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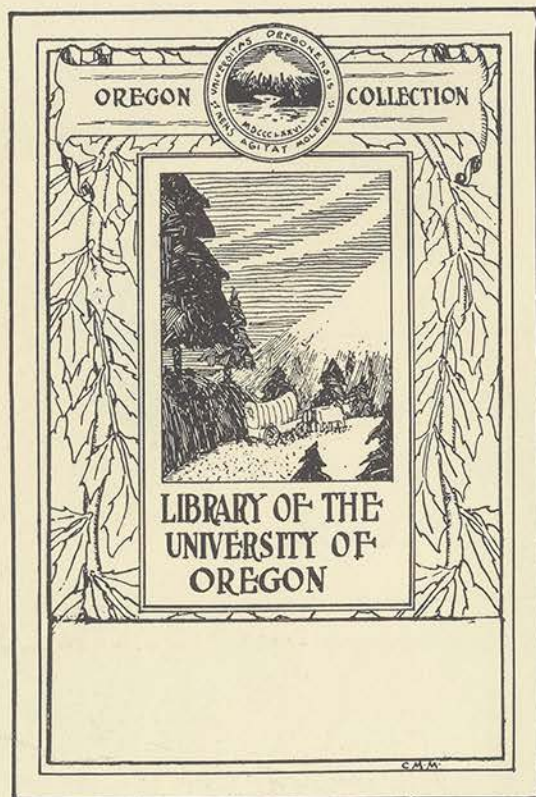
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THE OREGON COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION: THE RISE
AND DECLINE OF A REFORM ORGANIZATION

by

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A THESIS

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VITA

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation is the story of the rise and decline of a reform organization. This thesis is an attempt to discover why the OCF was formed, how it developed, and why it suddenly declined.

From 1936 to 1942 the OCF tried to unite Oregon liberals behind the New Deal in an effort to bring liberal policies to the state. In this effort to bring a chicken to every pot, the OCF had a finger in almost every pie. Therefore, the history of the Commonwealth Federation involves a number of other organizations.

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one outlines the political situation in Oregon that led to the formation of the OCF and its first convention in the spring of 1937. Monroe Sweetland became executive secretary of the OCF at this convention and was the organization's moving spirit until shortly before its decline. Chapter two covers the period from the first convention through the election in the fall of 1938. It deals with the problems the OCF faced in trying to gain the support of suspicious farm organizations and a divided labor movement for its first foray into the political arena.

Chapter three carries the OCF from late 1938 through the elections of 1940. During this period the OCF was the chief supporter of the

national administration in the state and tried to gain control of the Oregon Democratic Party. This chapter also deals with the unsuccessful attempt of the Communist Party to take over the OCF. The further development and sudden decline of the Federation following the outbreak of the Second World War are handled in chapter four. The final chapter compares the Commonwealth Federation with left-wing movements in other states during these years and surveys the role it played in Oregon.

This thesis is based primarily on the Papers of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation. The writer is indebted to Mr. Monroe Sweetland for permission to use this collection, which includes not only the minutes, publicity, and communications of the OCF, but a great deal of material on other organizations as well.

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF THE OREGON COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION

A few days after Franklin D. Roosevelt was re-elected president in 1936, articles of incorporation were filed in Salem for an organization to be known as the Oregon Commonwealth Federation. The purpose of the new organization was

the education of farmers, industrial workers and other workers relative to their economic, social and political interest; to unite such persons in a political organization devoted to their economic and social interests; such political organization to be committed to the principle of production for use. . . .¹

As a first step in fulfilling this purpose, the Oregon Commonwealth Federation sought to bring a New Deal to Oregon. Although Oregonians had twice overwhelmingly endorsed FDR at the polls, the supporters of his programs were not yet in control of the state's political life.

Oregonians may have thought they were bringing the New Deal to Oregon in 1934 when they elected Democrat Charles H. Martin governor. A retired army general and former Republican, Martin had been elected to Congress as an advocate of public power in 1930 and campaigned as a supporter of the New Deal in 1934. It soon became apparent, however, that the General was

¹Articles of Incorporation of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation, November 5, 1936, Oregon Commonwealth Federation Papers (Oregon Collection, University of Oregon Library, Eugene). Manuscript sources cited in this thesis are in the OCF Papers unless otherwise indicated.

more sympathetic with big businessmen than with the underprivileged. By the end of his gubernatorial term he had broken with Roosevelt and vehemently attacked the administration's labor and hydroelectric policies.²

The General, whose sobriquet was "Old Iron Pants," was as well known for his profanity and tactlessness as for his conservative policies. Martin regarded refugees from the Dust Bowl as "alien paupers," and his attitude toward recipients of relief was "Hell! Let them work"--when there was no work. He advised the Grange's lobbyists at the state legislature to "get back to your fields where the birdies sing," and was sure that Oregonians were "just choked" with power when almost half of the state's farms were not electrified. On more than one occasion the General appeared to support vigilantism against strikers and was particularly famed for the remark: "The Italians wouldn't submit; they organized their Blackshirts. The Germans wouldn't submit, so they had their Brownshirts and Hitler. I don't believe Americans will submit!"³

Despite the reactionary leadership of Governor Martin, the Oregon Democratic Party grew by leaps and bounds during the thirties. In November, 1932, the 319,840 registered Republican voters outnumbered Democrats more than 2 to 1. By 1936 the Republican registration had declined to 288,791, while Democratic strength shot up to 247,141. The trend continued, and by 1940, the Democrats were less than 6,000 behind. Presumably most

²Portland Oregonian, November 9, 1934, p. 1; September 23, 1946, p. 1; February 21, 1959, p. 5.

³New York Times, May 20, 1938, p. 18; Richard L. Neuberger, "Goon Squads -- Halt!" Collier's, CI (April 2, 1938), 24; Hearings before the Committee on Rivers and Harbors, House of Representatives, on H. R. 7642 (Washington, 1937), 65.

of these new Democrats had been attracted to the party by Roosevelt rather than by "Old Iron Pants," but the rank and file were unorganized and the old-guard, Martin Democrats were in control of the party's councils.⁴

If the New Deal were to come to Oregon, its supporters had to be organized behind common candidates and programs. This could not be accomplished immediately within the Democratic Party, for the major sources of support for the New Deal's programs in Oregon were Republican farmers and Democratic laborers.

Oregon's farmers shared the administration's commitment to public power. The largest farm organization in the state, the Oregon Grange, was also the state's most ardent advocate of rural electrification and of public development and distribution of hydroelectric power. The majority of farmers and Grange leaders seem to have been Republicans, but it had been progressive Republicans, such as George Joseph, Julius Meier, and Peter Zimmerman, who had led the fight against private power companies in Oregon.

Some of the officials of the State Federation of Labor were also Republicans, but the majority of rank-and-file unionists in Oregon were Democrats. In Oregon, as elsewhere, labor took on new vigor under the protection of the New Deal's legislation. In the early thirties Northwest lumber and mill workers flocked into the AFL unions in droves, and a wave of bitter strikes swept the area. These Depression recruits brought new militancy into the unions and were as passionately attached to the administration that supported their right to organize as they were opposed to the Democratic governor who appeared eager to subvert this right.

⁴Oregon Blue Book, 1933-1934, p. 133; 1937-1938, p. 194; 1941-1942, p. 243.

These two focal points of support for the New Deal suggested a political alliance of farmers and laborers. Such an idea struck a responsive chord among liberals who were convinced of the fundamental harmony of interest between producers in the factory and field, and it seemed to fit the national trend, for across the nation farmer-labor organizations were stirring with new life. The formula appeared particularly workable in Oregon where the State Federation of Labor and the Oregon Grange had maintained friendly relations for some years. It did not seem impossible that these two groups could be drawn still closer together, for the distinction between farmers and laborers was often blurred. Many lumber workers or fishermen lived in rural areas and worked a small farm on the side, and a good many Oregon farmers had at some time worked in the woods or in a sawmill, or at a trade.⁵

Although the Oregon Commonwealth Federation was not formed until late 1936, the idea for such an organization grew out of the gubernatorial campaign of 1934. In that year Peter Zimmerman ran for governor as an independent. The Grange maintained its traditional policy and did not endorse candidates, but Zimmerman, an officer of the State Grange and the only gubernatorial candidate supporting a Grange-sponsored power initiative, was understood to be the Grange's candidate. In August Zimmerman addressed the convention of the State Federation of Labor. The Federation endorsed his candidacy and also instructed its executive committee to join with farm organizations and other progressives in building a political party "separate

⁵Oregon Grange Bulletin, September 5, 1934, p. 1; Neuberger, Our Promised Land (New York, 1938), 251-53.

and distinct" from the two major parties for the purpose of achieving collective ownership of the basic industries of the state.⁶

Zimmerman lost the election, but sentiment for a third party continued within the AFL. At the convention of the State Federation of Labor in 1935, proposals for the formation of a new political party gave rise to the hottest debate of the session. Three resolutions were presented on the subject, calling respectively for a labor party, a farmer-labor party, and a party based on the principle of production for use. The debate was settled with a compromise resolution which called upon the officers of the organization to co-operate with other groups in establishing a "new political organization" to back "progressive candidates."⁷

The following year saw little progress toward this goal, but the convention of 1936 again instructed Ben Osborne and the other officers of the State Federation of Labor to continue efforts to form a "third party." Shortly after the convention the AFL newspaper, the Oregon Labor Press, began carrying references to meetings held to organize a Portland branch of a farmer-labor party sponsored by the AFL and "others."⁸

In November some of the men promoting this farmer-labor party filed articles of incorporation for the Oregon Commonwealth Federation. Listed as officers of the new organization were Daniel D. Whedon, a member of a Portland AFL union, president; Roy R. Hewitt, Salem lawyer and former Dean

⁶Oregon Labor Press, November 10, 1934, p. 1; August 31, 1934, p. 1; September 7, 1934, p. 1.

⁷Ibid., August 23, 1935, p. 1.

⁸Ibid., June 19, 1936, p. 1; June 26, 1936, p. 1; July 10, 1936, p. 1; August 28, 1936, p. 1.

of Willamette law school, vice-president; and Gail M. Bell of Portland, secretary. In addition to these men, the articles of incorporation were signed by Ben T. Osborne, executive secretary of the State Federation of Labor, and Dr. Albert Slaughter, a chiropractor and prominent Granger.⁹

The plan of creating a third political party appears to have been discarded by November, for the articles of incorporation refer only to endorsing candidates for public office. If the organizers of the OCF had not already abandoned the idea of a third party, the reaffirmation by the national convention of the AFL of its traditional disapproval of third-party action in early December, 1936, would probably have had that result as the organizers of the OCF depended on the AFL for support. At any rate, when the OCF revealed itself to the public the following spring, it was as a nonpartisan league of progressives.¹⁰

Early in 1937 a committee began to plan for the first convention of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation. Among the young men on this committee was twenty-seven year-old Monroe Sweetland, who was designated by the minutes as "organizer, OCF." Although born in Oregon, where his father was football coach at Willamette University, Sweetland received most of his education in the Midwest and East, where he plunged into left-wing politics and became a Socialist and field secretary for the League for Industrial Democracy. Roy Hewitt suggested Sweetland for the job of organizer for the OCF, and Sweetland, then a student at Willamette law

⁹Articles of Incorporation of the OCF, November 5, 1936.

¹⁰Oregon Labor Press, December 4, 1936, p. 1.

school, left to make the OCF his labor of love for the next five years.¹¹

The committee asked Sweetland to prepare a draft of a call to the convention. In March Sweetland reported to the committee that the executive committee of the Federation had accepted Ben Osborne's substitute call, "which dealt less harshly with the Democratic Party" than had his own.¹² It was apparently Osborne's call that was issued shortly thereafter over the names of the executive committee.

Addressed "To the People of Oregon" and calling them to a convention for "progressive political action" in Portland, April 24-25, 1937, the call disclosed "the need for united political action by the progressive forces of the State." Reactionaries from both parties had combined in the state legislature to check progressive legislation; the Democratic governor used his office to resist the progressive policies of the national administration; the courts were packed with "legalistic and reactionary judges"; and county and city officials used their power to "oppress the dispossessed," to aid wealth, and deny civil rights.

It is established that our natural resources and highly developed productive power make abundance possible and poverty no longer excusable. Yet organized special privilege . . . threatens our democratic institutions, violates our civil liberties, incites international war and domestic discord, and by its selfish policies keeps the great mass of the people in poverty and insecurity. In defense of human rights we must unite against this common menace. With our united force we must press on by every democratic means to secure the blessings which this age of abundance might be made to provide for us and our posterity.¹³

¹¹Monroe Sweetland to T. J. Larson, February 14, 1938; Reuben O. Norman (ed.), Capitol's Who's Who for Oregon, 1942-44 (Portland, 1942), 408.

¹²Minutes of OCF Convention Committee, March 20, 1937.

¹³"A CALL to a convention for progressive political action."

To counter the forces of "special privilege" the OCF proposed to bring together the "liberal-minded" citizenry who "comprise a preponderant majority" in a "powerful federation of all progressives ready to advance through democratic methods." So the call went out to:

farm organizations and trade unions, to producers and consumers cooperatives, to youth and student and unemployed organizations, to religious and cultural societies, to pension and political clubs.¹⁴

All of these were invited to select delegates to lay the foundation for progress in Oregon.

Sweetland urged the committee to endeavor to get the call endorsed by "certain representative persons upstate," suggesting that this would "eliminate much of the stigma which would be attached to a convention called and managed almost solely by the Portland Labor Groups."¹⁵ Many of the endorsements were from labor leaders, but the call also carried the name of the most widely known and revered progressive leader in the state, Peter Zimmerman. Among the other endorsers were persons prominent in the Oregon Farmers' Union, the State Grange, and the Oregon Workers' Alliance, as well as the inevitable handful of liberal lawyers, ministers, and college professors.

The new organization had the backing of the Portland labor groups, but the OCF also needed support from farmers. The membership of the Oregon Grange was the obvious source of this support, but the Grange had a prohibition against political affiliation so it could not send official delegates

¹⁴Ibid. (All capitals in original).

¹⁵Minutes of OCF Convention Committee, March 6, 1937.

to the convention, and G. W. Theissen, State Grange overseer, warned the committee that an approach to farmers through the Grange would spell "almost certain death to the progressive leadership now on the spot in the organization." He suggested that the OCF could reach farmers through other organizations, such as Townsend clubs. Theissen and Zimmerman had endorsed the call, but by early April, Theissen resigned from the convention committee and both he and Zimmerman asked that their names be omitted from further literature put out by the committee.¹⁶

The position of the Grange handicapped the search for a keynote speaker. The OCF convention committee hoped to avoid having a labor leader assume this prominent role and tried to find a well-known Oregon farmer to give the address. But in Oregon the most prominent liberal farmers were officers of the Grange, and the committee was unsuccessful. Lawyer Hewitt was finally selected, although the committee felt that his profession was a distinct liability for a liberal.¹⁷

By the last meeting of the committee on April 21, the convention was well in line. A draft constitution had been prepared, rules for the convention drawn, 178 delegates already registered, and an agreement reached that the committee would recommend Monroe Sweetland for secretary of the convention and Dr. S. Stephenson Smith for permanent chairman. The committee also agreed that the OCF would be handed over to a new "mass base" at the convention and that there would be no effort to control the deliberations of the convention.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., March 27, 1937, and April 3, 1937.

¹⁷Ibid., March 27, 1937, and April 10, 1937.

¹⁸Ibid., April 21, 1937, April 10, 1937, and March 27, 1937.

The first convention of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation opened at Harmony Hall in Portland with about three hundred and fifty people present. The basis of representation set forth in the call was essentially the same as that contemplated in the proposed constitution. Any organization in accord with the general purpose of the OCF could send two delegates if the organization had between ten and twenty-five members, an additional delegate for its next twenty-five members, and after that, one delegate for each succeeding fifty members up to a total of ten delegates.¹⁹

The organizations that took up the offer to join in a progressive political program ranged from the Rosebud Study Club to the Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union. According to the report of the convention credentials committee, labor was most heavily represented, with one hundred and eighty delegates. Pension groups and organizations of the unemployed together sent seventy-five delegates, farm organizations fifteen, student and youth groups seven, and "miscellaneous groups" seventy-one. The delegates represented four central labor councils, fifty-six labor unions and auxiliaries, eleven pension groups, fifteen organizations of the unemployed, four Granges, six Farmers' Unions, seven student groups, and twenty-seven "miscellaneous" organizations.²⁰

The convention followed the advice of the convention committee and elected Stephenson Smith, professor of English at the University of Oregon,

¹⁹Minutes of the first OCF Convention, April 24-25, 1937; "A CALL."

²⁰Minutes of the first OCF Convention, April 24-25, 1937. The Grange's representatives presumably came under a special arrangement outlined in the call, which allowed ten or more members of any one farm organization to select delegates. Strictly speaking, the delegates did not represent the Grange.

as chairman of the convention, and president of the OCF as well. The forty year-old professor was a graduate of Reed College and had been its first Rhodes Scholar. He had political as well as academic qualifications, for during the twenties he had been active in the Farmer-Labor Party in the state of Washington. Byron G. Carney, Democratic state senator from Milwaukie, was elected first vice-president and A. C. Heyman, an Albany farmer active in the Farmers' Union, second vice-president. Harry Gross, a radical young Portland lawyer who was shortly to die of tuberculosis, was elected third vice-president and Sweetland was selected to be the executive secretary of the OCF. In addition to these officers, thirty-three directors were named from the convention caucusing by interest groups--labor, farm, youth, pension and unemployed, and "miscellaneous."²¹

Throughout the convention a great deal of emphasis was placed on the common interests of labor and the scarcely-represented farmers. A member of the State Grange labor committee was on hand to address the convention on that topic, and the convention responded by pledging the absent farmers aid of every kind. The farm plank in the platform adopted by the convention pledged the OCF to work for security for farmers from eviction, for subsidies for co-operatives, and for the

fostering of the organization of farmers into economic and political units, to the end that they may secure a measure of control over the marketing of their products through collective bargaining and thereby obtain cost of production. . . .

²¹Ibid. Information on individuals has been culled in bits from a variety of sources. The Oregon Voter, the Oregon Grange Bulletin, the Oregon Labor Press, the Labor Newdealer, and, of course, the OCF Papers have been particularly useful.

Resolutions passed by the convention reiterated and supplemented these pledges.²²

Probably of more interest to farmers was the discussion of power from Bonneville Dam. The first plank in the OCF platform called for "[p]ublic ownership of all natural resources, utilities, banks, and monopolies." It went on to call for "publicly constructed transmission lines" to make power from Bonneville available throughout the state. This was the purpose of the Grange's power bill for which Zimmerman had campaigned in 1934. The plank also endorsed the creation of People's Utility Districts (PUD's) and a uniform rate to distributing agencies for Bonneville power. These principles were embodied in a bill presented in Congress by Representative Walter M. Pierce, and the convention passed a resolution specifically endorsing the Pierce bill.

The Commonwealth platform went on to cover almost every other topic of contemporary interest. The OCF supported civil liberties and academic freedom, wage and hour legislation and legislation providing protection for consumers. It advocated a one-house legislature and limiting the power of judicial review by the Supreme Court. The platform also called for adequate public works, public housing, unemployment insurance, and old-age pensions, as well as free medical care for school children and families with low incomes. To finance all this the Federation called for a system of taxation based on the ability to pay, and expressed opposition to the sales tax. "Nothing," commented the Portland Oregonian,

²²Ibid.; Resolutions passed at the first OCF Convention. The Platform adopted at the first OCF Convention is given in full in Appendix A.

"seems to have been overlooked by the platform makers in the way of public beneficence, munificence or magnificence."²³

In both their platform and resolutions the delegates expressed themselves on war. They opposed it. They also opposed militarism wherever it showed its head, home or foreign grown fascism, and war profits. They urged:

the establishment of world peace by an embargo on all war materials, and on all raw materials used for war purposes to fascist aggressor nations and by cooperation with all democratic peoples for the defense of international democracy and peace.²⁴

The convention adopted the proposed constitution with little discussion except on Article X. This article provided that any official or affiliate guilty of supporting candidates or legislation contrary to OCF policy, or engaging in activity "designed to disrupt" the OCF, could be suspended by a two-thirds vote of the board of directors. The provision was vigorously assailed by the officials of the AFL who were unwilling to sacrifice labor's political autonomy to an organization which could conceivably be dominated by nonunion groups.²⁵

The rest of the constitution provoked little discussion. It provided biannual conventions composed of delegates from each organization "which has subscribed officially to the minimum program of legislation as outlined in the platform and has affiliated with the OCF." An organization could affiliate by paying a one-dollar charter fee and monthly dues based upon

²³Portland Oregonian, April 27, 1937, p. 8.

²⁴Platform of the OCF.

