Interview with George Patterson
by Edward Sadlowski
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I. This tape is with George Patterson, a retired staff representative of the Steel Workers Union, first president of Local 65 representing the employees in South Works in South Chicago, and a long time active member in the formation of trade unions in and around the Chicago area.

R. Thank you Ed. I would like to discuss the beginnings of the union, which would be between 1924 and 1932 when I began to serve my apprenticeship in the roll shop. My father worked also as a stationary engineer in the blast furnace department. John Patterson had been a member of the Enginemen and Boilermen's Association, a national union in the British Isles. He had, during the national steel strike in 1922 or thereabout, gone to Ten Downing Street with national committees. In about 1923 they electrified the steam engines. He found himself being out of work, laid off on the basis that there was no necessity to have stationary engineers. However, being a union man, they put him to work in the coal mines and in the gallery digging coal, a thing he had never done as a stationary engineer. He worked at that, but finally a few months later they closed down the coal mines and gallery and he was laid off. Then the blacklist
certainly became apparent. He could no longer find a job. He'd go to different coal mines in and around the Lanarkshire, Scotland region and work for a couple of weeks until they found out who he was and then they would lay him off again. This action over in the British Isles, the blacklisting, was perhaps one of the reasons and most likely the main reason we came to the United States.

When the bread winner could no longer work they had to think about where can they go to work. One night I came home from work,—I had been working as a boy, fourteen and a half, in the blacksmith shop after I graduated from high school. My dad said to me; "How would you like to go the United States?" And I said, "Why that would be just fine with me." "Well," he said, "I think there you'll have a better chance to make a living for yourself than we have here at home." And so we came over to the United States. At the age of sixteen I had to wait a year or a year and a half before we could get under the quota to come in 1924 to the United States.

My dad got a job working in the blast furnaces in South Works, South Chicago and about two weeks later I went to work in the blacksmith shop and later I transferred over to the roll shop and became a roll turner's apprentice. We started for twenty-six cents an hour at that time. I worked ten hours a day at $2.90 a day. And dad, who went to work as a full fledged stationary engineer, he was earning about thirty-five to forty cents an hour, ten hours a day, although
the blast furnaces later went on the eight hour shift and they were working eight hours at the time I’m talking about.

It was an interesting experience for a young man like me. I was strange to the ways and customs of the country and especially to the working man and the mill. One could sense that having come from a union country to a non-union plant that there was a great lot of favoritism certainly. We could see that if you kow-towed or bowed down to the foreman you could get many favors. John Patterson had experienced the bitter taste in the fact that the union in the old country had been unable to beat the blacklist so he was cautious about talking unionism in the steel mills. But his young son, who had just been married and had a son on the way, kept wondering about the lack of unionism, kept wondering how one could stop the favoritism that was being shown by the foreman. Nepotism was one of the strongest things: People often wondered how they hired their help. Well, generally the sons of foremen, the sons of men who had been working in the shop and were friendly with the foreman were the people who were hired in the various departments, especially in the skilled trades -- the electric shop, the roll shop, the carpenter shop, the bricklaying shop. There you would always find nepotism very strong within those departments.

In as much as nepotism was one of the most serious things they committed as far as the average workers were concerned, one would have thought that the workers would have
talked about the 1919 strike. But I, as a stranger to this country, was quite unaware that there had been a serious strike. In fact I learned more about the 1919 strike that had been lost, which was led by William Z. Foster, at the time when the CIO was beginning. Then the relationship back to what had happened in 1919 became apparent. Of course it was the old story. They tried to say that the organizers of 1919 had run away with the money, they had sold the workers out, that the union was something that could not be trusted. This was the impression that I found in the mill at the time when workers began to think that perhaps they needed an organization to give them some security and some good standing as far as seniority and working conditions were concerned.

But there were a lot of things going back between that period and 1924 and 1932. The company had been expanding, they were selling stock. Great-campaigns were going on to get the workers to buy steel stock and lots of workers were trying to do it. For example myself, making 29 cents an hour and getting a raise every six months, I finally fell and succumbed and bought one share of steel stock around 1927, paid a hundred and forty-four dollars for it. I recall in October 1929 looking at the paper, that this share of steel stock was worth two hundred and fifty-nine dollars. That was about the first week in October I noticed this, Yet in October, 1929 when the crash came, within six months that
share of stock had tumbled down between forty and fifty dollars; This kind of tragedy made lots of people sit up and take notice that there was a lack of security, not only without a union, but also in the economic program of the country.

It was interesting to know that I started to work in 1924, four years later I was finishing my apprenticeship. Then I began to save some money until I accumulated close to four hundred dollars and I began to think that I'd like to go back to Scotland and see some of my friends who I had left five years previously so I made a deal with my father. I sold my share of steel stock, or rather he-took the share of steel stock and gave me a hundred and fifty dollars for it. I paid a hundred and forty with a total of $500 so I took a trip for three months back to Scotland and came back with forty dollars in my pocket.

I went back to work in the mill in the month of October 1929 and then the crash hit. Still we in the steel mills didn't feel that we were going to be too badly affected. The average worker didn't and I especially, being a prima donna roll turner, you know, said that the roll shop was one of the last places that would feel the pinch. My wife and I got married in 1931 and I had said, "Don't worry about it, we'll always do all right." But I began to work about 1932 one day a month and my son was about to be born and I found out couldn't buy a bottle of milk. That makes a man sit up, the economic
pinch really hurt.

I. How did the foremen, George, at that time dole out the work to the employees?

R. That was done strictly on the basis of who you knew, nepotism. They tried to work out a bulletin board system where they would put the names of every one up and would say, "You'll work on such and such a day." But most of the time the bulletin board system was a maze of confusion. If you didn't know the foreman you found that you didn't get any more than your one day in the month. But if you did know the foreman you would find that the foreman would be apt to send a man off into some other department out in the yard with the bull gang. There a worker could sometimes put in an extra day but this was done strictly on the basis of favoritism. This favoritism, you know, meant that you found these people would go over and cut the foreman's grass or else they'd take him a bottle of wine. Prohibition was on at the time. Or else they would have their wives go over and wash the windows, take care of the foreman. Other men who were handy with cars would be seeing to it that the foreman's car was well shined up or the superintendent's car was well taken care of. That type of man was quite prevalent in the various parts of the mill and the worker would often time use his influence and say well if you do a favor for the foreman -- its who you know, what you get in return. This existed and was very prevalent. In fact it was talked of openly. You would hear different workers doing a
little cussing under their breath because of that so and so. "Look at him, he's getting the work because the foreman got a favor from him."

I. And that was the accepted way of doing it, wasn't it?

R. Oh yes, that was accepted. There was no move to organize, no growling, no grievances. If you went to the foreman and said something about this kind of condition existing you'd be fired and you had no recourse. There was no such thing as seniority.

I. The tighter the economic situation became, was it the tighter the foreman became or the tighter the mill became on their work rules and their oppressiveness towards the workers?

R. Well I would say yes, but the work rules were issued when you were hired and it was a fairly good document as far as safety requirements that the worker had to follow. What management practiced, however, was quite different and you would find that the wash-up period would be clamped down on. If the workers took five minutes at the end of their job to wash up they were liable to get a day off, they were liable to be fired. I would say the workers instinctively knew they had to toe the mark and if the foreman said clean up on your own time it was done. Yeah, they would very indirectly put the squeeze play on when things were tight as far as short work was concerned, not to the extent where it became a great issue though. At that time they were not thinking of unionism most
likely. Without my knowledge of having known the economic
pinch brought with the 1919 strike; I didn't realize that
these old timers were staying in line because of the lessons,
the bitter lessons, they had learned from experience from the
union.

I. Did the company cut any wages at that time?
R. Oh yes.
I. Did they do it across the board or just
discriminately?
R. They did it across the board. No they didn't
discriminate. There would be a ten percent wage cut, fifteen
percent wage cut. They only made two or three hourly wage
cuts on the percentage basis but they did change our hours
from ten hours a day to eight hours a day in the roll shops or
in the other shops. Then they cut down --instead of working
seven days a week you began to work five days a week, four days
a week, three days a week. This is the way they did it and
that was the natural lay-off. In fact, to a young man like
'myself, when these things happened I was often glad we would
get a couple of days off because in this roll shop we had
worked pretty steady. When we went down to the forty hour
week we thought we had lost our best friend as far as making a
half way decent check was concerned because the lay off cut
your wages. There was growling and I could hear the workers
saying, "It's too bad that we don't have a union." But this
was the radical type of worker, not the average worker. The
usual thing was, "Well, next week it will start picking up." The question you would hear being asked in those days was, "How much tonnage does the mill get?" Then you would watch the paper and you'd find out that the tonnage was dropping and dropping. Management gauged their plans by the tonnage. Newspaper reporters issued economic statements on the basis of tonnage as to whether or not the mills would be operating or whether or not South Chicago would be hard pinched for money because of the fact that mills were not operating to full capacity. It often was down to ten percent, the capacity operation in the mill.

I. How many guys had been working in the mill, say at the peak time of the mid-twenties? There were good times then.

R. Yeah, there were close to sixteen thousand men at the peak time at the South Works and there would be eighteen thousand at Gary at that time. The way that they gauged the size of a mill was that Gary was the largest mill in the world. They had twelve blast furnaces. South Chicago's the second largest, they had eleven blast furnaces. We always figured in those days that Gary had about two thousand more employees than South Chicago. When I organized, I began to organize the place in 1936, there were sixteen; seventeen thousand. During the war years in 1941 we actually went up to nineteen thousand. Then all of a sudden the bottom came out with the technocracy coming into being.

I. In that period of 1929 and the early '30s, did the
average worker feel any bitterness towards the company or the
government? What was the general feeling if he was walking
the bread line. or suddenly found himself out of a job or
working one day a week? Was there any grass roots type of
action taking place?

R. No, the only grass roots type of action that I sensed
that any one was taking was from the outside of the mill, not
inside the mill. This is the period of about 1932. For the
first time I began to see an occasional group of people at the
mill gate giving out a leaflet. I recall taking one of the
leaflets and I found out it was the Communist Party. They
were at the gates as early as 1932 but they were never there
too steady. You'd get an occasional leaflet. I recall
taking the leaflet then and sitting down at my work bench and
reading it and having a couple of workers come up and say,
"What the hell's the matter with you?" I said, "Well what's
the matter? It's a leaflet and I'm reading it." "Well you
don't want to get contaminated with that thought do you?" I
recall reading the leaflet and turning around and saying,
"Say, they haven't got bad ideas." I recall just
instinctively -- I had no knowledge of what a Communist Party
was, I had never read a book about the Communist Party -- but
it was through the leaflets, I recall, that we sensed that
there were people who were interested in organizing ourselves
and who were suggesting it. I recall having tremendous
arguments after that first remark made by these couple of
people. I said that I would rather read that type of a leaflet than read the Chicago American which at that time was denouncing the legitimate organized labor movement of the AFL.

The craft unions, they were showing the gangsterism. They were showing the incidents where some embezzlement had taken place and I had been pointing out and did point out that I knew that legitimate unions existed in the world and they were good. I would illustrate it by what my father had experienced as far as what he had done in the 1922 strike back in Great Britain. Of course everybody knew how well advanced the Scandinavian unions were. They were, even at that time, talking about pension plans and socialized medicine and here we were not even organizing.

When I would talk like this I found the average American guy saying, "Why the hell don't you go back to that country if it's so good?" And this is a pretty hard kind of question to answer when you've come over here and you saw the possibilities of earning more money, working steadier. But this didn't actually take place the way that they'd dreamed it would take place. The average American began to feel the economic pinch at the same time I began to feel it. And lo and behold it didn't take too long before I began to find that they were saying to me, "You seem to know a little about unions, tell us more." The workers on the job would say this to me and it was very interesting.
I. What role at that time did the company play as far as trying to direct the workers thinking on who was the cause of this depression? Were they trying to say it was government, outside forces, foreign powers? Did they come out with any propaganda at the time?

R. About the only propaganda that I would sense that they pointed out was when men like Samuel Insull and various bankers and institutions who had cornered different markets -- they pointed out that these people had become embezzlers. They pointed out that they were the crooked individuals but not large industry. They passed the buck to the individuals like Bain, the banker in Chicago, Samuel Insull, people who had lost their paper assets. They could very well show by the different ones who were jumping out of the windows, they had lost their fortunes but it was all paper assets, whereas they pointed out the steel industry was a steady industry, would come back. "Stay with us, we'll keep you on the payroll."

They kept the skilled craftsmen. Of course they laid off lots of semi-skilled workers. In fact the working force went down to, I would say, about twenty percent. They were kept as a skeleton crew but that was the method of management. And the papers fully cooperated in passing the economic collapse not on to the government, not on to large industry, but by the write-ups and the pictures exhibited in the paper it was individuals who had collapsed and their investments.
Did the average guy that worked in the mill at that time feel that the mill was a benevolent organization, that there was a benevolent company affording them a job and that? Didn't they feel any repulsiveness that they had to give the boss a cigar or pint of wine or possibly have to have their wife do some service for the boss to work?

R. I would say that an occasional individual would talk up and say this was a repulsive action but it was never taken up as a big issue. There was too much fear.

I. Was that the key word -- fear?

R. Yeah, fear of losing your job. See, there was no seniority, you had no safety. Management could walk in and fire anybody anytime. They didn't practice this too much but they did do it on occasion. For example, the average steel worker on the day after payday, many of them would get drunk, wouldn't show up for work for a couple of days. They never got fired but were kept on the job. You could take a day off without asking for permission, that was quite common. But like you do anything, the way you would be confronted by the foreman and he would see to it that you got laid off, there wasn't much that you could do about it. They would give you a threat that your job would be insecure and this would keep a man in line for quite a period of time. You were dominated but it was done in such a manner, the hidden fear, the hidden persuader, might I put it. It was always there, the hidden persuader with your job.
I. How much control did a company like Carnegie's U.S. Steel, South Works have in a community at the time?

R. Oh they had complete control. For example, if you wanted to build a brand new YMCA you had to get the company's consent and the company, if they agreed, they would see to it. I, myself, was assigned the job, as an apprentice, to collect money for that YMCA in South Chicago. It was solicited by the company. They'd use their young apprentices to go around in the shop and get the promises of donations. When it came time to open a new library you would have to get the approval of the company. The type of books that went into the library were approved by the company.

I. These were public institutions.

R. They were public institutions. We had a man named Wilson Franklin. Later on I became acquainted with Wilson Franklin, who was a member of the School Board, and never in my life did I meet such a meek, such a weak-willy sister type of an individual. He had very little to say in the South Chicago community but it was a favorite expression of the Daily Calumet to point out that Mr. Wilson had been appointed to a committee. That would be the last you would hear about it and he represented organized labor. They would do that but they had him completely under control. He would do nothing other than that. He was a front showing that organized labor was represented on the School Board.

I. You say U.S. Steel did play a great role. Would the
merchants and the churches?

R. Oh well, as far as the churches were concerned, when we were beginning to organize and we went and asked the churches to aid us encouraging members to sign up, they said do you want us to bite the hand that feeds us? We said what do you mean by that? "Well, see all that wood lying over there? We got it from U.S. Steel. Come on down in the basement." And they showed us it was full of coke for firing the furnaces in St. Michael's Church. And the priest said, "You don't think we're out to bite the hand that feeds us? We're rather afraid that we can't do too much for you."

I. That was later on but during the real height of the depression what was the attitude of the church towards the working man and big business, if anything? What was the priest, the preacher saying from the pulpit, do you recall that?

R. No all I can recall is that as a member of the Presbyterian Church, they said nothing. They just completely ignored the fact that the depression was on. There was no move that I can't recall by any of the churches to feed the hungry. I don't recall that. I recall that there was more of a move by the organized labor movement to demonstrate and take you down to the welfare agencies and do a little bit for you.

I. Do you recall some of the storming of the relief stations and all that?
Oh I recall that back in 1936 when Workers Alliances got together and many a time I went. We stormed into the welfare station of Mr. Lyons and demonstrated by saying that he had to use his influence in seeing to it that more food and clothing were provided and that rent and food and fuel would be taken care of and there would be a stop to the evictions that were going on. Those were hectic days! They were stormy days and it was nothing to be followed by the police of Chicago. They would break up our groups or else they would be stopping our cars. Those of us who could afford a car would be stopped and frisked. This was common practice back during the height of the depression.

It helped of course, develop the union. Really the thing that organized the labor union was the economic pinch. Workers became more convinced that they've got to use their representatives, they've got to get organized, they've got to get safety, and the only way is through the contract system, getting it down in black and white such and such will be provided for you in the way of wages and hours and working conditions. There's no other way that I have ever been able to resolve it.

Going on with the South Chicago element, the role that the steel industry played in that area economically, socially and possibly even religiously, when did you first start to notice the worker in the South Works plant taking heed of the fact that he was getting a screwing by the
the industrialists?

R. I would say that it all came about in the most innocuous manner. It was a real sunny morning about 1934 in the spring and I saw the foreman coming down the line handing out a white sheet of paper to each individual. Finally he got to me and I looked at it and lo and behold, there was a titled document saying, "Employee Representation Plan," being submitted to the workers. It explained that due to the fact that the National Labor Relations Act had been created and that collective bargaining had become the right of the worker under the law through Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Congress, that the company suggested that we elect representatives of our own choosing. They'd drawn up a whole constitution and by-laws where by we could have a union of our own. This is how the people in the Calumet region and the mass steel industries became introduced to the labor movement as we now recognize it in the CIO. This is the early beginning.

I. Was the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Sheet and Tin still in existence?

R. That was a real dead organization at that time. It was actually in existence but there was no form or semblance of it in South Works. There were a half dozen people who called themselves an Amalgamated Union over in Gary. I think it was called Rubicon Lodge but they had no influence. They were as dead as the proverbial dodo but they carried the name. In other words there were a few workers who had the courage,
had the nerve, had the intestinal fortitude to say we think you should belong to the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers but it was so deep an abyss they were buried in that they meant nothing. Management was not at all afraid of them. They themselves didn't know where they were going or how to do it.

But when an Employee Representation Plan was submitted it was amazing how many of these relatives of the bosses put themselves forward to be elected to be an employee representative in the institution. It was created and they began to hold meetings. I recall reading the constitution and starting to laugh about the wording and the clauses in it. I said immediately that this thing could never work. One of the workers that I was talking with about it in an informal manner at lunch time said, "Well how do you know so much about it?" And I said, "Well, common sense tells me that if five management and five workers sat down and they began to argue about a grievance it would wind up in a tie vote. "Then look," I said, "the arbitrator, the man who makes the final decision is the president of the company. How do you think he'd answer such a thing?"

So they said to me, "Well in as much as you seem to know about the union so much, how about us electing you?" I was the second employee representative out of the roll shop. A fellow by the name of Donovan was elected first. Ed Donovan would come back and I would always ask him, "How did you make
"Oh, tie vote, can't get anywhere. In fact management runs the thing, it's no use." He had nothing to tell us. So one day he said, "I'm resigning," and the workers turned around and they elected me.

Of course, I was a brave heart. I thought I could go down and straighten it out right away. But I soon found out when I was among all those employee representatives that I stood alone. They were not sincere, they were not interested in challenging management on their employee representation, but I set myself to the task. First thing I sensed was that the President of the Employee Representation Plan was a man named Tom Fogett, a statistician clerk in the main office. The secretary of the organization was George Dowding. George Dowding was an office worker in the main office. I said, "Wait a minute, let's get these guys out. If this is a workers union let's get men from the mill." I found out that I could no more get a man elected from the mill but I kept at it. I never really got a man elected from the mill to head, the ERP but I did successfully test every point, which I deliberately did, of the company's union procedure.

And I was finally able to show that not one part of the procedure under the Employee Representation Plan would work, that it always ended in a tie vote or ended in management being the final say so. I concluded that by the fact that when I was fired I took my case up under the Employee Representation Plan to the Department of Labor of the United States government who
ordered me back to work. Management again said the hell with any ruling under the ERP or the arbitrator or the Department of Labor. You're not coming back to work. They deposited my tools outside the gate and said there you are and I became a labor organizer.

I.

In that period of '34 and '35 when that ERP was quite prevalent in the mill, you made mention of some of the people that were the representatives. Guys like Jerry Bouchey and Leo Levereno, John Barton and these guys later became big honchos with the company in the industrial relations area. Was that the general trend throughout the country, would you know?

R.

Yeah, well I kind of illustrated very roughly and kind of hurriedly the Employee Representation Plan but many things were going on underground. For example, one night after I came home from work aft& a very hectic meeting with the Employee's Representative group, I found a man sitting in my home and here this man was making a proposition to my sister that I be hired as a spy. He didn't come out and say that outright but he offered me seventy-five dollars a month to work and give him reports on what was going on in the Employee Representation Plan and what was going on in the mill, with the hint that perhaps I should report to his organization. This man's name was Mr. Gray and the other man, who was his associate, was Mr. Hanning. They said what they were really interested in was getting reports on safety and waste but they
did understand that I was a leader in the Employee's Representation Plan and that through that kind of contact perhaps I could get them reports.

When this proposition was made to me I was greatly disturbed because I was unaware of the spying. It came as a complete revelation -- the first contacts I ever had. When this man made the proposition to me, he'd pay me money for the reports, I went over to the plant's security, Mr. Nicholaisen, and this is the original Mr. Nicholaisen, by the way. I reported that I was being hired for spying and he laughed and said, "Aw, somebody's kidding you." I said, "Look, aren't you at all interested in the seriousness of the charges that I'm listing. Their men want to meet me tomorrow morning, how about giving me some protection? I'll go down and meet with them, and you who represent security here protect me and I'll give you a report as to exactly what they intend to really propose to me." This meeting was to be at either the Majestic Hotel or the Atlantic Hotel downtown, I forget at the moment. But he laughed it off. I took, as a witness, Jim Davies to hear the story about the proposition and the spying. Jim Davies was an Employee Representative. He could hardly believe what I was saying and afterward I recall he said, "I don't understand the Chief of Police not being interested in your proposition of following through here, Patterson, just to see how far this spy thing goes."

It turned out though that management dropped this
matter. But I met a man named John Mullin in Pittsburgh, who was given this similar proposition, and he had accepted the salary of fifty dollars and was reporting to Clinton Golden, who was working for the National Labor Relations Board at the time. John Mullin and I, through a series of circumstances which is a rather unique story, both testified before the Senator LaFollette's committee in the investigation of industrial espionage. It came out from the findings of that hearing that there were over four thousand spy agencies in the country and there were an estimated two or three million spies in industrial espionage in the United States.

A similar thing has just been revealed in espionage in the last week or two here and it's a complete similarity as to what happened in 1936 and that period of time '34 to '36. Now we're going through a repeat of espionage only it's being conducted by the Army. At that time it was conducted by the companies and industry, they had complete control.

Perhaps one of the most interesting points that I could tell you, Ed, is that when I was at the hearing of Senator LaFollette they placed a series of photographs in front of me and one of the pictures showed two men getting off of an airplane and three men standing down below welcoming them. They asked me if I knew any of the people in this picture. And I said yeah I knew that was Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI, and I knew these two fellows standing with him were the same two spies who had been trying to get me to become
a spy. They said, "Do you know these fellows getting off the plane?" And I said; "No, I don't know who they are, I've never seen them before." He said, "Well, that's your Vice President of U.S. Steel, Mr. Frick." I said, "What do you mean? You mean Hoover of the FBI and these two spies who were trying to get me to be an industrial spy are meeting with Frick?" They said, "Yeah, do you get the significance?" I said, "Yeah, I want to tell people about this." They said, "You never saw this picture." I said, "You mean I can't get a copy of this picture even?" They said, "Nope, we just wanted you to look at this picture and see if you could identify these people." But that picture is in the record of Senator LaFollette's investigation and that's back in the year 1936. This is the same Mr. Hoover who is still head of the FBI. I don't know what the connection is but there's something there.

I.

In that period of '35 after you became involved in the Employee Representation Plan that U.S. Steel had setup, you tried to get some better people representing the employees. I know that your brother Hugh, that had worked in the bar mill, was also at this time actively involved.

R.

Yeah, it's an interesting point you raise. It's something that I never talk too much about because it becomes kind of chauvinistic if you begin to speak about who did the actual organizing in the South Works. Well, very modestly, I must say many a time I stood alone as an individual. Because
of being an Employee Representative I had top contacts, I had the freedom of the mill, I served on many committees. I had lots of excuses to say I was on business so I'd go to the Open Hearth, talk to the Company Union Representatives. As a member of the Rules Committee or the Election Committee or the Safety Committee I could go across the mill and see different people. There were about three people, at the beginning of my company union experience, who were legitimate, good, dedicated men who wanted a decent union in the mill. There was myself and Roy Flannery and Joe Gilbert. Joe Gilbert was from the Open Hearth. Roy Flannery worked as a clerk in the 22" Mill office on the billet dock at the Finishing End office. But, these three, the three of us, were the beginnings.

It took two years till finally out of thirty two representatives we had about seventeen that would actually begin to cooperate and would begin to move towards forming an independent union. We were still hesitant because there was no form of legitimate trade union. There was no Amalgamated Association in South Works. We were moving towards our own independent union. There was a machinist by the name of McClennan who always claimed to be an old Amalgamated man but he stood alone. He would say, "I think you ought to get into the Amalgamated Association." But when I would ask him how he got into it he could never seem to direct me to any people and I came to the conclusion that while his heart lay in the
right place his manners were really strictly company union. He was an older man and maybe he was rather afraid because of his age.

We found that the Scotch type, the Irish type of individual in the mill, the people who were Anglo Saxon types were the ones that were moving really, and now I'm talking chauvinistically, but to be truthful they were the ones who started the labor movement at South Works. They backed me up -- Danes and Swedes, Norwegians. I hate to say it, very lacking at the beginning was the support of the Polish people who predominated. They really predominated. In the company union they could have taken over the company union and didn't. Later a man like Steve Ulanowski began to come forward a little bit. He's one of the early Polish fellows who supported us. I think that's about the only one I can say when I think of all the Polish fellows. But Steve began to say in a half hearted manner, "Well, I think you're on the right track. Yeah, I'll work with you." But it took a long time. In fact I'd always sensed the day that we could convince the Polish worker to give his support that the union would be made because once they came in, it would not only be the union, they would take over the union, which they did. I'd done a good job but it took a long time to get them started. Fellows. like Jerome Wilzewski who finally came along, came into the union, I'd never heard of him. I didn't know of him until he was elected president.
Under the old ERP, prior to going in to the SWOC (Steel Workers Organizing Committee), how long did it take guys to realize that that (ERP) was nothing but a stooge, outfit, nothing but a company union? Then when they started to look forward after the inception of the CIO that they had to go this way in a year or two years?

R.

There came the time when we had in the Employee Representation Plan a majority and we voted to form an independent group called the Associated Employees. This meeting that we called to organize the Associated Employees' was held on the night that Joe Lewis won the championship of the world. In fact I recall our meeting was adjourned in order to catch the fight which started at 9:30. But about eight hundred workers showed up at the Bessemer Park and we began to sign them into the Associated Employees and we started holding regular meetings. I was elected president. One night Joe Gilbert came to the meeting and said he had read in the paper where they were forming a similar organization of Employee Representative Councils down in Pittsburgh. They, suggested that I be sent there so I went to Pittsburgh and I met a man named Johnny Mullin who later was involved with me in the spy espionage business and who also began to organize into independent unions.

