

---

# The Class War in Oregon.

[April 19, 1920]

by K.W. Oster

Published in *The Toiler* [Cleveland], whole no. 118 (May 7, 1920), pg. 1.

## Casualties: Jan. 1 to April 19, 1920.

**K.W. Oster** — State Secretary CLP; sentenced April 16th to 5 years in the state penitentiary.

**Claude Hurst** — Secretary, Local Portland, CLP; sentenced April 16th to 2 years in the state penitentiary.

**Fred W. Fry** — member of Local Portland, CLP; sentenced to 2 years in the state penitentiary on April 16th and paroled.

**Joseph Laundry** — Secretary of the Workers', Soldiers', and Sailors' Council and member of the CLP and the IWW; was sentenced today, April 19th, to 2 years in the state penitentiary.

**Note:** This does not include the numerous varnancy charges handed 90 days, etc. where membership was doubtful; nor does it cover the many aliens held here for deportation on which no returns have yet been made.

• • • • •

Palmer and his pals did not neglect us here in Oregon, indeed they started bright and early here. On the evening of Nov. 11, 1919 a raid took place on the hall of the Workers', Soldiers', and Sailors' council. Fifty-eight were arrested out of which number 26 alleged IWWs were held to answer charges of having violated the Oregon Criminal Syndicalism Law — better known as the Oregon Comical Sillyism Law. All of these are still awaiting trial save for Joseph Laundry, who has been tried and “convicted,” and who was sentenced today.

On Jan. 2nd [1920] the hall of the Communist Labor Party was raided as well as the homes of all who

were suspected as being members. A total of some 25 or 30 were made out of which 6 were indicted for Comical Sillyism and about a dozen received deportation warrants. Of those held for deportation one took sick and was taken to a hospital. Frank Cusak, the patient, did not choose to go out the regular way, i.e. through the door, and so he just walked out through a hole in the wall, known as a window, and “escaped.” It is only recently that the bail of these have been lowered so as to make it possible to get the most of them out. Victor Saulit (delegate to National Convention) and his wife Julia Saulit are still held on \$10,000 bail.

The “trial” of Hurst, Fry, and myself was a one-sided farce inasmuch as we had to take an attorney whose name appears in Wilson’s *New Freedom* — no others seemed to want anything to do with us. This attorney specialized in objecting to everything which he knew that he could not keep out of the prosecution and instead he brought in Tennyson’s poems and other poems from which he read to our “peers” — as if Tennyson’s poems had anything to do with the class struggle. In his “argument” to the jury of our “peers,” he absolutely forgot to try to refute any of the accusations of the prosecution and instead he made himself conspicuous by his silence. In short he sabotaged on us all the way through. His presence constituted a barrier so we could not defend ourselves.

“Guilty” said the jury of our peers, and our bail went up to \$1,000. A date for the sentence was set, which was later postponed until April 16th. I shall here quote some of the language of the Court:

“I could not face the picture of my father who died in service, or again clasp the hands of my two brothers who are wearing the uniform of the United States if I did less,” declared Robert G. Morrow, as he

passed sentence.

“The defendant Oster is not entitled to any consideration from this court. From circumstances surrounding his life and education, he apparently went into this organization understanding just exactly what he was doing, knowing that it advocated the destruction of property, the taking of life, and the overthrow of our public institutions.

“If the opportunity was offered Oster, Russia would have nothing on the United States in terrorism and crime. Unfortunately he has brains which are of material assistance in his disloyal work. (This kind of “Americanism” would make an American of 1776 homesick for the penitentiary.)

“Oster boasts of his connections with the party. He sat on the witness stand and, disregarding the record as he must have known it, stigmatized as ‘piracy’ the action of the United States in sending troops to Russia to protect the interests of ourselves and allies in Siberia.”

Throughout trial I wondered if the Americanism of 1776 had actually become the criminal syndicalism of today. If this be true — and I think it is — the prosecution can not glory any more than I in my conviction.

Put for the present all the brains in jails, and let the lowest scum that cringes, crawls, and “stools” continue still to propagate their hellish kin! Exalted ignorance never can prevail — nor can it, even for a moment, turn back the clock of evolution so as to retard the onrush of the blazing dawn of Industrial Democracy — of “Man’s humanity to man.”

*K. W. Oster.*

Multnomah County Jail,  
Portland, Oregon,  
April 19, 1920.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*