Interview with William Austin Meehan, Esq.
March 23, 1977

Dad first came into politics when I was a kid. He was a professional basketball player and he was active in the Catholic League basketball teams throughout the city. He played in the Jewish League, too. And the priest up at St. William's parish, which is our parish, couldn't get sewers for his church up there and he got Dad and a few of the parishioners involved in this thing. They went to see Councilman [Name], who was the leader at the time and they put the pressure on Councilman Crossen to get the sewers. Eventually they got the sewers. Some fellow who was running for office one day -- and I couldn't tell you the name of this fellow -- and Crossen wasn't for him and he knew Dad from basketball and he said can you help me out in the neighborhood where you live. Dad said well I don't know anything about politics, but I'll try to help you out. Dad went in and he carried the division by a couple hundred majority and he got himself elected Committeeman. And Crossen wasn't going to recognize him. So then he said I'm going to throw you out. So he ran against Crossen, which was an unheard of thing in those days of the Republican machine for a ward leader -- and when they counted the votes, Dad had won. And subsequently and after that he became friendly with Clarence Crossen, who was a very capable guy. He was an engineer by profession and his family was a very wealthy family. He had the million dollar piers. He was the Chairman of the Finance Committee and a good one. Subsequently, Dad -- you know he was always looked upon as the organization man -- Dad was in politics for 22 or 23 years and 18 out of 23 years he opposed the organization choice in full or in part in the primary elections.

He first became a maverick -- I guess he supported Pinchot and Sunny Jim Davis, and Jim Duff. Of course he opposed Jay Cook and Jay was the chairman. Dad ran for Treasurer and City Controller and kept getting licked but that didn't bother him at all. He didn't really want the job anyhow, he just wanted to let them know he was around, but he was getting significant votes. 80,000 and 90,000 votes against the organization.

He was with his brothers in a contracting business which his father had founded and which we today still maintain, my three brothers and myself. We've been in business about 70 years. We do paving, we do some utility work, water work, we've done natural gas lines. We've done work in North and South Carolina, out in Iowa, but we try to keep close to home.
Another thing that people can get thrown off — the first year of the Clark administration our contracting firm did 8 times as much work in Philadelphia as we had done in the ten years prior to that. Clark started building projects going and secondly, Dad was always sensitive to bidding on city work. But we didn't need it because our big work was in New York City and my uncle was President of the New York City's Contract Association. We did paving work on the tri-borough bridge, the Holland Tunnel, the first world fairgrounds, we did the paving on that. So we didn't need the work in Philly.

Philosophically, I wouldn't say Dad is a liberal -- I think he was a moderate. He was a liberal with respect to people. Dad founded the first labor union in New York City in the contracting business. He told the laborers to get themselves unionized. I think probably to save the Republican party and that gets into other questions that you ask me.

I don't know that it could have been saved. But his philosophy arrived a little too late for them. He fought Mead, he fought Kelly and Jay Cook and all those fellows. The Grundy machine — he was always opposed to the Grundys. But probably one of the biggest boosts he got in his political career was that as a result of the election of S. Davis Wilson -- Dad had supported (?) Hegemann in the primary for Mayor. He was the Sheriff at the time. S. Davis Wilson was the Democrat Controller, who was endorsed by one segment of the Republican organization. And Wilson won the nomination and Jack Kelly was his opponent. So Dad said he was going to support Jack Kelly for Mayor and the rest of the rest of the Republican ticket, but he was going to be for Jack Kelly. Jay Cook said you can't do that, you've got to support the whole ticket. He said I'll have to remove you as ward leader. Dad said you can remove me any way you want, but I don't let people pick my Republicans, I'm certainly not going to let them pick my Democrats. You picked a Democrat -- there's two Democrats, I'll pick mine. Don't talk to me about I have to support the Republican ticket. Jay Cook did attempt to remove him and he came up to a ward meeting at Summit and Bustleton and he stayed three hours trying to get somebody on the ward committee to nominate somebody else for the job. And he couldn't get a nomination and he finally said if you want him that bad, he stays. He subsequently became friendly with Jay Cook -- he didn't support him when he ran for Governor because he was sticking with Jim Duff, but he would have preferred to support Cook if it hadn't been for his loyalty for Jim Duff over John Fine. Fine he never did like. We didn't see or hear from Fine for the four years he was Governor.

