

LOCAL UNION 302 I.B.E.W.  
BY: E.A. "RED" LAWRENCE

This will be an endeavor on my part to give a history of Local Union 302, I.B.E.W. from May, 1928 to about June, 1945, and the activity of some of the early members from the receipt of the Charter in May, 1928, until the end of World War II. First, you must remember that there was a Charter of Electrical Workers 302 prior to and during World War I. This Charter was located in Martinez and was a mixed Charter that is Narrow Backs, Maintenance Men and Linemen.

The Financial Secretary - Business Manager absconded with the funds of the Local Union sometime late in 1918 or early in 1919.

The Charter was withdrawn by the I.O. at the time of the absconding of the funds. Local Union 595 was supposed to have the jurisdiction of the Narrow Back and Local Union 290 of the Linemen. Local Union 595 did take care of part of the county, particularly El Cerrito and Richmond. You must remember that at this time (1919) Martinez was the second largest city in the county, there was not any Orinda, Lafayette was only a name, no St. Mary's college, Pittsburg was the third largest and then came Antioch.

During 1919, the contractors locked out organized labor and created the American Plan. The contractors and suppliers were so well organized into the Builders Exchange that no union contractor could receive materials. Every job had to have at least one non-union man for every craft on the every job. The contractors were schooled in various ways to cause friction by and between craftsmen in various trades in the several shops in an area. The men fell for these underhanded devices for several years. The men working in one shop were not friendly with the men in a rival shop. The craftsmen would, in turn, use every trick in the book to outwit or cut the throat of a fellow craftsman. Many of the journeymen furnished trucks and tools for the shops, worked overtime for straight time on Saturdays and Sundays. The regular work week was 5-1/2 days.

About 1924 or 1925, some of the Electrical Workers in Richmond commenced to get wise to how they were being used. The men commenced to talk about organizing. Some of us went to Local Union 595 and requested that we be allowed to join that Local and that all of the county be policed. For various reasons, nothing was done.

In 1927, Ray C. Kerlaouezo of V.G. Electric, Bill Casey of Pacific Electric, Red Lawrence of Economy Electric and Joe Gerlach of Pioneer Electric all of Richmond. We had a rump meeting and decided that we would request Martin Hauge, President and Business Manager of the Building Trades Council of Contra Costa County to apply for a Charter for the Electrical Workers. All of the men in V.G. Electric were willing to sign up and did. Among them was Joe Giovanini who was a helper at the time. We received the Charter in May, 1928 and the officers elected were Bill Casey, President, R.C. Kerlaouezo was elected Financial Secretary, Recording Secretary and Business Manager, Joe Gerlach Vice-President and Red Lawrence was on the Executive Board. The officers were installed by Amos Feeley from the I.O. He also put his card in the Local to help defray the expenses. We had about fifteen members.

Then it was necessary to prepare a set of By-Laws and working rules. One of the working rules - all overtime was to be at the rate of double the regular rate. After the rules were effective, we learned only certain members were getting overtime work. It happened that the majority of those working overtime were the same parties using their cars and trucks for the shops. So the Local passed a rule that 50% of all overtime was to be paid to the Local Union. The wage rate at the time was \$9.00 per day or \$1.25 per hour. A group of us did police work and we knew all of the jobs and visited them outside of regular working hours. Those working were assessed and within a month the overtime about ceased. The overtime that was necessary was then given to the men that were manning the particular job.

Another error the By-Laws and Working Rules Committee made was setting the initiation fee at \$10.00 and the monthly dues at \$4.00.

Some of the fringe members would allow their card to lapse and rejoin for \$10.00 thereby saving six months dues plus \$2.50 to reinstate the E.W.B.A.

Those of us that were trying to build a solid footing for the Local Union had the initiation raised, if memory serves me correctly, to \$50.00. Then later when Gossler started the big drive to organize, I believe we had special rates for the "B" members and "A" members in the industrial plants. But as time went by, the initiation became \$100.00. But the overall effect, no more drop outs to save dues. Also by now, we were strong enough to pull a man from the job if dues were not paid quarterly in advance.

