

R O Y K U B I S T A

This is an interview with Roy Kubista, taped in Madison, Wisconsin, December 17, 1982, by Philip R. Mason, Director of the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Dr. Mason: Roy, could you start by telling us something about your early life, where you were born and brought up, your family, and recollections that you have of that period in your life.

Mr. Kubista: I was born in 1911 in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Manitowoc is a city now of about 50,000 on the west shore of Lake Michigan. My father was born in Czechoslovakia and my mother was born here in this country. I am a Czech, a "non-violent Czech." My early schooling was in the city of Manitowoc. My father, who was the father of five children, decided when the oldest was of college age that the whole family ought to move to Madison so that all five kids could get a college education at the University of Wisconsin. So when I was ten years old and my oldest brother was about in his middle teens, the whole family moved to Madison and we all went to the University of Wisconsin. I think there was somebody in my family at the University of Wisconsin from 1921 to 1942. So I got my high school at Madison Central and then went on to the University and took a degree in Chemistry. I graduated in

1933 with a Bachelor's degree, and, of course, in 1933 there were no jobs. So I went back for some additional degrees and chose a major in economics because it seemed to me at that time that economics was a more profitable and more likely field for employment than chemistry. I got a Master's degree in economics and went on towards a Ph.D. and came within one semester of that Ph.D. I've never finished it. The reason I came within one semester is because I went to work for the Wisconsin State Employees Association on a part-time basis in 1934-1935 and continued my schooling but never got to the Ph.D.

Dr. Mason: Roy, could you go into a little more detail about your family life?

Mr. Kubista: There were four boys and one sister. My oldest brother was a chemical engineer. My sister was a teacher of English and French. My next oldest brother, my next youngest brother became an assistant comptroller of Sears, Roebuck in Chicago and has since retired from that job. My youngest brother continues to work and he is a microbiologist. So the University trained all of us for some kind of a profession and of my family of brothers and sisters, all of them are living except my oldest brother who died some years ago.

Dr. Mason: What do you remember about your father and mother.

Mr. Kubista: My father was a laborer, a blue-collar man, who belonged to the Railroad Clerks Union for many, many years. He had a high school education, came over here when he was very

young from Czechoslovakia, lived on a farm in Manitowoc county in his early years. My mother was born here, had an eighth grade education, and was a homemaker and a housewife all of her life. She never worked outside of the home. My father, was a railroad worker and retired from the Northwestern Railroad with a very meager pension. They died in 1969 and 1970, my father at the age of 93 and my mother at the the ripe old age of 88.

Dr. Mason: How do you explain the the great interest in education?

Mr. Kubista: They were of that generation who believed that the kids ought to do better than the mother and father. They believed that very strongly. I remember my mother used to say to those of us who were at the University at the same time, when we were ready to quit because we didn't do very well in some courses: "You don't want to grow up dumb do ya"? So she encouraged all of us and I think that was the reason. My father always used to say: "We want to give the children the biggest and best start we can in life and they're gonna do better than we ever did and that's the way it's gonna be." So we all went, whether we wanted to or not, to the University.

Dr. Mason: Your father, you mentioned, was a member of the Railway Clerks Union. Did he talk to you about unions?

Mr. Kubista: Yes, oh yes. There was some talk of labor unions and their protection and the seniority problem on the railroads, and so on. During the Depression in Madison he was laid off part of the time. When the war started, of

course, he had a job all the time because the young men on the railroad went to war and the older fellows stayed on. In fact, they asked him to stay on past his normal retirement age. I think he worked well past age 65. So some of the early background came from that but more of the early labor background that I got, and the interest inspired in me was in college. I had some very stimulating teachers. I had Selig Perlman, who was one of the people who influenced my thinking and my interest in organized labor. Edwin E. Witte, the father of the Social Security Act, at that time was teaching a seminar and other classes that I took from him. It was Edwin E. Witte who got me into AFSCME and the Wisconsin State Employees Association movement in the first place. Let me go back to Selig Perlman. Two people were a great influence on me in those early years. They were both Russian Jews, one was Selig Perlman and the other was Bill Kirsch. As I recall, the Russian Jews were discriminated against in Russia. They weren't in any professions, they weren't allowed into government and they weren't allowed to teach. So these two people came over here at about the same time and Perlman went into the professor business and Bill Kirsch was a statistician in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. He was one of the charter members of the Wisconsin State Employees Association, that early federal labor union, 18213, out of which AFSCME grew.

I knew both of them very well. Edwin Witte came to

me in 1934, when I was doing some paper for him on social security, and he suggested that I might want to file for a job with the Wisconsin State Employees Association. They had an opening. They wanted somebody to do research in the area of public employee pensions. The State of Wisconsin didn't have any retirement system for state employees at that early date. In fact, they didn't get one until about ten years later. But Edwin Witte said: "why don't you go up and talk to Arnold Zander in his office in the insurance building, near the Capitol Square, and maybe he will give you a job if you tell him I sent you." So I did. And Arnold said: "well, you can have the job. It won't pay very much. It will be part-time." It paid \$45.00 a month. "It will be part-time and I want you to do some research in public employee retirement systems and help prepare legislation for the legislature which is meeting." I came in October, the legislature was supposed to meet in January 1935. I did that research and did some early writing for the Wisconsin State Employee magazine which was the official publication of the Association at that time. I prepared legislation for the 1935 legislature by way of a retirement bill which didn't get anywhere but at least we had a bill introduced and to work for.

Dr. Mason: What was the Wisconsin State Employees Association and when was it established? What did it attempt to do at that time?

