

Interview with Leon Beverly  
December 16, 1970  
By Elizabeth Butters  
Time: 1 hour

Folio.  
HD  
8066  
B 3  
v. 9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Experience at Armour Plant . . . . .	1-4
Organizing Techniques . . . . .	5
Racial Discrimination . . . . .	6
Union opposition to Discrimination . . . . .	7-10
Back-of-the-Yards Community Organization . . . . .	10-11
Official Positions in Union . . . . .	12
Relations with Amalgamated Meat Cutters . . . . .	13-14
Decline of the Stock Yards . . . . .	14-15
Special Union Projects . . . . .	16-18
McCarthy Era . . . . .	20
Current Problems in Community Organizing . . . . .	21-24
1940 Strike . . . . .	24
Lobbying in Springfield . . . . .	25-26

FEB 13 1973

Oral History Project

I, Leon Beverly, hereby direct that the interview  
recorded December 16, 1970, at 4859 So. Wabash Ave.  
Date Location  
by Elizabeth Butters by the Roosevelt University Oral

History Project in Labor History be handled in the following manner:

USE BY RESEARCHERS

- Open
- Closed Pending Instructions
- Closed until \_\_\_\_\_
- Permission needed to cite or quote

Elizabeth Balanoff  
Director, Oral History Project

x Leon Beverly  
Signature of interviewee

Respondant : Leon Beverly

Interviewer : Elizabeth Butters

Date: December 16, 1970

I. Could you just describe your first experiences in the Armour plant, your first grievance experiences and how you became a steward?

R. Well, when I started working conditions were pretty bad but the really important things started for me with Armour. After having my muscles felt and all that, to see whether I was a good specimen, I was hired. And I made only one big mistake, I put my union button on, I joined the union the first day. The joining fee for one months dues was 50¢, and 50¢ was a lot of money those days, but anyway I made a mistake and I put my button on. The boss saw that. He came up to me on the job and said, "You're working with the wrong people."

I didn't say anything, because I didn't know. I resented it, but I didn't say anything until I had talked to the steward and he said, "Well, you have to be a little careful," but I didn't take my button off. This was my first day. After a few more weeks of getting involved with the union and talking to the guys, the boss came up to me and said, "O.K. we're going to put you downstairs in the pens." Although I had seniority on this job, the union wasn't in there.

So they took a man with less seniority who wasn't in the union; they took him off and put me on. Then I went down in the pens. I couldn't quit since I'd just got married and I didn't want to go back on relief, so I stuck it out. They gave me a raincoat, a rain hat and some high boots and a paddle and I chased the hogs to the killing floor. This

Beverly -2-

hog refuse would come up as high as three feet some days, but I stuck it out.

Every day when I would get off work, I would go upstairs where the stewards were and give them hell. "What the hell is the union doing?" And I guess I must have made them mad one day and they told me, "Look, young man, we need everyone to come out to the meetings and get involved to help us out. Don't just come here and raise hell. You got a case, everyone's got a case. We got many people's problems." So that kind of shook me up a little bit. I went home and talked to my wife and she told me, "Never ask another man to do for you what you can do for yourself." And I've lived with that motto ever *since*. From then on I became active in the union, going to meetings, and I finally was elected steward. All this time I had this case, which was close to the way a million-other guys were being abused. Some guys was given three days off, some five. All the guys is union sympathizers. So finally we began to build. We got a little more courage. More guys began to put on these buttons and things began to pick up. Things was happening all over the-country and we got a little nerve. So we attended a meeting with the company but they refused to meet. I forget the date, but we gave them an ultimatum. I know it was in the fall.