The next big problem was to stop the use of personal cars for the use of the shop. There were many other rules and regulations that took a lot of hard work to convince certain of the members that should be followed. R.C. Kerlaouezo was an ideal man for the job of Business Manager at this time. The big job was to educate our own members first as to the meaning of unionism. Times were getting real bad and there was a scarcity of work. R.C. Kerlaouezo took a state civil service exam for electrician. He passed number one. We received a tip that a non-union man was slated for the job. This was our first contact with politics. But we were successful in securing the job for brother Kerlaouezo. Bill Casey was then made Financial Secretary, Recording Secretary and Business Manager. By this time, the market crashed in October, 1929. Times were real bad. However, most of us still had some work and some money and were able to pay our dues. One day Carl Gossler came to me and said he thought something was wrong with the finances of the Local. At the following meeting we demanded, and was voted, an immediate audit of the books. Gossler, Lawrence and Johnnie Manyik were the audit committee. We found a shortage in excess of \$125.00. Bill Casey was confronted with the information and he stated that he had been robbed and he had reported to the Richmond police. Upon investigation, we learned this was not true. We requested an investigation by the I.O. The results was that Bill Casey was removed from office with the ruling by the I.O., he was never to hold office in an I.B.E.W. Local again.

E.A. Lawrence was voted to the office of the Financial Secretary and Business Manager. There was no work and what work there was, none of the active members of 302 were getting.

We formed a co-op with Economy Electric. On this co-op was Joe Giovanini, Bill Casey, George

Mann, Red Lawrence, John Manyik and one or two others. The agreement was that we would do all of the estimating, pay Economy cost plus 10% for the materials. We would work under the Economy license. Red Lawrence and Bill Casey did the estimating. We made maybe three or four dollars a week. But it was a means of keeping the charter of the Local. In those days the I.O. per capita was \$2.00 per month. We had on paper twelve members - of this group, only about Joe Giovanini, John Manyik and Red Lawrence could pay their dues. We got so low on funds that for three months, we could not pay per capita on the minimum of ten members. I notified all of the members of our financial condition - each of those who could not pay came to me and said so. Mrs. Lawrence was working one and two days a week for Heinz Food Products in Berkeley. She then made up the difference between the funds the Local had and that required to keep a minimum of ten members. The depression was so bad that some of us did not earn a dime in a regular job for more than two years.

The Local Union soon learned that it could not stand alone. That we must affiliate with the Central Labor Council and the Building Trades Council. Delegates to each council from 1928 until about 1938 attended all council meetings at their own expense. This same program applied to all offices of the Local with the exception of the Financial Secretary and Recording Secretary.

We learned in the council meetings that it was good for organized labor to have friends that could be counted upon in certain public offices. Such as City Councils, City and District Attorneys, the Sheriffs office, the Board of Supervisors and the Civil Service Commissions.

To start with during these times and before the Wagner Act, there were only about 600 union people in the whole of Contra Costa County. This included laundry workers which was then a strong union and also the musicians union and the barbers. But with all members working hard and cooperating, we did have and elect people to the Sheriff's office (John Miller and Jim Long) a teamster to the City Council of Richmond. Cliff Anglimn to the State Assembly over an entrenched anti-union man from Antioch.

Jim Kenney to the City Council of Richmond and to the Board of Supervisors also Jack Cummings and Ray Taylor to the Board of Supervisors and others to other offices. With those kind of people in key spots, we were able to get union people on the Civil Service Commission and other spots. All of this helped in ways too numerous to mention.

Today, labor is not doing the job it is capable of in their field and they should wake up before it is too late.

In April 1933, I was successful in being appointed Superintendent of Buildings for Contra Costa County. I had the full support of the labor movement at the time. Upon my going to work for the County, I appointed Carl Gossler Assistant Business Manager to run until election which was June, 1933.

