

Oral History Project

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Interview with Ernest De Maio
November 16, 1970 .
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Respondant: Ernest De Maio

Interviewer: Morris Vogel

Date: November 16, 1970

I. Mr. De Maio, I'd like to start off asking you something about your personal background, your parents, when you were born, etc.

R. Well, I was born November 26, 1908, approximately 62 years ago. My parents were Italian immigrants. My mother came here when she was 4 years old, my father when he was 16, so they both spoke English, not the King's English, but as a result of their speaking English, I never learned to speak Italian, nor did any of the rest of the kids. We were a large family. My mother had nine children, all boys. She died in 1921 and I'll tell you later what broke her health and hastened her death. After her death my father remarried and the first three were boys, so the first twelve children were boys; seventeen kids in all, thirteen boys, four girls. There are fourteen of us still living.

My father was in the building trades. He did stone work, but there wasn't too much of that, and when that wasn't available he did whatever was available. In the wintertime, because of the large family, he worked in the factories, if things weren't slack. When things were slack, though, we just didn't eat.

I. You lived in Chicago?

R. No, no, Hartford, Connecticut. I was born, appropriately enough, on Mechanic Street in Hartford, Connecticut, so you know it was a working class section. And it was pretty well ghettoized. I didn't realize that at the time. We were an Italian ghetto. On one side of us was a Polish ghetto, on another side was a Jewish, although there was some intermingling of Jews and Italians, because in the same building we would live in there were Jews. We moved around quite a bit. The old man found it cheaper to move than to pay rent. And we would be in and out with Jews and sometimes an Irish family here and there, but mainly Italian.

My father was active in the Wobblies, he was a Wobbly, the Industrial Workers of the World. And in 1919 he and an uncle of mine, together with many, many other Italians, were arrested in the broad sweep of the Palmer raids, thrown in jail, and held there incommunicado for all practical purposes -- no charges. When they finally did let them out, they threw some charge on them. I never did find out what it was, but he remained in jail for about six months. Well, my mother had that army of kids and there was no relief or welfare in those days, and the net result was it broke her health and she died of tuberculosis in 1921. I first went to work when I was about 11 years old in 1920.

- I. This was already after the Palmer raids. Can you tell me something about your feelings with your father in jail?
- R. I didn't know too much about it. As a matter of fact, they tried to keep it from us. I found out more from my uncle than I found out from my father. I don't know what they did; they tried to organize. You've got to understand, there was a great terror in the country at that time. The Russian revolution had broken out; there was a strong revolutionary movement in Italy; and there were 67 varieties of left organizations in the Italian community. There must have been a dozen anarchist groupings. Every meeting they had resulted in two or more anarchist groupings. At least, so it seemed. There were several socialist movements of various varieties. I had no idea what it was all about. Very heated discussions went on all the time. My mother became active as a suffragette. As a matter of fact, we used to march down Main Street in Hartford. I remember as far back as 1916, 17, 18, marching on the street with Katie Hepburn's mother, Dr. Hepburn, fighting for votes for women. We lived, as I said, in an Italian community, mainly Catholic, and the Church at that time was opposed to suffrage for women. But my mother would send me to school with a button: "Votes for Women". They did grab the buttons and I'd get a black eye or a bloody nose trying to defend the button, which didn't daunt my mother in the least. She would tell me; "That's all right. There's plenty of buttons where that one came from." In fact, I was marched off to school to start all over again.

- I. Can you tell me where your family got such advanced notions, developed such social consciousness? We hear that Catholic immigrants were always supposed to follow the church and not join the Wobblies, or be interested in the suffrage movement.
- R. It seems that my family had some problems back in Italy. I don't know too much about them, but my family was never religious. They did not go to church in Italy. When Sundays came, the women and children would go to church, and the men would gather in the village squares, or the city squares in front of the churches, and they would harangue against the monarchy and against the church. It's understandable, you know, because the church was the main landowner in Italy at that time and you don't work for a boss all week long and pray to him on Sunday. So that, plus the fact, as I said, that there was a strong Socialist movement in Italy -- so who knows what smatterings of this they picked up along the way. I wouldn't know. I didn't know, because I didn't get along too well with my father. First, I thought these guys are greenhorns. They don't know what this country's all about. There are opportunities here. And I was getting an education. I knew that I was going to do better than they did, so I turned my back on this. I was growing up in the American Dream: Any American boy can become President. I never aspired to that high office. I thought that would be beyond my reach, not being a Wasp. Nevertheless I thought somewhere down the road I would

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make my mark.

As I started to say, I went to work as a boy in the tobacco fields in the Connecticut valley. Every summer from the time I was 10 years old going on 11, every summer vacation -- I never had one -- I worked on the tobacco plantation up until I graduated high school. And then I went to work in Kearney, New Jersey, for the Western Electric Company. Around this time, I'm beginning to review some of my own work experiences, the people I met with, because in the tobacco plantation there were occasional Wobblies who used to work in the fields from whom I would get some little smatterings of what it was all about without it bothering me too much. And I heard occasional references to Sacco and Vanzetti, I heard them at home. Everybody on the Eastern seaboard, where there were many, many Italians, were aware of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, even though the press was generally silent about it.

Well, when I got to work at Western Electric, the differentiation between the WASP element who ran the plant and the Italians was pretty much like the blacks and whites today. There were no blacks in the plant at that time, and whatever miserable jobs there were, were given to the Italians. I sensed and felt the discrimination and resented it, without being too clear as to what it

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was all about. At any rate, I couldn't tell you exactly how I became interested in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, but I did. I read about it. And I participated in some of the demonstrations around freeing Sacco and Vanzetti. I was convinced at that time, it was a frame-up and as history has shown, it was. They were framed and they were executed. There was a tremendous demonstration on the night of their execution in Times Square. Like a New Year's Eve revel, or something, people were turning out in protest. Up to that time, that was the biggest demonstration I'd ever seen. Well, to make a long story short, the word came out during the demonstration that they were executed. And by the time we'd gotten through having a few drinks and got back to Jersey and got home, I guess I had very little sleep that night. The next day my boss was pushing me. The drive for getting out more production didn't start recently: it starts with the factory system. I told him to lay off me, that I wasn't in the best of moods. I was tired. And he asked me, "Why?" He said, "Don't tell me you were in that demonstration in New York yesterday?" I said, "Yeah, why?" He said, "I always knew it." I said, "You always knew what?" He said, "I always knew you were a no-good, dago, anarchist son-of-a-bitch," Well, I was young in those days and I didn't have to take that crap from anybody, When I got through with him, I wound up being fired and blacklisted, just a simple thing like that. I didn't realize I was blacklisted then. I went through I don't know how many jobs, two weeks here, a week there, three weeks there. I was stupid enough to give as

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a recommendation that I worked at Western Electric. Whenever they checked with Western Electric, the word would come I had to go. And this happened despite the fact the foreman said I was a good worker. Hell, I needed the work. There was nobody supporting me, and I had to have it. And I soon realized that, as I said, I was stupid. It took me a long time to understand that anybody would be so interested in me to see to it that I wouldn't get a job. And, as usually happens, they overreacted; the repressiveness was too great, and I reacted to it. And I came to the conclusion that what we needed in this country was strong labor unions. So I went to Washington to see Bill Green. Of course, I never got to see him. And from there, I even looked up Norman Thomas. I couldn't get to see him. And, by this time the Great Depression had come along. It was 1927 when I was fired. I'd gone through about 15 jobs in the meantime, and there was nothing to do. There was no sense in trying to organize the unorganized. The people were scared stiff, tremendous fear! Companies were chopping up, firing people right and left, and the first thing I knew, I was active in helping to organize the unemployed. That's what there was around to organize.

- I. Could you tell me more about this organizing the unemployed, what form that took?

R. Well, before I had gotten into it, there were what they call Unemployment Councils. I was living in New York City at the time, and had a particular function. During the unemployed days the utility companies would cut off the gas and cut off the electricity. Well, if you live in high rises and you live on gas and live on electricity it's like living in a cage. The problem was to get the gas and electricity restored without the company knowing it. And so I developed technique and facility. What they would do, they'd put about a three foot plugged pipe into the piping system for the gas, so there was no way of getting the gas turned on unless you removed that and replaced it with a pipe that was undamaged, a new pipe. And you had to do this holding your breath, because once you took out the plug the gas would be running. Well, I could hold my breath for a couple of minutes -- long enough to have one end of the new pipe capped while I screwed in the other end. And I would restore the gas that way. I never knew whose home I was working at. It was on a highly organized basis. These people, through their Unemployed Councils, would put in their requisition slips, and I would go as if this were my job.

I. Who oversaw these Unemployed Councils?

R. Oh, they had committees and officers. They were well organized throughout the entire community. Every block had its operation.

Just like you have a shop steward system now, you had block committees. And depending on the size of the operation, housing committees.

- I. Was this a grass roots organization?
- R. It was grass roots. People in many places would hear about somebody else doing it and would do it themselves, set up their own operations. And when they ran into a problem they couldn't handle, they looked up the storefront or some lot that was maintained as a headquarters, and they'd meet with the people there, tell them who they were, what their problem was, and what help they could get. The offices just became a clearing house for these things. Then we'd all get together and decide what we'd need; we need more welfare, or when the WPA's came along, we fought for jobs on WPA. We fought for better conditions on WPA; we fought for better wages, so on down the line. So we were dealing with the immediate problems of the people. Just the fight to exist in those days was the key fight. You've got to remember that the official figures showed 13 million people unemployed. And, as I said, official -- actually, there were more than that. If you worked one hour a day or 1 day a week you were considered employed, and more than half of those who were employed did not put in a full week so that there were millions of unemployed and underemployed. The result is everybody, in one way or another, was involved. I remember once a shoe store in the mid forties in Manhattan, just east of Broadway, advertised

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for a shoe salesman. Well, what the hell, you don't need to know anything to sell shoes, and I applied for the job or I tried to. That street was jammed from both ends. Over a hundred thousand people at least showed up for that one stinking job for a shoe salesman. Unbelievable! The least bit of an ad anywhere there would be outpourings. You had millions of people who would do anything for a job, because there was no way of getting by. There was hunger in the United States. And I could never understand that, because I knew our warehouses were full. Why people should go hungry when warehouses are full, when we were paying farmers not to plant, when we were destroying food, when we were plowing under wheat and plowing under corn, and actually taking the pigs and putting them in lime pits and destroying them, rather than give the people food. Well all of this was taking place at this time, and all of America was being radicalized. It wasn't just a question of a few radical people -- the whole country was radicalized. I suppose that was as close we ever came to a basic change. The only thing that prevented a revolution, in my opinion, there was no revolutionary core to give any leadership. But the American people were desperate enough in those days to do anything. When

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they did get jobs in the factories they found out that these jobs paid nothing. I remember, because after this I'd had gotten pretty worn down and pretty sick from the ordeal I'd gone through. I went to Hartford and stayed with an older brother of mine for a while. A job was advertised for in one of the plants in the western part of Hartford, which was quite an industrial center in addition to being an insurance city. It's where Underwood Typewriter was, Royal Typewriter, and Pratt and Whitney Tool, and Pratt and Whitney Aircraft and a number of important companies. This company, whoever was doing the hiring, whether he was a foreman or someone from the personnel office, there was a crowd of guys. The easiest way to get a crowd was to advertise for a job, and people came in by the thousands. He would get up and ask who would work for 25 cents an hour and everybody signed the book. 25 cents an hour! And he'd tell us to put our hands down. Who'd work for 24? And then 23, and 22, and he'd beat it down to the lowest figure he could get. He said, "Okay, you're hired." I'm on the job 2 or 3 weeks, and release somebody who'd been there for a while, who'd probably worked himself up to a magnificent wage like 40¢ an hour and let him go. And in this process the workers found themselves bidding against each other, hammering down their own wages and their own working conditions. They had

appealed to the AFL but got no relief there. You may not know it, but the A.F. of L. in 1934 opposed organizing the unorganized in the mass production industries. It was opposed to unemployment compensation, fought these things. And here you have millions of people who were hungry. A tremendous movement developed in the United States around the Lundeen Bill, which was the precursor of unemployment compensation, and when the A.F.L. would not support this legislation, those workers who had fought for it where they finally did get jobs and were interested in organization, realized that they were not going to get anywhere in the A.F.L. They resented the lack of leadership. They were opposed to the A.F.L. And when they organized, there were three methods in which they organized then. The companies attempted to set up company unions to forestall the development of independent unionism. The A.F.L., the international unions in the field, like the International Association of Machinists or the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers were not interested in organizing the unorganized mass production workers. They were fearful of them. They had been set up as craft unions, concerned only with the interests of highly skilled craft workers, and their rituals called for excluding women and for excluding blacks, and an unwritten rule

was to exclude the foreigner too. When I graduated high school it was impossible for Italian kids, for instance, to get anywhere in the apprentice trades -- no different from the black trying to crash the apprentice trades today. All right, that's changed. I don't want to go into the reasons for the change, you're probably familiar with it. Anyway, as this development took place, the companies succeeded many places in forming company unions. The workers formed unions which they did not want the company to control, but were independent. The A.F. of L. organized them, and where they organized them, they set them up as federal locals, not attached to any international union but directly affiliated to the A.F. of L. During this period, there were a lot of things happening simultaneously. The first big battle took place in the industrial valley, or black valley as Ruth McKinney called it, in rubber, around Akron. The struggle in 1934, there were two of them, one on the West Coast among the longshoremen and the rubber workers in Akron. As a result of these struggles, there were people killed in both of them, many injured, but the workers came out of both struggles with unions. In the West Coast case, they had to do it in opposition to the International Longshoremen's Association, the ILA, and so they

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set up their own union, the Longshore Warehouseman's Union headed up by Harry Bridges. In the rubber workers union, they set themselves up, and they applied to the A.F.L. for a charter. Since there was no union in that field, they were chartered in the A.F.L. A number of locals in the electrical and metal industries also were organizing, and they were put in what was called the Radio and Allied Trades Council. At that time, "Iron Pants" Johnson was the head of the NRA, General Johnson. Simultaneously with this, a number of unions in the A.F. of L. opened up a drive for the "Buy Only Union Made Goods", the union label drive. And because, particularly in the radio industry, the capacity was far greater than the market, and the question was who was going to improve their position in the market at the expense of other companies, Philco decided that, because people were union conscious, even though they may not have been in unions, that if they signed a union shop contract with the Philco workers they would have the edge on the radio market. Consequently the union shop was negotiated with Philco. The chairman of the local at that time was a young fellow by the name of Carey, Jim Carey. I mention this, because out of this little accident some other accidents took place which fated him to become the head of the U.E.

when it was formed. In 1935, the winter of 1935-36, the workers in RCA went into a strike struggle, and we, of course, those of us who had anything to do with our industry, the electrical industry, all converged on Camden , New Jersey, to see to it that the RCA workers won their strike, which they did. At about this time, all the forces were moving toward putting up a new international union in our industry.