Basically, Dad loved people and he knew people and I think the fact that, as reported in the newspapers, 70 thousand people showed up at his wake. That's counted by the Inquirer which, as you know, was never particularly friendly to Dad.
That in itself is another whole story — his break with Walter Annenberg. Actually, he was Annenberg's fair-haired boy. He was a maverick against the machine. When he ran for Sheriff the first time they wrote probably one of the finest editorials endorsing somebody that I've ever read. Dad used to have Friday night meetings at home. We used to call it hearing confessions. He would see people from 6 in the evening until about 1 in the morning. People from all over the city — he would see 200 people. And later in the evening the judges, political office holders, would come down to our basement after 12 -- we wouldn't feed them before 12 because in those days we couldn't eat meat on Friday so we made them wait.

Morrie Lipman used to be with the Inquirer came up in 1948 a week before the Republican convention and he said to Dad that Walter had asked him to talk to him because he wants you to support Tom Dewey for President. Dad said is Jim Duff for Tom Dewey? And Morrie said I don't know. Dad said I told Jim Duff that I would be for whoever he wanted. If he is for Tom Dewey, I'll be for Tom Dewey, but if he is for Fu Man Chu I'm going to be for Fu Man Chu. You tell Walter -- I assume Walter's for Jim Duff because they are very friendly. So on Monday the week of the convention -- at that time Duff wasn't sure who he was for. He started out being for Vandenberg but Vandenberg discovered that he had cancer and he withdrew. So then they were without a candidate and Duff was trying to get somebody in the picture. Walter Annenberg called and said Morrie Lipman told me of your conversation. Dad said yes, Walter, I'm surprised you didn't call me before. If Jim Duff is for Dewey, Dewey is all right with me. I don't care who it is. He said I don't think he is going to be. I want you to be for Dewey. Dad said Walter, I'll be for Dewey only if Jim Duff is for Dewey. And Walter got a little fresh. He said if you aren't for Dewey, I'll ruin you politically. Dad said Walter, you're not talking to John O'Malley -- John O'Malley has reasons to be afraid of your newspaper. I don't have any reason to be afraid. You can investigate me all you want. You may ruin me politically, but you will know you are in a battle. That was the start of the battle and Walter Annenberg knew he was in a battle. He gave us a work-out. Gave our family a work-out. But we couldn't print newspapers. But half the city of Philadelphia knew the story of the Annenberg family before Dad got done with them. They never did get that Annenberg school at Penn until about four or five years ago. Dad had said Walter you distribute your newspapers and every time my kids go to school the kids read that newspaper story. So he said when you dedicate that school of communications I'm going to distribute a copy of a book called the Tax Dodgers, which contains the 21 most famous tax cases in the history of the internal revenue service. It details the story of the Annenberg family where Walter was the culprit and his father took the rap for him. And it starts out as I recall that it is a great thing for the economy of the United States that Moses Annenberg only went to the fourth grade because the economy of the United States could never have stood it if he was more educated.
Dad did support Dewey. And after Dewey got the nomination Dad supported him but Dad said he would never get elected. At that time they were laying all kinds of odds on Truman. And Dad won $18,000 betting on Truman. Everybody said he was crazy. The polls and everything were showing landslides for Dewey. I asked Dad how do you figure Truman? Well, he said, -- we were at the contracting office and he got out the payroll book and said tell me what the laborers are making today? They were making about $120 a week. Dad said now bring out that withholding thing -- he never knew what it was called. Withholding based on how many dependents, etc. He brought it out -- and half of the people had signed it with an x. He said these people can't read or write and they are making $120 a week. If they vote against Truman, they are out of their minds and I don't think they are out of their minds. Basically, that's what it came down to. They just weren't ready to make a change.

Dad almost was a Democrat. He and Jack Kelly were very friendly. Dad was appointed Registration Commissioner by Governor Earle for six months and then he quit. He said they are all going to go to jail and I'm not going with them.

Dad did a lot of good for people. He loved people. He made a lot of mistakes, too. He wasn't a bitter guy. He could get mad at anybody -- he'd fight you down the line if he thought he was right. But if he could help you, he would.

(WMP: How did he feel about Dick Dilworth?)

