A Small City Police Strike: Klamath Falls, Oregon, 1973

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ABSTRACT
This article examines Oregon’s first police strike, which occurred just as the state legislature was negotiating the final provisions for a comprehensive public employee collective bargaining law. It offers a narrative account of the strike itself, and an analysis of some of the organizational characteristics of the police officers’ union and its job action. The strike is seen in the context of the history of police unionism, as well as in terms of the overall growth of public employee unionism in Oregon and the United States. The strike illustrated that militant police unionism was evident in smaller communities, like Klamath Falls, Oregon, as well as in larger, eastern urban communities, where it has been most carefully studied.

Police officers haven’t been the most typical group of workers to find carrying picket signs in American labor history. More often than not, they have protected management interests against striking workers. However, this changed significantly in the late 1960s and early 1970s when union militancy rose within the ranks of the police themselves. The most dramatic examples occurred in larger eastern cities like Milwaukee, Montreal and New York, where police officers resorted to strikes against city government to raise their living standards. Smaller communities were not immune to the trend though, and when labor militancy came to Oregon police officers, it was not a large city, but Klamath Falls (pop. 16,000) that experienced the first police strike in Oregon history.

On the night of June 4, 1973, eighteen Klamath Falls police officers and clerks walked off the job and set up picket lines in front of City Hall, the police department, and the business places of various city councilmen [1, p. 1]. The
resolve of the officers was strong, as indicated by the 18-to-1 strike vote taken after the City Council failed to allocate more money for police wages and benefits. During the nearly two-week strike that followed only one officer crossed the picket line, and public opinion seemed to galvanize behind the police officers' cause.

The Klamath Falls strike was the first work stoppage by police in Oregon history. Furthermore, the strike occurred at a crucial juncture in the development of collective bargaining for all public employees in the state. While the Klamath Falls police walked the picket line, legislators in Salem were entering final negotiations on a bill that would grant full collective bargaining rights to public employees \([4,5]\). That bill would end up outlawing strikes for police and firefighters and substitute a system of binding arbitration to settle the type of dispute that led to the Klamath Falls strike. While the strike did not predetermine the outcome of the legislation, it did keep the issue before the legislature and the public. The existence of a comprehensive law governing bargaining rights was crucial. Without some mechanism to guarantee good faith bargaining, even a group such as police were likely to resort to strikes if their wage and working condition concerns went unaddressed for too long.

**POLICE UNIONS AND POLICE STRIKES IN AMERICA**

The 1960s and 1970s were an era of rapid unionization among police officers throughout the United States. Their 72 percent rate of organization was second only to firefighters, whose national organization dated back to 1918 \([6, p. 19; 7, p. 189]\). Police, on the other hand, did not possess one national organization that represented them in bargaining with their employers. Until the late 1960s the American Federation of Labor had a prohibition on police membership that dated back to 1897, when a group of Cleveland police requested a charter \([8, p. 33]\). The AFL changed its position in 1918 and began issuing charters to police unions, only to reverse itself the following year in the wake of the disastrous 1919 Boston Police Strike \([9, p. 25]\).

The defeat in 1919 led to a long lull in attempts of police to organize. Although some national unions like the State, County and Municipal Employees continued to organize police during the 1930s and early 1940s, their attempts were largely unsuccessful. Local ordinances were used to deny police the right to join unions,

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1 A second strike occurred in Oregon in Ontario, July 1-6, 1976. It differed considerably from the Klamath Falls strike because it was a legal walkout. Although the PECBA of 1973 outlawed strikes by police, a local Ontario ordinance gave the city government the right to waive the prohibition. They did so apparently as a bluff, which was called by the police when they walked out. Like the Klamath Falls strike, the police were generally supported by the community and obtained a 47 percent wage increase in the final settlement \([2,3]\).
and those who did were often dismissed [8, pp. 44-48]. A rebirth of nonunion, "fraternal" groups such as the Fraternal Order of Police (founded in 1915) did occur in the 1940s. However, when police officer organizations attempted to engage in any real bargaining they were quickly suppressed by police chiefs and mayors of the larger cities. A dramatic example was the firing of thirty-six Jackson, Mississippi police officers who failed to disband their AFL affiliate in 1944 [10, p. 132]. It was not until the 1960s that a third wave of police organizing came to American cities in the wake of urban racial unrest, antiwar demonstrations, and the ensuing disputes over police brutality and the need for citizen review boards.