I. What were you yourself doing at this point?

R . Well, I'd gone back to New England. I got involved in assisting some people out there. I would get odds 'n ends jobs in shops. I never had too much luck with it, because they could get highly experienced people to work for the same damned money that I would work for. And I was unmarried, no kids, and so what little jobs I got I always had plenty of time. In the Pratt and Whitney plant in Hartford, that's Pratt and Whitney Tool, they had a local union in the machinists union. They didn't get the service they wanted; they pulled out of the Machinists union and set up an independent union which they called the Machine Tool Co. Workers of America, Local 1. I was active in that and I became sort of a part-time organizer. I was considered the organizer without pay, let me put it that way, an unpaid organizer. I worked

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with them, helped them put out their shop paper. When Pratt and Whitney Aircraft went the same route, it became Machine Tool CO Workers of America, Local 2. And there were dreams in those days that we would be able to set up, on the basis of these two shops, a new international union in that field. It didn't work out that way, but that was the dream. Together with a number of independent unions throughout New England, we set up a loosely federated operation known as the New England Council of Metal and Allied Unions, of which I was secretary. We didn't have enough membership, enough income, to carry on much of an activity, but there was a lot of independent organization work taking place on a grass-roots basis without organizers, and we'd just keep in touch with these. Wherever the likelihood seemed good we would concentrate what little money and effort we had to help pull it through. In addition to that we did some legislative work in the state legislatures, mainly Boston and Hartford, in the state legislatures of Massachusetts and Connecticut. During the winter of 1935-36 John Brophy came into New England to see a number of people including myself whom he sought out. He was telling us that a new movement was developing within the A.F. of L., that a number of unions were very much dissatisfied

with the policies of Bill Green, Matthew Woll and Bill Hutcheson, who dominated the A.F. of L. at that time, and that they wanted to be in touch with all of the movements and were willing to do what they could to help these movements get going.

So we were encouraged to continue our efforts, that somewhere down the road was a realignment shaping up. And Brophy was charged with traveling the country at that time as a spokesman for John L. Lewis. He worked for the miners and was doing this work for John L. Lewis, so we watched very carefully the struggles taking place inside the A.F. of L; the setting up of the Committee for Industrial Organization within the A.F. of L; the later expulsion of this committee and the forming of the C.I.O. But it was just during this period that we set up our union, the United Electrical and Radio Workers, which was on April 1 of 1936. Since the C.I.O. was still a committee within the A.F. of L., we applied to the A.F. of L. for a charter and that we were denied: So we decided to go into existence anyway as an international union. Now we had no money; we didn't have a dime. So when we set up the organization we tried to figure out where we could get some money.

Side II

- I . Of what was the U.E. composed? Who came together to form it?
- R. The three major groupings I spoke of before -- the federal locals within the A.F. of L., which were part of the Radio and Allied Trades

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Council; the independent unions, which had either been in the A.F.L. or had been in company unions and broke away from them to establish separate locals independent of any of these; and groupings who were at that time works councils or company unions in the process of shedding their company unionism and becoming real unions. From these three groupings we formed the U.E. That included the group I was with, the Machine Tool Co. Workers and the New England Council. As I said, we didn't have a dime and we needed some money to get going because we had agreed to set up an international office, to have a full-time president and secretary-treasurer, and to issue charters, and all of that took money to get going. Carey, because of the fact that he had this union shop with Philco that I talked about earlier, was in a position to advance 2 months per capita from local 101, which was the Philco local. It was his local and that was the district that he was going to get as a district when it became local 101. And the 2 months per capita he advanced, (the per capita was only 25 cents a month), amounted to \$ 5,000 dollars. Well, \$5,000 dollars at that time looked as big as the harvest moon. And on the basis of this, we made Jim Carey the president of the Electrical and Radio Workers Union. He seemed to be all right. Nobody asked about credentials or what the hell he thought about anything. Everybody was for only one thing. The common purpose that united all of us was that we had to have one

union in this industry that was able to deal with G.E., Westinghouse, Philco, R.C.A., with some power behind their voice. And since the A.F.L. refused to do it, and since we had applied to them for a charter and we were refused it, we decided to go on our own and set it up. Here was 5,000 bucks to get started with. I was hired as the first union organizer by the U.E. at the magnificent salary of ten bucks a week with no expenses. That's like some of these kids in some of these student movements, you know, work for \$30.00 a week. I don't want to comment on where they're going or how they're going to get there, but the same idea: we weren't interested in what was in it for us. We had missionary zeal. We had gone through the sufferings of the depression; we were still in the depression for that matter. It had been alleviated somewhat by the New Deal measures, but there was still mass unemployment, and we were convinced at that time that if the workers were able to organize and bargain with the employers on an even basis that we would be able to improve the wages and working conditions of the workers. That was the one thing upon which we all agreed. In the meantime, as we're setting this up, comes the expulsion of the Committee for Industrial Organization from the A.F.L. About six months after we were set up the C.I.O. was expelled and became

known as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, keeping the same initials, because in the meantime, it had won a tremendous amount of publicity. Now, from the very beginning, the C.I.O. was a grouping of many different forces. All of them, practically everyone in it, had gone through some suffering because of the depression. People who had a flair for leadership, who became leaders of the unemployed councils and naturally became leaders in the shops when the hiring began, began setting up first little groupings, skeleton organizations, and then when they were assured of a charter, just blossoming out. The Wagner Act, which was passed at about the same time, was held up until the spring of '37 because of appeal to the Supreme Court. In the spring of '37 it was upheld by the courts and the big organizational drives were under way. We concentrated mainly on G.E. and Westinghouse. We felt the industry could not be organized unless we had them and we began to organize, together, of course, with the forces already in the plants, because without them it couldn't have been done. They knew the company; they knew the problems in the plant; they knew the people, and there were enough people in the plants who, in normal times perhaps, might have gone elsewhere but who had no opportunities, who were happy to get a job in the plant. Leadership qualities -- the only chance they had of exercising them was to play some role in organizing the unorganized, and they did it. During the depression, you've got to understand, there was a great deal of discussion

in the Unemployed Councils of every possible development they could face. There was the revolution in the Soviet Union, so there was the Russian Communist idea there. There was the development of fascism in Italy and Germany. There was the struggle in Spain; the loyalist government was being overthrown by Franco and by the intervention of Italy and Italian and German fascism. All of these things were thoroughly discussed; these were the big topics. We could solve the problems of the world; we couldn't put bread on the table. But that didn't stop us from trying to solve our problems either.

- I. How did you relate what was going on in the world to your problems? Which of these foreign movements was the most attractive? Were any of them considered models?
- R. I don't think any of them were really considered models, because the experience was quite different. At any rate, you could never get agreement. There were the Trotskyites, who, of course, were for some variant of it; whatever it was only Trotsky knew. Then there were the Lovestonites. Lovestone, who is now the advisor on foreign affairs to George Meany, was, prior to this period, the General Secretary, I think it was, of the Communist

Party. So he set up what was known as the C.P.O., the Communist Party Opposition. And so we had the Lovestonites, and there were splinterings among them and splinterings among the Communists, and splinterings among the Trotskyites. So you had Heinz's 57 varieties of these brands and you could never be too sure who was what, and nobody really cared. Because where we could disagree on everything else, we had common agreement on the basic need of organizing the unorganized.

- I. The immediate objectives were the most important?
- R. The immediate objectives overshadowed everything else -- the need for more money, the need for a job, the need for better working conditions, so on down the line. That ate up all our energies. Those who were more interested in the ideological questions became divorced from the immediate problems of the people. They went on with their fine hair-splitting, you know. They continued to argue what seemed to us somewhere out in left field, while those of us who saw the practice and immediate needs proceeded to try to solve those. That's where we were, and we made tremendous progress on it. The CIO became a very powerful and viable force. We had taken on the major industries in the country, the huge corporate centers of wealth and power in this country that dominated the economic and political

life of t&e nation and we organized over their opposition. There were some far-seeing leaders of industry like Ben Fairless of U.S. Steel. When he saw that organization was inevitable, he sought to blunt the blows of it by not antagonizing the workers by making it more difficult for them to organize and worked out his deal with John L. Lewis. The Carnegie Steel Deal it was called, where he recognized the Steelworkers Organizing Committee for the members it represented, not as the exclusive bargaining agent, but for the members they represented. And that was considered a milestone because it was at least a foot in the door that the steelworkers could use. No matter who won a victory, if the auto workers won a big election, the press would play it up, and of course we would use it. If we won a big G.E. or Westinghouse plant, the others would use it. We worked pretty closely in those days because, again, we had not yet gotten to the point where we were dizzy with success. That came a little later. People who had been unemployed, giving leadership to unemployed workers and demonstrations of unemployed workers, in a period of a few months, a year or two at the most, found themselves at the head of huge labor organizations with contracts, with per capita coming; in regularly, vast sums of money, vast full-paid full-time people on their staffs, technical assistants, and all kinds of able guys who had gone through the various universities who couldn't get connected anywhere else and became connected with the labor movement. It was quite a change. For some of them it was more than they could handle; others I suppose managed to do it. Throughout all of this period there

were forces of disintegration as well as consolidation taking place. Dubinsky, who was one of the eight APL presidents who pulled out to form the CIO was the first to return to the AFL. A bit frightening to see what was coming up, the masses moving into organization. He wanted no part of it. On the other hand, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers were in a unique position. They were never part of the AFL. They had an agreement with the United garment Workers Union and the agreement was that in the plants organized by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the United Garment Workers union label would be sewn in those garments, and they would be paid so much for each union label, so that the Amalgamated was sort of a bastard child of the labor movement at the time. It was not recognized as an entity and it was fighting for its own existence, although it was a well organized and well-knit organization. So they welcomed Sidney Hillman at that time, welcomed the development of the CIO and became part of it, not as an AFL operation, but as I said, as some bastard offspring of the AFL. Lewis was typical of many of the labor leaders of the '20's. Up to World War II when American industry, booming all over the place, was supplying the belligerents of World War I, the need for labor was tremendous. The companies wanted the support and cooperation of labor; they didn't want strikes, so the labor leaders were patted on the head and some minor concessions were made to them, And Lewis was one who

played the game. But right after World War I, when American big business decided to wreck the unions in the mass production industries, Lewis found out that without a union he had no influence. And he was among the first to see that what he needed was membership if he was to have any influence at all. So prior to the building up of C.I.O., contrary to what many of the other union leaders did during the depression, he decided to organize, reorganize the mines. And in the early '30's, before the development of the C.I.O, even before the New Deal, he was well on the way to developing organization among the coal miners.

Then you had Howard of the ITU, who was a helluva decent guy, but who had problems in his own union, so that while he was part of the CIO, he played no role in it. He was essentially a craft unionist who believed in the principles of industrial unionism but was unable to achieve them in his own industry.

You had Homer Martin of the auto workers, who, it was obvious, had sold out to the auto industry. And we had Jim Carey in our set-up who very frankly was a creature of the corporations. It was hard to see it at the time. He was a poor administrator and a lousy leader.

- I. When did you, as a person in the union, start becoming conscious of this failing?
- R. Well I, of course, as the first organizer for the UE, I knew Jim Carey

just see somebody get up and bum rap a company was to be regarded as a leader. This is the kind of guy we wanted. He would go out to a company and do it in the most irresponsible fashion. It didn't bother us. Fine, if that's what he wants to do. But in negotiations, you know, he would act the same way in negotiations. It's one thing to call a man a son-of-a-bitch and sit down and want to negotiate with him too. He was able to get nowhere in negotiations in General Electric or Westinghouse, which to us were key. Too flippant, too irresponsible and also domineering -- he wouldn't let anybody else do it, with the result that we ran into the kind of problems with him that we decided we're not going to go anywhere with this guy. He was an obstacle to growth in the union and quite early. As a matter of fact, in 1941, before World War II, we dumped him.

- I. How was a decision like that, to dump him, reached? Who enters into that kind of decision?
- R. Well, first I think it was the conference board in G.E. The conference board is made up of delegates -- you know what a conference board is.
- I. Right.

R. They had problems, and they needed somebody who could help them with their problems, not somebody that'd pop off. If you have an immediate problem, calling that guy a son-of-a-bitch doesn't solve your problem. You want somebody with some know-how and he would never do the necessary homework to find out what the problems were. If you're not interested in finding out what the problem is, you're never going to be able to solve it. So from that point of view, he just didn't measure up. Funny part of it, nobody liked him. John L. Lewis at that time characterized him -- he said to him once, "You were once a precocious youngster. You are now a sad case of arrested development." And that's what he became -- the boy wonder of the labor movement without anybody ever knowing what the hell he had on the ball. We were quite content to let him be a president and go out and build a union which we did. But once you build a union, you've got to do something for the people, because that was the basis upon which they were organized. And that's where he fell short. And it didn't take too much trouble. Of course we were beginning to get the red-baiting. The CIO was born in red-baiting. The slogan of the employees was: "Join the CIO and build a Soviet America." So every union went through it; the auto workers went through it; the steelworkers went through it, rubber, ourselves.

industrial towns, going in alone, meeting under difficult conditions, with no prestige and very little of anything else going for them; seeking out, pulling together the forces in the shops that could do the job of organizing the unorganized. It worked out. So at the first stages, people were just not ready 'to accept red-baiting. And of course Carey, at the time he was defeated, did not use the red issue as the reason for his defeat. It became handy later for him to use that. The real sharp struggle took place first in 1940, when John L. Lewis was our labor hero. And we had Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was the guy whose New Deal had been the only really decent progressive labor and social legislation that was ever put in the books.

So we were torn, all of us were. None of us knew, except maybe a v&y small handful, just what John Lewis was going to do. I was in Dayton, Ohio, at the time, listening in the union hall to his speech, and when he said he was coming out for Wilkie, well it was just as though we were being gutted.

And this was the period, mind you, when Fascism was making its drive. Around Labor Day of '39 was when Hitler had marched into Poland. England and France had declared war against Germany. The Spanish Republic had been destroyed. Italy had moved on Ethiopia and had moved into Albania and then into Greece. All of these things were happening. We saw Hitler move into the Saar first, then move into Austria, then

called all anti-fascist forces reds or communists. They tarred everybody with that. Now, the forces that were against fascism in the labor movement then, they were, I would say, the dominant forces. Very few people would get up and speak for Hitler or for Mussolini, particularly since it was common knowledge that in Hitler Germany some 50,000 trade union leaders were beheaded. That's not a figure of speech -- he had their heads chopped off. These things were pretty common knowledge; these things were being discussed and debated. And so what was shaping up, although we weren't aware of it at the time, was, "Where is American labor going?" As a result of our experiences in World War II, we had the grand alliance eventually to defeat fascism, and a grand alliance which included the Soviet Union at one end of that alliance to the United States on the other end, with England, the Free French and some other groupings in between. From the alliance against fascism, many of those who were "left" in their thinking in the war period and the immediate post-war period thought in terms of continuing this alliance with American big business, because essentially, that's what the alliance included. American big business and the Bolsheviks were in a grand alliance to destroy fascism. That's a quirk of history, but that's what happened. As the war was over and we won it, of course, In the meantime Lewis was finished. He'd already pulled out of the CIO. We

had Murray in his place who was a weakling -- I so regarded him from long experience with him -- and Roosevelt had died. We had Truman, who was another accident of history in the White House; Winston Churchill made his Fulton, Missouri speech, rang down the iron curtain, and red-baiting then became a way of life in America. So that, I would say, that the labor movement at that period was at the crossroads.

