

## 'WORKING PEOPLE' DOMINATE ACTIVITIES OF ELDON, IOWA

Organized Labor Usually Bests Business Group in Elections; Citizens Are Proud of School System.

By BARROW LYONS

(EDITOR'S NOTE—This is one of a series of articles written for this paper by Barrow Lyons, staff correspondent of Western Newspaper Union. He has just completed an extended trip through the nation and in these reports gives his first-hand impressions of what rural America is thinking as we enter the third year of war and the first weeks of a presidential election year. Any opinions expressed are the writer's and not necessarily those of this newspaper.)

ELDON, IOWA.—Two worlds meet in this Iowa town—the world of organized labor and the business world. But labor runs this town of 1,700 people on the banks of the Des Moines river where the Sac and Fox Indians once lived.

Eldon is a railroad town—a division point on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific railway where the main line intersects the Des Moines and Keokuk branch. The railway came there to get coal. A majority of Eldon people work for the Rock Island. They are somewhat clannish, very independent and understand the importance of organization.

As a result they dominate the elections. The mayor is a railroader. So are four of the five members of the city council, three of the five members of the school board, and several of the city officials.

And although Eldon people are traditionally Republicans, the railroaders are now almost 100 per cent New Dealers.

Merchants and other business men of Eldon form the political opposition. They are known locally as the County Fair group. The fair has been discontinued for the duration, but in peace times it is the third largest fair in the state, being surpassed only by the Iowa state fair and the Clay county fair at Spencer, said to be the largest county fair in the world. This great fair seems to be a compensation for the business man's political eclipse in Eldon.

An examination of this New Deal town in which the working people dominate reveals advantages and disadvantages. There is no hotel, but a number of the railroad men take lodgers, where one can get a room. The fastidious traveler would not like the accommodations, but the beds are clean and one can get a warm bath in the hall bathroom. And the railroader's wife who runs the establishment makes up in friendliness what her hostelry lacks in modern decorations and conveniences.

There are no modernly fitted out restaurants. But there are eating places where one can buy well-prepared food, and plenty of it at moderate prices.

Many of the people who live in Eldon own their homes—and assessments are low. There is no real estate tax, except the school tax, for most of the expenses of government are met from the profit the city derives from distributing electric current. From these charges all



One of Eldon's railroad workers, Mrs. Freda Penrod, round house employee.

city indebtedness has been paid off and the city owns \$10,000 in U. S. treasury bonds.

### Over 200 in Service From This Town

Out of the small population of this town more than 200 men and women have joined the armed services. Eldon people are very proud of this record.

Let J. G. Saurenman, general roundhouse foreman, tell the advantages of Eldon to working men. Incidentally, he is extremely proud of the fact that one of his sons is a major in the army engineer corps, and the other an ensign in the navy.

"It's a good town to live in," he said. "The people are neighborly, considerate and very democratic. I was sent here 13 months ago by the railroad to take charge of the roundhouse. Right off the bat I was accepted as a member of the community and extended all the credit



I wanted. Now that's something. Eldon is a fine place to bring up my two little boys where there is such a good school. I'm paying \$16 a month rent for a modern five-room house. In Kansas City the same house would cost me \$35 to \$40 a month.

### Neighbors Are Ready To Help Distressed

"Anyone in distress usually is looked after by the neighbors—we don't need charity. For those who have grief, there is always sympathy. I've seldom seen drunkenness around here. This is a good town for working men. You hear that wherever you go."

William H. Sapp, member of the Switchmen's Union of North America, was asked why Eldon remained New Deal.

"Well, we remember that the New Deal helped us get out of the depression and get work," he explained. "This wage deal that's coming up now is not against the government. The men are working twice as hard as they did before the war and getting the same money, and the companies are making twice as much.

"I'm registered as a Republican, but I'm for the New Deal. I don't think there's a railroad man who likes John L. Lewis as a man, but they admire his stand because they know that if the miners are licked, we're all sunk. There are quite a few miners living around here, and they're about the poorest paid workers there are—and they work hard, too. You take a mining town and it has the poorest teachers there are."

It is easy to understand why most of the business men of Eldon are not very vocal in opposition to the New Deal. Frank Davis, director of the First National bank, however, was willing to voice criticism.

"One thing that we're blessed with, brother," he exclaimed, "is that we're living in a land where there's free speech. There is a great deal of unrest among the people. They wonder what's going on. This enormous spending—enormous taxation. There's a great deal of talk on how much labor is going to control the powers that be.

"When I try to look forward, I kind of look at a high wall. I read a great deal and try to keep posted, but I can't see where we're headed.

"All power to Mr. Roosevelt for the good things he's done. We've seen them in this town. But there's such a thing as a man becoming drunk with power."

Eldon remembers the curse of unemployment more bitterly than most small towns. Many of its young men were gathered into the local National Youth administration project, and it was the grief of the Eldon people that these boys were contented to make the NYA their way of life—to hope for nothing better.

But it is their pride to have seen these boys make splendid fighters in the armed forces. Several already have given their lives.

### As Eldon, Iowa, Views It . . .

There are quite a few coal miners who work in the strip coal mines around Eldon, but not nearly as many as used to live there before the mines at Laddsdale across the river caught fire and caused such great loss about 30 years ago.

Those were the days, however, when Eldon flourished commercially. There were more people then to patronize the business establish-

ments. Across the tracks there was a settlement which no longer exists—a wide open town with its saloons and dives, and two hotels. As this block deteriorated, and the buildings were vacated, they were demolished, and this rowdy block is now only a memory. "There's very little moral turpitude in Eldon now," one old railroader remarked, and he meant it.

## Red Cross Counter Serves 650,000 In Month

AT MEDITERRANEAN HEAD-QUARTERS—If you operated a luncheon counter and served 650,000 persons in a month, you'd feel you were doing a pretty fair business, wouldn't you?

Anyway, that's roughly the number of service men served at canteens and snack bars of American Red Cross clubs in just one region of the Mediterranean war theater during one month. And on a below cost basis, of course.

This is but one, though a chief, activity of the area's Red Cross clubs, as revealed in a recent statistical report from the region.

Do you operate a small motion picture chain? Well, how would a monthly attendance of 364,941 look to you? That is the approximate number of servicemen seeing Red Cross movies in this one region in a month.

Are you a librarian, worried about the public's disinclination to seek the solace of books? The total of 149,482 men using Red Cross reading facilities might cheer you up. None of the reading required, either.

Have you ever been a tournament manager? If so, you'll know that the 37,500 men participating in various Red Cross tournaments, ranging from table tennis to bridge, kept somebody busy.

All this goes to show why a regional Red Cross club staff doesn't do much thumb-twiddling.

Various other facilities are offered the servicemen in greater or lesser degrees. There are such examples as swimming, games, music, dances (25,950 attendance), boxing, swing bands, language lessons, variety shows, church services, song fests, current events discussions, and, even art lessons. That is a sample of Red Cross service in one region of this one war theatre. It can be multiplied many times, the world over.

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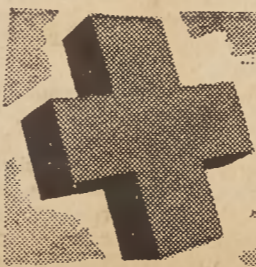


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