
S.D. Warren Company

Stories of Maine's Paper Plantation


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Interview with Peter Kellman

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Peter Kellman Interview (February 13, 2003)

Three points of note:

- Paints a picture of how strike transformed political culture of paper workers via strike support and dispersion of strikers into jobs in other mills where they became heroes.
- How HPWO became a key class issue for Jay strikers, and therefore other workers throughout Maine
- The Jane Slaughter training event in Waterville on how to “resist” inside the plant, esp. work reorganization initiatives.

What to find out from Roland Sampson and Ray Pineau:

- Their general view of the level of support and involvement of people at Westbrook and Somerset.
- Who worked at Westbrook and Somerset. How many Jay workers do they estimate worked in these mills.
- What would get talked about at work and also in plant-gate collections.
- Their view of the QIP resistance, and how that was discussed when talking to people from the Scott mills.
- Roland Sampson: describe his work on training UPIU folks around the country to “resist from within.” How did this fit with jointness? Did he recall the Slaughter training? Was he involved?

Track 7 – PK describes S.D. Warren and Scott as at “the liberal end” of the labor relations spectrum.

“They didn’t have any problem with hiring Jay strikers during the Jay strike.” (2:27)

Ray Pineau had worked in Westbrook (*note: I need to interview him*)

Track 9 – Jay strikers return every weekend and meet to give updates on level of support for the strike.

Transcript:

At the union hall at jay, during and after the strike, when these guys from all over the state were working [in other] paper mills would come back, and they would talk about the conditions at these different places, and what the people were talking about, and how they were proselytizing, how they were constantly talking to people about what’s going on.

And they were seen as leaders in those mills – people looked to them – but it was also, to me, it was gratifying to know that when you go through a strike, they become very political, and very conscious of themselves as workers. And where in the past, if they had gone somewhere else, they would have talked about snowmobiling, or deer hunting, or something, they [now] talked about *labor*, and conditions ...

MH: They brought class-consciousness?

PK: There is no questions about it.

You know, for a while after the strike, in Jay, I remember going to the union hall on Sundays in Jay, and people would come in from all over the state, and they would report – I mean, they weren't reporting to me, they were just talking – and that was more the normal conversation, than just what was on TV.

Track 10 Support by Local 1069

Transcript:

The local president there [Bill Carver] ... was very supportive and came to everything we did in Jay and was a real pusher, at least until they made him international rep (laughs).

They did plant-gate collections and they gave – I'm not positive of this, I know they gave plant-gate collections, my guess is they also gave money out of the treasury of the local, but I just don't have a solid memory of that, but they definitely were plant-gate collections.

And on a *regular* basis. The books are still available as to who gave what.¹

PK goes on to explain that Rumsford was the top contributor at •\$10,000 per month, whereas S.D. Warren was “a few thousand dollars” per month. Per person the highest contributor was the Machinists' local at Somerset, who contributed \$10 per member per month.

“But they all gave, and they were all very supportive.”

He describes Jay workers going to all of these mills to do plant-gate collections, and then later the Caravan. Also, of course, big press coverage.

Track 11 How Scott's jointness initiative played out in Maine.

First, Frazier Paper also took this approach of announcing, “They didn't want another Jay” and seeking cooperation and high road reorganization.

¹ From Roland Sampson, who was treasurer.

Key: Scott and FP didn't go after concessions, especially Sunday premium pay. (Peter goes on to say it was premium pay in general).

He argues that workers in other mills throughout the state benefited from the Jay strike in retaining premium pay for another decade. This put the notion of Jay as a "lost" strike in a different light (i.e. a victory for others in important ways).

Track 14 PK on the Scott locals

Begins by talking about how all three mills had just one UPIU local and therefore were more united. Many other mills (e.g. Champion in Bucksport) still had two reflecting the division paper makers and pulp and sulfite workers. This meant the locals had greater solidarity, and esp. the company couldn't play them off against each other. Scott did play off the craft vs. the UPIU locals, though.

He comments again on how Machinists at Somerset were "the most radical" of the unions.

Politics and Local 1069. Discusses Arthur Gordon and the Maine labor group on health and the creation of the right to know.

