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FRANK ROSENBLUM

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Oral History Project

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Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

Frank Rosenblum
Signature of interviewee

Respondent: Frank Rosenblum

Interviewer: Elizabeth Balanoff

Date: August 14, 1970

I. Tell me a little of your background.

R. I was born in New York City in 1887, as a result of my dad escaping Russian military service for the Czars in 1886. When I was about three years old, my mother went back to Russia. Lithuania is where she came from. She had become very ill. Living was extremely hard in those days, in the late '80's. Her brothers lived with her. My dad was a student of the Talmud, totally unable to do ordinary work. They threw him into a tailor shop where he had a heck of a time adjusting himself. In the old country, they looked down on the worker. Here, the worker became a somebody, and the student, a fellow who had status in the old country, was looked down upon as a totally incompetent fellow. At any rate, my father worked very hard, and they lived in extremely difficult circumstances. My mother worked so hard that she became extremely ill. The families in the old country were people accustomed to the usual illnesses. She was advised by the doctors to go back to the old country and she did. We spent nearly six years there.

I. You went with her?

R. I went. I was taken along, and a younger brother, whom I don't remember at all, who was younger than myself about a year or more, passed away.

This I attribute probably to the living conditions and a heart condition as well. When I returned, my father was living in Philadelphia where I was raised until I was about twenty-one. Then in 1908, I made Chicago my home. I learned my trade in Philadelphia. I was a clothing cutter.

I. They were the aristocrats of the trade, is that right?

R. At that time, considering everything, they did fairly well compared with the others. Among the oldest unions in the country were cutters who made headway, usually at the expense of the tailors. They got theirs; they, in turn, didn't do anything to help the others. The same thing you can say about the laundries, maybe. The teamsters controlled it. The teamsters got more. (Now, it's not as true today as it was years back.) And the poor devils working inside the laundries, worked under substandard conditions, which is a pattern that the old trade union movement had. In 1910, the clothing strike broke out in Chicago. I was in that. I was a member of the strikers executive committee.

I. You were in Chicago then?

R. Yes, 1908 was when I came to Chicago, And that should tell you my course of life, as it were. Where I floated before, in and out of cities and back, the union became the established job. And although we had a very poor contract in those days, I mean, the original contract when we were licked from a strike point of view, it did create a nucleus of an organization. And with the set-up, as time went on, the improvements were negligible but meaningful. And eventually

the structure hardened in the direction of a trade union. We had discrimination in the beginning and no recognition. Finally we won recognition, no discrimination, preferential shop and the union shop. I believe that that particular setup in 1910-1911 had the makings of our present organization, the character that it had over the years.

I. Can you tell me about that 1910 strike?

R. The 1910 strike was not an organized strike. It was a rebellion against conditions as they were. At that time there was a national organization called the United Garment Workers. The people at the head of that organization, I'd say, did nothing to organize. At the time of the 1910 strike, I was a member of the strikers executive committee. And the new thinking of the cutters already began to bear down on us, and we thought in terms of lifting the whole body up. An earlier cutters' strike was broken in 1904. And we were without an organization from 1904 'til 1910. And we were a new breed, a new crowd altogether. The old-timers, in the main, were either liquidated or had passed away, or were blacklisted. They couldn't get work anymore. And the handful of them were mostly people not too sympathetic with us. But, I said, the 1910 strike was a rebellion It really was n&organized. People just followed. The issue at that time was the closed shop. And we thought that was the answer for everything and anything. Proud? If you asked people what the closed shop meant, well, to them it meant "union" I suppose, more than anything else. That was the issue, and they fell for the phrase 'til the end. We had a lot of difficulties in making friends of the 1910 strike. The old organization didn't

exactly sell out, I think, looking back. We thought at that time they did. But actually, they tried to settle it according to the conditions that existed, as they saw it. I believe they were more or less honest in their approach, in that sense. But the people wanted the closed shop, and nothing less than that was what they wanted. At any rate, the fact is that in the strike the only solid thing achieved was a memorandum of understanding with Dart, Schaffner and Marx. When people went back, but not with enthusiasm, all that we had that time was -- no discrimination. It wasn't an agreement. It was a memorandum -- no discrimination for union activities. Everybody was to go back to work, and we were to appoint a representative from our side, a representative from the company's side, both of whom in turn would choose a third man as arbitrator. And they were to make a decision on the question of wages. We picked Clarence Darrow. At that time, many of the social workers, so-called group leaders, were on our side.

I. Did they give you a lot of help?

R. Oh, yes. They did yeoman service there -- Hull Rouse with Jane Addams at the head and Ellen Gates Starr. Then there were the professors from the University of Chicago and Northwestern University.

I. What kind of things did they do?

R. Well, they went on the picket-line. No one used public relations,

publicity, at that time. The police were very rough in those days. We were outside the law, the strikers in 1910. So-called labor leaders were outside the law.. The employers used to hire people with penitentiary records, sluggers, to beat up pickets. And we in turn answered in kind. There were no rules, no laws.