THE LEGACY OF 1919

The entire history of police unionism in the United States must be seen in light of the legacy of the 1919 Boston police strike. A brief review of the events surrounding the strike is illustrative of both the similarities and differences faced by the Klamath Falls police under study here.

In 1919 more than 1000 Boston police went on strike after their fraternal organization, "The Boston Social Club," failed to obtain a salary increase from the Commissioner of Police by lobbying him. Like many workers in the immediate post-World War I era, their wages had eroded drastically due to inflation. They were aware of other recent police job actions, in Cincinnati, 1918, and in Montreal, London and Liverpool early in 1919. Their pleas for a pay increase fell on the deaf ears of the Police Commissioner, who fired seventeen officers after the Boston Social Club refused to rescind its affiliation with the AFL. The firings were the immediate cause of the four-day strike, which set the tone for nights of looting in the city in which seven people died. The looting and violence swayed public opinion against the strikers. Although an impartial mediator proposed a compromise settlement that was acceptable to the union, the Police Commissioner adamantly and arrogantly refused to accept it. Ultimately, Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis enlisted the support of then-Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge to crush the strike by firing more than a thousand police officers. Coolidge's action is generally acknowledged as the event that led to his rise as a national figure, and ultimately his election as president [11, pp. 92-94]. It was in the midst of the strike that Coolidge sent AFL President Samuel Gompers a telegram with the famous retort, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime." [9, p. 191].

While the strike in Klamath Falls bears little outward resemblance to the one in Boston, there are some important similarities. Both situations show the ongoing frustration of police with their salaries as a reflection of their professional status. As we shall see, the Klamath Falls strike also pitted police officers against extremely conservative political forces within the community. On this point, the
Klamath Falls strike had more in common with the 1919 strike than it had with the various large city strikes of the 1960s—most of which were directed at distinctly liberal city administrators.

Almost all of the literature on modern American police departments, and their industrial relations environments, deals with the large cities [6, 10, 12]. Police unionization is usually seen as a side issue in the overall police "reform" and "professionalism" movement [13]. The reform movement in the early 1950s stressed the demilitarization of police command, the creation of more autonomy for police chiefs, less political control from above and an emphasis on greater training for the police officer on the street [12, pp. 222-224]. In this context, reformers argued that the professionalization of the police ran counter to the notion of collective bargaining. As one writer on the subject put it [12, p. 214]:

... the reformers spoke out strongly against the unionization of the big city police ... they stressed time and again that this movement would nullify the achievements of the campaign for police reform. It would undermine the police officers' claims to professional status, infringe on the police chiefs' managerial prerogatives, inject partisan politics into departmental affairs, and by encouraging the rank and file to strike or otherwise withhold their services, weaken public confidence in the police.

While the management-dominated reform movement adamantly opposed police unions and collective bargaining, there were many forces at work that pushed police toward the trade union movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Professionalization was thought to raise the social and economic status of police, but this was not always its result. During the 1960s and 70s the wages and fringe benefits for other municipal employees who engaged in legalized collective bargaining increasingly edged up toward those of police and firefighters.

The process of collective bargaining in the public sector was further legitimized by the successive executive orders issued by Presidents Kennedy and Nixon in 1962 and 1969 that extended bargaining rights to federal employees. Police officers saw their own rights continue to fall behind as more and more government workers began to organize and bargain legally. By 1973 even police management begrudgingly acknowledged that collective bargaining in law enforcement was here to stay [14, pp. 16-17].

