This transcript was reviewed and corrected by Mr. Helstein through page 74 only.
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RELEASE

I, Rachel Helstein, do hereby give to the Library of Roosevelt University the transcript of my husband, Ralph Helstein's oral memoirs as recorded by Elizabeth Balanoff at our home 1972 to 1974. Permission to cite or quote is freely given.

Name: Rachel P. Helstein  
Date: January 6, 1956
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
May 3, 1972

I. Mr. Helstein, I hope you'll have the patience to tell me about your whole life. While we're mainly interested in the union movement -- for those who've been leaders of it, we're interested, too, in what made them the kind of people they are and where their ideas came from even before they entered the union movement. Could you begin by telling me a little about your family background?

R. Well, I was the only son in the family. I had a sister who was thirteen years older and another sister who had some illness at birth. I never quite understood the nature of it, but she was an invalid for many years and died at a pretty young age in her teens. So I never really felt that I had any contact with her.

My father had migrated to this country at the age of ten or thereabouts and had become a supporter of a family. I don't remember how many there were but it was a rather substantial size family. He was about eleven at that time. I've always assumed he was just a partial supporter, but he at least contributed.

I. You mean with his brothers?

R. His mother and father worked too, actually.

I. From what country did they come?

R. He came from eastern Germany. My mother came, I think, at about the age of fifteen or sixteen to join a sister who had already been here for a number of years who was living in Superior, Wisconsin. The whole group of migration ended up in the so called Iron Range country in Minnesota where the iron ore comes from -- Mesabi Range.

I. Did they ever tell you why they came at the time they came? What was going on at home that made them leave?

R. Well, my mother's father had been a captain of a grain barge that went up and down the Nieman River and they had been subject from, time to time to pogroms. At least one of her early memories was the pogroms that used to go on in this little town. I think it was Kovno in Lithuania.. And they just finally gave up and decided this was no place to stay. The children began going first. First her older sister and then she went and then a couple of the other sisters and
finally the parents came. They were all in the United States and all living up in northern Minnesota and that's where my father ended up, too.

I recall as a youngster hearing stories about how strong he was. He could lift one end of something that took two men to lift the other end. It always seemed strange to me because I always attached strength to size and he was actually shorter than I am. He was 5'5", I'm 5'6", but he had big shoulders and big, bones and obviously was a powerful man.

Mother used to tell me that he'd come courting her in a big wagon with four white horses that he used to drive with one hand. This was a time when a youngster never thinks of romance and his parents. I remember looking at her in complete amazement at the light that used to come in her eyes when she'd tell me this story.

He went from one thing to another in business. He'd had no formal education in any language but he decided he was going to business school. He wanted to take accounting and he wanted to get some knowledge of business techniques and methods. The teachers discouraged him because they thought that he would just be a problem for them with their other students and so after awhile he dropped out. He didn't need it. He established a manufacturing business.

As a matter of fact my first experience with a strike was when I was about fifteen or thereabouts. It was before I entered college. I think I entered at sixteen. But there was a strike at his plant. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers had organized the plant and there was a strike there and that was really my first exposure to the problem.

Well, the family had a certain amount of success and moved up to the middle class as one thinks of the movement of those days. My mother had this terrible drive for knowledge and education. When I was still in grade school we moved away from that section of Minneapolis where much of the Jewish population resided and where the Talmud Torah was located. This was a Hebrew school and it was thought to be one of the best in the country.

I. Did you attend it?

R. I attended it but then we moved away and at her insistence I continued to attend it. This meant my getting out of school at 3:15 or thereabout and getting on a streetcar and riding the street car for an hour and being there for two hours and then getting out of there at 6 o'clock and taking the street car and riding over an hour back.
It was bad at any time of the year because it deprived me of any opportunity to be with my friends, but in the winter in Minnesota it was really something special to wait on those corners for a street car in real below zero weather. Of course, that was long before cars had come into such common use. And even though we had an automobile, in those days in the winter time you just jacked it up on blocks and you took the tires off and the battery out and you just put it away. You never looked at it until spring because the block would freeze. There, was no such thing as anti-freeze, no ways of keeping the windows from frosting, no heaters or even windshield wipers. I remember the first windshield wiper we had, which was one of those you did with your hand. You just moved the wiper up and back in order to keep your windshield clear.

Well, at any rate, my mother's drive was there constantly and Mother had never learned to read or write English but she was fluent in Yiddish. I used to stop at the library up near the Talmud Torah and bring her books several times a week. She was just an omniverous reader. Obviously enough at this library they had translations of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan playwrights like Johnson and others. Dickens, Scott, all of this stuff had been at one time or another translated -- the Russians, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and many of the French of the Enlightenment. She had this terrible need and that drive took its form in many ways.

I remember my sister and the question of her going to college. I suppose I must have been five or six years old at the time. She was thirteen years older than I. My father just didn't approve of this. It didn't make sense to him. He never heard of a girl going to college. Once she's through high school he thought she should go take a secretarial course or something. But my mother was absolutely adamant! She was definitely to go to college.

I. She sounds like an early women's libber.

R. Well, not really. As a matter of fact, I think the real radical strains in the family, that is intellectual radicalism, came from my father more than from her. But there was this terrible drive for knowledge and education. This was a magic term to my mother. She sold all her carpets to get enough money for my sister's tuition. And this was a time when the tuition at Minnesota ran $25 a quarter. I think it was less than that because when I went there it was only $27. This was before the First World War I'm talking about, around 1916 or thereabout. At any rate my sister went all four years. My father came to like the idea and when she
finished she thought she had really not yet had enough of it so off she went to Columbia in New York. Of course that was absolutely unheard of to get a Master's Degree in History. A guy named Muzzey was teaching her and she did her dissertation under Muzzey. She got a Master's Degree in History.

Well, this created a sort of climate in the household. where there never was any question about what I was going to do. It was a matter of what I ended up with, not whether I would go to school or not. I had to take it for granted I'd go to grade school, I'd go to high school, I'd go to college and then I'd go on to whatever, if any, professional work that I was interested in.

There were not too many political discussions until my sister grew up and then she became a very conservative person. She disliked Wilson terribly because she felt he was lying. She, herself, was an Anglophile and felt we ought to be in the war on the side of England. My father voted the Republican ticket as a matter of course and no one ever asked questions. This was the first time that I can recall any political discussions in the house.

Then as the years went by, when the depression came my father's business had difficulties and of course during this period I was going through many changes. My sister had married a guy who was a lawyer and also a book collector who understood rare books, first editions and special editions of. one kind or another, and the companies who did the good binding. Stanley was an amazingly well informed man. He was the kind of a guy who would walk into a second hand book shop, and I did this many a time with him. One time he went in there and he bought a book and paid 25 cents for it and it turned out to be a first edition of Lafcadio Hearn's Some Chinese Ghost Stories and he sold it many years later for $125 during the depression when he needed the money. He had a really great eye for rare books and he spent a lot of time with bulletins learning about it because it was a matter of great interest to him.

He had a large personal library which I had made available tome from the time that I was in the early years of high school. And I had also available his omnivorous reading as well as tremendously catholic tastes. I suppose that before I had finished high school I had run the gamut from Gorky and other Russians to Confucius to Mohammed to Smith, the Mormon, to Marx and to early Freud and Pareto. We were just beginning to get the noises of that guy. I had an understanding of what they meant when they talked about Mussolini and his facisti when my friends at school just
thought this was some silly Italian name that had been pulled out of thin air. I shouldn't just indicate that it was in these areas, politics or religion or philosophy, but it is also true of the novel. I had a very broadly based reading background even among the Americans. Stanley, my brother-in-law, was very enamored of the early American literary critics like James Gibbons Huneker in the days before Mencken. I became particularly attracted to Huneker. At any rate, reading criticism of the music and arts, the drama, that came from the pens of these men, I developed a taste that just made very little sense because it wasn't in any particular area. I got so I could spend weeks at a time on chess books fooling around with plays, different chess moves and plays. Stanley and I would play a lot of chess together. I was still in high school, probably early college at this point.

Well I went to college and some of this began to have an impact. I got extremely interested in old English at one time, as much because I had a fantastic teacher in Chaucer by the name of Ruud, who was then considered a national authority. Beowulf interested me and then I moved from that to Chaucer. I'd almost decided that that's really what I wanted to do -- I wanted to be a teacher, not just English but old English. I was fortunate in that department at the university at that time. We had people like Bush who later went to Harvard and taught 19th Century poetry.

I:

Which college were you attending?

R. I was at Minnesota. I graduated from the University of Minnesota. In those days, interestingly enough, in both its department of English and Economics and in the Law, Minnesota had some of the names that became most famous in their respective fields. I took a course in advanced Shakespeare from Stoll who politically, I don't use the term lightly, was as close to being a Nazi as anyone could have been. But G-d, what feeling he had for Shakespeare! It's hard to understand, too. I was never quite sure I could figure that one out. He was thought at the time to be one of the leading Shakespeare scholars in the country. Joseph Warren Beach, who was an authority on the novel, and Sinclair Lewis, who was a Minnesotan, used to come down and give visiting lectures.

Perhaps the most interesting of the lot was a man by the name of Oscar W. Ferkins, whose name is probably not known to you, but John Galsworthy spoke of him as the leading American critic of the drama in his day. This was in the 20's. He was a fantastic man, practically blind, impossible habits. The story about him was that he had been in love with
the daughter of Cyrus Northrup, who was the president of the university, and lost out to Warren Beach, the novelist, and he just went into a shell. He could recognize you if you spoke to him on the street. He could recognize you by your voice because his ears were very highly attuned, but he couldn't see you. His glasses were incredibly thick. He wouldn't use a phone. If he wanted to communicate with you it was always by note. And some of the notes were really treasures because he had this old style of writing. I remember onetime I was ill and I got a note from him saying, "When the most faithful of students is absent, I must be assured that he is sick. Believe me that I suffer in your pain." This kind of language this is the late '20s already. The first World War is already over. Clarence Darrow in the case of Loeb and Leopold was beginning to think in Freudian terms and Oscar Ferkins is still writing notes like this. He was a terribly important factor in my life because he was a devotee of Ibsen. And in his course on the drama we spent a whole quarter on Ibsen alone.

Of course this really began to shatter a world that I'd come to sort of take for granted. I mean I started looking again at some of these things that didn't seem so unreasonable. And then when I got reading increasingly in politics and some economics, Knut Hamsun was there teaching economics. Later he went to Harvard and really was the guy who was the forerunner of the whole Galbraith school. so this was very exciting and a period of real gestation for me. I became attracted to much of this as a result of pure intellectual involvement. You'd read the Communist Manifesto and you'd read Lenin's State and Revolution. You'd start asking all kinds of questions about some of this other stuff, and Dickens and Ibsen and Hamsun, always with that terribly bitter really Scandinavian drive that comes out of that cold country in the North. This man, Knut Hamsun, later became a supporter of Hitler. Of course he was senile by that time but he'd written a book called Hungerers and The Growth of the Soil. They were just fantastic books in terms of making one see through the facade of all you know the '20s were a period of booming stockmarket, the second guilded age.

I. Affluence!

R. Well, not this kind of affluence but for the '20s. You know as a youngster, before my, teens, my friends and I used to sit on curbstones and watch cars go by and try to recognize them by their hub caps. Now if we saw one car every half hour we were lucky. Mostly it was horse and wagon and of course the Model A Ford and the Model T. But by the '20s
this situation had changed completely. You drove every place you went. We no longer put our car up on blocks in the winter. They now had Prestone and they had automatic windshield wipers. They had heaters. You could put celluloid or is in glass of some kind in the car which you would seal over the windows so the windows wouldn't frost up. You had no defrosters in those days. So life had begun to, get much easier and I guess one began to identify that kind of ease with progress without examining the term very carefully. Well, I was more and more moving in the direction of English literature. Mary Ellen Chase, who became a novelist and taught at Smith, (she had taught at Minnesota) came back to teach there for a quarter and she was giving a course I think on 19th Century Prose, it may have been 18th. At any rate, I wrote a paper for her on Newman. He bothered me, this conversion of his, and I had grave difficulties with it.

I. In what way?

R. Well, this man had an amazing intellect and I had already begun to break away from the orthodoxy that my mother represented. My mother was the orthodox factor in the family. She kept a Kosher house, if you know what that means. As a youngster I couldn't go swimming on Saturday or couldn't play games on saturday. And every other day in the week I had to go all the way up to the Talmud Torah. That continued only until I was thirteen. I made a deal by the time I reached, the age when you become Bar Mitzvahed so I stopped that, although I've regretted it some. I had a good basic understanding of Hebrew and probably could have developed some skills with the language but I just resented the effort so much. The same thing happened in connection with smoking. She exacted a promise from me when I was seventeen that I wouldn't smoke until I was twenty and the day I was twenty I smoked four packs of cigarettes and I never stopped until April, 1969 when I had a hip operation. Since then I haven't had another cigarette.

But back to Mary Ellen Chase who was teaching one quarter at the university. She called me in after this paper on Cardinal Newman. It was really his conversion that was giving me the biggest trouble and then the extreme that it seemed to me that it had led him to. This had intrigued me a great deal, trying to comprehend and understand. I could have understood the depth of feeling, but he had come from such a distance into this. In any event, she asked me if I would come in and visit with her for a bit and I went in. She was a most attractive and charming lady who was a teacher, of great skill. At least I thought so. My recollection is still the same. I still think of her as a woman with deep knowledge and real insight, and the capacity to draw it out of
I.

the student. She said to me, "What do you think you're going to do?" Remember, at this point I may be about eighteen. And I said, "Well, I think I'm going to teach college, teach English." She said, "Yes, I was afraid that that's probably what you had in mind. I just thought that I wanted to say one thing to you. You, of course, will do what you think you want to do. But I think you ought to understand that it's not a question of whether it's good or bad. It's a fact of life that it's almost impossible for Jews to get jobs on faculties in English departments in colleges around the country. As a matter of fact, I don't know of a single one."

Well, that came as a great blow for many reasons: one, I had never been bothered too much by this problem. I was aware of it, obviously. I grew up with fights with kids, but the level of anti-Semitism was always a very primitive kind of nuisance. It never seemed to be anything that could fundamentally affect my life in any way. Of course, I must confess I was very naive about it. Particularly in Minneapolis. I should have known better, but I guess it was because I was so young. In any event that made a very strong impact on me. I kept working, I just stayed on, I finally got my degree. I think I entered when I was sixteen and finished in less than four years. I was just about nineteen, going to be twenty and I just didn't know where I was.

My father had his business that I could have gone into but I didn't find that very attractive. I'll have to backtrack on some of this. I just didn't know what I really wanted to do and I had also been troubled. I had gone with my brother-in-law to a series of lectures by the Unitarian minister in Minneapolis, a guy by the name of Detrich, who was a man I learned later of some national stature, although I can't remember now in what connection. But he had given a series of lectures on "Relationships of Science and Religion," and this had had a very important effect on me. The whole weight of the world seemed to have suddenly descended on me and I had to have a career that would somehow carry that weight. In any event this worried me for a good deal of time. This went on for a year or so and it was during this time that I had to make some decisions about what was going to happen.

II.

Did you want to go back to pick up something else?

R.

Now, if I can leave this for a moment -- I mentioned to you before that my first experience with a strike was in my father's factory. I was roughly fifteen or sixteen at the time and it was during summer vacation. I used to drive over to St. Paul. We lived in Minneapolis and I used to pick up a guy who worked in the plant. He was one of the skilled
workers and I used to drive him to work and go up with him into the plant through the picket line. They'd yell, "Scab!" at him and I didn't know what it meant at the time. Later I got hold of Jack London and started reading some of that radical literature and I learned. But this went on for a period of a week or so and I finally went to my father one time and I said, "You know, I don't understand this. Here's this guy, what's he coming to work for? All the people, who I would think his interests are identified with are out there and he's coming to work. What's he doing? I can't comprehend it."

So he said, "Well look, this is a form of warfare really. It's class warfare." And he wasn't using the term "class" in the Marxian sense because he had never read any Marx or had any interest in Marx. But it's a question of how you divide up this pie. He said, "That guy isn't any good, that's all. He's a traitor to his own group." He said, "I use him because he's willing to be used if I pay for him, but I wouldn't trust him." He had, complete contempt for him.

I said, "Don't you encourage it? Aren't you contributing to make him this kind of person when you do this?" He said, "Well, I feel I may make it easy for him but he already is that way. I'm not making him that way. If he wasn't that way I wouldn't have any special effect." Well, that had a great impact on me and made me worry about this now.

If I can go back now to here I left it I'm three years older approximately in age and time and I'm looking at the world through glasses that aren't quite so rose tinted and I'm trying to make some decision what do I do. How especially do I do it in a way that it makes mine a meaningful existence in the light of these terrible problems? Man's got to find some way to reconcile these social questions, religious and scientific understandings: So I finally decided that even though I had no special talent for it, didn't have the slightest interest in it, what I'd do is become a doctor, because somehow or other a doctor, in spite of himself, couldn't do anything but help people. Even if he wasn't very good at least he would help. He may not have had a special genius. You know, if I had been a Horowitz or a Heifitz or something then it would have been simple. Then you have a genius, but in the absence of that a doctor seemed to be the best substitute.

I should add here, I guess, that my mother with this same drive she'd had for making sure everyone got an education, this didn't stop with just her own immediate family, it went into her sister's family, too. So all through college I had two or three cousins living with me. One of them got his degree in dentistry and two others got
degrees in medicine. And in most of these cases she helped finance their going through school by getting them jobs or shaking the woodwork somehow and coming up with money to buy microscopes or instruments for the dentist. In a very real sense she was responsible.

I guess among the boys in the family there wasn't a single one of them, with one exception, who never finished college. And that one went to college but turned out to be the man you may know as a radio announcer by the name Pierre Andre. His name was Phil Litman. When he first went on radio way back in the '20s they spent a half a day and gave him that name. But he's the only one that I can remember who didn't finish college. It wasn't just true of the men in the family, it was also true of the women as a result of my sister. If they wanted to go they did. Very few of them wanted to as it turned out. At any rate I was going to be a doctor but had none of the prerequisites. I hadn't taken a course in chemistry or any of the others. One of the things that I had to do was take a course in scientific French or a scientific language course. It could have been German, anything. French was my course.

One of the things that I got myself to do in my senior year was a matter of pleasure really. I used to go to the university library and look at the rare books. It was a beautiful little library and it was very comfortable. I read Madame Flaubert in French, the whole thing. This course in scientific French was just deadly. You can't imagine. It was the only one. I was taking a course in chemistry that I didn't like but it wasn't so bad, but this thing was just deadly. At the end of the first quarter they came out with an announcement that you could take an exam and if you passed the exam with a B or better you'd get credit for a year's work in scientific French and be through with it. Well, that just seemed made to order for me so I went and took the exam. I went to where the grades are posted and my name wasn't on the list. Of course, I didn't pass with a B or better. I couldn't believe it but that's the way it was. Well, this was just the final blow, it was too much. First of all I was tired of school. I really had put in a lot of time. It had been pretty constant and I was tired of school. I said to hell with all of this.

Of course the difficulty of it was that it was probably in November of 1929 when this happened and that was less than a month after the stock market crashed and everything started to go to sea. But I said I'd had it with school. I went to New York. I didn't know what I was going to do in New York. All I had was a few hundred dollars saved up. I took that and I went to New York and that was a very
difficult period, difficult in many ways. In retrospect I realized I was really going to New York, not because I wanted to make my fate and fortune, although I did think about myself as Dick Whittington, but really it was breaking my mother's apron string.

My mother always held us very tight to home. My father, fortunately, understood this a lot better than I did and in his own non-directive way encouraged it. I don't mean to suggest he was non-direct because he wasn't. He was very strong and a dominant personality. He really was the father of the whole family -- his brothers, sisters, everybody -- and a very strong man. But in this respect he wasn't pushing me. Just one example -- I had ringlets and my mother couldn't bring herself to cut them. I went around until I was nine years old with those curls. They used to drive me crazy. One night my father took me by the hand and just walked me down to the barbershop and I got a haircut.

I. What did your mother say?

R. She walked by the barber shop while I was on the chair and, she just let out a whoop and came running in and gave that barber hell. And do you know to this day my wife has some of those curls which she made the barber give her and which she then gave to Rachel when we got married. But that was all she could say. The job was done and I wasn't going to have them anymore and she knew that and there just wasn't any point in carrying an argument on.

But my father encouraged my going to New York. I got a wire from him every once in a while saying, "Mother's very ill. You better come home." So I'd wait until he went to the office and I'd wire him the next day in the office, "Is she really that ill? Is it essential?" And invariably his answer would be, "Use your judgement." He wasn't going to be faithless to her, but by golly, you know, stay there. At the same time I was going to be given a chance to make a decision. I just didn't go then.

I. Was she ill?

R. No, the truth was a mechanism that I learned than and at occasion learned better later. It was a very useful mechanism, it worked for a long time. But at any rate, I stayed in New York and it was very rough going getting jobs. They just weren't there. And the money, you'd, eke it out, you know. You'd pick up something to earn a few bucks.

I. What kind of work, did you find?
R: Well, I didn't really find any. I'd work in a bookstore for an afternoon or a day if someone was sick. I went down to Macy's and they accepted me for their junior executive program and then they showed me some of the stuff that it consisted of. I tried that for a week or two, you know, then an insurance outfit. I went to work for them for a while. It was just clear that it was not the sort of thing that I wanted to do. Finally I got another one of these things from home. Only this time my father said, "Yes, I really think it's important that you come home. It's got to be talked out." So I went home and my mother had worked herself into a real psychological stage of depression. It was clear that somehow we had to find a modus vivendi when we were closer to each other than the distance to New York. And it began to work out. At any rate I went into my father's business. The business was bad, everything was bad, you know, the height of the depression. I found it rather interesting, or certain elements of it were interesting. My father tried to teach me what the market meant and I thought this was a concept that didn't make very much sense.

I. You didn't relate to the market?

R. I didn't relate to the market, I never had to, you know. What happened was that I bought some cloth, 10,000 yards of a certain kind of fabric that we were to use. And, as I remember it the price I'm talking now about the 1930s so my memory might not be very accurate -- but it seems to me it was about 11 cents a yard. It was delivered some six weeks later but when it was delivered it was worth only 9 1/2, cents a yard and we had to pay 11 cents. I said to my father "This is insane. What kind of a system works this way? It's just crazy." And he said, "But that's the way it works." And I said, "Then it's crazy and anyone who lets it work that way is crazy. Either that stuff was never worth 11 cents, it was always worth 9 cents, or it ought to be worth 11 cents now." I said, "Nothing's happened to that fabric." "Well," he said, "people won't pay as much now as they would then." And I said, "Then they shouldn't charge you what they were charging then." Well, I didn't get anywhere convincing him. But I said to him at the time, "This confirms me at least in one fact. That is that if I have inventories I want to have them under my hat, I don't want to have them on the shelves. I can control what's in my head but I can't control what's on, the shelves subject to somebody else."

I wanted to be able to have some sort of controls over my life. Well, the thing that I had always been told that I was going to, be as I grew up, because from the age of four or five I had been making public speeches, was a lawyer. Everybody just took this for granted, you know. If you could
speak in those days that just meant you could be a good lawyer. But I had sort of pushed it away and pushed it away. I still went around making speeches, but I just didn't think I wanted to be a lawyer.

I. On what occasions did you make speeches? Were they special functions?

R. No, no, no. What happened was by accident. I learned for some course in grade school, when I was in first or second grade during the First World War, a thing called, "Your Flag and My Flag," an Edgar Guest type of thing. And I'd recited it in school and the teacher had been impressed so they had a bond rally and they put me up to recite this at the bond rally. Someone connected with the bond organization had heard about it and the next thing I knew they had me traveling all over the state of Minnesota reciting this stupid thing and my mother just glorying and encouraging it and finally insisting that I had to take elocution, lessons. I took elocution lessons and I moved from that kind of speech to another kind of speech. From the time that I was five or six years old I'd made public speeches and then it cut off when I was in college. I wasn't doing any more of it then. Well, actually most of the way, although high school, too. At any rate I decided I'd go to law School and I entered laws School in 1931.

I. Was this at Minnesota, too?

R. This was at Minnesota. Oh, I should go back to say that when my transcript of my grades came in 1930 I had credit for a full year of French. They made a mistake and hadn't put my name up on the passing list but I had obviously passed the exam and they had given me credit for a whole year's French.

I. You had never asked about it then?

R. I had asked the teacher and she said whatever was on the board was right. "I am the person responsible for posting the list. If your name isn't on the list you didn't do very well." It never occurred to me to pursue it. I guess I wouldn't do that any more but in those days it seemed perfectly reasonable. If it wasn't on there it wasn't on there because it didn't belong on there.

I. Do you think you would have really gone into medicine if it had been there?

R. I don't know. I doubt it, I really doubt it. I might not have gone onto New York. If I had been on that list I might have stayed on. I might have shifted to law school or
I. But now that you were starting law you, still, weren't, very enthusiastic about it?

R. I not only wasn't enthusiastic but it was a bad time because law had less relevance then than many of these kids today see in it. Remember, in 1931 there was no such thing as a course in labor law. The closest you came to dealing with any kind of labor problems was when you'd read, cases on injunctions -- the famous Yellow Jacket case or the Danbury Hatters' case. These were only questions on whether the courts had jurisdiction to give an injunction or not and they always did. There was no such thing as labor law. I began having trouble very early in, law school.

I got involved in the Roosevelt campaign of '32. I heard him on the radio and he just carried me away; I started working as part of the Younger Democrats of the State of Minnesota. I want to, the National Younger Democratic Convention. We really worked. We worked so hard that in a period of three years or four years we were running the Democratic Party of the State of Minnesota. We had taken it away from the old timers. We were in our twenties, most of us, a few older people. This was also during the period of the Farmer Labor Party of Minnesota when Floyd Olsen was the governor. And in this respect I was not a pure Democrat because my sympathies were with Olsen. Floyd Olsen made that famous speech, "I am a radical because I want to be," a radical was one who goes root of things in our troubled society.

I. Did you vote Farm-Labor or Democrat?

R. I voted Farm-Labor locally and Roosevelt nationally but I became Chairman of the Hennepin County (which was the county I lived in Minneapolis) Younger Democrats. Subsequently I became the Younger Democrats national committee man or representative or whatever they called it for the state of Minnesota. I really got into this for a little while with both feet; went through the campaign. Roosevelt was elected and at this point I was finishing my second year of law school. I entered in '31, Roosevelt was elected in '32, so I was well through my second year in college.

Some point in there, I think it was after Roosevelt had taken office, they started tearing down the red light section of Minneapolis to build a new post office and they hired people to work for Rose Construction Company, a family my father knew. They hired men to work for 40 cents an hour, but when it came to paying them they paid 20 cents in cash and told them
to take the other 20 cents in wrecked material so a strike started.

Let me go back one minute to say to you something about Minneapolis and Minnesota. Minneapolis had in the 30s the strongest Trotskyite movement in the world because of the Teamsters union. It had a very strong Stalinist group. The Coughlinites, the Silver Shirts, were stronger there than anywhere else in the United States. As a matter of fact, Eric Severeid came to fame because, while a student in the university, he got into the Silver Shirts and he wrote an expose of it in the newspaper there. That's what brought him into fame. That's how Eric Severeid first really made it:

Minneapolis was, in additonto all of this, the most anti-Semitic city that you could find. A Jew couldn't belong to the service clubs; you couldn't get into the Lions, the Athletic Club or Automobile Club if you were Jewish. It's an interesting thing but, there was a very strong WASPish community there that leaped over from Boston and landed in the midwest. This was very strong, clearly the dominant influence in the community, culturally, educationally, every way. The art museum was one of the better ones in the country. The symphony orchestra was clearly a great one. It's no accident the Guthrie Theatre is there and they've done as many things as they have and the Walker Art Gallery. It reflects this kind of an aristocratic view of life, but that kind of aristocratic power which they used they used, it without really any kind of comprehension except that they were going to keep it. It encouraged all these other groups, such as museums, theatres, etc. to grow.

Now in St. Paul there was a strong Irish Catholic influence. You had politics similar in some respects, though not as sophisticated as they are now, but it was machine kind of politics. It was a totally different thing in these two towns and the Mississippi River was all that divided them. When I went to college I would just be in minutes of St. Paul.

Well, let me go back to the strike that I started to discuss. It got nasty and a group of us at school decided, by G-d; this, is just insane. Human beings, don't behave this way. You don't do this kind of thing. You understand, now I'm in law school, so we formed ourselves a group, went down and started picketing.

I. You joined the strikers?

R. Yes. Well, in those days this hadn't yet become the thing to do, as in fact it did of course later in the 30s, but this was early.
I. This was what 31 or 33?

R. I would have guessed '33. I don't think they started building the post office until Roosevelt came into power, so that's where I set if. It was when the depression was still pretty deep. So the cops threw some of us in jail. I called my father up and said, "I'm in jail." Wait a minute, this had to be before '32. Actually it was before Roosevelt. Hoover had, started some of these things. My dates are clearly not precise. My father died in October, 1932 and so this had, to be in 31 or the early part of '32. At any rate he said, "Okay, I'll come down." So he came down. Of course, he'd never heard of any member in our family being in jail. "How could it happen to a nice Jewish boy like you?" My mother -- well, he didn't say anything to her. He came down and I told him what had happened and he said he'd arrange whatever had to be done. I never did find out whether it was a fine or what. All I know was I got out. I don't think they wanted to fine us. I think they just kept us there for awhile and then when the parents showed up released us.

I. On what grounds did they arrest you? Do you remember that?

R. Oh, they claimed we were blocking traffic, that there shouldn't be so many. In those days they didn't allow pickets. It was conspiracy. My recollection was we had a labor mayor at that time, too. My father said, "You know, I wish you'd find other ways of doing it, but if you feel very strongly about these things, you know I'm not apt to agree with you on many of them, but don't let that restrain or influence you. I'll do what I can to make sure you get an opportunity to express your views in whatever way you think is right. I just would be grateful if you picked otherways." Well, that had a big impact on me.

And then I think really it was my classes in law school that made me take the final step. I just could not stand the way this law was enforced. I found it intellectually offensive. I found it operating without any relation to reality. It was purely a matter of interest or so, it seemed to me. I assume Don Frazier, Congressman Don Frazier, is a name that means something to you. He was really one of the better congressmen, has been for a longtime. His father was Dean of the law school, he taught real property law. I don't know whether Don was born at the time but his father was a great teacher, absolutely great. He went on to La Jolla after he retired and he taught there for many years, just died recent. He was a great teacher in what everybody conceived of as a deep, dry subject and it was, too. Real
property law doesn't afford many areas of the kind of conflict that you think of as being interesting but he taught it in a way where you began to get some comprehension of what land meant in terms of power the passage of land, the whole system of inheritance and transmitting land and what this meant in terms of controlling institutions and making them run and being the dominant influences.

And then we had a character by the name of Page whose wife was a woman of real substance. She was a legislator for many years one of the first women ever to be elected to a state legislature. And she was on the whole a good one, a liberal one. This guy -- the story was that he graduated in the first law School class that graduated from the University of Minnesota, that he tried one case and lost it. Then he started teaching torts and he was still teaching it when I got there. He was the kind of guy that would put something on the blackboard and if you'd wait for him to get back to the blackboard so he didn't have his notes in his hands and you asked him a question, he just couldn't answer it. He was a fool really just a fool. I got into a terrible argument with him one day about the whole matter of the rights of property and human rights as it related to accidents. How far could you carry the question of both parties being negligent, where is the responsibility in workmen's compensation and this kind of stuff. And he finally told me to get out, he wasn't going to listen to that kind of talk. Now I, thought I was carrying on a perfectly responsible inquiry on how did the law get this way and he threw me out. I never paid much attention to it. When I came back he never made anything of it but I got thrown out of class that year.

I had a class in Constitutional Law with a guy who was an extremely conservative, guy, but who was a good lawyer and I would get into these, arguments with him. I remember one particularly in connection with how far you could carry this question of what was interstate commerce. You know it was just the beginning of the, New Deal kind of thinking that was entering and that Supreme Court was killing every thing that Roosevelt was trying to do. We'll, I didn't get along very well with him.

My father died in '32. I went to work and we liquidated the business and had problems supporting the family. I sort of inherited my father's role so I just didn't have time to study very much. I organized what we called a briefing trust. I got six guys together and we worked out an arrangement where each of us read. There were six classes you took a year and each of us would read, a class and then type up a little brief and we'd make six copies, then we'd distribute them. The only trouble was the others used to
read the cases. I didn't read the cases, I relied entirely on this brief and that got me into some trouble on a couple of occasions. Professor Cherry, who taught evidence, said, "You know we know about this trust. Give us credit for some sense." And I said, "Sure, I know you do. What the hell do you expect? I haven't got time, I've got all these other things I have to do and the pressure is on me. Now if I can get in here and pass these exams I don't think it should make any difference to you." Well, we didn't see eye to eye on that.

I finally got into a real nasty argument with a man by the name of Prosser who taught a course in sales. I thought that was really a stupid class, just so ridiculous. The whole subject matter was crazy -- commissions. To make kids take this, that are going to go into the world to presumably structure the law that the country lives with, it just infuriated me. By this time you'll understand that my reading had already begun to formulate some notions about what the society ought to be doing. So I didn't show up in class one day. I had some business that had to take care of and I just didn't come to class. He announced to the class that he was striking me from the roll until I came into see him so I went in to see him. It told him why I hadn't been there and we got into an argument. I thought he was a smart alec, he really was, too. He ended up as Dean of the Law School at the University of California in Berkeley but that never changed my opinion of him. I saw him years later and I thought he was still a smart alec. I said to him, "I am absolutely convinced that if you take these blue books in which we write our final exams and you don't look at the names on them, that if I read these cases and I get notes from somebody, that I don't have to go to your class, to get an A. Well that infuriated him. I didn't realize until afterwards that he had every right to be infuriated. But he was and that's what happened. He made a bet with me. I did precisely what I said. I never went to another class but I got the notes from friend of mine who was the best student in our whole class. I got his notes and I copied them. I worked diligently on them and I got an A in that class. So the lawschool experience was a formative one.

Near the end of it one of the guys that I worked with, during the Roosevelt campaign (this must have been early '34 or late '33) came to me and said, "They need some people at the NRA." (This was after Roosevelt had created the Blue Eagle.) "Would you like to work there?" Well, you know this was the depression and I wanted job real bad. Then I think they were offering $1,800 a year which seemed like the world with a fence around it. I said "I would but I'm so close to finishing and I don't want, to pass up this degree." He was a lawyer. He said, "Let me see if I can work it out so you can go
on, continue to go down there and do the work you need through June and then you go on full time after June."

I. 'What month was this now?

R. Well, my hunch, would be it would probably have been about April, March, might even have been February, but I think, it was very early in '34. I don't recall just when. I think he set it up near the end of '33 with Hugh Johnson and they spent a lot of time blowing the thing up but it really didn't get going it seems to me until early 34. So I did that and I finally went to work full time in June. I didn't get through my bar, though because that didn't come until fall and I was working at this thing.

At any event, I got all involved in the NRA because my job was to enforce the codes of fair competition as they applied to minimum wages. That really let me operate in the area that I was already beginning to develop an interest in. You see, I had gone through this period in law school complaining because workers had no protection. It's almost like the landlord and renter in our society today. In any event I went to work for the NRA and the guy who had been the labor compliance officer was in charge of the labor provisions of the codes of the whole state. He left and I was given that job. I got it at a time when I also had to take my bar exams. I didn't do very well on the bar exam. As a matter of fact, I failed it and I wasn't admitted to the bar but I couldn't have cared less. In any event I really had myself a time. I ought to emphasize that at that point I was twenty-four years of age. I was responsible for operating the minimum wage provisions of the codes for the entire state. I must have had a staff of fifteen or twenty people. I'd never known what it meant to have people working under my direction and I was a brash kid and my G-d, I was absolutely inflexible about the code. But I got to the point with some of these characters where all I had to do was to call them on the phone and tell them that they owed some money. They'd ask me how much and I'd tell them what I thought and they'd mail the check. We operated very effectively.

The director of the agency was a woman by the name of Anna Dickey Olson. She had been a very active Democratic politician for many years. Her husband was registrar at Carlton College so she lived in Northfield which is I guess, roughly, forty miles from Minneapolis. Now you make it in a half hour or twenty minutes and it's regarded as a suburb. In those days it was almost a two hour drive. She used to drive in and back every night. In many ways she was a quite remarkable woman, also in many ways a very impossible woman, but I learned lots of things about people from her.
I. How was she impossible?

R. I don't know to what extent this had to do with her relationship with her husband, but she was constantly convinced that people weren't listening to her because she was a woman so she over reacted and she over demanded. She was simply incredible the way she talked to people, that is to anybody but me. I don't recall how it happened or when it first happened but at some point she began to depend on, me so that, whether it was within my province or not, she literally wasn't going to do anything without my advice. And I could do almost anything. I should quickly add she must have been clearly in her 50s at this point.

At some juncture we had a couple of cases that created some problems and the Senate was beginning to get, a little restive with the NRA. This was just before the Supreme Court made the Ryan decision. She got a call from Washington to come to testify before the Senate. She was scared stiff and she insisted that I go with her. Well, that wasn't very hard. I'd never been to Washington. Washington seemed like a very exciting place in those days for me to go so I went with her and I can still see that hearing room. It was one of those rooms that had raised desks, very high, behind which the Senate sat in a semi-circle. The senators on the committee, all of them of course, were familiar to me. The two that I remember the most were King of Utah, who I think was the chairman and who, had W.C. Fields nose, which I'm convinced he got in the same way, and who was stupid and vicious, a real reactionary. He was one of the old line types. And the other guy was Black. Black was enough to throw the fear of G-d in you penetrating eyes. Sharp, too, were his questions. But Bob LaFollette was on it, that's the young, Bob. Well, I suppose I might remember some of the others, there were a number of very famous senators.

Anyway she just either got scared or completely muddled, I don't know what the hell happened. She couldn't answer the questions, she wasn't answering responsively. I kept whispering to her and at one point King told me to stop, because I'd be in contempt of the Senate. I said, "Well, I don't agree with the Senate, Senator, maybe some senators, but that's my view and my prerogative." Jesus! The Director of NRA, who has to get his budget approved, was sitting back and he was just dying a thousand deaths. This punk was being so smart. And Black finally got mad at me. Up to that time I think he was enjoying the proceedings. He realized I was telling her what to say but he finally turned to the chairman and said, "You know, if this young man is going to testify I think he ought to be sworn." I think he's the one
we ought to listen to." Well, we took a recess and at this point Rosenberg, who was the head of the NRA, said to me, "Go get lost, get out of here, beat it quick. You're not under subpoena, she is but you're not. Get out of here, don't let me see you again." So I got out.

But I began to get some insight then into how political mechanisms worked and what power meant and how it operated, who used it and for what purposes. Then, the Ryan decision came down which, declared one little phase of the NRA unconstitutional. We kept operating but finally the Schecter decision, which was the chicken case, that finished us. That put us out of business and we became a research agency. They asked me to come to Washington to work with it and I did. Then they sent me up to Boston to do a special study on monopoly in the fish industry.

I. Now how did this work, you became a research agency?

R. It turned into a research agency. Well, Walton Hamilton was asked to take a look at what this thing did, what it accomplished, how it worked. So we set up this research group and called in certain people from all over the country and we became the team. My job was to go up to Boston and I spent, I don't know, a couple of months. I was beginning to get fed up with this thing. I didn't like Washington. I couldn't stand it by this time. I liked the political operation but I hated living there. It seems to me it rained six weeks straight when I first got there. The sheets were always damp. I had a lot of interesting experiences, of course, but I really began to get some feeling of power, the way it worked and the importance of organizing if you were going to deal with it. So I went back to Minneapolis. This was my first plane flight, I started flying the planes.

I. You flew them yourself?

R. Oh no, I took commercial flight from Washington to Minneapolis. It lasted a whole day. It was a twelve passenger plane, one of those first little Lockheed Electras. It had a big bump in the center that I got stuck on so I had to sit there with my feet under my chin. This was the dead of winter and Mother wouldn't believe I had done it. I took a plane to Minneapolis and it took a whole day. I remember years afterwards mentioning it to a stewardess on a plane. I was very impatient and walking up and down the aisle of one of these jets. She said, "It does get awful boring and tiresome." I said, "My dear, we do it in four hours. I can remember flying a D.C. 3 to Los Angeles when it took twelve hours or a whole day," and she couldn't believe it. But in
any event I came back to Minneapolis and I took the bar again.

I. You just quit, that job?

R. Well, it folded up. I just never tried to stay on. Other friends got other jobs with their agencies. I came back to Minneapolis and took the bar and was admitted? I hung out my shingle and started practicing. Well, I just couldn't stand the ordinary practice of law but this was 1935 The CIO had not yet really been set up.

I had gotten to know number of people connected with unions in the city because of the NRA work. The Teamsters in St. Paul came in and asked me if I would help them negotiate their contract. In those days that was a very big contract. They had may be two thousand members or something. Even five hundred would have been tremendous. I spent the whole summer on it. That was when I first began learning skills and learning how to use power when you had it or how to manipulate them so that people thought you would use it, or at least there was always that potential. That's really an important thing when it's used to its potential. In any event, I did, that job and a couple of other unions came and I got to the point where I didn't want to handle other kinds of cases even though I used to have all kinds of other cases.

Very early somehow I got involved with the unemployed groups. There used to be organizations of unemployed -- Workers Alliance and Unemployed Council. Of course I began to learn something about radical politics, then because both the Trotskyite and StaliniSt groups were working, as well as poor little innocents, like me who didn't know the difference between them half the time. I'd have known them in theory but I never knew how they operated as a practical matter until, then.

I: Which groups were in Minneapolis all of them? Was there intense rivalry between them?

R. All of them, intense rivals! Well, as the story goes on, later when I had become established, when the CIO finally set itself up and I became established as a CIO lawyer it just seemed to me insane that this kind of rivalry went on. I tried to set up a meeting between the leaders of the CIO and the leaders of the Teamsters union, as well as some of the other AFL unions. My G-d! That broke into three groups. The CIO was mostly Stalinists. They had more in common with the Teamsters and Trotskyites, they because they both were radicals but they hated each other with a passion. And the third group were the old conservative, old line labor leaders who had no use for either of these two groups and who were hated less by
either the Trotskyites or the Stalinists than they hated each other. Well, live and learn the hard way! It was essentially theoretical. You were dealing with rather, strong personalities. When Trotsky was booted out there were people who felt that he was the only one who had an answer and the real issue was: can you have socialism in one country, or at least that's the way, it got stated. Trotsky said you couldn't, most of the people who followed him believed that. The Stalinists said you could, you could build it in Russia and you had to do it. The people who agreed with stalin followed that.

I. Would that greatly, affect the way you would organize a union?

R. It wouldn't affect the way you would organize it but it would affect the positions you would take and the way you would operate. For example, when the Teamsters were on strike in Minneapolis, in the mid 30s, this was when I was still at the NRA, and the Citizens Alliance, which was the real arm of the employers to keep unions out, was still in the heyday of its glory. That was when they lined up in the market place in Minneapolis. A blue stocking society man was manning the lines as a deputy with a badge and a gun. He got killed during this melee. That created all kinds of uproar. Floyd Olsen finally called out the National Guard and he announced that the contract that had been proposed, there was a basis for settlement and he thought it reasonable. The Teamsters had indicated the thought it was reasonable and no truck would operate unless they signed that contract. If they signed that contract they got a permit to operate. Well, do you know the Teamsters attacked him, tore him up and down and sideways, and he ended up having to arrest, most of them because they wouldn't let trucks operate.

I. Why did they attack him?

R. They attacked him because he had no right to intervene in their fight with these employers and what was happening was they weren't really pressuring the employer to do this. That was what you did if you were trying to create socialism. It's what the kids today call,"radicalizing" only they didn't think of it in those terms. But he saved their union as a matter of fact. They built from then on and it became very powerful and they pretty much dominated the union. But this was part of their philosophy. Now the Stalinists, on the other hand, would have felt you ought to work with this because this was the period when they were talking about united fronts and they were prepared to deal with anyone. It was only when the united front died --that's a funny story but I shouldn't confuse all these things.
Anyway, I came back, I started practicing. I began representing some of these unions on contracts and other problems they had. In 1937 when the CIO started organizing they needed a local lawyer, and they came to me and said will, you handle this and I said yes, I would be delighted. So I started representing all, the CIO unions. It was very, small then. They didn't have any money, no one ever paid me. Oh, I was earning enough to pay my rent and live on but that was all because they had no money.) These years when I see some of the fees we pay lawyers now, I just can't believe it, you know. If I got $50-$100 for two months work it was a lot. I also learned what it meant to go into court on days when, if you came in representing a union, the judge didn't want to even listen to you, when getting injunctions without a hearing was normal operating procedure. That happened to you all the time. If it didn't happen, to you, you were surprised. And to finally get a judge who would listen to you argue what the meaning of the anti-injunction law was (like Luther Youngdahl, who later became Governor of Minnesota and is now a federal judge in Washington), that was really something. Luther Youngdahl and another guy, both of them were Republicans but they were good lawyers and they understood, this and they would listen to you. They were two federal judges, both of them Republicans, and I used to have better luck with them than. I did, with Roosevelt appointees. But those were the days when the court room was a very unpleasant place for a labor lawyer. Today he is treated with courtesy, listened to in many cases. The hell of it is you couldn't win cases.

Well, I started practicing law and I continued at it and I identified with it. I wasn't married yet. At night I'd go out organizing and in the day, time I'd practice law or I'd negotiate contracts. I was just a complete and integral part of the whole CIO operation in Minnesota. I never really functioned only as a lawyer. To me the law, in so far as the labor movement was concerned, was primarily designed to provide you with a forum which you could use then as an organizing mechanism or which you could use as an instrument of power in the situation, but it was ancillary to the basic need of organizing and unifying workers. I used to say to our people in those days, "Look, you know you can't pour the ink back into the bottle. Once you get it on paper in a contract it's there, so please talk to me first and not afterwards." Then we worked out how we ought to say something and the whole use of political mechanisms that were available.
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
May 10, 1972

I. Do you want to start today with something we left out of last week's tape?

R. Yes, I'd like to talk for just a bit about another influence to which I was exposed during my undergraduate years in college. At some point, I would suppose it would be near the mid part of the third year or perhaps the last year, although I kaleidoscoped those years, I finished in less than the four year period. The University of Minnesota, I think, really was doing a little bit of pioneering in this respect, it brought to the college a psychiatrist by the name of Dr. DuBerry. He was a tall, attractive man, one of the first people I came close to who had a waxed mustache, it seemed to go entirely with his personality. He was sallow skinned and rather handsome. He came from a family of great wealth in Texas. This was not in my undergraduate days, it occurred during the period I was in law school because I remember it was in the height of the depression. DuBerry always impressed all of us with the amount of money he had to spend as compared to most people we knew, so it must have occurred some time after 1931. He was married to "Laughing Allegra" of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Children's Hour," one of the grandchildren, a lovely lady. And they lived in the big mansion on the Mississippi River right off campus in those days.

DuBerry brought around him a circle of people who in many respects represented the intellectual leaders of the university at the time. I'm talking now about students -- a poet by the name of Audrey Ferissy and a guy active in the newspapers by the name of Nordau Schomburg, a man who I think later went on to become a literary critic by the name of Armand Wilson. I don't recall them but there was a whole group of us. It got to the point where we would go out almost daily with him for lunch and several times a week we'd be at his house. He got intrigued at some point along the way in getting plywood and pasting pictures on it and bought himself a jig saw. We used to cut the plywood up into jig saw puzzles and sit there the whole night long working on these mammoth jig saws that he put together. This was long before the fad had become popular and puzzles were for sale in the stores as a regular thing. We had our own built-in factory for them.

But this became, as I say, a matter of several nights a week and we would use the time not just working on the puzzle but carrying on big arguments. I remember during the period
I had just been reading Zola's *Therese Raquin*. The book had had a tremendous impact on me, a very real impression. DuBerry was absolutely amazed at my excitement, at how I could get this excited over a book. I recall his saying to me, "If you can keep that kind of enthusiasm about things that you get involved in, my Lord, there's no limit to what you can do." Of course, this kind of reassurance was something that during the period of the depression was very important to kids in school because that was in a age where, even though you were going to school and even though you thought you were working for a vocation, you had absolutely no idea what this world was going to open up into.

Well, in later years let me just tell two little interesting bits of stories. This went on I suppose for about a year and there's no question that this whole group had an influence in many ways in a very important maturing process. It was my first contact, for example, with the problems of homosexuality because in the group, especially among those with artistic inclinations, there were a couple of men who were overt homosexuals. I didn't even know really at the beginning that that sort of thing existed. You know I read about Sappho and things of that kind but it never occurred to me that it might be for real. But it was fortunate that it happened that way because I had it put to me in a dimension where I could understand that this didn't necessarily impair other capacities that a person had and it made me a good bit more tolerant of it. First of all, one of them was really a remarkable fine fellow and went on to have a lot of his stuff published and for all I know (I lost track of him) he became an important teacher at some college.

But DuBerry did have this capacity for bringing all kinds of people together. You know we had football players in this group, too, so it wasn't just a matter of those with intellectual capacities. It gave one a glimpse of a wider world than what you normally get as a student in college, or at least it did in those days. Today, of course, with the kind of mobility that exists I think that kids, by the time they're ready for college, have already seen a good part of the world and are much more sophisticated in many many areas than we were in our generation. This was away of seeing the world in dimensions that was not at all customary in the '20s or '30s.

I. What held the group together? Was it DuBerry's personality?

R. Well, it wasn't as much his personality, I suppose it was just the way he was an exciting character. That had something to do with it. We all felt sort of honored by his interest and it was fun when we were together. We enjoyed the
arguments and discussions and bull sessions we used to have. We enjoyed the food that his wife always had available, which was very good in those days and a lot more than we could afford to buy. Money was hard to come by. It was the time that we used to measure out how many gallons of gasoline it would take for my old Model T Ford to travel a few miles and whether or not the 18 cents for the gallon of gasolinewas available. Or may be it was 12 cents, I don't know, but it was very low as compared to today. You, literally would buy one gallon at a time and you measured that against what a token for the streetcar would cost and usually, of course, you could do it better if your car held together. So there was all this that went into it.

Then he did open up a world that was strange to many of . For instance, he'd tell us a story about how when the Queen of Roumania, Queen Marie, visited this country they were picked to be her hosts at a dinner party and how, as DuBerry put it, his wife dragged out their gold service so that everything could meet the style. This was at a time when Queen Marie of Roumania was sort of thought of as the setter of fashion to the world of style, that part of the world that just existed -- not even in the local news, papers. You had to buy a New York or Paris paper to read about it. But at any rate, they had this dinner party which included a list of the Twin City society, of course, and when the dinner was over the queen's way of thanking the DuBerrys was to say to them, propo of how beautiful the service had been, "But that's, what I like about you Americans," He did this, by the way, with an accent that I'm sure was more accurate than anything I could achieve so I'm not even going to try it. She said, "That what I like about you Americans. You're so informal.' He said here he had his gold service and everything, his wife had gone to all this effort and, she 's told she's accomplished the height of informality. Well, you know, this was a world that would have been completely foreclosed to us.

They owned among other things, outside of ranches all over the Southwest and cattle, an island off the coast of Maine and they used to go there during, the summer. It was an eerie kind of a place and one of the things that they used to read and reread was the ghost stories of, I think it was Wilken Collins. Wasn't that the early writer why wrote those awful things? DuBerry would, tell us about these stories and about how they would read them at night and they were doing it by lamp because there was no electricity on the island. You could almost feel those ghosts moving around. It was a stimulus for imagination and many other things.

I recall that DuBerry came to visit me when I was in New York. Certainly I recall the visit in New York as being one that I found to be very shocking because I suddenly
realized that he was a terribly conservative man. I had just begun to think more in political terms really. I guess otherwise I would have known it before. My friend Nordau, who had been part of this group, had known it already but I just became aware of it. And my recollection is that he became one of the America First group and one of the supporters of Hitler in the United States as time went on. At any rate within a matter of few years it disappeared from my mind.

I. How did his conservatism reveal itself?

R. Oh, just in discussion. But I always suspected that there was a purpose that he was serving by gathering this group around him. Now there may have been a couple of them. I think, at least one who he might have been treating in the health service.

I. Oh that's right, he was the psychiatrist.

R. He was a psychiatrist and this was a totally new project. Universities had not yet started this sort of thing. Well, it was only a matter of a few years before that Darrow had been able to fix the notion that psychiatric considerations ought to determine a law suitor at least the application of, the death penalty in the Loeb and Leopold matter so this was really an innovative thing. In retrospect I would suppose that the importance of DuBerry was that as I began to move on into these more public issues and concerns, which eventually led me where I am now, I think what I am most indebted to him is that I got, at what in those days was a relatively early age, exposed to a world that most people at that time were not exposed to and it was a very maturing kind of process both in terms of my comprehension of the forces that were at work, particularly the whole relationship of power to events and how you control it and what it meant and what a person like DuBerry was able to do because of his great wealth and, of course, his social status.

I lost complete sight of what happened to him. I've often wondered about it. I'll still in touch with a couple of the people who used to be part of that group and every once in a while we see each other. DuBerry may well be dead, probably is by now. If he's living he must well be in his 80s because he was certainly double our age at the time. Nordau, I guess, had experiences with him long after we did. He was the one who told me about DuBerry's involvement with the America First group and the Hitler groups and all the rest of it. I haven't the slightest doubt that this was the case. I often wondered if Madame DuBerry really was the one who might have talked about it.
That's a good story.

It's strange how it came back to me. I don't know that this is necessarily the second part of it but think it's worth referring to and it still goes back to this period of my undergraduate days and law, school days and continued on to a short period after law school. There were a group of us, two others and myself, the same age, and the fourth one was a little bit younger, all with the same kind of intellectual and literary interests. One of them, who died quite young, wrote the first definitive book that was written on Hollywood. He was very interested and a real authority on moving pictures. His name was Lefkowitz when I knew him but he changed it, I think, to Leonard at the time the book was written. He was an extremely bright guy and very knowledgeable, very able. The second was a guy by the name of Eddie Brecker, who has been a free lance writer with a great deal of status for many years now. He lives in the East and he was part of this group. This, by the way, is a group that my relationship with them was really away from campus and not on campus. Harold went to the University of Minnesota, that's Harold Lefkowitz. I don't remember if Brecker did or not. And the fourth one, who turned out to be the most prominent of all of us, was Harry Levin, the man who is head of the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard, the world authority on James Joyce and T.S. Elliot.

It was a very intriguing kind of a group. And the arguments that Levin and Brecker and Lefkowitz used to get into! I often felt that may have been where I discovered my political instinct in the power of mediation. There was constant friction. All three of them were prima donnas and high strung personalities. But these associations had a very important effect in terms of my reading and my general thinking. Harry used to, have, by the way, what he called in those days soirees. His parents were quite wealthy and had a very large home and he would get about a dozen people of kindred spirits and go out and buy a whole set of phonograph records. Very few of us could afford to do that sort of thing in those days but Harry could. So we'd sit through a whole Flagner opera. That's where I learned to have such a terrible distaste for Wagner, which I guess Harry joined me in after a bit. But every week or two we'd spend an evening this way with Beethoven or Bach or whatever it might be.

All kinds of other things would happen. For example, there was a young man there. I don't really know what happened to him but one of his interests was humor and I can recall one evening B.F. Skinner, who at that time was professor at Minnesota and who was just leaving to go to
Indiana, and Harry and Louis Sauerback, whose name just comes, back to me, this other guy, the four of us were together. I think Rachel was with me. I think I was already married so that would have been the early '40s probably. At any rate the whole evening we spent, talking about what is humor in philosophical terms. You know, the question of the Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy and the Three Stooges and the whole spectrum of the movies as represented by W.C. Fields., the Howard Brothers who at that time were famous on the stage and in vaudeville. Those were the days when Jack Benny and Bob Hope used to come around on the, vaudeville circuit and you wouldn't bother going down to pay any attention to them because they didn't have the same intellectual appeal as humorists.

Well, this kept alive for me at one time a whole constellation of interests. Skinner, for instance that's the first time, so far as I remember, that I had ever heard of that crib that he eventually made which he kept his youngster in for a couple of years. He was always talking about these things. I developed a great dislike for him then which I retained.

I. On the basis of his ideas or his personality?

R. On his ideas. Personally he was a nice enough guy but it just seemed entirely too much an attempt at manipulating and controlling. He didn't want to let people grow. He didn't want to let them be free. He was afraid of what might happen. He talked one night at Harry's I recall the conversation switched from the Marx Brothers or whatever it was we were talking about into this crib that he had a design for and that he intended to make when they had their first child. What he was going to do was to create an environment that would insure, I thought, complete neutrality. He thought complete serenity, maybe it's the samething, I don't know. But the child would just be exposed to the kind of stimuli they thought would be most constructive. I guess he would have also said the most creative.

Well, you know, in this relatively short span of time I was going through the maturing process. I, was in college when I was seventeen, got my B.A. when I was twenty. I was out for a couple of years and got out of law school when I was twenty four or twenty five. I became the head of the NRA's Labor Compliance Division when I was twenty four. But part of the reason I could do this was because I had this broad spectrum of interests that made it possible for me to mature much faster than I think I would have done otherwise so that I was interested in the whole, field of literature with the kinds
of interpretation that one would get as you discussed it with people who eventually not only made it their livelihood but became famous in it. Well, Harry, for instance, I remember his coming back from Harvard and he'd been offered a Gugenheim. We spent a longtime talking about what would he do because in those days the Gugenheim people had come to believe the Ph.D. should not be an important consideration in terms of scholarship, that the drive for it negated really the purpose of it. So they were offering scholarships if people would take it and commit themselves not to get Ph. D.s and this was what Harry had been offered. The inducement was that he could go to London and spend six months working with T.S. Elliott and be exposed to Joyce during that period, and then the next six months of travel any place he wanted to go. Then he'd come back and spend a year studying at Harvard. Well, you know, it seemed at the time to make awfully good sense. Everybody who knew Harry knew he was going to be a great teacher. He didn't need a Ph.D. and we assumed the college would understand that. Of course Ph.D.s in those days were a rare thing. They weren't a dime a dozen as they are now. And so he accepted the Gugenheim, did not get his doctorate, was hired by Harvard, but found at some point that Harvard itself said, look, this will create problems for us. They took it up with the Gugenheim people and the Gugenheim people were willing to tear up his contractual commitment to them.

I. He actually had to promise never to get a Ph.D.?

R. That was the commitment. He had to promise not to take the Ph.D. So he finally did it. I guess he did it while he was teaching at the same time. Anyhow, in his case it was no real sweat. There were very few people who would be on his committee who would really be intellectually or knowledgeable in his field his peer.

I. One thing I wanted to ask you, this is sort of a side line, but did Skinner's wife ever have any complaints about his ideas?

R. I really can't say. She was there that evening and she seemed to share his view, or at least gave no indication that she disagreed with this notion.

I. Did you ever see the child?

R. I never saw the child. He left, I don't know whether I've ever seen him since that evening. I've read his stuff though and this last one especially had me walking on the ceiling for a while. But it could have been predicted really. All along this whole behavioral idea that he has preached, and apparently very successfully, my impression is that he gets a great deal of, support from the young kids in the field, a lot of publicity. And of course he's been, at
Harvard. I've often been curious and I must think the, next time I'm in Boston to ask Harry. I wonder if he still has a relationship of any sort with Skinner.

I. They're both there together?

R. Well, they must have been there together for many years. Harry is still there because when I was in Boston for this hip operation I had back in '69 we called and he came down and he spent an hour or so with me. Helena, his wife, and Rachel went out together once or twice so we know he's still there and we know Skinner is still there.

I. What were their reactions to your ending up in the union business?

R. Well, Harry's reaction, I used to see him quite frequently when I had an occasion to go to Boston back in the late '40s and '50s. Harry was just fired up with joy. But by this time he had begun to get a little politically conscious, which no one would have ever expected, and he still is. When I saw him last in '69 it was after that Harvard explosion when Pusey had called the police and they beat those kids up so unmercifully. Harry, at this point a senior faculty member, was just outraged and of course even more outraged by the dean of the faculty who was supposed to be representative to the administration of the faculty and who had written that letter to Pusey which the kids had uncovered when they seized one of those buildings. This was, in effect, a letter where the guy was saying, "Pusey, you tell me what you want me to do and I'll sell it to the faculty." Harry was just infuriated at this kind of traitorous behavior.

As I say, he was still a little naive but his instincts were always good. Early on his being on the Harvard faculty he became exposed to F.O. Mathieson. I think the man was an authority on Theodore Dreiser, the American novelist. I remember meeting Mathieson at his home and Mathieson, of course, had a reputation of being a good deal on the left. Well, of course, Dreiser had that reputation, too. I don't know how justified it was in the case of either of them. I know there were good causes that Mathieson supported but that didn't prove that he was way over on the left. When Mathieson committed suicide a few years later Harry was named as his literary executor so it was clear that they had a very close relationship. As a matter of fact, he published or was responsible for the publication of Mathieson's letters and other material.

Eddie Brecker, who I hear from on occasion, became very much politically involved and at one time was an
important cog in the early days of the Consumers Union. He did a lot of writing for them. He still does maybe for all I know. I haven't seen him for quite a while because he's a good distance away. He didn't have any ties back in the middle West, which Harry had for many years, so we had more contact. Plus the fact that Rachel had grown up with and been a close friend of Jane Levin, whom as Harry's younger sister. This is a relationship that still exists, not with the same kind of closeness obviously, but the basis for more contact was present. Well, at any rate, there were all these influences that affected my thinking and kept pushing me into directions that I found, I guess, most pleasant and inviting for my intellectual life.

Then when the NRA came I went to Washington, then came back. For a period I represented a number of unions. I knew that was the thing I wanted. I guess really in that last session I had gotten up to the point where the CIO started organizing Minnesota in the fall of '37 and they needed an attorney and they came to me.

I thought the Teamsters were the ones who came first.

R. Well, the Teamsters were in the AFL yet and that was in '36, the first year I had come back, the first year I started practicing.

I. That's right. We were just getting to the CIO last week when we quit.

R. That, of course, was great excitement because the CIO represented this entirely new element that was being roundly denounced in editorials as agitators, communists or worse, or goonsquads. And I began to get a new impression of the law in this process because I found that judges who might have treated me with a certain amount of decency and courtesy if I was in there with a divorce case or a negligency case or something like that, but if I came in there with a labor case I'd get the back of their hand. They wouldn't even hear me out. They'd issue an injunction just for the asking. They weren't interested in what the law was. Those were the days when unions didn't have the money to appeal and even if they did, by the time you perfected an appeal it would be too late because everything moved much faster. I saw that in those early days of organizing the CIO I was doing everything, not because I had to really, it wasn't part of my function or my role, but I enjoyed it so much I'd go out organizing people, organizing plants. I'd go to union meetings or whatever the purpose of the meeting was. I'd get involved with contract negotiations, so that I functioned at every level of the union's existence -- in writing material, in determining
I. What kind of things did they (AFL) do to put you under pressure?