Let me say this. He didn't like Dilworth. He didn't like Dilworth's campaign tactics. Dick didn't always pay too much attention to the truth. I remember when he accused my father of owning Malachi's. Harry Halloran, who was a Democrat of the Conduit Foundation -- Harry said to him one day and he was for Dilworth -- Dick, who is giving you this information that Aus Meehan owns Conduit Foundation? That's my company. And he doesn't own any of Malachi's either. Dilworth said I know that, but the people don't. He said the only guy in the Republican party -- and it was in an interview he gave to the Saturday Evening Post after he was elected -- he said the only politician in Philadelphia on the Republican side that the people have any respect for is Austin Meehan and he said we've got to knock him down. If he crumbles, they all crumble. So he made Dad the target.

Afterwards, Dad got along well with him. I got along good with him at the Board of Education. He still had a tendency not to always tell the truth. I used to kid him. But I'll say this for him -- he was very practical. I said Dick, most people have trouble telling a lie, you have trouble telling the truth most times. And he would laugh. And he said well I've got a job to do. I said I know and I'll help you. And I did help him.
Dick Dilworth named a school after my father. The Austin Meehan Elementary School in the Northeast. Dick Dilworth made the motion. I got along good with him. We used to laugh together. He was very very practical. I think he (Aus) had more respect for Dilworth than he did for Joe Clark. He got along with all of them afterwards. Joe Clark was friendly with him. Joe Clark was at his wake -- he came up from Washington. I think he liked Dilworth more because I guess he liked fighters -- Dilworth was a fighter. Of course, Dad would have preferred going out in the street -- probably Dilworth would have too -- settling it out there.

(BF: After your father died, where were you in the political scene?)

I had been working in the party. I was a ward leader. And had been working for Dad. And Dad hadn't been well for a couple of years. But he still was in the picture. At that time there was an attack launched on Dad in the Republican organization by the Republican Alliance, which was a group founded after the 1960 election. It was a formidable group. Had Walter Annenberg on the board. Dr. Johnson, who was President of Temple, resigned as President of Temple to head the Republican Alliance. Tom McCabe, the Chairman of the Board at Scott Paper. Phil Sharpless of Sharpless, the Fodor people, Pitcairn, -- they raised almost overnight a half million dollars to take on the Republican organization. They were going to have their own organization. I guess we were preparing for that and then Dad died. We hadn't had our fund-raising dinner. He died four weeks before election. So somebody had to raise money quick. So I jumped in. And we got over that election and prepared to take on the Alliance. The Governorship was coming up and we had agreed to support Scranton and they were of course for Scranton. Scranton was their candidate. And they said Scranton was against Meehan, which was thoroughly untrue. Scranton and I had an understanding and a reasonable understanding. I said I don't want any help from you. All I want you to do is recognize the Republican organization. If they win it, then I want you to recognize them. If I win it, then I want you to recognize us. And I said don't come into Philadelphia during the primary. Let us settle it ourselves. And he agreed to that and he didn't come into Philadelphia. He said they've got to settle their own problems. They ran 44 candidates for legislator, state, and congress. Of course the Daily News and Inquirer were for them. I'm not sure about the Bulletin. I think they stayed out. The day before the primary, they brought Eisenhower in to endorse their ticket from the steps of the Union League and they spent on election day $120,000, 70 of which was Bob Johnson's own money. We spent $20,000 and I won 44 out of 44. I elected all but two committeemen out of 400. And they had two ward leaders and I licked one of them. The Alliance collapsed overnight. The Inquirer headline said Organization Smashes Alliance. We did smash them. Because the one thing they couldn't understand -- they prepared for a year. They had eight regional directors, that they paid $7500 a year. They had 33 organizers that they
paid $100 a month. They had a suite over at the Pitcairn building. They had the computer from Penn. They hired an Executive Director by the name of Norati (?) and Bob Johnson, of course, was working full-time. But one thing they couldn't understand -- they had all kinds of money -- but they never could understand was loyalty. I had guys who had patches in the seats of their pants -- they didn't know where their next meal was coming from. But they were loyal. And they couldn't be bought. They got robbed -- that was the biggest robbery since the Brinks. They were committeemen -- I sent all the committeemen (?) -- they couldn't get a day's pay. I told Arthur Johnson, Dr. you are going to get robbed. You can do as you want. So that was the end of the Alliance. And Dr. Johnson really got hurt. He never got that $70,000 back and he went down after that. He was shot. Most of those people who were supporting it financially -- Phil Sharpless, Tom McCabe (?), they didn't know me. I never met them. Of course after that I met them and they are probably two of my best friends today -- Tom McCay(?), Phil Sharpless.