Now I see two people played a significant role in that development. As far as Carey is concerned, his was the role of a lackey; he was no motivating or driving force. Carey has the distinction of being the only man in the history of the American labor movement who was the international president of two international unions, the UE and the I.U.E. He was kicked out of the UE by convention action, and so he decided when he formed the IUE that his election would no longer be determined by convention delegates but by a referendum. And the first referendum they ever had in the IUE, he tried to steal it. He was caught at it, and he was kicked out. So he had the distinction of being the only man who has been kicked out of two international unions, the only president to be kicked out of two international unions, one by convention and the other one by referendum. He was not a very powerful person; he was a creature of circumstance. The powerful forces in the C.I.O. at that time -- Hillman had died; John L. Lewis had become aged and embittered; we had Murray as the head of the CIO and the head of the Steelworkers,

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and Reuther, who was just coming into being. In the winter of 1945-46, the AFL unions, as they saw, the war coming to an end had decided that we had to dump the War Labor Board and the wage freeze, which we had agreed to during the war, and that we would have to launch an organized campaign for a "catch-up", as we call it, on wages. Robert Nathan, an economist who is still around, had made a study for the CIO, and came to the conclusion that what the workers needed at that time was 18½¢ an hour to catch up, and we launched a campaign for 18½¢ an hour. It was agreed that, as of the first of April 1946, on the first Monday after the first of April, the Steelworkers would go down. On Tuesday the Autoworkers would go down; Wednesday; the Electrical Workers would go down) on Thursday rubber and whatever else there was, a number of smaller unions; and then whatever was left over would come out on Friday, so that by the end of the week we would have the entire CIO out on the streets. And it was possible then, because John L. Lewis developed the whole notion that all contracts should expire and be re-negotiated on Mitchell's day. Now Mitchell's Day, for your information is April 1, otherwise known as April Fool's. The first president of the United Mine Workers, Mitchell, that was his birthday, so it became Mitchell Day and in the early days of the CIO all of the major unions had their contracts expiring in April. So it was possible for us to sit down and plan, one industry after another going down in this fashion.

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R. Well, in 1946, Reuther jumped the gun. When the war was over, G.M.

found its vast operations mainly tied into the war effort and it needed time to reconvert. During the period of reconversion when it couldn't possible produce any automobiles, Reuther found time to be extremely militant and he shut general Motors down. GM would have had to lay off most of its workers in the reconversion process. Instead of that they were on strike. And as I saw it, GM saved an awful lot of money by having the people strike rather than paying them layoff benefits. But it made Reuther look very militant, because here's the first labor leader in the country to go on strike right after the war is over. He got 18¢ an hour, a half-cent less than what we were shooting for. But there were other things that were involved which I'll come to later. In the meantime, Joe Beirne of communications went on strike. He was not part of the A.F. of L. or CIO at that time; he was strictly an independent union. In fact he was a creature of the company. A brother of mine used to be on his board of directors and it was strictly a company setup. But, be that as it may, he struck, so we found ourselves without communications just as April was rolling around. I went to New York. I wanted to be sure of what was going on. I was in New York on midnight the night before we were to strike General Electric and Westinghouse. And Phil Murray was somewhere down in Florida, I believe, with John Steelman who was Truman's labor trouble-shooter. They asked us to call

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off the strike, in that we would be able to resolve our differences, without spelling out what it was we were going to get. But this was around 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening and the plants were scheduled to go down at midnight. There was no telephone communication. Of course, the White House could get through to our vast-flung operations around the country. We would have been caught in a situation where some of the plants would be going down and others not going down. And we told them "nothing doing." G.E. and Westinghouse went down. And steel, which was supposed to have gone down on the Monday didn't, but they did come down on the following Monday, and the rest of auto, in the meantime, came down, and rubber came down, and some of the others came down. I was too busy at G.E. and Westinghouse, you know, to figure out exactly who else came down, because I was operating in the field. Well, to make a long story short, in steel and in auto, where the plants were shut down, the companies were willing to just close the plants down and made no effort to reopen the plants. In electrical an entirely different process took place. Both GE and Westinghouse, I guess by agreement among themselves, decided they were going to keep their plants open and so advertised. And a pitched battle took place from one end of the country to the other in the effort to break the strikes by getting the people to cross the picket lines. The picture that you see on the latest issue of Labor's Untold Story is a picture from that strike, the cops beating a GE worker in

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Philadelphia. We won it. No strike is ever a 100% victory. But it was a victory in the sense that some of the major objectives we sought were won.

What had happened however was, after we got the 18½¢ and steel got it (but we were in a fight at the time) we could have gotten 16¢ and assurances that OPA would have been maintained. OPA was the Office of Price Administration. Murray, at that time, took the position the steelworkers don't eat steel. As far as he was concerned, he was for the 18½¢ even if OPA had to go. So behind the scenes, Phil Murray was making his deal to knife OPA. The result was that in the year that followed our getting the 18½¢, the cost of living wiped it out completely in one year. Now his book began to develop, it's all on the economic level, where the suspicions began to develop and the divisions began to take place that finally tore the CIO apart. Reuther, in settling with General Motors, set a contract terminal date that was not April. He set it for later on in the year. We were for one year contracts. Steel took a two year contract, with the understanding that they could reopen the following February, and they could discuss wages for 28 days and if nothing were negotiated in that 28 days the old wages would remain in effect for another year. Well hell, the way companies can stall, it was obvious what was going to happen. And we, behind the scenes, told Murray that

It finally was settled as supplementary unemployment benefits. That took the auto workers out of the fight for the unemployment section of the social legislation that we were seeking. Instead of federal legislation with federal standards covering the entire work force, we had special legislation by one of the most profitable industries in the country for just one section of labor. That took the autoworkers out of the fight for a broad unemployment compensation program. Steel soon followed in that they also went in for S.U.B. So once you took steel and auto out of the fight for unemployment "coup," it's been dead as a doornail ever since. We have never been able really to get the labor movement off the ground on a common fight for a basic unemployment compensation program of the United States since then. The other aspect of it -- a National Health program -- Phil Murray scuttled that in 1949, the year of the split, when, to cover up his skullduggery, he announced that he had negotiated a private pension plan with the steel industry. I believe it was Republic Steel at the time, but I could be wrong on which of the companies it was, which called for \$100.00 a month including Social Security. Now Social Security at that time was \$68.50 a month, so that it amounted to something like \$31.50. Immediately after it was passed the Congress upped Social Security to \$98.50, so what it amounted to in the end was Phil Murray had negotiated a private pension program for a buck-and-a-half a month. But he played this up as the greatest thing that ever happened to labor. And what really happened was, from that point on, every union has been fighting for independent private pension programs with their employers divorced

from the Social security aspect of it, so that the best organized get a fairly decent pension program and down the line as the less organized get less, and the unorganized get whatever the boss wants to give them or nothing at all. Many of these pension programs are so loosely written that very few workers will get anything out of it. So what we had was two basic splits on two very key issues, economic issues confronting the workers -- well, three. You had the unions no longer having a common expiration date, which the steelworkers fought for in the copper strike two years ago and the courts ruled against them on it. But they had it once. They gave it away and then in a fight couldn't get it back. They gave up the fight on a broad unemployment compensation program and they gave up the fight on the social security. These three major things, plus the fact that steel in negotiating its wage increase had just a reopener where they would talk for 28 days and if nothing happened the old wage would remain in effect. So on the economic front we were beginning to divide, and it developed into a question of who was playing the bosses' game and who was playing a basic game of defending and advancing the interests and welfare of the membership. And we saw ourselves as fighting for the rank and file, and not making some cozy deal where we would get union shops out of it.

- I. You are speaking of the U.E.

R. Of the U.E. This is where the differences began. The differences began, then, to develop politically. As 1948 began to loom on the horizon, the question was who was going to be president. The Vice-President at that time was Henry Wallace. And Phil Murray and a number of others were very interested in Wallace behind the scenes. So was Sidney Hillman. But I guess somewhere along the line a switch was made and it was decided it wasn't going to be Henry. Interestingly enough, in 1946, at the Camden convention of the CIO, general Eisenhower was speaking there. And one of the newspapermen here from the Daily News, Bob Lewin, Chicago Daily News, he came to me and said, "Why is he speaking here?" And I said, "Well, I think he's being groomed for the presidency of the United States." He said, "On what ticket?" I said, "On the Democratic ticket." And a pamphlet was produced, you know, by the CIO grooming Eisenhower for president on the Democratic ticket. Well, of course, they had to put the kabosh on that, because it was becoming less and less evident that he was going to run on the Democratic ticket and more and more that he was going to run on the Republican ticket. In all of this horseplay that's going on behind the scenes, the big question was who we were going to back up in '48. Murray took the position that whatever decisions the CIO made would have to be accepted as such,, by the international unions making up the CIO and this had to be the position of these unions right down the line. But the decision was going to be made on top, and we disagreed with him on that.

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We said that as far as we were concerned in most presidential campaigns we didn't endorse anybody. We left that up to our membership, the local unions and districts. At any rate, we weren't about to accept the dictates of Phil Murray, because the way Phil Murray ran the CIO was the CIO decisions were whatever Phil Murray wanted to do. We were always confronted with an accomplished fact. He would come in and say, "Well, this is what I've done. Now this is what I'm going to do." And then it became a crisis. Do you take Phil Murray on? Do you challenge him? There was no room for discussion. It was a whole rubber-stamp operation, The democracy of the organization was being destroyed. He was running the CIO like John L. Lewis ran the miner's union. And there were too many forces in the CIO who weren't willing to accept that kind of an operation. However, where there was political agreement on Truman, that difference was papered over. Sidney Hillman could live with Murray, because they were both for Truman. So could Reuther. And so could Jim Carey, who, by the way, at that time was only the secretary of the CIO, one of the big mistakes we made, because we were not interested in destroying him as a person. When we dumped him as president of our union, we also proposed by convention that we would support him as Secretary for the CIO, would continue to support him as such. So that what we did was we continued in a position of some

significance the guy who lent himself to the destruction or near-destruction of our union. He was able to use his position as national CIO secretary as a front for the funneling in of funds and forces to destroy our union. That's another story and that takes quite a bit of telling.

What I'm trying to show you is where some major differences crept in that the general public wasn't even aware of, which was not being played up, some of the infighting that was taking place on key questions. At the time, Murray wrote what we consider that phony steel contract calling for a 28 day reopener, I wrote an article. We used to put a paper out here, and I headed it, "You are my meat." I started out by raying, "The more I hear of Phil Murray's marching song the more I'm reminded of the old hip tune 'I Surrender Dear.'" And I went to work exposing what he did, and ended up by quoting Gene Debs. I said Gene Debs admonished the American labor movement not to follow a leader. Said Gene, "A leader may lead you into the land of milk and honey. But in all probability he will lead you into the wilderness. For when a leader says, "ye are my sheep" he means, "You are my mutton." In other words," you are my meat." Well I thought nothing of the damn article, forgot about it. Slim Connelly, who was

the CIO director on the west coast got a copy of it, and without saying a word to me, had a couple hundred thousand copies of that reprinted and plastered them all over the West Coast. He was a John L. Lewis man; he was only too happy to do a job of what he thought was exposing Phil Murray. The first I heard about it was Fitzgerald called me up and said, "What the hell!"

- I. Fitzgerald here of the Chicago Federation?
- R. No, no, no the international president of our union, Albert J. Fitzgerald called me up and said, "What the hell are you doing with Phil Murray?" I said, "nothing, why?" He says, "Well there's this goddamn leaflet going all over the West Coast." I said, "I don't know what the hell's going on on the West Coast." I said, "read it to me." He started reading; I began to laugh. I said, "Oh hell, I wrote that a couple months ago in our paper. They must've got it and reprinted it." Well, that's what happened. Phil Murray never forgot that, because he was a very small man, and I remember when we were in Cleveland at the time of the split, I was on the committee that met with him. By the way, what we did was exactly what the UAW did in its fight with Meany -- we took a position. There were a number of AFL unions at that time who were attacking us and raiding our union. We took the position

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that unless these things were put an end to by Phil Murray, that we would withhold our per capita. So when we met with Phil Murray at the Hollanden Hotel --

I. This is what year now?

R. 1949. November of 1949, before the convention took place, we went in to meet with Phil Murray. We had all the newspapermen there. He had this goddamn goon squad up there. He used a goon squad, by the way. Phil Murray believed in strong-arm methods. Many is the guy who had his goddamn brains handed to him behind the means by Phil Murray. And only a petty man needs that because he couldn't rule by reason. He was always considered a soft-spoken, gentle person. Well that was a paper myth. The reality was that he was a weakling and needed strong men to beat down others. But as I said, he didn't forget the slight. I had slighted him twice. Once in 1937 when I was assigned by Lewis to help organize the steelworkers at the J. & L. plant in Aliquippa. It's a long story and I don't want to bother you with the details of it, but we had organized a plant under extremely difficult conditions.

I. Sounds like an interesting story. Go on with it.

R. It is. The character who later headed up Republic Steel, his name escapes me, was the works manager at Aliquippa at that time.

town, this along the Ohio River, here's where the plant gate is.

I. Down by the river, the main street goes down by the plant.

R. That's right. Right here at the Y.

I. Directly across from the entrance to the plant.

R. About 150 - 200 feet from the entrance of the plant, but everybody had to pass it going into and out of the town. He had this little room and we made a deal with him. At first he didn't know who we were. We told him, you know. We got to talking; we found out he was an anti-fascist who fled from Italy. For five bucks a day he let us use his office and we put up a P.A. system there and we would speak to those people for 10 hours a day because the shift would come and go, all day long. All we asked the people was, "Drag your feet when you pass by so we can get our message across." And for ten solid days all we did was talk. We'd take a half hour on, an hour and a half off, and back we'd go on. Well, after 10 days of it we were knocked out. I, as a matter of fact, had burst a blood vessel in the throat and I didn't know what was giving way. Showered the microphone with it. It turned out to be something superficial. We were convinced we'd had it now. In the meantime the workers were signing up -- not in Aliquippa, but in Ambridge across the river where there was sub-regional office of the Steelworkers Organizing

Committee. And as we reached a point where we had a majority, a good solid majority, we decided to meet with Phil Murray, Clint Golden, Dave McDonald, and Joe Timko, who was a sub-regional director at that time, and sat down with them. We pleaded with them to let us shut the plant down and Phil Murray wouldn't give his consent. Since I wasn't on the steel payroll and I wasn't responsible to Phil Murray, (I'd done this at a request of John L. Lewis to help out) after we'd been arguing for a long time, I said, "Well Phil, if you don't want to give us your okay, I'm going to call John L. Lewis." Well it was just like shoving an icicle up his ass. He hit that ceiling. And when he came down he finally said, "All right. But if you don't shut that plant down, you're all fired!" Well, hell, we left there happy as sparrows on fresh dropped horseshit, you know. We ran back there; we got there in time for one of the shift changes. We told the people not to go in, that we were shutting the plant down, and to those coming out we said, "The plant's on strike, Wait here." Well this was something new, you know. We were taking decisive action and it had to be with the consent of the workers only as we talked to them. We couldn't have a meeting. A meeting was impossible under the conditions that prevailed, Well; to make a long story short, we shut the plant down and the next morning Phil Murray, Governor Earl, Clint Golden, Dave McDonald, they were in open Cadillacs and Lincolns; they came parading through the "Y" there like conquering heroes. And those of us who had our jobs on the line,

you know, we were lost in the shadows, but we didn't mind. We accomplished what we thought was most important. We organized the plant and it was the first basic steel plant in the country to establish exclusive bargaining rights. Well that, and this article of mine, as I said, Phil Murray never forgot.

