

DOC AND LARRY CALLANAN

Defining the relationship between Doc and Larry Callanan is not easy. Though they grew up together, played in the same kids' gangs, and shared similar goals for the Steamfitters union, they operated in very different fashions. Some considered Doc to be an extension of Callanan's power, while others would talk only with Doc and refused to see Callanan. Friends talked of Lawler and Callanan as "inseparable," but they were also quick to point out that the two men "were a contrast in personalities." While Callanan was described as "volatile, dogmatic and was nicknamed 'The Bully,' Doc was quiet, humble, [and] never flaunted his power."¹ Because many of their activities were kept secret, and doubly so because Doc was working quietly while Callanan did the bullying that drew attention, it is sometimes difficult to know the exact nature of Doc's actions. Doc later recorded, in a letter to his daughter, his sense that his son John Jr. possessed "some of the con that I have." Doc would use that "con" when he and Callanan seized power in the Steamfitter union. In a comment on con artistry, Doc would also later write, "What's the old saying, you can catch more flies with honey than you can with your fist." Callanan looked first to his fists, while Doc brought out the honey. Working together, they were able to gain power in St. Louis' Steamfitter Union Local 562.

When Doc joined the Steamfitters in the early 1940's, he did so without fanfare. He was a union member with no special distinctions. Before joining the union, he had worked a number of odd jobs including bell hop, taxi driver, and delivery boy for the *St. Louis Star Times* newspaper. Even as a Steamfitter, Doc had to continue working other jobs because there was only enough construction work to employ him for six or seven months. Callanan, born in 1909 and five years younger than Doc, joined the Steamfitters

after a volatile childhood. After a series of run-ins with the police, Callanan had been sent to Bellefontaine Farms, St. Louis city's youth correctional facility. When he turned eighteen, he served five years in the Missouri Penitentiary for robbery. After his release from prison, Callanan began working with the Steamfitters, where Lawler and several other friends were already employed.

It wasn't until World War II that the union leadership was shaken up by Doc, Callanan and what the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* described as "hoodlum elements."ⁱⁱ Before the war, Local 562 was run by business manager Edward G. Flynn. But when Flynn left to serve as a Seabee in 1944, Doc, Callanan and their allies saw an opportunity to take control. Because the war created a boom in defense construction, there was a corresponding demand for Steamfitter workers. Taking advantage of this high demand, the Steamfitters began issuing work permit cards – fitters who weren't union members could come and work on the projects, but they would have to pay more for the opportunity to do so. During the first two years of the war, revenue from work permits and other dues totaled almost \$500,000 (which today would be over \$4 million.) Using this and other opportunities created by the wartime construction boom, Doc and Callanan established themselves as union leaders. When former boss Flynn returned from Seabee duty in 1945, he found himself out of a job.

Elections for business manager were held in 1946, but they were a formality which gave Doc and Callanan their official titles. Callanan was named business manager and Doc became one of his chief lieutenants. Callanan liked his role as the front-man who wielded power with strong-arm tactics. Doc enjoyed working behind the scenes, where his gentler approach was most effective. In various forms, Doc and Callanan stuck with

these roles for the rest of their lives. Callanan's style was more intimidating, but not always more effective. Doc's relationship with Missouri Governor Warren Hearnes emphasized this point.

Using a massive political war chest which will be examined later in this narrative, Doc and Local 562 were able to help Hearnes win his bid for governor in 1964 and again in 1968. He was the first person to serve two successive terms, but he would not have served at all had it not been for Steamfitter support. The Steamfitters were able to deliver a large portion of St. Louis to Hearnes, as well as influence other areas of the state. The fear voiced by Ethan Shepley, Hearnes' Republican opponent in 1964, was that Hearnes' tie to the Steamfitters would make him an extension of Larry Callanan's power. With obligations "expected to be fulfilled, and pressures [to] be exerted" on Hearnes, Shepley felt the Steamfitters would gain too much control of state government because Callanan would have his way with Hearnes. After winning the election in November, however, Hearnes wanted no part of Callanan. In an interview on the subject while serving as Governor, Hearnes commented that "Callanan and I never got along. Doc Lawler was a good friend and that was why the fitters took me. Whenever I got around Lawrence, we got into an argument." They argued because Callanan only operated with demands and threats. With Hearnes in place, it would not be through Callanan's power moves, but through Doc's loyal friendship, that the Steamfitters could assure themselves another pipeline to the Missouri State Capital.

During Hearnes' second run for governor in 1968, Callanan was particularly aggressive, threatening to sponsor another candidate if Hearnes would not promise political favors. Callanan's threats, however, proved fruitless, and Hearnes told him and

the Steamfitter union, “If you want something from me, send the Doctor.” While Hearnese was in office, the Doctor would pay regular visits to Jefferson City, following a regular routine each time. When Doc wanted to meet with Hearnese, he would first talk with Tommy Walsh in St. Louis. Once Walsh contacted Hearnese’s personal assistant in the state capitol, the meeting would be set. Always with his little derby hat placed neatly on his head, Doc would stroll in to Hearnese’s office and the two men would talk. Though Doc had an agenda, he recognized that Callanan-style threats would get him nowhere. Warren Hearnese recalled that he “never heard Doc raise his voice.” Although Doc’s subtle style lacked Callanan’s attention-grabbing tactics, Republican opponents recognized Doc as a very effective politician. In September 1964, Republican Jean Paul Bradshaw voiced the concern that, it “is generally known that the better elements of organized labor fear the growing influence of Lawler and his associates, since it’s an open secret that the Lawler forces are trying to gain control of the labor movement in this state, as well as control of the Democratic party.”ⁱⁱⁱ No one was ever exactly sure what Doc said, or what deals were cut, but as Bradshaw points out, it was no secret that Doc could make things happen. It was also no secret that he made things happen because he knew the importance of friendship.

ⁱ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 9/5/72. “Doc Lawler: A Behind-the-Scenes”

ⁱⁱ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 5/17/53. “Trouble Nothing New to Larry Callanan”

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 9/18/64. “Bradshaw Hits Sen. Symington’s Tie With Lawler”