I. You said it was in the fall of 1937.

Beverly -3-

- R. Yes, when all the livestock came in. That's the time to operate. They was loaded down. These livestock got to be slaughtered. Otherwise they lose weight and the company loses money. We knew that, so we got to have a meeting. We picked the busiest day and told them if they hadn't given us a meeting by 9 o'clock, there would be no work. We were worried. We didn't know whether the guys, the workers, were going to respond or not. So at 8:45 the tenseness began to build up. We had wrote out our demands on a plain piece of paper, We didn't have this fancy paper, like we have now. So at 9 o'clock that was it. Myself and a couple more stewards were the ones to lead off, so we took off our aprons and put down our tools and walked out in the middle of the floor. That was the longest -- it seemed like about an hour, but I imagine it couldn't have been but a minute. Finally two more workers stepped down and in, a couple of minutes everybody was down except about two or three. Some of the younger guys had a little violence on their minds, but we told them, "Come on down, brother," We argued, around there for I don't know how long. The company called down town; they called the labor board. Before the day was over we had a meeting and we settled. The only thing we was not getting was retroactive pay, but that was all right. It was a victory. We agreed to put out a bulletin.
- I. Let people know what happened?

Beverly -4-

- R. Everybody knew, everybody was cheerful. Cards began coming in, hand over fist.
- I. So that was a major victory.
- R. That was a major breakthrough.
- I. You got a lot of new members?
- R. Right right of course, we had more complaints. More grievances, too. But that was good. That built the union. Now there's one thing that I didn't say. These companies, Armour, built our union because they was batting these people around. They didn't do like they do today. Today they got this paternalistic approach. But then they was vicious. I see foreman -- guys would come up on the floor to beg for a job -- good butchers. He would tell the boss, "I'll do that job that Beverly's doing a dime an hour cheaper," but the boss would never hire these guys. But I seen them; they weren't supposed to come in the department unless they had a pass but these guys were slippery. I seen the foreman get a worker in back of his jacket like a little kid and give him a boot. Well, I almost took up for the guy, but I didn't. I said; "Hell, he should be man enough. Nobody does that, not even for a reason." That's how bad things were; we had all kinds of skirmishes. One thing I didn't mention before, one thing that made

Beverly -5-

our union strong was our contact with the rank and file through leaflets, meetings, sound equipment, moving pictures, every form of communication, daily. One time we put out three leaflets in one day, so we got criticised by the workers. Leaflets are all right, but if they print another one they should change the color. You can learn from them. You get around these workers, you got to be careful. They watch you and listen to you, just like now. I'm very careful if I quote anything or give out any figures in a rank and file meeting, much less a big meeting. These people are not dumb, but its a battle for the mind. Now big wigs have brainwashed them and we've got to understand that the big wigs bombard workers all day and all night. Now they've got the television. And most of these newspapers -- some of them are liberal, but they're not actually conscious of the workers problems. Now the workers got their papers, but their papers are not supported by big money, you know.

I. I was going to ask you some more questions about the relations between workers of different groups, How would you say the relations between the black and white workers and the men and women workers were? How many women were there at the time?

R. Yes, these are all good questions.

I. How did the union respond to the conditions of black workers or women?

R. History proves that this is another tradition of our union -- not because it is my union -- but we have a policy that on our executive board there will be representation from every ethnic group -- Spanish speaking, women; Polish, every group. Whenever we ran a campaign, there was another group, they blasted us for that. They didn't think that was necessary. People ought to be elevated on their ability, but you didn't have to be no lawyer to serve on the executive board in those days. All you needed was some guts -- fight. That worked very successful. That was the policy of our slate. We always had a mixture. It worked wonderful by the way. I was president for eight years, never got defeated. Of course I had some tough battles because they carried us through the wringer on this subversive kick.

I. When was that?

R. They subpoenaed us twice, 1955 and 1958.

I. Yes, right.

R. We probably shouldn't get into that yet. I'd like to come back to it. You want more on the women problem?

I. Yes, both the black people and the women.

R. Very well, you know the history of the yards. That's one of the problems we had with the Amalgamated. They couldn't use Negroes.

They could only be janitors. So they got into a big strike and the company went to the south and put these Negroes in the box cars and when these white workers walked out, they bought these Pullman cars into the yards, and that's when the Negroes got in there. So there was that feeling there all the time -- resentment. But for me, when I got active in the union, I would understand what the problem was. We developed the policy of our union. That's the paper I told you about. See, here's the symbol, Negro and white, women and men. But the company had certain departments where Negro women couldn't work, the sliced bacon department, etc. It was beautiful -- clean, good wages. But the Negroes only-worked on the chitlings, blood and the undesirable jobs. Naturally it wasn't the fault of the white workers, but a lot of the white workers like today was not clear on the problem.

