Interview with Emily Ehle Jones -- her recollections of the founding and early activities of the Philadelphia Chapter of Americans for Democrat Action. Mrs. Jones.

Emily, my first question to you is how did you get drawn into ADA? Who asked you to do whatever you did?

How I got started on this, Walter, actually escapes me at the moment. As you know, I would have been interested in anything in the generally social-political action field because of my public affairs interest, but I had never been in political action (organized political action) as such. Certainly, the greatest single influence, I think, was from a dear and respected friend like Johannes Hoeber, who had himself been politically active in Germany under the Nazis and who had worked very closely with the Communist party there because it was a necessary alliance that the Socialists and Communists had to make to defeat a worse evil, shall we say. And he knew a great deal about working with extreme left-wing groups. I don't know about the formation of Citizen's Pact; all of the data surely must be available on who was on that first board, and so on. Th usual assortment of do-gooders, which I suppose we all are, without much hard political knowledge, and we have every reason to believe, I think, that there were also very experienced, dedicated, and highly motivated Communist party members. The need for a non-Communist liberal organization, I think became first evident to national leaders like Mrs. Roosevelt and Walter Reuther. I had the pleasure of being in the same room in which that organization really came into being in Washington and, as we all know, Philadelphia became one of the strongest individual, if not the strongest, individual chapter. Then the question arose as how to form such a chapter in Philadelphia. The major problem, of course, was -- let me put this another way -- I think those of us who wished to form such a liberal organization realized that citizen's pact in Philadelphia already had on its roles the same people whose support and enthusiasm we would need. It therefore became extremely important that we should be able to reach these people. Further, those of us who were talking and thinking about this new ADA, felt that there was a real danger in Citizen's Pact and while we were building a new organization we felt it our responsibility to destroy the old.

Now, how do you go about that? A great many lunches and cups of coffee and long hours of discussion were held as to how to do this. We recognized that the we, that is a group of people who were gradually deciding to work actively in ADA, were in no way as well trained as would be the dedicated hard core of the Citizen's Pact. The most needed single person was John Frederick Lewis. He was already a member of Citizen's Pact and with his prestige and what they hoped would be further financial contributions, he was a key figure in their lives. They of course saw him as representing a prestigious front to the Philadelphia community, which they badly needed. At long last we had seventeen people decided that they too could stay up late at night, as did the hard-core left-wingers and their New York organizers, and that if they could learn how to do political action so could we. It was essential that this group of 17 be made up
of liberals and trade union leaders. This, of course, was the new alliance that ADA used so effectively.

The make-up of this new board was extremely interesting, and I think the exact make-up you would have to see the files of the Philadelphia Record. Perhaps it was in the Inquirer as well; I just happened to remember specifically a very large banner headline saying Seventeen Citizens Take Over Organization. The names included the Trade Union Movement, Mike Harris and Joseph Schwartz, Charles Weinstein, a Quaker like Marnie Chauffer, and Justice Williams, Johannes Hoeber, ... I can't remember any other members of the board, I'm sorry. Of course John Frederick Lewis was to be the Chairman of this new group. You think France Daniels was on, and I'm not sure but that you're right on this. We certainly worked very closely with him. France Daniels, the executive director of the CIO Political Action Committee, in Philadelphia.

The takeover itself was somewhat dramatic in the sense that the Citizen's Pac people felt that this was a very interesting and presentable board on the whole, and that, after all, it could do them no harm since they would retain control of the organization through their executive director and his wife, who acted as the organization's secretary. Stupidly, we can't remember this name -- we think Mary Phillips remembers particularly the woman's name because she knew her. The meetings were in a very unassuming room in the Broad St. Station building. I remember particularly the long halls of that building because I was put in a small room at the very end of the long hall.

The first strategy was to put in a new Executive Director. After the board had been voted into office with no incidences of any kind, and John Lewis took the chair, then, all by prearrangement, of course, one member of the board got up and said he would like to make a nomination for a new Executive Director. That was seconded and I happened to be the nominee. We carried the meeting, of course. To the rage of the Director and his wife, the Director found himself ousted. The weeks that ensued were made extremely difficult by the continuation as my own personal secretary and the organization's secretary of Mrs. X, whose name you are going to get from Mary.

At one time I was particularly grateful to Mike Harris who sent over from his office a very tall, blond steelworker with arms of a fighter to sit outside our office. We had gotten word that the Citizen's Pac from New York would attempt to steal the files by force. These files, as you would recognize for any organization, were the life-blood because this, of course, told us who had given money, who was prepare to come to meetings, who was prepared to offer their houses for fund-raising, etc. We then managed to discharge this secretary and started on our way as an organization.