- I. We're in 1949 now.
- R. Yeah. So we're meeting in the Hollanden Hotel; we're discussing this question of per capita, this fact that other CIO unions were raiding our organization. Regional directors of the CIO were attacking us, and we didn't think that was a responsible position for the CIO to take. Phil Murray was very huffy, arrogant. The press was there, and he saw his opportunity. I looked at him with disbelief. Frankly, I didn't think that much drivel could come out of one man's mouth, and this doddering old idiot was drivelling all over the place. I must have looked at him with a face of disbelief, and so he wagged a bony finger at me, and says, "Hey Ernie, wipe that sneer off your face." "Sneering," he went on, "is a peculiarly reprehensible form of idiocy. Nothing personal, Ernie," he said, and everybody in the room laughed, you know. It was a great big joke. He had his beef squad there and I wouldn't hit the old man if he didn't have it. I might have pissed on him, but I wouldn't have bit him. So, this is how names are made. He had sold out completely, on every level -- on the economic level,

on the political level, on the organizational level. This you will never read about; this you won't hear steelworkers officials talk about. They try to play him up as a saint. He was, in my opinion, no saint, if anything, a fallen angel. And I never thought he fell very far because he was never that high. I had about as much use for him as John L. Lewis had.

Well anyway, you see there were other forces at work. But we were in a period where the Cold War was coming on. Remember, I said that I think it was in the fall of '47 when Churchill came to Fulton, Missouri. The iron curtain had been rung down. A climate had been developed in America where issues could not be discussed. And whenever you didn't want to discuss a basic issue it was a helluva lot easier to say, "He's a goddamn Red," And consequently you didn't have to discuss what he said, whether it was worthwhile or not worthwhile; and this was added to by the so-called liberals, like Douglas of Illinois, Humphrey of Minnesota. We made that little bastard, and that's all he is. I made him. He knows it. He came to my district council and praised and thanked us for the job we did. We elected him Mayor of Minneapolis.

I. You were in Minneapolis at the time?

R. Oh yes. Our union was the biggest union in town. We were there. Arid without us he couldn't have made it. Ah, I could tell you a story about him, but not now. The important thing is the liberals--

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they were played up as liberals -- but they made red-baiting respectable. They laid the basis for what became the McCarthyism that came later -- not too much later. I'm not saying that there weren't some. What the hell, you couldn't even be for a wage policy without being called a red. If you were for social security, that was a red issue now. If you were for a national federal program on wages, that was a red issue. One of the things that was said was, "The way you can tell a Communist is if he's for the short work week." You know, they had guidelines. The poor simple worker, he couldn't tell, because some things sounded so plausible. What worker's against higher wages? What worker's against a shorter work week without a loss in take-home pay? Nearly every union in the country is for it on paper now. But at that time this was a position we had advanced, and we found ourselves red baited.

Tape 2, side 2

I was commenting on Reuther, who had played such a damaging role in splitting the CIO. And after Murray died, he had become the head of the CIO. We predicted at the time that there was no room for two A.F. of L. unions in the American labor movement, that if the policies and the program of the CIO were to be a pale echo of what the A.F. of L. was doing that it would result in the end of the C.I.O. Well, our prediction became true. There was no plausible reason for the continued

existence of the CIO as a separate organization because their policies and programs began to blend, they both became red-baiters. This was the key principle upon which they operated to stifle any dissent within their own unions. You could always attack anybody who opposed the leadership and say he's an agent of Moscow and consign him to hell. They began to put into their constitutions clauses that in some unions you could not even be a member if you were a Communist. Of course, they always hung in the Fascists too, just to be equally balanced you know. But in most of the unions you could not be an officer, which essentially was what they wanted. Anybody who took an advanced position on the very economic issues I have outlined could be called a Communist, and therefore nobody could actually develop in their unions who could challenge them for leadership on an economic program, let alone a political program.

Reuther, who was an able man, and a very ambitious man, had brought the CIO into the AFL with the hope that brother Meany, who was advanced in years, would feel the pressures of retiring, and when that happened, why the mantle would pass on to Reuther. But as Meany gave no signs of dying, let alone retiring, time was running short for Reuther because the UAW constitution calls for compulsory retirement at 65. Reuther then began to think in terms of how does he challenge Meany's leadership. Now the thing that was quite different from the way Reuther went about going after Meany and Lewis after Bill Green,

is that Lewis began to develop the forces down below. I told you of how Brophy was touring the country talking to people, diverse groups, young people like myself who were interested in organizing the unorganized, Reuther was not doing this. He wasn't even meeting with union heads except two or three unions where he had established some relationship down through the years. He carried on no fight within the AFL-CIO, as Lewis did within the old AFL. Lewis championed the right of organizing the unorganized within the AFL and slugged old Bill Hutcheson in the 1935 convention; slugged him, hit him to the floor, in a bitter personal fight that developed over the issues. The way Reuther went about it was he would just fail to appear. And he completely isolated himself in the AFL-CIO, because while he talked a good fight, when the time came, he marched his troops to the top of the hill and marched them down again, time and time again. So that when the time came he found himself walking out alone. He went into the AFL with some 4¼ million people and he walked out with his own union, less than a million and a half. An alliance of convenience was established with the Teamsters to form the ALA. I say of convenience because whatever program they adopted, not much of anything has been done that I am aware of, and I am on fairly good terms now with both organizations, to put life into the program of the ALA.

I think that some men can live too long. John L. Lewis lived too long. Had John L. Lewis died just prior to his speech on Wilkie, killed in a quick plane crash somewhere, or whatever happened to him, he would have gone down as one of the great leaders of American labor, without any question. But he lived long enough to become a money grubber, to be concerned only with money and building up that big-built bank: in Washington D.C., and doing nothing to develop the strength of democracy within his own union to the point that the union, with the deals he made with the industry, grew like the cow's tail, closer and closer to the ground, where today the miner's union is hardly a factor of any importance in the American trade union movement. I think that Reuther, and I probably shouldn't say this because he was helpful to us in our G.E. Strike, I like to think it was reparations, but be that as it may it was helpful. I think that the beginnings of some new alliances were taking place, and I think they may still take place because I think America economically is going downhill. That's long range. There may be a little bump here and there. Our GNP may rise, but the living standards of the people will go down. They have been going down for nearly six years; they will continue to go down. And under this stress we're going to see more struggles. And out of these struggles we're going to see the American labor movement move leftward. What direction

leftward I don't know at this moment because there is nobody in a position to give it leadership. I think it'll be something that develops out of its own experiences, out of its own history and that's the direction in which it will move, pretty much like the British trade union movement is going. Only it'll be faster and sharper in the United States because we're a more dynamic country. Our economics are more dynamic. When we go up we go up awful fast and when we go down we go down damn fast.

- I. One final question. What's it like to be part of the leadership of a more radical union, when much of the rest of the union movement is so status quo oriented?
- R. Well. Having survived it, we are now in great demand as the people in the labor movement become more and more aware of the period we've gone through. And even some of those who've participated in our lynching, looking back on it.

- I. In '47?
- R. In '47, 50's -- who participated in attempting to destroy us, railroad us, send us to jail and just about everything else they could do. Looking back on it, some of them mellow, and some of them realize that the role they were playing were not some of the most glorious

pages in the history of labor. Some feel somewhat ashamed about it. We find ourselves more able to deal with these people than we were ever able to do before. We have established a good relationship with the UAW, with a number of leaders in the Teamsters Union. I say a number of leaders, because the Teamsters union is not some homogeneous outfit; it's like a Chinese warlord operation; each business agent or each president of each district council or joint council of the Teamsters is a power within himself and pretty much establishes the conditions within his little fiefdom. We have good relations with the IUE, oh not the best, but we have a common problem. We're both tied to GE and Westinghouse; we're the only two unions that have national contracts with the industry and we're compelled for just straight economic reasons. We can't get very far without the other.

- I. Was this the case also in the '50's with the I.U.E.?
- R. Oh, in GE and Westinghouse, nobody got anywhere. Prior to the split, we used to lead in industry on economic conditions. We were the first to get holidays with pay, vacations with pay, first to develop any number of things that aren't in contracts at all today. But we're way behind the eight-ball on that now. And we have fallen so far behind that we could not go through another contract. See, if something began to happen, you've heard the term Boulwarism from Lemuel Boulware, who was head of labor relations in General Electric? He had a policy of saying that the company will make a careful study of the conditions

that and we proposed the get-together.

I. When did this get-together happen?

R. Oh, we first started out, I would say, about 7 years ago.

I. 1963?

R. '63 when we had behind the scenes meetings, when we would see each other. One or two members of their conference board or their committee would meet with ours, off the record, on a semi-official or semi-unofficial basis. Then 3 years later it was a little more official but not open. And no binding agreements -- just understandings would be arrived at, where we would let each other know and we would essentially agree that one would not settle without the other. But that hadn't paid off, not enough anyway. It was obvious that we would have to go beyond that, so that by the time last year rolled around we had pretty well established that there was a need for coordinated bargaining. And it may surprise you to know that we got 2 checks signed by George Meany. They would never admit we were part of the coalition, but when it came time to pass out the checks, we got checks from George Meany.

I. These checks were for what?

R. For strike -- you know. They raised a fund for the G.E. strikers and they could not ignore the fact that we were a part of the G.E. setup. We were the second largest union dealing with G.E. We were the ideological

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leaders. These other guys, the IUE didn't have one single experienced person, Jennings, it was his first time up dealing with G.E., Fitzmorris, the Secretary-Treasurer, his first time up. He had just been made Secretary-Treasurer. The new guy, Shambaugh was a very decent guy, but he was green. It was his first negotiations with G.E. Well, you can't negotiate with an old pro outfit like G.E. with a crew that had never been tried. So the only people who had experience dealing with G.E. was us. And they had to rely on us. They didn't know what the hell to do without us. That company is as clever as can be. So we were indispensable to the situation and we found ourselves being helped by the UAW. They put money into our campaign, and the AFL-CIO put money into our strike. Well, they didn't put in a helluva lot, but it was helpful. And it was helpful, and I think they had to do it, obviously, because of the pressures and what's new in the labor movement. There is something new happening. The workers don't go for the raiding anymore. They don't see that it strengthens anybody. What the hell, a worker's paying his dues to the I.A. of M. or to the U.A.W. or to the Steelworkers or to the Teamsters, not to raid some other union, but to do something for him. And if he wants anything, he wants unity of labor. He doesn't want labor at each other's throats. So the pressures are on. And they couldn't ignore the fact that we were an indispensable part of the fight, and you can't help part of it. The funny part of it was that the I.U.E., which started out with a helluva lot more money, two weeks before the end of the strike had to cut off their strike benefits, because they continued to live high

on the hog. While negotiations would go on in New York, they would stay in one of the fancier hotels there, the Barclay, which is a very fancy hotel on Lexington, not too far from the Waldorf-Astoria, where their daily room rent was twice what our was. Oh, we stayed at the Abbey -- Victoria, it's just a commercial hotel. And towards the end, they got so broke they began to stay at the Abbey. Because we were meeting each day, it was a helluva lot easier to be in the same hotel . Things like that were going on.

Well, what's it like today? I would say, generally speaking, our position is better. We've grown. First we've proved that we can take good hard positions on whatever the workers' interests might be, defending those interests. That means taking on the companies, fighting them, fighting them at the factory level, fighting them at the political level, fighting them at the legislative level -- wherever that fight takes us. We can do that and survive. We not only can do that and survive, but we can do that with the rest of the labor movement trying to tear us apart. Well, if you can't whip 'em, you've got to figure out what the hell have these guys got. Most of the labor movement is scared stiff of the bosses, afraid of a fight, Sometimes when inventories are right, a strike can be helpful to the company. That's not a strike. There's no real battle going on when the company shuts the plant gate and supplies you with a truck or a van or a trailer for your pickets to stay in, and provides you with coffee and doughnuts on the picket line, as happens in some of

these strikes. Ours were knock-down drag-outs. In the face of that we've survived and we've grown. We're picking up membership, we're organizing workers, and generally speaking, I would say that there's an esprit de corps in our operation that's a helluva lot higher than it is in others. We've taken advanced positions on the black question, on the women's question. Generally speaking, you name the question, we've had a pretty advanced position on it all along the line, and we've proven that you can bring the membership along with you on these advanced positions. If you can fight, you can defend the interests of the workers and you can advance them. Now we know that we're not changing the character of society. As a collective bargaining agency, you can't have collective bargaining unless there's a company with which to bargain. So, despite all the attacks made against us and the advanced positions we have taken, ours is not a revolutionary operation. I have some question in my mind as to whether any union operating under the conditions that prevail here can be. That doesn't mean that here and there, there aren't some people with even more advanced thoughts than we have, but we have to be very practical; we have to assess our people, and since they have to do the fighting, they have to make the decision as to whether or not they'll take on the fight. So there's no such thing as being ordered from somebody afar. The I.U.E. gave up the notion. In outfits like G.E. and Westinghouse where there

are conference boards, it's the conference board that decides the strikes; it's the conference board that settles the strikes or settles the negotiations. They don't have to bring it to a referendum of the membership, We think that the membership, since it's their job, their wages, and their working conditions, they should have the final say on what to propose to the company, whether or not they'll accept what the committee has negotiated, and whether or not they'll strike based upon that report.

