Interview with Father Dennis Comey, S.J.

January 29, 1979

I was born and raised in Philadelphia. After grade school I went to what was known then as St. Joseph's College, though it included both high school and college work. After I finished the high school curriculum I entered the Society of Jesus -- I became a Jesuit. 1914. And the first two years were spent in what we call the noviceship, where you oriented your thinking in terms of heaven and hell and good and bad and virtue and vice and so forth and so forth. The following two years, called the juniorate, was spent in classical studies, which might be equivalent to the first two years of college work, but a much more intensive program. After that, I moved from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where that was, to Woodstock College in Maryland and there we put in three years of philosophy. Now, during those three years I got a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1920 and a Master of Arts in 1921. Now this long training of a Jesuit called for a break in study there to see how well you could use your study, so we were sent out to teach. I spent one year in Boston teaching a third year high school class and then I spent the next three years teaching sophomores at Georgetown the art of persuasion.

(WMP: In Washington?)

Yes. In that remote day the rhetoric or the art of persuasion was taught through the medium of Latin and Greek and English. Now after I finished that teaching period I returned again to Woodstock for theology. Now because we were in this all this time much longer than any seminary program we were ordained at the end of the third year of theology. So I was an ordained priest in June 20th, 1928.

(WMP: How old were you then?)

Well, I was 32. Now we spent another year there in theology. At the end of that year -- 1929 -- I started three years in Europe and from '29 to '30 I lived in England on what we called tertianship. Now after all this scientific study of classics, philosophy, theology, and some experience in teaching, then we put this year aside to make all that scientific accomplishment much more personal and to relate it to our growth in a spiritual way. It was a personal effort to put yourself into a proper perspective and orient yourself to
the will of God. Then I did two years of graduate study in Rome -- research. And there, of course like anybody else in a doctorate study, I had to do a dissertation or a thesis and you have to make a discovery. So I had to find something that no one else had ever done. And I lit on to the Second Council of Orange some time in the fifth century and I was able to establish that there were 25 canons of the Council of Orange. The first two were always conceived as a repetition of a previous council on palladianism. The Council of Orange therefore dealt with semi-palladianism but the first two were considered a re-definition of palladianism. I unplugged that. That was wrong. And I proved it. Now, to do my thesis I had to read all of the works of Augustine, Prosper, Peter the Deacon, the Sjthian Monks, and assorted other peoples. It took me 256 pages to write up the first two canons, so therefore I wasn't going to go any further and I just adjusted the title of my thesis to accommodate itself to that.

Now there I acquired a Doctorate in Theology and also the aggregatus -- meaning that I was aggregated to the theological faculty of the Pontifical Gregorian University, which in turn, qualified me to teach theology in any papal seminary in the world. Are you impressed? Just a hard-working lug -- no genius! Then, I went back to Woodstock and I taught dogmatic theology for five years. These are the young Jesuits coming along now. That was from 1932 to 1937. I never worked so hard in my life. I was up to my eyebrows in fifth century theology all day and half the night and all these people that I had sitting in front of me in a class were all thoroughly educated by that time and they allowed no double talk. I had to know what I was saying, why I was saying it, and why I was punctuating it with a period. In my own shy way, I accomplished exactly that.

Now, in 1937 I was taken out of that and assigned as President of St. Peter's College in Jersey City. It was a very difficult problem. We had two colleges. We had a high school. A commercial school for girls. A parochial school. And a parish. And I was the number one man for all of them and after that I could do anything I wanted to do. Take my time about it. Twiddle my thumbs. Take a walk. Anything. It was Depression time and we were carrying a heavy debt and we were borrowing money to pay the interest on the debt. Now, I must say that with all of our problems
I was very happy there. They were great people in Jersey City and when a priest went into Jersey City he was a friend and if he wasn't, he had to prove it. It was assumed.

In 1943 -- by canon law because I was also the superior of the religious community made up of 46 Jesuits I was limited to six years. So at the end of six years out you go. That's a good law. Sometimes you live in a community and have a superior and would like to keep him forever. But there were other times when you lived in a community and you got a superior and you could send him away tomorrow. But you know that at the end of six years he is going! So at that time the Provincial asked me to come to Philadelphia and see what I could do about opening a labor school.

Now in the late '30's and early '40's the labor school was a very popular exercise that fascinated and intrigued a great many people. The Jesuits were right out in the front and they were scattered all over the United States. So I went to our Provincial -- I knew him and he knew me. And happily, he trusted my judgment. And I told him I didn't believe in a labor school. He said, you don't? And I said no. I think that any education that is one-sided or lopsided ceases to be education. I will be very interested in a program of education in labor-management relations with an emphasis on the hyphen. He said go ahead. I brought something with me there for this reason -- I grew up as the oldest of 13 children. We had a nice quiet home -- start our fights on the 3rd floor and finish them in the cellar. But my father was a hard-working man and happily for us he was what was known then as a skilled man. Though he didn't think so. He was a flange turner working in the Baldwin Locomotive Works. And in that primitive day the way that was made they would take a sheet of metal a little bigger than this area here, put it into a fire and get it red hot. Then they had four or five men standing around it with sledge hammers and it was up to him to pick the spot, estimate the heat, and say to this man hit it there. And it would curl up and if it didn't curl up in the right place you had to put it back. So in the interests of productivity they needed the flange turner with a good sense of how to estimate the heat and where to hit that piece so it would curl up in the proper spot.

When I was a child and he was doing that Baldwin's always paid in gold and silver -- never in paper money. And he used to allow me to count it. This was my arithmetic lesson.
And at that time he was making $55 a week.

(WMP: That was good money in those days.)

That was fabulous money. I'm talking about 1906.

One time when the Trolley Men, PRT at the time, had a strike Baldwin's went out on sympathy. Baldwin's wasn't organized. They went out on sympathy and everybody walked out. My father was blacklisted because — I think I borrowed a little from him — both he and I were assertive and aggressive and maybe sometimes abrasive. But he had to beg for his job and he determined he would leave there. So the first chance he got he moved over to the New York shipbuilding company and brought his skill with him. And there he earned $125 a week.

Now, I grew up in this. I knew there was a problem there. And as I became more analytical and more reflective, I agreed it was a joint problem. Both labor and management had problems. But they had some of the same problems and they ought to get together on it.

Even when I was the President of St. Peter's College, I recruited some of our graduates to make a study into labor problems. And we just took one issue so that we wouldn't go scattered. How to organize and strike a shop. We met first in one of their homes and then gradually we moved back into the college building where we had more space. And then I said we have said all we know about now, so I brought in people. I brought in a manufacturer. I brought in a union official. I brought them in one by one and said look, we don't want you to tell us what you think the situation should be, could be, or how you'd like it to be. We want you to tell us how it is. And you're going to be interrupted, so start talking.

I was going to use them the following year for a lecture series. But unfortunately, World War II came into the picture and took them all away into the army. So I brought some interest and some fascination and some curiosity about this whole problem called labor-management relations.

I came here in '43. We started with four courses.

(WMP: When you say came here you mean St. Joseph's?)

Yes. But that was downtown. St. Joseph's Prep. We had four courses and 26 students. When they finished that year
they said what do we get next year. Well I really didn't know but I had to learn in a hurry. And the next year we had nine courses and the following year we had 16. And the year after that we had 32. And as it grew, by 1966 we had 51 courses.

