by the AFL no effort was made to secure agreements or better wages and conditions until in 1939 when the IWA held its convention in Klamath Falls. Mr. Bridges being plenty smart could see how poorly organized the workers were under his CIO and decided on an organization campaign with the results that the timber workers are again in hot water with their overnight strikes and 10-point grievances. Demands for collective bargaining with but a minority of the employees of the company. These tactics are the ones employed by the CIO. The fact that no one wishes to go through picket lines is their strong point. A small group decides to strike and will throw a picket line in front of a job, and of course nobody goes to work regardless of the fact they don't belong to the union.

We have learned in our ex-

perience that not all non-union men are scabs. Most people are fair-minded enough to refuse to cross picket lines. What happened in Westwood, Calif., is an example of what can happen here. The Westwood strike of the CIO was called by the minority workers but they didn't get away with it and as a result the plant is today enjoying peaceful relations with its employees under agreements.

We cite all this to give you and the general public an idea of why all the troubles in the lumber industry. Since the advent of AFL organizers to reclaim what rightfully belongs to them the agitators in the CIO have started the fight to make up for lost time when the AFL ignored their organization. The AFL unions here have felt that sooner or later definite peace could be arranged between the leaders of the CIO and AFL, but it seems as if there can be no settlement made and that we must fight back in defense of our own unions.

It is time that Klamath Falls gets off the fence it has been riding so long. The choice must be made some time and the merchants and lumbermen must

decide whether they wish to deal with the AFL or with the CIO. This is not a quarrel between the workers any longer; this is a matter that must be decided by the citizens of this country. If you want the radical elements in your community you can have them. Break up the bona fide labor unions and you will have open shop with all the cheap trimmings: low wages, long hours, and cut-throat competition. This is no time for the merchant and lumbermen of Klamath basin to deny their responsibility.

The AFL is accused by Mr. Dalrymple as being bedfellows with the chamber of commerce. Be that as it may, cooperation is our theme and we expect to get it.

The AFL does not seek trouble but we are forced to accept the challenge and don't intend to lay down on our job of organizing the lumber and sawmill workers.

C. D. LONG, Secretary, Education Committee of the Klamath Falls Central Labor Union, AFL.

Muskats are never without a faint, sweet-smelling perfume in their furs.

ALBANY WOMAN TO HEAD STATE PEO

GRANTS PASS, June 6 (AP)—Orah H. Buhl of chapter O, Albany, was elected state president of the PEO sisterhood at elections Wednesday morning which concluded official business of the state convention here.

Bend was selected for the 1941 convention with Bend and Redmond as co-hostesses. The convention will be in June but the exact dates were not selected.

Other new officers are: Narcissa Shaw, chapter A, Portland, first vice president; Edna Beatty, chapter P, Oregon City, second vice president; Mary Ruth King, chapter Z, Portland; organizer; Dorothy Hartung, chapter AW, Portland, recording secretary;

Frances Reynolds, chapter U, Klamath Falls, corresponding secretary, and Helen Kaser, chapter AG, Grants Pass, treasurer.

A large party of the 200 delegates and visitors went through the Oregon caves Wednesday afternoon before returning to their home cities.

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