Interview with William Ross

May 20, 1980

I was born in July, 1899, in the northeast corner of the old Austro-Hungarian empire on the border of Czarist Russia. Where I lived the population consisted of four ethnic groups. Each one had a different religion, a different script, and each one despised, if not hated, all the other ethnic groups. It was a very unsettling time at the beginning of this century. There was a great deal of talk of war and war was imminent there from time to time. Also talk of revolution. The Russian-Japanese war was in 1905 and then came the Russian revolution, the first revolution. And then there were various clashes between the great powers, particularly Germany and England, and then there was the Balkan war of 1908 and there were the preludes to the first World War. And you had this preliminary activity and fear during that time. And then in addition to that complex situation you had the fear of the Jewish people of pogroms, which were not infrequent in that general area.

Surprisingly, I had a very good basic education in my early youth. By the time I came to this country I had had several years of Latin and Greek and mathematics, geology, history — I really had a very good educational background for those years.

I was very unhappy. So were many people. That was the time when large masses of people immigrated to the United States. That seemed to be the one hope -- as it still is at this particular moment. I came from a broken home and my mother immigrated to the United States in order to prepare the way for her children, myself and two brothers. It was about a year of waiting while this happened and things became more unsettled at the time. I remember a very exciting moment when a group of Russian students -- revolutionary students -- were escaping from Russia and came over the border and we met in secret with them. Of course I was very young at the time but I guess you grow very fast under such conditions as I lived. And we heard their recital of the oppression of the Czarist regime and their hopes of finding freedom in the west -- some in the United States and some in Palestine. And it gave me a feeling of the hopelessness of staying in this area and I looked forward to coming over to meet my mother in this country.
(WMP: How old were you?)

I was fourteen years when I immigrated and came to this country. That was 1913. A year before the world war. It was a very fortunate thing with me because I probably escaped military service because I learned later that boys my age were conscripted and killed on the Italian front.

So that was the first time when I had a lease on life -- there were other times later, of course, when Hitler came and exterminated the Jewish population -- but that was the first time that I felt my life was saved by coming to this country.

We were very poor and I came by steerage. And the long trip lasting two weeks on the boat was very memorable for its dirt and rats running around. It was crowded with immigrants -- all of them very anxious fearing they would be denied entrance to this country. There were examinations -- mostly physical examinations -- and they feared being denied admittance.

I remember particularly there were two or three men who were coming back from a visit they paid to their old country. They were immigrants originally and they were coming back. They were looked upon with great wonder because they would not have any difficulty getting in. They were returning to their homes. And they were subjects of great envy. And I remember examining their clothes. Their clothes were a different type than we had where I lived. And their shoes. Of course it was probably Sears Roebuck shoes but it looked quite wonderful and very special.

When I landed here and I came to New York I had an emotional feeling I've never had since. It was a feeling that here, finally, I found a very happy situation. A place of opportunities. I almost imagined I could breathe in the spirit of liberty in that city. I've never gotten over that feeling of joy that I had the first time I came to New York City. And of course there were a great many things which I had never seen before. There were various museums, there were libraries, tremendous libraries with books of many languages, there were theaters, -- and almost everything was free. And you could see a theater if you went up to the pit for 25¢. Or if you stood in line you could see the opera for maybe 50¢. And of course there was Coney Island as well not far from New York. So this made for a joyous situation. Of course I was brought down to realities soon enough because my mother was very poor. She had an apartment in the slums of the East Side. You had to walk up five flights and on each floor
in that building there was an apartment on each end with the toilet facilities in the middle. Of course that was an advantage because at that time in New York they still had privvies so that was probably a step in advance.

Then I was sent to school. I remember being sent to the 7th grade although I didn't know a word of English. But I learned very quickly because of my knowledge of languages. And I thought that the schools in this country were very easy. Too easy. Because in the European system you go to school six days a week and you have long hours. And here you usually had about six or less hours and only five days. And I thought it was just a cinch. And I found schooling very easy. In fact, I became the teacher's pet because she would point out that a foreigner was doing so much better than the others, which is usual of course in such situations.

By the time I entered high school I found that I could not continue with my education because my mother's wages were extremely low and not enough to feed us. And there weren't at that time any additional contributions such as food stamps or anything of that sort that we have now. You lived on what you earned. In fact, there wasn't even any unemployment benefit of any sort. And I had to quit school and get to work.

When it was time to look for work -- I had reached the age when you had a permit to go to work. When you were permitted to go to work -- age of sixteen. I came across certain realities and my first disappointments with the way things are in our country. Of course I had many other disappointments later. But at no time did I become overwhelmed by the disappointments I had, and some of them were of a tragic nature, because I always felt there was so much good about our country that it is sufficient to have faith in the way we work and the way we operate our fortunes.

I found that to get a job you couldn't qualify in certain places because of your supposed religion or your race. That was quite an open attitude because there were no limitations -- no legal limitations about discrimination of any kind. And that was a very painful process of facing that kind of reaction. And almost every time I looked for work -- and that was intermittent because you had a job and then you lost your job for various reasons. You found there was always a certain amount of prejudice in looking for work and finding a job.
And then of course the kind of work I had was menial, very
dull, and destructive of the spirit. And of course I always
resented the fact that I could not continue with my education.
So I faced a lot of misery in those early years and I tried
to overcome it by developing other interests. First of all,
educational. We lived at that time in the east side of New
York and the east side had slums but it also had a great
deal of ambition, a great deal of stirring, a great deal
of art, literature, and educational activities especially for
people like myself who couldn't qualify for regular education
for one reason or another. And I spent a great many nights
attending lectures of all kinds -- such lectures as Karl
Marx, Herbert Spencer, Immanual Kant, and meeting people who
discussed very intently the various attitudes about the social
and political implications of these philosophies. I also
became active politically and for a long time I tested
various movements, not knowing just where I belonged really.

The first obvious group were the Socialists and the Socialist
Party. Being a very young person my greatest usefulness in
that area was that I carried along the soapbox of the orator
for the speaker who ran for office. And I attended various
activities. And somehow I found that group wanting. I tried
for a time the Industrial Workers of the World, and they are
an anarchist group, a syndacalist group, closely allied to
the ideas of anarchism. And in fact I also took part in
some activities with the Anarchist Group in New York. Of
course in New York you had every possible movement represented.

See, at that time -- this was before the Russian Revolution
so you didn't have the Communists at that time. When the
Communists came I became very active and a very warm supporter
of the Russian Revolution and hoped to bring the Revolution
all over the world. However, in all these associations I
somehow failed to get a sense of satisfaction because I realized
that what all these various groups are doing is promising a
great deal without having to deliver. Because the promise
was to be realized at some distant future. So I felt that
I really couldn't prove anything on that basis nor could
I be proven as a beneficiary of whatever they have to propose
because I might be dead a long time before any of these
dreams or hopes are realized.

So I gradually drifted into the ideas of the Trade Union Movement,
because in that movement you had to deliver. You had to
organize a group, build up some strength, you had to negotiate
and secure benefits and say to the workers here's what you
have. And that of course was very modest by comparison to
what was promised by the Socialist Party, let's say, or the Anarchists, who promised a millennium. But at least it was something tangible and it appealed to my limited expectations -- my practical approach to these movements. I felt that a movement is not justified unless it is of visible benefit.

And my ambition was to become a labor leader. Now the opportunities at that time in the labor movement were very limited. First of all, there was a very small membership. I think the total membership in the time after the world war was less than the membership of one union -- the Teamster's Union -- in this country at the present time. What's more, it consisted almost entirely of skilled craftsmen. So a person of my background, for example, would have no opportunity for any official position. But my idea was that I would try to organize. That I would become a labor organizer and in that manner become involved in that movement. And I tried to do this in a small way on the jobs I worked as I had one job or the other and I found that each time that I tried that one of my fellow workers would betray me and tell the boss about my being an agitator and I wouldn't last very long. But something happened eventually which appealed to me a great deal. I found that a group of liberals -- some of them church liberals, some of them Fabians, as that movement was called at the time after the English Fabian Society -- and some liberal trade unionists formed a college in New York. It was called Brookwood Labor College. The purpose of the college was to instill a spirit of development in the labor movement to organize all the workers rather than just a limited group of skilled men and to provide leadership for that particular purpose. That was the intent of that college. It was a two-year course and they were good enough to give me a scholarship. I had no money. I was entirely broke and I was there for two years because of the kindness and maybe charity, for that matter.