(WMP: Where were you set up at that point?)

Down at St. Joseph's Prep. Now, from the night we opened our classes were available to both labor and management. We put labor and management side by side in the same classes. We're teaching principles. If the principles are any good they apply to both.

That in turn gives -- the students, now representing both labor and management, an area of easy exchange. And the fact is that our students educate one another in the corridor or in the library just as effectively as we do in any classroom. Now, while all this was going on -- this expansion of the student body -- I had to expand the faculty. So I had to recruit good men. Now, they had to be good. They had to be alive and alert and even dynamic. They had to be informed and articulate because in tuition-free adult evening education you cannot afford to have a dull teacher. If you have a dull teacher the class quits.

It is very interesting -- we have a far better faculty in our Institute of Industrial Relations than any college has in its undergraduate division. Because if they have a dull teacher in psychology or sociology or biology or whatever, that's it, they have a dull teacher. We can't afford that.

So I have a high-class faculty. And what is very interesting -- I don't pay them. Not a dime. Here are men who are social-minded enough that they are willing to sacrifice their evening leisure in the interest of sharing with others the benefits of their education and experience. What better can there be?

(WMP: How did they know to come to you?)

I recruited them. Sometimes I would devise a course. Then I would go looking for a man who could teach that course. Other times I would discover a man and I would tailor a course to suit his competence. The teachers we had were always ready
to recommend somebody else. They were enjoying it. Nobody ever quit on me because he was unhappy. Seven or eight of them died. Others were made infirm or they moved out of the area or something of the kind. But nobody quits. Nobody stops. So those who are happy doing this -- and we had an instance of it just in the last two years. Jim Payne has been teaching for me for twenty years. He gave me the name of George Costello. I had an opening. I talked to Jim Payne. I said does he have what we need? He says he has what you need. So we brought George Costello in. Now George Costello has a perfect background for which we are interested in. First of all his early background was in truck driving. His later background was in management of a trucking company. So he knows it from both ends.

Now, I'm at question three. For the first five years I was here no one paid much attention to me because the hard-nosed people in labor and management relations said he must be wet behind the ears because he is walking around with his head in the clouds.

(WMP: What year are you talking about now?)

I'm talking about 1946. Then it happened that some company and the union got themselves into a very nasty wrangle. And having tried a few other approaches and didn't do anything with it they brought it into me. I made it very clear to them that I am not in the business of settling problems. I analyze them. And you settle them. I'll point the way and you trod that path. Now, that word spread. First couple of years I was working in this I used to go up to New Hampshire for eight weeks in the summer and chaplain a children's camp. After the first couple of years that was out of the question. I have to make an eight-day retreat once each year and I have an awful time getting eight days.

Then of course I was being discovered so I used to make 50 speech-making excursions in any given year -- breakfast, lunch, dinner, conferences, seminars. Meantime, people are coming in with their problems and I'm sending them away.

That also involved me into mediation -- that was mediation -- it involved me in more formal arbitration and I would bring tears to the eyes of a professional arbitrator because if I would get into a situation where as soon as I would discover that this problem should never have reached beyond the first stage of the grievance procedure. I alert the parties -- I say look here if by reason of any questions
that I ask you see a solution to this problem you can take it away and settle it and I'll help you. The professional arbitrator doesn't do that because he would be killing a fee. He's wiping out a fee. I don't mind. I'm interested in doing things. I'm interested in peace. I'm interested in getting people to agree.

(WMP: I should think you would be sought out all the time.)

Yes. I was. So I was and I am on the roster of arbitrators supplied by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. I'm on the roster for the American Arbitration Association. There are also independent people who don't go through any of them and come to me. For instance, next Thursday morning I have an arbitration case here with the Sheet Metal Workers and some employer. The man called me -- he knew little or nothing about arbitration. He said do we tell you all about it before you have it? I said no. You don't tell me anything about it until we get to the hearing. And both sides are there. I don't want to know anything about it. So when we get to the hearing I will open and I always do and I never get away with it -- I say, look here, I am the only one in this room who knows nothing about this squabble.

I'd like first for you to give me facts, without argument. And after we have the facts agreed on then we can go into argument. But nobody can do that. They can't give you a fact without making sure that you see its implications and complications and its persuasive value and so forth. So I never get away with it but I keep nudging them.

I was written into some contracts as the arbitrator. I was written into other contracts to appoint the arbitrator. I was on the panel of arbitrators for the Midvale Company for 20 years. Now they are closed up. I didn't close them. They had their own internal problems.

As you know, I put in eight years as the arbitrator for the ports of Philadelphia.

I had one case of a decision appealed to a court. One. That's in my waterfront business. Now, I think that would be a key for you. Those eight years as an arbitrator for the ports of Philadelphia. From Trenton to Wilmington. That came about in a very curious way. Bob Kelly -- Robert G. Kelly -- was teaching for me and he was the attorney of record for the Philadelphia Marine Trade Association.
Bob Kelly phoned me one day and he said you are wanted to be the permanent arbitrator for the ports of Philadelphia. And I said hold everything. Don't go any further. I could walk into a trap and I wouldn't know it. If somebody trips me I want to know who did it. There's no place for me down on that waterfront -- with black clothes and a Roman collar. You'd better look into that a lot more. A couple of days later he called me back -- he said they mean it. They mean it! I said both parties? He said both parties. Well, I thought if I'm called for service I ought to give it. So I became designated as the permanent arbitrator for the ports of Philadelphia.

Now the first case I had was an instance where longshoremen were hired to handle explosives, for which they would get double pay. They were transported down to Delaware City, which is a few miles south of Wilmington. And from the pier at Delaware City they were taken by launch out to the lower bay and there they would handle explosives. So when they got to Delaware City the Coast Guard met them and said the wind is too high, the water is too rough, you cannot go out there to work explosives. They were afraid the longshoremen would blow up themselves in the Middle Atlantic states. So the longshoremen sat on the end of the pier -- probably started a crap game -- and the Coast Guard people came back and said look, we told you once and we're telling you again and this time is final -- you are not going out there. So they brought them home and when the longshoremen were paid they were paid straight time. So they filed a grievance immediately. And that was the first grievance that was referred to me.

So I went downtown to the Bourse Building and it was outrageous. There were about 45 or 50 people in the room. Now I knew why they were there. They wanted to size me up. And I was glad they were there because I wanted to size them up.

It was a shambles. Everybody was talking all at once. Nobody was paying any attention to anyone else. So after about eight or ten minutes of that I slammed the table and I said STOP! I'm taking charge of this meeting from here in. No one is to speak unless I give them the nod and no one is to be interrupted. Now what have you got to say? It was a new experience for them. While some of them was making a speech which had little or no bearing on the issue I was leafing through the mimeographed copy of their contract, which was handed to me when I got in, and I found a clause and I said just a minute. It says here when work is done in the stream -- that is, not at a pier, -- the time is to be computed from the time of
leaving the pier until the time of return. They had never left the pier. Well, there was consternation on the union side of the table and someone found a copy of the contract and they looked it up and the reaction was priceless. They said that shouldn't be in the contract! Well, it was there. Now there was a clue there for me and I didn't recognize it immediately. They had a contract and the only thing that interested anyone -- management as well as labor -- was the wage rate. So they built a contract around the wage rate and promptly ignored it. Everybody knew the wage rate. They didn't need the contract.