Another trend that encouraged police union organizing was the wave of urban unrest surrounding the civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s and early 1970s. Public demonstrations, and police responses to them, raised new questions about the respect with which police were held in their communities. Accusations of brutality brought calls for citizen review boards in large cities where police had still not won the right to any real grievance/arbitration process in disciplinary matters.
Here Klamath Falls is a good example of a small town with some very big city problems. With a sizable American Indian minority population there was constant friction between the police and the minority community. This was heightened by the new militancy in the Indian community exemplified nationally by the American Indian Movement (AIM). In Klamath Falls the Organization of Forgotten Americans (OFA), a native American Civil Rights organization, organized protests of brutality and discrimination toward Indians in the community during the early 1970s. Often these protests were aimed at the police.\(^2\)

The Citizen Review Board issue, rather than wages or benefits, became a crucial organizing issue for police in cities like Rochester, Philadelphia and New York [6, pp. 5-6]. The New York City Police Benevolent Association’s defeat of Mayor John Lindsay’s proposed Citizen Review Board in a 1966 voter referendum is a good example. It served as a sign to police across the country that they could pursue their goals by organizing and getting active in politics [14, p. 14].

The growing fiscal crisis of the cities heightened the insecurity of the police officers’ economic positions. It also threatened their safety when budget cuts led to a change from two-person to one-person patrol cars. This became the major organizing issue in Detroit, where police engaged in a traffic ticket writing “slowdown” in opposition to the labor policies of a liberal mayor and police commissioner in 1967 [10, p. 111].

Police organizations reacted to adverse economic and working conditions in different ways. Traditionally, they lobbied city councilmen and mayors for their requests. However, despite the disastrous legacy of the 1919 strike, during the 1960s they increasingly turned toward militant job actions, including strikes. While public employees had shown a low propensity to strike during the 1950s, this clearly changed by the mid-1960s [17]. Nationally, strike activity in the public sector increased from thirty job actions in 1960 to 412 in 1970 [18].

In some communities this militancy was due to new collective bargaining legislation that allowed strikes for the first time. In others, it was the sheer inertia of years of neglect that led public employees to engage in illegal strikes. While the trend in strike activity for all government employees was clearly up, there are very few statistics that break out police separately from those figures. One set of statistics does reveal that between 1965 and 1969 there were fifty-one strikes by police, representing only 9 percent of the total of all government worker strikes during the period [19, p. 166]. While police strikes were by no means common, it was clear by the late 1960s that the taboo created by the disaster of 1919 had been lifted.

\(^2\) See for example, letter to the editor [15]. *Breakdown*, Vol. 4, #17, 1973. The Breakdown was a local Klamath Falls underground newspaper that published in the early 1970s. While supportive of the Indian rights movement, it also supported the striking police officers (Vol. 4, #23, June 12-18, 1973) [16].
Police did not always engage in outright strikes, however. Other job actions could be just as effective. The two most common were the previously mentioned ticket writing strike, and the “Blue Flu,” or mass sick-out. The ticket writing strike put extreme pressure on those cities that relied heavily on revenues from traffic violations. The “Blue Flu” was a way for police to dramatically demonstrate the importance of their labor by engaging in what was really a limited and selective strike outside the technical prohibition established by the law. Again, Detroit police used this tactic to good effect [10, pp. 113-117].

The most dramatic examples of police union militancy occurred in the East, but Oregon was not immune to the trend. The Portland police enjoyed a long tradition of activism, and in 1969 their affiliate of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) halted work on the docks when maritime workers honored their informational pickets [7, p. 163].

**SOCIOLICAL ASPECTS OF POLICE ORGANIZATION**

While many factors inhibited the organization of police, some important aspects of their work culture also cultivated it. While the reform movement argued that unions were an anathema to the nature of their work, many of the reformers’ policies tended to exacerbate working conditions that could only be addressed with concerted activity. “Reform” meant attempting to “objectify” and “depersonalize” the nature of the police officers’ contact with the public. Professional public safety personnel would apply their skills not as the friendly “cop on the beat” who knows everyone in town, but as technicians applying the newest tools of criminology. This sometimes made the job less personal and more detached [20, p. 79]. It tended to dilute the authority of the police officer as a “street-level bureaucrat,” who enjoyed his social status due to his ability to deal with citizens on a one-to-one, personal basis. This challenge to the officers’ authority has been identified as one cause for the growing unionization trend among police officers during the 1960s [10, p. 10; 21, p. 19; 22, pp. 196-213].