R. Well, first of all, they had more resources, they had more money so they could hire more people to work for them. And those people were constantly working against us in plants that we might have felt we could get. Secondly, they'd go behind their back and they'd deal with the employers because the employers would prefer to deal with them although they didn't want to deal with anyone. That was part of our luck. Minneapolis was a city of great reaction in those days.

We would have to go through these long, slow, what seemed to us at the time, I guess today they wouldn't seem long or slow at all, but in those days the torturous proceedings of the Labor Board seemed endless. In 1937 shortly after I started this, the Supreme Court finally declared the law constitutional in the Jones and Laughlin case and in a whole series of court cases. Well, when that happened there was no such thing as labor law. Of course, no university had a course in labor law. There was no body of law on the subject. All you had were courses in equity. You dealt with the power of the court to issue injunctions in labor disputes and that was generally thought to be universal. Under La Guardia's urging and with Hoover's signature the Norris-LaGuardia Act was finally passed and that was supposed to take federal courts out of the business of granting injunctions.

In most places they didn't even bother to read the law, or if they did and therefore couldn't do it, they'd go to the state court. The state court said we won't bother you, you don't have to worry about it. Well, states like Minnesota, once the Farm-Labor Party came into power, passed an anti-injunction law, too. Finally, it turned out the first guy who was willing to read the law and take it seriously later became the Republican Governor of Minnesota, Luther Youngdahl. He was the first one to rule under that law and to sustain it. I almost dropped over, we won it, they didn't grant an injunction.

What it did for me, that whole period, it made me realize that the law was an important and useful instrument in terms of social action. But many times its usefulness was rarely a directly useful matter because it took more time and the decision that you got also took time to get implemented. And time was usually bad when it came to organizing. But its usefulness was in, first, the aura of sanctity that it gave you, which made you a bit more respectable and therefore more
acceptable. Even more importantly, it provided you with a
forum through which you could talk to the workers in the
plant. We had these Labor Board hearings which went on and on
and on, but we put out leaflets everyday about what so and so
said during the course of the evidence. This became a very
important organizational tool and a very effective one. I
learned very quickly to understand, at least in this area, the
real role of the law and its most important function was to
assist in accomplishing a certain objective. Now if that
objective could be accomplished better in another way and the
law could be used as a useful forum, a tool in some respects,
why we would do that.

I think today one of the things that is happening now
with these younger people that are in law school, coming out,
is that they are beginning to see the law as an instrument for
social change. To that extent I think this represents great
progress because I certainly felt that that was its most
important role, not necessarily its only role, obviously,
because it is still necessary in a highly complicated
industrialized society to be able to have some method by which
you resolve differences between people who make up the
community. In addition to that it is an instrument that can
be used to bring about social change.

The best example that I know of there are two of
them. Of course one of them could have always been expected
after the first. But the hostility toward the question of
recognition for labor unions and dealing with them was just as
great in those days as ten years ago the hostility towards
hiring Blacks. But once the law was passed and once the
Supreme Court declared it constitutional, the Labor Board
said that an employer had no right to interfere with his
employees organizing into unions and, having organized a
union, he had an obligation to bargain with them. It didn't
take such an awfully long time before that became the
appropriate way of doing things.

I. I guess it relieved people of making a decision, it
was made for them. They just had to adjust to it.

R. Yes, the law can be an instrument that precedes
change many times and puts the stamp of society's approval
upon that change. One of the arguments that was used against
the non-discrimination provisions of the federal statute,
that is that you can't discriminate against applicants
because of race, creed, color or sex one of the arguments
used against that was that it couldn't work. You were trying
to shove things down peoples throats. Well, the truth is
that the law has away, if you do it, of changing what people
say they are willing to accept and even the way they look at it.
I think the average employer today would say it was wrong to have ever discriminated against people because of color. I think more and more they are beginning to say the same thing about sex, although I think that implies sometimes a different kind of question -- the problem of physical differences, what is a woman able to do.

Especially in an industry like Steel or Packing where there are a lot of heavy jobs.

That was one of the worst headaches we had was that question. And there on it was a headache is because we were trying to preserve women on the job. If we had taken the easy route and said, okay, let's forget about preserving these jobs. Let's just say we'll apply seniority and if the woman can do it that's fine and if she can't that's tough. If we had done that we would have been much better off than what we did because we got sued all over the country by women who claimed we were discriminating against them.

Well, at any rate, that whole period of the organizing of the CIO was a very great excitement. It took very little time before I had practically no other practice except labor unions and that was very unremunerative because, first of all, they didn't have any money. Secondly, I felt it was indecent somehow to charge and I didn't know how to do it very well. That was also my first experience with Packing because as a lawyer I got involved with the Packing House Workers Organizing Committee that had been set up in 1937. They were trying to organize the stockyards in St. Paul which was one of the biggest in the country. Also, I got involved in the Austin plant where George A. Hormel Company was. I had those contacts, but during this period I got to represent all of the CIO unions. They were still a very small part of the total labor movement. That was in the area reasonably well organized in which the AFL had been very dominant for many years. But it was a period of great excitement.

I'll never forget the night that the Ford workers finally won their election and negotiated their first contract. A meeting was called of the Ford plant in St. Paul. They had called it in a park because they realized they were going to have a lot of people there and they were just mobbed. There must have been a thousand guys working at that plant at that time. I don't know how big it ever got eventually, but everyone wanted a card to sign right now because they had broken through. Bennett had been forced to sign an agreement. Of course, Bennett's name was hated more than
Henry Fords even, though I guess that was before Seward's book on Ford, certainly before that book on Bennett. So there really hadn't been very much done on Bennett except Henry Ford's with his capacity of getting involved with these crackpot outfits, like this Zion thing and some of that stuff. The truth is Bennett was doing what Ford wanted him to do all along. He was very successful at it, very skillful.

Well, we were literally mobbed. Now that was the kind of situation that existed all over the place. You'd get a call I remember an Armour Plant of seventy-five people or a hundred people or whatever it was what do we do to join the CIO? Nobody knew the difference between unions. It could be a packing house union or a steel union or an auto union it was always joining the CIO. It was the CIO people wanted to join. So they'd call up and we'd mail out cards and the next thing you knew you had enough to go to the Labor Board and ask to be certified. In the early days of the Labor Board they were doing that. They would certify based on what was known as a card check. They'd take your cards and they'd get the payroll from the company and they'd check it off to make sure you had a majority. They'd issue a certification and then the employer was obligated to bargain. But then Congress put on so much heat that they adopted the election procedure.

I.

Why did they do that? Did they think the cards were forged or that people were pressured to sign them?

R.

Well no, the people who put the heat on Congress that led to the change were convinced that if there was an election the employer would have a chance to work on the people and the chances of them voting for the union in an election, even though it was by secret ballot, people would be afraid and they wouldn't think it was a secret ballot. And the fear of this was still very very prevalent. As a matter of fact, you'll still run into it in certain areas of the country.

I.

In the South?

R.

No, right here -- in the Donnelly Printing Presses. They're not organized and one of the important reasons for them being unorganized is fear. They're afraid that their boss or somebody will find out and they have ways of making this known. That was a very important factor, but in any event, the CIO continued to grow. It grew both independently of and at the expense of the AFL. The Electrical Workers Union took away a very substantial proportion of the membership of the Machinists Union in Minneapolis. The Woodworkers, who had never been organized to speak of, who were up in the iron range, they organized the steelworkers up there in iron ore country. Generally all over the state
groups who had never been organized before were organized and many old line unions lost membership in this process. And as I say, for me these were extremely exciting, and creative learning, periods.

I began to have, through some of these early experiences I talked of, some notion of the union as power. In this context I began to have a much clearer understanding of what power meant, although it was very useful to have good arguments, valid arguments and to build your case very carefully. This came instinctively because of my training as a lawyer I guess. I worked very carefully at being, able to support the argument I was making. But what this taught me, or what I was learning in this process, was that while all, of that was useful, in the final analysis the thing that counted on how good your argument was, was not how persuasively you made it but how much muscle there was behind it. I used to say this to the membership in meetings, "You know it's good to have good arguments and I can develop good arguments, others can develop good arguments. We have all the evidence we need to support it, but unless you people are really willing to do something about making the employer understand that you not only believe the argument but you agree with the argument and that you are willing to take whatever steps may be necessary in order to enforce the, results of the argument, well we might just as well save our breath." I began to understand this very clearly.

Then in 1940 I guess it was, the National Defense Mediation Board was set up. This was after Roosevelt's "Arsenal of Democracy" speech and the purpose of it was to try to prevent strikes. So we found ourselves, whenever, we were in the middle of one of these real hot disputes involving companies, especially with government contracts, we found ourselves being called to Washington to appear before the National Defense Mediation Board. There I got another dimension to this whole question of power and I began to remember some of the stuff that I had read earlier -- what the state might be as Lenin would put it or as Pareto would put it or some of the others, even Hobbes or Locke. I began to comprehend the fact that the state was an instrument used by somebody and once it got used that did represent real power that one had to reckon with. The whole question was how could you operate in a way where you kept that instrument either neutralized or on your side, preferably on your side. And, I began to develop a whole philosophy about this question, the importance of politics, not just in labor relations but in terms of how man lives. This, after all, is, the way you decide how you're going to live together and what kind of institutions you're going to have. So this period from 1937 to 1942 up until came to Chicago was a period of a great deal
of learning. In that period, too, one of the other things that stands out was the negotiation of what I think was the first negotiated annual wage agreement in the country and that was at the Hormel Plant in Austin, Minnesota.

I. Were you involved in that?

R. Yes. As I had indicated to you before, I had experience with the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee both in south St. Paul, where, we had Labor Board cases pending against Cudahy, Armour, Swift and other major factories where there were cases in which I got involved, and Austin, Minnesota where the Hormel Plant is, which I initially got involved with as a result of a strike that started in an effort to organize Montgomery Ward. It wasn't the Packinghouse Workers, it was a different group. And these people had finally decided the way to organize, since they weren't getting anywhere, was to just flood the store with people. So when the packing house would let out at three o'clock in the afternoon hundreds of them would go to the store and just walk around and the store couldn't do, any business. Nobody was buying anything but people were looking at things as potential customers. It was a very interesting technique and tactic to use. The only difficulty was that after the second or third day like in many cases, the discipline broke down, if there ever had been any, and people began to feel that they were free to get away with a lot of stuff you know, smoking and burning a coat or a garment of some kind. And somebody would push up or get pushed up against a show case and things would break. Well, the result was a bunch of them got arrested for what they called riotous behavior or some such thing. I had gone down to defend these people. That must have been around '37 or '38 when that happened.

But in 1939 they were beginning to have a lot of trouble in the packinghouse. I got a call one day to come down and I came down and they were angry. They were going to have a strike and would I help them with their negotiations? I said sure and I started listening to their stories about Jay Hormel, the man who was president of the company. I began, looking into their financial statements and stuff, and I suddenly began to realize another dimension of power and that was money because I never talked about money. The companies I was dealing with, in other parts of the state were relatively small after all. I didn't know it then but I realize it now, but this was a business that was doing over a hundred million dollars a year. That seemed to me like all the money in the world. That was even a lot of money for the federal budget in those days. When Harry Hopkins would ask for a hundred million for a welfare program people just wouldn't believe
their ears. The early appropriations were in the millions not, the tens of millions.

Well, I finally met Jay Hormel and that turned out to be one of the more interesting experiences of my life in many ways. I suddenly realized that I was dealing with a man of extraordinary capacities, with any, unusual intelligence, with a complete comprehension of a very complicated industry and who had some notions about where he, wanted to go. He was going to use power because he had been brought up to use it but he was willing to temper it. He found it very, difficult to just use raw naked power when he couldn't support it with some kind of an intellectual argument.

Part of the story that I've been told, so far as I've ever been able to learn, the first sit-down strike that ever occurred in the United States occurred in that plant in 1933. Jay Hormel told me the story and it was later confirmed to me by Frank Ellis who was a vice president and one of the organizers of the, United Packinghouse Workers after it was set up as an international. Frank was an old time Wobbly and he was what was known as a boomer butcher. He used to go from one place to another. He was a very skilled butcher and he had no trouble getting a job. He'd go in preaching and get free speech fights started and, preach his Wobbly philosophy; He'd organized these people in Austin and they'd taken over the plants, by G-d. They picked up Jay, a couple of them, one on, each side of him and they'd taken him out to the front gate and just threw him out. He landed on his rear, he said. He said, "You know the shock finally penetrated up to, my brain and I began to realize if you couldn't lick them you ought to join them and in some sense begin looking, into the things that they were complaining about. If they were that mad maybe there was some reason for it and maybe I was being stupid because I was just doing things the way I had been taught to in the old traditional way."

Well, I just never had run into an employer like this and from the very beginning we understood each other very easily and after weeks and months, because it was a highly complicated formula, we finally negotiated this first agreement. To the best of my knowledge that agreement is still in effect. The only thing is, what would happen each year as we would change conditions nationally they would write supplemental arrangement that would take the place of whatever it took the place of, but the basic agreement is, I think, still in operation, still in effect.

One of the significant things about that agreement, which has never been duplicated as far as I know was a provision for arbitration. Jay kept saying all the way
through, "Look, if you tell me what your complaint is and you give me all the facts, my answer will be right. I'll give you the right answer just so long as I get all the facts. If you're going to withhold some facts now you can't expect this." So I got to the point where I started calling him the Holy Trinity. As a matter of fact Saul Alinsky had just written his book, _Reveille for Radicals_. Jay had heard about it and got interested in it and wanted a copy so I got Saul to autograph a copy to "Jay who, I understand. from Ralph-Helstein, is the fourth member of the Holy Trinity." He was just beside himself with rage he was so mad. But I said, "Look, how ridiculous can you be? You're not God. You can tell me that you want to be right. If you know all the facts you'll try to be right. I might even believe that but to agree in advance that you will be right is asking, more than you've got any right to expect me to believe. And we want that arbitration provision." Well, he fussed and fumed at the idea of a third person. Then he said, "Anyway, on what basis does an arbitrator make a decision?" So I said to him "On what basis would you like him to make the decisions?" I said, "You'll agree, I'm sure, the decision will be based on what's fair." He said, "Well, of course." I said, "And it really shouldn't have anything to do with what's in this contract. He ought to be able to go outside of the terms of the contract." He said, "Yes, that's not unreasonable." We ended up by writing a provision that said that the arbitrator would make the final decision and it would be based on what was fair, just and equitable. I'm told that when the other people in the industry heard about it -- they thought it was crazy anyway because of the annual wage, but this they thought was insane. He agreed to it, we worked and set the thing up. We used to meet, several times, a week, winter and summer, but we got that thing working and it worked well for many many years. I developed a very interesting relationship with Hormel.

Just one quick story. I got called one day. By this time I had moved to Chicago and I was president of the union. I had known Hormel for a minimum of six or, seven years by this time probably and Jay calls me on the phone. I knew he had what today we call a Watts line. In those days he had a phone and he could talk to any place in the United States. He had it connected up to this, home at night from the switchboard in Austin so he could sit there at home and call anybody in the country he wanted to. Well my phone rang and it's Jay. He says, "Ralph, I want to come in and talk to you." And I said, "Yeah, so can't a phone be enough?" "Oh no, this has nothing to do with the plant," he said. "You know this guy Beardsly Rummell? Rummell was a man who became famous by advocating and getting put through the withholding tax. "Well," he said, "Beardsly's a friend of mine and he's called a meeting to deal with these problems of discrimination on account of
race and I've got some problems with that. I know you're interested in this field and I'd like to come in and talk to you about it." So I said, "Okay, come on in and we'll spend the evening from the time you get in. Why don't you come out, to my house and have dinner and we'll sit and talk?." And he did.

I knew in those days he used to drink Irish whiskey so I had a bottle of Irish whiskey. He sat and drank Irish whiskey and really it was a fascinating thing. He really unburdened himself of all the prejudices that an upper middle class white -- well, this is, a guy whose father made the fortune. He would not have been in the old Boston society. I mean they didn't go back to the Mayflower but he made a lot of money. It had been in the family now and this was the second generation. He had gone to every college in the country and gotten kicked out of most of them because of the trouble he would get into, drinking or driving cars or horses or whatever it was. And all of the prejudices that people of this kind were prone to obviously were bound to come out.

I'd keep pressing him. He'd keep admitting to me that he didn't, know if these things were true. He'd say all the cliches, you know, and he'd keep backing up and backing up and finally he said, "Look Ralph, I'm going to quit this kind of life. You're right and I'm wrong. I don't know if any of this stuff is true but there is one basic fact; You break the economic barriers and you break the social barriers and whether you agree with this or disagree with it, or no matter how you feel about it, I cannot emotionally accept the notion of my sister or any white woman marrying a black man. I just can't accept that! Now I may be wrong." Now mind you, this is the '40s, this is very early in the game. "Now" he said, "I may be wrong but that's the way I feel about it. You can argue with me and try and convince me I'm wrong if you want to but on this one on the rest of them I'll drop all of that stuff. I won't make a fool of myself. I'm glad that I came here to talk to you. Otherwise I would be laughed at so I won't make a fool of myself. But this is one thing I simply can't get over."

So I said to, him, "Well, that's understandable. It's been ground into you for so many years you can't expect to get over it in one argument. Just keep working on it. The trouble with you is that you don't think about this kind of thing.. You just assume you're right and you go ahead on that basis." He went on to that meeting, and it was out of that meeting that support for Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Executive Order came.

I. You mean out of Rummell's meeting?
R. Out of Rummell's meeting. Of course, this was after the war but they indicated their support. But Jay I don't know what happened.

I. He couldn't take the step?

R. Nope But there are all kinds of other stories about him that are really fascinating. I can tell you more about him next time.
Interview with Ralph Helstein  
by Elizabeth Balanoff  
May, 22, 1972

R.

I think I had related the experience of meeting Mr. Hormel prior to his attending the meeting called by Beardsly Rummell to discuss questions of civil rights and his reactions. I suppose it might be appropriate at this juncture, even though chronologically out of context to tell the story of Mr. Hormel's oldest son, Geordie, whose first marriage had been to the movie actress, Leslie Caron, and who was divorced and subsequently was to be remarried. He was married at their family estate in Austin, Minnesota to which had been invited many of the socially prominent people of the state. And the front pages of the newspapers which announced the wedding throughout the state had pictures of the wedding party which included Geordie's friend, Sammy Davis, Jr. This occurred a number of years after the incident of Jay visiting me to discuss the civil rights question prior to his meeting with Beardsly, Rummell and I couldn't help but put the two things together and to speculate on this factor, how Jay would have taken it had he still been living. He was dead at the time. Maybe this made it possible.

Geordie's mother, Mrs. Hormel, was an extremely interesting woman, French by nationality, whom Jay had met while he was in the American Army during World War I. They'd been married, had three or four children, I've forgotten. I suppose since I am referring to her at this point it might be useful to interject another item that I would suppose would be most unusual in the experiences of any labor leader. Mrs. Hormel had a son who, at the particular time this incident occurred, was teaching in the Law School at the University of Chicago. She came to visit them on occasion and her grandchildren and one Sunday I recall her calling me and asking if she could come to see me. This was a number of years after Jay's death and I had not seen her although we exchanged cards on some special occasions and did maintain a correspondence of a very desultory kind, but you know there was contact at least. By the way it's continued to this day. I think we still exchange Christmas cards and on one or two other occasions during the year. She must be close to eighty now if not more. In any event, she called on this Sunday and asked if she could come to see me. Well, since her son taught at the University of Chicago he lived in Hyde Park. We also lived there and so she was only minutes away and she came over.

Her purpose for wanting to talk with me was to get advice on how to handle the problems of the business which
seemed to her to be excluding her sons from participation. When Jay died he had left most of the stock, the controlling stock --of course this is quite apart from trust funds and other inheritances which had been left for all the children -- but the corporation funds had been left in a trust which was administered by a board of trustees. It had to have a member of the Hormel family on it but in addition it had the president, chairman of the board and other officers of the Hormel company. So for all practical purposes the person who ran the company at any point in time would also be running the trust. That meant that he could act as if he owned the trust since he was pretty sure of his votes with people who were officers of the company. A vice president, for example, was also on the board of trustees and if he didn't vote right there' d be no trick in firing him as a vice president of the company since that was the place from which the man's income came, not from the trust fund. I think it was perfectly clear that he ran it.

Well, Mrs. Hormel had the feeling that the person who at that point in time was running the company had not permitted adequate participation of her sons in terms of their moving into the management and control of the enterprise. I think that one thing should be said in this connection. Jay was searching desperately for mechanisms by which he would be able to avoid the old adage, you know, "From shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations." I think he wanted to see the institutions which carried the family name continue and I don't know that he had enough confidence in his sons to do it. Still he wanted it tied in closely enough with the whole family concept that this trust seemed to him to be a method by which he might accomplish this. I can't say that it's been successful. Certainly the people who are presently running the company do not reflect any of his vision either as business men or in terms of the vision he had as a citizen.

I. Would his sons have done better?

R. I can't say that, I really don't know. None of them so far as I am aware has ever lived up to the capacities that he had. Now maybe they never had them, I don't know. Or maybe he was just so hard on them that he just drove them away and out of it. I'm inclined to think that may well be the case although I never saw him in relation to that. I met Geordie a couple of times and I met the others once, I think. Geordie, at some point in time, came back, took over the family estate in Austin and turned it in to a sort of resort hotel and gourmet restaurant. I went over there one night with some of the people in the local union for dinner and he came and sat with us through the whole dinner. He was what I guess in those
days we'd call dressed in hippy fashion. At that point in
time I don't know what you called it. It just seemed all very
very strange tome, the setting. There was a certain irony.

I.

About what year would that have been in the '50s?

R.

Well, that would have been in probably the mid '50s or
late '50s. I spend this amount of time on all this because he
was an interesting phenomenon as an American businessman.
He got me involved and himself involved in all kinds of other
things.

For instance, one day he said to me, "Ralph, our old
family friend, General Leonard Wood," (This was back in the
late '30s, early '40s before our involvement in the-second
World War.) He said "You know he's an old family friend and
he got to talking to me and I became a member of the America
First Committee. This is a very worthwhile thing and I'd
like to send you some material, see if I can't interest you in
it." And I said, "Jay, you're out of your mind. Do you know
what that outfit is?" He said, "What do you mean 'that
outfit'?' And I said, "I mean precisely what I say. This
thing is a propaganda arm, as far as I'm concerned, of the
Nazis in America and from my point of view it is so far right
that it will subvert American policy. If they have their way
we will find ourselves not only accepting but supporting
Hitler all over the world. I just can't see how you can have
anything to do with it."

Well, he was shocked at the vehemence of my reaction
and backed off. Months later I raised this question with him
and asked him what he had done about it. He said, "Oh, I
resigned." And I said, "Oh you did, how interesting. Why
don't you do it publicly?" I said, "Your name was associated
with them publicly initially, why don't you resign publicly?"
He said, "Well, you know, I told you General Wood was an old
family friend and very close to my father. I just couldn't do
that sort of thing."

One other thing he got involved with although not
deeper was that he was constantly experimenting with things
like the Buckmanites, the Moral Rearmament group. He saw in
this possibly something that would offer a potential solution
to the worlds ills. One time we really talked seriously
about this. One time I was in Minneapolis and he came up and
we went out to dinner and we got ourselves into a very serious
discussion about it. I finally said to him, "You know, Jay, I
think the problem is that you know something's wrong with this
system but it's the only system you know and it's the only one
that you think you really like because you gota big fat piece
of it." He had told me on a previous occasion that with the
tax laws what they were then -- he wasn't complaining, he was just stating the facts -- what he had left from his income, which in those days, I'm talking now about a time when inflation had not yet hit the dollar like it has now -- his income in those days was over $300,000 a year. He said, "My income with the tax out of it is not sufficient for me to maintain the standard of living that I maintain and I have to draw on capital to do this." Of course that standard of living meant the maintenance of at least two major estates that I know of, one in Austin. And when I say estates I literally mean estates with vast acreage and gardens of incredible complexity and beauty and obviously costly. He had these two estates that I know of. One was in Bel Air in California and the other in Austin. And then there were apartments in New York and I think in Paris. So you know I never had reason to question his point.

Well, I said to him, "I think part of the problem is that you realize that the way this thing works isn't right and that it's going to blow one of these days and so you keep looking for solutions but you don't want to deal with any solution such as changing of the system that involves a change in the method by which you live and get your income. Now I can understand why that would be difficult for you. You'd not only probably lose in the process, whereas someone like myself might gain, but you'd lose heavily. And you might have to work under other circumstances, although in your case I don't think it makes a darn bit of difference. You'd enjoy it as long as it was challenging and interesting." Now this is Hormel on one level.

On other levels, for example on very practical levels, he was a merchandiser par excellence. He took a product which was relatively unknown and he built it up into one of the better known meat companies in the country. It was all in a very short period of time and during a period when the so-called big four packers, which were Armour, Swift, Wilson and Cudahy, operated better than 65% of the production facilities of the industry so they were really in a very dominant position. It was during that period that he took Hormel and put it in that position. He was one of the first people, if not the first, in the packing industry, even before Oscar Meier, who realized the importance in the way he packaged his goods.

He took this product it was known as Spam-- and it got its name because what he did was throw a big party at his estate in Austin. I think he told me a hundred and fifty people were there. The place was big enough so they could easily be lost. Liquor flowed like water and he put on a contest to get a name for this product and out of this stupor
of somebody's drunkeness came the name Spam and he decided that was it. Spam, most packers will tell you, is just plain lunch meat that they've been making for years. But he took it, put it in this can, gave it this name, started this advertising campaign and the first thing you know it was one of the best, if not the best, selling meat products in the country. Of course every other company started, making it but it didn't make any difference what it was, Spam became the generic name for that kind of thing. Well, the other packers used to call him a crackpot, because, he would do these things but there never was one of these merchandising efforts of his that I was aware of that didn't bring great dividends.

I. Was he trained in this or was it just his own imagination?

R. Well, it must have been his own imagination. When, you say training you mean by education? He never finished college, he got thrown out of every college he went to.

I. They weren't teaching marketing and that sort of thing then?

R. No, I think I've already indicated, and he would have preceded me in college, when I was in college they didn't have such things as labor law and I can assume they didn't teach marketing. I suppose what the business schools in those days taught was how to be a bookkeeper, accounting. No, he had no special training. This is primarily his own native imagination and his love of selling something, getting people to do what he wanted them to do.

He'd go to great lengths. Some of our negotiations were very fantastic in this respect. I can remember we wanted him to take the first step in wiping out what we call the geographical differential, the different levels of rates in the industry. There was a rate for the metropolitan area, areas like New York and Chicago. Then there was the so-called river rate and that included theoretically the towns on the river like St. Paul, Kansas City, St. Louis, Fort Worth, St. Jo. Austin was on that river rate and I wanted to get this two and a half cents an hour differential wiped out.

I kept arguing with him about doing it and he didn't want to do it. He wasn't going to do it. Finally he said to me, "Look, suppose I pay a bonus." And I said, "What do you want to pay a bonus for? We're not asking you to pay a bonus." He said, "Well two and a half cents --we can assume a 40 hour week at 50 cents a day, take a bonus of 50 cents." I said,' "That's crazy, why do it that way? Why not do it the way we want it?" Well, then he starts giving me some very involved
explanation about how it depends on which pocket the dollar came out of whether he could buy hogs at a certain price or compete in the purchase of hogs. Obviously the cost of the livestock was the crucial cost and still is in this industry, Well it was a very complicated explanation. When he finished I said, "Look, you may be absolutely right but it's still a lot of, nonsense." Before we had got out of that meeting he had raised that bonus to a dollar. I said to him, "Jay, as far as I'm concerned, I'm not going to argue with you if you know what you're talking about or not. I'm going to assume you do, otherwise you wouldn't do these things. But I can't understand it, it doesn't make sense to me. I think it's wacky and it's bribery. What you're doing is bribing us. You're paying us an amount that is sufficiently more than what we've asked for so that we can't say no to it but in order to have it done your way you're obviously willing." He said, "Yes and not only that but we make money on it this way." Well this is what hapened many times.

I recall at one point we set ourselves up to negotiations. This was during a conflict period of one kind. It was 1945 and it was with five or six of the large independent packers and that included Fred Tobin, who at that time operated plants in Fort Dodge, Iowa, Rochester, New York, Syracuse, New York and I think there was one other I just can't recall. He was also an interesting character but totally different than Hormel in that first he was a good deal older. He was probably closer to the age of Jay's father but he was a more primitive kind of person. He had none of Jay's sophistication and comprehension of affairs, on broader levels but he was real tough; He was one of the kinds of industrialists that really built at least the meatpacking industry.

I. He was the old fashioned kind.

R. Yes, but at any rate we get in this meeting and we bogged down over an issue. I think, 50 cents a week was the question. I forget precisely what the issue was but it had to do with knife sharpening time or something that they didn't want to pay for in the way we wanted it so it was a question of finding a compromise. Jay was just bound and determined that this just made no sense. It was stupid, he wasn't going to have any part of it and he was holding all these guys in line. It was getting later, got to be around 4:30 or 5 o'clock and I began to notice that Tobin was getting very itchy. A little bit later he put on his, coat and he grabbed for his hat. And I said to him, "Once you guys walk out of here you're in for trouble now. "You're going to have to get this thing settled." I finally told them, "You've got to wait." Tobin
I. "What the hell are you arguing about?" I knew at this point that Tobin had himself a date, what kind I didn't know. I had my suspicions but that was another matter entirely. I said to him, "Fred, these guys are just being completely unreasonable. I think it's terrible that you should have to be late for your engagement." I said, "I don't know what engagement, it's perfectly obvious you've got one." He said, "Your're absolutely right. To hell with it! We'll give it to you. I don't care what the rest of you guys do, we'll give it to you." And he stalks out. Well, Jay was just beside himself with fury. He didn't trust himself to talk. But once Tobin agreed the others fell in line. Tobin loosened the wax and they all agreed and he had to agree.

II. Was it just an ego thing with him or was there really a money difference to him, or did you ever know for sure?

R. Well, he had an interesting concept. How valid it was I was never able to find out, never did know. The crucial part of the meat industry is the purchase of live stock and the maintenance of high levels of production. At least it was in that point of time. It's changed a good deal now but in the period I'm talking about, the mid to late '40s, this was crucial. You had to maintain production at a very high level because this kept your overhead costs down and although you didn't make a lot on each dollar of which you sold, your total was cumulative and it became very substantial. So with a packer that wasn't doing a hundred fifty to two hundred million dollars a year business, he was really a very small packer because of the cost in the livestock being so important.

Now Jay's contention was, on some of these so-called fringe items which he fought so hard, that if you paid the men the way we wanted them paid then you would have to do your mathematics by including them as part of the cost of production rather than as part of the overhead. If you included them as part of the production, because he was very rigid about this, whether rightly or wrongly I don't know, all I know is that he was very successful. I can't see why it made any difference because it seems to me that this is a question which pocket it came out. But his contention was that if you included it in the price of production you had to get it some place. The only place you could get it was by paying less for the hogs but he always wanted to be in a position where he could pay more for the animals so that he could buy more even at his competitor's expense. Of course the truth was that he was operating on this guaranteed annual wage at that time and it was absolutely essential that he have hogs all the time. If he didn't provide enough hogs to get out forty hours of work and he had to pay his people for forty hours of work every week
why he was in real trouble.

I remember during what we called the strike of the packers against OPA when there was just absolutely no beef available, somewhere people working in the beef department in Austin were getting their checks and working three, four, five hours a week if that. And I remember one of the old timers by the name of Eddie Tolan, a funny little Irishman, was drunk a good portion of the time. One couldn't blame him either when you saw the conditions under which he worked. When I'd get to town Eddie'd comearound. He'd sit around the union hall. He didn't have anything else to do, he was getting along in years. The kids were all grown up and away. Eddie would come in and he had one big gripe. "Why do I have to go to the plant to pick up my check? Why can't they mail it to me?" Perfectly reasonable. Well, I must say that seemed to me to be completely reasonable and I raised the question with Hormel at one point. He just blew sky high! "I pay him forty hours pay for three to five hours work, whatever it is. He wants me to add the cost of stuffing envelopes and buying stamps." Well Eddie continued to raise that. I wasn't really very serious about it. It didn't seem to me that that was a very great penalty for what results you got. So this was really the key point to this.

I. Did Mr. Hormel ever comment on your suggestion that he couldn't think in terms of any other system or did he just let these comments go?

R. No, when I said this he sort of absorbed this, didn't argue too much. We had already been at it for quite a while and were just about ready to separate but sometime later -- I had left Minnesota by then and was in Chicago -- he came through and we had lunch together. He said to me that he had been thinking about this and that it might be true but that that didn't change the problem in his mind. And I said it might not change the problem but it seems to me that it would make you more aware of the fact that you shouldn't get yourself involved in what seemed to me at least to be crackpot, or certainly wrongful politically, movements that were like the Moral Rearmament, which Rickenbacher, by the way, was already beginning to subsidize. I'm not so sure that it wasn't Rickenbacher whom Jay probably knew from world War II.

I. Did he leave the Moral Rearmament?

R. Well, he hadn't really got too involved with Moral Rearmament. This was sort of a puttinghis foot in the water to see what it was like and he never, so far as I knew, made contributions. At least if he did he didn't do it publicly
and he never got involved in any of the famous meetings at the Mackinac Island. This is where they've got their big retreat. My hunch is that probably before he died he was involved with a half dozen other things of this kind, always curiously enough groups that might or might not appear to have a deliberate political purpose. But if there was one showing in any way it was always right wing kind of politics. I think in a sense he felt more comfortable with that but he'd also be the first to tell you that. He wouldn't make any effort to hide his bias and prejudices in this regard but he was a man of real vision and real understanding. Living in a different age and under different circumstances he could have operated in almost any milieu.

I think I probably have exhausted this particular thing although there are so many stories and anecdotes about him that I'm not sure but that I could make a whole book just relating some of those. Just one last one which gives you something of the flavor of the guy. There was a walkout that occurred in the hog killing right when we had gotten to the point of signing this first, what we called master agreement, blanket agreement. Ths is the one that I think is still in effect, by the way, which just gave the broad outlines of the understandings, provided the machinery by which we worked out the rest of it. They fired, I think, eight people or thereabouts because of their involvement. I called Jay and we just had it hot and heavy for awhile. Now remember, I'm talking about a period around 1939 or 1940, whereas it is perfectly obvious to you I was much much younger and I had not learned anywhere near as much as I have with age. I hadn't had a chance, I guess. As a matter of fact, as I think of it, I'm always impressed with the remarkable perspicacity of Bernard Shaw's comment that youth is wasted on the young because I certainly was a perfect example, I think, of that. In any case we got into this big argument and he finally agreed to put certain people back to work. Then he said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I just can't do this without at least having hearings of some kind and I'm going to hold them myself." I said, "What kind?" We argued this for a while but he was absolutely adamant.

Now Jay had an industrial relations man. You didn't call them that in those days but his name was Fayette Sherman and Jay had really brought him up in his own image. Fay stayed on long after Jay's death and didn't retire actually until he passed sixty-five. He died a short time afterwards. While Fay was living you could always feel the Hormel touch, he really enjoyed it. I say this by way of saying that in all the negotiations we ever had with Hormel, Fay was the only person that was in there with him. He wouldn't allow any of his other officers or any of his other personnel. It's not
like these days where you line up on each side of the table with a battery of people.

Well we had a large enough committee. We had a committee I would say of twenty-five or more people. Every division had a chairman. We had the chairmen of all the divisions and the bargaining committees and the officers. We had a good size committee and they used to meet in a long narrow room. It was so long and so narrow really it was almost impossible to get two rows of chairs and we'd get a little crowded all trying to get in there. It was worse when we had these hearings because there were a lot of people who wanted to be in on it and Jay wasn't going to keep anyone out who wanted to hear it. One of the people that was involved turned out to be a guy by the name of Weichert and his nickname was Dutch. Everybody called him Dutch, he was German. It turned out, I learned years afterwards, he had been on a merchant marine vessel and he jumped the boat in New York and somehow worked his way to Austin and was living there and working there for years, family and everything else.

At any rate we got a place for the witness to sit near Jay and Jay's asking him questions and making decisions. He's being judge and jury and prosecutor and everything else in the trial. But Jay also prided himself on the fact that he knew practically every one of the three thousand people who worked in that plant personally. The fact is he did know a very substantial number of them and he could call most of them by their first names. Well he gets Weichert on the witness stand and he starts asking him some questions and all of a sudden he stops. He says, "Look, I know you in some special context but I can't place it, it slips my mind. Weren't we together on some occasion and where was it?" Weichert begins to get uncomfortable. He was getting fidgety and edgy and Hormel keeps pressing him. He says, "Are you sure you want me to tell you, Mr. Hormel?" Jay said, "Yes, I wouldn't ask you if I didn't want to know. Where was it? It's bothering me, I ought to be able to remember it." He says, "Well, Mr. Hormel, one night a number of years ago you apparently had been someplace and you ran your car into a snow bank and I fished you and your car out of the snow bank." Well, obviously Jay had been off on a bender somewhere. Hormel was of very very sallow skin. As a matter of fact he suffered from jaundice and he was yellow, almost an olive color on occasion. In all the years I knew him I never saw his skin red, I don't think, except that one time. He never asked the guy another question. This was still during the period of my first experience with him. I was saying to myself, well, what are, you doing with him? This guy isn't for real. I just couldn't believe what was going on. And I said to him after I got to know him better, "Well, you got more than you bargained
for there, didn't you?" He said, "I sure did. You know something, I realized the last time I pushed him, just as he started answering the question I remembered what it was and I knew I shouldn't have asked him but couldn't stop him then."

Well, there were all kinds of things of this sort in our dealings with him so that it was both refreshing because you were dealing with a person to whom you could say this is a problem and he would start jointly searching with you for an answer and the question of cost would come in only at a point when you found the answer. Then it would be a question of, is this costing us more than I'm willing to pay. You do it on that basis. But you would have an agreement that this is the sensible answer. Of course the costs then become a totally different question when you deal with the average company and they sit there and say no just because they want their profits.

I. It's a matter of principle?

R. What I'm really saying is that the Hormel experience was one very important part of my formative stages. For example, it fits pretty clearly something that I guess I must have always had and certainly had through law school and even more in the practice of law. The Hormel thing certainly fits more firmly with this fact that everything ought to be examined, everything ought to be challenged. There's nothing that's holy just because this is the way you always do it.

I remember years later getting into an argument with Armours about the seasonal character of the work and the fact that our people were getting substantial lay-offs months at a time when the hog season was over. They kept arguing, "How do you expect us to do it? Sure we build these gangs up when the hogs come in and when the hog runs are over we cut them down." I said to them, "That's really your problem. If you bought hogs on a different basis the farmers would bring them in differently. I can't believe that it's not possible to plan receipts so that you don't have these terrible peaks and gullies with all their consequences." Well the Armour Vice President in charge of Industrial Relations said with scathing contempt, "Oh, now you want to start changing the biology of the hog, huh?" You know they operated on the theory that there's only certain times of the year that the hogs would breed.

Well, Jay at his estate had a laboratory there and he had been carrying on experiments for years, one of which was devoted just to this question about breeding of hogs and they had long since gotten past this point. The University of Minnesota's Department of Agriculture was in charge of these
experiments. They were doing them on his estate in Austin, obviously because as I pointed out to him he got a tax credit. This gave him some kind of a connection with the university and he was able to declare so much of this land or so much of the costs of operating his estate as a legitimate expense or a legitimate gift to an educational institution and that of course is tax deductible, even in those days. So it was a very useful device from his point of view, plus the fact he had this going on right under his nose so he could keep watching it and he was very much interested. He had long since established the fact that, given the proper conditions, which of course they do and have done now for years, you can breed all year round and you can pretty well determine what the flow of the hog supply is going to be. I said to Green, "Yeah, if it means changing their biology I think that can be done. But more importantly it's not a question of changing their biology, it's a question of changing the manner under which it gets exercised."

The Hormel experience was my first involvement with a major meat packer, too. One of the things that really was fixed indelibly on my mind was that this was an industry that was hardly comparable to any other, bizarre in many ways, terribly imaginative in other ways, primitive in all kinds of ways including the manner in which the operation started with the killing of living things. But everything they did ought to be subject to challenge.

I. Did they actually then begin to breed a different way? Is that what they do now?

R. Well sure. Look at the charts, the flow of hog supply. There are peaks and gullies yet but they're small peaks and very small valleys as compared to what they had been before and it was our pressures for guarantees that brought this around. When every other union in the country was negotiating for supplementary unemployment benefits, and that must have been in the '50s, we made a very careful and exhaustive study of the situation and we found that I think over 92% of the men working were getting in better than forty weeks of work a year and 80 some % of the women were doing that. Now that meant that with the amount of work they got -- remember we already had fixed a weekly guarantee of thirty-six hours so that if they worked at all in the workweek they'd get thirty-six hours pay -- that meant, in effect, that that plus unemployment comp, which in those days was for thirteen weeks, and of course now most states have expanded that where you had a full year's pay, certainly, for better than 90% of your people when you weighted the averages, which of course created a totally different problem for us. We didn't have anything like the problem the auto workers had which, come
hell or high water, there were going to be lay-offs when people quit buying cars, when they shifted over to the making of new models and that sort of thing. In our case the situation had stabilized very substantially.

Well, as I say, the industry itself, and if I haven't observed this before I should have, was the first mass production industry in the country. It developed the whole assembly line technique, the difference being of course that we disassembled whereas the motor companies assembled. But Henry Ford acknowledged that the idea for the assembly line kind of production had come from the meat packing industry.

So it was a highly imaginative industry but it was also the kind of industry whose dominant forces made these breakthroughs, at least one major breakthrough, and then just didn't think it had to do anything in the way of staying modern for years. Well, that was not true of Hormel and my early exposure to Hormeland the fact that I realized then that lots of things that weren't being done were possible to do had a very important bearing on my attitude in terms of negotiations over the years. It's part of the reason I think it's worth this amount of time but I'm sure there are many other things that we probably ought to spend some time with.
I think that last time I described some of my experiences with Jay Hormel, president of the Hormel Company and this brought me up to roughly 1942 which was the year that I came to Chicago. As I think I indicated previously, while in Minneapolis I had become General Counsel for the Minnesota CIO. Among the other unions that I represented were packing house local unions both in Austin and also in south St. Paul where organizing drives were under way. Those plants had not yet been recognized. As a result of some of the contacts I had developed over this time I was contacted at some point by the Chicago offices of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee.

In those days the CIO used to set up organizing committees to organize an industry at what seemed to them an appropriate time. That committee would then be given a charter by the Federation and the CIO as an international union and it would get what has come to be known as its own autonomy and it could adopt its own constitution and then proceed to run its business. Now the members of the committee were all appointed by the president of the CIO and that committee ran the business of the organization. At the time I came to Chicago it was still in the stage of a committee known as the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee. A man by the name of J.C. Lewis had been chairman of the committee. He had retired, however, I think a short time before I came. The man who was chairman at the time I arrived was Sam Sponseller. He had been on the staff of the CIO for many years. My recollection at the moment is that he came out of the Glass Workers Union originally. But you did see that kind of thing happening. For example, clothing workers did a lot of organizing in south St. Paul before the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee was set up and of course the mine workers organized all kinds of unions.

I guess organizing is a special skill.

It is a skill but this was a period of time in which there was a spirit which was sweeping this thing along. So if you had the skill and know how and if, plus that, you had some resources and the backing of a powerful organization like the Mine Workers or like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, why obviously you could do more. At any rate that was the status of the Packinghouse Workers at the time that I was originally contacted and as I recall it was in September or August of 1942 and I was asked to handle a Labor Board matter for the
Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee in Waterloo, Iowa where they had an organizing drive going at what was then one of the largest packing houses in the country, the Rath Packing Company.

Waterloo, Iowa was relatively close to the Minnesota border and there had been contact between Austin and Waterloo and this may have led to that initial request. So I went to Waterloo to handle the Labor Board case and while there met Tony Stephens who at that time was a director for the Packing house Workers Organizing Committee in that particular district or region. I think it was known as District 3 -- 2 in those days—later it was known as District 3. I developed a very good and happy relationship with Stephens during that time. I handled the case and the results were satisfactory and a short time afterwards, and my memory fails me here, it was August or September or maybe October, somewhere in the early fall of 1942 there was a series of cases, one of which was the G.H. Hammond case. G.H. Hammond was a Swift's plant. Swift had bought many plants in the course of its being a national company and in many cases it continued to operate under the name of the plant it bought. Lots of time this was done because there was a trade name connected with that plant that had some certain local significance with consumer acceptance so they continued to operate that way. G.H. Hammond was one of the cases. I think there were two others.

At any rate I came to Chicago and that time I got to know the people in the Packinghouse Workers office and I handled those cases before the Labor Board. We got our decisions and they were satisfactory. We were satisfied with them and in all those cases, by the way, we won the election. I say this only as an after thought but I didn't have much to do with that phase of the work. We won the elections and we were certified to bargain with all of these companies eventually. At some point after the experience with these cases in Chicago I was talked to by the officials of the committee. They approached me and asked me if I would be interested in moving to Chicago as the General Counsel of the PWOC and just work out of that office. Well I found it very intriguing. I wasn't sure I wanted to leave Minneapolis but the prospects of operating in a bigger field -- I was in my late twenties, early thirties at the time and I'd just decided finally that this was a greener pasture from where I sat, that I couldn't turn it down for the comforts of what had been a very happy city for me to live in, so finally in October of '42 or early November, I roughly remember that period, I came to Chicago.

I worked out an arrangement for my withdrawing from my office in Minneapolis although I continued to be a part of
it for a few months, maybe even a couple of years, I don't recall. My partner then ran it and he got other people into work with him. As a matter of fact in 1948, some six years later, through the result of a strike that the Packinghouse Workers had in south St. Paul I went there to testify in the course of the hearings but also because I was still a member of the Minnesota bar, and still am as far as I know. I participated in the trial of that case and found it very interesting and satisfying. Meanwhile I maintained this connection more because I wasn't quite sure, I didn't want to completely cut root, I guess.

At any rate I did it. I suppose there's all kinds of reasons, it would be difficult to recapture now. So we moved to Chicago, my wife joined me finally in December. She came to visit and we found ourselves an apartment, an old converted mansion on the near North side, 40 East Elm. I think the thing we were attracted to was the fact that it had a wood burning fireplace. We needed that, our lives had always been in family homes. It never occurred to us we'd be in a place like Chicago. It was so obviously cut out and made over from an older house. The bedroom had been a sun porch and the most intriguing aspect of the whole thing was that the bathroom had been placed between the dining room and the kitchen so that when you ate you had to serve by walking through the bathroom. It was inconvenient on occasion but liveable. There was also a very large hole which was quite obviously designed for rats, or at least they had designed it for themselves because I saw them running around our back porch on a couple of occasions. Anyway we bought logs for our fire place and we had our wood burning fire and we managed to cover up the hole so we weren't bothered. We found it very pleasant and exciting living in it.

It so happened, however, that my wife was pregnant and we were expecting a baby in spring and we hardly thought this kind of place was a place for a family so we spent a lot of time looking around. We were attracted to Hyde Park primarily because Rachel had been at Wellesley for the first two years and then transferred because she didn't feel she got a decent education there.

I. Really?

R. Yes. Her mother had come to visit her. Her mother, I may have mentioned before, was a woman of great stature. She had been the national president of the Council of Jewish Women for several terms and was responsible for their peace program and, along with Mrs. Roosevelt, had been name done of the ten leading American women. When she returned from a trip to Europe she gave a national radio broadcast on what she
had seen in the late '30s, around 1938.

I. What was her name?

Brin, Fanny Brin. She was a very remarkable woman who lived into her seventies. She had planned to visit Rachel at Wellesley and discussed with her the question as to whether, or not this wasn't just really sort of a finishing school operation which would maybe qualify her for a good junior college. My mother-in-law hardly thought that it met the standards that one should get at college and I guess Rachel quite independently of her had come to the very same conclusion. That by the way has changed very substantially since those days. Wellesley did provide a good education but at any rate she had left Wellesley and had moved to Chicago. This was after the first couple of years of Hutchins and the university was full of excitement, change. It was the beginning of the whole role of the Great Books dialogue, the fights that occurred between McKern and Adler.

You may not know but when Hutchins appointed Adler as professor of philosophy the philosophy department threatened to resign en masse if he was made a professor of philosophy so Hutchins ended by making him a professor in the law school who taught philosophy. But the excitement was great. The neo-Thomist movement was a very strong force at the time. A good many converts to Catholicism grew out of it, the leading light of which was a man by the name of Schwartz who was a professor of music and a Jew from the East side of New York who had himself apparently become converted and then had a good deal of success in bringing around his students.

Well, this is all a diversion, but this is the reason we picked Hyde Park. Rachel knew Hyde Park, she had lived in International House while she had been at the University of Chicago. She assured me it was a much nicer dormitory than it is presently. So we looked around Hyde Park. Fortunately we found a place in the nook of Hyde Park called East View Park, not known to many. It's got its own little park, and a little series of apartment buildings no more than three stories high built around it. The story, which may not be true, was that the man who owned it had sold the riparian rights to that particular land to the city when they were building the Outer Drive and had received enough money for the payments for those rights so that he paid off the mortgage completely on this. Oh it was a complex of about a minimum of fifty or seventy-five units or more, large apartments. They weren't small by any measurement. We moved there and we have lived in Hyde Park ever since.

Finally in 1951 we moved out of East View Park and we
and out of that grew the Industrial Areas Foundation which was
the foundation that sponsored Alinsky's work over the years.
And Marshall Field got interested in that. Now that's
Marshall Field III, I think. This is the one, at any rate,
who founded the Chicago Sun and bought the Times and also
started P.M., a newspaper in New York that was very important
during the period of the '30s, some great reporters on it. I
thought that it used to do the best job on reporting on the
Spanish Civil War of any paper in the country.

I.

The Field family turn up in all my interviews. They
seemed to have helped everywhere.

R.

Well of course, you know this is a man of great wealth
and he set up this foundation I'm sure for many many reasons,
intellectual, emotional and I think also financial.
Marshall Field was hardly a person to be an activist of any
kind nor was he about to subvert the system that had given him
so much. But he did have an intellectual interest and an
intellectual curiosity and he was very fond of Saul. He got
to know him quite well and the foundation provided the money
in order for the Industrial Areas Foundation to get started.

At any rate this was Sheil's first open clear cut,
identification with the labor movement. Of course later on
over the years the packing house workers, many of them, saw him
as a patron saint, not that we thought he was really a saint.
But Sheil, over the years, worked with steel workers, auto
workers, many many unions. Of course his denunciation of
McCarthy still stands out as an act of great courage. Well, I
guess I'm interested in the politics of the Catholic Church
just as in the union. I found myself time and time again
caught between competing factions, in the union, that is.
Many of them had a common end but none of them had any common
understanding on, how to get there or willingness to accept a
compromise on people and individuals, who would be in the
leadership and all of that kind of stuff. But they did want
an organization to be run by packinghouse workers. They
wanted no glass workers, miners or clothing workers and this
is what they had ever since they were set up in 1937. This
meeting that I referred to with Lewis that sheil spoke at was
in 1937. After that the issue to charter the establishment
of PWOC became important. Now it was that charter that was
under attack,. They wanted that charter replaced with an
international charter and they wanted to elect their own
officers.

At the same time when I first got there the major
problem probably that was within my scope and that I came to
take over completely was the War Labor-Board case that had
been started in early 1942. The hearings had been held and a
panel had made a recommendation that a wage increase of five and a half cents an hour be allotted on the basis that this was the increase that the Little Steel Formula gave the steelworkers and that there had been a relationship. They were very careful it seemed to me at least and did a very scholarly job at tracing the historical relationships between wage rate's in meat packing and in steel. Going back over a period of many years the relationship indicated not that the rates were always the same, generally steel was a little, higher, but that the increases were pretty much, the same. Of course the labor market economists out at the University of Chicago would have argued that how could it have been different because both steel and packing were competing for labor in the same area of the market and therefore it was natural that the increases would be the same.

Now that had gone through the various stages of War Labor Board procedures. The case had originally been presented to a panel by the CIO counselors and research people, which was by the way a service that was available to the committees through the CIO. When I arrived in October or November we were waiting for a decision and we were having great difficulty getting a decision out of the Board. I learned very quickly to my distress that the big argument that was going on in the Board was that the five and a half cents in our case would have brought the increases the packinghouse workers were receiving within whatever the time period was that the War Labor Board had fixed as the base period, that the increases that had been given, during that period plus five and a half cents would bring us above the level of increases permitted under the Little Steel Formula. Of course, the timing was pure coincidence, a matter of sheer chance. Different timing, a few months in the opposite direction, and we might have escaped it. But that was the reality and that was the fight that was going on in the Board. There were those on the Board who were insisting you couldn't pay any attention to any historically determined relationships and others said you should. Finally the case was set for argument in Washington, oral argument before the Board.

I went down and appeared before the Board. This was my first exposure to all the packing companies. Some of their attorneys I had met in the cases around the country before, one way or another, but this was the first time I had seen their operating people and certainly it was the first time I had seen them operate, the hierarchy of the corporate structure. And they were all there -- Armour, Swift, Cudahy, Wilson, Hy-Grade, the whole works, all the major packers.

If I can just go back a bit, one of the first things I
I. How early?

R. This was way back prior to the turn of the century. They had some form of a moving line going and the process was very primitive in terms of a present mechanized plant. But the overhead rails, for example, it's true men had to push them. They didn't have motors to drive them but the pulley that got them there and the way you moved the cattle or hogs along on there, it was the assembly line principle. This occurred early, I think, prior to the turn of the century.

And it was ingenious in many other ways, chiefly in terms of by products. This comment, I don't remember who it's attributed to, I think Upton Sinclair used it, "The factories used everything but the squeal in the hog and they were trying to figure out how they could work that into an automobile siren." I think this may well be in the preface of some of the early editions of The Jungle. Later he said he had written a book designed to appeal to the conscience of America and it ended up by appealing only to the stomach because as you know the Pure Food and Drug Act was the political end of The Jungle. That's what it accomplished I suppose. But Sinclair was really partly right and at that time I think he was really committed to socialism and saw that as the solution. In any event all this literature I just filled myself with and I'll never forget the absolute shock, the incredible reaction that it had on what was essentially a small it own young guy out of the mid West.

I'll never forget either the impact that those financial statements made when I looked at them for the first time. I had thought that when you dealt with Minneapolis
Honeywell or with Jay Hormell 25, 50, 75 up to a 100 million dollars of business, that seemed to me to be an awful lot. But when I decided these people were pushing a billion, or in the case of Swift I think they were well over two billion, it shocked me. Really it just didn't seem conceivable to me that corporate power could function in a way that it could amass that kind of resources into a centralized point under a common control and direction with everything that entails. They talk about making a cent per dollar of sales. Well of course it's a ridiculous figure. It's a meaningless figure and it's one that all these companies use today. And they do it for a purpose. It is designed many factories had been doing it for years, the rest of the packing industry took it up during World War II. Its purpose, of course, is to direct people's attention from how much money they do make and it then becomes a way of these companies financing their own expansion on without the need to bank on credit. It's not just this slogan but the thinking behind it. The power that it will generate accounts in a very real way for tremendous corporate power and the fact that banks and professionals and other who used to play real power roles in the life, of industry now only play secondary positions to the Corporation. There's an accumulation of power that has no public responsibility even though these private decision makers will make decisions that have very broad public impact.

Well this was my first exposure to some of the ideas that led me into what I've just been saying and a lot of other things? I realized very quickly that the technological developments in the industry and the advances it made were very natural developments and probably could be seen in any under developed society striving towards industrialization. That is you meet those needs that first have to be met in the society. So the meat industry became a natural for being organized in a different way. I think this is still true. Seasonal demand to most was a shelter and that business is one hat operates most inefficiently. That's really the result if the way the contractors do their business. It's not sound) it's not sane, it's corrupt as hell.

Many people have just gone along with it and as a latter of fact are used by the contractors to further their interests. They sometimes know it and other times they don't. But even when they know it they're willing to be used in that form. The fact is that when we used to have jurisdictional disputes between two building trades unions In a particular job, nine times out of ten it was because the contractor called, one of the unions in and said, "It looks like they're going to lose their bid to this other character. If you let them get away with it, I'm going to have to lay
people off." So they'd start picketing, the job if the other contractor got it. This was par for the course. This was general, normal operating procedure.

Well at any rate in meat, packing I realized first that this was one of the reasons for thorough mechanization and that there, were people with great ingenuity, which is accounted for not just by mechanization but by their use of the by products, that they could use it so completely. I was just amazed, for instance, to learn that blood was sold to plywood companies and went into the plywood to strengthen the stuff and would finally end up in PT boats that were used during the second world war. And the medical drug ACTH came originally as a use of the pituitary glands. They brought great skill—it really was an industry of amazing capacity. I found some days later when we were able to get the OPA Figures the figures indicated that out of a thousand, pound steer there was a hundred and some pounds lost in water, shrinkage and waste material. The rest of it was completely used for one thing or another. The meat was something like six or seven hundred pounds and the balance was by products of one kind or another. Many of these by products were very, very, very profitable. Hides for many years were very profitable until other substitutes came in. Casings they used for sausage and hotdogs, natural casings. Well, pretty soon plastic casings came in but the market stayed up because they shipped so much of it to England and Europe where they preferred the natural casings.

These things all came as a great surprise but the greatest surprise of all, of course, was the power that was implicit in this. The far flung operations all over the country— it was perfectly clear where the decisions would generate from— a central source—. But they would always try to give the great impression that it was all decentralized, that each plant was operating on its own. Well, this was all stuff that I had to comprehend at some point. I'm not sure if I got it all right away but the shock of the size had a tremendous impact on me, an impact of a character that did broaden my whole political spectrum very quickly so I didn't have to spend a lot of time beginning to understand what power.

A couple of years after this I got a lesson in that.

At any rate the War Labor Board issued its decision in February and it denied us the five and a half cents. They used our case to say to other unions that that steel formula was it— that's all we got. We picked up a lot of fringe benefits and new membership and check-off which served to stabilize the institution of the union but the wage increase was denied. People were just perfectly furious in the plants. This was 1941 and obviously the cost of living had
gone up but we were committed to the no strike policies of the labor movement and it was a rough go keeping those plants operating for a good long time. I suddenly found myself in the middle of all these questions and now, because I was more familiar with the case on what you could do and what could be said to the people and because I found myself in a position that I could be much more persuasive with them, more and more of this stuff was passed off on me.

After the decision it was decided to call a national conference to explain this decision. I think the first one was held on February 19, 1943 and we explained the decision and made a recommendation as to what to do. For example one of the things that was done was to direct the company to eliminate inequities. Well there were enough inequities to drive you up a wall. The only question was how do you get at them. The company would simply say no, so we'd have to start a case through the Labor Board again. You never got anywhere. As a matter of fact there was damage the war Labor Board did through delay. I say damage and I guess it depends from where you were sitting. From our point of view it was delay but I'm sure it served very important functions from their point of view. At any rate during the course of that meeting, because of all the fears that the guys were going to strike or walk out, we got Murray, who was then President of the CIO, to get Allen Haywood to come into Chicago. Allen was director of our organization and a vice president of the CIO. He came in to speak to the convention and in the process committees started meeting with him and they forced out of him an agreement. I say forced and I shouldn't say that. My recollection of the time is that everybody around thought that it had been forced out of them. At any rate a commitment was obtained that there would be a convention in the fall of that year at which time the international union would be established. A constitution would be prepared, we'd elect our own officers and we would be on our way.

A committee was appointed and a constitution was worked on beginning immediately. I worked very closely with that committee. It was perfectly natural that the lawyer would, but I had begun finding myself in another kind of role and I was to begin to cement, to mediate, to operate politically even though it was none of my damn business. I shouldn't say it was' not part of my job but I became so much involved in this. Whether it was part of my job or not it was clearly part of my temperament that I got very much involved in the internal politics of the union. I began to work in the direction of bringing together the disparate elements from one end of the country to the other, making them sit down and talk to each other and insisting that they had to work, out meaningful compromises because others now were waiting for
the establishment of an international union. If that's what they wanted why this was the way it had to be done. And I got such disparate people, in those days at least. There was a guy like Tony Stephens out in Iowa, a guy like Herb March who was a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party, I'm not sure if it was true at that time but at some point it was. He was certainly a spokesman for the left. I got them to sit down and they finally agreed that they had to work out these problems. I got people from St. Paul. I became the center of this and began operating on all these questions about the Labor Board in such away that people like the union officials soon got in the habit of calling and talking directly to me instead of calling one of the operating people whom they should have called. Given my temperament I didn't do what! I should have done and that is referred them to them. Well I talked to the in about it. It was clear that all they'd do was refer them back to me and I discussed this with Clark and the others. They said take the calls and give them the answers. They were perfectly happy not to be bothered. What it did, obviously, and this was not conscious on my part,. I am most reluctant to say that there weren't some unconscious elements operating within me at the time but it clearly was not conscious.) , it did result in my establishing a much closer relationship with the average worker than I would have done otherwise.

Well we sweated through that Labor Board decision somehow and avoided a strike. Then we began working on the process of how we would get these inequities straightened out and how we'd get the other advantages that the Board had ordered. As I remember they ordered premium pay and a number of items. It should not be said that the case didn't provide us with many benefits, it did do that. But the crucial issue at that time was money. The going rate in meat packing at the time in Chicago was seventy-two and a half cents. The river towns like St. Paul, St. Louis, Kansas City, Fort Worth and St. Jo, they were known as the river towns. There the minimum rate was seventy cents an hour and in the far South it was actually less. But we broke down completely on two problems. One was how do we get anything done on our inequities. Part, of the difficulty was that we failed to establish a procedure. I tried to get them to do that.

Our problem there, which I had no way of knowing but it didn,'t take very long to find out, was that the Regional Director was Robert Burns who had been running what is known. as the Industrial Relations section at the University of Chicago,for many many years now. It's really an arm of the corporations that make substantial contributions to the university . They do studies for them, they work out questionaires, they work out personnel interviews. Really
for all practical purposes the institute functions as an arm of corporations. There was no doubt that Burns's sympathies ended up there. He had no previous experience in the field. He had no real skill, at least that he was willing to use in this direction. There is no doubt about his skills as far as his relationship with the company was concerned. But we simply could not get any action out of him. We started working with some of the staff people here and did get occasional things straightened out.