Very shortly after that I was called down to the shore house on Shakamackson Street. They had a problem there. So when I got there I said to the reigning steward -- under what provision of your contract do you refer this complaint? He said -- contract? Don't give us none of that stuff. That's not the way we do it here!

Now, I had an educational problem on my hand -- to alert all the union officials and the company officials as well. All the rank and fillers. That they had a contract. They wrote it. I read it. They are going to live it.

The following year, instead of the mimeograph sheet that was pretty shabby, they printed up the four or five contracts -- and there were that many. Deep sea longshoremen, coast line longshoremen, clerks, checkers, wood butchers, and cleaners. All different locals. They printed up in a nice little pocket-size book all the contracts. And everybody in the port had a copy. Everybody!

(WMP: What year was that?)

About 1952 or '53.

(WMP: That's when I was in City Hall.)

Yeah. You and Mike Byrne came up to me about investigating the waterfront.

They all became sea lawyers. I'd go onto a pier and the first thing some longshoreman would say is -- just a minute! And he'd haul out the contract. That was good. Now we had a base. We had a rule book. We had a source of reference. I did something at that time that was daring and it had to be done. I set up job site arbitration.
As soon as the dispute broke out on any ship I went to the ship and two members of the Marine Trade Association -- not the stevedore and contractor or the owner of the ship involved -- and two union officials went to the ship. And if they could agree on the solution of the problem and stay within the terms of their contract I accepted that. If they disagreed then I would take the case home and I would write a formal award.

In return, for all that prompt inspection -- and it had to be that way -- because the conditions on the ship could change in an hour and in the normal course of events they always had their grievance hearing which never solved anything the following Tuesday after it was lodged and by that time the ship was gone and nobody on the face of the earth could tell you what was the condition on that ship. But in return for this prompt inspection the rule was no work stoppage. You continue working. If the longshoremen were entitled to any penalty pay or anything of that kind they will get it when my award comes up. Now that was important because the normal course of events sometimes the union delegates, as they were known, business agents, would be in the business of acquiring a little extra cash so they would walk onto a ship and say to the stevedore and contractor -- you've got trouble. I don't have any trouble. Oh yes you do! Those poor men down there in the hold -- all the trouble they have -- that's your trouble. We don't have any trouble here! And they would all walk off the ship. Now that is damagingly expensive. The reason is very obvious when you hear it. When a ship comes into port it contracts for two or three days. After that there is a charge and on the ordinary freighter that could amount to $2500 a day; I eliminated the work stoppage. I told them I wouldn't arbitrate anything during a work stoppage. I won't even talk about it.

It took a little time for that because -- and it was a rather spectacular affair that set it up. One time Bob Kelly phoned me from the Marine Trade Association meeting and he said I'm in a meeting here and these people are going to shut down the whole port because one ship had been knocked off. And he said I don't want them to do it. Now this was all on the basis of something that the international vice president had said. Now, he was a man you couldn't trust his judgment around the corner. He had no difficulty within a fifteen minute period of giving you thoroughly contradictory statements and he would believe both of them! He said I'm not too sure I can stop them so I'm going to ask for you to come down. Stay close to that phone. If I need you, I'll call.
So an hour and a half later he called me and said you'd better come down. I can't stop them. So we got down there and he met me on the landing in the Bourse Building and I said ok, Bob, do I be sweetly reasonable or do I give them hell? He said you are on your own.

I get in there and I dressed them down and I told them they were a gang of thieves and they were corrupting the union officials and thereby doing untold damage to the rank and file longshoremen. And I said it won't do. I said you are not to close the port. I'll be down there 7 o'clock tomorrow morning. And they said who will go with Father Comey? I said wait a minute -- I don't need a bodyguard when I go down there. I don't need a bodyguard. I don't want any of them. If you are smart you'll send somebody down there and listen to what I have to say and you can report back to the body. I don't have any secrets.

Out on the wall there when you go out there is a picture of that -- I was on the tailgate of a truck with about 3,000 longshoremen out in front of me and it was a good chance for some education. And I gave them some education. I said I'm the only one in this port who is honest. Nobody else is honest. You are not honest. Your employers are not honest. Nobody is honest. I'm the only one that is honest and I am the one who won't stand for any dishonesty at any level of the operation of this port. I don't care whether it is the top official of the company or the lowliest steward. I won't stand for it. I said in this particular I do wish you were right, but you are wrong. Honestly I wish you were right, but you're not. You're wrong. And there is only one answer. Let's go back to work! So they went back to work.

(WMP: Supposing they hadn't. What would you have done?)

I don't know. Nothing for me to do but go home and go to bed.

Here's a perfect instance of it. One time I was called -- somebody phoned me and said there's a ship knocked off at pier 51. So I called the union hall and the international man was there and he answered the phone. I said there is a ship idle at 53 South. Send two men down there. He said there are none here. I said then go yourself because I'm going to be there in 20 minutes. Then the Marine Trade Association sent two down. Now the men at that time they were
learning gradually. They had stopped work but they didn't leave the ship. So the two employer representatives were a little ahead of me going onto the pier and I said don't go on that ship. Well, it's usually the first thing we do. I said don't go on that ship. There's no work being done. So I went out and I stood on the apron of the pier and with that two union delegates came over and somebody was hanging over the rail and I said send a gang boss down here.

So two men came off the ship and they started to -- I said I don't want to hear a word. There's no complaint, no gripe, no grievance, there's no talk, no discussion unless and until you go back to work and go back to work without any strings attached to it. Well, they did.

Now while they are setting up their rigging -- it was some kind of a chemical, I forget what it is -- but there was some kind of a chemical in burlap bags on the pier and one of the bags had opened. So I picked it up and it looked like rock candy. And I rubbed it in my hands and sniffed it -- I did everything but eat it. I said there's something phoney here. I had caught a number of phoney cases that had no merit whatever. But after the first draft came over the side then I went onto the ship and I had to allow that any time I go to a ship with black clothes and a roman collar the longshoremen are going to put on an act. And then I discount the act and we get down to business. So as I stood on the deck and looked down into the hold all the longshoremen had handkerchiefs around their mouth and they were coughing and they were gasping their last breath away. And I said oh no, don't do that. Then I noticed a couple of supervisors who were down there were also covered with a handkerchief. And I said there is something here I can't see. So I got onto the ladder and I climbed down into the hold and I went over and stood against the wing deck against the bulk head. Now I was only there for about ten minutes without any of the exertion of work and the tears were rolling down my face and that stuff was going up into my nose and I wouldn't reach for a handkerchief if my life depended on it but after a while I couldn't take it and I groped my way over and I climbed up the ladder. Whatever it was, out on the pier where there was ventilation it was harmless. Down in the hold where there was no ventilation -- now, the key to that was not that the longshoremen were complaining but that they didn't leave the ship. They stayed on the ship. Now they came out of the hold but they didn't leave the ship. Now, this went on -- sometimes I'd be out
four times a week, but it had a very good effect because
the commercial situation in Philadelphia depends at least
for 10% on the operation of the port. The railroads are
tied into it. If you shut the port down they lay them
off on the railroads. Hershey shuts down in Hershey, Pa.,
because there are no cocoa beans and so on.

(WMP: Is the port as important as it used to be in my day?)

Yes. Moreso. Because now they have container cargo coming
in. It used to be strictly a bulk operation. Coal and
grain. Now they are getting more general cargo.