And my experience in that school was extremely important to me. When I came to that school I was still a very militant radical. I was still imbued with the promises of the Communist movement. By the time I came out I was very much changed. I had to face self examination and examination by others. I remember particularly a professor of psychology who taught at the Cooper Union Institute in New York and came to visit and lecture. And he had the theory in one of his lectures that extreme radicals are very egotistical individuals who merely try to embellish their ego and pretend to be beneficent towards the masses when in fact they are very self-centered. And I remember a very hot exchange with him. But when days passed by I thought that he might have had some basis for saying that and perhaps I should really develop my feeling that activities on behalf of the masses have to be very practical and perhaps limited but at
at the same time efforts which bring forth visible results. In other words, I picked up prior to my going to that college the idea of trade unionism and its perhaps limited but real objectives and then it developed much further as I spent my time in Brookwood Labor College. I still maintained some contact with the Communist movement and in fact during the two-month vacation period in 1923 or '24 the Communist Party people -- they used a fake name at the time but they were the Communist Party people -- gave me an assignment which proved to be extremely important and interesting to me.

The assignment was to spend the summer visiting conventions of labor unions from coast to coast. The first one was in Atlantic City and the last one was in Portland, Oregon. And the purpose of my tour was to induce these organizations to pass a resolution asking for the recognition of Soviet Russia. That was before Soviet Russia was recognized. And I made that appeal in each case and I received a rather pleasant reception. People liked seeing a young man who seems to be enthusiastic but I got nowhere. I had a 100% failure. None of these groups would adopt that resolution because the policy of the American Federation of Labor at that time -- that was a time of Samuel Gompers -- who was very conservative and very much anti-Communist -- their policy was not to give an inch so far as Soviet Russia was concerned. And that went down through the ranks and that was the treatment I had. So I didn't get very far.

But my personal experience on this trip turned out to be very impressive so far as I was concerned. I travelled by train. At that time it took four and a half days to get from the East Coast to the West Coast and I travelled by train across the country and I stopped wherever necessary. At one point I got on a train in Kansas City -- that was in the morning -- and I travelled west and all day all you saw was cornfields all the way to the Colorado border. It was the same sight all along but it tremendous and overwhelming and I felt what a rich country this is to have such great fields of so many hundreds almost thousands of miles of fruitful land. And I meditated on that. And then when we came to Colorado and toward the Rockies and you saw another kind of beauty. And that too was very overwhelming to see the red rock and the great mountains. And then when you went over the Rockies you came to the coast of California, which has of course a beauty of its own. And I thought this land is so great and so beautiful that all these things that worry me and I agitate about are really not that important. And I
was overcome by that kind of balance. There may not have been enough logic in my thinking but that was my response to seeing the country at that time.

Now when I came back to finish my last school year at this college my plans were to find some area where I could operate and feel useful and I did something which was in keeping with my thinking then and also much later. There was a program on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad which was a program of cooperation between the unions and that company and the way it operated was that in return for the fact that a railroad dealt with a union -- which was unusual at that time because labor was not fully recognized -- in turn for negotiating and agreeing to conditions the union itself would cooperate with the firm and advise its workers to meet in regular conferences and make suggestions for the improvement of the operation of the firm. That was a useful program and the person who originated the program had thought that I might become very useful if I would get a job as a worker in the firm and become part of that committee. It was not a question of getting a paid job with the union as an official -- it was a question of getting there and getting a laborers job and participating in the activity of the union in that manner.

And that's what I did. But even that was not very easy to accomplish because it was a period of one of the intermittent recessions. It was in the '20's -- 1924 actually. And there wasn't a job for me. I had to wait for a job. And the people on the Baltimore paper knew me -- especially through one of the men, Mr. Morley, who was the editorial writer. They suggested that I might get some other kind of work since I couldn't get that job on the Baltimore-Ohio anyway. And I said no, I wasn't interested in any other kind of work. I wanted to work in connection with the labor movement and this was the spot I came for and I'll wait. It was very hard waiting because I didn't have much in the way of resources. And this Mr. Morley told that story to a psychiatrist attached to the Johns Hopkins Hospital -- told him -- the way he knew me from before he met me was that Mr. Morley was lecturing at times at this college and got to know me then -- and he told him I was a person of average intelligence but I insist on working as a laborer and you couldn't convince me to try anything else. So this psychiatrist asked to see me. And I had a session with him and I thought that maybe he will offer something in the meantime -- perhaps some temporary kind of activity until I get that job. And he questioned me very closely and I knew enough about psychiatry to see what he was driving at and he tried to get to my psyche to see why do I have this complex of wanting to work as a laborer when I could do something else. And I was so hurt at
that time. It really undermined me for some time to come
to imagine that a person would underestimate my dedication or
whatever and who would assume that it was abnormal. It was
very upsetting to me. I've never forgotten it. I even
remember the doctor's name.

Well, eventually, I got the job and it was not very exciting.
It was a boilermaker's helper and it was a very dangerous job.
Very often you had to get into the hot boiler at night to
repair a leak or sometimes you'd have to go on a board high
up above the ground and work with the boilermaker who was
driving rivets into the boiler. And he would have an air
machine and you would hold up the chisel while he would press
on it -- while he would hammer. And you have no idea how
painful that is for the ear and eventually it affected my
hearing and I have limited hearing because of that.

But I became extremely active in Baltimore in the labor
movement. One of the things I was involved with was the
establishment of the Baltimore Labor College. It wasn't
a college in the full sense -- we just used that name. It
consisted of classes for adults and sociological and historical
subjects. We also developed a radio labor program, probably
the first such program in the country. That was before
television. And that was successful. It was paid for by
an important New York firm ... (tape change) ... 

... in addition to it I had to develop a cooperative program
with Johns Hopkins University -- its economics department.
And the program was a joint organization of a number of
seminars of very large size. Weekend seminars which would
have people of national importance dealing with current labor
and industry problems, such as the future of the railroad
industry. See, I was connected with the railroad industry
at that time -- as a boilermaker's helper. I
would devise the program and have the people agree to participate.
And those questions were of national importance and received
very wide notice and it was very pleasing. And I worked
on this program with a man by the name of *Brody* Mitchell.
He was a professor of high rank in the economics department.
And we worked together extremely well and he developed some
sympathy for me and he said to me Bill, why do you waste your
time with these labor boys. They are not much good and you
will never get anywhere with them. Why don't you plan for
another future. If you will write some things I will have
them published in the Virginia Quarterly and you will make a
beginning that way. Of course, I thought there was nothing
in his suggestion and I was disappointed that his attitude
was so limited as to expect me to become excited about a
Virginia Journal -- a quarterly journal. The amusing thing about it is that when the second world war broke out and the person who was the director of the research department of the union I work for -- that was much later of course and that union was the International Ladies Garment Workers Union -- well, this director went to war and we had to find someone else. The same Brca,dt Mitchell was brought in as a director. In other words he came to work for our union and I had a big laugh with him and at him when the tables turned in this manner.