Our other major problem was that we did not have arbitration as the final step in the grievance procedure. We had to take all grievances to the Board for final resolution and these companies just really made life impossible. We could not get anything settled. We'd stand on our head. We got to the point where we said to the Board finally we'd quit counting the grievances, we were now weighing them. We just can't keep track of this stuff. It So happened that the Board had so long delayed in issuing the order that finally came down in February, that in April of the same year, 1943, just about a month or so, later when we were right in the midst of all this stuff, another hearing had started before the Board and we had a panel established to hear the case and proceed to introduce our new case. But what kind of a case do you make out? They just finished telling you you're not entitled to a general wage increase because of the limitations of the Little Steel Formula. Well the Board had announced a policy that in rare and unusual cases they would break the Little Steel Formula. By rare and unusual they probably meant like special manpower problems but we started to argue that what they meant was a case in which equity is required to be a consideration, that made the case really rare and unusual.

I. That was the union which gave that interpretation to it?
R. Well the government did not give that interpretation and never accepted it, they rejected it. We never won that issue but that was the basis on which our case was submitted. We took the rare and unusual exception that the Board had laid down and we tried to adapt it to our case.

I. You never won any cases under that though?
R. We never won it but we sure made their life miserable with that case.

I. Some unions did win cases like that.
R. Well a few unions. Copper mining, I remember, won a case because that was tied in with manpower questions. They
just simply couldn't get anybody to work. The timber industry is another one where they have trouble getting guys to work up in those wilds. There were certain cases won on that issue where the Board handed down decisions saying, yes this it's a rare and unusual case and therefore an increase will be allowed over and above that permitted by the Little Steel Formula. But they never said it in connection with any case based on what the inequities were. Or as I put it, it was a question of the ethics of the democratic system operating under wartime conditions. You can't treat people this way.

But in that hearing and before the panel were also issues of arbitration and the question of what we did about resolving these differences, the whole question of inequities and that sort of thing. Now I'd already begun to have enough experience with the Board so I had a notion of the kinds of things we had to get out of it. During the course of those hearings tensions between the parties became so great that there were times when the chairman would recess and ask us to go into a separate room, go out and have a drink. At one point the company offered to buy everybody a drink and sent down for a drink. We were, meeting in the Morrison Hotel while the hearings were going on and I refused to touch anything that they provided. And of course all the people with me wouldn't touch it. The chairman came over, Handler was his name. He was a patent expert, taught at Columbia. He is now a member of a very large Wall Street firm, has been for years even while he taught at Columbia. I think he was generally regarded as one of the leading authorities in patent and copyright law. William H. Davis, of course, was a man who was really most crucial in organizing, successful functions and a man of great capacity as a mediator in labor disputes. Interestingly enough he was also a famous patent lawyer. But Handler used to come plead, "Please can't you be decent."

Swift, we realized eventually, would be our major problem but at least operated with a silk glove. The fist was there but you didn't see it as sharply. But Armour, with no pretense, they were just nasty. Their objection to arbitration as their lawyer so graphically put it was that, "We're not going to agree that you, can name some third party to come in and tell us whether we have to paint our smoke stack green if we want to paint it red."

This kind of infuriating, aggravating, irrational sort of behavior that they'd gotten away with for decades. They treated union's with complete contempt and they saw no reason why there shouldn't be a repetition of it. Those hearings went on for weeks and tensions mounted. They, at some point, began to, feel the pressures in the room and backed off. One of their executive vice presidents in charge of production came up to me and wanted to start talking. I said, "I don't believe you.
Don’t talk, settle some of those grievances and then come and talk to me. You may be a very nice guy but at this point I’m more interested in what you do than in what you say."

Their main spokes man was the Vice President in charge, of, Industrial Relations, a guy by the name of Frank Green, who after a period of years I developed a strange kind of affection for but I sure didn't have it at that time. They were attacking, at one point, the fact that we were an irresponsible union. Here we had been tearing our hair out to avoid strikes. Of course we had stoppages occasionally. They'd be impossible to avoid, you know the tension, but we got them settled right away. We thought we'd done a remarkable job.

One of the proofs of how irresponsible we were was they introduced a series of leaflets into the record that were put out in St. Jo, Missouri by our local union. The local had a cartoonist, I learned to know him after this. I'm sure he had great talent. If he had any kind of a chance he could have been beautifully developed but he didn't and he ended by being fired six or seven times for drunkenness. I'd get him back every time until he ran off on a bender and never came back. I just lost track of him. But what he had done was take the face of the superintendent of the plant and proceeded to put it on a series of different kinds of animals. Oh these were rats, snakes, dogs, every nasty kind of animal his imagination could conjure. So Green puts this in and works himself up to a regular pitch. And he says, "And what's more is you can't mistake the likeness." Well that really broke the place up. It was the first time we laughed, everybody just howled. I guess it was true because this worker was talented.

Well these hearings went on and on and on. That case which started in April, 1943 finally got a panel's recommendation. I don't remember if we even got it in the year '43 or early '44. And then we got the final decision of the Board, if I remember correctly, in February of 1945 and we finally settled it as a result of negotiations and everything in June of 1945. Now that settlement contained many of the basic provisions that are today in our contract and paved the way for many other unions. The auto workers, for instance, Reuther used to call me every time he was ready to go into negotiations to check on whether we had a particular provision that he was raising and we always did have. And I mentioned a few others. It took them an awful long time before they caught up with us. But at any rate I want to come back the next time, perhaps, to the political situation in our union during this period that I was still general counsel. It was, during this period that the union became an union in a functional sense.
There's one interesting anecdote that is tied in with it the final settlement of a case that was finally settled in June, of 1945 that I might tell here. It involves the same Frank Green. At the time we finally resolved it (and I prefer leaving the details to a later interview, too) one of the elements of the resolution was that they had written in a release of any other claims we might have. I looked at it and read it and was bothered by it. It touched off a nerve somewhere and I said, "What's this for?" They said, "Well you had a hundred or whatever it was demands. You're only getting x number settled and it just means that for this time, for this contract at least, those questions are all disposed of and settled. Well that was not unreasonable. As a matter of fact it was customary and so we went ahead and we signed the document and that was the end of it.

A couple of months later I get a call from Indianapolis saying that a certain grievance involving some truck drivers we had had pending and I thought we had worked out had not been settled. Those people had not gotten their money. So I called Frank Green and I said, "I got this call from Indianapolis and I don't understand it because we had agreed on this." And he said, "Oh yes I know but that was before we signed the agreement in June." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well you know that agreement in June. We agreed to drop all pending cases and that obviously included all grievances." I said, "But you know that's a lie, we never discussed that." And he said, "Well, you'll learn young man, in this game you'll learn. You have to pitch curves occasionally and you just got struck out on a curve. That's tough but that's the way it is." So I said, "You mean I have to call Indianapolis back and tell them that?" And he said yes. I said, "Look, let me tell you something, Green. I'm young, you're right, and I have to learn and apparently I'm going to have to learn the hard way with you. That's all right if it's got to be that way. Let me tell you something. I'm learning and I understand that knowledge is power and you will never finish paying for this. This is going to be the most expensive curve you ever threw," and I hung up the phone. I called Indianapolis and I told them what the situation was and I wasn't sure what if anything we could do but to just calm these guys down and sit tight because sooner or later something would come up and I would never forget this particular thing.

A few months later I got a call from Swift. Part of our settlement called for retroactive payment on inequities. We had a commission set up to deal with inequities this time of which Clark Kerr, who later became President of the University of California, was chairman. In his younger days he was head of the Industrial Relations Institute at
Berkeley. Clark Kerr and that Meat Commission were operating under the direction of the War Labor Board to use the equivalent of two cents per hour per employee which could bespread. It didn't mean everybody got two cents. It could be spread in different amounts but it was clear that there would be this kind of a cost and it was to be retroactive to February or August. I forgot the retroactive date of 1943 but this was a substantial sum of money. Swift had called me and said that their tax people had decided that it would be to their advantage if they could set aside a certain amount of that retroactive payment that year, that is 1945, rather than do it all when the job was complete. It was clear that it was going to take some months to complete the job. Well I saw no objection to our cooperating so they prepared a stipulation and sent it over to us and we signed it.

Well when I got the call I said to myself, well now when Mr. Green calls I think I will get Indianapolis settled. And sure enough on a Saturday morning the telephone rang and it was Frank Green. He starts out with, "Ralph, you know we're in the middle of this and our tax people want us to get this thing signed so if I send that stipulation down will you have it signed for me and send it back." No, he called me several days earlier and I said, "I want to see it, mail me one first." So he mailed me one and when I got it I called him back and I said I didn't like certain parts of it so he changed the parts I didn't like and sent me another copy. Now I didn't respond so on Saturday morning he calls me and he says, "You know, I've got to get this done today. Time's running out." I said, "Yeah, I know Frank, isn't that too bad." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Frank, does the word Indianapolis evoke any memory? Now before you say anything you just try to control yourself. I understand that there is absolutely no relationship between what you're asking me to do now and Indianapolis. These two things have absolutely nothing to do with each other. I understand that my even raising the question in this form makes me out into a first class bastard so you can save yourself the trouble of calling me names. Now all these things I understand, Frank, but having understood them I am now telling you don't ask me to get anything signed for you until you are prepared to do a number of things that I have in front of me that you should have done a long time ago. Now the only thing I can tell you finally is that, I have been brought up in the tradition of American baseball. I don't know where you learned your baseball. In American baseball each side has a pitcher and both of those pitchers can presumably throw curves." And I hung up the phone.

The phone rings right away and he calls back and says, "I'm coming right down there." I said, "You can come if you
want to, you may be, wasting your time." "I'll be right down."
So I sat down and I drafted a series of stipulations, one on
Indianapolis paying it off and making sure that they would
never use this claim again about everything being settled,
spelling out in detail what that limitation on that
settlement amounted to. I don't know, I had three or four
other items that involved some money that they owed our people
that they should have paid and I wanted to get out of them. I
had a separate stipulation for each one.

At this point in time a guy by the name of Lewis J.
Clark was president of the union. It was now the
International of United Packinghouse Workers. Frank Green
walks into the office with a couple of his people, just
steaming. I said, "You're mad. You know this isn't
healthy. This is no way to transact business, Frank. I'm
not even going to talk to you but I'll tell you something.
Sit down in that chair. Here are the stipulations I drafted.
I know that you're concerned involving the stipulation you
sent me which represents literally hundreds of thousands of
dollars if not over a million in savings to Armour and Co.
Now you just make up your mind whether you want to sign these
stipulations that I've prepared and after they're signed I'll
get this other one signed for you."

He grabbed the paper out of my hand and signed the
stipulations, all of them. "Now get that other one signed."
I put it in a folder very carefully and I put it in an envelope.
I hand it to him and I say, "You may want to check to see if it's
been signed." He said, "Is it signed?" I said, "Yes," and
then he said, "Then I won't have to check." I said, "Okay, I
hope we learned to understand each other better, Frank. You
know I haven't been around too long yet but with teachers like
you it doesn't take too long to learn. I'm sorry to have
given you such an unpleasant moment. Goodbye." And he
left.

Well I suppose, as I think about that in retrospect,
it was good to have learned my lesson as early as I did learn it
because I sure behaved much more carefully in the future. I
just didn't think people did things like that. Back in
Minneapolis people didn't do things like that, they didn't
take advantage of you. Even if it was clear that they could
do it and get away with it they wouldn't have done it.
I think in the last session we reviewed some of the earliest experiences I had after coming to Chicago and working with the PWOC and subsequently UPWA in connection with its Labor Board cases. This took, as I recall it, a matter of a couple of years and roughly from the end of 1942 through to the middle of 1945. Concurrently and during this same period there were very substantial internal changes taking place. As I had indicated in the earlier sections there were great pressures within the union for the establishment of an international union, which in 1943 the CIO began to respond to. We had a Wage and Policy Conference early in '43 during which Allen Haywood, who was at that time the man Philip Murray had appointed as chairman of the committee which the CIO had set up as the Packing house Workers Organizing Committee, although the director was a man called Sam Sponseller. But Haywood during the course of that conference, in response to a great deal of pressure he got from the delegates -- this, by the way, was the first full delegated national meeting that PWOC had had after its establishment by John L. Lewis. Haywood had responded by pretty much committing himself to the recognition of the sentiment that existed to the establishment of an international union during that year.

A constitution committee was established which I was a member of. The names of the others can easily be obtained if they are important. And we set about the task of drafting a constitution looking toward an international convention in the fall of 1943. It was, of course, as I think I've already indicated, during this point that we were all so very much involved with the War Labor Board in connection with our pending cases. The real motivating factor in calling that conference was the decision of the Board, turning down that five and a half cents an hour wage increase that the panel had recommended and that our people had been looking forward to. Actually the Board used our case as a guinea pig. They used it really to reaffirm the fact that there were going to be no wage increases outside of that Little Steel Formula. But other benefits did flow and I think I referred to some of them.

At any event there was a great deal of political activity going on and I found myself almost willy nilly, first because I suppose of my own temperament, secondly because of the position that I occupied which was a professional position and I would have been in an organizing position and therefore gave me access to all the groups within the union. I found
myself in a sort of mediating position where I could bring together these various forces that were in existence: for a long period of time but had never been able to work together long enough to accomplish their purpose.

I. Could you identify these groups?

R. Well there were all kinds of groups there. There was a group out of Iowa which wanted an international union very badly but it had always had a very strong anticommmunist orientation and it looked at the group in Chicago, which also wanted an international union very strongly, as essentially communist dominated. There was a group out in Nebraska, Omaha being at that time one of the larger centers, next to Chicago probably the largest packing center, who had ties with people in Kansas and Texas and all around that part who wanted an international union very strongly but were concerned about who the officers were going to be, what kind of officers were they going to get. They were very strongly committed to the notion that what they absolutely had to have was a packing house worker as president. There was a group in New York which wanted an international union very strongly but had allegedly left wing leanings also so they seemed to be more closely tied in with the Chicago group and at odds with these other groups. There was a group in St. Paul that was a hybrid in many ways. It was said to be under certain Trotskyite influences which may or may not have been true. Minneapolis, of course, that twin city region had a strong Trotskyite influence growing out of the Teamsters Union in Minneapolis. The Dunn Brothers in the union gave rise to Farrell Dobbs who I guess to this day is the Secretary of the SWP. And then of course, there was the Austin group which was a very big local union which had been engaged in the first sit down strike in the United States, very much under the influence of a guy who was an old time Wobbly, a guy by the name of Sam Keller. He used to continue to preach it. He wasn't practicing it very much. He maybe had a dozen followers but he was continuing to preach his Wobbly philosophy. He was one of the people Jay Hormel always used to remind me of who had him under the arm and threw him out of the plant when they took it over in 1933. And then there were some people whose complete loyalties were toward the CIO. By the way I've separated these in a geographical way, this is not entirely accurate.

I. Each area had splits in it?

R. There were different kinds in each of these areas, I used it only as a way of identifying what seemed to be the prevailing pattern in a particular area but they would criss-cross with all the various kinds. The last group I was
mentioning were those whose loyalties were primarily with the CIO. They really didn't care very much. They wanted an international union but they were perfectly content to wait until Phil Murray said, "You're full blown now, you can spring from Juno's head."

In any event I found myself kind of mediating between these groups and saying you all may be right, that's completely unimportant. If your main purpose is to get an international union what you've got to do is find some way of compromising these other areas of difference. See what you can solidify and just compromise to the point where you accept those things you can agree on and you set the others off for agreement at some future date. Well, I say this only in passing. This was one of the things I was doing in connection with it. I think it was a matter of some importance. I am not prepared to say it was really crucial because I think the crucial thing, which was the drive for an international union, was extremely strong. But I did manage to bring together in a rather close working relationship the groups out of Iowa particularly and possibly the Nebraska and the Chicago groups which were two unlikely groups. But they were led by two strong young men, extremely confident, who had some comprehension of where they wanted to go. One of them was a man by the name of Tony Stephens, and Herb March out of Chicago who at some point there's no question about his political affiliation because he was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party for a while. But he was a very effective man, unquestionably the leader of the Chicago group. And it wasn't because they were communist, it was just because he had been shot at and wounded by thugs that it was said Armour hired and my hunch is it was probably true. He had stood up under extreme pressures and he was really quite a remarkable mass leader, a most intriguing guy.

I might just tell you one story off on the side that might throw some light as to the quality of this guy. We were in Montreal in 1946 and we were sitting in a restaurant and this young waitress comes up to us and in very difficult English she took our order until she got to March who ordered in French and in beautiful French. I started asking him where did this come from. He said, "Well I sort of got interested in French so I've been reading it." Two years later after the international union had been set up and I had become president we had some business in Milwaukee and he was then district director so he was there with me, it was in his district. That evening we were sitting around at dinner and I raised this question with him because I was terribly intrigued. He said, "I don't know what happened but at some point in my teens I got interested in French romantic literature. Of course I never say anything about it because no one would really think
that I could possibly be." He was almost embarrassed confessing to the fact that he was interested in French romantic literature.

Another example of the amazing quality of this guy at age fifty he left the Sheet Metal Workers Union because he was thrown out on account of the fact that he had been a communist many years before. He had long since left the Communist Party because he had got fed up after that Kruschev speech and he went to law school in California, graduated from law school. I'm told he got the highest score of anyone who took the bar exam in California. And California has a reputation for very difficult bar exams because they want to keep down the number of lawyers they admit. He had difficulty getting admitted to the bar because they dug up the old communist stuff and they had to sue. I sent in an affidavit in his support and, by golly, this Supreme Court of the State of California reversed the Bar Association and ordered his admittance to the bar in the State of California in his mid 50s or something.

By the way he had a son who was an honor student working in Enrico Fermi's class at the University of Chicago, a nuclear physicist, who is now teaching at the University of Wisconsin as a full professor. Another son, the middle son, did his dissertation in Yugoslavia, taping the dialect of every tribe he could come across. I don't know what the other son is doing but he's probably doing something in another very esoteric area. He was quite a remarkable guy, Herb March! In spite of these things he had a remarkable capacity as a mass leader. First because he had a lot of courage, a great deal of guts.

I. I guess those years really required that.

R. Yes and he was ready to stand up in the front and get shot at if that's what it mean but on top of that he was a fine orator in mass meetings. I make this distinction. I used to think I could do better with a small group than he could but I would never have undertaken it. He'd get out in front of three, four, five thousand of these guys out on CIO corner and start making these speeches that really pulled them out of their shoes. He had them roaring and yelling till you weren't sure if they were going to pull the plants down or not. At any rate over a period of time I began to bring in some of the St. Paul people and the Austin people that I knew.

I. Excuse me, could you tell me a little about the other man, Stephens?

R. Oh Stephens, yes I could. Well Tony was a very
interesting guy. I would suppose that for many years in the union I was closer to him than to anyone else. I felt almost as either a younger brother or son. Tony, I think he was Lebanese, he had been involved in one of the early strikes in 1937 or '38 against Swift and it went on for over a hundred days. Swift finally was forced to settle and it's one of the few strikes Swift ever did settle in those early days. During that strike Tony became the leader of it. He was untrained in the sense that he had been working in the packinghouse all of his life. He hadn't been exposed to the outside world. He was undisciplined because he had never lived the kind of life in which you either were taught how to use your mind in a disciplined way to think with it and he had never had the disposition. This distinguished him from March, for instance, who I don't know if he did more than go through high school. I'm almost sure he didn't go through college until he went to law school. But as distinguished from March, who had spent a good deal of his years in reading Marx, Lenin, all the radical literature he could get his hands on plus French romantic literature. We must not forget that by the way it has a lot of stuff that made very good reading for a lot of people. But Stephens had not had to practice that kind of discipline and so he had a real native shrewdness and a sense of what was right but he hadn't learned yet how to take a problem and to start taking it apart and to analyze it. I used to spend hours with him and he used to just eat it up. We had the long bull sessions, all night long on occasion, and he was just thirsting for -- I got books for him to read on labor history and not just labor history but things like I got him some radical stuff and I got him Pareti on fascism. I don't think he ever managed to get through that but I got him some of Mussolini's stuff and the humanists, something on utopian society and utopian literature, Fourier and Laski. He would read it and sit and talk about it for long hours at a time, talk about power and what it meant and how it worked, what Acton really meant when he said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

At any rate you could just see him growing during this period so that really in terms of creating a situation where he understood the importance of working with other groups, not just a small group but enough other groups so that you could have votes necessary to accomplish a given end, he began to comprehend this intellectually and this made it possible to work with his membership where he had strong and close ties, with the men he was most effective. And of course he had the additional advantage of being thought of as a non-communist, whereas March carried that stigma around as a special kind of handicap. Although that was still pretty early in the game there, it wasn't as destructive as it later became.
Well, then there were some people from St. Paul who were able to get drawn into this and of course March had contacts with the people in New York. As we approached October there began to meet more regularly representatives of these various groups and they finally worked out as late which made it appear a certainty that they would win. Now they had picked to be president, Louis Clark. He was out of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They picked him really because they realized, I think, that anyone else might have led to too much friction. Clark was essentially a nonentity, no quality or ability, but he had been around in the early days in organizing in Cedar Rapids. As a matter of fact he was one of those who originally was involved in Cedar Rapids Meatcutters Amalgamated and led an early strike and then he had helped organize the union in Cedar Rapids and eventually had been brought into Chicago and was working for PWOC as secretary-treasurer. Now Sponseller, the man who was the CIO designee for the chairmanship, was extremely anxious to get this job. I was going to say hungry but I'm not sure that tells enough because if it was hunger it was starvation hunger. He really wanted it very very badly. And the CIO would have liked to see him get it because they would have felt they would have exercised more control over us, plus the fact that they realized that even though they didn't have any great feeling about Clark one way or another, they felt he would be subject to the controls of these people who were supporting him. So the tensions were really between the question of Sponseller and Clark.

I think there was agreement at that time on Meyer Stern, who was the CIO appointed director from New York. Now Stern was generally regarded as a left winger so that was their son. Then the union felt from the very beginning that it had to have a Black in one of its major offices and so it picked for one of the vice presidents a man by the name of Philip Weightman who was black, from Chicago, clearly a non-communist. There wasn't even an odor of it around him but he worked with March. They had worked in organizing a Swift plant in Chicago. There was peace and harmony in that area. And the fourth man was Frank Ellis, he's the old time Wobbly from Austin.

Well as we got closer and closer to the convention the tensions got to be just awful. I finally had gotten to the point where I had concluded that if Sponseller were elected I just wouldn't stay on. I'd leave and go into a regular practice of law or something but I wouldn't stay on for many reasons. There's no point in making any historical recording out of it. This was a guy not without abilities and not without certain kinds of decency but also a very difficult guy to work with and especially if he did any drinking. You
could just never be sure what you were going to run into. It was very hard to work with him. Well he finally decided at some point just a couple weeks before the convention that I was lined up with the other side and we had a big blow-up. The truth of it was at that point if I was lined up with any side it was the side that was getting a convention and getting an international because these people wanted it and felt that I ought to help them get it. In the process there is no doubt that I was working much closer with that group because they were the group that were pushing the most. Sponseller was perfectly content to have the organizing committee continue because as long as it continued he remained in power there so he wasn't breaking any bones to get this accomplished.

Well the convention was finally held in October and Haywood and R.J. Thomas, who was then President of the Auto Workers Union, and one other person, I don't recall who, from the CIO came in and proceeded to really pour heat on the delegates. That was my first experience with real arm twisting on a very high scale. Now when I read about some of the things people claim Daley does I have a much better understanding of the way this thing operates. At any rate they really put a lot of pressure on and what they did was finally force into the forefront a crucial issue, one that hadn't been an issue at all up to that point and that was this communist plot. That's one of the reasons I gave as much of that as a background. Really no one had made any special point out of it.

I. So it came out early.

R. They began to make a big thing out of it and they oriented it almost completely around Stern, the guy from New York.

I. Oh, they didn't bother March?

R. Well March wasn't going to be a national officer. He was going to be elected director and under the constitution the directors were elected by the people in his district and there was really very little they could do about that. Just like there was nothing they could do about Stephens or the guy in St. Paul. They couldn't influence that but the national they could. Well this went on for a day or so or more. R.J. Thomas, as I remember it, said, "I used to think the Auto Workers had very tough politics, but boy, I'm really getting a lesson in the politics of you guys. It's really out of this world."

A compromise was finally worked out so that clark was named president, Ellis and Weightman were named vice
presidents. Stern stepped aside and a guy by the name of Ed Roche, no one really knew about him. He was out of a local in East St. Louis, a man I would say at that time very close to sixty if not in his sixties. He had no qualifications for the job. Maybe that's why he was picked because he was so neutral that no one could get excited about it one way or the other. At any rate Ed Roche was picked and Stern stepped aside and Stern was elected director of the New York area.

Stern stepped aside and he became director of that whole eastern region. So the first national officers of the union were Clark as president, Ellis and Weightman as vice presidents and Roche as secretary-treasurer. Then there were various directors around the country, ten districts including Canada. Of course I was named general counsel and Clark found himself increasingly dependent on me. As a matter of fact he found that it was even more difficult to function than I think anybody thought he would because he hadn't done too badly when he was occupying the job of secretary-treasurer. But he had a very narrow view of that job. He thought that when he took that job essentially he had to be purely an administrator in terms of accounts and that sort of thing and office procedures. When it came to policy questions or any thing like that he was completely lost but the union went on from that point on.

They continued their Labor Board case. We had in 1944 a convention. I forget if it was '44 or '45, I think it was 1944 we had a convention in Omaha. That convention takes on certain importance in connection with another phase of the union's history and that is its commitment from a very early stage to the civil rights questions and in at least some respects I played a reasonably important role in that. The convention was scheduled to be held in the Fontanelle Hotel in Omaha and all the arrangements had been made. It was the first convention that was going to be held by this union as an international union with outside influence. The delegates were coming in from all over the country so everybody wanted to make sure it went off right and relatively easy and that kind of thing.

We got to the Fontanelle Hotel and they wouldn't allow Weightman to register. No one had made an issue out of it. They wouldn't serve him in the dining room so we got him into another hotel where he could eat when he was there at the meetings. I guess that was also the first time I was ever exposed to the problem in that particular kind of a role, by which I mean that I felt I was being deprived. It wasn't just what they were doing to Weightman, which was bad enough for a black stranger, but they were doing it to me because I would want to eat lunch with him. We had meetings scheduled there.
It was actually insane. So I insisted that we go to the manager of the hotel and point out several things. First that he had promised us to get us the facilities that our contract called for, giving the facilities for the convention and for board meetings in advance to the convention and to house our delegates, many of whom had confirmed reservations and a number of whom, in addition to Weightman, were black and he couldn't expect them to be staying there and not serve them. We raved and ranted and carried on. He couldn't do anything so I went then with Clark to the board meeting to report on just what happened and Clark said we'll just have to find something, we can't help it.

I said, "Well, one thing we can do is arrange to have lunches together and have them served in the parlor so that there isn't any problem about eating but I don't that that's enough. I think you have to move this convention." And he said it's impossible. I said, "I just don't believe it's impossible and even if it is impossible and it means pitching a tent and holding it outside I don't think you can permit this character to get away with this." Well everybody on the board was beginning to look at me as if I was a little crazy. I suppose the one most sympathetic to my position was March but more because it was unquestionably a theoretical and emotional thing with him. On top of that everyone was from his district and it represented a bad kind of a problem. Well I kept insisting and I finally said to them, "Look, I'm going to start talking to these black delegates when they come in."

Well it so happened that in the city of Omaha, as I said before, we had a very large membership. It was the second largest packing center in the country. They had a hall there, the local union in Omaha had this big two or three story building with a big hall on the top floor. I suppose the hall could have accommodated rather comfortably three or four hundred people but we had, I think, something like five or six hundred people. We had to have tables. Well we transferred the convention from the Fontanelle to that hall. I said to the manager of the Fontanelle, "Now you're perfectly free to sue us. As a matter of fact I'd welcome it if you did. Your name's going to become dirt for this throughout the land. Anybody in the labor movement who holds a convention at your hotel we'll picket." Well, you know in 1944 people weren't saying things like this about this kind of thing.

At any rate our delegates came in and we told them that it had been transferred and we laid it out. We told it to them straight just the way it was and they were furious at the hotel. I don't think we got over a half a dozen beefs, mostly from people in the South because that hall left much to be desired. Outside of the fact that we were jammed in so one
person was on top of the other every other facility was crowded. One afternoon during a particularly difficult debate the temperature -- I was sitting right under a thermometer right next to the platform -- the temperature was over 110 degrees.

I. Where did you sleep?

R. Well we slept at the hotels downtown, they were spread all over town. No one of them could have taken all of us so we were stuck with the Fontanelle with that, that is for those who stayed there. I moved but most of the others stayed.

I had written a statement for Clark and I think in this convention we adopted it, the first strong anti-discrimination resolution. Now should say to you, and this requires going back, that in the course of drafting the constitution I had inserted into the preamble a provision about the dangers of divisiveness on the grounds of race, creed and color. Well think what I did was review the history of how the packers had divided on the grounds of race during earlier days. That was one of the reasons that prevented organizing. So that preamble to our constitution had this very strong language which I had been using on the Board as an excuse for saying, "Look, you can't start off like this. If you're going to start by violating the constitution we're going to be in trouble." And it was presented this way to the convention. Except for a hand full of southerners, who we had complete disagreements with, it went through.

During the course of that debate I was mentioning, however, there arose an issue that was extremely interesting. At some point a guy by the name of Weaver, who was black and had been working for the international union, was fired. He was appealing the decision of his firing to the convention. Everybody thought that it was perfectly reasonable since it was a democracy and I kept calling out that they couldn't do this. I don't know of any administration that is subject to so-called democratic controls which would induce an archy and not democracy. And there were certainly administrative acts that you had to be free to take although it might be appealed to the Executive Board and then if they wanted to appeal to a Labor Board decision they would have a right to do that. But it was just totally a different thing. You just could not have the convention decide who's going to work for the union or not, you'd have chaos. And that was the debate. And this guy, he really could have been a southern preacher, that man! How he could rave and rant and work himself up into an absolute frenzy. I've had occasion in the past to attend -- I managed to get myself into a couple of holy roller Baptist meetings.
This could have really been one of that group although at the
time I didn't know it. But that place was just afire and it
was only by the skin of our teeth that we won. Everybody
wanted to bargain and my stand was you can't bargain over this
kind of issue, it's impossible. You've got to put it to a
vote and you've got to win the vote. The vote can't just be on
the question of Weaver. It's got to be a vote on the
propriety of handling it this way and that's what finally
prevailed.

At that convention the two things that I remember
most clearly were: first, that it allowed us the opportunity
to affirm very strongly that we would not tolerate
discriminatory conduct against any of our people no matter
what inconvenience it put us to; and secondly, that
administratively the union had to be run so that although it
was subject to democratic control it could operate where
anarchy didn't prevail. And it was interesting that both
issues involved Blacks. Well that convention after some
three or four days finally ended. People went away. I think
in retrospect I'd like to check with Les Orear and see what
his reaction is -- but in retrospect it seems to me they went
away more with a feeling of relief that it hadn't fallen apart
than with a sense of any great, special accomplishment. The
circumstances just weren't right for that.

I. Could we get a copy of the preamble of the
constitution and of that resolution to put with your
interview?

R. We'll see, I think we can do that.

I. I want to ask you roughly what percentage of black
workers you had in your union at the time when you took this
stand on civil rights?

R. Well I would say that in 1944 nationally we had
somewhere between 25 and 30% as a maximum and I think that's a
high figure. The Chicago area, which had the highest
concentration at any point and which during the second World
War may well have reached to as high as 70 or 80%, but at this
particular point in time, that was in 1944, the employment of
Blacks in the Chicago area, I'm certain, was well below the
50% mark.

I. Then did this action simply represent the feelings of
the union's leadership about what was right or was it
something you felt you had to do because you had so many black
workers?

R. This action represented a deep commitment. I
neglected probably to make clear that it was so. The preamble to the constitution implies it but it doesn't actually say it. But there'd been many efforts made to organize industry, particularly in the Chicago yards, because everybody felt that if you could launch off and organize Chicago the rest of the country would fall into place. They had been defeated time after time by the packers playing one ethnic group off against another. One time it was the Slavs against the Poles and then it was the Poles against the Irish and the Irish against all of them. Upton Sinclair even indicates this in *The Jungle*.

But from the '20s on they imported large numbers of Blacks from the South to break the 1921 strike. Blacks had been used and tremendous bitterness had existed between Blacks and whites and there was no real working together. It was even hard to get them to talk to each other. It was only as the conditions in the yards got unbearable that they began to find it was possible to communicate, that an organization really started. And it was in this kind of a spectrum that the CIO put many trained organizers, people like March and Henry Johnson and Sid Wlodarczyk and Frank McCarthy. They made a deliberate effort to get all the groups that had to be contacted in there so you had Slavs and Poles and Irish and radicals and conservatives, Catholics Protestants, every conceivable kind. They began to bring these people together.

One of the things that had kept them apart however -- at the time we were drafting the preamble I was told, and it made a tremendous impression on me, by a couple of Blacks, "Look this is still upper most in the minds of the Whites as well as the Blacks. This is the way we were divided. It is important if we can find some way of giving recognition of that fact and do it in a matter that will prevent it from ever happening again." So if you read the preamble you'll find the language:

"We recognize that our industry is composed of workers of all nationalities and many races, of different creeds and political opinions. In the past these differences have been used to divide us and one group has been set up against another by those who would prevent our unifying. We have organized by over-coming these divisive influences and by recognizing that our movement must be big enough to encompass all groups and all opinions."
That was done consciously with this background in mind and it was a conviction that most of the leadership had that this had to be avoided. What is crucial about this however in the case of UPWA is that there was still an additional dimension. There was a driving commitment on the part of the leadership that it was also immoral and indecent. You can look at the CIO constitution when it was first setup and you'll find there was a pledge against discrimination in membership, too. In our case we recognized, and it wasn't just in membership, it has to be in every area of the union operations. At some point maybe we can go into this in greater detail.

As a matter of fact there's been a book written on it by John Hope, who at that time was at Fisk University, called equal opportunity. This was published some time in the mid '50s or thereabouts but he developed that. It continued all the way through and developed. It continued with the things we did do with it but crucial to it was our comprehension of the fact that it wasn't enough just to say you got a right to be a member. You had to be a first class citizen, everybody had to be. That's why always from the very beginning, from the first executive board to now, there was a Negro on it and there was a Negro officer and we always insisted on Negroes at leadership levels all over. You know with the current fight going on about these credentials and Daley's protest about how do you have democracy and still have quotas, well it isn't a matter of quotas at all, it's a question of representation. That's why proportional representation had generally been regarded as a way of meeting the problem that will insure representation.

You may be interested in the fact also at this point that not only did we initiate very early in the '40s this anti-discrimination program but also a program committed to women's participation in unions. We had what you call the Women's Activities Program and also a Farm Labor Relations Program because we felt we had a particular identity of interests with the family farmer and ought to be working with him instead of against him. These three strains ran through the whole history of that union. The importance of first class citizenship for all of its members, coupled with a recognition that we didn't live in a vacuum so that it wasn't enough to practice it in our union. We had to carry it out into the community at large and therefore we got involved in all these outside things like providing Martin Luther King with the seed money to establish SCLC. Our union made the contribution that made the SCLC possible. Then in the Women's activities Committee we were, so far as I know, the first union in the country to eliminate the wage differential on a national scale between men and women. We had some
trouble with that but more with the women than the men about it.

I. You mean the women liked it?

R. Well it isn't a question whether they liked it. They were absolutely convinced that the packers would keep them, they would have jobs only if they made less money. Part of the conditioning process, you know, (that's true of all groups that are discriminated against) is to try to denigrate their sense of their own worth and value. Many women opposed our efforts because they felt that they would lose their jobs. Of course they didn't lose their jobs but they felt they would. The one thing we never did get around to do, it's hard to know exactly why, it isn't really hard to know I guess, more because we sort of took for granted that it was all right, but we never got a woman in elected leadership. Many women were on the staff, or at least a substantial number for the size of our staff, but they were never in elected leadership --that is on the Board.

I. They were appointed?

R. They were always appointed staff representatives. They worked as lawyers for us from time to time. They worked as research people from time to time. They worked organizing in the field if they came out of the plant. As a matter of fact a woman who at age 65 is getting married for the first time and had been with the union going way back to the '30s when she helped organize the Tobin plant in Fort Dodge, Iowa, subsequently came and started working in the bookkeeping department of the international union. She is just now retiring and getting married, as I say for the first time, she's 65. It's a very happy thing for all of us. But these are strains that ran through that union.

I. They were deliberate? Not as a response to necessity?

R. It was not cause and effect. We never had the problem either at the same time or in the same intensity in either the South or any other part of the country that steel or auto or any of the others had over the civil rights question. One of the reasons for it was that we very early fixed in the minds of our membership the fact these were the mores and customs of the union and these were its statutes and we lived with them or you might as well get out because that's the way it was going to be.

I. How did you educate the whole large membership? Was it through the meetings?
R.

Through constant contact. We adopted resolutions requiring every local union to set up an anti-discrimination committee very early and they did. Some of them worked, some of them didn't but we were always there pushing. Things like this came up just as passing incidents. We were meeting with Swift one day. As I indicated to you before, we had large numbers of people in these meetings, seventy-five or more. There was one man there from Oak Tree, Georgia. So at some point during the course of negotiations these delegates all could participate whenever they wanted to. All they had to do was get recognized. He spoke up and started telling a story about when the people were getting pushed around and he suddenly referred to them as niggers and you could just feel the tension in the room. I asked for a recess, the company left. I turned on that guy and I said, "That kind of language is not permitted here. You can look around the room and you can see that there are a lot of Negroes here. Your union benefits from the fact that they're here. You personally are better off because they're here because this is one of the ways we get our strength and you don't insult your friends. You owe this entire group an apology which we expect you to make here and if you want to stay repeat it again when the company comes into the room because we don't want the company to get the notion that anybody can getaway with that kind of talk in our presence." Well, he didn't quite know what to do. He wasn't a man with any special quality and no special skills of any kind, I mean intellectual equivalent of any special kind. And he apologized. When the company came back I said he had a statement to make and he stood up and said he used that term 'nigger' because after all that's the way he had been brought up and realized that it was wrong and was sorry he used it and we went on.

I.

So you didn't let anything pass.

R.

That's the sort of thing. A similar situation occurred in an arbitration hearing down in Georgia onetime. This happened where I made the guy apologize publicly for it, either that or I told him we'd withdraw his case. We had a flare up in Fort Worth, Texas once that was one of the worst things we had. We had finally gotten around to this many years afterwards, to the point where we were tearing down dressing rooms and eating facilities to integrate them. This was in the '50s, Martin Luther King hadn't come on the scene yet, the marches weren't starting. They went to tear the thing down and one day we get a call from our representative in Texas in Fort Worth. He could hardly talk, he was absolutely speechless, got laryngitis. He, said, "There are three hundred Whites marching on the hall and threatening to tear it apart and blow me up if we don't tell
tell the company we can't take that thing down. I said, "Lock
the office and go home and don't you dare open your mouth." I
called the company and I said, "What are your plans?" They
said, "Oh hell, we're not going to get that plant torn down."
So I said, "I think you ought to change your mind about that
but wait a day or a week or so." So we had Russ Lasley and
Butch Hathaway, which happily we figured this made a good
combination -- Lasley being Black, Hathaway being a Southern
Baptist. He was then secretary-treasurer of the union.
They went down to Fort Worth and they spoke and they said it
was impossible at that meeting. Knives were out all over the
place, guns. They were absolutely convinced it was sheer
fortune that nothing happened. They said their piece and
adjourned the meeting and got everybody out of there. I
called the head of the company and
(tape unclear - 30 seconds)
Two minutes later he called back, "Don't get so precipitous.
I really can't go but I'll have you and Hawkins, my assistant,
go. It so happened that I preferred having Hawkins because
he was much more decent on this issue and I thought a more
intelligent man. So Hawkins and I went down there and I first
met with the members of that committee. I should say that at
that time they had a director by the name of A.J. Quit man who
gave lip service to the policy but who himself was very
unsympathetic, had a very typical southern attitude, a very
ugly man.

At any rate we went down and had a meeting. People
were saying to me, "What do you want to tear it down for? It's
just not right. We work right along the side of them, they
have the same thing we do. We'll take you down to the steel
plant where they've got them on separate seniority lists.
They can't get promoted to the better paying jobs, they don't
earn the same money as the white. Why don't you go pick on
them? What are you picking on us for? They live in their
area and we live in our area." I said, "They've got to have
the same rights everybody else has. As long as you've got
segregated facilities, rest room facilities, eating
facilities it's not the same. Now those guys are going to have
to cool down. There's no three ways about it."

One guy comes up to me and whispers into my ear and
says, "You don't expect me to use the same dressing room.
Don't you know all the niggers got syphilis?" And I said,
"No, I didn't know that. Is that true? There must be a
medical library in this town. Let's go down to the medical
library and check it. Can you read?" And he turned and
walked away.

Then a woman came up and threw her purse open and
there was a revolver. She said, "See that!" And I said,
"Yeah." She said, "If one of those niggers comes close enough to me I'll kill them." I said, "Doesn't that seem like an awful serious penalty for such a minor offense?" "Sir, you just don't understand." "Well of course I don't, I was born in the North but can't you educate me?" She said, "You know what's going on." I said, "What?" She said, "Women are getting raped." I said, "Oh I understand that, that even happens in Chicago but I was under the impression that in Chicago white men rape white women and black women and black men rape black women and white women but this is a matter of biology and has absolutely nothing to do with color." "Well," she said, "you just don't understand." She slammed her purse and walked away.

I finally said to them, "Look, let's understand this. This is the way it's going to be. We just finished negotiating a contract, the best contract. You people in Texas got more of a wage increase than the people in Chicago. You got it because we're attempting to eliminate the geographical differential. I want you to know, though, that the people in Chicago paid for it. If it had been straight across the board you would have gotten part of it and they would have gotten part of it. They wanted you to be up there because they don't feel they're safe as long as your wages are below theirs and so they made that sacrifice. Now many of them are black and they don't understand this kind of business. And the union can't survive this kind of business. Now you can't have it both ways. Prejudices are expensive things. You may not know it but you'd better start learning. If you want to keep your prejudices you keep them but the agreement does not go into effect then. I'll advise the company that they are not to put it in effect. If they do we'll close down every other plant they got and you can work. But it will not go into effect. Now I tell you this, not because I'm trying to frighten you, I tell you this because I want you to know that I'm going to meet with the company and you're going to hear me tell them they're going to take those walls down and when they come down you'd better not monkey around."

So we called Hawkins and he came over with his superintendents and his foremen and I told him, "We've had a discussion and we understand each other. I don't think they agree with me. I want to say to you though, publicly in front of your superintendents and foremen, that I don't care how much they deny it, they stimulated it. They've had their finger in it because they don't like it either. And you ought to do with them whatever is necessary because they work for YOU. You can fire them, I can't fire anybody. Now I'll be in touch with you about how we proceed afterward. That's it!"
Then I turned to my committee and said, "Do you want to say anything?" There was one guy, they told me he had a steel plate in his head. Maybe it's true, I don't know. He said, "We don't like it a bit. We advise you not to do it." And I said, "Anybody else?" Then I said, "Okay, now I've told you officially what our position is." And we broke up the meeting and I came back to Chicago and I called Hawkins. I said, "Look, I'm convinced that your people had as much to do with it as any of them. They don't want it. There's a holiday coming." I don't remember which holiday it was. Under our contract people have to work the day before and the day after in order to collect holiday pay and the holiday started on a Tuesday. I said to him, "I want you to take those walls down on the previous Sunday and see what happens." I said, "But don't tell your people until the day before you want them to do it. Don't go and give them another chance to go and stir up trouble." He said, "Don't worry about that, I'll take care of that. We won't stir up trouble."

So they went ahead, took the eating room walls down, took the dressing room walls down. And Monday people came in and saw it. I suppose some of them would have liked to walk out. Maybe some did but if they did they lost their holiday pay. They knew they had to come back the day following the holiday and after three days had gone by it wasn't so terrible. None of them died, nobody got syphilis and it passed.

The key to the story, however, the most important part of the story is that we then decided that we had to prepare for an election that was coming up in January. We had to do it and get ourselves a black and white slate. We just couldn't have it one way. We ran against a straight white slate. But the Blacks supported us and the Whites supported us. The plant was a preponderance of whites and the black and white slate was elected and the following year the director was elected for the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi.

I. What year was all this?

R. I would say this was '53 probably or '52. George Thomas was elected director in '54, that I can remember. There were other stories about what happened but the point is that long before anyone had heard of Bull Connor we were insisting on the elimination of separate dressing rooms. There's the whole story of John Hope and that self survey he made for us which was another step in the direction of making this thing work. So this whole civil rights thing we were into early.
I. It's a real big part of your union's history then.

R. It's a big part of the union's history as much because what it reflects is the philosophy that the trade union is an instrument for social change, it's not just a narrow sectarian instrument. That's what many people like to say. The truth is that in many instances it functions that way but the point is it doesn't have to and it doesn't in all cases.
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
July 19, 1972

R.

We pick up this narrative at the 1944 convention which was held at Omaha, Nebraska at the union's headquarters under the most difficult and adverse conditions of crowding and heat. In addition to resolving and setting the course for the future on the union's attitude towards the whole problem of civil rights, one other extremely important question that was considered by the convention and finally resolved had to do with an appeal by a member of the union going back a number of years, I believe, although I had not known him for very long, by the name of Neal Weaver, who had been dismissed from his job with the union.

Under the terms of the constitution and the procedures which had been in existence in an effort to make certain that the union operated democratically anyone could appeal almost any kind of a question to a convention and in this case Weaver was appealing his dismissal. In a debate that lasted a good hour and a half or perhaps two hours, certainly the most of one session in a hall where the temperature according to the thermometer hit as high as 110 degrees, this debate went on with Weaver himself speaking for close to an hour and bringing in everything under the sun. Fortunately we were able at that time to resolve this kind of a question and did it in a manner that never bothered us again in the future. Namely we excluded from the appeal procedure the question of routine administrative operations of the union so that some coherence could be brought in to its administration. And the basis was laid in this convention for the pulling together of the whole question of staff operations, assignments and matters of major concern which previously had been sort of floating around and could become political issues because of the rights of appeal that rested in both the practice as well as probably the constitution that put a greater emphasis on providing safeguards for civil liberties and civil rights than for some kind of administrative coherence and judgement. But this convention pretty much resolved that so that it was important in a number of respects.

I.

Did Weaver have support for his point of view?

R.

Oh yes, there was no doubt that there was a good deal of support. Weaver himself was black and he got support from a number of blacks at the convention. He tried to imply that his color had something to do with the action taken against him but actually the case against him was so good on purely
functional grounds that the division did not become a black-white division in the final vote. But there's no doubt that there was support. I can't tell you at the moment but I could check it to see what the actual count was. My best recollection at the moment is his appeal was defeated by a fairly substantial majority.

I. Were there any other issues besides the race issue coming from people other than him?

R. You mean as it affected him? Well yes, there were people who continued to argue that you couldn't have a situation in which questions of this sort were not appealable to the convention because if you did the officers would be in a position to play politics with the staff and that kind of thing. Well of course it worked both ways. There's a difficult question as to how you do it. One thing is clear, that you either operated the organization with some institutional structure and coherence and power, authority, or you were reduced pretty much to an anarchic kind of a situation where anybody, no matter what his reasons might be, could take up very substantial proportions at the convention and delay its functioning on important questions by matters of this kind, which were really housekeeping matters. The truth, I think, is also pretty much in the way it worked over the years and that is that increasingly there was an acceptance on the part of the membership of the fact that housekeeping affairs were better left to the executive board and the officers.

Our executive board was elected by district. We divided the union into, I think at that time, ten districts including Canada and each district in a separate caucus would elect its own director. That director then sat on the board which gave some assurance to the membership that the views of each district would be reflected in the board and their director could vote their opinions. He might win, he might lose, but at any rate they had a forum through which to be heard. So that convention in that respect at least represented a very important cohesive kind of decision that made it possible to move on into a more unified and more coherent, that is administratively more coherent union. In any event the convention was over and there were no special repercussions that flowed from it.

I. There was a continuation of many of the internal and very divisive political fights that had gone on within the union prior to the establishment of the international convention in which the sides that were taken up continued to be pretty much those who wanted complete autonomy as far as the CIO was concerned and others who felt that you had to work
closer with the CIO. There were problems of political questions over the matter of communist influence and that continued to play a role of some import in the union.

I. Can you give me some details of the inner battles?

R. I have some difficulty in doing it because my memory isn't sharp enough on any particular incidents. But it is true that it continued and it practically reached a culmination in 1946. 1946 however resulted also in a temporary stalemate and it never came to its real final conclusion until 1948 when the issue got pretty much put to rest or at least one group became dominant and the union wasn't split as evenly. The final laying to rest, particularly of the communist question, was in 1954 so that this increased in intensity from 1945 on, I would say, through 1954. And of course that marked the period in which it was becoming a more highly debated and highly emotional question within the CIO itself as well as within the country because of the whole McCarthy kind of influence that began to operate in the early '50s. But the quarrels were personal. There was still a lot of opposition to Clark as president. Weightman was the first Black that was on the Executive Board. He was elected in 1943 and he was the one they wouldn't allow to eat in the dining room of the Fontanelle Hotel, a member of our board. Well he became a strong center for activity, not just on a color basis, because he was drawing as much if not more support from Whites as he was from Blacks. But he became ideologically a center for a lot.

I. Where did he stand?

R. Perhaps around the time of the 1946 convention he stood very close to the so called pro-CIO group. This was an artificial division because there was nobody who wanted to get out of the CIO but it was really a question of whether or not you were going to have the kind of leadership that would go to the CIO and get approval for certain kinds of action or whether we would operate more autonomously and not go to the CIO. And Weightman emerged in the '46 convention, I think, as pretty much the leader of the pro-CIO group. But prior to that we had of course all kinds of problems that kept us busy, some of which I've already reviewed. In 1944 we were still before the war Labor Board on these major cases which were not settled until '45.

In 1945 we couldn't hold a convention you know. We were supposed to hold one but that was the time when the transportation was so tight during the war that the federal government asked groups not to hold conventions if they could be avoided. The convention was supposed to have been held in
April or May. We just postponed it for a year and did it because of the request. As it turned out, of course, the war was over. I've forgotten when the landing took place in Normandy but it seems to me it was some time in June or May, perhaps late spring. In any event we didn't go ahead with the convention that year. And that of course riled up a number of people, particularly those who had all kinds of grievances and grudges at Clark. Clark was not, as I think I've already indicated, a very strong person. Weightman was much the stronger of the two and the ablest of the two. The other vice president was Frank Ellis who had been an old time Wobbly and Frank was never very strong on policy questions. His instincts were always invariably right, at least so many of us thought, but it was hard to know where he would be on this CIO question. He didn't want to break with the CIO but neither was he in a position where he was prepared to say, yeah we want them to keep hands off completely. And of course Roche who was the secretary-treasurer was a complete nonentity really. He was a very decent guy. I don't mean to say that he didn't mean well because I think he did but he took a job that was way over his head. I don't think he had ever been more than president of his local union, if that. He had no experience.

During 1945 after the convention of '44 and during the year '45 there were increasing tensions building up in the union, both political tensions as well as tensions around the whole War Labor Board problem. And even though we got that settled finally in June of '45 with substantial sums of back pay there had still been no general wage increase. The last one had been back around '42. It was the 1943 decision that turned us down under the Little Steel Formula, the decision on the case that was heard in '43. So there was still a tension around this whole matter of wages.

Let me ask you one question. In these internal disputes were the rank and file involved in the political ones or were they mainly just disgruntled about the wage increase? How far down did the division go?

Well it went down to local union leadership. They were the ones who were most active in the political question. It did go way down into their ranks and they usually were in a position to carry with them the local union membership. There's no question about the fact that this reflected important segments of the union and that they were involved to a larger or smaller degree depending on the attitude of their own local leadership on many of these questions. There is also no doubt that they were the ones who were most embittered by the wage question. The local union leadership were close enough to the whole negotiating situation so that they understood what the problems were about. And it is true that
the settlement in 1946 involved many unusual items, some that still remain in the contract to this day.

For example, we negotiated a portal to portal pay arrangement. That was in the form of clothes changing time. Under M.I.D., which is the government inspection unit, you had to wear white coats and white outfits on certain jobs so the guys would come to work and they had to change into those clothes. They couldn't work in the plant in the clothes they came to work in. Of course afterwards especially those on the killing floor who were doing the dirty work would have to shower and change back so one of the provisions that we were able to obtain from the War Labor Board was an allowance for clothes changing time. Which meant, we worked it out I think so it meant twelve minutes a day. And if you took twelve minutes a day back over two years it's an hour a week. At that time an hour a week represented something like a minimum of seventy cents an hour and if you take that back over a period of two or two and a half years, whatever it was. It was settled in June I think. It was to be effective August 11, 1943 so it was almost a period of two years which meant very substantial back pay checks. This did a lot to take some of the tensions out of the pressures that were building on the wage question. Then we extended the weekly guarantee. We had had a weekly guarantee of thirty two hours a week; we were able to extend that to thirty six hours a week. We pushed some improvements in vacations, all of that kind of thing.

I. Now did you have to strike at the end of the war to get all of these things?

R. No this came from the war Labor Board, the things I'm talking about now and we recontinued in this settlement of the June, 1945 contract which was the one which we started with the War Labor Board back on August, 1943 and didn't settle until June, 1945. So this was going on during this period after the 1944 convention, this along with the problems of the internal politics of the union, jockeying for position and jobs without any real strong figure, Weightman being the strongest but not having that kind of support to make the position coming up.

In 1946 at the end of '45 Truman finally lifted OPA and the same time represented the end of the War Labor Board. They set up, however, a Wage Stabilization Board which theoretically was to pass on wage increases in order to keep the inflationary pressures down. But in 1946 we got into the middle of negotiations again. This was near the end of the year 1945. Now this happened in the electrical industry and a whole raft of contracts throughout the United States. These are the four big mass production industries that I
I. Remember. And in one week in January of '46 General Motors was on strike. This was the first strike that Walter Reuther had led and that was before he was president. He was Vice President of the Auto Workers in charge of the G.M. Division. That was the strike, by the way, that finally led to his election as President of the UAW which was in the summer of '46. But Murray had a strike going in the Steelworkers and then there was a strike in the Electrical Workers at G.E. and Westinghouse and we got into this mess. That was in mid January or thereabouts. We were out on strike for about ten days when the government decided that, given the problem of meat, that this involved a national emergency and that they were going to seize the plants. Truman issued an order seizing the plants, directing the Secretary of Agriculture who was then Clinton Anderson to seize the plant.

We had a meeting of our executive board the day the order was issued. We knew it was coming and the question was what were we going to recommend to our people. We had called our people into a conference for the next day, the day the order was going to go into effect. And the whole debate that evening in the executive board was what do we do. Well I advised most strongly that we issue a statement attacking the seizure of the plant and indicating, without actually saying so at that point, that we would not comply with such an order and would refuse to return to work. This created a great deal of debate and split, fragmented the political situation in the union even more so because more conservative people -- Clark was president and although he was taking my advice he was doing it with great reluctance.

I. He was probably scared.

R. Sure, he was scared stiff. It was easy enough for me to give the advice but the statements were being issued in his name. Weightman was opposed to it because he just felt it would be too far out. We were going too far. My real reasons for making the recommendation were twofold: one, a fact finding panel had been appointed by the government to hold hearings in both the steel and the G.M. dispute. I'm not sure whether both of them had reported yet. I think they had and in both cases the companies had refused to comply with the recommendations and so the strike was continuing. Essentially at that time the strike was going on over the question of trying to force the company to accept the report that these public people had submitted. Well it seemed to me that if Truman was going to have to seize the plant the very least we could expect out of this was some assurance that if they were going to operate the plants, because his order contained a provision for the appointment of a panel, would be that whatever recommendations were made would be implemented
and we could get a guarantee that the increase would be put into effect.

Well I think I convinced everybody of the justice of that position. The alternative, to refuse to comply with the order, was something that they were frightened of. I had a number of feelings about that. First, I felt politically that it would be impossible for them to do anything about it. I felt that we could force them into coming through with a commitment on this implementation and that if we turned our willingness to comply on that question alone, rather than going into the substance of how much the recommendation was, the administration would be in a very rough spot to turn this down. Secondly, the order was not to go into effect until midnight the following night and so we had lots of time to change our minds if we wanted to. Now I didn't take that seriously because I thought once we made a public declaration, unless we were committed to following through, otherwise our credibility would be gone. But I at least presented this alternative to the board in order to allay their fears to some extent.

Well we went in. The board finally adopted it, a split vote, but they adopted that recommendation. And the statement that we issued was a very strong condemning statement of their intervention without any commitments or any assurances, this kind of stuff. We had a full house of reporters. Those were the days when even the Chicago papers had labor reporters. They don't anymore, but then the Sun had them. The Times, which was separate, had them. The Daily News had them, the Tribune had them. Hearst's paper, the Herald American, and the New York Times had people out here for this, all API. All were hanging around our office waiting for us to come out and we came out and told them that we would have no statement until the next day when we met with our delegation. If they came over to the Amalgamated Hall on Ashland where we were meeting we would give them a statement.

Well the very first thing that morning we called that conference to order and submitted that recommendation and it was approved overwhelmingly by the delegates. I was involved in a war Labor Board hearing that afternoon but I was at the morning session. The noon issue of the War Labor Board carried a headline to the effect, "The Packinghouse Workers Defy the U.S." or some such language. At any rate Anderson knew he had trouble and he managed to get Clark on the telephone on the stage at the hall during the meeting. I had rehearsed Clark sufficiently and this was a case where the fact that he wasn't so very bright was helpful because he just kept repeating that, "All we want is your commitment that if
we return to work you will put into effect whatever recommendation that is made by this panel and see that it gets approved by all appropriate authorities." Well finally around noon or one o'clock Anderson agreed to these terms and Clark, at my suggestion, said, "Very well, send it to us in the form of a wire which we will release to the press." Anderson did in less than an hour. We had a wire from them saying that he would see to it that whatever recommendations the panel made were implemented and put into effect.

Well this created a big furor throughout the labor movement. It was the first time in the history of plant seizures that any union had said they wouldn't comply with an order and not return to work until they got a commitment from the government to do what they asked them to do. And we were doing it in the face of the Amalgamated (Meatcutters) saying they'd go back to work as soon as the plants were seized. These stories were appearing simultaneously. Here we were, the radical wing, the CIO, we were saying we'd never go back to work and the Amalgamated was saying they would never defy their government and they would return. We got the wire and our people returned to work and then the whole question of these hearings before the panel started.

We appeared before the panel and presented evidence for our case. Wage increases at that time, I think the G.M. increase was something like eighteen and a half cents or may be it was more. I think that's what they finally settled for. I think the steel increase was around eighteen cents or some such figure. And we were expecting a similar increase. The hearings had ended and they moved on to Washington for arguments before the panel. That afternoon a statement was issued by Amalgamated representatives, Gorman and Jimmerson, in which they said they would be satisfied with a fifteen cent wage increase. Well that really burned us up because we were trying to restore parity with the steelworkers to which we had been driven as a result of the earlier decisions of the War Labor Board way back in 1943.

I spent until, I don't know, maybe eleven o'clock at night with the chairman of the panel and a couple of the panel members. The chairman of the panel was Ed Witte from the University of Wisconsin. He was probably the most knowledgeable man in the country in labor history matters as well as social security. Arthur Altmeyer is the father of the Social Security Law, a man of real stature. He had a real grasp of these problems. He had handled our second case that we had before the War Labor Board. At any rate he was chairman of the panel and I argued with him half of the night and with the other members of the panel, unofficially of course. I finally got a commitment out of them that they
would recommend sixteen cents an hour. This was going to be a
great victory. I was at the end of the road and that was that
so I finally went back to the hotel and told people what I had
done.

At four o'clock in the morning I went out and I telephoned  John Dunlap, who at that time was an associate of
some instructors at Harvard. He had been doing a lot of work
with the government and was beginning to get involved with
Clark Kerr who was at that time at the Institute for
Industrial Relations in Berkeley. John got himself involved
in this more as an advisor to Chester Bowles. Well he called
at four o'clock in the morning and he started swearing at me
and saying, "When the history of this period is written,
Ralph, you and the Packinghouse Workers will be responsible
for creating the inflation." So I say, "John, don't hand me
that stuff." John was very much of a Calvinist really, not
intellectually but emotionally, terribly puritanical. I
said, "Don't go to such extremes. You know perfectly well we
won't be responsible for one penny an hour." "Oh you don't
understand", he said, "this is an afternoon press release." He
went on and on. Well at any rate we were going to cause
inflation.

The next day the panel issued the decision and we got
an increase of sixteen cents an hour. It didn't faze the
Amalgamated at all. Truth is, if they'd have kept their
mouths shut we'd have gotten the eighteen cents which we
really deserved. Then we had the problem of getting it
through the Wage Stabilization Board. We took the position
that that was not our problem, that was Clinton Anderson's
problem because he had given us the commitment that he would
see that this was implemented so we expected him to put it into
effect. He took the position that he couldn't put it into
effect until the Wage Stabilization Board approved it. So
we said to him, "That's all right. If you feel that way you
get their approval." He said, "Well but it has to fit their
standards." And we said, "Well make sure it fits their
standards. You're after all a member of the cabinet. It's a
government board. See to it that we get this approval."

Well Wirtz was then Chairman of the Wage
Stabilization Board or Assistant Vice Chairman. At any rate
I went into see him and drew him a picture of the whole thing.
In a matter of a few days they had approved it and Anderson
kept his word and saw that it was put into effect. We had a
problem arise about the stockyards as to whether or not they
were covered. See we took the position that this covered
every single plant whether they were part of our negotiations
or not, that this applied to every plant, big, small or
independent. Of course they hadn't seized all the plants.
At any rate the order was put into effect in all the plants.

Interiorly, inside the union this had the effect of changing my whole status because the policies that had been followed had been the ones that I initiated. The successful implementation had been a result of my activity with the panel and so people began to look to me increasingly for leadership, not just in problems of what are your rights, how do you handle things, but also on broader policy questions, on tactics and strategy and where do you go, what direction should you follow. This was in January of 1946 and in either Mayor June of that year we had a convention. All during this period political questions got increasingly tense and a real bitter fight had developed within the Communist Party. There were certain guys who had been part of the communist movement who were on the outs with the communists now and they were carrying that fight over into the union. They were lining up with guys who had always been anti-communist in terms of trying to build up a real red purge even before McCarthy, but this was also building up. Then there were all kinds of questions about what sorts of policy should the union follow in the future, organizational as well as in terms of collective bargaining and that sort of thing.

All of a sudden a guy from St. Paul came up with the notion that I ought to run for president. Well I sort of laughed that off, I didn't take it very seriously. I wasn't particularly interested in the presidency. I didn't really think I wanted it but he kept talking about it to me and a number of others. There was clearly going to be opposition to Clark. What happened was that the so called pro-CIO, which you could also call anti-communist or anti-red, or anti-supposed-red, forces had lined up in support of Clark.