At the same, time this was going on, John Lewis was beginning to split away from the AFL and I was also instructed to write a letter to John Lewis from the Associated Employees,
asking him to come in and organize us steelworkers. I recall getting a letter from Mr. Lewis saying that if I would just hold my shirt tails they would be down there in the summer of 1936. These incidents took place between the summer of 1935 and 1936.

I. Let me break for a minute. When you formed your association, after you busted up the ERP, did the company recognize you as an independent union at that time?

No, they refused to. I would be attending my meetings of Employee Representation and every once and a while management would say tome, "What the hell's the matter with you? Where do you get the idea that you can run an independent union? Suppose you had to call a meeting?". I recall some of the foremen talking it over with me in the plant general office. They said, "Where could you hold the meeting big enough to call all the workers?" And I said, "Oh, that's easy enough. We'll hold three meetings a day and we'll hire Asher Theatre." They'd say, "Where would you get the money?" And I'd say, "Well, we'll begin to get dues. We'll get money, we can do it. We've got the spirit, we can do it." So they would attempt to discourage all of the activity. Then when I would say; "Well one of these days we'll come in and demand recognition. Under the Employee's Representation you recognize them as the chosen bargaining representatives. well I'll show you cards, I will show you membership that you will have to recognize us." The management never did. They
declined to meet with us although we submitted grievances. We signed petitions, we got thousands of petitions, signatures with demands of all the names in my records. But we never were able to present them to management because they declined.

In the meantime, simultaneous with this action was the move to form the Steel Worker's Organizing Committee by John Lewis and then Philip Murray and VanBittner. And we, at the appropriate moment, joined the SWOC in 1936. While that was going on, I was also a member of the Calumet Council of Employee Representatives and that was a group of all the major steel plants, all of the "Little Steel" plants. These company union representative councils would meet, hold meetings, talk together about the kind of demands we'd like to make, the type of grievances that were being submitted to management, the possibility of us forming a sort of national union out of these employee representatives. And whilst we got encouragement from the company stooges within this Employee Representation Plan, it would always die away and nothing would come of it. We were organized well enough under the Employee Representation Plan, all the way to Keystone Steel and Wire in Peoria, Illinois but we still couldn't consolidate our efforts or thinking and this kind of action showed me very plainly that we had to get into a legitimate labor movement.

I. Do you remember some of the guys that were active in
the Calumet area in the old ERP that were really legitimate
guys, guys that really had the workers at heart?

R. Well I can remember most of the people but the ones
that were legitimate, I can't name too many. I'm afraid that
when the time came for the South Works and Associated
Employees, when I went to Gary, for example, I found none. I
approached a man, John Mayerick, I approached a man named Joe
Goin, I approached people in Youngstown. I forget their
names now but none of them were ready to go to Pittsburgh. In
fact I would end up taking strangers with me, Jimmy Steward,
Joe Gilbert, myself. And I met a man for the first time, an
Irishman by the name of Peg Ennis in Gary and a man named Mike
Ostrowski in Gary who had not been active but who turned out to
be legitimate workers for the labor movement but not big
figures.

Later on men like Goin and Mayerick, when they saw
the groundwork was laid, they came back in. They had been on
the fringe but they came back in, began to give support to the
Steelworkers Organizing Committee. In fact they were early
people who jumped on the bandwagon. As we began to roll more
and more people came in. It was amazing for me to hear the
type of people who in 1937 were saying, "We've been behind you
all the time, Patterson. We were in the meeting in Bessemer
Park." But I have the names and addresses of the people that
were in Bessemer Park and I find that if I looked over the list
a lot of people who claimed to have been there, their names
were not down as members. It's interesting to note that the records speak for themselves as to who was actually a legitimate member in our union at that time.

I. Did a guy kind of shy away from a legitimate union movement again out of fear, George?

R. Yeah it took quite a bit of convincing the average worker that this time the union was here to stay. They listened to the foremen and if a man had worked twenty years in the mill or so at that time, he had been through the 1919 steel strike. It wasn't too difficult for the foremen to put the fear of God into these old timers and say, "Ah, this Patterson, that representative from the union, is a radical. This man John Lewis is a way out bum. He's fighting, the legitimate organized labor movement, he'll split it into the CIO."

Management never let up. In fact they went to the extent of signing a yellow dog contract with the Employees Representatives and they claimed the first contract that was ever signed by U.S. Steel was by the Company Union Representatives and Management of South Works. That document, they're quite proud of. I've seen it hanging on the wall in the Employee Personnel Office. But the last time when I finally pensioned out, I looked for it and they said, "Oh no, we don't put that up on the wall anymore." They had removed it finally. It's in the record and the files.

TAPE II
I. You say that that agreement then was signed between that ERP group and the management and that it really never had beneficial aspects to the employees. When did the employees in South Works and in the Calumet area really start to realize that there was something in the wind?

R. Well the representatives of the Associated Employees were not recognized as yet and were never really recognized, but under them we were reading legitimate union labor papers. We were interested in affiliating with a legitimate labor organization. I recall the United Roll Turners of America, which we had also organized as a craft union. Being a craftsman I was interested in the crafts. Then I began to hear about the industrial type of union, the vertical type, the horizontal type. Ed, you know how we get it in school. I went with a committee down to the International Association of Machinists and, as roll turners and craftsmen, we invited them—to come to our meeting and see whether or not we could affiliate as craftsmen. They showed no interest. They were interested more in machine shops on the outside. They felt they had nothing to gain by getting craftsmen within the steel mills. These large mass producing industries were beyond their comprehension. They felt that they couldn't bargain for people such as us so they showed no interest. But John Lewis, as I've already stated, indicated that he was interested in mass production groups and that he would send organizers in.
Management never really bargained under the yellow dog contract that was signed with the Employee Representatives. They never really gave us an opportunity through our Associated Employees to bargain on behalf of ourselves. We as a group, though, had been moving in the right direction. We had, for example, bought a mimeograph machine and were putting out leaflets at the gate. Now you can imagine a handful of people -- in fact this handful of people was my wife and myself -- when we were half the time running off ten, fifteen thousand leaflets at a time on the mimeograph and then the five plant gates had to be covered as far as giving out leaflets. I finally resorted to going down to the unemployment agency and hiring boys whom we would pay out of the quarter dues we were getting through the Associated Employees, pay for distribution.

Then the Chicago Police began to arrest the boys. That was a difficulty. I went to jail with these boys in my day because the company was successful in having the police arrest us. Then we would be taken to jail and be held with the charges of disorderly conduct or littering the streets. This, of course, was fought all the way for free dissemination of literature up to the Supreme Court.

Finally when the legitimate unions were organized we could begin to give out the literature. We also got in contact with a newspaper publisher, a man who was issuing a paper called The Peoples Press, and we were able to get the
front page in South Chicago. We South Works workers, under the Associated Employees, began to issue this newspaper at the plant gates. This had a tremendous effect. We were able to get good contact through a legitimate newspaper with the welders in the plant and we were able to write up articles concerning grievances.

One of the biggest and best that helped organize more workers than anything at that time was when the company discharged a man named Harry Cullen who was the head of the Good Fellow Club. He was the one who'd run all the sports and recreational activities. He was the fellow who, when somebody died, would see to it that the wreath was taken to the funeral on behalf of the company. He was a popular man. It grew time for Harry to get his pension, management laid him off. This was a golden opportunity. We grieved this through our publicity in our newspaper, The Peoples Press. We were successful by shocking management through the uproar raised by the workers in the plant that poor Harry had been discharged just about the time when he was due to get his pension. Management rehired him, put him back to work.

We gained more members by that type of action then we had up to that time because we had never been able to settle grievances. And it was through an incident where a management man was involved who was popular that the workers finally saw that if we put the pressure on the right places at the right time under the correct circumstances that we could
form a union and we could get management to acknowledge the fact that we were a bargaining power. This is a very important point. It was spontaneous combustion, but if timed properly, really spontaneously with a little concerted push at the right moment you can begin to build your union.

When you were going to the public press and primarily The Peoples Press, as you call it, was management coming back with any form of rebuttal, internally or through the newspapers in the community at that time?

R. Yeah, whenever we would show up with a committee in Pittsburgh or show up in some hotel or in Youngstown, wherever we'd get publicity about the fact that we were organizing, that we had a group in South Chicago, Youngstown, Pittsburgh, McKeesport, Duquesne -- wherever we'd show up management would always issue a statement that some "rump red group meeting was held in Pittsburgh but they are a minority and the legitimate company union representatives have denounced them." This kind of publicity was always forthcoming after any of our forays into other parts of the country.

I. The fact of the matter though, George, is that I think the company union representatives were denouncing you, weren't they?

R. Yeah, very much. For example, at that time I was an Employee Representative, I was an independent union man, I was a member of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, I was a member of the Council of all Employee Representatives of the
Calumet Region. And when we appeared before Mr. Lamont or Mr. Burnett who was assigned to hear us in the offices of the Pittsburgh U.S. Steel Company I pointed out that I carried all of these titles and he had to recognize me under one, I hoped, and that we wanted a raise in wages, wanted a paid vacation, wanted favoritism stopped and two or three other matters we presented to him. He listened very kindly and said he would take matters under advisement. In the mean time the press came out saying—that a "rump red group" had appeared at the offices of the company and had been denounced. I came back and found that I had been fired for insubordination and for going off the job without permission, the point being I had asked permission. It had been denied and management had said if you dare go as a representative to this meeting you will no longer have a job.

Now the Employee Representatives at the same time had issued a statement that they had signed a yellow dog — they had signed a contract with management which Patterson had immediately branded as yellow dog. You do understand, Ed, we were playing publicity, we were playing strategy, we, were playing all the angles, management just as viciously as we were, attempting just as strongly as we knew how to get the workers interested in the issues at hand and moving into legitimate, unionism.

But the Employee Representatives, when I returned from that meeting, called me into session, proposed to have a
trial. I appeared before a committee in the basement of the general offices of the South Works and there they began to question me about some of the evidence that I had been submitting down in the Pittsburgh region before the National Labor Relations Board, as well as for the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. They were going to take me to court they said, so I told them to be damned and go to court if they wished and I had nothing to say to them because they had the verbatim records which management had thoughtfully provided from the hearings I had been appearing at.

I. This was your own ERP group?
R. Yeah!
I. This was union guys?
R. Members of my committee were people that I've mentioned, Ed. There was Leo Laverence, there was Jimmy Kirkland, there was George Dowding, there was Tom Foggott, there was Jerry Bogey, there was John Barton, there was George Connors, all of these people who later became bosses and members of personnel and general foremen.
I. These guys were company stifffs at the time I came around the barn and they were in charge of personnel and they were firing our people and discharging our people.
R. And that was the same man who was pretending that he had been representing the workers under the Employee Representation Plan. In fact there's a strong indication to me that at the time that I was approached to become a spy,
certainly among all the Employee Representatives some of these people had been approached to become spies. It would not be far amiss to project your mind to saying that you point the finger at some of these people who later became top officials with management and had used Employee Representation to further their own ends and had sold the people they represented down the river within their own departments. This I say after long and careful deliberation of thought as the years went by!

I.

I think you're right, George. You mentioned The Peoples Press and the steelworkers using that to bring the issues to the community as well as management. In South Chicago there is a community newspaper of long existence called The Daily Calumet. Did they play any part in that period of time in taking a position on either side?

R.

Well as you know the press, in my opinion, today as in that day is strictly a controlled press. Management certainly had strong control of The Daily Calumet. The United States Steel Corporation especially had its fingers in many pies and it was not inhibited in using The Daily Calumet. I knew the publisher in 1936 very well, his name was Robert Worden. Bob Worden had several quiet conversations with me at the time. I recall he belonged, he said, to the South Shore Country Club. Of course belonging to the South Shore Country Club he was in close contact with the general superintendent of the steel plant and the assistant general.
They all played golf and hunted together and he told me that he had been having a talk and he had asked about this George Patterson from George Danforth and Walter Mathesius, who were superintendents about the time I'm talking about. They had said Patterson was an up and coming leader in the community but he had got off to a bad start because he was interested in these radical unions and the AFL and they thought if he could be pointed in the right direction they would control him.

So Worden, who was taking statements and news items from our Associated Employees at the time, would pretend to be fairly confidential and friendly to our endeavors. But at the same time he let me clearly understand that his bread was really buttered with industry and the community and that he felt that we were fighting a losing cause, that he didn't think we would ever get ourselves established in the legitimate labor movement. I remember him talking about Wilson Franklin, who was a member of the Printer's Union at the time and who was on the School Board, that that type of union (the craft union) was quite necessary but this industrial type of union where they took in everybody from the common laborer up was a far fetched dream and even John Lewis, he felt, was way out of line.

Of course I totally disagreed with him about his attitudes. As far as the control of the paper he let me know, Worden as the publisher, that first he reserved a certain degree of independence, that the paper was holding to the line
that anything that was good for South Chicago must come from the steelmills. It was the same attitude of the church, that anything that was good for the people came out of it. It was a very typical Republican philosophy. Workers had jobs provided first if the steel mill is taken care of and this attitude still prevails today. The articles would show this. When they would write up an article concerning the activities of our independent union or the Employee Representatives or the Calumet Councils they would always start them in such a manner that it would be degrading to the peoples side of the question but that management in a dignified manner was generally on the right track. 'And we took for granted that any time we got publicity in The Daily Calumet that we could never expect it to be truthful, it was always slanted.

I. Did The Calumet, prior to the CIO, resort to any red herring, any red baiting?

R. Only merely on the basis that they reported from statements of Associated Press, the UP, where they would say management had said there was a red group that was organizing. Then they would quote but never to the extent that they would take on the union, that we would feel we would like to sue them for libel.

I. Did this come later when you did go into the CIO though? Did The Calumet or any of the other newspapers --

R. Only in the slanted basis that I have mentioned.
They never took us on wholesale. For example, the communists at that time were putting out a paper called The Midwest Record. I think that's the title of it. And it was interesting at this time, close to the year 1937 after the Memorial Day Massacre at Republic Steel, that I had the politicians such as Alderman Rowan, who was a key figure during this organizing campaign period, come to me and indicate that if I knew how to get some copies of The Midwest Record that he would appreciate it and he would give me an article to put in as a Democrat. Now this was known as a left wingpaper. I would point out to him we didn't use that paper but we had The Peoples Press and then we had the Steelworkers Organizing Committee labor paper coming out, that's what we used. Rut it is interesting to notice that The Daily Calumet, if it suited their purpose, could praise us or denounce us. The Midwest Daily Record could be used by the ultra-right or the ultra-left and everybody jumps on the band wagon in a case like this where there's a direct move going on to organize.

I see the similarities now in the pollution movement of this day where publicity is coming out on the one hand from the management that Socialist Trotskyite people are involved from the worker's side and the papers play this up. It's just exactly what management did through The Daily Calumet and what they attempted to do through other publications. The workers in the meantime used their papers which are becoming
more prevalent today, showing that it's a people fight and the people are rallying and urging that management begin to pay the proper share of the taxes invent the proper things to get rid of the smoke, do something in the way of sewage disposal, that they pay that part of the burden and it not come out of the worker who's already paying taxes for his own water meter and is not polluting anything.

I. What you're talking about now, George, is this about the end of the ERP era, late 1935, early '36?

R. '36 was the end, by the summer of 1936 it had practically disintegrated.

I. Let me ask you then, being very active in the labor movement or what was considered the labor movement of its time in South Chicago in the steel industry, how did you and your officers and your comrades in the mill get into the CIO? How did that come about in Chicago? I know it probably wasn't just something that happened overnight, how did it come about?

R. Well my part in the way it came about as far as South Chicago was concerned, in April of 1936 I was down at the United Roll Turners Convention in Pittsburgh and this John Mullin, whom I've talked about before, from Clairton, Pennsylvania, came in and said, "When you've got time, Patterson, we'd like you to leave the convention and come over and meet a man named Phil Murray." Now I realized that this Phil Murray he was talking about was the man that John Lewis
was going to send in to organize South Chicago.

I went over and I met Phil Murray for the first time and I found out he was a brother Scot, born in the same part of the country where I was born so we immediately set up an affinity that was rather close. Phil Murray said to me that he was going to send a rather pompous little individual by the name of Van Bittner into the Midwest region and he hoped I would be able to get along with him. But he said he's a good organizer, "I think you'll find that he'll help build your union and we'll all go down the road merrily until we get a contract in the shortest possible time with the U.S. Steel Corporation."

Now South Chicago was the first and I might say proudly Local 65 was the first group. We were in closer contact. We were much better organized than any other steel group across the country through our Associated Employees. I waited about the first of June expecting to get a call from Van Bittner, who was supposed to come to the area. It was about the end of June when Jim Thimmes finally showed up and knocked on the door and said Van Bittner was down living in the Morrison Hotel in Chicago and he'd like to see me. I said to Jim that I had been waiting for over a month to meet with Van Bittner. I went down and I met Van Bittner and told him, "We're ready to affiliate, Mr. Bittner, you just say when." That was about the first of July and the 16th or thereabout of July the Associated Employees called their mass meeting and
we affiliated. That was the beginning of the campaign of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC). In the country we were the first to affiliate and the banner headlines read, "Three Thousand to Four Thousand Workers joined—the CIO." That's how it began.

I. That meeting was held at Eagles Hall?

R. That's right, Ed, that's right.

I. And was it a general acceptance on the part of the guys working in the mill that they wanted to throw their lot with the CIO?

R. Yeah, I was pretty well convinced that we wouldn't have any trouble. I did it with the strongest convictions and told Mr. Bittner that as far as South Works was concerned, I said, "We'll be right there with you. You just drop the word when you're ready to accept us and we'll apply for a charter." And we did this with no obligation or any reservations at South Works.

I also told him there was another plant in Chicago Heights -- Inland Steel. This plant was a little rail splitting mill and I said, "That one's ready to go. I've been talking with the independent company union guy over there and they said, 'We're ready to affiliate.' So we applied for a charter for them at the same time that night and both local unions started the drive of the SWOC in the Midwest region. I told them it would be a little more difficult to get the Gary plant going and it did take a couple of months after that
before we were able to hold a big meeting and get the Employee Representatives convinced that they should affiliate and begin to form up with the Steelworkers Organizing Committee but we were successful in getting the drive started.

I. What kind of reaction did the representatives of the ERP at South Works have?

R. Oh they formed the Steel Employees Independent Union. It so happened that finally a ruling came from Madame Perkins, whom we had challenged as a Steel Workers Organizing Committee to investigate, and again we played a pretty instrumental part in taking the evidence from the Employees Representative files. Remember, I said to you Ed, I was the Secretary of the Employees Representative Plan and I had all the files under my lock and key. I recall getting a call from Philip Murray and he said there was going to be a hearing and if I could bring some evidence down it would be greatly appreciated by him. Well I went up and I took the files and walked out with them and appeared before the National Labor Relations Board and testified that these were the original files and that from them they could easily see that the company unions were completely dominated, that the Employees Representatives Plan was truthfully a company union. We testified and used the files to great advantage.

Of course that's one of the trials. The Employee Representatives, who were management's stooges, put me on trial under the fact that I had confiscated the files. Well I
pointed out to them that they weren't really lost. They weren't really confiscated, they could get them back if they just went to the Labor Board. In fact, when the Labor Board was done with them I was sure they would return them, they'd indicated they would. I walked out of the meeting and told them that I didn't need to tell them anything about what went on because they had the verbatim files in front of them and they knew more about them than I did because I had only been a witness there but I hadn't read the files as carefully as no doubt they had.

It was interesting but this was the reaction to your original question that the Steel Employees Independent union or the company union representatives, who were still trying to hang on to the semblence of forming an independent union in the steel mill, they now adopted what we were casting aside. We had been independent, now they wanted to go independent but it fell by the wayside.

They kept at it for a period of several months. But gradually I remember getting guys like Mike Delich of the Pipe Shop, who was always sympathetic in a way with what I had been endeavoring to do but had never the guts to follow. He went with this independent group. One day I went over to his house and I said, "Why don't you give up Mike," and he said, "I think I will, I'll join your steelworkers." We got two or three others to come in from the Steel Employees, people who had actually signed the yellow dog contract like Frank Kaczmarik.
Jimmy Kirkland very begrudgingly came in many years later. When the day came that we had a union shop I often wished I had been there to see when these fellows signed union contracts.

I. Now George, you'd been discharged by plant management some months prior to the CIO actually coming into being at South Works. I'm sure they used the pretext of discharging you for violating some work rule where the fact was it was because of your labor activities. Just—what did you relate that discharge directly to, George?

R. Well I finally got a call from Phil Murray asking me to come down to a meeting in Pittsburgh and I went to the management who'd been carefully supervising my activities. I had been followed around in the mill for several months by the security police, as they call them today. Then it was the plant guards. I felt the pressure of management. The foreman of the Roll Shop began to indicate that he felt I was taking too much time, that they needed me at the machine I worked on. But I had said to the foreman that I had received a call to go down to Pittsburgh and I would like to go down to this meeting. He said that he was sorry he couldn't let me off. I said, "Well now, wait a minute, I know that I can get off. We haven't got that much work ahead and you've, got enough roll turners that can take my place." He said he was very sorry and I said, "Well, you'll have no objections if I go
down to the main office and talk to the general superintendent," who was E.E. Moore at that time. He said, "No, I don't care where you go. You're just not going to be off."

I excused myself and I took time off to go down to the general office and E.E. Moore listened to me very carefully. He said, "You know, Patterson, I just got a call from Adolf Rasch, the foreman of the Roll Shop and he said that you wanted to be off and he pointed out to me that work is heavy. You can't go." I naturally resorted to the National Labor Relations Act that allowed collective bargaining, allowed me as an Employee Representative, allowed me as a union representative to be off and to go about my work without hindrance from management. He said that he didn't care about my argument but if I went he would have to charge me with being off work without permission. And he said, "I should think very seriously before going to this meeting, your job comes first." He made no bones about it and of course I realized my job was highly important. He said, "I'm afraid you'll be discharged if you go. Now are you going to go?" I said, "Well, I'll have to think it over. I'll take it under advisement just exactly what you said."

I left and I remember that I lay awake until four o'clock in the morning trying to make up my mind whether I would call up Phil Murray and tell him I couldn't come to the meeting or whether I'd go back into the shop and work. Should
I go to the meeting and take the chance of discharge? I recall at four in the morning I said to my wife after a sleepless night, "I think I'm going to Pittsburgh. I want you to know, honey, that most likely my job will be gone. There's an indication that I might get a job working as an organizer." She said she would support me in whatever I decided to do if it made me happy. She didn't feel very good about the fact that I might be sacrificing my job in the steel mill. After all, twelve years of seniority was quite a bit. It was a good trade, we were making as much money as the average craftsman in the mill at that time.

Anyhow I went to the meeting in Pittsburgh and then I came back. I stayed just barely the time of the meeting and I took the train and came back. It was about a quarter of eight in the morning when I got off the train. I called my wife up and I said, "Well, is there any communication for me?" She said yes there was a special delivery letter for me. Then I knew there was no use running into the mill and going to work. I'd better go on home and see what the letter said. Sure enough it said that my services were no longer desired, that I had been fired for insubordination.

Of course this started quite a procedure. I called Phil Murray up and he said, "Well you can go to work for us, starting as of this moment." So I became an organizer and in the meantime I filed my case under the Employee Representation Plan. We went for a hearing in the Department
of Labor under Charles Gregory, who was solicitor for Madame Perkins. He ruled that I had been discharged for union activities. When I got the final ruling I took it over to management. They said, "We don't care what they said or what they ruled, you're through!"

The next step would have been to use the National Labor Relations Board and proceed according to the law of the land where they had some teeth. I talked to Madame Perkins and she said that they had no teeth to compel the company to take me back to work, the Labor Board might. I talked that over with Phil Murray and Van Bittner and they said, "Look, you have a job with us. "You'll never need to worry about a job anytime, you just come to work with us. You'll have a job as long as you want one." So I went to work as an organizer and never did take it up with the Labor Board.

I did prove my final point, that the Employee Representation Plan wasn't worth the paper it was written on, that they would not even abide by a decision made by an examiner of the United States government through the Department of Labor. I think that in itself upheld all of my arguments in the past that it had been company dominated, it was a company union and these kinds of organizations have no place in the United States of America as far as freedom's concerned.

In the organizing of South Works then the CIO had come into being in 1936 as you just stated. But I'm sure there's a
tremendous amount of organizing still going on within the mill itself. How were you doing that, George, now that you'd been discharged?

R. Yeah, Ed, that's the beginning of my life now, jumping from being a man who'd been confined to four prison walls in the Roll Shop within the boundaries of the United States Steel Corporation plant. Now you become a public figure. The difference between now being out in the public and having been an employee in the steelmills is like day and night. I found that we had to begin to sign up-cards. I began to work with a group of people on the staff of the Steel Workers Union who came from all sorts of sources. Some came from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, some came from the Oil Workers. Some of the staff men came from left wing organizations such as the IWO, the International Workers Order I think they called it. Some were well known, left wing figures and some were intellectuals, like out of college, this type.

It didn't take me very long to find that I was a greenhorn among some of these people who had been leading public lives and organizing long before me in other endeavors, in other fields in other parts of the country. But we had only one purpose, we were all consolidated. We started to organize under a person named Nicholas Fontaccio, who was a right hand lieutenant to John Lewis from the United Mine Workers. Nick was a strong man. He called two
meetings, sometimes three meetings a week to see how many cards each of the staff men had signed up. I found out that some of these people were experts at getting cards signed compared to me, who had been organizing in a general manner getting cards signed by workers in the plant. Now I found that these people were able to rally meetings that I had never even heard of. They would have meetings in bars, they would have meetings in church organizations, Holy Name societies. You never knew where some of those people had contacts but they began to bring in more cards than I did and I was right in the mill itself. You would think that I would have gotten many more cards signed up, being so well known. This wasn't true, you'd find yourself getting lost. When there're sixteen thousand workers they all know you but you don't know them and their buddies. We developed a shop steward system and it was quite evident that some of these organizers were pretty good at getting in touch with the shop stewards much quicker than I was.

I learned the tricks fast however and I began to find that I needed friends among the staff. I immediately noticed the staff was divided. Some of these people had their own bones to pick. When they were left wing inclined I found out there was the type that was supposed to be a Communist, there was a type that was supposed to be Socialist Labor, there was a type that was supposed to be Socialist Trotsky, a type that was supposed to be Socialist Democrat. I wondered just what
in the world I had gotten into. This was something that was very enlightening to find.

I found there was the Mexican organizer type, there was the Polish, there was the Italian. There were favorites, nepotism was right there in the organization. The thing I had been fighting, I found existed pretty soon on the staff and with the people that organized out in the shop. You would find the Serbian type of worker favoring the Serbian type of organizer or the Polish would be inclined to go with the Polish organizer. I soon found out that Anglo Saxons were quite a bit in the minority. It was an interesting thing to me, it was a new field, a new world altogether, Ed, that I faced.

But with all of this that I'm talking about everybody was getting cards. Cards were being signed hand over fist and we were exclaiming every other week two thousand more workers coming to the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. Local 65 had a large meeting and initiated 300 people at the meeting and we began to grow. Now this was from July until about November that we were growing hand over fist as far as organizing, getting cards signed up.