I had a lot of satisfaction in this activity in Baltimore but I was of course a bit restless and wanted to do more things and I became interested in getting to learn more about the European labor movement and especially I wanted to attend the college known as Ruskin College in Oxford. It's not part of the university but it is in Oxford and has some affiliation. And the people who were running the Brookwood Labor College arranged for me to go to Ruskin and to Oxford. Of course the town of Baltimore became very thrilled and excited. They said I'm the first Rhodes scholar going to Oxford -- it was not a Rhodes scholarship. They accumulated some money for me -- not a great deal but enough for me to go there. Later when I got there I supplemented that by writing for labor papers in this country and also in European countries. Some of them, for example, like in Denmark, would be translated. I also went on a speaking tour and they always paid me for doing that. So I was able to spend a year and a half in Europe and in several countries and in each case I was in contact in some way with the labor movement in England and in Denmark and Germany and Belgium. In time, of course, I left on a leave of absence from my job and the job was eventually -- at that time paid 57¢ an hour, that boilermaker's job. That was an advancement. When I started working there it was only 53¢. Of course that was a different time. But I took a leave of absence and of course the people working with me thought -- didn't think too much of me. Perhaps I imagined that they should have sympathy with me and appreciate the fact that I have a labor interest and an interest for them. But they didn't look that way -- they felt that they wouldn't do a thing like that if they had a chance not to -- and that I was probably some kind of fool. In other words, they believed like this psychiatrist that I was abnormal in trying to do it. Especially that I was in England and Europe and here I come back to a lowly job.

Well, I stayed there for another year. My stay in Baltimore off and on was stretched over a five-year period. And then something happened in the South. The South was always a difficult area for labor organization and it still is to this day. And it occurred that several mills faced spontaneous
strikes. There was no organization but the workers rebelled what was called the stretch-out, which means adding a great many more tasks from time to time to the operator.

And I was asked to go and work in one of the strike situations, namely, in Marion, North Carolina. That's near Ashville. There the workers went out because they couldn't tolerate things any longer and they asked for help. And the regular union was very small and consisted of only highly skilled workers in the textile mills and they didn't have very much money for that matter. And their response was very cool. They didn't have the spirit of organization. They weren't evangelists. They were just job holders with a little bit of the union and enough money to get by with.

So a group of people who really were around this Brookwood Labor College -- the same type I mentioned before -- people who were liberal and had some access to money -- some church people -- they thought they would like to help that situation. They asked me to go down there. And I came down to the strike situation. There were several people who were sent down there. I was not alone. And my particular job was to maintain the spirit of the workers there by various programs and I found a pitiful situation. These people lived in a town which was owned by the mill owners and the mill owners owned everything -- they even paid the minister's salary. They along with the Duke Power Company owned the hospital in town, as I found later. They were just living at their mercy and anytime they wanted to they could throw you out of the dwelling and the homes they had were pitiful structures. They were hovels. You had boards covered with newspaper very often to keep the wind out. Sometimes earthen floors or rough floors. One of the most unhappy things I found there was not their diet so much, which was very bad -- people lived largely on fatback and beans. That was the constant portion of their diet. Amazingly little else. Of course you could say they could grow green vegetables. They just weren't educated. They were mountain people. They are the people who lived in the barren hillsides and they came to work in the mills. They were all white -- they were Elizabethan people actually, dating back to the times of immigration. Very religious, but very poor and they had to leave the land and here they found themselves in the mill.

But what I found most sad was that the children didn't have any toys. Can you imagine children without any toys? They just couldn't afford them and perhaps they could have made them, but I never saw any sign of anything being made. It was that kind of community. But they were very warm people.
Very friendly. Very responsive. I found them responsive at least. But they met a very adamant position with the company. And not only the company they worked for directly but the company which was part of an association of Southern mill owners who were dead set against unionization and who would threaten any members with dire consequences of some sort if he agreed to negotiate. Now the owner of this mill was also from Baltimore and he was a hating person and we just couldn't move him. In fact, they wouldn't meet with us -- we had to meet through third parties.

And then the Governor came down and he decided that the situation was volatile, which it was, and he issued all kinds of warnings, including warning me because he thought I had a great deal of contact with the people. And then finally the Governor and the conciliation department of the United States Department of Labor became involved and there were meetings with the company. They met with the company and then they met with us and that was the time when the strike was going on for weeks and months and we were running out of money. We couldn't find any new sources of contributions to carry on the strike. The money was necessary because these people had no resources and had to be fed and given some clothing. Otherwise they couldn't last out the strike. And an agreement was made with the company, which was a very unsatisfactory agreement which gave up the strike and the only concession it made was that the company would take back the workers on strike without any discrimination. That was the only thing that we gained -- which was of course no gain at all. But at that time we felt that we couldn't go on with the strike.

Well, when the company reopened its mill it didn't keep its promise and it kept out about 100 workers and that caused a great deal of commotion because they expected at least that they would get their jobs back and one morning they went out picketing and when they were picketing there were, by my information, there was the sheriff and some 20 assistant deputy sheriffs who met the strikers and they started shooting at some point, killing six people on the spot and injuring some 20 others. That's when I found out that the hospital was owned by the company and Duke Power because they didn't want to take our wounded men into the hospital.

On that occasion it was my sad duty to preside over the funeral of six men all lined up in caskets. It made national news of course because it was such a horrible story. That was 1929, in October. And the tragedy of it stirred a great
many people. Of course one thing they wanted to do for the strikers was to provide them with food and clothing. And the people in the YWCA all over the country were extremely helpful and they sent in food and money and clothes. And people like Pickett -- he was able to get the Quakers for the first time to become involved in an industrial dispute. They never were before and it was very helpful. Later, I met him in Philadelphia when he and I were members of the Police Advisory Board. Clarence Pickett. And still later I officiated at a ground-breaking of a school named after him.

Well, also people like Sherwood Anderson, the novelist, and Sinclair Lewis came down. Sinclair Lewis was sent down by the Scripps Howard papers and he wrote a great deal about the events which took place in Merion. And he became concerned about my safety. The National Guard was sent down there and they kept watching the house as long as Sinclair Lewis was there. When he left, the Guard also left the house which they were guarding for my safety. The thing dribbled out and it was a complete defeat. There is a special reaction in a human being when he faces complete defeat, complete disaster. It's hard to understand the devastating completeness of your being when there is just no way out when everything is lost. And that was the feeling in that particular strike.

In fact things became very dangerous and all my associates left. I was very much interested in the element of fear. There was a black woman who was one of the few blacks in that area who was a maid and when she saw what was evolving she vanished one day completely. She never said good-bye and she never made any apologies. She just left. She just didn't want to be involved in white people's troubles. And that gave me an inkling of how blacks react to struggles of this kind. She felt that she didn't belong in that kind of situation.

Incidentally, I might say at this point, that about two years ago my wife and I went to Marion, North Carolina. That was after 48 years absence. I arranged to go there through the labor organization in Asheville. They expressed interest in the history of that situation and I arranged to visit Marion. And the labor official informed the press and the media that I was coming and they sent a team of television people with me as we travelled towards Marion. And we came to that town which I hadn't seen for 48 years and we approached the street leading to the mill and lo and behold the street is named after Mr. Baldwin, who was the President of the mill when I was involved. And he died and in his honor they named the street after him. And then we came to the front of the
mill and it was just like it was before. It looked prosperous. People working. And two very well-dressed men came out of the mill and they must have heard about my being there and who I was and they asked us to leave the area. Which of course we did. And the television reporter who was with us said to me do you think a situation like that could happen again? And I said yes in the South it certainly could happen again. You saw these men. You saw their attitude and you know about the companies in the South violating the law and refusing to deal with the union in spite of the law's requirements and I think it could happen again.

(BF: What was the name of that mill?)

Marion Manufacturing Company.

Well, that was the end of that phase of my activity. I came to New York looking for a job and Sinclair Lewis heard about my being in New York and he told Heywood Broun, who in the beginning of the Depression decided he was going to do something about the Depression. And he was a very generous person but not very worldly wise in such matters, but he thought I could help him and we worked at it and he collected money for the unemployed. Eventually, the beneficiaries were not the unemployed so much as the Bowery people. You know what sort of situation that is. And overwhelmingly those who came to the kitchens that we had and participated in the benefits were people who were hopeless. I remember trying to send them to jobs and they just didn't want the jobs. They were a different human category. They attached themselves to us. I never took this work too seriously because as a labor radical I knew how limited those possibilities were -- one man collecting money to solve the situation.