I. Oh they did?

R. Yes because this seemed to be the CIO position so that they had lined up in support of Clark and there was all kinds of opposition beginning to develop to Clark. Stephens, for instance, had decided that rather than to see Clark continue on he was going to run against him and there were several others who got in the race because they just didn't want any more Clark. Well we go to Montreal for our convention. Tensions were very high and I had a room right adjacent to Clark's suite. As a matter of fact it opened right into his suite. I was doing a lot of important work in terms of resolutions and everything else for us and the talk then was beginning about my being a potential candidate and was reaching the kind of proportions that the delegates were beginning to arrive and pressure me. Of course this was known to Clark for the tension between Clark and me was high.
Well, they kept this thing going.

Finally one night a very strange thing happened. I was visited by a group of reporters, labor reporters from papers all over the country, including Chicago, who I had become very friendly with, who came to see me as trade unionists not as reporters to urge me to run against Clark. At one o'clock at night or thereabouts there's a pounding at my door. I go to the door, I'm in bed, and in walk a whole group of these guys and Clark's next door to me practically. They start off on this, you got to do it and I didn't say anything. Finally I said I didn't think I was the one. "Well, that's a lot of nonsense," they say, "You're the best man," and this kind of stuff. They really gave me a rough time. They stayed there for about a couple of hours. I simply could not get rid of them.

Finally when they left others called and there was clearly an organized campaign going on. So finally that morning I decided that I just couldn't keep playing with this thing any longer and I better come to some resolution in my own mind as to what I intended to do. It's just not healthy to let the situation continue so I called my wife. Our youngest daughter, our second child, had been born just in April and this was either May or June so she was just a couple of months old. I called Rachel and told her what was happening and that if I did this it would mean that our life probably would be different. She already had got quite used to my being away from home a lot because we were commuting to Washington weekly for the war Labor Board stuff when that was going on. And she said, "Look, whatever you feel you want to do is fine." She wasn't going to press me in either direction, to do it or not do it. She sensed that I was leaning in the direction of doing it and she told me that she did and that she thought that was fine if that was the kind of decision I was going to make.

So I went back and started this all over again. The pressures were just getting to be very great. Then another dimension was added to this and that was the question about what to do with the secretarytreasurer's job. This guy was a decent guy but clearly it was far beyond his capacity and something had to be done about that. I made it clear that I wasn't willing to do this without any competent people around. We had to do something about that. So the Canadians, who had been among those who were pushing me the hardest, the Canadians finally decided that we should use one of their people, a guy by the name of Roche that I liked and who I felt could do a good first rate job. He'd run for secretary treasurer.

Now during this period when I was in the process of
making up my mind Allen Haywood came to town. Now Allen Haywood at that time was Vice President and Director of Organization in the CIO and probably closer to Murray than anyone else. When he spoke everybody felt it was Murray's voice. He was going around the convention telling everybody how reprehensible it would be to elect a president who was unheard of and that Clark was their man. People were just going to have to get behind Clark and support him. And he had with him a half a dozen other CIO people in different parts of the country that he brought who were lobbying among our delegates building up the votes. Well as this went on people began to get madder and madder and madder.

Finally Haywood sent word that he wanted to talk to me so I went up. He started telling me he thought this was reprehensible and that he had talked to Murray on the phone and Murray said this was the worst thing he ever heard of. And I said to him, "Look, if you'd come down a few days ago and talked to me about this then it would be one thing but I've now made commitments to people and I just will not back off of them." So he ranted and raved and I said, "Look, you're wasting your time, I'm just not going to listen to that. That's the way it's going to be. Now if you get the votes you're in but I don't think you've got them and you don't think you've got them and that's why you're carrying on like this." I left but he continued his efforts and they ended by arranging to have Fullerton Fulton, who at that time was the regional director for the CIO here in Chicago and a guy who I always had a great deal of respect and affection for. He was a great trade unionist and a really very lovely person. They had him act as chairman for the purposes of the election.

So Fulton took over. Somebody got up and raised the question as to whether or not I was a member in good standing of the union, whether I belonged to a local union and paid my dues. Well the truth was I was a member in good standing at a local in Chicago that had at one time been part of this progressive wing. It was a local that Weightman came out of, a Swift local, but one of its leaders had been a member of the Communist Party and had a split with Herb March. Because of the split with Herb March, he had started carrying on an anti-communist fight and they viewed me, since I was opposing their candidate Clark, they viewed me as part of this March group. They knew very well I didn't have my membership card with me. I never went to a convention after that without having it but that time I didn't have it. They knew that I paid my dues a year in advance and not one of them would get up and say so. Fulton proceeded to rule that I could not be on the floor of the convention. I had to ask for the privilege of making a statement on this and he ruled that not only couldn't I make a statement but I couldn't get on the floor of the convention.
This drew such an uproar that finally Fulton acknowledged a motion to adjourn and they adjourned the convention, shut it off right in the middle.

I. Completely?

k. Well no, just for that session. Well I got hold of some of these characters and the next morning when the session started they got up and in order to save face they said they called their office in Chicago and they checked and found out that I was a member in good standing. By this time Fulton realized he didn't have the votes and so he went ahead and called the roll. No, before he started calling the roll Clark withdrew as a candidate and this caught us completely off guard, just staggered us. But he withdrew and I suddenly found myself elected by acclamation with no opposition. You know the tension had been very very great. This was not just an anti-climax, it was just incredible. Before we had a chance to recover our breath I heard Fulton open nominations for secretary treasurer and who's nominated but Clark. This was obviously a gambit that they had worked out the night before and they caught us again completely off guard.

In view of Clark's apparent generosity in withdrawing, was that going to sway some of our delegates? Would we be able to hold our votes in line or were we going to be able to hold Riches? So very quickly a group of us got together and decided at the last minute that Riches would better withdraw. We didn't want him to be defeated and Clark elected over our opposition. I mean if he was going to be elected anyway we'd better not -- so Riches declined the nomination. Clark was elected and Riches wasn't even nominated. Riches was a Haywood man and they dumped him. So Ellis and Weightman were elected vice presidents, of course, and that's the way, it ended with myself as president, Clark as secretary treasurer and Weightman and Ellis, vice presidents.

I went up to the podium and I was sworn in. Weightman gave me the gavel and I began running the convention for the first time in my life and it came naturally, I discovered, and very easy. One guy started right at the very beginning giving me a bad time and I sat him down and asserted the authority of that gavel and from that time on I had no problems in terms of the way the convention progressed.

One of the interesting things was the relationship with Clark. He actually seemed happy and as a matter of fact he was. He was perfectly content to be secretary treasurer. He felt he had no responsibility and that's the way he wanted it. The other office had been more of a burden than he could carry. As a matter of fact during that '46 strike, when we
refused to return to work Time magazine carried a story on us in which they referred to the Casper Milktoast of the labor movement being Lewis Clark, speaking completely out of character, obviously under pressure from other groups within the union.

Well my election was quite a shock and sent a lot of waves out into the labor movement, all kinds of comments being made about lawyers taking over and professional unionism. I got a letter from Ed Witte saying that it was very interesting to most of them, that they'd gone to the trouble of going back to the 1800s at some point, I guess the Knights of Labor, to check and see and as far as he could tell this was the first time that a lawyer had been elected or a professional person had been elected president of a union and he thought it was a fine thing. I've always kept that letter. In any event there was a lot of publicity connected with it. I had the experience of being a celebrity for a little while and then I began running the union.

It was perfectly clear that there were still some very very difficult problems internally, primarily around this whole communist question and which direction do you go. Well this before the CIO convention in Portland in 1947 where there had been an open fight and where Murray made an open attack upon the communists in the CIO. That was the convention I think where the resolution came up saying they resent and object to the Communist Party in the affairs of the union. Well I had obviously been trained as a lawyer and that affected the way I viewed this kind of an issue. I was terribly disturbed by these trends. I saw them as subverting the whole civil liberties process, at least as I'd understood it. I made it very clear to our board very early in the game that my attitude on this kind of question was that we kept the channels of communication open. No group would be permitted to stifle opposition or to stifle debate. Of course the argument always was that when the communists took over no one had a chance to debate and I think there were some unions where that was true. That was not going to be true in our union as long as I had anything to do with it but as long as we kept those channels open I had enough confidence in the judgement of our people so that we were not going to start legislating against who could run for office, who couldn't run for office, or start purges or anything else that didn't contain not just formal due process but also substantive due process. This is a distinction that I make that's not made in law but it's one thing to give a person a hearing, it's another thing to have the hearing held by people whose minds have been made up in advance and who made a political judgement, not a judgement on the merits and the issues.
The truth was that that's what happened in the CIO. Actually most of those hearings that were held, Art Goldberg saw to that, they had formal due process, they had the hearings and an opportunity to rebut testimony. They heard witnesses and they presented their counter claims and all the rest. But the truth was that the people who were making the decisions had made a political judgement in advance as to what position they were going to take on these questions. As far as I was concerned this was just an empty procedure. so I made that clear very quickly and I said that that was the position I would take and I would hope I could ever mediate these disputes. I considered myself in many ways a conduit for all the various tensions and pressures and I would try to synthesize them as they came on and find some way if it was at all possible to compromise those differences so that at least we could get on with the business of the union.

Well in the fall of '46, I was elected in June I think, and in the fall, after all of this, we went back into negotiations with the packers. Now we had this increase of sixteen cents an hour in January but the whole contract was open and those negotiations were very long and complicated. They resulted in our doing some very revolutionary things. In my opening remarks to the convention in Montreal right after I was elected I had said that our goal ought to be the establishment of a dollar an hour wage for the packinghouse workers. Now at that time we had had the sixteen cents which had made the metropolitan wage sixteen plus seventy two and a half cents. That would have made it eighty eight and a half cents. And people laughed at me, they thought I was out of my mind. Whoever heard of a minimum rate in packing of a dollar an hour?

So we went into those negotiations. I don't know whether in that one we made the dollar but we came so close to it that it didn't matter much. We established such things as sick leave for the first time in the history of the industry. In other words an employee who got sick would collect half pay for a period of illness. Just as an aside, I can remember some months later after that went into the contract being in Kansas city speaking at a rally there and having some guy from the Cudahy Plant in Kansas City come hobbling up to me on crutches showing me that he had a broken leg and that he had been out of work for several weeks and he'd be out for x period, whatever it was. He said, "And thanks to you I'm even getting paid. Who ever thought the company would pay me without even going to work?" So I said, "Well don't have any illusions about how this happened. It happened because we had a unified union behind these kinds of demands." Well we did establish that.
We established for the first time in American industry holidays with pay. The fact is we got eight holidays with pay. The packers had allowed eight holidays on their own initiative but of course these were holidays that we didn't get paid for so we simply took the position that we wanted to keep the holidays that were established and we wanted to be paid for them. They finally agreed to pay for them so at least these two things represented very major breakthroughs. It was also extremely important in terms of solidifying my whole position in the leadership of the union because the contract contained not just wage increases but a whole variety of things.

I. These contracts opened every year?

R. At that time they were opened every year. I think it was in the '50s that we started longer term contracts. I think first we started two year contracts with wage reopeners every six months and we finally moved to the three year contract with so called intermediate wage increases I guess the term used to be. The auto workers started it with their so called improvement factor but we just negotiated wage increases at definite intervals. We did that only, however, after we also got a provision protecting us on the cost of living so that we were certain that whatever wage increases we got were real wage increases with cost of living adjustments coming every six months.

Well that takes us up to 1947. 1947 was a year in which we had a wage reopener, a lot of internal politics and also the year of the enactment of Taft Hartley which mean tall kinds of adjustments. It also made for certain tensions between us and a number of other unions because of the different positions we took, and this is both left and right, on issues of Taft Hartley. Many unions, even left wing unions, in order to avoid being sued by a company in an event of a wildcat strike took the position that if there was a wildcat they would publicly denounce it. Then the company agreed that if they did that then they would not sue. I refused to do that because I took the position that it was when our people were in trouble that they needed help, it wasn't when things were going smoother. And I didn't think the union was organized to protect a reservoir of great capital assets. I thought it was to be used for the membership and I'd be damned if I'd start denouncing our people at a time when they needed help.

That was also a year when they amended the constitution. I think it was in '47, it might have been the time I was elected, the term of office was extended from one year to two years. It must have been done in 1946 at the time
I was elected because in '47 we had no election at the convention, just a policy making convention. But in the interim the tensions within the CIO were increasing as far as this red fight was concerned and they also increased in our union. They came to a head in '48.
A section of the next tape dealing with the 1948 election and its aftermath proved to be inaudible. That period was covered by Les Orear who began interviewing Mr. Helstein at the point where I stopped.
We concluded the last session after the '48 strike and all the problems that were incidental to that strike and then into the 1949 convention and what we had achieved in terms of rebuilding the union after the '48 strike. And I think we also used as a basis for information the convention the union had in Estes Park, Colorado. Now that was a convention in which elections did not occur. It was simply a policy convention and its primary purpose was to lay the ground work for the negotiations which we were expecting to go into in August of that year because our contracts normally expired around September 1. The negotiations in 1949 were interesting in the sense that the union was still in the process of recovering from the '48 strike. Although in truth we had achieved a good deal, the fact remained that we were still weak. Our membership was in no position to consider seriously another strike. And the real question was what were we going to be able to get out of those '49 negotiations given some of the problems we had been having. And we'd been having some very serious problems.

What we discovered after the '48 strike was that in the case of Armour and Co. at least, their losses had been so substantial that the president of the company resigned and a new president was elected and many changes were made in the hierarchy in the company. This was unquestionably connected with the poor financial results they had. Well we realized, even though we weren't in a position to consider a strike, if we weren't able to achieve our purposes through the normal collective bargaining procedure neither was Armour. So it would have been a good idea to put most of our emphasis on Armour in the negotiations in an effort to set a pattern for the rest of the industry and that's precisely what we did.

In the '49 negotiations Armour's effort was to secure an agreement and, as I recall it, the issues were not primarily money. We were able to work out what we were satisfied with even though we didn't say so. But we had all kinds of other changes we wanted to make in the contract, some very basic ones. And in fact in that '49 contract even though we were not yet fully healed from the trauma of the '48 strike, we did succeed in making what my hunch is were some of the most important changes that we made at any time over a period of several decades in the contract. We started, I recall, the last session with Armour on a Friday morning and with no break went straight through until around 4 or 5 o'clock Sunday afternoon and then broke off and walked out without an
agreement. We discovered very early in the game however, even though we had gotten a number of concessions, that our committee was so anxious to avoid a strike because they were accurately reflecting the attitudes of our membership, that we were much better off in carrying on these negotiations with a small sub committee.

I. You mean the company could sense that?

R. Oh sure they would have sensed it so we carried on the negotiations with a small sub committee of myself and one or two other officers. We'd go meet with the company's representatives alone and this was contrary to our normal procedure. They couldn't quite understand it and our explanation was, "Look they think you're taking advantage of the '48 strike yet and everybody is just too damn mad. We're going to have an explosion if we meet together as long as you people remain so intransigent." I don't recall the exact count but we had eighteen to twenty different issues still pending. Much of it we never thought we would do anything with. And as we kept this up, going back and forth and back and forth, we began to pick up more of this kind of small thing that affected working conditions in the plant and interpretations of contract provisions, sick leave problems.

In this contract was the first time we had ever gotten an agreement on guarantees. We had a thirty six hour guarantee, that is if you started work the first day of the workweek, but they could spread that over a six day period so they could actually meet their obligations with six six-hour days. Our people wanted a five day work week at that point and in these negotiations we were able to get an agreement with that guarantee that it had to be given in five days. They couldn't count the sixth day towards the guarantee. So if by Friday night they only had thirty two hours then and they wanted the people to work on Saturday, they'd have to pay them Saturday work plus four hours make up time because the guarantee was there. Well that's an example of one of the very important items that we worked out in those '49 negotiations. Actually that was one of the items that held up the settlement on Sunday afternoon because they didn't want to agree to it.

I. What were the other big items?

R. I can't recall exactly. I remember this because it was probably the major thing that we accomplished. We checked through some of the old records and now I'm in the position where I can indicate other important advances that we made in those '49 negotiations. In addition to the guaranteeing five days, which as I've already indicated is
probably the most important single advance, we were able to reduce the number of years of service required for three weeks vacation to fifteen. It had previously been twenty or twenty five. We changed the basis on which sick leave was accumulated from what was known as a continuous service to accumulated service. By that was meant the fact that continuous service could be broken by a lay off of sixty or ninety days, depending on the length of service, at which point you had to start getting it all over again. Cumulative service just meant an accumulation of all your service so at the end of ten years, even though it had been interspersed with lay offs of any duration at all, you still have the benefit of ten years. So that became an important gain.

In addition to that, even though previously the contract had permitted leaves of absence for pregnancy, there were no sick leave payments made for pregnancy and back in 1949 my hunch is this is the first time any union in American industry achieved that. We provided eightweek payments for pregnancy leaves. We made additional progress in the direction of reducing the geographical differentials between the North and the South which had been very substantial. We tried to cut them down and in Armour, where we had had only department seniority, we established the principle of plant wide seniority after fifteen years of service.

Of special importance as one looks back is the fact that we wrote into all packinghouse contracts in the year '49, just the year after that disastrous strike, a provision for separation pay benefits. Now at the time our own membership didn't feel that this was a matter of any concern to them or of any importance. They couldn't understand my insistence on getting it in the contract. Companies actually objected to it as a potential problem. They weren't thinking seriously of closing the plants but when we kept insisting that we would not conclude the agreement without it they finally conceded and they put it in. I suppose as one looks back over the thirty years that I've been connected with the union I would guess that probably more money was paid out by the industry in the form of separation pay than almost any other single item, other than of course weekly pay roll.

I. Did you anticipate it to the extent that it actually occurred?

R. Well I never anticipated it obviously to the extent that it occurred but I was pretty certain by 1949. After the 1948 strike we had begun to make some sort of analysis as to the reason that Armour had suffered such substantial losses and it seemed pretty clear to us that they were very tardy in technological improvements, that they had done very little
either during the war or after the war. I mean by that the second World War. Even such things as lift trucks, which were pretty general in American industry by 1946 and '47, they didn't even have them in meat packing. All kinds of new developments were taking place in connection with the curing and smoking of hams and bacon such as the automatic curing process where a ham came off the line in a position on a machine and you pressed the lever of hydraulic equipment which forced needles down that squirted the cure into the veins known as vein pumpers. Then the stuff was sent to the smokehouse and it was being shipped and cured in transit instead of lines that took thirty to ninety days, sometimes even as much as six months to bask in brine in the cellar before it was moved on out into the market. So it seemed pretty clear to us that we were in advance of some changes, that the industry had to begin to do some things in the way of capital investment. Plants were old, you walked through them and you got rained on. My feeling was that this was, at the time, in advance of the issue. Once you face the issue it's going to be a lot more difficult but this was a period in advance of the issue when plants were going to be closed and I thought that separation pay, in time, was going to become a very serious problem and it worked out that way.

As a matter of fact I think the first sign of the rise in benefits was when Cudahy closed the plant in Kansas City as a result of a flood which did very extensive damage. It hardly became worthwhile for them to rehabilitate the building and they decided to abandon Kansas City as a market. They had a large plant with a couple thousand people and the fact that these people were getting separation pay, which I think originally amounted to, I guess it was a week a year for the first ten years and than a half a week for each year remaining. I don't recall the scale of this plan but it was much less, obviously, than the plans we now have in effect which are more sophisticated both in the way they operate, what goes with it and also in amounts. But this was the beginning.

I don't know other unions, except the Newspaper Guild, who had ever adopted a separation pay as an important contractual provision. The Newspaper Guild did it of course because the nature of the industry involved shifting of jobs. It wasn't a question so much of a closing down in those days, it was the professional nature for that kind of stuff. But this was the first, so far as I know, on a mass industrial operation for which separation pay was negotiated.

Now each of these things that I have just been referring to, as well as a number of others, were probably obtained without our committees in the room. One thing that
I. Did the committee realize what you were doing?

R. Oh yes, we told them. I just told them very frankly, "Look you guys are too anxious to get a settlement. You don't dare do it." On that Sunday afternoon when we broke off at four o'clock and left I think the major issue that remained at that time was the question of the five day guarantee. On the following Monday in a meeting in my office I got a call from the company. A number of people on the committee were in the office at the time and I let them know that this was the company that was calling. I also indicated that it wouldn't hurt if angry voices were being raised so they proceeded to start talking about how they were going home and I cleared with Frank Green who was the Armour representative on the other end of the line who was hearing it. He was saying, "You're having a meeting?" I said, "Yes, we're having a meeting, not a very pleasant one either thanks to you." And I terminated the conversation very quickly. I indicated there was no point in talking. I think it took until Wednesday for them to finally break and make this last concession which they realized would settle it. We settled the contract, there was no strike and this happened throughout the industry that year, except of course for Wilson where we were still messed up in a hassle over a contract.

It might be well to just summarize a bit by saying that the '49 contract changes although in immediate monetary terms do not seem to be substantial, I think that most of us have always felt over the years the revisions that we made in '49, one year after the strike, were not only in the contract itself but it marked the turning point in the power relationship with the company. We were clearly able to seize the initiative, which we had for a very longtime afterwards in our relationship with the company, primarily because we were very careful in the way we used it, but we found ourselves in a position where the companies had developed a great deal of respect for us. They never felt we would be able to survive that strike. They certainly had never expected the kind of opposition they ran into in the '49 contract negotiations. And that fact that we were able to come out of it with so many major and basic changes, the importance of many of which they
themselves did not realize at that time. They didn't realize, for example, that the sick leave benefits that we were able to work out, which they figured would cost some three cents an hour or may be less than that, some two cents an hour at that point, in time it became ten, twelve and fifteen cents an hour. As wages went up why obviously the cost of sick leave went up and of course we extended the sick leave benefits once we got the principle established and each contract we improved the benefits. Of course separation pay, they never expected it to amount to what it did and we were able over the years to work out the separation pay so that it was possible for a worker under certain circumstances to collect both a pension and separation pay depending on years of service and age and a number of other things. These later became elements that we started to put together into a full package to deal with some of the problems that came from plant close downs as a result of automated equipment, if not automated, highly advanced technological equipment, shifts in marketing practices, the tremendous advances that took place in terms of refrigeration to operate totally differently.

I. You anticipated that, though?

R. Well I can't say that we anticipated those particular developments, we did anticipate some of them. I had, from my very introduction to the industry, never been able to understand why they couldn't breed hogs constantly. Why should they only breed twice a year? And of course this went through, an evolution as a result of experimentation. They then began to develop air conditioned methods so the animals didn't lose as much weight. The problem of the sow that had a tendency to eat its young, or lying on them and killing them, improved methods were introduced to prevent this. All of this one could anticipate.

It would have been pretty hard to have anticipated an area like Chicago being closed down as a packing center because it didn't make sense. As a matter of fact I finally came around to see that this was going to happen early in the '50s but not at the time. We already had separation pay by the time it came. I realized it when the President of Armour Company told me that water alone in the Chicago plant costs $900,000 a year and that they could buy the same amount of water on a comparable basis for $200,000 a year in Omaha. Clearly it just didn't make sense for Chicago to be the packing center and of course it didn't and it wasn't. It didn't take long until 1955 when Wilson closed its big Chicago plant, that was the first one to close. But in any event this improved vacation allowance, separation pay, five day work week, all these things began to add up over a period of time
and were some of the elements that we used in order to attempt to expand employment or at least to preserve it and to temporize this issue of what happened when a plant closes.

After the 1948 strike we had, as I think I've already indicated a number of times, a continuing problem with Wilson. Wilson was the only packer who said they didn't have to recognize the contract, refused to deal with us at all on any question. They fired hundreds of people and we were in one constant fight with them. We finally found ourselves in a position we had to file a petition for election before the Labor Board in each Wilson plant. In the process we filed for some of their other plants and we ended up by winning all those elections overwhelmingly, including some new plants.

I. It seems to me you had a lot of work there.

R. Oh yes, of course and then after we won the election they were insisting that they wouldn't reinstate these people they had fired. They claimed they had hired scabs to replace them and these scabs had super seniority and they were going to put these people on a list and take them back to work if any of the other people left.

I. How did scabs get super seniority? Was this a company edict?

R. They gave it to them, yes sure, they weren't dealing with us. We didn't have a contract. The Labor Board by that time was already moving quite a good deal to the right and it recognized the principle of economic replacement, personnel replacement which gave them super seniority. We conceded this fight. Then we needed some strategy. We were obviously in no position to strike again but we needed some way of doing two things: one, keeping up the morale of our own people while we were trying our best to handle grievances and the company refusing to meet with us. After we won an election they could meet with us but they were making it impossible to get anything really settled. I'm not talking just about settling the contract, I'm talking also about the grievances. Although they began to realize that they were going to have to deal with us, as a result of which they tempered some of their behavior as against the worst period, we than developed this tactic of a consumer boycott.

I. Do you want to tell me about the consumer boycott?

R. The consumer boycott was a device that was made necessary as a result of the Taft Hartley Law and the secondary boycott provision. This was a problem which I think most people never fully comprehended. And I think
liberals, particularly, people who professed to be friends of labor, including many labor people, used to look askance at this notion of secondary boycott. Now what they always talked about when they talked about secondary boycott was the crazy situation of where an AFL electrical worker would refuse to install an electrical unit made in a CIO shop because they were boycotting it. But that really was not the big problem. That could have been handled without the kind of provision that Taft Hartley had. What Taft Hartley did was to make it an unfair labor practice to refuse to handle the product of a struck employer. Well that meant that given a situation like ours, Wilson and Co. could and did go to Swift and buy products. The companies were constantly buying products. Our Wilson people were fighting Wilson; our Swift people were supporting them in the form of contributions and everything else; but our Swift people could not refuse to handle that Wilson product or they'd be subject to being enjoined.

That, in effect, put a premium on dividing workers, in other words striking at the very notion of the solidarity of workers. The real thing that they wanted to cure they could have cured without creating this other problem. Of course that wasn't their purpose, their essential purpose was to make it impossible to unify workers for the reasons they joined the union in the first place. So we were forced into a consumer boycott which said to the consumer, please don't buy Wilson products. It didn't ask the worker in the store not to handle it because it would have been illegal if he had. And he would have been enjoined and we would have been enjoined and subject to damages. All we could do is to ask the consumer and we developed all kinds of gimmicks, you know, special posters. And in working class neighborhoods we won tremendous support.

I. What about other places?

R. Well even in other places we had some. Of course there were certain areas where the mere fact that we were the union and asking people not to buy a product stimulated them into buying it. That became much more true in later years. I would figure it would be true today. I don't know if you noticed the last issue of the New Yorker but in it there's a cartoon of some guy. He looks as if he's a retired guy of some wealth in Florida in a supermarket saying, "What are the do gooders boycotting this week? Give me some." Well there's a lot of truth to that I think. In any event we started this "Don't Buy Wilson" campaign. Wilson threatened to sue, tried to sue, couldn't get anywhere because it would have been a denial of our right to free speech to have kept us from asking the consumer, so long as it was just the consumer that
we were asking not to buy it and not the workers in the plant or
the shop or the store not to handle it, they couldn't prevent
it. And of course other unions since then have used it and
with success. It was something that we could do with a
product like Wilson because it had a label and it was known and
in that respect it was something easily identifiable and that
we could get across. This we carried on for quite sometime.

Finally we got to the point where the "Don't Buy"
campaign was as successful as it was going to be. We still
were having trouble with the company and it was perfectly
clear we were going to have to start building up for some more
drastic action and we started putting the machinery to work to
organize and mobilize for a strike. Only this time we were
bound and determined it was going to be done with much more
care and all the resources we could garner and have ready in
advance. It was only going to be against Wilson. We were
not going to ever get into the position where we struck more
than one company at a time after that '48 experience. Well
before that happened, I think it was in October of 1950,
Wilson finally capitulated, dropped its demand for a super
seniority provision. And by the way, we had been negotiating
with them now for a period of sometime, ever since we won the
elections. They were required by law to do this. We worked
out a good many of the provisions of the contract but there
were a few that we were bogged down on. One of them was this
super seniority. When they dropped that it opened up the
whole thing and we were able to compromise our differences and
some of the others relatively easily.

I. Did they take back those other workers?

R. Well we worked out arrangements to the extent that we
could. Some of our plants were terribly intransigent, Cedar
Rapids being one of them. They wouldn't let us bargain with
them, they had the Labor Board cases. They insisted on
letting them make the decision. But in Chicago and a few
other places we got a substantial number of the workers
reinstated. And in those areas where they would permit us to
do it, that is where workers would permit us to do it, we were
successful.

The Labor Board case unfortunately involved a
pattern where we would get a decision from the hearings
officers. At the same time Wilson would appeal it to the
Board and they would sustain it and then it went to the Circuit
Court of Appeals and I think they reversed it although it may
even have gone to the Supreme Court, I just forgot. At any
rate in the final round that case was lost and those were the
people who had put all their faith in the Labor Board case.
We weren't able to do anything for them. Finally in October
of 1950 we cleared out the problem of the Wilson case and that, I suppose, was the last step in the chain of events that had begun with this strike in early 1948 and from then on it's a new chapter.

I guess that chapter, except for problems like the ones during the Korean War -- we had problems getting Wage Stabilization Board approval, which was not easily done, and I suppose that the important stories in the '50s had to do with a continuation of some of the internal fights within the union, which were never really laid to rest until 1954. More important was the beginning of the plant close downs and this wholedesperate search for some kind of an answer to what do we do about preserving and protecting jobs for people in the industry. Just as one example, in a period I think from 1956 to 1960 or thereabouts, '61 I think, employment in the industry had dropped by over 50,000 people from 200,000 to 150,000. So these were really serious.

I. New kinds of problems? Some new, some old?

R. But really what was new were the kinds of problems that were created by this, the diminution of the jobs available. This was a constant thing that one was struggling with although never in such wholesale lots as with the whole plant. It was just that technological change constantly made fewer jobs. But the whole question of how do you deal with it, what do you do about it, where is the responsibility for it. Is it with a particular company in a particular industry? Is it really a national problem? How do you make the country aware of this? What sorts of campaigns do you carry on for that purpose? These were all pretty mean questions that no one had started wrestling with and we began to wrestle with them in the '50s and of course into the '60s, particularly when it assumed major proportions. In the meanwhile we were carrying on our own internal battles with the old red question still being kicked around and an issue being made of it, Murray coming to our convention in1950 and stirring up some more of it.

I. What happened at that convention?

R. Well nothing really happened except that he came there and among other things I made a speech in which I made it clear that the union was going to keep its channels of communication open and that we had room for everybody, irrespective of their opinions. And Murray's way of dealing with this was not to attack it straight on out but sort of pat me on the head and say what a fine boy I was and how they could always rely on me. And I wasn't turning my back on them, I was just as anticommunist as everyone else, that kind of thing.
It created the kind of situation where I felt compelled before the convention was over to just respond and say, not withstanding anything that he said, this was the way I felt. We had had a fight, the usual fight about amending the constitution to bar communists. But again we had gone through the business of creating other issues that made those people pressing this anxious to make bargains because we always had votes. In the final analysis that's what counted.

We worked out arrangements and we compromised differences and one thing was dropped. Other things were settled so we were able to work out generally these problems without ever conceding to the demand for amendment and never really pressing our advantages. We could have pressed them and there were those in our own ranks who felt we should. On the other hand I felt it was just as important to make sure even those whose views I thought were terrible -- I looked on them as not willing sympathizers with McCarthy but really representing, even though they didn't realize it, but they were caught up in this general national hysteria and never understood really what the issues were. I think I felt they were fearful people but I was convinced they had a right to be heard and to make sure they had their opportunity. Now if, in the process, they decided that it was politically wise for them not to press something because if they pressed one thing we might press something else, that was just the way the thing worked. We managed to go through it and finally in 1954 brought it to a head. Instead of constantly making these arrangements outside of the convention hall, outside of those processes, in '54 we finally brought it into the convention hall and debated the issue and put it to rest. From that time on we had no more problems although there were those who tried to create them. We had some difficulties in '52 or '53, I think, with Walter Reuther over these issues.

R. What did he do?

I. Well he had been told that we had a bunch of reds and so he set up a committee to investigate us. I'm trying to remember when it was. I think Murray died in '52 so this must have been '53 or it could have been even after our '54 convention. I have a hunch it was. And we just fought it out with him. We refused to give him an inch. That's when he turned to me one time in exasperation and said, "You know, Ralph, there isn't your intellectual peer in the CIO. There isn't anything you want that you couldn't have if you'd just straighten yourself out on this issue." And I said, "Walter, let's understand each other. First, I don't view this as a very great, great compliment when you tell me I don't have my intellectual peer in the CIO. If you would have said it about other places it might be a different matter but not here."
Secondly, there's really not a single thing that you're in a position to give me that I really want except to be able to be left alone so this union could run its business as part of the labor movement and make its impact on the thinking of the labor movement as a whole. All we ask is that the channels be kept open to that purpose and that end. We are not going to go off on purges. Now you may think that's the right way to do it, we don't. And you're just going to have to let us handle our business in our own way."

He finally appointed a committee. He had appointed one committee and we got into a terrible fight with that committee. I remember Jake Potofsky was on that committee. Well what had happened was, I think in '52 we had a school for organizers and as a result we adopted a position and devoted an issue of our program to a statement, a special section that we called, "The Road Ahead." If you were to read it now you would think that it was very mild. It's the kind of thing a liberal newspaper, the Sun Times, might even write today but in those days it was regarded as a flaming left wing document because we said we opposed oppression whether it was in Moscow or America and we didn't care if somebody pointed that out as a typical communist stunt. I happened to believe it was true and of course that's what everybody is now saying about Moscow and Peking, acting in connection with Indo China. But what we were really saying was that we've got to get out of Asia and stay out of Asia. We'd lose our neck in Asia. This is the beginning of it and it's going to keep on going unless they understand the full implications of it. It was a very interesting document and that had been preceded by an editorial which I had authorized called, "We Will Speak Up," in which we said we were tired of keeping quiet on some of these major issues of foreign policy and everything else. You ought to at sometime get hold of a copy of that and if you make a note of it I'll see if I can't dig it up for you. It's called,"The Road Ahead."

Jake Potofsky, who was Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the CIO, was a member of the committee that was investigating us and he was perfectly furious, just beside himself. I remember him beating his chest and saying, "I'm Chairman of the International Affairs Committee. What right have you got to -- I'm the one who's speaking for --what right have you got to?" I said, "Jesus, Jake, relax. We're not speaking for the CIO, we're speaking for ourselves. You go right ahead, do what you want."

The difference between Reuther and Murray in the important sense was that Reuther was an intelligent man and an intelligent man is a reasonable man. I realized very quickly I wasn't going to have the same problem with him that I had
with Murray because Murray was in the old tradition and he felt, he didn't think. Reuther thought so I could embarrass Reuther. It was much easier to deal with Reuther as far as I was concerned. So he finally ended up appointing a committee. Let's see, who did he have on it? Emil Mazey, Frank Rosenblum. Who was the third one? I don't remember, I forget who the third one was, maybe it was just two. At any rate they worked with us for awhile and finally made a report that this was just a lot of stuff and hogwash and sure there were communists in the union but they weren't running it. All they did was find out that what we had been saying was right.

This was brought back to the Executive Committee of the CIO where Jim Carey threw a tantrum because he was carrying out a vendetta as a result of some friends of his who had been beaten. An interesting commentary on this was in later years I was the only one who defended Jim Carey for the same reasons that I had taken this position that I was taking here. He got into difficulties with Meany and I just felt he wasn't being given his rights so I came to his defense. But at this point he just was furious. So as a result of that Reuther wrote a letter that he had no business writing and I wrote back and told him he had no business writing it. But he did and it was on the record and it came back to haunt us later in the early '60s when we went through the same thing, in the late '50s when we went through a third one of these things, this time with Meany. But this one was finally put to rest. Maybe this is a good time to stop and pick up on that 1954 convention,
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
May 22, 1973

R. The last time we taped was in August of 1972 and I have refreshed my recollection as to where we left off on that occasion. We had gone through the period of the problem with Wilson and the final settling of the contract which was the finishing touch to the strike of 1948. And I referred to some of our internal problems around the communist issue which haunted us for a good period and also to the problems of an investigation by the CIO at a point in time when Walter Reuther had become president. I think that rather than going forward from that point I ought to go back just a bit to pickup a few loose ends that I think might be of some importance.

We spent sometime on the previous tape in developing the 1949 negotiations and some of the issues that were involved there. I pointed out, for example, that 1949 marked the point of time in which we had obtained and written into the contract separation pay benefits that later served to provide such very substantial funds for our membership when the industry began to reorganize itself and plants in wholesale numbers were closed down. But in a more important sense the 1949 negotiations, which were referred to earlier, marked a real turning point in the power relationships between the union and the company. After recovering from the 1948 strike which had been so debilitating and damaging to the union we had been able to recover sufficiently so that we succeeded in the 1949 agreement in clearing up many many issues of major importance that I have previously referred to. In those negotiations we were really able to seize the initiative even though the amounts that we were successful in getting in terms of money benefits were not so important. But the contractual benefits over a period of years turned out to be of major substance.

1949 in other respects also produced new experiences for us. There had been a very serious explosion in the Swift plant in Sioux City that killed a number of people and hurt many others. And this was an opportunity for us to put in motion mobilizing the union membership throughout the country in providing relief assistance for people who were hurt and we were successful in sending into Sioux City substantial sums of money as well as food, clothing and other things for the people who were in serious straits. In later years we experienced the same thing in connection with a flood in Winnepeg, Manitoba in 1950 and subsequently the floods in Kansas City and other natural disasters. So we were able, as a result of these experiences, to really bring a greater sense
of unity into our planning and our activities for future years.

On an earlier recording I also had made some reference to the 1950 convention. Now in that convention we established our goals for our 1950 negotiations and we called for the elimination of the geographical differentials, for a guaranteed annual wage, for Saturday an overtime day and for general wage increases of course. We wanted, at this point, to do something about pensions or supplements for social security benefits. We wanted to reduce the workweek and so forth. I had already indicated that our 1950 convention was a convention where the communist issue and the internal union conflicts, which really used this issue as an organizing ground—there were really different internal differences as to who and where the leadership of the union was going. So it seized on the communist issue because I had had such a strong position on not relinquishing any of the commitments to civil liberties that we had pursued for so many years. At that convention Phil Murray came as one of the speakers as did Allen Haywood.

Haywood of course was an old friend who had come to other conventions of ours. This was the first time Murray had ever come to any of our conventions. I'd made a very strong statement in my opening speech to the convention in keynoting it, that I would be opposed to any effort to amend our constitution to ban people of different political persuasions from holding office. I think the way it read was communists, fascists, you know, a whole list of them, on the theory that I thought our people ought to be willing to trust themselves to decide who they wanted to elect to office. Murray, as I've already indicated on a previous record, and Haywood too for that matter, handled this problem. They had seen copies of my speech before they spoke. I know that because when I went up to visit with Murray in his office I had been preceded by somebody else who had left a copy of my speech, which had been distributed, on a table, perhaps for my benefit and had underlined those particular sections of the speech so that I knew that Murray was familiar with them. In spite of that he used the occasion to pat me on my back and to tell everyone that I had been a very good boy and they could rely on me to follow CIO policy and that never were they wrong in their expectations. And Haywood, as was his wont, pretty much followed Murray's general approach to this. Although he spoke for many other and different things on this particular question he repeated many of the things that Murray had said. As I indicated the manner in which Murray and Haywood had both addressed themselves to these problems had been getting increasingly unpleasant for me and I had a feeling it was creating a good deal of tension in the
convention and that it required something to be said.

There was a resolution that had been introduced on internal unity and after it was introduced I said the following:

"The chair would ask the indulgence of the convention for a moment in order to make a few comments at this point. He does this in the hope and in the firm conviction that we are here a sample of democracy in action. We have differences of opinion and they get expressed. That is the way it should be. Out of those differences we formulate certain policies. At the time we formulate them we have no way of knowing whether we are right, whether we are wrong or whether we are somewhere in between. None of us had a crystal ball to look into but history will record eventually the accuracy or inaccuracy of the position that we may have on any given issue. Once we have acted in the convention, the highest body of our organization, that becomes the policy of our organization. Our union has consistently and steadfastly held to the basic principle that we exist for the benefit of the worker in the plant, the stockyard, the soap factory, the sugar mill. We have consistently and steadfastly held to the basic principle of American Trade Unionism that the way to achieve our objective is by uniting these workers in the packing plants, the stockyards, the soap factory and the sugar mill so that we can use our collective strength in the improvement of the hours of work, the wages and all the working conditions in the plant. Unity has been our watchword. It is not an empty catchword either but a living reality. There are cynics who may sneer as I say that and point to differences that have existed and still exist and probably will continue to exist, you know, but it is exactly there that the singular strength and power of this union of ours lies, in the fact that we can have these differences and not only benefit from them but still go forward as we have and as we will. We have succeeded in that because we have not allowed ourselves to be deterred from our main highway. We have grown with and benefitted from these differences because we've held firm and sound to the basic premise of trade unionism, that the grievance
of one worker in the plant is the grievance of all the workers in the plant, that the struggle of one plant or one department is the struggle of all of us. There in lies our strength, in the fact that we are many and we act as one. When we stop doing that we stop being a union. Yes, we have met this test because we have asked of all our members only one thing, that he or she join in the common fight for the benefit of all of us because this common fight is for the benefit of all of us. We don't ask about their color. We haven't asked about their race, political opinions, their religion. We know that from the time a labor movement first came into being employers have tried an infinite variety of tactics to divide their employees. We have proven that we can stand firm and united and hold to these basic trade union principles, the principles of freedom and democracy. And we have proven that we can do it even in a growing national atmosphere of hysteria. In this convention hall you've heard specific and very gracious approval given to the policies and record of your union and its officers. That approval has been given at a time when the past record and policies of this union and its officers have been clear. That approval has been given at a time when my own views and policies have been very clearly and forthrightly stated and when, known to all, I have pledged myself to steer a clear course and maintain my loyalty to my union only, but respecting the rights of every member, accepting the differences among us and building upon those differences. I hope that what has happened in this convention has been a proof and an acknowledgement that it is possible to steer such a course of consistent and honest trade unionism and still not be called a red. I hope that what has happened in this convention has been proof and an acknowledgement that the labor movement always has and still does enforce the American principles of freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and freedom of press. I hope that what has happened in this convention has been a proof and acknowledgement that the united effort of all workers in the common cause of the union is the accepted principle of the American trade union movement. And if in this convention we have accomplished this, we have completed a tremendous
achievement. And if that is our achievement then your union has thus given an important and meaningful demonstration of what a union should be, a demonstration of particular significance. Most important of all, and for this the rank and file membership whom we represent will be most appreciative, we, in our day to day work and our week to week existence, have proven that a union can devote itself wholeheartedly to the wage problems, the grievance problems, the working conditions of its membership and not become divided by issues unrelated to our performance as a union. Therein lies our strength and there in lies our power. And if we can all affirm to these principles and still receive the support and approval of the labor movement then we have established that real militant trade unionism can flourish and grow stronger over the years just because of our differences and our devotion to the general welfare. I am grateful to the convention for giving me this opportunity to make this statement to you. The convention will be in order."

I had the distinct feeling, and as I remember it, it was pretty general, that there was a certain relaxation of tension as a result of that statement. Then, as you will note from the transcript of the proceedings, a very generous resolution was adopted as a testimonial to my leadership and these things together sort of put the convention on an even keel and the bad taste of what had been going on seemed to leave and we ended on a note that seemed to make us ready for our 1950 negotiations.

Now I think I should pause at this point to also indicate that there were a number of items that we were pressing in the '50 negotiations. These were the geographical differentials and the male-female wage differentials as far back as that time. As a matter of fact in the '49 negotiations we had made a breakthrough on the male-female differential and had reduced it rather substantially. I noted, in reviewing some of the back issues of the paper, that as far back as the December, 1949 issue we began a column dealing with the problems of women in the industry.

I. Was this at the initiative of women or was it the initiative of the men?

R. No my impression is that it was the initiative--well
it came out of the international office. I do not recall now whose idea it was except that during the '40s at several conventions we had set up committees on discrimination and from that we had gotten into this whole problem of discrimination against women so we set up a Women's Activities Committee. We formalized it and as a matter of fact in subsequent years at each convention there was a separate committee dealing with it. We always saw to it that the membership on that committee had just as many men on it as it did women so that the men could understand what the problem was.

We began at least early in the '50s if not in the late '40s, we began urging every local union to make sure that they had women on their grievance committee in the plant, holding office in the local union because we looked at it in very much the same way that we looked at the question of Blacks in the union. You know, no one would express the opinion of a person being discriminated against as well as that person. As a matter of fact the women were responsive to this although it took a while, as it did with the Blacks also, before they really began to think that we meant it, before they were convinced that we meant it. And then they were in so many ways responding to the same kinds of problems and pressures that Blacks responded to. We could do something about the problem of the Black in the plant but it was only if we carried the fight out into the community that we could do anything about them there. As we pressed, for instance, for the elimination of the male-female wage differential the leaders among the women were all for this but I used to get letters just berating me for pressing on this because they were convinced this was the way they'd lose their jobs. They had bought the idea which the employers had sold them that they wouldn't hire a woman if they could get a man at the same price. Why should they hire a woman under those circumstances? I used to have to point out to them that women had certain kinds of dexterity. "Just look at the kinds of jobs you're doing, you have a manual dexterity that a man hasn't got. You know the small amount of money represented by the difference in what they pay women and what they pay men would never get them to hire you instead of a man unless they knew you could do this particular work better."

Well it was a very interesting experience and a very educational experience for me as it had been earlier with the Blacks. In more recent years as I've watched this Women's Liberation Movement develop I've become more or less attuned to it. I began to see it
through the eyes of what we were dealing with and I realized then that we had failed miserably in that even though we were probably ahead of every other union in terms of developing women among the leadership, in terms of making certain they were on the committees so that they would have an opportunity to voice their grievances and gripes and they'd feel they had a spokesman, to have them in the official family of the local union so that they felt they could get a hearing there, but we never did comprehend, I don't think, the philosophical problem of the whole role of women and status of women in an essentially male dominated society. So that whereas in the case of the Black we could put that into the framework of the broader social and sociological problem and political problem that that represented, we never did for some strange reason -- because I suppose we never really believed it or understood it ourselves. And none of the women we were dealing with did either, I don't think, understand that the problem was in many ways similar and essentially if we were going to make any real progress it wasn't just enough to get a woman the same wage that a man got for doing that same work. There was also the problem of what her status was. You know if there were certain piecework jobs in the plant, for example, women were so much more skillful than men, they could work right alongside of the men and they make twice as much money as the men because they were paid on a piecework basis. With that kind of a woman you didn't have any problem making her understand that it was because of her dexterity that she was being retained on the job. Well I guess I've gotten off on this a bit too much.

I. While you're off on it let me ask you something. You never did have a single seniority sequence did you?

R. Well I will be jumping over now but let me do it because I guess this is an appropriate time. That was a source of great difficulty for us and it was a very sad experience for me. When the Civil Rights Act was passed Howard Smith, the miserable congressman from Virginia who had been for so many years Chairman of the Rules Committee, and he was really reactionary beyond measure, had added to the non discrimination clause, I think it's Title VII or Section VII of the act, a provision not only to eliminate discrimination because of race, creed or color but also of sex. Now he was reported to have done it with his tongue in his cheek, believing that this was the surest way of killing the bill. Well the bill passsed the House without a word of debate on this addition. The word was in it.

We had always over the years maintained separate seniority lists for men and women. Certain jobs were thought of as women's jobs and certain jobs thought of as men's. So
the question, became how do you deal with it. Obviously the simplest way to deal with it would have been to set up a single seniority list and just go down it based on your services. But there were many women in those plants that had been there for a long time. Now what do you do if a woman can't do the job that's open and there were many jobs in a packing plant where that was the case. You could create a situation where she'd be laid off, whereas this other way you protect against it. So what we did was set up what we called a three pronged system. We setup one group of jobs that it was assumed that men would want to do, a group of jobs that it was assumed that women would want to do and then a group of jobs that either one or the other might want to have and seniority applied.

Now if some woman insisted on taking a man's job and she had the seniority she could take it or vice versa. If a man wanted a woman's job he could take it and of course those were the cases where we had most of our troubles because the men looked at those jobs as the easier jobs, the cleaner jobs and the more desirable jobs. Now this gray area where both would want them they would take them. What we discovered happening, however, was that women got into terrible arguments with each other. And we had these just nasty, unbelievably nasty meetings, membership meetings in which many of the young men wanted a single seniority list because they saw this as a way of getting the women out of the plant and their having jobs. These would have been men in their 20s with only a few years of service but very anxious to get jobs.

One of them I can remember in Waterloo, Iowa at a meeting I was at getting up and saying, "Look, I'm married, I have two children, I'm twenty six and I need a job just as much as any woman here. I don't understand why you should enforce this kind of a rule that would protect her and not protect me." Well we used to have just awful times because under our system the people had to vote on it and approve it. We couldn't just impose it and there's some problems with democracy.

Then what began happening -- some smart lawyer in Iowa got hold of a few of these women and saw this as away of making himself a lot of money and he organized groups of women in plants all through Iowa and Minnesota and they began suing the company and ourselves on these issues. Now they never really got anywhere with the cases but they'd get settlements. You know it would cost the company several thousand dollars to pay to try the case or defend against it. They'd pay them off and that just encouraged someone else to do it. And we finally got to the point where, I am convinced yet, that if we had not done that, employment of women would have just dropped down to nothing in a very quick period of time.
See our contracts provided that a person could have the job which his seniority entitled him to, or her to, provided they could do the job or learn to do it in a reasonable length of time. Now what was a reasonable length of time? You had to give them a chance to learn. Well some of these jobs, I used to sit with women who claimed they'd been forced into certain jobs by the company. These were the so called middle jobs, the gray jobs, you know. And they claimed that they had been improperly selected and how could a woman be expected to do these jobs. First of all I began to learn more about the kind of seniority rules that existed in those plants than I had ever heard of before. You know you wrote general rules about seniority but its details you could never have covered in a contract and so in each plant the contract would usually say that a plant would determine its own seniority. So they would develop seniority rules that would impel them to stay on a particular job or seniority rules that said you may have a lot of plant seniority but you can stay on the job only if you've got enough department seniority to stay within the department. Well so many different wrinkles! Many times I would discover that what had happened was that some women, because they luckily had gotten into a particular department in some point in time may have had much less seniority than other women but because they'd gotten there earlier they'd picked up the best jobs. And they were the ones who generally complained if these other women were brought into the department. They took their jobs away.

It was the old problem you know and as I used to try and explain to people that the real problem here is scarcity. There aren't enough jobs to go around. It's perfectly natural for everybody to fight for what is here. These proved to be very difficult questions but the fact is that even though we had started very early on in the area of trying to deal with these questions of women's rights I don't think we ever put it in the kind of perspective that it should have been put into. We questioned the failure of local unions to elect women and do all that kind of thing. Despite all that we never went out of our way to see to it that a woman got on our executive board. Now it is true that our union is set up so that the people on the board were the national officers plus the district directors. There was a president, secretary treasurer and at the end one vice president, but at one point we had as many as two or three vice presidents plus a Canadian vice president but he was also the Director of Canada. Now each of these district directors were also members of the board and the truth is that even though we had a number of women on our staff they would have had a very rough time in getting elected. So as I think back on this particular phase
of the problem I realize how we failed in providing a philosophical understanding to the membership on the issue of women's status, although we did on the question of racial discrimination even though I don't know that everybody got it. At least we made the effort to give it to them. In terms of their participation in the union and in terms of their working conditions in the plant and all that kind of thing we were, so far as I know, one of the first national unions that eliminated the wage differential on account of sex and also made provision for women participating in the official life of the union.

Well we did a number of other things too, along with having ourselves involved in this question of women's activities. We understood that there was a very close relationship, and this given today's inflationary problems, there was a close relationship between our membership and the farmer so we set up a Farm Labor Relations Committee. We carried on all kinds of public relations activities in connection with farm groups. In some areas we were even able to work with the Farm Bureau. That was a little unusual, given the fact that they are pretty right wing, really. It's more than just conservative. But we used to try and set up negotiations so that farmers would be brought in. We used to take the public position that sensible negotiations in an industry like ours would involve the meat companies, our union, the farmers or farmgroups and the consumer groups, if anybody could find consumer representatives. Essentially this was the kind of industry where all these four parties were essential.

We made a movie that was a hit wherever it was shown. It was called, They Met at the Fair. Somebody out in Iowa had come up with the idea of our opening a booth in a state fair, I think in Iowa, or at a county fair and we went all over Iowa. Then we spread it out throughout the country and we began to put out a publication out of our national office. It was edited by Lyle Cooper, our research director, a very wise and extremely competent economist and research person. But Lyle put out a little fourteen page pamphlet called The Meat of It, which we used to publish about four times a year. We'd have a special fair edition in which we'd go into detail showing what the relationships were, how what happened to the farmer affected us and how what happened to us affected the farmer. You know it wasn't very hard to develop this and of course I'm talking now about the late '40s and '50s and in those days you had a lot of small family farms still around. That isn't the case anymore. At least if there are still some around they're much fewer in number. In those days there were a lot of them. We carried on all kinds of activities.
I note I neglected to mention when we were talking about our program with the Women's Committee that we forced Armour's in Kansas City in I think it was 1950 to eliminate its segregated dressing rooms for women. And we made Cudahy hire black women in their sliced bacon department in Kansas City and in Sioux City we made them break down discrimination against women in hiring. So while we were attacking it on one level we were doing it on all levels so that women would understand that they had a unity of purpose in this, that they had a common sex even though they didn't have a common color.

All this was going on in 1950 and then we got into our negotiations. We ended the contract negotiations in the fall of 1950 with an eleven cent an hour wage increase and I assume other minor improvements. Eleven cents an hour at that time would have been a rather substantial increase in a single year although I guess it was in 1946 we had received sixteen cents at one time and six cents later in that year. I would have thought that the eleven cents at one time was among the larger increases up to that point in time. Of course by today's standards that doesn't mean anything.

The cent isn't worth that much any more.

Our contract also, when we concluded it, permitted us to reopen it on wages and we obviously did. We reopened our contracts for negotiations in the end of '50 and the beginning of '51 and we did this apparently after discussions with the Meat Cutters. We acted together in opening. Just as now, the Bureau of Labor Statistics was reporting that living costs had reached an all time high. The last session of Congress had raised the tax rate on individuals while watering down corporation taxes so that many of the same patterns that seem to be prevailing today, perhaps not as severely, but they were still evident, and we opened the contracts for negotiations and we began to get into them.

The Korean involvement started and Truman froze wages and set up a price stabilization arrangement of which he put Eric Johnston in charge. Eric Johnston had been President of the United States Chamber of Commerce and a figure of some prominence. That whole issue around that particular negotiation, I think, was an interesting one, particularly our relationship with Johnston. He was reported in the press as saying after one session that we had together that he should have worn an asbestos suit.

You mean you roasted him?

Well our language was not particularly gentle nor was the tone very gentle.
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
May 31, 1973

R. We left off last time with the negotiations of early 1951, with our problems with Eric Johnston who in January of that year, I think, had been named by the president, who would have been Truman at that point, to the Wage and Price Control Administrator, the Economic Stabilization Director. I've forgotten what title they gave him but it was labeled to that effect. And in January Eric Johnston imposed a price and wage freeze. We had concluded a contract the previous year and had obtained a wage increase of eleven cents an hour in August of that year. That had been the second largest wage increase, as I think I already noted, that we were ever able to negotiate.

Between June and roughly December of 1950 the cost of living had gone up so sharply that we felt entitled to a substantial wage increase just to catch up with the cost of living. We started our negotiations early in January and our experience with the companies, initially that is after we got into the discussions, was that they took the position that until there was clarification by Johnston on the price and wage freeze orders, they weren't prepared to negotiate. It was perfectly clear from the orders themselves that the only time an issue could be resolved would be if an agreement was reached and it had been submitted for approval. The War Labor Board, of course, you could go to them with a dispute and they would then act as an arbitrator and resolve the dispute. That was not true under these orders that Johnston had issued. And by the way, he had set up a wage Stabilization Board to act on agreements so that with out an agreement to submit we were just tied and in the face of the company's refusal to do anything we were just tied up completely. We had, of course, reported to our membership on this situation and, as could have been expected, all over the country there were demonstrations and telegrams and letters going to companies, newspaper comments, television reports and a few problems in the plants -- extended lunch hours for meetings being taken and things of this sort.

Finally on February 8, and I don't recall what was their motivation or if they even gave us one, but we got a call from Swift suggesting that we have a meeting. They called and said they were ready to talk and so we went in and talked and by February 9 we had reached an agreement with them for a nine cent an hour wage increase, which in retrospect I think reflected what had really happened to the cost of living, almost a catch up thing and what we called a blanket
adjustment. In other words way back in 1945 under the aegis of the War Labor Board we had established a bracket system of wages that had two and a half cent spreads between them. Over a period of years we kept increasing that spread so that you had zero labor grade, labor grade one, labor grade two and it went up to something like twenty two labor grades. There was two and a half cents initially between them; today there's five cents between them. The two and a half cents became five as a result of half cent increments over a period of years. This represented, I think, the first half cent increment that would have probably raised the spread from two and a half cents to three cents. At any rate, this had been the arrangement we worked out.

Now, in these negotiations we had raised a couple of other questions that haunted us later, at least one of them did. I guess the other we worked out over a period of time but we were terribly resentful of the fact that the Congress had done nothing about correcting some of the tax inequities and these had been as much because of the elimination of the excess profits tax that had been in effect during the period of war, the World War. They had eliminated the excess profits tax and done nothing about eliminating some of the inequities that existed in the tax system and we felt this was really another factor that should be considered along with the cost of living in terms of maintaining the purchasing power of the worker's dollar.

Our whole philosophy was directed towards the proposition of getting wage adjustments or income that represented real income rather than a fancied increase which was taken away either by rises in the cost of living, by inflation or by increased taxes. So we conceived of two propositions the tax thing we wanted to deal with by saying to the company we want a wage increase that will restore what we lost by reason of inflation, a cost of living increase, and we also want that amount to increase sufficiently so it will pay the additional tax that will be imposed, that has been imposed through the new tax law but also by reason of the increase we got. And we want similar automatic adjustments in the future whenever tax increases are levied. Then we asked for what we called the cost of living bonus, which was different from the usual cost of living escalator clause. As you may know the cost of living escalator clause operates on the basis of defining a certain date and if it's gone up as between two points, x or x amount on the cost of living index that the Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes, then you get a cent an hour for so many points increase in that index. Well, we asked for what we called a bonus which would have made it effective retroactively so that we would not always be dragging behind the cost of living. The cost of living goes
up and we get an increase three or six months or nine months or a year later, which of course doesn't do much for the guy for what is lost in between. So what we sought was this bonus to take care of that.

Well the company was particularly infuriated with the taxcalator, which was what we called it, because they said it was unAmerican, an infringement on free enterprise. Every American citizen had an obligation to pay taxes and to try and avoid it, etc. So you could try to be rational with this, you know. It didn't matter that you said, "Nobody wants to avoid paying the tax, it's a question of who should bear the burden, the worker will still be paying the tax. What he seeks is a wage increase adequate in the amount to take care of that tax. Now you guys sponsored, or at least it was big American business who sponsored, the tax laws." And I recited the history of Beardsly Rummel's campaign in which he succeeded, by the way, with the assistance of most of American industry, to get this withholding tax arrangement through so that there would be no delay in the collection of it. "You thought it was perfectly all right to push that on, even though that put additional work on you because now you've got to withhold that tax every week so this is an additional accounting load. If we asked you to do that for the check off you were perfectly furious but we have to do it because that's the law." Well obviously we didn't get anywhere and they didn't agree to it.

Years later, however, in a talk with one of the key company negotiators during this period, he told me that the top management had become very disturbed by our position on both of these questions, the taxcalator demand, which they really felt undermined the system, to ask the company to pay a man's taxes. Why how could he hope to be a responsible citizen? And the other was the cost of living bonus which they thought was so unfair because they had to charge current prices but they couldn't go back and get what they might have lost because the price shifted from one day to the next. I pointed out to them that under the cost of living escalator arrangement there was a six month lag where they might have a lag of a few days before they could adjust their prices upward and, depending on what their inventories were, they might make money on this upward movement of prices rather than lose money. That would also be true, of course, if prices dropped but the concern at this point was the prices going up. Well, as I say, there wasn't much point in arguing the question but I had always been rather intrigued in the memory that they really seemed to be terribly disturbed by that. Now I would suppose if I were to talk to those people at this point they would laugh at their own attitudes at that time but then at that time this reflected the whole conflict situation, I'm
I.

Did you get the taxcalator?

R.

Oh no, of course not. We didn't get the cost of living bonus either. At some point in time we got the cost of living escalator clause, the traditional one, which left that lag there, but not in these 1951 negotiations. What was interesting in the '51 negotiations was the give and take of the Washington conflict that went on. Having finally resolved our agreement with the company at nine cents plus this bracket adjustment, we then submitted the thing to Johnston and he referred it to the Wage Stabilization Board and we said we wanted him to act. While all of this was going on there was a lot of controversy with Johnston because of the nature of the freeze rule. What he had done was he had rolled back the base date for the freeze to January, 1950 and had allowed wages to go up 10%. Well we had gotten the eleven cents an hour increase in August of 1950. Now it's true that that had reflected periods prior to 1950 but if you took the base of 1950 and you applied the eleven cents it took up most of the 10% that his order allowed. Our case was the first case to come up after that order and we wanted him to rule on it and grant it and get it over with.

In the meanwhile he had set up a Wage Stabilization Board and I remember John Dunlap, who is now the Chairman of the Cost of Living Council or whatever they call this thing that's functioning in Washington now, who was at Harvard then in the Department of Economics, just as he still is, but who was performing various jobs for the government. I may or may not have recalled that in 1946, I think it was, when we got a sixteen cent an hour wage increase instead of a fifteen cent
an hour wage increase, John was advising Chester Bowles, who at that time was the head of the OPA and who called me at four o'clock in the morning in my hotel room and woke me up. This was in Washington and he called to tell me that when the history of the period was written the packinghouse worker would be responsible for inflation because of that one penny an hour. Well this is the same John Dunlap who is now head of the Cost of Living Council and also the one who, along with Clark Kerr, was co-chairman of the wage Stabilization Board, the public members in charge. And it had industry members and labor members.

I knew from talking with the labor members that they weren't going to stay. They were ready to walk out, they were going to walk out in a day or two and our casewould sit there. But, given the problem of Johnston's freeze order, I also realized that even though we might get our case acted on this would have been very destructive to the whole labor movement unless there was some relaxing of the rules because there were some other unions that would have been seriously affected. So we kept insisting that Johnston make a determination of it. As I say we knew that the board was going to fold because the labor people were going to walk off.