Mr. Kubista: Phil, that organization was established in May of 1932 by a group of fifty state civil service employees who met with the blessing of the then Governor Phil LaFollette and under the auspices of the state AFL, whose president was Henry Ohl, a very forward looking and able labor leader. The reason for having a meeting of the state civil service workers was the fact that there were rumors, I think more than rumors going around, that the legislature of 1933 was going to repeal the state civil service law and give jobs to the unemployed who were besieging legislators for jobs with the state because in 1932 we were in the depths of a depression. There were unemployment rates of about 25%.

In 1932 there was a Democratic sweep nationally, and the Democrats were elected in Wisconsin, at least they came into the Senate on Roosevelt's coattails and Wisconsin elected a Democratic governor for the first time in many years. It was the Democrats who were threatening to repeal the Wisconsin civil service law and give out the jobs to the faithful Democrats who put them in office. I remember Colonel A. E. Garey, who was the Director of Personnel at that time and later Civil Service Counsel for AFSCME. He told me on a number of occasions that when the legislature met in 1933, many unemployed were camped in the corridors of the Capitol waiting to get these civil service jobs. They were supposed to be handed out if the civil service law was repealed. Well, these people who met then in the Assembly Chamber of the State Capitol in

May of 1932, formed the Wisconsin Administrative, Clerical, Fiscal and Technical Employees Association, that was the early name. You note the word "administrative" in the title, the word "fiscal" in the title, the word "technical" and "clerical" are there, but no mention of the blue-collar people. Blue-collar people, I guess, weren't afraid for their jobs as much as the administrators and the fiscal people and technical people. I guess that's where the higher salaries were and where they were going to be replaced. And who were the early leaders of that organization? Colonel A. E. Garey who I've mentioned here. His name was Alva E. Garey but he liked to be called Colonel because he was a Colonel in the first World War and a Colonel in the State Guard. He also was in the Second World War. But anyway, apparently Garey and his chief examiner, Arnold S. Zander, (the chief examiner at that time in the Civil Service System, was a Deputy Director of Civil Service), were the most eager to form an organization of state employees in order to defeat the repeal of the Civil Service law. They recruited among those early fifty people the department heads, top administrators of state government and the top fiscal people of state government in order to have an organization ready by 1933 to defeat this proposed bill. But it's interesting to me that situation, as I look back on it, because here was a union under the AFL which was formed from the top down, rather than from the bottom up. Now that

doesn't happen very often but it happened here in Wisconsin in the public sector, and there was some good in it.

What was the good part of it? Well, the good part was that they formed an organization in the first place. But they contributed a lot to the structure of the organization. The bookkeeping, for example, record keeping, all of that was done with great detail, and it was just perfect. When I came in, there was no problem with bookkeeping. The books were set up beautifully. Records were kept orderly. The files were in great shape. I think those people with their brain power and their background experience contributed a lot to the structure of the early unions.

Dr. Mason: Were their policies, their approach, their programs, broader than a typical trade union or did they represent a narrow constituency?

Mr. Kubista: Pretty narrow constituency, I would say. They were interested primarily in saving their jobs, the way that I remember that history. Let me develop that a little further. When the legislature met, sure enough, the eighth bill introduced in the Senate, Bill #8, was a repeal of the Civil Service law. Wisconsin had Civil Service since 1905. The state senate passed it. Arnold Zander and the early leaders of that movement with Colonel Garey, called in an AFL representative from Washington, a man by the name of Paul Smith, who came in and recruited the League of Women Voters and a number of other civic

organizations to help in the assembly. They were able to defeat Bill #8S. So they saved the Civil Service law. But as time went on those early people dropped out and Arnold, who by that time had become secretary of the union and had left his job with the Civil Service system, began an organizing campaign among the blue-collar workers and the institutional workers. Some of these early people that formed the union, a few of the professionals, continued in membership like the man that I mentioned a few minutes ago, Bill Kirsch, the statistician in the State Department of Agriculture, and an engineer by the name of Martin Bennett, and also, a securities examiner, Martha Block, one of the first women in the union. Wisconsin had a Securities Law at that time, and she was helping to administer it. This was way before there was a Securities and Exchange Commission at the federal level. I think the federals copied the Wisconsin law and the regulation of securities. But anyway, the union changed thereafter. The membership changed. One of the reasons the membership changed as we went along in those early years in 1934 and 1935, was that the 1933 Democrat controlled legislature started an investigation of the state institutions. There were charges that the institutional employees were abusing patients. There were problems with the prison rules with brutality on the part of the guards. Arnold Zander thought it might be a good idea if he followed the investigating committee around the state and defend the

employees whether they were members or not, which he did. In some places he told me they tried to throw him out but he refused to be thrown out and as a result, many employees from the institutions began to come into the union. Its complexion gradually changed from being purely an administrative and fiscal employees union to a union representing more blue-collar institutional workers. Then it changed its name.

Dr. Mason: Originally it was just state employees regardless of the classification?

Mr. Kubista: That's right. Then it became the Wisconsin State Employees Association and that name lasted until 1970 when the name changed to the Wisconsin State Employees Union. We've tried to trace the early history of the Wisconsin State Employees Association, its early name, the reasons for its formation and some of the early leadership. I came on with the Association in 1934. I hadn't been there very long when Arnold Zander said to me that he was in the process of forming an international union. That startled me because we were in an economic depression, and I thought, here is a guy who must be dreaming. We didn't have any money, we didn't have anything to form an international union of state, county and municipal employees. But Arnold said there are a lot of federal labor unions around the country of public employees, at least at the local government level. There weren't any state employees organized under the AFL that I remember, except Wisconsin.

The federal labor unions were affiliated with the AFL and they have no international union now he said. I think we can form an international union of these people. I think, in 1935 Zander went to the AFL Executive Council. They turned down his request for a charter. The executive Council turned over to the American Federation of Government Employees the jurisdiction over state, county and municipal employees. I don't think the American Federation of Government Employees wanted them very badly, but they got jurisdiction and began to charge a per capita tax which was impounded, as I remember. They wouldn't release any of the money to the state, county and municipal employee unions. So there were problems. But in the spring of 1935 the AFL Executive Council affiliated the public employee federal labor unions with the AFGE. Then the AFGE later changed its constitution to accommodate these affiliations.