- I. As a postscript, you mentioned before you had a story about Hubert Humphrey that you said was too long to go into. I wonder if you could now.
- R. Well, I'll capsulize it for you. Our people were very unhappy with the level of politics in the city of Minneapolis at the time. Bear in mind that Minnesota had a Farmer-Labor Party and was far to the left of the New Deal in its approach to legislation and other matters, farm programs, worker's programs. So that when the job of mayor was open, the workers there decided if they couldn't have somebody that the labor movement could agree on for a labor mayor, that we ought to have someone who was a friend of labor. We cast around looking. And there was an extremely voluble instructor at the University of Minnesota whose name was Triple-H, Hubert Horatio Humphrey. We met with him, and I'll be frank with you, it wasn't very easy to get in a word edgewise with him; once he got talking, like a triphammer,

nothing stopped him. But he seemed to guess what was on our minds and what issues we were interested in. He would touch all bases -- not too thoroughly, rather vaguely, but he was at least the beat of whatever there was available at the time. So we agreed that we would support him for the office of Mayor of Minneapolis. He said he would like to have that job and we felt, well, there's nothing wrong. The mayor's position isn't too damned important, but we ran him and we lost. The next time, you know, we had made some mistakes, so we operated much more carefully. We threw our whole staff into it; we put a lot of money into it.

- I. So this is the I.U. itself, or the labor council in Minneapolis?
- R. The U.E. That was in the 40's where the CIO had not split yet, but there was still the division between the AFL and the CIO, and for all practical purposes we were the CIO in Minnesota at the time, particularly in Minneapolis. The Steelworkers had the range up near Duluth, but they had next to nothing and the auto workers had next to nothing in Minneapolis then. We had agreed to support him and we did. And we took people out of the shops. We paid them their lost time, "Go ahead and do the job." The locals in the district all worked on this. We did a pretty credible job, enough of a credible job that he came to our next district council meeting and he wanted to personally thank us for the job we had done and assured our district council delegates that he would

never forget w&t we had done for him.

And I must admit that he's lived up to his word. He's never forgotten, because he's never lost an opportunity to cut our throats. After he'd been mayor for a while, I had occasion to see him about something. He was red-baiting. And since we were getting a lot of that kind of flack around, I went to see him about it. And I said to him, "Mr. Mayor, you're engaging in some red-baiting and I'm kind of surprised about that. Why do you do it?" He said, "Well, you've got to understand Ernie, that I have to do it." I And I said, "Well, you don't have to do anything. Why do you feel you have to do it?" He says, "Well, my credentials as a liberal would be suspect if I didn't red bait ." I And I said, 'Well, Jesus Christ, how do you distinguish yourself from from ordinary red-baiter? What's to distinguish you from anybody else that red-baits? So this guy does it because he's a right-wing son-of-a-bitch and you do it because you're a liberal. What's the difference?"

Well, we got to talking and it was clear that he had other ambitions. In the course of that discussion, he wanted to change the subject . He was telling me how popular he'd become and how he'd received a whole series of letters from Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. With these letters were honorariums, one thousand, fifteen hundred, two thousand, up to sire three thousand dollars -- and mind you, in the 1940's that was pretty good money just to come down and speak.

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debts . And while we were instrumental in helping him become mayor, he was for bigger fish than that. And by that time we were not so appreciative of our handiwork. We realized that while we thought we were doing something for the people, we were doing something to them. We'd been taken. He knows it. We know we have been taken. We know each other personally and he never loses an opportunity even to this day where he doesn't use his political office to stick a knife in us somewhere. The day after his election --

I. To the Senate?

R. Yes, this month. We had a case pending before the N.L.R.B. The company screamed bloody murder. This was a company we know in the past contributed to his campaigns and --

1. Can you tell me which company this is?

R. Yeah, I don't mind telling you. It's now the Dyson-Kissner Co., but the plant up there which they've taken over is the Northwest Automatic Products and the K.P. Manufacturing Co., two plants, same company, in one building; one side is K.P. and the other side is Northwest Automatic Products . We had a labor board petition pending. We'd had a hearing; it was pending before the board and the board was dragging its feet.

The company was screaming bloody murder that we had created conditions that had made it impossible for the workers to have their minds free. And they held up on it. The day after the election, they came down and gave the company what they wanted. And I happened to be in Minneapolis at that time, and I said to the guys up there, "This is a political decision, and you know it." Nothing gaddamn wrong with that record. They're insisting on another hearing which started this morning, which only delays things. Companies, over the weekend, said to one of the people what Senator Humphrey has said about us. Now they wouldn't have used his name without his O.K. That was just this past weekend. So this guy may be a liberal to some people but we'll be buying what the Italian people bought when they bought that "Socialist" Mussolini. That's what we'll be buying if we ever take him. And I don't think the American people will. We don't need a gasbag in the White House. The people can be asphyxiated without it. And I don't think they're ready for asphyxiation.

I. Thank you very much.

End

Oral History Project

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Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

Ernest De Maio
Signature of interviewee

Interview with Ernest De Maio

February 23, 1972

Interviewer: Elizabeth Balanoff

I: Okay, now lets start with your Chicago experience today.

R: I had just completed some organizational assignments in Ohio and I was asked by the International Union to take my choice of three different situations: California, Iowa, or Chicago. Since I was quite cocky in those days, I asked for the toughest assignment. They said that was Chicago and I said, "Fine, I'll go to Chicago." I was told I would have a beautiful set-up here. When I got here I found that we were operating in a small two-room office on Madison Avenue in the middle of skid row. We had very little organization here at the time, a small local of tool and die makers and a small local of electrical workers. There was a third local, headed up by Earl McGrew, who was very closely tied in with Jim Carey, who didn't work with us and never amounted to much of anything.

I decided at first to make a thorough survey of Chicago--the various sections of our industry, the electronic and radio industry, the machine-tool

industry, and the optical-machine industry. We set ourselves the task of first establishing a base of operation so that we would have sufficient funds coming in here and forces with which to do the job. All of our organizational campaigns were based on the idea that since we had no money that we were getting from the CIO, it was a boot-strap operation, that we would have to get people, and people would build the organization.

We set ourselves first the goal of picking up a number of small shops. This was important because Carey had just come into town and indicated that we were heading in for a fight and that I had better line up with him--or else. And since I wasn't too happy with the way Carey was operating and I'd just got into Chicago (we were having a convention in Camden in September) I felt we would have to build up some organization. We had twenty-one weeks to go and we set ourselves the goal of organizing twenty-one plants in the twenty-one weeks, which we did. We met our goal.

The most interesting one (it's out of business now) was a plant on Western Boulevard called Ampro Products-Ansel Munson Production. Ansel Munson was the president. They were putting out a

16-millimeter sound projector at the time. I was passing down Western Boulevard one day, and I said to one of the organizers with me, "Let's organize that plant tomorrow." He says, 'You don't know anybody there?' I said, "no." He said "How are you going to do it?" I said "Look, we'll get out there, we'll call up the shop, find out what time the plant opens. We'll be there forty-five minutes before it opens. I'll take the main gate, you take the secondary gate. What we'll do is, we'll stop the people coming in and say the Plant's on strike."

I: Just the two of you?

R: Just like that, just the two of us. We proceeded on that basis. People would say to me, "Strike? I didn't know we were on strike." And I'd say 'You haven't been attending your union meetings, have you?' He said, "No." I said, "See, if you don't attend your meetings you don't know what's going on." To make a long story short we shut the plant down. Then the question was what to do with them. We didn't know the name of a single worker in the plant. I decided to take the people around the side of the plant, where there was some parking space. I suggested that they

break up by departments, and each department pick their own steward and hand in the name of the stewards to me. We would make that our Bargaining Committee. We would go in and meet with the Company.

I: Did they ever ask who you were?

R: Oh, I told them who I was. In the meantime, we'd passed out the cards. We'd signed practically everybody up. Now I had not only the names of everybody in the shop, but I had a Shop Committee, elected by the workers. We went in, met with the company. He said that if the people wanted a union he would recognize it without any trouble. So we went in with the Committee; we showed him the cards. He stalled and we immediately filed for an election with the NLRB. To make a long story short, we won the election.

Now, that's some of the means we used. We were operating on the basic fact that the conditions of the workers were so bad, that if we took forceful action we could rally the people. It proved out right. Having gotten the base of operations, we then decided to concentrate on the major plants in our industry in this area. We set ourselves the goal of Stewart-Warner, which the UAW had attempted to organize and failed; We set ourselves

Sunbeam, Danley Machine, Miehle-Press, and Foot Brothers Gear. These plants, of course, were large plants at that time and we didn't win them overnight. Steel had attempted to organize Foot Brothers Gear, had a number of workers fired, and so we had to overcome the fear in that situation. But it was expanding. A lot of new people were coming in who weren't aware of the past failures, and we built our organization on them. To make a long story short, we succeeded in organizing all of these major objectives.

Then, of course, we were adding on organizers. We broke the city down into sections and we would clean out a section, one after another, with the results that we built the largest union in the city of Chicago. While this was going on, unfortunately, we got involved with World War II and I found myself in the early part of 1942 without any organizers. Here I had a hell of a big union. We'd done a big organizational job in Minneapolis, the same as we had done down here, and had no one to service these new plants. Of course, we had to get whatever the Army didn't want, women, old men, 4-Per's, and we managed to hold the union together with these people.'

It was obvious, even during the war, that there would be a battle for leadership, not only in our union, which was never a serious problem, but in the CIO as such. Herb March was the president of the Chicago CIO Council. The AF of L didn't amount to much in the mass production industries then. The Teamsters had not beefed up their organization. The struggle was between ourselves and the Steel Workers. Germano wanted to dominate the economic scene, because he wanted to dominate the political operation--complete tie-in with City Hall.

I: Can you go into that, a little in detail?

R: Yeah, I'll give you an 'interesting story on how the thing operated. Kelly was then the Mayor of Chicago and because we had done a good job in his election, I forget which one that was, he asked the CIO to appoint a person that he would see to it would become a judge. Immediately I became wooed by Sam Levin of the Clothing Workers, and Riskin, also of the Clothing Workers, To make a long story short, it developed that Sam Levin had a son who was a lawyer and Riskin, also of the Amalgamated, had a son who was a lawyer, and they were 'playing little games with themselves as to

who would get our blessing. It was finally decided. Because of the bitterness in that situation, we told the Amalgamated people to resolve their situation and that whoever they picked would be our choice. I forget who they picked, whether it was the young Levin or the young Riskin because it didn't matter.

The Committee that went to meet with Kelly was made up of Sam Levin, Herb March, Matson of the Auto Workers, Joe Germano and I. We presented our proposal to Kelly, and Kelly said, "Well, I'm a little bit now in doubt as to what to do". We'd called a meeting before we went to meet with Kelly and we had complete agreement on the man that we were going to nominate. So when we were meeting with Kelly he looked at Joe Germano. He says, 'You know I got a call from Phil Murray this morning, and that Phil Murray asked me for this guy.' It turns out they give us a complete machine hack, who had handled one arbitration case for the Steel Workers in some situation. That gave him a worker background.

I: But he wasn't your choice?

R: No, he wasn't our choice and Joe Germano and Kelly walked off with the prize.

I: Was he Germano's choice?

R: He was Germano's choice also. It was a complete humiliation of this Committee, with everyone else accepting the fact that this was the way power moves were made. But I wasn't prepared to accept the fact, even though I had no man and wasn't proposing anybody. I thought that we were being treated pretty shabbily and I expressed that. Well, we had any number of cross battles taking place on any issue you can think of. And it was clear that as far as the delegates of the City Council were concerned the so-called "left forces" were in control. At an election we had in the engineering building where the steel workers' John Dougherty had his office, when the time came to vote, what they usually do is have a test vote on some technical questions. When they saw they didn't have the delegates there, they put the lights out and wouldn't permit the election to take place. I don't know whether Herb told you about that or not.

The State CIO was run pretty much the same way. I was the Vice-President of the State CIO, so was Joe. Sam Levin was President. It was a complete rubber stamp operation. I'll give you an

idea of just how we were used for window-dressing. I was appointed to, I think they called it the Community Chest then, or the War Chest, I don't know, anyway it was the Red Cross and all of the other agencies - the Red Feather Campaign, Community Campaign. I was put on the Executive Board and Sam Levin was also on the Executive Board. The Unions dealing with these agencies (the Welfare Union) worked out a whole list of demands that I should present to this Executive Board that they were interested in. So I went there with this list of demands. We met in the Board Room of the Continental Bank. It was a lunch hour meeting, and just before lunch I met with Sam, and I told him I had this list, and I said, "**When** do I get a chance to present this?" **He** said, "You'll **see**". And while **I'm** whispering to him, somebody had gotten up and mumbled a few words, and someone said, "The motion is to approve." It was carried and then everybody got up to leave. And I said, "**What** happened?" **He** said, "That was the meeting." Well, I got off that lousy board. I went back and told the Welfare Workers we were being used for window-dressing and I again resent that approach.

Later on when Martin Kennelly was running for

mayor, we met with him and we met with Jake Arvey. Jake Arvey spent a great deal of time trying to convince us what a liberal he was, and how he had a labor background, his family worked for a living. It was sickening to listen to this guy try to convince us how good he was. We went to meet with Martin Kennelly next and Martin Kennelly said that he was going to be entirely independent. He was making no commitments to anyone, because he wanted to be entirely free to administer the city for the best interest of all of the people, which was a lot of crap, Well to make a long story short he got elected. We had a meeting of the state CIO and he's brought up, as is **usual** with AF of L and CIO meetings. They got a bunch of worn-out political hacks who berated us and this makes it impossible to carry on any work. But he got up there and to my amazement (Our delegation was sitting up front center) he said how he had lived up to every commitment he had made to labor. And I let it out just as clear as could be, so everybody in the hall could hear, 'That's right Mr. Mayor, but you didn't make any commitments". Well, he became completely rattled, he didn't know what to say, he looked around and then mumbled a few

words and got off the platform.

Well, I was Chairman of the Resolutions Committee at that convention, on which were four steel workers. The resolutions were basically economic resolutions passed unanimously in the Committee.

I was reporting them out to the Convention, when somebody said "Look out De Maio!" There I am on the platform at the Amalgamated Headquarters there, reading off the resolution, when some big guy came at me (turned out later to be a guy by the name of McBride, who is now the Regional Director of the Steel Workers in Missouri, but at that time he had been a heavy weight wrestling champion of Missouri, or some damned thing or other) and he gave me a karate chop. I was able to deflect the blow by moving, but he hit me hard enough on the side of the temple that my head rang for two weeks.

I: What happened to him, did they grab him or something?

R: No, they were quite willing to let him beat the hell out of me. I have to tell you, that at that time soaking wet I probably weighed 120 lbs. I let out a roar that I wasn't going to be blackmailed into submission by the steel workers. And what was evident was the steel workers were making

their move to take over the state CIO. They just brushed Sam Levin aside, and eventually Joe Germano took it over. When Joe Germano took it over Frank Annunzio became the Legislative Representative of state CIO. Germano moved in on the State CIO and the City CIO, just like Capone moved in on the rackets in Chicago. The same techniques--strong-armed muscle men. There were quite a few people beaten up at that convention. Newspapers said nothing about it and therefore only those who were present knew about it. Of course, those who were on the so-called winning side pooh-poohed it. Those on the losing side screamed bloody murder, but there was no one to listen, because who could you talk to but your own friends?

I: Can you remember who some of the others were? Or is that too difficult?

R: Who were beaten up?