Well I had this experience and later I spent about a year and a half working for the Cooperative League of the United States. Now that is a consumer cooperative organization which was a central body for cooperatives all over the country. And that movement holds some interest on my part. It's important. There wasn't as much consumerism at that time as there is now but that organization provided opportunities for development and I organized some cooperatives both in New England and in the Middle West. But my strong desire, of course, was to go back to work for a labor union and that came some years after that, really. It came when Roosevelt introduced his New Deal. When Roosevelt introduced the New Deal part of it was the encouragement of the organization of unions. And at that time the unions which were sort of dying on the vine -- the unions which could hardly subsist -- suddenly came to life and looked for organizing talent. And I came to work for a union in the
garment industry. The union I came to work for first was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. I worked for that for about a year and then I was taken on by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. And that opened up a new chapter in my life. Actually, that was the work I wanted to do all the time.

At first all you could do is organize and that wasn't too difficult. At that time you could come to a city where you had factories and tell the workers that Roosevelt in the government sent you in there to organize them. That had some truth in it -- not entirely, but there was something in that. And even the employers believed there was something in that. It was of course in the air and I feel that sometimes when I talk to my more recent colleagues and the difficulties they have now -- they are very serious -- I tell them how things were easier in those days of much less money than unions have now. But more opportunity for achievement -- more public recognition, as a matter of fact. At that time there was still a great deal of sympathy for unions dealing with workers because workers were poor and there was not much protection at that time and there was little to fall back on.

Eventually, I found myself in Southern New England working for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The job was to organize the industry. The headquarters were in Fall River, Massachusetts and the offices of the ILGWU in New York never heard of Fall River. And Fall River never heard about the ILGWU. So that when the city of Fall River published a special edition of the newspaper on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the city, they listed four pioneers in the labor movement. I was one of the four and the other three have been dead a long time. So I go down in that area as one who contributed to the beginnings of the labor movement in our situation.

In Fall River I had the opportunity to establish the kind of a union which I considered a model organization. By that I mean an organization which had the interest and loyalty of its membership, an organization which provided service which was appreciated by the membership, the respect of the employers, and wide participation in community activities. There was a great deal of satisfaction in being able to (tape change)....

.... One of the most important elements in running a union is the negotiations with the employers. That's the main thing. And it was possible for me to have a dominating position in
our negotiation for the industry. It was possible because the employers were many but none of them -- or very few of them -- were of large size and therefore it was easy for me to manipulate the situation. Now what I would do in negotiating would be to determine in my own mind what the employers could possibly pay. And of course my idea was to get as much as possible for the employees. And when I made up my mind that this was what we had to get the question was can they pay that much. And I had to make a decision whether or not they can pay that much. But once I made up my mind that this is how much I have to get and this is what the employers can pay I proceeded along that line and I would take a very adament position because eventually you can always go on strike. And I was generally successful in that position. That meant that the employees by and large felt that the union has done well by them, but the employers also felt that we were reasonable. That I did not push them to the wall and that even though I was perhaps very demanding and maybe went the limit, I didn't go beyond the limit. And that was very important. I applied this attitude--tried to apply it--in the school system when I negotiated with the union but it was a very different attitude, which I will explain later.

In Fall River we also established something which became a part of my activity later -- a very much developed welfare program, which later on I developed in other parts of the country for the union. So on the whole this was a very good experience and the time came when I felt I couldn't do much more. Incidentally, one of my.... would you turn the tape off a minute?

.... well, I left this area and for several years wandered in the organizational activities in various parts of the country, including New York and the coast, and then the union called me for a special job in New York City. The job was to organize employers who were tainted with contacts with the gangs, with the racketeers. And that developed to be a very gruesome business. I was very militant in facing these people. I told the pickets not to give any quarter to anyone just because they had the reputation of having a lot of support and muscle and there was retaliation. In fact, I was attacked in the office and beaten up pretty badly. I discovered that I had a pretty thick skull and they couldn't do much damage. They surrounded me in the office and they had pipes and they beat me with pipes. I was taken to the St. Vincent Hospital and sewed up. And then the police guarded me for weeks, almost months, around the clock. They would live with me, in fact. They would come and live with me in the apartment.
Then I discovered something about the authorities in New York. I was interviewed by the District Attorney who wanted to know the ramifications of my problems and I told him what I knew. And then I discovered that some of my opponents in the opposite camp, in the racketeer camp, were given a verbatim report of what I told the District Attorney.

At one point I tried to get a gun to defend myself, because it was really serious, and then I decided that I probably couldn't shoot as well as the other people and I didn't do much about it. But my assistant fared very badly. The Seafarers Union, which is a very militant organization in New York, came to our help with these racketeers. And they sent scores of seamen to help us. And what happened with these poor fellows -- they would be tracked at night when they went home and cut up very badly. Really cut up with very sharp knives very seriously. And like good soldiers they took it and I wondered about their stamina and their dedication and I was always grateful to them for what they suffered. One of the men who worked with me -- was my second in command, so to speak, in that particular trouble was killed in a telephone booth.

(WMP: How come they didn't get you?)

They tried. They were going to throw me out the window when they attacked my office -- I was told later -- they were going to pick me up and throw me out the window. But I sort of maneuvered around and didn't give them time to do it.

Eventually, this particular struggle came to a standstill. The union could not overcome the gangsters. They were too strongly entrenched and you couldn't get to the workers. They didn't respond because they were in fear of the gangsters themselves. And then what we returned to was a status quo and I was of course very much disappointed and perhaps disillusioned. But that particular struggle came to nothing except that I perhaps had the satisfaction that I didn't waver in that situation. In fact I saw a lot of people waver and that was part of my disappointment.

Soon after that the American Federation of Labor was asked to provide a person to join the team of five who would investigate a certain commission in Germany. The position was the establishment by the German government -- West German government -- of camps for German expatriots. Germans who were expelled from Poland, from Yugoslavia, who were expelled after the end of the war because they were pro-German and pro-Nazi. These people lived in camps all over the country and we travelled and tried to develop a program and I spent about three or four months in Germany. As I travelled in these camps I couldn't help but compare them to the camps established by
the Nazi regime. The extermination camps where the Jews and Gypsies were exterminated. In fact, I did visit Dachau, which was one of the extermination camps. And I thought no matter how much these Germans suffered they lived in comparative luxury when you compare it with what happened with these poor victims of the Holocaust.

We presented a very extensive program but what happened fortunately for these people was that West Germany became very prosperous and in great need of labor and absorbed these people. Not only absorbed them, they also imported foreigners who came to work in Germany. You know, there has been a large exodus of people from Yugoslavia, Turkey, and other countries. So Germany absorbed these people and this was an experience which gave me -- I found out that very few Germans knew anything about the Nazis being active. Never knew about the camps. They just didn't know. They claimed -- even situations where a camp like Dachau was right adjoining the city of Dachau where you couldn't help knowing what was going on, they pretended that they knew nothing about it.

When I came back to the United States I went to the West Coast for about a year and a half for the union, organizing. And after that I was called to Philadelphia. That was in 1952. The reason why I was asked to come to Philadelphia was that the organization that we had was in trouble and its leadership was being challenged and it was a question of getting someone to straighten things out. And when I came I preceded to do it immediately, without any delay -- perhaps too rapidly. And at first I encountered a great deal of antagonism, in fact I had a rebellion among the membership. And a couple of thousand people would parade in front of my building and asked me to go back where I came from. They were used to a very easy attitude and they didn't feel responsible for living up to the agreements we had with employers and they had very little respect for the leadership of the union. And it was my job to correct all of that.

