

B O O K 4 0

JAMES WISHART

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Interview with James Wishart

by Elizabeth Balanoff

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I. I hope that you'll begin by giving *me* some of *your* family background. I know from talking to your wife that you have an interesting family history, so would you tell me about some of your ancestors, some of the rebel traditions in your family.

R.. I'm not sure how rebellious they were but the Wishart family, a Scottish family, does go back some distance in the application of the slogan, "Resistance to tyranny is Obedience to God." The family tradition points to one George Wishart who was extant early in the 16th Century. He was a Scotsman who went to Cambridge, received an education there, then moved on to the continent of Europe where he became a teacher for a young Calvinist named John Knox. Wishart then moved back into Scotland where he continued to preach the gospel of Calvinism with its concept of the propriety of industry, interest on debts, thriftiness and success in acquisition of worldly goods as evidence of the application of divine grace for salvation from the flames of hell fire. In doing this wishart came into conflict with the established Catholic hierarchy in Scotland then operating under the control of Mary Queen of Scots. In St. Andrews he was picked

up by the local Cardinal and thrown into a bottle dungeon where he subsisted for some days in misery. He was then taken out and burned at the stake in the fashion of the times. Apparently the Wisharts didn't like this very much, and the report is that a number of them came in from the countryside. With the assistance of stone masons who had constructed the Cardinal's castle, they worked their way in during some dark time of night, seized the Cardinal, stuck a rope around his neck and hung him from the front window of his castle. This was considered something of a triumph and Wishart qualified as a martyr in the battle against the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the feudal establishment which it represented at that time. My own conclusion from the whole thing is, it's very dangerous to mess around with us Wisharts.

I. I expect in the course of this tape you'll give me some more evidence to support that. Do you know when the first Wishart came to America?

R. It was some time before the American Revolution, about 1750. There were seven brothers who had emigrated from Scotland to northern Ireland, the Ulster area, and then moved on to the Colonies. They settled apparently in western Pennsylvania and they all fought in the American Revolution and I suspect, also, in terms of the locality and the social structure, in the Whiskey Rebellion which took place later in that part of Pennsylvania.

Then the family moved on to Ohio. My own grandfather

apparently was a bright young man. He decided, since farming was a fairly tough racket, to become a minister of the United Presbyterian Church which stemmed back to the Scottish Covenanters. The United Presbyterian Church in which my father was a minister was distinguished from the Presbyterian Church, so far as I was able to determine, only by the fact that the United Presbyterians sang only psalms in church, psalms that were of divine origin, whereas we Presbyterians, (I'm technically a Presbyterian), sang hymns written by the hand of man.

Let's shift back. My grandfather then, having been to the Seminary and acquired the proper training in Latin and Greek and Hebrew, became a pastor of small country churches. He was the pastor of a church in Xenia, Ohio at the time of the Civil War. He had refused communion to members of the church who had voted as Copperheads, in effect sending them to hell. Finally he was forced out of southern Ohio and moved on to Ontario, Ohio which was farther north. There he was the minister for a group of tight fisted Scottish farmers who observed the Sabbath rigidly and turned out rich crops.

I. It sounds like your family were Union people in the Civil War.

R. Yes, some of them were friends of John Brown.

I. Personal friends?

R. Yes, they were strong abolitionists.

Do you know very much about their abolitionist

activities?

R. Not very much. One close relative in Ohio operated a station of the underground railroad. The story is that he had a group of slaves hidden down in the cellar when some heavily armed southern characters showed up. In full hospitality he invited the southerners in for a total breakfast. A total breakfast then could run eight or nine courses and better than an hour. After breakfast of course there must be prayers. These lasted for about thirty or forty minutes. Meanwhile the slaves had moved about fifteen miles down the road to freedom.

I. So your family were Calvinists, they were revolutionaries, they were abolitionists.

R. Well I suppose their position after the Civil War would not be totally progressive. Remember the guy who attacked a presidential candidate because he stood for "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion"?

I. Yes, that was in line with your family tradition, too.

R. Yes. My father's first vote was for a Prohibitionist candidate for the presidency. He himself was the youngest of twelve children.

I. Your father was a minister, too, wasn't he?

R. Yes. My grandfather at a certain point lost his church in Ohio and moved to Monmouth, Illinois. It's near Galesburg. He allowed himself to be cared for by the five or

six daughters who had not yet married. One daughter had been on the point of being married and was very much in love with a young man. It turned out that the man was a Presbyterian where she was the daughter of a United Presbyterian minister, so the marriage couldn't take place.

I. So that was your aunt who didn't marry because of slight religious differences.

R. Yes. My father, who I said was the youngest of twelve, went to college in Monmouth. He had worked in a bookstore there for a number of years in order to get enough money to put himself through. He was a highly competent student and an orator in the style of the times, which as you know was flamboyant and rhetorical. In his senior year he won the Interstate Oratorical Contest at Indianapolis with an oration titled, "The Policy of Richelieu." Exactly what he meant by that I'm not quite sure. I remember reading the oration when I was a kid. This was considered a major triumph, about as high as any undergraduate could aspire to at the time. Then he went on to the theological seminary in Pittsburgh to become an ordained United Presbyterian minister. He operated in Pittsburgh at the Eleventh Presbyterian Church, taking responsibility for organizing the thing, financing and directing the construction of the church. I remember the church itself. It was not a large place, but it was pleasant.

I. Is that where you were born?

R. Yes, I was born in Pittsburgh. In 1914 my father accepted a call to the Second Presbyterian Church here in Chicago. This meant jumping the fence from the United Presbyterian to the Presbyterian Church.

I. And he did?

R. Yes, the fleshpots were pretty strong, I guess.

I. How did his sister feel about that?

R. He was their favorite and there were no recriminations that I know of. His two brothers remained United Presbyterian ministers, one in Pittsburgh and another a professor in the theological seminary in Xenia, Ohio.

I. How many children were born to your father and mother?

R. I was the first and then my sister Sarah was born two and a half years later. Both of us were Pittsburgh products. Then the daughter Josepine was born here in Chicago, that was 1915. She's now in Evanston, she teaches at Kendall College. She has four very pleasant children I'm very happy to associate with.

I. You were the oldest. Did you feel like typical preacher's kids? That is did you have to be models for the other children?

R. No. We lived at 1823 Prairie Avenue in Chicago and there weren't any other kids. There was a Catherine Crerar in a house two doors down. She was under very severe restrictions with nursemaids and governesses. I remember a

fairly bleak period in my childhood when I'd go to school and I'd have a few hassles around the schoolyard, but that was about the range of my social relationships. I'd come home and I'd read most of the rest of the day.

I. Did you have to do any kind of work at home?

R. No, the work ethic apparently had dropped out of the Wishart tradition at that point, I'm sure unfortunately.

I. So you were a big reader then as a child. What kind of things did you like to read?

R. Youth' s Companion, Boy Scout publications, naval heroes of the American Revolution, the usual sort of boy books. I can't even remember. Then I got into Kipling and Sir Walter Scott which I read fairly extensively. And Conan Doyle.

I. Tell me a little bit about your mother, too.

R. She was born on a farm in Chehalis, Washington.

I. So she came from quite a distance away. How did she get to the middle West? Did her family move or did your father meet her somewhere?

R. My father met her at some young people's religious convocation, I'm not sure what it was.

I. She was undoubtedly a Presbyterian, too.

No, she was Episcopalian. Her father was born someplace in the Boston area, I'm not quite sure where, and tried to enlist in the Civil War at the age of sixteen. They told him no, you're too young, and so he moved west and walked

most of the way with a wagon train from St. Jo, Missouri to Washington state where he established title, I'm not sure how, to a large farm that specialized in raising hops for, the production of beer, something my father has never greatly emphasized. My mother's mother died when she was ten or eleven years old. Her father died a few years later and she was brought up in Tacoma by an older sister.

I. What were the relationships within your family between brother and sisters and parents? Were any particular children favorites of one parent or another, or did you have a particular favorite sister?

R. There were the classical tensions I think between myself and the older sister. At least I remember being told to stop teasing her, don't pull her hair, stop this, that and the other. Jo, who was much younger, I took more of a paternal feeling toward her. So far as my parents were concerned there was no visible discrimination among the kids. I think my mother somehow felt uncomfortable with me in my teen age years, I'm not sure why. I'm afraid I concealed too well my affection for both sisters.

I. Did you have a preference for anybody in the family?

R. Well of course my mother was a very firm, very good, and a very devoted woman. My father was more of a charismatic type, he was full of jokes and stories and anecdotes. The evening dinner would be a big performance by Dr. Wishart. If we had guests he would allow the guests some remarks, but

generally speaking he controlled the flow of conversation.

So he was the star of the family. Did you spend your entire growing up years on Prairie Avenue?

R. No, from 1914 to 1918 I lived there and I went to this damned Harvard School on the South Side?

I. What was that? Was that a public or a private school?

R. No, a private school. It was Teutonic. My father first sent me to the University of Chicago lab school. They had me making clay objects there and dancing in Indian moccasins. He decided this was not for his son, so I was shifted to the Harvard School. There the tradition was much more Teutonic and intellectual rigidity was much more dominant.

I. Which did you prefer?

R. I was unhappy with them both, I was not a good student.

I. But you were an avid reader on your own. Were you like most boys, you didn't want to be a good student? You had other things on your mind?

R. I don't know.

I. Were you a Boy Scout?

R. In Wooster I was. I established service as a Tenderfoot and went to a few meetings. Then after one meeting I was drinking at a water fountain when one of my young companions came and rammed my head down in the fountain. I

broke off a front tooth. My mother was aghast and in tears over it. After that I didn't go to Boy Scouts anymore. That was a later period, 1914 to 1918 we were in Chicago. That's when I went to the Harvard School. This Bobby Franks was one of my classmates.

I. Did you know him well?

R. No, I remember him though.

I. What do you remember about him?

R. He had very shiny black hair and wore very neat little suits with silk bow ties. I thought of him as a bit of a sissy. It was much later, 1922 or 1923 that he was killed by older students from the school.

In 1918 my father got into a hassle with a few of the old line people in the Second Presbyterian Church who wanted to hold the thing as the exclusive preserve of the Armour's and the Pullmans and the Blackstones. His idea was to expand it a bit as a community center. Obviously types other than Chicago millionaires were moving into the area quite rapidly. There was a hassle over that and he was offered a position as president of Wooster College, a Presbyterian school in Ohio. He accepted that in 1918, so we moved from Chicago to Ohio. Wooster was a town of ten thousand, a pleasant Ohio country town.

I. It must have been quite different.

R. Yes, it was a great relief to me.

I. You liked it better?

R. Yes, there were kids around. I could walk to school and didn't have to ride the street car thirty-five minutes back and forth every day.

I. Did you make any special friends or just a lot of different friends?

R. Not any large group to begin with. Many of my friends were kids who were the sons of missionaries. Wooster had homes where missionaries could park their kids for four or five years while they went back to do the Lord's service in China or Africa or elsewhere, and I tended to go around with them. My closest friend in high school was the son of missionaries to India.

I. They must have been almost looking for another family themselves. Were they, in a sense?

R. Yes they were. And when I was about twelve or thirteen years old another missionary kid and I set up an amateur radio station. It operated with a great roar and electronic fireworks. Then we moved on to a vacuum tube. 88MF were our call letters. Because I had started out in this progressive school I never really learned the alphabet until I studied the Morse Code. I knew all the letters but I didn't know quite what their sequence might be, so in learning the code I also learned the alphabet.

I. What subjects did you like best in school?

R. I didn't care for any of them. Rat says don't downgrade yourself, but the fact is I was not a good student,

C+, B- as I remember it.

I. When did you become interested in being a good student? You must have become one at some point because you went pretty far.

R. Well I never really put much effort into schoolwork until I got into graduate school. Among other things we had to present a seminar paper once a week. You wrote the damn thing out and then read it: then everyone discussed it and tried to tear it to bits. This was some real peer group pressure to get going. I did make up for some lost time then.

I. Did your family stay in Wooster permanently?

R. Yes.

I. And then where did you first go to college?

R. At Wooster. That was not my first choice by any means.

I. That was a family decision?

R. That was a family decision. They said if you want us to pay for your education it's got to be Wooster. I wasn't in any position to be properly independent and say I'll pay for my own education.

I. What did you major in at Wooster?

R. I majored in English. It was the line of least resistance.

I. At that time maybe. Then where did you go after that? You went to graduate school where?

R. Princeton. I spent two years there.

What did you get, a Masters Degree?

R. I got a Masters, yes. I had taken all the course work for a Ph.D. but I have never taken my prelims.

I. Why did you quit, because you weren't interested?

R. No I wasn't basically interested, though teaching was always a challenge. The first job I was interested in was when I went to work for the Rubber Workers. There was something that really did call for throwing all available energies into the work.

I. Before we start on your work life let me ask if there were any important influences in your youth, any individual people beside your father, any teachers or older friends?

R. I suppose a man named Howard Lowery, who was the bright man of the school and a top notch English scholar.

I. You took his courses?

R. Yes, one course. out of thankfulness to my father who had done him a number of favors I became sort of a protege of his. He gave me a little coaching to help me make the Wooster High School debate team in my sophomore year.

I. Did you like debating?

R. Yes, I liked that.

I. The oratorical tradition passed on down?

R. It gave an outlet for various forms of exhibitionism, rage and indignation.

I. I get this feeling that you had a good deal of repressed indignation of some kind, feelings that were

repressed. what were they, just normal youthful adolescent feelings?

R. I guess they were. I had a feeling that I could never really match up.

I. To your father?

R. To his expectations. Of course my father was massive competition.

I. I think all oldest sons feel that way, perhaps all sons in general.

R. My sister Jo once said, "You were the battering ram, in a sense you opened the way for the rest of us."

I. The oldest child.

R. I established that certain books could be read, that certain things could be done but not without some bloodshed and some psychic warfare.

I. What kinds of things did you argue about, what books for instance or what things that you wanted to do that your parents didn't want you to do.

R. Oh modern novels, I can't remember what they were. Then I read the American Mercury which became later a very nasty publication but for a time did carry some very important stuff.

My old man was a Presbyterian minister with some of the doctrinaire positions and rigidities that flow from that, but at the same time he was a rational human being. When people came to him and said that Jim is involved in very

dangerous left wing activities he'd say, "Well Jim is serving God in his own way."

I. That's pretty broad minded for that era.

R. It represented a recognition of individual independence and difference.

I. You said he was a Wilsonian Democrat. Would you consider him a part of the Progressive Movement of that period in other ways? You could be a lot of different things, I suppose, and be a Wilsonian Democrat. Did he ever show an interest in labor legislation in the early period?

R. He was not anti-labor, I'll put it that way. I remember he came home one night from the Second Presbyterian Church where they had been doing some rebuilding and said that the business agent for such and such a craft union came in and asked for money on the line. He was indignant over it, but it didn't translate into any generalized attack on unions as such.

I. Criticism of one man's ethics.

R. He thought he was a crook, a dirty citizen. I'm sure he was.

I. But you did indicate that in Chicago he was interested in opening up the church to poorer members of the community.

R. Yes, he talked about the Social Gospel. He would go down for street corner meetings on Sunday nights and he would go around to prisons and what not.

- I. He did quite a bit then. Would he be in that Rauschenbusch group of Social Gospel ministers or simply not hostile to them, moderately friendly.
- R. I doubt that, not hostile, no. In 1923 I think it was, William Jennings Bryan attacked the college of Wooster because it was teaching evolution, particularly Dr. Mateer, a highly venerated teacher. My father resisted it in a decent way. So at the Presbyterian General Assembly, which in effect is the General Convention of the Church, my father ran for Moderator and Bryan ran for Moderator and my father won out.
- I. Did that issue come into play in the election?
- R. Oh yes, the issue was evolution. Should the church colleges be forced to forego the teaching of evolution?
- I. Was it an overwhelming victory or close?
- R. It wasn't overwhelming, it was very close. Apparently there was some sort of a big dinner afterward at which Bryan spoke and my father spoke and the report is my father came out top dog. He was a real orator and could handle himself.
- I. Did he ever tell you exactly what he said, what his arguments were? Were they along the Darrow line?
- R. No he didn't. Some of them were, in fact he did supply some of the material which was handed to Darrow in the Scopes trial. I think Darrow was in touch with my Dad and somebody at the University of Chicago.