(WMP: Are they still alive?)

Yes. Neither of them very well. Tom had that tragedy about a month ago. His son and his wife burned to death out there in Haverford. He is a super gentleman. One of the finest men I ever met. He started with Scott paper as a clerk. He served as President of the Federal Reserve under Truman. He was always a Republican all his life, but Truman asked him to take the job.

Let's see if I can move on to some of your questions. I'm just rambling. To follow up on how I got involved, after that I guess the leadership was mine. I don't know if anybody has ever wanted it ever since then. They can challenge me -- I'm ready to get out. All I want is somebody who tries -- we've got to have a two-party system. As weak as they say we are -- we are weak -- it's a lot better than nothing. I don't think the Democratic party could have been stopped from building up a political organization. We were in power -- the Republicans -- much longer than we should have been. Every city in the country had gone Democrat in Roosevelt days, except Philadelphia was one of the last to fall. And even a more moderate approach to people and even opening the doors to younger people, I don't think that would have done it. It might have staved it off a while. I don't think it could have stopped the Democratic take-over.

(WMP: As I recall the Republican party had sort of fallen down in several little principalities -- )

Well, that was always true of the Republican party. Back in the '30's you had the Trainor wing and you had the McNichol wing, and you had Penrose and Vare -- which were all patronage.
If a fellow was Sheriff and he had 300 jobs available, he had an automatic organization and if he were Recorder of Deeds he had 150 jobs. Of course their problem was in the primary. After that, there weren't many Democratic votes around but they used to have the fights in the primary. I think that's one of the reasons now you see the various cliques in the Democratic party. They don't have as much patronage, which was at that time a much more valuable weapon than it is today.

(WMP: Well, the city-county consolidation changed things considerably didn't it -- the way politics is today)

Yes. They put a lot of people under civil service, who like anything else, if they weren't under civil service they either worked politically or they didn't hold their job. Once they were under civil service they took the easy way out --- they'd rather not work anyhow.

(WMP: How stringently does the (?) today?)

Probably much more today than at any time since '51.

(WMP: Where is it lodged?)

Federal monies. Revenue sharing money. Model Cities money. Redevelopment Authority. Parking Authority. They are all political havens.

(WMP: What about the non-profit corporations like the Industrial Development Corporation?)

Very. You look at the first three or four top men. They are all personal appointments of the mayor. I don't want to name them. That's not fair to people.

(WMP: Is that true of the Food Distribution Center?)

I'm not that familiar with that, Walter. I don't know how active that is right now.

I think it is half and half with the Chamber of Commerce -- it's a partnership. But the Chamber of Commerce is about as effective as a wet noodle. And I've told Thacher that. They have a premise, and I agree with them, that they should get along with the city administration so far as they can, but they don't have to be subserviant and that's what they are. I don't know who the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce is now -- but fellows like Dick Bond and Paul Kiser, the Haas's, they've got a stake and its a question of how much belly you've got. There were a lot of people vulnerable when Dilworth and
Clark ran. But there were some fellows there who were willing to put their necks out and fight for something that they thought was right.

(WMP: Businessmen put their necks out for city-county consolidation, and home rule ...)

That's like being for motherhood. Anybody would be for that.

What they are lacking there -- just looking at them -- is a younger group. Just the recollection I have, going back to '48, '49, and '50, there were young executives around, coming on to the scene. Movers and shakers. Sometimes they did more shaking than they did moving. At least they got into the swim of things. But you don't have that now. They don't want to get involved. It's a phobia with all people today -- don't get me involved.

(WMP: Well, the times are different. After the war (tape unclear)

We haven't done too much improving around here in the last four or five years. The housing situation is just pathetic. Nobody wants to tackle it. I don't know the answer. We can't continue to lose people as well as business -- SKF is moving, Exide is moving, Lit Brothers gone, Blum's gone, -- we just can't keep losing them. And we've got about 6,000 more city employees with about 250,000 - 300,000 less people than we had 20 years ago. We've got 6,000 more school employees but less school people than we had ten years ago. And we've gotten to a point -- and of course with business moving out -- you are getting to a point where I guess 80% of the people supported 100% of the people. Today it is getting to the point where 50% is supporting the other 50%. I mean in tax dollars. And you just can't make that continue.