Another phenomenon that encouraged unionization was the danger of occupations like police work and firefighting. Numerous commentators on the police have noted how this danger tends to foster a strong sense of solidarity among the rank and file [23, p. 277; 24, p. 52]. Some have also argued that this type of solidarity is most apparent in larger city police departments, and not in smaller communities, with which Klamath Falls could more easily be compared [20, p. 59]. This raises an interesting problem. Nearly all of the work on the history and sociology of the police deals with large cities. For this reason it is sometimes difficult to assess how many of the dynamics operative in large city bureaucracies would be applicable to a town like Klamath Falls. If we look at the late 1960s and early 1970s though, we do find a significant number of police strikes in smaller cities in the West. In 1969 and 1970 there were three strikes by police and/or
firefighters in smaller California cities: Vallejo (pop. 70,000), Antioch (26,000), and Hollister (7,500). All three strikes involved disputes over traditional wage and benefit demands, as opposed to worker control issues such as the citizens review boards that provoked disputes in large Eastern cities [8, pp. 63-71].

BACKGROUND TO THE KLAMATH FALLS STRIKE

Klamath Falls was a conservative town, built around the wood products industry. During the early part of the century the primary product was wooden boxes. This gradually gave way to larger scale production, and in 1929 the Weyerhaeuser Corporation built its large mill. While Oregon lumber workers were not known for their militancy when compared to their Washington or British Columbia counterparts, there is evidence that the local power structure felt threatened by the trade union movement [25, pp. 6-12]. In 1917 nearly thirty suspected “Wobblies” were arrested after a local mill burned. The Portland attorney who arrived by train to represent them was summarily threatened with lynching and run out of town [26, p. 91].

The other notable labor dispute in Klamath Falls occurred in 1922. In February of that year the International Timber Workers struck mills throughout the Klamath Valley, south to California, when the employers attempted to increase the work day from eight to nine hours. The strike dragged on for five months before the workers were forced to return under the employer’s terms [27, pp. 150-163; 28, p. 101]. The strike was significant in that it marked a setback to the eight-hour day demand that had been the rallying cry of the entire American labor movement since the late nineteenth century. It also signaled the decline of unionism in the wood products industry generally during the virulently anti-labor 1920s. Unionism among mill workers would not be rekindled until the 1930s, with the birth of the International Woodworkers of America (CIO).

KLAMATH FALLS IN THE 1970s

By the early 1970s Klamath Falls was a good example of a community whose government was out of touch with the realities of modern police work. Despite the growing “professionalization” of law enforcement nationally, wages and benefits for officers lagged further and further behind in the southern Oregon city [21, Chapters 2, 6]. By 1971 Klamath Falls police salaries were the lowest in the state for communities of its size [29]. Other typical police benefits were also much lower than in comparable communities. It was the only city of its size that refused to pay overtime rates for hours worked beyond a normal shift [30]. Furthermore, officers often had to stay at the station for hours beyond their normal shift writing up their arrest reports. This was done off the clock, with no compensation at all [31].
With no legal framework for mandatory bargaining over these issues, police (and firefighters) had to resort to a kind of "collective begging." Annually their beneficiary association would ask for higher wages and, if the city fathers were feeling benevolent, they might grant an increase. Or, the city fathers might ignore them entirely. Many other police departments around the country enacted this same scenario, year after year. As far back as 1943, Klamath Falls police had passed a hat around the squad room and filled it with their badges, which they then had the chief of police deliver to the city manager as a sign of their dissatisfaction. The implication was that they would resign if wages were not raised. The tactic worked in 1943, and police salaries went up from $135 a month to $190 a month, a huge increase at the time [32]. The powers that be were a bit more stubborn in 1973 though. Wages and benefits were an issue not just because they were so low, but because Klamath Falls was considered a very tough place to be a cop [32]. The city served as a southern hub for the northwest, and its population was a diverse mix: loggers and ranchers, military personnel from Kingsley Airforce Base, Klamath Indians from the nearby reservation, and many transients riding the rails north and south. The county was also the poorest in the state in the early 1970s, with a median family income of $8,459 per year compared with the state median of $9,489 per family [33, p. 4]. These factors may have contributed to the violent atmosphere suggested by crime statistics from the period. In 1973 the county ranked number three in the state for murder, number two for robbery, and number two for assault [34]. In 1971 the county had the highest murder rate in the entire state [35].