Carl Gossler was working at the Union Oil Company as an electrician. When the Wagner Act was passed, Gossler started to really organize the jurisdiction. The Local put an assessment on of 15% of wages in the Building Trades. Gossler was so effective that the 9th District borrowed him to

organize the Redding area and the Shasta Dam project. After that was completed he came back full time for 302. Gossler organized every shop in the county but two. Those two were in the Antioch area. One gave up and joined the Local. All of the one-man shops were organized. Gossler also at this time, in a period of about three months, raised the pay of members \$3.00 per day. He got mileage for cars out of Richmond. Gossler was the right man at the right time.

All of the fine organizing done by C.E. Gossler was not complete without resistance from the contractors. They set one up, M.P. Guyon (who had a one-man shop in his garage) to bring a law suit against the Local Union and all of its officers. The Local Union and each individual officer was sued for \$25,000.00. This included the Executive Board and all.

At the time E.A. Lawrence was Financial Secretary and Recording Secretary. Joe Giovanini was on the Executive Board, Harry Gates was President. After each of us were served, the Executive Board instructed the Secretary to secure counsel and fight the case. The Secretary selected Mr. George Carmondy as our defense attorney. After a study of the case, he informed me he thought he could keep us all out of court. He did just that and the case was found in favor of the Local Union and its officers. The fees were rather minor, a total of \$250.00. We were on an assessment at the time of 15% of earnings and this helped pay the bill.

The Electrical Contractors of Alameda and Contra Costa employed Gossler for the Bid Directory. This writer was Financial and Recording Secretary during this period and we refused to be a party to the depository bid. It was later found by the courts as unconstitutional. Upon Gossler going with the Contractors, Joe Giovanini was appointed Business Manager to fulfill the unexpired term and was elected on his own later. Also, about this time, Harry Gates was elected President of the Local.

Harry Gates had a thorough knowledge of Roberts Rules of Order. He conducted the meetings in a fair and impartial manner. He did not allow any foolishness. The meetings were spirited and informational.

The Local and Business Manager were demanding better workmanship from the members and better conditions and wages from the employers. The working rules were enforced fully. Violators were brought before the Executive Board and were assessed never less than \$25.00 and the maximum usually \$100.00. One case a member was found guilty of carrying off an electric drill. This member was given a traveler for six months.

At the time Gossler was Business Manager, he designed a temporary triplicate receipt which was used by the Shop Stewards. However, this receipt did not have serial numbers. Therefore, the receipt was not of much value if the Local grew.

Along came the preparedness program, four shipyards, Camp Stoneman, housing projects and many others. The Local had to provide divisions such as maintenance with "A" and "B" cards, Marine Division A cards and Building Trades Division. It was necessary to rewrite the By-Laws, working rules, systems of bookkeeping, etc. The Financial Secretary and Recording Secretary was paid a fee basis of \$0.15 cents and \$0.05 cents per month per member or a total of \$0.20 cents per member per month. Up to this time the fee was o.k., as there were from 150 to 200 members. But with the

shipyards and housings, etc. a complete revision was necessary. Our membership was climbing and to get the work done Joe Giovanini had to put on three girls and an Assistant Business Manager.

The Financial Secretary had to secure permission to do away with the ledger-page system to a sight-file system that is presently used. It was necessary to design membership cards - they are still in use. Had to use connections to purchase the files - buy furniture, adding machines, typewriters, etc. All of these items were next to impossible to get. For a period of four months we used from eight to fifteen girls each weekend changing the bookkeeping system from the ledger to the sight file. The Financial Secretary put on three full time girls. Our membership exceeded 11,500 at one time, in addition to about 3,000 on permit. The temporary receipt book had to be redesigned to have serial numbers. In this way the Business Manager and Financial Secretary could keep strict account of monies received and books used.

Due to the great amount of funds being handled which far exceeded the bond, the Financial Secretary requested the Local provide a Certified Public Accounting firm to audit the books at least quarterly. This was done. We also made our own audit three times daily. It was common to handle \$25,000 to \$50,000 daily.