In the last ten years here in Philly, we've elected a district attorney twice (the Republicans), Specter was licked on his third try. Tommy Gola once for Controller. Of course we've had the two minority members of the Council. At one time we had a third one. And we have won some legislative seats. At one time two state senators -- we have one now, which we hadn't had.

The only thing we can do is try to run better candidates. Our problem is the reluctance of candidates to run.

(WMP: Do you see any development of corruption in the government that might get them in trouble? That's the one thing that happened when the Republicans were toppled by the Democrats.)
Oh sure. Corruption is always involved. The problem today is that the court system is so overwhelmingly controlled and dictated to by the Democratic organization, particularly the 29 judges that Shapp appointed at one time. And the type of material -- you know, I talk to judges today and they don't want to sit on the bench because they are afraid of being compared to the people they are sitting with. And that's terrible. And what they were able to do with this grand jury -- in the last year and a half is unbelievable.

(WMP: What was that?)

Well, your son was the Special Prosecutor. What they were able to do for the legislature -- cut monies and eliminate the use of technical equipment that is necessary under proper court guidance and anything else. The shortening of statutes of limitations. You could go into the whole rampant of the thing. You had the District Attorney down at the federal building taking the fifth amendment. And the Deputy Mayor goes in and takes the fifth amendment and now they are running him for judge. What's happening? The arrogance will catch up with them, I'm convinced of that. But all I can do is the best I can. We've got good young fellows. We have a good team this year running. Lazin is a good kid. He's young, they had a great record prosecuting the FHA fraud cases. Got the National Justice Award from the justice department. The people still say why can't you get a big name? Big names don't want to run. The number of people I talked to about running. The greatest tragedy we had was the defeat of Gola and Specter. That's disturbing. Those two, regardless of personalities or anything else, they gave the city good government for four years. They served the people. And they run against a Fitzpatrick and a Klink or Klunk and the people reject them. Tommy Gola said to me -- a fantastic kid -- he said to me what do I need this for? I gave up an insurance business. I do a good job and they elect that guy. I don't know if I'll ever get Tommy to take another office. He's a little bitter.

(WMP: How is Thacher? I thought he ran a good campaign against Rizzo.)

Thacher is my friend. He's a decent, fine human being. But Thacher will never get elected. Thacher knows less about the city today than he did in '55. His race against Rizzo -- he worked like a dog. Said all the wrong things for the most part. But he got the negative Rizzo vote in the Black community. He got 72% of the Black vote. It wasn't pro-Longstreth. It was an anti-Rizzo situation. I think if I had run anybody else, I would have got 72% of the Black vote. Thacher as I said worked
hard but I think what the Republican needs is a good shot and a beer candidate. A guy who can talk the language of the fellow on 10th street and up in Kensington and Fishtown and South Philly. As I told Arlen Specter, who was a fantastic candidate and good public servant, -- Arlen went up to Fishtown one time and he talked about something being de minimus. I said Arlen, you're in Fishtown. Next time you say fishcake, they'll understand you. He still remembers that story.

(tape change -- some conversation omitted)

(WMP: We interviewed Thacher and he talked for about three hours without stopping ...)

Well, Thacher, as I say he's a warm, decent human being, but in the eyes of the people he wasn't mature. Everybody grows out of knickers and grows out of something, but Thacher wants to ride horses into costume balls and things like that. He doesn't look like a Mayor to people. And that hurt him a lot. I'm not so sure, Walter, how good a mayor Thacher would make. I think he would have been a great city representative. Of course, he was a councilman.

(WMP: How did he do as a councilman?)

Not so well. He's so busy. Thacher makes speeches. Thacher never attended committee meetings where all the work is done. He had a girl who attended the meetings -- a capable girl. And she would report back to Thacher. You can't be in council that way. You have to be in there and know what's going on. Thacher is a decent guy and a good citizen but I don't think that could get elected mayor.

(WMP: Who do you have in City Council now?)

We have two girls -- Ethel Allen, an articulate girl, a go-getter and a fighter and Bea Chernock, who is a very qualified lady and does a good job in her own way -- not as aggressive as Ethel is or gets as much publicity, but she gets more done than Ethel does. She's on the ball. We can be proud of both of them.