I. Who were some of the university professors who helped you?

R. There was a Professor Mead; there were the Abbott sisters, who were social workers years ago at the University of Chicago. Hull House was a tremendous organization doing social work. I really don't remember the names anymore. But I know that they were in our corner, social workers of different kinds, academics, society liberals, of course. Let's see now. That was about 1910. I say there must have been at that time at least about 40.

The 1910 strike was totally unorganized. It was a spontaneous rebellion against intolerable conditions. Without being solicited, the workers just came to the headquarters of the strikers, which was Hod Carriers Hall. It was on Halsted and Harrison. They came from large factories and small shops -- anywhere from a handful of people to numbers sometimes as high as 40-50 people. It was a revolution. That was the 1910 situation. Wage earnings at that time, the cutters' average wage at that time was about $16.00, and the first eight weeks were without pay. Now, in 1904 the cutters bad $24.00 as a minimum wage. They had an

organization at the time which was broken later. So you can see what happened to the wage structure during that period. But it wasn't the people, though, who were involved in the strike, it was new people who were brought in and trained and promoted into situations. The old-timers, so-called scabs of the period, they were paid. And they were given the same money. And even among the supervision of the company there was a great prejudice against the newcomers. What is it you want to know besides the Amalgamated? Is there anything you choose to know about the labor movement at all? My background goes even further back than our own set up.

I. YOU mean you were involved in the labor movement before this?

R. I was involved.

I. Tell me about that.

R. I was involved. And then, of course, I mean, as a child I can remember different things that happened that I was aware of.

1. I would like to hear those things. Go ahead, go back and tell me the early part.

R. Well, by beginning starts, really, with the period when the American Federation of Labor was established already and the Knights of Labor were on the way out for practical purposes. That's going back, I think, as far as about 1900 or thereabouts, just at the beginning of the century. You know the Knights of Labor were the dominant union here. The American Federation of Labor came in with Gompers, the organizing genius. And it's not a very flattering way of coming in, you know; where the

Knights of Labor were having trouble, the American Federation of Labor stepped in. And that was pretty much of a strike-breaking start. And the strength of the American Federation of Labor came mostly from the building trades setup. And to the end, Gompers, politically, had the building trades for his backhone. I've heard it said, when I was a youngster, that Marx once said that Gompers would someday become a very important guy in the socialist movement. Of course, that's one of Marx's mistakes, his record that we can talk about. I'd seen Sam. I didn't know him too well, but he was quite able.

I. Row do you remember him?

R. I remember him as a clever person more than an idealistic one. I don't remember him as an idealist. I remember him as a practical so-called trade unionist to whom the labor movement only meant wages, working conditions, and so on. He was against all legislation as accepted by the movement today. Of course, he didn't believe in minimum wages or maximum hours, figuring that minimum wages would become the maximum, and that if he depended on legislation, the labor movement would have very little to offer to the people to join them.

I. Yes.

R. You know we have a habit of rationalizing our positions. And that was the rationale at that time in the labor movement. The changes in that kind of thinking came with the C.I.O. Even a little before that, I think, the depression years, the Roosevelt era, changed a good deal of that kind of thinking. The thing got so bad that before the C.I.O., the

maximum numbers in the labor movement was a little over three million people and probably less. With the coming of the C.I.O., labor reached heights of 18 to 20 million. I'm speaking now of the A.F. of L., C.I.O., independents, and so on, combined. All our life you know, from 1914, when the Amalgamated was formed, until 1933, we were an independent organization with no affiliations of any kind. And in our relationship with more or less progressive unions, we had a lot of difficulties as a result of it, particularly when we had a strike. Not only did we have to depend on ourselves, but very frequently the labor movement officially bucked us, tried to break our strikes and take over. That was not uncommon, and I don't know if it was luck or talent, but we managed to make headway. I think a great deal of the credit for that is due to Sidney Hillman, our president. And also we maintained a very fine relationship with the liberal movement in this country and the academic community, which is liberal. Because of that, it was not too easy to dismiss us altogether, because of publicity. We had talent, as a result of our relationship, for the right kind of publicity, fortunately. And also because of arbitration which we popularized, because arbitration was definitely taboo in the labor unions, only accepted when they were licked. We, on the other hand, made arbitration a key to our settlements. We also introduced the idea that the arbitrator was not to be taken from the outside, completely unaware of the thing he was doing, or the industry, or the thing he was to arbitrate, but one familiar in

part with the industry and knowing the basic interests of one or the basic interests of the other. And that kind of arbitration we introduced, actually, and today it is prevalent.

I. And you were the first union to support that idea?

R. We were the first union that brought forth that idea and more than that, I say that actually lived by it from the beginning.

I. Can you remember anything else about the labor movement from your childhood?

R. I don't know in just exactly what period but you had Dan De Leon and the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. They challenged the American Federation of Labor, the dominant unions at that time already, The Knights of Labor had passed out of the picture. But, they never got off the ground.

I. What went wrong with that movement?

R. Well, first the prejudice against Socialism was great. Socialism had almost the same connotation as Communism today, you understand?