Dr. Mason: Was Zander by this time the head of or the leading officer in the Wisconsin State Employees Association?

Mr. Kubista: He started out as financial secretary of the Wisconsin State Employees Association and he wasn't paid much. Then in 1933 he must have gone on full-time. He became Executive Secretary, which was a title that was used at that time by all of the state-wide associations. Let me add here one other thing that ought to be said. Zander and I were sold in those early years, on affiliation with organized labor. We had members who didn't care to be

affiliated with organized labor. We had in the 1930s many women members, for example, who didn't want to go to the labor temple for meetings because it was a kind of dusty, dirty place and after prohibition was repealed in 1933 they usually added a tavern. We had some members who just said, "why should we be affiliated with organized labor when all they are doing is running a saloon." Well, Arnold always took the position that it was good for public employees to be affiliated with organized labor and the AFL in particular, because it provided the public employees with a chance in labor's conventions to be exposed to a representative group of taxpayers and and to bring the public service message to all of these taxpayers. He felt that was the most important reason. He could go to an AFL convention, a state convention, or a central body and talk to them about public employees' wages, hours and conditions of employment, and thereby have access to a great body of taxpayers. I think that worked out. He had the support of organized labor in many of the legislative battles that took place over the years. It was a good idea. But we had many people who were critical of affiliating the early Wisconsin State Employees Association with organized labor, and many who complained about AFSCME being affiliated with organized labor as years went along.

- Dr. Mason: As there would be similar opposition to expanding the membership of the employees to include blue-collar and non-professional workers?
- Mr. Kubista: No, I don't think that followed. I don't think there was any trouble with them. Most of the blue-collar people were separated into their own locals. The clerical employees had their own local and the institutional employees had their own local. So we didn't have too much trouble. They had their own meetings and so on.
- Dr. Mason: I see. Go back a bit, Roy, when you went on to graduate school to work with the Wisconsin State Association. You said you were hired to do research. What was the nature of the job you did? What types of projects were you working on and how did that bring you in touch with Arnold Zander?
- Mr. Kubista: Arnold was the boss. He was doing a great deal of traveling the country in 1934 and 1935, contacting these federal labor unions and working with the AFL. So a lot of what he was doing as Executive Secretary was delegated to me. For example, all the research, the legislative research retirement systems, group life insurance, we were talking about as early as then; the eight-hour day, we didn't have an eight-hour day in the institutions; coverage under unemployment compensation, which had just come in through the Social Security Act. Wisconsin was the first state with unemployment compensation. All of that was an area of research. Besides that, we were publishing a monthly

magazine, which had a lot of advertising and ran 28, 32, 36 pages a copy. He made me the associate editor of that magazine almost as soon as I went on the job, to supervise the editing and the publication of articles, research articles, and so on. Then he wanted me to take over the legislative function, lobbying in the legislature as early as the legislature in 1935. One of the first bills we passed was the closed back door in Civil Service. We had a Civil Service law which didn't provide hearings on appeals in discharges, suspensions and demotions or whatever, so we legislated and passed a bill in 1935 closing the back door and providing hearings before the State Personnel Board. As we went along, all of those things contributed to a growth in membership. But in any event, those were some of my duties. Incidentally, the Wisconsin State Employees Association was financing all that early travel of Zander in the interest of AFSCME and was never repaid for by the early AFSCME at all. The state employees of Wisconsin financed Zander and all those early expenses in the formation of the international union.

In 1935, I have a note here that Zander went to the AFL convention in May and asked for a charter for the new international union of state, county and municipal employees and he was refused. The AFGE had begun to collect dues from the state, county and municipal employees and therefore, in 1935, the state, county and municipal union

became a department of the AFGE. When Zander got back in May in 1935 from the AFL convention with a refusal, he delegated again another duty to me. He said, "you better get busy planning the constitutional convention of all of these federal labor unions sometime later this year. We are going to need a constitution, a convention call. We're gonna have a lot of resolutions prepared, all the details worked out. We've got to get a listing of where these public employee AFL labor unions are, who the officers are and how many members they've got, and we will call a convention sometime later." Beginning about June 1935, I started working on that and wrote to every international union in the country for a copy of the constitution. I had a stack of constitutions finally and proceeded with a draft of a constitution for the public employees union. A convention call, a copy of which I showed you, and an early constitution, we got all of that together. Then Zander said, "we'll have this convention on December 8, I think, in Chicago and we'll send out the call. We did in the fall of 1935. The convention call was drafted along the format of the convention call for the United Auto Workers, which held its constitutional convention in Detroit in 1935, I think in August, according to one of these documents. So we used that convention call as a kind of model. Surprising that two unions should have been born in the same year, two great unions; also, the Wagner Act of 1935. That was a great year for

labor. But in any event, before we met, Bill Green, President of the AFL at that time, tried to talk Zander out of having this convention. He was mad about it. He wrote and said, "You shouldn't hold that convention in Chicago," and Zander, who was stubborn - (that was one of Arnold's characteristics, he was a stubborn Dutchman) - refused and said, "we're going to hold the convention. We met in the old Morrison Hotel in Chicago, which has since been torn down. We had 32 delegates, elected officers, adopted a constitution, agreed to the department status that we had with the AFGE. We didn't like to agree with it but we did, set up headquarters of the brand new AFSCME in Madison, Wisconsin. The name American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees was not the name that we suggested in the original constitution. We wanted the American Federation of Public Employees but we had representatives there from counties and cities and the state of Wisconsin. Some of the delegates from these jurisdictions wanted to be identified in the title. So an amendment was adopted to provide that the organization be called the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. It's been called that ever since, although it's a very awkward name. The initials are much more appropriate, I guess, than to say the whole name.