²⁵OCF Constitution and By-laws; Minutes of the first OCF Convention, April 24-25, 1937.

the size of its membership. Apparently payment of these fees was ample proof that the organization subscribed to the minimum program. Aside from possible contributions, dues and charter fees were the sole financial support of the OCF.²⁶

Hailing from afar the birth of this new organization were such left-ist lights as Upton Sinclair, the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation of Wisconsin, and the farmer-labor governor of Minnesota, Elmer Benson. Sending greetings too, was the head of the Oregon Communist Party--although the minutes do not record that this telegram was read to the convention. On hand to play midwife in person was Howard Costigan, executive secretary of the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF).²⁷

The WCF, which Costigan had fashioned out of his earlier Commonwealth Builders, gained control of the Washington Democratic Party in 1936, and in the elections of that year Democratic-Commonwealth candidates met with phenomenal success. Although the WCF was originally an outburst of native radicalism, the Communist Party began infiltrating it after the party adopted the Popular Front policy in 1935, and by 1937 the party had gained control of the WCF. Costigan himself covertly joined the party, although he was to leave it a few years later.²⁸

²⁶Affiliated organizations were assessed fifty cents per month for a membership between ten and twenty-five; one dollar for twenty-six to a hundred members; two dollars for one hundred to five hundred members; five dollars for five hundred to a thousand members; and one dollar per month additional for every five hundred members over one thousand.

²⁷Minutes of the first OCF Convention, April 24-25, 1937; Henry Rutz to OCF, April 20, 1937; James Murphy to OCF Convention, April 25, 1937.

²⁸A brief treatment of the WCF can be found in David J. Saposs, Communism in American Politics (Washington, 1960), 20-40. The investigations analyzed in Vern Countryman, Un-American Activities in the State of Washington; The Work of the Canwell Committee (Ithaca, 1951), concerned many of the members and activities of the WCF.

The OCF had no formal connection with the Washington Commonwealth Federation, and it is difficult to tell to what extent the planners of the OCF consciously modeled their organization after the Washington group. At the first OCF convention, two of its incorporators gave brief accounts of the genesis of the Federation. According to Daniel Whedon, the OCF was "patterned after the Washington Commonwealth when it was determined the original A.F. of L. farmer-labor committee needed to be broadened." But Ben Osborne, who was credited by all with furnishing the original impulse for farmer-labor political organization, said in his historical sketch: "We decided to follow the Minnesota program of farmer-labor organization." Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Barnett, who attended some of the early farmer-labor committee meetings, recall that the OCF was patterned after Canadian Commonwealth groups, and Roy Hewitt, one of the incorporators, attributes the OCF to a local impulse to alleviate the distress caused by the Depression and the realize the brotherhood of man through a co-operative group. The Washington Commonwealth Federation, he thought, had nothing to do with it.²⁹

Unanimity about the inspiration for such an organization is scarcely to be expected. But it is obvious that the platform of the OCF, which the Oregonian attributed to Harry Gross, was drawn in large part from the platform of the Washington Commonwealth Federation and followed it verbatim in places. Much of the OCF constitution was also borrowed, including the disputed Article X. As Roy Hewitt said in his keynote address,

²⁹Minutes of the first OCF Convention, April 24-25, 1937; Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Barnett, July 3, 1962, and with Mr. Roy R. Hewitt, August 2, 1962.

"[t]he urge that called this convention is not peculiar to Oregon. . . .

What we are doing here today has its counterpart in Minnesota, North Dakota, Washington, California and Canada."³⁰

³⁰Portland Oregonian, May 28, 1937, p. 4; See Appendix B for the Platform of the WCF; Keynote Address by Roy R. Hewitt.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST YEAR: TRIALS AND TESTS

From the beginning some Oregonians saw the OCF as a distinct threat to the "American way of life." The Oregonian predicted that the Commonwealth Federation would have a hard time convincing many people that it was "anything less than a menace from Moscow"; the prediction soon proved to be correct. The Governor's secretary, W. L. Gosslin, was one of the first to detect the "menace," and he set about sharing his insight. Gosslin wrote to the Portland School Board informing them that a Franklin High School teacher, Miss Ruth Stone, had participated in a convention called by a branch of the Communist Party. The letter drew attention to the criticism of Governor Martin contained in the call to the OCF convention, and asked what the board thought of the "propriety of public school teachers publicly attacking the executive head of the state." Miss Stone denied she had "communistic leanings," and the School Board filed the letter without action. A similar attack was made on Dr. Smith at the University of Oregon without serious effect.¹

Others did not see red so quickly, but as the election of 1938 approached the "menace" of the Commonwealth Federation became obvious to

¹Portland Oregonian, May 28, 1937, p. 4; Salem Capital Journal, May 11, 1937, p. 7, and May 12, 1937, p. 3.

the editor of the Salem Capital Journal. The Journal charged that the first Commonwealth convention had been organized under the direction of the Communist Party, and that Morris Rappaport of the Communist Party had selected the officers and framed the resolutions. The paper urged political candidates to repudiate the "Commonwealth-Communist endorsement."²

The OCF, which had been watching the Salem paper since an earlier reference to the "Commonwealth-communists," denied the "clumsy libel." The Capital Journal, said Monroe Sweetland, was using an "old device of the desperate" in shouting "Communist at the top of its wrathful voice." When a retraction was not forthcoming from the Capital Journal, the OCF considered taking legal action but soon dropped the matter for lack of funds to pursue it successfully.³

The accusations of the Salem paper probably did the OCF little harm among its potential adherents, for the Commonwealth could point to the contrary judgment of the conservative but responsible Portland Oregonian. The Oregonian had little sympathy with the Federation, finding that "[s]ome of its advocacies are . . . impossible and others are fantastic." The Oregonian found that the OCF included "a few Communists" but also noted that the Commonwealth included most every other shade of "liberalism,

²Salem Capital Journal, October 20, 1938, p. 4.

³Ibid., May 10, 1938, p. 4; Statement by Monroe Sweetland, October 19, 1938; Sweetland to George Putnam, n.d.; "A Complaint in the Circuit Court, of the State of Oregon, for the County of Marion, Oregon Commonwealth Federation, Plaintiff and Capital Journal Publishing Company, Defendant"; Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, November 13, 1938.

radicalism and discontent," and that there was no evidence that the Commonwealth was connected with the Communist Party.⁴

More serious to the future of the OCF than the allegations of the Capital Journal or the criticism of the Oregonian were assaults upon the new organization from within organized labor itself. At its first convention, the OCF looked like a potential political force. It appeared to have the support of the State Federation of Labor, and it did not seem altogether impossible to win the backing of a substantial number of farmers, particularly members of the Grange, which was a traditional ally of the AFL. It soon became apparent, however, that even the AFL could not be taken for granted.

Instead of affiliating with the OCF immediately after the first convention, the Portland Central Labor Council decided to delay the matter for several weeks in order to give its affiliates time for discussion. Along with the notice of this decision, the council sent its affiliates copies of arguments for and against Article X of the OCF constitution. However, discussion of the Federation's constitution soon gave way to denunciation of the new organization in a pamphlet issued by Kelly Loe. Loe, who as editor of the Oregon Labor Press appeared to be the voice of the state leadership of the AFL, complained that a Communist had been chairman of one of the important Commonwealth convention committees while outstanding liberals of the labor movement had been neglected. Ben Osborne's role as midwife for the OCF had been presumed to signify labor's acceptance of

⁴Portland Oregonian, May 15, 1937, p. 8, and May 28, 1937, p. 4.

the new organization, commented the Oregonian, but Loe's pamphlet had withdrawn the AFL's "blessing from the babe and . . . placed the infant, by implication at least, on the doorstep of the communists."⁵

In June the State Federation of Labor convention advised unions affiliated with the AFL not to join the Commonwealth, but the fundamental reason for rejecting the OCF was not specified until November, 1937. Osborne then wrote: "Commonwealth is only the back door to the CIO. So, A.F. of L. unions are being solicited to accept a semi-affiliation with CIO by joining the Commonwealth."⁶

The AFL's hostility to the OCF was due neither to the OCF's constitution nor to the alleged presence of Communists. The hostility was caused by the break between the Committee for Industrial Organization and the American Federation of Labor. Ramifications of this break were felt strongly in the Northwest, and the OCF inevitably became involved in the controversy swirling around the CIO, for the OCF included a number of unions that cast their lots with John L. Lewis.

The most important of these unions to the OCF and the one which was the immediate cause of labor warfare in Oregon was the Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union. In 1934 the AFL placed Northwest lumber unions under the jurisdiction of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Many lumber workers were dissatisfied with the imposed leadership of the conservative Carpenters, particularly during the long lumber strike of

⁵Oregon Labor Press, May 7, 1937, p. 1, and May 14, 1937, p. 1; Portland Oregonian, May 28, 1937, p. 4.

⁶Oregon Labor Press, July 2, 1937, p. 2, and November 19, 1937, p. 1.

1935. In 1936 the lumber workers began a flirtation with the CIO, and in July, 1937 -- just a few months after the first OCF convention -- representatives of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union met in Portland. Here they took the name of International Woodworkers of America (IWA) and joined the CIO.⁷

The Carpenters responded to this defection by instructing all locals that

our members must not handle any lumber or mill work manufactured by any operator who employs C.I.O. . . . Let your watchword be "No C.I.O. lumber or mill work in your district," and let them know you mean it.⁸

The Carpenters did their best, and scarcely two years after the strike of 1935, Oregon and the Northwest were again in the grip of violent labor turmoil. This time the struggle was a three-ring circus between employers, the CIO, and the AFL, with Governor Martin ranting in the background. In this struggle "Portland became the battleground upon which was fought one of the most bitter and involved controversies over jurisdiction that the labor movement has ever experienced."⁹

This intra-labor controversy obviously held dire peril for the new Commonwealth Federation, which depended upon united labor backing as the beachhead from which to gain ground among other progressive groups. It could turn to no other comparable base of support; farm groups were

⁷Vernon H. Jensen, Lumber and Labor (New York, 1945), chs. 9-11.

⁸Carpenter's circular of August 11, 1937, in Walter Galenson, The CIO Challenge to the AFL; A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935-1941 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 387.

⁹Jensen, Lumber and Labor, 215. Both Galenson and Jensen discuss the labor warfare and the character of the IWA.

cautious, almost cold, and beside labor and a few farmers the first OCF convention had attracted only a motley assortment of study clubs and rival pension groups. In order to pursue even these prospects, the Federation needed money, and for this labor unions were the most promising source. The leaders of the OCF were also committed emotionally and theoretically to the cause of the working class. For both ideological and practical reasons the Commonwealth needed united support from labor, but this support was dissolving, and labor's warfare threatened to alienate the middle-class and farm support which the OCF also required.

The OCF attempted to meet the crisis by standing above the storm and deploring its existence. Commonwealth officials tirelessly called for unity in labor and denounced disorder. Despite the attacks of the AFL hierarchy upon the OCF, ten members of AFL unions served on the OCF's board of directors and persistently appealed to their AFL brethren to join the Commonwealth. It was imperative, they believed, that labor be united politically despite "minor" disagreements. Pointing out that labor's disunity played into the hands of labor haters like Governor Martin, these OCF members urged unaffiliated AFL locals to send "fraternal" delegates to the convention of the OCF in December, 1937, which would shape plans for the political campaign of 1938.¹⁰

While calling for unity in labor, the OCF attempted to minimize labor's responsibility for the strife by emphasizing the role of "reactionary public officials" who blew up the "so-called fight in the ranks of labor for the purpose of cutting wages and discrediting labor." The

¹⁰Statement of the OCF on Labor Disorder, n.d.; Ruth Stone and others to AFL locals, December 7, 1937.

OCF believed that support of the National Labor Relations Board's decisions by public officials would do much to reduce the tension, and they had good reason to think that this support was missing. In October the NLRB found majorities favorable to the CIO in six major Portland mills. Governor Martin announced in December that he was dissatisfied with the result of the election in one of these mills and would conduct his own election. Explaining his action to a Senate committee several years later, Martin said:

I was told by the employers in the Poulsen mill, which is the biggest mill . . . that a decided majority of that mill was A.F. of L. . . . I said, "I am not going to call an election here unless I know that you have a majority, because I want this election to be a cinch. I don't want to get licked. I want this thing to go A.F. of L." . . . I made those fellows-- I had to wait 2 weeks to bring me the cards that the A.F. of L. would carry that election, and at last they produced them.

The IWA carried the election, and that, Martin complained, had "spoiled the whole business."¹¹

The OCF demanded that public officials cease interfering in labor's choice of bargaining agent and that they protect rival labor organizations from each other. In September, Stephenson Smith wrote to the Portland City Council demanding protection for Portland workers from the "reign of terroristic violence" which had been imposed on them because of their choice of labor organization. When Mayor Joseph Carson protested that there was no reign of terror, Monroe Sweetland compiled a list of

¹¹Resolutions passed at the second OCF Convention, December, 18-19 1937; National Labor Relations Act and Proposed Amendments, Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, 76 Cong., 1st-3rd Sess. (Washington, 1939), 1481-82.

twenty-seven acts of violence which had come to his attention in the previous two weeks. In most of the incidents CIO trucks had been dumped, or CIO tugboats bombarded from Portland bridges with bullets, bottles, or boulders.¹²

Although the OCF's pleas for unity in labor, support of the NLRB, and an end to violence seem both reasonable and innocuous, the leadership of the AFL did not find them so. Unity, even on the political front, implied recognizing the vigor of the CIO. The AFL found this untenable, and the State Federation of Labor convention of 1938 declared that "A.F. of L. unions cannot compromise with C.I.O. or enter into joint action with it, either in industry or politics."¹³

Nor was the AFL enthusiastic about the NLRB, which they maintained was biased in favor of the CIO. In urging law enforcement, the OCF was also stepping on the AFL's toes. All of the violence during this period was certainly not perpetrated by members of AFL unions, and the officials of the Stated Federation of Labor deplored violence. But a "goon squad" of Dave Beck's teamsters seems to have been responsible for much of the violence, and the teamsters were in the AFL.¹⁴

It would have been almost impossible to find a more neutral position in the turmoil than the one taken by the OCF; yet the AFL continued to

¹²S. Stephenson Smith to the Portland City Council, September 9, 1937; Sweetland to Mayor Joseph K. Carson, September 18, 1937.

¹³"The Position of the Oregon State Federation of Labor on the Commonwealth Federation," June 23, 1938.

¹⁴Jensen, Lumber and Labor, 216-17; Neuberger, Our Promised Land, 212-14.

attack the Commonwealth. In 1938 -- an election year -- the convention of the State Federation of Labor passed a strong recommendation against AFL locals affiliating or allying with the Commonwealth "on its general program or in support of or opposition to any candidate or measure."

Noting that Harry Bridges had admitted that the Oregon and Washington Commonwealth Federations were "organizations similar to the Lewis Non-Partisan League," the convention went on to declare the OCF a "political fungus growth" that menaced good government; the AFL would "resist its penetration into the political affairs of the state."¹⁵

Some AFL locals and union members ignored such pronouncements, but these attacks hurt the Commonwealth. It is impossible to tell from the OCF files just how many AFL unions did affiliate with the OCF; however, a list of organizations represented at the OCF convention of May, 1938, includes only three AFL locals and only one is listed for the fall convention.¹⁶

A few members of AFL unions worked as individuals in the OCF despite attacks upon them in the Oregon Labor Press and harassment within their unions. S. P. Stevens, president of Local 43 of the International Association of Firefighters, had been selected by the Portland Central Labor Council as a delegate to the first OCF convention and was elected to the OCF board of directors at that time. In August, 1937, another member of

¹⁵"The Position of the Oregon State Federation of Labor on the Commonwealth Federation," June 23, 1938.

¹⁶Official delegates list, third OCF Convention, May 7, 1938; List of delegates registered for the fourth OCF Convention, October 16, 1938. The OCF kept some kind of a file of its affiliates, but this is not in the OCF Papers.

Local 43 requested that Stevens be tried for espousing the cause of the CIO, associating with radicals and Communists, and defending the Oregon Commonwealth Federation. Stevens apparently withstood the onslaught, for he continued as president of Local 43. The young secretary of the Retail Clerks local in Eugene, however, was suspended from his office because of his activities in the OCF. He reported that the business agent of the local said they were kicking Commonwealth sympathizers out as fast as they could catch up with them, because the "O.C.F. was 'the back door to the CIO.'" ¹⁷

To support his accusation that the OCF was essentially a CIO front, Osborne cited the fact that six of the Commonwealth directors were active in the CIO. He neglected to mention that even more were members of AFL unions. These he dismissed with the remark that those "who still retain their membership in A.F. of L. unions, are boring from within in the interests of C.I.O." There is no evidence that these persons were "boring from within," but they apparently were more concerned than was Osborne about a divided and politically impotent labor movement. ¹⁸

While the Commonwealth's leaders genuinely deplored disunity in labor and were eager to have the support of the AFL, it does seem to have been true that the sympathy of the majority of them was with the CIO. This is hardly surprising, for there were many young people in the group as well as a few former Wobblies, several Socialists, and an occa-

¹⁷A. J. Dooney to Local 43, International Association of Firefighters, August 9, 1937; Charles Paddock, Jr. to Heinie [Esterly], January 8, 1938.

¹⁸Oregon Labor Press, November 19, 1937, p. 1.

sional Communist sympathizer. The group shared a common disaffection from the status quo -- and in the labor movement, the AFL represented the status quo. Even had there not been this sympathetic response to the CIO, the antagonism of the AFL to both new organizations would have made the CIO and the OCF natural allies. And allies they became.

October 1, 1937, saw the first edition of the Labor Newdealer, a weekly newspaper edited by Bob Wilmot, who was a member of the Commonwealth board of directors. The paper was sponsored by the Portland Unity Council, which purported to consist of both AFL and CIO unions interested in preventing a split in the labor movement. In fact, the Council seems to have been a halfway house for unions moving into the CIO, and the sympathies of the Council were reflected in its paper. The Labor Newdealer consistently lambasted the policies and officials of the AFL, and pursued Kelly Loe with particular relish. Week after week the Newdealer carried a column which featured such tidbits as:

Kelly had a little herring
Its scales he painted red,
And now in place of argument
He waves that fish instead.¹⁹

News of both the CIO and the OCF, on the other hand, received solicitous attention. Monroe Sweetland issued press releases on the slightest provocation, and these appeared regularly in the Newdealer if nowhere else. When the Labor Unity Council gave way to the frankly CIO Portland Industrial Union Council, the Labor Newdealer continued the same editorial policies as the organ of the new council.²⁰

¹⁹Labor Newdealer, particularly October 1, 1937, and October 22, 1937. Most issues of the Labor Newdealer can be found in the library of the Oregon Historical Society in Portland.

²⁰Ibid., December 24, 1937.

The bond between the OCF and CIO was strengthened by the establishment of an informal working relationship between the OCF and Labor's Non-Partisan League. The League had been established under the leadership of John L. Lewis before the suspension of the CIO unions from the AFL in the fall of 1936. After this its AFL members gradually dropped out, and the League became the political arm of the CIO. The purpose of the League was to promote legislation favorable to labor through farmer-labor political co-operation, and the League signed a political pact with the National Farmers' Union in the fall of 1937. The League also urged strong precinct organization and support of the New Deal.²¹

Shortly after the first OCF convention, Stephenson Smith began to explore the possibility of having the Commonwealth Federation designated as a "kind of holding company" for the League in Oregon so that a rival organization would not be established in the state. In October, E. L. Oliver, executive secretary of the League, conferred with the leaders of the OCF during a brief visit to Portland. A few weeks later the OCF began receiving installments of a loan from the League to be used for organizational work in agricultural areas.²²

Far more important to the OCF than the financial aid from the League was the contact with Washington, D.C., that Oliver's office provided. The OCF was in no position to maintain a representative in

²¹Pamphlet, Labor's Non-Partisan League, Its Origin and Growth (1939); Labor's Non-Partisan League, Organizing Letters, particularly no. 14, September 15, 1939. The Oregon Labor Press carried new releases from the League during 1936, but in 1938 William Green publicly condemned the League. Oregon Labor Press, April 8, 1938, p. 1.

²²Smith to Sweetland, June 1, 1937; Sweetland to E. L. Oliver, November 2, 1937.

Washington; yet to make its limited weight felt it needed to know what was going on behind the scenes in the capital. In addition to providing this kind of information, the League encouraged the leaders of the OCF in their desire to develop precinct organizations. Much of what limited success the OCF enjoyed can be attributed to these factors -- contacts in Washington and precinct organization.

Intra-labor conflict severely handicapped the OCF's attempts to carry out its various promises to the working class, but it went to bat for labor where it could. One of the planks in the platform called for an adequate program of low-cost public housing, and in the fall of 1937 the Federation began a major effort to have a Public Housing Authority established in Portland. In September President Roosevelt signed the Wagner-Steagall Act, and immediately a Portland Committee on Rents and Housing appeared which included persons concerned with housing conditions from church, labor, women's, and minority organizations. The Portland Committee had no formal connection with the OCF, but it was obviously a broader version of a previous housing committee of the OCF, which had now assumed an independent character in order that "the hostility of the Mayor and Governor to . . . the Federation would not injure the housing program." The chairman and secretary of the OCF committee became chairman and secretary of the new committee, and Sweetland was also active in the new group.²³

The Portland Committee became a thorn in the side of the City

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²³Sweetland to Herman Kehrli, October 9, 1937.