- I. They didn't challenge it?
- R. They didn't fight it. They didn't fight nothing. Put every time one would, he was identified by his fellow workers. One guy, beautiful worker, he disappeared somewhere. He was working with us; he was really fighting to integrate that plant. He did, through his help, and he developed some other guys. So a bunch of guys went over to his house (he lived in Oak Lawn) and told his wife that he was a nigger lover and he was working with us and she almost divorced him. He came over to me and told me he wanted to talk to me private one Saturday. There wasn't nobody around. He cried and he said, "I've got to give it up; otherwise I'll lose my family," and so he disappeared. But generally,

Beverly -7-

we received the respect of the white workers. One of the key things that brought unity was that when the workers saw the executive board, white saw white, Polish saw Polish, Negroes saw Negroes. In fact they was amazed. I am a Negro, and about that time it was about 60 - 45 white, but I got elected every time, so it wasn't a matter of race. It was a matter of ability. And I got fired eight times, you know, because of my union activities. That helped my case some. At least they had confidence. So we put on a campaign to integrate the front office -- well to integrate these segregated departments first. We put on a terrific campaign. We were cited by the top C.I.O. for this. We wound up with Negro women and men in the Armour general office in Swift and Wilson. Well, the Armour general office, now on Michigan, is integrated. It was as a result of this struggle. In the mechanical gang we have Negro foremen today in most of the packinghouses, not just Armour, but all of them. This was where I was involved, and I can speak what I know. I can't resist telling this. One of the highlights was when we first met with the company and told them that we wanted some Negro women, especially on those typewriters. They thought we was crazy, you know. You represent the production workers -- you don't have no contract. We told them the Constitution was our contract. As long as you're sending meat to the Army on the government's contract, you got to stop discriminating.

I. This was during the war?

R. Yes.

I. What year about was it?

R. It was during the war. Even after the war we still got government contracts. Well, we knew that was our ace in the hole. Now we had to build our case, so what we did, we went to the Urban League and the NAACP and told them what we wanted. They told us to put an ad in the Negro press for typists. And we had about 200. I was in charge; I interviewed them myself. We gave them questions. Most of them qualified, but they said they didn't have time to pioneer a fight. They needed a job now. About 20 of them worked with us. We sent them down to the Urban League. The Urban League has all kinds of places they can send you to brush you up and we sent them. O.K., so we sat down and mapped out our strategy. Here's what the strategy was.. First, at a certain time, on a certain day, we'd send two Negro women in to apply for a job in the general office, take their names or find out who they talked to, the time they came and everything. And about three hours later, in the afternoon, we'd send two white women. The white women we used was women who worked in our International office. They knew their business. We put the plan in effect. The black women went in casually. "We're not hiring." They were very nice. We'll take your application. In fact, it would be better if you go over there to the hog department." And they named the department, not the sliced bacon! They were saying, "I know you can get a job there."

Beverly -9-

And if you've ever seen the hog department, that's a rough place. But anyway, they said, "Thank you." Then they come on back and they report to the office; Then we sent the young white ladies and this was something else. They was short of help and said, "Oh come on in." They weren't going to work no way, but they went in and filled out applications. They got a training room; they had about 40 typewriters upstairs. They was training a lot of people, but we were sending in finished people. So the white women filled out applications and they went upstairs, but they weren't going to work. One of them said she had just come off pregnancy leave and the other said, "Well, come back in the morning." And this was all we needed. We had a meeting with the International legal department, went to Washington, and met with the government. And that was powerful in those days. This great big building, with about five floors and oodles of employees, and this was the government committee on contracts. So we go right in and the guys practically fell off their chairs. They said, "What's the matter?" We said, "We've got a case." And they said, "I'm glad somebody came here." They only had about five complaints and that's all they had at that time. But I'm sure they're loaded now.