While the murder rate gives a dramatic example of police working conditions in Klamath Falls, it was the more typical barroom brawl that dominated most patrolmen's daily working lives. Joe Mountain, one of the more outspoken strikers, recalled that, "If you went to work at 4:00 p.m., you'd be answering the fights by 5:00" [36]. The "fights" often broke out in and around the core of downtown bars that Klamath Falls police called the "Hot Block." This was a group of about a dozen bars on 5th to 8th Streets between Main and Klamath, each with a different clientele drawn from the town's wide spectrum of citizens. Public drunkenness was an arrestable offense, and the police spent many hours on the "Hot Block" breaking up fights and hauling away drunks [37]. The situation in Klamath Falls' bars was complicated by the racial dynamics of the community. American Indians accused various tavern owners of discriminating against Indian patrons and overcharging them. This led to a boycott of various bars in the summer of 1973, organized by the Organization of Forgotten Americans [38, p. 1].

Two young officers who were fed up with the working conditions, including the $572 starting salary the city was paying, were Bryan Carpenter and Mike Reynolds. Reynolds was president and Carpenter secretary-treasurer of the Klamath Falls Police Beneficiary Association, the social and fraternal group that sponsored the police balls and fundraisers and occasionally went across the street
to City Hall to do the collective begging. Carpenter joined the force in 1971 after getting out of the service. He became incensed by the low wages and off the clock report writing required of the patrolmen. After exchanging some words with City Manager John Halvorsen and Police Chief Charlie Howard over low wages in 1972, Carpenter went looking for a union to represent the officers.

Despite its conservatism Klamath Falls had a sizable number of union members, largely due to the big International Woodworkers of America local that represented workers at the Weyerhaeuser Corporation. The IWA seemed like an inappropriate union for the police, as did the Teamsters, so Carpenter ended up calling Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) representative Lee Clinton in Bend. Primarily a building construction trade union, the Laborers had also organized public employees around the country, including the Oakland, California police department, which affiliated with LIUNA in 1968 [7, p. 169]. Clinton represented other law enforcement personnel around the state, and Carpenter felt that having someone come in from outside the community might be advantageous in pushing for some real negotiations between the police and city hall [31]. The police quickly signed up, and by the early spring of 1973 the new patrolmen’s local (No. 915) of the LIUNA sat down to bargain as a true trade union with the City of Klamath Falls.

The structure of city government placed most power in the hands of the city council and a city manager. But Mayor Robert Veatch, who had been in office since 1961, exercised an unusual amount of influence and control. He had a reputation for fiscal conservatism, and his city council of five members were mostly small businessmen of a similar persuasion. One exception was Councilman Harold Douglas, a railroad yardmaster for the Southern Pacific who had once been an organizer for the Switchmen’s Union of North America [39]. Douglas would be the most vocal of the councilmen in his support of the patrolmen. The bargaining team for the city included City Manager John Halvorsen, his assistant Pat Reichert, and Assistant City Manager Ed Ivey. Neither Halvorsen nor Ivey had any labor negotiations experience, and the early rounds of the bargaining were handled exclusively by Ivey, the junior official. He would later describe his situation as like “... being thrown to the lions.” From the first negotiating session the city seemed intent on holding the line on salary increases, and Ivey was given virtually no authority to increase the city’s offer [40]. This may have been the first indication that a confrontation was in the making. The city was negotiating with representatives from the Laborers, including Lee Clinton and Dwain Abbott, an international representative. Both of them had an aggressive, “pound-the-table” style of bargaining, atypical of public employee collective bargaining at the time. The city was not prepared for this approach.

The regular city council meeting scheduled for Monday, June 4, 1973 was to take a first vote on a budget proposal for 1973-74. With no progress at the bargaining table the patrolmen and their two union representatives walked across
the street from the police station to present their case at the meeting. In addition to Clinton and Abbott, there were at least four patrolmen present, including Mike Reynolds, Bryan Carpenter, Joe Mountain and Dick Swan. Don Crownover, president of the Klamath Falls firefighters' union (International Association of Firefighters [IAFF] Local 890), was also there to back up the policemen's demands [41].