Then rumors came that John Lewis had been meeting with Myron Taylor of the United States Steel Corporation and had been discussing a contract. Around January of 1937 came the grand day, that John Lewis had signed a contract with the United States Steel Corporation on behalf of the Steel
Workers Organizing Committee. When that contract was signed there was an avalanche. We got way beyond the majority of workers into the Steelworkers Union at Local 65. We were on our way! Then we began to really organize Republic Steel, Inland Steel and they began to come in, in larger numbers.

I. Prior to that contract in early '37, what was the general attitude of the community towards the CIO?

R. They looked at it as a sort of left wing organization just like people today would look at the hippie movement. People looked at people's movements much as the Calumet Community Congress, people raised their eyebrows. Frankly I see the similarities very strongly in your endeavor in the Calumet Community Congress as a fair comparison with the beginnings of the CIO except for one difference and that is its financing. John Lewis had been given a million and a half dollars so they were able to pay organizers. They were able to support the needs for publicity and leaflets. If the money is forthcoming then you can take care of your organizers. In the Calumet Community Congress you've got your issues and you've got the movement, the similarity is great. I hope you pardon me for digressing but the similarity is there, Ed.

(The reference to the Calumet Community Congress, relates to an organizing effort spearheaded by Staughton Lynd in the early '70s to create a giant community congress of social clubs, fraternal groups, church organizations, etc. in the Calumet area, Chicago and Northwest
Indiana, to deal with community problems.)

I. And the similarity is there as far as the static you get on both organizations in the community in some areas such as your religious or your fraternal or your political factions within the communities.

R. None of these groups ever openly come out to denounce you but they will, by inference, degrade you and say you're not going to be successful but you just ignore them and go forward with your activities.

I. What did the American Legion or fraternal organizations in South Chicago or your church groups do as far as your organization was concerned?

R. They left us alone, that's what they did. They didn't uphold any of our activities, they didn't offer their halls for rent. In fact getting a hall for rent was quite a problem in the early days. Now the American Legion and the churches -- it took about a year or more, for example, to convince the YMCA to let us begin meeting in some of their rooms. But they began, condescendingly, after we signed the contract with U.S. Steel to say well the handwriting is on the wall, we'll let them meet. I used to go to meetings in the early 1937 with the community forum. It was organized groups within the South Chicago community which included businessmen, librarians, schoolteachers, etc., and I, as a representative of the steel workers, would meet with them. We'd talk about different endeavors for the benefit of South
Chicago. We began to work in civic affairs from the very beginning to help build our union.

I. Did you have any personal type reaction, George, within the community where your neighbors or someone was shunning you because of your union activities at that time?

R Yes, we certainly did. Neighbors would call. I had several obscene phone calls, you know, in the early days. We would have people call up and say, "Hey are you the Patterson that's with that radical group trying to organize the steel mills?" Then they'd curse you up and down and hang up.

There were other things you began to notice as you became active at that time. I'd been very active in my church work at the South Shore Presbyterian Church and I participated in many of the affairs and functions such as the Boy Scouts, as a deacon, as the Superintendent of the Sunday School. I was a Sunday School teacher. I belonged to the Christian Endeavor Society and the things young men usually do in these church groups. As I became active in the labor movement I found that people whom I'd thought were close friends of mine now were turning their backs and I found it a little difficult to function in my official capacities within the church as I became more involved in my union activities. But I kept at it and finally I said to the minister one day I thought maybe I'd better begin resigning some of my positions in the church group. He didn't put up any argument, he seemed quite relieved to think that I was going to withdraw, that he
might be having difficulties with me. He indicated it in so many words. It was a nice relationship with him but not with the membership of the church.

For example, one man who worked in the post office said, "Hey Patterson, I noticed that you're not around church, that you're more with the union, that left wing group." And I pointed out there was nothing left wing about it. It was a legitimate labor organizing group that I was working with. He raised his eyebrows and said, "Huh?" I'd say, "Yeah." Well from such remarks you began to sense that your so called friends and neighbors and church members are beginning to discard your friendship.

The time came when we got involved in the Republic Steel Strike in 1937, the month of May, and then the Memorial Day incidents and later. After that I was arrested and put in jail as a leader of Memorial Day, held incommunicado for four days and four nights. No one could reach me, didn't know where I was at, in fact. When I was finally granted my release I came home and I was busy washing myself in the bath tub and shaking the bed bugs out of my clothes and the door bell rang. My wife said it was the pastor of the church who was outside. I said, "Well, if he'll wait until get through here taking a bath I'll talk with him." I went out and met the Rev. Dr. Warren and I said, "Well, longtime no see." "Yeah," he said, "I hear you've been in trouble." So we had a talk about the fact that I had been arrested and put in jail. All
he wanted to know was whether or not these reds were influencing me and had I not really gotten myself in serious trouble and wasn't I afraid of all these reds that were around. He wanted to know if there weren't reds in the union and I said, "Yeah, there may, be a couple around alright, but they're so few in number I really can't point them out to you."

After he had the discussion with me and I sensed he was trying to be nice but advising me against all of my activities, suggesting I give them up, I finally let him know that I was pretty well dedicated to the labor movement, just as I'd been to my church work, and I had come to a quite serious decision that I thought I'd begin to relieve myself of all activities with my church work and I was going to devote myself to the labor movement. I said, "I've given it a lot of thought, because I was very fond of the spiritual side of life, but now I've decided I had better become a little bit more materialistic." I could help other people as well as myself and I felt I was doing some of the same work.

He said goodbye and I never saw him again. Years later when I wrote to get my transfer from the South Shore Presbyterian Church I found they had dropped me as of that date. In fact they said they didn't remember any George Patterson. After I had devoted twelve years of my life to the South Shore Presbyterian Church they had no records of me.

I. You didn't exist.

R. Didn't exist, it was rather sad. I smile about it
now but I didn't smile about it when I found out because I knew
the church wasn't supposed to do things like that.

I .

Was that a general reaction by most clergymen in and
around South Chicago, George, in various religious groups?

R.        Yeah, I could give you an illustration. I recall my
wife who was very active in helping organize --in fact all of
our organizers' wives were, especially in the South Works.
My wife was the head of the Auxiliary and as the chairman, she
and a committee of women in the Auxiliary began to go around
and signcards. We used our wives to sign. They would rap on
doors. They would say, "Does your husband belong to the
union?" And if the woman would say no they would say, "Well,
we'd like to leave a card and see if he wouldn't sign it and
we'll come back tomorrow and pick it up." If the husband was
in, the women would sit down with him and try to convince him.
Now of course they did that kind of work.

They also decided one time to go into St. Michaels
Church at 83rd and South Shore Drive and there they had a long
interesting chat with a couple of the priests. They were
asking the priests if they couldn't perhaps begin to show a
little sign, encouraging the members of the congregation to
sign up in the Steelworkers Union. They began to try to get
the priests to understand that it was a legitimate
organization. It had nothing to do with politics and left
wing communists.& so forth. But the priests pointed out
that they were more involved with U.S. Steel and gave an
illustration. "See the coal down there in the basement? We get that, the charcoal comes from this mill. See that lumber that's lying outside the window? We're going to build a playroom for the kids. We got that from the steel mills. You don't expect us to bite the hand, do you, that feeds us?"

And it was just as crudely put to the Womens Auxiliary as that by the St. Michaels Church. When I kind of indicated in my Presbyterian church that the labor movement was a respectable organization all they could talk about was reds.

There was only one minister around South Chicago that was active and that was a minister who was sort of a freelance minister. His name was Raymond Sandford and he worked for Common Ground. This was his pet name for his project. Now he was a welfare missionary type of minister. He did more and was the lone star churchman for the Steelworkers Organizing Committee in helping organize and in helping people who got involved in the Republic Steel Strike. I don't know what happened to him, but I can say out of all of the church groups in and around Chicago there was one lonely minister that ever gave us a hand and his name was Sandford.

I. George, now that you've left the mill, not by your own choice to some degree, but you're out in the streets organizing, you said you started to learn a lot from some of the guys that had been kicking around the labor movement and.. fringe groups for twenty or thirty years. What type of activities were going on in the South side of Chicago outside
of U.S. Steel, in the other mills and other factories?

R. Well as you recall from your historical reading I'm sure, Ed, you know the sit down strikes were in full bloom from 1936 to about 1938. You know it was not a gift alone to the auto workers. The steel workers were sitting down at the same time the auto workers were sitting down. I recall, for instance, that the Vail Manufacturing Company on 95th St. had gone on a sit down strike. They sent word to our union office that they wanted to be organized and John Dorwalski and myself took off. We climbed through the windows of the Vail Manufacturing Plant and went into the plant, knocked around and talked to the workers, signing them up on cards. I recall that we petitioned for an election but management gave them a substantial increase in wages and that group fell by the wayside. You were not always successful.

Just shortly thereafter then, Fan Steel went on strike up in Waukegan and they had a tremendous sit down. They had a battle on the street and at the plant gate. I was asked to go up there with some of the organizers and I was there when Adelman was arrested. In fact I was driving Meyer Adelman around, who was the leader and director of the area, and he was charged with contempt. It was interesting to note that men were so highly principled in those days and knew what they were fighting for. Not only did the worker know that his wages, hours and working conditions and his recognition as a legitimate member of organized labor was in dispute, they
also knew they needed a contract. And they would go to any extent when they went on strike to see that management would give them this legitimate recognition.

Organizing in strange towns where you were charged with being an outside agitator was common in those days as it is today, but after all what is a man when he becomes an international representative of an international union but a stranger in all parts of the country he goes into? While he as an individual might be a stranger, his union and his union principles are well recognized by the people he meets with and this is where the local governments failed to note the difference. When a man comes in as an outsider everyone's well aware of the principles in which this man is well versed and comes in to give the workers the proper representation. This we were successful in doing in the beginnings of the CI0. We did it at Wisconsin Steel, we did it at Interlake Iron, we did it at Youngstown Sheet and Tube, we did it at all these plants who were in the early formative stage of becoming members of the union.

I would say that I lived more in the first twelve months as a labor organizer than I had lived in the full twelve years I had lived as a steel worker. I became much more acquainted with the facts of life as it related to the economic situation, as against the prison like existence of a man who's taught to follow routine. You start when the whistle blows, you stop when the whistle blows and in between
your mind is bent with the roar of the machinery or the heat of the furnace. This is when you're working as a steelworker. These things I recall.

I.

Were you finding the majority of the workers around the Chicago area signing up in the CIO? This was a fresh new movement. Was it something that people working inside a factory were looking for?

R.

Oh, it was! In fact we were so besieged at times with demands to come and organize plants between July, 1936 and July, 1937 that sometimes we didn't know which way we were going. It was nothing to attend three or four meetings a day. It was nothing to be organizing six or seven different plants and attending ten meetings in a week, all new plants.

I recall when Wilson and Bennett, which is known now as Inland Steel Container was organized, it was done on a sit down basis. Fan Steel was done on a sit down basis. Vail Manufacturing, Chicago Steel and wire went out there on 95th. I recall when they were sitting down. There're so many of the mall the way out to Chicago Heights, to Joliet, to Aurora, to De Kalb, to Waukegan. And then we cross into Wisconsin, 'that was a field in itself. Meyer Adelman was the director out there with Fontaccio the director down in our Chicago-Calumet area.

By the time the war years rolled around I was handling 23 unions and Harper was handling about 22 on the west side of Chicago where we had opened up the office. We not only
serviced them but we organized them, we negotiated their first contract, we swore in the charter members, we got the charters. It was really our full time occupation.

Who were some of the other organizers around the Chicago area in steel that you remember at that time?

Well on the staff when I was hired there was Jim Thimmes.

He later became vice president.

Right, Jim was one of the first to be hired by Van Bittner. He was the man that they sent to me. I, of course, didn't come on until I was discharged. Germano came on in January or thereabouts in 1936 when he became a full time organizer. He'd been active, of course, just as I had been active since '35, the same as Germano with this Amalgamated Association. The first man that I recommended from South Works was Charlie Fleeger but he only lasted about six months, apparently couldn't handle the job. It went to his head, he fell by the way side so fast it was a good thing I got fired so somebody could take his place from South Works. We had at one time about six people from South Works but most of them worked part time as organizers. There was Avila, who was a Mexican, there was Charlie Henry, a Negro. Part time there was Steve Ulanowski. Definitely I musn't forget Steve. Steve was alright for awhile, Steve did fine. I consider Steve one of the early organizers. By that I mean he came in about 1936.

On the staff originally, as far as old timers, there
were outsiders like Joe Weber, Jack Rusak, Mike Martin, Harry Harper. After Republic Steel he was hired, but that's after 1937. John Dorwalski came in at the beginning from the Amalgamated Association. And there were so many of them that I can name that weren't in, in the beginning. There was Sam Taylor, there was Ray Sarocco. There was a man on part time named Mario Manzardo. There were women organizers, too. Mineola Ingersoll, who was our star performer as a lady organizer, she was good. And there was a woman named Barbara Martin. At one time there was a big complement of staff people.

Down in Inland Steel in the Indiana Harbor region was Don Henderson, Jack Rusak. I think I mentioned he's from Gary. In East Chicago there was Nick Migas, Nick was on the staff. Joe Goin came on the staff finally in Gary. Fellows like Kincaid came on in '37, towards the end of '37. There was young John Rusak as well as Jack Rusak, they were brothers. John came on quite awhile later. Mel Pitzele, a college man from Madison, Wisconsin, John Riffe, a miner named Young, Leo Kryczynski, the son of Leo of the Clothing Workers.

During all this organizing and hand billing the plant gates and things like that in and around the Chicago area, were you getting any help from outside organizations? What about the liberal movement on college campuses and young students?
Once in a blue moon. That was few and far between but it was an indication. Especially in a strike situation you'd find college kids roaming around but you had a harder time keeping them in line just like you do today because they always wanted to go much stronger than the organizer does. Because of their book learning I think they believe they want to practice what they've been reading and they find out that the police clubs are just as hard from spontaneous combustion as from intellectual approaches.

That was an interesting thing, to watch the intellectuals. Like the American Civil Liberties movement would come around. People who said they were representing the press would come around and you'd find it was the left wing press, so called. You didn't know what publication they really represented. You'd have to be careful all the time when you got into a strike, especially when unknown photographers came up. They'd say, "Hey, pose, give us some action!" That kind of photographer you can well do without, that kind of newspaper reporter that wants some action so he can give you a good write up. You'll find the write up very disastrous to your cause. This goes on constantly.

I'd say that students were more interested in interviewing you on past activity than they would be on a current issue. The students were not that active. Occasionally you would find, in those days, a few people might come saying we represent the International Workers Order.
Or they might come and say, I'm issuing a leaflet, and when it came out you'd find it'd be a Socialist Labor Party paper. But they were never actually involved in what the activity was, they were utilizing your gathering for their own selfish cause. Generally they got run out by the worker. The worker would say, "Get the hell out of here, you don't belong here."

The worker at that time did not accept the student too well?

No, not too well and we didn't accept the intellectual either. For example, we had a man on the staff at the beginning named Mel Pitzele. Mel was an intellectual out of the University of Wisconsin who came down. He had two strikes against him, I suppose. You hate to say it but first he was Jewish and secondly he was a scholarly looking boy. He certainly showed out like a sore finger. He didn't belong with a bunch of steelworkers. He could impress, if you were interested in listening to his theoretical discussions. When it came time to get down to the hard nitty-gritty of organizing, he didn't know bones or beans. He couldn't really approach, but when it came to discussing the way a committee should be formed or to write up something that would be good to present to the workers as our cause or to management as a clause in the contract, there his grammar was quite valuable, not absolutely necessary, it could be used. But Mel was a living example of a man not fitting in. None of us really accepted Mel, he was on the fringe of all the groups on
the staff.

I. When you were doing this great amount of organizing, George, in that period of time what was the approach, the technique of the organizer? Was it any different then than it was say 25 or 30 years later?

R. No, I would say that it hadn't changed too much. Then the technique of the organizer was to play the situation he found by ear. If the workers were ready to be organized you'd find out what their main gripe or bitch was, then he'd capitalize on it. If he found it was too strenuous a gripe, something that would lead into a strike rather than organizing, he would carefully circumvent it. He would keep it in the forefront but gradually change their minds by talking about, "You got to get a card signed first. This is important, getting the cards, getting a majority of the cards signed. We've got to have a bargaining committee. You've got to have somebody who'll come in, I'll come in with you."

Then you moved them to saying, "You'll make a pretty good leader," and you began to develop leadership at the same time that you're organizing around the issues. At the same time you were organizing to get a contract you were trying to convince management to deal with you.

I. Where did you usually conduct your meeting? Say a plant wanted to be organized, did the guy come to you and then you meet in some back room? Was it a secretive type thing by and large?
At the very beginning, Ed, it was usually quite secretive. I'm talking of not only that special union but the beginning of the steelworkers strike. We would meet in any place that was quiet, any place that you're not likely to be followed. It could be a bar, it could be a basement, it could be a worker's home. It was quite bold for them to come up in the union office and begin meeting. It was not unusual, as I said, for us to organize right in the plant itself or go right to the plant gates. When it came time for the committee meetings, you generally were careful. You met where the worker would suggest. You gave them the leeway of saying where would be the spot.

I've seen some of the handbills that were used by the organizers in that period of '35,'36,'37. To some degree they were quite different than the ones that are used today in that they're much bolder in calling the boss an S.O.B. and everything else.

You're right about that. If someone was really off the beam and really giving the workers a hard time we were not immune to saying to the workers, "Well, we've got to put out a pretty tough leaflet." It was nothing for us to draw the body of a man and put a rat's head on him and say, "Well, here's one rat and this is what he says. "What do you say, Mr. Worker?" We'd have a nice handsome figure of a steelworker saying, "We need the CIO." That's the way we would do it and this was quite successful in many plants.
For example, I recall the type of plant would be a foundry or reverberatory plant, like Federated Metals, where the working conditions were even worse than in the steel mills, where they were very poorly paid. They had no safety conditions. The gas from the furnaces was really disastrous, silicosis and occupation disease were pretty prevalent in these type of industries. Where these bosses were really rough the leaflets were correspondingly rough. Whatever the situation demanded, there was no hesitation on the part of the organizer.

You would notice that type of organizer who would not say a thing smelled if it did. There was the other organizer who'd say let's meet them head on, deal with fire with fire. Personally I found that I was not immune, I would use both tactics. It was a common practice in those days to have two organizers work as a team, we found this worked out very well. The one organizer would play the bad man, the other organizer would play the good man. By that I mean when we would go into management the bad organizer would be thumping the table and be doing a bit of yelling and the other organizer would be saying after awhile, "But, Mr. Management we can do it this way." And he would act as the good guy, showing the boss the solutions to the problems. The other guy'd be saying, "We're not going to put up with that." In the meantime we'd gradually get our way by seducing management through the good guy. We might go into another plant. This fellow who was
the good guy now played the bad guy. So management used to say, "Well which one of you is going to be the bad guy today," after they got to know us.

This got results in the beginning just like these types of leaflets I described, they got results. It would be not unusual to plaster the telephone poles and the plant gates with leaflets. This is prohibited today, according to some organizers. It was nothing to ask an organizer to go into a plant, I've done it many times. I've done it where I'd go into a plant and walk around in the plant itself talking with workers, organizing and then get run out by management who would threaten to call the police. You have to have the nerve and the courage to do these things when you begin starting unions.

In basic steel, in the community like Gary, Inland Steel, Republic Steel in that period of 1937, there was a semblance of unions within those plants. Did they immediately throw in their lot with the CIO as Local65 of the South Works Employees had done?

It was interesting to watch and to hear how some of them were organized. I know that as far as the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, they were supposed to have called a meeting, a convention at Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania just before the SWOC started a drive and Mike Tige's union voted for a resolution to affiliate and become part of the Steel Workers Organizing
Committee's drive. They were going to reserve the right to issue charters and they did. They issued charters for the unions that were organized at the very beginning. Local 65, for example, got an Amalgamated charter. Some of the other unions that were Amalgamated never got the charter, they were given a charter under the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, which was kind of unusual. I never was able to resolve what transpired between Mike Tige and Philip Murray but Local 65 got their old Amalgamated number whereas Germano's group, chartered under the Amalgamated, got a local number of 1011, which was a Steel Workers Organizing Committee number.

I. 1008 I think.

R. Was it 1008? Whatever the number -- 1008, 1010, 1011, 1014, these were some of the first few. The other day there I had a man come to me and say he belonged to Local 1068 and I said, "What union's that?" He said, "Blaw Knox." "Oh, I said, "Blaw Knox, I heard of that. That didn't come into our union until years and years later." He said, "Yeah, we're only in the Steel Workers eight years." I said, "Yeah, but you've got an awful low number." "That's the number we got when you first chartered us and then we gave up the union, then you chartered us back." I said, "I can tell by 1068 you were one of the first unions." "Well," he said, "they gave us our old number."

As a matter of fact, for your information they just done that with Burnside.
R  Yeah, what was the number, do you know?
I.  10 something.
R.  I think it's 1098, I think I have the number here.
    the way I have the papers.
I.  They just done that, they reissued the old charter.
R.  I applied for that charter, by the way.
I.  I know you did, that's why I mentioned it. I know you
    organized it in 1936 or '37. What type of reaction was the
    worker having in a community relationship with the union?
    Was the union going into the community or just staying within
    the plant? Was it trying to see its program in the community?
R.  Yeah, we immediately began to let the businessman in
    the community know that if we were successful in getting wage
    increases for the workers through a union contract and a
    union, that the worker would be spending money in the
    community. This is accepted by the businessman as a fact, they
    know it. Getting them to participate and do a little
    backing took a little doing. But we were able to do that when
    we would have a picnic and you'd go to them and ask for a prize
    or you'd go to them and ask for an advertisement in the
    newspaper. You do find that businessmen will gradually warm
    up to your organization to that extent.

    We would meet with the Community Trades Assembly as
    they called it. I've been trying to think of the name --
    South Chicago Trades Assembly, I believe, and Businessmen and
    Trades Assembly. It's a fancy name like that, very polite.
It was originated by the old AFL, don't you see, and it met from the very beginning. Once the YMCA began to recognize us as a legitimate union, an establishment, or an institution of South Chicago, we would find the director of the YMCA saying, "Well yes, you can have the meeting, you can come here and meet." Then we got invited to the South Chicago Businessmen's Forum to make speeches. There was the beginning of a local cooperation.

We found that we could get involved in the issue where a school teacher would come and say we need a new library. We began to pass a resolution for a new library. You find your businessmen and the labor movement signing petitions together, petitioning the library board in Chicago to bring a library to South Chicago. This was successful, we weren't thanked for that. That's a very old library now but it was new. I remember when it was first built and opened. I forget the name of the young lady but she was a very fine woman who believed in the labor movement but had to be careful, just as afraid as the usual businessman. A woman would be, of the beginnings of a new union. It was intriguing!

I.

George, with all the organizing that was going on around the Chicago area that you were taking a part in, I assume that quite a bit of it was going on in your basic steel mills like U.S. Steel, Republic Steel and Wisconsin Steel. Now you stated that U.S. Steel gave the Steel Workers Organizing committee the recognition agreement in early '37.
In the other mills this didn't come about at that time, did it?

R. No it didn't, Ed. The fact of the matter was that the Little Steel plants, other than U.S. Steel, such as Youngstown, Republic and Inland, they were fighting the recognizing of our Steel Worker's union. We had been petitioning so that we'd have the right to bargain and represent them before the Labor Board but Tom Girdler had said he'd rather pick apples or dig potatoes than recognize the union and that led to the Little Steel strike.

We had, of course, been having dues inspections. The steel workers and the people that joined the union paid their dues, you know, which was a dollar a month at that time, to get into the union and be a member in good standing. We would go to the plant gates and it was nothing to see half a dozen organizers plus a bunch of the officers of the union at the plant gates. As everybody would go through we'd say, "Show us your card, buddy. You in good standing?" And if they didn't have a card in good standing we would get them to sign up right then and there or else there'd be a little battle and maybe we would let them go in and if we put up enough of a fight maybe we wouldn't, all depended on the circumstances. In fact the workers in the plant at that time knew who the organizers were and who the officers of the union were and a man had to be pretty silly to be too hostile when he saw the dues inspection going on at the plant gates.

We signed up a lot of members with this method to get
recognition, that we were requiring by notifying management that we were ready to bargain, that management should recognize us. These requests were made by Van Bittner, Nicholas, Fontaccio and often by the organizer himself, depending on who had organized the plant.

Well, Republic Steel, of course, is a story in itself. That strike took place and we had incidents starting from the night of the strike till the Memorial Day incident. It was six months later after the strike before the management condescended it might recognize the union and finally it did.

The argument about dues was quite a field in itself. There was a discussion towards the end of 1937, as to whether or not we should have dues check-off and it was interesting to hear the organizers themselves arguing as to whether or not getting the company to check dues and turn the dues into the International wouldn't make a lazy union or whether or not it'd be a much more aggressive union compared to when we were, sending the stewards around to collect the dues from the workers. Their argument was pro and con, depending which side you felt you were on. I, myself, had never given the thought very much serious attention until it was brought up. You could see merit on both sides of the argument. Ultimately we got a dues check-off in U.S. Steel and it is my considered opinion that the union has never become aggressive from it. Let us leave it at that.

I. If you didn't have the dues check-off, which
didn't at that time, it was common for the steward then to go around and collect the dues in the department, wasn't it?

R.

Yeah, we had dues books where we gave a receipt and the steward went around regularly once a month, especially right after pay day and received the dollar dues that was forthcoming. I would say that we had large -department meetings, healthier department meetings, and that workers were much more aggressive on the floor. They were much more apt to say, "Look, I just paid my dollar so why in the hell don't you settle this grievance I put before you?" Or they'd ask what's the answer to a grievance. This was healthy.

I.

Was the same thing going on in Republic Steel, for example?

R.

Yeah, the same thing. They were collecting the dues at Republic Steel through the dues system. That was the shop steward's job.

I.

What was management's attitude at Republic to that, George?

R.

Management's attitude at Republic was that you had to do it behind the foreman's back. You just didn't go in front of your foreman collecting dues. You generally had an arrangement to meet with the workers outside the plant, often at the tavern where they cashed their checks. There the steward would be sitting and there he collected the money but he also got the hell.

I.

He issued the stamp and receipt?
R. That's right. He issued the stamp and made accounting for the money received. Then the officers of the union would send it with an accounting for the number of stamps they had received from the international union. It was quite a good system and it worked just as efficiently as the dues check-off.

I. Was the average guy signed up at Republic Steel by and large the same way -- by the steward or by the active union member?

R. Yeah. Republic Steel had the remnants of the Amalgamated Association and from that they branched out to organizing through the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and we were holding meetings at the plant gates. We were holding meetings at the taverns on Burley Avenue. We were holding meetings right around where Sam's place is that was so historically mentioned in the Memorial Day Massacre'. In fact they have a headquarters now just about where we used to meet, the local union at Republic Steel.

I. How many guys were actually members of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee that were employed at Republic Steel at that time, George do you recall?

R. I would say about seventy percent were organized and we were in a healthy position. If Tom Girdler wanted to take us on with a vote we would have won the election handsomely but he had no desire to let us get to that stage. He preferred to give us the denial that he would ever bargain with us. The
workers were finally ordered to walk out by Mr. Murray who was the representative of the Steel Workers.