I. Yes.

R. That was one of the troubles. And then the dictatorship, Dan De Leon's personality -- the "dictatorship of the proletariat", that the communists usurped. I think he's the original man in this country and probably in the world who formulated this theory. And then you had the Wobblies, who were the Industrial Workers of the World, which was a combination of

everybody, Dan De Leon, the Western Federation of Miners, the men who were battling, if you remember -- Moyer, Pettibone, Haywood.

I. What kind of following did they have in this area?

R. Well, they had a very strong following in the West, and in some degree in the eastern textiles, lumberjacks, textile workers -- and they were a challenge.

I. Did they try to organize in your group?

R. No, no. We were never a part of it. We were not part of any of the things 1 mentioned now. As a matter of fact, their major activity was before we came to be, which was 1914. Now, although we had an organization history from 1910 to 1914 in Hart, Schaffner and Marx, and in the United Garment Workers, we became the Amalgamated& 1914. Many of the Wobblies were basically syndicalists. They were a challenge for a time, but they never quite got off the ground either.

I. What do you think went wrong with their movement?

R. Well, I'll tell you, They rejected all of our standards our moral standards. It got so that although they rejected the so-called capitalist moral standards, amongst themselves they began to practice them. For instance, in those days there were flophouses where they gathered and slept, and they didn't dare take off their shoes because someone would take them. Sex was also completely loose and on money, they were the same way. Now you couldn't build an organization where the secretaries steal all the

money. I mean, basically, I think they rejected our moral standards, but didn't create substitutes in their place with which they could live. That was, I think, more basic than any other consideration in their downfall. They got resistance, I'll admit. But they might have come through if they had had some moral standards which they themselves could live by.

That's what I'm wondering about the kids in our time. They are rejecting our own standards, but are not substituting a code in place of them, and a civilized society must have a code. You may not want the code that you're living with, but you want a code to replace it.

These were the three great challenges. Then came the C.I.O. Now that, already, had a much better start than the movements challenging the official labor movement. John L. Lewis was a great leader, no question about it. And he had a tremendous ego. That ego, however, was even more of a factor than integrity, and that's a question of the time periods of his career, I think, with John eventually the undoing of the C.I.O. I mean as an organization, the C.I.O. brought into existence the Automobile Workers; it couldn't have happened any other way. Dealt with as crafts, competing with each other, they couldn't have possibly have built a U.A.W. And steel, with crafts competing with each other, could not build the Steelworkers. The C.I.O. brought into being the Rubber Workers; it's the same way. And in that, of course, my judgment is that it was a brainchild of Hillman, executed by John L. Lewis. We couldn't have done it without John Lewis. Lewis

didn't have the understanding that Hillman did. Anyhow, the miners and ourselves did that job in the beginning. There's not much doubt about that.

I. That's right. You mixed your crafts into one union, didn't you?

R. Yes. We took over certain spots like the textile workers, and made contributions to the Automobile workers, the Steelworkers. And the miners did likewise. It was not a question of taking anything for yourself. Really, it was idealistic in the finest sense, And, of course, in that competition for membership, the A.F. of L. also grew. We grew, and then the C.I.O. which we were part of. It might be said that if Lewis were not as egotistical as he was, the only consideration would have been the growth of the movement and the story would have been entirely different. The C.I.O. would have been the dominant union rather than the A.F. of L. It's when the powers that be were scared of seeing themselves dominated by that type of person, by Lewis, that they were willing to deal with one union in the industrial field rather than different crafts. I mean, that appealed to them. But they were not willing to see a man taking over. And they became scared. And then the weight of the establishment began their shift toward the A.F. of L. Whatever the C.I.O. did, the A.F. of L. did, and so that, before we got started, they were on the ground floor, more or less. The A.F. of L. growth began just at that time. If Hillman would have been in Lewis's place, the story

might have been different.

I. What do you think he would have done?

R. Well, Hillman was more idealistic than Lewis. Hillman didn't have the ego that Lewis had. And Hillman was the kind of a fellow who would persuade the other side without great difficulty, show the advantages. And there are definite advantages in dealing with an organization instead of being non-union altogether. The climate at that time was a Roosevelt climate. So the establishment set its action as though it was a fact of life and you have to deal with it. And my judgment is that if Hillman had Lewis' stature and was p&aced there the story might have been a great deal different. The fact that Hillman was an immigrant boy didn't help him any, Lewis being a native.

I. This is one of the things I'd like for you to talk more about, the whole attitude toward immigrants and how this affected the organizing.

R. Well, it's true today. It's true that minority groups have never had the status that the others have. It's true today; it always was. As a matter of fact, we do things for minority groups now that we never thought of doing. Years ago, they had to lift themselves with their own bootstraps. Nobody would help, to speak of. Today -- registration, this that is being done. That wasn't true years ago. Anyhow, the fact that he was an immigrant didn't give him the stature

in the labor movement that he really deserved. As a matter of fact, when Roosevelt put Hillman in as the head of the War Production Board, it wasn't taken very kindly by the others.

I. By the other labor people?

R. Yes.

I. Oh, really?

R. It wasn't taken kindly. Instead of being glad, they tended to interfere with him. Some of his friends, unfortunately, when they were in trouble they'd come to him, but the moment they were out, it was different.