Council and the real estate interests. In October it secured a hearing before the Council which resulted in the Council appointing a committee of experts to investigate Portland housing conditions. Four months later the experts reported in favor of creating a Housing Authority, but the Council did nothing about the report for another four months and in June, 1938, passed the buck to the voters by placing the matter on the ballot for the election in November, although the Council itself was empowered under Oregon law to establish a housing authority.²⁴

In addition to the labor situation, the leaders of the OCF had other problems during the organization's first year. On the day following the first convention of the OCF, G. W. Ward, a leader in the pension movement, wrote to Monroe Sweetland. Ward was disturbed by the "noticeable fact that farm representatives were conspicuous by their absence" from the convention. He was not alone in his concern.²⁵

Leaders of the Commonwealth tried in two ways to improve the relationship between their organization and farmers; one method involved a major political issue, while the other less dramatic approach involved the slow work of gaining contacts and organizing for the Federation in farming districts. Both approaches involved dealings with the two chief

²⁴William L. Brunner, "The Development of Federal Public Housing Policies and the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon," unpublished B.A. thesis (Reed College, 1948), deals with attempts from 1937 to 1941 to get a Public Housing Authority in Portland, but does not mention the OCF. On the role of the OCF see: Sweetland to Bob [possibly columnist Robert S. Allen], October 21, 1938; H. M. Esterly, Sr. to Smith, March 15, 1938; Oregon Commonwealth Housing Program by Smith, n.d. [fall, 1937]; Portland Committee on Rents and Housing, Agenda, Housing Hearing, October 18, 1937.

²⁵G. H. Ward to OCF, April 26, 1937.

farm organizations in Oregon -- the powerful State Grange and the Farmers' Union.

The Grange was by far the larger of the two organizations. In 1937 it claimed a membership of 21,000 with units in every part of the state. Throughout this period of turmoil in labor the leadership of the Grange was undoubtedly sympathetic to its organization's old ally, the AFL, and hence cautious in regard to the Commonwealth Federation. Even had this not been so, the leaders of the Grange would have been inhibited from an open alliance with the OCF both by the Grange's prohibition against partisan political activity and by periodic threats from more conservative Grangers. As the alliance between the CIO and the OCF developed, some Grangers became openly hostile to the OCF, but many leaders of the Commonwealth were members of the Grange, and the OCF had good friends in such prominent Grangers as Dr. Albert Slaughter, Dr. C. H. Bailey, editor of the Grange Bulletin, and Morton Tompkins, Overseer of the State Grange. Although not openly friendly, State Grange Master Ray Gill was quite willing to work with the OCF on projects of common concern. Gill consistently defended the traditional Grange policy of co-operating with labor, and rejected efforts to have the farmers pull "the chestnuts out of the fire for large corporation employers." He was wary of the radical labor leaders who emerged during the rapid unionization of the thirties, but expressed confidence that responsible leadership would develop as the new unionists gained experience.²⁶

²⁶Oregon Grange Bulletin, February 24, 1937, p. 12; July 5, 1937, p. 2; March 20, 1938, p. 11; Sweetland to A. C. Heyman, September 20, 1937. Sweetland, Smith, Hewitt, Heyman, Neuberger, and Dr. J. F. Hosch were among the leaders of the OCF who were also members of the Grange.

In contrast to the Grange, the Farmers' Union was mainly confined to western Oregon, and most of its 2600 member families were in the northern Willamette Valley. The National Farmers' Union had close ties with the CIO, and a few of the OCF's more radical members were also members of the Farmers' Union. But the leadership of the Oregon Farmers' Union was cautious about getting too chummy with labor, or with the friends of labor in the OCF.²⁷

In November, 1937, the OCF, with the aid of seventy-five dollars from Labor's Non-Partisan League, sent former missionary and State Senator Byron G. Carney on a month's tour of the Willamette Valley to carry the good news of the Commonwealth Federation to farmers. Carney seemed to have no trouble finding groups with which to talk, but whatever gains the tour made for the OCF were certainly not immediate. Only nineteen representatives from fourteen farm organizations -- five Granges, six Farmers' Unions, and three co-operatives -- attended the second convention of the OCF in December.²⁸

When the OCF encountered the lukewarm attitude of the Farmers' Union officials and the Grange's prohibition against direct affiliation, they hit upon the expedient of setting up OCF Clubs to enroll farmers and other interested parties. These clubs paid dues and were represented at conventions on the same basis as other affiliates of the Federation. Although the OCF claimed a score of such clubs, this writer has found

²⁷Oregon Farmer, June 10, 1937, p. 6; Charles E. Nelson to Sweetland, June 30, 1937; Sweetland to Heyman, May 25, 1937.

²⁸Labor Newdealer, November 12, 1937; Mailing list of delegates to the second OCF Convention, December 18-19, 1937.

mention of but half that number, and even these seem to have been active only sporadically.²⁹

The Commonwealth was dedicated not only to winning the friendship of farmers, but also to fostering political co-operation between farmers and labor. Progress was slow, and there was danger that Governor Martin's inflammatory statements would strike a responsive chord with enough farmers to destroy even the meager result of the OCF's work. A remark the Governor made in Grants Pass was not unique. There he was reported to have said, "I hope the good old American farmer will reach for his pitchfork" if labor should attempt to disrupt the harvest.³⁰

In response to this remark an OCF farm committee composed of members of the Farmers' Union and Grange rushed off a letter to the Portland Central Labor Council. The letter was written to "disassociate Oregon farmers . . . [from Martin's] un-American attempt to foment class warfare, and to incite force and violence." It concluded with the characteristic Commonwealth touch: "our only security against reaction lies in cooperation and joint action in the political field."³¹

In February, 1938, there was trouble at a market in Portland when some "farmers" attempted to deliver potatoes. According to the "farmers," union men insisted on unloading the potatoes and a scuffle ensued for

²⁹Sweetland to Harry W. Laidler, December 11, 1937.

³⁰Salem Capital Journal, May 26, 1937, p. 11.

³¹Heyman and others to Phil Brady, May 26, 1937.

which the "farmers" conveniently were armed with pitchforks. The Governor hastily offered to send state police to maintain order. This time the farm-labor relations committee of the State Grange responded. The committee investigated the incident and reported that the "farmers" admitted that they were not delivering their own potatoes but were operating a truck for hire; that they had telephoned photographers on their way to Portland to warn them there would be trouble; that they had attempted to start a fight; and that they had received a letter from Governor Martin congratulating them for their efforts. Although the "farmers" later denied this report, the committee stuck to its conclusion that the incident was "prearranged." Needless to say, the OCF was delighted with the committee's report.³²

Setting up OCF Clubs and denouncing the Governor were relatively ineffectual in achieving the ends of the OCF, but the Commonwealth held more powerful bait with which to lure farmers, particularly Grangers, into co-operation if not affiliation. The lure was the OCF's stand for public power, which, happily, also appealed to labor and middle-class progressives.

The specific issue in 1937 was the use to be made of hydroelectric power from Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River. Although the dam had been under construction for four years and was scheduled to begin operation in late 1937, by the spring of 1937 Congress had not yet made any provision for marketing the power.

³²Portland Oregon Journal, February 4, 1938, p. 17; Salem Capital Journal, February 5, p. 2; Oregon Grange Bulletin, February 20, 1938, p. 14.

In Oregon there were but two sides to the debate. Partisans on one side included Governor Martin and other leading Democrats, private power companies, and the Portland Chamber of Commerce. This group maintained that the people were "just choked" with electricity and that consequently industry was the only possible market for the power. To attract the necessary industry, Bonneville must offer it the lowest possible rates -- large blocks of power should be available at the dam site for a rate which would cover only the cost of generating the power. The cost of transmitting power from the dam should be borne by users of that power in proportion to their distance from the dam. As Walter Pierce noted, along with attracting industry to the Columbia Gorge, this plan would keep Bonneville power from interfering with the high rates of private power companies in Portland and elsewhere.

The most vocal opponents of this plan included the Grange, organized labor, the OCF, and Walter Pierce. With rhetoric reminiscent of Populist days, this group harangued against the evils of Wall Street capitalists who wished to monopolize another great natural resource so that they could continue to bilk the public with exorbitant rates. Professor Smith succinctly expressed their attitude: "We don't want the big boys to grease their snouts in the trough until the common people have had first chance at the cheapest power in the world."³³

³³Smith to Lillian Herstein, June 1, 1937. Spokesmen for both sides of the controversy present their cases in Hearings before the Committee on Rivers and Harbors, House of Representatives, on H. R. 7642 (Washington, 1937), 75 Cong., 1st Sess., and in Conference on the Distribution of Bonneville Power, printed in the University of Oregon Commonwealth Service Series (Eugene, 1937), II, no. 4. The controversy is summarized by Neuberger in the Portland Oregonian,

The OCF and its allies heartily endorsed FDR's plan for federal power projects to serve as "yardsticks" of fair power costs, forcing down the rates of private companies. This purpose could be achieved only if the power were available to as many people as possible at the lowest possible rate. To insure this result the group urged state or federal construction of major transmission lines, blanket rates over large areas, preference for public agencies in distribution of the power, and reservation of 50 per cent of the power for several years to give public-power districts time to organize.

For Walter Pierce, public-power development was the most pressing issue of the day. When not preparing a speech on the subject for the Congressional Record, he was busy entreating his Oregon friends, including the officers of the Commonwealth, to forsake side issues and give their all for public power. In the Seventy-fifth Congress Pierce introduced a bill incorporating his views on the marketing of Bonneville power. Hearings were held on the subject in late spring, 1937, and after Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes endorsed the principles of the Pierce bill, it was reported out of the House Rivers and Harbors Committee with only minor changes.³⁴

Throughout the spring of 1937 Oregon Granges sent resolutions to Washington in support of "Brother" Pierce's stand on Bonneville. By the

September 26, 1937, mag. sec., 13, and February 16, 1938, III, 6. Most issues of the Oregon Grange Bulletin during the thirties refer to the power issue. Walter Pierce expressed himself frequently in the Congressional Record, 75 Cong., 1st Sess.

³⁴Pierce to Smith, June 25, 1937.

end of May the Commonwealth Federation entered the act and arranged "Save Bonneville" meetings wherever sponsors could be found -- Astoria, St. Helens, McMinnville, Milwaukie, Salem, Eugene, Bend, Klamath Falls. These meetings served as a platform for OCF speakers, passed appropriate resolutions on Bonneville, provided a convenient opportunity to sign up members for the OCF and organize OCF Clubs.³⁵

In connection with the "Save Bonneville" meetings, the OCF organized a "Bonneville Caravan." To this all-day picnic near the dam progressives from farm and factory were invited to hear how the "Insulls of Oregon, with their Martins, their Carsons and their Corbetts and other stooges in high places, have been fighting for their 'right' to grab still more gravy and graft from the people of Oregon." In spite of a steady down-pour some two hundred people showed up to view the "new Bridge of the Gods" and hear the message -- including a long one from Secretary Ickes.³⁶

In August President Roosevelt signed the Bonneville legislation. Although the legislation embodied all the principles for which the advocates of public power had been fighting, the application of these principles depended upon a sympathetic administrator. J. D. Ross, former

³⁵Illustrative of resolutions sent to Pierce are those from Sheridan Pomona Grange, April 23, 1937, and Harding Grange No. 122, June 13, 1937, Walter M. Pierce Papers (Oregon Collection, University of Oregon Library, Eugene); Oregon Commonwealth Federation News, n.d. [June, 1937].

³⁶Flyer, "Join the Bonneville Caravan"; unsigned letter from OCF to Pierce, June 23, 1937; Harry Slattery to Smith, June 11, 1937, with attached statement of Harold Ickes.

administrator of the Seattle municipal power system and vice-president of the American Public Ownership League, was thought to be a likely candidate for the post. Governor Martin took the lead in attacking the candidacy of Ross and called a meeting at the Multnomah Hotel to organize the anti-Ross forces. The OCF promptly had one of its members, Assemblyman Dr. J. F. Hosch, call a meeting of the leading advocates of public power at the same hotel, and although Hosch invited only nine or ten people, the Grange Bulletin reports that nearly three hundred showed up. On the motion of Stephenson Smith this meeting organized the People's Power League, with Hosch as chairman, to campaign for the appointment of Ross.

The OCF had been planning a picnic in late August and hastily turned over the picnic date and site to the new League for its organizational rally. Over a thousand people attended the rally, which passed resolutions urging the appointment of Ross and the immediate formation of People's Utility Districts, and elected permanent officers. The OCF had endorsed a slate of officers for the major positions in the People's Power League, and the whole slate was successfully elected.³⁷

When President Roosevelt made a brief visit to Oregon in late September, the opposing factions seized the occasion to gain his attention for their claims for or against Ross. The OCF mustered a crowd, reported to number three thousand, armed with posters to greet the

³⁷Oregon Grange Bulletin, January 20, 1938, p. 2; Minutes of the OCF Executive Committee, August 14, 1937; Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, August 28, 1937; Report of the executive secretary to the OCF Board of Directors, August 28, 1937; Sweetland to Will Puustinen, August 30, 1937.

President at the west end of the Ross Island Bridge in Portland. The previous evening the public-power forces, under the disguise of the "Plain People of Oregon Reception Committee," had held a rally to welcome the President and urge the appointment of Ross. As Oregon's leading Democrat, Martin had an opportunity to gain the President's ear, but to no avail. At Bonneville the Governor sat dourly by while Roosevelt dedicated power from the dam for use in homes and on farms, and a few weeks later the President appointed Ross.³⁸

The battle of Bonneville was not finished with the appointment of Ross; it had only been joined. The battlefield now shifted from Washington, D. C., to the counties where attempts were made to form People's Utility Districts. On this field the battle outlasted the CCF.

Although the public-power people all appeared to be working toward the same goal, feuds rent the movement. Conflict apparently revolved around the question of leadership and grew out of distrust caused by divergent views on the issue of labor. J. L. Steinback, a director of the first PUD in Oregon, wrote to Sweetland in June, 1937, complaining of the lack of co-operation among the advocates of public power:

Whenever I sit in with some of you fellows you are cussing [Albert] Streiff, [Herman] Lafky, Theissen and others of that group as anti-Labor and whenever I run into some one from that crowd I hear that you guys are a bunch of Communists.

"Now how in hell," asked Steinback, "are we ever going to win this fight if this is allowed to go on?"³⁹

³⁸Labor Newdealer, October 1, 1937; Flyer, "Welcome the President"; Portland Oregonian, September 28, 1937, p. 1, and October 11, 1937, p. 1.

³⁹J. L. Steinback to Sweetland, June 17, 1937.

Mrs. Grace Charlton, wife of a Tillamook doctor, also wondered. She complained that "the sum total of work done is to foster a sorry mess of petty rivalry," and warned Sweetland that the OCF could expect little co-operation from Herman Lafky and other Grangers, as "I understand that they have decided your group is communistic."⁴⁰

Discord broke out in the ranks of the People's Power League a few weeks after it was formed. The original incorporators of the League included, in addition to Hosch, AFL officials Ben Osborne and George McDonald; Herman Lafky, an attorney from Salem who numbered the AFL among his clients; Sam Brown, a Gervais farmer active in the Farmers' Union; Charles Thomas, former state Utility Commissioner; and A. M. Church, editor of the Salem Capital Press. The majority of this group refused to accept the election of the "liberal" officers at the rally in August. This particular row apparently was settled, for the People's Power League operated during the following winter. In January, 1938, Hosch announced his candidacy for the governorship and resigned as president of the League. Yet early in April the League's board of directors suddenly ousted Hosch as president and George M. Clevenger as treasurer, citing the unauthorized publication of a pamphlet attacking the stand of the Oregon Voter on public power. According to the directors, the League had not authorized any such publication, which they

⁴⁰Grace M. Charlton to Sweetland, June 1, 1937.

said came from "the Hosch crowd" -- that is, from the Commonwealth crowd.⁴¹

It is not surprising that only one new PUD was formed in Oregon during 1938.⁴² The prestige of being associated with a victorious cause would have greatly enhanced the position of the OCF, but aside from reducing the likelihood of victory, the dissension within the power ranks probably did not hurt the OCF too much. The feud was sufficiently veiled that probably few people beyond those directly involved were aware of it. At any rate it received little publicity in the daily press or in the Grange or labor papers. However, the OCF gained from the public-power movement publicity that associated it with the position of the thoroughly respectable Oregon State Grange.

From the beginning of the OCF both its critics and its supporters looked forward to the elections of 1938 as the first real test of the Commonwealth's mettle. As 1937 drew to a close, the OCF's prospects looked dim; it had not realized its anticipated support from either farmers or laborers. Nevertheless, the leaders were eager to enter the fray and trained for the campaign by attacking Governor Martin at every opportunity. The Governor was to be the Commonwealth's greatest asset, for unity against a common foe was much easier to achieve than unity on a positive program.

⁴¹Dr. J. F. Hosch to Sweetland, September 16, 1937, October 14, 1937, and October 19, 1937; Hosch to the Directors of the People's Power League, January 29, 1938; Portland Oregon Journal, April 1, 1938, p. 1. Lafky and Brown were reported to be in sympathy with the Associated Farmers, Madie Lippe to Sweetland, February 18, 1938. Church and Clevenger were members of the OCF.

⁴²Eleventh Annual Report of the Hydroelectric Commission of Oregon, For the Period July 1, 1941 to June 30, 1942, p. 26.

In December 1937, the OCF announced that the battle to defeat Governor Martin was on, and pledged itself to "remove forever from public office the man who has ridden rough-shod over the rights of every citizen who is not his crony in the Chamber of Commerce." To open the campaign they imported Minnesota's farmer-labor governor, Elmer Benson, to show Oregonians what a "Real Governor" was like.⁴³

Having opened the campaign, the OCF stood in some need of a candidate. In late January Dr. Hosch announced his candidacy for the governorship on the Democratic ticket. The prospect for Hosch looked bright, and the OCF's leaders were delighted. Sweetland was sure Hosch could get support from the rank and file of the AFL and began setting up political committees in AFL locals to circumvent the state leadership if necessary. However, on the last day for filing, Hosch withdrew in favor of young Henry L. Hess of LaGrande. Hess was an active liberal state senator and frequently appeared at public-power programs. During the previous summer the OCF and labor groups had backed him unsuccessfully for a position as a federal judge.⁴⁴

In addition to Martin, the OCF was particularly unhappy with the incumbent in the first Congressional district, Representative James A. Mott. The OCF's strategists thought Byron G. Carney would be a strong progressive candidate on the Democratic ticket, but in the last minute shuffle at the end of the filing period, both Carney and another pro-

⁴³Flyer, "Can Governor Martin be Defeated?"; Labor Newdealer, December 3, 1937.

⁴⁴Sweetland to Oliver, January 31, 193[8], and May 2, 1938; Sweetland to Hewitt, June 16, 1937.

gressive withdrew, and with them went any real hope for unseating Mott.⁴⁵

Outside of northwestern Oregon, where it was strongest, the Commonwealth did little to encourage progressives to run for the state legislature or for local office. In Columbia and Clatsop counties the OCF made a successful attempt to bring representative persons together from the Grange, Farmers' Union, AFL, and CIO. This group formed a political strategy committee and sought out candidates behind whom all progressives could unite. Here the CIO and AFL worked together, for the Astoria Central Labor Council officers agreed with the CIO men that "[w]e should forget our union fight and unite on the political front."⁴⁶

The OCF also made an effort during the primary campaign to get New Deal Democrats to run for precinct committee positions. Sweetland wrote to one prospect that "[i]t is apparent . . . that many precincts in the County have neither a committeeman or committeewoman at the present time. The set-up is wide open for the OCF to move in." This effort was of minor proportions in 1938, but it did foreshadow a later technique of the OCF.⁴⁷

Of more significance at the time was the effort to get the membership of affiliated organizations registered to vote. Sweetland had the membership of Portland IWA Local 3 checked against the lists of voters

⁴⁵Sweetland to Oliver, May 2, 1938.

⁴⁶Max Gardner to Sweetland, February 13, 1938; Sweetland to Pearl Becker, March 17, 1938; Manley Wilson to Sweetland, March 31, 1938; Gardner to Sweetland, n.d.

⁴⁷Sweetland to Mrs. Selby, February 14, 1938.

and was appalled to find that only 36 per cent of the 3851 members were registered. Other unions were checked, and all but one very small union had less than 50 per cent of their membership registered to vote. After making this discovery in the Portland area, Sweetland urged CIO locals as well as AFL locals to set up political committees to get union members registered. By letter, postcard, flyer, and news bulletin, Sweetland pounded away with the message "To Vote Against Governor Martin in the May 20th Primary, you must be Registered Democratic!"⁴⁸

Two weeks before the primary election, the OCF held its third convention, which was devoted to endorsing candidates for state and district offices. By this time few of the endorsements were in doubt. The Commonwealth was officially nonpartisan, but the convention endorsed no Republicans. The OCF unanimously favored Senator Hess for governor over their archenemy, Governor Martin, and a candidate with a euphonious name but erratic views, O. Henry Oleen. Martin retaliated by calling the OCF conference a "convention of 250 nuts."⁴⁹

Willis Mahoney, who had given Senator Charles McNary a scare in 1936, was endorsed by the Commonwealth to try for Oregon's other seat in the Senate, and the two incumbent Democratic representatives, Walter M. Pierce and Mrs. Nan Wood Honeyman, also received backing from the OCF. Among the other candidates endorsed were Mrs. Emily Edson for

⁴⁸Sweetland to Oliver, March 5, 1938; to Elmer D. West, February 11, 1938; to Hale Bankson, January 19, 1938; Postcard sent by OCF, April 11, 1938.