Dwain Abbott spoke for the union, saying, "The whole negotiations have been a farce." Despite the fact that the union had moved from an initial demand of a $200 per month pay increase to a request for $74.50 plus benefits a month, the city had not moved on its position at all. Lee Clinton added that a package including the $74.50 per month increase, participation in the state's Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) pension plan, and full medical coverage, were "not unreasonable" demands [41]. But Mayor Veatch refused to respond to the specific contract proposal and complained that the union should have made an earlier presentation at a budget committee meeting. Only Councilman Douglas spoke in favor of the union's proposal, and the council refused to add additional funds to the budget for police salaries and benefits.

Recognizing that the council would vote against them, the patrolmen walked back to the police department squad room where the rest of the officers were meeting. Dan Toffel, a junior patrolman at the time who later went on to become Chief of Police in Klamath Falls, was out on duty when he received a call to come back to the station. For him, the strike vote, "... was a difficult decision, and I had a lot of mixed feelings" [42]. Clinton never urged the officers to go on strike, but despite this the vote was nearly unanimous with only one officer, Dick Swan, abstaining. Although Swan was supportive of the union's position, he didn't believe police officers had a right to walk off their jobs [43]. In fact, all the officers faced this dilemma, but although police strikes in Oregon were illegal, this was not the crucial issue. "The big talk was not whether it was legal or not. It was a moral issue with the guys."

As the officers left to set up pickets, a call came in from one of the bars on the "Hot Block," reporting that there was fight in progress, and police assistance was requested. The officer answering the phone said, "You'll have to call somebody else, Jack; we're on strike!" [31, 43].

To understand why a strike like this would occur in Klamath Falls it is crucial to understand that the dispute was essentially between the rank-and-file patrolmen and City Hall, not with the police department itself [42]. Chief Howard was well liked by the men, and the sergeants and lieutenants who were to operate the department during the strike had much to gain themselves from whatever the union could negotiate.

It's not surprising that sergeants, lieutenants and the chief himself might be sympathetic with the patrolmen's demands. Police departments tend to be "closed" personnel systems, where officers work their way up through the ranks.
Police jobs were not very portable. You couldn’t leave Klamath Falls and carry your seniority and rank with you to work in another city that paid better. You would have to begin again there at the bottom of the list. Higher officers were well aware of this. They also used it to their own advantage. In the larger Eastern cities, sergeants, lieutenants and detectives all had their own employee associations to negotiate for them, sometimes whipsawing the employer with their different contract negotiations. Despite the apparent militarization of command in law enforcement, there was much interrank solidarity. Chief of Police Howard had been a patrolman in the 1940s and striking patrolmen Don Toffel would become chief himself in the 1980s. When the officers finally walked out, few who were familiar with the situation were really surprised. Charlie Howard later recalled that he “had kind of mixed emotions . . . it was the only way that salaries would be increased” [32].

Klamath Falls citizens awoke on Tuesday, June 5 to find that their police department was being staffed by nine sergeants and lieutenants and one nonstriking patrolman. Howard had called them all Monday night and assigned them to rotating twelve-hour shifts. Operating at one-third strength, the supervisory personnel were instructed to concentrate on major complaints only [1].

While the patrolmen continued to picket, the city council members met in executive session, but stated that they had not given any consideration to changing their salary offer. They also had not scheduled any additional negotiating sessions with the union [44]. All indications were that the city planned to wait out the strike. Either they didn’t believe the union would stay on the picket line, or the action had angered them sufficiently to make them walk away from the bargaining table, or both. Bob Veatch, in particular, was quite angered, especially when the union picketed his downtown title company. Furthermore, he didn’t care for Lee Clinton’s aggressive bargaining approach. “He made me bow my neck,” said Veatch, who also attacked the local media for allowing itself to be exploited by the union [41, 45].