During the course of those eight years I wrote awards that
covered all the major provisions of their contracts.
At the end of that time they had precedents established,
they had principles set up for them, and they were equipped
to do the job for themselves. But they couldn't stop.
And they began to give me cases that were trivial or else
strictly political in origin. Union politics or management
politics. Or else one party or the other was trying to
get through arbitration what they couldn't get in negotiation.
So at that stage, after eight years, I said I don't play games.

Now, there are certain -- the awards I wrote pretty much
still govern the handling of the problems of the port.

(WMP: You must have had to be familiar with their contracts...)

Oh yes. One of the first things I had to do -- what they needed
down there was a philosopher. That's what I brought to them.
For instance, and this was a key -- this is where the
philosopher came into it. They had a clause in their contract
that when men worked damaged cargo they got double pay.
Now that really made no sense because sometimes cargo that
was damaged was just as easy to handle as cargo that wasn't
damaged. And therefore they had to determine the extent
of the damage. Then they changed that. And they re-wrote
the clause that when men are called upon to work under
conditions of unusual distress they are repaid double the
prevailing rate.

(WMP: And you made the decision of what was unusual distress.)

Because no one in the port had the foggiest idea what they
meant by unusual distress. They needed a definition of
unusual distress. Not from what I think it is. Not from
a dictionary, but from the text and context of their contract.
I wrote that one and it began this way -- work itself creates distress. Any work. It may be the cramped quarters of a plumber. It may be the dull routine of a file clerk. It may be the concentration required of an accountant. It may be the risk of a steeple jack. Work itself creates some distress. No one has any right arbitrarily and capriciously to expose another to distress. Therefore, as soon as I hire a man I am obliged to provide him with the comfort and convenience that matches the distress that I cause for him. And the easiest way for me to match that distress is for me to give him money where he can secure for himself whatever comfort and convenience he needs to match that distress.

Now at that time the wage rate was $2.10 an hour. It's way beyond that now. But the ordinary distress of ordinary work pays $2.10 an hour. That's the ordinary distress of ordinary work. I had a notice also that in the contract there were certain cargoes that paid a differential -- explosives, corrosives, wet hides, refrigerator cargo because a man has to go from 90° temperature to 32° and so on, but that is ordinary distress because it is intrinsic to the cargo being handled. That's usual distress: It is intrinsic to the cargo. Therefore, unusual distress is distress notably in excess of the ordinary distress of ordinary work and must stem from some factor foreign to the commodity being handled.

Sugar. I was down at the sugar house. I got up on the ship and they said look at that sugar. So I looked at it and I said what's the matter with it? Look at those bags. What's the matter with them? They are stained. A stained bag would outrage the sensibilities of a longshoremen, which could be cured with double pay. Now, with my definition I'm in business. Sugar comes from a tropical climate. It's bagged in a tropical climate. It is stacked usually outdoors, thirty bags high and thirty bags deep and a big tarpaulin pulled over it. In a tropical climate, with weight and pressure, sugar melts. And when sugar melts it becomes syrupy and when it becomes syrupy it stains the bag. Ordinary distress.

However, we have had this occasion where a ship would run into bad weather on its way to Philadelphia and a fuel line would break or they would take salt water in and the fuel or the salt water would get into those bags where the bags should weigh 300 pounds they would weigh 370. That's notably in excess of the ordinary distress of handling a
300 pound bag and it stems from some factor foreign to the commodity being handled. That award went all the way up and down the east coast. The firms here sent it to their partners all over. It even reached the west coast. I was out in Los Angeles one time and I was in with the port authorities out there and they said what is your name? And they said we know you! They were being nice to me, a stranger coming in asking stupid questions. But they had it out there.

Now these are typical. One time Abe Freedman -- there was this too -- longshoremen would be quarreling with their union officials and longshoremen would always charge -- you're not giving us any service. So the longshoreman is sent to me. And I get down there -- a completely fruitless exercise. There is nothing wrong with it or anything of the kind. For instance, ...

(WMP: One little thing I might ask you -- when you referred to Abe Freedman, of course he is the Abe Freedman of the port.)

He was the attorney for the Longshoremen's Union.

(WMP: Not the City Solicitor.)

Yes. One Saturday morning -- we had all kinds of trouble in the two sugar houses because they were accustomed to get extra pay. And I wasn't giving it to them. One Saturday morning I was called down there. Because it was Saturday they were getting time and a half anyhow so they wanted to double that and make it triple time. Anyhow, I went down and I said when my phone rings I don't answer it, I just come here. So I went onto the ship and the hatches are covered. So I said to the steward, who covered the hatches? He said the men. I said you tell them to cover it? He said no. So I went to the foreman on the job and I said did you cover the hatches? He said no. I said who covered them? He said you know better than that. I said I want an answer -- who covered them? He said the men. On their own? On their own. Well, Dugan and McNamara were the stevedore contractors there so I called Dugan and I said did you tell them to cover the hatches? He said no. I said ok. Now, they were off the ship. There was a cloud went by and they thought it might rain so they covered the hatches. At any rate, after a while Dick Askew came along and he said will you talk to the men? I said sure.
Any time I get them together I give them a little education. Askew was the President of the local union. So they were down there and I got up on a little hand truck. So I explained to them that the contract is very important. It gives us the rules of the working conditions and I said there are restrictions in that for you but there are also protections for you. I said as you know very well one of the protections is unusual distress. And some individual said that's what we have here. So I was startled. And so I said just a minute -- as long as I'm on this little truck I'm doing the talking here and if anybody else wants to talk he can get up on this truck and I'll get down. But as long as I'm here I'm doing the talking. Well, then I went on and after a while Mickey O'Brien, who was the number writer on the pier, that was an important job, made a bundle of money, he said unless we get a decision by 12 o'clock noon there will be no work done on this ship this afternoon. So I said I want everybody to hear what the gentleman had to say. I knew he meant a decision in their favor -- he didn't mean a decision. He meant a favorable decision. So I repeated it. I said no one has ever badgered me into a hasty decision yet and you're not going to do it and there will be no decision by 12 o'clock noon. So with that I walked off the pier.

Monday morning the four delegates -- business agents -- came into my office and they said good morning. And I said good morning. And how are you this morning, Father Comey? And I said I was very well and how were they? And they were very well, too. We had all of the niceties. And then they said we've got bad news. Those men didn't go to work. Well, I am shocked. You don't mean it! They didn't go to work! I can't believe it. They said when will you have the award ready? I said I don't know. The fact is I had started to write it up and when I saw them come in I put it in my desk. You have to be a little devious in all of this. So we talked and finally I said look, you are the elected and delegated representatives of those men. You have a right and a responsibility to make sure that they follow your direction and you have enough good judgement to know that they belong on the job and I said you go down there and tell those men to go to work. And I dismissed them. Well, they didn't do what I told them because that river could be very cold in February and that's where they might land. It's a rough business!