⁴⁹Minutes of the third OCF Convention, May 7, 1938; Portland Oregonian, May 13, 1938, p. 3.

secretary of state and, of course, the OCF's own Roy Hewitt for Supreme Court position number two. The delegates concluded the convention with a resolution to build a bigger and better OCF and went home.⁵⁰

Shortly before the state convention, conferences of Commonwealth affiliates had been held in Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Clatsop, and Columbia counties to endorse local candidates, particularly for the state legislature. Along with a good many ardent Commonwealthers, the Multnomah County conference endorsed S. Eugene Allen, president of the AFL Office Employees' Union, and Phil Brady, president of the Portland Central Labor Council. Both of these men were bitter critics of the Commonwealth, and Sweetland explained this action as a "gesture of goodwill toward the Labor Temple which makes the way easier for our forces in the A.F. of L., and makes the anti-OCF campaign of the die-hards commensurately more difficult."⁵¹

The position of the AFL in the campaign was somewhat ambiguous. For Supreme Court position number two, the State Federation of Labor's executive board endorsed the eighty-six year-old incumbent for another six-year term. When the board's endorsements were made public the Salem Trades and Labor Council endorsed Roy Hewitt for the position and requested that the board reconsider its endorsement of the incumbent. Ben Osborne answered this request with a letter to all AFL unions

⁵⁰Minutes of the third OCF Convention, May 7, 1938.

⁵¹Minutes of Multnomah County Conference, May 1, 1938; Minutes of Clackamas County Progressive Political Conference, April 2, 1938; OCF to Progressive Groups in Washington County, n.d.; Wilson to Sweetland, March 31, 1938; Sweetland to Oliver, May 2, 1938.

repeating his charge that the Commonwealth was a CIO front and pointing out that Hewitt had the support of the OCF and was active in that organization. Yet the Portland Central Labor Council, while attacking some candidates for their connections with the OCF, endorsed others with equally close ties, including a candidate who is said to have been endorsed by the OCF for the sole purpose of defeating a prominent AFL candidate with a very similar name.⁵²

Despite qualms about candidates with the backing of the OCF, the AFL endorsed Hess, and Sweetland reported with a faint slur at the AFL's political savvy, that they were working as energetically "as they know how" for the election of Hess. In fact, the AFL had no other choice. Having decided that "[p]olitically and socially . . . [Martin] is a Neanderthal man, swinging a club at any who dares to disagree with him," the AFL could hardly avoid concluding that the "only way to eliminate Martin in the primary is by supporting Senator Hess."⁵³

The Governor campaigned for re-election as a New Dealer. About all he could say in support of this claim was that "he rode all day with the President and that Jim Farley wrote him a letter," but the claim bothered Hess's supporters. Sweetland fired off a telegram to Thomas Corcoran entreating him to get Ickes or Senator George Norris to endorse Hess. Five days before the election Norris wired that although he and his friends had once thought Martin to be a true liberal, the Governor had

⁵²Oregon Labor Press, April 15, 1938, p. 3, and May 6, 1938, p. 1; Barnett Interview.

⁵³Sweetland to Oliver, May 2, 1938; Oregon Labor Press, April 15, 1938, p. 1.

"disappointed all those hopes." Ickes produced a long letter to Hess which concluded with the statement that "Martin is at heart no New Dealer."⁵⁴

The Commonwealth's efforts in the gubernatorial race apparently paid dividends, for Hess defeated Martin in the Democratic primary by but a slim seven thousand votes of the one hundred and twenty thousand cast. Hess carried the northwestern Oregon counties where the OCF was strongest -- Clatsop, Columbia, Washington, Clackamas, Tillamook, and Multnomah -- as well as a scattering of other counties, such as Douglas, for which the Commonwealth could take little credit. Few of the other candidates endorsed by the OCF had serious competition in the primary, although Roy Hewitt was eliminated from the race for the Supreme Court.⁵⁵

As the general election approached the OCF forces were engaged not only in campaigning for successful liberal candidates but also in fighting an initiative measure. The measure, which purported to be a bill "to protect the employee, the employer and the public in case of labor controversies," was sponsored by the Associated Farmers, Incorporated -- a front for reactionary business interests -- and the Oregon Farm Bureau, the Eastern Oregon Wheat League, and the Hood River Growers Club. Despite its innocent-sounding title, the measure was obviously aimed at making effective labor organization impossible. Among its offensive clauses was one that declared it unlawful for unions to collect funds in excess

⁵⁴Speech by Elton Watkins over KGW, April 27, 1938; Sweetland to Thomas G. Corcoran, May 12, 1938; George W. Norris to Henry L. Hess, May 15, 1938; Harold Ickes to Hess, May 14, 1938.

⁵⁵Oregon Blue Book, 1939-1940, pp. 200-201.

of their "legitimate requirements" without specifying what requirements were legitimate, and another clause declared it unlawful "by direct or indirect means to prevent, hinder or molest" a person seeking work from any employer.⁵⁶

Although there was strong doubt that the measure would be upheld by the courts if it passed, the OCF and all organized labor vigorously assailed both the measure and its sponsors. "In conception, in construction and in sponsorship it presents a structure of deceit which has not been previously equaled" declared the State Federation of Labor. Both gubernatorial candidates, Hess and Charles Sprague, condemned the measure, as did the Oregonian, and labor arbitrator Wayne L. Morse took to the radio to oppose it.⁵⁷

The sponsors of the initiative seemed to suffer no shortage of funds for their campaign. They made frequent use of radio and flooded the state with pamphlets which in red, white, and blue told of the concern of "us farmers" to protect "true American unionism" from the clutches of "foreign labor dictators." One of Sweetland's contacts in Warrenton reported that all box holders on her mail route received these pamphlets.

⁵⁶On the Associated Farmers, which originated in California, see Clarke A. Chambers, California Farm Organizations; A Historical Study of the Grange, the Farm Bureau and the Associated Farmers, 1929-1941 (Berkeley, 1952), chs. 5, 6, 8. The initiative measure is printed in full in "An Expose of the Anti-Labor Bill," by the executive board of the State Federation of Labor.

⁵⁷New York Times, November 8, 1938, p. 18; Portland Oregonian, November 7, 1938, p. 6; Radio address by Wayne L. Morse, KEX, November 4, 1938, given in full in Appendix B of Anne Golding, "The Oregon Anti-Picketing Act," unpublished B.A. thesis (Reed College, 1941). Miss Golding deals with the background of the measure and follows it through the legal proceedings which resulted in the Oregon Supreme Court declaring the entire measure unconstitutional in October, 1940.

"For 'poor farmers'," she wrote, "it is remarkable where they can scrape up so much money for their campaign purposes! Probably had a good crop of 'taters' -- or something. . . ." OCF funds were so limited that the organization could do little to counter the barrage but add the advice "Vote initiative 317 -- NO!" on whatever literature it put out.⁵⁸

As the summer passed, the OCF encountered other political problems. The Commonwealth stuck with Henry Hess in his contest with Republican Charles A. Sprague, although they attributed Hess's victory in the primary to Martin's unpopularity rather than to the excellence of his own campaign. Even during the primary campaign Sweetland had complained of the incompetence with which the Hess campaign was run. It lacked "able political generalship," he thought, but since the abler "generals" were all too radical, too closely identified with the Commonwealth, or eliminated by the Hatch Act, no changes were made. Throughout the campaign the OCF continued to receive complaints: Hess's people didn't get leaflets to the farmers or posters distributed; his camp was afraid of its shadow; Hess didn't hit the issues, Hess didn't take to heart warnings of weak areas.⁵⁹

Mahoney also worried the leaders of the OCF who thought he showed a deplorable lack of interest in the rest of the ticket. Nan Wood

⁵⁸Sweetland to Robert S. Allen, September 30, 1938; Flyer, "Shall Foreign Labor Dictators and Racketeers Dominate and Control Oregon Labor, Agriculture and Industry?"; Blanche Pickering to Sweetland, September 20, 1938.

⁵⁹Sweetland to Corcoran, June 6, 1938; Nathalie Panek to Sweetland, October 8, 1938; Gardner to Sweetland, n.d.; Sweetland to Oliver, October 15, 1938.

Honeyman was in trouble, and there was further difficulty with the AFL.⁶⁰

In June the OCF had backed the successful candidate for chairman of the Multnomah County Democratic Central Committee. Although the new chairman was not closely identified with the OCF, the growing strength of the Commonwealth in the Committee roused the ire of the AFL. In July it became necessary for the Committee to appoint a candidate for the state legislature, and a spokesman for the AFL warned in a radio address that selection of a person close to the OCF might forfeit the AFL's support of the Democratic ticket in November.⁶¹

Roy Hewitt, a former student of psychologist E. Stanley Hall, thought he knew what these attacks meant -- Osborne and Kelly Loe were looking for an excuse to slide into support of Sprague. To counter or discredit the anticipated move, Hewitt took his "good friend" Osborne to task in a bitter and public exchange of letters.⁶²

Why, Hewitt wrote, did Osborne attack him when it had been Osborne who had recruited him for the OCF and they had served together for a time on the executive board? Possibly Osborne had become the tool of "concentrated wealth and vested interests?" Osborne's reply was that the Commonwealth was "dominated, or strongly influenced by, the Communist Party, as was evident from the first convention of OCF." To this Hewitt

⁶⁰Sweetland to Corcoran, June 6, 1938.

⁶¹Portland Oregon Journal, June 17, 1938, p. 15; Ruth Stone to Hewitt, June 25, 1938; Oregon Labor Press, June 17, 1938, p. 1; Portland Oregonian, August 24, 1938, p. 3.

⁶²Hewitt to OCF, August 24, 1938.

retorted:

I have investiaged [sic] the present program of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation, and I find it still building on the foundation and living up to the standards that you and I had a part in defining. You now oppose these principles and declare them communistic.⁶³

The exchange proved pointless and rather tragic, for Hewitt's "good friend" Osborne died suddenly in early September. However, Hewitt had prophesied correctly the drift in the AFL. When the State Federation of Labor's endorsements came out in September, neither Hess nor Mrs. Honeyman was endorsed, but both they and their opponents were commended. The AFL's leaders took this approach, according to Sweetland, because they "didn't have the brass to come out openly for their reactionary Republican opponents." At first Sweetland thought Mrs. Honeyman could win without the AFL's endorsement, but soon he was writing columnist Robert S. Allen that she was his major concern, as the AFL was giving her opponent, Homer Angell, all the support it could.⁶⁴

"What a tornado that was! and what a lot of 'refuse' it blew into office," exclaimed a luckless OCF-endorsed candidate the day after the election. Surveying the results of the election, the Commonwealth found that the major candidates whom it had most actively backed -- Hess, Mahoney, and Mrs. Honeyman -- had all been defeated. Hess lost by

⁶³Hewitt to Ben Osborne, August 24, 1938; Osborne to Hewitt, August 29, 1938; Hewitt to Osborne, August 30, 1938; Portland Oregonian, September 1, 1938, p. 11.

⁶⁴Oregon Labor Press, September 9, 1938, p. 1, and September 16, 1938, p. 1; Sweetland to Oliver, September 13, 1938; Sweetland to Allen, September 30, 1938. Neither Sprague nor Angell looked so "reactionary" to Sweetland after the election.

fifty-six thousand votes, Mahoney by thirty-five thousand, but Mrs. Honeyman by less than three thousand. All had done poorly even in areas where the OCF was strongest. Walter Pierce had been comfortably re-elected in his sagebrush district, but with no help from the Commonwealth. Worse yet, the antilabor initiative had passed by a substantial margin, and the OCF-backed Public Housing Authority had gone down to defeat in Portland.⁶⁵

Monroe Sweetland glumly assessed the election as a "terrific schellacing [sic]" for the Commonwealth Federation. The OCF certainly had failed in its aim of uniting farmers and laborers and leading them in triumph down progressive paths. But the Commonwealth was not in control of the causes of the defeat. The return to their regular party of Republicans who had voted for Martin in 1934, the defection of many conservative Democrats to the Republicans, and warfare in labor seem to have been the chief reasons for the Democratic defeat. The OCF may have been partly responsible for giving the warfare in labor a political cast, but at the same time it had undoubtedly mustered many votes from the new CIO unions. The antilabor measure was a foolish but not entirely undeserved retribution for disorder in the ranks of labor, and the OCF could not eliminate the cause of the disorder. Defections from the Democratic ranks were probably encouraged by the identification of the Commonwealth and CIO with leading Democratic candidates, but had the OCF forces not united behind a liberal candidate in the Democratic primary Martin might

⁶⁵Pickering to Sweetland, November 10, 1938; Oregon Blue Book, 1939-1941, pp. 202-203, 209; Portland Oregonian, November 9, 1938, p. 1.

well have won the election and possibly the general election as well. It was certainly better for the OCF to be defeated by Sprague than by Martin.⁶⁶

For an organization of persons convinced of the immediate need -- for some, the immediate personal need -- of adequate pensions, unemployment compensation, relief, lower power bills, protection of civil rights, and the right to freely join a labor union, the defeat was thoroughly galling. Yet, viewed from a long-range perspective, there were some elements of hope for the OCF in the political picture.

Although only 20 per cent of the OCF-endorsed candidates had been elected in the general election, 70 per cent of the OCF-endorsed candidates had been successful in the primary.⁶⁷ Some of these, such as Mahoney, Pierce, and Mrs. Honeyman, accepted the OCF's backing, but they had made their political reputations before the Commonwealth appeared on the scene, and owed little of their success to its endorsement. However, there were lesser known candidates, many of them younger people, who were more immediately involved with the OCF, and a number of these had also been successful in the Democratic primary. It would take several years for these newer politicians to build the wide reputations necessary for competition for state-wide offices, but their success in the Demo-

⁶⁶Sweetland to Henry Rutz, December 22, 1938; New York Times, November 6, 1938, p. 41, and November 8, 1938, p. 18.

⁶⁷Sweetland to Rutz, December 22, 1938. Sweetland gives these percentages, which agree with the writer's calculations. However, it should be remembered that the OCF did not endorse a candidate for every state-wide office, and endorsed candidates for the state legislature only in districts in northwestern Oregon.

cratic primaries in some of the most populous counties of the state, combined with the growing Democratic registration, augured a brighter future for the Commonwealth and its friends. The defeat of Governor Martin in the primary was hopeful, too, not only because it removed his platform for attacking the Commonwealth Federation, but because it opened the possibility of ousting his lieutenants from control of the Democratic Party to make way for persons more sympathetic to the New Deal. The OCF had already started to work toward this goal.

CHAPTER III

THE MIDDLE YEARS: SPOILS AND SUBVERSIVES

The OCF lost no time licking its political wounds after the debacle in November, but immediately re-entered the political arena. Early in 1939 political interest in Oregon centered on the biennial legislative session in Salem where Sweetland and Byron Carney established themselves as the OCF's legislative committee.

The Federation's lobby found Governor Sprague's inaugural address more liberal than they had expected, and they decided to assume an attitude of watchful waiting for the performance of his program. Predictably, the OCF grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Republican governor as the elections of 1940 drew near, but relations between Sprague and the Commonwealth never deteriorated to the rabid name calling of the previous administration. The leaders of the OCF viewed Sprague as an "honest conservative" and were heartened by his staunch support of civil liberties.¹

After Martin's defeat the literature put out by the OCF began to tame down. This may have been due to the change in the governorship, or

¹Labor Newdealer, January 13, 1939; Excerpts from address by Sweetland before CIO Convention, February 11, 1940; Radio address by Sweetland, KEW, January 18, 1941.

to the responsibility imposed by even a slight measure of success, or simply to a greater acquaintance with the opposition. There were still references to "reactionary labor-haters," "vested interests," and "concentrated wealth," but now the standard leftist vocabulary was sprinkled with recognition that members of the opposition might be sincere -- although obviously misguided.

The OCF had too few friends in the legislature of 1939 to hope for any positive gains from it. The Commonwealth's lobby kept busy, however, simply fighting steps backward such as attempts to outlaw the closed shop, to exclude aliens from the practice of certain professions, and to increase the income tax in the lower brackets. Such "victories" as the OCF could claim were simply playing a part in defeating some of these backward steps and occasionally having OCF-backed bills do better than in previous sessions. For instance, the Commonwealth went to bat for a bill forbidding discrimination against racial minorities in public places. The bill passed the Senate but failed in the Assembly. This was progress, Sweetland thought, for it was the first time such a bill had passed either house.²

On one of the big fights of the session -- and one of particular importance to the Commonwealth's political future -- the OCF and its allies were defeated by a narrow margin. The bill in question moved the date of the primary election from May to September, eliminated the

²The OCF considered nine of the sixty representatives and five of the thirty senators as "notably progressive." Sweetland to Roger Baldwin, February 20, 1939; News release, n.d.; Sweetland to Lucille B. Milner, July 1, 1939.

presidential primary, and provided that delegates to the national conventions be picked by the state party committees.³

There are some good arguments for shortening the campaign period between the primary and general elections, but the opponents of the bills believed that in Oregon in 1939, these arguments simply concealed the main issue. The crux of the matter, they thought, was the question of a third term for Roosevelt. There was little doubt that Roosevelt could carry the Oregon Democratic presidential primary in 1940, but the state Democratic committee was still controlled by Martin Democrats who were opposed to Roosevelt.

Leaders in labor, the Grange, and the OCF were convinced that the change in the date of the primary was also aimed at reducing the progressive vote in state elections. In September many farmers would probably be too busy to vote, and thousands of farm laborers would be away from their polling places, working in the harvest. Further, the shorter campaign period seemed to favor candidates with money for air transportation and for radio and newspaper advertising. Progressive forces suffered from a chronic lack of funds, and with a short period for campaigning it would be impossible to continue to rely on voluntary committees and a personal appearance by candidates at every crossroad community hall.⁴

A similar law changing the primary date had been defeated in a

³House Calendar, Fortieth Legislative Session of Oregon, 1939, p. 119.

⁴Sweetland to Milner, July 1, 1939; Radio address by Sweetland, May 21, 1939; Pierce to Sweetland, March 20, 1939; Oregon Grange Bulletin, March 20, 1939, p. 1.

referendum in 1936 by more than a two-to-one vote, but despite this portent and the threats of the opponents of the bill to file referendum petitions to suspend operation of the law during the elections of 1940, the bill carried. The OCF's legislative committee immediately issued a press release which promised that the OCF would join other opponents of the measure in a campaign to secure the necessary signatures for a referendum. When the petitions came out, however, only the State Federation of Labor and the State Grange were listed on them as sponsors. The omission of the Commonwealth, Sweetland explained to the convention of the OCF in April, 1939, was necessary because the AFL threatened to withdraw its support if the Commonwealth appeared as a sponsor.⁵

Nevertheless, the OCF supported the drive. Working closely with the Grange, the CIO, and a few AFL locals, the OCF set up county committees to organize the campaign. Referendum petitions required 16,969 signatures in 1939. By the middle of June the sponsors had filed 26,000 signatures. Of these the Grange secured 15,000, the OCF 10,000, and the AFL but 1,000. Sweetland attributed the small contribution of the AFL not to sabotage but simply to the fact "that they have no enthusiasm or mechanics for political action."⁶

The campaign against the law changing the date of the primary was widely interpreted as the first skirmish in the campaign of 1940. The

⁵Oregon Blue Book, 1939-1940, p. 209; OCF Legislative Committee to Representatives, March 7, 1939; Press release, n.d. [March 9 or 10, 1939]; Portland Oregon Journal, April 16, 1939, p. 13.

⁶Sweetland to Ralph Peters, May 17, 1939, and similar letter to chairmen of OCF petition committees in Lane, Marion, Linn, Yamhill, and Coos counties, same date; Press release, n.d. [mid-June, 1939]; Sweetland to R. L. Burgess, June 2, 1939.

OCF encouraged this interpretation, particularly after the petitions had been successfully completed, and Sweetland took particular care that the meaning of the campaign and the Commonwealth's part in it were understood in the national administration.⁷

The Commonwealth Federation worked closely with the Grange against the new primary law and for public power. In addition to co-operating with the Grange on these emotion-charged issues, the OCF increasingly cultivated farmers on a piecemeal basis by offering other small services. Illustrative of this growing concern with the problems of small groups of farmers was the effort on behalf of loganberry growers.

Sweetland attended meetings with indefatigable zeal. At a Farmers' Union meeting in May, 1940, he learned that a bumper loganberry crop threatened growers with disastrously low prices. Sweetland immediately began urging the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation to place loganberries on its seasonal surplus list so that part of the crop could be absorbed under the Food Stamp Plan. With the co-operation of Senator McNary, these entreaties were successful, and arrangements were made for the purchase of 1,500 tons of loganberries in Oregon and Washington.⁸

Sweetland hoped that such Commonwealth efforts on behalf of farmers would receive publicity in the Grange Bulletin as an example of the benefits of farmer-labor co-operation. Although the stories did not

⁷Portland Oregonian, April 2, 1939, p. 6; Sweetland to Burgess, April 6, 1939; to James Rowe, April 18, 1939; to Corcoran, June 16, 1939; to Lowell Mellett, June 16, 1939.