I: Yea, who were beaten up at that particular session.

R: I remember John Schaffer of the Farm Equipment Workers, who was a little fellow also. They didn't go after any more of our guys, because we had a number of delegates there. We had some pretty big sized guys- six feet and more, and wherever I went they went with me. Now these other guys didn't

come near because they were cowards basically, they were bullies.

I don't know whether Herb got it or not; somebody from packing got it, but who it was I don't know. The steel delegation was completely under Germano's control. A vote wouldn't have been permitted by a delegate from any one of their locals. If it had been I suppose they would handle it the same way they handled us, or they handled it before they even got there. An interesting side light to that-- Sam Levin, who was supposed to be chairing the meeting just before I introduced this resolution, left the chair, turned it over to someone else (I don't remember who because I was just opening up the reading of the resolution) and he didn't come back until it was all over. Then he came to me and said "What happened?". I said "You know goddam well what happened." We used to have all our savings accounts in the Amalgamated bank and the very next Monday we just yanked them all out of there. He called up and said we shouldn't blame the bank for what happened at the State CIO Convention. I said, "You're the same damned people, you're the President of the bank, you're the President of the State CIO, and as far as I'm concerned

if I'm no good for one, you're no good for the other."

Along with what I told you in the earlier tapes about what was happening in the National CIO, it was obvious that we were moving towards, not a struggle over policy. We found ourselves in this rather embarrassing situation; Phil Murray would give us the resolutions at the National Conventions, provided some concessions were made to him in organization. So we got the resolutions, and he consolidated his position within the organization. More and more control was concentrated in his hands. We found out that when we tried to give life to resolutions which were adopted by the CIO, we were being attacked and red baited for pursuing CIO policy. It was clear, therefore, that the CIO resolutions were nothing more than window-dressing, were never intended to be acted upon. They were intended to be passed at a convention and then filed, shelved, and forgotten. We realized that although there were differences in policy, the difference was that while we wanted to pursue the policies they didn't want to.

From that point of view we ran into any number of struggles, and they had one CIO Regional Director here after another whose job was to try

to do a wrecking job. They decided that it wasn't so easy to tackle us. They would go after some of the smaller, weaker CIO unions, and in the process pretty well destroyed them. What they decided to do with us was --wherever we were carrying out organizational campaigns, the CIO in it's own name would put out leaflets attacking us as Reds, attacking us as sell-out artists, that we were working with the Boss. Now how the hell you could be both, you know? But there was a lot of ignorance on this question at that time and they figured if one way didn't win it the other way would. The result was our organizational campaigns began to grind to a halt. If you're part of the CIO and the CIO is going to the people that you're trying to organize and attacking you in a most unprincipled manner, organization is impossible.

We began to have very bitter disagreements with Operation Dixie. All the international unions of the CIO put up a big chunk of money to organize the unorganized in the south; They took the position that they wanted our money, but they didn't want any UE organizers down there. Also if they organized any plants that would fit into our industry, they would not turn them over to us. Well,

we decided that we need that like we need a hole in the head. We'd put a half a million dollars into it and if the result was going to be we're going to be slapped around and other people are going to be given people in our industry, we eventually pulled out of it. We said it couldn't go anywhere, since the purpose wasn't really to concern themselves with the needs and the interest of the workers, but how to get more members to strengthen what was essentially a bankrupt policy.

Well we were right, it got nowhere. They didn't know how to handle the black question. They didn't know how to handle the question of the southern white worker, with the result that the whole campaign failed. They had a Regional Director by the name of Harris, and there was another one by the name of Mike Mann, whose name you may have heard of. Mike Mann played the role of--he was Jewish, he claimed to have been born in Ireland, and he cultivated an Irish accent. You'd think you were talking to Mike Quill whenever you heard him talk. These fellows had absolutely nothing on the ball. They could not do anything constructive, but with the aid of the employers and the political machine and other sections of the labor movement, they

could destroy. It's a hell-of-a lot easier to de-, story. It takes an awful long time to put up a building, but one man with a bomb can blow it up overnight.

Now these guys decided that if they could not take over our union, they would participate in it's destruction. They would come to meetings of our local unions, you know, and attack us and our policies, at the same time taking our per capita. So I was one of those who took a very strong position in our union: To hell with these guys, they can't take our money and use that to destroy us, too. This is an unheard of approach. After all the CIO was first brought together under Lewis's domination, but the whole concept of it was where the workers would be able to build up their own unions and control them. And since that policy was being abandoned and destroyed, we began to recognize that the CIO and the policies upon which it was founded were being abandoned.

Well, to make a long story short, they opened up attacks at us in all of the major plants that we had, at the shop gates, at the same time that the companies were working within. On April 1, 1949, we had three shops that fired five hundred

officers and stewards of our union; Stewart-Warner, Sunbeam and Foot Brothers Gear.

If you will recall in the spring of 1949 it was our first post-World War II recession. We had this situation where everybody was fearful of, "Are we going back to the Depression?".

I: Could they fire shop-stewards?

R I'll come to that. We found ourselves with heavy layoffs, and our entire leadership fired, in a very poor position to strike the plants. So we filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board and we took the Stewart-Warner case first because that seemed to be the most obvious. We went to the NLRB and presented our case. To make a long story short the NLRB ruled after a long time, that these people were not fired for union activity, that they were fired because of their loyalty, and that if the company had a reasonable doubt as to their loyalty it could fire them. They were fired and black-listed.

Then, of course, the Wagner Act was amended, the Taft-Hartley came in, the non-communist affidavit came along with it. We were a union which took the position--to hell with the ,Taft-Hartley Act, you know, We're not going to sign those lousy

affidavits. We took the position that the British Trade Union Movement took on a similar law passed in England last year by the Heath government. The whole labor movement refused to go along with it. The policy, of course, is falling by the wayside. If we took the position of the Labor Movement and refused to line up on this, it would die of it's own weight. But, as we said at the time, they acted as though it was a chow line. They all lined up there and were anxious to get in on it'.

With that kind of a situation we found ourselves in this sort of a position in most of the major companies we were dealing with--all another union had to do was to send a telegram to the company and say, "We represent the majority of your employees Therefore, you continue to negotiate with the UE at your own risk". And the company would say, "Well, now there is some question as to who represents our employees." This is the position that Stewart-Warner took before they fired the two hundred-fifty officers and stewards there. Our position was, "Well, we've got people." The company said to us, "Well, if you will agree to extend the contract for another year without a

wage raise, we will recognize you, but if you insist on having a wage raise, then we do not recognize you and we will have to see what's behind this telegram sent by Frank Darling of Local 1031 of the IBEW.1'' So we had the intervention of the IBEW to prevent us from getting a wage increase at Stewart-Warner.

Sunbeam--we were able to strike because just before they fired, the IAM, which had taken the Tool Room from us there, lined up in single file. Captain George Barnes of the Police Labor Detail saw to it that all those who wanted to scab could go through the single file of IAM Tool and Die Makers.

In Elkay in Cicero where we had a long and bitter strike, the Teamsters made a deal with the company to get the people back to work. In Brad Foot Gear, where we had a strike, the Teamsters took one plant. They had two plants. One they called American Gear, and the other the Brad-Foot Gear. There are two gear companies; there was Foot Brothers and Brad-Foot Gear. They had been connected in the past some time. The brothers broke up, I guess. We found ourselves being attacked by the Steel Workers, and the Teamsters. We had the

people on strike and the Teamsters are organizing the workers good to go back to work. The Auto Workers did pretty much the same thing in a whole number of plants.

I: It was really a concerted thing?

R: Yes, the IUE would take the position, if another union raided our plant and they couldn't win it-- (They were once part of the UE). They got out because they said we were not a democratic union, that we were a bunch of Reds, and that we were not concerned about the needs or interests of workers, that if they couldn't see themselves voting for the IUE, then vote for whoever else is up, the IBEW, the IAM, the Teamsters, the Steel Workers, or whoever the hell it was. So, the purpose was to destroy the union.

Now, let's take Sunbeam, which is still a large plant. We were raided there by 1031 of the IBEW. We had an election. We defeated them by a plurality of over thirteen hundred votes. The very next day the company called in the machinists, who were not on the ballot; who were not attempting to organize the workers, and signed a contract with them for the membership for the whole plant.

I: How can,they do that?

R: Well, this is how they did it. There was a Regional Director here by the name of George Bott. We had signed our affidavits, but the Board in Washington had taken the position that trustees were not members of the Executive Board. They were not policy making people and therefore did not have to sign affidavits. Our trustees in that local had not signed. At the same time our business agent in that local was going phony. We find this out later. What he did was--he didn't have the trustees sign. We took it to Bott, the Regional Director, and Bott ruled that it was okay, the trustees did not have to sign. However, in the process of all this, Regional Director Bott became the General Counsel of the Board. The Taft-Hartley boys had been reorganized so that the key person was the General Counsel. So, when the case was appealed from Chicago, General Counsel Bott overruled Regional Director Bott, the same person, with the result that our election was declared null and void.

I: That's ridiculous.

R: Yes. A plurality of thirteen hundred votes' more--than the IBEW, and our election was declared null and void and the IAM went unchallenged as the recognized union, never had an election there for the

people. So you see, here's how the Taft-Hartley Law was used. The Farm Equipment Workers were in the process of being destroyed. The UAW put one raid after another on their plants. They were broke, they came to us. We said, "Fine, we'll take you in." We took them in the fall of 1949. Three years later, it was the day after Labor Day, 1952, we shut down the Harvester plants all over the country, and at that time there were four major Harvester Plants we had in Chicago.

The day that the strike took place, the House Unamerican Activities Committee had subpoenaed me to appear before the Committee. We had about three thousand of our strikers who left the picket lines, marched around the Old Court House. (They're building the new Federal Building there now in the Loop.) Then while I was inside there, they stormed the Courthouse singing, We'll hang Chairman Wood to a sour apple tree". Wood was Chairman of the Committee at the time. Herb was called up later in the week. Before the week was over Chairman Wood had a heart attack.

I: Never finished?

R: Never finished.

I: Did they call off the hearing?

R: They called off the hearing. The whole purpose of that was to create the kind of situation that would weaken our collective bargaining position with the company, with the UAW raiding us, and the UAW did. In every one of our situations, the UAW was organizing the people for a back to work movement. Went on 1015 West 120th Street at the Pullman Plant. The UAW managed to get a majority of the people to scab, to return to work. We decided we weren't going to call them scabs, we'd call them returnees. The UAW then filed, after the strike was over, for elections in all of these plants. We had a real merry-go-round. We defeated the UAW in that round of raids. This, despite the fact, you know, that it appeared that because the workers had gone to work, we were going to lose them. We won it in McCormack Works, we won it in Pullman, we won it in the Twine Mill and we won it in the old Tractor Works. (Tractor, McCormack, and the Twine Mill are now gone, i.e. shut down.)

The whole objective was one of total collaboration with the Boss, on both domestic policy and foreign policy. Nobody thought in terms of what was good for labor--that destroying the union didn't strengthen the Labor Movement, but actually it

guttled it. The way the gutting took place in our union, of course, they were open about it. The corporations decided they were not going to get the support of the union leadership to clean out the radicals from the plants. Therefore, they cleaned them out. There may have been maybe two members or three members of the Communist Party in Stewart-Warner, but they weren't taking any chances. They fired two hundred fifty, Anybody that took an active position in the union, anyone who fought on grievances, anyone who was for the policies of our union, which they helped formulate (so why shouldn't they be for them) was cleaned out.

Here's the way the McCarthyites worked in that period. Interestingly enough, McCarthy never touched us in Wisconsin; that was his home base. We were a fairly good sized union there, and he wasn't about to antagonize his own voters. But here in the rest of the country they would do it this way. I'll give you' an example: We had the Taft-Hartley Law and 9-11, which required you to sign an affidavit each-year that you were not a member of the Communist Party and you were not a Communist. Of course, if you perjured your affidavit you were subject to a five year rap and-a

ten thousand dollar fine. They would announce that they were going to hold hearings.

I'll give you a specific example: Schenectady, New York. We were the union recognized by General Electric Company. The House UnAmerican Activities Committee Chairman Walters announced that they were going to subpoena some members of our union there. It turns out it's the whole Executive Board. The IUE opens up a raid on us to coincide with the hearings. The Company announced that if any of their employees were called before a Congressional Committee, unless they answered all of the questions they would be fired. Well, this GE dominates Schenectady. If you don't work for GE, get thrown out of GE, your chances of getting a job are pretty slim. You have to pull stakes and leave the town. So they called these 'men in and the first question, of course, is, "Are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" If he doesn't answer the question he gets fired. If he says yes, he's caught on the Taft-Hartley 9H. If he says yes, the only way he gets off the hook is to provide a whole bunch of names to the Committee to feed the witch hunt. If he said no, they had some informer in the wings

who would come out and say that he was a member of the Communist Party, belonged to the same group or cell that person did, and he collected his dues and, therefore, he knew that this man had perjured himself when he said no. So there was no way of beating the rap. Once called, the Shop workers got cleaned out.

The UAW, the Steel, the IUE, the IAN, the IBEW participated with the Committee in fingering people in plants that they had just taken over from us, or plants that they had that they weren't 'certain that they could control. So we had there an almost unbelievable combination.

The Catholic Church, at that time much more monolithic than it is today, had an organization known as The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. There was a Father Rice and Father Smith, both Jesuits, They headed up this ACTU and what they would do is find out who the 'Catholics were in the particular parish where they worked, and organize among them to destroy the union from within. It's interesting to note that a few years back, when we had a convention in Pittsburgh, that Fr. Rice, now a Monseigneur, came to Fitzgerald, the president of our Union, asked if he could speak to

the convention. He wanted to purge himself of the harm he had done when he helped to destroy our union.

I: Really? I never heard that.

R: Yes, but we told him no, he would have to make his peace somewhere else. We were not going to give him a platform.

I: It would have been nice to get it down on paper though somewhere, wouldn't it?

R: Oh, he has written. He has admitted that it was the biggest mistake he ever made. But he couldn't undo his mistake any more than any of the others could. With the war in Korea, the heat was unbelievable. As a matter of fact I have a leaflet here which we printed up twenty-five thousand copies of, at 'that time, and distributed to the shop workers, in which we took on the Korean War--took it on front center.

I : You must have been the only one who did.

R: Well, we were being red-baited, We were told that we were against the United States and we were supporting the Koreans, and I said the biggest mistake we could make was to be silent on it. We couldn't support the war. Therefore, the only position we could take was to take on the war itself, show what was wrong about it, why it was wrong for the country,

that our whole objective there was to provide a low wage area for American big business. I'll show it to you when we get through. It's quite a leaflet! Our job in that period was how the hell do you survive under these circumstances.

I: Kind of amazing that you did.

R: Yeah, we managed nevertheless, and I suppose we learned something from the animals, you know. You learn to assimilate yourself into the background. I believe that: 1) having taken an advanced position on any number of policies, to abandon that position would have been wrong, so I continued to fight for the advanced policies I always believed in. I was able to influence the union on these things, because I'd been either the secretary or the chairman of Resolutions Committee for as long as I can remember. We fought for those policies in the District Council, in our local unions. The debate would go on, rage all throughout this entire period. We were fighting for the minds of our people.