Dr. Mason: If you can drop back a bit, before your mentioned President Green of the AFL was opposed to the calling of the convention, that he believed that the affiliation with the

American Federation of Government Employees was satisfactory. What argument did Arnold Zander use to get Green's limited support for the convention?

Mr. Kubista: He never did get Green's support for the convention.

Dr. Mason: He didn't?

Mr. Kubista: As I remember, he never got Green's support for that constitutional convention. Arnold went ahead with it anyway. That is my recollection. I don't think Green got too upset about it. Here was an upstart union forming the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, adopting a constitution and electing officers. We didn't have any charter. It was just bringing all the public employee federal labor unions together to form a going organization. We signed a charter application. Arnold was elected President and I was elected Secretary-Treasurer and we had enough additional officers elected to sign a charter application with the AFL. I think those names from that first convention are still on the original charter in international headquarters.

Dr. Mason: Some writers suggested that Arnold Zander used the argument that there was sentiment for affiliation with the CIO and John L. Lewis.

Mr. Kubista: There was. Arnold was torn between John L. Lewis and affiliation with the AFL. John L. Lewis, as you know, was a very colorful leader at the time and Zander was much attracted to him. Now why didn't we affiliate with the CIO? I think it was in the Chicago constitutional

convention that issue was discussed but the delegates there from the AFL federal labor unions said, "We have very close ties not with the Washington AFL but with our local labor councils." Take a look here, here's a public employees union in Atlanta. The delegate said there were very close ties with the Atlanta Federation of Labor. Two Rivers Wisconsin, was one of those unions, very close ties with the Two Rivers Federation of Labor. The Milwaukee unions, federal labor unions. Milwaukee inspectors, they were closely tied with that very strong Milwaukee Federation of Labor. As we went through, these people spoke up at the convention, they said, "We don't want to jeopardize that kind of local attachment that we have and the support we're getting from these people."

Dr. Mason: What was the reaction of the American Federation of Government Employees and President Babcock there?

Mr. Kubista: Babcock came to the meeting and brought with him one or two of his officers. Babcock was a hard drinker. The night before the convention convened, he was out on the town and got into a barroom scrape. He broke the glass above the bar and came into our convention in bad shape. I think one of his eyes was covered and he had a bandage on his head. We viewed that with great skepticism. He didn't make a very good impression. When the convention was over, Zander again requested a separate charter. Bill Green then urged AFSCME and AFGE to go along until the September, 1936 AFGE convention in Detroit. I'm going

over this rather fast. However, to finish up with Babcock, it was in 1936, in the early summer of 1936, that the AFGE suspended Babcock, I think the reason was because he getting obstreperous with his drinking. I think the suspension of Babcock may have helped the AFGE to change its mind about wanting jurisdiction over the state, county and municipal employees. But I've often thought, over the years, Phil, that there was a relationship here between the consumption of gin and the granting of a charter to the AFSCME by the AFL. I think Babcock was one of the AFGE officers who was very eager to keep a hold on the state, county and municipal employees even though they were sort of a stepchild in the AFGE.

Dr. Mason: Before the separate charter had been granted and the '35 convention, you had changed the name at the '35 convention to AFSCME?

Mr. Kubista: Yes, that first constitutional convention adopted the official name which is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. What I was trying to point out is that that was not the name that Arnold Zander and I recommended in the constitution which was drafted by us.

Dr. Mason: I see.

Mr. Kubista: We thought it was too long and too cumbersome.

Dr. Mason: It was at this convention in '35 that you were elected Secretary-Treasurer?

Mr. Kubista: Yes.

Dr. Mason: And Arnold was elected President?

Mr. Kubista: Arnold was elected President. We served without pay until the Executive Board met in Chicago in 1936. The first Executive Board was also elected at the convention, I think I mentioned that. The Executive Board of AFSCME, met in Chicago on August 11, in anticipation of the September 1936 convention of AFSCME which was going to be held directly after the AFGE met in Detroit and in the same city. We wanted to be there to see what happened with respect to our charter and our jurisdiction under the AFGE and be on the grounds in case they relinquished jurisdiction of the state, county and municipal employees.

Dr. Mason: What, in effect, did the change mean when you were given a separate charter as distinct from being a part of AFGE?

Mr. Kubista: Well, first thing that it meant was that we collected our own money, per capita tax. We had our own headquarters. In other words, we were funded, we could go ahead and hire staff and begin to operate. But you see, from January 1, 1936, when the AFGE got the right to collect per capita tax and began to impound the per capita tax from all these state, county and municipal employees, there was no money for AFSCME. They simply kept all the money so we, Zander and I, as President and Secretary-Treasurer, operated out of the office of the Wisconsin State Employees Association, keeping up contacts with these AFSCME local unions throughout the country and planning our next move. We didn't know what was going to happen in the AFGE

convention in September 1936. I have here a financial statement that was prepared for the August 11, Executive Board meeting of AFSCME in 1936, one month prior to the Detroit convention, and this statement shows that \$6,688.76 of impounded funds, these were the per capita tax funds, were transferred to the new AFSCME as of August 3, 1936. From January through August there was no money but then AFSCME turned over \$6,688. The Secretary-Treasurer's salary was paid from January 1, 1936 to August 1, 1936, in the amount of \$525. I don't see any item here where the President's salary was paid but I think he received his first back salary going back to January 1, at the rate of \$300 a month. My salary as Secretary-Treasurer was set at \$200 a month.

Dr. Mason: Up to 1935 the organization was primarily state employees. When this was expanded to include government employees on the state, county and local level you then attracted other federal labor unions throughout the United States?