There's an interesting little side light on that. I had been a very good friend for a number of years with Joe Loftis, who was the New York Times reporter who covered labor matters in Washington, a very intuitive and astute newspaper reporter, one of the best that I ever ran across. Well, there were many very good ones but the other one I remember being somewhat in Joe's class was Lou Carolis who I understand is now the managing editor and publisher of Chicago Today, but in those days he was the labor reporter for the Herald Tribune. At any rate Joe Loftis and I had been very good friends. We had great admiration and respect for each other. I had never been asked by Joe to give him any information and I never did. He'd interview me like he would interview anybody else but I never got any special story breaks, never asked for any, and he never offered any, he never gave me any. But everybody was convinced that he had this story. The New York Times edition that hit the streets that night, the next morning edition, carried the story that the labor members had resigned and of course they weren't resigning till the next day and everybody was absolutely convinced that I had told him. He was grinning from ear to ear when I saw him and I told him the beating I was taking over it because, of course, it wasn't true. I hadn't given it to him.

Well at any rate we kept pressing Johnston for a decision. Once the labor members resigned there was no board to act on it and Johnston then began to try to use us as
blackmail on the labor movement to get these members to go back. We said publicly that that's what he was doing and remember, I told you there was some newspaper comment to the effect that after an interview with me he said to the press that he should have been wearing an asbestos suit. Well actually what happened then in the course of that interview was I told him precisely what I thought of his effort to use their principled position of opposition, of refusing to be a party to what they thought was inequitable and unjust and then trying to get us to use our need to bring them back to the board was just indecent. And I did it in language that he didn't expect to have come from a labor leader I guess, in a way that was just too difficult for him to deal with. As a matter of fact he couldn't. But he didn't have any answers because, that was precisely what he was doing. He just had not been expecting to be told politely that he was doing a pretty vicious indecent thing and that's what I told him. In addition to which I told him he was simply asking us to close these plants down and I didn't know what would happen to his price stabilization plan because without me at being produced what would happen with a black market and all that kind of thing.

Then we began to bring our people in. We called them to go to Washington from all over the country and we had them go see their congressmen, their senators and him. He met one afternoon with reporters present and I don't know, about fifty to seventy-five people from the plants around the country and they just gave him a real bad time. You ought to take a look at some of the clippings in The Packinghouse Worker on that. Maybe there are some in the morgue. But some of these women from the plant, you know, they were just great. All of them, the men too. He had a very bad time but in spite of all of that we reached that agreement on February 9, 1951. We didn't get it finally approved until May, 1951, that was three months. And we didn't get that bracket adjustment that I explained, that half cent increment on each labor grade, we didn't get that approved until June of 1951.

Now one of the things that happened was that the board got reconstituted. Johnston finally appointed a panel as a result of all the pressure we put on him. I'm convinced he did it, I'm not even sure I may not through one way or another have suggested it, a panel to make a recommendation to him to hold hearings and make a recommendation which would do a couple of things. It would first make it easier to get the approval and secondly, it would at least take some of the immediate heat out of the situation. You know you build these things up to such a point where every eye is focused on it and there comes a time when it's better to let it get a little diffusion and not be in such sharp focus. We had an
effective date. I mean our people weren't going to be out of anything in terms of money because the agreed on date of the increase was there and he had promised to see to it that that was respected.

At any rate he appointed a panel consisting of Ed Witte, Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Phillips Garman, who had been at the University of Illinois in Urbana, and Pierce Davis, who had for many years taught Labor Relations at IIT. I think I heard that he had retired last year but he had been there and an arbitrator for many years. These three men held hearings. Well they had to hire a big room. I think it was in the Morrison Hotel if I remember correctly. Everybody was sitting at chairs you know, theatre style. Practically the whole industry was there, every packer in the whole country almost and there were four unions there because the Teamsters were there, too. They had negotiated a contract for the Chicago operation. They represented the truck drivers and they had a nine cent increase and so they were there.

I got provoked at the way they had it structured for some reason, I can't remember why, and made a big fuss and insisted on getting a table. I think I did it as much to upset the decorum of it, you know. People will see something in a certain way and get themselves all set to have it going a certain way and you come along with just some physical change which had absolutely nothing to do with the substance of the problem you're dealing with, but just change the physical environment some way or other. That, interestingly enough, can many times affect their ability to control a situation.

I remember shocking Ed Witte badly by, at one point, saying that I thought this whole Price Wage Stabilization was a fraud and a delusion and in the face of the Korean War it was absolutely inexcusable. I later discovered that he had either a son or a relative in the service and he was just shocked that I would speak that way about it. But he was an old and good friend of mine and he got over his shock, a man of complete integrity and really a father of social security in this country, or the social security law I guess is a more accurate way of putting it because a lot of other people have done work on the concept. He was as well informed a man as any one I have ever come across. When he finally retired from Wisconsin something was done that was so nice. They ran a two day institute in which they had people like me and John Dunlap and Clark Kerr, many of his coterie that over the years whose lives he had touched in one way or another. In my case I met him first when he was sent in to mediate a dispute we had in Minneapolis. That was way back in the late '30s or early'40s and the others had met him in one way or another. We had this
Labor Relations Symposium in Wisconsin in Madison for two
days with a dinner. He was a lovely kind of man, a really
competent kind of man. He knew the field and he was very
careful. I recall when he was a member of the War Labor Board
going in to see him one time. He was working on one of our
casesthen. This must have been in '44 or '45. It was simply
incredible how much he knew about it, the amount of work and
research. He had gone all the way back to some common law
stuff early in the century about the packing industry, he was
very familiar with it.

At any rate they finally made a recommendation and
the Wage Stabilization Board got reconstituted at some point
in time. I've forgotten all the details of the shifts that
were made but for a couple of months we were simply commuting
between here and Washington, screaming, yelling and getting
everybody we could to call, put pressure. But there was
literally no other way of doing it and that's one of the things
that's going on right now. I think that the so called
controls they've got you see these things are basically so
unjust because what they do is the freeze on the wage is
almost perfect but on the price it rarely is because there's
so many ways of getting around that.

I.

Do you think the labor movement is fighting it as well
now as you did then?

Well see, the whole labor movement was involved in
that fight. Their walking off the board was part of the
fight, the pressures that we built up. We had always found in
our experience that we got further and we kept our membership
more involved and more active to the extent that we mobilized
them and got them to participate. We liked the action that
came out of it because it was an educational device for them,
too. They developed strength out of it in an organizational
sense, an understanding of tactics, a discipline and all
kinds of things that we thought were very important. So
there were a lot of functions at their end.

But we also discovered that administrators in those
days -- of course remember now, this is over twenty years ago
and they've learned a lot since that time with the campus
demonstrations, with a few other demonstrations, the whole
civil rights period. I don't know whether this so called
mass confrontation is as effective but it depended on how you
used it. Now we used it with a single issue objective, it
wasn't diffused at all. And it had to do with whether or not
the government would be justified in issuing rules and
regulations that interfered with two things: one, an
existing contract. Could they set aside a contract? There
are some Constitutional lawyers who raise very serious
questions about the validity of that kind of action unless the contract itself is illegal and clearly these were not. And secondly, in view of the national policy to support and stimulate the process of collective bargaining, what happened when a national policy gets imposed that frustrates the results of collective bargaining?

Really these were then the issues that were being raised and when we'd go and talk to congressmen and senators it was really rather surprising. You could go to a conservative guy and if somebody from his district or state came to him and told him this story in these terms he used to get rather outraged. Now if the company had objected he might not have felt so willing to do it and so we were able to mobilize a good deal of support. Now these, of course, were tactics that we had used rather effectively back in the '40s with the Labor Board. Vincent, when he was director of Economic Stabilization, I don't remember who all else, but over a period of time we'd had these kinds of problems. Well at any rate, finally in May we got approval of the nine cent increase and finally in June they approved the bracket adjustment so the whole thing was resolved.

Now I think I covered last time rather briefly, and I'm not certain how clear my recollection was on that issue, but we had in August of '51 an increase that I suppose went into effect on February 1. It was six months after the other one and the other one was probably September or so. We had a right to reopen our contracts in August '51 and we did. And that's the time, as I think I've indicated, that the Amalgamated settled for six cents an hour even though they could have opened on many more issues. We were just infuriated because it was another case of where, in spite of all kinds of commitments they had made to us, they went off on their own without saying a thing. They called Swift and arranged a meeting with Swift and they actually offered to settle for five cents an hour. Swift's statistician made the computation and said, "Well, if you just got a cost of living increase you'd be entitled to six cents an hour so the Amalgamated agreed to take six cents, that was the settlement.

Well we couldn't take it and we called a national conference of our membership to get their view of the matter as to whether or not they shared our analysis of it and they did. This was the point in time where we began what they called these hit and run strikes. Oh all kinds of names were given to it by various editorial writers for the various papers. We used those in other ways, too, but this time it was one where I enunciated the principle that we had a right to call strikes and we could determine how long they should be
because we also had the right to call them off whenever we wanted to. So if we called a strike for one day it was for one day and there was no law that said you had to strike an entire plant. So far as I knew we had a right to strike a single department or a few workers in a department or any number of people within the bargaining units that we represented. And I still think that's the law. I shouldn't say I think it's the law, I don't know whether it's the law. What I'm really saying is that I'm not sure that a court has ever ruled on this particular phase of it. There are very practical considerations, however, why it's not always a good idea but at that time it was a new idea.

It worked most effectively for us and for a period of weeks after the Amalgamated settlement we continued this activity until finally, I think sometime in January, we worked out an agreement with Armour first in which, in addition to the six cents an hour, we reduced the male-female wage differential by one and a half cents an hour. We eliminated some inequities, that is payment for particular jobs that should have been paid as much as another job and wasn't. These were always harrassing problems that constantly came up because of the nature of the work. It would keep changing and so there was a difference. At any rate we eliminated a lot of those kinds of issues and we also arranged for jury pay. It's true it wasn't major changes but it represented some principled issues that we had been arguing about for a long time and it really reflected the discipline and the unprecedented participation of the membership, the union as a whole. Otherwise we never would have done it.

This kind of activity was continued by us for quite a period of time, especially at Armour because Armour was in the process then of intensifying its mechanization, putting in all kinds of new equipment. Every time they put in a piece of new equipment they'd cut the rate of the job. Now we'd point out to them that over a period of time they would increase their production, they would have fewer people and why also cut the rate of the job, you know. Why do you have to be so hoggish about this? But that was the way they saw it.

We had a job, for instance, it was one of the highest paying jobs in the packinghouse. It was called splitting beef and that meant a man took a very heavy cleaver and he split down the spine of the animal that had been killed and cleaned it out as he cut it in half so they had the carcass in two halves. He couldn't go in either direction, he had to go right straight down because if he did, he'd score the meat and destroy the cut. This took a lot of skill, there was no doubt about it. Well there came along an electric saw. At first
they had a lot of trouble with it because it did what they called burning the bone. It didn't look right and people didn't want to buy it but they corrected that and they'd saw it down. It's true it's a much easier job but our argument was that we weren't going to have our rate structure subverted that way.

Years later we got an agreement out of the companies and they wrote it in the contract that they would maintain the rate. Any time they put in a new piece of equipment they would not cut the rate. They would maintain the rate on the job even though the job had changed to the degree that you didn't recognize it. Well that was essential if we were going to maintain any type of rate structure because it was always the more skilled jobs that they were eliminating, the higher priced jobs. If you let those go down, obviously you'd have trouble with the lower paid ones. Well at any rate this was a fight that went on for a long time. We finally forced in the same rate with the saw that we had with the cleaver. This, again, represented a major breakthrough because it was the first time we had succeeded. I think it was probably the first time we had made such a major issue out of this kind of a question because we hadn't been presented with it in quite this form. The industry was very slow in mechanizing and this was the first time we had been presented with it.

Well to continue with things that happened in 1951, one of the principles that the union had laid down in our convention in 1950 was a guaranteed annual wage and $3,000.00 a year minimum and we almost obtained that goal in our sugar negotiations in the year 1951. We were able to establish a 1,900 hour guarantee in a sugar refinery in Boston, the Revere Sugar Refinery, which was owned by United Fruit. In the National Sugar Refinery which was then in Long Island, New York, we were able to get a 1,936 hour guarantee with a minimum wage for men of $2,981.84, which was only $18.56 less than the $3,000.00 dollar minimum. I was reminded of that in reading through some of the old material.

I. When did you get sugar refining in your union?
R. I think that they joined the union in roughly '47. I think it was '47 or '48.
I. Is there any connection between the products or did they just join because they liked your union?
R. No, they were food and they had been an industrial union which means they had been chartered directly by the CIO. There were a whole group of them and the CIO was having trouble
servicing them so they wanted them to go into some international union which would assume the responsibility of servicing them. We competed along with the Longshoremen, one other union. I don't know if it was the East Coast Longshoremen or who. But the CIO ran an election which we won and they all became affiliates of ours. In the '48, '49 internal red fight they were among the ones who gave us the greatest difficulty, particularly the Louisiana group and that continued for several years. Eventually, of course, it got all straightened out and they became very strong adherents of the union.

I. What kind of things did they do to give you trouble?

R. Well at conventions they were part of the group that refused to pay per capita in '48 after the '48 strike. Remember I told you about that whole internal so called CIO loyalists. That wasn't the name they used, CIO Caucus or whatever it was. Well at any rate in economic terms in 1955 we had this very nasty strike down in New Orleans.

As a matter of fact when I went there recently they had a district convention and they turned the banquet at the convention into a testimonial for me. Rachel and I went down and they took me up the bayou to where I saw the woman, the Negro woman who ran a bar and a restaurant which was the place that we had for strike headquarters. It was the first time in that area that Blacks and Whites had eaten together and sat together. There wasn't much room, you know, and they just had no other place to go. It was so interesting to relive some of those experiences.

I was cited for contempt in a little town called Grammercy, which was may be ten miles if that from this town of Reserve where this woman had the restaurant. Grammercy was the same kind of a town, only their union hall was bigger so they set up a commissary and the same thing happened there. I had been over there speaking to a strike meeting. I'm getting ahead of myself now. I'm talking about '55 but I wanted to see the plant. I had never seen this particular plant. It was Colonial Sugar at the time and so I walked over there with George Thomas and Charlie Fischer and we just walked around the plant. We were cited for contempt because they had an injuction out limiting us to two pickets and they claimed we were picketing without signs, without anything. Well the judge apologized for it afterwards. It all came out but it was a very difficult situation.

At any rate the gains they made -- they all have guaranteed work years now, 2,080 hours of work guaranteed in Louisiana. We eliminated the North- South differential completely, it had been forty five cents an hour. That was one of the reasons for that strike in 1955. We have the most
unusual pension, health and welfare arrangements down there. It's the one place in the country where we have extended pre-retirement vacations so a guy can begin to get the feel of it a year or so before he retires. I've forgotten the exact terms but it seems to me he's entitled to twelve or thirteen weeks vacation to begin to get ready.

Well in 1951, in addition to that in sugar, we had the Puerto Rican group join the union and there of course there were substantial sugar workers in both grinding mills and in the sugar cane fields. They were the actual cane cutters and I was to come in the coming period to spend a good deal of time in Puerto Rico. After the first few times I didn't envy myself, I got so I didn't like it at all.

I.

Why?

R.

Many, many reasons that when we get in to it perhaps we ought to spend a session on Puerto Rico which has so many interesting ramifications, so much human interest. And language problems -- the whole question of how do you get across the importance of some self discipline both in institutional as well as organizational terms and personal terms.

I.

It was a real cultural difference?

R.

It's very difficult, at least for someone with my temperament. I dealt with it and I used to get along beautifully with it but it was terribly frustrating for me. And it was so true generally. That was one of the things that was so, you know, just a matter of time. For instance, Luis Marin at one time appointed me to a commission to make recommendations about the sugar industry for the island and the Chairman of the Commission was a guy by the name of Byrd. He was a banker and a fisherman of note. He had written several books. He was a distinguished citizen of the island and the other man, Ramos I think his name was, he had been Secretary of Agriculture at one time for the island. Well the three of us were on the commission and do you know used to go to the meeting on time and even they came an hour late. They'd tell me they thought it was scheduled for a different hour. So it was not a socio-economic problem. This Puerto Rican group joined our union in 1951 and in 1952 they were pretty much part of it and I think that was when I took my first trip there.

In 1951 it also included that very bad flood in Kansas that resulted in the closing of two plants there, a big Cudahy plant which had been one of the first plants organized into the union and had an old membership, old in the sense that they
had been in the union a long time and faithful and loyal people. I still remember especially two Mexican Americans with great pleasure. They were fired during the 1948 strike. After a lot of argument with the company I got them back to work and the reason they put them back to work is because he asked him if he did something, slugged a guy or something and he said, "Yeah, I did, why shouldn't I? He was taking my job away. I was mad at him and lost my temper and I slugged him." The man hearing it was an unusual guy, for a company man anyway, in other respects. He, himself, had been a member of a union and in later years he told me, (He's dead now so I don't mind telling you this story.) about how when he was young he used to work in the Wilson plant and how they treated him. They had a strike there. He used to lie in the weeds in a hill above the plant with a rifle watching to see who went in.

I. Did he ever shoot?

R. I don't know. He said he never shot anyone as far as he knew but he probably would have. So you know he had this kind of a background. He's also the man (I guess we have it recorded) who I was negotiating with the reinstatement of a bunch of the guys in St. Paul who had gone wacky. All of a sudden I heard something land on the table in front of me and there was this blackjack. He's the one who threw it. Well they put these two guys back to work and the flood hit and he said to me afterwards, "I came to Kansas City and I just had never seen anything like it, as if giant hands had been dug in and turned the dirt, buildings and everything upside down. You'd walk on floors that were literally a hill going upon one side and going down on the other, walls leaning."

I remember going through it with the chief Steward in the union, Ray Calvin was name, he was black. He was a man who I'd say was 6'2" I suppose, big shouldered, handsome guy. I was so much younger then, he seemed rather old but, as I think of it now (that's twenty seven years ago) he probably must have been in his early 50s. He kept his head cropped close, the whole skull, and his features were very handsome. It wasn't the traditional negroid features of size, these were classic features. In any event he'd been extremely effective, tough, hard and disciplined. You could always rely on him, very effective. Well when I came to visit there, he and this company superintendent, Ray English was his name, the three of us walked through the plant and I don't think I'll ever forget exactly. We got to a certain place, we stopped and when I turned, you have to understand first this place was emptied out completely. Ray turned and he said to me, "You know the time clock that I punched for thirty years used to hang on that wall." And you could just see a life time
kaleidoscoping into that minute and it was gone and that was really an important part of his life. He worked, he had a pay check. All the values that our society has fastened on to what a human being's role should be was represented in his statement. And he had gotten status, the union had meant status to him. They already knew by this time that the plant was not going to reopen. It would have cost too much, they'd have had to rebuild it completely.

I. What happened to those workers. Did they go into other industries?

R. Yes, they went into other industries or some of them I suppose just wandered off. We kept in touch with as many as we could. One of the things that we did learn in that situation was the importance of that separation pay arrangement that we negotiated in 1949 and no one paid any attention to it. Our understanding was that the company paid out over a million dollars in separation pay as a result of that plant closing. But that was really a very dramatic thing.

The other thing that I started telling you was that English, in the course of this same trip, said to me at one point, "You know one of the best things you ever got me to do was when you got me to put those two Mexicans back to work." And I said, "Yeah, why?" He said, "Well you should have seen them that night." And everybody tells me this. "I got in on the tail end of it. They worked for almost forty eight hours around the clock during the flood, getting that flood, the perishable stuff out of the plant and into safety. And they drove everybody else, they managed the thing." You know it was not atypical. The guys had guts, strength, conviction. This was something he ought to do, it's not right not to do everything you can to preserve something and so they did it even though they weren't getting anything extra for it. But they did it!

At any rate we raised, in addition in just straight dollar contributions from our membership from various parts of the country well over $30,000 for food relief and we sent it in. This had nothing to do with foodstuffs and clothing and that kind of thing which must have gone in, in thousands more. But two plants closed as a result of this, this one in Kansas City, Kansas which was a big one and the other in Topeka, Kansas and it was a real blow.
In our last session I think I had indicated that a group from Puerto Rico was affiliated with our union. I think it might be well to indicate the nature of that grouping first. Puerto Rico has a tradition that is substantially different from the mainland's tradition in terms of labor organization. They think of the "syndicate" as embracing workers from all kinds of fields not just one particular industry.

Nor is it limited to any particular geography if you remember that the island is approximately 35 miles wide and 125 or 140 miles long. Although a drive from San Juan to Salinas (San Juan being on the Atlantic side and Salinas on the Caribbean are just directly across from each other), might be 35 miles by the way the crow flies but it takes a good two and a half to three hours to drive it because of the nature of the roads and the mountains that you cross, all that kind of thing.

One additional bit of information ought to be added, I guess, and that's the fact that at one point, I'm not sure what the most recent census data would show, but in the early '50s Puerto Rico was still thought of as the second most densely populated area in the world, the other one being in Indo China, I think. I'm not quite sure of that but Puerto Rico did have this real over population problem.

Since I got started on this I guess some of these facts are useful to get reported as they were at least presented to me. It had very little in the way of natural resources except rich soil and a good deal of beauty. Of course it had a lot of that but most of its foodstuffs in 1952, the first time I went there, were being imported from the mainland, rice from Maryland, for example. Rice was the basic commodity of their diet but they still had to import it from the mainland, dairy products of all kinds, practically everything, meat of course. Initially they did some fishing but no canned stuff and they had never developed this internal market. Obviously they had such a low per capita income for so many years. But in any event sugar was traditionally a product of Puerto Rico and, as a matter of fact, it always intrigued me that this is true of so many areas of the world which we think of now as underdeveloped. It is true of Latin America, the Philippines, it is true of Cuba.

Now in all this the United States occupies a very
interesting role because in the '30s during the first Roosevelt administration a Sugar Act was passed. Everybody thinks it was good. The net result of the Sugar Act was to make the price to the American consumer higher than it is anywhere else in the world. What it does is limit the importation of sugar into quotas which are in turn allotted to various countries and the quotas, once being met, that's all that country could send in. It had to be raw sugar, very small quota for refined sugar of any kind. That's because we have a lot of refineries in the mainland. We have very few cane sugar producing states. For many years this is how she worked. Now for the sugar that is sent in under quota to the mainland the price is whatever we have fixed as the American price and it may be twice what the world price is. The world price is open to fluctuation. I recall on one particular occasion looking at the relative figures and it was something like well over seven dollars, close to eight dollars whereas the world price was under four dollars.

I say at any rate, Puerto Rico had a favorable quota and of course sugar provided them with a cash crop and they'd harvest it and send it in. As a result the majority of the people who worked in Puerto Rico were working the sugar fields and the "syndicate azucar", which is the Spanish name for sugar, is what the union that affiliated was called. This was made up primarily of fieldworkers the men who actually planted the cane and tilled it and cut it, harvested it and then it would be ground on the island and then shipped to the mainland as raw sugar, but ground sugar not the cane sugar. It was much more expensive to ship the cane itself. This union or this "syndicate" had a very intriguing history running for many, many years. As a matter of fact, it probably went back to some point in the '30s. At some point also it had a tie, which I was never quite able to pin down, with independence.

You may or may not remember that the history of American domination of Puerto Rico was such that in some point in time, I think during the Roosevelt administration or one of them, they announced that a Puerto Rican governor would be appointed. This was on the recommendation of Rex Tugwell who had been there as governor for many years and had been responsible for many innovations. And I learned, when I started going down there, that if there was a person in the world hated as badly as Roosevelt was by some people in the United States, the growers, the sugar growers, the sugar operators hated Tugwell that way down there because he had put through what was known as a 500 acre limitation law. He was trying to limit their size and they just hated him with a passion because of that. In addition to that he had seen to it that the southern part of the island had been irrigated.
He had seen to it that a very modern watering system had been engineered and put into effect and this was in the early '40s and of course this is the most fertile part of the island.

Well at some point along the way Munoz Marin was appointed. He was the leader in the Puerto Rican legislature which we had allowed them to elect at some point in time, I'm not quite clear when. Munoz was the unquestionable leader and spokesman of the Puerto Ricans. When they finally decided to appoint a Puerto Rican as governor he obviously was the man they appointed. He was appointed and then within a relatively short period of time elections were held and he was elected Governor of Puerto Rico and served close to 25 or 30 years, I've forgotten. He's been out of there now no more than six years. He still, of course, sits in the senate, he is still the elder statesman.

This syndicato had been organized for a long time and the man who was the head of it at the time we went there was a man by the name of Pedro Vega. Now Vega was in his late fifties at the time I first knew him but he was really there by sufferance. He was a member of the Puerto Rican legislature. He had been elected as a congressman at large and of course to be in the insular legislature is a very important role. He represented a big union there, this is what got him the nomination of the Populaire Party, which was the winning party, and so he was elected.

Well Vega was really put there, however, by a man named Ramos Antonini. Now Ramos was a Negro, a brilliant lawyer. He was Speaker of the House. Next to Munoz, without any question, he was a leading figure of the island. He had gotten involved as a lawyer with the labor movement and helped it along and so he became its spokesman actually. It was perfectly permissible in Puerto Rico. You didn't have to be a member of the union to be its president or one of its officers. For instance, you'd go to a town and you'd meet a mayor and the mayor would turn out to be the local union president although he never worked in the fields or the grinding mill, but he'd be the president. Or it might be a school teacher or a lawyer.

I. Was it the need for literacy?

R. I'm not sure if it's the need because that presumes a conscious thing. It was the fact that they were in a position where they were both more knowledgeable, better trained, better educated and also more skillful, usually more articulate, which is of course a very important attribute to have, I guess, in any Spanish country but I can't speak for others. I can only speak for Puerto Rico and it was certainly
important there. I think that this was why people responded. They'd always feel that the teacher or lawyer would be better able to lead them than they would be able to lead themselves. So that Antonino had at some point run into a factional fight.

The man who, along with him, had originally organized in the island, a man by the name of Mejias, who I, met only briefly and he had been responsible for organizing the syndicato in the first instance. At some point Mejias wanted to go out on his own and there was a factional split which is not unusual in Puerto Rico, I later learned to my chagrin. But Mejias began to break off and Antonini came to the states, (This was the '40s, quite awhile before their affiliation with us), and met with Phil Murray and Allen Haywood and developed a relationship with the CIO and became affiliated with the CIO in one form or another, sort of as an industrial union council.

They retained that affiliation for a number of years. Then at some point they were beginning to ask for the kind of help and assistance that the CIO wasn't in a position to give but only that an international union could give. We had won that election among the sugar refinery workers in the United States that I mentioned in our last session, you remember, this group that affiliated with us from New Orleans and Boston and Long Island. They had all been local industrial unions, too. So Haywood suggested to these people that they affiliate with us. I met with Antonini and a young man then who was secretary treasurer, I think. I don't recall what his official position at the time was in the syndicate but a man named Armande Sanchez. The two men who, as I understood it at least, were the key people in this thing were Pedro Vega and a man by the name, I think, of Albert0 Sanchez, but it was Armando and Antonini that I met. At any rate we worked out an arrangement and they affiliated with us.

I agreed at the time because I was touched by their problems and, well, for many reasons. I had been told what wages they were being paid, you know thirty to forty cents. Even the people who worked in the grinding mills were getting fifty cents an hour, fifty five cents an hour and there was a wage and hour hearing scheduled to be held in the fall of 1952. I think it was fall or later summer in 1952 and I promised that I would come down and be there for the presentation of the case before this industrial commission just to explain the Wage and Hour Law. The Wage and Hour Law had a provision from its inception that where industries were permitted to pay less than the minimum wage, as a number of them would, those wages would be fixed by hearings before an industrial commission for that purpose. There were a whole series of situations in which these industrial commissions functioned,
both on the mainland and, of course, Puerto Rico for almost all of the industries in the 1950s.

The commission that I was interested in was holding a hearing in San Juan on the question of what the appropriate wage should be for grinding mill workers, that was the one I was going to. The commission consisted of: Cecil Snyder, who was then the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, who had originally come from Baltimore, Maryland, I think as the United States Attorney, (He had fallen in love with the island and decided to stay there and I guess was originally appointed by Munoz and subsequently elected as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court); a man by the name of Olivarez, who at that time was the Research Director of the Planning Board. He subsequently became Chairman of the Board, then he went from there to become Secretary of Education for the island.

My meeting with Olivarez was very fortuitous for me because I think he probably had a better comprehension and a more refined sense of the economy of the island and what its implications were than anyone I ever knew over the years there. I developed a habit when I'd be going back, the first thing I'd do when I got to the island was to call him and either have lunch with him or get away with him somewhere I could spend a couple of hours. Then I'd go away having a feeling I knew what was going on all the time I'd been away from the island. But he had a great capacity for instruction and for making things clear and pointing them out. He was absolutely invaluable in giving me a comprehension of the island.

The third man was Willard Wirtz. The law required that two men be from the island and one from the mainland. These are public members. Now of course labor members were appointed by the unions involved and the employer members were appointed by the employer groups that were involved. So this was the hearing that I was going to and this was going to be my first trip to San Juan. As a matter of fact it was also, if I remember correctly, the first trip I had ever taken over a large body of water so I wasn't sure how apprehensive to be, if at all, about it. But I had felt that I had to. There were three things that I had to be familiar with. One, I ought to get some feel of the history of the island; two, I ought to get some clear understanding of the economy of the island; and third and of special importance would be an understanding of the sugar industry, how it operated, what its problems were.

Even though we had the sugar workers in the United States affiliated with us I never really, except on a rather superficial basis, had been involved in negotiations, really only in the sense that power may have been involved in one
point or another and these questions would come up in the contract. For whatever value my voice added it was added but I never had to argue the economics of the industry so I really was not too, familiar with it. I had gone to the trouble of checking on the old anti-trust cases involved with the sugar industry and the sugar trust. You may remember the famous cases during Roosevelt's period, the first Roosevelt. But I really didn't understand at all the way this thing worked and all of its implications.

I had three fortunate breaks in this situation. One, we had a research director by the name of Lyle Cooper, a man of tremendous capacity and understanding, a very careful researcher, a very thoughtful one with a real comprehension of all these things. Lyle and I had had a very good relationship over many years and it was very easy for me. He'd give me things and put them in a form that he knew I could observe easier so I had that available to me. Secondly, there lived in Chicago right here in Hyde Park at that time Victor Perlov who had written what was then thought to be the definitive book on Puerto Rico. He had spent a lot of time in Puerto Rico and he had written this very sensitive book about it. He was very sympathetic to their problems and he lived right here in Hyde Park. And Rex Tugwell lived in Hyde Park and of course Tugwell had first, a comprehensive understanding of not just the economics of the sugar industry but also its political economy. Not only had he been Governor of Puerto Rico but he had also been president or head of the United States Molasses Company or chairman of the board, whatever they called them in those days. So he had it both from the management point of view as well as the government point of view and the scholar's point of view which he brought from his work here at the university. Now Tugwell had been, in addition to being Governor of Puerto Rico, he had been President of the University of Puerto Rico. He was the one who practically put it on its feet. He just came along and it began to prosper. I don't know how it's doing at this point but my impression is that, well its enrollment I am told is fabulous.

I must just depart for a moment. I mentioned the name of Armando Sanchez. Last time I was in Puerto Rico, it must have been a good ten years ago, it may have been closer to five or six but it was some years ago, this man Sanchez's daughter graduated from law school. I don't know how big a family she already had but she had a family and was a judge on the island. And Armando never graduated grade school. In this one generation they obtained this whole educational background.

Well so I spend time with Perlov and Tugwell getting
something in this field. Tugwell also had been, as it turned out, Under Secretary of Agriculture at the time that the Sugar Act had been passed so he knew the politics of the Sugar Act. I remember his sitting here in this room, my sticking an order in front of him with the name Rex Tugwell signed to it, pointing out that it fixed wages at thirty cents an hour. I asked him if he wasn't embarassed.

I. What did he say?

R. He said yes, yes. I shouldn't have treated a guest in my house that way but I think he understood it. Well at any rate I spent a good deal of time with them, as much time as I could with them before I left. Then I recall that we left here on a Monday morning heading for Miami by train. We got a couple of rooms on the train next to each other. Lyle and I went together and Lyle just filled me full of stuff. I'd it in one room and read, I would keep going over it, drumming it into me, getting the feel of it and then when I had questions I'd talk with him for a while, get him to set a perspective. I did this for two days straight.

We finally arrived in Miami as I recall at about five o'clock on Tuesday. We then went over to a hotel. That was my first time in Miami, too. We went over to a hotel where we stayed until three thirty or four o'clock the next afternoon and then we took off for the plane at five o'clock and went off to San Juan. But that day in Miami we sat out, I recall, next to the pool. This was not in season so there weren't too many people around to bother us but I don't suppose that hotel had ever been used that way before by so called tourists from the North. I really made that stuff a part of me. I used to, in those days, have great absorptive qualities and by concentrating sufficiently the stuff used to stick and fall into place and I would put it together with things that Perlov had said or Tugwell had said so I was beginning to get a pretty rounded picture of this.

Well I recall leaving and I recall the trip. We were flying a Lockheed Constellation, I remember, an old plane that Easternhad I guess. For all I know they fly jets now but they used to fly it for many years. The pilot, who I got to know after a number of years, used to make it into a regular Cook's tour. He'd tell you about this island where Henry Morgan's treasure had been sunk. He'd give you little travelogues as you went along, a guy by the name of Smith, a very interesting guy. I remember Life magazine once did a story on him because he would do great things. Well at any rate I'll always remember seeing lights all of a sudden through the plane windows and I remember approaching the island with great excitement. It was a tropical country and
opened up to a totally new world. I get off the plane and there are just batches of people around. Armando, as well as Pedro Vega, was there. I had some internal union business to do at this point too. I had to rearrange our internal mechanism and get rid of Pedro Vega. I think he understood this was going to happen, though. As a result of this Armando became president. Alberto Sánchez also left. Armando was already taking over and he was an interesting guy, competent in many ways but with all the troubles and problems that Latin men have.

I. Go ahead, explain it a little bit.

R. Well their whole complex of things. Over a period of years I got to know him very well. The union didn't flourish quite as well as it should. I came and we kept sending people in from the States to work with him and none of them were successful. I never knew it at the time but one was a Scotsman. He had been in the British Army for a number of years and I later learned that he had been a drill sergeant in India and I sent him in, you know, and they're colonials anyway. This was the last place for him but he meant well. He understood the limitations of what he could do but they didn't like him and he didn't like them I don't think. At any rate they didn't hit it off. He knew sugar, he was out of sugar. That's why we sent him, he had been the director of our sugar operations on the mainland so it wasn't pure accident. We got rid of him.

I looked around for someone else to get and we finally were able to pick up a guy who was in the union and worked in a packing plant in Omaha. His major attribute was one, that he was loyal and reliable and two, that he spoke Spanish. He was a Mexican-American and he spoke Spanish and so we sent him over. Aguilera was his name and his problem was that because he understood Spanish it wasn't easy for them to carry on conversations in his presence, do all kinds of other things, so they started a campaign designed to get rid of him. One of their arguments was that he had an affair going with some woman.

I had, at that point, a woman and I'll come back to her. She was from the mainland, she translated for me. She was brilliant at it and had a real feel for it. She also was married and had lived in Puerto Rico for a long time and she had two or three children, all grown. Her husband was a very successful doctor working on tropical disease. Then he had shifted over and had done a lot of work with the pill in Puerto Rico. You know that's where much of the experimental work was done and he had worked on that. She was an exceptional woman. I'd have these people coming into see me and she'd be
there translating and finally I said to her, "How much of this am I supposed to believe? You know, I'll tell you the way it sounds to me, sounds to me that they think I'm going to be affected by this so they just keep piling it on." And she said, "Well of course, ask them about their affairs. How many wives have they got? It couldn't bother them less and it couldn't bother the membership of the union less if it's true even."

Well so the next guy who came in I said to him, "By the way, how many wives have you got?" And he just didn't know what to say. He had been coached and he wasn't very bright, I guess that's why I picked on him. Well finally pressed him long enough and it turned out he had three families with, I don't know, five or seven kids in one and three or four in another. Then I discovered that Armando himself had several families and I finally met his second wife. This must have been a few years later. I felt very strongly that the most stable influences in that community were the women rather than the men. I'm not sure that one can generalize that way because I'm sure it was true in the sense that they were stable but men also made contributions. They had great imaginations, fantastic.

When Vega was out, the Populaire Party wanted a successor and so Armando Sanchez was picked. He then became elected a congressman at large by a big majority, third only to Munoz. Armando had a great following and held much promise and one of our falling outs grew out of this a number of years later but that I think we'd better pickup in another spot. What I'm trying to do is give you some feeling. He was still young at this point, enthusiastic and really building and everything was going his way, you know, attractive, but a very limited education. I had lots of things to learn, as you can imagine, not the least of which was the fact that if people got excited about something it didn't necessarily make it important.

The best illustration I had with that was, we were at a convention with people from all over the island one year a number of years later. The Mayor, Donna Luisa, a woman mayor of San Juan, came to greet the convention when it was opening. She started speaking and she worked herself up. Boy, she was really belting them and everybody is clapping and yelling and cheering. I turned to my secretary but this time I had a secretary who was Spanish speaking and travelled with me because the other woman had gone back to the mainland. I was having trouble finding a good translator when Eva Sandburg had turned up. Her family had left Germany when Hitler came into power and had moved to Argentina where she had lived from the age of four to twenty or, twenty two. Then she moved here
so that she had three mother tongues practically, German, English, Spanish and her Spanish was remarkably good plus the fact that she understood the union. She was an invaluable asset. I certainly developed tremendous respect for these translators. I used to watch with amazement the skill of that guy that Krushchev had with him when he visited here. He was on educational TV, channel 11 or something like that. Great skill that this requires, words have shadings, you know, and it's important that when you are presenting something to somebody its shadings be presented properly, too, that's if you're going to be persuasive. So I turned to Eva and I asked her what was the Mayor saying that had the mall excited and cheering. And she said she was just talking about how beautiful San Juan is; the climate in Puerto Rico is better than any other place in the world. Well, it took me quite a while before I really was able to appreciate this.

Armando himself had these qualities. I recall he came to our convention in Denver in 'l952. He had been there earlier, before I came to San Juan, and he made a speech. He spoke in Spanish and he had the delegates just cheering him thereafter because of the way his arms were waving. Afterwards I said to him, "What did you say, what did you say?" He said, "Oh I told them how glad we were to be in the union." I said, "But they didn't understand you." He said, "No, I know." It was the way he sounded and the way he looked that evoked this response. It was really a very interesting thing.

There's one additional personality that needs some mention at this early point. Working for the CIO and this group affiliated with us was a man by the name of David Sternbach. Now Sternbach was an extremely interesting guy. I don't know where he was born, in Europe or European countries, I don't recall which one at the moment. My wife might remember. But he had lived in the United States for many, many years. He was a U.S. citizen, he came as close to a beachcomber as any man I have ever had an experience with. He had been all over the world and particularly in Latin countries. He spoke in Spanish, he was completely bilingual. Right in the middle of a sentence or in the middle of a word he could move, and without a trace of accent, in either language. I think he did the same thing with French, by the way. I don't think this was peculiar to English and Spanish. He had that perfect ear and a great facility with languages, he was very, skillful. He had lived in a very intellectual community in New York. His educational background I was never able to really pin down but it wasn't too great. He was self educated, he read everything worth reading, he played chess brilliantly. I could never come close to beating him, he was a fantastic chess player. He had
an appreciation of the arts, literature, And in Puerto Rico I quickly learned he lived at many levels of that society there. He lived with the workers because that's who he was working with. He lived with the intellectual community and the artistic community, political community. I'm not suggesting he was fitful in all these areas because politically I don't think he ever did what could have been done but he at least knew them. So he was available to me, too, to give me direction.

Well we got there and they finally took me to the hotel where we were staying and it turned out to be a hotel owned by a group of men, I think mostly from chicago, the same people who own the Executive House here and all over the country, the Candado Beach Hotel. I fell in love with that place because it was a very simple -- well, it was a simply beautiful hotel but simple in the sense that the floors were slate, in beautiful red grayish slate depending on the room, very colorful drapes and beds. It was a very pleasant hotel and the reason I liked it so much was that it was the place where the island people went when they were taking a vacation, that is the upper class who could afford that kind of thing, they would stay in the Candado Beach. It was the most famous hotel. Unquestionably one of the more beautiful buildings that you'd find anywhere was the Caribbean Hilton which was built by the government by Puerto Rican architects. It was a magnificent piece of art but they, the Puerto Rican government, built it and then turned it over to the Hiltons to operate for them. It proved to be a very profitable arrangement, I guess. They worked the same thing out in a number of other places.

Of course these hotels all had casinos in them because gambling was legal on the island. So for the first time in my life I watched the roulette wheels. I never played, I'm not that interested, plus the fact I played blackjack a couple of times. At least I understand what can happen at blackjack, and roulette, I simply had no comprehension of it at all. It doesn't mean anything to me. Yet you'd see people just sit there for night after night, all night long or as long as they could. They'd eat there, they'd have waiters bring them drinks, food. Of course they'd feed them practically free for keeping them at the tables, it's understandable. But Puerto Rico at this point -- this would be before Castro, of course, so Havana still had a good deal of the international set but Puerto Rico was becoming more attractive to them. It did have high society running around there. Lots of money was changing hands in those casinos every night I'm sure.

At any rate I got this hotel and it was beautiful and
we set ourselves up in our rooms. We had gotten in early. My recollection was that we got there on Tuesday night and the hearings weren't going to start actually until the following Monday. I wanted to meet the members of the commission. Armando began to set up these meetings and we went over. This was when I first met Olivarez and he was invaluable in assisting me, putting the economic questions in their proper focus. By this time I knew enough about this to know what questions to ask, you know. The big problem was to ask the questions that needed asking and I think I was asking the right questions most of the time.

Then I also said to Armando that at some point I wanted to get around that island, I wanted to see people. I wanted to go to meetings at various places around the island. I didn't know what I was getting into. So okay, we'll go around the island. They start setting up a series of meetings for me and one of them would take us to Guanica. Now Guanica is in the southwestern corner of the island and South Puerto Rican Sugar Company had the biggest grinding mill on the island. It's right near the phosphorescent bay. Guanica was important to me on this occasion because that's where we were going to eat. Sternbach said to me, "Now look, you better understand so that you're prepared for it. They will serve you what they regard as a great delicacy." so I said, "Yes, what's that?" I had no idea, I used to think that I had a pretty queasy stomach and he said goat's meat. Well you know for days I was scared stiff. I wasn't sure how I was going to be able to handle it but I might as well finish it. I got there and I finally ate it and really it turned out to be very tasty. I enjoyed it, it didn't bother me at all. Of course with rice and beans and very sharp sauces it was very good.

We started off one morning. San Juan is a very metropolitan city. It was even in 1952 and of course now it's just spread out all over the place. They made another Miami Beach out of many areas of it. They've done very bad things, I think, over the recent years. But at that time it was still a little open. The roads weren't very good. They're better now but I liked it better when they weren't so good. In any event, off we go to the southern part of the island. The houses are built right next to the street practically, no sidewalks separating them and people running, walking and they're tooting the horns all the time. It's just driving me crazy. Well we get going, I finally couldn't stand it. I asked them to let me drive and then they all wanted to get out and walk because I scared them. They said I drove too fast but I, at least, didn't toot the horn. Well at any rate, we went through several towns. When you were at the edge of the mountains you could look down and you could see the plains,
the Caribbean plains down below. The sand stretched out in front of you, beautiful fields, and we stopped there and had a coke or whatever the hell it was we were drinking. They may have brought me a rum coke, I don't remember now. But all these little towns that you pass by, goats walking down, dogs, cats, kids, people, nobody got out of your way, you know, you'd creep along. That's why it took so long, two and a half to three hours to get all the way down.

Well we got to a town called Salinas where we go into a fish restaurant. I meet a group of people there that were an independent union and I try to get them to affiliate with us. There was a young man in that group by the name of Carabello who will figure prominently in this story as I go on. But Carabello was a very impressive guy, a black Indian, features, high cheekbones, slightly slanted eyes and a wonderful smile, warm, rich, very attractive. I found him to an extent very bright, tremendously impressive. Of course Sternbach was translating for us. I have a series of pictures that were taken on this trip and you could see these pictures and maybe get some feel of it. So they took me to a famous fish restaurant right on the shores of the Caribbean. Now at that point this was a building that was a shabby kind of building with screened porch, a very large one, and they had a bunch of tables just shoved together. We all sat down. I don't know how many bottles of rum we had. I had developed a taste by this time for Puerto Rican beer which I think is just like Mexican beer, excellent. I like it better than ours and most European beers. The fish was just out of this world. Whenever I went back to Puerto Rico in years later, I shouldn't say whenever but many times, whenever I could, I would make it a point to end up at that restaurant.

Well so we were there for a while and then we went over to a place called Santa Isabel, which was just a few miles from Salinas. We had a meeting in the city square because the mayor of the town was the president of our local union. He's the guy who was also the representative. This was the man who I told you about last week who threw that temper tantrum. What I'm really trying to do at this juncture is give you these first impressions of my going around the island. I can't begin to convey the excitement I felt. Everything was so new, so challenging and so important. These people were such lovely people and they were being pushed around. Every summer I'd see them. They were all over the place. They weren't enslaved in our sense but the conditions under which they lived were really incredible. Running water was an unknown thing. For instance, in some of the unions they'd have toilets and they didn't know how to use them. And kids all over the place, beautiful little children. We'd meet some of the guys who had been working with their machetes in
the field and what it meant to work on the sugar cane in that blinding hot sun, Jesus!

Well at any rate I developed all these feelings, so we kept on and we finally got to the largest sugar refinery on the island. As you drove into this place you drove down very wide streets with relatively big houses, very well kept, lining each side of the street, with magnificent trees, great shade, beautiful trees, foliage of all kinds, you know tropical flowers all over the place. We drove in there and we finally got in to town, you go through it to the other side and there you find the workers' houses. These were all little shacks upon stilts because of water problems. We went through workers' quarters. This, by the way, was a company town.

We were told that we were going to eat in a house which the woman who was entertaining us, her husband was in the army. This was roughly around the Korean time. Because he was in the army she had the steadiest income of anybody in the town and probably was one of the best off. I must say her house had what we used to call lace curtains in the window. It was the only house that I remember seeing among the workers' homes, I think, that did have curtains of any kind, let alone this kind. You understand I would say lace in quotes.

We went over to somebody else's house, one of the men who was an officer in the union. This house was two rooms with a lean-to which was the kitchen that you stepped down or stepped up. A mud floor was on the ground level. The others were raised because of the stilts. A table, a very small table which I would doubt if it was two feet long and one chair. Other than that there were boxes, crates. There was a pile of some stuff in the corner. I asked what those were and those were mats. That's where people slept and I guess there were a number of people. There were a number of us there but they brought the crates in for Sanchez and Sternbach and these other visitors. I was getting on this chair so they could sit there. The house was absolutely bare. The woman of the house was pregnant, quite well advanced. And I remember being so concerned, almost instinctively getting up because of the way she stepped down from that kitchen in back of the house. I say back of the house, it was attached to the house. It worried me but nobody seemed to pay much attention. I've forgotten how many children there were but it was rather substantial. At any rate we went there and we visited a couple of other houses and all of them were identical. I was told that eight or ten people sleep in there. The yards, they were right at the ocean, you know they had beauty.
Well we finally go over to the house with the woman whose husband was in the army where we were going to be entertained and eat. We ate in shifts because her table could not handle over four or five people at a time. There was Sternbach and Armando and myself and I've forgotten a couple of the others. There were organizers who worked for the union. They were people who Armando had arranged to have come work for the union and they were with us. As a matter of fact they were doing much of the driving.

Now I should tell you one other thing about this that I forgot until just this moment. That is that I had a feeling that I wanted to communicate and that I wanted to really get the feeling of these people. I felt that the first thing I had to do was to make them understand that I didn't come there with the thought that they ought to be talking English to me. Of course I had had experience with French, really, but not Spanish. I had never really touched it, I didn't know the first thing about it. French at least I'd studied. I read books in French but Spanish was completely new to my ear. I sat down with Sternbach and we worked out a short two paragraph speech. You know I may be kaleidoscoping into two trips here, I think I am. I don't know if it matters a great deal. I think I may have come first before the hearings and then I came back a second time for the hearing but that's not the way I remember it. I remember this as all happening on this occasion. In any event we worked out this little two paragraph speech and then we worked over it so I'd get the accent. What I said to myself at the time was I'm going to have to learn Spanish, there's just no excuse for this and I really intended to. I made inquiries and I started figuring out ways of taking it but the longer I kept going back to Puerto Rico the less disposed I was for it. At any rate I gave them all kinds of assurances about how I would learn it and then I told them years later how I had let them down. I failed to keep my assurances. But this made a great impression and they would get a report. I'd had somebody, Sternbach didn't want to be hanging around me all the time, he had his own fish to fry off in the corner some place. But there were a few younger people there who did understand English and at least made it possible for me to communicate a little bit with others.

I was shown the sugar refinery from the outside. Then we had a big fiesta that night in the town and they took everything to the square of the town. They danced and played music. Oh everything was fun and everyone was young and gay. Life was really exciting.
I. Let's begin with Puerto Rico where we left off last time.

R. I don't remember exactly where we left off but I do recall there were two anecdotes, interesting vignettes. One year, I think probably around '55, '56 or '57, Rachel went with me. I was there for negotiations around Christmas time and they had the Twelve Night celebration. Most Spanish countries have that. The first time I saw it was in Mexico and Puerto Rico was the second time. You know the traditional kind of thing with candles and people dancing, very gay and festive.

Armando Sanchez invited us for Christmas dinner at his home. At this point he lived in a small town which was approximately 35 to 50 miles west of San Juan. The north side of the island along the coast became a fertile sugar growing area and Armando had lived there all of his life. He was still living there even though he had been elected to the House and he would sort of commute. It was a fact that with no traffic it wasn't much of a distance to go. At any rate, he asked us to come so at the appointed hour we drove to this town. We got there and we were brought to the Sanchez home, a small frame house. It had a living room and what we would call a dining alcove, a sort of dinette kind of arrangement. We never saw much of the rest of the house. Obviously there were bedrooms off of there. We could see kids going in and out of them. Armando had arranged again for his uncle to be there because I knew he had been in the states for a while and spoke some English. I assure you I could do better with Spanish than he could with English and I couldn't do anything with Spanish.

All kinds of people were there whom he didn't identify. There was a constant stream of them through the house. They had a record player and it would be playing a rhumba and some other people would be dancing, as Armando would. Of course he danced beautifully. He was much younger than I and he danced very well. Well he spent most of his time dancing so I sat there, a very uncomfortable feeling, and really getting hungrier and hungrier. Finally at some point we sat down to eat and Armando's wife took no food and she never sat down with us.

I. Did she serve?
R. She served and they had the traditional roast pig for Christmas dinner and what all the trimmings were I don't remember. We later discovered that one of the reasons (I think I asked Armando about this) for the delay was that all these people had to be fed that were dancing around. They were relatives. We never did find out how many but there must have been 20 or 25 people at different times wandering through the house. So they were feeding them before they could even set things up right for the company. That was a fascinating experience. After that we went on into town and we walked around. The stores would be open and we could see how they celebrated, how they decorated their houses. Not our usual kind of decorations. In those days they had a lot of home made things with lots of color in them, real vibrant. You'd see young people walking around the square and the churches would be open and busy. We didn't have the proper kind of clothes, I didn't at least, so we didn't go in.

I. What did you have to wear?

R. I don't know, some kind of head covering. I didn't quite understand it. Rachel could have put a handkerchief over her head. I never did understand it all but we found it extremely interesting, the whole cultural thing. We've often recalled this whole thing at Sanchez's house and we've often recalled how she never did sit down. At no point did she ever have anything to eat. But it was an interesting experience.

I'd gone in thinking I could do the work but I couldn't get any agreement among a group of people to sit down and negotiate a contract. There was very little work done. Everybody I would send out for something never came back. In the afternoon everybody took a nap. And they just expected that, this was part of 'the culture of Spain. It was similar, of course, to Mexico. I don't know if I have mentioned this before but we were very conscious of the fact that everything moved very slowly.

Well let me just give you the other example of the kinds of problems. I went to Puerto Rico on another occasion to the District Conference. Armando at this time had been the leader of the group and then President of the District Council. I had the earphones and a translator so I could know what was going on. And somehow that meeting simply became impossible. People wouldn't sit in their seats, they came running up, screaming, right up in the front there. It was just veritable chaos, we couldn't do anything. They're yelling and screaming and it seemed to me that the issue, whatever it was, wasn't one to cause that kind of excitement. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer and I got up and took
the gavel and pounded that, thing and said, "Sit down! There won't be a thing happening here until everyone is in their seats." Pretty soon a few, people began sitting down and I'm still standing there pounding and pounding. One guy got up and started talking. I said, "I won't listen to anything. Sit down. After everyone is sitting down, anyone who wants to can talk." Finally I pounded the gavel so hard the table broke. Everybody started to laugh. It was the best thing that could have happened. They sat down and everybody got quiet and I said, "Now you just can't do business this way." Somehow or other we put enough of it together so that Armando could go on and conduct the rest of the meeting. I'll always remember that experience breaking that table. But they were so unruly, there's no way to conduct affairs like that.

I. Did they get into fights?

R. Oh yes, several people were killed. Not that I witnessed.

I. In meetings or after meetings?

R. Yes, after meetings. Well these two little things were things that I thought were interesting.

I. Are there any other things about Puerto Rico that you'd like to tell?

R. Well what there is left of it. I haven't been back there in some time. I think the last time I was back there must have been in '58 or '59 so I really can't say what the situation is there now. It's an island of great beauty. I don't happen to like the climate, I don't care for tropical climates, but there's something breathtaking about the mountains.

I. Overall do you think the union really did make a difference in the lives of the people there? Did the situation improve and then deteriorate? What happened?

R. Well first of all you have to remember that Munoz represented in a sense a New Deal kind of development and the union was operating within that milieu. The union was very dependent on this power of the government. Of course that's why, like the European unions, political strike there are a powerful economic pressure on the government to force it to do things. Of course in their case many of their people are government employees. I can say that in broad long range terms the union did some things. It made them much more aware of what working together could accomplish. I'm not sure in long range perspective that one could make the same claim
about unions in Puerto Rico that one could make in the United States.
At one of our previous sessions I went through the '48 strike and what happened with it. Let me just, at perhaps the expense of duplicating what I said, pick up at the end. At the end of that strike we had 599 people discharged and the major plants were Swift, Armour, Cudahy, Morrell and Rath. We had a substantial number, I have no record any more, but a number of people fired at Wilson. Plus the fact that Wilson was refusing to recognize the union as I think we've indicated before.

In addition we were being raided in many plants. Questions of our representation rights were being raised by a number of different employers. Taft Hartley permitted the employer, too, to file petitions for elections at that point in time. Our resources were depleted, were practically nil. We were faced with all kinds of litigation all over the country. You know, actions against members, injunction suits, suits for damages. So we were involved in law suits all over the place. We were confronted with operating problems. The companies were using us as an excuse to speed up production lines and demand more production. They felt they were in a position where they could really beat us over the head because of our inability to take any overt kind of action. And in the case of Armour they simply took the position that they weren't going to pay any vacations to any of the people for that year, claiming that the period they had lost during the strike had been enough to constitute a break of some kind so that they were not eligible for vacation. Well those are just some of the many kinds of questions that we started to face.

Then at or about the same time a number of the group who had opposed my election as president in 1946 organized what they called a CIO Caucus. We had in our ranks a number of people who were very pro-Wallace. This was Henry Wallace. You may remember the Progressive Party business in 1948. This was then used as a claim that we were not following the CIO policy and they were using this as an excuse for undermining the ability of the union to function. They began withholding per capita tax, that is that portion of the dues that goes to the international union. Of course at that point in time we were already without resources to begin with. The withholding of the per capita tax was an additional blow because it reduced the amount that we had. And this was a relatively small number of unions but of some size so that it made a difference.
I.

Were they just locals?

R.

They were just locals within the international and they were following a particular leadership in the international. Well our response was to do the first thing first. And clearly first thing we had to do was get these local unions rebuilt and reorganized so that we could start having some kind of an organizational sense about ourselves. And we were able to get this message out about the locals that were withholding the per capita. Many of them might have been sympathetic with them on these other broader issues of policy but were not sympathetic with this.

As a matter of fact the Wallace question I had thought had been laid to rest during that very difficult convention that we talked about in another session because there was a resolution adopted there supporting Truman, supporting the CIO policy. But these guys were using this anyway because it turned out that a couple of our staff people felt rather strongly about this. One of them, interestingly enough, was, a very conservative Iowa farmer. Wallace was from Iowa, he published that family magazine there. I've forgotten the name of it but it was published in Des Moines. It was one of the better farm papers in the country, The American Farmer or something. It was this organ that Wallace had used for many of his very important treatises on his experimentation in agriculture. You know he was really an agricultural scientist along with a lot of other things. So this guy was one of them. But this was simply a matter of conviction. Others were doing it for other political reasons. Close to Philadelphia they were mad at Truman. So these people in the various local unions around the country were really in opposition to the administration of the union and were using this as an excuse to carry on their campaign, withhold per capita of dues and other things of that nature. They continued it for a number of months.

In the meantime we had begun the business of getting our leaders back to work in the plants. People had been fired, you know. Under the terms of the contract that was still in effect the companies were required to arbitrate these cases. Gene Cotton and I began dividing up the work and I was handling some and he was handling some. We started on a number of very interesting cases. I think they were in Omaha and from our point of view they were not the best cases but they were the ones that we got going on and we won practically everyone of them. There were twenty some or more people that were fired and we won practically every one of them and with back pay.
This, then, set a tone where Armour decided this is nothing to fool around with. They wanted to negotiate settlements of all of them and so our Grievance people started meeting with the Armour people around the country and they began to negotiate the settlement of these cases. I don't think we, had more than two or three arbitration awards in Armour all together. Swifts, however, was a different kind of story. Swift would insist on negotiating every single case. In Armour's what we discovered was that although we could settle them the test was how quickly do we get guys back into the shop because part of the settlement, from Armour's point of view, invariably was refusal to pay back pay and it was always a question. Well most of them would have preferred work right away rather than waiting for months even though they might get a good sized check in one lump sum. Well we arbitrated most of the Swift cases.

I.

One by one?

R.

Well what we'd do was go to a town and take as many cases, for example, Evansville, Indiana. I went and handled a bunch of cases in Moultrie, Georgia. That was interesting in a number of ways but one of the intriguing things that came out of it was that one of the people who was fired was a very attractive young man who was accused of slugging someone. I don't remember who the other person was. Now he denied it and I think he was probably telling the truth. But in the course of his examination the company's attorney, who happened to be a reasonably decent guy, asked him whether he'd talked to a couple of men and he said no. The company's lawyer pressed, him and he continued to assert that he had not talked to them. Finally Art Curtis, the company's lawyer, said to him, "Well, how can you be, so sure that you never talked to them? This happened some months ago. Didn't you ever talk to them?" He said, "No, I never talked to a nigger in my life." Well you can just imagine the shock that went through that room. Most of the people I don't think felt it but the company representative from Chicago plus myself and the other union officials. I immediately called a recess. The arbitrator at that time was Jim Healy, Professor in Industrial Relations at Harvard. I think probably he's still there. He'd been very active in our Labor Board days, this was how he got into it. In fact this was how John Dunlop got into it and many other people.

I got a recess and then I got hold of local union people and the director was with me. He was a southerner who, as of that time, was not very sympathetic. He was just beginning to shed some of his views after the '48 convention. He had been in the opposition prior to that. I got the committee together with this guy and I said, "Now look, let me
tell you something. This is not the kind of language that is permissible in this union. I don't care how you feel, that's your business. Maybe it's true that you wouldn't talk to a black man, that's possible. But you don't call him a nigger. You're going to go back in that room and you're going to apologize to everybody in that room for that language if you expect this case to go on. Otherwise I'm going in there and I'm going to withdraw it and I don't care what happens to your reinstatement.

Moultrie is very close to the Florida border and it's one of the worst parts of Georgia, always had been and was then. We went back in the room, he apologized rather nicely, I must say. I was a little surprised that he had used that language, it was customary to him. He was sorry he had offended, he had no intention to offend any particular people. This was the way he had been brought up and the way he felt and he really wanted everybody to know he should not have done it and he was sorry that he did do it.

At any rate we won practically all the Swift cases but we won them by decisions from the arbitrator. This guy got his job back, by the way. It's interesting to note that we had 591 people discharged, not counting the Wilson people. Of the 591 there were 541 who actually went back to work. There were only 24 who were not reinstated. The difference between those two, figures would be 26 who obviously didn't want to go back to work. They had accepted other jobs, they may have come back long enough to get back pay. They were Swift people and then left so we didn't count them. But the results of the 591 discharges was that 541 actually went back to work. Well of course this began to change the morale within the locals.

I. What about the 24, were they leaders or were they just rank and file workers?

R. Not in many cases. Some of them may have been and some may have been people you never heard of even or I'd never seen. I can only think of one guy that I would have said was a real leader who got fired, outside of Wilson. Wilson was where the leaders got fired, but that was during an election.

I. What happened? Had these people done stupid things that made it difficult to get them reinstated?

R. Well sure. I remember one case, there was a woman in Omaha whose name I don't even remember. She just blew her cork completely. She had a picket banner and she hit the supervisor or one of the department superintendents as he was going in. She just sluggedy him with this thing and I guess
the paper cut him, he had stitches. Well you know he had not done anything, there had been no act of provocation. We couldn't even claim that his going to work through the picket line was a provocation but she was just all teed off that morning. And then you know the guys'd get drunk occasionally and start throwing rocks. For the most part these were not the leaders who were involved in giving leadership in fracases that occurred. But there was always a justification of some kind that you could find. I can remember one gal in Armours in Omaha who we used to say of her that she was bout 80 pounds wringing wet and the company had fired her. She wasn't a leader either. I'd never seen her before and so far as I remember afterwards, though she got back to work. But she was accused of beating up on another woman who must have been at least ten times her size both in weight and height which just didn't make sense, you know.

At any rate we were able to secure the reinstatement of 91% of all the Armour and Swift People who were fired, 98% of all the Cudahy people that were fired and practically all the Morrell and Rath people. And we did most of this, with the exception of Swift, through negotiations after the first pattern had been set by the arbitrator. The rest of the companies decided to go along.

In the process of doing these things we had to do other things. What, for instance, do we do about the contracts that were up for renegotiation? The convention had been held in June and the contract came up in September. We had real problems and the companies had announced that they were opening. Well they came in intending to get all kinds of concessions and actually the negotiations ended up without us giving up anything of any substance that we had achieved. We actually got another four cents an hour wage increase. That's over and above the nine cents. So we began to be able to do something about our grievances.