- I. That's something. This was quite a big thing before the civil rights period.
- R. Yes, this was before King started. But that's what I was trying to tell you.

Beverly -10-

I. Your union seems to be very progressive in terms of being on top of the things very early.

a. Well, I was telling some of these guys, "Some of you guys out there getting all these progressive ideas, which is good, I wish you guys had been out with us then. You'd be a hundred years advance, but you all were staying back in the weeds some place." They was afraid to come out. Every time we went out, "You're subversive."

I. That as around the 1950's right?

R. McCarthy period.

I. McCarthy period, so there were probably a lot of accusations.

R. Right. I don't want to go into that, but I get little peeved sometimes at some of these super-militants. I'm talking about guys I know personally. I can't accuse a person. We found that a lot of people make speeches; but we judge people by-what they do, you know.

I. I had some things to get back to. This Back of the Yards community organization in the early days,, I got the impression it was closely tied with the union. I was wondering what your memories of that were. Do you remember anything about their involvement?

R. They was very instrumental in helping us when some of our people were layed off. I think they had Christmas baskets. They helped them out

Beverly -11-

on legal problems. They was very instrumental in helping us in those days. In the later years we weren't as close as we used to be. But back then we had some of our members on the Back of the Yards Council. In fact I was on there for a while. We were very close together.

- I. I think they've become more racist. Their symbol used to be a black worker and a white worker and a priest in the middle. And now their symbol now is a white worker, a white businessman and a priest in the middle. I can see maybe in the early days you were close to them, but now they've become more conservative.
- R. Yes, well there have been some drastic changes. I know Meeghan used to be close with us and Saul Alinsky, you know. I didn't really know them well, but I knew the priests and some of them were very good. I think in the last few years there's been a change over and I don't really know what's been happening over there.
- I. Well, they're pretty much tied up with the democratic machine. They're more like a ward organization or a ward organization and community group combined 'is how they operate.
- R. It's not like it was. Not only that, they was in charge of this big church. Over at 48th and McDowell; I think it's closed now, but, that was our strike headquarters.

Beverly -12-

I. That was your strike headquarters? It's a Spanish speaking church now.

R. Yes, we had our strike headquarters there and they gave us food and everything. But there's no question about it, there's been some changes. But in those days they was very cooperative.

I. I wanted to add a little information about your history in the union when you became steward, and when you rose to president. Could you just give the years of the different positions that you had in the union?

R. Not exactly. I was elected steward in '37 a couple of years later, chief steward. I held that position for about three years. I served as grievance chairman of our division not for the whole plant, all the pork divisions. That was over about 7 or 800 people. Then I ran for president. I was elected and served as president up until 1948. And our peak membership was up to 7,500. When our plant closed down it dropped to 2000.

I. In what year did the plant close?

R. In 1959, July, that's when the phase out started.

I. Then what did you do after you served as president? You came to this office here?

R. At the end of 1958, I received a letter from the International office requesting: Could I be interested in working for the International union? Frankly, I wasn't at the time because I had a big job that I

Beverly -13-

was doing. I was making a contribution then based on certain things that I knew. Because of contributions I felt I could make, I accepted. I gave up the presidency. When the term was up, I-didn't run anymore, and I went to work for the International in 1958. I was with it till when we merged with the meatcutters.

I. I wanted to get that in. I was going to go back to this whole history with the Amalgamated. You've mentioned how your union was more popular because of its contact with the workers, whereas they drove through the yards in Cadillacs.

R. Oh, yes, that was just one high-light.

I. Well, I was wondering if you wanted to say anything more about the history of the relations with the Amalgamated up to the present. Were they ever a threat to you in the yards?

R. Well yes, up until the merger discussions started. Every time we would start organizing, here they come. If they start on a plant, we, would jump in. We was at each others throats. We called each other all kinds of names, fist fights and everything. That's how bad it was. And then in 1946, 1947, we went out on strike. They signed, they didn't strike, they worked.