I. There's a book by a character named Clancy Sigal in which Pat and I are in a sense portrayed, though not in any total way. The one thing I resented about it was Sigal's quoting me as saying, "Well, when I think of the stuff I'm doing it must make my father turn in his grave to know it." I resented that.

I. You didn't think that it would make your father turn in his grave? It was really progression along the same lines?

R. In fact he took some pride in it. I'm sure it was after some emotional struggle.

I. What was the title of Sigal's book?

R. I think, Going Away.

I. Sigal probably didn't know you that well, did he? He was assuming that that was probably the kind of thing you would have said and quoting you as saying it?

R. I guess so. At the time I was alleged to have made the statement my father was still alive and well.

I. Did it cause hard feelings or did your father ever know about it?

R. He never knew. The book was published after he was dead.

I. But that wasn't in line with the way you felt about your father at the time?

R. No, no. There were other inaccuracies in Sigal's account, but this is the one that --

touched home with you. Well, I'm glad we got the chance to set the record straight. From the horse's mouth, that's not the way he felt about his father.

Now we left you with a Master's degree from Princeton and you did most of the work for a Ph. D. and then what happened? Did you leave Princeton?

R. I became sort of an academic tramp. I had a teaching assistanceship in Western Reserve for one year and at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill for another year. It was there that I first began to get really involved in left activities.

I. In Chapel Hill? What kind of left activities?

R. The Textile Strike of 1934 had just been broken and a bunch of textile workers were being railroaded through the charges of using dynamite against their mill. So there was a committee set up. We worked with the committee; they organized meetings at Chapel Hill and tried to raise money. There were a number of us involved. We coursed up and down the landscape and all around.

I. You say we. Does that mean other young professors?

R. Yes, professors and a guy named Don West. I don't know whether you know him or not, Highlander Folk School? And there was a grad student in history named C. Vann Woodward. He seemed at the time to be a totally bright and totally decent guy. His later career certainly proved this true.

I. Did you get into any trouble doing this?

R. Not specifically, no. We did have a debate. I do get involved in these damned debates. It was on the campus, it was myself, a guy from Notre Dame who was a former Jesuit, and a former Jesuit is very much anti-Jesuit as you know. We were on one Side and a kid from the American Liberty League and a professor of political science were on the other side. The Proposition was Resolved, That the Problems of the South Cannot be Solved without Socialism.

I. Was this at the university?

R. Yes, at the university.

I. Who won that debate?

Surprisingly enough, we were not lynched. We became fairly popular figures on campus.

I. That was a victory --to advocate socialism in the South and not be lynched? Was that the main left activity you got involved in at Chapel Hill?

R. Yes. There was some vague work with sharecroppers, but it didn't amount to very much.

I. What was it, educational work?

R. I can't remember. It was organizational.

I. How long were you at Chapel Hill?

R. One year, and after Chapel Hill I went to Akron.

I. And that was the beginning of your real involvement. Were you at the university?

R. Yes, at the university teaching English, principally

freshman English but a couple of sophomore and senior courses.

I. This time what was it that got you involved in other than academic things?

R. Let's say by that time I was an organized person and I accepted assignments of various types which included working with rubber workers. Infra-structure is the current term for it. I'd done some economic study, so I held sessions in value, price, profit, a sort of ABC's.

I. The ABCs of socialism to the rubber workers in other words.

R. I found some very good people there, a number of whom a few years before had been members of the Ku Klux Klan.

I. Really? They changed that much that fast?

R. They were guys out of Kentucky and Tennessee. A few years of depression and the realities of life and class structure began to come through to them very vigorously.

I : You didn't teach these classes in the union structure, did you? It was all in private homes?

R. Private homes. And I worked on leaflets and shop papers, etc.

I. Did you hand out leaflets?

R. I didn't hand them out. I was in a fairly sensitive position because any conviction on overt left activity would result in my discharge from the Akron school.

I. So you must have been working very hard to do both and

keep your two lives separate, so to speak. You weren't married yet, that comes later?

R. No, I was married in 1938.

I. Okay, why didn't you continue doing both, working at the university and teaching workers on the side? What happened next?

R. I mentioned to you earlier off the tape that I got involved again in a debate on the question of the Spanish Civil War, a debate which overwhelmingly I won. I think the audience was biased to begin with. But the opposition speaker was a local judge who was also a member of the Board of Directors of Akron University, so the Dean called me in within a few days after the debate and suggested that it might be well for me to spend the next year or so completing my work for the Ph.D.

I. They weren't ready to keep you. Where was the debate, was it at the university?

R. No it was at a hall down town. It was a good turnout.

I. So you won the debate and you lost your job. Was the crowd mostly workers or students or a mixed group?

R. Some workers. There were many middle class types. You may remember the League Against War and Fascism.

I. Yes. Were there any people who had relatives in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from that area or was that mostly from the East?

A few, yes.

I. So then what did you do after you lost that job?

R. The job hadn't been lost. I was able to complete the school year.

I. Yes, but the following year you had to go somewhere else.

R. I was offered a job in the Education and Research Department of the Rubber Workers within a month or so after this ultimatum came down, so I took that job and to hell with it.

I. That's the beginning of your union career then.

R. Yes, it was union education to begin with. I'd go out and run full day sessions. I don't know whether you remember Frank Fern back or not, but he ran similar sessions for the steelworkers on handling grievances.

I. Is that the kind of thing you taught, too, the grievance procedure?

R. Yes.

I. How did you learn all that? That's not taught in English courses. Where did you learn this? You just got a book and learned it, or from the contract?

R. No, I'd been working with these guys who were in the union.

I. But you just learned it from them or the contracts. They didn't have contracts yet, did they?

In 1937 the industry had been organized and was under

contract and they were handling grievances. I learned a good deal about it. I was a fairly quick study at that point. In teaching them about handling grievances I also taught how to conduct the class struggle in the shop. I used this as a starting point.

I. How long did you do that?

R. For a year or so, perhaps longer. It was the end of 1939 before I moved on.

I. Was there anything of particular importance that occurred during this period while you were with the rubber workers? Or was it mainly a matter of your education in the labor movement?

R. There were no major strikes.

I. No internal union disputes of any great magnitude?

R. There were some internal union disputes.

I. Were you involved in them?

R. Unofficially, yes.

I. Want to tell me about it?

R. I can't remember the details. It was the period's usual right-left confrontation, though not nearly so nasty as in so many other unions. I remember we came out of the 1939 convention with the whole progressive slate elected to the Executive Board and all the key resolutions passed. It didn't hold for a long time, but it was a temporary and gratifying victory.

What made you decide to leave the rubber workers?

R I was offered a job with the UAW-CIO at the end of '39.
I. Alright, I think it might be a good place to stop for
today.

May 27, 1980

I. Alright, last time when we were talking about your early life we skipped rather quickly through several cities that you grew up in, and I wonder if you might want to go back and tell me a little bit more of what you remember of Pittsburgh and Chicago and Wooster.

R. I remember Pittsburgh as living upto its title at the time as a smokey city. The skies were almost always gray. I remember that about a block away from my aunt's home in Pittsburgh there was a bluff overlooking the Ohio River and I would walk out there often. Looking down over the bluff to the river below with railroad tracks and steel mills and activity going on, it looked like the operation of some sort of hell. But it was a matter of great fascination to me. The whole thing seemed to be a vicious gash in the earth with horrible things going on down below. This is the memory I have of it.

 There were some pleasant memories of Pittsburgh, too. I remember my father taking me to the movies for the first time. Of course there was no sound. I remember concerts by the riverside. The Pittsburgh Symphony played there in the summer. People sat out and had drinks, soft drinks I presume, and listened to the orchestra. That was pleasant. I remember driving around Riverview Park which was on the north side of Pittsburgh. And I remember the first automobile ride I had. Some fairly affluent one of my

father's parishioners came with one of these 1912 vintage cars and we had a drive through the park. I was fascinated by the equipment. My father often took me to watch the Pirates play ball. They had a bow-legged shortstop named Honey Wagner who remains one of the myth's giants in the history of baseball. In general, although Pittsburgh was a desolate place in many ways it didn't quite have the sense of hostility which I later felt in Chicago.

I. What do you mean by that?

R. In Chicago I had the feeling that the whole town was essentially turned against any individual human being, that it was a hostile environment, one in which human flesh and blood didn't count for very much, an accurate impression I may say judged by later and more scientific calculations. In a sense I lived in fear of Chicago, a sort of sense that the total situation was beyond anyone's control.

I. Was it the size that made the difference?

R. I think it was the size and noise. I remember, for example, we went to the two armistice celebrations, the first false one and the second real one on November 11. The crowds were gigantic, crazy, noisy. After the second one I came home in tears. My father said, "What's wrong with you? Your country has won a great victory." I didn't know what was wrong, but I guess I was really frightened by the manifestation of what appeared to be vast inhumanity that I saw in Chicago.

I. Then you felt this always in Chicago?

R. Yes I did. Of course, we lived a very isolated life in Chicago. We were there as sort of the final remnants of the upper crust which had lived on Prairie Avenue. Mrs. Blackstone was still there and we visited her occasionally and Mrs. Pullman. I remember once I went to a dinner at the Pullman house with my father, and my mother was out of town for some reason. Mrs. Pullman pointed out that I had round toed shoes. She said, "I don't like round toed shoes." And I got involved in the elevator, I guess it was properly called a lift. I got the damn thing stuck between floors and there were a whole series of butlers and servants and major domos and God knows what not, sort of circling around, I'm sure saying what the devil the brat is doing here. Finally I was pulled out, but I didn't enjoy it somehow.

I. Do you think you felt caught between the upper class and the lower class somewhat, or were you aware of classes that much?

R. I wasn't aware of classes. I just felt I didn't really belong much of anyplace. For example, I learned to swim not in the old swimming hole but in the University Club. My father was given an honorary membership. And in September or October of 1914 I remember my father was given a Cadillac car by the church in order to carry through his rounds of calling on parishioners. We had a picture of the family in the car in the Chicago Tribune one time.

I. You mentioned that your father wanted to bring more of the ordinary people into the church and that it caused conflict with the other members.

R. Yes.

I. Was he able to bring these other people in?

R. To a certain extent. He was able to build a gymnasium and to start a community center, but I guess by the time he moved forward resistance developed, and a man named Dave McBirney led the oppositon to a union contract at a session of the church. He was not thrown out, but things were made a bit unpleasant for him.

I. He felt like he didn't belong either then.

R.. Yes. The Second Presbyterian Church, as you know, is a beautiful church. Byrne Jones windows and all kinds of pre-Raphaelite decor.

I. What else can you remember about your Chicago days.

R. I remember once that the furnace at 1823 Prairie Avenue broke down, so we spent a few days at a hotel. It turned out it was the Hotel Metropole, later known as the headquarters for Al Capone. It was at Twenty-third St. and Michigan. There was no evidence of Capone around there then, although Bathhouse John and I think Big Jim Colisimo were still legendary mythic figres in the folklore of the area.

I. Did you ever see them?

R. No, I never saw them. Our life was a peaceful one. There was no burglary or anything else in the area where we

were living. The precision of the real estate interests was fairly obvious even then. They took these magnificent old houses and turned them either into publishing houses or rented them out to black families. Of course this was the block busting technique which has been applied on a wider and wider basis as the foundation of progress in Chicago.

I. Yes, it's gone on for many years since then. Did you ever feel hostility from that poorer group of people? You seemed to be very much affected emotionally by the hostility of the rich people around you toward other people.

R. No I never felt any hostility from the poorer people. I didn't have any opportunity much for a relationship with working people, but the conductors on streetcars were all friendly. I'd kid around with them and they'd make as to punch me on the jaw and I would punch them back on the ride to school. It was relatively friendly. I'm sure right now no one would send a six or seven year old kid by himself on a streetcar ride through the southern part of Chicago, but there was never any problem. It was a relatively tranquil time in other words, though even then I did have the sense of menace, that there were dangers, there were things hiding in the dark.

I. What was it about the crowd? You talked about their in humanity. What kind of things did they say or do that seemed to bother you?

R. They were yelling, screaming, cavorting. Many of

them were drunk, I suppose. It was a scene of bedlam in many ways.

I. I imagine that the armistice would be.

R. Everyone was letting go.

I. Any other particular memories about Chicago?

R. I remember the smell of the stockyards on warm summer afternoons. It was evident

I. Even in your neighborhood?

R. Yes, even where the Armour's and the others lived.

I. That might have driven them out even if the real estate people hadn't.

R. The basis of their wealth was evident to the nose. Did you ever see the stockyards?

R. No I never went through the stockyards. That is I never went through until I was working for the unions here. Then I went through a tour of the Swift's stockyards. That was about it.

I. Now what about Wooster? Wooster's quite a contrast to Chicago.

R. Wooster's quite a contrast. Of course my father and my mother felt Wooster was a great deal of a country town and they smirked a little bit about some of the slow going rural ways. But they enjoyed it and I enjoyed it too, in the sense that I did have an opportunity to play with kids my own age, and the tensions of the city were not there. It was an easy walk to school, a somewhat longer walk but not difficult to

high school. So in Wooster it was relatively tranquil. I did form some friendships there which I had been denied completely in Chicago.

I. You mentioned that you were particularly friendly with the children of missionaries. Have you any other recollections of life in wooster? How big was Wooster at the time you were there?

R. It was about ten to twelve thousand.

I. That's a pretty good sized town.

R. It was a substantial small town, and of course the college added some cultural verve to it.

I. Did it have any industry?

R. They had small industry, a rubber plant, I think a truck plant. They're still making trucks for the Christian Slugger Trucks for U.S. Mail delivery, but it was primarily a farming center. The farmland around was rich farm land, and many of the farmers were Amish or Mennonite.

I. Did they mingle with the other people?

R. Not particularly. No they were totally to themselves, but they would drive in with their little black buggies and their long beards and their black costumes. I'm sure they wouldn't regard them as costumes but as proper working clothes.

I. What kind of people did the college itself attract? Were they mostly Presbyterian, or did they attract a kind of cross section of young people?

R. They were mostly Presbyterians. They tended to be small town, suburban, professional, middle class types. Wooster was a liberal arts college, and most of the students expected to go onto become teachers, doctors or lawyers. It was professional preparation, and academically the school was not the highest level but it was up fairly well. It had been down considerably in the period of the regime prior to my father's coming. Then he'd been able to upgrade it academically a great deal. Of course as a college student in Wooster there were a number of conflicts and problems between myself and my father.

I. Tell me about them.

R. Well first of all I was editor of a literary magazine which we started, called The Unicorn, which went through all of seven or eight issues before it finally expired. But there was one issue in which a roommate of mine wrote an editorial questioning the immortal life. My father was totally indignant over this. He bought up the whole issue of the publication and had it destroyed.

I. So other people never saw it. Did he make you cease publication?

R. No he didn't apply any discipline to anyone directly involved. He just made sure that the publication was not circulated.

I. Was he angry at you?

R. I think he was more grieved than angry probably. He

was very tolerant and compassionate so far as I was concerned. I'm sure I was a matter of considerable agony to him from time to time. He couldn't quite understand how this creature had emerged from the Wishart household.

I. He must have been pretty tolerant or you wouldn't have even tried that. I know many preachers' children who wouldn't have dared considering doing that in years later than that. Were there any other problems?

R. He fired a professor of philosophy who questioned the virgin birth or something of that sort, and there were a few demonstrations in his support in which I participated.

I. In support of the professor?

Yes, the professor.

I. Did that cause tension at home?

R. That caused tension at home, though nobody ever said a word about it. In my junior and senior year I went to live in one of the men's dormitories. Dormitories were strictly segregated, as you can understand, in that day. My college career was fairly undistinguished I should say. My grade level was not high. I did make the freshman football team, and I was a reserve sophomore and junior on the varsity. My senior year when the prospects were fairly good for making the team, I decided the hell with it and I went out for the debate team instead, where I was accepted as a top level performer. I was among the top one, two, or three, I'm not sure which, in college.

- I. I think you told me last time that your father was opposed to William Jennings Bryan's views about evolution, so he really in a sense, for his time, took a middle path.
- R. Yes he did. He was considered a liberal among Presbyterian ministers of the day. And he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly as a liberal and as an opponent of William Jennings Bryan.
- I. And you put him in jeopardy by being a radical, I suppose.
- R. Probably.
- I. Is there anything else you remember about Wooster?
- R. Not particularly. I was a fairly inhibited character in a sense. I didn't have a date until the end of my sophomore year in college. I was just too intimidated to ask *anyone*.
- I. Was that normal for the times? At what age did most people date?
- R. Oh most of them dated in high school -- fifteen, sixteen.
- I. So you were a little slow getting to that.
- R. Yes. I had a fairly intense relationship with a young lady my junior and senior years which came to nothing.
- I. But it was an emotional experience, your first serious emotional experience?
- R. Yes.
- I. Were you traumatized by it in any way? Most people

are, I think, to some extent.