I. Which ones gave him trouble?

R. Well, I don't want to get personal but, generally speaking, it was not an accepted kind of appointment in the C.I.O. and in the A.F. of L.

I. Who do you think they would have accepted? Would they have been jealous of anybody?

R. Well, there wouldn't be universal acceptance, but there would be less opposition, let me put it that way. It would be either one side or the other. For instance, if it was an A.F. of L. man, surely the American Federation of Labor people would be behind him. If he's a C.I.O. man, the C.I.O. group'd be behind him, assuming the same problem didn't arise. But being that he was an immigrant, he got a very unfavorable

reaction, some openly and some undercover.

I. Were all the immigrants equally discriminated against?

R. No. It's not an easy question. It wasn't discrimination exactly. It wasn't that. It was acceptance more than anything.

I. Were some more acceptable than others?

R. That's right.

I. Among the immigrants?

R. Discrimination existed, of course, but that was universal. But here it was a question of acceptance rather than discrimination. After all, for any given place there was not necessarily one only to be picked. One can be picked from any number of people. Now these were the things that happened in the labor movement that I can remember -- before I was in and after I was in. As far back as 1918 or 1919, William Z. Foster, who later became t&e Communist chief, conducted a strike in Pennsylvania, I believe. We had I don't know how many Steelworkers, but at least 100,000 or more, I guess. We in the Amalgamated raised money at that time. We contributed to that strike as much money as the entire labor movement put together. That was before the C.I.O. movement.

I. You were a very young union at that time.

R. We were, relatively speaking, a small organization. We are larger today than we were then. And we contributed that much. Fitzpatrick,

a friend of mine, was the chairman of the organizing committee. $100,000 in those days was more than $l,OOO,OOO is today. Organizational funds were limited in those days.

I. Did you donate that much to the Steelworkers?

R. We gave one check of $100,000 in 1920, I think it was. Well, we were very friendly with the Chicago Federation of Labor, you might say. In those days it was a great institution. They used to meet on Sundays, and take up all the problems of the city, anything and everything. It was an open forum. Anybody could express himself on the issues of the day.

I. Now, did the Amalgamated belong to that?

R. We belonged to that from 1910 to 1914. And we again didn't become an official part of the A.F. of L. until 1933. But by that time a lot of changes had taken place. Fitzpatrick and Nockels were our friends. We bad friends in the labor movement before. It wasn't all hostility. They maintained their friendship with us.

I. All the way?

R. As a matter of fact, we helped WCFL, although we were not a part of the labor movement. Ed Nockels was the genius who was responsible for that.

I. That's what I've been told. That was his brainchild.

R. His brainchild. We made substantial contributions toward the establishment of their radio station.

I. And you were not part of the A.F. of L.?

R. No, but our relationships were always very good. We always managed to get decent sections of the labor movement. I say "decent," let us say those of us not in the racketeer category. Our relationships were rather good all the years.

I. Was your union ever bothered by racketeering at all?

R. Oh, they tried to get hold of us, '31, '32, in New York City. And, they came to us with a proposition, giving a very attractive offer. Some of the unions wanted to join to become part of us, but fortunately we knew who they were and we would not.

I. These were unions that were organized by racketeers?

R. They wanted to join us, hoping, you know, that some day they would take us over.

I. Get hold of your treasury, maybe?

R. Of course, they must have had that in mind, and we have two insurance companies, and we had two banks.

I. When did your Chicago bank begin? How long did it last?

R. It was the first one. It began in 1922, and the New York bank in the following year.

I. Oh, before the Depression.

R. It weathered the Depression. Cur banks didn't close. We had the only labor bank that was left for a long time.

I. How did you happen to get the idea of setting up a bank?

R. Well, it was a thought at first; no reason why we shouldn't earn our own money on our money. And then, small loans. For instance, small people never made use of the bank; the banks didn't make loans to them. A lot of people had never had entry. Ranks didn't even consider it worthwhile. Later on we got into it, then everybody else got in -- making small loans, small mortgages on homes, not exorbitant, our rates were lower. We were able to do that.

I. How did you find personnel that you knew or could trust in the beginning?

R. That was always a problem. We had a fellow by the name of Redheffer.

I. What was that name?

R. Redheffer. He was a president of Mercantile Bank in Chicago for a

period. He was with us about 8 - 9 years altogether. Then we shifted a man from Chicago into the bank. Walter Fisher was president of the bank until we brought this young man over. But as time went on, it became more and more difficult, because we didn't want to compete with them on salaries and we couldn't do the things that other banks did. For instance, the only unions we had were the legitimate ones and not even all of them. We didn't do the favors that a private bank would do. They have more labor accounts in the bank now in Chicago than we had, although we were union. And the reason was that they'll do things that we wouldn't dare do.

I. Like what, for instance?

R. Well, if its to the advantage of an officer of the union to deal with a given bank because of considerations that may be given one way or the other, We couldn't do that.

I. Is this the reason that you decided to close your bank?

R. No, that was not the reason. The reason was that we just couldn't find the right persons to deal with it, and we had so many other things to do.