Tape 2, Side 1

I. You were talking about your relation to the Amalgamated.

R. We were just like two rival organizations, bitter campaigns, name calling. Here's two unions in the same industry fighting each other and the company beating both of their brains in. Then, and I don't know exactly what the year was, '55 I guess, or earlier, resolutions were being presented by various plants. Workers held discussions on merger, and the concept of merger. Finally we did have a joint negotiation with Armour and Swift and it came out better that year than it ever had. And that laid the basis for the merger. It's very difficult when you take two organizations and put them together, but I think you learn over the years. It's still been only two years. I think in the future, with the younger workers coming up, that its going to be one of the best unions that this industry has ever made. Actually, what was happening, was all these plants were closing down. Automation was coming in; all these plants was getting smaller and smaller. We was- getting smaller and smaller. This whole district, in this new, district had 20,000 people in the immediate area. Our old district only had 4,000.

I. Would you want to say anything more about that the effects of the stockyards decline on your union here, how the union tried to deal with the problem of workers out of work?

R. What our union did was, we worked out an agreement long before. We knew that these plants was going to close down. The old buildings five

Beverly -15-

or six stories high was also inefficient. They had a sausage machine in the plant in Indiana, where I went to visit. I think they only had 30 or 50 women on it then. And our membership was dropping. As the membership dropped, these plants were moving out. By the way, this fallacy that the union run these people out of Chicago is not true. We got a signed statement from all of the companies. In fact most of these companies, where they moved, they carried the union right on with them. That's not true that the union drove them out. Of course, a lot of people still believe that, especially in Back of the Yards, by the way. However, the union and Armour negotiated to retain these workers, to transfer them wherever the company moved. If the company moved to another plant, they would pay their fare and rent them a house until they could make a pay. That's one thing we did. We tried this training program. We had a pilot project, I think, in Texas. We trained about 20 guys in automechanics. When they got them trained; they couldn't get no jobs because of the age factor. So, other than that, there ain't too much we been able to do as a union, other than legislative things like' higher pensions, severance pay. We got that. Of course that's just a stop-gap. When our plant closed you got \$100 a week for every year. So a man that had 22 years at that time got \$2200.00 Of course that helped. A lot of them don't even have that, but its really stop-gap. Some of them invested the money, some of them bought little newsstands. We were very much concerned about automation.

Beverly -16-

I. I learned that the union paid you for a while to work with the J.O.I.N. project.

R. Yes. That was another good experience. In fact, I think some of these kids are involved in a lot of other things on the north side. We had two offices.

I. When was this 1964-1965?

R. '64 or '65, somewhere in there.

I. And I remember hearing about selling apples on the street.

R. Yes. yes. I'll tell you, I think the thing that's important is that some people got the association. At that time these organizations were talking about poverty and unemployment and all that. Of course, it was controversial. What was the unemployment rate? We said 6%; some said 4%, some said ain't but 1%. At any rate, I don't think it was as w&calculated, but it was bad enough. I don't know who conceived the idea, but I do know I've always felt this way, not because I was. raised in this area. I do know there's a lot of people on top don't know what goes on there where the poverty is. They got ideas, but anyway, when this idea came forth, I thought it was a good idea. However I still think there's a lot of weaknesses in it. I still think they're on the right track, but I think they're not getting through to it yet because there's been so many grants and jobs; big jobs you know. Rut to get back my real point I think it was a credit to our union. They were among the first. They gave each district \$1,000.

Beverly -17-

That wasn't a lot of money, but that was enough to get a headquarters. It wasn't no fancy place. The whole idea was to go down into the communities where the unemployed, where unfortunate people are and find out what the story was. I've been in Chicago 42 years. I was raised over here. I'm familiar, in fact, I know half the people over there and I had some experiences there. The first thing to do was to get close to an unemployment office, which we did -- right around the corner. We leafleted, we got around and talked to people: We interviewed about 2000 people. Of course, we had a lot of other administrative problems. We didn't have enough help. Nobody was volunteering. We didn't have enough money to hire too many people. I think the kids on the North side done a bang up job. The only thing we really got was information, which was good. I took that back to a lot of people. I think some of these organizations got some ideas going. I think one of the problems, not only with the Packinghouse Workers, because a lot of them came -- but many people only had one skill and they was up in age. Then we had a lot of them, there was no question about it, they was on relief. They had a big family and, they would be offered a job at \$2.00 an hour. Well,, maybe some other guy would say, "I'll take it at \$2,00. I want to get off this doggone thing, get a subsidy or something." I imagine there are some people that probably wouldn't pay much, income today. That's \$80.00 gross,