⁸Sweetland to Milo Perkins, June 1, 1940; E. W. Gaumnitz to Sweetland, June 20, 1940; Charles L. McNary to Sweetland, June 21, 1940.

receive much publicity, the Commonwealth enjoyed an increasingly cordial relationship with Dr. C. H. Bailey, editor of the Grange Bulletin. The OCF plied Dr. Bailey with congratulations on his liberal stands and invitations to attend OCF affairs. Although these efforts seldom bore fruit in direct mention of the OCF in the Grange Bulletin, Dr. Bailey did consistently support the position of labor -- and of the CIO -- on state and national issues of the day.⁹

From its establishment the OCF had operated as an informal speakers' bureau for many organizations. In 1939 it attempted to reach more farmers by formally establishing a speakers service for Granges and Farmers' Unions. These organizations were offered qualified speakers on current topics -- the power issue, migratory labor, the legislature of 1939, the labor controversy. A number of Granges took advantage of this offer, but the proposal got little response from Farmers' Unions, although the relationship between the Commonwealth and the Union appeared to be somewhat improved. The Yamhill County Farmers' Union selected delegates to the OCF's convention of April, 1939, and in January, 1940, Sweetland was invited to speak to the annual convention of the Linn County organization. Sweetland was also cultivating members of the national executive committee of the Farmers' Union and exchanging cordial letters with the president of the Oregon Union, who, however, remained noncommittal.¹⁰

⁹Sweetland to Dr. C. H. Bailey, September 27, 1939; Ruth Stone to Bailey, June 15, 1938; Sweetland to Bailey, April 6, 1939, and January 11, 1940.

¹⁰Sweetland to Lecturers, August 22, 1939; Don Kern to OCF, September 8, 1939; Sweetland to C. A. Schooling, April 12, 1939; to Oliver, January 15, 1940; to Morris Erickson, December 26, 1939; to Harley Libby, November 28, 1939; Libby to Sweetland, n.d.

The Commonwealth Federation continued to be deeply involved in the field of public power during 1939 and 1940. J. D. Ross died suddenly in March, 1939, and the advocates of public power again began a campaign for a sympathetic administrator. R. A. Banks, chief engineer on the Grand Coulee project, was appointed temporary administrator for Bonneville, and as he was reportedly cool to both public power and CIO organizing on federal projects, the OCF was eager to keep his appointment from becoming permanent. The OCF and some leaders in the Grange soon settled on Robert W. Beck, a former Oregon boy and one of J. D. Ross's assistants, as the most suitable candidate. But their hopes for Beck were soon squelched, for in May Banks, on orders from Ickes, fired him for insubordination.¹¹

After May the OCF seems to have dropped out of the effort to influence the appointment of a Bonneville administrator, despite speculation that the dismissal of Beck signified a shift away from public-power policies by the administration. In August the appointment of Dr. Paul Raver, chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission, was announced. Raver adopted an eminently sane approach in his first public appearance in Oregon. The dispute over industrial versus home use of the power from Bonneville was pointless, he told the Portland City Club; "There is power enough in the Columbia River for both purposes -- if we use it wisely."¹²

Despite such moderation, the new administrator pleased the OCF. Sweetland assured Byron Carney that "all of us" have confidence in Raver

¹¹Portland Oregonian, March 15, 1939, p. 1, and May 11, 1939, p. 4; Sweetland to E. K. Burlew, April 6, 1939; Robert Beck to Sweetland, May 7, 1939, with attached exchange with Banks and Ickes.

¹²Portland Oregonian, August 22, 1939, p. 1; Bonneville Administration Press Release, September 29, 1939.

as an "astute supporter of public power." "[W]e are all full of hope because of his presence." The public-power people could use some hope, for they were hard at work on a number of campaigns for PUD's. During the summer there had been three PUD elections, and in Washington, Clackamas, and Coos counties as well as in Portland there were PUD committees at work, but elsewhere the cause was still dormant.¹³

Efforts to get PUD elections were still hindered by divisions among the members of the public-power bloc. Carl D. Thompson, president of the American Public Ownership League, sensed fertile fields for public power in Oregon, and by late 1939 he had established himself in the state, joined the OCF, and become a consultant to the Bonneville Administration. Thompson was frustrated by the divisions among the faithful and in July, 1939, had begun setting up still another organization, the Oregon Committee of the Public Ownership League, in an effort to achieve united backing for PUD campaigns. The members of the new organization were carefully screened for co-operativeness and loyalty to the cause, and it came to include the usual group -- leaders from the Grange, Farmers' Union, and Commonwealth Federation. A. C. Heyman was chairman of the Oregon Committee, and many other members of the Commonwealth were involved in its work.¹⁴

The OCF encouraged and kept in touch with public-power efforts throughout the state through the Oregon Committee, and through its own

¹³Sweetland to Byron G. Carney, September 28, 1939; Oregon Committee of the Public Ownership League of America, Bulletin No. 1, August 7, 1939.

¹⁴Oregon Committee, Bulletin No. 1, August 7, 1939, and No. 5, November 20, 1939; Carl D. Thompson to Sweetland, September 12, 1939.

members, but the Commonwealth was most involved in the campaign for a PUD in Portland. In July the People's Power League began the campaign by circulating preliminary petitions for a PUD. When these were successfully completed, the state Hydroelectric Commission held a hearing on the proposals, for which the OCF mustered its friends from the CIO and AFL, and from community, New Deal, and OCF clubs. The state commission returned a favorable report on the project, and in February, 1940, the OCF-backed Bonneville-For-Portland Committee, headed by a member of the OCF, State Senator Harry Kenin, began circulating the final petition to place the proposal for a PUD on the ballot for the primary election in May.¹⁵

With the filing of the final petition the campaign for a Portland PUD was on in earnest. The proponents of a PUD considered the election of particular significance, feeling that success would break the "backbone" of the power companies in the Northwest. The power companies were concerned for the same reason and put out reams of literature attacking the PUD; the inevitable "citizens'" committees sprang up to fight the "vicious measure." The AFL cooled to public power as it got closer to home, for members of AFL unions were employed by the private power companies. In addition the backers of the PUD had to contend with the allegation that a PUD would pay no taxes despite the fact that the 1939 legislature passed a bill providing that PUD's be taxed on the same basis

¹⁵Sweetland to Joel Wolfsohn, July 1, 1939; Speakers at PUD Preliminary Hearing, September 29, 1939; Sweetland to Oliver, February 14, 1940.

as private companies.¹⁶

In spite of the strenuous efforts of the backers of the proposed PUD, they were "swamped" in the election in May. Elsewhere the effort continued, and the elections in November resulted in the creation of five new PUD's which raised the total in Oregon to ten. The results of the public-power effort in Oregon were far from spectacular, and the state lagged behind Washington in the formation of PUD's; yet after the long lean years of effort, even five new districts were hailed as a major victory.¹⁷

Compared to the bitter fall of 1937, the Oregon labor front was relatively quiet during 1939 and 1940. The AFL continued to oppose the Commonwealth Federation, and the Labor Press continued to attack the "Commonwealth-CIO-Communist group" as a "fungus political growth." These attacks were unpleasant, as Sweetland was personally reminded when the Central Labor Council condemned the appointment of Mrs. Sweetland to a federal civil-service position, but they no longer did the OCF much harm. The OCF would have been much stronger had it had full support from the AFL, and such support might have encouraged some of the AFL's traditional agricultural allies to work more closely with the Commonwealth. Once having withheld this support, however, the AFL did little additional damage with its continual harping on the Commonwealth menace. The State

¹⁶Sweetland to Oliver, February 14, 1940; Flyer, "The A B C of the P U D," by the Citizens' Committee Against PUD; Oregon Labor Press, September 29, 1939, p. 1.

¹⁷Portland Oregonian, May 18, 1940, p. 1; Oregon Committee, Victory Bulletin, November 10, 1940.

Federation of Labor no longer had a leader of the public stature of the late Ben Osborne, the AFL was weakened by the growth of the CIO, and there were signs that the AFL's membership took the attacks upon the Commonwealth with a grain of salt.¹⁸

Members of AFL unions continued to attend the OCF's conventions and to serve on its board of directors, and a number of AFL locals co-operated in OCF projects. Officials of the AFL denied that any AFL locals were actually affiliated with the Commonwealth, which, they claimed, misrepresented the actions of a few misguided individuals. The OCF was indeed casual about what constituted its membership. It is impossible to tell how many of the members of AFL unions who participated in the Commonwealth were official delegates from an affiliated union, or "fraternal" delegates from an interested but unaffiliated union, or representing no one but themselves.¹⁹

The main strength of the OCF continued to be in Oregon's CIO unions, and particularly in the big Columbia River District Council of the IWA. The OCF's executive board was eager to make the connection with the CIO even more secure by formal affiliation with John L. Lewis's Labor's Non-Partisan League. In January, 1938, the board had voted to open negotiations with the League toward this goal; but although E. L. Oliver assured Sweetland that the "national organization will look with great favor upon such a proposal," the board decided the time was not yet propitious for

¹⁸Oregon Labor Press, March 24, 1939, p. 1; April 21, 1939, p. 1; April 4, 1940, p. 4; January 12, 1940, p. 3.

¹⁹Ibid., January 19, 1940, p. 1.

the move, and took no further action. By the fall of 1939 the OCF's leaders decided the step must be taken soon if the OCF were to derive maximum benefit out of its connection with the League during the elections of 1940, and put the question on the agenda for the convention of December, 1939.²⁰

At the convention Al Hartung of the IWA opened the discussion by moving that the Commonwealth Federation affiliate with the League. Immediately the motion was assailed by delegates who claimed the proposal took them by surprise and tried to have consideration of the matter postponed until the following day. After much parliamentary maneuvering this effort failed, and the convention finally approved the motion to affiliate with but one dissenting voice.²¹

Curiously, the opposition to affiliation with the League did not come from farmers or members of AFL unions. The opponents of affiliation who are identified in the convention minutes were all CIO men, mostly from the Portland Longshoremen's Union. Sweetland claimed that the opposition to affiliation came from about fifteen "Communist delegates."²²

The controversy about the role of Communists in the Oregon Commonwealth Federation started with its organization. The AFL and the Capital Journal accused the OCF of being Communist-dominated, rumors spread in

²⁰Sweetland to Oliver, January 31, 1938; Oliver to Sweetland, February 7, 1938, and November 10, 1939; Sweetland to Oliver, November 13, 1939.

²¹Minutes of the sixth OCF Convention, December 9-10, 1939.

²²Sweetland to Oliver, December 12, 1939.

rural districts, and anonymous pamphlets and flyers circulated identifying the OCF as a "Communist Organization" and as an "agency to put Communists or their duped tools into office." The controversy continues more than twenty years later. When Sweetland ran for secretary of state in 1960, materials based in part on his association with the OCF circulated accusing him of Communist activities during the thirties.²³

The Oregon Commonwealth Federation was organized by non-Communist reformers, but soon a few persons who were believed to have Communist sympathies were working within it. While Sweetland and other leaders of the OCF were aware that there were Communist sympathizers in the OCF and regarded them with suspicion, they seemed to have no qualms about using their energy as long as the Communists appeared to be working for the same immediate ends. Sweetland apparently felt that he and the other liberals could defeat the fellow travelers if a real test came, and he proved to be correct.²⁴

There was really no danger of the Communist faction assuming control of the Federation as long as the OCF retained the support of the Columbia River District Council of the IWA. Some of the international officers of the IWA had Communist leanings, but the Columbia River District was the

²³Sweetland to Herbert Michelbrook, February 10, 1938; Pamphlet, Oregon Wants No Communist-Recommended Officials; Flyer, "Candidates endorsed by the Oregon Commonwealth Federation (A Communist Organization)"; Portland Oregonian, May 27, 1961, p. 1.

²⁴Willard Uphaus to Sweetland, January 28, 1938; Sweetland to Uphaus, February 11, 1938; Panek to Sweetland, October 8, 1938; Sweetland to Panek, October 13, 1938.

focal point of anti-Communist sentiment in the union, and Al Hartung, president of the Council, became vice-president of the OCF after Harry Gross died in 1938.²⁵

Until December 7, 1941, the touchiest subject in the OCF was its stand on foreign relations. The first convention adopted a plank in the platform calling for the preservation of peace through the co-operation of all democratic peoples against "fascist aggressor nations." The Communist Party line favored collective security, and the phrase "fascist aggressor nations" had currency in Communist circles, but many non-Communists who were alarmed at Hitler and Mussolini took the same position. A number of Commonwealth members dissented from the Federation's stand, including Sweetland, who as a pacifist objected to the threat of force implied by the doctrine of collective security.²⁶

Despite the endeavors of Sweetland and others, the plank adopted by the convention of April, 1937, remained the official position of the OCF on foreign affairs until April, 1939. Revisions of the platform were considered at the spring convention in 1939, and the majority report of the platform committee recommended changing the wording of the foreign-relations plank from "fascist aggressor nations" to "all aggressor nations." After much discussion a compromise wording was adopted which

²⁵On the issue of Communism in the IWA and the role of Don Helmick, Al Hartung and the Columbia River District Council in the struggle for control of the IWA, see Jensen, Lumber and Labor; Galenson, The CIO Challenge to the AFL; and Proceedings of the Constitutional Conventions of the International Woodworkers of America, 1937-1941.

²⁶Frances Orser to Sweetland, July 20, 1940; Panek to Sweetland, October 8, 1938; Sweetland to Ray Newton, August 16, 1939.

called for an embargo against "Nazi, fascist and all other aggressor nations." Sweetland reported to a friend that he had heard that Morris Rappaport, the Communist Party functionary for the Northwest, was "quite perturbed" with the change in the OCF's position. However, he mused, "[i]t occurs to me that the delegates are beginning to learn."²⁷

Although the Communist Party may have been perturbed with the OCF's action, the Party did not turn its tiny but vocal group of supporters against the Federation until the following fall. Then it was not a change in the Commonwealth position that explained its ire, but an event far from the provincial field of Oregon politics -- the Nazi-Soviet Pact. After the Pact the Communist Party discarded its advocacy of collective security; from the fall of 1939 until the German invasion of Russia in the summer of 1941, the Communist Party in the United States was an ardent advocate of peace and neutrality.

At the meeting of the OCF's board of directors on September 16, 1939, a heated discussion took place on a resolution dealing with the Commonwealth's position on foreign policy. After many votes, the board decided to leave the whole matter until a later date. On October 15, the board again took up the discussion. This time four of the board members introduced a mimeographed resolution entitled "For a peaceful America." The resolution began:

WHEREAS the present war in Europe is an Imperialist War between . . . British-French warmongers and German fascism, each seeking domination of the earth, and is the direct result of the Chamberlain appeasement policy and,

²⁷Minutes of the fifth OCF Convention, April 15-16, 1939; Sweetland to Clayton Van Lydegraf, April 22, 1939.

WHEREAS the scope of this Imperialist war has been narrowed down and confined to these three countries due to the consistent peace policy of the USSR

The rest of the resolution asserted that the "warmongers of America are doing all within their power to tie our country to Chamberlain for the furtherance of British-French imperialism" and demanded that the United States stay out of the war. The resolution provoked pointed discussion, and the board rejected it with only its four sponsors voting for it.

The board then adopted a different resolution from which the four sponsors of "For a peaceful America" dissented. This resolution expressed the hope that the United States would stay out of war, as "we believe war will inevitably bring to our nation . . . the very dictatorship which we detest." However, it promised support to "every step which the President and Congress make toward that end," urged the re-election of FDR for a third term, and called for improved transcontinental highways as a defensive measure that would also provide considerable employment.²⁸

Another debate on foreign affairs took place at the sixth convention in December, 1939. A resolution condemning Germany and the Soviet Union for the partition of Poland and the Soviet Union for the invasion of Finland was introduced at the convention. One delegate opposed the resolution with the frank statement that "[m]y sympathies are still with the Russian experiment." Others were more devious. The convention was cautioned not to take the side of "Hoover and the reactionaries"; that "red-baiting" would not solve international problems; that the resolution

²⁸ Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, September 16, 1939, and October 15, 1939. Both resolutions are attached to the Board's minutes of September 16, 1939.

would help drive America into war; and that the OCF was carrying on like the Second International in 1914 -- talking peace but supporting war. These imaginative arguments were of no avail, and the convention passed the resolution by a vote of 85 to 56.²⁹

The same delegates who were most vocal in their opposition to the resolution on foreign affairs also opposed affiliating with Labor's Non-Partisan League and working for the re-election of President Roosevelt. A few Socialists joined the Communist faction in opposing the resolution favoring a third term for FDR, but the resolution passed by a vote of 104 to 13. When the convention was over, Sweetland could report to E. L. Oliver that "there is not a single member of the Communist Party on the new Board."³⁰

When the Communist faction found its attempts to swing the Commonwealth to the new party line thwarted in the meetings of the board of directors and at the convention, it launched an attack upon the Commonwealth Federation from several angles. One form of the attack was an attempt to weaken the relationship between the OCF and Labor's Non-Partisan League. In November one of the members of the OCF board who had sponsored the resolution "For a peaceful America" began an attempt to get direct affiliation with Labor's Non-Partisan League for the Maritime Federation of the Pacific's District Council, on which he also served. The reason he gave for this action was that there was no

²⁹Minutes of the sixth OCF Convention, December 9-10, 1939,

³⁰Ibid.; Sweetland to Oliver, December 12, 1939.

organization in Oregon which could be "relied upon to put into operation a planned, strong political program for organized labor." In February, 1940, after the OCF had been designated as the League's official representative in Oregon, he was still trying to circumvent the OCF by gaining direct affiliation with the League for the Maritime Council, but the move was defeated in the Maritime Council. There were rumors of similar attempts being made in other unions, but none materialized.³¹

In the Portland Industrial Union Council the Communist faction tried to prevent the Council from sending delegates to the convention of the OCF. According to the Labor Newdealer's report of the Council's December meeting, Mark Haller of the Inlandboatmen, a member of the board of the OCF, started the discussion. He opposed sending delegates to the convention because he claimed it was being packed with OCF members-at-large. A representative of the Cannery Workers took up the cry by attacking the board as "anti-labor" and in favor of the "huge armaments program of the administration." Harry Pilcher of the Longshoremen, another member of the board, attacked a recent resolution of the board as "anti-labor." Sweetland was on hand to answer these attacks, and the Council decided to send delegates to the convention by a vote of nearly three to one.³²

The Labor Newdealer (no longer edited by Bob Wilmot) appeared to be following the Communist line during this period. On September 8, 1939,

³¹George Kell to Oliver, February 14, 1940; Oliver to Kell, February 19, 1940; Sweetland to Oliver, February 24, 1940.

³²Labor Newdealer, December 8, 1939; Sweetland to Oliver, December 7, 1939.

the paper carried an article comparing the OCF to Gulliver awakening, and an editorial endorsing a resolution of the Portland Industrial Union Council that urged repeal of the neutrality act because it benefited Hitler. In October the Newdealer continued to carry small items of OCF news without editorial embellishment, and in November the OCF was simply ignored. In December the Newdealer began printing attacks upon the OCF as news items. By January the transition was complete, and the Newdealer was attacking the Roosevelt administration, the anti-Communist leadership of the Columbia River District Council of the IWA, and the OCF with equal virulence as "pro-war."

Three small unions withdrew from the OCF shortly after the convention in December and during January, 1940, the Labor Newdealer printed statements from members of these unions explaining why they left the Commonwealth. The reasons included everything from the OCF's failure to set up precinct organizations to accusations that the officers were allied with the "splitters [i.e. anti-Communists] who are trying to disrupt the CIO in Oregon." All of the articles, however, cited the OCF's stand on foreign policy among their complaints. One of the articles, for instance, complained that the OCF had "adopted a hysterical resolution echoing all the 'poor Finland' stories that have appeared in the Big Business newspapers."³³

³³Labor Newdealer, January 4, 1940, January 12, 1940, and January 19, 1940. The Newdealer continued to attack the OCF, the CIO "splitters," and the Roosevelt administration until June, 1941. After the German attack on the Soviet Union, the paper was full of resolutions supporting full aid to the Soviet Union. An editorial of July 18, 1941, accused the administration not of being "pro-war," but of "playing the old game of appeasement of Fascism."

These attacks, particularly when combined with attacks upon the Roosevelt administration and the anti-Communist group in the IWA, did the OCF more good than harm. Shortly after the convention, the big Forest Grove local of the IWA, led by Don Helmick, reaffiliated with the OCF, and the Coos Bay Longshoremen's Union and the long "skeptical" Ladies' Garment Worker's local in Portland affiliated. These additions more than made up for the membership lost in the defecting unions.³⁴

When the opposition of the Communist faction developed, Sweetland carried the Commonwealth's cause directly to the unions. In October, 1939, he attacked the Communist Party at the IWA convention in Klamath Falls and in February, 1940, did the same before the CIO convention in Eugene. In December he had appeared at the Portland Industrial Union Council to ward off attempts to keep the Council from sending delegates to the convention. Later in December he attended a meeting of the Portland Longshoremen's local and took the floor to answer the Communist faction; the local gave the OCF a "rising vote of confidence." In this fight Sweetland was strongly supported not only by the other officers of the OCF, and by E. L. Oliver, but by the CIO state director, William Dalrymple, and the CIO state secretary (and OCF vice-president), Ralph Peoples, as well as by many other union members.³⁵

The top officers of the Commonwealth were neither Communists nor

³⁴Ibid., February 9, 1940; Sweetland to Oliver, February 14, 1940.

³⁵Proceedings of the Third Constitutional Convention of the International Woodworkers of America, 1939, p. 157; Excerpts from address by Sweetland before the CIO Convention, February 11, 1940; Sweetland to Norman Littell, December 29, 1939; William Dalrymple to CIO locals, March 16, 1940; Ralph Peoples to CIO locals, March 13, 1940.