I

In Philadelphia had the opportunity to continue what I did when I was in New England and the other thing I always hoped to be able to do is establish a model labor organization. I encountered a new element in Philadelphia, which I didn't have before -- mainly the racial situation. You had a great many black people come into the union. And my objective, naturally, was to gain their confidence and gain their friendship and they were waking up at that time, beginning to stir. And I found there were some injustices there.
There was, for example, some unions were separating -- they met separately as white and black. Also women were separated from men in certain areas. I remember one active black woman came up to see me and she was telling me I'm a race woman and we demand our rights. And she wanted some special consideration.

(WMP: I don't understand...)

This black woman was a member of the organization -- my union -- and she felt there was some injustice involved in the operation of the union and she came to tell me that, as she put it, "I'm a race woman" and she wanted some special benefits. And I told her I would give her none of the things she asked for, but I would do one thing -- treat everybody in the union alike, whether they are black or white. There would be no advantage for blacks or whites or men or women. And I said to her, you observe and if you think I don't do it come and let me know. Well, this woman of course became a friend of mine because my policy was to treat everyone on the same basis. And my union in Philadelphia stood out in our national organization as a union where there was an exceptionally good relationship with black people. I didn't cater to them anymore than I would to any other members but I think people appreciate being treated on an equal basis. And I was able to do that. And of course I've got the union involved in various activities, not only in the negotiation of contracts, which were generally successful and generally acceptable by the employers, even though they complained that I was not only firm but I also enforced the contracts. And enforcing of a contract is very important to workers because then they know that what was promised was given to them. And they employers surprised me because I was never too easy with them. When I retired they gave a dinner in my honor at which time they donated money for some cause -- I believe it was the cause of the Allied Jewish Appeal -- and some employers were out of business for years sent in contributions in my honor. Contributions they would never have made. And that surprised me because I never really catered to them especially, except when they had a problem I would always help them if I could. They knew that -- in fact I helped them survive.

So that was a very important attitude and I did bring in that kind of attitude to my negotiations in the school board. The same general attitude. Not very successfully, I'm sorry to say.
I was of course involved with City Hall and when Dilworth decided to appoint a Police Advisory Board he appointed me as one of the members. I was always helpful to Dilworth and I had a great deal of admiration for him and later on when the Board of Education was formed he was very glad to have Tate suggest me as being one of the members. There was a member of a labor union official a member of the board before -- the older board -- this was a new board established by the new city charter. But the vision of that board member was rather limited. He was put in there -- he was a Building Trades official -- and he was put in to make sure that any building work was given to union employees, which was a laudable objective and I would follow that objective, but that was the objective rather than the educational process involved.

Now I would like to speak at this point about the Board of Education and my relationship with -- I'm sorry, I'd like to add something else to my activity in Philadelphia. One or two items. It was my interest in black people that prompted me to do it and also my general international interest. And I was helpful in two situations. One in Israel and one in Africa. In Israel we established a number of health centers, a club for women, and a youth center -- the youth center is being developed. And in each case that was done in Arab -- Israeli, but Arab towns. And I was very much amused at a dinner they gave me when I first came there -- or rather, when I came the second or third time. They wanted to know why was I interested in Arab situations. Now these are Israeli Arabs -- people who live in Israel. And I told them the reason why my union was interested is that we have minority problems, which were very grievous, and I knew that they also have a minority problem and we wanted to accentuate the approach to a minority situation by favoring these efforts in Arab situations. I didn't think it meant much to them but I thought it was important to tell them that.

Now the second thing -- in that period, I'm speaking of the '50's, the black people were not particularly excited about the black nations in Africa. About the fact that for the first time you have black people ruling those countries. And I thought it would be a good thing for young black people to visit some of these African countries and see their nations being ruled by Africans. And I was able to secure a fund for that purpose and for a number of years I arranged for people to go -- people largely from Gratz High School -- over there and in two cases they stayed in Africa. They
became nationalistic and they decided to stay in Africa.

(WMP: Did you go over yourself?)

Yes. I went over.

Now eventually, this fund gave out. And what's more, the black members became enemies because we sent non-union people, the students. So we sent some members and they became too greedy and when the money giving out I decided to let it go by. I occasionally meet somebody who went there on that trip and they ...

My other effort was more important, really. I got to know that in Kenya there is a tailor's union and they wanted some help and they appealed to the International Federation of Trade Unions and they couldn't get any help. They wouldn't help them. So I decided to find help for them. And eventually I worked out a program where they established a vocational school for garment workers -- and find money for them. I started with $50,000 and they did establish such a school. I went to Africa. In fact I travelled throughout Africa but I spent time in Kenya in connection with this. This became a very successful affair. It was started with $50,000 but then money came along from various sources and it was praised in wide circles as a people-to-people effort. And it established a garment industry in Kenya. Before that they had tailors but not a manufacturing industry. In fact there were so successful that they tried to develop trade with this country. And they are still operating today. And I think that was an important thing to do for them.

And of course the members we have in Philadelphia have always seen that we are anxious to cooperate and are not just interested in Italy or Israel, for example, but also in African countries.

Let me come to the school board. Dilworth became interested in becoming the school board president.

(BF: How had you and Dilworth known each other?)

When he ran for office I arranged for meetings for him in our hall and worked for his election, provided election day people to give the votes. It was activity that was supported by funds and labor -- not only for Dilworth, but that was true
for Clark and others. It was a continuous program. We collected from voluntary funds from members for this purpose and we had some expertise. We were probably as active as any union in the city. And that was taken for granted that we would be because we had developed that kind of reputation.

I may say things which are very critical of Dilworth, and they should be said, but I had a great and abiding admiration for the man. I was happy to participate, for example, in the effort to erect a memorial in his honor and -- but I was so critical of him that people were surprised that I would pay that much attention to him. For example, when he died there was a service in a church in Rittenhouse Square and Harold Cohen said "I'm so glad to see you here " as if I wouldn't be there on that occasion. Also, when they had this meeting of people who would donate money for the erection of this memorial it seemed to people that why would I have come when I have this much objection to Dilworth.

Well, Dilworth decided to become the president. To my knowledge, that was the first time he showed an interest in the public education. As mayor there was no indication that he was actively in any way interested. I found nothing of that sort.

(WMP: Whose idea was it to get him on the board?)

He wanted to be on the board. Tate of course would know how it happened. But I think he volunteered on the basis of becoming president and Tate was glad to have him out of his way. There was always a certain amount of feeling between Tate and Dilworth and Tate didn't care a hell of a lot one way or the other about that situation. At that point the school system seemed to be outside of the city's operation. That was the attitude. And naturally, Dilworth was a very attractive candidate for President of the Board. And when Tate selected the people to be members of the board, there were nine members, I believe he consulted with Dilworth and had his acquiescence. And both Dilworth and Tate were glad to have me on the board. And Dilworth decided to create an overall program to meet the school situation. One of his objectives was to get rid of the dead-heads, as he put it. In other words, the school system was in the doldrums at the time and there was very little confidence in the school system and he thought new blood was needed. And that attitude was good and had its limitations as well. We established various boards to deal with the problems of the school system. There was a board to deal with the
educational program. There was a board to deal with the finance program. The building program. And so on. And these boards consisted not only of newly appointed school board members but also very prominent... (tape change)

... and Dilworth lost very little time. He was a very determined person and he did what -- and the first thing he wanted to do was to get rid of this poor man, Whittier, who was at that time Superintendent of Schools. And he assigned to me the job of negotiating his departure. Which I did. In fact, I had two occasions where I negotiated the departure of Superintendents -- this Whittier, and later on, Shedd. Whittier was very grateful to me for what I did. I arranged for him to get certain compensation that he was entitled to because he had a contract and for years he would send me a long Christmas letter. And he was grateful because the departure was negotiated with a rather generous sum of money, to which the man was definitely entitled. But that was the first thing that was done.