R. I suppose so.

I. Particularly if they don't date a lot or if they tend to be deep in their feelings.

R. I was totally unorganized and totally vulnerable. I didn't handle it well.

I. How did it end? Was it because college was over and you drifted apart or did you really break off the relationship?

R. I continued to see her for sometime and it gradually dwindled away.

I. Then you went away to school. Is there anything that you've thought of that you'd like to add on your later school experiences?

R. I enjoyed Princeton, I suppose, because in a sense the graduate students were at least on the vestibule of acceptance in the academic community. That is we would have small seminars, just five or six, seven or eight guys with a professor for three or four hours and I was responsible for about a seminar paper each week. I sweated it, too. To begin with my production was fairly low level, but I picked up fairly rapidly until I became a fairly competent craftsman.

I. So you were both more challenged and more accepted.

R. Yes, more challenged and more accepted, and of course the other students were for the most part very bright young men. I didn't spend my off duty hours much with English

students.

I. Who did you pal around with at Princeton?

R. My best friend was a guy taking philosophy, a specialist in Hegel and a little of a specialist in some of the reversals of Hegel carried through by other German philosophers whom I shall not name. We had many discussions of that type. The Depression had broken out and I had some sense of guilt being in graduate school in a fairly luxurious situation. I knew that the kids I played football with in high school were working in factories and some of them were being killed in factories or were unemployed.

I. You kept up with these old friends?

R. Not directly, but I was aware of them. I was never very good at keeping up with friends unfortunately. I'm a lousy correspondent.

I. But you still worry about them.

R. I worry about them and I had a sense of what the hell right do you have? You're really no brighter than they are. Why the hell are you here and they're not?

I. So you spent the rest of your life making up for it?

R. In a way.

I. Last time we were just about to talk about your experiences with the autoworkers. Do you want to switch to that now?

R. Yes, we can witch to that now.

- I. You said you were offered a job by the auto workers. In what capacity was that -- research or education?
- R. I was offered the job initially as Research and Education Director. For awhile I did serve in both capacities, research and education. However, I was presented with an assistant named Richard L.G. Deveral, who was a local activist in the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. After some maneuvering, including some assistance from members of the Socialist Workers Party in Akron, Deveral was able to shove me out as Education Director and take over the job himself. I was then Research Director.
- I. So they became two jobs.
- R. They became two jobs, he had one and I had the research job. Frankly, in some ways I was happier with the research job than the education job.
- I. But that meant that he had more contact with the people.
- R. It meant that he had wider field contact. I'd run education conferences, and I suspect that one of my mistakes, if you call it a mistake, had been to bring in characters like Phil Foner who lectured on labor history. He was gigantically popular, he was worshipped almost by the students at the camp, but there were repercussions afterward. Who the hell brought this commie in here and why?
- I. Now in recent days the Socialist Workers Party

students in college are admirers of Phil Foner. In those days I guess the left wing factions were --

R. I was a goddam Stalinist as far as they were concerned, and anything went.

I. So the two groups automatically lined up on opposite teams.

R. Yes. They had been fairly active in Akron, two guys one named B.J. Widdick and another named Chalmers Stewart. Chalmers Stewart was in the teachers union with me and we ran against each other for president of the local A.F. of T. We tied in three elections and the fourth election one of my people was absent so he got the job. He was the president of the local union, but it was an honor that didn't really carry much weight with it.

I. Now when you went to work for the autoworkers union, what city were you in?

R. I had been living in Akron. When I went to work for the auto workers I moved into Detroit.

I. But you had your old battles with the Socialist Workers people that went back to your teaching days.

R. Yes, the vendetta extended back.

I. Why don't you say a little bit about the state of affairs in the Auto Workers Union at the point where you went into it. What year was it?

R. It was 1939. Here in a sense I'm getting into the causes of Reuther's ultimate victory and takeover in the Auto

workers Union. As you know, there had been a sharp factional conflict between Homer Martin and other elements in the union, particularly the left elements, the Reuther elements, with swing centrist groups in a sense carrying the balance of power. This had operated through '37 and '38. In '39 there was a union victory in the General Motors Tool and Die strike, a victory won by the skilled tool and die workers, many of whom were Scottish from Glasgow and some of whom were German, good Social Democrats. The skilled workers were more advanced even than the production workers, at least in this sector of the industry. They gave the U.A.W. the margin of victory to retain its bargaining position in General Motors, the foundation on which the U.A.W. -C.I.O. reestablished itself after the wrecking and ravaging done by Homer Martin and company.

I don't need to go into the origins of the battle between Martin and the rest of the U.A.W., about which I had no direct knowledge at all. But when I was hired early in 1939 the new union was first emerging. It had been formed, its structure had been established in the Cleveland convention of 1939. It was a structure established on the basis of very hard bargaining by Reuther, with compliance by Murray and Hillman on what was objectively an anti-left bias. In a sense that Cleveland convention, with the blessings of Hillman and Murray, awarded the U.A.W. to Reuther, even though at the time Reuther was simply a vice president. R.J.

Thomas, over the objections of most delegates, was made president. Addes, who was a really popular figure who had been the leader in the battle against Martin, was secretary-treasurer. Although he did not hold top office, Reuther did have control of the basic strategic sector of the union, the General Motors Department. He became responsible for handling the grievances and the negotiations for a majority of the members of the union who worked in General Motors plants. This, of course, gave him immense leverage which he was smart, shrewd, industrious and bright enough to apply in a very total way.

In the second place, in the division of departments Reuther was given the public relations department of the union. This is an element which at least those historians whom I've followed on the U.A.W. totally ignored. But Reuther brought into the post a bright, nasty little character from the New York Post named Eddie Levinson. Levinson was an industrious guy with wide ranging connections throughout the nation's press and he played the Reuther theme. He opened the way for Reuther on all kinds of interview shows, statements, public events, etc. Reuther himself, of course, had a very live sense of public relations. In a sense he swam in a sea of public images, and his political sensitivity, which had been sharpened by many good people, became applied to the single cause of promoting Walter. This became the mission, the purpose, the sole concern of his life, and he went

at it with real effectiveness.

In the third place, Reuther did have this ability to bargain and to exploit the vast pressures operating then of anti-communism, which was the form in which anti-unionism existed and operated. So this combination, number one the basic element that Reuther was on the side of the big battallions, whatever his effervescence about socialism might be, he was on the side of big business, was accepted by big business as the preferable alternative to leftism or anarchism or business as usual tradition in the auto industry. In addition to that gigantic leverage he had control of the strategic General Motors Department. He had full access to the Public Relations Department, which meant avenues open to the press, to the ADA, to the liberal groups.

I remember early in 1940 I was asked to work up material for a pamphlet that I.F. Stone was writing for walter entitled, "Fifty Thousand Planes a Year." This was a pamphlet demonstrating how the automobile industry could be converted instantly to the production of war planes in support of the cause of freedom and democracy throughout. the world. This was a fairly widely circulated pamphlet at the time and in fact tended to establish by the pure power of initiative and action, without any vote by the International Executive Board or anything else, U. A. W. policy toward the war in the period.

The fact is that following the 1939 convention the

left tended to be in retreat. Its major leaders had been cut away from the center, had been sent out to the provinces, to the boondocks where they were isolated and could do no harm. Thomas and Addes, giving them credit for good will and decency, were not really competent trade unionists. At least they couldn't hold a candle to Walter in terms of tactical strategic operations. They were presumably at the control panels, so under the pressure of the anti-red hysteria, the Finnish War, the situation existing in the earlier phase of World War II prior to June 22, 1941, let's say there was some ambiguity in their attitude. Personally I felt very goddam uncomfortable when those Nazis were overrunning France and Belgium. I felt that was a dangerous thing in spite of the principle that there were just two imperialisms here and there wasn't a hell of a lot I could do about it.

Boasting very briefly, we did put out one pamphlet when I was Education Director on stewards, grievance handling and procedure. It was based on what I mentioned before, my experience in running stewards training courses and the discussions. It was titled, "How to Win for the Union", and we printed about a hundred thousand copies for the U.A.W. and on the second edition about a hundred thousand. Then other C.I.O. unions asked for copies of it, so we printed an additional two hundred thousand.

I. Do you have copies of it?

R. No I don't. I remember that it was reproduced by one of the California labor research outfits as an example, so there are probably copies of it around. It was, speaking modestly, fairly well written. No many-syllable words, but it was written with some sense of what went on.

I. How long did you function in both education and research before you became just one?

R. A little less than a year. Then to continue that story -- I've said my basic say on the U.A.W., but there are one or two things I should add in terms of the usual historical approach to what the hell happened in the U.A.W. in the war time period. It is, I think, an historical cliché to say that the left's adherence to a no-strike pledge is a suggestion of a labor management coexistence, cohabitation after the war reduced its strength or reduced its power in the union and opened the way to the ultimate defeat by Reuther. There's also a reference to Browder's proposal on incentive pay as an answer to the pay problems of workers. This proposal was made very much in the abstract without much of any sense of what really goes on in shops, particularly automobile shops. Sugar and I worked up a resolution a little unhappily in support of the position which was introduced to the International Executive Board by Frankenstein. It did not carry.

I. And you were not sorry.

R. We were not sorry. The fact is, of course, that if

you say incentive pay to auto workers it brought in a host of very unpleasant associations. In the Depression period the technique of wage cutting had not called for overall across the board wage cuts, but simply retiming of incentive jobs and reductions of pay of thirty, forty, fifty percent simply on a job by job basis through retiming of the jobs. That's point number one. Point number two, of course, an incentive system where there's no union to police it is essentially a vicious system. It can be vicious enough even with the best of unions operating.

I. Did those of you who knew the union situation put up a battle against that idea?

R. We weren't in a position to battle the fifth floor in New York City, but let's say we were in a mass organization situation and I was able to say I just am not able to put this across.

I. So you argued by dragging your heels.

R. But then as the situation developed in advance of the next convention of the U.A.W. I worked up a speech for Frankenstein in which he repudiated the whole idea of incentive pay and said, "Walter Reuther is the man who is attacking incentive pay. The battle against incentive pay like charity should begin at home. Look at Local 174. Local 174 has umpteen incentive pay contracts, some of them the most vicious in the whole file of the International Union. Here's item one, item, two, item three."

I. So you really attacked incentive pay in your own way.

R. And this speech by Frankenstein was effective. It took the wind out of Reuther's sails, and he was unable to carry any offensive on the thing at the convention. My own conclusion is that the political significance of the incentive pay thing was considerably exaggerated and the no-strike pledge, too.

I. Can you talk a little more on that no-strike pledge?

R. There were battles on the no-strike pledge, and of course in some local unions where management was nasty and provocative workers resorted to strike action. My own feeling is that Roy Hudson and some of the other boys were totally rigid in their approach to it. I remember Hudson coming in and lecturing about some strikers in the Dodge plant, "They're worse than scabs, they're no good sons of bitches." I felt at the time that Roy should bail out from a position of that sort, that after all these were workers and they did have reason to strike. In addition, for Christ's sake, there was a surplus of war production at that point and why run a good issue into the ground. That is almost all workers would support the no-strike pledge in principle, but when push came to shove if they were kicked around too much on the job they had the normal reflex, and it seemed to me that it follows that he should take this into consideration. He didn't particularly and of course there was a big hassle over

it.

At the Grand Rapids Convention of the U.A.W. in 1943 there were a whole series of resolutions presented in effect repudiating the no-strike pledge which was not solely by any means the product of the left wing. The no-strike pledge was official C.I.O. policy and represented policy applied without exception to the whole labor movement. The thing finally wound up with a decision to submit the issue to a referendum of the membership. The referendum was held, the vote was very low suggesting a lack of any really dynamic interest in the thing, but the no-strike pledge was upheld by a very comfortable majority. But at the Grand Rapids Convention the word was that Reuther could have been defeated. We were told that Reuther was vulnerable, we had the votes to lick the little red headed son of a bitch, but the left said we don't want to create a split, we don't want division, etc., so he was reelected. Now the preliminary estimate may have been a little generous.

I. You mean they may not have been able to defeat him?

R. They may not have been able to defeat him.

I. If they could have defeated him who would they have allied with?

I. That's the question! It would have been Addes and Thomas. They couldn't have put in a left winger. In other words the alternative to Reuther would have been someone who didn't really know how to handle the business of the union as

well as Reuther did, to be very candid with you. That is Reuther was good at handling grievances, although he allowed General Motors to go on, on a lily white employment policy year after year after year. But on grievances where it was clear cut Reuther was effective. He was good in public debates with C. E. Wilson of General Motors. He had the respect of many auto workers simply as a competent, bright guy who could give skill, knowledge, experience to the leadership of the union. This was part of his appeal to those who were not addicted to his particular ideology. Unfortunately the Addes-Thomas left wing forces really had no alternative to Reuther which could hold water, which was credible, and this became more and more evident as time went on. The point I want to make, though, is that in the war period actually the left gained rather than lost ground. By 1944 the left was in a much stronger position than it had been in 1940. By 1945 and '46 with the full blasts of red baiting, with some of the internal crazy policies of the reorganization in effect the left had lost ground.

I. It wasn't the no-strike pledge, it was the red baiting specifically then?

R. No, it was not the war time experience as such, it was the post war reaction.

I. The post war red scare.

R. Yes, that is in a sense the position of the left in the union reflected the position of the left in national

political life. And as I saw it in '46 and '47 the weakness of the left, its vulnerability was evidence that the whole country was going to the right, that we were in for a period of repression and scares, which I don't think it took any seventh son of a seer or prophet to determine. It was fairly obvious. But the U.A.W. in microcosm represented what was going on in the whole economy, the whole society. There was a tendency of course for some of the left to become self castigating, that it was our mistakes that were responsible. There were mistakes made. Of course the most obvious, in my opinion, was the decision to liquidate shop units, to eliminate the power structure of the organization.

I. Can you explain that a little bit? When was this decision made?

R. That was when the organization was to become a Communist Political Association and the word went down -- no more shop units. Dissolve them, we're a popular democratic organization. Nobody understood that.

I. But they did dissolve the shop units? Were they then community units or what?

R. Yes. Of course nobody went into community units. What the hell! It was simply a liquidation of the organization, that's what it amounted to. And I can't help feeling that the hand of the enemy had something to do with that decision in one form or another.

I. Do you have any ideas as to which form?

R. I don't know, I refuse to speculate, except of course Browder did get out of jail. There are sometimes deals made in which liberation comes on the basis of some specific understanding. Who knows! Except that when something smells you smell it. When wrecking is being done you can't help feeling perhaps it's not totally accidental, and it was wrecking in a sense. I don't think it would have made a hell of a lot of difference. The forces of the right wing were so overwhelming that sooner or later the left would have been pretty well crushed, but it could have had a longer play and a more effective one under better policy.

I. Were there some people who tried to keep shop units going in spite of the policy?

R. I think there were unofficially. Nobody would concede it.

I. But unofficially you suspect there were?

R. I suspect a guy named Billy Allen, who was a Daily Worker correspondent in Detroit and who was responsible for some activity in the Ford set-up, tried to keep something going. His instincts were very good. He had a firm sense of rank and file unionism. He never expressed any difference of opinion but I can't help assuming that he couldn't really swallow this. This was the point at which I had to express myself as being totally in conflict with the official position.

I. You did express yourself? What was the result of

that?

R. Zero.

I. Nobody cared?

R. Not that I know of.

I. But you made it clear how you felt.

R. I made it clear. There are one or two other points in evaluating the U.A.W., and I'm referring here to some of the historians on it. Number one, it's peculiar how Eddie Levinson has dropped out of all the accounts. He's the little man who wasn't there.

I. This is the man from the Post ?

R. That's right, who was really the public relations channel.

I. Well you may be the only one who puts him into history, so let's hear more about it.

R. Well, he was a friend of my friend Ruth McKinney, at least an acquaintance of my friend Ruth McKinney. She was a writer of the period. She'd been a feature writer on the along with Eddie. She'd known the guy, and she said he was a nasty little son of a bitch. That was her description of him.