Communist sympathizers. They fought the efforts of the Communist faction to bend the OCF to changes in the Communist line and were successful. It is more difficult to tell how many Communist sympathizers there were elsewhere in the OCF. From April to December, 1939, four or five of the thirty-three members of the board of directors followed the Communist Party line on foreign affairs. In 1951 the Portland Oregonian identified one of these members, Mark Haller, ^(representing Inland Boatmen's Union) as the chairman of the Communist Party in Oregon. In a feature article based on an interview with Haller, the Oregonian reported that he had joined the party in 1931 and had been active in it ever since. Harry Pilcher, another member of the OCF board, was identified in the Labor Newdealer in 1941 as chairman of the Multnomah County Communist Party.³⁶

In addition to four or five members of the board, there seem to have been about ten other people who at one time or another were fairly active in the Commonwealth Federation and who frequently and conspicuously supported Communist causes. The writer would hesitate to identify these people as confirmed fellow travelers, however, either because of insufficient information or because some of them seemed to depart from the Communist line from time to time. The Oregonian concluded that the fifty-six persons who voted against the resolution condemning Germany and the Soviet Union constituted the rock-bottom Communist strength in the OCF. This seems highly unlikely for there is no other evidence that there were so many Communist sympathizers in the Federation and there

³⁶Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, particularly September 16, 1939, and October 15, 1939; Portland Oregonian, September 30, 1951, p. 23; Labor Newdealer, July 25, 1941.

were many reasons non-Communists might vote against the resolution. Indifference and ignorance were two such reasons. For instance, from the discussion of the resolution "For a Peaceful America" it is obvious that one of the members of the board hadn't the slightest idea that she was participating in a test of strength between the Communist and liberal factions. There also were a number of members of the OCF who thought that the organization should stick to domestic problems and that foreign affairs were not worth splitting the Federation over. Previous conflicts over foreign affairs had been ignored or compromised; a vote against the resolution condemning Germany and the Soviet Union was a vote to handle the situation in the usual way.³⁷

Since 1937 the Commonwealth Federation had been the most active supporter of the New Deal in Oregon. Members were genuinely committed to public power, public housing, more adequate pensions, and unemployment insurance, and were willing to fight for these programs. But by 1939 grumbling could be heard about the lack of patronage going to the OCF. Many of the Commonwealth's friends needed jobs and it seemed grossly unfair that the administration gave its recognition to people who did not support its program and occasionally tried to sabotage the New Deal. In December, 1938, Sweetland told Oliver, "[f]rankly, our whole group here is getting pretty weary of everlastingly battling for the New Deal, and yet seeing virtually every key Federal post in the hands of the opposition."³⁸

³⁷Portland Oregonian, December 12, 1939, p. 8.

³⁸Sweetland to Oliver, December 5, 1938.

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³⁷Portland Oregonian, December 12, 1939, p. 8.

³⁸Sweetland to Oliver, December 5, 1938.

The chief subject of complaint was the head of the Oregon Works Progress Administration, E. J. Griffith. According to the OCF, Griffith's subordinates deliberately pigeonholed a request of the OCF for a Portland housing survey. Griffith was unfair to the Workers' Alliance and was attempting to build a political machine of WPA workers. He did nothing to help the Democratic ticket in 1938 and issued a blast at Mrs. Honeyman which did her considerable damage. Worst of all, he had required WPA workers to resign from membership in the OCF and Young Democrats, although this order had been countermanded from Washington. Griffith's whole patronage philosophy, Sweetland complained, was "that by taking in Republicans and unregenerate Democrats you make good New Dealers out of them -- so far the net result has been to make the 'regular' Democrats sore." In a report aimed at Mrs. Roosevelt, Sweetland outlined other complaints: the Oregon Federal Housing Administration was "hopelessly reactionary"; the head of the National Emergency Council was "by every measure a Tory"; and the Bonneville Administration was "politically inept."³⁹

However, after the successful petition campaign against the law changing the date of the primary election, the situation changed. In September, 1939, the OCF's first vice-president, Byron G. Carney was selected as state director of the census of 1940 through the influence

³⁹Statement by Jessie M. Short, n.d.; Statement by Trent Phillips, n.d.; Oliver to Sweetland, May 9, 1939, with copy of wire from Howard O. Hunter to E. J. Griffith, May 9, 1939; "Informal Report on Political Slant of Federal Office-Holders in Oregon," n.d. Howard Costigan asked Sweetland for such a report to show to Mrs. Roosevelt when she visited Seattle, Costigan to Sweetland, March 16, 1939.

of Stephenson Smith. The announcement created consternation among state Democratic officials who apparently had not known that Carney was even in the running for the job (the OCF had been promoting him for the Fish Commission); when they got word of the appointment it "started the dishes rattling in the Democratic cupboard." The Party's chieftains, particularly National Committeeman Howard Latourette and State Chairman Frank Tierney, were not easily reconciled to the appointment, for they as well as Sweetland knew that it meant an opportunity to employ some 1,500 of the faithful, and in April, 1940, right before the primary election.⁴⁰

Telephone and telegraph messages flew between the upset party officials in Oregon and the capital. Carney reported that Jim Farley greeted him with "So you're the bad fellow that is causing me a lot of trouble." Farley said, however, that he had advised Tierney that Carney's appointment would stand and had urged the officers of the party to co-operate.⁴¹

With his position assured, Carney asked Sweetland, Mrs. Honeyman, and OCF treasurer Gus Solomon to start considering personnel for census positions. They agreed that some of the appointments must be made with "an eye to appeasing some of the disconcerted elements," and recommended giving the top position in Portland to neither a member of the OCF nor to an old-guard Democrat, but to a member of an AFL union who was sympathetic to the OCF but could gain the approval of at least some of the

⁴⁰Portland Oregonian, September 13, 1939; p. 6; Carney to Heyman, October 28, 1939; Portland Oregon Journal, September 17, 1939; p. 11; Salem Capital Journal, September 14, p. 1.

⁴¹Carney to Sweetland, September 28, 1938.

Democratic officials.⁴²

For the next two months Carney and his Oregon friends exchanged long daily letters. Clearly there were just not enough top positions for all the OCF's competent, deserving, and needy, and unfortunately some of the needy were not competent, even if deserving. Appointments to appease the old guard caused headaches, too. Carney was urged in Washington to appoint Mrs. Emily Edson of the old guard as his assistant, but both Carney and Sweetland felt that she would jeopardize the entire project because of "her complete innocence of any idea of effective administration," something the OCF had overlooked when it endorsed Mrs. Edson for secretary of state in 1938.⁴³

Carney also ran into trouble with the friends of the OCF. Mrs. Pierce was very much interested in appointments in eastern Oregon. She insisted that the people she recommended went down to the "grass-roots of the country." "I think they do," Carney plaintively complained. "Clear down to Coolidge and McKinley." Carney finally agreed to let Walter Pierce handle all appointments in his district, but Carney assured the OCF that "we will be right there because he is going to run again and he will be glad to have me go over those names with them."⁴⁴

In western Oregon Carney was to make the major appointments, but

⁴²Sweetland to Carney, September 24, 1939, and September 28, 1939.

⁴³Carney to Smith, October 7, 1939; Sweetland to Carney, September 28, 1939.

⁴⁴Carney to Sweetland, October 5, 1939; Carney to Lottie [Mrs. Carney], October 21, 1939.

the director of the census wanted appointees to have the endorsement of Latourette and Tierney in order to avoid another squabble with the state Democratic leaders. This development set off a scurry to secure these endorsements, but the party chieftains were reluctant. At the end of October, Carney urged Tierney to give an endorsement to anyone who asked for it, "because whoever was selected would feel that your recommendation had been of help . . . and the others would feel that you had given them an equally fair chance." Tierney was unimpressed with this reasoning, and in November Carney was still trying to get Tierney to endorse some of the Commonwealth's favorites.⁴⁵

When the dust settled, the OCF had placed many of its candidates in top census positions. Some of these people, such as the supervisor for the southern Oregon district, were sympathetic to the Commonwealth but not closely identified with it. Others, however, such as Miss Ruth Haefner, the Portland area supervisor, and Mrs. Nathalie Panek, in the office at Salem, were among the most active members of the OCF. An announcement of the OCF reported that of the first sixty major census appointments, thirty-eight were well-known members of the Grange, Farmers' Union, AFL, or CIO, and that many of the rest were progressives, while a few were regular old-line Democrats.⁴⁶

Census enumerators were to be appointed by the district supervisors.

⁴⁵Carney to Lottie [Mrs. Carney], October 21, 1939; Carney to Frank Tierney, October 30, 1939, and November 7, 1939; Sweetland to Tierney, November 24, 1939.

⁴⁶Portland Oregonian, December 3, 1939, p. 1; News release, "Census Posts to Farmers and Labor," n.d.

Here, too, Sweetland was busy writing to friends of the OCF for the names of interested progressives, and checking the lists of applicants for the proper liberal sentiments. From the partial list of census employees in the Commonwealth files it is clear that many of the enumerators were also from farm and labor groups, or were friends or relatives of the OCF's supporters. Others, however, had only their competence to recommend them. The applications for census positions give a vivid picture of the dislocations which accompanied the Depression. An amazing number of the applicants were lawyers and school teachers or had other training which should have prepared them for steady work, and a former clerk of the New York Supreme Court, a person with a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, and a concert pianist were among the applicants.⁴⁷

Carney's appointment as head of the census was viewed as an indication that the national administration recognized the Commonwealth Federation as its chief supporter in the state. Consequently the appointment was interpreted as a direct slap at the state party leaders, many of whom had been Martin Democrats in the primary of 1938 and inactive or "Sprague Democrats" in November, 1938. The appointment was also construed as a bolster to the third-term movement, which the OCF led in Oregon and toward which the state Democratic leadership was distinctly cool. The Commonwealth Federation had favored a third term for Roosevelt long before there had been any hint of Carney's appointment to the census position, but that recognition may well have fired the OCF's enthusiasm even more.

⁴⁷Sweetland to Merle Stuart, February 6, 1940; Marval Shurtliff to Sweetland, n.d.; Sweetland to Maudie Ellman, March 7, 1940.

A week after the convention of December, 1939, reaffirmed the Federation's support for the third term, the Commonwealth's petitions for placing FDR's name on the primary ballot in 1940 were in circulation. With his usual care, Sweetland sent copies of the petitions to James Rowe in the White House and to the President's son-in-law in Seattle.⁴⁸

The OCF had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary signatures, and Sweetland planned to file the petitions on February 6th, the first day of the filing period. Shortly before this date, however, Gus Solomon received a "very insistent" letter from Lowell Mellett saying that Roosevelt did not want his name filed in Oregon's or in any other primary election. Having secured the signatures, the OCF was required by law either to file them or to obtain the permission of each signer to withdraw his signature. These obstacles were enough, Sweetland wrote, but a recent attack on the administration by John L. Lewis really made withdrawal of the petitions impossible, "since any change on our part would be immediately attributed to his domination." The OCF would consider backing out of filing Roosevelt's name only if it received a "direct statement either from the Chief or someone who is willing to state that they spoke with his permission." No statement was forthcoming, and the OCF went ahead and filed the petitions.⁴⁹

The OCF had much more difficulty deciding on a candidate to support for the vice-presidency. A representative of Burton K. Wheeler attended

⁴⁸Salem Capital Journal, September 14, 1939, p. 1; Sweetland to James Rowe, December 15, 1939; to John Boettiger, December 15, 1939.

⁴⁹News release, January 31, 1940; Sweetland to Helen Fuller, February 6, 1940; to Lowell Mellett, February 5, 1940.

the convention in December, 1939, and aroused a good deal of support. Sweetland had begun asking for advice from the League in the fall of 1939 but got no help from that quarter. In April he reported to Oliver that the old-line Democrats were conducting a write-in campaign for Assistant Secretary of War Louis Johnson. Sweetland thought the OCF could easily beat Johnson with a write-in candidate of their own and was eager for the Commonwealth to back a "reliable anti-war progressive" for the vice-presidency to express the Commonwealth's "considerable reservations" about Roosevelt's foreign policy. There were still no suggestions from the League, and the OCF convention late in April decided to conduct a write-in campaign for Senator Robert La Follette, although the primary was just a few weeks away.⁵⁰

The Federation had been actively preparing for state and local campaigns since the previous fall. Sweetland devoted six weeks early in 1940 to setting up county organizations, which were put to work finding candidates and encouraging registration and precinct organization. In this election the OCF extended its efforts beyond the vicinity of Portland and took a hand in encouraging progressive activity from Coos and Curry counties to Malheur County. More than twenty-five candidates for the state legislature had the OCF's encouragement, as did several candidates for local offices in Multnomah County.⁵¹

After filing Roosevelt's name in the primary and paying for the

⁵⁰Sweetland to Oliver, December 12, 1939, and April 18, 1940; Minutes of the seventh OCF Convention, April 28, 1940.

⁵¹Sweetland to Oliver, February 14, 1940; to Arthur Pulford, April 18, 1940; to Anthony Yturri, April 15, 1940; to Dalrymple, April 16, 1940.

corresponding pages in the Voter's Pamphlet the OCF naturally campaigned for delegates loyal to the New Deal for the Democratic national convention. In addition to Commonwealth members Stephenson Smith, David C. Epps and Monroe Sweetland, the convention endorsed five other persons for the ten-member delegation. General Martin, who was the leader of John Nance Garner's supporters in Oregon, was running for one of the positions as delegate-at-large, and the OCF was as eager to defeat the General as it was to elect candidates it supported. The OCF's convention also endorsed Pierce for re-election, Mrs. Honeyman for her old seat in the third Congressional district, and Lyman Ross for state treasurer.⁵²

The efforts of the Commonwealth were seriously handicapped by inadequate funds. Much of its money was going into the campaign for a PUD in Portland, and the remaining funds were not adequate to cover all the races in which the OCF was interested. The OCF put out flyers listing the OCF-endorsed candidates in Multnomah and Clatsop counties, but other campaign literature consisted only of a modest advertisement the day before the election in the Coos Bay and Eugene papers.⁵³

Portland turned down the PUD by a substantial vote, and Lyman Ross was defeated in the Democratic primary for state treasurer. Elsewhere the OCF's candidates did well. About two thirds of its candidates for the legislature won, and half of the Oregon delegation to the Democratic convention was elected with the OCF's help; although Sweetland was de-

⁵²Sweetland to Herman Kenin, March 25, 1940; Minutes of the seventh OCF Convention, April 28, 1940.

⁵³Sweetland to Mellett, May 2, 1940.

feated, Epps and Smith were on the delegation, and General Martin was not. Walter Pierce and Mrs. Honeyman won their races, and Roosevelt defeated Garner by a huge vote. Roosevelt would undoubtedly have won the presidential primary in Oregon without any help from the Commonwealth, but the OCF could take much of the credit for the fact that there was a presidential primary, and all of the credit for entering Roosevelt's name in it. Robert La Follette led the field of eight in the vote for a Democratic vice-presidential candidate. Sweetland enthusiastically told Oliver that the vote for La Follette was the best indication of the OCF's strength. Perhaps it was because La Follette ran best in areas where the OCF was strongest, but very few people bothered to vote in so meaningless an election, and even if Sweetland was right about the meaning of the vote, it is difficult to understand his enthusiasm.⁵⁴

Although the OCF was still officially nonpartisan, by 1940 it was acting almost solely as a pressure group within the Democratic Party, where it had discovered that approximately 80 per cent of the OCF membership was registered. "The real battleground at this time between progress and reaction is the Democratic Party," Sweetland told the state CIO convention.⁵⁵

Throughout 1939 and 1940 Sweetland urged friends of the OCF to file for precinct committeeman or committeewoman, and following the primary of 1940 the OCF had enough strength in county Democratic committees to justify an attempt to oust the state chairman, Frank Tierney. Immediately after the primary, Sweetland wrote to friends of the OCF

⁵⁴Portland Oregonian, May 18, 1940, p. 1; Oregon Blue Book, 1941-1942, pp. 223-26; Oregon Voter, June 22, 1940, pp. 16-18.

⁵⁵Excerpts from address by Sweetland before the CIO Convention, February 11, 1940.

throughout the state urging them to organize the progressive members of their county Democratic committees behind a common slate of progressive officers. Sweetland reminded them to concentrate on electing the state committeeman and committeewoman from their county, for the state committee elected the state officers, and to sacrifice the county chairmanship to the old guard if necessary. If the progressives were weak, Sweetland urged them to at least try to elect a state committeewoman. The old guard might permit this, he thought, since they seemed to think the post was unimportant, but women had an equal vote on the state committee. Sweetland also used the possibility of selecting some of the state officers from outside Multnomah County as bait to enlist support. The state leaders from Multnomah County "have become so involved in the intrigues and maneuverings of Portland politics that we all know absolutely nothing has been done to strengthen the Party upstate," Sweetland confided to Democrats in eastern Oregon.⁵⁶

Using this strategy, the OCF picked up a vote on the state committee from many counties, and in several counties the progressives elected their entire slate of officers. In Multnomah County, the Commonwealth's organization paid off with the election of a prominent member as state committeewoman, and an "ally" of the OCF defeated the former county chairman for state committeeman.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Sweetland to precinct committeemen and women, May 23, 1940; Sweetland to Robert Bradford, June 8, 1940.

⁵⁷Sweetland to Stuart, June 25, 1940; Heyman to Sweetland, June 16, 1940; Sweetland to Multnomah County precinct committeemen and women, n.d.; to Morris Fisher, June 19, 1940; "Democratic County Central Committee Election," Multnomah County, June 25, 1940.

Sweetland thought the OCF might have enough votes to elect the state Democratic chairman, but it was decided that an attempt to do so would seriously damage party unity. The OCF did, however, insist on a chairman who was loyal to the New Deal, had the confidence of the administration, and had "some sense of the importance of organization, particularly in the up-state districts." In Charles Leach the OCF's strategists believed they had found a good compromise candidate. Although he had generally been identified with the conservative wing of the party, Leach had supported the Democratic ticket in 1938 and had shown himself to be willing to co-operate with the OCF. The Commonwealth backed Leach, and he was elected. Sweetland was even more pleased with the selection of the vice-president for women's affairs, Mrs. Joan Dixon of Hood River. She was not only a strong New Dealer, he reported, but was energetic, and she started on a tour of eastern Oregon "to stir up party workers" the week after her election.⁵⁸

Inadequate finances again hampered the Commonwealth's efforts in the general election. Despite the OCF's victory in the state Democratic committee, the committee remained its "usual uninspired and uninspiring self." Consequently much of the burden of the campaign fell on the OCF. Its help from Washington, D.C. was earmarked for Mrs. Honeyman's campaign, the IWA was spending heavily on an organizational drive, and the available union money was designated for particular legislative races. The nomination of Oregon's Charles McNary as the Republican vice-

⁵⁸Sweetland to Bradford, June 8, 1940; to David K. Niles, August 6, 1940; to Thomas Roe, n.d.

presidential candidate made the Willkie ticket a real threat in Oregon, Sweetland thought, unless Willkie's association with private power companies could be made the issue. For this purpose the state branch of the Independent Committee for Roosevelt and Wallace, headed by Republicans Harry Kenin and State Grange Master Gill, could do particularly effective work among Oregon's Republican power-conscious farmers. But the state Democratic party was unwilling to give the Independent Committee financial support.⁵⁹

The prospect of receiving financial support from Labor's Non-Partisan League was dim as a result of the direction that organization was taking and the resignation of E. L. Oliver in June. Oliver could no longer conscientiously serve the League, he explained, because it was apparent that Lewis meant to step up his attack on Roosevelt and was allying with Communists in pursuing this course. After Oliver's resignation, correspondence between the League and the OCF dropped to only the occasional exchange of routine reports.⁶⁰

By early September the OCF's financial position was desperate, and Sweetland wrote to Oliver, who was then working for the American Labor Party, to ask if he knew of anyone interested in preserving organizations like the OCF. The Commonwealth Federation had decided not to appeal to the League, Sweetland told Oliver, "for reasons which I think you will understand." But by the end of the month the Commonwealth was reduced

⁵⁹Sweetland to Tex Goldschmidt, August 10, 1940; to Oliver, September 10, 1940; to Verda Barnes, August 6, 1940.

⁶⁰Press release of letter from Oliver to John L. Lewis, June 21, 1940; Oliver to Sweetland, June 22, 1940.

to asking help even from the League. "We have pledges of less than \$700.00 for this whole all-important campaign," Sweetland wrote. But the League did not come to the aid of the OCF, and when John L. Lewis endorsed Willkie in October, Sweetland fired off a wire of protest. The OCF did scrape together enough money to put Sweetland on the radio a few days before election, and much of his address was devoted to an attack on Lewis and the Communist Party for their opposition to Roosevelt.⁶¹

Roosevelt carried Oregon for the third time in 1940, but by less than forty thousand votes. More than half of the margin came from Multnomah County, where the OCF had conducted a vigorous registration drive under the direction of Nathalie Panek. Mrs. Honeyman again lost to Homer Angell in the third Congressional district, but the OCF's candidates fared a little better in the legislative races than they had in 1938.⁶²

⁶¹Sweetland to Oliver, September 10, 1940; to John T. Jones, September 28, 1940; to Lewis, October 22, 1940; Address by Sweetland, KEX, November 2, 1940.

⁶²Oregon Blue Book, 1941-1942, pp. 227-28.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECLINE OF THE OREGON COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION

The Commonwealth Federation wound up 1940 with its eighth semi-annual convention in December. "[T]his convention marks the end of the formative period of our Federation," the executive secretary told the gathering. "Your Federation is now an accepted political institution of our state."¹

The OCF was noticed, to be sure, but it was not yet "accepted," particularly in some circles of labor. Despite the attack of the Communists on the OCF during the preceding year, the AFL showed no sign of warming toward the Commonwealth. Indeed the Labor Press printed some of its most virulent attacks upon the OCF during this period. During 1941 the paper carried a series of articles on "The Enemy Within." The "enemy" was, of course, the Communist Party, and the Labor Press applied the red brush to many of the members of the OCF with rather indiscriminate zeal.² Communism was still an issue in the IWA, where the opposition faction had stepped up their attack on the Communist-leaning leadership of the international union. This fight inevitably spilled over into

¹Minutes of the eighth OCF Convention, December 14-15, 1940, Appendix II.