And then there was the question of a new superintendent. And Dilworth found Shedd. Shedd came out of the Harvard School of Education -- that was the year 1965. The '60's were with us, with all its foibles and fads. And Harvard seemed to be the fountainhead of all of the new faddish ideas about education at that time. One of these ideas was that you really can't trust the family with the upbringing of these children -- many families neglect their children -- and therefore the school system is a surrogate of all these children and it is up to the school system to take care of them. And Shedd brought such ideas into this school system. His educational program generally was an improvement over the dull situation which existed before. But a limited improvement because as time went along I found that the big ideas were there -- like this idea that the state is a surrogate parent. But what he failed to see was important was the simple thing of Johnny learning the 3 R's -- reading, writing, and arithmetic. That seemed to be a little removed. There was some talk about the approach of education to the whole being. These are mysterious kinds of words that I didn't fully appreciate, perhaps, but you don't worry so much about whether the boy can read. That was implied. In fact the first time that the school system took the question of reading seriously was when the United States minister of education -- secretary of education -- stressed the importance of reading and the lack of reading ability in our schools throughout the country. And that was the beginning of the change in our school system. In fact, when I spoke about the need for the ability to read I was
looked upon as being a very old-fashioned fossil sort of individual who talks about unimportant things.

Shedd brought this kind of attitude. And there was something else that he brought into the school system. The importance of confrontation. This confrontation was a very painful thing. That was much more popular at that time than it is now. There were various schools in California which practiced that. In fact, you had to go and pay for being confronted in one way or the other. And they thought it was good for the soul to have someone tell you some very nasty things. And there was one situation for example which was allowed by the school. Foster, who was the first black principal we appointed -- he was appointed principal of the Gratz School. Later on he went to be superintendent of schools in California and he was killed by extremists. But this Foster had a session -- one of these confrontation sessions -- and people came there not knowing what to expect. People from the school system -- teachers and others. And suddenly a gun exploded right in the room -- just like that. And the deal was to surprise people by shooting and seeing what their reaction is. I'm giving this as an illustration.

Then there was something far more grievous. I discovered that he had established certain weekend institutes -- confrontation institutes -- where he would bring together very aggressive young students and teachers and principals, maybe old fogeys. And the students would insult these people and tell them they would beat them up or burn the school down and say a lot of things to scare them. And these people were terribly scared and they let someone know that this was being done to them. And I raised objections to it but I was told that this is a very important method. This is something that is important to the school system, to education, it's good for the people. Finally, the opportunity came to do something about it. And the opportunity, sadly enough, came when these youngsters used four-letter words. And the use of four-letter words evidently is far worse than using scare tactics which are far more damaging. And that shamed I guess Dilworth and some board members who supported him and Shedd and they discontinued that particular event. But the attitude was there.

Then there was another part of the attitude for which I held Dilworth and Shedd responsible -- they had a theory, that probably comes down from studies made by Harvard University, that one of the problems in the urban school systems is that the people who tend to go into that occupation are second generation Americans. And these second generation
Americans do not have sympathy for the slum children. That was an obvious attack on a large section of certain ethnic groups -- Jews, Italians -- where teaching is a step in the ladder, I guess. And evidently when you are second generation you don't sympathize with people from the slums. But that was written on a confidential report that spoke deprecatingly of people of that sort and someone in the school system mailed it to me. And I decided to use it. In fact, we had our sessions televised at the time and I read this letter on television and made a great stir and exposed the attitude which prevailed at that time in the school system.

(WMP: On the part of what people in the system?)

You mean when they spoke of the second generation Americans? They meant the teachers and the principals who are in the school system and who are second generation Americans and who don't have sympathy for Blacks, I guess -- people from the slums. There is no relationship between them.

( BF: You felt that Dilworth and Shedd had that attitude?)

Oh yes, they definitely did. There's no question about it. In fact, they said that much. Dilworth was very outspoken about it.

Now, there was this injustice in the system. Namely, that blacks were not encouraged by the WASPS who controlled the school system. They were not encouraged in any way. They were not promoted. So that you had an inadequate representation of black people especially in the upper ranks of the school system. And we proceeded to correct that situation. In fact this man Foster was the first Negro high school principal ever appointed. And we appointed him and then we appointed others. In fact I think this situation is very very different.

(WMP: Why was he killed?)

Well, you know that group on the coast was very extremist and at one time he had a lot of trouble in the school system and he considered issuing passes for students with their picture on it -- identification cards. Whether he was to do it I'm not sure but there was a discussion about it. And then you had these crazy people -- the Symbionic group who kidnapped Patricia Hearst -- that's the group and they are the ones who killed them. That's been established.
So we established a very good balance. Of course, later on there was a demand made by some black people that we establish an affirmative program, where you actually go out and secure Negroes to occupy certain jobs. Well, I opposed that on the board -- I was overruled. That came perhaps a little later, but I'm trying to establish a point. I opposed it because I thought that it should be appointment on the basis of achievement and quality of the person if there was a fair attitude on the part of the governing body. And I thought there was a fair attitude. You wouldn't discriminate against a person because he was black or because he was white. And after taking a position against it I had the amusing occasion to vote for black people for promotions when others who claimed they were for affirmative methods voted against the very same person.

Mr. Logan -- I don't know if you've ever heard of Mr. Logan -- he was the black educator who was very active in the school system for 35 years or more -- he was very anxious to have affirmative policies adopted and then he saw the hypocrisy of some people voting which ever way they liked in spite of agreeing to principle, whereas I wouldn't agree to a principle of that sort but I did what he thought was the right thing and the fair thing.

Another thing which happened during the first years of the board which was very damaging and still is is the extensive program of school construction. And school construction went on at a great scale and some schools had to be built, without any doubt, but they built more than necessary. There are still others on the board which never got to building because we ran out of sources of money. But building a school became a very important element and of course when you build a school you become liable for the interest that has to be paid over maybe 20 or 30 years.

(WMP: And the maintenance.)

In other words you mortgage the financial future of the school system by borrowing money. You borrow when you have to. But that was done in a tremendous extent and much of the problems facing the school system -- financial problems -- is the very heavy investment and very heavy commitment over many years for this money. I think that in another five years this expenditure will begin going down because schools are being paid off.
Some of those schools were fitted out with pools, fireplaces, which parents were very glad to have. In fact, they would come before the board asking for all sorts of luxuries. But this also added to the cost and that was ignored. It was almost as if Dilworth -- I would say to him, where is the money going to come from? Do you have a press to make money for this purpose? And Dilworth amusingly gave me the same answer I got from the teacher's union when I said to them we can't get the money. How can you expect these increases if we can't get the money? And they would say to me we'll get the money somehow. And Dilworth said the same.

It so happens that we didn't get the money in the beginning. There were all kinds of difficulties. And when I became the president I was able to get the money -- money from Harrisburg, among other places. But there is a limit to how much money you could get. Dilworth I don't think understood the financial problems sufficiently to be concerned. Sometimes it felt like Dilworth was intent on building a monument for himself. And these structures were part of the monument. But he didn't give sufficient thought for finances.

And another area where he didn't do it which is perhaps even more serious is the negotiations with the union. It was amusing that a labor person like myself should have called his attention to his extravagance in dealing with the unions. He didn't want the school system to be interrupted at any cost. And in order to avoid interruption he would concede to monies which we had a very hard time finding later. Not only that, you see what happened during that period is you establish a pattern of giving to the administration people and to the teachers particularly. And when you establish a pattern that pyramids as time goes on. In other words you can set a pattern of a modest approach to a problem -- a financial problem -- and sort of establish a habit with the people you deal with and they realize that you have a certain attitude. And also be free with the things and they are sure that they can also get things from you because you are free-handed. And Dilworth established a pattern of giving-in so he wouldn't have a strike.

One situation upset me -- he wanted me to talk to the union about their demands at that time during negotiations and maybe make a bargain with them. And I met with them and I suggested a bargain and I told them to think about it and I told them something that was very fair. In fact, they made a mistake by not accepting my offer. But I went
But I went away for a weekend at the Poconos and when I came back I found that Dilworth just ignored entirely what I had done and made a new deal that was far more expensive.