Now nobody was foolish enough to go out and say, "I'm a member of the Communist Party." For heaven's sake, the FBI and everyone else was hunting them down, tracking them down. Life was im-

possible for them. You know they'd say, "If you are one, why don't you admit you're one? Why don't you be proud of what you are?" Very simple for the guy to say it because all you're saying is, "I'm ready for suicide". "Here, I'm through living. Destroy me, destroy my family, destroy my friends." That kind of a thing didn't happen.

Now the problem was how to continue these advanced positions and survive. To have abandoned progressive unionism, we might as well have done that when we were a big union. We might as well have kow-towed to Murray and kow-towed to all of the bastards, become part of the whole machinery to gut the content of the unions and become company unionized. As we said at the time, the CIO could not prevail, it could not survive, because there was no need for two AF of L's in the, Labor Movement. It was obvious that once they had pursued the same policies that the AF of L pursued, they went into the AF of L and became the AF of L-CIO. -They generally felt at home there, and still do. We decided that we would have to do the best possible job we could. We concentrated on "in-the-shop" issues, what was troubling the workers, and we fought at that level. We fought at every level

that the workers' interest showed and stuck with that, We were not trying to save the world, although we have never taken a red-baiting position in this union, I had insisted that we do not help ourselves by joining those who have used a technique to destroy us. If we were going to red-bait then we should have red-baited from the very beginning. We didn't red-bait then. We were the victims of it, we're not going to become party to it. That was number one.

2) We were going to be for peace. We said that the problems of this world were not going to be solved by militarism, that the whole military, long before Eisenhower called it the military-industrial complex, that this was not going to advance the interests of the people. I made a formulation along the lines that the purpose of government, according to the Constitution, is to promote the general welfare, the general welfare not the welfare of the Generals, (General Motors, General Electric, and the Pentagon brass). The people understood that. We should why that our tax money was being siphoned from our pockets as a tribute to the big corporations and the brass. Their interest and their welfare were being harmed.

It wasn't easy because this was the honeymoon, period of American Capitalism. This was the period when we were furnishing the world with just about everything, when we dominated the whole world scene, we set the monetary policies, we called the shots. There was an improvement in the absolute condition of the workers. There was a rise in their living standards in that post-war period when the fight raged the hardest. It's very difficult to get a guy excited. He used to live in a slum or semi-slum; he never knew what steady work was like before the war. Now he's working steady, he's got overtime. Maybe his wife is also working. They're saving money, maybe they put a down payment on a home. They're out in the suburbs. They never had it so good. So what the hell's all the fight about? We were caught in that kind of situation.

But it never worked out that perfectly that there weren't problems. We addressed ourselves to the problems. Sure, we took terrible losses. The question is, you know, are you willing to stand up for what you believe, even if you know that in the process you're going to take some terrible defeats. Well: that's a test of where we stood, we thought. We decided that we would not abandon the positions

we'd fought on and we paid one hell of a price for it. When we got down to what was the hard core, and we beat back raid after raid after raid, it became an expensive proposition for these other unions. Besides they're not organizationally inclined. They don't know, in many instances, how to organize the unorganized. They're not really too interested in it. After all, if you're the head of a **big** union, you don't want to bother with too much. Let the sleeping dogs lie, and lie to the sleeping dogs is the policy that these guys pursue. If you bring in another ten thousand members, you're still the president. You're not going to become bigger and better,, so why bother? Why bring in a lot of headaches? Every time you organize new plants it means new contracts; it means having to fight to get something that's fairly decent. It may mean strikes, because these new workers 'are not trained yet in how we operate, etc.

The result was- organization has fallen off. The AF of L-CIO was not destroyed. It was not destroyed in a formal sense. What they did was they took the old bottles and poured in new wine. At least they poured out the old. And what they have in there now, who knows what it is, maybe it's

vinegar. We kept hammering away and we began to find the rest of the Labor Movement doesn't know how to fight even where it's interests are involved now. Look at this shameful thing that they've gone through on the Pay Board. It's a ten-to-five proposition--it's a fifty-to-nothing if you ask me.

I: What do you think they're going to do, though?

R: Well, the administration spelled it out. The purpose of the freeze and Phase Two was to hold down the wages of the workers and to enhance the profitability of the corporations. It's as simple as that. If the purpose of the trade union leadership is to improve the profit position of the corporations, they belong on the Pay Board. If they believe that their position is to improve the living standards of the people they represent and who are paying their salaries, then they don't belong on the Pay Board. In every crucial fight they find a way of lining up with the Boss' positions.

I don't know whether it was in yesterday or the day before's newspapers, the Maritime Unions have decided that they would pledge not to strike if the Congress will not pass a law prohibiting them from striking; In other words, they'll pass a

law prohibiting us, so we'll regulate ourselves. That included the NMU, the Sailor's Union of the Pacific, the ILA on the east coast. The Steel Workers, their division that handles the Great-Lakes ore boats, are all part of this, It's a step-by-step surrender.

I: Kind of reminds you of the old yellow dog contract in a way.

R: Well, what is the boss' interest after all? His purpose is to produce products to be sold on the open market at a profit. He wants uninterrupted production. He wants as much production as he possibly can get out of the workers. So all he has to do is convince the union that he is no longer competitive. And the unions then crack the whip for the employer to get out more production, as our friend Abel is running around the country setting up committees to improve the competitiveness of the industry by speeding up the workers.

How serious is this business about moving plants out of the country? Do you have any facts and figures on how rapidly this is happening?

Yes. In certain fields it's been very rapid. For instance, we no longer make in this country a precision camera. Before World War II the Japanese

used to put out junk that was sold here. We would get them to make parts for us that we would assemble. We would job out stuff for them and make it here, our designs, etc. Well, the whole thing is turned around now. They make the precision cameras. The only cameras made in the United States are plastic bodies, stamped parts, and plastic lenses, the cheap little \$10 cameras that you can buy today, \$10, \$12 cameras. On black and white TV, none of it's made in the United States anymore. Tape recorders, radios--you can't get an American made job anymore. The guts of these electric calculators, all but one or two companies make them outside of the country. They carry the names RCA, Zenith, Motorola, GE, Westinghouse, so you don't know when you are buying on the open market whether you are buying a Japanese product or an American product.

We're taking our technology, paid for by American taxes, because most research and development has been done at the government's expense,. We develop it, and though Uncle Sam has paid for it, we don't own it after it's developed. We say to the company that developed it, "It's now yours". Then we give these companies contracts to produce these

things that we want or the government wants. And after they've done that, they decide what do we do with this R. and D. Japan is willing to buy it. We have been selling all of this to Japan at two cents on the dollar. You take our research and development (R & D), our technology, and Japanese wages.

In Japan the unions are strong now, they're pushing the wages up. So Japan is even moving out to Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and places like that. There's just no way to compete against that. The steel industry could have easily kept Japanese steel out of the United States but they would have to do one of two things. 1) If it were willing to accept a little smaller profit, and 2) if it were willing to go into more advanced methods of producing steel, As the Japanese Steel Industry was booming, using the BOF, we were still building here the old open hearth, blast furnaces. We had hundreds of billions of dollars tied up in this, and the cost of producing steel was probably two, three times as much as under the other method. Now, of course, as the old facilities run out they're replacing them with new, but they still talk about productivity and lack of

competition.

I'll give you a specific instance in our industry. We had a plant, a lamp plant in Boston owned by the General Electric Company. The General Electric Company said that they had to shut that plant down because they could no longer compete with Japanese plants. So what happened? GE opened up a plant in Japan to make those lamps. This country is being flooded with all kinds of lamps made by GE (Christmas lamps, of all things, you know, because Japan's a "Christian nation" and they would understand that we would want those for our purposes). We can give you any number of examples of this, The drive for profit gets to a point where it is no longer rational.

We have a company that was producing a ferrite product and it looked like they were going to have to close the plant down because they could not compete with the Japanese imports. They brought charges that the Japanese were dumping their ferrite product in the American Market. They won their case, and as soon as they did, they hiked the price of their products 30%. So you see, what we have is a situation where, from the president on down, the only thing that means anything is

profit.

In the drive for profits the interests of the people are ignored. We're in a new ball game. I won't be in much longer, but the trade union movement is in the process of basic change. No longer are the living standards rising. The United States finds the cost of imperialism so great that it doesn't have enough left over to be able to use to buy off certain sections of the working class. They still want to maintain the building trades as their aristocracy. They're finding that they're less and less able to do so.

We're in the kind of position the British Labor Movement was when the British Empire finally disintegrated. Up to that time, the British Trade Union Movement was not much different from ours. Casper Milktoast at the head of it, Sir Milktoast because they all got knighted, you know, for their services to the country. But once the empire ended, then the British workers found themselves in sharper conflict with the owners of the British industry, which was less able to make concessions to them. And in the process the labor leaders who never knew how to fight or never wanted to fight, or couldn't even if they did, were swept off and

the complete change in the leadership is taking place in the British Trade Union Movement today. You pick up the papers and you read a tremendous strike's taking place in that country, nearly bringing the Heath government down with the Coal Strikers in the last few days. What happened there was the government threatened to use the army to get the coal rolling in Britain. The rest of the Trade Union Movement said to Heath that if you do, you'll have a general strike on your hands. Now all the misleaders of labor had to do in this country is to say to President Nixon that if you're going to impose this income policy on us, because it was not a wage-price policy, prices are permitted to rise, they are rising, wages are being held down, that if you're-going to impose this on the American worker you're going to have a general strike on your hands. When that day comes it will be because these people are no longer there, a new and more vital, more representative leadership would have developed in the American Trade Union Movement.

I: And you think that is going to happen?

R: Oh, that's in the process right now. We're in the gestation period. There's nothing that can stop it, because these guys are going to be less and

less able to deliver. They don't want to deliver. They're convinced that the wage increases that they're winning are not enough to offset the rise in the cost of living. In other words, their statisticians, their Research departments, tell them the same that our's tell us, that the living standards of the American worker are going down. He knows the worker is taking a beating, yet he sits on a Board, which will make it impossible for that worker to catch up (the people he represents).

So the standards are going to get worse and these guys are going to be part of it and they're going to be smeared with it. It was one thing to clean themselves off when the living standards of the workers were rising after World War II, it's another thing when they are going in the other direction. With the cities falling apart, with taxes rising at every level of government, he is being harried now as he hasn't been harried since the last days of the 1920's. And the economy--whew! You can't pour five hundred billion dollars down a rat hole as we have, which has been squeezed out of the pockets of the working people, and produce nothing with it.

Our whole foreign policy, which we have fought

on a principled basis--it is now proven that we were correct. Basically, our policy was to take our former enemies, Japan and Italy, build them up as major industrial powers, use them as a base for operations against China and the Soviet Union. They cannot do that, they will never be able to do that. Therefore, we find ourselves in a bitter struggle for the world market, with the very countries that we fought against in World War II. All of this money that was being spent to contain China and contain the Soviet Union, that policy has gone down the drain. We fought two wars to do that-- Korea and Vietnam. Our position in Vietnam becomes just unbelievable. Our maximum leader is in Peking, wining and dining with Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai, so what the hell's all the fighting going on in Vietnam for?

I: And it's increased, apparently.

R: Well, the bombing. I think, what we're saying is that if we can't win, we'll destroy you.

Tape 2

I: You know one thing that's been puzzling me about this business of moving industries to other countries is that they accomplish what they used to accomplish by bringing immigrants in here. Now they're taking the industries out. The unions can't organize in those other countries. If you talk about an international union it means the United States and Canada. Do you think the Unions will follow the industries, or that the unions will try to get the government to prevent the industries from moving out? What do you see in terms of this?

R: Of course, we're for the Hartke-Burke Bill. It has certain shortcomings, but I have strongly believed in the whole concept that no American company should be permitted to put a plant in another country where a free trade union does not exist. If you have a situation such as prevails in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, (I don't know the Hong Kong situation) the workers there are unorganized, the government won't permit them to organize, they can impose 15c an hour wages, no fringe benefits, and that's what's happening there.

I: Even if they permitted unions, and if the living conditions were very low and the union was not part

of your union, would it help, really, from the economic point of view of the workers here?

R: One of the major fights we had during World War II, the CIO became affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions. There was all kinds of exchange of delegates. Delegations went to the Soviet Union, to England, to France, to the extent that they were able to during the war. Then in the immediate post-war period this continued. As the focus changed from our working with the Soviet Union to win World War II, to working against the Soviet Union and the rebuilding of Germany and Japan, the policies of the CIO began to change. Instead of our working within the World Federation of Trade Unions, we were beginning to feel uncomfortable in there. And under the pressure of the State Department, we eventually got the hell out of the World Federation of Trade Unions. The WFTU was split. They set up the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which the AF of L became a part of, and later the CIO became a part of. The British Trade Unions' pulled out of the WFTU and became part of ICFTU.

The French split. They had a character there by the name of Joho who spoke to the 1945 Convention, I think it was, of the CIO. All he could say

every other word was, "Fraternite, Equalite, et Liberte". He was paid off by the CIA, it was later learned, to split the French Trade Unions. The largest section of the French Trade Unions was left-communist dominated. That remained with the CGT, communist-left, I should say. That remains, and still is a part of the WFTJ. In Italy, where they had three unions, they had the Catholic Unions, the Socialist Unions, and the Communist Unions. In each factory, as different from our structure here, you would have all three unions operating. The result was because they were in these different unions, because of the political policies pursued, because of their fierce political fights, there wasn't enough unity on the economic level, with a result that the conditions, and somewhat similar situations prevailed in France. They were not able to mount a good enough fight against the employers for improving their economic conditions.

Well, that's being overcome now. The three unions--this Communist, the Catholic, and the Socialist Unions in Italy are uniting to form one trade union. The same developments are in the process in France. They are beginning to find that their class interest supercedes any other interest

that they may have and what differences they have on the political and religious issues are being submerged for greater unity on their economic interests. You have economic interests, they have their political counterparts. It will develop in the kind of unity at that level which I think will lead to structural changes in Italy and in France, and that will be followed with what is happening in England.

An interesting thing when the UAW pulled out of the AF of L-CIO, another thing was happening with the AF of L. Meany became quite disturbed with the ICFTU leadership. He found that he was unable to prevent the unions in eastern Europe from getting together with the unions in western Europe and vice-versa, particularly in the same industry, because there were problems. So the workers in the metal working industry, the steel industry, the electrical industry, the chemical industry, the food industries, they would get together, exchange information. Meany wanted to stop this, under the pressures from Lovestone. When the ICFTU leaders would not go along with this, he withheld the per capita from the AF of L-CIO to the ICFTU and then tried to use this to sandbag

them. When they wouldn't fall for this, instead of admitting what the real reason was, he said it was infiltrated with fairies.