I. Did you ever know him personally or have anything to do with him personally?

R. Not particularly. That is he and I sized each other up immediately as hostiles so there was no interchange. When I went into the U.A.W. there were two guys in public relations, an old time Debs type named Carl Hessler and Eddie.

Carl and Eddie were at swords points. Carl and I became pretty good friends , at leaston a temporary basis, but Eddie I spoke to only officially. I would say good morning to him, "How are you Eddie?" , when I passed him on the stairs at 281 Grand Blvd., but there was never any happy chitchat back and forth. Eddie was a Daily Forward type socialist from New York City.

I. How did he and Hessler get along?

R. The same way. Carl was ultimately forced out and Eddie , of course, took over control completely, bringing in also a fairly competent guy named Frank Wynn. You must say about Reuther that the people he brought in were not slobs. They were not incompetents. Most of them were not as complete bastards as Eddie Levinson, but they tended to be pretty good trade unionists in their way, although many of them had an anti-red obsession. But they did know how to operate, they had a sense of a union and some sense of what's done and what is not done by people who are representing a union, so you could not have contempt for them. I had no contempt for Victor Reuther, for example, though I disagreed with him sharply. I had a couple of debates with victor. In a way we were friendly but with an acceptance of the hostility.

I. Did you prefer him to Walter?

R. Not really. I tended to like Walter fairly well personally in terms of operation. That is he was a good guy

to work with as a researcher. He would call you in and explain what he was trying to get at, what he was hoping to do, and ask for suggestions how to do it, and it would be a fairly free discussion back and forth. Then I'd go to work and turn stuff out for him and he was responsive to it. He understood what I had done and he would use it. In that sense he was a good guy to work for.

I. Tell me about some of the other people, just your views of different people.

R. Well R.J. Thomas was a sort of a good solid shop steward, a man of greatly limited vision and perspective but fundamental decency. He reacted like a worker, a not very sophisticated, not very developed worker, but like an honest worker to most things, and he was able to preserve that even though he retained power. He wanted very much to do the right thing. He wanted very much to retain control of the U.A.W., but he didn't quite know how to go about it. He was willing to accept some help in terms of speeches and memos, suggestions. For example, we wrote a whole series of documents for him in the war period on what was going on in the plants. We knew -various guys in sensitive points in the Washinton bureaucracy who would let us know that something was being fouled up in plane production at such and such a pointor that such and such a plane engine was no damned good and why did we keep on producing it. Then we would get in touch with the local involved and get the local to send an objection in, and then

we'd get a statement from R.J. Thomas publicizing this foul up in war production. Why the hell were they producing this type of tank, for example, which went up in flames? The minute it was really under attack we'd put that before the Kilgore Committee or the various other committees in Washington. Well, we had some buddies who saw to it that it was all publicized, and we were effective on a whole series of issues that way. Unofficially I'm sure that some of these guys were violating their rules of official secrecy.

I. So we won't ever mention their names.

R. We won't ever mention their names.

I. But they were doing a public service.

They were doing a public service. One or two of them were up on espionage charges since, but I assume they considered that a public service also.

I. What about some of the other people? What about Addes?

R. Addes was impressive, he had a dignified demeanor. He gave the impression of stature and wisdom, but if you poked beneath the surface there was really nothing there. He had no sense really of what the hell was going on. He was, in many ways, almost helpless, and in working up statements for him and press releases, congressional testimony I always had to be careful, because I would tell myself Addes won't protect himself on this. you've got to make sure you don't get the guy out on a limb because he has no sense of what can be said

and what can't be said. It was too bad. Here you had two guys like this, decent, good, not very bright guys up against this whirling dervish, this very bright guy Walter Reuther, who threw all the dedication, Stakhanovite zeal, and it was Stakhanovite because he was there during that period, into the development of Walter Reuther and his cause. The result was inevitable.

I. You said you liked Walter better than Victor. Do you want to tell a little more about Victor?

R . Victor tended to be a little bit super virtuous. I could visualize him as a medieval bishop laying forth the law and exorcising the evil heretics. Roy, of course, was the most affable of the three, and I was told the most effective speaker, though in terms of power structure he was at the lowest level of the three. Victor was more of an ideologist in some ways, I think, than Walter. At least he was more governed by ideology than Walter. Walter never allowed a principle to interfere with the basic purpose of enhancing Walter. He was always able to rationalize and to establish a sound proletarian reason for doing what he wanted to do in the first place.

I. How do you account for that family's personal power? Was it sheer intelligence, or was it a long period of training that produced that?

R. It was a combination. Of course they came from a socialist family. They were weaned on socialism, on

ideological clashes, on the labor movement, so they had a much longer period of development and training and conditioning than most anybody. In addition they were bright people and very energetic people. That is they had that teutonic zeal, the almost Prussian push for organization and completeness of detailed structure. In addition they, at least on the surface, seemed to be companionable guys. They were pleasant to get along with. When they were crossed they would be as nasty, as vicious as anyone could imagine, but they did understand affability. They had political sensitivity. It's unfortunate.

I. You said something that led me to think that you didn't think Walter's racial policies were nearly as good as his reputation. Would you elaborate on that?

R. Well, number one, there was the General Motors situation in which so far as I know, at least while I was in the U.A.W. Walter never took a single affirmative step toward eliminating the almost one hundred percent lily white policy. G.M. did employ some Blacks in the Buick Foundry in Flint, some Blacks I think in the Chevy Plant in Detroit, but in the main assembly plants, the Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac combine, the Chevrolet combine, the Cadillac plant, there might be an occasional Black, but if the percentage was over one or two I'd be vastly surprised. Our surveys, and we made surveys in the research department, indicated that in the General Motors plants there was almost no representation of

Black workers at all.

I. Was this pointed out to Walter?

R. So far as I know it was, yes. At least the figures showed it and I think they used the figures to a certain extent. And R.J. Thomas, for all his clumsiness and what not, I think has to be given credit for in '42 or early '43 there were race riots in the auto plants in Detroit. The white workers refused to work with black, and there was some violence and whatnot. R.J. Thomas walked into the nastiest place in Detroit, the big Packard plant, and, simply announced, "The policy of our union is to employ without regard to skin color one way or another. The Blacks have just as full a right to a job as anybody else. Anyone who doesn't agree with that policy can turn in his slips right away and will not be continued in employment in the plant. This is the policy of the union." He was roundly booed and attacked and everything else, but he held to the policy and ultimately won out. Reuther'd never do a thing like that any place at any point. But Thomas, for all of his clumsiness, did have that sort of basic integrity. This was the policy, and I'm sure he had as much racism as anyone else, but goddam it, he was going to stand by the policy. In the second place, in a number of UAW conventions the Addes-Thomas forces, under perhaps some stimulus from the left, proposed electing a Black vice president. Reuther opposed this under the heading that this was establishing a Jim Crow segregation situation in the

union and that he believed in equality. Everyone should be elected on the basis of their ability and their standing in the union.

I. Were there any Blacks on the executive board?

R. No.

I. When did the first one come on the executive board?.

R. I don't know, not in the time, I was there.

I. What about women in the auto plants. Were they there, were they represented? Did they ever become an issue in any way?

R. There were women in a number of the plants, though there were no women in the Ford plant, so far as I know. That was the Ford Rouge Plant where there were seventy thousand workers altogether and a whole combination of industries. Ford's procedure was to gather the total complex required for auto production in one plant area. There were no women there. There were practically no women in General Motors plants. Chrysler had women in some departments; for example, the wire room in the Dodge plant was manned, if I may use the inappropriate term, by women. The Turnated Plant, a small GM parts plant, that is a client, a large plant devoted to the production of small parts for GM, had a nnumber of women in it.

I. Okay, now we've had a little breathing spell for lunch, and you have some things you'd like to add.

R. Number one, on the account of Deveral I failed to

include the conclusion of the story. By the 1942 convention someone in the union's research department, obviously it could not have been its director, had located a series of statements by Deveral in a Catholic magazine supporting to the hilt the Petain regime in Vichy. This by some device, I have no idea how it could have happened, fell into the hands of the Education Director of the Plymouth Local 51, Sam Sweet, who, following the convention, turned the material over to the International Executive Board with a question about what was this semi-fascist doing educating our workers in this period of struggle against Naziism. Having been somewhat dissatisfied with Deveral, who was antagonistic both to the socialism on the Reuther side of the fence and to the position of Addes on the other side, the Intenational Executive Board decided unanimously to fire Deveral at this point to clear the organization's record. R.J. Thomas, who was Deveral's only supporter, as president had no vote since there was no tie. That, so far as I know, was the one instance in the history of the UAW where the discharge of a staff member was carried through by a unanimous vote of the executive board. Following the discharge of Deveral, Thomas decided to elevate Bill Levitt, who had been my assistant in the Research Department, to the position of Education Director. Bill became Education Director and, objectively speaking, did, in accordance with the limitations, a very good job. He hired a number of skilled people: Elizabeth Hawes, who was then

known as a writer and a fashion expert and was for the time an advocate of feminism; David Erdman, a Ph.D. in English Literature, who later was the author of a comprehensive edition of The Works of William Blake; Sig Diamond, who was later to become a somewhat controversial character at Harvard and is now a professor of history and sociology at Columbia and the editor of a very prestigious academic journal and very much opposed to any kind of a relationship with his former friends of the UAW; Clancy Siegel, a very young untried man who later became a writer some what in the fashion of Kerouac, but more developed. Siegel was the author of a book purportedly centering itself on the UAW in which Pat and I appear to be recognizable characters. Later he shifted to England where he wrote two or three fairly good books and became a very close friend of Doris Lessing for a period of time. Another was John Trockelson, who is profesor of economics now at the University of Connecicut at Storrs, and there were two or three other very competent people.

Contrary to the statement of a very well meaning author in Science and Society, the first quarter issue in 1979, Irving Richter was not a member of the Education Department but of the Research Department. He served as the Washington staff representative of research along with Lincoln Fairleigh, a very scholarly person who, before the catastrophe in UAW, moved onto become Research Director for the Longshoremen in San Francisco and has recently completed

a book on the Longshoremen's adventures with what in my opinion was an ill-fated automation plan.

So much for Deveral. Deveral himself then moved to the higher circles of AFL where he joined forces with Lovestone and became one of the international operatives journeying from Japan to France carrying the message of free trade unionism to the more benighted sectors of the world's labor movement. Recently I haven't heard of him, it could be that he's dead. I'm not expressing any preference there, but I disliked him completely. I did not dislike completely a number of the Reuther people with whom I was also officially in antagonism. There was no question that we fought with all the available weapons. There was a considerable measure of respect, at least as far as I was concerned and I think also, if I can read between the lines, so far as Walter and Victor themselves were concerned. At least the last time I met Walter, which was a year or so before his death, he was totally friendly, amiable, "How are you doing, Jim, how's the family?" And I confess I was friendly toward him also.

I. You didn't feel any hostility?

R. I felt hostility but not total. I had respect for him in terms of what he was, and he was a bundle of contradictions. Under a happier situation in a socialist society I'm sure he would have turned out to be a better man, but he had a very clear eye for the main chance. He saw where the tides were rolling and he decided to roll along with the

tides.

Just one reminiscence, if I may, about a character named Louis Budenz whom I met in Akron during the period. I was working up news reports on the Goodyear strike. Budenz came into cover it, and I had a queasy feeling about the guy even at the time. Number one, he said, "Years ago I would have been staying at the big hotel downtown with Powers Hapgood and Rose Pesotta and Adolph Germer. Now I'm in a second rate hotel, I don't like it very much." Then he said, "Four or five years ago I got caught in a situation at Patterson, New Jersey where a mob was after me and I escaped. After that I decided I would never be on the side against the mob." I had questions about the guy from that point on. In addition I felt what he wrote was almost unreadable. It added up essentially to nothing at all.

I. Are there any other people in this period that you'd like to describe?

R. Ruth McKinney, whom I knew fairly well, she was the author of a book entitled Industrial vallex, which was the story of the Goodyear strike. And my own feeling is that it deserves a hell of a lot more recognition than it has had. It is a real down to earth, effective account of the rubber workers, the sit down strikes. It gives the feel of the situation with perception, humor, verve. The Communist Party organizer is presented with a halo around his head. That's one defect in the book, but otherwise it is, in my

opinion, as good as anything that's been written about the early CIO period. My own feeling is that Ruth's later conflict and falling out and misadventures are probably responsible for a minimization of the book itself.

I. Tell me a little bit more about her. What kind of falling out did she have? Did she fall out with the Communist Party?

R. Yes, that's my understanding. When she was in Akron she had been a leading figure in the New York Newspaper Guild. She was full of verve, wit, Irishdrive, dynamic. She came in bringing a certain air of sophistication to the Akron scene. She had been a reporter earlier on the Akron Beacon Journal, so she knew the situation there very totally, and her mission was to write this book on the Goodyear strike. During the course of her work she'd run short of money, so she'd take a day off and sit up there in a small rented room typing up on yellow copy paper an article of a sort. She'd read it over to me, I thought they were funny as hell. She'd mail it off to the New Yorker and she'd get what for those days was a fairly sizable check for literary compensation. The articles were later pulled together into the book, My Sister Eileen. She could sit down and really turn out high level stuff, she was a disciplined writer. She said inspiration was important, but writing is a craft just as plumbing is a craft. She had that approach plus the verve. Later on she wrote a book which was a total failure, Jake Holme. It was sharply criticized in

many left publications. She came into a disagreement with it. She split, I think, with the left wing at that point. It was almost a fantasy.

I. She split with the left because they criticized her book?

R. Yes, they should have been more compassionate toward her. They should have said Ruth has failed on this one, but she's still a magnificent, beautiful person, which she was.

I. Do you have other things that you want to add to our morning session?

R. Well, on the general hassle in the UAW the position taken both by the pro and anti Reuther historians on the whole thing gives, as I indicated before, primary credit to issues like incentive pay, the no strike pledge, post war amity between labor and capital. These are the issues brought forward as explaining Reuther's victory. I think that's totally phony.

I. Okay let's hear your version then.

R. The assumption behind it is that the Reuther victory was a victory for militant trade unionism. That was simply the gloss over the thing. Essentially the victory of Reuther was a victory of the right wing and Reuther knew it. His support came from places like Toledo, Pontiac, the East Coast, elsewhere in the country where the union had been pro Homer Martin in the past, where it had been consistently in support of right wing, easy going, semi pro-management

policies all the way through.

I. What would you say were the real issues then?

R. The real issues were between right and left.

I. The amount of company effect on unions?

R. The amount of company control over unions. And of course the vast amount of support that Reuther had through the press and indirectly through the corporations themselves.

I. Elaborate on this.

R. The press support can be documented simply by reading the columns of the newspapers straight through, and Reuther had one hundred percent domination. Everything the left did was brought up for ridicule and pilloried as being crazy, fanatic, irresponsible, no good or directed from Moscow. Reuther's policies were given status as sane, responsible, reasonable unionism. And I can't prove that General Motors was specifically behind Reuther, but I know that all the pressures flowed in that direction and that the locals under company domination were entirely, exclusively and consistently pro Reuther in their outlook. In other words the Reuther victory was not a victory based on more militant policies or more correct policies in terms of trade unionism. It was a victory based on the pressures and the currents and the trends of a reactionary period. I would say that the Reuther victory in and 1947 was made immediately obvious by the explosion of the bomb over Hiroshima in 1945. This changed the total relationship between the United States and

the Soviet Union, which had been one of cooperation and collaboration, to one of attempted domination under which, in terms of domestic policy, the left had to be repressed as an essential part of the total operation of the economy, and the UAW situation was just one incident in that total campaign.

I. How do you think Reuther saw it? Did he think he was saving part of the left by sacrificing the rest? Or was he in that spot where he just couldn't let go of that office, didn't want to risk losing it?

R. He didn't want to risk losing it, but I'm sure he told himself that, after all Walter, if you don't stay here some real right wing son of a bitch will take over, and the union will really go down the broad path to hell in the hands of a total right wing Homer Martin, destructive, idiot type. There could be some truth to it, and I wouldn't, in terms of Reuther's own personal responsibility, laugh the argument totally off, though it's obvious it doesn't represent the highest application of principle.

I. Do you think that if the war hadn't ended when it did, or if it had gone on for another three or four years that that would have been delayed? In other words, if the situation hadn't changed, diplomatically speaking between the Soviet Union and the United States, do you think Reuther would have kept the peace with the Communists in the union, or do you think that was bound to happen anyway? Was it in Reuther, in other words, to go only with them as far as he had to and then

break?