Mr. Kubista: Yes. By the time of the convention in 1936, it was nationwide in scope. At the 1935 meeting because we had local unions, federal labor unions from Toledo; Atlanta, Richmond; Elgin, Illinois; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; Kenosha; Two Rivers; Mobile, Alabama; West Allis; Chicago; Golden, Colorado; Duluth; and the Boston Bridge Tenders who had ten members. The Boston Bridge Tenders are our oldest public employee union. They went back to 1908. The

Boston Bridge Tenders, the old federal union, 12333, was the number compared to federal labor union Wisconsin state employees, 18213, you can see the difference in numbers. So we were nationwide at that time in a sense.

Dr. Mason: How was Arnold Zander and his colleagues, like yourself, able to exert control over the newly-found organization? Was it because you had given leadership to its founding?

Mr. Kubista: I think so. Arnold was so well known at that time. He had contact with a lot of these people personally. He had gone to see them as I said, traveled extensively during that period before the 1935 convention. From the time that I came on in 1934 until 1935 convention a year later, he traveled all over the country visiting these labor unions and had a lot of correspondence with these labor unions. He was well accepted. I was accepted, I suppose, as Secretary-Treasurer because I was sort of in the backroom doing research and the bookwork. Only one other candidate was nominated, a man by the name of Alan Solly, from Duluth. He was a grain inspector or a grain weigher. I think, it was the personal leadership, the fact that somebody was out in front trying to do this job when there was little competition in those early years. Nobody wanted these offices. There was always trouble getting somebody to want to take the responsibility.

Dr. Mason: By 1936, however, there were factions within the union that wanted representation.

Mr. Kubista: What happened was probably on oversight on Arnold Zander's part. In an unguarded moment he went out to the East in Pennsylvania and New York. He had heard about an organization of social workers in those two states. As I recall, it was not affiliated with the AFL. It was run by Abram Flaxer and David Kaner, who came out of Pennsylvania. Flaxer was a New Yorker, a mathematician, a Ph.D., very, very intelligent fellow who later went on to lead the CIO public workers union. He was cited by the Congress for Communist activities. I think was held in contempt of Congress, and I think he went to jail later. But anyway, Zander recruited the New York and Pennsylvania new members in the summer 1936. He was so proud when he came back to Madison. He told me that he had been able to affiliate with our new union about 8,000 new members and they were going to come to the convention in September with full voting strength. We were both new boys, I think. We didn't think much was going to happen. Well, they came to the convention and they ran it, as well they might, because they had votes for 8,000 members, and there weren't that many around in the rest of the country. I don't know the total membership here that we called on to come to the convention. I think there were 3,248 members not counting the 8,000 new ones.

Dr. Mason: You were mentioning the size of the membership at the 1936...

Mr. Kubista: Yes. It looks like there were some 3,248 public employees, state, county and municipal employee members of federal labor unions who were, whose representatives were, invited to the Chicago constitutional convention and I don't recall how many members would have been represented at the 1936 convention. I have a note here however that in 1936 the AFSCME had a total of 9,737 members. Probably that included all the people from the east that I was talking about that Arnold Zander recruited in the summer of 1936. The point I was getting at was that the easterners were all represented at the convention in Detroit and they pretty much ran the convention. A deal was made that Arnold Zander would be continued as President but the easterners wanted their own Secretary-Treasurer and so they elected David Kaner, a social worker from Pennsylvania. I then took over Arnold Zander's job as Executive Secretary of the Wisconsin State Employees Association. The Executive Board of the Association said, "we have a vacancy in the job of Executive Secretary because Arnold is going to be full-time with the international union. We offer it to you." And I took it. I stayed there for 36 years and resigned from the Wisconsin State Employees Association in 1970 and went with the International as head of the newly established Wisconsin AFSCME office.

Dr. Mason: Was the Wisconsin State Employees Association that you took over in 1936 affiliated with AFSCME?

Mr. Kubista: Yes. It was affiliated with AFSCME as Local #1. At that time there were no state councils. The original federation structure did not include state councils or district councils, which came in later, and so all the large unions, like the Wisconsin State Employees Association were local unions. Wisconsin was Local #1. Under Local #1 there were chapters in various institutions and departments.

Dr. Mason: So you continued though, to take an active part in the politics of AFSCME even though you were no longer Secretary-Treasurer?

Mr. Kubista: Right.

Dr. Mason: And what other offices did you hold in AFSCME?

Mr. Kubista: That was the only office I ever held in AFSCME. I was on a number of committees, went to conventions and usually chaired the committee on legislation over the years.

Dr. Mason: Were you not President of AFSCME Wisconsin State branch in 1942?

Mr. Kubista: In 1942 we had a consolidation of the local unions in Wisconsin into one council, as I recall it. I was the director of that Council. So all the state, county and municipal employees were in one organization, which didn't last long. I think it lasted one year. I wasn't President. I think I was the Executive Secretary. I kept that same title. I think that lasted for one year, and in 1943 because it didn't work out, separate councils were granted to state employees and the Milwaukee district council, for

Milwaukee city and county employees. Then a council was chartered in Wisconsin for county and municipal employees outside of the Milwaukee city and county. We had three councils then and I stayed with the state employees council as the Executive Secretary.

Well, to get on with this story, at the convention in 1936, the AFGE voted to relinquish jurisdiction and recommended that AFSCME get its own charter. The AFL had sent a representative, George Googe, to the AFSCME convention to inform the convention that the AFGE no longer wanted us and was recommending to the AFL executive Council that a separate charter be granted. In October, Arnold Zander and one of the newly elected Vice Presidents of AFSCME, a man by the name of Snyder from Toledo, attended the AFL executive council and a separate charter was granted. Well, Arnold came back to Madison. We all came back to Madison and Arnold rented offices in the Bank of Madison building, on the State Capitol square for himself, David Kanes and one secretary. That was the original staff of AFSCME. I think there were three offices. The accounting for the union was done by a young man by the name of Gordon W. Chapman. I think you have Gordon Chapman's papers, maybe you've interviewed Gordon.