Beverly -18-

but he couldn't come home with \$80.00 with car fare, clothes, and doctor bills and all that. So a guy'd say, "Look, there's no sense in me taking this type of job." Well, we'd send them to the unemployment office. My best friend there, he'll tell you somethings that would make you sick down there. They don't have no jobs for these people. And a few decent jobs were passed out to friends, you know.

- I. Were some of these people, or a lot of them, unemployed after the stockyards closed?
- R. Yes, I knew a lot of them. Lot of them used to come over and talk. They had passed out leaflets in the campaigns. We had about ten of them in the apple selling deal. That was a good idea, but we didn't get too much support. Like I said, years ago when one union went out on strike where a union had a project like the grape workers, all the unions would. send people; But there we were, a small group. We done all right, we went into restaurants. We, didn't just go along on LaSalle Street where all the money was. Well, we sold quite a few and got some good comments. We got a few fools give us a bad time, but it came out good. They donated us a few quarters.

- I. Could you explain more about the purpose of it?
- R. The purpose was to try to warn the people that the way the economy was going, we were going to get back into a depression like we did

Beverly -19-

in '29 and '30. And then the veterans who went over to the world war and had big bonuses waiting, well they had to go out and sell apples in order to survive. So that was the whole purpose -- a little education, you know. One demonstration and one picture can sometimes do better than a thousand words.

I. Yes, that's right.

R. Anyway, we had some very interesting experiences with that thing. A Presbyterian church worked with us. We had a few of these community organizations; they didn't participate in the demonstration. They thought it was a little too far out, you know. I got a kick out of it. In fact, I think we need more of it, but I think it ought to be organized. I was teasing the guys. You see, I believe in organization. In other words, I don't believe in going out with ten cops standing in front of me with two guns. Maybe sometimes you have to, but that ain't the way you do it. We always believed in real organization, avoid any bad publicity. Because we know like during strikes, the companies used' to plant guys in the picket lines and give them a few bucks to buy booze. here a guy is kind of depressed and they'll get him boozed up too and he'll start taking it out on the cops. Our guys would get steamed up and they'd throw them in the jug. We had a lot of that. We even had them infiltrate the union hall, but we took care of most of that now. We didn't hurt anybody, but we got them out of there. So really there's quite a history behind this union and I still think there's more to be made.

Beverly -20-

I. Do you want to say anything more about the McCarthy period?

R. Well, I'll tell you what's important is that this fear campaign was one of the big problems in those days. Anybody who stepped out, like peace, peace was very unpopular. We had a peace campaign, although the U.A.W. guys got beat up and they almost killed one guy. He was passing out literature and getting petitions. These fascist cats, they'd hit him with an iron pipe. But we didn't have no trouble in our plants; in fact we got 2000 signatures in one day for peace. We put them in the paper, and they had all that in the records downtown.

I. What year was this about?

R. '50's, during the McCarthy era, about '55, I think. One time when I was president, when workers came out to vote we had a petition so everybody signed a petition for peace to stop the war.

I. Does your union take a position as a union on the war?

R. Yes. Our International president -- he's on some peace committee." But see, it's very easy to get up and to issue a press release -- Leon Beverly stands for peace. But you got to work for it. Like our guys get up and say, you know, discrimination is bad and they go on television. But, as I said, the basic thing that needs to be done is lobbying, educating the people. One thing on this question now, I'm on the west side, and I got a lot of friends who work for these

community organizations, but they haven't had any training. Political understanding is what they all need. They pay them a little salary and they got good dedicated people. They get out and knock on doors. They go in teams, sometimes two women, sometimes a man and a woman. I know a lot of these people. They talk to me and they say, "We go around but they won't open the door and we're trying to help them." Well what is it? I got a brother-in-law. He's husky, he ain't the tallest guy but he's muscular and everything. He's got a whole lot of kids and he's got some problems. They went up to see him.