R. Well Reuther would go as far as he could in terms of an immediate relationship of forces. He had a very real sense of his strategic limits and he never went beyond that. He never got his neck too far extended. He never projected himself beyond what his base would support, so that if the situation had been a different one and if the red baiting campaign, the Jimmy Byrnes/Truman policy, the Martin Dies policy had not become national policy, Reuther I think would move more slowly.

I. But would he have moved in the same direction?

R. Yes, it was in Reuther to move in that direction, that was his basic gravitation. That was the law of his being that sort of dictated his own nature. It wasn't even hatred of the left as much, it was just the feeling that Reuther was the guy appointed by God or somebody to be in control.

I. So that any possible competition from any area had to be sort of repressed?

R. Yes, either repressed or suppressed or coalesced with or digested or whatever was called for.

I. Do you want to describe to me the purge that came at the end, or are there other things you want to talk about before that?

R. The purge wasn't very complicated. Reuther won a majority of the executive board in 1947. He simply removed the entire international representatives and staff people

who had supported Thomas and Addes in a bloc. There were about 250 or 300 people.

I. What percentage of the total?

R. It was close to fifty percent.

I. In one fell swoop.

R. Yes, it took two weeks longer for me and Morris Sugar and Bill Levitt. We were department heads, it took an official vote of the executive board to get us fired, so we hung on for an additional two weeks.

I. Did you know all this was coming? Were you sure he would go that far?

R. Oh sure, it was no surprise to us. To the victor belongs the spoils, woe to the defeated. There was no surprise to it at all.

I. I remember reading Clancy Siegel's book about that period, and he described the offices as a kind of armed camp where every group had its own loyal faction down to the secretaries and perhaps the janitors.

R. It was more or less true.

I. And then he wondered later why it was all necessary.

R. Well it was part of the total factionalism that operated there.

I. Given Reuther's personality and his temperament was it possible to avoid that?

R. I think not. In a sense Reuther had spent sometime in the Soviet Union, and he'd picked up the purge technique,

so its application was no surprise to anyone.

- I. Are there any other things you would like to talk about in the UAW before the purge, any more insights you could add to an interpretation of what went on there?
- R. Yes, I mentioned before I. F. Stone's preparation of a pamphlet which is officially issued over Reuther's name, "Fifty Thousand Planes a Year." The essential thesis of the pamphlet was that auto plants could be converted immediately to produce aircraft. That turned out to be wrong. When push came to shove the requirements of aircraft production called for a greater precision and for more sophisticated kind of production techniques than any of the auto plants were equipped to provide, so what was later developed was a pitch by R.J. Thomas calling for the conversion of the plants, not to the production of aircraft but to all kinds of military parts, that is guns, tanks, shells, some aircraft parts, etc. General Motors resisted this, and we had a hassle before government committees on the issues in which the union stridently argued that conversion was possible. The decisive element in the thing was the testimony of a General Motors engineer, a Britisher, Taub was his name, who had been working for General Motors but who was a patriotic so and so and he came in and said the company frankly is lying. These plants could very well be transformed to do that, to do this, to do the other. The union is absolutely correct. As a result the government did insist on converting many of them to

the production of war materials. William Knudson, a former head of General Motors who was then head of the Office of Production Management, was fairly soon sort of eased out of his job and a guy named Wilson from General Electric was put in.

I. Didn't the company stand to make a lot of money by this conversion? Why were they so reluctant to do it?

R. Well there was the feeling that it would retard them in getting back into the production of automobiles, that their status in the auto market might be sacrificed.

I. So in the long run they were sure they'd make more the other way.

R. Yes, plus I think just sort of a bureaucratic stasis, an inertia, an unwillingness to be disturbed by these goddamned characters from Washington who were in league with the communists anyhow.

I. That was their view?

R. That was the official position of General Motors at the time. I remember riding down on a train to Washington for a War Labor Board hearing on a GM case. Two or three GM guys were along. They said off the record, "Why should we collaborate with these goddamned Russians? All they'll want to do is to eat our ass out in the end."

I. Let them take the brunt of the war and let Hitler and Stalin fight each other?

R. Yes.

I. What other big issues came up during the period that you were there?

R. Well of course there were the economic issues, the question of wage policy and the National War Labor Board. We attacked sharply the bracket system that was imposed by Taylor and Carroll Daugherty, who teaches in Northwestern Business School, a system which sharply limited wage increases. And the Little Steel Formula we felt was so unrealistically restrictive. So we got together a committee, this represented collaboration with the Steelworkers Union. Harold Rutenberg was then Research Director, not a bad guy. The United Electrical Workers and the Auto Workers, we formed an unofficial committee. We hired on a pay for service basis a number of statistical experts and we did a good deal of work. We finally produced a volume which was printed as the Meany-Thomas report on Living Costs in World War II. It established, I think, about a thirty five percent rise in the cost of living or more in comparison with the ten or twelve percent that was officially reflected in the Cost of Living Index. The BLS of course was apoplectic over the damn thing. They were out with all kinds of refutations and apologies and denunciations. Our work was unscholarly and unstatistical and everything else. The only specific result we got was a change in the title of the index from the Cost of Living Index to the Consumer Price Index.

I. Changed the title but didn't change the situation?

R. They didn't change the situation, but it may have had some leverage on wage increases. That was a big hassle. Then there was this constant running battle over who was going to call the shots on war production with the companies holding out for what was most profitable on the one side and the union, in collaboration with a number of staff people on committees in Washington, trying to point out the realities and force action in line with war needs. I suppose you can describe it as patriotic service, but we threw a great deal into it at the time.

I. The unions really did take a lot of initiative didn't they in that period?

R. The UAW did, most of the others didn't. That is in a sense Reuther had set the precedent with this "Fifty Thousand Planes a Year" deal, and with Irving Richter and Fairleigh operating in Washington, with my own connections with some guys on the committees, and with a fairly good relationship with a good number of people in the plants themselves, we were able to provide a sort of flow of information completing the circuit between Washington and the plants and back. So when the company was turning out phony aircraft engines we were able to blow the whistle on them fairly quickly and with a good deal of emphasis. And I think we had some effect, but it's awfully hard to tell.

I. Were there any other incidents that you could recall where there was substantial collaboration between the auto

workers and several other unions on anything that would improve conditions for people in general?

R. Not really. You see in the '45 and '46 wage negotiations we tried ourselves to establish some sort of basis of cooperation with the electrical workers and the steelworkers, but Walter would have nothing of it. He took his own policy.

I. He wouldn't cooperate that much or wouldn't work that close with other unions?

R. No. His policy, let's say it has some arguments to support it, was to request General Motors in '45 for a wage increase without any price increase, and he had vast statistics to establish the validity of his case. By that time he had gone into Washington to get some fairly sophisticated statisticians to get some correlation matrices which I was not competent to do, and he put forward all this relevant statistical evidence for his position, and he got himself into debates with C.E. Wilson and others on the principle of wage increases without price increases, a debate on corporate profits.

I. That was sort of C. Wright Mills's dream, that the labor leaders would follow that approach and thus save us this inflationary spiral.

R. Yes, but this infuriated Phil Murray because the profit margin in the steel industry was a hell of a lot thinner than in the auto industry, and Reuther's formula, if applied

literally, would have left Murray with a wage increase which was really inconsequential in comparison with the substantial one by the auto workers.

I. Were auto workers paid about the same rate as steelworkers then?

R. Just about the same. So in November of '45 Reuther put General Motors on strike, and it wasn't ended until April of '46 with a wage increase, which I think was seventeen and a half cents an hour, but no statement about price increases one way or the other. I remember being at the Pittsburgh headquarters at one time, and Murray came in and said, "Reuther deserves to be smacked on his ass like a little baby." He was really infuriated by the whole thing.

I. One other labor leader that I talked to told me that in the '40s if the unions had stuck together they could have gotten real health insurance for the whole public, but that instead they went off, union by union, getting it for their own members. He tended to blame Reuther for leading in that trend. Do you have an opinion on that?

R. He's probably right. Whether the unions realistically would have stuck together, even assuming that Reuther had been ready to do it, is I think an open question.

I. Of course in a way the government almost made it the only way the unions could go by being willing to approve fringe benefits but not wage increases to a certain extent.

R. Though of course the big push was for pensions.

There was a private social security deal. The first agreements, you may remember, on pensions with Ford for example, provided for a fixed amount of pension with the employees share representing the difference between that fixed amount and the amount provided by social security, so that the more social security paid the less the employer paid, which gave a little incentive for awhile for the employers to support social security. I would also include, if we're being totally candid here, a criticism of the left. I'm not sure if it's a criticism or not, but when Leonard first proposed a pension plan to Ford the left elements in the Rouge plant opposed the pension plan, saying we prefer wage increases.

I. Why did they do that?

R. The feeling was that the pensions would sop off militancy, etc. The guys needed wage increases now rather than pensions thirty years from now. That I would say is a debatable position and in terms of later developments one which was not validated.

I. I also remember hearing somebody criticize Reuther for changing the dates when contracts terminated. I was told that at one time practically all CIO contracts came to an end at the same time in the spring, I think around the first of May, and that Reuther was the one who broke that pattern. Do you remember anything about that?

R. I don't think that's true. The GM contracts

terminated in April in '46. Then the date shifted to September or October which in a sense was the beginning of the model of the year. I don't know that there was ever any move toward a uniform termination date.

I. What else were big issues that you can recall in those days?

R. None that I can think of right now, some may occur to me later. But I would like to emphasize the point that essentially, in terms of the struggle against Reuther, the issues that are usually brought forth, the incentive pay, etc., are really dust in the eye, that the underlying issue was right wing vs. left wing, collaboration with the company vs. a more militant position.

I. And you really see Reuther as collaborating with the company basically?

R. As leaning more in that direction. Obviously the collaboration was not total.

I. It couldn't be total and still have a union.

R. That's right. I wouldn't say that Reuther was a company unionist anyway, but he adjusted to what he considered to be the reality of the situation.

I. The degree of compromise he could live with was higher than that of the left?

R. Yes, he was a bright enough guy to know that he had to provide somebacon, he had to bring home some results in order to justify his continued control of the union and he did.

There's no question about it. Some people may have opposed some of his formulas, as for example his formula on the cost of living, an automatic 3% annual increment factor. It was sharply attacked to begin with, but it certainly didn't abolish the class struggle in the Auto Workers Union.

- I. Attacked by whom and for what reasons?
- R. Attacked by the left as representing a resort to arithmetic rather than battle in the determination of industrial conflict.

June 5, 1980

I. Last time we talked about your experiences with the Auto Workers. You had some more, I think, to tell me.

R. I think one thing I didn't mention was the campaign to organize the Ford Motor Co. This was, of course, a major objective of UAW-CIO when I went on the staff in early 1940. There had been a number of fruitless efforts to organize Ford, defeated by the Ford servicemen, defeated it is suspected by some Ford influence inside the old UAW, Homer Martin specifically. So Ford remained as the one unorganized sector in the entire automobile industry. When our negotiators went in to talk to General Motors, General Motors would say how can we give you that when we know that Ford Motor Co, has not given it to you. This was constantly thrown into our faces. As a matter of fact, the Ford Motor Co. had been operating at a minimal profit all through the depression at a time when General Motors had been making 35% return on net worth, and once we had organized Ford we found that the Ford wage rates were actually a bit above General Motors wage rates. So this talk of competitive pressures was dust in the eye, it was a negotiating maneuver. But in the long run of course, if we had allowed the industry to remain divided with a substantial unorganized sector these competitive factors would inevitably have come into play, so the organizing of Ford became a major issue before the union and a major issue

before the CIO as well. It was a concern of John L. Lewis. Late in 1940 Lewis sent in a henchman, a Michael Widman, charged with the responsibility of organizing Ford. There had been, of course, agreement with the offices of UAW on the whole proposal, an agreement which would call for the mobilizing of organizers and resources and everything else for a successful campaign.

One basic ingredient to a successful campaign in the Ford situation, one which was not mentioned, was the actual political structure which had been created by left elements inside the plants. Only such a structure could survive the espionage and the terrorism of the Ford Service Department. Only when workers had confidence that they could meet in small groups and that Harry Bennett would not know the following morning that a meeting had taken place were they ready to move toward organization. So the organized structure inside the plant, prior to organization, was essentially a left wing structure. The union had not organized effectively at all. This structure was, of course, put at the disposal of the Ford Organizing Committee. In addition the left wing in Detroit had been very active in the neighborhoods. The so-called language groups had been powerful and had included thousands of Ford workers. Stanley Novak, for example, a state representative elected from the area including tens of thousands of Ford workers, was a man representing the best in Polish tradition, a left winger also, and Stanley had won wide

support among Ford workers. It was the coalescence of these forces with the official pressure from the top, with scores of organizers who worked day and night on the campaign that began to create some sort of underground movement, and it had to be underground at first in Ford.

Organization progressed, building committees were established more or less unofficially at first, then as organization spread more and more openly. Meanwhile of course a Labor Board case was being carried forward by the union's attorney, Morris Sugar, charging Ford with all kinds of terrorism, intimidation, discharge of workers, the whole gamut of unfair labor practices. This case was moving forward in the courts. A favorable Board decision had come. It was in the federal courts in Detroit early in '41 at the time that organization was moving forward that the whole thing came to a crisis. And it was no April Fool's Day on April 1, 1941. I remember I was in the headquarters of the organizing committee, which was on the West Side of Detroit. A number of building committeemen came in. There were sit down strikes apparently in a number of the key buildings, the motor building and two or three others. There had been some action by service men. Workers had responded simply by sitting down. The question was what to do next. There was a fairly sharp difference of opinion. The Reuther people, as represented unofficially by Eddie Levinson, took the position, well the sit down strike is over, it's not to be

tolerated. If we allow the strike to continue the cops will come in or the National Guard. We'll simply be crushed and defeated. We've got to get the hell out of the plant. Morris Sugar and I were there, and the position we took was, yes, maybe the sit down strike is not the best thing, but they've already started a sit down strike. Let the sit downers walk out of the plant and establish a picket line to close the entire plant. And this was the policy which was accepted and applied, so that as of April 1 the entire plant with 70,000 workers and God knows how many different products was, for the first time in history, closed down entirely. And Harry Bennett was left to pull what remnants of hair he had left out of his skull.

The workers returned on the basis of an interim agreement, a settlement. The court case came out totally in favor of the union. Thirty five or forty workers were reinstated with back pay. A Labor Board election was held in which the union won overwhelmingly, and Ford, through Harry Bennett, agreed to a contract which, for the first time in the automobile industry, established the full union shop. General Motors and the others had taken a holier than thou attitude, it's not moral to force workers to join a union contrary to their basic feelings. But Ford went whole hog, I think perhaps on the theory that he might be able to enlist the union. If you can't lick them, join them. I remember sitting in Bennett's office one afternoon, we were

negotiating the preamble to the agreement. He was sitting there, a little sort of red faced guy with a polka dot bow tie, and we saw Henry II drive in, in his naval uniform. He was then a naval cadet of some sort. It was quite a feeling to be sitting there at the center of things where you'd felt that somehow no union foot would ever step. That was in 1941. And of course the victory in Ford did have some impact in shifting the political weights in the total UAW since, as I indicated, the plant itself tended to be left wing in its basic orientation with obvious exceptions. Men like Bill McKy, Carl Stilletto and others were distinguished rank and filers. I should mention Tony Maronovich, who was a Ford worker beaten up in the 1937 Battle of the Overpass and from that point on a representative of the union, who was returned to work. These were the more or less unsung heroes of the whole situation. Walter Reuther, as matter of literal fact, had almost nothing whatsoever to do with the organization of the Rouge plant. That's about it.

I. Were these real active rank and filers old left wingers?

R. Yes, the ones I mentioned were left wing types. Then of course there were some official left wing types. The Daily Worker reporter, a Billy Allen, was a very effective, trusty little operator, smart, quick, fiercely dedicated and much respected by the workers.

 And you think that story hasn't been told in the

traditional accounts?

R. I haven't seen it.

I. Can you think of anything else during your years with the Auto Workers that you want to tell?

R. Well my personal life was troubled at the time. When I was fired from the UAW I went through the agonizing procedure of a divorce.

I. Do you think the job problem affected the marriage?

R. It could well have. At least let's say the loss of job affected my own stability a great deal.

I. When were you married? Before you took the Auto Workers Job?

R. I was married in 1938.

I. And that fell apart with the purge period.

Yes, I was forced out of Detroit. I could find no employment in Detroit, so I went to Chicago for a geographic separation.

