
**Letter to Frank B. O'Connell,
Department Adjutant, The American Legion,
in Lincoln, Nebraska,
from Harrison Fuller, Commander,
Department of Minnesota, American Legion,
in St. Paul, Minnesota,
March 15, 1920.**

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Confidential.

March 15, 1920.

Mr. Frank B. O'Connell,
Department Adjutant,
The American Legion,
Lincoln, Nebraska.

Dear Mr. O'Connell:

Mr. [Lemuel] Bolles, the National Adjutant, has referred to me your correspondence with National Headquarters regarding the World War Veterans.

The World War Veterans cannot properly be described as a soldiers' organization. It is nothing more or less than an effort on the part of the radical elements of the labor movement to organize such servicemen as are in sympathy with them. What strength the organization has in Minnesota is based on an endorsement by the State Federation of Labor, which has since been counteracted to a very large extent by the endorsement of different unions extended to the American Legion, and the obvious fact that many union men are members of the Legion.

You may be interested in knowing that our

membership is now approximately 60,000, or a little more than one-half of all the potential members. The World War Veterans in their most enthusiastic moments have claimed a membership of 3,000. Leaders of the WWV have made many attempts throughout the state to organize posts, but with very little success. In a majority of communities where they have attempted to hold meetings they have left without making the slightest impression upon servicemen. In most cases the meetings were arranged and speakers provided by the Non-Partisan League and not by the servicemen themselves; in other words, Non-Partisan League members in various parts of the state have attempted to cram the WWV organization down the throats of servicemen. However, this does not represent the avowed policy of the Non-Partisan League, which for the past few months has been treating us with considerable respect, even going out of its way in its publications to be polite to us. As far as Townley is concerned, this policy is probably prompted more by political shrewdness than by friendliness; but this does not alter the fact.

The active leaders in the WWV include the following:

1. **Lester P. Barlow.** Barlow used to describe himself as State Organizing Manager of the World

War Veterans. He now describes himself as National Organizing Manager, and I believe his organization has effected some kind of a merger with groups in other parts of the country. Barlow, as nearly as I can determine, was never in the service. He claims to have been the inventor of the depth bomb used by the United States in combating submarine warfare, and asserts that he received a fortune for this invention and will receive several hundred thousand dollars more when all his royalties are adjusted. I have heard it said that he evaded the draft but have not been able to verify this statement any more than his claim about his invention.

His attitude of mind is best explained by a statement he made casually to me not long ago. He came to see me about sedition bills pending in Congress and opened his remarks with this: "Now the people I represent, namely, the Non-Partisan League and organized labor, are very much opposed to this legislation." I caught him up immediately and told him that it was my impression that he represented the World War Veterans, supposed to be a soldiers' organization; and he hastily added, "Oh, yes, and the World War Veterans also, of course." To my mind this constitutes an admission by him of the things we have been saying about him and should make it impossible for him to claim that he is working primarily for the interests of servicemen. In plain words, he is a radical of a very undesirable type.

While he claims to be independently rich as the result of his invention, my impression is that his income is from sources he would rather not disclose. He does no work as far as I can learn.

At the national convention I had the pleasure of having several conferences with Mr. Barlow on behalf of the national organization.

After we admitted their organization to our Armistice Day parade rather than give them an excuse to attack us on the ground of exclusiveness, I found one of their men, Parsons, described below, distributing their propaganda in the lobby

of the convention hall. I insisted that he withdraw, which he did under protest.

Barlow's next attempt to invade the convention was a request to me to obtain the privilege of the floor for him. What he proposed to do was not to suggest an affiliation or attack our financial policy, but to urge the convention to make an attack on profiteers. He seemed to be very much agitated because we were devoting so much time to Reds and so little time to profiteers. I turned him over to the Minnesota member of the Resolutions Committee to get rid of him, and he was permitted to address that committee. He lasted about 2 minutes. His remarks there were so ridiculous that they adopted unanimously a motion to shut him up.

So far as I know these are the only instances in which the American Legion took any cognizance of the existence of Barlow and his outfit during the convention, and I do not think I missed anything in this regard.

2. **Carl O. Parsons.** I think Parsons is State Commander of the organization, but I am not sure. He belongs to a labor union and is a man of no presence and less education. He is merely a weak-kneed mouthpiece for Barlow. Our chief point of contact with him, aside from the incident mentioned above, was at Two Harbors, Minn., several weeks ago when our post, despite my advice to the contrary, undertook a joint debate in which Parsons should represent the Veterans and a man named Bryant the American Legion. Parsons, I am told, made himself thoroughly ridiculous and finally refused to enter into the debate at all, the whole incident rebounding completely to the credit of the Legion. Parsons makes speeches once in a while in which he delights to attack the Legion, but as far as my observation goes, he does us more good than harm.

3. **George H. Mallon.** Mallon is a really big man in every sense of the word and is the only force which has held the organization together and kept it from running wild or falling to pieces. He

is the man to whom they always "point with pride" when their loyalty is questioned.

Mallon was a Captain of Infantry, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, and several other decorations. He is the Secretary of the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly, I believe, and is of course the chief asset of the WWV.

We had hoped through Mallon to bring about the disintegration of the WWV in favor of the Legion, but attacks of other members of the WWV upon the Legion made further negotiations impossible and we gave up the attempt some time ago.

Not long ago an organizer of the Private Soldiers and Sailors Legion visited Minneapolis, and I am informed that some kind of an affiliation with the WWV was worked out. They have also been dickering with the Rank and File Veterans Association. Both these organizations are, as you know, extremely radical, not to say openly communistic.

Our policy now is simply to ignore the World

War Veterans completely, being polite to their members when we meet them, although it is hard to do this in the case of Barlow. Their organization draws its life blood from the spirit of unrest now permeating the ranks of labor and will last only so long as there is unrest. In the meantime we continue to gain strength at the rate of 7 new posts a week and have now approximately 450 posts. As the Legion gets into its stride there will be less and less opportunity for it to be hindered in any way by such organizations as the WWV.

Trusting that this information, together with Mr. Bolles' letter to you, will answer all your questions, and with best wishes for the success of the American Legion in Nebraska, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Harrison Fuller,
Commander.

HF-K.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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