They trained him for a job. You know what they trained him for? How to make a bed in these hotels and motels; And I told them that's stupid, they should train him for construction. He didn't have too much education. That's another problem we've got. Most of these jobs that's available, you've got to at least have a high school education. That's the main problem, people don't have that. See, that's one of the problems that we got, but O.K., they'll go ahead and talk to the women. Now they're going to tell them how to stretch food and amongst the Negro women -- I know my wife was raised. in the South and she can. take some leftovers and feed a hundred people. Now suppose they was in that position and here comes a woman with a course in cooking some left-overs, to stretch the food. It's something they don't want to hear that. They raised children, they probably could tell some of them something. They're spending all this money and they go out and they come in and make a report but they're not being accepted. I don't

know what the answer is. Someone will eventually get it, but these programs are not being accepted.

I. They're not really touching people.

R. Now, these kids on the north side. They're getting to the people.

You've got to go out and do something else besides hum. I worked for a tenant union for a while, run by UPWA. The approach was modeled on labor organizing, kind of. It was successful for a while, but the landlord had so many tricks, and finally they sold their buildings to another landlord. They got rid of the whole set of buildings and the next landlord wouldn't keep the contract. It didn't have the kind of strength that was needed. For a while it did do something. The landlord had to fix up some of the conditions, you know, heat the buildings, remodeling, doing the basic things like replastering.

Well, the way I see it, in the first place you got to educate the people. How do you educate them? You got to get them together and give them some basic understanding, let them know that they've got to get out and participate in all of these problems -- education, etc.

My wife is active in Concerned Parents. They do a pretty good job. You know you got them all over the city. And sometime they get in contact with the P.T.A. Well, just like I say, I hate to say it, but some people don't know where they're at. They' think we're in the upper crust, when we're down here. I went to a P.T.A meeting once and I had a little time. I see one lady, a young Negro, got up, very highly educated, and she was telling the mothers that did come, "Now

Beverly -23-

when the children come home you should have them some broth and some milk and warm them up." I was just sitting there, I was just boiling over. I know I was out of order. "In the evening when they come in have them take a nap and dress them in calico," (whatever that is). When she got through, I apologized in front because I know what I said was going to shake her up. I said, "Young lady, you need to get some advice in your program. These women you're talking to don't even know what broth is, and if you want to talk about soup you tell them' that. You should know your audience. A lot of these women is on ADC and they can't buy all this calico and this warm milk. I say, you're giving them the television version of life and over here on the west side life ain't like that. These kids is lucky to get beans. And that's what you've got to address yourself to. One reason why you can't get in contact with them, all of you are fashion plates. I think every woman wants to be glamorous but some of the women who come in ain't got but one dress." And they have these teas. If you want to get through you have to work with these people. I worked with P.L.C.C. I worked with all of them until I had to give it up; it got too much on me. I got some good friends of mine, they do a good job, but when they get through they go to Evanston. They go up North and then they come back to the West side to teach those people how to live and they're getting a big salary. There's nothing wrong with it, but they're professional, I don't know what you call it. I've got nothing against them personally, but --

I. You don't think they're going about it the right way?

R. In the first place, if you're, going to lead a group of people, well then you ought to be in there with them.

I. I agree with that, your union, was like that more.

R. We had a policy, anybody who led the union full time, maybe two years, should work at least 2 months or more in the plant because once you get in these offices --

I. You get separated.

R. Sure, but once you've gotten in there, you're with these guys every day, you get the feel. And what made our union strong, the workers participated. Like this march, I never will forget that. During the 1940 strike, one of our guys was shot and killed by Captain John Barnes of the Police Labor Detail. We marched all the way from the site in a circle. We circled the yards. We took moving pictures of thousands of workers. Every month we would bring the sound truck around and go through the yards just blasting away -- whatever the issues are. We had about eight elevated cars taking the people down to register. Of course, we didn't get too many but it was a good demonstration. They participated. We went to Springfield. We wore boots and overalls. We just walked off the job, got into the bus and went on down in white uniforms, women and men, going through to lobby and everything else.