(WMP: To what extent are the labor unions a big factor in the success of the Democratic party in Philadelphia?)

They are a big factor. Of course, most people identify themselves with labor -- whether or not they follow their advice all the time -- maybe some unions have more effect than others in delivering their vote, but basically it's a Democrat vote, but where they help is that they produce funds and they provide workers.
They'll give you as many workers (at the polls) as you want, they may supply 800, 1,200, 1,500 workers for you. But they are ineffective.

(BF: There was a long article in the *Inquirer* about the Republican party a few weeks ago. One of the things they were asking was if there are any real differences between the Democrats and Republicans in terms of philosophy.)

I'd like to believe there is. Basically, I think that the Republicans believe in driving a Chevrolet when you can afford a Chevrolet. I think the Democrats believe in driving a Cadillac when you can afford a Chevrolet. I think fiscally and I know it's poo-pahed -- I think we're more conservative that way. At least I am. And I'm for helping people that can't help themselves. And I don't think that we always do that.

There was only one thing about that article that depressed me -- of course, nobody believes in newspapers anyway -- it was to me a good omen, actually, because in 1965 *Philadelphia* magazine had an almost identical piece called "Is The Elephant Extinct?" and we won the election that year. But one thing in that article of Aaron Epstein that bothered me and that was he said that the Republicans said they stand for honesty and he poo-pahed that as being totally unimportant. When news people are writing and think that to stand for honesty doesn't mean anything, I think they are full of baloney. I think it's something to stand for. I think you can stand for other things. I don't poo-pah that. Of course the funny thing about these newspapers -- Aaron Epstein wrote that. And I only met the fellow once about a month before the article. But I noticed in the by-line that he has been the political editor of the city desk for five years. And that was the first time I met him. Five years and he never took occasion to call or -- the old political reporters, as you know, Walter, they were in your office every day or on the phone. Joe Miller and John Calpin and Joe Lowry -- Joe Miller called me every day of the year. Even if he had nothing to ask me. He had a list of 20 - 25 people he called every day, including Christmas Day. How are you doing? This and that. And out of 25, somebody might drop something. And he would have a story. I don't know where these people get all their information. But that was the only depressing thing to me in that article. They thought that was ridicule that some of our ward leaders said we think we stand for more honesty in government.
(BF: Does your party have trouble with that after Watergate?)

I think Watergate hurt the Republican party everywhere. There's no question about that. Fifty percent of the fall of Specter and Gola -- if that election were held the day after it was held, if people had known what had happened the day before, Specter and Gola would have won big. But we took a drop from a 61% turnout, based over 40 years in similar elections, to a 43% turnout. Anytime we get below 50% we can't overcome the machine.

But with Watergate, it's going to be tough for a time. The Republican party was not a strong national party anyhow. People for the most part don't identify with the Republican party and we were probably 35 - 40 years and I don't know that we ever were trying to get Hoover off our backs. Whether or not one party can stand Hoover and Nixon in one century, I don't know. It's a factor and I'd be kidding you if I told you anything else.

(WMP: I thought Jerry Ford did a good job.)

Very good job. He was a decent guy. I think he was given a bad strategy. The key to the election from the beginning lay in the big cities and they chose to ignore that till the end. Just a change of the vote in Wisconsin -- in Milwaukee and in Cleveland a percentage point or two would have been the whole election.

(WMP: How much patronage does Rizzo and his staff have now?)

I would say that they can lay their hands on in the city itself what I'd call patronage jobs and that includes the court system -- probably a good bit -- 8-10,000 jobs. Now on top of that you have your state patronage. I'd say probably 1,600 - 1,800 non-civil service. Maybe another 8,000 civil service. See the fallacy of the civil service system under our charter is that while initially you must take competitive exams to get a job, after that they are allowed to count up to 50% oral interviews in promoting you. If you are not a good loyal fellow, you'll never pass that oral exam. That's where the laugh is in the civil service. Any cop they want to promote -- they can knock him right out on the oral. They've had more oral examinations -- they have the right to go totally oral now -- in the last five years than in the past 25 years before. The Civil Service Commission has the right to authorize oral examinations -- they take a panel of three people. Civil service is a farce. And it is with the state too. They don't take competitive examinations. This was true with the Republicans as well. They don't take competitive examinations for promotions.
Rizzo.