I. Yes.

R. We still have a bank in New York City. But there we've got our old personnel.

I. Oh, I see.

R. And we're right in the same building with it. The fact that it's downtown also makes a difference.

I. I see. Can you tell me a little bit about the 1914 strike and the actual founding of this union?

R. Well, that time the history of the United Garment Workers was one of division. It was dominated by the cutters, as I said before, at the expense of the so-called tailors, the shop people. The shop people, as time went on, became discontented, and all that. And there was a deep chasm between the official leaders of the organization and the tailors. We also had what we call the cotton garment work clothes industry, which was mostly based on the union label. And they were less than half the organization. And they were mostly women. Tailors, on the other hand, were mostly men in the big cities. And the girls in the cotton overalls were mostly in the southern and midwestern small communities. Now, between the cutters and the girls, they dominated the officials. Well, we had a strike in 1910. And New York City had a strike in 1912. Very substantial growth took place just about that time. The tailors had, in all probability, more than the cotton overall workers and cutters. And besides that we here in Chicago were never kindly disposed towards the official family nationally. We

paid our per capita but told them to stay away. And as long as they got their money from us, they didn't bother us.

I. What were the differences between you?

R. There was a generation gap, number one. But I think more than that, there were philosophical differences. For instance, we resented the idea of cutters benefiting from a compromise made in the tailor shop, And, by the way, our own people were sold out. I told you that wage levels already were low. The old-timers didn't dominate any more. Luckily, I was one of the higher paid people; but philosophically, I was always liberal. I learned my trade in Philadelphia years back, and once a cutter had an opening it paid well. Generally, the people were hired and worked and trained; but they were abused or taken advantage of. And that difference existed. In 1914 the UGW had a convention and the convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee. The reason it was held there was because they didn't think that the tailors would have enough money to send people there. After all, train rides were long in those days, as against airplanes today, and money was scarce too. But they came there. Well, to make sure they controlled the convention, the leaders refused to seat the eastern delegates who probably, in some degree, were behind in per capita and all that because the struggle to live at that time was hard. The convention opened up and the Chicago delegation was seated in the gallery, the delegates that were O.K.'d. That was at the capital building in Nashville. I don't know if it's still there now or not. I was

there a few months ago. I didn't remember seeing it. The town didn't look the same, anyway. After all, it was 56 years ago.

I. It shouldn't look the same.

R. The Chicago delegation was seated. There were one or two that were not, but on the whole, they were, and I was one of the delegates seated. I was a floor leader on the floor to seat the delegates. Well, they said No, No, No, No! to seating the eastern delegates. Finally we walked out on them. There was a Duncan Hotel. We walked out and we went to the hall in the Duncan Hotel and we declared ourselves the United Garment Workers of America. That was in October. We organized then, and we elected Hillman as President.

I. I was told that some people wanted you for president.

R. I could have had it because I was spokesman, but I had the misfortune of having a reputation as a radical. I myself felt that if I took it there would be more resistance on the part of the employers, even the Chicago Federation of Labor, Nockels and Fitzpatrick. In other words, the outside influence might have given us a lot of trouble. We were in for a fight and we knew it. I myself decided at the time not to take it. Hillman had a fairly good reputation and was completely accepted by Hart, Schaffner and Marx and the other companies, management,

and would meet less resistance. We declared ourselves the United Garment Workers and continued that fight to try to get recognition from the American Federation of Labor. And, by the way, until that time no secession movement had ever succeeded in the labor movement.

I. That's the first one?

R. We were the first one that survived. And in December or January, or about that time of year, we decided to change our name and go on our own. We organized as the Amalgamated. We had a policy. The industry was unorganized at that time. We decided not to quarrel with the old-timers, to let them alone and let them sleep. We proceeded to try to organize the non-organized and, being more aggressive, younger perhaps, more dedicated, we succeeded. We had grave difficulties at times, but on the whole it worked out.

I. Were there any places where you couldn't organize that you tried very hard?

R. Oh, there were many places. We bad a lot of trouble.

I. What were the worst spots?

R. Greef and Schoeneman in Baltimore. It took us a very long time to get Schoeneman. Rochester took us about 4-5 years before we succeeded. Chicago took us 5 years.

I. Did you pay full-time organizers in those days?

R. You couldn't possible pay them what they pay them today. We used people from the plants and shops. As a matter of fact, professionals are only good to the extent that they can get the others to work for them who don't get paid.

I. Go ahead. You were talking about organizing new shops.

R. We concentrated on that. We succeeded. I think the clothing industry from which we originated is to&y better than 95% organized.

I. Probably one of the most highly organized that you can find.

R. Since that time we've done other things. Cotton garments, which were part of the old United Garment Workers, we neglected in the beginning, because the people who had rebelled were not the people engaged in cotton. That we began, I guess, in the early 30's in the depression years, and as time went on we succeeded. We've got nearly every brand name shirt house in the country.

I. Was it easier to organize during the depression?

R. It's never easy. Organizing is never easy.

I. I'd think the depression would be harder.

R. Oh, it was harder. Stories that were told at that time were unbelievable -- the wage level -- the wages that they got, all that. We had people working for as little as a dollar. Girls had to sell their bodies. But we succeeded there. We got Manhattan and Arrow Shirt. The only brand name shirt that we haven't got is Van Heusen.