Dr. Mason: Yes, we have.

Mr. Kubista: Gordon was called in to do the books, as we used to call it. Once a month he'd draw up the financial statement. He worked at that time as an accountant for the Wisconsin

State Department of Public Welfare. Later, he became Secretary-Treasurer when one of the Secretary-Treasurers quit or died, and he had a long career with AFSCME.

Dr. Mason: What were the prime objectives of Mr. Zander and his colleagues when they got a separate charter? What were the priorities of the union in 1936?

Mr. Kubista: Well, the first priority was organization, as I recall. Arnold wanted to begin to organize immediately throughout the country. He would talk about having a million members in ten years. Well, we didn't have a million members until about two years ago. We never grew at the rate that Arnold wanted or thought we could grow. We used to talk about the great potential membership there was in the state, county and municipal services in this country and how we would grow very, very fast. We did grow in 10 years. We grew from 9,700 members in 1936 to 73,000 in 1946. So there was organizing that went on and that was one of the first objectives.

AFSCME had a number of legislative objectives. One of the first things that happened in 1938, I believe, was the employment of a civil service council. He was Alva E. Garey, that I've talked about at some length before. Garey was Director of Personnel for the State of Wisconsin. He decided to abandon that job and go with AFSCME as a Civil Service Counsel. The duties were to promote the extension of the merit system in the various states, counties, and cities of this country. In the early years

it was thought that the merit system and the civil service laws were the best guarantee of hours, wages, and conditions of employment that public employees could have, including the administrative rules that accompanied the laws. The other big push was for the extension of Social Security to public employees and the adoption of the retirement systems in the states and counties and cities that didn't have them. Retirement systems, except for teachers, were few in those early years. Those were some of the legislative objectives. Organization and the promotion of the merit system and retirement. There was very little talk of collective bargaining. Our people didn't want to talk about strikes, for example. That was a dirty word in the public sector. Some places, I imagine, in the country, were a little more progressive in that area than we were here in the midwest. But there wasn't much talk about collective bargaining. We didn't get a collective bargaining law in Wisconsin, until 1959 after a great deal of work. But the early international worked in that direction. Zander had some internal structure problems with the International. He wasn't satisfied with that early structure of local unions without councils to service the local unions. There was no way for the International out of Madison to service all the local unions all over the country. There were problems of travel, staffing, and expense and so on. So he came up with the idea of having councils of state employee

local unions and councils of county and city employee local unions, each with their per capita tax structure, which then could employ staff to provide service to those local unions and help them accomplish their objectives.

Dr. Mason: When did the term "general representative" come in as an employee of the union?

Mr. Kubista: I think it came in rather soon. Some of the early organizers, Jim McCormack was one, were employed and I think they were called "general representatives" quite early. I don't remember that fact too well. But I think they were called general representatives quite early, rather than organizers.

Dr. Mason: Did they represent Mr. Zander and the national organization or were they assigned to regions or councils?

Mr. Kubista: They represented the international organization. There was a great deal of discussion in the early years as to the functions of the councils. Arnold thought that the councils ought to be doing their own organization work, or as much of it as they could. Then the International wouldn't have to employ so many organizers and general representatives. The councils felt that they ought not be doing organization work. They ought to be spending their money doing service work. So there was some friction and argument about that over the years. I think that was worked out finally when the council was doing some organizing, not too much, and doing more service than organizing, with the International doing as much organizing as it

could. The other issue at that time on the front burner was whether the International should spend its time and its general organizing services in jurisdictions which already had a going organization and were fertile ground for organizing or rather in states, counties and municipalities where there were no members. We used to take the position in the Wisconsin State Employees Council that the International ought to organize the state of Wisconsin because there was such a great potential. Our people were ready to help. We were already organized. We had a going organization. Arnold would argue that he ought to be in Kansas where there was no union. Why? Because if he didn't get there, somebody else would, like the Teamsters, or the Laborers' or any other AFL union would get there before he did and therefore, AFSCME would lose out on these potential members. Well, that argument was never really resolved, and I think we each worked at our own organizing as much as we could. Arnold tried to keep everybody happy by doing a little bit here and there "bringing religion to the heathen" he used to call it, in Oklahoma or Kansas or Missouri where there weren't any organizations at all. There was no political movement. Incidentally, that's interesting isn't it? There was no P.E.O.P.L.E. organization like we've got now. There was no great drive for supporting one party over another. There wasn't that interest in politics in those early years that I recall.

Dr. Mason: Did you endorse any presidential candidate?

Mr. Kubista: Not that I remember.

Dr. Mason: In those first ten years of AFSCME's history, were there any close allies you had with other unions?

Mr. Kubista: Well, that I don't recall. I think that Arnold Zander, who, of course, had more contact with these people than I did, after I left AFSCME, had some contacts with unions and people he worked closely with. I know Gordon Chapman did after he got in as Secretary-Treasurer. But I don't know who those unions were. I think there was a lot of suspicion too, because there was a lot of raiding going on.

Dr. Mason: I wonder whether you could talk for a few minutes about Arnold Zander. You knew him in this early period as well as anyone did and you saw him in the beginning stages of the union.

Mr. Kubista: Arnold was physically a tall man. He was probably 6'4", had sort of Lincoln-like features, a craggy face even at the age when I first knew him, of 30 when I was in my early 20s. He came from a socialist background in the city of Two Rivers, Wisconsin. His father was a socialist, active in the city of Two Rivers and also all kinds of municipal activities. Arnold had two sisters and a brother. His two sisters were both school teachers, and he had a younger brother, whose name was Eugene. The younger brother is still alive, incidentally. He was a member of the Maryland legislature until quite recently.