Joe Giovanini and I were always worried about the money. We were handling as stated above, funds anywhere from \$20,000 to \$50,000 and we were not properly organized at first. In the beginning I would take the money home with me to Martinez and then deposit. One night I was run in the ditch in Franklin Canyon on the old road. I could not get out. It scared the hell out of me as I had more than \$30,000. I was in the ditch until 7:00 am at which time, Harry McPeak, a member, and five other electrical workers came along and got me out.

Joe and I discussed this situation with the Executive Board. They instructed L.M. Murphy, the Treasurer, to stay in the office until our books were balanced after each meeting to deposit the money in the Mechanics bank in a night depository at 10th and MacDonald Avenue. We would have three cars, Murphy in the middle, Joe and I front and back. Several times the police were notified. We improved this situation with experience, we had one of our girls make a deposit once or twice a day, each day. However, the night depository continued.

There was from the start a strong urge on the part of the majority of the members for a good apprenticeship program and one that would be of great benefit to members wherever they may be working. All of the Locals around the Bay area had programs, but they were not of the best. So the Northern and Southern Joint Executive Boards appointed a Joint Committee to prepare a four-year program of study that would do the job.

In the meantime, it was evident that we must receive public help. As a result, the proper bills were introduced in the State legislature and as a result, we did get the program that is in effect today for all of the crafts. The Plumbers, Steamfitters and Electrical Workers took the lead in this endeavor.

The book of study that was developed for the Electrical workers was chaired by Fred Eggers of Local Union 595 and I believe that Joe Giovanini was on the committee as was also Grant Howard.

In our own jurisdiction, we at first had trouble with the apprentice co-ordinator from the County Superintendent of Schools Office as he insisted on his own program and tried to operate only for the benefit of the industrial plants.

Local Union 302 Executive Board took him on. We could not come to an agreement. Through instructions from the Executive Board, I met with the County Superintendent of Schools, B.O. Wilson and requested that the Apprentice Co-ordinator either accept our program and an instructor of our approval or he could be removed from office. The man was removed and for all of the crafts the program became a very fair and worthwhile step towards a good apprentice program.

There are many in the Local that saw to it that the program became a success. Many of those have been moved elsewhere. I believe that Joe Giovanini, Harry Gates, Carl Gossler and Grant Howard also deserve a lot of credit for the success of the program.

It was very difficult to take care of our young apprentices in regards to military cards. All of a sudden they would not show up. By inquiry you would learn that they were in the service. The dues would be paid by the Local Union, card brought to date and the I.O. notified. To my knowledge, we only dropped one young member that was in the military and that was due to the fact that we could not locate any of his family. Again, we were very lucky in having the right man at the right time in Joe Giovanini as Business Manager. Brother Giovanini was as honest as they come. He was a hard worker, firm but fair. He had plenty of guts when required. Joe had a tremendous respect for his fellowman. I never heard him condemn any one although he may of known that they were double-crossing him. There were several others during this time that deserve a lot of credit and so I may have missed some, if so, please accept my apology. Harry Gates as President, Pop Eaton on the Executive Board, Dan O'Brien, Bill Avery, Burley Leonard, Forrest L. Ebert and many more.

During the war, Joe and myself, with the staff, on some days initiated as many as 750. When the Local Union grew so fast, I could not accept the \$.20 cents per member. I went to the I.O. for permission to accept a wage that was agreeable to the Local Union. If I had kept the \$.20 cents per member at the peak, my wage would have been around \$3,000.00 per month.

I discussed the matter with the Executive Board and we agreed on \$200.00 per month. This was proposed to the Local Union and accepted.

I lost favor with the membership for the reason that the Marine men who outnumbered the Building Tradesmen knew that I was opposed to any Marine man being sent out on Building Trades work at the closing of the shipyards. I felt then, and I do now, that it was an imposition on the employer to pay a recognized scale to a poor mechanic. I was defeated as Secretary in the election of 1945, this I expected.

Joe was defeated in 1947 because he, too, found that the Marine man was not a Building Trades Journeyman and somebody had to carry them. Joe was also double-crossed by his Assistant.

We were the first Electrical Local in the United States to get a paid vacation. The contractors raised so much hell about it, the I.O. sent hatchetman Broach out and took it away from the members.