Every other brand name is under our jurisdiction. And today, we have a larger membership outside of clothing than we have inside, Technology, of course, took its toll. We protect the hand workers. As time went on, they became smaller in numbers. Then laundries came to us. At that time, we were a wonder organization. People just came to us. We don't know to this day whether we were right or wrong about that.

I. Did you take in people that were outside of clothing?

R. We were choosy that way. I told you that a lot of people came to us.

I. You worried about the criminal element. Did you reject people on other grounds?

R. In a city like Rochester, we got some spaghetti workers. They came to us. And we have machines, Xerox is under our jurisdiction. That was because in Rochester there were no unions of any consequence, and they came to us. People came to us and we took them in. And from a small organization a giant developed. We had problems with the retail end of it. Clerks were picketed to join. After all, our clothing was in the stores. The question was what to do, so we got into that. In New York City, nearly all the clothing salesmen are also in. In Chicago, Baskins, Rothschild's and nearly all the others belong

to us. We had as complete an organization as it could be. Clothing is still the dominant group because they're so well organized, but our other members now probably outnumber clothing more than two to one.

I. What per cent of your union consists of women workers?

R. The numbers are growing. Let me say this, the percentage is growing. I would say that it is about 75%. Percentage-wise it's growing continuously. There are areas where only men would work because of the nature of the work -- like pressing, hard physical work. Today, you press a button, and now women are doing some pressing.

I. Do they play, a very extensive role in the union?

R. The men dominate, I think women are coming in more and more in organizing. We have a large number of women organizing. But in management, it is limited. You know women get married, decide not to work.

I. What about the ethnic makeup of the union. Has that changed over the years?

R. In the country towns (we operate in nearly all states of the union) the areas where there are small towns and all that, it's American, with rare exceptions. In the larger cities, we have other ethnic groups: Negroes have been coming in, Puerto Ricans in the larger cities, Greeks, and so on. The big cities are still dominated by the ethnic groups.

I. Have racial tensions affected the union?

R. We have not until now had problems with racial groups or ethnic groups. We have not.

I. How easy is it to organize in a small town? I've always heard that they were very difficult.

R. Well, I'll tell you they have been difficult, extremely difficult, less difficult now. We're the second largest organization in the South. Our membership in southern states, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and so on, is about 35,000 to 40,000.

I. When did you begin to make real inroads in the South?

R. Oh, the beginning of it was with the Roosevelt era. In recent years, we've met less resistance. You must remember also that some of the southern plants also are dominated by eastern companies, You're able to pressure frequently, break down the resistance of some other managements, because we have a substantial portion. And then you go after them in retail and all that. We, fortunately, enjoy a very good reputation. We are able to do things a great many organizations would not because their reputations weren't that good.

I. One of the things that I would like to find an answer to, if possible, is why this union seems to have retained more of its idealism than some of the others in terms of the programs it has been able to provide for its workers.

R. I think that can be answered in a broad sense. Show me an organi-ration, any organization, and its behavior. You can trace it back to the organizers. If the top echelons are idealistic, it's reflected. If they're not, it's reflected also. In other words, people, unfortunately, do not think for themselves. They usually follow a pattern, and the leaders determine it in a very substantial way. We started out as rebels and we were on our own. We couldn't have survived any other way. And for great periods of time, we held our ranks, purely on the appeal of our idealism. Now we suffer and are influenced, as time takes it's toll. We are not an island unto ourselves. A good deal of it is being lost. But no matter how much it erodes, some of it still remains. When the old leadership leaves us then its a question mark as to what can happen.

I. I wonder if younger people take these gains for granted.

R. Youth in itself is no recommendation. Age in itself is not necessarily a liability. There's a lot of wisdom in experience, and those able to retain their wits, as it were, who don't become senile, and don't think in terms of yesterday, are an asset. Unfortunately, the young who reject experience are handicapped to that extent, because to learn is to get hurt, because you have to learn the hard way. We can draw on our experience, those of us that have the competence to do that, So it's pretty hard to say just what's what. It depends greatly on personnel. And it depends greatly on who's organizing. The building trades accepted,

I remember 40-50 years ago, the attitude "What do I care if a business agent does this or does that? I get mine." Then there were the high brackets, not just the business agent of the building trades. That was reflected even in other places. I remember a local of ours years ago, said, "What we need is a business agent who eats a big steak, gets some money, and drinks with the manufacturers and brings us home the bacon." Ideology had nothing to do with any of their thinking at all. Whether he took money or didn't take money, whether he accepted favors from the employers or didn't accept, as long as they got theirs. That, unfortunately, still exists in a great portion of the labor movement that, unfortunately, dominates the labor movement and its building trades control.

I. What would you say has been the basic ideology of your union?

R. I think that a great many of the things that are accepted today were at one time socialistic. I dare say that the socialist philosophy dominated the founders of the organization. Not party people, but I mean the philosophy. There's a difference in being a party person and having the philosophy. For instance social security, which we accept, was socialism then. The immediate demands of the socialist party at the turn of the century were not as good as the actual things we have accomplished since.