²Oregon Labor Press, particularly the column, "The Enemy Within," between June 6, 1941 and July 11, 1941.

the OCF.

In his report to the eighth convention, Sweetland dealt at some length with the activities of the Communist Party, which throughout the year had done "everything in its power to injure and discredit" the Commonwealth Federation. Sweetland concluded this part of his report with an appeal to the convention not to join in the current attempt to bar the Communist Party from the ballot.

[I]t is my opinion that this offensive and vicious minority furnishes the acid test of our faith in civil liberties in our democracy [W]e should much prefer that the Communists would run on their own ticket and the channels of democratic expression be kept open, than to suppress them by legal action.³

In spite of Sweetland's plea, Don Helmick, one of the leading oppositionists in the IWA, moved that "the Communist party, Nazi party, or Fascist party organizations, or any other group whose object is the abolition of constitutional government be condemned and be denied affiliation with OCF, and that we support the prohibition of such groups from the American ballot."⁴

Leading the fight against the motion was Francis J. Murnane of the Plywood and Veneer Workers' Union, who urged the convention "not to go on record against civil liberties." In the course of the long debate, Sweetland tried to amend the resolution by dropping the phrase supporting the exclusion of Communists from the ballot. He was defeated in

³Minutes of the eighth OCF Convention, December 14-15, 1940, Appendix II.

⁴Minutes of the eighth OCF Convention, December 14-15, 1940.

this attempt, however, and Helmick's original motion finally carried by a vote of fifty-four to twenty-eight.⁵

On the following day Murnane's black eye was the talk of the convention. Murnane charged that five "goons" assaulted him as he left the session because of his opposition to Helmick's resolution. The resolution, he thought, was intended to "bar all persons who oppose Helmick and Al. F. Hartung." Murnane denied being a Communist himself and said that he would continue "in spite of goon squads, psychopathic cases, and homicidal maniacs to endeavor to advance the cause of labor and American civil liberties." According to Murnane, three of his assailants were delegates to the convention, and the leader of the "squad" had been elected to the board of directors.⁶

The incident, which was ignored in the minutes and in the friendly Salem Capital Press, was given prominent coverage in the Labor Newdealer. It provided an opportunity for that paper to attack two of its favorite whipping boys at the same time -- the "pro-war" bloc in the IWA and the OCF. The resolution, reported the Newdealer, was the usual red-baiting and was "intended to provide employers with a weapon to use in crushing labor."⁷

⁵Ibid.

⁶Portland Oregon Journal, December 16, 1940, p. 1; Labor Newdealer, December 20, 1940.

⁷Labor Newdealer, December 20, 1940. The Oregon Industrial Union Council (CIO) repudiated the Labor Newdealer in February, 1941. The opposition faction gained control of the IWA in 1941, and the international union adopted a constitutional amendment barring Communists from membership.

The resolution was not only opposed by a faction in the CIO. Long-time leaders of the OCF, such as Roy Hewitt, Byron Carney, and A. C. Heyman, opposed it, as did Sweetland and Smith. Heyman had been elected to the OCF's board of directors at the convention. Later in December, he wrote to the board explaining his absence from a recent meeting. He opposed the resolution, and assumed that he would not have been elected to the board had he been able to make his opinion known at the convention. The OCF had always stressed civil liberties and welcomed all liberal groups who were looking for more liberty and justice, Heyman continued. His first contact with Communists had been at meetings of the OCF and "I, for one welcomed their energy and activity." Had not the OCF bled from within in the Democratic Party? "As I see it, the communists have used similar tactics and also have made their contribution." If there was any truth in socialism it could not be suppressed and "[i]f the communists have a more direct and logical plan for bringing about socialism than the old line socialists, then, for God sake, let's listen to their argument and accept whatever contribution they can make."⁸ But the OCF was past the stage where help from any and every quarter was accepted.

The financial condition of the Commonwealth had not improved following the elections of 1940. "We have not yet learned to finance our work and are constantly harassed and restricted by our lack of revenue," Sweetland told the eighth convention. To Washington, D. C.,

⁸Heyman to OCF Board of Directors, December 31, 1940.

in another appeal for help, he reported that something had to be done "about the terrific incubus of debt which has us almost strangled at the moment" if the OCF was to do effective legislative work in 1941. The delegates to the convention voted to eliminate one of the semi-annual conventions to reduce expenses. In addition the convention prepared a resolution to be submitted to affiliated organizations for ratification. It called for each affiliate to pay twenty-five cents per member per year in addition to the regular dues. Confident that the resolution would be ratified, the convention urged major efforts on behalf of a number of bills in the coming legislature and appointed a legislative committee.⁹

The OCF's "People's Lobby" was established in the Senator Hotel in Salem when the legislature opened in 1941. Members were Sweetland, state CIO President John Brost, CIO Secretary and OCF Vice-President Ralph Peoples, Miss Ruth Haefner, who was active in the Portland League of Women Voters, Byron Carney, and Wendell Barnett, a Socialist farmer from Gervais. This group sent weekly bulletins on the legislature to the OCF's affiliates, rounded up the friends of the OCF for hearings, and attempted to induce legislators to vote for bills that the OCF approved. However, the effort on behalf of particular bills was secondary to an effort to arouse interest in the legislative process. Every two weeks during the session Sweetland gave radio talks on the legislature. The theme, sounded again and again, was "help make demo-

⁹Minutes of the eighth OCF Convention, December 14-15, 1940, and Appendixes II and III; Sweetland to Niles, December 30, 1940.

cracy work," and the message was that democracy, like charity, begins at home.

We have yet a little time at least to set our democracy in order, before the erosion of faith which results from ill health, unemployment, insecurity and despair has undermined and destroyed our America as it has the other democracies. No one here or abroad decides this for us -- we decide that problem for ourselves. It's up to us all from now on to help make democracy work.¹⁰

To aid the cause the OCF offered "honest and accurate reports directly from the firing line in Salem," but made no pretense of being impartial. The OCF was partial -- to the farmer and laborer, the senior citizen without a decent pension, the student, and the family with medical bills -- in short, to the "people." The Commonwealth did not have a single formula for making democracy work, and the People's Lobby backed bills providing for everything from free blood tests for syphilis to forest conservation.¹¹

To fight the battle for the people, the Commonwealth counted upon eight assemblymen who were members of the CIO, AFL, or a Railroad Brotherhood. These, together with the other liberals who supported the OCF's general program, made up about a fourth of the lower house. In the Senate the OCF was even weaker. The first fight of the session was for Robert Farrell for speaker of the house. Farrell was a Republican and no flaming liberal, but the OCF accused his opponent of being a

¹⁰Smith to Members of the 41st Oregon Legislature, January 8, 1941; Radio address, "Legislative Round-Up," by Sweetland, KEX, March 20, 1941.

¹¹Radio address by Sweetland, KEX, January 18, 1941.

member of the Associated Farmers. The Commonwealth cited Farrell's election as a significant victory and felt that he gave liberals a fair share of committee assignments.¹²

During the session the People's Lobby devoted considerable attention to bills providing for increased pensions, repeal of the seasonality clause in the unemployment compensation act, and the establishment of junior colleges. The major bill framed and backed by the OCF provided for state medical insurance for low-income families.

The OCF had called for some type of medical insurance in its original platform, but had taken no action on the matter until the spring convention of 1939. That convention instructed the board of directors to appoint a committee to study the problem and to draw up a bill to take to the legislature. By 1941 the committee had prepared a bill which was introduced in the legislature by Dr. J. F. Hosch, who was a successful Bend physician. The OCF had no illusion that the bill could pass either house in 1941, but it did seem possible to begin focusing public attention on the problem of medical care for the needy.¹³

The bill received twelve votes in the house, but the vote of Richard L. Neuberger, a freshman representative and a member of the OCF, was not among them. This created a minor flurry when Neuberger wrote to the editor of the magazine, Social Security, explaining that the bill

¹²Sweetland to John F. Sullivan, December 26, 1940; Legislative Notes, n.d.; OCF Legislative Bulletin, January 18, 1941.

¹³Minutes of the fifth annual OCF convention, April 15-16, 1939, Appendix II; Pamphlet, The Biggest "If", by the OCF, n.d.; Sweetland to Arthur Capper, February 12, 1941; Sweetland to Abraham Epstein, January 27, 1941.

provided no revenue and that he didn't want to raise false hopes about medical insurance. To this Sweetland replied that "[n]o vote cast by any member of the Oregon Legislature during the 1941 Session was more shocking" to liberals of Oregon than that cast by Neuberger against the health bill. Since it was obvious the bill would not pass, the vote was on the principle of health insurance, Sweetland maintained, and Neuberger not only voted against it but gave the "chief speech against it." This exchange did not indicate a break between Neuberger and the OCF, but it was a reflection of a disconcerting tendency Sweetland believed Neuberger had of going his own way when he found it profitable.¹⁴

While the OCF's legislative committee was engaged at the legislature, CIO organizer Max Gardner was at work in Lane County. "We consider Lane county just about the most important spot in the state just now," Sweetland wrote to Gardner in January, "since your work offers us hope of breaking into what has been an apparently impregnable reactionary fortress." By late April some eleven new CIO unions had been organized among the lumber workers and fishermen in the county. The OCF was not far behind the CIO. As soon as the unions were formed, Sweetland urged them to inform their legislators that the People's Lobby spoke for them, and the OCF quietly began to form a Lane County OCF Council. Although labor was heavily represented in this endeavor, liberal Grangers provided the leadership.¹⁵

¹⁴Sweetland to Epstein, April 12, 1941; Epstein to Sweetland, April 24, 1941; Sweetland to Epstein, May 3, 1941.

¹⁵Sweetland to Max Gardner, January 28, 1941; to Harry Kenin, April 29, 1941; to Virgil Caskey, April 3, 1941; to Dr. C. H. Bailey, April 29, 1941.

The census of 1940 had given Oregon a fourth Congressional district, which was established in southwestern Oregon. This development increased the political importance of Lane County, for it was the most populous area in the new district. When the Lane County OCF Council held its first public meeting late in April, the event created some interest. Both Democrats and Republicans, reported the Eugene Register-Guard, saw the formation of the Council as a move by "the Commonweathers to set themselves up in the valley with a view to splitting old-line votes and making their bid for national recognition via the new congressional district."¹⁶

From Lane County, the OCF's attention turned to Clatsop County, where a PUD election came up in May. In a similar election two years before, the county had defeated a PUD by nearly a two-to-one vote. Now in 1941 the supporters of the PUD had to contend not only with the usual citizens' committee but with the impending connection of the Pacific Power and Light Company with Bonneville power. On April 25, scarcely two weeks before the election, the PP & L announced a reduction in rates which was possible because the company would begin to receive power from Bonneville within the next thirty days. The citizens' committee made good use of the argument that since Clatsop County could have Bonneville power with or without a PUD, voters should wait and see how things went under private management.¹⁷

¹⁶Eugene Register-Guard, May 4, 1941, p. 23.

¹⁷Clipping from the Salem Capital Press, May 16, 1941; Salem Capital Journal, May 7, 1941, p. 11; M. G. Thorn to PP & L Customers, April 25, 1941; Pamphlet, Clatsop County Citizens' Committee to Oppose \$4,000,000 P.U.D., April 19, 1941.

But the backers of the PUD were neither few nor disorganized. In Astoria the Central Labor Council was wholeheartedly behind the PUD and reminded the businessmen of Astoria that support of the measure would please their many patrons who were members of AFL unions. The Grange was actively involved in the campaign, and State Master Gill spent the week before the election campaigning in the county. Sweetland spent the last ten days before the election rousing the IWA locals which were strong in the area. Bonneville field representatives Carl D. Thompson and Morton Tompkins were also present.¹⁸

The campaign, which Sweetland described as "one of the nastiest rough and tumbles I have ever experienced," culminated in the defeat of the PUD by less than two hundred votes out of six thousand. The supporters of the PUD interpreted this to mean that sentiment was coming around to public power and that they would win if they could arrange another election. Sweetland agreed with this interpretation but must have been more frustrated than elated with the result. The day following the election he wrote to each of the IWA locals in the county reminding them that if every member of their local and their wives had been registered to vote, their local alone could have made the difference between defeat and success. "Speaking for the Commonwealth Federation, I want to say that we believe no man or woman is a full fledged union member unless he or she is also a registered voter."¹⁹

¹⁸An Open Letter to the Business Men of Astoria from Eli McConkey, April 29, 1941; Clipping from the Salem Capital Press, May 16, 1941; Sweetland to Oscar Chapman, May 8, 1941; Astorian-Budget, May 7, 1941, pp. 1, 8.

¹⁹Sweetland to Chapman, May 8, 1941; Astorian-Budget, May 7, 1941, pp. 1, 8; Sweetland to Guy T. Haney, May 7, 1941.

In March the OCF had announced with thanksgiving that sufficient affiliates of the OCF had ratified the additional tax of twenty-five cents per capita to put it into effect. The OCF's financial position had improved, but the treasury was still far from well padded. The Federation was supposed to pay Sweetland a modest salary for his full-time service as executive secretary, but payments were highly irregular. Time after time Sweetland concluded his report to the board with the comment that the executive secretary's salary was several weeks overdue. During these years, Wendell Barnett recalls, Sweetland was frequently so hard up that he rummaged the railroad for discarded ties for fuel. Mrs. Sweetland worked during some of this period, but her work took her to Seattle, Los Angeles, and the East. In 1940 and early in 1941 Sweetland received several offers of more remunerative positions. But he turned them down, although he told Oliver in September that he would have to take at least a six months' leave from the OCF to recoup his personal finances, and the separation from his family was growing more irksome. By June, 1941, however, he felt the OCF was sufficiently established financially and politically for him to leave, and he took a position in Washington, D. C., with the Office of Production Management.²⁰

The executive committee arranged for Vice-President Ralph Peoples to assume the direction of the OCF's activities until the next convention in December, 1941. Throughout the remainder of the year there appears to

²⁰Sweetland to OCF affiliates, March 12, 1941; Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, August 28, 1937; Sweetland to Oliver, September 10, 1940; Oregon Labor Press, July 18, 1941, p. 1.

have been little activity by the OCF. It was a slack season politically, and Peoples had a full-time job as state CIO secretary. However, on the Saturday following the attack on Pearl Harbor the Commonwealth met in a convention which opened with President Stephenson Smith reaffirming the Federation's support of the administration's foreign policy. "Personal and partisan politics are adjourned for the duration," Smith told the convention. "But the economic and social policies for which we have stood are now more vital than ever to keep up national morale." "This is a people's war and we must not, when it is over, find that what we have been fighting for has disappeared."²¹

At this convention Smith submitted his resignation as president of the OCF. In the fall of 1939 he had taken a leave of absence from his job at the University of Oregon to take a position with the American Society of Artists, Composers, and Musicians. During 1940, he occasionally returned to Oregon, where he kept his hand in the political game, and he served on his travels as a field representative for the OCF. Later, however, he resigned his teaching job to move east permanently. In December, 1941, the OCF for the first time needed to find new men to fill the two top offices. For president the convention selected Douglas Anderson, a former Indiana minister who had gone into labor work. Anderson came to Portland in the late thirties as an organizer for the Textile Workers and was considered by Sweetland to be one of the most gifted young men in progressive circles in Oregon. Ralph

²¹Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, September 7, 1941;
Minutes of the fifth annual OCF Convention, December 13, 1941.

Peoples was asked by the convention to continue as executive director until funds were available to pay a full-time director. To hasten that day, the convention raised the per capita tax established by the previous convention from twenty-five cents a year to five cents a month per member.²²

The convention, which was smaller than most, was no doubt subdued by the events of the previous weekend. At any rate it produced no fireworks and passed only eight resolutions instead of the usual twenty to thirty. After the convention, the OCF again showed some life. Its office help was engaged in trying to straighten out the records of affiliates, urging those that had fallen by the wayside to reaffiliate, and attempting to extract payment from affiliates that had neglected their dues. With the elections of 1942 approaching, Peoples tried to find liberal candidates and to have places of registration established near the Portland shipyards. Meetings to endorse candidates were organized in Multnomah, Clackamas, Columbia, and Clatsop counties, and for the first time in Lane County. The OCF did not put on much of a campaign, however. The CIO directed Peoples to give up his work for the OCF by April, and no one else was available to do the job. There seemed to be a general disinterest in state politics, and the OCF found a number of its young male politicians leaving for the service. Candidates were hard to find, and several times the OCF was reduced to backing weak candidates in hastily arranged write-in campaigns.²³

²²Minutes of the fifth annual OCF Convention, December 13, 1941; Portland Oregonian, September 13, 1939, p. 6; Sweetland to Oliver, May 8, 1941.

²³Peoples to Heyman, May 19, 1942; to A. A. Bailey, March 3, 1942; Minutes of Special Meeting, Clatsop County, May 6, 1942; Peoples to OCF affiliates in Multnomah, Columbia, and Clackamas counties, April 15, 1942; Commonwealth People invited to Committee for Endorsements, Lane County, n.d.; Minutes of the OCF Executive Board, March 1, 1942, and April 12, 1942.

As the OCF's financial position improved, the board of directors began to look for someone to take over as executive director. They were now prepared to pay \$150 a month for a director and, through Sweetland, had arranged for the CIO War Relief Committee to pay \$100 a month for the director to do part-time work for the CIO. Several possible candidates for the job were being considered by the board when the roof caved in on the OCF.²⁴

On June 6, the Columbia River District Council of the IWA voted to disaffiliate from the OCF, apparently because it felt that the IWA was getting an inadequate return on its money. The Commonwealth urged the Council to reconsider, since the OCF was in the process of finding a director who could devote more time to the job, but the Council refused to reaffiliate. Several of the IWA locals immediately withdrew, and this spelled the end of the OCF. Without their financial support the Commonwealth could not pay an executive director, and a director was necessary to keep the OCF going. Reluctantly the executive board agreed to discontinue active operations by the OCF for the duration of the war, although they agreed to continue to issue occasional pieces of publicity. In 1943 a few very subdued legislative bulletins appeared, and with that the Commonwealth Federation faded from the political scene in Oregon.²⁵

²⁴Minutes of the OCF Executive Board, March 1, 1942, and April 12, 1942.

²⁵Peoples to Columbia River District IWA locals, June 16, 1942; Douglas Anderson to Columbia River District Council, July 8, 1942; W. E. Edmiston to OCF, July 20, 1942; Claude Ballard to OCF, June 12, 1942; Minutes of the Extraordinary OCF Executive Board, July 26, 1942; Legislative Bulletin No. 1, January 25, 1943, and Summary Legislative Bulletin, March 24, 1943.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The OCF was one of many organizations that developed during the Depression as disturbed citizens saw the need for reform and, in characteristic American fashion, organized to bring it about. The Commonwealth Federation was in touch with a number of these organizations, particularly through Sweetland, Smith and Neuberger, all of whom had contacts in liberal circles across the county, but its leaders do not appear to have modeled the Commonwealth after any particular organization. Although they borrowed the OCF's platform from the Washington Commonwealth Federation, they more often found their neighbor to the north useful as a bad example.

However, the OCF did share some characteristics and problems with left-wing political organizations in other states. Most of these organizations, for example, also drew their strength from the groups hit hardest by the Depression -- laborers, small farmers, the unemployed, and the aged -- and from a few leftist intellectuals and professional people. They shared the problems of combining radical theories with practical politics, of controlling internecine war among different kinds of reformers, and of defining attitudes toward the Communist Party. The OCF seemed to meet some of these problems more successfully than did three comparable movements, the WCF, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor

Party, and the supporters of Governor Culbert Olson in California.

This success is more apparent than real, however, for the OCF never faced the test of success as did the left wing in Minnesota, California and, to some extent, in Washington. The Oregon group thus avoided many of the problems of distributing patronage, of increasing the opportunities for Communist penetration, and of being expected to carry out the pledges in its platform.¹

The OCF managed to avoid being taken over by the Communists, while its counterpart to the north succumbed. The Communist Party was undoubtedly much weaker in Oregon than in Washington, but much of the credit for avoiding this pitfall must go to the leaders of the OCF, particularly Sweetland. Sweetland, Solomon, Smith, and others at the helm were aware of Communist tactics and skilled in meeting them. As strong supporters of civil liberties they believed in the right of Communists to work freely in a democratic society, although the majority of the OCF did not share their belief in 1940. They were confident that American society could be reformed and that they could use the Communists toward this end without prejudicing the result. They correctly judged American democracy, the strength of the Communist Party in Oregon, and their own skills.