They didn't go to work on Monday but Tuesday morning they did go to work. Then, along about four or five o'clock in the afternoon I got a call from Blackie Cardillo. He was the
port agent from the seafarer's union. From the first day that Blackie Cardillo and I met we got along. Because we talked the same language. I would say you don't know what you are talking about, you big lug! What do you mean I don't know what I'm talking about! We got along. So he called me and said I understand those people at the sugar house were trying to give you some trouble on Saturday. I said look, my good friend, I don't need any help from you. I gave them more trouble than they gave me. I said you don't need to protect me. I can take care of myself. And so he said we can't have that kind of thing. We can't allow them to be jawing away at you that way. We can't have that. He said I was afraid they weren't going to go to work this morning. So he said I sent an educational squad up there. I said do you mind telling me who was the dean of the faculty? He said that was Torpedo Johnny. He sent two loads of goons up there and they just sat in their cars and the longshoremen started to work and two men stepped out of the line -- and two men could have stopped 140. So with that, Blackie's friends got out of the car and headed for them and they took off going north on Delaware Avenue. They kept on going.

So I had a lot of help from people like Blackie Cardillo.

(WMP: How did he get that name -- Blackie?)

He looked it. Big, strong, husky, swarthy individual who roared and blustered at you and had a heart as big as his body. And he was a wonderful bargainer. He could see the other man's point of view.

(WMP: Is he still down there?)

No. He died and I sent him to heaven. You see, I'm not only an arbitrator. Secondarily, I'm an arbitrator. Primarily, I'm a priest.

I was in town one day and I met Ray Oates, who was Blackie Cardillo's assistant. So I hadn't seen him in some time and he said that Blackie was in bad shape. This would be six years ago. He said he's got cancer. I said is it terminal? He said yes. I said does he know it? He said yes. And he figures he can lick it. He was out in the Ravdin Memorial out at the University of Pennsylvania. So I went out there and I think it was New Year's Day. But there were other
visitors there. Back and forth. So when I was leaving I wasn't going to get anywhere. I leaned over to him and I said look here, bud, I'm coming back about 11 o'clock tomorrow morning and I'm not coming on a social visit. I'm coming on business. Be ready for me!

So I went home and I called the chancellory office and I said I've got a terminal cancer case and I don't know what I'm going to run into but I said I want to be very clear that I have all the faculties that I'm going to need. Go right ahead they said.

So I went back there the next morning and I took a catechism and a prayer book with me and I talked to Blackie. I took my rosary out of my pocket and I gave it to him. I heard his confession. I arranged with St. James that they would come over and give him holy communion and give him the last rites. The funny thing was on that night his sister came down from Syracuse with her husband. And Blackie said do you know what they did today? He said well, I went to confession, I was at holy communion, and I got the last rites of the church. So his brother-in-law said -- you? Who did this? So Blackie's wife said, I see you don't know Father Comey! So the waterfront spills over into my church work.

(WMP: Where is your parish?)

I don't have a parish. I had a parish in Jersey City. That was 1943 that I left that. I'm full-time at the labor relations.

You had a thing in here about an appeal. This happened at the sugar house also. The company there, National Sugar, was putting in a whole raft of improvements for the handling of the sugar coming off the ship. It was awfully primitive the way they handled it. But they put in belt lines running up and across to the refinery. And trolley lines running around here through the weighmaster and the salt test and all this and it took about a year. And all the time they were doing it everybody knew for certain that it was a labor-saving device. It was obvious. They all knew it. All this was going on and they are trundling sugar bags around with hand trucks and chitneys and then they had to take it upstairs to the refinery. So eventually it got to the stage where it had to operate because the old system wouldn't work.
And they anticipated this by about a month. So then it went to the Marine Trade Association because they had a clause in their calendar -- in the event of any mechanical or technological change a subcommittee shall be appointed to determine the number of men henceforth to be employed. So there were three from the Marine Trade Association and three from the union. Now the top officials from the union shied away from it because they knew that it was hopeless. So they sent in the second level. And one of them was the spokesman. So the company was down there with all kinds of charts and graphs and so forth and they had 155 men there and they could prove very conclusively that they only needed 80. And this one individual -- a spokesman for the union -- he responded all the time they were in meetings with we ain't going to lose no men. Well, they were going to lose men, that was for sure.

And then the Marine Trade Association said that it goes to arbitration. And said no it doesn't. So it went to Judge Kun (?) and he ruled that I should hear the case in arbitration and render a decision. Now, I'm now arbitrating the arbitrability under the contract. So I get in there -- there was another clause in the contract that all disputes and all differences of any kind or nature whatsoever arising under the terms of this agreement shall first be referred to the grievance procedure and if unresolved shall be relayed to the Rev. Dennis J. Comey, S.J., in his capacity as impartial arbitrator and he shall have the right to establish his own rules of procedure. Carte blanche. So I ruled the case was arbitrable. And Abe Freedman promptly appealed it to the Supreme Court of the state. Now they've got an arbitration award and they should go back to work. And they wouldn't. I used a little monkey business. They were out for about a week or ten days and John Murray was with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service at the time and John Murray knew waterfront operation like the back of his hand. And I knew John. We were pretty good friends. So I said John, I don't want you as an official of the Mediation and Conciliation Service but I want you as a friend of the longshoremen to go up there and have a meeting and explain the facts of life to them. John went up and he told them nobody, nobody, but nobody knows how many men are needed on this job from herein. Nobody knows. He said there is only one way to do it. There's got to be a job study made to see how many men are needed. He said ok, so they agreed to go back to work. And that was going to be the following day. Well, Bob Kelly called me and said you're in a bad spot. I said what do you mean? He said if you
determine the number of men to be employed in that job
the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania could reverse you.
I said I can't wait for that. It's going to take them
seven or eight or ten weeks to get around to it and if they
are smart they will agree with me. So I called the Marine
Trade Association and I said look, I don't want any of your
people to be shaking hands with me. I told them I wanted
two people from the Marine Trade Association -- I told the
union I wanted two. So I have four helpers. And I got
them together and I said I don't want to hear a word and
I refuse to hear a word from anybody on this pier. If
anybody thinks he has an idea that I should know he is
to relay it to you, if it is from the longshoremen,
to you, if it is from an employer, then you relay it to
me. So I had a clipboard. So we started in the hold
of the ship watching the whole operation. So I'm marking
my clipboard. Then we take it up here and it's going to
come over the side. Down there, they have three men
because a ton of sugar comes over the side and sometimes
the sling will loosen and it is what they call a hamburger.
The sugar spills. They had an extra man there to make
it up again. Not to waste time. But that might mean once
an hour or once every two hours. But they had three men
there.

I've got to back-track a little bit. I said I want the
number of people on the job that the company insisted was
needed. They said what about the others? I said they
stay outside. Well you determine who stays outside. I
said no you don't. I don't fire anybody. That's your
business. But they stayed there and they are on pay.
And if they are needed they will be brought in. So I
make a study. I see that the sugar is coming here and
there is a man there and as the sugar reaches this point
he reaches up and pulls a lever. That drops the sugar.
Then he takes the bite out of the sling and he pulls another
lever and sends it up. Meantime an empty bag comes down
and he puts that on a hook and sends it away. A 14-year-old
boy could do it. No problem. Except they neglected to
remember that he had that sugar coming at him at a rate of
about 14 tons an hour with no relief. It's impractical.
So there I assigned that this man would get relief and he
would join the people on the hamburger and one of the men
from there would come over to this. They had an extra relief
man over there. So after -- while we were going around,
Dick Askew, the union president, is reading everything I
write on this and he said I don't see you putting any
ok down there anywhere. I said you won't see it. Wherever
I saw that a man was needed I put it down in Latin.
Well, at the end of the morning I brought them in -- the four of them. I said here's what I find. I found they needed instead of 20 and instead of 155/160 they needed 100/180. I wasn't splitting the difference at all. That was an actual study. Askew said that's the best news I've heard in a long time. At any rate, I told them what I had -- I told them that this is not a formal award but it is unprofessional -- I should have waited until I went home and wrote it and put it on paper. For instance, I had an extra man in the hold. Those longshoremen work in pairs. But you needed somebody if a bag broke you needed a sewer down there who would sew up that bag. Also, when they work in pairs one man answers the call of nature and he leaves there the bag sewer could fill in for him. So I had productivity going.