One of the greatest problems was getting for every meeting enough of the new ADA people to attend the meetings so that we could out-vote other members on the Board. Perhaps I've not made it clear that the board that we took in was a majority board of ADA-type people. In other words we took over the organization by
holding the required number of votes for any measure. It wasn't that the old board was completely destroyed. This meant then that busy trade union leaders, particularly, who had so many other commitments on their time, had to be lured, instructed, cajoled, urged, to turn up for every meeting because of course in the early days of any organization there were all kinds of important decisions being made at the early meetings. As the executive director, I spent a great deal of my time on the telephone persuading the Joe Schwartz's of this world that there was nothing more important that they turn up for an evening session, such as a board meeting. They understood the importance, and of course these were the trade unions, who, on a national basis, were making the Communists fight within their own unions. This is the only reason we could get this kind of support at this time. The whole idea of trade union and management and liberals getting together, which is an old-hat idea now, was still very new, I think you would agree. (note: Walter has just remembered that the executive director was Pierre Frahley. Walter is not sure whether it is Frahley or his brother, but Frahley we are certain of.)

Justice Williams was a key figure -- I can just see us walking up and down on Rittenhouse Square talking about this and it is my memory that he was Chairman of Citizen's Pac -- all unwittingly giving his good name and presence to this rather extreme left-wing group. (I hope Walter will check that with him) He served as executive director then, first under our new and first chairman of ADA, John Frederick Lewis, after that, under Joseph Clark. John and I became very good friends. One always felt that ADA was perhaps the tougher in its best sense, the tougher of the two. John gave far more than the financial support, which of course was part of the early organizing days. He was a very busy man and we tried not to be too much of a nuisance on his time. But one felt that one could always go to his tiny little law office, or to his handsome house on Spruce St. to discuss a problem, get his moral support for a new step. I never remember being turned down by him for time or advice.

The struggle of the Communists was endless. As we said, we had the problem more or less licked on the board, as long as the majority of the 17 people all turned up. The vote was very close indeed; I assume only perhaps two or three majority. This attendance as we've said, was crucial. We managed to keep on top of this due to the devotion of the people on this board, who gave a great deal of their time of their personal lives for these meetings. It was at the general membership meetings, also, which all policy was passed, discussed, or board suggestions agreed upon -- remember this was in the field of foreign policy, of course, which ADA has always been very much concerned with as well as domestic policy. It was in these meetings that eternally we had to plan defeat again a very well-trained, hard-core experienced group of (I don't know whether they carried cards or not; it didn't matter) but their line was the straight, Russian Communist line at that time. Later when I became chairman of the organization and therefore would have been presiding at the meetings I was even more conscious of all of the parliamentary difficulties involved. It might be
absolutely crucial who was recognized from the floor to make the motion and then who was recognized to discuss the motion. Our meetings were exhausting and a very good apprenticeship for all of us in the Democratic process. You were asking about Harry Furliger, who was a marvelous executive director when I had the pleasure of being the chairman of the organization. I suppose one would say that he came from the general AF of L trade union field since his teacher's union was part of the AF of L rather than the CIO side.

A highlight of the organization's activities during the year was the Roosevelt Day dinner. Eleanor Roosevelt had given to ADA right as an organization to celebrate her husband's birthday. It was at these meetings, from the very beginning of ADA, the more formal presentation of ADA's face to the public could be made. Individual chapters like ourselves vied with the national organization or with other chapters to bring to their head-table on that night the outstanding names in liberal America.

In a sense ADA was very fortunate, I think, to have such important figures as Joseph Clark and Dick Dillworth around which to build their own activity. In other words, if we had had run-of-the-mill people doing run-of-the-mill campaigns, I think it would have been much slower to build up an organization. As it was, ADA's role really was to organize independent vote which might be attracted from the Republican party as well as the Democratic, although, as you know, it would have been mainly from the Democratic ranks simply because of the ideology of the candidate. ADA really had nothing to do with the organized Democratic party. As a matter of fact, I'm afraid that most of us in this new movement were very snorty actually about the old hands in the Democratic party. We found them, we thought them to be cynical and probably corrupt and tired. The liaison if there was any between ourselves as an independent group and the organized Democratic party actually was done by the candidates themselves. Dick Dillworth, I think, always took a very healthy view that he had to use the organized Democratic party as best he could.

It so happened that within our own ranks we had a fair share of expertise in public relations, propagandizing, if you like, and use of the media. We can credit ourselves with the entire campaign of the broom-sweeping Philadelphia clean in which many of us marched in triumph around City Hall on the night of Dillworth's victory, carrying our brooms over our shoulders in 1947 (sorry, 1949; my interviewer here is feeding me very bad information).

Television was a very new media. We started television programs, the script mainly under Sue Roberts, my main contribution to this was to sweep a broom underneath a curtain where it would show as a symbol of the program. It was the crudity of a new medium -- I remember we tried to think of what we would use as a background
for all this and finally someone cut out a photograph of the Philadelphia skyline and we put this behind Dillworth, who often spoke on the program.