The Commonwealth had trouble with divisions among reformers as

¹A number of works have been consulted on left-wing groups during the thirties, particularly: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt (Boston, 1957-60), 3 vols.; Robert E. Burke, Olson's New Deal for California (Berkeley, 1953); George H. Mayer, The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson (Minneapolis, 1951); and David J. Saposs, Communism in American Politics (Washington, 1960).

did similar organizations. The AFL cooled to the OCF as it had to the WCF; the Socialist Party officially withdrew in the summer of 1938,² and the Communists pulled out of the OCF with a great deal of noise after the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Although the OCF did enlist the support of many pension supporters and did not have the difficulty with the ham-and-eggs groups that plagued Olson in California, it never enjoyed the strong backing from the advocates of pensions that the WCF developed in the Washington Old Age Pension Union.³ Tension existed between farmers and laborers in Oregon as elsewhere, but it did not take the form of a struggle within the OCF as it did in the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota. The absence of this struggle within the OCF is, however, a symptom of failure rather than of success, for the OCF did not have enough rural support to create the problem.

The OCF also had difficulty in combining extravagant hopes with practical politics. As it matured, however, it seemed gradually and smoothly to adjust to the realities of political life in Oregon; the OCF suffered no aberrations as did the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party in its sudden burst of radicalism in the platform of 1934. The original

²Socialist Call, August 13, 1938, p. 3. The Socialist Party of Oregon complained that the OCF was becoming a pressure group in the Democratic Party and that it was "inconsistent with working class party principles to descend to such levels of political opportunism."

³The OCF hoped to create a unified pension movement which would support the OCF. In pursuit of this goal the Commonwealth tried to co-operate with other groups interested in increased pensions in putting a common initiative measure on the ballot in 1940. The coalition fell apart after several months work, and although the OCF made a preliminary filing to put its own pension measure on the ballot, it became too involved in the campaign for Roosevelt to circulate the necessary petitions.

platform of the Commonwealth Federation was fairly extreme by prevailing political standards in Oregon, and although the OCF never significantly changed the platform, it did increasingly ignore it.

The leaders of the OCF shared the ambiguity of many liberals about their role in national politics. In theory most liberals believed that they should co-operate, but they were unable to effect a national organization of any consequence. As the liberals debated, FDR solved their problem by stealing the thunder of the left, and groups like the WCF and the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party ended up in or allied with the party of the New Deal. The OCF shared the same fate; many of its members had probably belonged to the Democratic Party in sentiment if not in fact from the beginning, but when the OCF was organized many of its leaders seemed to feel that they were to the left of the national Democratic Party and certainly far to the left of the Democratic Party in Oregon.

The original call for a new political organization in Oregon at the convention of the State Federation of Labor in 1934 had been for a third party "separate and distinct" from the two regular parties. But it seemed impossible immediately to wean Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists from their traditional party loyalties, and the OCF was established as a nonpartisan progressive organization. The OCF kept this designation as it moved into the Democratic Party, and its leaders, particularly Wendell Barnett and Sweetland, never quite gave up hope that a major realignment of political parties would soon occur in the United States. Sweetland was not quite sure whether the realign-

ment would bring a third and liberal party, or would simply polarize liberals in the Democratic Party and conservatives in the Republican, but he intended to be ready for either eventuality. Part of the reason Sweetland was so much interested in OCF precinct organization was that he wanted to create an independent source of support for the OCF which could be swung into the proper camp when the realignment occurred.⁴

At the convention in the spring of 1940 Barnett presented a resolution calling for the OCF to run candidates under its own name in the first Congressional district in that year. The convention referred the resolution to the board of directors for decision. Sweetland seemed interested in it both as a means of forcing the major parties to run more progressive candidates and as a means of starting to build a third party in Oregon which would be ready to go when liberals got together nationally. E. L. Oliver shared Sweetland's hope for a realignment of parties but discouraged this venture. The threat of a third party, he cautioned Sweetland, would probably be just as effective as the fact, and was certainly much less risky. When the OCF was in its last throes in the spring of 1942 Wendell Barnett was still eager to turn it into a third party.⁵

The membership of the OCF included persons of various party loyalties and reform or protest traditions. Some information is avail-

⁴Sweetland to Harry W. Laidler, December 11, 1937; Sweetland to Oliver, October 15, 1938.

⁵Minutes of the OCF Board of Directors, March 3, 1940; Oliver to Sweetland, February 19, 1940; Minutes of the OCF Executive Board, April 12, 1942.

able on the more active members, and it is possible to make a few generalizations about the different traditions that they represented.

The Populist tradition, particularly of opposition to Wall Street capitalists and to private monopolies, was probably common to the many members of rural background. However, it seems to have been strongest among the advocates of public power in the Grange and Farmers' Union who were suspicious of the OCF and never achieved more than a wary truce with it. Many of these farmers felt antipathy toward labor organizations, for foreigners, and occasionally for religious minorities. Obviously the OCF would not be a comfortable political home for persons of this persuasion, although Walter Pierce, who perhaps belonged to this tradition, managed to work with the Commonwealth.

The Progressive tradition is also hard to isolate in the OCF. Its presence was possibly revealed by the OCF's concern with clean and democratic government; the Federation supported reform in state institutions, the registration of lobbyists, higher pay for legislators, and, of course, the direct primary. But in so far as these concerns may have reflected the Progressive tradition, all OCF members seemed to share them to about the same degree. The constant reference by the OCF to its members and friends as "progressives" also suggests that the Progressive tradition was widely diffused.

Marxists of various shades were represented in the Commonwealth Federation, and the small Communist group has already been discussed. During the first year of the OCF, members of this faction appeared to have quite a bit of influence on the OCF's publications. The ideas of

class conflict and working-class solidarity were pertinent in the bitter days of 1937 and 1938 and were shared by non-Communists. However, after the warfare in labor lessened and General Martin was defeated, the literature also became more subdued, and it is impossible to tell how much credence non-Communists in the working class gave to Marxist doctrines.

The Socialist group shared the Communists' interest in the working class, although few of the Socialists in the OCF were "workers." Most of them were college students and professional people, housewives and farmers. It is difficult to tell how many Socialists were members of the Commonwealth. Representatives of Socialist organizations never numbered more than ten at a convention, but some of the representatives of other organizations were Socialists. Whatever their number, they played an important part in the OCF both because they were politically experienced and because the executive secretary of the OCF was a Socialist. The Socialist Party formally withdrew from the Commonwealth Federation in the summer of 1938, but many individual Socialists remained in the OCF. Although Sweetland's relations with the party's leaders in Oregon were strained, he remained on good terms with Norman Thomas.

Many of the Socialists in the OCF, including Sweetland, seem to have drawn their Socialism as much from the Social Gospel as from Marx. Sweetland was an active Methodist, one of the young representatives from the Socialist club in Eugene was a Methodist minister, and several of the other Socialists moved in the same liberal Methodist circles. The OCF also drew support from some liberal Congregationalists,

and ministers, former ministers, and the sons of ministers were represented in the Commonwealth out of all proportion to their numbers in the general population.

The greatest single source of strength for the OCF was the CIO, particularly the IWA. It is impossible to tell how much the anti-Communists here thought or cared about Marxist ideas. They were, of course, advocates of vigorous unionism and interested in political action to achieve labor's rights. Interest in political action occasionally lagged, but not for long. For instance, Max Gardner was sufficiently discouraged following the general election of 1938 to suggest that labor should stick to its "first job," educating the worker "along the lines of economic union activities."⁶ However, when Gardner was organizing CIO unions in Lane County in 1941 he encouraged the new unionists to work with the OCF. The withdrawal from the OCF of the Columbia River District Council of the IWA did not mean that the woodworkers were abandoning political action, but simply that they intended to pursue it through different channels.

It seems probable that the CIO, and especially the IWA, included a number of former Wobblies, but if so, the Wobbly influence is not discernible in the OCF. The writer has been able to identify only three former Wobblies among the active members of the Federation apart from Dr. Marie Equi, who had been associated with the Wobblies and who supported the OCF financially.

⁶Gardner to Sweetland, January 2, 1939.

Most of the OCF's officers were keenly interested in civil liberties, and the OCF drew a number of liberal lawyers who did a great deal of quiet work on cases that came to the attention of the Commonwealth Federation. The Portland chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was affiliated with the OCF, at least in 1937, but neither racial nor religious minority groups provided major sources of support for the OCF, primarily because minorities were not very numerous in Oregon.

The OCF also drew people with a panacea for the problems of the Depression. A few Technocrats attended the first convention and a number of Townsendites were active in the OCF. The Commonwealth had not endorsed the Plan, but by the late thirties, some of the Townsendites were willing to work with those interested in less extravagant pension programs.

The Democratic Party was growing tremendously in Oregon during the life of the OCF. The population was also growing, but the absolute decline in the registration of the Republican and Socialist parties indicates that much of the Democratic strength came from persons who were changing their affiliations. The realignment that Sweetland hoped for was taking place, although in a much less decisive way than he had expected. The Commonwealth Federation served as a halfway house for many changing their party identification. For instance, Dave Epps, Roy Hewitt, and Harry Kenin all changed their registration from Republican to Democratic during these years, and Sweetland left the Socialist Party to become a Democrat. Many people would have made the transi-

tion to the Democratic Party without the aid of the Commonwealth, but for others it provided encouragement and an occasion for changing. The Republican in Woodburn who had voted for Roosevelt, but did not change his registration until there was some immediate reason for doing so -- a census job -- was probably not unique.⁷

Considering the popularity of Roosevelt, the growing Democratic registration in Oregon and the enthusiasm for public power in many sections of the population, it is surprising that the OCF did not achieve greater electoral success than it did. There was never a clear-cut test of the strength of the OCF's following and it is impossible to make more than a rough guess of the number of votes it could influence. From a study of the results of the general election in 1938, Sweetland concluded that the OCF could swing 4 to 6 per cent of the normal Democratic vote to Republican candidates endorsed by the Federation. However, his calculations were based only on the 117 precincts in Portland where the OCF had done door-to-door campaigning and most of these precincts were in working-class areas.⁸ The Commonwealth Federation could never influence more than a small percentage of the Democratic vote in northwestern Oregon, although this was enough to make the difference in some elections.

⁷Rodney Alden to Sweetland, October 9, 1939.

⁸"Confidential Report on Effect of OCF Endorsment[sic] in 1938 Election". Sweetland himself had no clear idea of the size of the OCF's membership, which he estimated to be between 22,000 and 50,000 in 1939. It is unlikely that it was ever as high as the lowest figure.

Perhaps one reason for the OCF's relatively poor showing was that it was a late bloomer compared to many Depression-inspired left-wing groups. It did not get under way until the middle of 1937, and by that time New Deal measures had begun to take effect and it no longer seemed necessary to join a radical organization to achieve reform. The OCF was also born at the same time that warfare in labor rocked Oregon, and as a left-wing organization it was inevitably and unfavorably associated in the public mind with the violence of that period. The OCF had just four years to get established before the Second World War diverted attention and energy from domestic reform, and domestic reform was the Commonwealth's stock in trade.

The Commonwealth might have been able to struggle through the war years if it had had sufficient funds to employ a full-time director. The inadequate financing of the organization appears to this writer to have been one of the major reasons why it did not make a better showing in elections, as well as why it collapsed. Without substantial outside help the financial problem was almost insuperable. The large majority of the OCF's supporters were persons of little or no income: small farmers, the unemployed, the aged, workers frequently on strike, students and young professional people. Their poverty meant more than that they could not contribute enough to pay for much radio time or many newspaper advertisements. It meant that the executive secretary had to spend valuable time reassuring creditors, that travel was limited, and that money for postage was inadequate. The OCF had no trouble enlisting volunteer workers, but even eager volunteers need

their enthusiasm stoked by an occasional convention. The financial condition of the OCF forced it to eliminate one of its semiannual conventions, and the financial condition of the membership meant that members from further away than Astoria or Eugene rarely attended conventions. Those in Coquille or Klamath Falls simply couldn't afford the trip, nor could their organizations afford to send them.

The radical tone of its platform and literature was another reason for the weakness of the OCF with the electorate. Many Oregonians were prepared for public ownership of hydroelectric resources, but they were not prepared for the "[p]ublic ownership of all natural resources, utilities, banks, and monopolies."⁹ Nor were they prepared for free medical care for all school children or for the application of the principle of production for use. As it turned out, the OCF was not particularly committed to some parts of its platform, but the platform, combined with the Commonwealth's alliance with the CIO and the presence of a few Communists in the membership, made the organization appear to be much more extreme than it actually was.

The youthfulness of many of the leaders of the OCF may explain the radical tone of the OCF. Of the twenty-seven members of the board of directors in 1939, eight were twenty-five or younger, and another seven or eight were under thirty-five.¹⁰ This did not necessarily mean that they were politically inexperienced; for instance, one of the

⁹Platform of the OCF.

¹⁰Sweetland to Richard R. Brown, May 27, 1939.

young members of the board had become an organizer for the Socialist Party at the age of sixteen. But it did make it easier to dismiss the OCF with slighting references to the "infant Sweetland" than would have been possible if the OCF had been led by a score of middle-aged and well-established gentlemen. The youthfulness of many members of the Commonwealth also made them less effective candidates for public office.

The youth of the OCF and of its membership, its inadequate financing and radical platform, combined with the Republican tradition in Oregon, the strong grip of the old guard on the Democratic Party, and the turmoil in labor, were too much for the Commonwealth Federation to overcome in the short time allotted it before the war. However, the measure of the organization is not to be taken entirely in terms of its immediate success with the electorate.

The OCF was an educational as well as a political venture, and it provided training for some of Oregon's future leading Democratic figures. After the war, Sweetland returned to Oregon and was the force behind a precinct-by-precinct rehabilitation of the Democratic Party. In 1948 he was elected Democratic national committeeman; Dave Epps became chairman of the state Democratic Central Committee for a short time before his death in 1959; and Ralph Peoples made a respectable showing as the Democratic nominee for Labor Commissioner in 1946. Gus Solomon became a federal judge and Richard L. Neuberger a United States Senator.

The Commonwealth Federation helped train the alert and politically-conscious citizens who, though they may never hold public office,

are the backbone on which democracy depends. At a time when democracy was being tested around the world Roy Hewitt challenged the members of the OCF at its first convention.

If we fail to possess our social inheritance . . . what excuse can we offer to posterity? Can we say we did not know what was taking place until it was too late? That is not true. We do know. . . . Can we admit we knew what was taking place but that we did not have the means to prevent the disaster? That is not true, either. We have in form, given to us by the fathers to protect our inheritance, a government of, by and for the people; we still have the ballot. If we fail, we must admit that we lacked the courage, the intelligence and the necessary give and take to act together in time. . . . We will save our social inheritance for ourselves and posterity. . . . If we do not do it, it will not be done.¹¹

This sense of the personal responsibility of every citizen for the fate of his country was the most characteristic trait of the Oregon Commonwealth Federation and its most constructive contribution to the political life of Oregon.

¹¹Keynote Address by Hewitt.

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APPENDIX A

PROGRAM OF THE OREGON COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION

Preamble

It is evident that our natural resources and highly developed productive power make abundance possible and poverty no longer necessary. Yet organized special privilege threatens to destroy democratic institutions, abrogate civil liberties, keep the common people in permanent poverty and incite wars for profit -- unless all progressives organize to defend their democratic institutions, protect their civil liberties, advance the common security, and defeat the plans of the war-makers. For this purpose we ask all workers, farmers and progressives to unite on the following minimum program:

Platform

1. Public ownership of all natural resources, utilities, banks, and monopolies. Bonneville power made available to the people of Oregon by publicly constructed transmission lines, and by a blanket rate to public distributing agencies; endorsement and support of the creation of peoples' utility districts.
2. Security of tenure for farmers from eviction by mortgage foreclosure; public refinancing at a low interest rate; subsidizing of cooperative agricultural enterprises such as cooperative warehouses and canneries; encouragement of consumer and producer cooperatives. Encouragement and fostering of the organization of farmers into economic and political units, to the end that they may secure a measure of control over the marketing of their products through collective bargaining and thereby obtain cost of production; abolition of deficiency judgments in mortgage foreclosures.
3. Full protection of civil liberties to preserve our democratic rights; defense of the right of workers, employed and unemployed, to join unions of their own choosing, bargain collectively, and to strike and picket without interference from local, state or national authorities; full support of the campaign against lynching, and for the civil rights of Negroes and other racial minorities; against any infringements of civil rights for civil servants and public employees, local, state and national.
4. A union standard of wages for all those in private or public employment, legislation for minimum hours, and the complete abolition of the exploitation of children for profit.

5. A moratorium of two years on home owners' loans in cases where the borrower is unable to meet the terms of the contract; a moratorium of two years on all mortgages and taxes on homes and farms of \$2000 or less; public slum clearance and low-cost housing projects to provide homes for those inadequately housed.

6. Enactment of a law providing for the testing upon request of all consumer goods by a state bureau of standards, and investigation of conditions of labor under which they are made, and general publication of the findings.

7. Immediate enactment of legislation by the state or nation which will afford pensions sufficient to sustain the aged and others ineligible for employment in comfort and security.

8. Useful public works to re-employ all unemployed at union wages, and when such work is not available, complete unemployment insurance for all jobless workers equivalent to the prevailing wage.

9. Extension of the public health service to provide hospitalization and medical and dental treatment free to all school children, and all families whose annual income is less than \$1500 a year.

10. Maintenance of peace in America by the nationalizing of war industries to take the profit out of war, and the establishment of world peace by an embargo on all war materials, and on all raw materials used for war purposes to fascist aggressor nations and by cooperation with all democratic peoples for the defense of international democracy and peace.

11. Complete academic freedom both in class and out for students and teachers, guaranteeing that neither will be dismissed without a hearing; adequate salaries and retirement provisions for all teachers; democratic representation of labor and other groups on boards controlling all educational institutions; and abolition of tuition fees for students, with government help to needy students based on a living wage. We advocate complete demilitarization of the campus.

12. Exemption of \$2000 of the total actual value of any home, farm or residential building from property taxation, providing the owner is the occupant; taxation system based on ability to pay, with graduated taxes on high incomes, gifts, inheritances, corporation surpluses, intangibles, and public bonds now exempt, and the reassessment and reclassification of all property to eliminate the tax dodger and equalize taxes; reaffirmation of our opposition to general sales tax.

13. Adoption of a one-house legislature in order that the demands of the people may be more accurately reflected and quickly met, legislators to be paid a yearly salary.

14. Constitutional amendment to prohibit the Supreme Courts of the state or nation from exercising their usurped powers to nullify popular legislation by declaring it unconstitutional.

(Adopted April 24-25, 1937)

APPENDIX B

PROGRAM OF THE WASHINGTON COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION

Preamble

It is evident that our natural resources and highly developed productive power make abundance possible and poverty no longer necessary. Yet organized special privilege threatens to destroy democratic institutions, abrogate civil liberties, keep the common people in permanent poverty and incite wars for profit -- unless all progressives organize to defend their democratic institutions, protect their civil liberties, advance the common security, and defeat the plans of the war makers. For this prime purpose we ask all workers, farmers, and progressives to unite on the following minimum program:

Platform

1. Public ownership of all natural resources, public utilities, banks and monopolies.
2. Full protection of civil liberties to preserve our democratic rights and to ward off the threat of fascism.
3. Enactment of laws to protect workers in their rights to join unions of their own choosing and to strike and picket, without interference from the police power of the city, state, or federal governments or from court injunctions; the outlawing of company unions, and the rescinding of such laws as the Criminal Syndicalism Act which interfere with the rights of labor.
4. A union standard of wages for all those in private or public employment, legislation for minimum wages and maximum hours, and the complete abolition of child labor.
5. Security of tenure for farmers from eviction by mortgage foreclosures and the guarantee of maximum returns to the farmers by the subsidizing of cooperative warehousing, canning and farming enterprises.
6. Exemption of \$2000 of the total value of any home, farm or residential building from property taxation, providing the owner is the occupant; a moratorium of 50 years on Home Owners' Loans in cases where the borrower is unable to meet the terms of the contract;

a moratorium of two years on all mortgages and taxes on homes and farms of \$2000 or less; and public slum clearance and low-cost housing projects to provide homes for those inadequately housed.

7. Enactment of a law providing for the testing upon request of all consumer goods by a state bureau of standards, and investigation of conditions of labor under which they are made, and general publication of the findings.

8. Immediate enactment of any legislation by the state and nation which will afford adequate pensions for the aged and all others ineligible for employment.

9. Useful public works to re-employ all unemployed at union wages, and when such work is not available, complete unemployment insurance for all jobless workers equivalent to the prevailing wage.

10. Extension of the public health service to provide hospitalization and medical and dental treatment free to all school children, and all families whose annual income is less than \$1500 a year.

11. Maintenance of peace in America by the nationalizing of war industries to take the profit out of war, and the establishment of world peace by an embargo on all war materials, and on all raw materials used for war purposes to fascist aggressor nations and by cooperation with all democratic nations for the defense of international democracy.

12. Complete academic freedom guaranteeing that no teacher will be dismissed without a hearing; adequate salaries and retirement provisions for all teachers; democratic representation of labor and other groups on boards controlling all state educational institutions; and abolition of tuition fees for students, with government help to needy students based on a living wage.

13. Taxation system based on ability to pay, with graduated taxes on high incomes, gifts, inheritances, corporation surpluses, intangibles, and public bonds now exempt, and the reassessment and reclassification of all property to eliminate the tax dodger and equalize taxes, by these means to make possible the abolition of the sales tax.

14. Adoption of a one-house legislature in order that the demands of the people may be more accurately reflected and quickly met, legislators to be paid a yearly salary.

15. Constitutional amendment to prohibit the Supreme Courts of the state or nation from exercising their usurped powers to nullify popular legislation by declaring it unconstitutional.

(Adopted November 14-15, 1936)

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