We brought the other 25 men in in the afternoon and on my own I went through the whole process again to take my own count. They were in court that afternoon and they couldn't be with me. But that worked out so well that sometime later on I met Dugan down there and the stevedore contractors were Dugan and McNamarra. He said you know, when you first wrote that up I figured you them too many people but he said you know, you were exactly right except for one man. I said which one was that. He said the bag sewer. Bags don't open that fast. I said what do you do when one man goes to the men's room and the other one is idle. He said that's right. But that's the only one I've ever had that was appealed and when the Supreme Court got around to it they affirmed that I was right on the arbitrability question.

Where am I now? Question 5? The difference between the National Labor Relations Board and the War Labor Board that came into being in the beginning of World War II.

First of all, the NLRB is the agency of the United States Government for the implementation of the provision of the Wagner Act and later, the Taft-Hartley. For Landrom-Griffin there is another agency set up. But they hear representational elections, they hear unfavorable labor practice charges and so forth and so forth. They are entirely different from the War Labor Board. The War Labor Board was set up at the very beginning of World War II when the emphasis was to insure adequate protection for the conduct of the war so that we'd have all the goods, machinery, and everything else that we will need. What made the War Labor Board so effective was really something outside of their jurisdiction.
The labor movement gave a public pledge that there would be no strike during the war time and they stuck to it. Now, what happened then -- we maintained the pretense of collective bargaining. Went through the motions. Meetings. The union made a set of demands. They asked for the sun and the moon and the stars and half the planets. And the employer may read the stuff or maybe he didn't read it but probably out of curiosity he did and said no to everything. He didn't mean it. So the federal Mediation and Conciliation came in and worked it over with the parties and then they came in and it would lead to a conclusion that it was an impasse. Then it was referred to the War Labor Board and the War Labor Board wrote the directive -- wrote the rules and regulations under the contract and everything. So everybody in management and labor disapproves heartily of compulsory arbitration the War Labor Board acted as a compelling arbitrator during that time.

(WMP: Because of the war.)

Because of the war and that was their major function and their major contribution.

(WMP: Do you think it worked pretty well?)

Beautifully. So much so that after the war was over and Truman was the President he said this worked so beautifully we shouldn't lose it. So he summoned a big conference of labor and management at the highest levels to Washington. Now at their first couple of meetings they were all together. And they all agreed that they were in favor of home, heaven, mother, and apple pie. They were in favor of all of it. But then they broke up into sub-committees and sub-committee number two was the one where the whole thing foundered because they were given an assignment that they should write the respective rights of management and labor and management said no, no way. Inadvertently we might omit from that list a clear right and it would thereby be assumed that we had abandoned it. We're not going to abandon any right because we might forget to put it in that list. And labor gave the parallel answer from Walter Reuther, the Automobile Workers. He said oh no, we live in a dynamic economy and what is a unilateral determination of today may very well be a joined decision of tomorrow. So the experience of the War Labor Board was never carried on. Now, the War Labor Board had an authority that was unparalleled because of the war. They wrote the rules for continued operation because labor wouldn't strike. That was the key.
(WMP: Did you take any part in that?)

Not in that, no. Because I came into Philadelphia in 1943 and the war was already under-way and the War Labor Board functioned until 1945 so I was familiar enough with it. The National Labor Relations Board -- I don't remember what the precise issue was -- this was after I abandoned the waterfront people. But they had a massive problem or something or other and the NLRB was holding a hearing here in Philadelphia and I was asked to come there and give testimony. Now the testimony dealt with all the awards that I wrote over a period of eight years. That was an item. So Bob Kelley examined me and the room was crowded because Abe Freedman then would be privileged to cross-examine me and they wanted to see the clash when Freedman and I came together. Except Abe despoiled them of their pleasures by saying no questions.

One time Freedman made a count of the varied awards that I had given. Now he never looked into the merits of any one of them but I mentioned before -- I did any number of awards on cases that had no merit whatever. And to make them look good I would dress them up a little bit here and there but the result was negative. So he made a count one time of the number of awards that went to the management and the number of awards that went to the union.

(WMP: Who were the lawyers for the companies?)

Oh, Bob Kelly.

(WMP: Weren't there others too?)

Bob Kelly's associates -- Scanlon and Company. Abe Freedman was the attorney for the Longshoremen and there were other unions too. The other locals. But Abe made a count. Most of them went to management. So somebody got after me -- one of the papers -- and told me about it. Well, I said if he merely wants to count cases -- one for you and one for you -- then any third grade child could do that. I don't count cases. I weigh them.

There's a lot more on that waterfront if I can take it off the top of my head somehow.

We had another case one time. On a day that they were working -- this was one of the companies -- I don't like to mention names -- actually, it was Sobelman (?) -- but they hired two gangs and they worked them all morning in the rain. At the lunch break they covered the hatches to protect the cargo and one gang came back five or six men short. They just walked away. So that absolved the employer from any obligation to the rest
of the gang. The gang had to be intact. But the other gang was complete. And he said ok, go to work. And they said did you notice the rain? Now, they were probably a little more colorful than that about it! He said never mind the rain, go to work. So they left. Now the longshoremen were really disturbed because there was a protection in there for rain. Once you started a gang in the rain you had to pay them at least two hours. They knocked off that operation. So the Marine Trade Association came in and closed down the whole port. This was done properly.

(WMP: It was a lockout kind of thing?)

Yes, it was a lockout for this reason -- if the union could pick off one company after another -- if they could knock off one after another -- now the Marine Trade Association was the bargaining agent -- negotiating the terms of contract with the union. None of the individual companies did. So the Marine Trade Association offered protection to any one company by ordering all the rest of them to shut down. And that was protected by a decision of the United States Supreme Court a year or two before that in the Buffalo Linen Case. If you have an association and they take one member for strike action all the rest can close. But nobody told me anything about it. The stoppage went through Friday and Saturday and I was down in South Jersey Sunday morning. But anyhow I sent telegrams to the Marine Trade Association and to the union -- you are hereby -- I had authority to establish my own rules of procedure, remember? From the contract. You are hereby ordered to report in my library not later than 2 o'clock on Sunday afternoon. You may be accompanied by not more than six members of your association. I'm mad. I'm sore. I'm annoyed. They let the whole port close down without asking me a question. Without talking to me at all. And they were both being very hard-headed and very stubborn about the whole deal. So I separated them and I talked to the employers here and I talked to the union people here and I said it won't do. And I brought them together again and I got nowhere. I said gentlemen, you have no problem whatever if at any occasion you asked me to go away. You can't fire me because you didn't hire me. But I said unless you people get together and settle this problem I'll serve notice on you now that I am going to quit. At that stage they couldn't afford to lose me. Neither one of them.

(WMP: What would have happened?)