I. That almost sounds like the early 1800s black list. I'm surprised you got a job in Chicago, that period was pretty bad.

R. It was not easy in Chicago. My first job was with the Farm Equipment Workers -- Grant Oakes, Jerry Fields, who of course understood the auto situation.

I. Tell me about that.

R. My career there was brief and undistinguished. I did work around the office, and I worked up some pamphlets and

wrote some public relations releases, but I wasn't really part of their structure. I hadn't got ten integrated into it, so when the pressure came up and there was talk about discharging Aaron Cantor, who was their Research Director, I decided I'd check things out further. I took a job with the Illinois Progressive Party, working as Research Director there through the wallace campaign. Then in the fall of that year after the campaign was over, Abe Feinglass at the Midwest District of the Fur and Leather Workers Union offered me a job doing education or research or God knows what with him. I accepted this position and I worked here in Chicago from 1948 through 1952. Then in 1952 I moved into New York to be Research Director for the Fur and Leather Workers Union. In 1955 the merger with the Meatcutters union took place and I shifted back to Chicago as part of the merger movement.

I. Are there any good stories you could tell me about the Fur and Leather Workers Union? I know that's a fascinating union. Are there any stories connected with it that are not already in print?

R. I don't think so. Phil Foner, as you may know, has done the full history of that union and this Midwest District here. The Chicago fur workers, a tiny group of Jewish fur workers had moved out to organize workers in the backwoods of Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin effectively. They'd organized the tannery workers and had done it where nobody had been able to do it before. Feinglass in his day was a

tremendous organizer, a whirlwind when he was in activity. In recent years he has become otherwise involved, though when necessary Abe can still go into high gear. He doesn't find it necessary now as often as he did twenty five or thirty years ago. That's about it.

In New York essentially my work was for the union newspaper, The Fur and Leather Worker . I worked there with Irving Stern, the editor. Officially I was Research and Education Director, but actually we didn't attempt very much formally along those lines.

I. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you did for the Fur and Leather Workers?

R. Oddly enough, although the Fur and Leather Workers was a much more overtly political organization than the UAW, certainly than the Rubber Workers , actually as I look back on it I had less political activity and in a senseless political responsibility there than in these other organizations. I suspect that the difference was that in the Fur and Leather Workers Union there were plenty of established figures to carry the torch and to establish a proper approach to various problems so that in a sense I became almost excess baggage. At any rate my role in the organization became much more a routine one. I did normal research, I dug up facts on companies profits, history of corporate development. I tried to analyze what was going on in industries. I tried to predict price trends and economic trends. I served as a

conventional research director. In the UAW I had been research director officially, but this position provided me a base for a much wider range of activity, much of it I suspect illegitimate from an official point of view but vastly interesting and challenging. This I did not have after my purgation from the ranks of the UAW, CIO. There were many good, devoted, dedicated people in the Fur and Leather Workers Union and I'm happy to say that I have a good number of friends I think remaining among them even now. In 1954 the Fur and Leather Workers Union, having been under maximum pressure in that period of McCarthyism and repression, opened negotiations with the Amalated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America looking toward merger. The negotiations were finally completed, a merger document was signed.

The merger itself took physical form, so far as I was concerned, with my move from Brooklyn Heights where I'd been living to Evanston early in 1955. I might say that in Brooklyn Heights we had a very pleasant kind of life in the less affluent sector of the Heights. We rented a garden apartment, two floors. We took in a roomer to help pay the rent. My official salary was then less than a hundred dollars a week, but we found that within walking distance there were many friends we had known in college or school or labor union activity, so that in a sense it became a friendly community and we saw more people, had a more vigorous social

life there than ever before or since for that matter.

I. I bet you hated to leave.

R. We did, I did hate to leave. I was reluctant to come back to Chicago. Our apartment in Brooklyn Heights was on a street which led right straight down to the docks. It was a highly mixed type neighborhood. Two or three houses below there were a number of Puerto Ricans. Across the street there was a millionaire artist, four or five professional people. It was mixed up, it was not the kind of thing you have in Chicago where everything was compartmentalized and you have stratification on the basis of race, color, income, occupation, everything else, your neighborhood establishing in a sense who you are. It was in the better sense of the word a cosmopolitan neighborhood.

I. Were you married again?

R. yes, I was remarried to Patricia Crozier who had been my assistant in the Research Department in October, 1950, and of course she was with me in Brooklyn Heights. She did not work at the time, the one period in which she did no work. She regrets now that she didn't use the time for academic progress, but I think, looking back on it, she would have to concede that she did enjoy in a sense the leisure. She worked on a community newspaper. She saw people up and down the streets. We took care of cats which came racing in. We had a cat door in the back, so the cats could come in and out of their free will.

I. So how was your new job?

R. We had so-called coordinated bargaining. with the Packinghouse workers from 1956 through 1968 when the merger tookplace. I became part of the Amalgamated bargaining team on the national packinghouse negotiations so that I was thrown in with Helstein and Prosten. In coordinated bargaining they represented the UPW. That is the Amalgamated team would be the guy who was packinghouse director, Jack Lloyd to begin with, then Russ Dresser plus myself. Then there'd be Helstein and Prosten from the other side.

I. How did it work - the coordinated bargaining? Was it hard to do? There must have been some tensions.

R. There were great tensions. Of course essentially we piggy backed on the Helstein/Prosten team. I don't know whether you've ever heard these two guys in negotiations but the Lord have mercy on any company opponent who gets caught in the cross fire with Helstein and Prosten going in full health. They were the most devastating negotiators I've ever heard. Reuther couldn't hold a candle to them. Prosten would hit them low, Helstein would hit them high. They would carry the ball back and forth, and there were times even that I began to feel they were being just a little merciless on the poor slobs across the table who were after all only trying to earn a living.

I. I assume they got some very good contracts.

R. They got some very good contracts. In fact, Ralph may have told you this, Reuther used to give Ralph credit for contract innovations which he then applied in the automobile situation.

I. Reuther was learning from Helstein then.

R. Yes. At the same time in 1956 we took Reuther's formula on the cost of living and the annual increment factor, his so called arithmetic. We trailed after him at that point, although that cost of living provision has brought the packinghouse workers God knows how much in the way of money. The janitor's rate is now something like \$8.70 an hour. That's what you get the first day in the plant for sweeping the floor. The skilled rates don't go up quite in proportion. The maximum rate is only about \$1.10 or \$1.20 above that, but it does mean substantial earnings, particularly in the plants where piecework or incentive had been preserved. These are the Hormel plants and the Oscar Meyer plants which do still operate on an incentive basis.

I. How do you feel about incentive pay?

R. I'm opposed to it in principle, but I would not try to go in and root it out where it's been established for a long time and workers' expectations and earnings and lifestyle and everything else have been based on it. Essentially it means that one worker gets more for production which puts another worker out of a job. Essentially it is competitive. Harking back to the rubber worker period, I remember in the

time of the Good year strike I was in strike headquarters and I struck up a conversation with a big 6'2" truck tire builder and he said, "Before the strike we were all fighting each other. We all hated each other, we were all scratching and clawing at each other. Now we're just like one family." The answer was, of course, the piece work which operated in the Goodyear plant, and the guys were running faster and faster all the time to stay in the same place, and management was cracking the whip over them using the Bedaux system.

I. That was pretty vicious.

R. Yes that is pretty vicious. If you have sufficient controls, and it hardly ever happens that way, a time study system can be relatively fair. That is you can maintain an established level of physical output, of intensity of labor. But that requires very firm policing. It requires contract language which is clear cut and specific, which limits changes and standards to the actual changes in the job elements preventing a situation in which a minor little adjustment in the job excuses the complete retiming of the thing and establishment of a new tighter standard. If you have these protections you can live with incentive pay, but the guys generally do have to work a good deal harder. My position is they probably work hard enough on a day work basis. Why shorten their working lives?

I. Did you feel like you had more power after that merger when you represented such a big group?

R. Not necessarily. In a sense the merger, I think, did represent a defeat for the Packinghouse Workers. Jesse tends to blame me a little bit for it.

I. How's that?

R. Well, Wilson built a new plant in Cherokee, Iowa in 1967, a combined hog/cattle kill, a substantial plant. Most of the Wilson plants had been under contract to the UPW. As a new plant it was fair game for either one, so we went into an organizational campaign. I was called in to help work up leaflets, a position which unofficially can be transmuted fairly quickly to, in a sense, establishing organizational strategy. So I pulled a nasty trick on the Packinghouse Workers. Their master agreement provided that in the event one of the plants closed down, workers from the closed plant would have the right to move into any other Wilson plant displacing any worker with less than five years seniority. Soon the basis of that literal language we said you come under the Packinghouse Master Agreement, and if the Albert Lee plant in Minnesota is closed down, if the plant in Cedar Rapids is closed down the workers from that plant can move in here, and since all of you people have less than five years seniority they can take all of your jobs.

I. So you'd better join the Amalgamated.

R. That's right. To protect your jobs you'd better join the Amalgamated. Well, the UPW reacted that it's a monstrous lie, it's a total lie, it's not true. But we

reprinted the contract language and said, "Look the language means what it says doesn't it?" I assumed privately that before that happened the UPW would probably negotiate some protection for the workers in the plant but I didn't know. And in a rough situation of that sort you do tend to grab for whatever propaganda gimmick is available. And Jesse never forgave me.

I. He didn't? I'm sure he would have done the same.

R. His position was that they lost that plant, and because they lost that plant it meant that the solidarity of the Wilson chain was broken. Because that was broken they had no choice but to merge with the goddamned Amalgamated.

I. What was the point of contract language if it didn't mean what it said?

R. I don't know,

I. It must have been put in there at some point to reassure the people who were afraid their plants were going down.

R. Yes, it could have meant what it said, and it had been applied that way. But there had been no new Wilson plants, so there was no precedent for that situation. It would have required a change in the contract language to protect the jobs of the workers in the Cherokee plant, and that was all we were pointing out.

I. If you were doing coordinated bargaining anyway what was the point of delaying the merger? Most everyone else had

already merged hadn't they? Wasn't that Packinghouse Workers/Amalgamated merger almost inevitable anyway?

R. It became inevitable through the pressure. Of course I'm not going to criticize UPW policy except that it was a very, very rigid policy, and they were accused widely throughout the industry of being strikehappy. They did have that reputation. I suspect that more than anything else was really behind our victory in Cherokee, though this issue we did not use.

I. You mean you think the workers did not want that, that they preferred a union that was less likely to strike easily?

R. Yes. That issue I kept out of the campaign. I felt that to use it would be bad.

I. It would weaken both unions.

R. It would weaken both unions and would be contrary to any sound approach to union policy.

I. Was there reluctance on the Amalgamated's side to merge, or was all the reluctance on the United Packinghouse Workers side?

R. There was some fear on the Amalgamated's side that we would be dominated by the likes of Prosten and Helstein who were obviously much brighter. I won't say it officially, but in terms of general intelligence and tactical skills they were more advanced than most of the leadership of the Amalgamated. That's an understatement.

I. In talking to some people on the UPW side, they

mentioned the fact that their union had much more progressive racial policies than the Amalgamated.

R. That's correct.

I. Was there any concern on the Amalgamated's part that they might have to adjust their racial policies if there was a merger?

R. Not at that point, no. That conflict dated back for a good period of time.

I. In the early '40s period?

R. For example, the UPW had tried to enforce good policy in a number of its southern Swift plants. As a result the plants had decertified and then signed up later with the Amalgamated. This is true in Moultrie, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; and I think Tipton, Georgia, a plant that was closed a good long time ago.

I. So it didn't really work when they tried to enforce good racial policies in the South in many cases?

R. In many cases it did work.

I. In some it worked and some it didn't work?

R. Yes, but there was nasty conflict between the Amalgamated and the UPW on that issue.

I. Was this after you became involved with the Amalgamated?

R. No, that was before. While I was there at least there may have been some apathy on the issue of establishing good policy, but there was no nastiness, at least so far as the

International was concerned. And where there were evidences of racism the Amalgamated did move against them, not decisively or dramatically as the UPW, but they did move.

I. In that early period the UPW people commented on the fact that they had gone out of their way deliberately to include women and all the various ethnic groups in local leadership from the beginning. Did the Amalgamated do that at some point?

R. Well of course the Amalgamated took a very traditionalist approach on the whole thing. During the war period women were allowed as temporary replacements in the meat market, but once the war was over the jobs had to be preserved for our boys returning from the Service, and the women were either sent home or relegated to positions as wrappers, in which they were denied the right to use any of the tools of the trade and were kept at very low wage rates.

I. When did that change?

R. It hasn't changed substantially yet. There have been some token changes. That is under many contracts a wrapper may now apply for an apprentice's position and her wage rate will be protected since the beginning wage rate of a journeyman is below that of a wrapper. For that period she will continue on her wrapper's rate until she picks up through the journeyman's progression. About two years now is the normal apprenticeship period, and some very few women have gone through this process. The number is not great.

I. Did the Amalgamated have in its plants departments that were all white, or were they always racially integrated?

R. Not to my knowledge, at least not while I was there. There were some departments in which there were heavier concentrations of blacks and others in which there were heavier concentrations of whites. By coincidence the concentration of blacks tended to be in departments or on jobs that were heavier, dirtier, nastier.

I. That's typical. This was, in other words, company policy.

R. This was company policy, though the establishment of seniority with plant wide bidding washed out a good deal of it.

I. When did plant bidding become the policy?

R. I'm not sure. It was there when I came in, though it was more severely restricted then than it is now.

I. What do you mean? What kind of restrictions?

R. You couldn't carry any departmental seniority with you if you bid on a job from Department A to Department B. It would be a better job, but you came into Department B with zero departmental seniority. So with layoffs you'd be in trouble. And they still have, in my opinion, a fairly primitive system of applying seniority on layoffs.

I. How does it work?

R. The guy laid off in the department can bump on the job of the junior employee in the plant. This creates, of

course, a problem for women because a woman can be laid off from a bacon slicing job, and if her department is cut back she's laid off and the job held by the junior employee in the plant is some backbusting job and the woman doesn't happen to have the physique for it so she can't qualify.

I. So then what happens to her? Is she just out then?

R. She's just out then in many cases. I fought for a provision saying, "a job held by the least senior employee which he or she may be able to do or to learn within a reasonable time", but they weren't able to get that. There've been some modifications of it here and there, but it was really a very nasty system.

I. Do you think it was consciously anti woman? Or is that a fair question?

R. Um, perhaps not but it could very well have been.

I. Werethere pay differentials in the Amalgamated when you went there between men and women? Or black and white? Or North and South?

R. There were no black and white pay differentials, at least none that showed overtly. You would never have a plant rate schedule with a black rate and a white rate. There would be certain jobs assigned traditionally to black workers, and perhaps the rate on that job on the basis of a fair job evaluation would not be equal to the skill and other requirements of the job. But that became a metaphysical question in a sense.

When I first came there, there was a wage differential in the packing house agreement between men and women. I think it was about five cents an hour. That was very soon wiped out and now there is technical equality in pay.

There is a North/South differential still in varying amounts. There was a major hassle between the Amalgamated and the UPW in 1962 I think it was. Armour threatened to close down its plant in Memphis, Tennessee, a plant under contract to the Amalgamated. Under the pressure of that threat the local union people, with the sanction of the district people and I think also with the sanction of Russ Dresser of the International office, accepted a whole series of wage cuts and reductions in benefits amounting to I would estimate about sixty or seventy cents an hour. This is below a wage rate which is already somewhat less than the rates paid in Armour's northern plants. Once that had been put through Swift came knocking at our door with five southern plants and demanded the same thing and we agreed to it.

I. What was the rationale? Was it supposed to be cheap to live there?

R. The rationale was that unless we did this they'd close the damn plant and we'd lose any basis for organizing in the South.

I. A kind of blackmail operation.

R. It was blackmail. Jesse screamed and denounced us

up one side and down the other. Ralph did the same, though not so ear splittingly. And that was that! That created a major confrontation between the two organizations,

I. What happened when they were merged? Did the whole group then tend to follow the Amalgamated pattern or were there adjustments, compromises on both sides?

R. On the specific issue of the southern differential we negotiated part of it back into the wage rates. Most of the plants were then closed.