The companies were less sure about some of this speed up. That continued to be a problem for years just as it is to this day. You know with the new mechanization, machinery that comes in, this is a constant problem in all unions. Auto, you know, I think this has a lot to do with that overtime issue in Auto. I know that it had a lot to do with all that trouble they had in that Vega plant in Ohio. But this continued to be a problem.

We had to go through twenty three elections in a period of roughly some point after June until the following May. That would be a period of about ten months. And these were major elections, on top of which we had the Wilson election in which out of roughly 16,000 or 17,000 votes cast
we won by about 14,000 to 2,000 approximately. But these others we won overwhelmingly in the same kinds of proportions. As a matter of fact both Haywood and Murray commented on the fantastic results. So far as they knew this had not happened previously. Of course it's hard to find comparable circumstances because the whole election procedure under the Wagner Act was relative. You know it started in the late '30s before we had any unions and this was ten years later, so the election procedure itself was relatively new. Then Taft Hartley came in, in '47, which permitted the companies to challenge. That was new so it's hard to find comparable experiences but the fact is that we were able to overcome this. We did succeed in getting our people back to work. We did win all those elections. There were twenty three challenges plus the Wilson election; we won every one of them.

Also, interestingly enough, you know you get a certain momentum going and there's no telling where it will lead. We won elections in plants where we had never represented the people before. And it was part of this whole business because this began to be some meaningful and the morale of the people had been so lifted by our ability to put this thing back together again that in a given community, if we had three or four local unions, this became everybody's job. They were all involved, it wasn't just the local union. If Wilson was in Omaha, there was an Armour, Swift and Cudahy plant, too, plus a lot of little small ones. Everybody from those other plants were out calling on Wilson people and in the process we find that some Wilson guy had worked in a plant for a while that was not organized. So they'd go to work and start organizing that plant. At any rate over this period the union really had amazing vitality in the process of rebuilding.

I. What about the unions that were holding out their per capita? Did they stop that eventually?

R. This became a different kind of a problem, the whole question of how you dealt with this now. Once we had begun to restructure our position vis-a-vis these companies we then began to think how do we deal with these? Now some of these unions withholding their per capita were Wilson local unions. We authorized that eventually because we thought those Wilson locals needed whatever resources they could get. The company was not recognizing a check-off. You know they had real problems raising money but they were doing it for other reasons. And we began to debate this whole question as to whether or not we shouldn't put in administrators and take over those local unions. This was clearly a violation. You know this was the worst offense anyone committed in the trade
union movement, not pay per capita. It was such an offense that even though these were people with whom Haywood and some of the others were sympathetic they still wouldn't support this kind of failure on a principled basis. So we had a written statement from him which was sent to all local unions and published in the paper so that all membership would get it. This began to put pressure on the local leaders. Then they came around and wanted to make a deal, some of the leaders of this movement.

I. What kind of deal?

R. Well they wanted us to fire some staff people. They were carrying on this internal vendetta. Of course the vendetta, you see, was still a reflection of those old internal fights that occurred within the Communist Party and carried over into the local union. There was one guy, particularly, by the name of Ralph Gant who was out of the Chicago Swift plant and who had a whole coterie of people around him who was particularly bitter and almost incredible. He hadn't been able to get along with Herb March. Well Herb March wasn't bothering him, you know. And of course March was a much more competent guy anyway and as far as I'm concerned a much better trade unionist, whatever his politics were. At any rate Gant and some of these others -- I don't remember who the people were -- I think one, was a guy by the name of Harold Neilson. Harold was out of Milwaukee and his main reason for not liking him was not because he thought he was a communist but because he liked Herb March and that made him bad. It was really bad. But in any event it began frittering away and it ended up where there were just a few of them left and they just couldn't hold out any longer. They finally folded so we still had our problems. We never really resolved the issue, I think I indicated, until the '54 convention in Sioux City "when we finally settled this communist issue.

We hadn't settled it but at least it had calmed down and we were able to go in. We got our contracts negotiated. We got most of these people back to work. We finally forced Armour to pay that '48 vacation, which was tremendous. That I still remember, when we finally got the decision from the arbitrator. It was a very interesting thing to me how important that loomed in the eyes of the average worker. Here they'd been out of work for six weeks as a result of the strike. Many of them were out all summer long because of their being discharged. And still this issue of a vacation was so important. I used to say to them, "What is it you want? Is it the money or the time off?" Well you got different answers. There are some who my hunch is they would have always said they would have preferred the money but the
majority of them wanted the time off with pay. There's a
difference. It's not a vacation if it's not with pay. Well
of course it isn't. At any rate we got that resolved.

We finally came to the '49 convention in Estes Park
with most of these problems behind us, in a position where we
could report what I've just been telling you. We had 541 out
of 591 of their jobs back. And I was able to report that we'd
gotten all those people reinstated., that we'd won all those
elections, that we'd even won new ones. We had gotten the
vacation thing settled. We had just overwhelmed Wilson in a
series of elections we'd had with them and our single major
problem that still remained out of that '48 strike was that
Wilson contract. And, as I think we've indicated, that
probably continued to be a question for almost a year. I
think it was '50 before we got it. And we had put to rest, at
least to the point where it was no longer that same kind of a
problem, where if they were going to fight about policy and
program the fights were going to be carried on within the
ranks of the union through its parliamentary procedures and
not be withholding per capita or threatening to withdraw or
affiliating with other unions and then trying to pull out,
which also had happened.

I. Did that happen often?

R. Oh sure. For example, Meatcutters would come in and
raid us on the spot and we'd have some of the people who'd been
leaders in this group who suddenly would show up in the
Meatcutters' ranks as representing the Meatcutters because
they thought they could be of help to them. One man was a
former director of ours. He was defeated and ended up in
their ranks. Oh sure.

I. Did he take a whole group of people with him?

R. He wasn't able to take anybody with him. Most of
these things we won overwhelmingly. It was really a very
interesting result. And as I've thought of it over the years
I've felt increasingly persuaded to the notion that one of the
things that explains this kind of a result at these various
levels in terms of our membership, I think they were
responding to the fact that even though you hadn't won you
weren't licked to the point where you weren't fighting back.

I. You'd won quite a bit, hadn't you?

R. Well we'd lost the strike and we'd had these people
fired. I'm talking about that period of time.

I. I know but you got their jobs back.
We had revived something that had just taken a beating. And I think they were really responding to that, to the kind of feeling that we were going to continue to slug this out as long as was necessary. I think, in terms of the company, they had never expected us to respond with the same kind of militant spirit. They thought that the least that would happen now would be that we would be chastened. We'd have our tails hanging between our legs, at least at the beginning. But that didn't happen at all, we made it very clear to them that nothing had changed. If they want to try and turn the clock back its going to be a very hard thing to do. And I think this in turn was felt by the people in the plant and they responded. And then we began to pile up these victories. They could see their leaders coming back to work, people who were fired. In the old days when you got fired, you know, you were just dead. That was the end of it, you never got back to work. Well here they were coming to work. They were getting paid vacations in spite of the fact that the company had told them you couldn't get it. It was interesting that Armour was foolish enough even at that late date to try this because that's why they paid for it so badly in years afterwards. We could always do things with the Armour membership that we couldn't do with the Swift membership.

Really?

Yes, this stuff didn't fool them. They paid the vacation based on whatever that vacation policy called for. They lived up to the letter of the law. They didn't deviate, they paid it. They made no issues. You could figure out what you were entitled to, no one felt they were getting gypped. They may not have liked the results but at least they were getting what they felt they had coming. But Armour had to play games. So all of these elements came together and of course this had a further effect on the internal political situation in the union. This was the point at which this administration had taken a beating. There was no question about it but that in the space of a year this kind of a recovery had taken place and everybody began to feel that you were going to keep going. It was going to get even better. And the end result was that we began to win additional adherents so that someone like Hathaway, who had been the director in Georgia, began feeling that his future wasn't over on this side with the group that had been in opposition at the convention, with Weightman. I guess it's only fair to say that after '48 the leader of that group became a guy by the name of Glenn Chinander from Minnesota. Chinander became the leader or at least its spokesman. He was an effective spokesman. Hathaway began to leave, Pittman was still
I. Can you tell me a little more about Chinander?

R. Well Chinander had come out of a Cudahy plant in the early days of the organizing of the union. He'd lived in St. Paul all his life, and he'd worked in Newport which was where the Cudahy plant was. When the union was first formed in 1942 he had been a very active local union person and had gone through many of those early fights with Cudahy. He went off into the army. I'm confused about that, I could check it, but there was a guy by the name of Lee, Miller out of North Dakota and I can't remember whether Chinander was the first director of the union in that district or whether Miller was. My best recollection is that it was Miller. Then Miller went into the army and Chinander took his place. Then Chinander went into the army and I think Joe Ollman took his place. But then Joe had a long series of problems. He had a long history of tuberculosis so he finally went out on the coast, he couldn't take it. And Chinander succeeded again as director when he came back from serving in the army. He was a pedestrian sort of a person. He was most comfortable, I would say, with business unionism. He was competent, he understood, he was committed. He wanted to represent his people fairly and I think he did but he had no philosophical vision. He wasn't interested in using the union as an instrument for social change. I'm not sure he really wanted social change and that was really the only area of any problems we ever had. I used to like him, I got along with him and he behaved very very well as the years went by.

In subsequent years he was very helpful and at the time of the merger he performed a very important role in bringing about a merger. He really didn't want to leave Minnesota or at least I understood that. And I said it to him, would he be willing to stand aside and let someone else take that spot. He should have been entitled to it because of the size of his district. It so happens that the nominated person from that area is one that they would never have given up and we were confronted with real problems. He agreed quite willingly and very generously and behaved very very well in this whole thing. But on some of these issues he was one of these people who you just mention the word "communism" and he started going through all kinds of gyrations. I used to come up with a lot of these ideas a lot of my colleagues thought were crazy, you know, about how we ought to get paid, this tax calculator idea. Well he just didn't like that at all, he thought that just didn't make sense.

He became the spokesman for this group and he had not been. As a matter of fact I'd been successful in keeping most around but Pittman was never effective.
of the local unions that he had from withholding per capita because he felt this was not the way and he may have been one of those who influenced some of the others to finally abandon that practice, I don't really recall. But I think these successes resulted in that group losing a lot of its influence where it was. They didn't see the CIO as coming to their aid. They had no place to go. They counted on the Meatcutters and they didn't feel they could really take their membership into the Meatcutters because they were mad at the Meatcutters. The Meatcutters had made this nasty deal.

One of the interesting things is that there's a Minnesota group that was one of the most anxious to strike in '48. At any rate '49 saw the beginning of it-- it really was the end of the thing that started in '46 but had worked up to a strike in '48 with its most devastating impact, certainly very serious repercussions, and then the recovery from that which established the union really as a much more stable institution both politically and otherwise. From that time on the union's administration had a clear majority. There was strong opposition because there were still people like Pittman and Chinander and Fry: and groups of that kind who really were in opposition and would have liked to have seen a different administration but they had very little chance of success. Although they talked about running opponents in subsequent elections I am not sure that they ever did it. Of course 1954 marked a complete collapse of that kind of opposition. So we weathered that storm and then we learned from that storm a number of lessons.

I think we went through that period of those hit and run strikes. That was one of the products of the strike of '48 and of course the success of that did an awful lot to have our people feel that they were getting the kind of leadership that they wanted. It's not hard to recall individual incidents of people who got their jobs back who just never thought they were going to and they were convinced that they were dead ducks. They'd stay around because we'd urge them to and they could be helpful. We were providing as much relief as we could to these people while they waited and because of the limitations of our resources there wasn't an awful lot we could provide. But people managed somehow when they had to, they saw themselves through this period.

So I guess may be now we're at a point where we ought to try and get back on our old schedule. This was the period of that strike and the immediate period afterwards. Our negotiation was with the company and then we met with Swift and they made it clear that they were going to give us that additional four cents an hour which would have made it thirteen cents. The chief negotiator for Swift, I mentioned
to you before, was a man by the name of John Wilson, an extremely able man and my senior by a number of years. I had a good deal of respect for him and I learned a lot from him. He was a very skillful negotiator. But he -- whatever his reason was, he didn't say it in so many words but a number of years later after he had retired I asked him about it -- he gave me the clear impression that if the Amalgamated hadn't settled with them for nine cents we'd have got ten the thirteen cents in that strike settlement. And that was something that really ate at me.

I. The Amalgamated must have been pretty sick when you went ahead and got anything.

R. But they got that four cents, too. I hope this record is clear: the strike was over in May, our convention was in June. I think it must have been September or October before we negotiated that other four cents. They had signed up for nine cents but we found a memo someplace where the Amalgamated was willing to take eight cents and Swift showed them where their figures were wrong, they were really entitled to nine cents.

I. That's an amazing story.

R. Sure that's an amazing story. The other one was in 1946 when the panel was sitting when they announced publicly and it was in all the papers that they got fifteen cents and we got sixteen cents. But it didn't matter to them. They didn't care whether people thought it was good, bad or indifferent.

I. How did their members react to that?

R. Well we often asked them since then, those who are around. They felt badly but they had a certain loyalty to the Amalgamated.

I. It was like a lodge.

R. It was like our membership. Yes they weren't prepared to pull out over it. They had a hold over their people. Their people were devoted, committed, in a sense very much like ours were, too. But they used to be embarrassed and they felt badly about the fact.

I can remember one night we were negotiating. This happened years ago. We were over at the Palmer House and we were sleeping there because we'd been in almost round the clock session. There was Ray Wentz, who was the Vice President of the Amalgamated out of St. Paul and Glen Snyder,
who was at that time in their national office. We'd been working steadily with Armour and we were making some real progress. We had actually, in fact, opened up some areas that looked as if we might come up with an exceptionally good contract. And I can't recall now but I guess it was about two o'clock in the morning or thereabouts, Wentz or Snyder, one of them came and knocked on my door. Jesse Prosten and I were lying down getting some rest. They had just got a call from the Morrison Hotel where Harry Poole and Gorman and the others were meeting with Swift and they said they had to go over there right away. They thought they had a deal. Well we screamed! They didn't want us to come over, they were going to go over alone. But we went over and my G-d it was just shameful what they had agreed to. It was perfectly clear that, without telling these two guys, they had made the deal and nothing was going to break them up. And they didn't want to talk about it. They were embarrassed but that's the way it was. They weren't going to do anything.

I. You couldn't talk them out of it?

R. Of course not, no, no. The truth was Gorman just doesn't like to get in to these kinds of fights. That's one of the things that's made him so shaky about the problems we've had since we merged. He's having trouble with his own people in ways he never had before. I'm not talking about us now. He expected trouble with us. With his former Amalgamated people he's having problems he never expected because they are now getting a different kind of leadership. From his point of view this isn't really the way you do things.
Today we're going to start with 1954 but before doing that I ought to review what happened in the 1952 convention that sort of led up to the problem in '54. I think I mentioned that in 1950 there had been a change in top officers of the union. Tony Stephens, that's A.T. Stephens, was elected vice president, Tony had been the director of District which was the district at that time that included Iowa, Nebraska and Colorado. And he had been one of the important voices in the union during the strike and immediately afterwards. He had stood for progressive causes all the way through and was a very very close ally of mine. I thought of him in many ways as sort of a protege, able, competent and he worked hard at the job.

His district was at that time either the largest or one of the largest in the union. After the '48 strike Tony had taken over the responsibility from Frank Ellis, who at that time had been the vice president of the union, in handling the organizing campaign we were involved in when we had all those elections that we had to go through with as a result of raiding attempts and other efforts of that kind. And he had really given leadership to that and had been responsible in an important way for many of the results. So it was a perfectly natural thing that he at some stage had to move into the upper echelons of leadership of the union.

Ellis was getting along toward the point of retirement. I can't say that this was accomplished without any pressures, there were some. They were really implied and if Ellis at anytime had really said he wasn't going to do it I don't think anyone would have pushed it to the point where it would be an open fight. But he was ambivalent and torn about it, too. He finally withdrew with some sadness and it did leave some bad feeling on the part of some people. Stephens had been a particular anathema to the CIO Caucus in the union because they viewed him as a sort of a hatchet man and they resented this. They were prepared to support Ellis to the hilt even though, if you remember the closeness of the votes, they had not voted at all for him in the 1948 convention just two years earlier. At any rate that change had been made.

I must add one other bit of background before I get into the '52 story and that has to do with the status of Lewis J. Clark. If you remember when I was elected president in Quebec in Montreal in 1946 Clark had been president. As a result of some of Haywood's maneuverings he, at the last
minute, withdrew as a candidate and I was elected without any opposition. He then was nominated for secretary treasurer. Now at the time I was elected we had intended to support Norman Riches who had been one of the people on our staff in Canada, working under Fred Dowling's direction. He was young, very personable, very attractive and quite competent. We thought he'd really fill the job very well. Norman was going to be our candidate but the suddenness and the complete secrecy behind this maneuver of Haywood's, when Clark withdrew and then got nominated as secretary treasurer, just caught us all completely off guard. Our immediate reaction was that this would win Clark a lot of sympathy and might result in Riches' defeat. Other than that we thought we had the votes to elect him. We thought we could deliver the same votes for him that I would have gotten and obviously I had the votes or Clark would not have withdrawn. But under the pressure of that moment there was no time to make decisions at all and check to see where we stood. We concluded that the safest thing would be to have Riches withdraw and let Clark take the job unopposed. So Clark had held this post as secretary treasurer from 1946 up to the time that we began to approach preparations for the 1952 convention, a period of roughly six years. And Riches intended to work up in Canada.

At some point some months prior to the convention a meeting occurred between Stephens, Dowling and myself at which time, as we had many other times, we got into a discussion over this question. Now I must introduce one other character in this drama and that was a man by the name of Russell Bull, a strong figure, a tough and stubborn guy, thin, lean, very black hair, an intense person. He was the fisherman that we all went fishing with but he was really a driving force and a wonderful guy. As a matter of fact one of the most dramatic stories I ever listened to was the story of how he and about four or five other people organized the Tobin Packing Company in Fort Dodge, Iowa under the worst of circumstances. This was back in the '30s. Meanness and stubbornness was the only thing that did it but it was Bull. He was strong and able, had a whole lot of guts. He'd get us into all kinds of problems.

Bull was the kind of guy that I think I told the story about once when we were having a session down in Mount Eagle on civil rights and the question came up about using the term "boy" in connection with Negromen. Bull just blew up at some point and said, "That's a lot of stuff and nonsense. You mean to say if I want to say, 'Come on boys,' because one of you is black? That's crazy!" And he just wasn't going to have any part of this sort of foolishness. You're not going to change everybody's vocabulary on account of this. He just was adamant, no logic, nothing. You could use all the
sociological arguments about the historical meaning of "boy" in this country and it just went over his head. "Look, this is my way of talking. I say 'Come on boys,' and say it to anybody and that doesn't mean that I think they're children." Finally Charlie Hayes, who is black and very active in the union -- he had not yet taken over the job of director of the union which he subsequently became. But he finally said to Bull, "Look, if I can't convince you with my arguments let me just say this. I'm a friend of yours, you like me, I know it. If I tell you that that term applied to me demeans me and insults me will you stop using it because you're a friend of mine?" He said, "Would it insult you?" Charlie said, "Yeah, it really would." Bull said, "Well of course, I'm not going to insult you. Of course I'll stop using it." This is rather typical of the kind of person Bull was. He'd worked in a plant all his life, relatively little formal education, but bright, sharp as could be.

As director in his district they put out a newspaper in the district and he got mad at a CIO convention because of some of the hypocrisy that was going on, especially around this communist issue. So he issued a blast against Murray and this resulted in my getting all kinds of heat and pressure over it. But I had understood for a long time that you always provide an umbrella in order to make sure that people had an opportunity to express their views no matter what part of the spectrum those views came from. We kept the channels of communication open within the union.

Well this is by way of background leading up to the problem that arose in connection with the election of 1952 in Colorado where the convention was held. Stephens and I had had this meeting with Dowling and we finally decided we had to replace Clark. In looking for a replacement we came to the conclusion that Riches still remained a logical guy and we committed ourselves to this program. At some point along the way, if not before then immediately afterwards, we discussed this with Bull because Bull was an important political influence. His district still remained either the first or the second biggest district in the union. We talked to others about it and Bull committed himself and others committed themselves.

As the McCarthy problem began to mount in late '51, '52, at least I think that was the time that they were beginning to mount, one of the problems that began to appear was this whole question of regulations affecting the ability of Americans and Canadians to move easily across the border. There had been a number of cases in which American trade unionists had been denied entrance into Canada. Canadians claimed, and there is reason to believe that this had
resulted from the fact that American immigration authorities were refusing admission to Canadians coming across from Canada. As a matter of fact a famous case at the time had to do with the President of the Woodworkers Union, who came I think from British Columbia. This had been a union with a long history of Wobbly Sentiments, populist kinds of notions in the United States. The man, whom I never met, I think was named Pritchett. My recollection is that he was denied admission into the United States and eventually either he resigned or he was forced out of the presidency. They had to make some change.

The union didn't change its character particularly because I remember that the last president of that union I knew, a man by the name of Hartung, remained faithful to his old populist and Wobbly convictions. Reuther used to be quite fond of him because of this background but he was also very frustrated by him. Hartung would be the kind of guy who would come up and object to some particular program that Reuther might be espousing. Many times the objection was valid and it proved embarrassing because he would claim he had been instructed by his executive board to vote against it or to take this position. Of course most of these sophisticated characters that are on the executive board of the CIO in those days would hardly believe that because they knew in their unions they wouldn't be instructed to take some action they didn't want to take, first. Or secondly, if they were instructed they'd find some way of dealing with it so that they didn't have to be embarassed, but not so with Hartung.

Well at any rate the question of the need of a Canadian to cross the border and have access to the United States and to Canada began to loom larger in the minds of some of our people in the states, particularly in the more left wing sections of the union, and of course there were sections of that kind. They became real bothered by it. Now I don't want to create the impression that this was only among people who were in or close to the Communist Party because it wasn't. You had a lot of socialists and others -- the same kind of coalition that existed at the time when I originally got involved and many of these people, not all of them, but many of them were bothered by it. As we came closer to the convention they began pressing this concern and more and more people became involved.

At some point Bull indicated that this bothered him a great deal. I had taken the position that we had made the commitment and it was one of those political promises that you kept. Riches had been denied this once before. You don't repeat the offense, and for a purely mythical reason, even though there may be some truth to the fact that there would be
pressure. The State Department might get messed up in it and we didn't know how Riches would act. I was still convinced that the Canadians were very much part of our group, that they could be trusted to act in a proper way and that I was not going to permit this to change my views at all. It seemed to me it was more fancied than real but in any event I wouldn't warrant our backing off from the commitment.

Well Bull became more insistent and more bothered by it. And then the question came up, if not Riches, who was going to be the candidate. And this was of some concern to me because without Riches, and if he was the only other one, you found yourself in a position that almost willy-nilly you're back with Clark or somebody who might even be worse. I had, as I indicated before, been spending time with G.R. Hathaway who had been the director of the union in the Atlanta region. And after the '48 convention and that debacle I had been down in Georgia handling some of the arbitrations resulting from the strike. I had begun to establish some rapport with Hathaway and I kept it up. I'd worked quite carefully in the beginning to wean him and win him over and I was beginning to make some real progress. As a matter of fact, by 1952 it was pretty clear that he was ready to move over completely and had moved over, for whatever it was worth, to our caucus: I don't think we called it that, but our group. So I said, you know, just in the course of conversation, "If you guys are bound and determined to do something you might think of him as a possibility but you know it's no real substitute for Riches."

After the convention started the districts, as a matter of policy, used to have caucuses to determine what position they were going to take on various issues in the convention. I went to the caucus of District 3 and we had a big fight. Stephens was sort of neutral and his role in this will come out later. It was not a very good one but Bull was just absolutely flatly, opposed to it and he was using this argument and he wasn't playing games. He just didn't trust what the immigration authorities would do and he didn't see how you could elect a guy an officer of the union who was be holden to the government authority in order to perform the functions of his office. He was opposed to it and he said so. In any event the district voted to support Hathaway and the issue then became clear. Our old group, less Canada, supporting Hathaway, with the right wing group moving over to support Riches not completely, however.

As I look at the voting at that convention it seems to be pretty clear that what you had then was the alignment between Canada and a substantial portion of the CIO caucus. This is the right wing forces supporting Riches and the other, the so called left wing forces, supporting Hathaway. The
explanation was a combination of things. It was not complete one way or another. It would be a mistake to say that it was entirely so, but there were these groupings. The final vote was Hathaway 655.9 over Riches 519.1. So you see this was a more substantial vote than existed over the right wing in 1948. That's almost 35 votes difference whereas before one of them was 20 votes or thereabouts. So that if it wasn't as pure as I've indicated it clearly was a factor.

Now one of the intriguing things that occurred in connection with this vote was that part of our procedure called for the voting of the members of the executive board after the vote was in. Now everybody had been keeping track so everybody knew how the voting was. Well the people on the board voted the way one would have expected them to vote, with a couple of exceptions. They voted for Hathaway when I guess I would have thought some of them would have voted for Riches, but they didn't. At any rate when they came to Stephens he kept a half a vote for Hathaway and a half a vote for Riches.

I. How do you explain that?
R. Well he just couldn't face it. He had this conflict between the commitment he made and he knew he was running out. He didn't win any friends or influence anybody. As a matter of fact this haunted him for the rest of his period in the union. We finally had a blow up with him which occurred in 1958. People still remember this half a vote and it was really incredible. I voted for Riches and people came over to me afterwards and some of them were mad. Others told me that was good political judgement on my part. But I had been committed and everybody knew where I stood.

I. Can you explain why the CIO caucus picked up Riches?
R. Because they felt that the opposition was left wing opposition, that was it. And Fred was responsible then for a resolution dealing with the condemnation of communism or something. I want to find the resolution because that really came as close to blowing up our coalition as anything could have. Fred Dowling, who had a real Irish temper, was perfectly furious as he had every right to be over this defeat of Riches. He was particularly mad at Bull and at Stephens because he felt they'd run out on him and his anger was released in an attack on the left wing. In that respect he became right in with the right wing group who were perfectly happy to have him as their spokesman. He had never been one before nor was he ever again after this. But on this occasion it was really sheer vindictiveness. He didn't try to hide it any, he was perfectly willing to face up to it.
He originally had a resolution that would have required the executive board to fire anyone who was connected with anything, to investigate. I don't remember all the details but it was the kind of thing that many other unions had been adopting. It was just short of being a constitutional amendment. It was an alternative solution but in many ways it could have been that and I kept arguing with him, pleading with him. It, was hard for him to argue with me because I at least had kept my word. He began to realize, I think, near the end of this what its significance was to me. I said to him, "This is a power that you propose to give me. I will not and cannot exercise it. I am unwilling to hold this office with that kind of burden put on me when I'm expected to carry it out. If, therefore, it is adopted I will resign. I simply cannot live with this, I'm not willing to do these kind of things. I don't believe in purges and I won't do it."

Meanwhile he was being pushed to go as far as this other group did. The CIO caucus thought they could push him. They were perfectly happy to have him do this. At any rate the resolution that was finally agreed on was the following one. It was submitted by the International Executive Board which meant that I had succeeded in getting a compromise which was unanimously adopted by the Board and by the Resolutions Committee. And the resolution read:

We affirm our opposition to all forms of totalitarianism including fascism, communism and any other authoritarian group. We affirm our faith in the democratic process. We therefore subscribe to the rule of the majority and will oppose any activity within our organization on-the part of communists, fascists, or any other groups designed to destroy our democratic process in order to further their objectives.

That clause on the democratic process was one that I had demanded they include because it was really the opposite of what they wanted.

Well as far as I was concerned I could live with that because that said what I essentially believed. I would have just as soon have said that we would have opposed any other groups without caring to name them because at that time I thought the House UnAmerican Activities Committee was trying to subvert our democratic processes, too. But at any rate the motion was adopted. And on the question Herb March, who had been generally regarded as the spokesman of the Communist Party in the union, spoke. As you know he was an avowed member and he had been a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party. Herb March spoke on this question and I
think it's worth repeating what he said: 

It is not my intention to go into any great length on the resolution. I want to express, however, my sharp disagreement and opposition to it. The resolution in itself is based on facts which I consider inconsistent and incorrect. I don't regard totalitarianism and communism as synonymous, and it is not my intention to go into a lengthy debate on political questions. I don't think this convention is in the mood for it, nor do I think we have an atmosphere conducive to calm consideration of that type of political question. I want to say this much about the resolution, however. If there are any among you who think that by the adoption of this resolution our union will attain some measure of respectability in the eyes of our enemies and will avoid being red-baited and attacked, then disillusion yourselves. McCarthyism tolerates no half way approach and will not allow our union to be at rest from its attacks until such time as the union ceases to fight for the interests of the workers. Only at that time, in their eyes, will this union attain any sort of respectability. I want to warn the membership of the union of the dangers inherent in this type of resolution, inherent in that it can, with people who are intolerant and those who have the aim of exorcising intolerance, lay the basis for a witch hunt in the union. I would call to the minds of all the delegates here that the temper of the present hysteria is such as to fail to distinguish between those who are called communists and those who hold any social philosophy which does not correspond 100% with the so-called free enterprise that the NAM and the kept press keep pumping at us. There is serious danger, therefore. You cannot have a little red-baiting and expect to stop automatically because there are forces at work in this nation and in the world that just don't permit you that luxury. I want to say, as far as our delegation is concerned, and as far as my local is concerned, and as far as I am
concerned, it is my intention to follow the policies of this union and to carry on as best I can in the interests of a united fighting Packinghouse Workers Union. One other person spoke on it and that ended the debate. Then the debate was shut off and the motion was passed.

I. How did March vote on that Riches vs. Hathaway election?

R. Oh he voted for Hathaway. There was no question about where the left wing stood in this fight.

How did he react to Bull's introducing the red-baiting issue indirectly by saying they shouldn't vote for a Canadian because the government would do it?

R. But the government would do it because of its anti-Red bias. March agreed with Bull's view on that. What, in effect, Bull was saying was, we're vulnerable and Riches is vulnerable because of this virulent anti-communism. Therefore you can't expect rational conduct and I think it's too dangerous for the union to have him. That really was essentially March's position. The government is engaged in a Cold War. Red baiting is the pervasive, prevailing climate of opinion in the country. You run the risk with Riches of one of two things, either his being banned so he can't come and perform his functions or of his having so much pressure put on him that one way or another he yields to it. And therefore he was opposed to having Riches. These views came together on that question. The right wing took the position that they would just as soon see Riches pulled clear over to the right. In any event this would have meant defeating the left.

I. But March's position pushed Dowling then all the way to the right?

R. Oh sure, the left wing. There were a number of them who were perfectly furious with me. One of them insulted me incredibly after that resolution because I had a draft of it that I'd gotten their agreement to at one point and Dowling wouldn't buy it. I had to make some revisions on it and I had accepted their visions that resulted in that. As far as I was concerned that was a good draft. Well any change that I made at all as far as he was concerned was yielding to McCarthyism and I'd gone all the way over to the right. He was terribly insulting about it.

I. Did March feel bitter toward you?

R. No. March in these kind of questions was inclined to
be someone -- you couldn't budge him. He was a very stubborn guy. As I think I told you there was one point in his life where if by walking in a straight line you could avoid the fight but by walking around the corner you'd get into it, March would have walked around the corner. There was one point in his career when that was the prevailing thing. But on the broad questions he sensed the importance, to a degree greater than some of these other people. I felt that what I had to do was, at every cost, I had to keep this coalition that we had together because we stood for progressive things. This wasn't going to be the end of the union, it was going to continue on. And I could not permit this break with Dowling to get either wider or to get permanent. I had to find some way of bridging it and avoid a permanent break of that kind.

Otherwise as I saw it, the extreme left wing could go on and do anything they wanted to do as far as I was concerned just so long as the union could stay on this progressive course it had followed. We could be for things we believed in because we believed in them, not because we were worried about some communist menace. And I realized that to do this meant keeping these channels of communication open. I was not prepared to give in on that. That's why I was unwilling to use some of these powers that they wanted to put in. That's why I was opposed to constitutional amendments, because some that was a clogging up of the democratic processes and. it would have been permanent.

I. Did you and Dowling become friends again?

R. We never really broke. What happened was there was heated exchanges that occurred between us and a number of others of the Canadians who were also pushing. See, he had his right wing Canadians, too, and they were pushing him because they were basically sympathetic. But of course you had a lot of socialists there. They were mad but not quite as mad as Fred. They wouldn't say so out loud but they were very unhappy at the position they were finding themselves in. And they were pointing their finger at the left in America, including Bull, whom they classified by his time as with that extreme left, although they knew better.

I. I suppose to them it meant permanent second class citizenship within the union, having no international officers.

R. That's right. Well Dowling was a national officer but it was a slap at the Canadian nationality in some ways. But then they knew that this story about Pritchett was true so they realized that there was some merit in this. At any rate the break with Dowling was not at all complete. As a matter
of fact, there was some tension between us for a short period of time. It passed immediately. No, Fred was never the kind of guy to this day if I sat down and said to him you know when you did that how wrong you were, he still wouldn't admit he was wrong. He was a real stubborn Irishman if there ever was one. He's really got the map of Ireland all over his face.

I can remember his getting mad one time. I don't know if I told this story. We were in a bar and I was sitting at the bar and this was with one of his staff people. He got mad at him and he just became irrational. I stood up, I talked to him, I stood in front of him. He couldn't see me, all he could see was this-guy. His eyes had turned yellow and they were just blazing. I think he had a moment of complete blindness -- you know, blind with anger.

I. Was he violent?

R. His language was violent but you have to understand that Fred was at least three or four inches shorter than I am. That makes him about 5'2" or 5'3". He was not violent. I imagine when he was a kid he probably got into a lot of fights. I never knew him, as an adult, to engage in anything. And he had spent many years of his life in the socialist movement by this time, acquiring some of that climate. A very interesting guy, very active in the Young Socialist League when he was in his teens. He'd left the Catholic Church at a very early age and had been an admirer of Wadsworth, one of the leaders, the founder of the CCF in Canada. He was close to Caldwell and was a friend of Tommy Douglass's and he became a real stalwart of the CCP and the New Democratic Party, you know, the socialist complex. So this was not a role that he particularly liked but in his case it was sheer anger. And as I say, this resolution that came out, as far as I was concerned, was not that difficult.

I. You were able, then, to maintain a relationship with both March and Dowling. Were they ever friendly with each other?

R. Well March and Dowling had never been really friendly. The relationship was really one that continued through me, but they had mutual respect which they continued. Of course March at this point was no longer a director. This was in '52 and he had stepped down at the '48 election and Harold Neilson had become director and was director in '52. And it was only a year or so later that March moved out to the Coast. I think it was in '53. But Fred had always had respect for March. He knew exactly where March stood, he knew what his philosophical differences were. March, interestingly enough, a few years later would not have made
the speech that he made on this occasion. But I must say for him, it was a tense hall. You could just cut the tension in a large auditorium in this hotel. The Cosmopolitan Hotel in Denver was packed. They were sitting on the edge of their chairs. They knew this was a fight, knew that it was the result of the election that had taken place. When March came up to the podium and they recognized him you could have heard a pin drop. It was real tension and let me tell you it took an awful lot of courage to get up there and face those people at all. And he spoke, as you can tell, with feeling. You know he was a brilliant speaker, fantastically effective!

I. How would he have changed it later on? Did he ever comment on that later on?

R. Well you know he left the Communist Party. He got fed up with it. When he got out to California, well it might have even been before -- I forget when Stalin died and Kruschev came in. I think it was the 20th Congress when Kruschev began to reveal the fear that Stalin had engendered and the tactics they carried on. And when Herb realized this, you know, he had said he did not equate totalitarianism with communism. Herb, you know, his knowledge of this was through reading and he was committed to the Marxian notion of a communist society, one where people lived in community, that was his brand. He'd been part of the Communist Party of the United States. So they did all kinds of things but they always had a rationale for it.

I. And of course they had relatively little power, too.

R. That's right, but even if they had more he would not have spoken that way. I must say he did it with great self respect and even the people who didn't like it came away from there -- I heard them saying, "You know, he may be no good, he may be a Red and all that but you can't help but have respect for that guy. It took a lot of guts." And it did. It didn't change a single vote, of course, but he never expected it would. Well after that convention was over I decided in the interim period until '54 that someway or another we were not going to continue to be in a position where this thing was hanging over our head all the time. We were going to put the issue to rest. That year, I think it may have been the year Murray died, of course we can check, Reuther became president in Atlantic City. That is an interesting story, too, that I guess I never told you.

I. Want to tell me now?

R. I really do because that is a piece of labor history, too, that should be recorded some where and the people who were
in the room with meat the time, not very many of them are still living. I guess Dave McDonald is but he would never tell it. Well he might but he shouldn't. Frank Rosenblum now is dead. Well, Reuther's election at Atlantic City is another case of where I kept what I thought were political commitments. Well we've done enough today, we'll get that story another time.
Interview with Ralph Helstein  
by Elizabeth Balanoff  
April 15, 1974  

R. As I remember the last session, we'd gone through the 1952 convention in Denver. Between 1952 and 1954 there were a number of things on different levels that happened. But let me, for the purpose of this particular session, focus on this communist issue that we have been working on from time to time because it was so omnipresent in the history of the union and the period. And really in this particular period McCarthyism was just coming into its hey day, its power, I shouldn't say that, I guess it was the Eisenhower period and it was early in that period. That was when he reached his summit and went too far with the Army.

At any event between '52 and '54 we had had another one of those so called rump movements that occurred from time to time in the union. This one met in Kansas City and as a result of that it was known as the Kansas City Committee that organized there. They made two basic charges. One was that we were on the verge of effectuating a merger with Amalgamated Meatcutters, deserting the CIO. And the other was that we were a red dominated union and it was the reds that were doing it. Well they filed charges with the CIO. I think we've covered this ground before. That led to that whole investigation that Reuther conducted.

I. Who were these people?

R. Oh they were generally the people that had been involved in these fights before. Most of it came out of St. Paul.

I. Were they national leaders of the union?

R. They were national leaders. It had an excuse for beginning. It probably would have started without this but it had an excuse for beginning in connection with an affair that occurred in Atlanta, Georgia which was then District of our union. The director of that district was very much involved. The Kansas City affair, however; involved the Director of District 9, the Director of District 2, who was Glen Chinander, and the Director of District 4, who was Kermit Fry and the Director of District 8, who was A.J. Pittman. This was the Texas area. These had been people who had always been identified with the opposition group of the union. I shouldn't say always because McKinney was relatively new and he'd been almost handpicked by Hathaway after Hathaway had been elected Secretary Treasurer in Denver in 1952 and we
really would not have expected it from him. Fry was essentially a weak guy but you know he'd sort of gone along and nobody paid much attention one way or another. He was just one of the people who had a vote on the board. When it came to this is sue this was the group that formed what they called the Kansas City Committee and proceeded to make these charges.

Well this had gone on during this intervening period. In addition, to that we'd had some real bad collective bargaining problems and a very serious conflict with Cudahy. And it was a period when we made some of the major gains that we had made. We established the pension arrangement, we established Health and Welfare plans that, so far as I know, were the first insurance programs negotiated in the country. It covered both the employee and his family for hospitalization and all other medical attention, surgical benefits, that sort of thing. And this was really quite early for that in '53. And, so there'd been these kinds of problems. Then on top of that we had these internal political questions we had to deal with and put to rest. And, it was also at a time when Eisenhower was really beginning to introduce some of his programs that led to recession so there were serious economic difficulties on the horizon.

Well our convention had originally been scheduled to be held in New York because we had followed the process, of rotating them by numbers of districts. We'd gone to District one, then two, three, etc. We'd come around to the point where it was really time for New York to hold the convention but as we considered our problems I felt very strongly that we had to resolve this red question once and for all. I was sick and tired of arguing about it. I'd just had it! I wanted to get it settled and so everybody had agreed that we were going to bring the issue before the convention and resolve it. No more efforts to compromise it away, to set it aside. We would just take it on and fight it out in the convention. Well the real question then became one of: Is New York an ideal place to hold a convention that's going to deal with this kind of question?

I was very very conscious of a couple of newspaper, columnists who made it their business to stick their noses into unions affairs. One of these characters had actually come to me at one time at a CIO convention and I refused to give him information: I told him to go talk to Murray or whoever it was. He threatened to write a column exposing us as a communist union. And others had come looking for money. It was perfectly clear that this column business had become a racket. As a matter of fact it was shocking. One guy who you'd never have expected called me on the telephone one day from New York, said he needed a couple of hundred dollars,
would I send it to him. I said, "Why?" Well he needed it. I said, "Why are you asking me?" He said, "Well you have no problem getting money for purposes like this do you? Others do it." And I said, "Well I may be very naive but I've never heard that others do it. I've never been asked to do it before and I've no intention of starting."

So I began thinking about all this and here goes this convention in New York where these guys would be around it because they would pay more attention to it. And really what we were concerned about was resolving our affairs by ourselves, not with everybody and his brother hanging around us. Plus the fact that we had the feeling that a lot of other unions would be in New York. It's a logical place to get to. So we sat down and started trying to figure out where there was a place that's reasonable for us to hold a convention that's not so easy for everybody and his brother to come to, where the newspaper coverage will be more concerned with what is news rather than with the internal politics of the union, and we ended up deciding that the place to have it was in Sioux City, Iowa.

Sioux City, Iowa at one time had had a convention of the American Newspaper Guild why, I don't know. But I remember Hey wood Broun conducting a convention there. It seems to me he'd had a broken leg or something so he ran it from a chair. And from our point of view, as I say, we had a substantial membership there. It was known as a packing center, it was right next to Omaha, it had all kinds of things to recommend it. And of course it wasn't the easiest place in the world to get to. Trains weren't that convenient in those days. There weren't that many planes that flew into Sioux City. But from the point of view of our people, it meant that more of them would be able to drive to the convention and therefore it would keep the expenses down. Our membership was centered in areas like Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado. For almost anybody it was better except for the people who lived on the East Coast. It was better for almost everybody else except for them so we decided to have it in Sioux City and these were the considerations that went into it. Our decision to have it in Sioux City represented a change in what had become a pattern that the union had been following.

Were there objections?

Well yes, some of the people objected. As long as the director out of New York didn't object, and he didn't
because he understood the reasons for it, it was awfully hard-for anyone else to object. Some people did say, "Well look, our delegates would much rather go to New York City and have a better time than go to Sioux City, Iowa." But you know you can't make a big thing out of the fact that they can't go to the theatre and that sort of thing because theoretically that is not the reason they're going to the convention anyway. So it was a little difficult for anyone to make serious objections. It was going to be cheaper for everybody, including the delegates, not just in terms of distances and that sort of thing but in terms of living costs. Sioux City hotels were cheaper, the rooms were less, the food was going to be less. Whatever entertainment they were going to have was bound to be less. You could buy an awful lot of whiskey for what it cost you in New York to buy a drink, you know, so that although there were a few objections to it none of them were serious.

I'm trying to remember what our rationale for it was. Obviously we didn't publicly declare that we were moving it from New York to Sioux City for this reason. It may well have been that we had run into a problem with the New York hotel where, we were planning to have the convention and that had triggered my beginning to think about this possibility. Wait a minute, it wasn't New York that we were going to have the convention in, it was in Boston. I'd really have to check that but I really think it was in Boston and not New York. That would have been the same district.

In any event we moved it, we held it in Sioux City and that's where it was. It's true that we weren't able to attract the same kind of galaxy of speakers that we might have had if it were in Boston. Murray had died between '52 and '54. Reuther had been elected. Reuther was not at the convention but Riffe had been elected after Allen Haywood's death. Allen had also died in this period and after his death Riffe from the Steelworkers Union had been elected to take Haywood's place. He came and it seemed to me we had one other rather impressive guy. At any rate the convention was held at Sioux City and those were some of the considerations that went into it. I'm really going to have to check though to find out what the public rationale was for shifting it, both because I'm curious myself now and because I think it would be useful to add that to the history of the incident.

Well the fact is that the convention started. On the whole it was a very constructive convention. As I indicated some extremely important developments economically had occurred between the Denver convention and this one and all of these things were matters of some moment. This gave us an opportunity to develop our programmatic material. It was a very business like convention. There weren't the same
diversions that normally existed. That material I gave you from the officers reports served as a basis for discussion at the convention itself.

Well the convention received from the Committee on Constitution the normal amendment that had always come, the one which banned communists and fascists from holding office. It was considered by the Committee on Constitution and the majority voted to disapprove it. There was a minority that indicated a desire to make a report on it. The resolution was reported to the convention and the motion was made to adopt the report of the majority. Then the minority report was submitted. I can't remember now what the parliamentary situation was: It really wasn't important actually but debate took place and there was a good deal of debate. One of the men who led the debate was this man Pittman from Ft. Worth, Texas who was the director of the district down there. He was the one who made the famous speech in this convention about how he'd give them a fair trial and hang them. Really the quality of it was pretty bad.

Finally I undertook to say my piece on the theory that this was an issue of such moment that I had an obligation to make my views clear. And I said what I believed and had said for many years about the whole question of this legislation, that I didn't think it had any place in a union constitution. But there was a great deal of difference, as I saw it, between any action the CIO might take. I really think this is so although I'm not sure I was sympathetic to them doing it there either. But a federation is certainly in a different position than an international union where, theoretically at least, its controls are more direct and straightforward. The membership is in a better position to do what it wants to do, whereas in a federation there are all these other unions representing all these different points of view and the question of whatever political reasons may motivate getting control operates, differently in a federation as distinguished from an international union where they're all in the same union for the same reason.

Of course the thing that I felt the strongest about was that I didn't think union people should ever sell themselves short. I thought you ought to have confidence enough in what you're going to do so that if you don't want communists as officers you don't elect them. This notion of legislating against yourself was just sheer and utter stupidity and it raised serious questions as to whether you were an adult who could run your own business and run it well. I was still in the middle of what I had to say, when our convention had a rule that limited speakers to five minutes except with the consent of the convention. You had to have
some time limit or you'd never transact business. Most conventions have such rules. I had never been at our convention, nor had I ever known of any convention in which the president or the presiding officer was ever asked to limit himself. But one of these characters from District 2, which had been in the leadership of this argument, that is wanting this kind of a constitutional amendment, a man by the name of Zocher, actually challenged my right to continue on a point of order. I was not occupying the chair at the time, as I was speaking, but I asked if I had gone over and I was told I had. So I said that I was a little surprised that I would have this limitation imposed on me. However I knew of no provision that exempted me from it and under the circumstances I thought the point of order was well taken but I still thought it was important for me to finish my comments because this was an issue that had harrassed the union for so long so I would like to move the rules be suspended and be permitted to finish my remarks. Well, my G-d, the convention almost went up in smoke! I've never seen such a reaction.

What I hadn't realized was that the issue had turned when this guy raised this question from any issue at all to the question of an attack on me and at least a half dozen people almost fell over themselves trying to get to the microphone to second that motion. I don't think there were more than two dissenting votes to it. And at this time what I said and what anyone else had to say didn't mean a thing but I went on for a couple of minutes only because I felt I had to. Finally whoever else spoke, I don't even remember now, but there were many other speakers. At some point along the way someone got up and moved to close debate and it carried overwhelmingly and the motion was put. And of course the majority position of the committee was sustained overwhelmingly. There couldn't have, been a handful of votes against it.

There were a lot of interesting repercussions from this action first of all in the convention itself. This was a convention in which there was no longer room for the kind of divisiveness that had existed. There were a number of people changed. The Director of District 1, who was a very lovely guy by the name of Harold Neilson, he withdrew and Charlie Hayes, who is black, replaced him. The district had become more and more black. In District 4 Kermit Fry was reelected but by a very narrow margin and Glen Chinander was reelected in District 2 but also by an arrow margin. My recollection is McKinney didn't even show up at the convention so there was a new director in District 9. Pittman was beaten in Texas and beat quite decisively by a black so that at the end of that convention we had a black vice president and I think four directors and five out of a board of twelve or thirteen were black at that point.
Defeating Pittman was a very important development. McKinney wasn't, really of that much importance at way or another. The district wasn't a decisive one. But George Thomas, who replaced Pittman, added a very constructive voice to the board. Its quality improved a good deal. Chinander with whom, by the way, over the years I developed a very good relationship, as will come out when we get to the '58 convention, Chinander was a very competent guy. I always used to say, "I simply do not understand those people there because, you know, we represent the competence in this union. Now what the hell is he doing fooling around with some of those stupid jerks?" And they were stupid, the people who were part of that caucus. They were not bright politically nor in terms of issues, trade union issues, whereas Chinander and a good many of his people had a lot of ability. I have just always had difficulty understanding it. I discovered it a few years later but as of that time I had a lot of trouble understanding it.

I. What was the reason that you discovered?

R. Well the real reason was another vice president of the union, who was very close to me, by the name of Tony Stephens. They didn't trust Stephens. And much of the red stuff -- I don't know why they thought he was a red because they were just as wrong as they could be. He would turn on anyone. He turned out to be a real opportunist. When it suited his purpose to play along with the reds he'd play along with the reds but they hated him with a real passion and they felt that he was acting in my name so I bore the burden of that as well. The convention brought those changes in the board which were all healthy, I think.

There was one other item about that convention that I thought was deserving of some comment. That was that the position that I was advocating on the resolution was overwhelmingly adopted. Now I got reactions from a number of delegates to that as well as from some of the representatives of the CIO. One of the CIO representatives, not a man of any special brilliance, he'd been an organizer for awhile, then he ended up as a director of one of the regions and a was then working as a director from one of the regions. He came up to me and he said, "You know I don't agree with you at all." I said, "Well that's perfectly all right, you don't have to agree with me." He said, "I wish I'd had a chance to answer that argument about the difference between a federation and an international." I said, "Well what would your answer be?" And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well if you were going to answer it, what is your answer? Isn't a federation different from an international union?" "Well yeah, but why does that make any difference about this?" And I said,
"Because in terms of the way the two operate they have different roles, different functions. As a matter of fact, if you'd go to the trouble of reading the history of the AFL you'd note that when Gompers was bothered by the Socialists after Debs's break, where did he turn for his support? He turned to the ethnic groups in the building trades and particularly the Catholics. Catholics at that time were strongly opposed to Socialism."

Well I think he was a Catholic. I've never known for certain, although I never thought of him as being part of the ACTU group in the CIO. But this amazed him, he just didn't know the history. At any rate that was where the conversation ended and that was about it. I saw him many years afterwards and many times over the years. We always got along. As a matter of fact, a number of years later he came to me, but this was when the hysteria was passing. 1954 was right when it was rather tight and this, was when the hysteria was passing that he came around and, he said, "You know, I'm not so sure that you weren't right."

I don't know whether I ever had this transcript but there was one guy who was one of the real leaders of the anti-red stuff. This was when Murray was still living, right in '49 or '50. He was of the Ship Builders' Union as I remember it. I used to like him. He was an intransigent but there was something healthy about his antagonism and hostilities and he was brighter than most. He came up to me one day and he said, "You know Ralph, the worst mistake we ever made was in booting the reds out."

I. Really? When was this, many years later or a few?

R. Oh three or four years after it happened. I think the decisive convention, as I remember it, was in '49 and I would guess he must have said this around '54 or '53 maybe. Maybe even after he, heard what happened with us in Sioux City, I just don't recall. But I said to him, "Why do you say that?" And he said, "Well Christ, everything is conformity now, there's no issues. There's nothing to argue about, people aren't doing any thinking, there's no homework being done anymore. You've got to have conflict over something, otherwise you're not going to have any action." And it is true that the character of those conventions changed completely once the communists were gone. What you had was this drab kind of resolution being reported. There might be debate but everybody was really saying why they were for it. There was never any real discussion.

Well the other element that was interesting were some of the delegates who came tome. And I remember particularly
a woman from a sugar local in Boston, who I think also was Catholic, by the way. She and the president of her local, who was an Irish Catholic by the name of Callahan, they came up to me together. She said, "Do you know I came here expecting to vote for that resolution but I didn't. I voted against it because you persuaded me." So I said, "Well obviously I'm glad that I could have done that but are you bothered about it now that you've done it because we can fix the record if you want to change your vote." And she said, "Oh no, that's not it. The real problem is how are we going to explain our vote to our membership when we get back to Boston."

Now I'm sure that you will remember that the Irish Catholic community of Boston were very staunch supporters of McCarthy at some points. Or at least substantial parts of them were. It seems to me that Bob Kennedy at one point wasn't doing so well. She said, "We've got to explain the thing. They won't understand it. What I was wondering was, is there a tape of your speech? Because if there is and I could have that and play it for them." Well, you know there was and the person who had taped it was standing right next to us because he wanted to tell me he had a tape. I didn't tape it. They arranged to get a tape for her and I saw her afterward at subsequent conventions. I saw Callahan for I years afterwards. Callahan stayed as an officer of that union until he retired just a few years ago. But I've always remembered that with a good deal of pleasure, the fact that the converts weren't limited to people who agreed in advance.

I. Did she ever tell you how you were received in Boston? On tape, that is.

R. No. Well she may have, I don't remember. At any rate I do know that I saw her at other conventions.

I. You know her career wasn't ruined.

R. That's right. And I assume that things went reasonably well. As a matter of fact she never told me but I asked Emerson Mosely, who was our sugar director and who himself was a member of that Boston local, and he went to the meeting at which the report was made. I asked him how it went. He said, "Well she got up and she told the story and at first there were some murmurings. Then she played, the tape and the report was unanimously approved." It's the kind of thing that gives you the sense of the fact. It tells a great deal about that whole issue, just as it does about the issue of civil rights.

You know we had terrible times about the question of women and their seniority, just awful arguments. And one of
the people, by the way, who gave us the worst trouble on that
was this guy, Callahan from that sugar local in Boston. First
of all I'm not sure that he thought women ought to work but he
knew he wasn't going to be able to do very much about that.
And then there was a guy in Sioux City, Iowa who was also
terrible on that issue. I guess probably the worst one,
though, was a guy from Waterloo, Iowa. He was just simply
impossible. Basically it reflected attitudes that I guess
today would be described as sexist. I'm not sure how else
you'd describe it. But what I really think comes out of this
is a sense of the fact that you can change trends at
appropriate times in sensible ways. You deal with them and
fight out the issue, argue it out. People will respond no
matter how deeply set they may be in their attitudes. Well
there are some, of course, that won't, that can't see the
issue. This was certainly true in the civil rights fight.
Many simply could not understand why blacks -- you know, they
had to feel they were inferior.

At any rate I think there are two things that we
probably ought to remember to deal with still on this '54
convention: what public rationale we had for moving the
convention to Sioux City and, I guess, the officers report.
I think it's probably useful to add that we had, in the
previous negotiations a period between '52 and '54, in
addition to the pensions and the health and welfare benefits,
we had established for the first time in the history of the
industry making Saturday a premium day. We were moving in
the direction of the five day week. We improved that a great
deal in later years. But for the first time in the history of
the industry we established this. And this had been an issue
that was very close to the hearts of our people for a long long
time. They had pressed it in many negotiations and we had
never been able to do it.

Secondly, and one of the reasons that I think makes
putting that report invaluable, is that it was in this period
between '52 and '54 that we held our first national conference
on the problems of women in industry. I'm not sure whether or
not we hadn't had a Committee on Women's Activities before
then but this was a national conference called for the purpose
of dealing with that question alone. Of course it predates
more recent activity; I think that one of the reasons that
that report goes into the kind of detail it does on women's
activities is because of the fact that that conference was
held in that period.

For a while the Highlander Folk School handled our
education program. Miles Horton had found it difficult to
work within that kind of a political structure because if he
thought a director wasn't much good he was all for encouraging
people to say it. Well that created all kinds of political problems and Miles said to me that he knew it wouldn't work. I tried to convince him he ought to stay on. I was willing to take a chance because one of the people that they were complaining about particularly was Fry and I was willing to see Fry fry, if you'll permit me a pun. But Miles wouldn't stay with it so he left and it was when he left that we setup the Program Department.

Now that put a lot of fire into these things because it allowed us to assign responsibility on an issue basis as distinguished from an area. And it shifted from a geographical kind of thing, although it had that, too. We had program, coordinators in the various districts of the union but they were charged with the responsibility of resolving certain issues like the issue of civil rights, women's activities, farm-labor, all that kind of thing. That's why you can see the kind of emphasis in this report on these issues, because that Program Department had started working during the period between these two conventions.

The '52 negotiations, as well as the '48 strike, had taught us that we couldn't live with the Meatcutters and we couldn't live without them. So we had to find a modus vivendi and some way of living together. And finally on July 1, 1953 we signed a Memo of Understanding with the Meatcutters in terms of joint organizing efforts, negotiations and that kind of thing. It was the negotiations that led to that Memorandum of Understanding that this so called Kansas City Committee, functioning around the red question, had used as a way of going to Reuther and telling him that we were going to merge with the Meatcutters and leave the CIO. That was one of the things that had given rise to that whole question of our breaking with the CIO.

That Memorandum of Understanding helped but it was no cure because in the '53 negotiations we had that agreement and, in spite of that agreement, they went off and they settled for five cents when we could probably have had seven cents. But it was again a question of, do you do your job the way you ought to do it. It was not right, you know the craftsmanship of it was always -- they just had no sense of how to do things. Well I think that's about enough for today.
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff
April 22, 1974.

R. Last time we covered the 1954 convention. In the spring of our contract permitted a wage reopener. There had been many negotiations that year involving some of America's major industries. Among those were steel, automobile, and steel had received a settlement of fifteen cents an hour, which up to that time at least was regarded as a very very substantial settlement. We had gone into negotiations and we, had decided that in 1955, since our contract was open only on wages, it wasn't open on any other issue, that we were going to really go out after a big wage increase. Now prior to this time it should be noted that the largest single wage increase that the packing industry had ever given was a sixteen cents an hour increase and that was done as a result of the action of that Witte Commission that we covered back in '52.

So here we were in '55 going into negotiations and we were pressing Armour unmercifully in those negotiations. Armour at that time had gotten a new Vice President in charge of Production and he was also handling industrial relations. His name was Dean Hawkins. Now Hawkins was an intelligent man, an extremely competent guy, a great improvement over his predecessor, Frank Green, in terms of ability, general competence. And he also had an understanding of what we could do if we once cut ourselves loose. He didn't want to get in the middle of one of those. Essentially as a result of his maneuvering I had got together with Specht, who at that time was President of Armour and Company.

As a matter of fact, it had gone to the point that Specht had invited me to his house for lunch one day. He had an apartment somewhere up on the Gold Coast, I wouldn't even remember where. It was very pleasant. His wife seemed to be a woman of some accomplishment. I later learned that she'd been active in the business world herself, I think in brokeragework. It seemed perfectly possible. Specht was a salesman type, he wasn't a guy of any special quality. I guess he was good as these men go but a man of no special quality. Hawkins was a man I could have a lot more respect for but Specht was not a bad person. We got along reasonably well but I think that I was able to convey to him the fact that it would just be very sensible for them not to fool around. And I certainly got it over to Hawkins.

Negotiations went on for quite a while. At one point
during the course of those negotiations Hawkins said to me, "You know you're driving me crazy." And I said, "Well, you know," I have no particular objection to doing that. Can you give me a good reason why I shouldn't? So far you haven't given us what we want." And he said, "But I've, got the shingles. I've never had the shingles in my life before and it's impossible to live with.

don't know what to do." I said to him, "What do you mean, between me and Specht?" So he said, "Well this man calls me every hour of the night. He wants to know how much progress I've made and I can't tell him. You're not telling me anything. All you tell me is, 'Come on, you're not giving us enough,' and I can't just tell him that." "Well, that's all you've got to tell him until you give us more," I said. "You know Dean,- it's not really that hard. Steel has made a settlement. You know we have a sense of reality about these things, too." "G-d, we can't give you fifteen cents an hour!" I said, "Well then you just go ahead and suffer with your shingles. I can't be responsible for your problems."

Well this went on for quite a while and we finally got them to the point where I don't remember what their offer was but it was up somewhere around ten cents or eleven cents. I think it was eleven cents. It was perfectly clear that they were ready to go higher but the question was how much higher. You know I was afraid he was toying around with twelve cents. If you get to that point, you get yourself a real organizational problem, you know, twelve cents as against three cents. So I was refusing to meet with them. I was being very difficult because I didn't want him to make me another offer until he was doing it under the gun.

We set up a meeting of our Policy Committee for 10 o'clock on the morning of a particular day and at 7 o'clock that morning my phone rang. It was Hawkins, "Ralph, I've got to see you. I said, "Look, come on Dean, knock it off; You haven't got anything to see me about. You know I've got a meeting today, I can't, go fooling around listening to you complain about your shingles." He said, "No, I'm serious, I got to talk to you." I said, "Well look, I can't help you. All I can do is tell you that I have to be down town for a meeting at 10 o'clock. If you really want to see me, if there's any sense in your seeing me, come on over here and I'll talk to you before I go down town." He lived at that time in the Jackson Park over on 56th and Lake, the Jackson Park apartments or some such thing. So I said, "Come on over here. You're just a few blocks away. If you want to talk to me, come tell me what you want to tell me and I'll go off on my business."

So he comes over and we go and sit off on that porch
over there. It was a lovely day in spring as I remember it. It could have been more in July, late June or early July. He came up and he fooled around for a little while and then he said, "Look, I'm authorized to offer you fourteen cents and that's it!" And I started swearing at him, that was my instinctive reaction. You know it was such a chisel. What they were doing was chiseling's penny out of us. Of course there was no sense in my playing games with it. We couldn't get into a fight over a penny but I was perfectly furious at him. And he sat there and grinned. I said, "You're through with your shingles, huh?" "Well," he said, "you don't know what I had to go through to get authorization to, offer you this." I said, "Why in the hell didn't you put that other penny in?" I said, "You know I don't believe you. I think you're lying to me. I think you've got that penny authorization. I think you're refusing to give it to me so you can go back to Specht and tell him you saved him a penny." Those were in the days when a penny for Armour represented roughly a million dollars or more. So he just sat and grinned. He never admitted it, he never denied it.

Poor guy, not too long after he died of a heart attack. His wife had previously died and that had been a very hard experience. He dropped dead just before he was going to retire. It was really a sad business because as these people went he was both more decent and more competent. He was a guy with a lot of intellectual curiosity and he had some comprehension.

He was a strange character to me. He'd do all kinds of things. For example, he had what I thought was a very lovely taste in ties and so I'd comment on what a nice tie he was wearing. And one day I got a package from Cap and Capper. I opened it and here's some ties with a card from him. I packed them up, put the bill back in them. I wrapped them in the same wrapping and I took them down to Cappers and I said, "I don't want these, credit that account." I never said a word to him and a long time afterwards he said, "What did you do that for?" "What the hell right have you got? If I want ties I can afford to go out and buy them. I don't need you buying me ties," I said. "Look, when this is all over we may get to the point where we have a different relationship. Right now you stay where you belong and I'll stay where I belong and don't go buying me ties." Well, that fourteen cents, that was it. To this day I believe that.