I. Were there ever any ideological battles that went on inside your union or was this the dominant ideology, more or less, all the way

through?

R. Well, we never claimed we were socialists, communists, anarchists, or anything. We bad no claim, I'd say it was a philosophy that dominated. We were never party people. None of us.

I. It was just sort of a personal conviction that leaders held?

R. Yes, none of us were ever party people. Well, I'd say that, for instance, I *was a* member of the Socialist Party until 1907, but it was very small. I don't remember a party of any kind. The rest of our people -- some were temporarily. We never made much of political prospects, except on issues that came up.

I. Were any of these convictions religious convictions?

R. No, at no time did religion play any part at all. As a matter of fact, that was one area we held down, that we wouldn't discuss. And, by the way, you might say that also applied to the general overall labor movement. There was a time that religion and politics were bunched together as far as the labor movement was concerned, but we never permitted religion to inject itself. As a matter of *fact,* we tried to avoid religious issues. For instance, we got an extra holiday at one time. I think it was our seventh holiday. We didn't know just what one to pick. Somebody suggested Good Friday. We rejected it and took Lincoln's Birthday instead. Well, we got away from it, because the resistance against it was so great that we had to change to Good Friday anyhow, because Good Friday was always a Friday holiday and gave us a long weekend.

1. For non-religious reasons then it was accepted?

R. In other words, the pressure was great. We tried our best to keep away from it. Finally, we had to go along. Personal convenience was a greater factor there.

I. I see you've started a child care center.

R. That's only recently. We were the first ones that set up unemployment insurance. We had it here before it became a national issue. We were the first ones to adopt the idea. That was in 1923. From that came our insurance companies,

I. That's how your insurance companies began?

R. It started originally with unemployment insurance. We had the funds there, and when the federal program started in the 30's, we didn't know what to do with it, so we converted it.

I. Where did the idea for this child care center come from? Was this from the workers or from leadership?

R. There was no pressure from the workers. We fortunately have anticipated our problems rather than be pressured by them. Well, we are always looking for things to help our members. I mean, after all, today wages are taken away so easily by the high cost of living, inflation. And a great many of our people had to send their children into private homes and so on, and it was expensive. And the thought came to us, that we might experiment with that too. So we set up large ones in the Baltimore area, and here we started one. My own feeling

ultimately it will become the problem of the manufacturers, instead of the workers, with child care places on their premises. A woman could leave her child in a building adjacent.

I. Do you think that manufacturers will do this on their own or is this something that unions will ask them to do?

R. It will ask them. I'm not sure that we might not get it by legislation as time goes on.

I. Is it terribly expensive to operate a child care center?

R. Well, not terribly expensive I would say. Naturally, it's no burden on Chicago with its resources. I don't know what it is, but it's not prohibitive. We're getting some very favorable comment on it.

I. There is a great deal of interest on the part of women for these kinds of experiments, at this point.

R. This kind. of thing would help our situation in areas beyond that. A child that is raised, that will experience the care of these institutions, will be equal to any other child when they start school. They are not now, unfortunately, because of their home surroundings.

I. Do you know if there are other unions that are planning to follow your example?

R. I believe it's an issue more or less that people recognize now whether they want to or don't want to. It catches on. Our health center did.

I. When did you start your health center?

R. 15 years ago,

I. What kind of services do they provide?

R. Well, we've got complete diagnostic, as well as therapeutic and preventative medical care. And if you need hospitalization, we have insurance covering that. In many things we were forerunners, in a sense.

I. Experimenters for others to follow. Row fast do other unions seem to be following you? Are you way ahead?

R. I couldn't say. I think it was more true years ago than it is today. Today, things move fast. Now you take health centers. Nearly all the big unions locally have them. The janitors international has one. The tesmsters have one. Some unions are not financially capable of that, haven't got sufficient organization. Take the miners.

I. Theirs fell apart, didn't it?

R. Unfortunately, something happened to their organization, their planning was bad. We're always planning ahead.

I. Where do you get the expertise? Did this come from the union itself?

R. No, we hire people, naturally. But we are aware of the problems we might encounter. Outsiders may not know what problems you may run into. We ourselves are a aware in that sense. We hire people who are experts. But we try to get people that are philosophically attuned to a set-up like ours. We don't bring in strangers, complete strangers to our way of thinking.

I, Who would you say are the people on the modern scene who are outside of the union who might fit your way of thinking, like, for instance, Clarence Darrow did in the past and the social workers of Hull House? Do these people have counterparts today?

R. In those days, of course, we were the underdogs and people tried to help us. The same is true for the Negroes today. We don't need that now. We have to pay as we go. Some personnel are beyond our reach, especially those who do not want to make any sacrifices for the public good.

I. Did you have enough places for all of the children who wanted to attend your day care center?

R. No. We haven't scratched the surface on that.

I. So there is a demand for much more?

R. I wouldn't say a demand. There's a need maybe, but not a demand.

I. Do you think that the union could finance it on a large enough scale?

R. Some localities can. Some localities would have difficulty. The big markets could., But eventually we'll make demands upon the industry, For instance, insurance is that way. We tried it ourselves in a much more limited way. Then we spread it till everybody in our organization is covered.

