

METAL TRADES COUNCIL OF PORTLAND AND VICINITY

410 LABOR TEMPLE ★ PORTLAND 4, OREGON ★ ATWATER 0171

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March 20th, 1945

Hon. James M. Mead
Senate Chambers
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

We have been advised by one Al Lake, presently residing at Smith River, California, that he is to appear before a Senate Committee of which you are chairman and Senator Harley M. Kilgore and other senators whose names we do not know are members. We understand from Al Lake's letter that he is to appear before you for the purpose of giving testimony as to the deplorable labor conditions in the Portland area shipyards, both new construction and ship repair work.

This Al Lake was the author of the article which appeared in the February, 1945, issue of the "American Mercury", on page 143 thereof, entitled "Shipworkers in the Northwest". We have been advised by Al Lake that in his testimony before your committee he intends to discuss the same matters discussed in this particular article.

Our objective in writing you is two-fold: First, that you may know who Al Lake is, and what his work has been in the Portland, Oregon, area. Second, that this Metal Trades Council together with employers in this area engaged in new ship construction and ship repair work be privileged to make answer to any statements which Al Lake may make before your committee.

For your information, we enclose a copy of a letter sent to John B. Frey, President of the Metal Trades Department of the American Federation of Labor, by J. H. Lake, brother of Al Lake, the individual who is to appear before your committee. This letter from J. H. Lake will give you some indication of the credit that may be given to any statements made by Al Lake. His statements with respect to loafing, drinking, gambling, failure to work, and hoarding of manpower are not true, as an investigation will disclose. If statements made by Al Lake were true, it certainly would have been impossible for this area to have maintained the record of shipbuilding and ship repair work which has been maintained since the beginning of this emergency.

We desire to call your attention most pointedly to the fact that Al Lake was only publicity director for the Albina Engine & Machine Works, after having served as an electrician and an electricians' foreman. This is the smallest yard in the Portland area. He certainly had no opportunity to judge conditions in other yards. He claims to have access to this information through talks with other individuals in these yards, which, of course, would be the rankest type of hearsay. The thing which strikes us as being very peculiar is that, if these conditions were present in the yard of the Albina Engine & Machine Works and were witnessed by Lake, why he did not give publicity to these things while he was publicity director for this

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yard. If his answer should be that he failed to give this publicity due to the instructions of his superiors, then we would say that he was not honest, not sincere in his work, and not furthering the interests of the war effort, when it was his manifest duty as an American citizen to make these matters public, and when he was publicity director, we presume it was his duty to tell the truth as to the conditions prevailing in this particular yard.

We are not attempting to answer the charges made by Al Lake in the article in the "American Mercury". We know this is not within the province of the investigation being conducted by your committee. We simply say with respect to the truthfulness of this article and with particular reference to things that transpired on the train when union representatives were traveling from Portland, Oregon, to San Francisco, California, these things did not occur, Al Lake was not in the car with the representatives of the labor unions, and these statements are to our knowledge made from whole cloth and are to be classed as the figments of the imagination of this particular individual.

We earnestly request that if an investigation on your part of Lake's credibility, standing in this community, the work he has done throughout the years here persuades you to permit him to appear as a witness, this Metal Trades Council together with employers in this area be permitted to answer either by personal appearance or in writing the charges and accusations which may be made by Al Lake.

Very truly yours,

METAL TRADES COUNCIL OF PORTLAND AND VICINITY

By E. A. BIRD /s/ *E. A. Bird*

Secretary

EAB:NC

cc Senator Harley M. Kilgore

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INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS
LOCAL UNION No. 48

502 Labor Temple
Portland 4, Oregon

March 16, 1945

Mr. John B. Frey, Secretary
Metal Trades Council,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir and Brother:

I have just read in the paper that Al Lake who used to be publicity director for the Albina Marine & Engine Company, is going to Washington, D. C., to appear before a senate committee composed of Senators Harley M. Gilgore of West Virginia, and James M. Mead, chairman of the committee. He is expected to leave for Washington next week.

For your information, before the war Lake had a job as an electrical writer. Many years ago he had learned part of the electrical trade, and because he did have some knowledge of the trade I placed him to work as an electrician journeyman at the Albina yards. Inside of a year he was made general foreman of the graveyard shift. The largest crew he ever had was four journeymen. Following this he made application to Mr. Hussa, president of the Albina Marine Works, to write a magazine for the yard. He was very successful, but became ambitious to make more money, etc. At the time the Metal Trades and Ship Owners held a conference at San Francisco, he got time off to go to California. My understanding is that he went by automobile, and any information that he put in the Mercury about drinking, etc., must have been taken from some other individual who went by train, or it was purely make-believe on his part.

