

## **HERO OR VILLAIN**

In 1969 it seemed as if the *Globe-Democrat* had the story right on Doc Lawler. That year, *Globe-Democrat* reporters Al Delugach and Denny Walsh traveled to New York's Columbia University, where they each received a Pulitzer prize in journalism for their investigative reporting on Steamfitter Local 562. A year earlier, Doc Lawler, Larry Callanan and fellow Steamfitter George Seaton had all been indicted by a Federal Grand Jury for "conspiring in illegal political contributions by a union."<sup>i</sup> The case developed slowly due to a number of appeals, but the three men were eventually found guilty in June 1970. With a guilty verdict and a Pulitzer prize, it seemed in 1970 as if the *Globe-Democrat* had been right on the money with their reporting. Two years later, however, it was hard to be sure. The Steamfitters had immediately appealed the guilty verdict, and by January 1972, the appeal had worked its way up to the United States Supreme Court. In June 1972, the Supreme Court ordered the indictments dropped against Doc and Larry Callanan, both of whom had died by that time. In 1974, the entire case was dropped, and U.S. attorney Donald Stohr concluded that "the interpretation of the Supreme Court decision [would] not support a conviction under the facts of the case."<sup>ii</sup> But what do we conclude? Did the Supreme Court's decision mean the *Globe-Democrat* reporting had been mistaken? To find a satisfactory answer to these questions, we have to make a detailed consideration of the issues being investigated.

The *Globe-Democrat* questioned a number of Local 562's policies, but the item that they were most interested in was the Steamfitters' "Voluntary Political, Education, Legislative, Charity, and Defense Fund." Though officially the fund was voluntary and to be used for a variety of purposes, in reality it was mandatory and used as a war chest to

fund politicians who would promote Steamfitter goals once elected. It was this fund that made Steamfitter Local 562 stand out, enabled Larry Callanan to bully politicians and made Doc a powerful figure in the Democratic party. How did the Steamfitters create such a powerful stash of money? It wasn't purely through numbers. Steamfitter Local 562 had only 1200 men on payroll, which made them similar to a number of other small unions. They weren't the size of the Teamsters, and they didn't enjoy strong national support to give them power. The Steamfitter secret to success was a unique "voluntary" political fund system, which meant about \$1 a day for union members and \$2 a day for those working on temporary or out-of-town permits. In addition to regular dues, which members had subtracted out by their on-site employers and sent to the union, "donations" to the voluntary fund were paid in cash at the Steamfitter headquarters at 1242 Pierce Avenue. Assuming an average of 250 working days a year, the union could generate an annual political fund of over \$300,000. Though nothing in writing made donations mandatory, the unwritten rule was clear: If you didn't drop your dollar in the hat, you wouldn't be working for the Steamfitters.

Since everything involving the political fund was done under the table, the exact internal workings are a little cloudy. It is not too hard, however, to see how Larry Callanan, the ex-convict and bully, would operate in such a set-up. If you raised your voice against the political fund, you had better watch out for Callanan. But in addition to Callanan the enforcer, Doc Lawler presumably was the persuader. John Angelides, a *Globe-Democrat* writer who saw Doc later in his political career, commented that since Doc "didn't use the muscle that Callanan did, people felt they could talk to him." If Steamfitters had concerns about the fund, as surely some of them did, Doc was there to

reassure them that it was in their best interests. It's important to realize too, that Doc Lawler wasn't pulling a con on his own union members. Friends and enemies agreed with long-time political ally and friend Joe Roddy Sr. that Doc "always tried to be loyal to the people." Doc felt that amassing a large political war chest was important for maintaining a healthy union. Even if the fund clearly promoted Steamfitter interests, and thus was not a plot by union leadership to steal from their own members, there remained the question of the fund's legality.

In 1965, *Globe-Democrat* publisher Dick Amberg initiated the series of investigative reports because he felt the Steamfitter fund was in fact illegal. But as the investigation progressed, not all of his reporters agreed. Ted Schafers, one of the reporters originally assigned to the inquiry with Delugach and Walsh, describes his doubts in a section of Duncan Bauman's book. About midway through the assignment, Schafers "asked to be relieved ... because [he] learned the Steamfitters were using a political action program duplicating one used by a Teamster Union in St. Louis and that the Steamfitter-officers had adopted it only after being assured of its legality."<sup>iii</sup> Schafers, in an opinion which was not made public in the paper at the time, felt that under these circumstances, "not only would it be unfair to prosecute the union and its officers, but also that any conviction resulting would be overturned if appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court."<sup>iv</sup> Schafers opinion is a key piece of evidence in the Doc vs. *Globe-Democrat* debate. For if Schafers knew midway into the inquiry that the charges against the Steamfitters were not well founded, why didn't the *Globe-Democrat* call off its investigation? One might go further and ask, why didn't the *Globe-Democrat* check its sources before beginning the investigation at all? It should not have been very difficult or time consuming to run a

quick comparison of the Steamfitter political fund to other union funds in the area. It would have been that easy to see that Local 562 was not engaging in an illegal practice. The *Globe-Democrat*'s decision to push the investigation suggests that they were not as interested in the truth of the situation, but in discrediting Doc, Callanan, and the entire Steamfitter operation.

Doc's experiences with the *Globe-Democrat* are an essential part of his story, but the only reason the *Globe-Democrat* had anything to write about was because Doc took a lot of action. He acted in a manner that the *Globe-Democrat* didn't like, but the fact was that Doc didn't sit quietly. If that sounds familiar, it should – it is also an apt characterization of another man who solved problems by taking action: Jerome Shen. Seeing Doc and Jerome “in action” is to witness them in real-life tests, where the stakes are high and there's little room for error. It is exciting, but it is also very revealing because we see how Doc and Jerome work under pressure. In the next two sections, we will see Doc and Jerome in different times at different places with different people. Yet in each case, we will see Doc and Jerome emerge victorious.

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<sup>i</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 5/11/68. “Callanan, 2 Others Post \$1000 Bond Each.”

<sup>ii</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 2/2/74. “Steamfitter indictments are dismissed.”

<sup>iii</sup> Bauman, 60.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*