I. History shows me that Lewis as well as Murray and people who were in the hierarchy of the union tried extensively to meet and negotiate labor agreements with the likes of Girdler and Little Steel representatives but it just wasn't forthcoming.

That's right. Labor leaders like Murray and especially John Lewis used every part of their know how to get Tom Girdler to the bargaining table. When they saw it was hopeless then they ordered the strike to take place. When we issued the call for the strike I recall it well. I was at the staff meetings where we decided that we were going to ask the local union. Gus Yuratovic, who was the president of the local union, was a very good friend of mine. I was close to Gus all the years of his life and Gus said, "Look, you call the strike, they'll walk out." We said, "All of them?" And he said, "Ninety percent of them." That's just about what happened. I would say less than ten percent stayed in the plant.

I was there the night, a Wednesday night, when we had asked them to strike and we'd said at the eleven o'clock shift everyone should walk out. I got there about 9:30 and they were already walking out. By the time eleven o'clock came there was nobody there except policemen who were there by the hundreds guarding the gates on behalf of Republic Steel.
That was Chicago police?

That's, right.

What transpired after the strike had been called, George? I'm sure that the union set up their various committees and various programs. Can you take me on a day by day basis and tell me what role you played in the strike?

Well, as I said, I got there about 9:30 and I realized that none of the organizers were there. I was not in charge of it at Republic Steel at that time. I had been working with my own U.S. Steel, but I got out there as an organizer and I found nobody had made any provisions to set up a picket line, which is one of the first prerequisites of a strike. I recall I got up on top of a car and I made a speech from the roof of a car and suggested that all of the guys that had been coming out of the plant gather around me while we established picket captains and that from these picket captains they could hand pick the guys that were around thereto be their pickets. I got that thing pretty well established. In the meantime the police had been nosing all around, listening to my speech and listening to what was going on.

John Rife, who was in charge, sub district director of us at the time, had been doing his part in trying to assure the police there was going to be order and that we were not going to take over the plant. Each one of the organizers was busy but I had assumed this picket line. I became the picket captain later of the group, but this was the beginning.
We never did get our picket line started. Suddenly the police came marching out of the plant in formation. They talked about pickets being in military formation. They were forgetting it was themselves, the police, who were in military formation. If ever there was a disorganized group it was the workers. I'd been trying to rally them into some semblance of a picket line formation but I never got that far because the police suddenly began to walk forward in a big line and drove us all back from the plant gates down the road.

Well the gate was about two blocks from where we were trying to set up a picket line in front of the gates and we all got very angry. This was our first experience with the police. We decided we would sit down, the old sit down strike, and we sat in the middle of the road. I never saw so many people getting picked up and hurled bodily into the police patrol car. I landed in a car with about eighteen people, with John Rife. We all landed in the same cell in South Chicago. That was the end of my activities that night.

We got out the following morning and I went back up to set up my picket line. I found that the police were there and they wouldn't let me go down to the plant gates even. They said there'd be no picketing. Later when we put on the pressure they said we could have six pickets. So I picked up six pickets and went down and they stopped me again and they turned me back. I never was able to establish the six pickets on that Thursday. We were having big arguments. We were
suggesting to Van Bittner that he get in touch with Mayor Kelly who had issued a statement that legitimate picketing would be allowed. But the police had different orders, they weren't allowed. So there was quite a bit of confusion on Thursday.

On Friday we decided that we were going to have a picket line and Friday afternoon we got together. We began to rally a group of workers and we said, "You're all pickets." I walked down with this group Friday night and here we meet the police. Just as we approached the plant gates they came around the bend of one of the blocks where the taverns are and the homes of the people and they began to shout at us and club us and split a few heads. They demoralized us and drove us back. There was a lot of blood flowing but it was our blood. The police were completely in command. I thought that night they were shooting blanks but I could smell powder all around us. The bullets were flying by but nobody got hurt other than clubbed. The clubbing was hard enough. They demoralized us and of course the newspapers wrote us up, took pictures and so forth. This was our first experience of a little bit of violence. But from that first attempt at picketing on the Friday night, real serious picketing where we confronted the police, we decided that it was evident that we'd have to call a mass meeting on Sunday. That was Memorial Day, May 30.

We did call that meeting and all Saturday I had attempted to get pickets. I recall that we couldn't get any
of the colored fellows to go on the picket line and finally I saw two colored fellows in the strike hall kitchen. I said, "How'd you like to go down with me and set up a picket line?" I didn't let them know that we had been denied it. We were trying to get pickets. So they got in the car and went down with us and we were stopped as usual by the police. They pulled us out, frisked us. They finally went in the back of my car and this policeman came out with a great big knife. He said, "You guys put that knife there." That was the last I saw of them. The police arrested these poor guys and took them away. They didn't arrest me, arrested them. I went to our attorneys and I gave the attorneys the two guys names. Ten days later the lawyer found them and they had served about eight days in jail for having a weapon which they never had. The policeman had put that weapon there, you know. He had dropped it from his sleeve and said they had the weapon. Never in my life did I see such a thing, but this was common. The police thought nothing of framing the pickets in order to arrest them. That was the beginning of this crisis that we were working up to, evidently.

We had the meeting and I'll never forget that Sunday meeting. It was a beautiful day. It was the first warm day of that spring. Everybody was busy. We got the truck, we were going to have the people use it as a speaker's platform. We got the loud speakers, we got the picket signs. We were prepared to try to develop a picket line from this meeting.
Joe Weber was the chairman and Fontaccio was introduced as the first speaker. An old Amalgamated organizer, Leo Kryszski, who was a tremendous orator, spoke and we had a couple of other speakers.

After the speaking was through there was a couple of thousand spectators there, with the police mingling among us, and a large group of policemen down at the plant gates. We decided that we were going to march down and establish a picket line. Now we had a big picket line, a thousand or so people. So we started marching down the field. I recall when we got down the police were spread out in about a quarter mile line, I would say, plenty of them. We spread out and faced them. This time we had just as many pickets as there would be policemen. We really confronted each other, with a lot of stragglers in the back who were watching the confrontation, wondering what was going to happen.

We in front were also wondering what was going to happen. I looked down the line and I recall finally spotted Commander Kilroy and Mooney of the police. I knew them both because I had been seeing them in performance of my picket line duty. I walked up to Kilroy, who was reading a document, and then just as I got to him--he was a tall man, I had to look way up to see him--he stood there with the paper above my head and he said, "I ask you in the name of the people of the State of Illinois to disperse." He was quoting the law. When he put the paper down with a flourish all hell broke loose.
Bullets were flying, gas was flying, and then the clubbing. I remember running back. I knew that I had been spared being shot because I was standing right in front of the commander. People were falling to the left of me and the right of me. I ran back and I evidently ran back in such a manner that there was no shooting just exactly at the spot I was at but there was clubbing all around me.

Finally when I stopped running and I looked back I could see men lying on the ground but I still thought it was just blank bullets. You could smell the powder and the gas bombs. They meant nothing, you just stepped aside from the gas to get out of the way of gas. You had to avoid being clubbed if you could. Finally I saw a little boy come limping past and I could see he was bleeding. Then I knew that the bullets were real, I saw he'd been shot in the heel. Then I realized some of those people who were lying there had really been mortally wounded. It doesn't take long to know when a man falls forward on his face that he's killed, he's dead, he doesn't move any more. I learned what death was just from seeing what happened at Republic Steel. Later when I saw it in the movies I verified all my worst fears. That's a hard lesson to learn, that the Chicago police can be so cruel but there it was. I recall being filled with anger at what I realized had taken place and then I recall a deep calm that came over me and how I tried to get in touch with certain officers of the union and people I knew in the field to coax
them to come on back to the strike headquarters.

My wife was working in the soup kitchen in the strike headquarters and I guess an hour and a half to two hours went by before I got off the field and got back. She was worried stiff that I was one of those that was killed over there in the field. When I came in I found her bandaging the heads of different people along with other strikers that were helping the wounded. Of course some of my friends had used their cars and had taken wounded down to the different hospitals in South Chicago and over and around Burnside but nobody realized just what was going on. There was so much activity between the police taking away wounded and arresting people and between us taking people away. Archie Patterson took many people to the hospital in his car. My brother, Hugh, was down in the South Chicago hospital giving Hilding Anderson his blood transfusion. He said to me when I saw him later that night that he knew Hilding Anderson was going to die. They just simply couldn't save him. He gave blood there but he knew it was hopeless, that Hilding couldn't make it.

I got in touch with Gus Yuratovic and Emil Koch, secretary of the union for Republic Steel. We got to thinking about the dead. As reported on the radio they had bodies down at the morgue and we thought we'd better go to the morgue. We went down to see if we could identify them. There were five bodies when we got down to the morgue. They didn't want to let us in but they finally let us in when they
knew that we might know these people. They wanted identification and we thought that we might be able to find out who they were and then tell the family where the people were but we didn't know any of them. Later we found out it was Sam Popovich and Frank Causey and Tagliori. They were all in the morgue as I recall and I think Handley might have been, too, and one other man. Some of them died, you know, later in the hospital but that was one of the saddest things. That was the only time that I ever was in the morgue and I'll never forget it.

Well anyhow, we came on back from that terrible day and I again attempted to put up picket lines. I would say I never got a real picket line established until about two weeks after Memorial Day. I would get a few people to go down there and picket, then I'd get arrested. They would be arresting us all the time. What would they arrest you on? Any charge—disorderly conduct, refusing to obey an order, insisting on picketing. They'd put you down in jail. So the time came when it was pretty difficult to get anybody to want to go down there and you had to finally sell them a bill of goods that you would picket along with them and they would be all right. They allowed six pickets once in awhile. Finally we got a picket line established. I don't think we ever got more than twelve people at a time on a picket line at Republic Steel. That's how convinced the cops were that we wanted to take over the plant.
These police that were assembled at Republic Steel, did the strikers at any time provoke the police into doing what they did, George?

No, all they did was stand their ground and say, "We want to picket." In fact I was saying to Captain Kilroy, at the time he was putting the paper down, "Look Kilroy, all we want you to do is walk with us, help us peacefully establish a picket line. Mayor Kelly has just issued a statement in the paper that we've got the right to picket and we're asking you to keep law and order with us. Walk with us." And he paid no attention, he ignored me. He just paid no attention and put his paper down and that was the sign. There was no whistle, there was no order. It was a mutual understanding that once I've read this document and they have not dispersed you disperse them. This was the ruling for that massacre. You could never say that he gave the order but his actions spoke louder than words. When he put the paper down they knew they had a free hand, those policemen, and they took advantage.

The Chicago police contended at that time that was done in self defense. George, were the pickets armed?

No, of course not. The pickets were standing like any ordinary picket line you see today, asking the right to picket. When the cops began to shoot and club I saw them throwing stones. In fact I was inclined to throw a stone or two myself, but after the first two rocks I knew I couldn't reach them. The police was too far away from anybody to conk
one in the head. You sure felt like it because anger, for a minute after the first realization of the horribleness of what was going on, made you want to fight back in self defense but you saw how hopeless it was real quick and then you got calm. You wondered, now what do we do? You went back to the strike headquarters to pick up the pieces and here you found your workers in the picket line coming back with wounds and your next thought was to see that they were taken care of.

Police, you know, said that we had dope addicts amongst us. The fact of the matter was there was never a thought of dope among people in the union at that time. They said that we threw black pepper in their faces. None of us even knew enough about black pepper to even think we could throw it in the cop's face. We might have done it if we'd been that smart but when the police said that they were shooting at us because we were charging them this was completely ridiculous. This came out in the LaFollette hearings. We were all shot in the back while we were running away. All the wounds of the clubs were in the back of the worker's head when he was running away. The movies show two or three policemen beating a worker lying on the ground. Nobody was charging, it was the most disgusting exhibition of police brutality I've ever witnessed. You have to see that movie made by Pathe Movie Newsreel to realize it. And they have never really shown the public the whole movie which I happened to see at the beginning under the LaFollette Committee. It's much more
horrible than the ones they've been showing in union halls today.

I. So that strike lasted how long?

R. From my recollection I think it must have been in the fall that they began to go back to work and that Republic Steel agreed that they would recognize the union. In the meantime Phil Murray had said that he was going before the National Labor Relations Board, to present a case of unfair labor practices. And of course that case was ultimately won. A contract was finally signed, the union was recognized and I think it was two and a half million dollars paid in back pay to many of the workers.

I. You recall after the Memorial Day Massacre itself what happened immediately after that? The funeral, what was the reaction of the people in the community?

R. Well I landed in jail, of course, but I recall I was organizing Burnside Steel and I was just in the process of getting that union recognized. I was going to their meeting one Saturday to prepare the contract and I was arrested by the Chicago police. I was held incommunicado for four days. I lost all contact with the Burnside union through this activity. Some other organizer took it over and I think it fell by the way. It disappeared, that union. I never was able to follow it through although I have all the records. I still have them of what I had done up to that moment,

As far as the activities between the time of the
Memorial Day until the time that the contract was signed, I was on the picket line. The different organizers were organizing the unorganized as we always said at that time and we were waiting for the courts to act upon the hearing. The strike was continuing and we were picketing as much as we could at the gates. It was a period of waiting.

The papers had come out denouncing the strikers as rioters. They held a hearing before the LaFollette Committee and there it came out the police were guilty of brutality. The company was guilty of having an arsenal in the plant. The policewere guilty of shooting workers in the back and it was so obvious from the movie. That was self explanatory. The movie was suppressed and censored, not allowed to be shown in and around Chicago. The police, in the meantime, called an inquest and examined it and they got themselves whitewashed. You know, they held a coroner's inquest. They had themselves whitewashed. Some of us organizers were called and testified against them and our testimony was eliminated and the police testimony was upheld. You know they took care of themselves, to whitewash themselves. These things kept everyone in an uproar. And as the strike went along different workers got part time work, as often happens in strikes.

Then the time came and management said Republic Steel will recognize the union, we'll sit down and negotiate a contract. Then the call went out. Some of these men never
never came back that had gotten jobs elsewhere, but those who did report back to work began to rebuild the union and organize those who remained to be organized. Of course the difficulty came with those scabs that had remained in the plant, that ten percent. It was amazing how many of them that came out of the plant asked to be forgiven and wanted to come back into the union and they were taken in. They were recognized, some of them are leaders today. It's an interesting thing, I recognize some of the names and they were stout hearted people who were in Republic Steel but they never recognized the fact that they were scabbing there. That is an interesting thing to talk about, think about, but not to dwell on too much.

I. What kind of reaction did the community of South Chicago have to that massacre?

R. It was horror. People sat benumbed and there was a blockmass meeting held down in South Chicago and down town. They got it together, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Lawyers Guild, the people as a whole. John Lewis came in to speak in the Coliseum and Van Bittner spoke. We rallied many groups to come to this large mass meeting. I, myself, never. got to that meeting, I was arrested as usual. I never got to it, I was down in jail again fighting for the right to picket. Out of that meeting there came a great deal of sympathy from the people as a whole and I think, as I recall, that some
people had seen one showing of that movie and when the reaction of these people was acknowledged then the movie was suppressed. They said no we can't show that movie, people are going to get too angry. This is the type of support.

Right in South Chicago itself the workers accepted it philosophically. We rallied all the workers, we had a big caravan down to the meeting. I recall helping get the signs painted and the cars. I think two or three thousand cars went out of South Chicago down to the Coliseum with banners on, "South Chicago Steel Workers Rally to the Republic Steel." This type of organizing was done in order to bring it to the attention of the Chicago public.

Chicago's a large city. It's amazing, I remember sitting down reading the paper, the Tribune, in the restaurant down at Toffenetti's on Randolph Street in 1937 right after Memorial Day. I saw pictures of myself, pictures of strikers lying on the ground and I turned around to watch the reaction of the customers. It was amazing how they'd shake their heads and say, "These damn workers, they ought to all be shot." I was horrified. Instead of them saying these policemen should be shot they were saying that the workers were to blame. But Chicago, as I said, is a large city and you've got all types of opinions. It was amazing what the white collar worker was reading. The incident at Republic Steel was so indifferent.

I. He accepted the fact that the policemen must be
That's right, Ed.

I don't think that's any different then, than it is today.

No different today.

George, there were ten men that were killed on that field and over 80 or 90 people that were wounded. I believe seven were killed initially.

Three died later.

What transpired immediately after the killing on Memorial Day?. I know that you had the funeral and mass meetings and that, but just what actually happened?

We held a memorial service in Eagles Hall and it's interesting for you, as a past president of Local 65, to know that a man named Eddie Jesperson, who was a leader in our union, an officer, had a movie camera and Eddie Jesperson and Archie Patterson took movies of the funeral. Later they were able to obtain a copy of some of the Memorial Day pictures and they combined the funeral and the Memorial Day pictures into a very interesting record that I understand Local 65 had a copy of. That should be shown often and made part of a service annually in my opinion. I merely say that in passing.

The funeral was attended by thousands of people and Van Bittner got an opportunity to orate. He certainly was the orator on occasions like that. We have a leaflet that records who were the speakers at the Memorial Day. The
religious services were conducted by the Rev. Albert W. Palmer, who was President of the Chicago Federation of Churches. The Rabbi was Dr. George Fox, President of the Chicago Rabbinical Association. And there was the Rev. Fr. John M. Hayes, Quigly Seminary, with Philip Murray the principal speaker. Now that was at the first anniversary. At the funeral it was Van Bittner who was the main speaker.

Well that was about as sad an occasion and a memorable occasion. One doesn't forget what happened. People who were there, I'm sure, will remember it till their dying day just as I will. The stunnedness -- it's like a war after a bombing, like after the dropping of an atomic bomb. People walk around in a daze, they'll never quite remember what happened. They'll say, "I know what I was doing when that thing happened," and that's about the way they acted. We were able to capitalize in any special manner out of it? No, not really.

I. Did workers shun the union or did they flock to it?

R. They neither flocked nor shunned. They just stayed waiting to see what would be the outcome in the courts and a peacefulness of waiting settled. It took a law, the courts. It took the National Labor Relations Board, it took the Labor Board to finally convince Republic Steel that they were going to recognize the union, they were going to negotiate. It took the resigning of Tom Girdler from Republic Steel to get things moving.
And it's an amazing thing that if, for example, South Works was under union contract, Gary was under union contract with United States Steel Corporation, those plants could not strike in sympathy because they had to hold to the contracts, the union said. I often wondered whether they would have struck had they not been under contract. Could we have rallied? It's notable that in my part of the world when something like this would occur, for example in Spain where they are trying sixteen people now under the Franco regime, they've been on strike. They're refusing and if there's a guilty verdict even, the papers acknowledged that all hell will break loose in Spain. Well you'd have thought that might happen in and around South Chicago but it did not. People were with in the framework of the law, they were fearful of any action that they might take. The CIO was a new organization that was claimed to be radical but here, everybody was abiding by the law. We gradually grew. Nothing extraordinary was done except by the Chicago police when they shot and killed people. Who were the law abiders? The people! It reminds me of that expression by a man the other day when he said, "Show me one hippie who has polluted the lake, but I'll show you a steel corporation." And I think that man's name was Ralph Nader.

I. That's right.

R. Show me one who violated the law, it was the Chicago police in that day. And who behaved within the law? The
workers, especially the steel workers. And who got the abuse in jail? The steel workers!

I. It did take about two or three years for Republic Steel to finally recognize the union, didn't it?

R. To officially begin to sit down and bargain with the union and begin to recognize the grievance committee, the shop steward and the officers, that's right. After Memorial Day at least a full year went by before things began to fall in line.

I. The Senator LaFollette that you spoke about, George, had a senatorial hearing a few years after this incident, if I recall correctly, on violations of free speech and the right to assemble. You testified quite extensively in that. Being there first hand in Washington, could your elate some of the things that were said?

R. Yeah, that wasn't a few years later, that was just six months. Less than that, it was about the month of July. It was a summer day and we all got asked, we were subpoenaed in fact, to go and testify before the LaFollette Committee. At that hearing he interviewed the people who were involved, including myself and the other organizers of South Chicago. He was also investigating what had happened, the way a couple of people had been killed at Youngstown. And it was brought out in very short order by the testimony and by the medical reports that the workers had been shot in the back but there'd been no violence on their part. The movies stood for
themselves. The full movies were shown at the LaFollette hearings, not censored, and it was quite obvious that the police had performed all the acts of violence. You might see an occasional worker offering a little bit of resistance or throwing a rock but this was well after the bullets were fired and the clubbing took place.

There was mainly horror and numb shock also in Washington when LaFollette brought out the evidence. Even the papers were horrified on a national scale when he began to show just exactly what had happened. It was very difficult for Captains Kilroy and Mooney to uphold their contentions when, for example, a picture was shown of them standing watching two policemen beating a striker lying on the ground and they're doing nothing about it. Kilroy said, "Yeah, that's me standing there." These policemen are defending themselves and here they're beating the devil out of a poor guy lying on the ground whose hands are up trying to protect himself. There was only one beating going on. They were beating the worker, not the worker beating the police or challenging the police. This man had been trying to get away and he fell down and they caught up with him and just clubbed him for the sake of clubbing. It goes on and it's done by the police. I would say that out of the LaFollette hearings came much truth and much deep concern and a great deal of publicity. In fact you can't get your hands on a copy of the government documents concerning that period. It's been so
bought up or obtained by the public it's hard to find a copy of
that occasion concerning the hearing that you speak of.

During those hearings it was found that Republic
Steel was in possession of an arsenal. What was actually
brought out there by the Congressman?

R.

I, myself, being on these picket lines, saw these
scab security police on the roof of Republic Steel when we
confronted the police at the time we were trying to establish a
picket line. I could see guns on the roof. Later at the
LaFollette hearings it was found that they purchased
thousands of rounds of ammunition and guns. It was brought
out that they were feeding and bedding and looking after the
police, in fact that they were able to ask the police to do
almost anything and they would carry it out as a mandate, that
Republic Steel certainly had an inside as far as the police
force was concerned, as far as gas was concerned, gas bombs,
as far as all sorts of weapons were concerned. That was
noticed all the time, that the access of the police in and out
of the plant of Republic Steel was so obvious that they were
there as they said to protect the property of Republic Steel
but nobody was attempting to do a thing to the property. All
that the workers had ever asked was the right to picket in
front of the gates, yet they tried to indicate that Republic
Steel was fearful that their property would be destroyed. It
just makes no sense to anyone who thinks at all. Why would a
worker want to destroy the place where he gets his livelihood.
Workers don't do these things.

I. If he was about to embark on that, Sunday, he surely wouldn't have taken his children with him.

R. Well, as you know, I think from reading, Ed, it came out that it was like a picnic crowd. In fact people were there walking in their Sunday clothes, walking with their girl friends. Some were there with their children. They were interested in what was going on at that meeting. No one had any idea that there would be any violence. We had a feeling that in as much as Kelly, the mayor, had again proclaimed that we had the right to picket, that by Sunday at least the police would help us establish a picket line, at least keep law and order with us. We were willing to have law and order. You would have thought they would have worked with us on it. That was not their intent. They evidently felt they had the support of City Hall in Chicago, as well as the police felt they had the support of the steel corporation, Republic Steel's Tom Girdler. The charge had been made that there had been mutual understanding and pay offs. Who knows what goes on in the minds of people in moments of stress? Who knows what kind of pay off goes on behind closed doors? I do know that Captain Mooney and Captain Kilroy were closeted many hours in Republic Steel, that I know. I saw them there and saw them go in and saw them come out.

I. Was there any spying by the Chicago police at that time?
Oh the police were everywhere in plain clothes in the crowd and going around. With all of that, they came up with very little indication that there was any radicalism within the group. They tried to say that stones had been gathered and so on. This was ridiculous. When you look at the evidence of rocks and stones and bottles and broken bottles and clubs that they got on exhibit, that they gathered at Republic Steel on the prairie where this incident took place, it's the normal stuff you'd find in any prairie. It's used as a dumping ground. Different parts of that prairie were swamps and people were forever taking stuff over there to dump it. You could go get bottles at any time, broken bottles or stones.

Didn't the police even go so far, George, as to say that some of the strikers were shot in the back by their own people?

I don't know.

I recall reading that somewhere.

I wouldn't doubt it, they said many things. They talked about black powder or they talked about marijuana or they talked about red eyed drug addicts but this was completely foreign to the worker. In fact steel workers don't indulge in these things. It's hard enough working in the mill, they don't even think of drugs. This was the most amazing thing to me. When I think back, I just ignored it because I knew it wasn't true. As far as anyone having a gun,
they never were able to. The pictures show guns in the hands of private citizens but they're all on the police side, and the police guns. But you never see a striker with a gun, you never see a striker with a club. They tried to say that we used the picket signs for clubs. Well that's about as far as they could get. Naturally if a guy had a picket sign he's going to swat somebody who's swatting him. But even then you weren't given much of a chance because what do you do with a piece of wood in your hand that's got a paper sign on it against a guy that's, swinging a billy club or a gun at you. You just get out of the way, you don't have much chance.

I.

But the police came prepared to do battle that day.

R.

Oh they certainly were. The difference between them that day and today is that they didn't have riot helmets. Nobody ever thought of rioting. They weren't prepared to wear helmets but they certainly were prepared to shoot. Because, as I always have testified from the first day, the first moment that I was asked to testify, the police shot, then they gassed us, then they clubbed us, and if you watch the movie you'll see that the police shoot. Then you'll see the gas and then you'll see them clubbing. They didn't do it the other way. They always tried to get me to say that they clubbed us and warned us. They gave us no warning. Just as soon as he was through putting the paper down asking us to disperse, it started and that was it. There was no order, he didn't have to. He had already told them, I'm sure, that when
I'm through reading this document we've performed our duty. Then they've got the right to do as they please. It's a shocking thing to say about police but that's exactly the tactics they used. They do it today.

I. How many people did they arrest on that prairie that day? Do you recall?

R. It would be innumerable. The people first arrested were wounded of course. The wounded and injured were taken to the Bridewell. They were taken to Burnside by other bystanders and to the Bridewell Hospital by the police. Fellows like Archie Patterson and different ones that used their cars went to the closest hospital like South Chicago or South Shore. But their arresting of leaders and so forth, there was none of that till five, six, seven, eight days later.

I. On the prairie that day, in testimony you've mentioned Archie Patterson worked at South Works where he had one of the victims that eventually died in the car, a man by the name of Rutman.

R. Rothman.

I. He had been shot in the leg.

R. Raleigh Rothman.

I. And the police removed him from Patterson's car and put him in the paddy wagon and he eventually bled to death.

R. Oh yeah, that's interesting. You see Archie testified and I talked with him personally and he told me when
he found this man bleeding. And Archie, was an old soldier, he was in the medical corps and was very well aware of what wounds were and how serious they were. He said to me, "I could tell the guy was going to bleed to death, George." He said, "I immediately took off my belt and I wrapped it around and I put a tourniquet on. Then he said, "I took him to the car and I was just putting him in the car and the cops came and they grabbed him and they took him off me and they wouldn't let me look after him." Then, he said, "The next thing I see is that they're carrying him to the paddy wagon, holding on to the belt and then I looked at the movie later and I see this man is lying with the belt off and bleeding to death. That tourniquet that would have saved his life was off." He said this actually happened. He said, "I'll never get over it, to think that the cops were so ignorant that they knew a man was bleeding to death and they removed the tourniquet." The movie Showed Archie's story as he told it to me himself. I've heard it from him, the movies have shown it. I don't know whether it was Rothman but it was one of them.