While the city dug in for a fight, so did the patrolmen’s union. The local firefighters were also in negotiations with the city at the time, and Bryan Carpenter and others hoped that if push came to shove, the firefighters would join the police on the picket line [31]. Many of the issues that precipitated the police strike were also important to the firefighters. However, the two groups did not enjoy a close relationship, and the firefighters believed the police had made a mistake when they affiliated with the Laborers’ Union. Although sympathetic to the police demands, they felt a strike was a bad idea [46].

Carpenter believed the police had the full support of the local of the International Association of Firefighters, and was furious when the local voted against going out on strike on Tuesday, the second day of the walkout [31]. IAFF Local 890 president Don Crowe over announced, “There will be no strike [but] there’s a lot of unhappiness and dissent” [44].
Although the police union was unable to get the firefighters to join the strike, it did begin to receive considerable support from the community. Some small businessmen offered strikers discounts or free merchandise. One former city policeman donated turkeys to all the patrolmen, remarking, “It’s just a gesture on my part. I’m behind ‘em 100 percent” [47]. Letter writers to the city newspaper, The Herald and News, were even more vocal in their support, with virtually all correspondence supporting the police. One included an attack on the mayor, “As far as Mayor Veatch ‘blasting’ the news media for conducting an interest in these affairs . . . I don’t think he’d go for 24 hours on call for $680 a month” [48, p. 4].

By Friday, June 8, there were still no meetings scheduled between the strikers and the city, although John Halvorsen indicated that talks might reopen the next week. By this time the lone councilman who had favored the union, Harold Douglas, was voicing open support: “We have to use common sense in both directions. I feel they are justified in what they are doing” [49]. It was in this environment of growing public support that the union held a downtown parade on Saturday, June 9. Carrying banners made from rolls of newspaper print, eight cars full of strikers and their families drove down Main Street. Union president Mike Reynolds stated that, “Morale is still very high. As far as the strike goes, we feel that over the years we have tried to get things without going on strike. Now we feel we had no other choice” [38, p. 1]. With the strike about to enter its second week, solidarity among the police and their supporters continued to grow.

By Monday, June 11, the strike was no longer simply a novelty, but had become a serious problem that was not going to be resolved by the police simply backing down, as some city officials may originally have imagined. One immediate problem was the fact that the department was being staffed by personnel who had now been working twelve-hour shifts for a week. Fortunately, there had not been any serious police emergencies, but the men on duty were beginning to tire.

The positions of the two sides were still distant. The city was now willing to make some concessions, but was only offering a $40-50 per month increase, while continuing to study various proposals for pensions and health insurance. Emboldened by the show of solidarity, the union had returned to its original position, demanding a $200 per month increase.

Although the city and the union were as far apart as ever, City Manager John Halvorsen apparently decided that now was the time for him to become more involved in the negotiations. It had always irked the union that the main spokesperson for the city had been the Assistant Manager, Ed Ivey, rather than Halvorsen himself [50]. On Thursday, June 15, Halvorsen first appeared at the bargaining table, but he brought in a package no different than the last one that Ivey had presented. When Clinton and Abbott stormed out of City Hall eight minutes after arriving, Halvorsen complained that Dwain Abbott was, “violent in his display of anger . . . ill-mannered and bad tempered.” Abbott charged that Halvorsen was not negotiating in good faith [48, p. 1].
The city had, nonetheless, moved on a number of issues that, while minor compared to the salaries, were important. Halvorsen announced that the city had agreed to a health insurance provision, payment by the city for weapons and ammunition, and a union shop. Most important, perhaps, was an agreement to pay premium overtime rates for work beyond regular shifts [48, p. 2]. However, they refused to budge any more on salaries, and so what looked like an opportunity for settlement had quickly collapsed. Abbott acknowledged the movement by the city, but noted, “I appreciate their consideration in changing the working conditions for the policemen, but the fact remains that policemen cannot eat conditions” [48, p. 1].

The strike might have continued much longer had it not been for another development the same day negotiations fell apart. The seven sergeants whom Charlie Howard had assigned to twelve hour shifts had finally had enough. After an evening meeting with Halvorsen, the sergeants complained that they had lost their patience and would walk out if the strike was not settled soon. One declared, “We’re all getting rummy . . . I’m doing anything I can to stay awake” [48, p. 1]. That same night the striking patrolmen met at the Klamath Falls Labor Temple where they reaffirmed their strike vote and support of chief negotiator Dwain Abbott [48, p. 1]. As Lee Clinton put it, “We felt we had the upper hand . . . we didn’t want there to be any question in the public about the men standing behind the negotiating team” [51].