I. You had to take the fourteen cents?

R. Well sure. To this day I believe he was authorized to offer us fifteen cents but he chiseled off that penny, knowing damn well we weren't going, to get a strike over the one
penny. And knowing this would put him in a position where he could go back to Specht and tell him how much he'd saved him, you know.

Well at any rate it was during this period that we'd gotten involved in two really difficult situations. We'd gotten involved in a strike in Boston in a place called the Colonial Provision Co. As of August it had been going on for forty some weeks, the longest strike we'd ever had. It involved about three hundred people. We were hanging on but that was about it. They were hiring scabs and we were just having an awful rough time. We were carrying on a consumer boycott campaign. That was having some effect but it wasn't as effective as it should have been. It was a real rough situation.

And then these strikes in the bayous of Louisiana started at Colonial Sugar and Godchaux Sugar. That was in Reserve, Louisiana. The Colonial plant was in Gramercy, Louisiana. These strikes started primarily because of a refusal on the part of these two refineries to meet the wage increases that we had negotiated in the American Sugar Plant in Chalmette. It was a suburb right outside of New Orleans. These were up the bayou about 35 miles. Colonial Sugar was rather widely held, that is its ownership was owned by eastern capital. But Godchaux Sugar was owned by a family whose father, grandfather, I don't know what part of the family, had started this way back prior to the Civil War. I may have recorded, I think I did, the experience with this company the year before in 1954 when one of the two brothers who was running the plant in '54 had in a meeting said to me when we were complaining about their failure to do things. He turned to the committee and said to them over my head really, "But we've been good masters, haven't we?"
I. Worse than the fathers?

R. Oh much worse! One of them had been to Yale and one to Harvard. They're really vicious in every conceivable respect -- their use of company houses, the way they threw people out en masse. Well the strike had gone on for a long time. As a matter of fact the Colonial strike, I think we finally settled after roughly five or six months but the Godchaux strike took us nine months before we finally got a settlement and then only after that family sold out its interest. The older of the two cousins, who had become president of the company, announced publicly and was quoted in Life Magazine.

It might be interesting to find the report of that story there because this was in a sense a fight as you get if you read a transcript of that special convention. The fight was really partially for the building of a new South. The whole judicial process was incredibly feudal. They'd throw these people in jail. And they interpreted the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana, they interpreted their right to work law to mean that you could not grant exclusive recognition to a union. Of course that couldn't hold up because the field was pre-empted by the National Labor Relations Act, but it's an indication of how far those courts would go. Conspiracy doctrine was all over the place. You
might have been back to the period prior to the Hunt decision in 1842.

In any case what went on there was simply incredible. This strike had been going on for a long time and we were beginning to have difficulty in financing it. We finally decided there is no alternative. We couldn't let loose of it. The issue was essentially one of making some progress toward eliminating the North-South differential. We regarded this as an issue that warranted the complete resources of the union. So we decided eventually to hold a special convention and to submit to the membership the question of creating a strike fund.

The real problem was how do you go about doing that. We thought through many ways and finally concluded that the best way to do that was to raise our dues. Under Taft Hartley, assessments weren't possible, obviously, so it really became a question of raising dues. Now how much, do you raise them and for what period of time? Well we made some calculations and we finally concluded that if we were to raise the dues five dollars a month for a period of four months this would give us a fund of something between a million and a half and two million dollars, which hopefully would be sufficient to see us through this emergency.

And of course in May of the following year, in '56, we could then reexamine the fund because we would be having a regular convention. Also it contained provisions that would allow the board to increase the dues if the fund should ever drop below half a million dollars. Then we would be authorized to increase the dues by some five dollars a month, or is it a week? I think it may have been a week. It's in that amendement that I'm giving you to copy. After a referendum among our membership if we wanted to raise it for a dollar or less we could do that by action of the board alone without getting approval of the membership.

So we sent out a call for this convention and you will note one of the items submitted to the special convention which was held on August 8, 1955 in the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago was the question of approval of this contract with Armour and Co. for a fourteen cents an hour wage increase. Our convention in Sioux City, Iowa that we covered the last time, 1954, had required us to get this kind of approval from all local unions and so this offered an ideal forum to do that. But also you know it meant that the issue of the dues increase was being considered in the context of an increase of $5.60 a week in wages. So we called the convention and we held it and, of course, the convention approved the fourteen cents an hour wage increase although, there were some objections and
criticism. I think the transcript will indicate that some local unions were very strongly opposed to this. We adopted it and we raised the fund and we were able to finance the strike.

There are a couple of interesting incidents connected with these strikes that I think deserve some mention. I had gone to both Reserve and Gramercy during the course of the strikes to visit with the strikers, speak to strike meetings, you know, to help the morale as much as I possibly could. When I got to Gramercy I had never seen either of these plants. I walked around the plants and in Gramercy we walked around the Colonial plant, George Thomas, who was the director of the district, and Charlie Fisher, who then was my administrative assistant. Charlie had been, working down there with Thomas and the others. And we looked it over and went to a meeting and went on our way only to discover that the courts issued a citation fair contempt charging us with violating the injunction because it limited pickets to one every twenty feet apart or forty feet apart and the three of us had been walking together around this plant—not really around the plant but just in front of the plant. The citation was issued. By the way, that citation was outstanding at the time this convention was on but there was no special point made of it. Someone did indicate it but I issued a public statement saying that I was going to come back there and accept the citation and I would welcome their serving it and trying the issues, that it was a perfect example of the fact that they were still living in the early, part of the century and that their concept of labor relations was certainly 19th Century at least.

I. Was it ever served?

R. No, they never served it. Heck, they didn't want to serve it. I think, they issued it initially thinking maybe it would be intimidating but when I responded immediately they didn't want to go on with it. The last thing in the world they wanted was to get me in a court room down there. And actually what happened was I got a call from a local guy who was working in and around labor relations, who I always felt had been induced to do this by the company. He got us into a meeting and mediated a settlement and on the whole a reasonable settlement given the fact that that strike had been going for six months or more.

It was very interesting and if you take the time to read the transcript of that convention you'll note that many of these people, particularly blacks, felt that this was really a fight for a new South. It wasn't just a strike against these companies. They spoke about how they were
thrown in, jail and what it meant and the kind of disunity. And, you had whites speaking about how they were trying to divide them. This ended any effort at division there. We never had as good an integrated situation anywhere in the union as we developed in the last plats you would have expected it.

The second item is one involving Leon Godchaux, who was president of it. I mentioned before that he was quoted in Life but I don't know what I said how he was quoted. They owned a lot of plantation land around, the plant on which they'd grown cane. It was perfectly clear that the real estate business was a more profitable business than the sugar refinery business at that time. These characters, they were the product of lots of things. There isn't any point in trying to identify them. They were not people of any quality, at least I didn't think so. Had a lot of social standing in the community, but no real quality. In any event, he had said that he was going to repopulate that whole area, that he was going to get rid of all the people who had been working there and hire scabs to take their place and he was going to repopulate it. That had been his language. Of course this gave us something to work on for quite a long time.

The third thing that happened of very special interest in that strike was that the housing problem got to be really very acute. The man who built this house was Bertram Goldberg who also built Marina Towers, you know. He's an architect by training but an artist, essentially, with a broad view of human behavior. I got to talking to him one day about that housing problem. We went to lunch together and he got all excited over this and he was going to go down there. He is married to one of the Florsheim heirs, the shoe fortune, and Nancy Florsheim was related to a member of the Godchaux tribe, a woman. So Bud went down there with the avowed purpose of trying to figure out away he could get some housing going for us and, incidentally, to see if there was anything he could do about this. This was not his commission, he was doing that on his own. As a matter of fact, I didn't know this until he came back and he then told me the story.

You asked me how they felt about him. Did they think it was strange? I suppose they did. He indicated they felt he was not being faithful to his class, but obviously their social status was such that there wasn't much doubt. The Godchaux's were having a great deal of trouble because of this statement Leon made about repopulating the area. You know, this was in '55 and Hitler wasn't out of the picture that long. People still remembered that horrible holocaust when Hitler did some repopulating and we compared the young Godchaux with Adolph Hitler. That kind of a comparison didn't do him much
I. Would that have been a union supported project?

R. Yes if we'd been able to get it through. But it would have taken an awful lot of financing and it would have taken a long time to get it going. We were under the pressures of immediate housing for a lot of people who had been thrown out of these company owned houses. Reserve, Louisiana was a company town. They owned everything, including the schools.

I. How did people live during that period? Did you have tent colonies or what did you do?

R. No, we'd find housing around in the area. They weren't just company houses. In many cases they had to double up but they managed. It was a remarkable group. They did what they thought they had to do, that's the way they used to say it. This group was essentially Cajun and black. Most of the whites were Cajun -- Evangeline, you know. I recall being up around Acadia onetime and seeing names, exactly the same family names that I ran across in the bayous of New Orleans, Louisiana. They didn't know whether they had relatives still up in Acadia or not.

There's a footnote to the Leon Godchaux story. Last year, you may remember, I was in New Orleans in the district which includes this sugar workers group. They had a convention and the sugar workers were at the convention and held a testimonial in my honor. While I was there we went out one evening for dinner with Ben Smith, who had been our attorney during this '55 strike and had been the attorney for the local unions there ever since. And we were standing waiting for the maitre d' to seat us when a man came and soon Ben and he got into a discussion. In the course of it they started walking over to me about a minute later or so. Ben introduced him to me as Leon Godchaux and said, "Do you remember this man?" I looked at him and said no I didn't recognize him but I remembered him. "You don't look as if you do much repopulating any more," I said. "You know, you really were an awful bastard, weren't you?" And he kind of laughed and exchanged a couple of more pleasantries and off he
went. But my understanding is that he is in the real estate business and it's probably a very successful real estate operation. Certainly at one time, at least, he owned a lot of property.

I. He's not in the sugar business anymore?

R. So far as I know they're no longer in the sugar business. It's hard to be certain because that company has changed hands a number of times. It was owned by National Sugar for awhile. Then some Cuban interests got involved. Maybe they're the ones who own it now. When I say Cuban I really mean Cuban refugee financial interests. You know they put a lot of money into sugar on the mainland in Louisiana and I think in Florida.

One other story of some interest about that strike. The time we were there, and I think it was on the same occasion as the time I got cited for contempt, we'd been with Ben Smith in New Orleans. It was Gramercy -- that's the one. And in the course of talking with Ben he'd been describing the way some of these ordinances operated. You know Louisiana has what they call parishes instead of counties. And the parish elects officers and marshalls get elected by the various communities that make up the parish.

It turned out that in Gramercy the guy who was marshall of the town had been reasonably close to most of the people working in the plant. It's understandable because they represented the majority of the people and it would have been pretty hard to be elected if he hadn't been. But in any case he was and as part of his powers he had the right, or at least we got this from reading the statutes -- Ben dug it up and he and I poured over it and we decided that we could read that statute so that he would have the power to appoint deputies. Part of our problem was the problem of scabs that they were able to hire. They couldn't get local scabs. Very few people over this long six months in Colonial and nine months in Godchaux-- actually those guys working in the plant who went to work were just a handful. Neither could they hire the blacks who did most of the plantation work from which they thought they would have a pool of labor and had in previous years. Blacks had responded, to the union's program on integration in such away that they refused to go to work. It was a fascinating example of how the union can really help itself by programs based on change. This was one way of taking the civil rights thing out into the community.

So they had to go as far away as 150 to 200 miles to import scabs and they were doing that. Generally the local blacks, once they got there, were able to get to them. They
would walk out if they were able to. They housed them in the plant and getting to them was a real tough job. They moved them under guard. They had Pullman cars for them to sleep in. It was really a pretty incredible performance. And they were throwing our people in jail for everything. They never would bother in the course of some of those proceedings, to prove that a union person had done anything. But if a scab was hurt, beat up or whatever happened, anything might have happened to him, if there was a union person around, the officers of the union would be held guilty of contempt because it was a conspiracy and therefore acts of people unknown even were charged to them.

This goes back to the old conspiracy doctrine. It was clearly illegal if you could ever get it up for review. But, you know, they weren't giving them long penalties. They were putting them in jail for four or five days at a time. You just didn't have the time to bother with this kind of thing. As they point out in the course of this convention -- when I say "they" I mean these local Louisianians pointed out that they elected a separate set of officers so that they would be prepared to deal with these problems when the regular officers got put in jail. It happened not too infrequently.

So we came up with this notion that the thing we wanted to do was to deputize our people and then whenever they'd bring the scabs and, you'd see them around you'd arrest them as vagrants. I didn't care how long they kept them arrested, they were vagrants. The only problem was we met with this guy and we couldn't get him to do it. He was scared. He understood where the power lay, obviously. It turned out that he made a mistake in some of his judgements. Over a period of time they defeated every one of those guys and there's totally different political coloration now but it took us a long time.

What intrigues me now is that I may have told you last fall or winter, I don't remember, I went to Crystal City, Texas where the Chicanos have taken over the town --La Raza Unida. I came down to advise them in bargaining for a contract and in the course of it I asked this man that I was talkng to, to tell me what the power situation is here. He said, "Well, what is it that you want to know? You know if we want to turn the water off all we have to do is arrange to have the water turned off. If it's a matter of arresting somebody all we have to do is call the Chief of Police." They did precisely what had wanted to do but they had it already done. They never had to do it because they worked out a deal, but they could do it and that made the difference.

At any rate that sugar strike, was an extremely
important strike in many ways. First it brought the union
together in very important ways. It was the start of the
strike fund. We set up the strike fund which continued and
played a very important part in our ability to do many things
over the years. In fact even in Canada it played a very
important role in a big strike we had there in '60. As a
matter of fact, one of the Canadian employers was so convinced
that we didn't want to settle the strike because we really
wanted to build the strike fund. We were collecting money in
the States and sending it up to Canada for the strike. He
didn't think we were going to ever settle because of that.

I. How does your strike fund compare with other unions?

R. Most of them are larger. The Auto Workers are much
larger. I don't know what the Steelworkers ever did

I. What did you do with your money?

R. Well we gave it on the basis of need. We'd send the
money to the local union, instruct them to determine what the
needs were and then to report on how they had divided it.
Over a period of years we discovered that it was much easier
and it eliminated problems. It eliminated political
problems but more importantly it eliminated complaining and
people getting mad if we allotted an equal amount for
everybody.

I think before the merger with the Meat cutters we
were allotting ten dollars per person. Now that didn't mean
that everybody got ten dollars a week because a number of
people would go out and get jobs. We helped them get jobs and
obviously you can't get strike benefits if you're working.
They might come and man the picket line, many of them, did. So
you would take that money and you would divide it up. We did,
in addition, maintain in force, if the companies would work it
out with us, their insurance coverage. This was very
important to the average worker, to be sure he had that
coverage. And if the companies wouldn't work it out why you
would arrange to become self insured really. We'd
administer it ourselves and most of the time they'd figure it
out so that insurance coverage didn't run very much. They'd
pick it up on their next premium. So the strike fund was
handled that way.

Now we discovered that since the merger the amounts
have gone up. I think they went up from ten dollars to twenty
dollars and I don't know whether the international gets
twenty dollars yet or thirty dollars per person. But then,
of course, the cost of living has gone up and we have gotten
raises.
What happened was the district we had this long strike in, Dakota City, Nebraska, that went on for well over six months this year, it started last fall and ran over until early this year. I got a financial report. There was over a million dollars spent on that strike in relief and what happened was that local unions all over the country contributed, over and above their contributions to the International Strike Fund. The International Strike Fund made its contribution, twenty or thirty dollars a week. And then the district would contribute I think another twenty five dollars. It must be thirty dollars so that each employee got fifty five dollars a week. You can at least live on this. That grew out of our earlier experience but there really was no alternative. It was either that or see that strike go under. People were getting pretty desperate. Many of them had been out of work too long but they certainly held themselves together. It was an act of faith and commitment. And what was so intriguing was that they were building somehow a new South. They saw this, they saw this.
Between the 1954 sugar strike and the special convention in 1955 the important thing was the fact of the establishment of the strike fund. I think at some point, either at that time or, on some previous occasion when I discussed the numbers of times that we had dealt with the issue of communism, I pointed out that I had on one occasion received a letter from Joe Beirne, who was President of the Communications Workers, saying that he'd had a complaint from his local people in New Orleans, saying that we were communist dominated. And when I had checked into that complaint I had discovered that it was a result of a fight we'd carried on to desegregate pay lines. This particular company had had two pay lines, one with a canopy over it under which whites stood and one without where the blacks stood and if it rained of course the blacks got wet.

One of the other reasons, however, advanced was that there was a leaflet that probably is in the files at the Wisconsin Historical Society that we used -- a leaflet plus posters, plus stickers which had on it the face of a black woman and a white woman saying, "Women, our men are on strike for a decent wage. Don't buy Godchaux, Colonial, Red Ball Sugar. Appeals from the women of Local 1124 and 1167, United Packinghouse Workers of America, CIO." The claim was that because the leaflets were given wholesale distribution through the South in an attempt, of course, to get a boycott on the product, that made us communists, because they had both a white person and a black pictured on the leaflet.

Was that always regarded as a sign of communism?

I can't say that it was always. I'm sure it was not always but I have no doubt that, given the nature of that membership in the Communications Workers at that time (Remember it was '54.) they would have thought it as proving it. Unquestionably only communists would permit themselves to relate blacks and whites that way.

Integration was unAmerican in other words.

Integration was unAmerican, no doubt of it. Also in connection with the reporting on the sugar strike I mentioned the fact that Leon Godchaux, then president, was quoted in Life Magazine as saying, among other things, "We may be faced with the problem of repopulating the entire community." This quote was in the context of his talking about how they had
been hiring scabs and were replacing people and forcing people out of the company's houses. Many of the strikers were living in the company owned houses. Of course many of them were evicted as the strike went on. At any rate this was the kind of language that sounded almost 19th Century but it happened in 1955.

The UPWA went into Mississippi during the time of the trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, who had been charged with killing the young 14 year old, Chicago son of a Negro woman who lived in Chicago by the, name of Emmett Louis Till. His body was fished out of a river in Mississippi, tied up as I recall it now with wire. We were terribly concerned about the trial, hoping that there would be justice, knowing pretty well that a white jury, which is what was empaneled for it, was not about to convict these two men on a murder that most everyone felt they were guilty of. So we sent people down to exercise whatever influence they might.

They spent five days at the trial in and around the court house and visiting various areas around the scene of the murder. Some of them sat in the court room while the all white jury went through the motions. Others interviewed townspeople, passed out resolutions which had been adopted at a district convention of the UPWA condemning the murder and issued press releases to, news reporters from all over the country. One of our men, Jack Telfer, who was working out of our Atlanta office, said that it drew a great deal of attention to the fact that it was possible to have a friendly inter-racial delegation, because ours was that, of course. And Telfer was quoted as saying, "We have walked about together, shared sandwiches seated on the courthouse lawn in the midst of the turmoil."

I. Do you know whether any other unions sent anyone down there?

R. As far as I know they did not. I'm not even sure that there were any local unions represented. But we had two white representatives, one black one and a committee of three women. I don't remember what the racial composition was but it was mixed. These were women who were the wives of strikers in the sugar strike.

I. It must have been a little frightening in 1955 to mingle like that in public where something like that had happened.

R. It certainly was. I don't know whether the name Frank London Brown means anything to you but he used to work for us at that time.
I. Sure.

R. And he was down there with other people. Oscar Brown, by the way, the singer, the performer, also used to work for us. We distributed petitions calling on the President to convene a special session of Congress to pass anti-lynching laws immediately but, of course, nothing came of it. I should correct the statement about other unions. We contacted the Meat cutters at that time, Russ Lasling did. This was long before the AFL-CIO merger. Russ Lasling, called Pat Gorman and he sent a representative, Herman Gehrig, to come down there and work with us in observing this trial. He stayed there all through the period.

Frank Brown commented on the tremendous strength shown by one old Negro man who was one of the main witnesses in identifying these two men as the murderers. He said he could just see him standing alone after the conclusion of the third day of the trial when he was through testifying. He said it was just impossible to understand where he got the courage to do that because it was almost like signing his own death warrant. And he said this to this Mr. Wright and Wright's response was, "There are some things worse than death. A man lives, he must live with himself." It's amazing the kinds of courage that can come out of little ordinary people when they're exposed to this kind of thing.

But the total story shocked and challenged the nation. You would have thought there would have been this same kind of response all the way through the Civil Rights groups what there were of them then. This was before the Montgomery thing, before Martin Luther King had come on the scene, but there was not the kind of response from the movement generally that one had a right to expect. That isn't to say that people like Walter Reuther and the Auto Workers, groups of that kind, didn't say the things that needed saying and should have been said. But this was the kind of situation that needed real mass action, so we thought, and it wasn't forthcoming. The Women's Activities Committee of our district here in Chicago, in connection with this Till case, raised money and gave the family I know $300 to help them with some of the costs that they were experiencing in connection with it.

Well this was still 1955 and the time when the Korean War was still near the surface of people's thinking. Our district in Iowa joined the American Friends Service Committee, the Iowa Council of Churches, the Iowa Council of United Church Women and the World Federalists as the only labor organization to support a conference that was held
there on alternatives to war. I recall that because Frank Graham, who at one time was Senator from North Carolina and at that time a Representative of the United States to the United Nations, spoke and I spoke on that occasion. We were able, because we had a pretty substantial membership, to get the Iowa CIO Council involved in it, too. As I recall it there was some complaining about that after a while.

We had been engaged in 1955, among other things, in trying to see if we could have any luck in organizing the migrant workers particularly and we picked this area of Florida. You know the migrants start way down in the southern part of Florida and move up through that central part of the state, continue up north so they get up past New Jersey by the time the crops have run their course.

I. How did you decide to try and organize that group?
R. Well we had previously been working with the citrus groups in California. That was when we had our first contact with Chavez.

I. That goes really far back, then.
R. Well in 1952 or '51 we were starting to work among the Sunkist lemons. That was our first experience with the boycott. We started boycotting Sunkist lemons and oranges after that but that was when we were up in Oxnard, California. Chavez was working with us and we had our first experience with him. We developed a relationship that has been very close even to this day. He was a lovely guy and I think it was through his contact with us that he got his first feel about the trade unions as the essential mechanism to do something about the problems of Mexican Americans. Everything you did you'd always run up against the economic issue, and you didn't have an instrumentality available to you to really work at that problem.

I. Did somebody ask, you to go in there?
R. Well originally we took over a certain area in Salinas, California that were shed workers. I say we took them over, it had been, an industrial union of the CIO and Allen Haywood arranged at one point for its transfer to us. These people had become members of ours and we'd worked with them. And out of that grew our efforts to start working with agricultural workers. In the process of that, while we were engaged with carrots or asparagus, all that kind of thing, we never quite got up to grapes but we were working with nuts, different kinds of nuts. We suddenly were advised by the Labor Board that we'd won an election and an unfair labor
practice charge against five growers, or five sheds in Oxnard, California had been sustained. This brought us there and we started organizing the people. That's a whole chapter by itself. At any rate this led us from there. Is it possible that I've never mentioned this before?

I. No you haven't.

R. I should really spend sometime trying to refresh my recollection because we had a whole body of material. We were the ones who developed, or actually I developed, in a conference that we held once on Monterey peninsula in a YMCA center that they had near Monterey, I developed the whole concept of the hiring hall as applied to agricultural workers and a central agency into which you could pool all payments in order to provide things like pensions, vacations. You know these are very complicated problems when a man is working for one grower today and another one tomorrow. The question was how do you handle this. Well we'd worked out a whole scheme, I had, and I would think if I would put myself to the task of looking through my files I could come up with it. That's an exciting story. But at any rate out of that grew this effort in Florida.

I. Tell me about Florida today and we'll save California for later.

R. In Florida we sent a man by the name of Nation who came to us with some organizing experience in the South. Otis Nation was his name, he came to us from another union. He'd been known to. G.R. Hathaway, who was then our secretary treasurer, and on Hathaway's suggestion we hired him. He and another organizer of ours by the name of James Luke had organized a meeting that was being held at Umatilla, Florida. There had been threats made against them. There had been Klan literature distributed during the course of our various organizing campaigns in the area, literally stuff put out by the Klan.

And the sheriff in this county was an infamous character known as Sheriff McCall. He was infamous because, you may or may not remember an incident of two men being taken to jail, black men who were taken to jail. One of them was shot in the back in cold blood by McCall who claimed that he was trying to escape. Nothing ever happened to him for it. He was also the guy who got a lot of notoriety by ordering five black children out of a white school in Mount Dora, Florida on suspicion that they might be Negro. By the way, the set women that were being transported by him were being moved from one jail to another to be given a new trial that had been ordered by the United States Supreme Court and it was under those
circumstances that this one man was shot.

That was three years before this particular incident in 1955. Now McCall had personally sent word out to Nation that he was going to "get him." But we were having a meeting, just an ordinary simple meeting. I think there were only about a couple of dozen people at the most, it wasn't even a crowd, and suddenly this car went by, a couple of carloads and they shot into the meeting. One young man by the name, of Art is Griffin, a 24 year old man at that time, had 30 pieces of shot removed from him. The raw brutality and total atmosphere of hostility that marked it -- this by the way was Dade County, Florida which has had this reputation. And one of the reasons they had it was because of this guy McCall and because they were going to make darn certain that those pickers were kept unorganized.

We heard, and I must make it very very clear that this is pure rumor, that one of the important owners in the area was Bill Hutchison who had been President of the Carpenters Union. And we had heard that he was very much involved in this kind-of a cabal that used tactics like this. We came back and tried this Florida thing again in the sixties but it was not at all unusual in the South to run into this sort of thing. Both our organizers there were white, both Luke and Nation. They were both threatened, in some cases they had to leave town. They'd, come back but you know it was only under the most careful kinds of circumstances that you could do that. This was in the context, by the way, of no civil rights laws.

We started a campaign for a federal Civil Rights Law on the heels of the Till murder but it took until after Birmingham, after Montgomery. No, the first Civil Rights Act was passed after Birmingham. This, by the way, was also at the time of the Trumbull Park business in Chicago that we got very much involved in, for which we got an awful lot of hell from Joe Germano.

I. Tell me about it.

R. Well you know Trumbull Park was this public housing project and some black families were moved in there. This was a period when I think Kennelley was still Mayor of Chicago and we couldn't get Kennelley to do anything. Finally through a contact that I had I was sent to see a lawyer in Chicago, a member of one, of the most prestigious firms in Chicago, a lawyer who among other things had served on, the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago. I finally got to this man. I had come to know Laird Bell and I went to Laird Bell who at that time was Chairman of the Board of
Trustees of the University of Chicago. We had become acquainted in Aspen and I said to him, "How can people like you permit this to go on without anyone saying anything? It's just an education in lawlessness. All you're doing is telling people if you don't like something that's going on to start breaking windows, burning houses, do anything you want. Is it perhaps that there are some people in certain areas of Chicago society who don't mind that notion existing?"

"Well," he said, "come with me." He picked up the telephone and called, I think the man's name was Tenney. It was a very famous name in legal circles in Chicago. I think he was one of the senior partners in the firm of well the old Todd and Lincoln firm, whatever it was. We discussed it with him and he said to wait a minute. He picked up the telephone and called Kennelley and we had an appointment to go see him. So he and I went over to see Kennelley.

At that time Ben Adamowski was corporation counsel and so he was sitting there. And I told them, "Look men, you're not saying nothing. This is going on, you say you get the cops out there but it's going on. Now don't tell me the city of Chicago can't stop this kind of a performance. The least you can do is say something." And Tenney, much more gently and certainly without as much passion, but still I would say that he spoke very forthrightly on the issue, that this was just no way to have things. Well, Kennelley would let us know. I have always felt that Adamowski exercised a good influence in that situation. That was before he had decided he wanted to be mayor. Kennelley finally made a very watered down weak statement.

Well, we were popping off all over the place, in statements. After Kennelley issued the statement, I made a statement, Hayes made a statement. Joe German called me on the telephone just raising holy hell with me. "Don't you know it's our people out there? What do you mean?" I said, "Yeah, goddammit, why don't you do something about it? This is no way to behave." "What the hell do they have to move out there for?" He didn't say "they" you know. I said, "What do you mean? Have you got another place for them to move? This is a public housing project. Where are they supposed to live, they have to live somewhere." Well he just raved and ranted.

Of course that wasn't the only time. Joe many times -- I never even thought of it. I got pushed into, becoming a candidate once for the School Board because most of the liberal groups in Chicago were ready to stand on their heads in order to get rid of John Doherty who had been on the School Board for years. And my G-d, he almost had a fit - Germano.
And I made it very clear that I was not about to get involved in an intra-union fight over the School, Board, Well Doherty withdrew or was dropped or something happened. He was not on the Board at any rate and again they started pressing me to do it as the labor person.

This time I said okay. Well at this point this whole raft of pressure began to develop around the communist issue, especially under the president of was it Loyola or DePaul I'm not sure which one, but he was working on this Board. I failed of approval by one vote and in it Germano's fine hand was very prevalent. A steel worker was appointed, I'm trying to recall which one. He turned out to be a damn good one, Ray Pasnick. I've never regretted it that Ray Pasnick wasn't appointed. I thought that was all to the good because I would never have given it the time that he did and I'm not sure I could have done it as well. I think Ray Pasnick was a great member of the Chicago School Board. And I must say for Germano he stood up for him, that was one of the better things he did.

But you know Germano if you were on his side on some issue he'd applaud you to high heaven. It was not like talking with a rational person. Germano had this staccato kind of way of talking which I always thought was as much a bullying kind of way. Germano had all the instincts of the bully, there's no doubt of it. He threw his weight around, he had a lot of power. And he did exercise power during Murray's lifetime because he could always make it appear that he was speaking for Murray. And there isn't any question that Murray would back him up in those days.

Of course Murray, at that time, was a very dominant figure in the labor movement, certainly in the CIO. He, in many respects, occupied a position similar to that I would guess that you'd say that Meany occupies today in the AFL-CIO, if not even stronger. Meany is so clearly on a political basis but Murray seemed to be really above the internal politics of the union. He was, in a very real sense of the term, a father image to most trade unionists. Im not sure that I would be in that group because I had reservations. Murray had a number of limitations. There is no doubt that he gave the CIO a certain sense of cohesion. He was a figure around which people would rally.

He had good instincts when it came to things like the pension fight which the steelworkers got involved in, in 1949 against, I think, Bethlehem. For some reason Bethlehem I remember as being the main target. There were hearings of a special panel because there were serious questions being raised at that point as to whether pensions were a proper
subject matter for bargaining. The companies claimed that legally unions didn't have a right to bargain over pensions, that this was outside the scope of it. But Murray never realized the limitations of what he was working at. He negotiated a plan eventually, I can't remember whether it was with a strike or without one. That's a matter I guess that could be checked easily but I recall his reporting on it to the CIO convention and he was just full of it. With, that thick brogue of his, he'd start painting the picture of a steelworker's home in Pennsylvania or around Pittsburgh or Gary that he'd gone into, what, they had on the floor and the picture on the wall and furniture and what it would mean to them if they had the security of a pension.

And the interesting thing is that I'm convinced that he felt that, too. He was out of that tradition that would feel it. John Lewis would have done this with much more gusto and vigor and power and probably more literately, but I don't think he would have had the feeling that Murray had. It might have come over that he did but Murray, I really think, felt that. Lewis, you know, if you got it fine, if you didn't well.

Would you say that Murray was in some ways a conservative influence despite all this?

Well I always thought of Murray as being very much under the influence of Spellman, who I viewed as perhaps the most conservative influence in the church's hierarchy during the McCarthy period and the period before that, after the cold War started particularly. Murray was very much part of that attitude. You couldn't discuss some issues at all. For other reasons I found it difficult to support Wallace but that didn't mean that you couldn't talk about the problem that Wallace represented and that he posed as against Truman. But Murray, you just couldn't have that kind of a discussion with, it was impossible. You know in discussing a problem with Reuther a number of years after this when he had become President of the CIO, one thing became perfectly clear. And I can't remember whether he said it or I said it, it's unimportant because it represents both our thought. The difference between discussing a problem with Reuther and with Murray was that Murray was a feeling man. Reuther was a thinking, man so you could talk to Reuther. But Murray, if he felt this way, well you were a dead duck. You couldn't talk about it, couldn't get off the ground. And Germano understood the aspects of the thing.

I suppose I should complete this pension business. Murray did get the pension. That, in itself, was something. Secondly, he established the principle that pensions were a
I.

Let me ask you one thing. What were Murray's racial views? Did Germano feel confident in this area that Murray's views coincided with his?

R.

Well I don't think that Murray would have supported some of Germano's real deep -- I think Germano essentially, was a racist. I think, Murray was not a racist but a very thoughtless man who would be unwilling to risk anything on this kind of an issue. Now maybe this is a distinction without a difference. I think of Germano, however, as being more affirmatively bad on this question than Murray. Murray certainly would never have told Germano not to get involved in a fight on this. As a matter of fact, if he did he would have supported him.

One thinks back on the CIO office, Jim Carey who Worshipped Murray as if he were his father and there was good reason for it. Carey had been defeated in his union and they created another union for him. But Jim Carey had some Negroes on his staff, a guy like George L.P. Weaver. There were many Negro friends of mine who would have argued about whether or not he should have been called a Negro but he was black, there was no doubt about that. And some women. But if one looked through the CIO office in the '40s and as you came to our office-- I use this only byway of comparison, I'm not sure our office in this respect wouldn't have been different than almost any office anyway -- but I would suppose in our relatively small office, as contrasted with this three or four floor building of the CIO in Washington we would have had percentage wise many, many more people than they had working there. You know, secretaries, switchboard people,
that kind of thing. We really had gotten to the point you just didn't think twice if there was a job opening and someone came and they had the qualifications. We got to the point, I think it's reasonable to say, that we almost forgot that there was such a thing as color. Our policy was that, but as human beings, I got to the point where I had to be reminded of that. And that usually was when a problem presented itself because we couldn't go some place to eat or we couldn't do one thing or another that we wanted to do jointly.

This Trumbull Park thing, we started it again in 1955 because the incidents were continuing. Blacks still needed police protection so we were calling on Daley to put an end to this because he, by that time, was Mayor of Chicago. Kennelley had been defeated. We'd been helpful in getting Daley elected. I wonder if I've ever told you the story about how we had this big mass rally out at the stockyards for him.

I. No.

R. During the campaign, early in the campaign we had him and Joe Lohman. Joe Lohman at that time was a Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago who had, among other things, been an arbitrator for us under certain contracts not just for us but for others, too. He'd done arbitrations for the war Labor Board during the war Labor Board period. He had headed up the committee that issued the report. That is he had been staff director of the committee that issued the report called, "Discrimination in the Nation's Capitol," which was the first really hard hitting report on this whole problem of discrimination. That came out I think some time in the late '40s or thereabouts. It had a tremendous impact, it was very important. This led to a lot of the desegregation in the Army and it led to a lot of Truman's orders in this. It really served a very important role. And Joe also, had become an authority on running classes for police men on the question of how you deal with the problem of segregation and discrimination, how should you respond to these questions as they present themselves to the cop on the job. He went around Louisville to St. Paul, cities all over the country.

Well at any rate he was, running for sheriff so we had this great big mass meeting at the Yards. You know we used to be able to turn out at noon somewhere around five thousand people. Daley and Lohman came out to this rally and we all three spoke from the back of the truck with the bull horn, with the executives from Swift and Co. hanging out the window. We used to meet under their office building when they were still in the Yards.

I'll always remember our drive back to the Loop. We
were driving in Daley's chauffeur driven car. We got into a discussion about the housing problem. It probably came up in connection with Trumbull Park but I don't remember, that exactly. And Lohman said to Daley, "You know this housing problem has a basis. There just aren't enough houses. These cities were never built to handle the kind of migration that they've had. That's not only true of Chicago but it's true of almost every northern city because blacks have been migrating. (You know in recent years some of them have been going back but in those days the migration was extremely heavy and you've got to have this kind of pressure unless you get more housing.) Now what you've got to do is see to it that there are more housing units established."

Well, I'd always felt, you know, that that's right. I've said that many times since. I've repeated and quoted Joe, adopted it as my own view and dug up statistics to support it, read Bob Taft's speeches. You know the bill he marshalled through Congress whenever it was, '49 or 50, I don't remember when he died. His bill they never built the housing units that he, Mr. Republican, called for. But Daley very quickly forgot all this. Instead of that we got Taylor Homes. They got rid of Elizabeth Wood who knew more and had her heart more in this thing than anyone they'd ever had in that job.

I. So you really took Daley on.

R. Well on this particular issue. But you know Daley was the kind of guy who you could do this with one day and on another day agree with.

I. Did he respond to your, picket line?

R. I don't recall exactly how that worked out. I think he did. I think he issued a very strong statement, which was something we hadn't been able to get from Kennelley. I think he told the cops to get to work on it and my feeling is it began to die out as an issue. Another issue that we got involved in was a fight involving a man by the name of Carl Braden. I don't know if that name means, anything to you.

I. Wasn't he from the South?

R. He was from Louisville, Kentucky. And we got involved in that because he went and bought a house which he then turned around and sold to a black, a neighborhood that blacks hadn't lived in. The house got blown up but he got charged with sedition and was arrested, kept in jail and had to stand trial. They found him guilty in the lower court and they sentenced him to fifteen years in jail. We got terribly
concerned about the civil liberties aspect of it. The man's name was Wade who he sold the house to. We sent our guy down to do a story on it. This issue of *The Packinghouse Worker*, December, 1955 there was a full spread on it.

I went down because I was concerned about it and I went over to Mark Ethridge, who at that time was publisher of the *Louisville Courier Journal* for whom Braden had worked. And I asked him if he'd be prepared to tell me the story, as he saw it. Well he said Braden was a very difficult abrasive kind of a man, very hard to get a long with. He didn't think he was a particularly good newspaper man but they weren't about to fire him while he was under this kind of pressure and they didn't. This guy had real courage, a fine editorial policy. The *Louisville Courier Journal*, I guess along with the St. Louis Post Dispatch, the Life and Post, New York Times and the *Los Angeles Times* were the greatest newspapers in the country. But he turned over his whole file. I could understand what it was that he complained about as far as Braden was concerned but there was clearly no question that he was being harassed because of this racial issue.

I. How did it end?

R. Oh the Supreme Court reversed it on appeal.

I. What happened to the black guy, he still had no home?

R. I don't remember what happened, I guess they collected some insurance, I don't, really recall. We raised something like forty thousand dollars. I don't mean our union alone, I mean the civil liberties people who were involved in this. The ACLU provided a lawyer, a very able guy, Lusky, and he felt that the case would be reversed. You know the sedition law, my G-d, it was passed prior to the Civil War. They pulled that out. Our headline on the story was, "Kentucky rewards its Good Samaritan," and we quote from St. Luke as to what the good Samaritan can expect.
A couple of incidents occurred that I'm not sure that we previously recorded. One occurred shortly after the passage of the Taft Hartley law. I had been elected president of the union in 1946. I think this probably occurred at some time in '47 and I was still acting in a sort of a duel, capacity as both president and attorney for the union, although when we had these kinds of problems we had access to the assistance of other lawyers. The practice had been over a period of some time for regular meetings of lawyers that represented different CIO unions. These meetings would have been called usually---well I know of no exception --always by Lee Pressman who was then general counsel of the CIO. This was after Murray had become president of the CIO. At these meetings we would discuss whatever questions of concern and interest might come up. There was usually a substantial number present from all the various CIO unions or many of them. I shouldn't say that every one was represented but many would be.

Well shortly after the enactment of the Taft Hartley law Pressman called a meeting. One of the major items on the agenda of the meeting, I recall, was the issue of what legal position the union should take on the question of their response to the provision of the Taft Hartley law that made it possible for employers to sue unions for breach of contract. We'd had a good deal of discussion on that.

I may have, at some previous occasion, mentioned that there'd, always been differences of opinion that I had had with many of the attorneys because I think I was viewing the matter from another perspective than they were. For example on one occasion there was a big question as to what our position ought to be on publishing constitutions and by-laws and filing them with the Department of Labor so they'd be available. Well we said, ok course, why not, and there would be objections. To me it didn't make sense. Then I discovered that one of the reasons for the objections was that there were many unions, particularly AFL, unions, it was not so much true of, the CIO unions, they were newer. Some of the old line AFL unions who, among others, were represented by one of the lawyers present, or at least locals of those, unions were, couldn't because they never bothered to draft any. They hadn't! That's what we were told.

My hunch is that there were two things true. One,
that they didn't have them, or at least if they had they'd thrown them away so long ago and paid no attention to them that it was, pretty difficult to revive them. Or secondly, that they didn't want their membership or their people to have any easy access to them, both because they were so authoritarian in their nature and also because it might lead to challenges under the rules. It could be likened in many ways to some of the problems we have here with the political machinery, you know. How do you find out where a precinct meeting is going to be held? Well, I give that purely to indicate that all these considerations obviously affected the legal response that you would make because of your concern about your client's position on it. Well I was pretty clear as to what my client's position was, functioning as I, was in a duel capacity.

When it came to the question of what position we would take on these law suits Pressman proceeded to tell us that he had worked out, he'd advised Murray to this effect and then proceeded to work out with the steel company, a provision that they were going to put into the contract. It would be as an amendment to the contract that said, in effect, that if a wild cat strike should occur every effort would be made by the international union to get the people back to work immediately. They would call them publicly to return and if they were not successful in this they would publicly denounce them.

Well I was shocked by his position and I said so to them. This may give them legal immunity because in exchange for this provision, the companies were prepared to say that if the international union did this they would not sue them so they immunized themselves from potential law suits. My position was that the purpose of the union treasury was for the union members and it seemed to me that, when wild cat strikes occurred it was because people had, some complaints. They weren't just striking for the fun of it, although there were clearly irresponsible strikes, but those weren't the customary ones. They were the occasional ones that could be handled. It meant then that they were having trouble and it seemed to me that it was when they were in trouble that they needed their union most. That was not the time when you denounced them.

Well it was perfectly clear that I did not represent the majority view there. As a matter of fact, I don't remember whether I got; any support or not, although subsequently and on the side different people would say to me that they agreed with me. In the meeting I don't recall getting any agreement. Of course none of these decisions were binding. This group had no authority to bind
international unions or even lawyers on what position they might take in court. It was simply an advisory, and consultative kind of meeting. But the fact is that the steelworkers did put this into their contract. Most of the other unions also put it in. So far as I can remember we were one of the very few, that is the Packinghouse Union was one of the very few that never would agree to that kind of a provision.

I. Were you willing to call them back to work but not denounce them or were you willing to even do that?

R. Well I was perfectly willing to do everything we could. You know when they were on wild cat you had to get the thing settled. I was perfectly willing to do everything I could do but I wasn't going to publicly indicate either that they were wrong or that I was on the employer's side.

I recall that the sugar workers negotiated a contract. They used to do theirs locally and they could put this provision in; This was in the South. Well first of all they didn't know why they shouldn't, most unions, had them. It was a customary clause in the New Orleans area by the way. They had it in their contract and I refused to sign the contract because it was in there. I got a telegram one day from one of the employers because there was a wild cat and I simply crumpled it up and threw it in the waste basket. I didn't even bother to respond to it. It was demanding that I order them back to work and of course I didn't. I called our local people and asked them what was wrong. They got it settled.

We got sued on a number of occasions and when we'd get sued we'd play with the law suit for a longtime, or as long as we could, try to prevent it from going to trial. Then when we'd get into negotiations we'd include that as one of the issues in the negotiations. We did on one occasion pay damages. That was only once that I remember and then it was clearly wrong. We, were clearly in the wrong, there was no way we could have gotten out of it. I was so mad at the time that I wanted to send the money over in pennies but got talked out of it.

In any event this is an incident that still sticks with me and I am convinced that this particular provision in the Taft Hartley Act, taken together with the union's decision to insert these kinds of provisions, made the unions in many respects an arm of the company as a disciplinary mechanism because they were functioning, in effect, as a disciplinary mechanism.
I. Do you think that was the first major step in that direction?

R. Oh no, I'm sure there were many others but it may well have been one of the major ones because it spelled it out in the contract. You know contracts normally had a grievance procedure and you'd follow it. It was usually in that process that a wild cat would occur. Most responsible unions did their best to get their people back to work and usually did. But sometimes they had a really legitimate gripe and the company was taking advantage of the no strike provision. You know that's what they used to do. They used to sit there -- companies did. This happened to me many times. They'd do something that was clearly wrong and they'd sit there and laugh and they'd say go ahead, file a grievance. Take it up the grievance procedure. And we knew what that meant, that meant before we'd get it through the grievance procedure and before we'd get an arbitration decision it'd be months. In the meanwhile somebody's, getting pushed around in a way that he shouldn't. And all the company could do was pay out the same kind of money it was going to cost them anyway. There was no penalty for this involved so this is what generally would give rise to a wild cat.

By the way I used to often remind myself that this was one of the things that led the Wobblies in the old days to refuse to sign contracts. They would not sign contracts, you know, and one of the reasons was that, by G-d, they weren't going to have their, hands tied and let the companies be free to do anything they wanted to.

Well, I can't say I was the first but I think it was a major change because it added this to the grievance procedure. And so you had, on the one hand, the no strike provision; then you had on the other hand, the acceptance of the fact that a wild cat could not be blamed on the company but the union was accepting responsibility for it and in that process was going to take disciplinary action against the individuals involved or the local union.

And of course one of the things that it did was that it cemented the kinds of controls that the national leadership of the union, if it wanted to, could exercise over the local unions. People could get fired in this process and all kinds of dealings could go on between local union representatives or district representatives and the company. It's a very simple matter to provoke a wild cat. If you've got a guy who's making trouble you make sure that he's involved and then you go to the company and you say fire him, he's responsible for it. So this was really an important event that should not be taken lightly and of course I am convinced that when Taft
Hartley was passed they had this in mind when that provision was put in. This, of course, implied a sense of class consciousness and sophistication that it is hard to believe that Fred Hartley had, but I would not doubt for a moment that Bob Taft had it. He was a very bright man.

Now I want to turn to a totally different event that occurred some years after the one that we've just reviewed. Phil Murray died very suddenly in 1952. As a matter of fact my recollection is that he was on the West Coast. The convention was scheduled to be held on the West Coast. I don't remember now if it was Los Angeles or San Francisco. He was on his way out there for the board meeting which was to be held before the convention got under way when he suddenly died. It was unexpected. He had not been ill so far as I remember. It was a very sudden death. It resulted, Of course, in the postponement of the convention and the subsequent reconvening of it in Atlantic City.

We took off for Atlantic City. When we left and certainly when we arrived the major candidates for president were Allen Haywood and Walter Reuther. Allen Haywood was an old associate of Phil Murray's, out of the Mine Workers as was Phil Murray. He came over with Murray from the Mine, Workers. He got the same treatment from John L. Lewis that all the rest of them had gotten. He had been vice president of the CIO for a number of years and our union over the years had had a good relationship with Haywood. As I have already indicated he had been very helpful to us in connection with strikes, in connection with some of our internal fights, helping to pull our people together. He had raised a lot of objections to my election as president of the union but really whether he was doing it, as he said, because Murray thought it was reprehensible that a lawyer should become president or whether on his own he didn't like the politics that I represented and he felt more comfortable with other people who he felt he could exercise more hegemony over, I'm not sure. I've always thought it was the latter, that I made him a little uncomfortable, that he wasn't sure I could be controlled as easily as the others and that that was really the basis for it, but it was quite unimportant. We did feel a sense of loyalty to him.

And it really wasn't a question of our being opposed to Reuther because Reuther was obviously going to add up more ability and quality. But Haywood had been there for a long time and the probabilities were that he didn't have much longer to go. It would have been simple enough to have worked out an arrangement where he would have filled one or two terms, that would have been it. But Reuther was insistent that he was going to get in there. Of course he ran and
Haywood ran.

Well when we got there we discovered that there were a
lot of other unions that felt the same way we did about
Haywood, unions that he had been helpful to. These were
generally not the big, very large unions like the Auto Workers
or the, Electrical Workers. Even the Clothing Workers was not
in that group. They were all supporting Reuther. But
unions like the Glass Workers, like Mike Quill from, the
Transport Workers in New York. The two biggest unions that
were identified with Haywood's fight were the Steelworkers
with Dave McDonald, who by this time had succeeded Murray's
position. He'd been elected President of the Steelworkers.
And the Communication Workers, which was headed by Joe
Beirne. Beirne had been persuaded to affiliate with the CIO
actually by Allan Haywood and had a long and close
relationship with him. It was really a friendship thing as
much as anything else.

Well when we got there it became perfectly obvious to
me that we had to organize this thing because Reuther had an
awful lot of votes and if we were going to make any kind of a
showing it required some organization. So I got hold of Mike
Quill who I'd known for many years. Well I'd known most of
these people for a long time but Mike was one of the ones that
went back a number of years. And I said to him, "Now look,
we've got to set ourselves up an organization." Well Quill
was a curious combination of so many things really. It's
very hard to give any kind of a thumb-nail sketch of the man
but it is worth doing because he had a quality of humor and of
fun, nastiness and almost viciousness, skill. He had an
irrepressible tongue. He'd say anything and laugh or scream
in the process, depending on what he thought, the situation
called for.

Well between the two of us we worked out a plan and
divided up the unions that he should contact, that I should
contact or that we'd try to get some others to contact. And
we did, we, contacted those and we thought we had them all lined
up. Among this group, by the way, was Carl Feller who at that
time was President of the Brewery Workers. I mention him
particularly because of what happened subsequently, I could
mention all kinds of others like the Ship Builders Union.
I'd need a long list to cover them. We had far and away more
unions but we didn't begin to have the number of votes that
Reuther had. You know the Auto Workers alone had as many
votes as most of the unions. It's true it was offset to some
extent by Steel but with the other large unions it was an
uphill climb and it was perfectly clear to us.

Mike came up with the notion that we had to give our
group some kind of a name so he gave it the name, without ever
telling us, in a public meeting that we had of the unions that
were going to endorse Haywood, to which the press came. He
called it the Small Businessmen's Association. So here we
are in Atlantic City at a CIO convention, the Small
Businessmen's Association, caucussing within the ranks of
the CIO.

All the time this was going on I was spending most of
my time with Auto Workers. I was getting along better with
them than anybody else because I had more community of
interest with them, Vic Reuther, Roy Reuther. Walter, of
course, held himself somewhat aloof. We really got this
thing going and we began to organize it so that we could make a
respectable showing. I never did think that we had enough
votes. It looked to me as if we could make a respectable
showing, particularly if McDonald would have been able to get
Carey to switch.

Now McDonald claimed that Carey was so indebted to
the Steelworkers that he could get him to switch. The
trouble was that McDonald was so unreliable. He would tell
us that he was going to see Carey and then he'd go off
somewhere. He'd probably go off and get himself lit or have
himself a date or something but he just was not working at the
job. I kept saying this to Mike and Mike would say, you know
with that accent of his just working overtime, "Oh, Dave'll do
it." One night he called me at midnight. "Ralph." "Yeah,"
I'm in bed, I'm almost asleep when he calls me and he says,
"You gotta come right over." And I said, "What do you mean?,
What happened? Why do I have to come right over, what's
going on?" He said, "Wonderful television show." I said,
"Why you--", and I hung up the phone. But this is typical of
him, he could do all kinds of things. He was convinced that
McDonald would come through. McDonald, of course, never did
come through.

In any event it was perfectly clear as we approached
the important day of the convention that McDonald wasn't able
to switch Carey and with out Carey's vote our chances were nil.
There we're no chances. And so the real question was, do we
continue? Do we make a race of it or should we withdraw
gracefully and work out some other arrangement? I sort of
favored that but McDonald would not hear of it even though he
had done nothing. He was insisting that there be a race made
because the country had to understand how much opposition
there was to Reuther. This is what he was saying. He had a
hatred for Reuther that I never really appreciated. As a
matter of fact a lot of things came out in the process of this.

Finally at one point just before the convention was
to start I sat down along with a couple of people and we drafted a speech for Haywood. We worked until four o'clock in the morning. It was a pretty good speech, actually. He was all excited -- sweet old guy. He got up to give it the next morning and Carey just pushed him away from the mic and took over and started running the convention, calling it to order. Haywood never got a chance to deliver his speech. He was just devastated but he just didn't know how to deal with him, he never had, where another person would have stood his ground and said, look, I'm convening this convention, I'm acting president.

I. Did McDonald ever try to get Carey to change his vote?

R. My impression is that he never made any serious effort. I think he may have seen Carey in a hallway or may even have called, him on the phone. But when we put the question directly to him and said, "Did you get him in to a room and sit down with him and close the door and really work him over?" He said, "Well, there's no sense in that," or something to that effect. My hunch is that either Carey wouldn't commit himself to be pulled into it that way or McDonald didn't have the skills or the drive or desire. It is true that he had a real deep hatred for Reuther because among other things he felt so completely outclassed by him.

I. That's another thing I wanted to ask you. What was the basis of his hatred for Reuther?

R. Well I don't think Murray liked Reuther too much. He worked with him because there was no alternative. It was after all the biggest union in the country.

I. Was Reuther too radical for him?

R. Reuther would have been really too radical for McDonald. Murray was terribly bothered by Reuther's position on wanting to look at the books -- give a wage increase only if you don't have to raise the price of cars. Murray's position after the war was over and controls were lifted was: our worry is not the price of steel, our worry is the wages our people get. And it was only when John Snyder, who at that time was head of the stabilization program under Truman, only when he gave the steel companies an increase that the steel companies agreed to an eighteen and a half cents an hour wage increase. That's what helped settle the General Motors strike. Reuther was put in a position where that became the settlement in the General Motors strike which had been going for months. The fact, of course, is that the wage increase cost steel about 185 million and the price increase gave them 400 and some million.
I. And it's been, like that ever since.

R. Of course. Well it's a pattern of the way this kind of philosophy has dominated, probably since Roosevelt and through Truman.

I. Now what would Haywood have said if he'd had the chance?

R. I don't really remember. It's unfortunate. I can check back with the man who helped me work on that speech and see if he remembers. But I think it was first a testimonial to Murray. Secondly, it would have been a reaffirmation of the position of the CIO through the years, you know, the things it had done, its accomplishments. I don't think it was a speech of the kind of significance that would have lit a prairie fire like William Jennings Bryan did with his cross of Gold speech but it was a better speech than most CIO conventions are accustomed to from their leaders, I think. At any rate it was never given.

When it became clear that McDonald was insisting in this hasty way that there be a test made, all these unions that Quill and I had lined up, we were going to stand firm, you know. Haywood was saying that was what he wanted to do but Haywood was saying it because that was McDonald's position. He felt still a loyal part of the Steelworkers and, while I didn't realize until about that point in the convention, I really came to understand what was going on the night before the election when I was delegated to try and work out a deal with the Reuther forces to make sure that Haywood wasn't treated summarily, pushed around.

Nobody was seriously concerned about their dumping and their firing, but to affect some sense of security. And the person I started working with on this was Frank Rosenblum of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. I was an old friend of Frank's. We had a very good understanding and I said to him, "You know, Frank, we've had this old relationship with Haywood. That's really why we're supporting him." He said, "Well, don't you realize why we can't support him? McDonald's essentially a fascist and Haywood's completely under McDonald's domination. All that will happen is that the CIO will be pushed further right than it has been with Haywood in there. Reuther at least gives us a chance and that's why we're not supporting Haywood. That's why we're, for Reuther, it's not that we love Reuther so much but it's really McDonald who's the candidate here and we wouldn't support him for anything."
I should have been smart enough to realize that but I'd gotten all involved with this emotional problem of loyalty which I should have been, by that time, sophisticated enough to have understood better. But I didn't because clearly we didn't belong -- well there were many of the unions that I'd lined up that didn't belong there.

This takes me back to Carl Feller. We found out when the vote was taken that Feller voted for the Reuther forces and had been for Reuther from the very beginning. And I subsequently learned that Feller was brought up in a socialist home, as was Walter, and his father and Reuther's father had had a relationship and this thing went way back. He was simply sitting in on our meetings in order to find out what we were going to do and taking it back to Reuther.

It worked out in a way. I was being completely honest about this. I kept saying when guys would get up and make these speeches attacking Reuther, I'd say, "Look, let's be clear about this. We are not against Reuther, we are for Haywood. Now let's just keep this issue straight." I did this publicly, did it in front of the press, I did it all over. It was really the way I felt, you see. I wasn't playing politics with it because I didn't realize, what was going on. I must say that the way things worked out I think Rosenblum was right. I think that analysis was correct.

Let me get back to the specifics of the story. That night Rosenblum and I worked out a plan with a constitutional provision that would make Haywood executive vice president or something. It was to give him a status as vice president that was different from the others. And he would also be Director of Organization so that he would have some power that was constitutionally present and wasn't dependent completely on Reuther. But given Haywood's personality and his whole background and the fact that the head of a union is the boss, he just didn't know how to live any other way. He wouldn't know how. This was just not in keeping with the Mine Workers tradition that Lewis and the rest had drilled into him and Murray had taken over from Lewis. It was carried on into the CIO and into the Steelworkers.

Of course McDonald, coming as he did from the chataqua circuit. I don't know if you knew that but he had been on it for some time. And you know the story was pretty generally known. I've always believed it. I've repeated it to enough people so that if it wasn't true I think it would have been pointed out to me. But the story is that at one point -- you know Murray hired McDonald initially when he was with the Mine Workers and he hired him as his secretary. He was a handsome young man and he had been on chataqua but the
depression was on and the chataqua stage wasn't doing that well. And McDonald was not talented sufficiently to compete with some of those people who were working with the WPA Artists Project. He'd worked roughly on a part, time basis for some time. Finally one day he came to Murray and he told him that he'd been offered a job by the Chamber of Commerce and he was going to go over and take that unless he could get full time, work because he couldn't make out the way he was going. So Murray went to Lewis and just pleaded with him to keep him and Lewis finally grudgingly agreed that McDonald could get a full time salary.

He got it and then when Lewis appointed Murray Director of SWOC, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, he needed somebody to handle the records and that sort of thing. McDonald literally was a secretary and not a policy maker. He was doing a routine office function in the early days up until the union grew to the point where he, more and more, was leaving other policy questions to McDonald. But that's how McDonald started in the Steelworkers Union, one of the reasons that the steelworkers for so long resented him.

At any rate Rosenblum and I had worked, out this arrangement and there was the question of getting it confirmed, clearing it with Haywood so we called Haywood and arranged to come up there. He knew what I was doing. I wouldn't have done it without his knowledge. I also checked with my committee of the Small Businessmen and they were in agreement so we went up, Rosenblum and I went up to Haywood's suite. There were a couple of his close friends with him. I can't remember exactly who they were but McDonald had come in just before we did and he was there. Haywood had asked him to come. And he had with him, as I remember it, two guys. One guy was with him quite frequently so he was a bodyguard. I see his face but I'm not certain of his name.

The other guy was a guy I had known because he'd been connected with the Packing house Workers Organizing Committee back in the early '40s. He'd been located in Indianapolis with the Steelworkers. His name was Jimmy Dean and he was a pretty unreconstructed primitive kind of a guy but there was something friendly about him. We were sitting there reviewing and at some point, and I don't recall what issue now was really on, Dean had made some reference to Walter Reuther at which point McDonald turned on him with real venom and said, "How many times do I have to tell you not to call that no good bastard that. Remember you never say; 'Reuther', you say, that redheaded socialist bastard Reutlier'." And Dean didn't know what to say. His response was, "well, yes - uh - okay." But that happened twice in what couldn't have been
over forty five minutes altogether. As we left I remember Frank Rosenblum saying to me, "That's really what is behind this."

If Haywood had been able, if anyone felt that Haywood had been able to hold that spot without any kind of problems from McDonald, had been able to really operate on his own, it might have been possible to have a more open kind of convention. The truth is this man was really so fascistically directed and you know you could see it over the years. You could see it develop as the years went on. Remember that time when we were considering a merger with the AFL. Well, McDonald's one of the people who forced that merger. He wasn't alone there were a number of the CIO leaders who felt that a merger was necessary, their radical days were past, they wanted respectability. I don't think Reuther really was happy with it but he had very little choice. He was pushed by others. I remember his saying, "Between the intellectual cynicism of a guy like ______ who in many ways was nice and certainly a very bright guy out of textile and the real primitive fascism of a man like McDonald."

I'll never forget when he got up at a CIO Board meeting when we were considering the various issues that were still left in the merger negotiations. And one of them was what was it to be called. The AFL was unwilling to give up the name AFL and the CIO was unwilling to give up the name CIO. It was really Goldberg's deftness that came up with the compromise. But then McDonald said, "To me a rose by any other name smells just as sweet," with all this theatrical flourish and goo. He used to think he was great but I never had very much to do with him. We were always very friendly, we got along very nicely but I never quite got over that performance of his that night, I must say.

At any rate the next day there was a vote taken and all the way through the list of unions I don't remember by what vote Reuther was elected but it was substantial. The Small Businessmen's Association, with just a couple of defections, held together reasonably well and cast its vote for Haywood.

I. But you weren't sorry you lost?
R. Oh no, I was quite content. Let me take this occasion to go back to Quill for a minute. I remember walking down the street of New York with him once. I can't remember why, I think we were going out to eat. I don't remember why we were together even. He used to carry a cane, it was sort of his trade mark. And of course in New York, you know, at the bus and the subways and all that sort of thing he was a
celebrity. Everybody knew him and this cane was his trade mark. I never realized to what extent he was known. And it was a handsome cane, I remember. It may have been Irish brier or some fancy wood. It was like twisted wood with an interesting handle. We'd be walking and he'd stride along with that cane. We couldn't walk a block without stopping at least ten times for people who wanted to talk to him. And he was just loving it, absolutely loving it. But you know, he'd get to talking to me. I had this strange relationship with people at so many different points of the political spectrum. You know really quite conservative people would talk to me and were very friendly with me. I liked Beirne. Murray was always very friendly with me even though he knew that politically he and I had nothing in common.

But Mike Quill at one time had been very much part of the left wing. As a matter of fact it was generally said he was a communist. I have never had any reason to know one way or another except that he very freely spoke for them or took their position. And Joe Curran was thought of as being a communist at one point, too, but at some point, whatever it was, Quill had a break. Whether he felt they were pushing him out or whether the pressure on the left was getting too extreme. This was just before Murray was getting ready to throw the communists out and maybe that was part of it. At any rate he had a break with them and a number of them in the Transport Workers Union who had been close to Quill over the years, they got thrown out and Quill went on. But you know at some point, whatever the reason may have been, there was one guy by the name of Doug McMahon, I think his name was, and he plays apart only in the fact that Quill went out of his way, I think at first without anybody knowing it, to see that this guy had a job and slowly he worked him back into the union. He finally came back into one of the key spots in the union. I think he became secretary treasurer.