(WMP: Who is the patronage boss for Rizzo?)

Good. I've known him for a long time. His father was a Republican committeeman many many years ago when the police were allowed to be politically active -- that was back in '32. I knew Frank Rizzo then. Frank Rizzo wanted to be my candidate for mayor. He didn't want to be a Democrat the first time he ran.

(WMP: Why did you turn him down?)

Two reasons. I didn't think he would make the best mayor, frankly. Secondly, I didn't think he could win as a Republican.

(BF: Why could he win as a Democrat?)

Well, he licked Longstreth by about 48,000 votes. He got 28% of the Black vote. As a Republican he would have got about 2% of the Black vote.

(WMP: Bill, why didn't you support the recall?)

For several reasons. First of all, philosophically I don't agree with it. I just don't agree that because a fellow -- and that was the basis on which they made their move -- a fellow raises taxes when he says he wasn't going to raise them. I don't know a mayor in this town that hasn't done that. Dick Dilworth said he wasn't going to raise, and Tate said it three times and he raised them, so the fact that Rizzo said he wasn't going to raise taxes and he did I didn't think was sufficient. I think for removal we ought to try a man with a crime or a specific action. They based it on that he broke his word on the taxes and that the labor situation at the Inquirer -- well, that's a situation that is in dispute. The Inquirer says one thing happened up there that day and the city administration says something else happened. Something is going to be done on that in the court. That's in dispute. I don't know what happened. I probably would agree with the Inquirer version, but I don't know what happened. That's not sufficient reason for a recall. Thirdly, the people who were involved with the recall, promoting it, had an opportunity the year before to get together with the Republican party and try to support a candidate to lick him. They chose to form a third party, which from the moment of its conception made it impossible for either of us to win. Charlie Bowser. You know, I get that question asked of me all the time and Creed Black and I were playing golf one day when he was here at the Inquirer and he said why weren't you for the recall? I said will you answer one question for me first? He said yes. I said why aren't you for it? Not one newspaper in this town, not one radio or tv station, not one outstanding citizen in the business community, economic community, only
any stature at all that I read who was for it was Joe Clark. But why ask Bill Meehan why he wasn't for recall? Where was the Stu Rauch's and the Dick Bonds? Where were the Paul Kisers? Where were the movers and shakers? Where were the labor unions? I didn't see those people for recall, but when Bill Meehan's not for it, Bill is in cahoots with them. I was convinced it was doomed to failure anyhow. I didn't think we'd gain anything by being part and parcel of it.

(WMP: What do you see in the future of the city?)

We've got a shot this year with Fitzpatrick. A win gives you impetus. Gives other people courage to run. Next year only if we blow it we should elect a Republican governor. That will give us some patronage.

(BF: Who would be the candidate?)

I don't know.

(BF: Specter?)

Specter is interested, but I think it is far from being settled. There are several attractive candidates. Specter, Bob Butera from Montgomery County, whom I don't know from Pittsburg, the U.S. prosecutor out there, Joe McDade, who is a Congressman who succeeded Bill Scranton in Congress, is a very attractive young guy. Who's going to wind up, I think it's a little too early. I think we're in a real go situation.

(BF: Do you think it is essential to have the Governorship to get the city party going?)

Yes. I think it is a very important factor. I can see exceptions to it. You've got to have a little base.

(WMP: How much patronage is there in the state government now?)

I would say in Philadelphia probably 1600 - 1800 jobs. It's very important.

(WMP: Is there anything we haven't asked you that we should have asked? What would you like to say?)

Probably the only thing I might say is that I just wish there was some way to get more people involved. I'm finding less and less people wanting to get involved. That hurts us all.

(WMP: Has the racial composition of the city made it much more difficult? The percentage of Black people must be much higher than it used to be.)
We'll be pretty close to 40% Black. The Democratic party (?)

. I don't know how much we've done to try to change
that. I don't know how much we can do on the local level,
because the party is unfortunately formed on the national level.
We have no control over this.

(WMP: What percentage of the Black people actually vote?)