I don't think he is anymore. I knew Eugene when he was at the University just ahead of me. He was a little older than I was, but I knew him when he went to the University of Wisconsin. Arnold was educated in the Two Rivers public schools and then attended the University of Wisconsin, where he got a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He went on to take a doctorate in city management. He was training to be a city manager rather than an engineer. He felt that the civil engineering background would be good in the city management area. I don't know why he never got to be city manager because it was what he was trained for. And in that time, the city manager type of city government was quite popular, at least in Wisconsin. But when he graduated, he went with the State Bureau of Personnel. I think that was one of his first jobs as chief examiner. Arnold at one time competed for the job of Executive Secretary of the Wisconsin League of Municipalities against another candidate, Fred MacMillan. That was just about the time, or just before the time, that the State Employees Association was formed. The League chose Fred MacMillan and didn't choose Arnold Zander. I've often thought, in subsequent years, what might have happened to AFSCME and to the international public employees movement if Arnold Zander had been selected Secretary of the Wisconsin League of Municipalities. Fred MacMillan lasted in that job for about 40 years, and Arnold went on to the labor movement. Arnold was a Christian Scientist. He was a Reader in his

church. He was a teetotaler. I never saw him take a drink. I never heard him swear. He was a model of the upright citizen of the community. He was an early advocate of public ownership of utilities and took part at one time in a determined effort, biggest effort in the city of Madison, for the city to buy the Madison Gas and Electric Company. In those early years Arnold talked about collective bargaining for public employees way back in the 1930s, but nothing much came of it because the public employees, at least in Wisconsin, were not interested in collective bargaining. But Arnold was talking about it. In some of his correspondence he wrote about it. He was articulate, and he used the English language with great skill. He was, in my judgment, a very good man.

Dr. Mason: How effective was he as a speaker?

Mr. Kubista: He was very effective as a speaker. He did an excellent job speaking at conventions. He may have talked a little bit over their heads. He was not as dramatic a speaker as Jerry Wurf. He went over very, very well with professional audiences, professionals, like city managers and civil service assembly, and other personnel people that he spoke to. He was invited all over the country to speak at various public functions of that kind, conventions and so on. He did a very excellent job. I think he was honest. I have no doubt that Arnold Zander was scrupulously honest in all of his activities with the union, so far as I've

observed them and I've observed them over a period of at least thirty years. He loved to travel, and he was not what I would call a very good administrator in that he tended to avoid the everyday routine administrative duties and delegate them to somebody else. I think he loved to be out in the field, talking with his people, making speeches, and in his later years traveling internationally, rather than to do the day-to-day administration of headquarters office.

Dr. Mason: What were his views on the role of the labor movement as such? Did he see this merely as a force to help workers? Did he see the labor movement, or AFSCME in particular, as a force for political change?

Mr. Kubista: He saw AFSCME as a bread and butter movement and as a mechanism for improving government in this country. He said he could organize more people by talking to them about better government than I could organize by talking bread and butter issues. And he believed that. I think it depended upon whom he was talking to. In other words, I don't think it would have done him a bit of good to talk to the University of Wisconsin janitors about better government and attempt to organize those people, and do it better than I could if I talked to them about getting a \$50 a month raise. So I think neither of us ever defined the question how these philosophies would apply to the different groups of people. But he intended to talk to people who were in professional positions who were

interested in better government, probably more than they were in higher wages, better working conditions. But he had the philosophy of organization that, in a new organizing territory, if you could organize the people who count, then the others are going to follow suit.

Dr. Mason: To go back to a point you made before. He then would not have believed that the union should not be involved in political action?

Mr. Kubista: Not to the extent that Jerry Wurf did and certainly not to the extent that we've been doing in recent years. I think there was always a fear that if you happen to support the wrong guy for the public office, and his opponent comes in, and you didn't support him, then you're in for a lot of trouble. We didn't have collective bargaining. All we had was a nomadic union where members wandered in and out at will. You had to be doing something through the legislative process in order to get benefits. And if you didn't get benefits, why all these nomads would wander out.

Dr. Mason: Would you support any of the New Deal reforms, not candidates?

Mr. Kubista: Yes.

Dr. Mason: The movements themselves?

Mr. Kubista: Yes, in the early years, in the first convention of 1935, we drafted all of the early New Deal reforms as resolutions in support of Roosevelt and supporting the NRA and supporting the Triple A. I don't know if the Triple A was

there. When did the Supreme Court rule that out, in 1934?
When did Roosevelt come in, 1933?

Dr. Mason: Yes.

Mr. Kubista: Somewhere along there the Triple A was ruled out by the Supreme Court and other farm regulatory legislation was enacted, but we supported the NRA and the WPA and all of these early Roosevelt reforms. So we did support the principle, and I suppose we were supporting Roosevelt. Although I don't think the International ever endorsed anybody officially like we have in recent years.

Dr. Mason: Did you take an active part in Wisconsin politics and Wisconsin legislation?

Mr. Kubista: We were always active in Wisconsin legislation but we didn't endorse candidates. We tried to be neutral among the progressive and regular Republicans, and there were doggone few Democrats in those years. Wisconsin was a very conservative state. We had Republicans in office for 25 years before we elected the first Democrat, after the early Democrat, who came in with Roosevelt. It was 25 years before the First Democratic governor was elected, Gaylord Nelson in 1958.

Dr. Mason: What sort of relationship did Arnold Zander have with the people he worked closely with, like yourself, Gordon Chapman and others, and the other labor leaders throughout the country?