He watched Frank Causey bleeding to death and it's an interesting thing that I can cast as a side light, One of the men that helped me organize South Works, Joe McNellis, the Employee Representative I've talked about occasionally, Joe lived within two or three blocks of the place. And he came, walked down just about the time that we confronted the police, but he came in from the back through the police line. Joe
said he was standing there looking at what was going on and suddenly all the bullets. He was among the cops. They thought he was a pretty husky fellow. He could pass for a cop, you know, and old Joe said he watched it and he watched them beating up everybody and shooting everybody and thought what a hell of a mess this is. And finally they brought this Frank Causey through the crowd and they laid him down and you can see in the movie, and I recognize this is Joe McNellis, my old friend, walking up and lifting Causey's head, putting the newspaper under his head. He stood and looked at him and shook his head and walked away and he said, "I knew that man was going to die." It was interesting, you know, that McNellis, an old friend of mine, was there and saw this incident. No one cared for the man, he was left there lying on the ground. You could see a pool of blood gathering. It's about the saddest thing that you can imagine. Police who are supposed to serve -- no first aid. They left that man lying there bleeding and they did the same thing with this tourniquet. Instead they removed the tourniquet.

I. Once they had started rounding up the people and the wounded and arresting some of the people at will and taking them to the jailhouse or Bridewell or wherever they were taking them, what transpired next, as far as the guy that was pinched? Are you knowledgeable of that? Say a guy was arrested, how long did they keep him in jail? What was the action of the police at that time?
Well, you take Harry Harper, who became a member of our staff, he lost his eye. He got his eye knocked out, they said, by a blunt instrument. He said he just remembered talking to the police man and the policeman told him to get the hell out of there and he turned to say, "Well, I was just down here looking for my brother." And he said the next thing he knew he was staggering around, blood was gushing from his eye and he fell down in a ditch. The next thing he knew he was picked up and he was placed in the police wagon. Harper had told me this himself. Of course, his testimony will verify what I'm saying.

Before the LaFollette Committee he testified he was asking for help and they said, "We'll give you help, you son of a bitch." And they picked him up and threw him in the wagon with a bunch of other people. He was lying on the seat. There was a man lying, breathing heavily on the floor beside him and there were two or three other people in the wagon. The woman, Mrs. Marshall, was in the same wagon with him, taking him to the Bridewell, and he was asking for help, he was in such great pain. As bad as he was, he could tell the man on the floor along side him was dying. He could tell by the labored breathing. He said, "I thought I was going to die but I knew that man was worse off." Finally the man stopped breathing and he said, I knew that man died." There was no help, nobody in that wagon. He could hear a woman's voice and it was Mrs. Valez, I believe, Mrs. Marshall. Lupe Valez was
her maiden name. Anyhow Harper was taken to the hospital and put into bed and they began to treat him in the hospital a little bit. He was asking for help, he was asking for his own doctor. They wouldn't allow it and they kept him there about two weeks, they wouldn't let him out.

I. In the Bridewell?

R. In the Bridewell. And other people, too, people who were injured were kept in the Bridewell Hospital. But as far as any actual arrests that night, I knew of none. I don't remember that anybody was picked up and thrown in the jail, for example, in South Chicago from that incident. I would likely have known because our lawyer was a fellow named Paul Glazer who was the lawyer for us from Gary. Paul generally was called, you know, to come and bail us out. I don't recall, and that's the strange thing about this, that they didn't arrest any of the leaders on the field. They could have seen Joe Weber and Mamula, although they left a little earlier than I did. They weren't there on the field as long as I was. They were not prepared to arrest. They were evidently only set to demolish and destroy and disperse. That was the word they used and they dispersed us alright but none of them were arrested. I guess they realized the horror of their action. The cops were really busy trying to take people to the hospital.

I. Did the police administer first aid on the spot?

R. None of them. I never saw a policeman bend down and
I. Did the union have doctors or nurses?
R. There was Doctor Jacques who came down and there was a woman who came down there and we asked her what she was doing there. I recall asking her myself. She said, Well you know on Friday night they got beat up at a meeting. I'm from the Civil Liberties Union and we thought we'd better come down herein case there'll be something." So this woman was there and she gave a bit of first aid. I recall Archie Patterson said that he got hold of some mercurachrome and he made a red cross sign and put it on his arm, thinking that the police would recognize this, but they didn't. They took the guy right out of the car.

I. Dr. Jacques you talk about. I think Meyer Levin wrote a book later on called Citizen. He used Dr. Jacques quite extensively, used him as one of the main characters.
R. Yeah, they also used Archie Patterson and myself.
I. Right. Different characters with different names.
R. Right, and he talks about the man with the Scotch accent, you know, and puts him into one character. It's quite an interesting book. I think Meyer Levin did a pretty fair job, but of course like all books certain parts of it you think you could have improved. You just feel that way, you know.
I. You said earlier George, that in organizing there
was no acceleration or decrease.

R. From the Memorial Day thing?

I. From-the Memorial Day Massacre itself.

R. No, it was just like I said, a status quo position by the people. I think we may be increased our union locals, not overwhelmingly, from that.

I. What type of publicity was Republic Steel putting out to the press that time in order to change their image?

R. Oh they had very little comment other than that the police had done their duty, that their property was important and that the strikers had rioted, that people were wild eyed and seeking to take over the properties. This was their position but it all fell flat in their face when people began to realize that the management had gathered all these weapons and had strike breakers in the plant. They don't get much sympathy from the public as a whole. It was a peculiar thing, I would say that both sides had a quiet period. It was a calm after the storm, neither side said too much. It was a matter of holding our breath and waiting to see what happens next. It's an amazing thing, people seemed to rely on the courts, not only the union leadership but also management. They hoped that the courts would get them off the hot seat that they found themselves in, don't you see.

I. I think we've been brought up in that. It's not necessarily right or wrong. I think we accepted that.

R. I wouldn't doubt that.
George, , after Memorial Day and the activities that immediately followed, I imagine that you were under surveillance by the Chicago police because of your active role and your previous participation and previous encounters with the police. You told me that in the past you had some incidents where they ran you in. Could you elaborate on those?

Oh Ed, it was really common practice for the police to stop me every night on my way home. They would drive up, force me to curb, not say a word, signal to me to get out. I'd get out, they'd force me to lean against the car, frisk me and then while I was bent over leaning there I'd turn around and they would be gone. They'd get back in the car and leave me. That was intimidation of the worst sort. I'd get back in my car and drive off. I finally hired a room in a public garage to put my car in so that my wife would know if my car wasn't in the garage I must be in jail. Also my car wouldn't be bothered. You get a little scared, you know, when the cops are running you in night after night, especially after Republic Steel.

I think the most dramatic incident that happened to me was just like in the movies. You know you hate to be immodest but the fact of the matter is I was driving to a union meeting. I left the South Chicago office and I was going over to Burnside Steel on 95th St. to this local union meeting. All of a sudden the cops flashed their lights and they were
behind me. They drive into the side of the road and they get me out and they frisk me as usual and they said, "You, what's your, name?" I said, "Patterson." And they said, "Yeah, you're the guy we're after." I said, "Well what did I do wrong? I wasn't speeding." "Oh no," they said. "We're after you, wasn't you in the Memorial Day thing at Republic Steel?" I said, "Well yeah, what about it?" And he said, "Well just a minute." One of the policemen there went across to the filling station. He called and came back and said, "Yeah, that's the guy we want." So they put me back in my own car. They said, "You drive." And this police officer gets in beside me, a private policeman, you know, a detective I guess, plain clothes man. He said, "Are you one of these CIO organizers?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You sure don't look like one. You look more like a Sunday School teacher or minister or something." I looked back at him and I said, "Yeah, that's what they tell us these days. The people who are doing good work as far as the labor movement is concerned aren't the bush eyed guys like John Lewis, big fat bellied," I said, They're lean slim trim handsome young organizers just like me." He said, "Well you are different from the type of AFL organizers we see down town." We had a little chat.

By the time we got to Burnside police station he wasn't talking so much anymore. They said to get out and they took me inside to the police station. I sat around there for about three hours. I told them I had a meeting I was supposed.
to go to. They said, "You can forget your meeting, you're not going anywhere." So about eight o'clock, sitting around in that police station in the back office there in a back room, they finally said, "Well, we're going to put you in jail." I began to demand the right to make a telephone call. "After all," I said, "You got to book me." They were using that old "keep him 24 hours and move him to a different police station" and they don't have to book you, don't you see. I was unaware of this. I had been arrested before and the cops would always say to me, "Look, do you want to make a telephone call?" But now I wasn't getting an opportunity to make a telephone call.

About twelve o'clock that night they took me from the jail, run me up a dark stair and I landed in an upper room. It's all in darkness, just like you would see in the movies. I looked around as I went in and I see finally a faint glow of light, which I couldn't see when I first went in. I could see a bunch of men standing around and they sat me down and I was in the middle of a circle. All of a sudden a light flashed on right in my face and I was blinded and a voice says, "What's your name?"

I sat there. I didn't want to answer because I was shocked, stunned, half scared, wondering what the hell's going to happen here. Then the voice said, "I'm Alexander Napoli, Assistant District Attorney. I want to ask you a few questions. Will you please tell me what your name is?" I said, "Well if you're Mr. Napoli, I'll tell you. My name is
George Patterson.

"Who do you work for?" "The Steel Workers Organizing Committee." "How long you work for them?" And the questions began to proceed. I told them how long.

"Who do you know on the staff?" "Well I know all the staff people." "Do you know Joe Weber?" "Yeah, I know Joe Weber." "Who is he?" "He's on the staff of the SWOC." "What do you know about him?" "I only know that I met him about 8-12 months ago." "What do you know about him?" "I know he's a very good organizer." "That's not what we want to know." I said, "Well what do you want to know about him?" "Well do you know that he's a communist?" "No, I don't know he's a communist." "Do you know that he's born out of this country?" "No, I didn't know he was born -- I thought he was an American. I didn't know was he born out of this --" "Never mind, we'll ask the questions." I said, "I know very little about the guy except that I admire him greatly. He works for the Steel Workers Union and he's a good organizer and I think a lot of him."

"Well," they said, "do you know Nick Fontaccio?" "He's the director, he's my boss, in fact." "How long you known Nick?" "Only since he was made boss of the Steel Workers Union here and became an organizer." "Well do you know he works for the United Mine Workers?" I said, "Yeah, he came from John Lewis's union, the United Mine Workers." "Just answer." In fact the only thing you do know about the
guys you work with is what you would know about guys you work with in the mill. That's all you really know about people. So they proceed to question me and finally they said, "Well, we're not going to get much out of this guy. You can take him away."

They run me down the stairs. Of course the funny thing about it was they had taken off my shoe laces, they had taken off my belt. I'm running around trying to hold my pants up and they're dragging you by the arms. You're tripping and in the middle of the darkness. The photographers are outside, I found, taking pictures and I'm falling down the stairs. I'm pretty mad. They take a punch at me, they swat me to let me know they're the bosses.

By the way, they were members of the Red Squad I found out later. I didn't know who these cops were but they were the Red Squad, this industrial so called squad that's still in existence in Chicago. The man that was in charge there was, Mills. Make Mills was the head of the industrial squad, quite a character I found out years later. It was like these hysterical guys that see a red under every bed. That's the type of person he was and, of course, anybody who was a CIO organizer at that time was looked upon by the industrial squad as being a red. These things are completely ridiculous. You're interested in the labor movement and all they can see is red.

Well anyhow, I got the third degree with the bright
lights and the dark and the cops moving in and moving out in a
circle. It was just beautiful if you wanted to follow a
movie. Only it's not so beautiful when you're going through
it as an individual.

I always recall when I got rushed back into the cell
they'd taken me out, I go in and there was Joe Weber. That was
the first time I knew he had been arrested the same time that
afternoon. Old Joe had been arrested. Anyhow, later on I
met Joe. About the fourth day we landed in the Grand Crossing
and here I found Joe had been transferred to the Stony Island
Grand Crossing station and I was over in the Englewood jail.
I was down in the basement. Joe was sitting in comfort in the
first floor listening to a radio and I had all the discomforts
in the world. Later when we compared notes he said, "They
bought me papers. I'd ask how about bringing them and I read
all the news about you, Patterson, and about ourselves, how we
had been arrested and how you had admitted you were an avowed
communist." He said, "I knew that was a lot of crap." I
said, "Yeah, Joe, I don't understand how you could have such
comforts and I could have such discomforts. You must get
along with the cops better than me." It just happened, it
depended which police station you landed in, I guess. But
the results were that we finally were handcuffed together and
taken down to the Criminal Courts Building at 26th and
California there, you know.

I. How long were you in that jug there?
R. This was four days and four nights.
I. Never booked?
R. Never booked. So it’s an interesting story about how finally I got word out that I was arrested. Dorothy didn't know where I was at, my wife, you know. She kept wondering, no doubt, where I was at, but I was sitting in the Englewood police station. It was Saturday or Sunday night, I'd been in two days. I landed in Englewood and a youngster got arrested for drunken driving. He came from Joliet. He was put in the jail cell right next to me. I was left alone in a cell, they didn't put anybody in with me for some reason or another. In fact it makes you wonder about political prisoners. I was sitting there, they gave me nothing to eat. I was in there and this youngster came in and finally his mother came down from Joliet.

I’m listening to her talk to her boy next door. She's saying, "I always knew you were going to get into trouble, son. You've been running wild too long. Now look what's happened, your poor father’d turn over in his grave." I listened to this poor woman and her wayward boy and finally when she got through talking to him I said, "Lady, would you come over here a minute? I'd like to ask you something." She was a nice woman, she came over and she looked at me and she said, "What is it?" I said, "I'd like you just to do me a favor. I'm in jail here and I haven't been able to tell my wife where I'm at. Would you call this number and just say that
George, your husband, said to say he's in Englewood police station. She took her time and she wrote down the number.

It was my home number and I didn't know whether she would call or not but the next morning a cop came in and he said, "Look, you son of a bitch, I don't know how you did it." He said, "Here is a pot of tea and a bunch of sandwiches." And I knew right then and there my wife knew where I was at, because I only drank tea at the time. So poor Dorothy had come, she had got the call. She said, "George is in Englewood," and that was all she needed to know. Then she called Ben Meyers, our lawyer, and he said, "Well go on over and take George something to eat." She came down and the cops said, "You don't want to go down and see the rebel radical," you know. She said, "I do and I want to go because that's my husband." He didn't know what to say to her, here she was taking it. So I got my sandwiches and that's the first time that they knew where I was at.

You see Dorothy called Ben Meyers and said I was in Englewood. Then he demanded a writ of habeas corpus so they were forced to take us down to the Criminal Courts Building and produce the body. So they said that we could be released if we'd put up a fifty thousand dollar bond. The charge was to commit the act of conspiracy. You know that was the same thing that they charged Tom Mooney with. They were really after us, Weber and I. We finally were handcuffed together and taken in the court and now they were actually forced to
produce the body. Well of course the lawyer turned around and argued that the bail was way too high and I guess it must have been put up because we were released. I got my freedom from that court hearing.

I came home and that's the time I was just home and I was busy delousing myself in the bath tub when my minister friend showed up and he was very sympathetic but thought that I was moving amongst too radical a movement. Now that in itself was quite an exciting incident in my mind because I'd seen such things go on in the movies but I never realized that I'd ever experience them myself. You have to go through a thing like this to know what it is.

I. How did that eventually turn out, George?

R. Well it turned out that when the case came to trial a year later we were fined ten dollars. Eight or six dollars was for unlawful assembly and the remainder was for disorderly conduct. In other words the felony charges were all dropped. Conspiracy was a felony charge. Of course it was very difficult, for Harper and all of us were charged in the same conspiracy act and it was dropped. Then the lawyers worked out an agreement where the whole case would be dropped provided all prisoners would accept the unlawful assembly charge and the disorderly. Of course immediately I started, like you Ed, to put up an argument and say, "We don't even want to pay an unlawful assembly. We don't even want to pay a disorderly conduct charge." And you should have heard these
lawyers, including my own friend say, "You've got to. You realize this case will cost the union thousands and thousands of dollars if you don't ease off and take it this way? We can't afford it, we don't have the money. John Lewis and his miners can't afford to put up the money when we can get you off. This will not be held against your record."

And it never was, by the way. I went into the Army and Navy and all that stuff in the war and they said, "These are misdemeanors." At the same time it’s pretty hard for a man of principles to turn around and take such a miserable charge when it wasn't true. Even Harper fought it. He said, "I don't know why I should take a thing like that." Many a time we talked about it and said that thing should have never been allowed to stick. But that's the way of politics, that's the way of negotiations. That's the way of the city against labor. That's the way of big business. They will compromise their way out of all situations. If you have to become a labor organizer and do finally, you have to learn the meaning of compromise. It's a sort of important thing in this world. But where do you stop compromising your principles? This is the thing that has to be settled.

I. How much harassment was projected against you guys after that by the Chicago police?

R. Oh I don't recall too much other than this stop and frisk which gradually stopped. I would say it went on from the first of June till about the first of November in the year
1937 that the cops would stop and frisk and embarrass you. Yeah, it went on until the late fall.

**I.**
Did they ever harangue your families, and that?

**R.**
Yeah, well I recall that the police came up to the house when my wife was alone and rapped on the door. She found herself rather embarrassed finding that the cops were there and they were asking where was her husband. But she would just say, "Well he's at a union meeting." Then they would leave. They didn't do it in any prolonged way to her but she was always quite uncomfortable because she sensed that I was being harassed. Your family does bear the brunt of an occasional telephone call. I would say that we weren't harassed in any concerted fashion but maybe by some occasional policeman who took it in his head that he was going to do something that he thought would maybe put a feather in his hat or maybe get him promoted, but not in any deliberate manner.

**I:**
During that period of time when the CIO was coming into being in the steel industry and right after Republic Steel and the Memorial Day Massacre, what position did the AFL take on the city or the county or the state level?

**R.**
None, they never supported us. We had no contacts with the AFL. I don't recall them issuing any statements in the press upholding the rights of the strikers to organize. I recall us trying one time to meet with Soderstrom, who just died recently at the great age of over eighty, and he
indicated that he was sympathetic but there was no support from him. Although later when the AFL and CIO merged, he indicated again it was a nice feeling. But the AFL has always been a nonentity in my position and never did come out on record supporting us as a CIO group of the Steel Workers Union as a whole. I have no idea just how close an affinity Germano has worked up but I'm rather afraid it's pretty sparse and we're still looked upon as radicals in the labor movement.

I. You would suspect, George, that after ten workers were killed and numerous workers were shot down, regardless of your political philosophies internally with the labor movement, that the AFL, being a labor movement, would take some sort of position.

R. They may have but I don't recall anything that was outstanding. I don't recall that they were at that great big mass meeting, for example, in the Coliseum. I don't recall that at all. But, like I said, I wasn't—at the meeting. I was, as usual, involved in work for the union or getting arrested, whatever they were doing to me at that time. Now it took many years before there was a little cooperation exhibited between the AFL and we, who were members of the CIO.

I. Did you receive much support from other labor organizations that were young and foundling, such as the Auto Workers or the Garment Workers?

R. The Autoworkers, the Oil Workers, the Press, I mean by that the newspaper men who were organizing, the Retail
Clerks. We all helped each other, we'd step in and organize. It was nothing for me to go, when asked by an Auto Worker organizer to come on down and help give out leaflets. They would come and help us if we asked them. If they were on strike, like they did in the Chicago Examiner, we went down and talked to their meetings and helped them organize. They in turn would issue statements on behalf of the Steel Worker's Union. But these were CIO unions, they were people involved in the new industrial type union. There we got our support. We never got it from craft unions in the AFL, they were nix. We were too radical for them. It's almost like this Krupa whom you were just talking about. You just want to do something in the name of the people, the people's convention. They'd say, "Oh boy, that's strictly communist." It's so ridiculous. It's enough to make a man vomit. I think that's the best way to express it.

I. This is now the summer and fall of 1937 and history shows me that the CIO on a nationwide scale had organized five million people in the course of a year or year and a half. It caught up with the AFL as far as members were concerned. What happened after that initial organizing period?

R. Well there were about eight million people in the AFL and inside of two or three years we had eight million people in the CIO. There was about sixteen million people organized. Then, of course, came the sad occasion when Phil Murray had to examine the CIO and came to the conclusion that there were
radical unions in the CIO and he succumbed to the pressure of the average so called reactionary trade union man and decided to expel the ten unions, I believe it was.

I. That was later.

R. Yeah, that's later. Yeah, but the labor movement never grew. From then on it stayed or it's gone down a trifle. That's right and it will not ever come back until there's an aggressive position taken by the average working guy like we had when we took the idea into our heads to help build the so called CIO. And those people that take that idea, they'll have to shake themselves loose from the old AFL-CIO philosophy because the CIO philosophy was a thing in itself. Their new movement will have to be a thing in itself.

I. What was the position then from 1938 to say 1940-41, just prior to the war, as far as the steel worker was concerned, on organizing. Was it as accelerated as it had been?

R. Yeah, it was every bit as fast and started growing by leaps and bounds because people were demanding increases in wages. They found they were being bound by the Wage Stabilization law, and more people than ever wanted to get in. They felt the only way they could get a raise in pay was through organized labor. Between 1941 and '43, before I was drafted into the Army, I found myself servicing more and more unions, to the degree that we were demanding more and more staff people. But we were finding ourselves unable to hire
them or the bosses of the Steelworkers Union were refusing to hire them, to the extent that guys like Harper went on strike, especially after I went into the Army and they were lacking in staff members.

They said, "You've either got to hire people or we're going to have to quit working." And Germano, who was the boss at the time, let them quit. They went on strike. Of course a couple of guys went back to work but Harper and guys like that took other jobs, gave up the Steelworkers Union, because they couldn't get no help. That was the only reason they quit, it was too much work. They couldn't stand the guff.

Getting back to that period just prior to the second war, how much internal political pressures started coming into play among the staff? You were talking of factions. You were talking of the liberal faction and the semi-conservative faction, which is a natural thing. When you get any group of men you see this emanating as power struggles.

Yeah, only to the extent that when the Steelworkers Union began to have regular elections for district directors and for national officers, then you found that different fellows would like to run, you know, in the democratic election procedure as provided under the constitution. I would say that it was a simple thing for those in the office, that when somebody would give them a little bit of serious competition, they would -- well, they have them drafted or they would have them discharged, or they would make it so
tough for them they'd have to quit like Harper did. That's a story in itself.

I.

Yeah, George, before we get into that story in itself about the internal conflicts within the staff, I have another question. After the vast organizing drives going on in the South Chicago area, as well as around the country, many segments of our society tried to brand the labor movement, the CIO primarily, as being communistic, infiltrated by foreign powers and everyone was looking under rocks to a great degree. How did this affect the organizer in his home life and in his community and his every day relationship with people he had known prior to committing himself to the organizing of his fellow workers?

R.

It really did have-quite an effect on the individual. I, myself, never really had much to do with politics up until the time that the CIO was developed. I had cast maybe one ballot in a national election. As I recall it, a friend of mine in the roll shop said that a personal friend of his was a candidate and he asked me if I'd go over and cast a ballot for his friend. I did just exactly that. It was my first opportunity to cast a ballot. I recall I had to register as a Democrat and I cast my ballot and I made one X just for that person because I felt at a loss when I saw all the other names. I was very unfamiliar with candidates who were running and I was principled enough, even as a young boy, not to cast ballots for people whom I knew nothing about. It might be
strange to make that statement but when you're young many of
the things you hope in your later life kind of indicate what
course you're going to follow.

I recall the pressures being so great on me. One
time I had an opportunity to talk with Alderman Rowan. He was
the Tenth Ward alderman at the time and became quite a good
friend of mine. I felt the pressures of being called left and
so on. I said to him one day, "I think if it will be alright
with you, Alderman Rowan, I'd like to join the Democratic
Party. People keep on saying that you're a communist in the
CIO movement and it's kind of disgusting. I'd like to become
a member, I understand you've got a ward club. I see the
title above the door, 'Ward Club Democratic Party'. How do
you go about getting a card to become a member of the
Democratic Club?"

I recall he kind of laughed and put if off and said,
"Well you don't really have to have a membership card."
"Well, would I be welcome if I came down there and began to
work as a Democrat with you?" "Well," he said, "it is a
club." He kind of let me know that I couldn't come in without
an invitation but at the same time he wasn't issuing any
cards. In other words he was very cautious but he didn't seem
to want me as an organizer for the Steel Workers Organizing
Committee. He didn't seem to want me to be a member but he did
want me to be a friend. In fact I was always a pretty good
friend of his but I never did, no matter how I went about it,
get him to say I'd be welcome into the Tenth Ward Democratic Club. There were membership cards, I found out later, but I never got one of them.

I. Did the union at that time try to infiltrate the political parties of the city or were politicians vying for your support as they do today in the City of Chicago and other urban areas?

R. In an indirect manner. I recall there was a man named Wilson Franklin who was a member of the School Board. He was a printer and we used to endeavor to get Wilson Franklin to work with us as a member of the School Board. I recall sitting on the stage with him at a couple of meetings. He was a heavy set man with a dark mustache. It was a quite important job, it was about the only job that organized labor seemed to have in the City of Chicago. Wilson Franklin, I found out as we tried to talk with him, was a sort of neuter. He just simply had no life in him. He had simply no understanding in him what the CIO or the Steel Workers Organizing Committee was attempting to do. He had no encouragement to offer us.

I recall a young lady in the South Chicago public library system asked us to help her. Again I went down to assemble a group to go to the Library Board. I found that we couldn't put much pressure on. They didn't want our pressures although this young woman insisted that we go down two or three times. We went down and rapped on the door and
pointed out that we wanted a new library in South Chicago. Ultimately we did get this library and this young lady was always delighted that organized labor had played a part.

The Labor and Trades Assembly of South Chicago, we tried to enter that and we found that we weren't welcome. We tried to enter the YMCA. They had a brand new YMCA and they had many meeting halls. Maybe I've told you this before, Ed, but if not, it was difficult at first for us to get meeting halls there. Before a year or two was over we began to organize and, became strong; the YMCA began to invite us to their public forums, their luncheons. I recall around 1938 and '39 I'd be sitting with South Chicago businessmen who were sponsoring the YMCA and they were asking for us, as a group, to do a little work. But as soon as we did too much, then they would be pulling away from us, the usual practice.

This didn't last too long because, as an organizer, you get involved. Your activities are contract negotiations and you can't attend their luncheons too much. After awhile you actually lose interest because nothing's done in these Labor Trades Assembly groups. Nothing is done in YMCA forums. You make suggestions, you pass resolutions, you submit a problem to them and want to take action. It's amazing how it can be pigeonholed. It kind of reminds you of Congress when they don't want to pass a bill. Even all the way down to a small South Chicago group, they pigeon hole something real nicely if it doesn't suit their fancy.
I. Was the guy in the mill, the worker in the mill, politically oriented by the approach of, "let's back this guy or let's back that guy," as a labor movement?

R. Yeah, only to the degree that the organizer would show the interest and then bring the matter up with the workers at their division meeting or their departmental meetings. The average worker, very indirectly as a steel worker, knew nothing of politics. I, myself, was completely green on the matter.