Transcript:

They were also active in politics. I know Arthur [Gordon] was one of the first people – was very active in Muskie's campaign, which is kind of when Maine shifted over the beginning of Maine becoming a Democratic state. And Arthur woke up one day and was a state senator, which is another story ...

So, they were certainly an active local, certainly involved in a lot of different things that unions got involved in ...

They weren't, uh, you couldn't count on a big turnout from their membership. I mean, I don't think it went down past the level of local officers, in their activities, *until the Jay strike, and then the membership became more involved, as they did every place*. They always sent people to mass meetings, and after a while, people want to come up to the mass meetings, and they would bring friends to them, and then there would be the reverse, too.

MH: One of the effects of the Jay strike was that it created, in effect, a kind of class awareness in the state, particularly amongst paper workers ... Do you have a sense of how the leaders of these locals tuned into that? Did they agree with that? Had they had that view all along? What was your sense of that?

PK: No – I think that coming up in the UPIU what they learn is – how to be politicians. It is kind of what the organization teaches. As opposed to a union like the United Electrical Workers(UE), or the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW), which

eventually, of course, was part of the Paperworkers. And they have a tradition of involving people – certainly at the shop stewards’ level, and certainly try to get the members involved, and actually be involved in the union.

The Paperworkers – no such thing. You know, I think they were always kind of afraid of the members. And, they had no historical memory of actually involving members. They’re a business kind of unionism, where you represent workers, although, when they get in trouble, they want people to turn out, and they are kind of afraid of it. And so they tend to buy off anyone who does that. **And I think in their history, you’ll see that when workers, as local leaders step up and get kind of radical, they end up becoming international reps, and then they become kind of quiet, and there’s no question that that’s been done...**

Track 15 UPIU local leaders, continued.

Q: The local leaders themselves *are* very aggressive in fighting management – grievances, arbitration, etc. – can you comment on where that fits in?

PK: Yes. That’s what they do. I mean, that’s their role. **They’re lawyers.** And they’re aggressive. For the most part they’re aggressive, because that’s their job. That’s how you define a union person. An active union person, in most of our unions, is someone who is a shop steward, who files grievances, and works on them, and the officers who take it to the next step. Grievances, arbitration, negotiations are the things that they do.

And when they negotiate, they don’t buy and large involve the membership at all. They’re pretty much behind closed doors....

Track 17: More on UPIU leadership at 3 Scott mills. Here is where he goes into the creation of work reorganization as a politicized issue.

Transcript:

The leaders in the three mills, that I know, varied politically, left-to-right, in general, in terms of politics, in terms of religion, stuff like that. But they were all – I certainly have a lot of respect for all three of them, the three presidents that I knew, and they were very active and very supportive.

Q: Let’s talk about the int’l reps. *I then summarize what Beck told me, that he thought the three local presidents were very class aware, and that the int’l reps were also opponents of jointness.*

PK: Pelletier [was the president at Winslow]. He was the smartest of the three, in my opinion.

As far as the reps, I don’t have any recollection. I could just speculate, and that would be that, **one of the big issues in Jay was that, before the strike began, the company tried to do similar things with jointness.** They’ve got all kinds names for it – QIP I think at

Int'l Paper Co., and they're all pretty much the same. **One of the things**, I don't know, and this is speculation on my part, in terms of what Scott was doing – part of these programs was to write manuals on these machines – **everybody writes manuals. And in Jay, this happened just prior to the strike, it was one of the issues that people organized around initially, and actually took a stand – because they recognized that [if] they wrote these manuals, it would make it much easier for them to bring on and train workers and bring scabs in to run the mills. And it was a huge issue. And it was talked about a lot.**

Here he brings up Jane Slaughter.

In fact, I remember at the very end of the Jay strike, Jane Slaughter from *Labor Notes* came out. And she did a workshop on, basically, how not to do some of these jointness things.

MH: For who?

PK: She did it for the Paperworkers. Yeah, and it was, well, I say it was statewide, it took place in Waterville. If I remember right, I went. And it was the Paperworkers, and I think that the reps were supportive of people going to it.

Now, part of the reasoning was, there was also a shift on the national level, that you can't go on strike. And so the thing to do – they had hired one of the Jay strikers², to go around the country, to talk about how do you fight within, without going on strike... Anyways, so it would fit in that they would be resistant because – either do that, you fight from within, or you go on strikes, and they don't want to go on strike. So I think that's how, if the reps came to that conclusion.