I. Did they move or just quit?

R. They just quit.

I. Just like the plants are doing now. So they were serious about it, it wasn't a phony bluff in other words.

R. What factors were responsible for the closing is very difficult to say. I can't agree with Jesse in holding that wages are no relevant factor in competition at all, but very often they're not really a significant factor in determining whether a plant is to survive or to close down. You really have to take a very close look and analysis of the company's books, the real records, before you can give a confident answer. And you never get such a look, of course. The only safe assumption is that the company is bluffing, otherwise you're going to be caught short.

I. What about plants moving, not closing down but moving from one area to another? I know there's been a great deal of that in the packing industry.

R. You didn't actually have movement of plants. What you had, for example, was the closing of plants in major centers like Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City where the industry, when it was dependent on the railroads, had to locate its major operations. These plants were closed, then new plants were built out in the countryside where the cattle in a sense could walk across the road into the plant, and you had economies in transportation costs which were significant. So the expansion of the industry took place in the boondocks, in Iowa, Nebraska, the high plains of Texas. This is where the new plants were built. To begin with they were built by the established packers, but by 1970 the so called new breed packers led by Iowa Beef, operating without union contracts and at wage rates considerably below union wage rates and with technological efficiencies considerably greater than the old packers, were able to develop, began to move in. And they have now in effect captured the entire market for beef. The big packers, Swift, Armour, Morrell and others are for practical purposes out of the production of beef. They still operate in pork and meat products but their cattle killing plants are, with very few exceptions, simply closed, and they ran up the white flag of surrender to Iowa Beef and Missouri Beef and a number of others.

I. And those new companies are complete, they're not connected at all with the old companies?

R. Not on the surface. There are rumors that Iowa Beef

had its genesis with Armour, that there was some sort of underground connection. At least there was some flow of executives from Armour to Iowa Beef from time to time. Once it was operating Iowa Beef generated its own money, that is it was self financing. It paid no dividends, it plowed back all of its very considerable earnings into expansion.

I. And was the union able to unionize it?

R. In 1969 we conducted an organizing campaign in Dakota City, the largest plant then of Iowa Beef, a plant that specialized then not only in killing cattle but in producing boxed beef, that is processing the beef, doing in the packinghouse work that had been done previously only in the retail store. They did a substantial amount of the fabrication of the beef in this Dakota City plant. They boxed it, they shipped it out to meat markets. It was then ready to be unpacked, and it took one pass through a band saw and the steak was ready to be thrown into a box and put out for the customer to purchase. So the Iowa Beef Dakota City plant became a major goal of the union. There was a company union in the place, the AEO so called, the Amalgamated Employees Organization or Allied Employees Organizaion. I don't they they used the word amalgamated. Originally the first Iowa Beef plant at Dennison had been lost because of conflict between the Amalgamated and the UPW. There had been an independent, The Amalgamated and the UPW and the two legitimate unions knocked each other out of the box so the

company union took over. That was the starting point of our problems at Iowa Beef.

I. It would have been good if you had been merged before that happened.

R. It would have been very good if we had merged before that happened. If we had been merged before that happened we might have been able to be in there right at the beginning and to organize the new breed as they developed and to keep the thing under some sort of legitimate union influence. As it was it simply ran hog wild.

Well in an effort to recoup we developed this campaign in Dakota City. The UPW had already won bargaining rights in two or three of Iowa Beef's smaller plants, but this big key plant was, as I say, under company union. I was assigned to the organizing work again under the head of writing leaflets. I went in there and found it a fairly nasty situation with nobody doing very much of anything. Another guy from the Amalgamated, Harry Milston, also a fur and leather worker and a totally good, bright and decent guy, we were both assigned to it. And we began to scream a little bit. Dave Hart was the district director who had a taste for Early Times Bourbon but otherwise a pretty good guy. He came to life a little bit. We got out some leaflets. The propaganda approach before had been to denounce the hell out of the leaders of the company union and in a sense to ignore Iowa Beef entirely. We changed the emphasis completely,

that is we gave the company union the back of the hand. These are no good stooges, they don't represent much of anything. But with all the profits Iowa Beef is making, the most profitable company in the whole packinghouse industry, why should workers in this most profitable corporation have the lowest wages? And we bombarded them with leaflets with this pitch in one form or another. Milston was pretty imaginative in leaflets and I was pretty good myself. We put our skills together on it.

Then things began to turn a little bit, and people began to show up at the organizing headquarters and we scheduled meetings, first one a day and then finally three or four a day. We'd get two or three hundred people into the headquarters for each one of these sessions toward the end of the election period. Dave Hart would give a speech and I'd get up and talk a bit and we'd answer questions. I was fairly good at answering questions and this was an effective technique. But what really won the election was this. We had a half dozen paid international representatives there, responsible for organizing a plant of two thousand people. It occurred to me all the packinghouse workers in the damned area were deeply concerned with this, so I got an okay to call on each one of the packing house local unions to contribute the services of two officers for the period of the election to serve as volunteer organizers. So we had about seventy guys in with automobiles and they did a hell of a job. They were

organized by two of the Amalgamated's better representatives, a guy named Wendall Olson and Les Peck, and they were coordinated. They were scheduled and they were assigned lists. The workers in the plant lived to hell and gone all over the area, some of them thirty, thirty-five miles from the plant. But they worked twelve, fourteen hours a day visiting, visiting, visiting, talking, and the damn thing was effective. We won the goddamned election to the surprise of the personnel director, who later told me, "Well Jim I figured I had that one won. What the hell did you guys do?"

I. He didn't notice how your tactics had changed?

R. I guess not. That was 1969, there was a strike in 1970 that lasted God knows how long.

I. Were they trying to break the union?

R. Well, that's a controversial question. My own feeling is that our guys were trying to bite off a little bit too much in demanding full master agreement benefits at the first contract.

June 12, 1980

R. Pat looked at the transcript that you typed up and felt that I had left out a number of important things in the college career.

I. Okay, let's start with them.

R. What she mentioned was the fact that I was on the college debate team and was out for football and edited the literary magazine. I think I did cover that in some other segment.

I. You mentioned that you did those things, but you didn't give me great detail on them.

R. The detail isn't important but it's officially on the record that I wasn't a totally average student.

I. I would say that you were extremely active. Very few people can do all those things at one time.

R. Although I indicated that I was not a particularly good student.

I. By your definition possibly.

R. By the faculty's definition, by the official definition. I remember some years after I was out of college I got a letter from the Dean of Men who had turned Buckmanite. You may know what that sect is. In the letter he asked my forgiveness for the sins he had committed against me when I was an undergraduate. I thought back and I couldn't remember any particular sins that he had been responsible for, and I

always wondered what vile conspiracies were going on behind my back without my knowledge. At any rate he purged his own conscience.

I. You never found out?

R. I never found out.

I. You seem to have a tendency to forgive as you go along, maybe that's why you don't remember. But you never knew?

R. I think there was some question once about my use of the family car on some social expeditions out of town.

I. Do you feel that perhaps they resented you because you were the son of the president?

R. It was partly the official position of the college at that time. Such things were frowned on.

I. They perhaps thought you needed extra correction.

R. I didn't need extra correction and I never had any other hassles or any other disciplinary problems one way or the other. That was about it.

I. Was there anything that you remembered that you wanted to add about the auto workers? Or perhaps when you read today's transcript you may think of something then.

R. I may have then. I'm trying to write up a good statement on an article on the autoworkers which appeared in Science and Society early in 1979. But I think that will have to be a written job, I want to handle it with some precision.

I. In that case should we go back to Iowa Beef and start

with that story?

R. I think Iowa Beef.

I. Last time we just discussed the organizing drive and the union finally was able to win. That's where we left it.

R. Yes, the victory came in the late spring of 1969. It meant the union had the big plant at Dakota City, that it had two small cattle killing plants plus the fairly large plant, a third cattle killing plant whose location I don't now remember. It'll come back to me as we go on. During the summer negotiations on the first contract developed between Iowa Beef and the union. The union's proposal was simply for the master agreement which would have meant a massive increase for Iowa Beef, particularly on the rates applicable in the processing division where beef was fabricated and parcelled out and put into boxes for shipment out to retail meatmarkets. The rates there, where a great many women were employed incidentally, were very low rates indeed. I don't have the arithmetic with me now but they ran a dollar fifty or two dollars an hour below the rates established as the minimum rate in plants of their competitors like Armour, Swift, Morrell and others. So negotiations proceeded during the summer without any real success. Iowa Beef at one point proposed a compromise settlement with the understanding that other Iowa Beef plants not then organized in the union would be shoved into the union with the assistance of Iowa Beef. This proposal was rejected.

By August a strike was called. The big Dakota City plant was closed, pickets were involved and the strike action following it was a very violent action with hassles not only on the picket line but conflicts going through the whole Sioux City area. That was between union people, scabs, foremen in parking lots, in saloons. There were some bombings. Damage to cars on both sides was frequent. The whole thing lasted until April of 1970 when both sides, in a condition of near exhaustion, reached a compromise settlement which was not in any sense a good settlement. Prosten and a few others, and the economic facts on the company as they came out later supported his conclusion, argued that the company was really on the ropes and that they could be pushed to a much better settlement. Gorman and the official leadership of the Amalgamated simply moved in saying, "We've got enough. It's been too great a drain on us. We're facing law suits, secondary boycotts, illegal strikes. There have been strikes in the other Iowa Beef plants in violation of the contract, court suits, and we have to bring it to an end." So the strike was settled with very considerable dissatisfaction among the members.

The workers returned to the plant, production was resumed, but a very high turnover rate continued in the plant so that the union was weakened not only by the failure to win a clear cut victory in the strike but by the attrition, by the movement out of union people and their replacement by sons and

daughters of local farmers who hadn't heard tell much of unionism before. It should be added, however, that a brief time in the plant converted many of them very quickly to the idea of a union and the recognition of the need for some sort of protection against the kind of speed up and lax concern for safety that existed there. That was the picture in 1970. I'm hitting Iowa beef here because Iowa Beef in a sense I think is central to the whole development of the packinghouse industry or its disintegration from the union point of view.

By 1973 the situation to begin with was a difficult one. Prosten discovered that there had been an understanding more or less unofficially with the company for a settlement rate of twenty-five cents a year for three years. This would have been disastrous. It would have undermined our whole position in national collective bargaining. It would have sold out the Iowa Beef workers who were still at least a dollar fifty an hour below the master agreement rate. It would be like pension, health and welfare benefits, vacations, most other fringe benefits approaching, for example, something they never heard of. So we moved in on the situation. It became a two level operation. In the first place, and I don't think I'm suggesting any illegal activity here, it appeared that some of the major packers were unhappy over Iowa Beef. At any rate George Schultz, who was then Secretary of the Treasury, who had been Secretary of Labor, had been co chairman of the Armour Automation Committee and

was familiar with the situation in the packing house industry, he and Prosten were very good friends. Frank Livingstone, Armour's attorney, was also very close to George. So by various representations we were on the very odd posture of having in effect the support of the Nixon administration against this very right wing company. The support represented, and we realized it, the interests of the other major packers who felt that Iowa Beef was transgressing on their jurisdiction, as indeed it was, and felt that it was about time that somebody administered a few heavy knocks in that direction even if it was the union. They were ready to avail themselves of any instrumentality, being totally unscrupulous and without moral qualms. They were ready even to use working people to achieve their ends. So Prosten worked the Washington side, spending a great deal of time with Schultz, with Dunlop, Harvard's contribution to the Economic Stabilization program of the Nixon administration, the head of Federal Mediation, the bright boy from Georgia, the machinist whose name I don't now remember. He operated vigorously at that level.

On the other side, in effect, I was given the assignment of trying to maintain the home fires in Dakota City which in some ways was a fairly difficult deal. Prosten had moved in himself and had fully repudiated the twenty-five cents a year agreement. The membership, the workers in the plant, of course were in a fairly difficult position. They

remembered what had happened in the previous strike where they felt that the union in a sense had let them down. Dave Hart, who had been their leader in that strike had just retired, and Dave somehow had collapsed and was supporting an immediate accomodation with the company. Many of the workers were totally opposed to strike. "We don't want to go through six or seven or eight months of strike again as we did in '69 and '70." So we moved into a very difficult situation. We did not want an immediate strike because we were working with federal mediation with the idea of getting intervention of the government in the damn situation, perhaps in fact finding hearings, etc.

I remember we had scheduled two membership meetings. There were about 2,200 members. It was a big auditorium in Sioux City. And my problem was to convince guys I number one, that a strike was necessary and valid; number two, that the strike shouldn't take place right away quick. To do that I first of all had to establish some sort of confidence in the International Union. It required considerable talk, and there was a good deal of uproar in the meeting to begin with. It finally settled down, and the vote went exactly the way we had planned it. I found that a policy of absolute candor, putting all the facts on the table, went across. These were bright guys and when you levelled with them they understood quickly what you were about. They backed you up. But that was the critical decision. It was

an almost three to one vote in favor of the strike, maybe a two to one vote in favor of postponing the strike pending action of the federal mediation agencies, and that was that. I did not go through the constitutional requirement of a secret ballot on the strike issue. I thought it was better to have the vote public for obvious reasons.

I. So you got the optimum conditions there. You got their public declaration they were ready to strike but their willingness to support mediation. The company, therefore, would be under maximum pressure to give something.

R. Yes, after this vote. The head of federal mediation sent a wire through in which he said in the interest of the nation and the stabilization program and national production and consistent food supply he was recommending that instead of strike action the issues of the two parties be submitted to a fact finding commission to be appointed by federal mediation. Of course the question was would the company go along with it. Finally there was enough pressure on the company that they said yes with assurances, of course, that mediation didn't really mean anything much, just a big joy ride. I guess they thought that they had the facts on their side one way or another. But mediation was agreed to as an alternative to strike action.

Federal mediation went down to Lubbock, Texas and plucked out a character named Byron J. Abernathy to serve as chairman of the fact finding panel. I was the union

representative on the panel, and a guy named Holme was the company representative on the panel. We had a series of hearings in Sioux City in which we brought forth testimony about the wage relationships and the production relationships and the operating situation and the competitive pressures and everything else throughout the industry. It was an adversary quasi-judicial procedure. Before the hearing had been completed our friend Byron J., the mediator, announced that for some time he and his wife had planned a vacation trip down to Puerto Rico and he was leaving the following week end. We said, "When will you got back?" And he said, "In about six weeks." "Can we have a decision before you go?" "No it's an important issue. I'll have to take time to consider it." We said, "You're jeopardizing the whole situation. We don't think we can hold these workers for that length of time." He said, "Sorry," and off he went.

After we jockeyed around for awhile, about the first of July we decided it was time to strike, and we sent the company forty eight hour notice of intention to strike. The plant closed down entirely. This time the company made no effort to reopen the plan. They didn't try to run scabs, there were no hassles. They simply closed the place down. They kept the office going, but there was no protection in front. The strike went on.

Toward the end of August Abernathy came back from his vacation and federal mediation called up and said they wanted

to complete the hearings. We said we were on strike. "Well we want to complete the hearings anyhow. Byron will be greatly hurt if we don't." So we had two or three days more hearings in Washington and four or five weeks later Abernathy came through with his report which was one of equivocal, this way, that way, water on both shoulders. However, giving Prosten credit he said, "Look, let's claim it a victory right away quick." So we trumpeted the thing forth as a complete union victory, whereas Artie Walker from the company, who had been very sour on it, in effect had nothing to say about it at all. So we did get the first jump on them and created the impression that the report had been favorable to the union. Actually it was a nothing report and you could quote text on it for one side or the other. So we battled back and forth, it became an issue of conquest.

I got involved in a number of television program discussions on the thing which wound up in a big hour and a half debate with Louis Anderson, who was a very bright president of a local union, and myself on the union side, Hard in Walker and the company's public relations guy on the other side over the local CBS station. Our people thought we wiped the floor with them. I'm not sure we did quite that well, but the debate got a lot of attention. It was rebroadcast a couple of times.

- I. It would be nice if we could get a tape of it.
- R . I believe there's one around someplace. Then around

December or late in November Prosten began to push for impartial arbitration. They got Currier Holmes, the obnoxious president of Iowa Beef in Washington, and the administration put the clamps on Holmes. He finally agreed. I never thought it would happen, but he finally agreed to accept impartial arbitration to get over the strike. This time the Federal Mediation Board appointed a reasonably good arbitrator. We had hearings, first in Chicago, and went over much of the material we'd covered before, and on the basis of their agreement with federal mediation the guys went back to work.