I do recall brushing with the Democratic Party in the city hall one time. A man by the name of Sy Gorman called me up and indicated he would like the South Chicago Steelworkers to support his candidate at this late date. I kind of forgot who the candidate was but I recall that he sold us a bill of goods that the man would be good for the area. Between the two of us we drew up a leaflet and it advertised this man's background. I recall, Ed, when I attempted to get some organizers to go out with me and give them out at the I.C. station, for example, or other appropriate places where you put leaflets out for a candidate, I could get no help. The organizers were bad enough as far as getting in to politics but the worker in the mill just didn't show any interest either. I went to the I.C. and gave out these leaflets and I recall Gorman calling me up again and inviting my wife and I down to Henricis for a dinner. He bought my wife a lovely box of chocolates. He became quite friendly. He'd give me a call
about once a month or once every couple of months and let me know that he still knew I was around.

I recall the day coming when he took me down to the city hall and introduced me to Commissioner Whalen, who was head of the Sanitary Board, the Board of Sanitation of the City of Chicago, a mighty important political job today even. He took me in and introduced me to Mr. Whalen who was on the telephone. I noticed that Sy walked out and left me sitting there with him and finally when Mr. Whalen hung up he said to me, "Well, you're the steelworkers who done the nice job for our boy down there in South Chicago." "Well," I said, "Mr. German kind of introduced me to the idea and I said I'd work with him." "Well, he said, "I want to thank you for the fine job." Then he put his hand in his pocket and he brought out a couple of fifty dollar bills. I said, "What's that for?" And he said, "That's for the work you did." Well I recall I was hesitant about taking it but I took it because I had done work but that was a side job. And I suppose that kind of business goes on in politics to this-very day. That was the only time that I ever had any close affinity with city hall. They never asked me to do any more work after that and, as I said, I couldn't even get into the Democratic Party, even with work like that being on the record. Sometimes I don't think the right hand knows what the left hand's doing when it comes to politics, Ed.

You know the fact, though, is that the labor movement
on a whole in the South Chicago area is closely aligned with the Democratic Party, for example, right now the AFL-CIO in Chicago and the Daley political organization. Do you feel, George, that throughout the last thirty years when the CIO had thrown their hat into the Democratic circle that it has worked to the betterment or the detriment of the union movement and the working man?

R. Well that's a pretty involved question, Ed. I saw Joe Germano sitting at the right hand of Mayor Daley during that demonstration at the political convention of the Democrats in the City of Chicago when the rioting took place. You would think with the United Steel Workers of America having a man that close, a district director that close, that there would be signs that the organized labor movement could have results, fair results. We're not asking for unfair results, we wouldn't. But I have failed to see any response from the political candidates.

Take a look, for example, at this teacher's strike that's on right now. Why we even have a man, the Chairman of the Board, who's a member of the United Steel Workers of America. Here, the teacher's union, an AFL-CIO union, is attempting to negotiate a contract on their wages, hours and their working conditions and they fail to achieve results. They have to actually go out and strike. Now you know that the School Board knew this matter was coming up. The state government knows that the teachers have a contract with the
City of Chicago and the School Board. Yet everyone hears about the wonderful foresight of the average American business man but you find the politicians failing to meet the requirements financially through taxes that they would have to meet for the teachers, the firemen, the policemen's raises that should be taken as part of the business institution of running the government. So when you ask a question about do the Democrats help labor -- neither the Democrats nor the Republicans seem to measure up to the business of dealing with organized labor in a legitimate fashion. They pass it up, the opportunity is there for them to do it in a very proper manner. They take advantage, to be truthful with you, and in politics with organized labor, organized labor always gets the short end of the stick in my opinion.

I. I basically agree with you there. Getting back to that internal strife that was happening in 1937 or '38 within the union, I've noticed in a photograph I dug up somewhere that you're sitting in attendance at the first Steelworker's Convention that was held, I believe in June of 1937.

R. It was '37.

I. I believe in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

R. Yeah.

I. It looks like there's about maybe two hundred and fifty guys there and John Lewis and Phil Murray, Bittner and Golden and a bunch of them are sitting up in the front and then the delegates are scattered throughout the hall. I see guys
like Johnny Sargent, Harry Harper and Joe Germano.

Joe Weber, Jack Rusak, all of them were there, the young organizers.

All of you guys look young, that's what I just was going to say. You all look like you just came out of your teens. Can you give me a little background on that first convention, George? It wasn't the constitutional convention as such. I think it was probably more of an organizing convention wasn't it?

That's right. The first constitutional convention, I think, was held in 1942 and this is the first convention of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee. Phil Murray and his advisers had come to the conclusion that they felt that they had to get unity in the Steelworkers Organizing Committee so he called this convention to discuss the matter of policies in connection with contracts, with organizing, with formulating districts. That was important and most of the staff was controlled up to that time with United Mine Workers, who were John Lewis's lieutenants and knew John's policies. John was the man who was spending the money through his miners and there was already signs that some of the steelworkers, when they got organized, were a little hostile to the miners. The miners realized that to keep control of the steelworkers in the mill, to keep control of the local unions in a manner that would assure them of this manner of operating, they called this conference and reaffirmed the districts, reaffirmed the
local union statutes, reaffirmed the policies that would be followed in approaching U.S.. Steel. That was important.

From out of that conference came the idea of the Wage Policy Committee. Out of it came the first moves towards what the miners felt would necessitate sometime in the future developing a constitution. I would say, as I wandered around that convention, that steelworkers as a whole were unaware that the ground work was being laid for control of the local unions within the Steel Workers Organizing Committee.

Little did I know, even when the constitution was finally developed in 1942, that the miners had such foresight to begin to gather in the reins and see to it that they would be controlling each area throughout the country. They were no slouches within the labor movement, when I compare your previous question about how slouchy political parties are about how to approach organized labor. Let, me assure you that organized labor is really on the ball and knows what it's doing, especially when you talk about old line unions like the Mine Workers who were developing a brand new international such as the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. They knew exactly each step they were taking. They'd been through it before in their own Mine Workers Union and steelworkers were unaware but they gradually learned that. With all their knowledge, even today, I still think they're rather weak among themselves about knowing where they're going and what they're going to do.
I imagine that at that period of time the guys were like little foundlings. Not having any previous experience, they were having to look to established unions like the Mine Workers. Is it your opinion then that the Mine Workers had ulterior motives in setting up the geographic areas and that as they are set up today?

I wouldn't say that they had ulterior motives other than that they were going to keep control. If that's an ulterior motive, yeah. But the miners were very familiar with their constitution. They had been through it, you know, with various leaders in the background, the Progressive Miners in Southern Illinois. They had been challenged, the Steelworkers were not familiar with challenging. In fact, when you think about that, John Lewis came in with his million dollars and began to pay those steel workers who were now organizers. Even the average steel worker knew you don't bite the hand that feeds you. You just go ahead and follow the policies that are outlined for you. Murray was enough of the diplomat that he never attempted to embarrass the steel workers as such, but once in awhile you'd feel the strong hand of the miners.

What was the general reaction of the organizer at that time? Did his political alliance internally lay with the miners or with the Steel Workers Organizing Committee stage?

Well I would say that most of us felt the sun rose and
set on the head of Phil Murray. Murray as such, with the backing of this wonderful old man, John Lewis, between the two of them they got us to jump over the moon. And there were individual challenges, factionalism was always there right from the beginning. It's an interesting thing that I began to learn about the Communists, the Socialists, the Trotskyites, the Socialist Labor, Socialist Democrat. You name it and they get you so confused.

I just read a book recently called Labor Radical and it's cleared up half the confusion that existed in my young mind of those days. It's an intriguing thing to read Len De Caux's book, Labor Radical. He's thinking to the past, too, and it's kind of clearly spelled out, what part all of these organizations played in the early years of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, although he looks at it more from a CIO viewpoint. I met him and I recall that I took an instant liking to him, he was a good writer. He seemed to know what you were going to ask and what you demanded of him. He put out a magazine, CIO News. His column, I can remember, was on the left hand side of a shiny piece of paper. It was a little bit of a magazine in the early days. On the top it entitled all of the ten unions that started the CIO. Len De Caux could adjust himself, just as all of us could in those days, to any demands that were made upon us as far as organizing was concerned.

You talk of the philosophies that started to emanate through various staff representatives in the organization.
Did these philosophies that were to the left to some degree find themselves in conflict with the establishment at the time?

R.

Oh yes, you would find that time and again cropping up. Issues, such as when Van Bittner took a notion to sub-divide Local Union 65 into four different locals. I, as just a plain ordinary steelworker, immediately rebelled, made no bones about it and exploded with Van Bittner, asking them what the idea was, trying to split up my Local Union 65. I was the president of it.

He said, "I'm not only going to split it up, Patterson, because I'm going to develop more leaders, but we're going to make you resign your presidency because you can't be on the staff and be president of a local union."

Well, that really jolted me but I talked it over with the staff members. I found that the left wing staff organizers of that day, if you want to call them that, said Bittner's got a good idea. And the right wing faction let me know in a nice way that it was for my own good. It wouldn't hurt for me to give up the presidency so I resigned as President of Local 65.

There were times when you would find one group of organizers wanting to go out and climb through the windows and go into a plant and organize and you'd find another group saying, oh no, that's too radical. You would find the reserved, conservative, apple shining type of organizer running down all the time to Fontaccio to get permission to
organize. Then you would find the other type of organizer who never saw Fontaccio but was out running his own show and then came back and showed accomplishments. You would think that the fellow who did that would get the promotions when they came. Well I found out that it was the apple polishers who got the jobs. I think that's true in school often and it's true in the business world. It was just as true within organized labor, while you're recognized as having done a terrific job of having organized and brought in members.

I recall getting into a big argument when I had to shut up some of the organizers and I said, "Look, when Local 65 came in and I was the president we brought in three or four thousand members and you, who are doing all the talking, you brought in fifty." I said that to Joe Germano and Jim Thimmes, for example. They were old AFL union men, they loved to brag about the Amalgamated Association. They had around fifty to sixty members they brought in. We, in the independent group called the Associated Employees, when we affiliated we brought in over four thousand in one crack from the South Works. You'd think that kind of yoemanship work would be recognized, but it's interesting to note if you look at the record, that Jim Thimmes became Vice President of the United Steel Workers. Joe Germano had been the long time District Director doing yoemanship work. Well I know he didn't get it because of the number of members he brought in. I've already talked about the different types of organizers
so I'll leave it up to you as to just how exactly he got the job.

I. How many members did the staff number at that time, George, 1937 and early '38'?

R. We started off with about twelve.

I. Twelve guys. Were all of them out of the mill?

R. No they weren't by any means out of the mills. The first one out of the mill at South Works, a guy named Charlie Fleeger, he lasted about six months on the staff but he fell to the wayside real quick in the campaign. Then I came on from South Works full time. Charlie was a full time organizer but we put on a part time organizer, as I recall. Some of the fellows were Alfred Avila; six to eight months after the drive started we put on Steve Ulanowski; we put a colored fellow named Charley Henry from the blast furnaces and another fellow, Manuel Garcia. I had a hard time with some of those names.

There were a lot of people who came on to the staff who evidently had been organizing in the labor movement in and around Chicago or other parts of the country and came in as volunteers and were hired by Van Bittner, men like Joe Weber, Jack Rusak and all that bunch that came in. The best way I can describe them, they had simply been organizing an insurance, a health program called the International Workers Order. Many of their staff were hired; I think I've made the point before that there was a woman organizer named Mineola
Ingersoll and there was a woman by the name of Barbara and a Czechoslovak woman whose last name I can't remember. A man named Mike Martin came on the staff. The staff was an intermingling with John Durwalski coming in from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and Leo himself, Kryczki was from the Amalgamated. These were contributions made by Sidney Hillman. The staff at one time, when I thought it was rather large and good and doing a lot of work, was about twenty two, maybe twenty three people.

In the Chicago area, in the Calumet region?

R. That's right, it covered the Calumet region.

I. Then about 1938 I believe there was a cut back in the personnel on the staff and a cut in wages. What were you actually making as a staff representative at that time? And how many guys did they actually cut from the staff?

R. I would say that by 1937 right into that May, Memorial Day Massacre the staff had achieved the numbers of better than twenty and rumors began to seep through as the end of the year approached and '38 was coming that John Lewis was beginning to run out of money. The pressure was on the staff to begin to collect a dollar dues because we did take in many, many people and the union just was signing the cards. When we finally had the majority and the National Labor Relations elections were due to be coming up we had to get real legitimate unionism into the plant through a contract that John Lewis signed in 1937. Then Phil Murray, a few months later, signed another with Van
It was a real shock when Fontaccio one day said there were going to be layoffs. The layoffs were because there was a sort of let down as far as production in the steelmills was concerned, they both went together. John Lewis was beginning to press us to become independent financially and there was an indication that some of the staff would have to be laid off. I recall the morning that Fontaccio announced it because of short money, that I suggested to Fontaccio and I noticed it had quite a bit of support, that perhaps we should all take a cut in wages to keep anyone from being laid off. In answer to your question, I think we were making about six dollars a day and six dollars expenses or thereabouts as I recall. That six dollars expense had lasted all through the years you know. So at that time we were getting about twelve dollars including our expenses. Now I had a feeling that if we cut it we could get over the hump, that we should retain some of the organizers rather than see any laid off.

Well a month or two went by and no one seemed to press this point of the lay off. I noticed that a group of the organizers were called into Murray's office in Pittsburgh and when they came back I was shocked to find that some of the best organizers had been laid off. I again raised the point among the staff and said, "Look we can't afford to lose that type of organizer." But I was suppressed by the very men who were laid off. They indicated that they could go and get jobs with
the Farm Equipment Union, with the Furniture Workers Union, with the Tobacco and Retail Workers Union and you sensed that they evidently had a sort of understanding that they would be picked up as organizers by some of these other internationals. This kind of soothed my feelings, I hated to see them go.

I realized there would be a slow down in the campaign as far as organizing the unorganized shops and this did happen. There was quite a definite slow down when you lost those aggressive, militant, intellectual, sound thinking, labor movement guys who had helped build. It took a longtime for us to recover and get the old energy back. In fact I'm doubtful that we ever did get the old energy back.

I.

Do you think that that lay off was actually and primarily made because of monetary reasons or were there some other underlying things there?

R.

Oh I think that one was supplementary to the other. I have an idea that John Lewis and Phil Murray had had a chat about the left wing organizers that were on the staff and they felt that they could use the lack of money. I noticed that after the men were laid off and John Lewis came up with another half million dollars, that they had already hand picked people they could put on the staff and our staff grew larger than ever.

I. To replace the people laid off?

R. To replace the people who had been laid off. And I
can assure you that it wasn't filled with the real aggressive type of organizers. They were the kind of people, more of them out of the mill, that had to be taught. We began for the first time to hold classes. Fontaccio was a great man for having two meetings a week with the staff and he drove his staff men pretty hard. He insisted on knowing which plants they were organizing, had they any new plants, where were they negotiating contracts.

Most of the workers who were in the steel mills like U.S. Steel or Inland Steel-- even to this day I sense that the American Can, Continental Can almost establishes a base for what you're going to get in the steel mills. I've noticed this from the very beginning. This I don't think was done deliberately. I don't know that I could definitely say that there was an ulterior motive. I just feel that the developing of the content and the intents of a contract came about in a natural sort of way as plants were organized.

As to the laying off of people, I will say that the individuals who bare the heads of the union's are shrewd enough to take advantage of any little tradition that's developing, whether it's a slow down in work or whether it's a change in the political atmosphere. They are sharp enough to take advantage of it.

I. During that two year period between '38 and '40 did the organizing efforts of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee go down to any appreciable degree?
I do recall that a tour meeting of the staff with the District Director Fontaccio, he pointed out that Murray and Lewis did indicate that there was a stand still, that we were not growing. It was noticed and I recall that that was about the only time that I heard that the AFL had increased almost a million members because of our organizing and here suddenly we, the CIO, had not been able in that period of time to get too many more new members. So there was definitely a reflection on the type of staff men being hired and then laid off. It also was indicated in the internal organization of the CIO. There was a complete stand still. I think that's why that maybe there was a hiring in the different international unions of these men who had been laid off. Lewis was sharp enough to grasp the idea that when you lose your militant and your knowledgeable organizers you also lose growth.

Possibly Lewis siphoned these guys into the other unions that needed the growth.

That's right.

By 1940 John Lewis, history shows, has become semi-disillusioned with Phil Murray and they have a falling out. Lewis has a falling out with the CIO on different issues, which are political. Was the staff at that time being influenced by Fontaccio, who was a former coal miner, on the political issues in the 1940 election?

Talking quite roughly about the political atmosphere within the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, around 1938 we
began developing what was known as Labor's Non Partisan League. Labor's Nonpartisan League was getting a good kick off in the steel workers group. I was appointed to be the head of the first group of Labor's Non Partisan League, I recall, and I didn't know beans from Shinola about politics. As I pointed out, you don't learn politics, Ed, over night. I'm still learning about politics, it's a long road, too. And I recall him making a speech for Landon, about Landon, not for him, and I got real enthusiastic, thinking that he was real sincere. At that meeting I stood up on the floor and said, "We've got to get more into politics." And I evidently went too far because he kind of quieted me down at this meeting and pointed out that organized labor, whilst it went into politics, didn't go into politics to the extent that I was kind of angling at that moment. I had really wanted to do something about demonstrating against Landon and his sunflower and he let me know that he would control Labor's Non Partisan League and not me as the chairman of the group.

Roosevelt at this time began to show indications not so much of quarreling with Phil Murray, although there was the undercurrent of dissatisfaction. Murray had been showing just a little too much independence from Lewis, you see, and the money was not forthcoming. We were becoming, as a Steel Workers Union, independent financially. We were getting dues by 1940, we were paying our own wages. We were beginning to pay back the miners for the money we had borrowed and we did
pay back every dollar we ever got from the Mine Workers so we can hold our heads high. But Murray was being more disillusioned by Franklin Roosevelt, because at heart he had always been more or less a Republican in his thinking. John Lewis thought he had gone over to support Franklin Roosevelt and now he'd find that Franklin Roosevelt was issueing his famous statement, "A plague on both your houses." John decided that they had to look around for another candidate and he came up with this Wendell Wilkie and his "oneworld." John Lewis felt that he could take the entire CIO with him. It didn't turn out that way as history shows.

Now the steel workers themselves, Ed, were putting enough pressure on, you see. Right from the beginning I could sense, even in myself, a certain hostility towards the Mine Workers. We wanted our own independence, it's natural, you want to be free. Murray must have felt that pressure. He must have indicated it to John Lewis in some of his talks with him. He must have felt that he was popular enough with the steelworkers that he could, without too much hostility, win the day. He was elected unanimously to be the President of the United Steel Workers of America. It was a day of remodeling, a day of retrenching and Philip Murray made sure that when he gave up his job as Vice President of the United Mine Workers he was well entrenched in the United Steel Workers.

Lewis put his position on the line as far as that
election was concerned. Guys like Fontaccio did too, I would assume, by virtue of going back to the Mine Workers and leaving the CIO.

R. That's right.

I. Did Fontaccio bend any arms in the district on that?

R. No. I would say that I can recall quite vividly going down to East Chicago, the bank building where the office is even today, and I recall there was Joe Weber and Jack Rusak and Hank Johnson and myself. There may have been a couple of other organizers, but I recall that we went to go up to the office and we found that Fontaccio wasn't in. This Wendell Wilkie didn't sit good with the steel workers. We were for Franklin Roosevelt who was Democratic and Labor's' Non Partisan League was Democratic. Suddenly from the top down came John Lewis's order. Well we were just not going to do what he wanted.

We went up to the office and came back down to the restaurant to have a cup of coffee and wait because we had been told by Sam Evett, who was the office boy at the time, that Fontaccio would be back shortly. Weber went up, we were still eating and Weber got through. He said, "I'll go up and see if Fontaccio is in." About a half hour later, before we got a chance to go up, Weber came back down and he said, "Well, I never saw anything like it. Fontaccio had the window up in the office and he's standing with one foot out the window." I said, "What do you mean, Joe?" "Well," he said, "He's trying
to make up his mind, he's almost ready to commit suicide." I said, "Aw come on, it surely isn't that bad." He said, "You have never seen a man torn between loyalties. He loves the United Steelworkers, he loves the union, which was the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, he loves working with us fellows, but he's got to make up his mind as to whether or not he's going to go back with John Lewis and support him on this Wilkie political campaign.

I said, "Well don't you think we ought to go up and help him make up his mind and keep him here, Joe?" And Weber replied, saying, "It's too late, he's made up his mind. Already he's got the place half packed, he's moving out all of his belongings." Then we went up and that's when Fontaccio said good bye to us. He did go and the following week we were all interested in who would take Fontaccio's place and we found that Joe Germano had been appointed.

I. By Bittner?
R. By Van Bittner. Van Bittner picked Joe Germano as his man.
I . This was in about 1941?
R. It was just at the time the campaign began for Wilkie so the date could be easily established. Germano took over as an acting director for the group. We moved in '42, just a few months later to the Constitutional Convention. I would say it would be a matter of six to eight months that Germano acted as an appointee. He got himself well established so that
he would be in a position to run for the director.

And that was at the convention of 1942?

1942 in Constitutional Convention where we founded ourselves as the United Steelworkers Organizing Committee name.

May of '42 in Cleveland, Ohio, I believe it was.

Yeah, I was nominated at that convention to run against Germano and that again was quite an interesting event in my life.

We'll get into that in a minute. I have another question to ask about the staff itself prior to that first founding convention.

That'll be fine.

George, the organizers knew you were going to have an election for directors and international officers at the convention. My question is, prior to the convention in this seven to eight month period, did the organizers start lining up behind one candidate or the other? Was there any political factions emerging in the staff representative group itself?

No there was none that I was aware of, Ed. The organizers that remained on the staff, evidently there were a great number of them who, without much hesitation, gave their allegiance to Germano. Harper and I were working on the west side of Chicago and had opened that office a couple of years earlier and were fully engaged. I think I may have told you
that I had about twenty eight unions that I served and Harper had about twenty three. And I recall we had an awful argument with Germano to get another organizer in. We hired Tony Grazyck around '42, oh no it could be '41 when Grazyck came in. I'm not sure of the date, somewhere around there approximately. We were fully occupied organizing. All the organizers were really busy servicing unions then and we were getting original contracts, which is much harder than servicing a union that already has a contract so that I don't recall the factionalism. Germano did a very good job in getting the loyalty of the staff behind him. He never did approach me as an individual but I do recall talking to Harper as we went into the Constitutional Convention and I already had found out that we're going to have an election for district directors.

I. How many staff were there in the district at that time, George?

R. Oh I suppose sixteen.

I. Sixteen. How much control did the staff exert over the local union officers, if any?

R. Well that's an unusual thing about the United Steel Workers of America. In most local unions the staff was completely relied upon for advice and generally almost anything the organizer said would be taken as gospel. They would follow it, there were few rebel unions in those early days. I don't recall any special rebel unions.
The delegates at that convention elected the director. It was not the referendum vote that was left up to the membership. Is that correct?

That's right. This first Constitutional Convention, when the nominations took place, they were all gathered willy nilly around the platform. McDonald, I noticed, said in his book he had already sent over enough people to stuff that meeting and election, that they would make sure that their man got in. But I would say that they didn't have to go that far because before the nominations were held Van Bittner took me out behind the curtains and had quite a chat with me about my nomination.

You're saying that prior to the nominations which were being held at the convention Bittner, who by this time I guess, was vying for the position of vice president of the union, called you aside.

That's right, just about a half hour before the meeting was held for the nominations of district director in the Chicago-Calumet region.

Had you been caucussing with various local unions?

I hadn't caucussed with anybody. In fact when Van Bittner told me that he heard that I was going to be nominated I could very truthfully say to him, "Well, you know more than I do." And he said, "I don't want you to accept the nomination. In fact, I don't want you to be nominated, I want you to tell your people that." And I said, "What do you mean, tell my
people? What's the matter with you, Van Bittner? A man can't do anything if he doesn't 'know he's going to be nominated and I don't know. I've got to wait and see if I'm nominated." He said, "You know damn well you're going to be nominated.", And I said, "Well if you know it you know more than I do because nobody, and that's a fact, nobody has said to me that I was. going to be nominated."

So it grew pretty tense. John Riffe was on the one side of me and, as I recall it, I think it was Dave McDonald on the other side and they're pretty big fellows. Van Bittner was looking up at me because he's a little fellow. And I 'said, "Just what have you got against me Mr. Bittner? Have I ever let you down? What makes you turn on me like this? Any time that you ask me to do work for this organization I think truthfully you can't say that I ever failed you, I never did." I said, "This is an opportunity for anyone under the democratic constitution that's being adopted to run and I would like to run but I don't know if I'm going to be nominated until I hear my name and then when my nomination is placed on the floor I can decide at that moment whether I want to accept or decline."

Then I noticed his face light up. He looked at me and he said, "You better decline." I said, "NOW wait a minute, just by you saying that it almost makes me feel that I should run." He said, "You bum, you get elected and you'll find that you won't even have an office, telephone, or a bit of
I realized that when you hear that kind of threat come from a man like Bittner, who's going to be a vice president of this union, that I didn't stand much of a chance of getting cooperation but I didn't feel like I was beat yet. I said to him, "Well we'll wait and see what's going to happen, Mr. Bittner," and then I left. I said, "You'll find out what takes place."

I went looking for Phil Murray and I said, "Mr. Murray, I've got to talk to you, I just had a bad experience with Van Bittner." He said, "What's that George?" I said, "He just told me I can't run, I'm not going to run. He told me I'm not going to get a telephone or an office or anything if I was elected district director." And I said, "I didn't like it; I still don't like it and I think that I should get up and tell the workers what happened." He looked at me and he said, "Is that how Van Bittner did it, George?" I said, "It was pretty rugged, Mr. Murray." He said, "Well, I wouldn't have done it that way." And I said, "Well Mr. Murray have you any objections if I run? All you need to do is say fine and I'll be up there and I'll win." He said "Look, George, all I seek is unity." And he gave me a long lecture about unity and the labor movement. I said, "Well unity to what extent, Mr. Murray?" He said that whoever is the district director will cooperate and get the steel workers which is our primary consideration, organized and strengthened because our
enemies are the steel mills and not within our own house. I thought to myself well I don't have Murray's support here. So I went back and I said; "Well Mr. Murray, You'll have your unity." I went back, the nominations were held and the first man nominated, of course, was Joe Germano and the next man was Frank Grider.

I. You recall who nominated Germano, George?
R. Oh I don't think so.
I. Who else was nominated?
R. Frank Grider, an organizer from Gary, Indiana. Frank Grider was a miner. Then finally they let someone who wanted to nominate me have the floor. I don't know, I think it was Gus Yuratovic that nominated me. Gus was a good friend of mine and was very bitter later when I declined the nomination.

I. He was out of 1033 at Republic?
R. Yeah, he was the Republic Steel delegate and he told me that I would have won hands down if I'd allowed myself to continue in the race, although from my position on the platform I could easily see it was just going to be a show of hands. That's how the first election took place, just a show of hands.

I. In a hotel room?
R. No in the back of the convention hall and that show of hands would have been stuffed. There'd been no possibility of me winning it, I could see that. On top of that were the
thoughts of unity. I took the floor and made quite a speech and I looked VanBittner in the eye while I made my speech and I talked in favor of the candidacy of another man and I went to great length in my loyalty towards the United Steel Workers of America that was now being founded. I said it was important that whoever was elected should be a man who could gather the forces together and we'd have greater strength in the Chicago-Calumet area and I declined in favor of Joe Germano.