And I remember Royal [Gordon Roderick] saying people ought to go and figure this out – how do you fight from within, because we can't strike. You can't strike – they're going to permanently replace you, so it's preferable to do that [i.e. resist from within].

Here he returns to how this idea of resistance around jointness spread through grassroots contacts between strikers and workers in other paper mills.

Now the other thing is that it's not just the leaders. Now remember, for the first time, you have a tremendous amount of communication going on amongst the actual members of the Paperworkers, both from the people from Jay being in the plants, and talking about their experience, and I think that even if the reps were not in favor of it, and weren't and resistant to it, there would have been resistance. I don't think they had a lot of control over it. But I think in their own self-interest, they would be supportive of it and fighting from within.

² Roland Sampson.

MH: And you're saying they're supportive of this even where Jane Slaughter taught about it.

PK: In my recollection, yeah.

Track 18 Continued

It seems to me I remember going to something, and I'm pretty sure it was Jane [Slaughter], it was the time she came up, or it was around that time, and it was interesting to me that it wasn't promoted at the Jay meeting. It was organized independently. That would be unusual at that time, because everything was being organized out of Jay, for a lot of obvious reason, and this was something that seem to happen of its own.

He goes on and says that based on his experience of going to Mobile, that Maine was "the most active place" for resistance on this issue. He stresses how crucial it was to organizing the Jay workers themselves.

So, around the country, the most active place was Maine. And so it would be likely that the resistance would be the strongest here, and because there was such a thing about QIP and writing manuals, and opposition to that...

There were two things that were actually instrumental in organizing the Jay workers. One was the political elections of 1986, where I worked on, in-plant, the 25-to-1 program, and we elected somebody – Dick Tracy – to the legislature and built this organization of workers entirely in the plant. And the other was ... but probably the other major thing – it may have been the most important, I mean, it may have been more important than the political elections, was, or building and organization around the elections, *was* this resistance to QIP, and writing manuals.

He goes on to say — not entirely clearly but I'm confident on my interpretation— that the Jay workers were tipped off by what had happened in Rumsford. PK notes that "Billy Meserve and the executive board looked at that stuff and said: "we're going to be prepared."

And so one of the things ... clearly was this writing manuals. And this was where they took a strong stand, in the mill, you know, before the strike. The lines were drawn, and that whole notion of class solidarity begins to develop around writing manuals. And this was where they took a stand, in the mill, you know, before the strike.

To me, and it would be speculation on my part, would be, that would be the reason it carried over to the Scott mills, and not other mills.

And you can't get away from the fact that there were, like I say, I don't know – I knew at one time the numbers, how many Jay strikers were working there, and relatives of Jay strikers. That would be painfully clear to them.

You know, you're likely not going to lose your job. And if they force a strike, it's going to be to your detriment if you go along with this stuff.

Q: Is there more you want to say about the Scott council situation?

A: I didn't have much contact with them [the local Scott mill leaders in Maine] after the Jay strike, except I worked a couple of shut downs, I think both in Westbrook and in Somerset. **I just remember that there was a heightened awareness of being a union member, and of what unions were about, and a political awareness about supporting unions, which primarily meant you supported Democrats. And the other thing that is meant was — and I think that this was relatively universally true — I found, in the state of Maine, but, clearly, I worked in these places for short periods of time, and everybody still talked about the strike. I mean, it was a topic of conversation...**

He goes on to say that this was best illustrated by the fact that paperworkers' usual topic of conversation was hunting, fishing, and guns. They would vote based on their NRA/second amendment politics. He continues:

But along comes the Jay strike, and the threshold changes, and labor becomes the number 1 issue. And how they perceive a politician running for office, I mean, how they perceive a politician's position on labor, becomes more important ...

And he finishes by arguing that this was clearly demonstrated when Snowe nearly lost in 1990 to McGowen, who lost a close election only because of Green candidate J. Carter's taking 7% of the vote. And then how Snowe wised up that she had to pay attention to labor and came out in 1993-94 against NAFTA, whereas Andrews appeared to waffle.