Mr. Kubista: Other labor leaders I don't know too much about. His internal relationships were not good, in my judgment. I

don't think he and Gordon Chapman were very friendly for many, many years. And both of them tended to be out of the office a lot, out of the headquarters. The headquarters of the union was administered by A. E. Garey, the Civil Service Counsel, who did most of the work. Gordon was traveling some place and Arnold was traveling some other place. It was one of the criticisms of Arnold before Wurf was elected, the extensive travel and lack of administrative functioning in the headquarters. Arnold tended to be very penurious with his staff. He had a staff union, and they threatened to strike many times. He would negotiate with staff union about a 3¢ an hour raise or 5¢ or 10¢ an hour raise for hours and days at a time, because I think he kind of liked to hold out. And the staff union was, of course, very mad about that. They used to say, here we're supposed to be a labor union, and the President takes such a penurious view of his own help, and all these negotiations going on here, we can't even get to a settlement. They threatened to strike many times, but they never did. Arnold was saved from considerable embarrassment because of that, but he was "penny-pinching" with his staff. It caused a great deal of resentment.

He was a great ping-pong player, as I remember. He had long arms, long legs and he played vigorous ping-pong. You played ping-pong with him like playing with an octopus. He was not otherwise particularly athletic.

Dr. Mason: Roy, I find that one later Secretary-Treasurer, Joe Ames, made the comment that Arnold lost a lot of his effectiveness because he wasn't a back-slapper.

Mr. Kubista: He did not mix well. He didn't go into the saloon after the meeting as some labor leaders always do, and he was not a good mixer. I think that's what Joe meant by not being a back-slapper. Did it hurt him? I suppose it did in the long run. People thought he was standoffish, and that he was above them and so on. He didn't like Wurf very well. He told me one day that he thought Wurf had a voodoo doll made up to look like Arnold Zander, and he was sticking pins in it. And he believed that. I said, Arnold, you know you don't believe that but he did.

Dr. Mason: I trust that with his Christian Science background he didn't also mean that he was feeling the pins.

Mr. Kubista: No.

Dr. Mason: Tell me about his Christian Science background. Isn't it incongruous that a Christian Scientist, who has very strong views about government, a devout Christian Scientist and yet a socialist and a believer that government does have a role?

Mr. Kubista: Well, I don't know much about the Christian Science Church, Phil, so I don't think I'm qualified to comment on that. I do know that he was, as you've heard before, a devout Christian Science practitioner and Reader in his church and well thought of. But I never even gave any thought to the inconsistencies you're talking about. I

suppose you're right. But he was much disturbed at his defeat in 1964 by Wurf. He blamed it on the Wisconsin movement, saying that if Wisconsin delegates had voted for him, he would have won. He lost by 20 votes. He came back here and came into my office, and he was absolutely livid. He was so mad that this had happened to him and that the Wisconsin people had deserted him. Did they desert him? A lot of them did, as a matter of fact. Why? Well, while the International headquarters was in Madison, he did a lot of things that irritated people here. And one of the reasons headquarters moved to Washington was so he could get out from under the constant and close examination of the Wisconsin membership. Well, I was saying that the International headquarters was here in Wisconsin for a long time, and in 1955 Arnold Zander started a move to get out of Wisconsin and go to Washington. The argument was that he'd be closer there to other international unions, the AFL-CIO, and closer to the seat of government. There were some interests in Congress, like Social Security and federal grants to the states and so on. He thought the International ought to be closer to the seat of government. My guess is that he was also concerned very much about the fact that he was being criticized by the local people, local members about his life style. As the International President, he had an expense account of \$200 a month which he didn't have to report on to the union. In those days, \$200 a month was big money. He bought a

company Cadillac which he monopolized. The original plan was that AFSCME was going to have a Cadillac, for a sort of company car and top staff could use it. But he used it almost exclusively, and the members found out about it. They saw Lola Zander taking the kids to school in it and shopping for groceries and that kind of thing. He used to live on Virginia Terrace, on the west side of Madison, and there were some state employee members who lived not far away. They watched all these goings-on and brought up resolutions in their local union meetings. Arnold got awful sick of that. I think it was one of the reasons he moved, despite the fact that Gordon Chapman didn't want to move. Colonel Garey the other top officer, didn't want to move either. They were quite satisfied with Madison. But Arnold prevailed, and bought the building in Washington, the International moved there from Madison to Washington. He also antagonized the Wisconsin members by his activity in the housing program. I remember before the 1964 convention, Colonel Garey, John Lawton, our General Counsel, Bob Overbeck of the County, Municipal Employees, and Steve Clark, who was then an International Vice President, met with Zander here in Madison and encouraged him to get out of the housing business because there was so much criticism. The 1964 convention was coming up and Wurf was breathing down his back. There was going to be trouble. But Arnold insisted that the housing program that he was engaged in was one of the biggest things that

could ever happen to AFSCME, and he was by no means going to give it up. He thought it would be popular with the delegates and with the people around the country. The heck with you guys telling me that, well, to give it up. He didn't do it. I think he alienated a lot of people in this state. I think a lot of our delegates did vote against him in the Denver convention of 1964. He never recovered from that.

Dr. Mason: Let me ask you one other question that's unrelated to what we have done. AFSCME right now is planning a 50th anniversary, and I've heard two dates used, 1935 and 1936.

Mr. Kubista: I think 1936 would be the date. The charter was granted in 1936 and there is an international convention coming up in 1986.

Dr. Mason: That's probably more consistent because the 25th anniversary was in '61.

Mr. Kubista: Yes, I think it would be more consistent to do it for 1936. I urge, if you have any influence, and I've urged McEntee to bring the convention to Wisconsin. It would be nice if it could be right here in Madison. But I'm told we don't have facilities for that many people. But Milwaukee has. The convention ought to come back to the home state. I hope that they do that. It would be very good.

Dr. Mason: Let me put on tape this understanding with you, Roy. This is the first installment of an oral history interview. It's agreed that I will prepare a transcript of this

interview that will be given to Roy for his editing. He can change, alter, expand on any points. He will also review it and sign a release form that he is satisfied.