They would have gone right back to their bribery, extortion, corruption, shake-down, everything of the kind. And they knew it. Now, they said all right, this will be referred to the grievance procedure and the grievance hearing will
be heard at eight o'clock tomorrow morning in the Bourse. They were making it tough. So I went down and they put it forward and I said nothing. I didn't say a word. And they disagreed totally. So I moved up where I was sitting to the head of the table and I said ok, this case is now in arbitration. So I quizzed them. I had all the facts but I quizzed them again. I made my notes. This, that, and the other. And we went on. Then when I got finished I said this is unprecedented. It is very unprofessional because I have maintained since I have been coming here that you are never going to tell me what I say or what I said. Whatever I have to offer will be put on paper and I will sign it and if you have any quarrel with what I've offered then bring the paper in. But I said in this case it is an emergency and I'm telling you I'm going to order those men paid for the afternoon. I said look, you had your chance. Because in the course of the testimony it was found that other employers in varied parts of the port had paid their people. Others set up a tent over the whole operation and protected them from the rain. I said you had your chance and you blew it. That had a good effect. The next time that they got into negotiation they wrote a new clause on the rain problem which was satisfactory to both people and everybody knew it.

I ran into another problem. I'm an employer and there is one gang that always gives me a good day's work and every time I have work I want that gang. That gang wants steady work. And they are going to give this employer good work to insure their steady work. So every employer on the port had his favorite gang. Fair enough. No problem. They hired every day. So, I'm an employer and I send my man out to get that guy and get that guy. Then it happened that they have to safe-guard the interests of their favorite gangs so here is an employer that has cargo coming in down the lower end of the hatch -- his case goods. All packaged. No problem. Up in the top he's got a miserable cargo -- peat moss. Something nasty. So he'll bring a gang in and work the peat moss for the morning and when they get that out of the way then he would dismiss them and bring in the other gang. This is obvious favoritism and discrimination. So they called me down there. And whoever were the two employers on the job they gave me information about how this worked but it was bad information that they gave me. So Bob Kelly got wind of it and he called me. He said they gave you bad information. That's wrong. I said what a help that is! So I sent for the union officials and brought them up to our library and I sat them down at the table and I said here is the
problem -- it concerns you and it concerns me. I don't want any discrimination and I don't want any favoritism. So we hacked out the whole thing and those union officials were wonderful. I am now going to write gang priority rules.

(WMP: How were the gangs put together?)

On the shape-up. You are one of my habitual foremen. I go out and give you tickets for 22 men. Then he goes and picks up the 22 men and gives each of them a ticket. You are my regular foreman, you know your gang and you want to stay with that gang because if you don't even though you are the foreman the next time you might not be the foreman. You might be dependent on somebody that you left out. So he's got to pick his gang. Now, I'm going to write gang priority rules. The gangs are intact. These union officials said oh no. That would be a bad rule. That would hurt the employer. This, over a period of about two hours, we worked it out together. So I wrote gang priority rules. The gang that starts a hatch has a priority claim to all work in that hatch until the hatch is finished. If two gangs start a hatch each gang has a priority claim to its end of a hatch until that end is finished. If after a job starts with one gang and the second gang is introduced into the hatch in order to speed the work and get the ship away then that introduced gang has no priority claim whatever.

So I sent the rules in and they circulate them to their employers, the Marine Trade Association. And I must have had six or eight cases where I obliged the employer who is guilty of violating the gang priority rules to pay two gangs for the same period. The gang he dismissed and the gang he brought in. Do you get the picture?

(WMP: I hear what you say but I'm not sure I understood it.)

I'm in this gang and I do the dirty work and I'm sent away. Now his favorite boy comes in and does the work. This first gang is a victim of discrimination now.

(WMP: It's because some work is better pay or better conditions?)

The pay is the same. It's the conditions. Because they are all for one and one for all when it suits their advantage. But I must have had five or six cases where I had to oblige the employer to pay two gangs for the same hours. So they sent a complaint in to the Marine Trade Association and
the Marine Trade Association relayed the complaint to me and I wrote them a nice note back and I said tell your people to read the gang priority rules and they will have no further trouble. We never had any trouble after that.

Now you get monkey business. See, when a case is brought in there were two people from the Marine Trade Association that went to the ship. Not the man whose job was the ship. Not the stevedore contractor nor the ship owner. Two independent judgments and two from the union. Well, we head down to South Philadelphia a coal ship. This was coal coming in and ultimately it was destined for the United States Steel Corporation up in Fairless. But they brought it in there. Now, there was a clause in the contract for grain. The employer shall hire six men and a foreman when grain is being loaded or removed by the spout. Grain is a self-trimming cargo. They had another clause in their contract that if men are hired to remove and replace beams and hatches on coal ships the gang will be made up of six men and a foreman. Now that goes back -- you have to understand this. They bring a cargo of coal into Port Richmond -- a railroad car. And they put a ship under it. And they run the car up a level and turn the car upside down and put the coal into the ship. In the old days when they were using those old-fashioned liberty ships, mainly wood, you had to put beams across to keep the sides from breaking out. Later on, the ships were made of steel and you didn't need any beams. Well, they built this ship and they made up the beams but they were stacked in the corner and the hatch cover was controlled from the bridge and the master of the ship said no longshoreman is going to touch the control. I do it. So they had the ship down there and the longshoreman wanted six men and a foreman to do nothing. But you only have six men and a foreman if men are hired to replace and remove hatches and beams on coal ships. If you hire them to do that work, and this work wasn't going to be done. Well, the two members of the Marine Trade Association who were there and they are currying a little favor with the union in case they get into some trouble later. So they ruled that this was standard practice in the port and they had to hire six men and a foreman to do nothing. One of the longshoremen came over to me and said that was a good decision. I said thank you very much, but I didn't make it and I don't think it was a good decision.

Well, other people who were handling coal were astounded. Here was a chance to straighten that thing out. So a couple of weeks later there is another one up here at Port Richmond and I go up there -- now it is Atlantic and Gulf stevedores.
So they take me around and I've seen it before. And they said we're going to leave this in your lap. I said I've got news for you -- I wouldn't think for a minute of reversing the sound judgement of your Philadelphia Marine Trade representatives who ruled that this was a standard practice. I think it is outrageous but I'm going to support them. They are your buddies. You know, that stupid clause as far as I know is still in the contract.

The life of a permanent arbitrator, and I stress permanent, is precarious at best. He seldom lasts more than one year and often only until the second case.

(WMP: How many years have you been doing it?)

Eight years. Now, we had another problem. This was phenol residue. More chemistry. And the people who were making the phenol and had this residue were not allowed to bury it anywhere near running water. Most of the earth is running with water. They couldn't get rid of it there. So they devised a trick. They put the residue -- it was a corrosive and if you touch it it burns you -- into drums and put the drums on the deck of a ship going out and when the ship got far out to sea they would dump it into the sea. Well, they didn't like to throw it into the ocean in new drums so they used old drums and the old drums leaked, but they said to the longshoremen it won't hurt you a bit. So they made an under the cover deal with them that they would give them 50¢ an hour extra for loading those drums. I don't know what brought it up, but they brought me down there. So I looked at it and by dint of some deft questioning I found out about this under-cover deal. So I said that arrangement is abrogated as of now. That is a direct violation of your labor agreement. It's either double time or straight time. There is no partial allowance for this unless it is negotiated and it hasn't been negotiated.

(WMP: What actual authority did you have?)