On Saturday night John Halvorsen appeared unexpectedly at the Travel Lodge motel where the Laborers union had set up its strike headquarters. With the negotiations narrowed to Abbott, Clinton and Halvorsen, the city put forward a new salary proposal of $58 per month across the board, but Abbott immediately rejected it [52]. Halvorsen was back on Sunday after further consultation with the city council, and his offer this time was $67 per month (or 9.9%) along with the benefit package. Having realized almost all their demands, the union negotiating committee accepted this proposal [53].

The settlement was quickly ratified by the rank and file, and comments from participants on both sides, including City Councilman Ivey, Halvorsen, Clinton, and Abbott, were positive and conciliatory. Only Mayor Veatch had no immediate comment. Monday, June 28, the police were back on duty and Oregon’s first police strike was history.

**LEGACY OF THE STRIKE**

There is a cliche among labor relations professionals that there are no “winners” in any strike. This is true in the immediate sense simply because wage and benefit increases often do not compensate for the losses incurred by being on strike. But the reason that unions strike is to build a better basis for the future. In this sense the strike was a victory for the Klamath Falls police. The issues in the strike were
immediate and economic but the underpinnings for the whole event were ques-
tions of worker “dignity.” Should police professionals be paid so little that, as
Dwain Abbott claimed, they were close to collecting welfare [48, p. 1].

The union’s final settlement basically split the difference between the city’s and
the union’s original positions, and yet it took a thirteen-day strike to do it.
Rank-and-file leaders like Bryan Carpenter and Mike Reynolds believed the strike
had been worth it. Reynolds said, “It’s a shame it came to that.” But he believed,
“We’d never have gotten it (the raise) without the strike” [53, p. 2].

Collective bargaining would now replace begging in Klamath Falls as it would
throughout the state with the passage of the Public Employee Collective Bargain-
ing Act on June 28, 1973. The strike was a prime example of the type of dispute
that a comprehensive bargaining law was aimed at preventing. Although the
political winds in Salem were strongly pro-labor in the summer of 1973, the strike
served to hold legislators’ feet to fire when it came to voting on the PECBA. As
the bill’s proponents argued, it was the absence of a legal responsibility to bargain
that led to strikes, not the right to strike itself [54].

The Klamath Falls police strike resembled the typology of police union activity
that one writer referred to as “Militant Tactics/Conventional Demands” [6,
pp. 94-97]. While the issues involved were traditional economic collective bar-
gaining demands (wages, benefits, etc.), the means used to pursue them were
unusual for an employee organization in a uniformed service. It differed radically
from the large Eastern strikes, which often adopted more conventional bargaining
tactics (lobbying or voter referendums) to pursue unconventional demands, like
elimination of citizen review boards (Conventional Tactics/Militant Demands).
The strike in Klamath Falls more closely resembled the three California strikes
from the period, with one exception. The strikes in Hollister, Antioch and Vallejo
were quite short, lasting no more than five days. One study of the characteristics
of police strikes noted that they were all short, resulted in minimal increases in
criminal activity, and produced remarkably little citizen outrage [55, pp. 123-124].
Klamath Falls’ strike was exceptional in its length, although it was similar as far
as the level of crime and the reaction of the public. It is difficult to understand why
the strike lasted for two weeks without weighing heavily the conservative intrans-
sigence of the Klamath Falls city administration.

Finally, the Klamath Falls police strike was led by a largely young group of
officers. Police strikes have always been characterized by the militancy of
younger officers [21, pp. 21-22]. The average age of an employee in the Klamath
Falls police department in 1973 was thirty-five, and the two principal rank-and-
file leaders were thirty and twenty-seven years old, respectively [56]. In this
last way, the Klamath Falls police strike was typical of the discontent voiced
by younger workers during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Usually seen on the
other side of the picket line, police were not so uncomfortable in their role as
strikers after all.
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