Then this grass-roots idea was very much with us as an organization and we went out to all parts of Philadelphia on a sound truck. One of the volunteer drivers I remember most was an ex-OSS agent who used to regale me with tales of the way he and women who travelled with him checked the submarine slips in Northern Germany to get information for live bombers, and he had given up his job as a conductor on the Pennsylvania RR in order to enter this campaign. I would, for instance, if I was in the truck, sit with the record player on my lap and we would tour South Philadelphia, for example, playing the Marine National Anthem since Mr. Dillworth came from the Marine Corps. This would be used to gather people to a meeting in a special neighborhood. Occasionally, I took my own Ellen, who would be then about 5, and let her step off the truck and pass out pamphlets to the crowd. I can guarantee that you get 100% acceptance of any kind of pamphlet when they are passed out by a little girl of 5.

I think any organization on a neighborhood basis, if it came certainly it was not during my time, that would have been with Harry Furligher perhaps, and later. The one sub-division, if you wish to call it that, was a student's ADA. We did have a student's ADA that was extremely active and interested starting first with, I think I'm right, University of Pennsylvania, and later we had one some out from the suburbs such as Haverford. Funding I draw a very large blank, which is rather ridiculous since that would have been my responsibility at least to know about and I trust I knew about it at that time.

You ask whether any of the funding came from the trade unions. We must have had funding from them. I had, as a director, let us say, or then as a Chairman, I had no relationship with Mr. Finnegan. Few people besides the candidates, and I've already said crossed over between these two -- the independent and the -- I remember John Patterson, particularly, was very good. He had contacts or he happened to know the Jim Finnegans and so there was -- couldn't be described as any open break -- it was simply I don't think either of us as organizations had great respect for the other. Therefore it was a question only if we could occasionally be going the same way and not getting in each other's way. I think you're right, Walter, on that, that the order of chairmanship's would have then been John Lewis, to begin it with; Joe Clark; after Joe Clark; then comes Dillworth; then we think John Patterson -- this can be checked.

ADA's role in Mr. Truman's election of 1948 is rather interesting on a local level -- national played a large part, but I can tell only of the local. The National and local organization together had the fraternity houses as headquarters at the University of Pennsylvania. You remember that one of the weakest parts, let us say, or planks, of Mr. Truman's platform was civil
rights. He had not been prepared to put in a civil rights plank. ADA met during the long hours as did all groups and at 2 am came to this fraternity house, Hubert Humphrey's manager. ADA had asked Hubert Humphrey to propose and get carried civil rights plank. They put considerable pressure on Humphrey and as you know the ADA organization in his own state was one of the most effective in the United States. His manager, almost with tears in his eyes, said to us, "Do you realize that you are asking Hubert Humphrey to risk his entire political future?" And ADA'ers, being perhaps seeing the world in "black and white," said, "Yes, but he must do it." This is what a liberal must do.

Various people had assignments for the rest of the night. Convention floor of course opened at 9 am. The position of the Pennsylvania delegation was critical — of its alphabetical place and because of its size — and one knew that there would be a lot of showing of support of a civil rights plank and that the Pennsylvania vote would come at a very strategic place. My assignment was to talk to Dick Dillworth, who was then a very junior member of the Pennsylvania delegation to the National convention. My alarm didn't go off — I had gotten to bed about 4. Fortunately, I could reach Dick Dillworth just before he left his house to go on the convention floor. And he said very quietly, "I will vote for this because I don't want my children to grow up in a country without civil rights being assured."

I think Dick Dillworth can take credit for influencing the Pennsylvania delegation, which was by no means decided on its vote on the civil rights plank, in the direction of a civil rights plank. He is a very effective man, very aggressive, very full of the importance of it. And I think history already gives him credit for that influence.

I was very lucky, because thanks to Walter Lister, I had a press card which meant that I could be on the convention floor itself. A few of us from ADA were counting votes as does everyone else who moves around the convention floor and just as we had thought that the vote of the Pennsylvania delegation — the vote that assured passage of the civil rights plank. I believe that it was felt that it was that plank that assured the election of the President.

May we add to the board Lawrence Stapleton, professor of English at Bryn Mawr College.

Of course Johannes played a very large part because first of all, as we mentioned earlier, he had already had experience in (?) yet was a very fine researcher and we relied on him for all kinds of political research which had to be done, which, of course, as in everything everyone was doing with the exception of those of us who would be a staff member everyone was doing on his own time and as a gift.
As we finish here and just make a few last notes, I think it is very interesting to see that in such a group here, and I'm sure it was true all over the United States, were people who were not used to political action. They believed in it, but someone else had always done it in the past. That the trade union person joined us was crucially important for their support and know-how. But they were people already trained in this. I think sometimes that perhaps the most exciting part of these movements in this period were that the Lawrence Stapletons and the Marnie Shefflers had to return to other professions and other time commitments, were prepared to come into Philadelphia for dinner meetings or other meetings because they felt that the total purposes of the organization were so important.