I'll tell you where the authority was. With the longshoreman. That longshoreman didn't know what arbitration was. And he cared less. I was the 'guarantee that he would get a fair shake. Until I appeared on the scene a longshoreman could work in the muck and like it. There was bribery and corruption. It goes on in every port in the world. And by the way I operated I eliminated the bribery and corruption and the longshoreman got a fair shake and that was all he wanted.

I was going onto a pier one day and two men were coming off. Tom Fox picked this up, I think. I wasn't supposed to hear.
I heard one say to the other one. One thing we know -- if that Father Comey makes a mistake at least it is an honest mistake. They would live with my mistake. They would let me make a mistake because it was honest.

There's another funny one that happened one time. They were at their union meeting and the longshoremen were jawing away at their officers and telling them you are no good to us, you are a gang of bums, and this that and the other thing, and they were making no headway at all. It's vulgar, but it is funny. One longshoreman got up and said shut up, get that God Damn priest down here.

We had another problem. This was with bone meal. Bone meal is a good animal food and it is also a good fertilizer. And over in Holland and Belgium and so forth, they grind up bones and they ship them over here and they save a little money and they put 100 pounds of it into a paper bag. Great heavens! When you picked it up it broke and set up a fine precipitation of dust all through the hatch. There was one bone meal job where I ruined a suit of clothes. I called Kelly and said you owe me a suit of clothes. He said sure, go down and get yourself a suit. But the stevedore and contractor who had this ship was a nuisance. Longshoremen didn't work this way in 1910! And I said look, you are 40 years out of date! I'm trying to find the facts in this. He is a nuisance. So I finally said to him look here, if you get off this ship I'll find out what is going on here and I'll come up with a more equitable solution than you will ever come up with. I said that's all, good-bye. He went down to the union Trade people and said he put me off the ship. And they laughed and said that's the best decision Father Comey ever made. Well, I saw this. It was a mess. Now the problem was this -- they save a little money over there in Holland by putting it into a simple paper bag and when it got here it wasn't saving any money for anybody. That bag broke. Now that was not intrinsic to the cargo. And it certainly created unusual distress. So I ordered double pay. Now, this is interesting. I got on the ship about one o'clock in the afternoon. It was such a mess then that I knew it had to have been bad all day. So I gave them double pay from eight o'clock in the morning till they finished. I thought that was pretty good. So I came home and I got a call from a longshoreman. Now he doesn't identify himself. Somebody is looking for him and that's the reason they all have nicknames -- Germantown, and Sammy Oysters, and so on. They don't want their wife to know where they are. But he called me and said about that ship -- what about the night gang? Doesn't the night gang
get anything? I said wait a minute! I got on that ship about one o'clock and I made a finding that I moved back five hours and there isn't anybody who will tell me what the condition was for the night gang, if there was any, because the employer will tell me it is like your living room rug and the longshoremen will tell me it was a miserable mess, but I'll never know and I have no way to find out. But he kept on talking and there was nothing more to be said. So I said wait a minute -- are you concerned that maybe somebody got paid off on this deal? He said yes. I said you can take my word for it, nobody got a dime. That's all I wanted to know, Father. I'll tell the rest of the fellows. They took my word for it.

(WMP: You've earned their confidence over the years.)

That's right. Well, they knew I had no axe to grind. Now again, we had this one time -- they were moving stuff from a ship to a lighter (?) and it was a mess. I don't know what it was, but it was a mess. So they brought me up there and in the meantime the employer was sprinkling sawdust over it. So they brought me over. Then we repaired to the office to talk about and the agent was Henry Varlick and he is jawing away with Herman Miley about our people and in my simplicity I think he is talking about longshoremen and after about fifteen or twenty minutes of this I say wait a minute -- is this a racial problem? He said yes. I said ok, you want me in on it? They said no, Father, you are doing beautifully, let us handle this. Now half of them are black and half are white. They were just people to me. I had never had any complaint whatever about any evidence of racial prejudice. Never.

One time I was asked to talk at a dinner meeting of the Sunday Breakfast Club. The Sunday Breakfast Club never met on Sunday and never met for breakfast, but they were all the very top level of industrial Philadelphia. The top level. And they were curious. They knew all this business was going on at the waterfront and I was in it. When I got there they said we want you to be forthright and frank, open, and communicative. We want to know what is going on and we will protect you with a promise that you will never be quoted to anyone who is not in this room. So I shot the works. I was out in Broad Street afterwards and Gillen, who was then the President of Bell Telephone Company, he stopped in and said Father Comey, you call this arbitration and it really isn't. It is the impact of your personality. I said wait a minute -- would you agree that any pioneering work must of necessity be somewhat personal? He said yes, I'd agree with that.
I said this was pioneering. And I want to take the personal element out of it so we call it arbitration because we get the same effects that we get from arbitration.

They have had a very unhappy time since because after I left them they got one fellow -- he only did one case and both parties said we don't want any more of him. He violated the contract. Then Charlie Short had a case for them. He might be the arbitrator of record, but I don't think he has been getting much from them since. He had a very sticky, troublesome case. I don't remember all the details, but it dealt with the operation on the other side of the river.

We had a good one on the gang priority rules. The gang that starts a hatch has a claim to all the work in that hatch until the hatch is finished. Now the longshoremen could generalize a proposition like that that he owned that hatch. So anytime that ship came back they would say that is our hatch. He just neglected that his claim was valid until the hatch was finished. He would say that hatch isn't finished, they are still using it. It went to arbitration. Now I had to decide when is a ship a new ship and the hatch is open to anybody. And it was troublesome because I couldn't put it on any union rule -- they don't write the rules for the company or for the arbitrator. I couldn't put it on union's jurisdiction because a ship might stop in Wilmington on the way and there is another local down there. Or if it went to Wilmington after it left Philadelphia this gang might claim the right to go to Wilmington and work the hatch in Wilmington until it was finished. I said it was finished when the work for Philadelphia was finished. And I came up with a beauty. When is a ship a new ship? Now, we had a problem this way -- the Philadelphia locals do the work on the Jersey side of the river so it is not a new ship when it leaves Philadelphia and goes to Jersey or from Jersey to Philadelphia. There's no local longshoreman on the Jersey side so the Philadelphia locals work over in Jersey. They get paid for the transfer over there -- that's working time. But I came up with this -- Customs. It's a new ship when a ship enters and leaves customs. When it enters and clears Customs it is a new ship. When it went into Wilmington it had to enter Customs there. When it left Wilmington it had to clear Customs. Then it had to enter Customs in Philadelphia. Then it left Philadelphia and went to Wilmington it had to clear Customs here and enter Customs there so I put it on some factor that was entirely foreign to them and it was a perfect answer. Now there was nothing in the contract to give me a clue. There was nothing in the patterns of procedures to give me the slightest inkling. So when I wrote that award I put
an added note on it -- this award is to obtain until such time as the parties negotiate a replacement.

They never negotiated one. It's a fair and an equitable solution.

(WMP: How many cases have you handled over the years?)

I have no idea. There were times when I would be out four times a week. There was seldom a week that I wasn't out. So that would account for at least 400 cases. I would say an average of 100 cases a year. Eight years -- 800 cases. That's a guess.

It makes a very nice memory. I hope all the work that I did in the interests of truth and honesty and justice and equity and fair play, will get me into heaven. That's my major goal. I want to get to heaven! All my life I never had an assignment that had any leisure to it.