And during that time the school system was not making any reasonable progress in education. We talked liberalism and we pleased certain people but there was no evidence of any improvement in education. There was, however, evidence of destruction. And that happened on a large scale. You have young people in the community -- black people in most cases -- and they would invade the school and come into the auditorium during a meeting and disrupt the school and make all sorts of charges and racial slurs. Tate became very much annoyed and he demanded a meeting with us at one time. We met with Tate, all of us. And at that meeting I blamed openly the -- both Dilworth and Shedd for some of the situation in not being firm enough to handle it. And the tendency at that time was to give in to the blacks no matter what. Even if it wasn't good for them you would do it because that was the thing to do in the '60's. And Tate became very upset over it because of the community objection to it. The community objected a great deal to the disruptions. And it was at that time that the police was utilized more often than it was previously. See, the police didn't know what kind of support they would have from the school administration if they went in. And the principals were afraid to call the police because they didn't know what Shedd was going to do to them if they bring in the police. It was that kind of situation.

So that went on for quite some time and then there was another incident that was very much discussed at the time. Young people left school one day in large numbers and came to the Board of Education to demonstrate. And it later was discovered on fairly sound grounds that the administration, which means Shedd, encouraged this kind of demonstration. It was supposedly a demonstration against the city in some way. It was supposed to indicate in some way that the black student bodies were rebelling against the attitudes that they would find. And he himself was involved and that's when Rizzo became involved also.
(WMP: What did Rizzo do?)

Well Rizzo was the police chief at the time. Some of the kids were beaten up. He was pretty rough. Some of the youngsters were hurt by the police. It was a nasty affair. But it was something which the school administration didn't have clean hands in that particular incident.

I attacked the administration at that time for allowing this kind of a demonstration. I was open about it. And I wasn't very much contradicted. I don't think Dilworth had anything to do with it, but I believe Shedd had something to do with it.

Shedd was a good educator. His opinions, while I might not accept all of them, were fairly sound and some of them were very sound. But he defended Dilworth and he misled Dilworth to some extent. And I would talk to him and tell him that he was making a mistake by depending too much on one person. He had a board of nine and he should be able to meet the attitude of the board of nine. And I was one of the board of nine. But he felt very secure with Dilworth. And Dilworth was always able to control the majority of the board. Not all of them, but the majority. So I was in the minority.

Now during these years the school board meeting was always televised. And it was a big show in town. And I was told that the viewers were as numerous as at some of the good programs, popular programs, in town. And in those meetings there was always a great deal of debate. And I particularly participated in debates and I exposed or asserted a position on education or on finances or to the evils of board members using chauffeurs and so forth, and I received a great deal of notariety. And the person — the people who favored my views and my positions happened to be Tate and Rizzo. In fact, Rizzo made it part of his platform to fire Shedd when he comes into office. Tate didn't object to that particularly but Rizzo was the one who made a big issue out of it.

Rizzo and I became friendly when I was on the Police Review Board. He showed up to speak on behalf of some police officer, and he felt that I was fair in my judgments and my votes on that particular board. And we became friendly. I also knew him through his brother who was a neighbor of ours, Joe Rizzo. So we became very friendly. And Dilworth
would be very surprised about it and he said to me, "Bill, he's a monster. How can you work with a man like that?"
That was the period when Rizzo was preparing his campaign for mayor. And I very naively said to him, that I think Rizzo will make a good mayor and I think he will progress and change his position from a policeman to a person who is interested in the whole community.

And both Tate and Rizzo pleaded with me to become chairman of the board -- president of the board -- when Dilworth was going to leave. And after a time I agreed to it but I always pointed out afterwards that Rizzo never appointed me to the board nor did I become president because of his desire but rather because Tate was the one who urged me to be on that board. And when I assumed the position on the board I tried to live up to my idea of negotiations with the unions. And throughout the existence of the board it was obvious that the financial questions will never ease but certainly will become much worse if the wage policies of the board continued. I mean the whole scope of negotiating salaries and various fringe benefits which were being given to the employees. That it would be impossible to go on with a decent program if the old policy continues.

My attitude toward the situation was as follows. Among other things I wanted to prove that a union official can also be concerned about the community as a whole. That he is not prejudiced in favor of his union group but that he is community minded. And I was very naive to believe that that would find wide acceptance. It never really did. It certainly didn't with the union people, who became very antagonistic towards me, or even to the others -- those people who are in the general community. I wouldn't say that I was completely unappreciated, but I never impressed sufficiently to make much of a difference. And I was hoping that the union, having gotten a good many improvements over the years, would be more concerned about the stability of the school system. In other words, they will not only think of themselves as wage earners but also as educators. That also was a bit naive. But I was hoping that would be possible.
Incidentally, Dilworth's favorite method of dealing with board members, especially if he wanted their votes, was to invite them to lunch at a club and then pressure them to vote with him. And I had these lunches quite often with him and each time he wasn't interested in what I think -- not a bit -- he would just tell me what he wants. And when I didn't agree he was just impatient about it. There was that about him. I mentioned that to one of his loyal supporters, Natalie Saxe, and I said he pays no attention to anybody. He just knows what he wants and he's not willing to share and to exchange positions. She said, "Bill, he was a mayor and he was used to appointing people to a board or a job and if they didn't get along they could be fired. He thinks he is still the mayor." But I found his actions and Shedd's actions sometimes obnoxious. Now for example, there was a very important member of the administration in the educational program and I heard that he is going to be pushed out and Shedd arranged an assistant professorship for him at Temple in order to get rid of him. The man was a timid man. He was always timid and he was not a rebel of any sort. But I became annoyed by it because the man, to my knowledge, was an effective educator, although a timid educator, and he was Jewish. And that came at a time when the second generation of Americans were attacked as being inadequate in the urban situation. And I said to Dick at the time, "look, if you are going to back up Shedd in having this man pushed out of the system I'll charge with sufficient justification that this is an anti-Semitic act. And if you want to have a row about it, you're welcome to it." And I repeated the same thing to Shedd. And they backed out.

I guess Dilworth felt that kind of an attack would be harder to swallow. And the man was saved and he was on the job until very recently and then he went on to some other field.

Dilworth appointed the Vice President of the board, a black man, to act in his place. And he himself resigned a few months before the expiration of his term and a few months before the election. And he came to my office and he told me, "Bill, I will try to see to it that Henry succeeds me." And I gave him some opinions about it and he completely ignored it and he was going to do it. And of course he was going to be out of the board. And when the new elections
fort the president of the board came about there was this man who was president -- acting president -- and it was a question of who was going to be elected on the board. And that was when Tate urged me to stay on and I was very hesitant about it because I knew for one thing that I would have to negotiate with the unions and that I would probably antagonize all my life associates, which actually happened. But Tate convinced me and Rizzo wanted me to be on there. Rizzo was impressed by my position on the board throughout these years -- the fact that I wouldn't take any nonsense from black people, for one thing. In fact, one of the board members who was a professional person -- a black person -- and I charged him with being a racist. And that surprised a lot of people. Even Gladfelter, President of Temple University, said Bill you are the first person to point out that a black can be a racist. And that was wonderful. And the fact that this person was just as bad a racist as many a white person.

So they approved of my attitude and because Rizzo was a policeman he respected my courage, I guess. And I had the attitude that I could handle him. And as a matter of fact, for about a year and a half or two I did and I was able to get money from him and more importantly, I was able to keep him away from the board. And that was a good thing for the board of education. He didn't bother me about jobs. I think eventually I did employ three ex-policemen in some jobs where we needed people. But it was remarkable how he really stayed away from my problems.

So when people would ask me why do you support Rizzo I would tell them that as the president of the board of education I find him very helpful and very useful and on that basis I support him. And he acted very decently. Only when I took a position of insisting on public taxes did he start developing a different attitude against me. You see the school system was in bad shape and the first year of my office I didn't ask for any taxes for the school system because I knew that Rizzo would bitterly oppose it and that actually we could get by. And that first year was the only year that I know of when the school had a balanced budget. And I think I had something to do with it.