I. And now does the industry pay for most of it?

R. Oh, industry pays it all. It's part of the responsibility of the industry.

I. Tell me about your retiree program.

R. We have people in charge we hire. Things vary from place to place. Some give art lessons, music. They play cards, have lectures, are active in politics, all time-consuming and social, For instance, here some of the people are going to make a trip abroad. We have over a couple hundred from Hart, Schaffner, and Marx. We arranged the trip for them and so on. And we get it for nominal figures. In Philadelphia, we established a building where they can live for a very nominal rent. The retirees needs can be met. If you've got an active person in charge, the program will be active. If the person drags, it will reflect it. In Chicago, for several years, we had no activity; but the manager is a kind of a fellow that stepped out and helped them along a little bit, and now we have a lot of activities. Some things are experimental. And if it works out well enough, we'll

pose it to the industry.

I. Is there any way that people who don't belong to large unions can get these benefits? Do you have any kind of legislative program?

R. Well, for legislative programs, we use our organization also. I mean the retirees have a lot of leisure and can do things our own people might not be able to do, because the retirees have so much time.

I. So you have retirees who are active in political ways?

R. We utilize it.

I. We've talked about the labor scene up to the founding period of the C.I.O. and at one point you said you thought the idealism slowly died out.

R. Not universally true. I said to you before, we're not an island unto ourselves, we're influenced to some extent by others.

I. What do you see on the current scene, if anything, which reminds you of the idealism in your organization among other unions?

R. Well, I told you the organizational period, the start, never completely leaves you. Some of it is left. Even if there are changes, it stays with you to some degree. I can tell you the kind of people that organized a given local by looking at what is happening around them.

I. What about unions where the idealism was not present in the organizing period? Do you see anything in the future for those in terms of rebellion in their membership?

R. Rebellion in membership comes from idealists as well as people that haven't got ideals. I mean it's a question of personnel a good deal and accident as to who comes into the local organization. You can't predict it. You don't know what hits a person until it happens. Some people are made purely by situations rather than by thinking things through.

I. How does automation or technological change affect your union?

R. I told you we had a lot more people originally in any given branch than we have today. In tailored clothes, for instance, 25 years ago we made about 26-27 million units. We only make about 20 million today. The population has increased. And the numbers of clothing workers is going down. And we are subject to style considerations. I don't think we have as many members in the clothing industry today as we had fifty years ago.

I, Are you able to take care of all the people in the industry, or are some of the people squeezed out?

R. Well they have a pension program available to them. That's one thing. But basically they fall out and there's no replacement. We don't just throw people out. We change them from one kind of work to another where they fit in, more or less. It is sometimes years before a change is completed. Reduction comes steadily by attrition.

I. Is it moving any faster than it used to?

R. It's moving at a terrific pace!

I. What do you see in the future?

R. Well, I see what Lindberg saw. I saw an article of his in Time a while ago. Lindberg is no radical, as you know. He said we need to take control of technology or technology will put us out of commission, out of business. He can see the end of everything if we don't do something about it.

I. Is there any vision within the labor movement of a way of taking control of technology?

R. I know it's resisted. I don't think there's too much thought given to the issue in the highest places, let alone the labor movement. There's very little thought given to it. Here we are with that poison gas and they don't know what to do with it. Isn't that a terrible predicament! The A.B.M., the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb of today! By accident or by design we can wipe ourselves out. Our entire civilization can go in minutes. I mean, very little thought is given to it. I'm just saying what should we expect from the unions, after all? I'm critical of the unions to say that, but that exists all around.

I. 200 years ago the farm population was 90% of the population and now it is 5%. Do you think the industrial population will shrink?

R. Does it make sense when world hunger prevails for the biggest part, to cut down on the production of food? It doesn't make sense, This world of ours today is not the world that existed 100 years ago, 50 years ago' but here we are doing it. It doesn't make any sense to play around with things that you know mean total destruction. But, they're doing that. People play with destiny, humanity, as if it is a game of marbles. Does it make sense? And somebody said the other day, we need mediocrity in the Supreme Court. It's this kind of world. And that stuff is accepted by a tremendous number of people, enough anyhow to make a difference.

I. You're right, that's not just the problem of the labor movement. We can't ask the labor movement to solve all the problems single-handedly. Is there anything you would particularly like to get down on the record before we call it a day?

R. Well, no. I've reached an age where things are more or less behind me. I can be philosophical about it, more or less. I'm not worried about myself anymore and I'm giving thought to what the future holds. And I'd say from the things that I have experienced through my life that accidents play a great part -- totally unexpectedly. I'm not optimistic about the future, but I'm not pessimistic totally, hoping that things that you don't see may change our course and save us in the process. I told you of 1910.

I. It looked hopeless then?

R. I couldn't conceive of organizing the union, let alone the strike itself, It happened. Rebellion -- psychological -- call it what you will. But it happened then. Maybe something will happen -- who knows?

1. We're ready for another accident.

R. I'm hoping for another accident. As things are today, I can't see ahead.

I. Thank you.

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