I always recall VanBittner saying to Germano, "Joe, shake hands with Patterson. Don't you realize he's declined in your favor?" He had to tell him and then the next thing, I heard Frank Grider decline in favor of Germano so he was elected unanimously. There was no need to count the hands but that meeting was well packed by outsiders, I can assure you. I could see it myself. That's how Joe Germano was elected for the first time.

I. Was that election for a period of one year or two years?

R. It was two years, it began with two years for district director. Some people asked me if Germano had anything to do with this. I don't know but I would say Van Bittner really railroaded the election and it was all his idea. I think Joe Germano was just as surprised as some of the delegates to the convention when I declined. Later when I tried to explain to the delegates who were going to support my nomination that I had been pressured not to run they found it difficult to
believe and yet this is the truth.

I. So that's 1942, that was also the convention. You elected your first officers as directors and as president and vice president and you developed a constitution that even to this day by and large, is the governing document.

R. Many of the clauses are still the same.

I. The Mine Workers Union is a great reflection, as shown in our constitution.

R. That's right, it was founded and based on the Mine Workers with a few up to date clauses in it, but as to the collecting of dues and the set-up of districts, no matter what you look at you'll find that it reflects control in the same manner as the Mine Workers Union's controlled.

I. Did you find any of the delegates at the first convention that came out of the ranks of the local union realizing that the autonomy they enjoyed as local union officers to a great degree was being eroded or possibly taken away by this constitution?

R. I would say here andthere, there was a smattering of grumblings at the undemocratic way the constitution seemed to be being adopted., The delegates were often uninformed about the contents of the clauses of the constitution at this convention. When they did see it they had no time really to study the inner workings of it and it looked good as a method of managing the affairs of the large international union. In fact it was quite exciting for them to vote for the first time
on their district director. It did remove the control of some of the miners who, had been running, their affairs in different parts of the country and they did enjoy the privilege in their belief, of putting in a steel worker. Any hostility towards the real meaning and intent of the clauses was only in the far advanced thinking of a few who sensed that they were getting a mine workers contract and that this union would be no different than John Lewis's Mine Workers.

I. But it was no big issue at the time?

R. No they were too excited at developing a new international under a legal procedure.

I. That's interesting. You were in the period of the second war by this time in May, 1942. The second war had just started.

R. That's right.

I. Coming back to Chicago after you left Cleveland, was there any bitterness projected by the hierarchy of the union by virtue of you even being nominated? Did you feel any reflection of this at this time?

R. Yeah, very definitely. I wasn't a bosom companion of Joe Germano. He never did take me into the inner circles. I continued to go to the staff meetings when they were called in East Chicago. He followed very closely the line of Fontaccio. In fact to this day he still follows the ground work that was laid down by Fontaccio. Observing his actions
at district conferences, at staff meetings, I would say they have a great habit, these district directors of having their staff friends call them every morning. Johnny Doherty was the first one I ever heard use that expression that between six in the morning more work's done in the steel Workers Union by a telephone call to Mr. Van Bittner than's done in a weeks time by all these damn foolish organizers running around. I expressed surprise when I heard him say that one day and I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well all the ground work's laid by the district directors, the heads of the union, between six o'clock and nine o'clock in the morning. In fact if you ever get a responsible job in this union, Patterson, which I doubt you ever will, you would find that you keep yourself available with a clear head at that time in the morning because that's when they call each other." That is just an interesting observation I give you as I pass by.

I. Doherty was the assistant director of the district, wasn't he?

R. Yeah, he was an International Representative by title, an assistant to Van Bittner in later years.

I. Was he a former coal miner, George?

R. Yeah, definitely, right out of the Southern Illinois coal mines.

I. He worked for quite a while in the district.

R. Oh yes, he was a member of the School Board and then Ray Pasnick.
Yeah, I think he passed on in the late fifties or early sixties some time.

Yeah.

Getting back to that period of time, when you came back to Chicago now I assume that you guys were still in the stage of organizing various plants.

Oh yes.

You found yourself working on the West Side now?

Yeah and we were organizing mostly these war time plants. For example, the International Association of Machinists was a great competitor of ours in trying to get those new war plants. The Amertorp Co. was the American Can's torpedo plant.

Forest Park.

Forest Park. There we won that election, Harper and just by a couple of hundred votes but there were three thousand eight hundred workers in the plant. It was a hard fought election. Now that was a full time campaign. I, in the meantime, had also organized the American Can plant out at Harvey, Illinois. I’m trying to remember the name of it -- the Ammunition Container Co. They made card paper containers for the ammunition, shells, cartridges and so forth. They spun off paper by the yard, corrugated paper. I organized that just overnight by running a couple of dances. All the women that were in that plant came to the dances. We had charged admission by signing an application card. Then
we went before the Board and had an election and won it overwhelmingly and negotiated a contract. It was a different type of organizing this time, Ed.

On the West Side there, you stated previously that you went out there with Harry Harper from South Chicago and opened up an office in the early forties, I guess. By this time were there any additional staff guys working out on the West Side?

Just Harper and then as I said we got Tony Graczyk and a fellow by the name of Tony Kokodrovik and later Jesse Gonzales came. I'm sure these are names you don't know but they were very good organizers, these fellows. Gonzales was exceptionally good as far as the Mexican speaking and Spanish speaking people, a good organizer.

Did you find it difficult to organize by virtue of the war being on or was it easier?

It wasn't easier except that if you could pull a fast one like I illustrated by a couple of dances. You weren't allowed to strike. The Wage Stabilization Board had dome into effect and you negotiated a wage and then you waited to see if it would be approved by the Wage Board. Workers were very dissatisfied.

You would have quicky strikes. They would strike for about four hours and then an admiral or a general, a brigadier general would come on down and tell you to get these workers back to work and you'd have to get up there with a
uniform on both sides and make a speech and ask the workers to go, back to work in the name of patriotism, which they generally did. In the mean time you would get the Army, and the Navy to put on pressure to get your wage increase put through the Board.

I. This is generally the way it was done then?

R. Yeah that was the way it was being done, working as cooperatively as you could with your government because of the patriotic effort and at the same time trying to squeeze your advantages. It turned into being a real rat race between unions because it depended on which union had a member of their staff on the Wage Board as to whether or not your case got preference. All internationals weren't fortunate enough. Steel workers were a recognized big union, which generally had a couple of people on the Wage Board, and they would naturally give a little preference to your cases within limits. They had to recognize that there were other unions waiting to have their cases heard before the panels.

I. How would you organize a plant at that time if you couldn't to any great degree show any great progress in negotiation? What if an employer just said to you, "Well I'm not going to allow anything and then the government's going to back me up in case you strike so you can just go to hell."

R. Well—you found that management just didn't say that because they realized that they generally had governmental orders. If you went before the National Labor Relations
Board and pointed out that this company was unfair, the company realized that Uncle Sam was the greatest bargainer of all. They could withdraw orders. So you found management's not too willing to cross the union to the degree that the union could take them before the Labor Board. There was a certain pressure on management that they dealt half way within the framework of legitimate bargaining because they knew also that the increases would not be granted any more against a competitor than against them.

In fact I think some of the managements enjoyed the fact how unions were controlled by Uncle Sam. If ever we were close to a type of socialism, that was it during the war years. Management, I'm sure, a lot of them that are still living and thinking about it could cast their minds back and see you can't say, socialism is the worst thing in the world when you find that the government can do a good job acting as an arbitrator. This question of arbitrating issues when deadlocked is not all it's cracked up to be. You find that the legitimate labor movement, if examined closely, will say they're not for it. You might be shocked to find that management can remember that it worked to their advantage, that there were no large scale increases, that they could rely on Uncle Sam to make a reasonable offer and they could abide by it and pay it and still make handsome profits. Some of their biggest profits ever made were made during the war years. We'll get into that in a minute. When you found your
work force being diluted by literally hundreds of thousands of guys being drafted into the armed services, you found the rural worker coming into the plants to a great degree.

R. Not so much rural workers as women, tremendous numbers of women.

I. Did you find that you had to adopt a different attitude in servicing these people, that the demands they were making upon you as an organizer and negotiator were different than the demands of a year before or two years before?

R. We were so engrossed in trying to get the contracts put into effect by working with War Labor Board panels under the Wage Board ruling that servicing of the local unions was to a degree neglected. As far as grievances, I recall at this time that they might have several hundred grievances pending. In U.S. Steel I recall my brother pointing out that neglect was disgraceful as far as service was concerned during the war years. In my own way of thinking you could hardly blame the organizers because they were so engulfed in the war effort that lots of things were let slide and had to be cleared up later as far as the grievance procedure.

Wages were the big thing, Ed. Everybody wanted more money and more money was forthcoming. Everybody could see the industries prospering. They were getting plants built by Uncle Sam, they were running the plants. Later they got the plants for practically nothing and took them over and
enlarged their holdings. Workers' wages were frozen practically and they were granted pittances. Five or seven cents was the standard increase of wages at that time per hour. The Steel Workers Union was developing this increment business of standardizing wages and there was a great deal of confusion. That was the kind of thing my brother was talking about when he said that there was no service really being rendered. Yet under the patriotism people were letting some of these things slide and some of the organizers were taking advantage of it. In the meantime the district was growing. Organizing never really stopped during the war years. We got many of these war plants organized and the membership increased. Uncle Sam was quick to say to you, "Look, you're getting your dues paying members aren't you?"

I. How would you entice a guy to join the union at that time if you could not show to him that you had any strength as far as the strike structure?

R. You see we were still looked upon as a militant, wonderful bonanza by the American public, the CIO I mean as a whole. We had not yet by any means merged with the AFL. As these war plants developed and as workers got hired, as women came into the plants, the call for us to go out and organize them never diminished. In fact when they would see in the paper a plant had been granted a wage increase you would find workers calling you up saying, "Come on down and organize us. We've got to get a raise and the only way we're going to get it
is if we get into the union." So you see that worked two ways, the method of wage stabilization control. Workers found that they'd better get into a union because the unions were servicing the workers before these Wage Boards and where they didn't have a union and they asked for an increase the company would say, "We can't give you an increase because you know it has to be approved by the Wage Stabilization Board." It would dawn on the worker he's never going to ask for it for us so they they would ask the union to represent them. This is how we organized, it wasn't the case of us having to go seek to build the union. They were still demanding this aggressive, militant group called the CIO.

I. So basically it was different then let's say from five or six years before.

R Yeah.

I. The worker himself was different. You were finding the worker asking the unions to come in and five or six years before it was the worker himself who had to be asked.

R. At the beginning, yes, we had to go seek people.

I. It was just the opposite now.

R. But once we got those sit down strikes going they began to call us. Then they gradually eased up but then the war gave it a new impetus where they were calling us again because they needed our services.

I. I see, kind of an interesting analogy can be made there in that five or six year period.
R. Yes there was a big changeover of thinking. I would say, Ed, that it was a case of where we became political strategists before government. We began to know what it was, as organizers. Before we had, in the early days, appeared before the National Labor Relations Board, now we were appearing before War Councils. We were appearing before Wage Stabilization Boards. We were getting people appointed from the CIO and the AFL, I suppose, to these Wage Boards. It was an entire about face.

I. Did you find your dealings with the generals and admirals at that time went against the grain on a few occasions? Can you relate an example of where these guys tried to lace you?

R. No they never did try to lace you. They evidently had the type of fellow in Labor Relations from the Army or the Navy who would come to you and say, "Look, I understand there's been a strike down here and you know, confidentially speaking, that plant is making parts for a submarine." Or they're making parts for an airplane or torpedoes or they're winding contract equipment for rifles or machineguns. They would say, "We've got to get that out, you know. The war over in France is going thus and thus and thus."

And you would say to them, "Yeah we'll be down there immediately if not sooner. In the meantime we'll call up our union leadership and tell them to be prepared." We put on enough pressure, whatever the issue might be. It might be a
complete contract that was being looked into by Uncle Sam and the wage part was going to be approved. They would say they would use their influence to see that these workers get attention quicker. When they stood on the platform with these army officials they would make much the same speech that the organizers would. In other words there was a unity, it wasn't a case of threats. The joint patriotic effort could be felt from the general all the way down to the humblest laborer in the plant. The squeeze play was recognized alright. "You've gone your limit, now let's get back to work."

The only ones that were really worried by the fact that there was a work stoppage was management. They wanted the production for dollars and cents and whilst they put up the big E and flew it from the masthead, that this plant had earned the E for effort you know, dollars and cents was what they were interested in. As I pointed out quite often, you know, we were pretty well controlled. There were no lengthy strikes, they were all quickies.

I.

That was my question. Did you ever have any of the workers tell you to go to hell, or the admirals or the generals?

R.

No I never did. Although later on after the war was over, I've been overruled many times by the workers but not during the war. This was a different type of war from the one in Korea, you know, a different type of war. I think that the
worker knew Naziism and Fascism when they saw it in those days. I'm not sure what we know in connection with this war. It's just simply an unjust war in most peoples' opinion.

I. I agree with that. Going through the period of '42 you find the union now, after getting caught up in the war effort, still continuing to function as an organizing and servicing body, now finding itself established politically, becoming politically oriented, getting in the political mainstream of things on the national scene by virtue of Roosevelt appointing people to various boards and positions. On the local scene the union now comes into a position where it's growing, not by leaps and bounds, but growing as the economy grows. Is that correct?

R. Yes I would say you're right. There came the stop in growth as we came to 1944 and there was the beginnings of optimism that we were going to defeat Naziism. We were going to defeat the Japs. You do understand that 1942 was the beginning. In 1944 we were getting ready to elect district directors again. It's an interesting point that we had established ourselves now under a voted district director by the name of Germano and workers were observing what Joe had been doing during those two years. Of course, I sensed that he wasn't the most popular man in the district because he had to assume certain responsibilities under these war years.

I always had it in the back of my mind that somewhere along the line I was going to take this man, Germano, on again
because I had been very unhappy in the way he had been selected by Mr. Van Bittner. I talked it over with Harry Harper who was working with me. He was the sub-district director, by the way, in the West Side office. I had always the feeling that Harry could have defeated Germano without much effort. He was a popular man and I suggested to Harry as the nomination date approached, "Why don't you run, Harry?"

I recall he got quite angry at me. He wasn't going to run, wasn't going to be pushed in by me or anybody else. He acted a little bit hysterical in my thinking, a little bit more than he should have, because Harry was a pretty level headed fellow. I said, "Look, Harry, I'm not trying to force you to do anything, I'm just suggesting it. I'll manage your campaign, I'll fight for you. You'll be elected, Harry."

He said no so then I reversed it and said, "Well then, I'll run, Harry. How about you supporting me?" He said no and this was a big shock because I'd always felt that Harry was very close to me. I wouldn't make him do anything he didn't want to do but I'd always had the feeling he would have supported me if I had the courage to do something. I did have it and I found that he said no. I have never really known why he wouldn't support me, he could answer that better than me. But I decided to put my hat in the ring and began passing word around the different local unions that I'd like to be nominated when the nominations came up.

I.

The structure had changed now since you had adopted a
constitution. Now the locals were going to nominate you rather than the convention.

R.

That's correct, now we're following the correct procedure of the constitution. At the beginning, you see, the constitution had not been fully adopted and they were doing things on a hit or miss basis as they established the international. Of course, that was done deliberately in order to see that their hand picked candidates could get into office but now they have to do it according to the structure of the constitution.

So I began, I got my own local union, for example, to nominate me and that was a very exciting nomination, I can assure you. I went in to my local union meeting that night and it was jam packed in South Chicago. Al Towers was president of the local union when the time came for nominations. Al very pointedly made sure that Joe Germano was nominated first but of course there were further nominations. I was nominated and nominations were closed. Germano came himself to that meeting. He was in there, along with me, because they were interested in seeing that he carried Patterson's own local but when the votes were counted I received the nomination. It was really quite a time but I carried it there. Well, just shortly thereafter, I received a beautiful letter from the government of the United States.

I.

Before you go into that, how many locals were required?
Five.

Five and you did receive the five locals?

Oh yeah. When I received this greeting from the United States that I was going to be drafted I had about three nominations by that time. I called German and said, "Joe, a few months back you said that all of the staff were deferred from serving in the army and that none of us would have to serve. I'm kind of intrigued by the fact that I've received a draft notice." Germano, said, "Oh no, you can't have because there's a deferment for all the staff people at the draft boards." "Well, not according to my draft board. I'm right here now and they tell me there's nothing as far as me not being drafted." "Well I'll make sure there is one," he said. I said, "Well that will be fine, Joe, because if you don't do it within the next ten days I'll be gone. That's what they tell me, I'm right here," I said. "Do you want to talk to the draft board chairman here?" He did, I don't know what went on.

The draft board told me I probably would be placed under further advisement because I was thirty seven and a half years of age and here I'm being drafted. There were many more men on the staff of the Steelworkers who are younger than me, but here I'm being drafted and I'm running for office, don't you see? The board said, "If there's a draft deferment comes in, likely they'll hold it up because of your age Patterson."

Ten days later I was off in Fort Sheridan. There was
never any draft letter so, of course, I was up in Fort Sheridan. In the month of December I arrived up there and they gave me a leave of absence to come home for the Christmas holidays before they shipped me further afield. This gave me an opportunity to check on my deferment and my campaign committee who was politicking for me. I found that I had to sign certain papers, according to the constitution, to affirm my five nominations or more. I went to Al Towers and Al signed the papers for me that I had been nominated on behalf of my local on Christmas morning. He wished me luck. I said, "Well what do you wish me luck on, Al?" I asked him if it was being in the army or being his next district director and he said well maybe both.

That night I left for Fort Sheridan and when the election was held for district director I was over in India. I served in the China-Burma-India theatre during the war. When I came back about a year or so later, my brother told me Germano had won the election by a vote of about two to one, which wasn't too bad, according to my thoughts, for a man who was out of the country.

I waited my ninety day leave and then reported back to work and Germano said that I couldn't work for him, that there was a job for me, that according to the law any soldier could get his job back. But he said, "You'd better go down to Pittsburgh to find out where you're going to work." I said, "Well what's the trouble, Joe? Don't you think I could work
for you? I don't think, Joe, I'll be running against you anymore. You never know but I don't think so. I think I've learned my lesson." He said, "No, you can't work for me. If you go and see Dave McDonald I think he'll have an assignment." I said, "Well, I will give him a call but as of now I am reporting officially back to work."

I got a call from John Doherty and John let me know that I was on the pay roll from the time I had been discharged from the army so that I had a couple of months of back pay coming. Then I went down and I talked with McDonald and he said they had a wonderful; important job for me, much bigger than anything I ever had in Chicago, down in Houston, Texas. Of course I started to smile and said it seemed kind of far fetched that a guy with a brogue like I had and being a northern Yankee could go down and do much of a job with the southerners. He assured me that's where I had to go. If I didn't go there, I wouldn't have a job.

I reported to Houston, Texas and Mr. Dickerson, the district director of that time, said, "Oh yeah, I've heard about you Patterson. But I didn't want you down here, I wanted you to go up to Arkansas." I was sent up to Arkansas to organize the aluminum workers. They were needing a union there. I worked two months in Arkansas and then the 1948 convention was coming up.

I decided that I was going to leave the dismal southern drivewhere I didn't belong and I reported to Philip
Murray. Phil was the man I should have gone to first. I should never have gone to McDonald. He asked me where I was working. He had forgotten about me and I said I was down in the southern drive. He began to laugh and I said "Yeah, it sounds funny but it wasn't funny, Mr. Murray, down there. I've done the best I could but I'm letting you know I don't, belong there." He said, "I agree with you, you never belonged there. We'll get you closer to home."

He told me to go see Dave McDonald and let him know that I was going to be reassigned. I'll never forget the day that I left Mr. Murray's room and went downstairs in the lobby of the hotel in Atlantic City there. Dave was standing with two lovely women on his arms, one on each side. I looked and I thought, is, this the time to go up and tell him that you're going to be reassigned? I thought well just as good a time as any. So I walked up to McDonald and said, "Dave, I just left Mr. Murray and he asked me to talk to you."

He looked me square in the eye. He took his arm away from one of the young girls, looked at his watch and he said, "Patterson, I quit work at quarter to five." This was about three minutes to five. He said, "If you want to talk to me you come to Pittsburgh." I said, "Well now, I just told you Mr. Murray has asked me to give you a message." "I'm receiving no messages from you, Mr. Murray or anyone else. I'm telling you if you want to talk to me you see me in Pittsburgh."

I turned on my heel and I left him, I went back home.
I didn't want to bother Mr. Murray with this kind of nonsense. This was our glamour boy who, in the early years, all of the staff knew him for how far he could go. I went and I stayed about three weeks at home in Chicago. Suddenly I received a letter from this Mr. McDonald telling me that if I didn't return back to my assignment that I would be discharged. I called Pittsburgh immediately and I asked for Mr. Murray. Within a minute I was able to talk directly to Philip Murray. In fact he answered the telephone. I still don't understand it but he did. I found I wasn't talking to Phil Murray and I said, "I would like to read a letter to you," and I read off the letter. Murray said, "Oh God, George, I forgot to tell him that you were going to get another assignment." He said, "Just you stay where you're at and you'll receive instructions from Mr. McDonald reaffirming that you're going to go to Milwaukee and work."

A couple of days later I got a letter from Dave McDonald assuring me that, according to instructions from Mr. Murray, I was assigned to work out of Milwaukee. I had little to do with McDonald for a number of years thereafter. I did run into him years later and that's something to talk about when the time comes.'

I.

That was 1946 then. You were assigned then to Milwaukee in '46?

R.

That's right.

I.

The latter part of '46, what happened in Milwaukee
now, George?

R. I was evidently quite a trouble maker, Ed. I reported to Milwaukee to Meyer Edelman, who was the district director. I had worked for Meyer Edelman in 1936 and '37. I shouldn't say I worked for him, I worked with him. We were both at the very beginning of the drive and Edelman needed help in company unions. I knew him very well and he had another organizer by the name of Emil Castelloi. Emil was a very good friend of mine.

So was Edelman, I thought, but when I reported to him that I was coming to work there he said, "Who the hell sent you here? I don't want you." I recall stopped and I looked at him and I said, "Well you've got me, whether you like it or not." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, I don't think I can have any finer backing than Phil Murray." "Well," he said, you might as well quit. I'll give you no assignments." I recall I said, "You sound like a man named Van Bittner." I was very hostile to Edelman.

Anyhow it turned out that I went and reported from my home in Chicago up to Milwaukee for two months and he never gave me assignments; I would go around with this fellow, Castello, you know and do a little work with Emil. We'd get along fine and Emil was introducing me to the territory. That was the whole of Wisconsin and part of Illinois. Twenty-two counties in Illinois belonged to the District 32 area. I got acquainted with different local unions and at the end of
two months I began to service them and Edelman sort of accepted me.

Time moved fast that first year and a half because Edelman died in 1948. Just before he died he really must have been getting the pressure from somewhere to see that this guy Patterson quit because I worked for at least three or four months and Edelman refused to give me any expenses, no expense money. I had to use my own salary to do my work, travel from Chicago to Wisconsin. I lived in Chicago at the time. He was a very paradoxical character. He said that he had been instructed that had to receive no expenses. I said, "Well I can't continue that very long but I'll try it for awhile."

In the meantime there was a tremendous pressure on Edelman. He was coming up for reelection in 1948 and it was a big move about to bounce him. They wanted to have him removed from office. Yet I was very fond of Edelman. I knew the background of the man. He was a stormy petrel and organized the first labor movement of the CIO with Costello up there in Wisconsin. Now young radicals, or the young reactionaries as I called them, were out to remove him because they felt Edelman was too left wing, might I put it. I knew that Edelman was not a communist, I felt definitely he wasn't. I don't know why they were so hard after him but they evidently wanted a different district director there. This disturbed Edelman and his health began to fail.

One of the paradoxical things was when he removed me
from the payroll, as far as getting my expenses, he suggested I stay at his home and I wouldn't have rent to pay. You can see a man tormented with good and evil. He'd put me up and I was very adaptable. I said, "Sure Meyer, with no money to pay for rent for a hotel room or motel I'll stay at your home."

I. You remained in the Milwaukee area?

R. For the next twenty years, better twenty three years almost, Ed. I decided that I had made my stab for leadership. I had found that the pressures of the inner politics was too much for me as an individual, with the war and with the factionalism and with the strength that Germano had seemed to surround himself with. I realized that there was no sense in my staying in the Chicago area. I was inclined to agree with Germano that if I couldn't stay as a free agent, my own man, I would rather get out. So I went up there and I decided that I would service the United Steel Workers locals that I was ordered to look after. I organized a few plants and I did the general yeoman work of arbitrating the fourth step grievances and got along fine.

I. George, you stated that you had a confrontation with Dave McDonald, who at that time was the secretary treasurer, during the 1946 convention when you were seeking reassignment. Then Murray had said that you should see Dave about it. What transpired at that 1946 convention? Some people have analyzed that the ground work was being laid at the '46 convention for what was going to happen in 1948. What
is your opinion of that?

R. Well my own observation, Ed, is that those people were pretty sharp thinkers. From my own viewpoint, just listening to what the, constitutional changes were, that's when the clause was put in that no Socialist or Nazi or Fascist or Communist would be allowed to be a member of the union or could serve in any committee of the union if they were a known or avowed Communist. Now that indicated that there was a certain amount of hysteria in the thinking of labor leaders at the top, starting with Murray at the Steel Workers Union, because he seemed to approve of it. He talked in favor of that type. By the time 1948 rolled around he was certainly quite open about it.

As far as his CIO actions are concerned, when he ousted them at the West Coast convention, the left wing unions, this was the ultimate decision being carried out. It started back in 1946 through small indications of changes in the constitution. He had been indicating it also in his CIO work and you could tell it that the hysteria was there. There's Jim Carey, who was the Secretary of the CIO being kicked out of his U.E. and then coming back in and then being defeated again. And actions of the Catholic Trade Union Movement, their influence was felt. I recall Murray being surrounded by Catholics, Monseigneurs and priests, who were advising from the church viewpoint.

But the time had come that Murray had enough
hysteria. I recall talking with Walter Burke, who was the District Director of District 32 in Wisconsin where I worked and he had seen Murray at that period of time. He said he never saw such a tormented soul as Murray when he was toying with the idea of just exactly what to do, how to do it. But his mind, Burke said was obviously made up. He was going to oust and the reasons were not clear.

You can examine the times. I, myself, can only say it was evident that the church, perhaps the government, was putting the pressures onto the organized labor movement that something had to be done and it was the forerunner of McCarthyism that was later to follow. There's a groundwork of hostility. Meany, coming in to the picture in later years, just augmented all of these actions. It's a strange thing, if you talk like I'm talking, people say then you're talking definitely in favor of communism, but it doesn't have to be necessarily so. You're talking on the basis of: is there a sound reason to take certain actions? It's not based on good solid fact. We, who are just plain labor men working for the international union, looking around see that the communists had been taken care of.