Inasmuch as I personally made it possible for him to get a start in Oregon and knowing the kind of work the Unions are doing here, I feel very resentful of the fact that he would attempt to write an article of this kind. You and I know that Portland leads the entire nation in the building of ships. It is true that we do have some that loaf on the job but not with the consent of the Unions. This loafing is minor, and it is no different, in my opinion, than in any other large war industry.

I thought this ought to be called to your attention because I feel confident that one of the reasons that my brother, Al Lake, wrote this article was because of the fact that he was turned down by the boilermakers' organization as a representative. He seemed to feel that he had something to do with the election of their present business agent, and because he was not admitted to membership or to a director of the paper that the Boilermakers were publishing, he is, in my opinion, resentful.

I hope you will hear further from Al Bird, Secretary of the Metal Trades Council, and their members, but I thought I ought to write you in case they did not feel it necessary to do so.

Fraternally yours,
J. H. LAKE /s/
Business Manager

P. S. I believe this article was in the February issue of the Mercury.

Smith River, Calif.,
March 6, 1945

Green and Landye,
1003 Corbett Building,
Portland, Oregon.

Gentlemen:

I'm writing this up in the woods, and hope it will get out tomorrow. Weather is bad here, and there may be a day or two delay. However:

I talked to Manpower officials in Washington by telephone yesterday, and find that the investigation as to Labor conditions in the Portland area has been under way for some days. Consequently, the publicity of a libel suit wouldn't help open things up for that purpose. It comes to late.

Please understand that I have nothing but the friendliest feelings for the Portland area Labor officials. I think they are making a mistake to bring things into the light. I don't know which of them retained you, but there are several of them who would far better keep things quiet.....there's smells in them hills.

Everything I wrote in the article is true. I attended the conference in question (My article was written in early December or late November) as a Press representative. The press boys knew in advance that nothing would be gained by that particular wage conference. We knew before it happened that delegates from the other side were going to walk out on the conference. This conference was a complete bust from Labor's angle.

A libel suit seems to be a bad move on the part of Labor. The article was submitted to Al Bird, Metal Trade Council boss, BEFORE it was mailed to American Mercury. Bird made no formal protest, nor did he deny anything in the article. All he said to me was that "the oftener I read the article the madder I get.

Other Labor leaders saw the article in advance. They made no protest nor denial of any part of it.

I mentioned no names in the article in question out of consideration for the boys at the head of the Labor Movement. However, in an article scheduled for publication in a national magazine (as the editor says: "At the psychological moment"); I really go to town on Labor conditions here as to loafing and whistle jumping, and excessive manpower, and I NAME NAMES.

I suggest that if the boys want to sue for libel they wait for that article. It sizzles, and it is just one of six others scheduled for release between now and July first.

If the Labor lads want to play ball I'm willing to let them have copies of those manuscripts before publication. As with the first article "Ship Workers in the Northwest", it will give them a chance to cover up a little. They sure did a lot of fast work in the yards between the time Bird got my MS and the time it appeared in the American Mercury.

Most writers do not permit anyone to see articles in advance of publication, That I do it is because I bend over backward trying to be fair.

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The article as it appeared was mild.....I have a committee of 51 shipyard bosses in all yards who keep me in touch with every thing that goes on. This committee, all home owners and men and women with sons in the Service, is eager totell the world what it knows about war work in the Portland-Vancouver area.

I might add that I have telegrams and letters from scores of workers, union officials, management heads, Manpower Commission officials, and plain citizens complimenting me on that article, and begging for more.

It might also be interesting to know that that article was the final blow in the defeat of the work or jail bill. Labor should thank me for that.

Sooner or later the lid must blow off the manpower situation in Portland and vicinity.....I mean, really blow off. It might be just as well to have it come through a libel suit.....I don't know.

I'm willing to do the right thing at all times. If, the boys can show me where they accomplished ANYTHING at the wage conference in question, I'll be glad to retract. But they didn't. I know. I was there.

Sincerely,

Al Lake (signed)

Excuse poor typing, please. Wind blowing, lantern flickering.

A. L.

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