I: Oh, for heaven's sake.

R: That was the argument he used. The AF of L-CIO is now not part of any international labor organization. They pulled out of the ILO, because a Vole and a Soviet delegate were elected to some committees within them, chairing certain committees within them and the result is, in a formal sense we have no contact at all. I think that what's going to be happening is that brother Meany will have made his probably major and only contribution to the Trade Union Movement when he dies. out of this there will be some changes take place here. All institutions move slowly, and none move so slowly as the AF of L-CIO.

I: But in the past whenever the industrial market expanded and the unions didn't, in this country if you had a union in the east and they opened up a plant in the west--

R: We went after it.

But in the very early days that's how they wiped out the one in the east, until the unions got smart.. Then they expanded their organizations to

at least the coast.

R: Well, smart, but you never got enough income to be able to go after the others.

I: Not strong enough to do it. I can just see this whole thing repeated on an international level now, with the companies moving out. Either whipping the American unions or beating them down because they don't have any contact with the other workers, unless something is done. The other alternative is that in a lot of countries, mainly the European and Japanese countries, they just won't let plants move out unless the workers agree.

R: It's going to be difficult because you see we have a problem of nationalism versus the basic economic interests, the class interests of the workers. Their nationalism developed with the Bourgeois system, with the rise of the industrialization of Europe, of course, and other countries. Those ties are breaking down. During the GE strike in 1969-1970, I went to Europe and I met with Vic Feather, the head of the TUC in England. I met with the heads of the CGT, and the CGIL of Italy (CGT of France, CGIL of Italy) because GE had plants in those countries. I met with the ICFTU people and the WFTU people. I was concerned, as all of us

were here, that we had GE's plants shut down in the United States, would they be able to get their stuff made in other parts of the world? We got assurances from all of these other unions that, as far as GE was concerned, it would get nothing out of the rest of the world.

I: So you did have an informal arrangement?

Oh yes, all that became a direct formal tie. I went there for that purpose. More and more we are going to see that. Let's take the recent strike on the west coast, when Nixon asked for a bill that would bring about compulsory arbitration. Despite the fact that on this the rest of the Labor Movement, it didn't get into it strongly, it didn't threaten to do what the rest of the Trade Union Movement of England said they would do, but it did put out opposition to compulsory arbitration. Nevertheless, it was passed in the Congress and was before the president, just before his trip to China. He signed just two days ago while in China, the day before yesterday.

Harry Bridges told the Senate when he testified that if they tried to impose compulsory bargaining, or if they tried to call out the troops to break the strike, that he had some friends in

foreign ports and that they may very well find that the ships that are loaded here will not be unloaded elsewhere. Here you have for the first time the bringing in of the role of the foreign worker in support of an American strike. The lesson isn't being lost. The AF of L-CIO is not too happy about the fact that the union that brought it about is probably the only union that could have brought it about.

I don't like the term "multinational corporations" because the home base is in the United States. They are international corporations with plants, just as GE will put a plant in Dixie, or put one in southern California, or one up in the state of Washington, they're opening them up in Europe and elsewhere. The workers have a common exploiter. They have common interests and they'll find ways and means of supporting each other. I don't know just how that will be done because that's a democratic process. The people will get together, they'll state what their problems are and first what they can do on a minimum basis and build on that. That's what I see happening.

A funny story occurs to me. I told you about the two little brushes I had with Murray. I had

one here with the leadership of the CIO in 1946. Phil Murray didn't like riding trains. Everywhere he went he was driven in a chauffeured car. Harris, who was the Regional Director at that time, called me up and said, "Ernie, would you like to participate in our paying our respects to Murray?" I said, "Sure". I figured they were going to get him a brass plaque or something' like that, the usual hoopla that they go in for with these guys. He said, "Okay, your share will be \$400." Mind you this is 1946. I said, "\$400, for Christ sake, what are you buying him?" He said, Well, we're buying him a Roadmaster Buick."

Now bear in mind that this was during the war. No cars were being made. They had a Roadmaster Buick which they were able to pick up for forty-five hundred dollars. I said, "Like hell I will. That guy is making twenty-five thousand dollars a year. He gets all of his expenses paid, why the hell should I plunk down \$400 either of my money or my 'union's money for a guy who's got everything he needs?" He said, 'You mean to tell me you will not participate?" I said, "That's not paying my respects to him, that's kissing his ass, and I'm not going to be a party to the whole

proposition."

Well, do you know they told Phil Murray this. Phil Murray got in touch with Al Fitzgerald, president of our union. Fitzgerald got hold of me and said, "For crying-out-loud, why didn't you get a hold of us? We would have put in the \$400." I said, "No, they asked me. I told them nothing doing". Phil Murray and the whole CIO took that as a personal slight.

I: That's like the old Patron System--feudal.

R: As a matter of fact, I never had much use for Murray, but this was just another nail in his Coffin as far as I was concerned.

I never heard that story before,

Well, I don't tell it very often, As a matter of fact it didn't occur to me the other time. But that kind of stuff was going on.

I: Does that go on still? Was that mainly with Murray?

R: These people take awfully good care of themselves.

I: They probably quit asking you.

R: Oh, yeah. They never asked me again after that.

Well, if they wanted to buy him a plaque or buy him a scroll and call him the world's greatest something-or-other, what else are you going to do? He's the head of the organization. Then, you see,

you will have differences. Some people thought that you should swallow your pride, take it and try to live with it. Looking back on it, I don't think we made any mistake. From the short-run point of view, for the first twenty years of the post war period, maybe if we wanted to survive that and be big shots and be accepted by the community, all that, we could have gone along. If we wanted to be honest with ourselves and honest with the people we represent, we couldn't accept that. The result is we paid a price for it. But we managed to survive.

We're playing an important- role. They could not have had coordinated bargaining in the GE set-up without us. The IUE which got a basic portion of our members, they don't know how to negotiate a contract. That's the truth! Look at the brilliant job they just did in Frigidaire. We not only have the government establishing a Pay Board with guidelines on how much the workers can get, Frigidaire, which is a division of General Motors, only the most profitable company in the country, or in the world for that matter, is saying that they were no longer competitive. They used to be number one, now they're number two in the refrig-

erator industry, and therefore, something would have to be done about it. The thing that was done about it was the workers took a fifty cent an hour cut.

I: They took a cut?

R: The Chamber of Commerce, the newspapers in Dayton, the radio, the TV, and the Union, just caved in these workers--and they accepted it. Well, Chrysler Air Temp has a plant in Dayton and they come along and said, 'Well, look, we want to get into this act too.'" So they get into the act. Then the mayor of Dayton says, Well look, we don't have enough tax money, wages are too high, we want to cut the wages of the city employees". They get into the act. Then there's a rubber company there, Dayton Rubber, which is part of the GM operation. They get into it in the rubber industry. Then Goodyear, Goodrich, and Firestone, the big three in Akron say that Akron is no longer competitive. No longer competitive with what? They're still the big three in the country, with the plants that they've located in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi and places like that.

Romarito, the president of the rubber workers, announced just this past week that they're

going to permit the local unions to reopen the contracts and water down the shop rules in order to make the rubber industry in Akron more competitive. So we now see for the first time since the building of the CIO that the major unions' in the CIO are beginning to take wage cuts in order to make their companies more competitive. This is the road to hell! Let's take the situation of Frigidaire. They were number one, they became number two to GE. What do you think GE is going to say to us in the IE and IUE, comes the next round of negotiations? They're going to say, "Look, we were once number one, now Frigidaire is number one. We want to get back to number one, and the only way you could do that is to put us in a competitive position with Frigidaire." We go right back to the conditions that prevailed when the shops weren't organized.

I: Sounds like the 1890's.

R: Sounds like the 1930's, where the companies used the workers to bid against each other, only then they did it on an individual basis. Now they will do it through their unions. The unions will act as the force, to cave in the workers, because they say, "Now look, if we shut this place down, look

at all the dues money you're going to lose." This guy who's getting himself on the top is getting a fancy fifty or sixty or seventy-five thousand salary. He sees that if he loses all those dues paying members, he and all of his hangers on are not going to be able to cut the mustard. The unions in the process have lost their sense of direction. As I put it in the struggles we were having, when you're brown-nosing the boss, your eyes are right up against his cheeks and you can't possibly see what direction you're going in, and to continue to brown-nose you go in the direction of the boss. This is what's happening to these guys. Not only has there been a failure to put up a fight to advance their interests and welfare-- I don't know whether I talked about the fight on what happened to Social Security and what happened to the Federal Unemployment System. These things went down the drain. Reuther or Murray surrendered the fight on these to get a minor concession on a private plan rather than a public plan.

I: Do you have that in your first interview or not?
Do you remember?

R: I'm not, sure but we'll take a check on it. I think we did put it in. Once you give up the fight,

it's only a matter of time, the employers go on the offensive. They've gone on the overall offensive by the massive intervention of government into the collective bargaining process to weaken the bargaining position of the workers with the unions blessings. Oh yeah, they put up a fight, they were kicking and screaming a lot, but that was only a smoke screen behind which they retreated. They wound up where they said they would never go-- on the Pay Board.

Well if you accept the concept that the employers are no longer competitive in the United States and the only way you could make them competitive is. to improve their profitability and lower the labor costs by making it less possible for the workers to get something, it's only a matter of time where the employers go 'on the aggressive and say, 'That's not enough. That process is too slow, we lack liquidity. There is a danger that we may go the way of Penn Central. We have the assets but we can't service the interest on the bonds that are outstanding. Think what this will do to the poor banks and the widows and orphans who "control" these banks. Take cuts in wages." So the most powerful, richest corporation in the

United States shakes down the weaker of the unions.

Look what this means as far as our industry is concerned, where once we used to lead the way in wage increases. We were the first unions to establish holidays with pay, vacations with pay, the whole concept of Saturday being time-and-a-half day as such, if it were the only day in the week you worked; the concept that overtime was a voluntary thing, where it has now become a compulsory thing throughout all these other unions; the idea of the steward system, which has been abandoned in Steel and Auto, but which once prevailed.

Today we find that, because we have been fragmented, the conditions in our industry are way behind what the others are. We have not only fallen from first place, we're like a last hair on the end of a dog's long tail. If the IUE is accepting wage cuts in major units--by the way that Batavia, New York, Colonial (that's a division of General Telephone and Electric) they got into the act. They insisted on giving a wage cut. The workers 'turned it down, but they went to work on them and finally got the workers to accept it. We have plants in that company, We put out leaflets in Batavia to the workers that this was a trap, that they

didn't have to go for it, to vote against it. So they voted against it, but the pressure continued until they finally collapsed. This means that there's going to be a massive attack on the living standards of the American workers. We've got a trade union leadership that's going to acquiesce in it. Now they're talking about making Detroit competitive. I don't know if you've seen this latest campaign. Steel has to become competitive, Detroit has to become competitive, textiles have to become competitive.

We have a whole lot of sick industries. The railroad industry is sick; the steel industry is sick; the electronics industry is sick, so on down the line. When you get right down to it, the whole system is sick. It's sick because it's no longer concerned with protecting and promoting the interests of the people. Promoting the general welfare is the last thing they think about. Their only concern is how to get more profits. If they can't get it out of the people, then they get it out of further subsidization from the government, which is used to take it out of the pockets of the people. That's what the 20% accelerated depreciation program that went into effect last year means. That's

what the restoration of the 7% tax credit on capital investment means. The two, on a full year's basis, will probably amount to somewhere between twelve and fifteen billion dollars this year. That's besides all the other little hick-backs and subsidies and the government contracts they get. We find industry is becoming more and more parasitic. We're not expanding. More plants are being closed down in the United States than are being opened up.

I: What do you think will be the nature of the response? Do you think it will be through the union, or do you think it will be through a drive for legislation?

R: I think it will be a two-fold fight. One, the people are going to become much more active on the legislative front. They're going to wage a fight there, and they're going to wage a fight within the unions when they see their union leadership doing nothing, or just going through the motions, which may fool them for a while but isn't going to fool them forever. This is part of the process that is going to lead to a real change. The union that is not going to put up a fight on the economic front, who believes that the companies that he's dealing with are hurting, that he, has to do some-

thing to help the company he's dealing with, he's not going to fight that company on the economic front. He's not going to fight them on the legislative front either. This is the reason why we are getting nowhere either place.

Once you begin to surrender the fight on the economic front, why the hell should the Congressman stick their necks out for you? Or you don't put the kind of pressure on them which says, "Look, we need this. This is life or death for us, and if you don't go along with us it's your death as a politician." That kind of language a politician will understand, but if that kind of pressure isn't put on, then you have just a handful of guys who are decent and try to do something. We're entering a new era. There are going to be very bitter battles, and the labor movement is going to lose some of them. Out of these losses, the people will be licking their wounds; they will be finding out where the hell did they go wrong. The whole post-war policies pursued by this administration are said to be wrong. There's going to be someone saying, "The whole damn policies of the Labor Movement since World War II are wrong. This is where the breaks took place. This is where we were led down

the blind alleys. This is what we have to correct. These are the guys we have to get rid of. These are the policies we have to restore. This is the type of organization we have to build. We have to unite people, not fragment them. We have to see to it that the unions are in a position to put up the kind of a fight that will ameliorate our conditions. After all, the people have needs. We have the know-how, we have the resources, we have the manpower, we have the facilities, to produce more than enough to go around. Why the hell should anybody in America go hungry?. Why should 'they live in a rat hole when we have hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers in the construction industry? Why should he have to pay through the nose for transportation, when in other countries it isn't done that way?"

There's going to be a complete reassessment of the situation in the United States and the result of that -reassessment is going to be it won't happen. all over suddenly., You'll have one group-make an advance here on one issue. Another group make an advance there. And these groups will get together, they will coalesce, they will unite. In the process those who were found wanting in the

kind of struggles that the people are going to put will be divorced from the Labor Movement.

I: Do you think the Labor Movement will end up leading the struggle even though it might have to purge itself first?

R: It has to. I don't see any effective struggle being put up to defend and advance the economic, political, and social interest of the workers of this country, unless it's led by the trade unions, because that's the troops. With all of its weaknesses it's the only organized force there is, of a mass nature, that can be brought into action. Where it does, on some secondary issue, mobilize the people for action it shows how effective it is. When it begins to understand its economic needs and when it's willing to take on big business in America, we're going to have to return to the concept that John L. Lewis had, where all of the contracts end at the same time in the same year. If we're going to take on the major financial groupings in this country, you don't take on one of them, so they can be prospering on the others and you're out for one-hell-of-a long time. You take them all on at the same time.

That kind of an economic struggle becomes a

political struggle, because the question then arises, who really is running the country? who's producing its wealth? If we're producing it, if the country can't get along without what' we produce, if it can only get along with what we do produce, then why don't we get what we produce? Why should we be paying farmers not to plant when we have people in every city going hungry? The workers, in my opinion, will begin to take the position that these are our plants. They are our plants. If you don't want to run them, then we'll run them. If the government won't take them over, then we will continue to run them.

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