When the merger with the AFL took place, Quill refused to have any part of it and he called it the surrender at Indian Creek. The arrangement was made in Florida. I mean the agreement was signed. You know Indian Creek is there and it seems to me some battle was fought or some treaty signed or something maybe with the Indians and the white men. I don't know what it was but Quill always referred to this as surrender at Indian Creek. And then you know he went out in such a blaze of glory. You may not remember that strike.

I. That's about the only thing I remember about him.

R. That strike was on and he stood in front that television camera and tore up the injunction. Of course they had to put him in jail but you know he was such a hero in New
York. I tell you those guys just worshipped him. From the point of 'view of his, whole career -- he'd been all over the place. There isn't any doubt the real problem with that strike that he had was that Lindsey was listening to advice from Abe Raskin. He never had liked Mike Quill. Abe Raskin at this point had become an editorial writer for the New York Times. The transport strike could have been avoided with kind of compromise that had been worked out between Quill and Wagner in years before. But Raskin was apparently selling Lindsey on the fact that these negotiations had to be carried on above the table. There can't be any of these deals and all that sort of stuff. There was just no way of avoiding that strike under those circumstances because Quill's whole way of doing it, you know. It was clear that Wagner knew what he was doing was to threaten strikes to have everybody on the edge of their seats until New Year's eve and then announce a settlement. That was part of the scheme of things. I'm sure that, like with Nixon, the scenario had been written before.

At any rate Quill was a character of some -- I'm not sure what the right word is. I was going to say quality. He had quality but he was a pretty corrupt guy essentially. But really there was a sense of humanity in some way about him, warmthand fun. Great color! But he really enjoyed a fight and he made people around him enjoy it. It's a little hard to leave that Small Businessmen's Association just hang there, which will never appear in the record of that convention but I which certainly should, unless Mike referred to it in the course of a speech he made at the convention.

I. And it was an odd collection of people when you put them together.

R. If I could only remember the list of all of them. I can see any number of faces of these people who rallied around, all helped by Haywood in some way but of course they didn't have the votes. And I think as it turned out it was a good thing.

Let me pick up with some of the 1955 material. That was the year when the merger took place between the AFL and the CIO. It was held in the Armory in New York, a tremendous affair. A couple of interesting incidents around the merger. I told you the one of McDonald's speech at the CIO Board meeting before the merger. One other incident -- Reuther, by this time I'd established a relationship with him. You could see occurring among the CIO vice presidents -- now this meant the people who were going to be on the executive council of the merged federation. A vacancy was created by Quill. Quill, because of his "surrender at Indian Creek" statement had antagonized everybody so much that it
clear he wasn't going to be on it. And the others were pretty well set. There were Carey, Potofsky, Reebe, Curran, Beirne who else? Well that's five, the CIO was entitled to nine as I recall it. All of them as I remember it were carry-overs from the previous CIO Board. Well Reuther was going to become a vice president so he would have been one of them. Six -- that leaves three. Spotts and McDonald. Feller may have been, I'm not quite sure.

In any event I had gone to Reuther some time before and said that I thought it was essential that we get a Negro on it and I thought the CIO ought to take the initiative. I really had no one to propose. The only one who was president of an international union was Willard Townsend who was black and who was president of the Transport Workers Union, which was red caps that were located in Chicago. I indicated that would be satisfactory or if they wanted someone else and they'd be willing to take a black person, there was Lasling who was vice president of our union. And he started giving me this business about how you don't pick that way, you do it on the basis of merit. I said, "Oh Walter, come on now. Just look at what you've got there. Don't tell me that; you know you save that for somebody else." Well he kind of fidgeted and got embarrassed. No, couldn't do it, couldn't do it.

He was pushing Hartung from the Timber Workers Union. Hartung was in the old Wobbly tradition because you know the Wobblies had a strong base there and I used to be very fond of him actually. He wasn't a very bright guy but he was really a very decent guy and his instincts were always right, or at least I've always discovered them right. He was always on the right side of every fight that came up. Reuther said it was Hartung that he wanted to support for that. I had felt that he was making a mistake, that he should pick Townsend or Lasling.

Well at the last minute the AFL had a change of heart. I've never been able to discover how it came about but apparently somebody convinced them that Phil Randolph ought to become a member of the executive council. Well here was the AFL with a slate that includes Phil Randolph and what's the CIO going to do, you know. It's got a slate without a black on it and here is the group that has always claimed to be way ahead in this area so obviously we had to switch ground. So at the last minute at the board meeting, I think it was right in the Armory or maybe it was in the hotel room. See the CIO had a convention a day or two before the AFL convention. They had gone for two days. And it was during that convention because that was the convention that elected the slate that was to be submitted to the merger convention.
So at the last minute Reuther apparently told Hartung that he had to step back and Hartung was madder than hell. He'd been convinced that this wasn't the way to do it. You did it on the basis of merit, by G-d, the Wood Workers deserved their spot. He was their president and that was what you did. He never discriminated, he never did and he didn't know why he should be discriminated against. Well of course Thompson was elected. I went up to Reuther afterwards and I said, "You know Walter, you could have saved yourself a lot of headaches." He said, "Can you imagine how unreasonable Hartung was?" Like it was all Hartung's fault, you know. I said to him, "Oh Walter, knock it off." It was a perfect response of the quality of a politician Reuther was, you know.

Vic was much more committed. Vic didn't have the same power complex that Walter had, he didn't have the drive. That was probably the reason why Walter was the leader he was. Vic would never have gotten himself in that spot in the first place. But I always remember Walter saying that Hartung was unreasonable when he had given Hartung every reason to believe that it was all finished and done and settled, you know. That's what he told me when I argued with him.

Well at any rate, we went into the merger convention and during the merger convention we were meeting with the Meatcutters. We had been meeting with the Meatcutters even before. As a matter of fact we had already set up a committee to discuss merger with them. We had a meeting of our joint boards. We had dinner together or something. At any rate, out of it came agreements to do certain things and that led to our sending a telegram to the convention which was then meeting in the Armory in New York. And it was to that place that we sent the following telegram. It was sent to George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, 71st Regimental Armory, 34th Street and Park Avenue, New York City, New York. It was dated December 7, 1955 and it's signed by Earl W. Jimmerson, President and Patrick E. Gorman, Secretary Treasurer for the Amalgamated Meatcutters and by myself and G.R. Hathaway as Secretary Treasurer for the UPWA. The telegram read:

The Unity Committee of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen and the United Packinghouse Workers of America in meeting during this historic convention unifying the American Labor Movement and stimulated by the interests of the working men and women of the nation, are happy to advise you that we have reached an accord which we are certain represents, the basis for an early
merger of our two organizations.

That was sent to the convention and it served as a cover actually for the newspaper, The Packinghouse Worker, which we published, the December '55 issue reporting on that convention. That issue, by the way, also contained a report of the Colonial provision strike settlement and the Godchaux strike that I think we covered earlier in our session last time. At any rate we had worked out a number of the problems that we faced with this merger while recognizing that there were still many ahead.

Some of the big hurdles that we had cleared were, one was the size of the executive board. We agreed on a thirty-three member executive board, twelve positions going to the UPWA and twenty-one to the Amalgamated. The numbers had absolutely no relationship to the membership but they really had been arrived at in a very pragmatic way, making sure that you got the support of major numbers of leaders in both groups in order to insure that we'd be able to achieve it. Because of the problem of the size of the two unions there was a third office created that was known as the general vice president. It apparently had been an old tradition among many AFL unions. As a matter of fact, it had been an office that Gorman had held at one time. And it was agreed that the three officers would constitute the executive committee. That would have been president, secretary treasurer, and this general vice president. And then we'd agreed on five operational divisions which would have been retail, industrial, a program division, poultry, and a fur and leather division.

I. Where would your sugar people fit in there?

R. Well they would have fitted into what we called the industrial. Right now for all practical purposes they fit into the packing division but this was a more sensible arrangement. We set up a retail, industrial, program, poultry and fur and leather division and the UPWA would name the people who would head the industrial division and the program division. The latter was really a carry over from the old UPWA program department that had played such an important role in connection with our anti-discrimination program. We were very concerned about keeping it alive.

There were twelve geographical areas agreed on and it would be set up, each to be headed by a vice president. Canada would have one, the others would be jointly named by the two groups. And as a matter of fact that was something that we worked out over a period of time. But we had really made a lot more progress than we thought. And one of the things that we were concerned about was that we try and get
this thing really going quickly because we had major negotiations coming up in 1956. I notice that the story in the paper indicates that I had indicated that I was anxious that we get it effectuated no later than March or April. Obviously we didn't do that. As a matter of fact we didn't get it effectuated, at all for many years after that.

I. What was the comparative size of the two unions?

R. There wasn't a great deal of difference. I would suppose it was around two and a half to one or three to one, although we were much larger then in '56. I would guess that our union at that time was closer to 150,000 so that it might have been two to one.

I. The other union was the larger?

R. The other union had been the larger all the time, yes. At any rate we got this thing going and negotiations got started during the period immediately following and we made real progress.
We had gotten into these merger discussions and they continued on over the months. And as I say we were also getting ready for negotiations. It so happens that one of the benefits that we felt came out of the merger understanding was that we were able to negotiate with the companies jointly for the first time. Actually they met, including Swift (Armour I think had done this before) but they all met with us jointly. Our negotiations resulted in the best contract in history. And what this meant was drafting a constitution, a merger agreement and sending it out to the local unions so that they would have ample opportunity to consider it. And I think that probably you ought to take this, which is a copy of the official suggested local union constitution, the proposed constitution of the international, a local one and also the agreement for merger. You'll note that it was executed first on June 6, 1956 and subsequently amended on September 10, 1956.

Was this ever adopted?

This was adopted and approved by the committees representing both groups. If you look at the last page of the last document you'll see that it's been signed by Jimmerson and Gorman and by me and Hathaway, indicating that this had been previously adopted by their respective boards. Now this was all done under the power of an enabling resolution that they adopted in their convention in Cincinatti in July and which we had adopted at our convention I think in Cincinatti in July. That's right.

It was almost a political convention. I went to their convention which was, held first and spoke at that and there were firecrakers, bands. It was just incredible the sound, the noise and the cheering that was done. At any rate this is a copy of The Butcher Workman, which was the magazine of the Meatcutters. You can see pictures of Gorman, Jimmerson and my-self waving to the delegates at the convention. That was when I came there to speak at their convention. And as you look at this front page you see, a picture of Gorman and me standing there. Jimmerson is some place near by. So, we each spoke there at our respective conventions. Here's some notion, as to the way they were carrying on here. You notice they've got me up there dragging me around, throwing firecrackers.

Looks like you're, going to be president of the United States.
Yeah really, it was just awful. I'm convinced it was even dangerous. So this document was executed, that is that proposed constitution was executed pursuant to approval. Obviously its original draft was completed before those conventions in July because you'll notice that they were originally executed on June 6. And that was approved by the conventions. Then they were amended subsequently because of some changes that needed to be made.

Well we met jointly with the packers. We negotiated jointly. We were meeting constantly in terms of working out the problems of integration, how were they going to be handled. How did you go about getting these varying departmental functions absorbed in new structure? We were operating on the theory all along that what we were doing was really having 'a merger, that this was not going to be absorption., What we were going to do was create a new organization as a result. Well it became pretty clear after a while that when that finally dawned on them that that's what they had agreed to, and it is what they had agreed to, they became frightened by the prospects and backed out.

In any event, I got a telegram from Gorman and Jimmerson dated October 22. Now the merger convention was scheduled for October 26. On October 22 at 1:20 in the afternoon a telegram was sent to me signed by Jimmerson and Gorman and other members of their committee, reading:

We believe you should know that in view of the many misinterpretations placed by the UPWA upon various merger documents our Executive Board and Unity Committee have unanimously rescinded any approval of the proposed constitution draft and merger, agreement as amended. It is clear from positions taken by the UPWA that we are not in agreement on any of the drafted documents and the administrative details of the merger. Accordingly, our prior call for a special convention has regretfully been withdrawn.

I. Four days before the convention?

R. That was four' days before the convention. On October 23 I wired back:

We acknowledge the receipt of your telegram of October 22 wherein you
advise us that your Executive Board and your Unity Committee have rescinded approval of the proposed constitutional draft and the merger agreement as amended. Your wire was submitted to our International Executive Board and Unity Committee. Our Board and Committee do not have the power to set aside the action of our convention in Cincinnati which approved the merger agreement and under the terms of which the constitutional amendments to the merger agreement were worked out and agreed upon; Under the circumstances, our convention will be held as agreed upon by the joint Unity Committees and we will advise you of the action taken by our convention. We sincerely regret that you do not see fit to follow the same procedure.

Well I read as the first telegram I got this one on October 22. That was wrong. I see that there's a previous one of October 18. I'm not sure that it doesn't say the same thing:

At this late date new and impossible interpretations have been applied to the merger agreement by your committee which has resulted in very serious misunderstandings. Therefore in the interests of both organizations our Executive Board and Unity Committee has postponed the special and merger convention until some later date.

Well, the only difference is that in the second one they cancelled it altogether. One October 18, I replied to that first telegram in more detail than to the second one:

We have received your telegram with regret. The approach of the UPWA representatives has been and remains one based on a sincere desire to accomplish merger and to do so on an honorable basis which represents joindure of the two unions without absorption of either by the other. In our discussion of Amalgamated's insistence on wage cuts for certain UPWA staff members in the merged union contrary to the agreements previously reached, it has become clear that there is a real need for clarifying the structure and operation of the merged
union if this goal is to be achieved. We do not feel that any of the problems raised in the meetings of the last few days are as difficult as many others that we have managed to solve in our past negotiations. We are surprised at your action at postponing the merger convention, which as specifically required by the merger agreement approved by constitutional conventions of both unions, was called jointly by the two organizations and was not supposed to be the subject of control or direction of one union alone. However we will be available to meet at mutually convenient times to continue our efforts to accomplish this merger which means so much to the members of our union.

Now the charges and counter charges that went on in connection with this become quite complicated and I think that maybe the best way of dealing with this is to just give you the documents. This is the thing they sent out and I think I also have here newspaper ads which they put out. They bought newspaper ads which they put out all over the United States, it was simply incredible.

I. It sounds like they were bitterly opposed to it.

R. Well what actually happened, I think, was that they got very scared and they were getting a lot of pressure from their people. Nowhere, this is the Sun Times of October 24, 1956. I think that's pretty much the same thing that you find here. Now these are the only copies I have. We went ahead and held our convention. Here's a letter that I wrote them. It's dated October and here's a telegram from Gorman by, the president, of their Ohio branch. He was one of the people who was extremely anxious to have merger. This is a resolution that was adopted by our convention which we went ahead and held on October 24.

Now at that convention I went into detail. I spoke at length, which is my habit? as you know by now by your own experience. I spoke at some length on the reasons that led up to it. This was a special convention and it was held on October 24 at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Chicago. That's the place that Playboy bought which is the Playboy Hotel now. I went into detail and my hunch would be -- this is the whole convention, you see. It runs for forty pages only. And my speech is only part of that, fortunately, but I do go into some detail and I think it makes it a lot easier to comprehend the arguments that went on. My suggestion would be that you may
want to xerox that, make it part of the record, read it yourself and than ask me anything that is not too clear. Here's a copy of the resolution that was adopted there.

One of the things that we settled in the contract was we had many inequalities, which meant that one job as compared with another job was in an improper bracket, at an, improper rate. We had a certain spread between brackets. They have that, by the, way, in Steel. Well we had the same bracket system except that ours were narrower and we didn't have as wide a spread. But at any rate we went into these negotiations. We had for many years been working at this and we had pretty well worked them out. We did this jointly now. Now remember in the Big Four the people covered by this bracket examination, we represented at least four times more than they did. It was probably closer to 60,000 to around, 10,000, six times in the Big Four. Outside of Armour and Swift they didn't have anything and there they only had a handful.

Well in spite of the tremendous difference in membership we ended up with 937 bracket increases. That doesn't necessarily count people, it counts jobs. They got 3,109 and we had negotiated the changes. It was our people who did the work and there was a total of 4,046 adjustments. They got 3,109, we got only 937. I cite this only by way of indicating the difference. Part of their argument, you'll note, had to do with our so-called Wage Rate Department which they called a Production Engineering Department or something. They did a miserable job and that's why they had so many more, why they got the benefit. See, each of those may well have represented -- a total of 3,000 could have run into hundreds of thousands of dollars because you don't know how many brackets that amounts to.

Well let me go back now a minute to indicate what happened. As we came closer to this convention obviously tensions were increasing but that didn't necessarily mean tensions between us at all, that is that we were aware of. There was the tension of making the preparations for the adjustment. People were operating under some tension. We used to meet generally over at their office because they had better facilities than we did. They preferred meeting over there and we didn't care so we used to go over there and meet.

We had had for, a long time, without any difficulty, an office workers union. The woman who represented the office workers union in Chicago was a woman by the name of Sarah Keenan, who was the sister of Joe Keenan. That's how come she had the job actually. It was a way of patronage without it being done through the Electrical Workers Union. Of course
they had long old AFL ties, Gorman and Keenan. As a matter of fact I developed good relationships with Keenan subsequently, but remember the merger between the AFL and the CIO wasn't even a year old at this time. I hadn't had any time to go to work on this.

At our convention, as we normally did, we had worked out some salary adjustments. When we came home we sat down as we always do and put them in effect, or worked out a reasonable kind of an adjustment. In addition the Meatcutters had a thirty-two and a half hour week as I remember it. I think it still is that. Ours had been thirty-five hours. So the women raised this issue and, said why don't we make it conform. It seemed a little silly to me, frankly, because -- I don't know, they shaved off fifteen minutes every day and I just resented the process. You know, if you're going to do something substantial for a purpose all right, but this seemed a little crazy. But I wasn't prepared to argue it, it was only a matter of time.

At any rate we worked out this adjustment. We asked Keenan and she confirmed it. So we worked that out and we put that, in along with all these other benefits. There were no secrets about this at all. The adjustments we gave were reasonable, a pattern that we'd been following for a long time. The fact is that at the Meatcutters, and it's still true within limits, it's the most horrible personnel policy that you've ever heard of. Favorites are played. Efforts are made to keep people from knowing what rate someone else gets. They pay no attention to this union at all. It's purely a rubber stamp thing.

I. Their office workers are unionized though?

R. Yeah, they paid dues until the merger occurred. Then our gals got in there and they began to raise some hell and the union had to act more responsibly. I'm not sure how far they've gotten, with it. It's better but it used to be pretty awful. And we suddenly discovered that they had some women who were doing very routine book-keeping. They kept records that were incredible. They could, between a combination of personnel and machines, give you the amount of dues that John Jones paid in the year 1921. Now I never could figure out why I would want to know that. Some, of these records they had to keep because they had a death benefit fund and it was necessary to prove that your dues had been paid all that time but that was the only practical reason for this kind of thing. Well they had a lot of women that were needed to keep these records and some of the wage rates that they paid these women were just terribly bad. And we always suspected, among other reasons, that one of the factors that was working
on Gorman on this was the fear that once the women there got to
know the wages our people were getting they'd have an
explosion. So you'll notice that there's a whole business
made about these increases, how we snuck, behind their backs.
We only did it openly at our convention but we snuck behind
their back and put these wage increases in effect.

Then they compare the wages that we would get in the
Amalgamated compared to what we were getting. Well the truth
is that we would get a very substantial increase. As a matter
of fact we did when this merger went through but the reason for
it was that they wouldn't agree to cut their wages. We didn't
want to get that much but to get the wages equal they would
have had to take a wage cut and they weren't willing to do it.
But we noticed the day we went over there -- it may well have
been the 18th, the day that wire was sent -- that Keenan was
closeted with Gorman for a long time and didn't come into this
meeting with us. He subsequently came in, didn't have much
to say.

One of the members of our committee was Tony Stephens
who was a vice president of ours. I'll have occasion to get
back to this question of Stephens later. He was a
flamboyant rising guy who was pounding the table or making
noise. He could operate more sensibly, too, but he used to
think power was the way you did things. And he had been very
successful at it over a period of years so he figured that was
the way everything worked. He went barging into Gorman's
office at one point. I don't even know what happened there.
All I know is that he came out and said, "Oh are you guys nuts!"
Later it was discovered that he had tried to get Gorman to come
into meetings with us to get this thing moving because things
rarely happened.

I had long since discovered already that dealing with
Gorman it was very difficult for me to get anywhere because he
was afraid of me. He wouldn't get into any serious
discussion. It was almost impossible for me to get him to
focus on a problem for any length, of time and secondly, fear
that he might get outmaneuvered in some way or another.
Although really, if he had stopped to think about it, the
crucial issues were, behind us already as far as the merger was
concerned once we had agreed on the numbers of people on the
executive board and the positions they were going to have and
all that sort of thing. It was those issues that were being
raised about department structures. The salary thing, which
was made up out of whole cloth, that had never been a problem.
But department structures did represent a problem because
they made it one.

It simply didn't make sense for them to want to do the
things they said they wanted to do. We just couldn't make head or tail out of it. But at any rate it was pretty clear that there was something funny going on. I have always felt that what was going on essentially was that Gorman at the last minute got to looking around that office of his, saw us coming in. He knew he'd gone through those negotiations and really worked out a deal but he'd seen the way we operated. I think he just plain got scared. Later it came out that they were saying, yes it was true that they had an advantage. Out of thirty three people on the board there we would have twelve, they'd have twenty one. But out of the twenty one they then started counting up the numbers of their own people who they felt might side with us and it got very close.

I. He was really afraid of losing his own followers, then?

R. That's what the story was, that he wasn't sure that he could maintain control. And it is a fact that if that merger had taken place at that time in 1956 with all of us being much younger, with our having many more ambitions, being physically healthier and with our union the size that it was, as organized and progressive, with their structure and with our know-how, if we had gone in at that time I think that within a relatively short period of time we would have taken over that union. One thing is clear, when Jimmerson died a couple of years later and Jack Lloyd became president that never would have happened. I would have been president of that joint union at that time if the merger had taken place and I think he had serious reasons to be concerned.

I. From the point of view of his career you mean, not the welfare of the union?

R. Well he doesn't make a distinction. It's very important to understand that and by the way it's not peculiar to him. It's true of many of these guys but there is no distinction in his mind between his career or his personal well being and the union. These are interrelated entirely.

I don't like to break, the train of this merger thing. It blew up. We held our convention, we did it for several reasons. First because what I said in that telegram was correct, the commitment we'd made to our people, plus the fact that we wanted our people in there. We weren't going to get into a newspaper game with them over this, putting ads into answer theirs, and so we wanted to have our delegates there and we had them there.

I. Did they send any observers or anything at all?
No, no. What you have to understand is that the structure, the set up called for the following procedure. We each were to have our independent convention and the following day were to join together in a merged convention.

So all you could do is have your first day then.

So we only had our first day because there was nothing else to do. We adopted this resolution at that convention and we went about our business. There was nothing else to do. That was the year when Kefauver and Stevenson were running against Eisenhower and we had work we had to do. Out of these merger negotiations, however, a lot of things came. Internal friction was set off within our union, too.

Over the merger?

Yes. because of the ambitions that were being challenged. And Stephens, who had been part of the union from the time I first came into it, he had been quite close to me, had been growing steadily away during the merger. He had been caught up in this high living which had not happened to our people before, this expense account kind of living. He'd spent a lot of time with the Meatcutters, more than anyone else. Some of our other guys got worried about it and a big fight occurred between he and Charlies Hayes.

Tell me about that.

I had realized my personal difficulty in dealing with Gorman and so I was quite content to have Stephens be our front man. A guy by the name of Freese who was acting for Gorman, or so we believed, Stephens would go off and meet with Freese or go off and meet with almost anybody. And I must confess I did not raise any objection to it because I thought this was the way this was going to be done. As a matter of fact we did the same thing when we finally worked it out. The difference was that Jesse Prosten did it then instead of Stephens and of course people felt differently about Jesse. He didn't have his own axes to grind whereas Stephens -- at that time many people in the union felt he had his own axes to grind, as I later learned he did have.

At any rate we were in one of these sessions and he started to talk about how he did this and he did that. All of a sudden Charlie Hayes just exploded. He said, "Who in the hell ever gave you the authority to do all those things?" I can't remember what the issue was about now. It wasn't that important an issue. It was really the fact that he was running this thing, you know. Hayes said, "You're not chairman of this committee. If anybody should be meeting
with these people, Ralph ought to." Well that breach was never healed. Not only they remained enemies but it went much further. This is a longer story. It leads, up to the '58 convention when there was a brief effort to take over the union—our union.

I. By Stephens?

R. By Stephens, yes. The 1958 convention in New York was the most unified convention we'd ever had. Even the old red fight died and I discovered that the source of it had really been Stephens.

I. Oh really?

R. People had felt that he himself, either was using the communists as his wedge or was one himself. What occurred really was that he was the communist hatchet man and was red in that sense. One of the reasons they always tied me in was because he used to go around telling people he was speaking for me and I never knew that. But this is something that came out. That was a very interesting convention. I didn't even realize what was going on until about two weeks before the convention. I don't understand how I could have been so blind but I was. And the way it came out finally the whole thing was exposed, blown up and killed off because he was just too greedy. He didn't know when he ought to let something lie and give it time to jell. If he had he might have gotten away with it but he didn't. So he ended up on the outside looking in.

I. Did he lose an election finally or what happened?

R. Oh yes, he was not slated and withdrew and was done.

So he wasn't around when the merger actually occurred.

R. He was not around when the merger occurred, which was in itself a very interesting twist of fate and fortune. But this one I have always felt, essentially, there are no rational explanations for it blowing up. What I said there in one of those communications, that we'd worked out much harder problems than those that remained, was absolutely correct. The ones that remained were relatively simple compared to many, we'd worked out. Nevertheless, they weren't worked out. There were people there who were working on the problem but there was always a question of who would command his ear. Freese was very anxious. He was one of the people who wanted to merge. There were many of these guys, very decent.
I. Who were the people who were opposed?

R. People who thought they might get hurt. A guy like Helmuth Kern was opposed to it for several reasons. He came out of this old German Socialist background and he accepted all this red stuff or at least he used it. I don't know to what extent he accepted it because I've always had the best of relationships with him. But there was a Certain group in New York such as Max Bloch. We thought of them as racketeers essentially. You know he got thrown out of the union and I don't know if he went to jail but he was all messed up in one of those stock scandals. Being permitted to buy in Food Fare stock, I think they bought for practically nothing. They even got Gorman involved in that. Gorman was in trouble before the McClellan Committee. Bloch was called up before the McClellan Committee. Oh it was really messy! Those were the people who opposed it. What you had was a combination of elements Who, for their own reasons of ambition, were opposed to it as well as guys who felt that they couldn't do business with us and we'd be too principled.

I saw Max Bloch subsequently in Miami one time when I was there for an Executive Council meeting. He said, "Come have a cup of coffee with me." I said, "I don't know whether I should or not. Are you sure you won't poison it?" And he said, "Oh I'm not that bad." And I said, "No, I don't think you are. I think you're probaly worse but I'll go have coffee with you. You know," I said,"people always told me you were smart but you're foolish, you're a stupid man." Gee I didn't know if he was going to slug me, or not because that was his way of doing business. He said, "What do you mean, I'm stupid?" He was short, he looked like a pug, you know. I said, "Well if you weren't stupid you would have known well enough about me to know that I operate on the basis of certain principles. I represent certain things, I believe in certain things, I do certain things. I would be more apt to protect your right to do something legitimate than anybody else around here. Now if you want to get messed up and do illegitimate things you'd have trouble with me but you're going to have trouble with me on the outside as well as on the inside. And you could do business with me on a basis that would be more responsible and that you could rely on much better than you can with German or any of these other guys because you don't know from one day to the next when they're going to let you down."

That's exactly what happened. When the heat went on they threw him. But the fact is that these guys, for all kinds of reasons, had the notion that we were going to remake it. We would have tried to remake it, I can assure you. But it's getting remade, it has to be remade, time will remake it.
Gorman can't stay there forever you know. He's serving his last term.

I. This term is his last?

R. They amended the constitution to require retirement at 68 and he's already 81 or 82, maybe 83 even. And it'll change. But these were the elements that were, really working. He looked around that place and saw that nice beautiful building. He talks about how we wanted to get control of their assets. They have ten million dollars in assets. Relatively speaking for the period of time that we had both been in existence, for the nature of our two operations, income and the rest of it, we had so much more efficient an operation -- our assets in relation to our membership. We had a better relationship in relation to our membership than they had to theirs. As a matter of fact that was still true at the time of our merger because we operate more conservatively.

I. Did any of your people hate to see you merge on account of that?

R. Oh yes. Well no, not on account of the money -- on leadership, yes. But they had realized that this was something that they just had to do. We told them that. We had a few people who opposed it and voted against it for reasons that were understandable. Many of them were very devoted to some of us in leadership and didn't like to see these changes. They had no illusions about the changes. It was simply a question of how long it would take to get it back on the track. It's taken about six or seven years. I think, by about 1976 the union will be ready to get back pretty much where it was.

At any rate, unrelated to the merger there did occur in '56, as a result of the activities that I think I've referred to in the past in our efforts to get the packers to hire minority people in their office, Armour's in '56 hired the first Negro in their Omaha office with all the pressure from the local union. The year previous to that Cudahy had hired a Negro in its office in Omaha. And as a matter of fact, as of the time Armour finally got around to do it, three were working in the Cudahy office.

I. What kind of pressure did the union use?

R. We used pickets, we, distributed handbills, we tried to focus public attention on that situation. The other item of some interest, very much like this, is that you get Plamondon, who was a woman on our staff in Canada. Since '46
she'd worked for us when I was first elected president. She had been working in Montreal prior to the convention there. In 1956 she was elected a Vice President of the Canadian Congress of Labor, the first woman in Canadian history. Here I think there was a picture in here of a cocktail party for women at the convention. There are a lot of pictures of her around here. But this was not just our union, this was the Canadian Labor Congress. She was a representative. I think she'd been on their Executive Council before but that year she was elected a Vice President of the Canadian Labor Congress. Of course you know they had had for many years the old British Labor Party tradition in Canada and had been operating on that basis. But I thought it interesting that in '56 -- if I remember correctly it was in '54 or before that, that we had made our final step in eliminating wage differentials between men and women. So you can see the pattern this represented.

The 1956 convention in Cincinnatti was also interesting in that we introduced John Hope to the convention. Equality of Opportunity, that was his book with an introduction by Hubert Humphrey. So that was published then. That was quite a momentous thing for our union.

One of the items I wanted to talk about had to do with our whole position on the farm question, how we had argued that the whole question of the surplus that they were making, all these issues of, were not surpluses of the kind that you should worry about because all you needed was a few bad crop years. And you noticed how quickly, once they started shipping it off to Russia, once these brokers could make real money on it, how long, it took to get rid of that myth. But this had been our position for twenty years.

We've made the point, for example, that if they were really concerned about farmers, what they ought to do is talk about the income because we were relating purchase of food. I gave this speech to the Chamber of Commerce in Minneapolis in which I pointed out how much food a person with an income of, three thousand dollars bought and how much a person with six thousand bought of food. There came a point at which you couldn't eat more. It levelled off but there was a substantial difference, If they would raise the lower income people it would make much more consumption of meat and meat products and the farmer would have a larger market for his livestock. So all of these programs, you see, had been developed in the '40s and continued on.

I. Were these programs that the other union was reluctant to take up?

R. I would, be surprised if they were as conscious in a
way that would be disturbing to them of a program that argued about advancing the interests of farmers or in the interests of women. There is no doubt that our civil rights program bothered them. They were disturbed because they did not have Negroes in their leadership. As a matter of fact they went out and got a guy on their board, a completely inadequate guy, so they could say they had a black man on their board. And not a man of any stature at all, Holford Harris, a nice enough guy. But that, I think, did bother them. I think it was one of the things that was upsetting to Gorman.
Interview with Ralph Helstein
by Elizabeth Balanoff,
July 16, 1974

R: Let me quickly go through a few items of the '56 contract that I do think ought to be recorded as elements of special interest. One, in '56 we finally eliminated the last vestiges of the wage differential based on sex so that there was one single common labor rate throughout the plant for all employees. Obviously there'd be different rates depending on the job but then that always had been the case. We had always had a provision for equal pay for equal work but there had been, this sex differential which now was eliminated.

We established for the first time, in history the thirty six hour week guarantee on a Monday through Friday basis and fixed Saturday and Sunday as premium days even on round the clock shifts. Previously there, they could have used the guarantee in a six day period and they paid a percentage for overtime on Saturday and Sunday. This, of course, had the impact of establishing a five day work week and for all practical purposes that's what it became. There was some overtime but that would vary by season and that sort of thing.

We broadened separation pay for the first time to make allowance for technological changes. We were just beginning to feel the impact of plant and department close downs. And we were getting concerned about people being dropped as new technology came in.

One of the important things that we did was to increase sick leave payments. We had had sick leave provisions in the contract for ten years. It first went in in 1946 or maybe it was '45. But we now increased the amounts to provide 55% of wages for the first and second weeks, 60% for the third and fourth weeks and 65% for the fifth and all subsequent weeks. We also provided the minimum weekly payment irrespective of years of service, of thirteen weeks and then two weeks credit for each year of service, whichever was greater. In other words, if you'd been there seven years you'd get fourteen weeks; eight years would be sixteen weeks. But if you'd been there only six years you'd still get a minimum of thirteen weeks. This was a major change because prior to that we had had no minimum. And obviously two weeks or whatever it might be, even though the person had worked there for so short a time, hardly was enough.

Well we made many substantial changes. We improved the pension plan substantially and we worked out new
seniority arrangements. All in all it was a very important contract, not the least of, which was that we provided a cost-of-living escalator which provided one cent for each half point increase in the BLS Consumer Price Index. We were to change that in future years to four tenths of a point increase and that ought to be the level which it's at now. And of course that cost of living escalator became a very important factor in determining wage levels that were achieved. As a matter of fact there were some years when the cost of living escalator provided almost as much if not more in the way of wage increases than did the annual wage increase that we negotiated. And this, was all in addition to the other benefits.

1: Has the cost of living ever gone down during these years?

R. It hasn't. It went down one time as I remember. The index did fall but never enough in our case to warrant a cut in wages. We had an escalator that required it to go down the full amount rather than just a little. For instance, if it provided a .5 increase in the escalator, the Auto Workers had an escalator that said if that .5 dropped to .4 it went down by a penny. Ours required it to drop the full .5. So if the cost of living index was at a hundred it would have dropped to 95 before we would have actually taken a cut. The Auto Workers did actually take a cut once because it went down this fractional point. Steel did the same thing. I don't remember whether or not they ever had a cut but we never actually had a cut even though, as I recall on one, perhaps two occasions, there were some slight drops in the cost of living.

But the trend for years had been upward. As a matter of fact, they finally got to the point where they were changing the base point. They kept restating it in terms of the dollar value. You know at one point it was the '59 dollar, then they made it the '60 dollar. Now I think they're using the 1967 dollar to determine it, so when they say the cost of living is up to 153 that's in terms of the '67 dollar. But if you were to take a look at it way back to '60 you'd find it just incredible.

These negotiations were difficult ones and they involved a lot of maneuvering. We were doing this in the context yet of our merger still being on. So the companies were dealing with us as a single, union for the first time in history. We had joint, committee meetings and it required a lot of manipulation, as much because we were running into real serious difficulties with Swift. Swift was insisting on some real changes in the contract. As a result of that, what we did was put our major emphasis on Armour and then quite
deliberately let the Swift stuff sit. We went on and we picked up contracts with Cudahy and Morrell and Hy-Grade, Wilson. I think. I don't remember how soon the Wilson one came but we got as many of them out of the way as we could -- the major ones. I think we had all the major ones out of the way and then went to Swift.

Swift was still insisting on these changes that we weren't about to agree to. They wanted a waiting period for sick leave particularly. And we had what we called clothes changing time, which was a provision that we had gotten into the contract way back in the war Labor Board days in the '40s. We had cooked this up because we thought that we could play on their quilt for depriving us of five and a half cents in 1942 based on the Little Steel Formula. And we got them to agree there was, something peculiar about working in the Meat Packing Industry which warranted their making an allowance for clothes changing time. This was on the heels of John Lewis's big fight on portal-to-portal pay which, you may remember. And the War Labor Board finally ordered the companies to pay clothes changing time.

We sat down and negotiated with Swift on this and we worked out an agreement. We would average it out. Everybody conceded that this was not reflective of what everybody faced. The truth was that the majority of the people who had a major problem of this kind were those who worked in the slaughtering end of it. It was there they got full of blood and all kinds of stuff and they had to shower after they got through work, really change clothes completely. But a mechanic, you know, would wash up like a mechanic in any other plant. He didn't have much problem, or a guy on the cutting floor -- well he might be a little dirtier. What we did was work out this average of an hour a week. And we worked it out on the basis of fifteen minutes a day for four days a week until the computer came along because the company had said that they simply could not work out a payroll on less than fifteen minutes a day. Well I guess it was true. The cost of doing this would have been very great and so we agreed. I think it was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Thursday would be a blank day and Friday they'd pay it. It's true if a guy happened to be sick on one of those days and missed work on Thursday he might be out fifteen minutes pay or something but we worked it out.

Finally when they got the computers to handle the payroll, stuff that did the calculation on any number of minutes, they wanted to set it upon a twelve minute basis and that's the way it is today. But the key to this was that we got paid an hour's pay. Well obviously every time the rate went up the cost of that clothes changing time went up. So as
of September when this new labor rate will be, as I indicated, about $5.29 an hour, that means that you get $5.29 for that hour for clothes changing time whereas in 1945 when it first went into the contract if I remember correctly we were getting 72 cents an hour for that same hour spent changing clothes. I'm sure that very few of the people who were changing clothes in 1945 are still around but that is the difference that it represented.

So Swift wanted to convert that into cents per hour and eliminate it entirely. That was one of their major demands. They also wanted a waiting period on sick leave. It was one of their major demands because they claimed it was being abused. It may have been abused but the fact was that the waiting period didn't change it and what it was doing was making the guy who really needed it pay for the abuses of somebody else that arose out of the company's either unwillingness or inability to enforce reasonable standards. And that didn't seem to us a responsible way of going about it. In any event those are a couple of the items. There were a number of others. There were something like eighteen or nineteen different issues but these two meant a great deal to us and were ones that we weren't going to yield very quickly.

You may recall that I indicated before that we got an agreement to increase the sick pay up to as high as 65% of a man's earnings. Well Swift wanted to change that. They wanted a flat, amount because clearly the 65% went up as wages went up also, just like with the clothes changing time. Of course we were aware of that. As a matter of fact, 65% as time went on, when one took into account the fact of taxes, and sick leave was not taxable, he would come out almost --you know if he had a broken leg and was laid up for any length of time he wouldn't be even but he'd come out awfully close to being even. And this sick leave was a very important achievement.

By the way, in that year, too, and this it seems tome was early for this sort of thing, we negotiated changes in the insurance coverage to include nervous and mental illnesses. This grew out of a curious case that we had, which I'd gotten into a very nasty argument on, because they had claimed that someone who was mentally ill was not physically disabled. This just infuriated me so we got to the point where I wasn't about to argue the issue on whether he was physically disabled or not. But he was too sick to trust him with a knife at work and he was entitled to coverage so we got the coverage both in sick leave and the hospitalization coverage on the medical program.

Well the Swift strike started on September 20, I think that was '56, and it lasted for ten days. It was over on
September 30. We got everything we wanted and Swift dropped its demands for these changes that we were objecting to so strenuously. I think that this contract represented a very, special kind of achievement in many respects, especially the guarantees of a five day work week which had been an issue in our negotiations from the time I first came in, in 1942. It took us fourteen years to achieve that. It was really a great thing.

It was interesting, as I think back on it, how issues of that kind -- you know there were some issues that really didn't mean so much in terms of money but they took on a certain symbolic meaning for the average worker. And getting time and a half for Saturday, they just didn't give them Saturday work, you know, but really it meant a five day work week given the kind of hours that were typical in meat packing for many years prior to that. It was understandable why that occurred. I think maybe that covers that.

Maybe I ought to get on to the other question that I opened up in discussing the merger last time and that has to do with the internal problems arising around Stephens. Tony Stephens was the vice president of the union. When I first came to the union in '42 one of the first assignments I had as a lawyer was to handle a representation case before the Labor Board involving Rath Packing Company in Waterloo, Iowa. Rath at that time was a plant of four or five thousand people, one of the larger plants in Iowa and a very crucial plant as we tried to organize the industry. I was still practicing in Minneapolis at the time, I had not actually moved to Chicago. Well I went to Waterloo and I met Stephens there. This was still in the days of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee. And Stephens then was appointed, not elected, as director of the district which included Iowa. He was a young big husky guy, I thought quite attractive, with a real warm personality.

I. Did he come out of the industry?

R. Yes, he had worked for Swift and Co. in Sioux City, Iowa back in the late '30s, I've forgotten what year. There'd been an abortive strike at that plant as a result of which he'd gotten fired. The CIO was starting this organizing drive and he was picked up. "Shady" Lewis, I think, who was the man in charge at that time, gave him a job as an organizer for PWOC. He'd been at that for quite a while and he finally became, director of the district.

Tony and I established a very close relationship which increased over the years. There was, I assume, a difference pretty close to ten years between us. I guess
it'd be closer to six or seven years but it was a difference of, many kinds. This was a young guy who had gone through high school. I guess he'd gone through it, I don't know that he'd graduated. And he, had been exposed to a totally different kind of life than I had. He was very temperamental as well as he had a lot of dynamism, a good deal of charisma about him. At any rate we became very very close and as time went on he was anxious to have the union made into an international union. I guess we've gone through this. I finally made him understand that the only way this would happen was if he was able to establish relationships with other people around the country and he couldn't do it by himself. Well I go back over this ground only to pick up and to say that we had remained very close, both as allies in the union and as friends at a personal level, for many many years. He had many habits that I didn't approve of and that I would have liked to have him change but then I wasn't his father, although I think in many ways I was. That may have been part of the problem.

I. What kind of problem?

R. Well you couldn't rely completely on his stability. In a fight he was a great guy to have on your side but you couldn't always be sure how he would respond to different sorts of stimuli. He was subject to fluctuation a great deal. On top of that he was very much of a ladies man. He got himself involved in all kinds of problems that way at home. He was married and had a daughter and two sons, as a matter of fact, twins. But we had been close for many years.

During the merger negotiations in '56 Tony had developed a relationship with a guy by the name of Andy Ereese from St. Louis with the Amalgamated. And Ereese really had worked on Gorman and gotten Gorman involved. This was one of the ways this thing had started. And I had felt that Tony ought to keep working at that. I felt very strongly; as I've indicated, that the merger was desirable. Well Tony, in the course of this, began to go out a lot with AFL people. They had all kinds of different standards. To them it was all right to go to the most expensive restaurant in town, you know, and use credit cards. And all of a sudden we noticed that Tony was sort of liking to live that way too, that he was spending time with them.

Now let me go back a little bit. Let me leave that merger business there because I have to go back and then I'll come back to the merger business. At some point in the '50s, around '52 or '53, Russ Lasling had hired to work with him in programs a guy by the name of Richard Durham. Durham was a black and he had been recommended to us by, among others. Bob Weaver, whom I had known when he was at the University of
Chicago and subsequently, At this particular point that he gave us the recommendation he was the head of the Whitney Fund in New York. But you know he subsequently became Secretary of Housing with HUD. He'd recommended Durham to us and we'd hired him and Durham was a strange kind of guy. Lasling seemed to work well with him but there didn't seem to be any drive about him, or I didn't get any sense of coordination out of him. He wasn't the most articulate person in the world.

At some point we had a campaign in a Swift plant in Kansas City which we had tried to win. It was represented by the Swift Company Union and we had had all kinds of elections there to try to win that plant. Never succeeded. Soon this occasion we were going to make another effort. Tony vowed he was going to go down there and spend a lot of time. By this time he was Vice President of the union and Director of Organization of the International, He'd been elected Director and then in 1950 he'd been elected Vice President of the union. He succeeded Frank Ellis and he was Director of Organization. He decided he was going down to, Kansas City and-handle that campaign and he felt he needed all kinds of help he could get. It was a key plant, there was no doubt about that. So he asked for Durham to come down because he needed people who could write leaflets. Well they went down there, the election was lost, we never did win it. As a matter of fact we tried it again several times after that and we still haven't won it. They finally closed the plant. But Durham went down and worked with Stephens and Stephens, came back talking about Durham as though he was an absolute genius. And I still had not gotten that kind of an impression from him.

I made it my business to sit down and talk with him. Actually what had happened was Durham, who clearly was a student of black history and really understood the problem, he was saying things in those days that people started saying, in the '60s. He was way ahead of his time and I think in many ways he gave all of us an early education which contributed substantially to our being open. We were open which was not true of most unions. As a matter of fact he wouldn't have lasted in most unions for very long but I don't know that we would have been as informed as we were without his presence. He dug up all kinds of material. I knew Frederick Douglass, you know, but I never knew him well, I just had, a passing acquaintance with him. And it was really Durham that was responsible for my reading Douglass as a matter of fact. So, when I speak of him he turned out to be a very bad influence in the union, at least so many of us thought, but in any event he also made a very important contribution to the union.

Well Stephens was very very impressed with Durham and all of a sudden we found ourselves off on many of these civil
rights issues in ways that just were wrong. We were alienating many people in the way we were doing it. There was never any question about not making issues out of any question of discrimination that was clear. But to find it impossible to give a speech on any subject without beating people over the head about how discriminatory the whites were just became a little bit too much and that was what was going on.

I. You were developing a backlash by your approach, then?

R. Well I thought we were. And not only that but I finally said to them at one point, "Look, let's understand one thing. We are a trade union and we operate on the principle that as a trade union we cannot survive unless all our membership are treated equally and so we are opposed to discrimination in any form but we are not the NAACP. Our primary job is to advance the interests of our membership which we think we can do only in a community that is open, in an open society to use a philosopher's term, you know. But this goes sometimes just, too far."

At any rate Durham exercised a tremendous amount of influence within the union and on many people, not just on Stephens, a number of others, and we were constantly pushed in that direction. I was sort of dragging my feet. I had become the most conservative force in the union, insisting that our main function was trade unionism. Well now this background becomes important because in the context of the merger discussion Stephens was going off with the AFL people and becoming exposed. I've picked up now where I dropped before.

Stephens was enjoying the kind of life that the Amalgamated people lived and was spending an increasing amount of time with them. We had a formal merger committee and Stephens was coming back to our committee which met regularly. A number of them began to get a little, restive about this. Things got done without our being there if they, in fact, were being done. Well one day we were having a meeting on a Sunday as I recall, or may be it was Saturday. At any rate it was not on a work day. We were in our office in our board room in the old transportation building. It was a dark gloomy day and Charlie Hayes and, Tony and I and, I think, Hathaway were there. I don't remember if Russ Bull was there or not. A couple of other people were there. Tony was going on for quite some length and all of a sudden Charlie Hayes said, "Look Stephens, you know we've got a committee, you're not the whole committee." And Stephens looked at him in complete surprise and Hayes said, "You know you're not even
chairman of our committee. There's no reason why you should go on making these commitments one way or another." And Stephens said; "Well what do you mean? Don't you trust me?"

I don't remember that Charlie answered, immediately but at some point it became perfectly clear that he didn't trust him and he didn't want Stephens making any kind of side deals. Whatever deals were going to be made ought to be made openly and if anybody was to make them I, as chairman of the committee, should do it. And this resulted, as you can imagine, in all kinds of feelings, pressures. As a matter of fact this meeting ended on a very sour note.

As time went on it became clear that the black members of our committee and many of the black unionists -- first of all they started with real suspicions of the Amalgamated to begin with. Remember now, we're talking about 1956 and this was true of many, many unions, not just the Amalgamated. It's still true of a lot of them. But in those days the Amalgamated may have had one Negro member of a board of nineteen and he was completely in adequate, an inarticulate guy who our union people looked at with contempt, you know. And they had real concerns about what would happen. Would they be able to maintain any leadership in a merged union? They weren't sure they were happy at the prospect of merger at all so if there was going to be one they wanted to be sure it was on terms that suited them. And in spite of the way that Stephens had embraced Durham -- I discovered this later, I didn't know it at the time -- but in spite of the way Stephens embraced Durham they weren't sure that they could trust him. And I, subsequently learned that part of the reason was that Durham was playing politics within their districts. Well at any rate they insisted and forced the issue.

We were going to set up a Packinghouse Department under the terms of the merger agreement. I was to become what was called the General Vice President which is, in the old AFL terms, really a sort of executive vice president. It was something more than just a vice president. And we had talked up to that point of Stephens being the Director of the Packinghouse Department but at this point real serious questions were raised about Stephens being the head of the Packinghouse Department and we finally worked out an arrangement. It took a lot of internal pressures and stirred up tremendous dissension. Nerve endings were raw and there was a great deal of distrust and all kinds of politicking going on all around.

It was a most unpleasant kind of a situation, for people who had worked very closely and in real comradeship for years, to suddenly have this develop but it finally ended up
with an agreement that what we would have. would be co-directors. And one of the people to be elected a co-director by the Packinghouse Workers would be Don Smith and the other would be Tony Stephens. Don and Tony were, to be the two directors. Now Don was black, he was out of New York. He had been an organizer with the union for many, many years. He was extremely competent, very able, the kind of guy that if you were ever in a fight you couldn't think of anyone that you'd rather have near you, as much because he was so big as for any other reason. He also had a lot on the ball, very responsible, lovely guy. Then of course we had our list of other directors, assistant directors and everything, but this one issue was the key. On that basis we had agreed.

Well the merger blew up, of course, and in the process that blew up. At our convention in Cincinnati we elected the people who were to fill the various spots and Don Smith and Tony were both elected as co-directors. Tony resented this terribly. I don't think I ever realized how much he resented it. I knew he resented it but I didn't know how much. In any event I noticed a diminution of this whole attitude we were taking on civil rights. It began to get into somewhat more, proportion after this and also after the merger blew up and throughout '57. Durham was still there and still exercising a good deal of influence,

Around that time we also had, and I think. I've mentioned this before, a Program Department and we had a number of Program Coordinators in four or five areas. One of them was Oscar Brown, Jr. the entertainer. I guess I mentioned that. He worked here in Chicago with Charlie Hayes. He was very close to Durham during this time. I used to get into arguments with both of them because they fancied themselves Marxists of a sort. I didn't think they knew very much about it so we'd get into these long arguments in which I'd listen to these dogmatic recitals of what I thought was just a lot of nonsense. It came out of as much ignorance as anything else, probably the kind of stuff that led Marx to say, before his death that he was not a Marxist.

At any event throughout '57 Russ Bull got sick and he needed surgery. He had a very bad case of ulcers. I think I've indicated what kind of temperament he had, how high strung and intense he was. Committed, but also he would drink and go off on benders. I think I told the story of his calling me from the police station when he got thrown off a train. In any event Bull was very sick. After the surgery they couldn't get him to stop draining and I don't remember how long there was an acid condition that he had. I never could understand what was wrong but he was in that hospital for just weeks before they finally released him. He was
finally out and at some point he was beginning to feel better. We went out to his house in Des Moines because he wasn't able to travel yet to discuss the convention. We had a convention, on the horizon and there was, a question of what we were going to do so a number of us who had constituted a sort of a caucus met out at Bull's house and we got into a discussion with him.

Stephens raised for the first time in my presence, objection to Lasling as a vice president. Now Lasling really was not very adequate. He was not a very strong or aggressive person. Absolutely reliable, he'd do anything he was asked to do. He had very little initiative on his own. It was not an illegitimate question to be raised, it would seem to me. And Stephens had indicated there was a guy by the name of Walker out of Indianapolis he thought would be a good substitute. Well I must confess that I didn't find much to argue with on that score but I had a feeling that there was something about Bull's attitude that I couldn't quite understand and it disturbed me. It upset me.

In any event the meeting ended and we left and I never did get a chance to talk to Russ further because the next thing that happened was that he went out in a car with a friend to pick up some trees to plant in his yard. This was still while he was convalescing and another car, paying no attention to an arterial sign, just drove through the highway and hit him on his side and he was killed. After that horrible thing he was just coming out of, he was killed. I'm not sure but what the driver of the other car wasn't killed, too. In any event Bull was killed.

Well this created some political problems within the union about that district which was one of the key districts within the union, which Bull had really led and led well. Bull had named as assistant director, while, he was recovering, Dave Hart. And it seemed to me pretty clear that Dave Hart should be supported to succeed him. Stephens said he agreed with this but after a while I began to have reservations as to whether Stephens was really working in this direction. It wasn't just a question of saying this, it was a question whether he was prepared to produce on it and I was getting reports from all kinds of people about what was going on.

Well we had a practice of having a broader caucus meeting before a convention and discussing potential candidates. We got into that meeting and Stephens raised this question about Lasling. We had talked to Lasling before this and Lasling had agreed he wasn't going to make an issue of it. He'd step aside if people really wanted it and so everybody, without much fuss or argument, agreed to Walker.
Then after that had been out of the way everybody had a certain amount of distaste for this. We'd also agreed that Hart would be supported to succeed Bull.

Then Stern, who was the Director out of New York, he said he could just sense something funny. He picked up something funny and it must have escaped everybody else. But Stern all of a sudden said, "Well, now that that's out of the way I move that we agree that all other incumbents will be supported by this caucus." And at this point Stephens began, to object and, it developed into a first class row. I said, "Well what do you mean? What are you objecting to?" And finally he said, "Well how do I know who else may want to run? I may want to support somebody else." I said, "Like who? Who are you talking about? Is the're somebody else that you're talking about?" And at some point it suddenly developed that there was another guy who was on the staff by the name of Clayton Sayles out of Indiana who he was talking about supporting against Charlie.

I. Against Charlie Hayes?

R. Against Charlie Hayes. Now I have omitted one additional step in this. 'There had been a number of plant closings that had occurred from '56 on and we had decided we didn't need as many districts as we had so we had determined to consolidate part of District 4 with District 3 and with District 8 and to consolidate District 7, part of it, with District 1, which was Charlie's district, and the other part with District 9 that was in the South. No, all of District 7, which would have been Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky was going to be consolidated with the Chicago area. And Wisconsin, which had been part of the Chicago area, was being put with Minnesota. We had decided on this consolidation and the guy who had been Director of District 7, a guy by the name of LaRue, had come to me some time earlier and had told me that he'd been offered a job by one of the companies as labor relations man and he thought he wanted to take it. I said okay and he just wanted me to handle it in a way that made it easy for him to get out. Well I had no objection. I was perfectly willing for him to go, you know/because I had never felt he had the kinds of commitments I wanted to the cause. But he'd been reasonably faithful and reasonably competent. But he had picked up some stuff and had said nothing and he was the one who was through with the union,. He was going to wait through the convention and then leave after we'd completed this consolidation of districts. I had asked him to do that, as a matter of fact. It made it easier. I had asked him to stay away from this particular company and we assigned somebody else to handle it. He had picked up this business of Sayles. When I heard that I couldn't believe what I was
hearing, that Tony would really support Sayles against Hayes. It was incredible.

Who was this guy Sayles?

Sayles was a guy out of the Hy-Grade plant in Indianapolis, the same plant that Walker was out of. He was a competent young, guy, black, and he did a good job. Walker was competent but Walker was not particularly stable. I had no reason not to think that Sayles was stable. I had reason to think he was lazy but he was stable enough. But you know he was not in Charlie Hayes's class. Few people are, as a matter of fact. Charlie was a remarkable guy, still is.

Then I suddenly discovered that out in California there's another arrangement going on in which Stephens was working with a guy by the name of Simonson. Somebody by the name of Clyde Knowles who worked for us, who was one of our Program Coordinators at one time, very competent guy, someone that Bull had originally found and hired as a matter of fact. He was going to be running for director out in California. Well you know I began to look at this situation and began to take count and people began talking to me and telling me what was going on.

Then Charlie began telling me what this guy Oscar Brown was doing in his district. He'd been carrying—on an open campaign against Charlie. Durham had said this to me, he'd said it to Lasling and he'd said it to Stephens because Stephens in turn had told me, "There has to be a single center of power in any institution." He said, "Here you've got a sort of a double center of power shared between you and Stephens. That's fine because you work so close together." Well I suddenly realized that really what was happening was that Stephens wanted this merger all right in time, but he was just on the way because they began counting votes on the executive board afterwards, where we would be with him.

Then discovered when we had gone to Omaha to the District 3 Convention and the question of whether Hart was going to succeed Bull, that although he was openly supporting Hart, that there was reason to believe that behind the scenes he was supporting either Ed Filliman, who was out of Ottumwa and who both of us had known for many years and who worked out of the international office, or a guy by the name of Mauser from Texas who also had ambitions. So Tony was sort of playing all three of these guys. Well I made it perfectly clear that as far as I was concerned Hart was the man and Tony, in a feeble kind of away, tried to indicate that others might be acceptable. Of course he would not reject Hart but Hart was endorsed overwhelmingly. As a matter of fact there were
no votes against except the Ottumwa vote, which of course went to Filliman, and then may be a couple of votes for Mauser. It was perfectly clear that Hart had the support.

Well this thing kept building up and it began to be talked more and more in the open. Stephens was still taking this position that he wouldn't support everybody else and it was clear now that he was working for a slate that included Walker and Sayles, not Hayes, and also Simonson on the West coast. It seems to me there was another one he had in there but I can't remember who it could be.

In any case there was a guy by the name of Leroy Johnson who had been with the union from its very beginning here, a lovely, guy, black, out of Milwaukee. Lived a miserable kind of existence, been on the sea for many years, working in a packing house for many years. But he had a tremendous amount of latent intelligence if it ever really had a chance to develop. He was not a strong man, that is personality wise, but he was deeply loyal and he could be stubborn. He's the one who I may have told you once in some testimony explained what it meant to a butcher to have a sharp knife. He made that knife a work of art, you know, putting an edge on that knife. He'd get drunk much too often and when he'd get drunk he'd tell me how much he loved me. He really was very devoted to me and he just hated, Stephens's gut. I don't know why, I've often felt that may be he sensed something that I didn't sense. Plus the fact Stephens didn't have much respect for people that he couldn't either use or command or had to listen to. Johnson was none of those things. He couldn't use him, he couldn't command him. He didn't have much power but I liked Johnson. So when this fight starts in the open Johnson would constantly tell me, "Look this really strikes against you, it's not a strike against charlie." I'd say "Oh come on, knock it off."

So Stephens came to me one day and said, "Look, your people are going out campaigning against me." He was talking about Leroy and Jesse, I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well, they're going around saying this is a fight between you and me." 'And I said, "Well you and I obviously are not on the same side in this thing. I don't know if that, makes it a fight between you and me but if they want to support Hayes they got a right to support Hayes. You've got people out supporting Sayles, guys like, Oscar Brown. I don't understand what it is you're telling me. Well it was clear he was just sensing the water.

Stephen had for a long time taken all kinds of liberties. He'd call at all hours. This goes way back before this incident when I was still pampering him. And I
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Johnson who had been with the union from its very beginning
here, a lovely guy, black, out of Milwaukee. Lived a
miserable kind of existence, been on the sea for many years,
working in a packing house for many years. But he had a
tremendous amount of latent intelligence if it ever really
had a chance to develop. He was not a strong man, that is
personality wise, but he was deeply loyal and he could be
stubborn. He's the one who I may have told you once in some
testimony explained what it meant to a butcher to have a sharp
knife, He made that knife a work of art, you know, putting an
edge on that knife. He'd get drunk much too often and when
he'd get drunk he'd tell me how much he loved me. He really
was very devoted to me and he just hated, Stephens's gut. I
don't know why, I've often felt that may be he sensed something
that I didn't sense. Plus the fact Stephens didn't have much
respect for people that he couldn't either use or command or
had to listen to. Johnson was none of those things. He
couldn't use him, he couldn't command him. He didn't have
much power but I liked Johnson, So when this fight starts in
the open Johnson would constantly tell me, "Look this really
strikes against you, it's not a strike against Charlie." I'd
say,"Oh come on, knock it off."

So Stephens came to me one day, and said, "Look, your
people are going out campaigning against me." He was talking
about Leroy and Jesse. I said, "What do you mean?" And he
said, "Well, they're going around saying this is a fight
between you and me." And I said, "Well you and I obviously
are not on the same side in this thing. I don't know if that,
makes it a fight between you and me but if they want to support
Hayes they got a right to support Hayes. You've got people
out supporting Sayles, guys like Oscar Brown. I don't
understand what it is you're telling me." Well it was clear
he was just sensing the water.

Stephens had for a long time taken all kinds of
liberties. He'd call at all hours. This goes way back
before this incident when I was still pampering him. And I
used to, every once in a while when he'd make me mad say, "Look Tony, don't do these things. I don't mind. you taking advantage. I don't even mind being pushed around a little bit but I'm like, a bull, you know. 'I give but I never break and some time I'll stop giving. Now just don't carry it too far." And I reminded him, I said, "Tony don't overstep the boundaries. You're getting awful close, now stop it. This is crazy and you know it. You can't compare Sayles to Hayes. These other things are crazy. The Walker- Lasling thing, okay."

Well he kept it up and it got worse. They went all over the country at this point and finally I'd just had it. I called him up and I said, "Tony I want to meet with you." This was just a few days before we were scheduled to go to New York. I said, "I've had it and I want to sit down and talk with you." Well okay, he said, where. He'd been trying to get me. He had been wanting to talk to me and I'd been avoiding him because I didn't want to get into anymore arguments with him. So I arranged to meet with him at the Quadrangle Club because I wanted to be away from the office. I had called the Quadrangle Club and got a room. He came over.

Now he already had an inkling of what was up because he had a letter which he gave me in which he set forth his undying and unswerving loyalty, that he had heard that I felt that this was, now a fight between him and me and that he was really trying to take over, the union and that was just not true. It was, a lie. So I read the letter very carefully and I took it and I put it in my pocket. I said, "Tony I want to tell you that I'm going to have a slate in New York to run for offices and you're not going to be on it." He said, "What! Didn't you read the letter?" I said, "Yeah, I read your letter. It's too late, I've made the decision and that's the way it's going to be." He said, "Well is there any point in your arguing with me about it?" "I've made my decision and I did it carefully and after a lot of consideration. There will be a slate presented to the convention, I'm not bound by this time by the Walker thing, you understand. That, was out the window and you will, not be on that slate for any position."

I don't think that meeting lasted ten minutes. It involved a lot of tension. I was so tense I was just on edge because we'd been so close for so many years it was not an easy thing to do but I was bound and determined it was just impossible to work in that kind of a setting anymore. It was just awful! I'd done a number of things in preparation for this. I made the decision a few days before I actually called him. First I had to get somebody for that job and it was not easy to find someone to fill it.
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