I. When was that now?

R I think it was 1948 and I'm just talking about our union. We went to Springfield. I was a lobbyist in addition to my other duties. I was elected from the district to go down and lobby on certain bills. I got off at the old main station, St. Nicholas I think. Do you know they let me and my other Negro co-workers sleep upstairs, but we had to leave the lobby and go to the Greyhound Bus Station to eat. I didn't like that, but the guy said Negroes couldn't. All these big Negro politicians eat in St. Nicholas Hotel. A couple of them are dead now. They were sleeping with the Negro people in Springfield. They couldn't stay in these hotels and that's a fact. We got that in the records. So our little group, we had a demonstration. We had eight Negroes. and one white lady with us from our local. We got off the train and we wanted something to eat. We went into a little greasy spoon. We didn't go into the highest place. And the guy said, "We will serve this young white lady but you all Negroes -- we'll give you what you want to take out." I had my pencil. and paper. I said, "What's your name?" Oh, he was arrogant. He said, "My name is Matthews." If he'd been smart he wouldn't have told us. We said, "Can we use your phone?" He said yes. So we looked up the NAACP and they was upstairs of this joint. We went upstairs and gave them some information-- and we jumped on these NAACP people for living there. We said, "Where do you all eat?" I said, "That's nothing but a greasy spoon. Anybody ought to be able to eat there." They said, "We eat at the Greyhound Bus station." And we said, "That's what you're down here for. You're

Beverly -26-

supposed to be fighting this kind of stuff." So they apologized and that's a long story. We asked, "Where are your NAACP lawyers?" They didn't have none, but they were working with some. This is a matter of record. We called them **up and one took the case.** We won the case, we had this guy put in jail on 9 counts, 18 counts, one civil and one federal. I forget the law -- discrimination -- refusal to serve. It cost this guy so much money he went out of business, but in a few weeks all **of those places opened up.** I'm not saying it was all from this, but this helped.

- I. I'm sure that **helped.**
- R. This was long before the civil right peoples were out there. By these few handful of workers participating, every one of them went on to make leaders. Eleanor Franklin from Women for Peace, do you **remember** her? She was with us.
  
- I. This is a good example of the spirit of the union, that you had people that would speak up on all the issues relevant to human beings wherever **you went.** That you could take the time to challenge that, I think, shows something about the spirit of the union.
- R. There's a lot of that now, but its got to be given leadership. My only . criticism of the kids nowadays is that I think they're a little bit unorganized. I just hate to see them get beat up and thrown in jail. Now if they were more organized people might not agree and you

might eventually end up in jail but you don't have to make a martyr out of yourself. That's what I think. There's certain things you can do. Some of them will tell you it ain't revolution. My son just come back from Viet Nam. That's the reason I can kind of put it together. I can see that's the way he talked. You see they're for the revolution now. They're tired of this business. He told me, for example, since going on over there, I chawed him out for volunteering, but I was afraid he was going to get involved in this gang bit, too. I finally concurred for him. They had a big campaign and got him back. He told me, "Who's fooling who? Every time they have a hockey match, baseball, he pin points some of the things that people in the old days lived with and accepted. These kids are not accepting this baloney. I get into it even around here on-a friendly basis. "What do you thing about the hippies and the yippies?" I talk about them with some of the guys in the plant. We talk about all of this. We talk about all kinds of crazy things. I tell them I was noticing television. I don't know who this kid was, he was all decked out and they were asking him all these questions. "Do you take a bath?" So he said, "When I'm in town, I'm as clean as anybody else, but I dress different. I don't believe in the status quo. I don't believe that any time someone brings something over here from Paris, that I got to wear it. Everything we do here isn't right. I

Beverly -28-

don't agree with everything."

So I told them, "Why are you so down on these kids? These are the smartest people in the world. Most of them are college graduates. You can't talk about that, just cause you don't necessarily agree."

I went to Washington with-the big demonstrations.

END.