They are getting more and more sophisticated in their voting
and they are voting heavily. You know, Walter, people say they
don't know how to split the tickets -- don't you believe that.
When Dick Schweicker ran he got 43% of the Black vote in the
city of Philadelphia and that was not only in Germantown, where
you have a higher professional group of Blacks. You could
go into the jungle at 15th and Columbia and he was getting
37 and 38%. All you have to do is look at those returns.
They know what they are doing. They are getting to be
sophisticated voters. Somehow we've got to get them.

(BF: Do you see Rizzo as a shot and a beer guy?)

Yes. Most people can identify with Frank Rizzo. With all due
respect to art, that piece of art that Lipshitz designed,
Rizzo said looks like a piece of plaster, well, that's what
it looks like to me. It's probably a great piece of art.
But a guy up in Kensington, a guy says yes, Rizzo said I can
get an Italian plasterer to put that together. Dilworth had
that -- Dick Dilworth could identify with people. He could
use the language of the people. Dick I guess has been described
more often than not as a patrician, but he had the language
of the people. He wouldn't say de minimus. He would say
fishcake. He has a presence that certain candidates have.
Part of it I think is because of his size.

(BF: Rizzo?)

Yes. He walks into a room. Some people have it. Tommy Gola
has it. You can be in a room with a thousand people, Rizzo
walks into the room and right away you know he's in the
room. You can feel it or something. You know when Gola is
in the room. Other people like that. Jack Kennedy had it.
He walked into a room you knew he was there. I think the physical
thing has a lot to do with it, but I know some big fellows
who could be in the room forever and you'd never know they
were there. Thacher didn't have it.

(WMP: Thacher is still a college boy.)

Well, if he's not, he is still giving the people the impression
that he is. That's what I'm trying to get across.
(WMP: One more question. Do you think Rizzo will run for Governor?)

No. Everybody tells me I'm crazy. He's going to Rome and Israel, I understand, in the next couple of months. But knowing Frank Rizzo, he's a home guy. He only goes two places as far as I know. Besides his office -- he's in his office till 8 o'clock at night. He goes home and he goes to the Vesper Club on Friday nights. Other than that -- he takes a vacation up at Cape Cod -- but he's up there three days and he's got to come home. I can't see Frank Rizzo moving up to Harrisburg. He may think about it, but I think when the time comes I don't think he will. I can't see him up in the mansion in Indiantown Gap or up in Harrisburg -- they're not his kind of people, really. Fighting with 16 councilmen is one thing. But fighting with 200 house members and 50 senators, most of whom you don't know, that's another ball game. I think a lot of people around him are trying to push him into it, for their own purposes. I don't say it's wrong. They are ambitious. They figure the higher he goes the higher they are going to go. But he may, but I just don't think he will. I've never asked him.

(WMP: Do you see him from time to time?)

I guess I see him two or three times a year. I talk to him on the phone. Last time I talked to him was about three weeks ago. A bill up in the house -- if he has anything in the house or the senate that he's interested in and he thinks I can help him on he'll call. Most times he gets a yes. Sometimes he gets a no. I assured him as I did Jim Tate and Dick Dilworth that when I think they are right I'll be with them. When I think they are wrong I'll tell them they're wrong. And they've all accepted it in that spirit. He has.

(WMP: I wonder if you want to make any comments on the Tate years?)

Jim Tate was probably the hardest working mayor I know of. I think he was as knowledgeable about the city as anyone. Jim had some weaknesses, I think. Which didn't make him as good a mayor as he could have been, being hard-working and knowing the city. I think Jim felt there was a conspiracy around all the time to plot against him. There were very few people that he trusted and knowing the city as well as he did he wanted to run every department himself and that diluted his ability to do a better job than he did. But he was an honorable man. Very good living fellow. But he had a real phobia that everybody was out to get him. You'd say hello to him and he'd wonder why are you saying hello to him. What's that man up to? But a nice fellow. I got along with Jim. He'd yell at you and I'd yell back.
I don't get mad at people because they are Democrats. I'm supposed to, I guess. I don't get mad at people because they are Jewish or Lutheran or Baptist or I'm a Catholic. Why should I get mad at them if they are Democrats or Philadelphia or Communists? I don't get mad at Communists. They can be what they want.

(WMP: That's what politics is. That's why you are successful.)

I don't know if I'm successful. But I enjoy it. I've made a lot of friends.

(WMP: You haven't been Chairman at a good time for the party. But you've done a good job at it.)

I've done the best I could.