I. They went back to work, but the issues were still unresolved?

R. The issues were till unresolved. You're not supposed to talk to an arbitrator individually, but Bill Finer came through with some things. It included wage adjustments and a whole flock of other things so that Iowa Beef would not fall any further behind. It would keep up its position as it moved forward.

I. So you got a victory. After having announced one before you got it, you finally got one.

R. We finally got one and in comparison with twenty-five cents an hour once a year we got something like a dollar fifty an hour for the first year. It called for one of the most complicated strategic packages that I've ever seen operate in the collective bargaining situation.

- I. Some of this sounds like the thirties, all the violence in the strike part, but then the last part of it is not the thirties because this is really using the experts and sophisticated bargaining.
- R. In 1976 we were back to the thirties.
- I. You had another strike.
- R. Another strike. It was at this point that Prosten and I parted company, unofficially.
- I. Tell me about it.
- R. Number one, the company picked out some character who was associated with the Teamsters and was supposed to be a great expert in labor relations and supposed to be a friend also of our International officers, Hal Reigle and Pluto. He came in with a proposal which was not a bad proposal, and he committed himself unofficially to run forward a bit beyond that to what I thought amounted to about a maximum that could be expected out of the situation. But Prosten said, "No, it's not master agreement, and my position in master agreement negotiations is no compromise. We have to strike the bastards." So they went on strike about November and wound up the following April with a broken strike, a terrible contract massively inferior to what the company had proposed. I'm not sure whether there's a local union there now or not. There probably is because the company's stupidity recreates unions where unions themselves dont hold up.
- I. So there was a real defeat there. Did you and

Prosten argue about it vigorously beforehand?

R. Not too much, no. You don't argue with Prosten.

I. Well that's a kind of sad ending to that story. But you think there is a union surviving but greatly weakened?

R. Sort of, but we have no leverage for the next negotiations plus the fact that on the basis of the Iowa Beef settlement other packers have insisted on low level settlements. A big plant like Monford in Colorado -- Monford, a union plant since the year one -- busted the union, closed its original plant and is operating entirely on a non union basis.

I. Did it move to another location?

R. It had established other locations.

I. So it closed its union one and put all the business in the others.

R. Other companies were doing the same kind of thing. so you have currently a disintegrating situation particularly in the beef sector of the meat packing industry. Pork and processed meats were the old line producers that had a certain monopoly advantage, that is brand identification. There the union is still very strong. We have a hundred percent organization in companies like Oscar Meyer and Hormel. The Swift plants, those that are not closed, and the Armour plants that are not closed and the Morrell plants that are not closed are also completely union. And in the 1979 negotiations -when I spoke of Iowa Beef in is correct.

My chronology must be mixed up here somehow, I'll straighten it out. But the last packinghouse negotiations were successful. They maintained the cost of living clause, although the companies were out against it with meat axes and very sharp knives. They got some health and welfare benefits. Our pension program, our health and welfare program, I'd say is comparable with that of the UAW even though the profit level of the industry has never approached the automobile industry level. And where the union has been effective in bargaining in packing it has been gigantically effective. Where he has the edge Prosten is as effective a bargaining spokesman as I know of in the labor movement. Strategically I think he makes an occasional and major disastrous mistake, but in terms of tactics, in terms of bringing pressure to bear, in terms of sensing weakness on the other side of the table, of being aware of the points where pressure can be applied he's gigantically effective. So even though we had this personal falling out and I'm consigned to this outer darkness where there is only weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, I have great respect and admiration for him for the things he can do which are very considerable, which are massively lacking in many sectors of the labor movement these days.

- I. So your industry is really divided in two. One part is beef and the other part is doing well.
- R. Yes, the problem, of course, is the beef part sets the

example which could, I think, be emulated and followed by others.

I. Would that depend on new companies coming into it?

R. It would depend primarily on new companies coming into it, and it's fairly difficult to break into the national market in processed meats. Oscar Meyer and Hormel are established brands, they're identified in the minds of consumers, they have an edge on price. By reason of this advantage it gives them a foothold. Of course the theory of Iowa Beef and currier Holman to begin with was that they could develop a similar brand identification in beef, that by packaging beef under the Iowa Beef brand and packaging it for direct retail consumption they could establish a position in the minds of the consumers.

I. Have they done that?

R. No they haven't because they have not yet developed retail beef cuts. What they have done is to take a good portion of the work done in the retail meat market for performance inside the packinghouse, but there are still the final stages in the fabrication and wrapping and packaging the retail meat which have to be done in the back room of the retail meat market so that the meat as it comes to the customer is anonymous meat.

I. Then I'm not the only one who has never heard of Iowa beef before, the average customer hasn't heard of Iowa Beef either.

- R. If the inspection number is on the beef steak that you purchase, and if you have the federal inspection book you can check it out and say this is Iowa beef, but usually the inspection number is not there.
- I. The retailer knows the name but the customer actually doesn't.
- R. The retailer knows. So you have a situation again in which a very small number of meat buyers exercise gigantic leverage in the market in which beef is sold. The packers are trying to counter balance that by cartels and understandings and deals among themselves, but they haven't yet been able to carry it through.
- I. Do these old companies have any notions of trying to get beef back or have they given up on beef?
- R. I think they've given up. Armour just announced the closing of three out of its remaining four beef plants about six weeks ago. Their plants in Hereford, Texas and Brownsville, Texas will be closed and their plant in Napa, Idaho. That leave them with about one beef producing plant in the entire country. For all practical purposes they're out of beef production. And Swift is moving rapidly in the same direction.
- I. What has your union been able to do for the people whose jobs were lost when these plants closed down?
- R. Under the Armour Automation Committee we developed a fairly sophisticated program of benefits. The program

included an early retirement pension. Workers laid off by a plant closing who had reached the age of 55, or it's now 54, are given pensions at one and a half times the regular rate up to the social security age of 62. Workers under that age are given full severance pay plus a vested pension effective when they reach the age of 65. If it's a departmental close down, of course, workers from a closed plant have the option of taking these and other benefits which I'll specify later or a plant wide bump on the job, which is most satisfactory to them. There is an inter plant transfer system. Workers from a closed plant may move to a continuing one in operation with the right to bump onto the job of workers with less than five years seniority. There's been some modification of the five year seniority deal, but that essentially is the principle of the thing. Their moving expenses are paid, in part at least, by the Automation Committee. These are the general benefits provided. In addition the Automation Committee in a number of situations, as for example in Kansas City where a big plant was closed down, provided retraining schools. And its conclusion, one which I supported to begin with, was that what was effective was not so much direct vocational training because the employer who gave the laid off worker a job preferred to give his own training. That was not so important as training in the actual reading, writing and arithmetic -- literacy and the ability to handle a few figures. These turned out to be much more important than

specific advance training for particular jobs.

I. Does literacy training indicate that the people didn't basically have enough education?

R. It certainly did.

I. Were they graduates who weren't educated or were they not high school graduates?

R. Many of them were not graduates. The packinghouse industry, as you know, particularly in the earlier period, had not appealed to the highest level of Anglo Saxon type worker.

I. The work was too hard, too messy.

R. The work was hard, dirty, nasty so that although the industry had been manned and womaned by Irish, German, Scotch to begin with, these types were soon displaced by middle European and southern European immigrants, then after 1919 by Blacks in considerable numbers although with fairly vicious, discriminatory patterns.

I. So many didn't have much education.

R. Guys from Mississippi had been through four or five grades of Mississippi Jim Crow education.

I. Do you have any idea what percentage of these people got new jobs?

R. There are figures on it. The horrible fact is that the number of those who got jobs without going through training provided by the committee, the percentage there was just about equal to the percentage who got new jobs after the advantage of training, so what we did was raise the general

education level of a small sector of the working class.

I. Were those who took the training less educated than the others?

R. Possibly, I don't think the analysis was detailed enough to be sure.

I. Did very many of them choose to move from one location to another?

R. It was a surprisingly small percentage that agreed to move. My impression is that over all it was less than five percent. Where you had the greatest percentage agreeing to move came where the home community and the new community were more or less of the sametype. That is to say from Sioux City, Iowa to Cedar Rapids, Iowa the transfer rate was fairly great, but from Sioux City, Iowa to Memphis, Tennessee the transfer rate was not very high.

I. In other words they didn't like to go from one region to another.

R. The exception to that related to the Armour plant in San Francisco. The transfer rate there was very high.

I. From where to where?

R. To San Francisco from plants elsewhere in the country.

I. Oh well, I can understand that.

R. And some of the San Francisco local union members began to resent it. These outsiders are coming in to take over our jobs.

I. It was their misfortune to have picked the best climate in the country to begin with.

R. But that's the way it operated. The Automation Committee, of course, made the reputation of George Schultz, which I suspect catapulted him into the position of Secretary of Labor and then Secretary of the Treasury and now head of the notorious Bechtel Corporation in San Francisco which you probably know is a major multi national corporation. They build pipe lines in Arabia, electronic installations in Nigeria. They're mixed in at the highest level of international politics and economics.

I. What were some of the other problems that you dealt with in the Amalgamated Meat Cutters? I can see that Iowa Beef and this whole problem of really having to start the whole union all over again in beef would be the major one, and plant closings. But were there other major problems? Or internal battles? You haven't said much about the internal situation.

R. The internal situation in a sense was the confrontation between the two unions, the Amalgamated on the one side and the UPW on the other. You probably know more about the early history of the damn thing, that is the '48 strike, than I do. You know the Amalgamated settled quick and the UPW fought it out.

I. Did they stay bitter about that?

R. They stayed bitter about that for a good long time.

I. When the two finally merged how much did that bitterness interfere?

R. It's awfully hard to say. The bitterness may have projected itself even into the Iowa Beef situation where in the original strike Gorman himself and Lloyd who was president Lloyd was deaf and he couldn't have understood much of what was going on even if he hadn't been deaf. They went out to Phoenix, Arizona to sit down at a resor twith Currier Holman, and Gorman came back with a complete stinking settlement of the Iowa Beef situation giving the company practically everything it asked for. This was after two or three months of strike, and of course he had to be repudiated on it. But at the same time obviously the company, when two top officers of the organization, Amalgamated guys, had agreed on a settlement, the company cherished the assumption that it did represent what could be an ultimate level for final resolution of the whole business. That was a very nasty incident, and I think a reflection of those old tensions and jealousies and suspicions.

Then the most flagrant example of the damn thing came in one negotiation. It could have been 1960 or 1964, I can't pin it down. We were negotiating, we had a joint committee with Armour, we had separate committees with Swift but with the understanding that each side would keep the other fully informed. There'd be no basic moves without agreement, in a

sense we would operate as one. We had this agreement, but then Swift came in and soft soaped Harry Poole and one or two others. As a result we went in privately, secretly, confidentially on an all night session with Swift in which we negotiated the provisions of a final master agreement and came to a conclusion and then called in Helstein and Prosten and announced that a settlement had been made.

I. And then what? Were there fire works?

R. There were fire works but the settlement held nevertheless. They had been had and in a very nasty way.

I. Can you think of any other problems?

R. There was always pulling and hauling toward the end of master agreement negotiations, our boys wanting to settle quick and Prosten holding out, sometimes I thought with unnecessary rigidity. But there were always tensions in these areas.

I. I get the feeling that you were kind of in the middle on that, that you sometimes thought one side settled too quick and sometimes thought that they both got sort of rigid in their positions.

R. Yes. I was guilty of some traitorous conduct when the issue justified it. I unofficially threw my support to the UPWA in whatever way I could, particularly in the automation area.

I. Would you like to get some more details of your traitorous conduct on the tape ?

R. I can't fully remember the specifics of it, except I do remember that the UPW, in a hassle with Armour over some plant closing problems, exercised its right under the contract as it then existed to strike over production standards, that is after going through certain procedures. The local union did have a right to a legal strike during the term of a contract.

I. Was this on things that might affect their safety?

R. No, on production standards. What the UPW had done was to put in the machinery a whole series of grievances from each plant on production standards. They allowed them to stand at the back of the stove, but they were all primed, ready and set to go. At one point the UPW used this technique for closing down most of the Armour plants, and they came into the Armour Automation Committee seeking to negotiate, without any reference to the strike itself, some specific understandings on plant closings which Dresser, the other Amalgamated representative on the committee, was a little unhappy about. I persuaded Dresser that these were reasonable suggestions and after all the UPW was on strike and did we want to take a constructive approach here or not. Dresser gave in, he was not basically a nasty guy. Some of our people were.

I. Want to name any names?

R. Gorman could be pretty nasty.

I. Tell me about him. When we went through the Auto

Workers you gave me some good descriptions of individuals. Maybe you could do that for some of the people in the Amalgamated, too.

R. Gorman thought that the union was his private fief, he was the lord and master and the chieftain. Everyone owed allegiance to him. He was the gift giver, to use the Anglo Saxon term. He handed out merit to those who found his favor, he kicked in the rear those who displeased him. He'd been accustomed to operating that way for decades in full control of the situation. He knew where all the bodies were buried. He understood the techniques of blackmail and intimidation, and he used it for fairly absolute control of the structure itself. That is the international representatives had no clear cut rule or procedures to follow. They had to work it out as a relationship with Gorman. He would tolerate things from one guy which were verboten for another guy depending very much on the particular status and recent attitude of the character. I remember one black international representative had the temerity to run for the international executive board without the sanction of the establishment. This was about 1970 in the Atlantic City convention. Of course he wasn't elected and two weeks after the election he was carrying luggage at O'Hare Airport.

He couldn't go back into the plant? Did your international reps mostly come out of the plant?

R. They all came out of the plant.

I. But he couldn't go back to the plant either?

R. I guess his plant had closed or something of that sort.

I. So he was pretty ruthless.

R. Yes. On broad national, international issues German's Debs background would take over. He promoted the slogan, "Coexistence or no existence," for example on the nuclear bomb. He allowed Abe (Feinglass) to run over the world representing the Amalgamated at various conferences, including those with representation from Eastern Europe and other forbidden territories. The farther away you got from immediate shop problems and industry pressure the better Gorman was in his performance. You could almost make a mathematical formula about it. His virtue increased as of the square of the distance from the original shop situation. But when it came to a direct conflict with the employer, particularly one with whom Gorman had had personal relationships, he could become a very nasty guy.

I. With the employer?

R. That is if you were hassling an employer.

I. Oh I see, he did not want you to hassle an employer he liked.

R. On the contrary, the axe would come down on your neck if you were at all vulnerable to such action.

I. Did he get along a little too well with the employers? It seems to me that that's the picture.

R. I would say that he did, yes. He was vastly complimented when the American Meat Institute invited him down as the speaker at one of their annual conferences;

I. How do you explain that -- with a socialist background?

R. I don't know. It's a combination of aggression and dependency I guess, a desire to be loved plus fear. Fear I think played a large part in it. After all Gorman was an International officer in the early 1920's when the employers moved in and smashed the union -- bloodshed, terror, everything else. He saw it decline from an organization of a hundred thousand or so to two or three thousand.

I. Maybe he was convinced that would come again or that it was coming again.

R. In his bad moments he said, "Remember what happened in the 1920's. We could be smashed." I think this clutched at his vitals very often.

I. Now, what about some of the other people?

R. The other people really didn't count.

I. He was the only one?

R. That was the tragedy of it. He did not develop around him any kind of effective leadership. There was a man named Marvin Hook who was Retail Director. He was a guy from St. Louis, a fairly crude nasty guy, but at the same time he was a fairly dedicated trade unionist and up to a certain point he would fight him on issues. But Marvin died before he

could move on to higher office. In other words Gorman outlived his successors.

I. Could you draw any comparisons between Gorman and Reuther in terms of how they operated? They both seemed pretty power hungry.

R. Reuther was much more systematic, more rational, more coherent. He operated on the basis of a more sophisticated understanding of rank and file pressure and the dynamics of the total system. Gorman tended to go on instinct, to fly by the seat of his pants. Reuther would never have pulled the business that Gorman pulled in the Iowa Beef strike. Reuther might have sold out the strike, but he would have done it in a way that would have preserved his own prestige and honor. He would have had someone else do it and then he would have regretted the unfortunate development. He'd have fired one or two people but then accepted the strike settlement as inevitable and part of the general struggle.

I. Just one last question today -- when these plants closed down in places like Chicago and moved out into the boondocks did this mean that the racial composition of the work force was greatly changed?

R. Yes it did. If you go to Grand Island, Nebraska you'll find maybe one percent black and Hispanic in the total population.

I. So over all it meant it was a massive loss of jobs for

minority groups.

R. It certainly did.

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