It started with Phil Murray laying off some staff back in 1938. It went on down through the years that anybody that smacked too much of red would not be elected to a union office. But it got to the point where that now these left wing unions were no longer a threat. They were cooperating
and had cooperated during the war effort. Everything indicated that they were never in hostility, trying to tear the labor movement apart. They were, in fact, people who had built it and had cooperated with it. If you check the records you'll find that they were always trying to strengthen it and seeking to build it bigger. Yet Murray made, in my opinion, a fatal mistake of ousting them. The labor movement has never grown since. It stands on the record, it's plain for anyone to see. Organized labor just went and divided itself through Murray's actions. This ceased to exist as really being a force.

I.

Was Murray a vindictive man? Did he really have a fear instilled in him that the left wing element supposedly in the labor movement was out to destroy the labor movement?

R.

In my contact with Murray he never was vindictive. He did know how to diplomatically take care of situations and would do it usually on the basis of facts and then diplomatically. Later, as I've read this Len de Caux book, I'm inclined to his analysis. I bring it up because I've just read this book. He points out that he was at that convention and watched Murray's action and realized that some sort of creeping hysteria had come over Phil Murray. It was something to see, he said. Walter Burke had the same idea, as I've pointed out. I just felt morbid about the whole thing. In fact, I could tell, just being a plain worker on the outside looking in, that none of this action that took place was going
to strengthen the labor movement. This is, something that should really be analyzed by future labor organizations. I think they'll learn that under no circumstances can you, divide the labor movement and begin throwing people out just on their beliefs, whether it be political or whatever it may be. It only grows stronger by factionalism being within it and then having recognized it with everybody pulling together.

I. The theory of some people, though, is that some of these acts were perpetrated to put down factionalism because of the political threat that was possibly developing after the war and internally in the labor movement.

R. Yeah, but there was only one faction that it was put against and that was the so called left wing.

I. Was the left wing that strong?

R. This was the shocking thing, don't you see? They were not endangering. I pointed out they were working along and even to the point that they actually worked on resolutions for their own demolition. It was a strange thing, hard to believe that they did it for unity's sake.

I. What was the position of the delegates at that ground laying convention of 1946? Did they realize what was taking place at this time?

R. Well when I looked around and watched so called left delegates, you know, of course they got upon the floor and talked against such a resolution and got booed down by the big
majority who would do anything that Murray really desired at that time. When the vote was taken they accepted it and had to go along with it, these left wing delegates. There were a few in the Steel Workers Union, you know, but there were actually fights on the floor, physically, at the 1946 convention. By the time 1948 rolled around there weren't any fights and there's never been any fights on the floor, physical fights, from the left wing. In fact it's been pretty well controlled ever since.

This thing's been lacking when you look at the Steel Workers Union as being conducted, as I've always said, like a Sunday School operation. I've watched Germano and his district conferences conducted like school classes and I've watched Walter Burke in his district. The fire's gone! There's generally very little opposition. Occasionally in District 32 in the Wisconsin area I've seen a delegate get up and fight but it was strictly a local union factional fight about somebody who wanted to be elected to office or something and wanted attention. Or they wanted to be on the wage Policy Committee. This is about the height of a glorious fight in the United Steel Workers.

I. No philosophical --

R. No philosophical or political fights nationwide, on a state wide basis, for that matter not even county.

I. What was the opinion of the staff at that time by and large?
Staffs are so hand picked by now. Forgive me Ed, the majority of them are so hand picked that there's no opposition from staffs. In fact I think you'll notice that with an occasional exception very few staff people in those days took the floor, they left it up to the worker. But the workers in those days were already pretty well picked out, who was going to do the speaking. The staff man generally was the guy that encouraged this man to get up. They knew what he was going to say. If the opposition candidate got up and was too vociferous and was making his point too strong a staff man generally got up after him and tried to talk him down. It's pretty hard for them sometimes to handle the staff man. He's much more the professional talker. But an occasional worker will get up and take him on.

Do you think resolutions developed in 1946 to be incorporated into the constitution, depriving certain segments of our membership from seeking or holding political office, could have been passed in say 1937, 1938 and 1939? Had the thinking changed that drastically in seven/eight, nine years? I'm talking that rank and file thing.

That's a question I would have to weigh. Everything indicates to me that if we had adopted the constitution in 1937 the same constitution could have been adopted then as was adopted in 1942. Yes, I think that the Mine Workers had enough grasp and enough political get up to see to it the types of delegates at a convention would put over the same
constitution at any time. This is the unfortunate set up, of
delegates being picked in local unions. The staff of the
Steel Workers Union was based so strongly in the Mine Workers,
nobody gets elected -- a delegate who's not approved by the
staff, as a rule. When that happens then the staff man's job
is in jeopardy. They make sure that the delegates are hand
picked. This is a true thing.

In a big union like Local 65 this is not quite so true. A man
can break loose and overlook and overrule a staff man
because of the numbers of the votes. If he can get his
department down there he can get himself elected if they're
not prepared for him. But the sad thing is when he shows up at
the convention he finds he's got an awful tremendous obstacle
to overcome, that when you seek the floor on a convention that
already the signals are out. This guy either gets the floor
or he don't get the floor. And it doesn't take an
international man long to know whether or not a delegate can
hold the microphone and get the attention of the convention.
If they think he's too good at it they can ignore him quite,
politely. Or, if he's a poor talker and he wants to destroy
himself, which, you've seen happen, the Rarick case for
example, where the more he talked the worse he made it for
himself, they're glad to give that kind of delegate the floor.

Your thinking on that constitution that was adopted
and then amended in various conventions could have been
adopted in the thirties --
R. Thirty seven.
I. Thirty seven.
R. Yeah, sure. Yeah, because the red flag was always being waved in the Steel Workers Union from the very first convention.
I. Was the rank and file waving it or has he ever waved it in your opinion or has it only been by the leaders?
R. No, by the leadership of course, because the convention is always being controlled. We talk about democracy and it's something like Mayor Daley's aldermanic group. It's controlled. Well the Steelworkers Union is no different and the Auto Workers, too, controlled it, yet they had quite a bit of democracy.
I. You brought in, an interesting point. You played yourself down quite a bit in this interview in saying that what the hell, you were just a green kid and that, but I did ask the same questions you're asking. I wanted to take the floor at some of these conventions and got ruled out of order. I was too radical for them. The point here, when you had in dependency, prior to throwing in with the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, you had some form of autonomy. Did you at that time realize by virtue of getting in to a big house, the CIO, which was a necessary requirement at that time economically --
R. No, not necessary. I had no idea.
I. Did you realize that you were going to have to
R. pay though?

I. 

R. No, I didn't.

I. Did the worker realize what he was going to have to pay for that?

R. No, the only one that kind of warned me was the so called left wingers. They did tip me off that the time would come, for example, when I would become controlled by the International, that I would have to do their bidding. I said, "Oh no, no that's not going to happen. The rank and file, the steel workers will never let the miners tell us what to do."

It didn't take me long to find out the miners were just exactly doing that, telling us steel workers what we would do. We had a great deal. Nothing was done in the Associated Employees except in a pure democratic fashion and now, suddenly I found that men like Fontaccio and Van Bittner just didn't allow us to have a democracy function. They gave the rulings, they saw to it that people were hand picked; When they thought Patterson was going to try to put something over, why they made sure that they had a number of people there that would support them and always count us out. I became disillusioned quite fast about that. I was always hoping that we would some day be able to overcome it. I even live with that hope today when I see young organizers coming along whom I have faith in.

I. The right of ratification is a big issue today among
the basic steelworkers, fomented sometimes politically, but
the basic steel worker is aware of being deprived of this
right. He feels it should be his right. Did you ever
realize in the thirties that you were giving this whole basic
concept of democracy away?

R. No, I never realized it and even laughed about it.

Management, I think, gave me a stronger hint of what would
happen if we gave up, for example, our company unionism.
They said, "When you get out there among the labor bosses
you'll learn pretty fast what real domination is." I just
didn't believe them, I didn't grasp what they were telling me.

When the leftist said to me, "If you ever allow
yourself to get the union shop and give up, the privilege of
collecting your dues through the shop steward system, there
will be laggardness creeping in. A sluggishness will creep
into your union and you'll find that the finances going
directly to headquarters will place the domination there-in
their hands." I was a little doubtful that this would happen
but I have learned that this is true. It is true the union is
not as aggressive today as it was in the early days.

I. No one, especially a guy like you or myself, would
dispute the fact that the finest thing that happened to the
worker in this country was the formation of the CIO in the
thirties, the industrial union concept. Where did it go
amiss, if it did, George?

R. I personally feel that it has gone amiss.
Philosophically it's not there anymore to a great degree.

In your opinion, living through this whole era, what happened?

Well it went amiss by first, I would say, becoming financially a rich union, the dues being sent to the headquarters and the headquarters dispensing the funds among the paid staff of their hirelings. With the financial power of millions of dollars in their treasure, the United Steel Workers got a man like Dave McDonald with these silly advanced ideas. I recall him dreaming about getting homes for the pensioners down in Florida, getting us thirteen week vacations, dreaming way out more in left field than the left ever dreamed about wonderful advancements that could be granted if management and union cooperated. He proposed to do it by meeting with them at the Stork Club, by meeting and getting a home that's in Palm Springs where Eisenhower, for example, had his home and Dave was down the road a bit. The union lost out with Dave McDonald. After Murray it was bad enough. It began to slip with Murray but it sure went into decline with Dave McDonald's thinking.

I recall working in 1948 in Eau Claire. We had the National Pressure Cooker and Pat Nispol was the president of the union. I went down there to the 1948 convention and Nispol was there. He sought an audience with Dave McDonald. He found Dave sitting in his fancy suite with his big black cigar and his bathrobe and two sheets under the wind. I mean
he just finished a couple of cocktails, no doubt. He said he went to the door and rapped. Rosemary came to the door and asked who they were and Dave's voice came back, "Oh these damn workers can't give a man any peace. Do I have to put up with them? What do they want of me?"

Finally he let them in and Dave began to talk about the subject of government orders. National Pressure Cooker was making ammunition at the time. They still do today, I believe, in that plant. Yeah, it may not belong to National Pressure Cooker now, but it did. I think it still belongs to them. Anyhow they came back to me and they said, "Who in the hell does this McDonald think he is?. Doesn't he know we pay him from our dues and he can't give us an audience with respect?" They were so disgusted.

Now you ask me where did the union go amiss? Well, it went amiss by not being able to keep its eye on the top leadership, by lack of pressure all through the year, not only just at conventions. These labor leaders have to toe the mark and meet the demands of the worker's and pay attention to their audiences. Everything indicates to me that on a political basis, when a man like Nixon; for example, invites labor leaders to the White House, the workers should watch very closely who these labor leaders are that go to the White House.

Now there's the other outlook. You know there's two sides to every question., Labor leaders, McDonald for
example, was great to say that he had the attention of John Kennedy in the White House. He had a movie made and so forth with him sitting there. Workers realized, when they watched the movie, that it didn't amount to too much and they sensed that it was all McDonalds, that idea of the movie, that Kennedy just gave him the audience. There was no weight or substance to what came out of it but McDonald was highly pleased because he was able to say the White House door is always open to him. Well sometimes it's better to approach the White House door when you know you're not a welcomed guest but they do accept you because they know the power the labor movement has. That's the way to enter the White House door, with some strength and conviction, not that you just want the honor and glory of being able to say you sat with the President of the United States.

I could go on and point out the many weaknesses that crept in to the CIO. They failed to grasp and lead in the main issues of the day, even right now with the question of pollution, the question of school boards, the question of bargaining. The labor movement is not in the forefront, they're lacking, they're not leading. The question of the inner core -- I recall when Father Groppi, for example, went marching up in Milwaukee. Now I was working in and around that area and I kept waiting to see when the Steelworkers would be walking along with Father Groppi but they never did. When I mentioned it to McNamara, the district director, he
said, "Oh that guy!" I said, "Yeah, Groppi." Well I could gather he wouldn't argue with me politically on the activities of a Groppi. He just wanted to point out his radicalism and not the issues of the housing, the blight in the areas., what these black people were needing rectified. Organized labor in Milwaukee did nothing to support the cause.

The same thing goes with Jackson here in Chicago. You were mentioning, Ed, a while ago to me that there's a man that's taking much the same place now as Martin Luther King. He looks like a healthy individual, a good leader, but did you find him walking hand and hand with whites? No. Do you find whites offering to walk hand in hand with him? No. So the labor movement's missing the boat again. This is the thing that I say the AFL-CIO should be interested in but when you look at the AFL-CIO there's no activity on their behalf of the causes. The greatest leader that's going to develop, be he black or white, is the man who can get people involved, walking, regardless of ethnic group, walking hand in hand. Then there'll be another CIO when the workers march like that and it may come under another name.

That's an interesting point there, it may come under another name. I'd like to discuss that with you a little later but I'd like to get back to what happened around that 1948 period where we left off. George, you've run a gamut as far as staff representative, doing anything and everything.
Let me ask you about various strikes. I know that you were involved innumerable strikes. You were involved in strikes in basic steel. We heard you talk about the Memorial Day strike that involved thousands of workers. Finding yourself up in Wisconsin, a primarily rural area, were the strikes any different in that area, where sometimes the whole town or the economy of the town relied upon a plant or a factory, than they were in basic steel or in the Chicago area?

R.

That's a good question, Ed. I would say that the running of the strike, as an organizer I'm sure you're well aware of it, must be something that's developed very democratically. I've always followed the policy that I know you do, I'm sure, that it must come from the bottom up. In other words, the workers set the pace. When they're going and moving towards a strike, they tell the organizer that the issues are not being met with and they take the vote. The organizer listens very carefully to it and must come to the conclusion that the situation is serious enough. Then he makes his request to the international union for permission and gets it granted that he's got a solid strike forthcoming. This is the policy I followed in all of my union situations.

I'll give you an illustration, but first I think it's interesting to think of the Republic Steel strike in 1937 and when we couldn't get picketing. Then I think about the strikes that took place in '46 and the other years and the fifties where we couldn't picket. Then I heard that the
pickets at the U.S. Steel, for example, there would have a trailer with power supply to heat it by the U.S. Steel Co. That's a far run from when we were shot down and now we get the warmth and the heat. I don't think really that this is anything for a union to brag about. I still think it would be better if we just had the salamander like we had in our original strikes and when we had an awful time getting the right to picket.

Now when you come to that kind of strike, to a plant like say Quick Freeze in Fond du Lac, where the workers practically over ruled me and pointed out that they were going to go on strike because the company was unilaterally going to take away their insurance and give them a much poorer type of insurance with a Commercial broker who they didn't have any faith in, now this strike was called and approved by the International on the basis that the company was violating the National Labor Relations Act and unilaterally was taking action when we were the bargaining agent for this union for the last twenty years. Walter Burke, by the way, came out of this plant. He's now the secretary treasurer of our union. When that strike took effect and we went to the plant gates, as we have to, and the workers came out of the shop and set up a picket-line, it was interesting to me to note that all the women folks in the area were thereto meet their husbands and support them in the strike. I sensed I had a winning strike right from the beginning.
One man, who was a religious fanatic, decided that he was going to go in and scab. Out of two hundred and twenty workers, one man. It was almost natural for some of the workers to want to stop this individual. I, as a representative of the International union, said, "No, You know that Johnny isn't quite himself, never has been. Let him go in." So he walked through the plant praying and he said, "I go in to this plant because my Father who's in Heaven has instructed me to go in." While he was doing this the workers were throwing pennies at his feet and saying he was betraying the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, he would not support the union. But that man went into the plant. He was a welder and the company let him come and go because they knew Johnny. They, themselves, didn't take any action for Johnny or against him, they just let him come in. Nobody wanted to hurt a man like this. I was glad the union didn't.

As the picket line went along it was an interesting thing to note that it was the spring time. I used to play golf. Some of the union bargaining committee and myself and officers of the union would go out and play golf. One day we were up there playing golf and here's management up there playing golf. In the meantime the plant is lying idle.

Some of the businessmen in the community weren't very fond of this strike. I happened to know them very well because I'd lived in Fond du Lac off and on for twenty years. They would say to me, "When are you going to get it settled?"
I would say, "Well, I think you ought to talk to management." They'd say, "Well we've already talked to management. They don't seem to want to get it settled and we've talked to you and find you don't seem to want to. What's the matter with you people?" I'd say, "Well, it's an impasse caused by economic demands and management and the union just can't come to a meeting of minds. Now I think that you people would begin to point out the necessity for us to get payrolls rolling again and that there should be a compromise on both sides to meet this requirement. After all, it's just a matter of who's going to be the insurance agent for the company. It should be easily resolved because we've always had Blue Cross and they've done yeoman's service as far as we're concerned. You should be able to convince management." They protested that they couldn't get management to listen to reason. I don't know whether they tried very hard or not but they evidently did talk to some of the managers at the plant.

As the picket line kept going each day, management finally resolved that they were going to put a statement in the paper that they would advertise for scabs. Then the cheese got more binding. Picket lines grew strong. The women came down, the men were there. Management opened their hiring offices in the town. The workers were there and when any one thought about going into apply for a job the workers would talk them out of it. Here and there you'd find young
fools who would go through anyhow and apply for a job. When the first one showed up to go to work you've never heard anything like it. When a bunch of picketers see someone breaking through the picket lines and the police are lined up on both sides to see that these scabs get in, even the policemen were shocked at the hatred that was exhibited against these men that were going to scab.

They finally developed a scab crew in this plant by going to the reformatories up in Green Bay. They got maybe sixteen, twenty guys out of the reformatory and they went down to the jails in the small towns within a fifty mile radius of Fond du Lac. They'd get one from this little town jail and another one from that. Here and there they got a few farmer lads who seemed to think they'd rather break a picket line and go in and work than act sensible, until they got quite a group of people working. But you know it's a strange thing, these workers knew their work and that those type of people could never produce a decent refrigerator, for example, or a freezer. Management finally then, at the end of two months of work with these people, got out enough to fill half a box car. They made a great show of showing that they were in production.

Well that didn't disturb the workers, they just grew stronger. They sent word into the plant that if the management wanted to, they would help see to it that the production could go out by management doing only the thing
that they wouldn't do and that was meet the contract. It was a strange feeling. Finally one time I was talking with management about the negotiations and trying to come to it and a worker stood up in the bargaining and said, "Look Mr. Management, we'll load your plant on boxcars. Take it out of Fond du Lac because we will not work under the conditions you're trying to impose on us." This still didn't faze management, it didn't.

Now of course, Ed, this kind of a strike was a non economic strike. It had to do with the bargaining process, so I filed a case with the National Labor Relations Board. That case was still pending for about four months, five months of the strike. I had, with the president of the union, submitted the case to the Labor Board that management had unilaterally violated the contract and wouldn't bargain in good faith. They found in our favor. So in the midst of negotiations, when we got the ruling from the Labor Board, we shocked management by saying to them, "We'll go back to the plant and go to work and we'll finish our negotiations while we're working. We'll call the strike off."

Management was dumbfounded. They couldn't believe that we'd be calling the strike off after we'd been on strike about five months, five and a half months. They said, "But you can't go in, we've got two or three hundred workers there." "That's the point, Mr. Management. You'd better get these workers out of there because those are our jobs."
"Oh no; we've got, to keep them there." Management was suddenly horrified to find that they would have to pay us under the law for every hour worked by the scabs. When they realized the position they were in under the law they begged for time. We didn't have to give them the time but we did give them a couple of days to get the scabs out of the plant.

Now that's a real interesting situation where you have workers just waiting to meet the scabs coming out of the plant and they're going to go in. It took a little bit of convincing on the part of the management. They resolved it by saying that we'll work on such and such a day and as you know the workers quit at three o'clock. My workers got down there at three o'clock but they found out that management had let them out at-one o'clock so we avoided the bloody conflict. It's a matter of complete understanding of a very delicate situation, the difference you see between a small town strike.

Another example, Monseigneur of the Catholic Church gave us the soundest support because he had recalled the hardships that many of these people had gone through when that plant had been a furniture factory that made church furniture. He recalled the miserable wages and the hard times and he said he had grown up from a working family and he couldn't help but support labor. But when I turned around and talked to the Ministerial Association there was a slight holding back, sympathy was slower, nothing could be done.
When you talk to the businessmen they were only interested in their profits and their debts and the credit that people owed them, the bills. They would have done anything to get us to call the strike off under any conditions. You don't get much support from these people.

I. Did you find the local police in a small town having any different reaction than the Chicago police towards the strikers?

R. That's a very fine point to raise, Ed, because I was trying to compare the situation to the Republic Steel strike. I recall in trying, in Chicago, to contact Captain Mooney and Kilroy. I did succeed once in getting their ear but I wasn't listened to at Republic Steel. In this small town I knew the policemen, knew them by name, I knew many of them. They had quite a police force. They were well trained, by the way, they knew how to conduct themselves. I talked with the captain many a time in the restaurant when he was on the night beat. He'd come in and if he saw me he'd sit down and we'd have a cup of coffee together. He would ask me what the labor rules were. He had asked that before there was a strike. He continued to ask it when he'd see me because he said he wanted to conduct the picket line according to what the regulations were. In other words, there was cooperation from the small town police.

He was quite firm. There was always a man in charge of the picket detail from the police force. Some were fairly
broad minded and other ones were hewers to the line. In other
terms, what I mean by that is if they heard an obscene word
they would quick grab a guy and put him in jail. They'd put
him in the jug, that's right. If anyone was drinking there
were certain police who would grab the guy and put him in the
jug. I thought for a while I was going to have to go broke
just getting people out of jail. But it turned out that there
were other ones there who understood and would come to me
personally when the picket lines were busy and say, "Hey
Patterson, I see some guy over there, he looks like he's under
the influence of liquor. How about keeping him out of our
hair?"

Of course we were very willing. If we sensed that
someone was in that kind of condition we would see to it the
guy was taken away from the picket line. In other words it
wasn't the case where the police were going to try to torment
us, try to break our strike funds by just collecting fines.
When we appeared before the judge in cases like that he
usually upheld the fine or made the fine and we paid it. It
was normal but we tried to avoid any of these situations.

At the beginning of a strike you sense them but it
petered off immediately because workers understood, too.
They would rather have the money buying food than being paid
in fines. So altogether, if you treat the police fairly
they, in a small town, generally treat you fairly back. It's
not always true. I've been in small towns where the police
will harrass you to death and if the organizer is driving in or out of the town they'll give him a ticket for foolishness. But there was nothing like that in Fond du Lac. I would say it was a little different situation over in a town like Ripon Wisconsin.

I. Ripon?

R. Yeah, where the Republican Party was founded, you know, quite a Republican town.

I. That's the seat of the founding of the Republican Party?

R. I used to service local unions there and policemen weren't quite so friendly in that town.

I. You never had any experiences of brutality to any degree?

R. No, I would say that the only time that I could recall that in a small town was right, here in Michigan City, Indiana, twelve miles from where I live. I recall one time at the beginning of the CIO when we were organizing in there, that the police immediately arrested us when we were giving out leaflets. When we got to the jail we talked to the police and they slapped quite a few of the guys in the face. That didn't continue long either. By the time the end of 1937 rolled around the Michigan City police began to straighten up a little bit. As far as run-ins with the policemen, I would say that Chicago and after Republic Steel, when they used to flag me down and frisk me and embarrass me, that would be about the
roughest thing that I went through.

The comparisons, as I pointed out, Ed, are very similar between strike situations. An awful lot depends in my opinion on the organizer. I've watched strikes conducted by organizers and I've never seen anything so loused up and messed up, not because of the workers but because of the poor direction the organizer gave them. I, myself, tried to avoid these things. I wasn't the best organizer in the world. I assure you I never had a messed up strike and I never did lose one. I say that quite modestly, the records speak for themselves.

I.

Some very unique parallels can be drawn, I believe, if you started to draw from 1937 to 1957 and 1967 on strike issues and what, by and large, people strike over and when they project the most militancy. Some people contend, and I basically agree and I'd like your opinion, that the majority of the time the most militancy is projected not over the monetary issue. It's over the issue of --

R.

Like taking away their insurance, for example, something they were quite satisfied with.

I.

It's more of a slap in the face of the worker, like taking away his manhood, possibly.

R.

Putting in a speed up system that is outrageous can get them very angry. I think one of the things that also went along with this strike I just told you about was the foreman giving the men work to do and after they've performed it to
find out that all the pieces they've created were scrap.

I.

The scabs?

R.

Scrap, no, no, not the scabs. Now I'm not talking about scabs, I'm talking about causing a strike you know, not over the monetary thing. They were very angry in this plant at that time that the foreman would give them their orders and the work to do and the pattern to follow and then suddenly it would be found out that the engineer or someone had created it. They had done all this work and it was scrap. Sometimes the worker would notice that the thing was going to be scrap before he even started. He would tell the foreman, "Look, this thing's not going to work, it's wrong." The foreman would say, "Do it anyhow." Then it would be turned down. You know a worker's very proud of his workmanship, he hates to produce scrap. They'd get very angry and ready to strike about it. I'd get more grievances about stuff like that in this Quick Freeze plant just around the time they went on strike.

They were also very angry that their incentive system was being tampered with, you know the piece work. It takes a lot of little things to work up anger. Workers will take it just a certain length of time and then when their contracts expire, they'll lower the boom. And they'll lower it in spite of the advice of an organizer. Those are generally what I call real legitimate strikes from the workers vitally interested in the conditions.
I tend to agree with you there. I think that the labor, movement, to some degree sells the worker short, you know.

R.

You know, Ed, when they talk about this labor boss issuing an order to strike that's so far fetched as a rule. Labor bosses don't order strikes. It really is, it's a real far fetched thing. It can be done and has been done where some fool labor organizer thinks he's a dictator but that's few and far between. Even the international union has a governing factor that all strikes must be approved by the international and there's not such a thing as the labor boss.

I.

Do you think, George, that all the strikes that you've participated in and the strikes that you've watched, the economic strikes as well as the non economic strikes, that this is the way that labor must continue to go or do you see any other way for labor having its demands met by management?

R.

No, there's no other way that I know of except through collective bargaining. You know I've listened to the arguments by different groups down through the years about arbitration and a board of governors who would listen to the requests of workers and what management says they could do and then they would render a decision. I don't think that the working man in the United States is prepared to accept an arbitrator's decision. Even today we get arbitrators decisions and very seldom anyone's happy with what they get out of it. When you go through democratic elections where
the workers negotiate through representatives of their own choosing and these men come to a deadlock with management when they're pursuing the clauses in a contract covering their wages, hours and working conditions and it's a complete deadlock, the only way to bring the thing to a head is to strike, to picket and to accept no favors from management, no favors from government. Meet them head on and come out with a working contract and live up to it until that contract expires and then meet them again.

I think that as long as they have the healthy action of the people from the bottom up, not from the top down, from the bottom up, you'll have a healthy way of life. The average worker, if you ask him this question and if he's at all thought it out -- many of them haven't -- if he's at all thought it out, will always uphold the right to strike as the ultimate weapon labor has. This goes in civil groups such as police, domestic groups like firemen, school teachers, mailmen, government groups. They all should have the right to strike if they find that their conditions are unbearable.

I've always looked at it that way and I find that the major group of half way decent thinking people coincides. There are those who disagree, of course, but you'll find that they're people who live with platitudes. I don't propose to be one. I think you do draw some very good analogies on what the strike weapon has brought and even what the threat of the strike has brought to the laboring class during this
interview. I basically tend to agree with you that that is the only economic tool that the worker does possess today, that is to shut off the flow of goods that he's capable of producing. Even to the extent that the same worker from the bottom up controls his own leadership, this is very important, Ed.

I think so.