But then when the second year came around and the school system needed money very badly, Rizzo gave us $12 million as a favor to me, really, but that was was not nearly enough and I started to talk to him about taxes. Now no taxes was a very important element in his whole political
office. He thought he got elected because of his pledge not to raise taxes. And it was anathema to him for anyone to suggest that while he is mayor that taxes will be raised. Of course he changed his position later but at that point it was as important to him as some religious dogma. And what did was get to Schwartz and the Council and then that year they allotted certain mills in taxes to the school system and that angered Rizzo and from that time on he started turning against me.

Now when the negotiations started with the union the teacher's union knew by that time that I will take a very firm position and that I will be far less generous than Rizzo had been. And I convinced Rizzo that a strike is unavoidable. Now Rizzo, who passes as a tough guy, was very cautious about a strike. He didn't quite realize or know what to do about that situation. And actually I had to prod him and put him in a position where he would commit himself to supporting the position of the board of education if a strike occurred. And I had to go in on one occasion when his commissioner of education, Celia Pincus, was present at such a meeting, and where I saw that his position was sort of uncertain. And I put him in the position where he had to support an anti-union situation at that particular time. And during that strike at first he gave vocal support and he condemned teachers and blasted them for what they had done but as the strike went on he wavered. And it was very amusing to see this big tough man waver and expressing all kinds of fears about the situation. And the union became very aggressive so far as I was concerned. They especially resented my position because I was a labor man. And there were a great many personal attacks and eventually Rizzo felt the pressure of the community. See, the weakness of the school system is in facing its financial obligations that the parents at the particular time wanted the schools to operate regardless, under any condition. And they could be convinced into accepting any demands -- any conditions presented by the administration or the employers -- as long as the schools operate and the children are taken care of. So insisting on a modest budget, insisting on modest increases has this particular problem -- you can't get very much support from the community. Their interest is to get the children to the school. Their interest is not to support the principle of lower expenditure -- at least not until taxes are demanded.
So there was the pressure of the community. And then something occurred that was most damaging. Jamison was the judge who was in charge of hearings on the injunctions that were issued and so on. And he suddenly decided to punish these labor leaders and the teacher's union. And he put them in jail. That was the worst thing he could do. He meant it to be a severe punishment, but what he did is arouse the sympathy of the whole labor movement and maybe other people and that's when they really started taking action against the board. That was when the school system had the strike going for six weeks. And they felt that you were on the verge of being able to make an acceptable compromise. But when this happened -- when this was done by Jamison without any contact on his part with any members of the board or of the city -- then I realized that the situation is lost and at that point I was sort of pushed out and Rizzo took over negotiations and although the result was not as generous as the teachers expected at first, it was giving a great deal -- far more than the board could really digest. And in that particular point -- at all times, as a matter of fact -- when Rizzo negotiated he would reach a point where he would weigh the political advantages of his position and when he decided that there is a political advantage in minimizing the opposition to him on the part of teachers in this case or gaining the support of a group like the labor people he would make a decision on the basis of political advantage to himself. And he agreed to some things which are completely uncalled for in order to sort of reestablish his political support after opposing the strike. He's done that since and the teachers have gotten things which teachers haven't gotten anywhere else in the country because he took over the negotiations and he made decisions on the basis of political advantage. Now he's not the only politician that does that. Tate has done that to some extent with the public service unions, like the generous pension funds which he helped to establish.

Now when Rizzo decided that my relationship with him is questionable something else occurred to bring the thing to a head. In place of Shedd we had to appoint a new superintendent -- Matthew Costanzo -- who was a very good educator and who seemed to a very fine person who had gained the support of the staff of the school system, something which Shedd has lost, and I convinced Rizzo that he is an acceptable person. And hopes were very high that here we have a new situation which will really bring about school improvement, both educationally and also community-wise. There was something
wrong with Matthew Costanzo. Something happened in his life that was very tragic and I like to think that that was the cause of his later limitations. A son of his died at a very young age unexpectedly because of poor medical attention. In fact, he later collected a lot of money because of the situation. Now he has made a lasting contribution to the school system because he was a good educational leader. There's no question about it. And incidentally, one of the reasons why I was able to convince the board and the mayor to accept him was that he was a local person. All the other recent superintendents were from out of town. He was a local educator and he made a very good beginning.

But there was something about him which didn't help the constancy of this attitude. He went down to Florida, I believe, and he was in the airplane with a reporter from the News and he had a few drinks, which could be expected, but he couldn't control those drinks and he gave his opinion about Rizzo. And his opinion was not flattering. It was the kind of opinion that any civilized person would have about Rizzo! But there it was in print. And Rizzo became frantic. He was enraged. And he said, "Bill, you've got to fire him." And this went on for weeks and I said look, he's a very good educator. He'll come on his knees and beg your forgiveness. He had a few drinks -- that sort of thing can happen to anyone. But Rizzo wouldn't budge. He wanted blood. And I really pleaded with him and this went on for some time. And I said to Costanzo that you will have to humiliate yourself and get back somehow into Rizzo's favor. He was willing to do it, but Rizzo wasn't. So when he insisted that I fire him I said that that was something I can't do. That was the first time that I realized that he thought he would use me now. I thought I was using him. Maybe I was kidding myself, but I certainly felt comfortable and I saw no reason to fire the educator. And I said this is something I'm not going to do. And he said if you won't do it I'll get others to do it. And from that time on he organized the board against me. In all sorts of ways. Some I wouldn't want to repeat for anyone to hear. But he used pretty low tricks. And these people were indebted to him at that time. And I was in the minority and I knew that my days were numbered. And one of the things that he got them to do -- he got five members of the board through one of the board members who was his agent and they demanded that I resign. And of course I didn't do it.

And then Rizzo decided that the school board was getting too much publicity and he got these board members to quit
the televised meetings which put the board in the doldrums and Rizzo became the master of the board and since that time the board has been used to a very large extent to provide jobs for his favorites and the board itself was encouraged to petty extravagances. For example, they discovered that some of them had credit cards that were used for personal purposes and paid for by the board. I made a big issue of the use of chauffeured cars. The board members had very modest lives, but after I left each had an office with a secretary. Now all these things could be called petty because the amounts of money involved were not that big. It was symbolic of the attitude of the board members at the time. He of course made appointments of people nobody ever heard of. And the board is going to have a lot of trouble and Green will have to bide his time before he can do anything about that board.

However, I don't want to seem ungrateful. The board had a sort of unwritten rule that presidents of the board will have their portrait hung in the board room. And I was invited to have my portrait hung and the money was collected for that purpose and perhaps I'm a bit ungrateful because of this honor bestowed upon me. The portrait was made and it was hung and I was invited to be present at the occasion.

Now I quit the board after continuing for about a year until my term expired. I was glad to leave. It became very unpleasant. In fact, at one point I wrote the mayor a letter about it -- mayor Rizzo. And that letter referred to a member of the board who threatened my life. First he threatened to sue me and then he threatened my life. He died himself since. And I wrote a letter to Rizzo at that time pointing out that he was an ally of his and it might cast a wrong opinion and I would hold him responsible. He never responded to the letter. But being on the board became extremely unpleasant with the mayor being against you and organizing ill feeling on the board against you.

That's the story of my activity on the board.

(BF: Were you still with the ILGWU when you were on the school board?)

Yes. I'm glad you mentioned that because I was condemned by a great many people in the unions -- although some called me and told me that they sympathized with me. But the ILGWU supported me through all this and they thought that my attitude was clean and perhaps they agree with me that
- public employee unions demand altogether too much and that they are anti-public in their operation. So I was supported throughout by the ILGWU.

(BF: At what point did you retire from the ILGWU?)

Well, two years ago, when I reached the age of 78, it was thought that I served long enough -- and indeed I did. I was working for this union for 43 years. And it was time for me to go and I prepared someone.

(end of interview)