

Conversation with Victor Reuther and Philip Mason
August 1972

....Russian peasant work. You will recognize it. It comes from the Volga area and Walter and I carried this back with us from the Soviet Union after our working experience there in 1933 and 1934. They gave this as a gift to that other. I don't know whether someone put some varnish on it in subsequent years, but it ought to be perhaps cleaned up a little. Perhaps someone will know how to handle that at the

Inside this I have put some little pocket dictionaries in different languages: Italian, English and French, that we carried in our pockets as we went to different countries. These are the original ones. I thought they would be very nice for the display at Black Lake. And, of course, one of our monthly trade union books from the factory in Gorki, in the Soviet Union where we worked. This is Walter's trade union membership book. That would be nice, too, I think to have in the display. You'll probably want to do a photostat of that and keep it in the Archives itself.

Also, here is a little Sunday School book which was used by Walter. It has the old South Wheeling address on it, that might be nice to have there too.

What church was this, Victor"

Zion Lutheran Church.

Zion Lutheran?

Yes, that's where the family went.

I've got a little series of pocket books which were issued by E. Halderman Julius. They were very famous in the early days. A little blue book series. These were used very, very extensively in the period of my dad's early trade union socialist activity and were distributed by

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the Central Labor body there. Dad always had these in his library and of course these were some of the resource materials used by the boys in preparation for the famous family debates. I thought they would be nice to have on display. Now, what I would like from you is a xerox of at least the covers of these because I want to make some reference to it. Now I have here two, no one, receipt showing payment by my dad on March 23, 1910, of \$6.00 for one of the courses in the International Correspondence School. This was part of his self-education program and the certificate which he received for having completed the stenographic course at the International Correspondence School. He took a whole series of course in penmanship, in English, in literature and a host of other subjects. But I thought this would be of interest. I would like xerox copies of these also.

All right.

Blueprint....working drawing of a machine part made by Walter when he was a student at Wheeling High School, grade 9A. It's dated January 3. I don't know exactly what year that was, but that should be easy to identify since he was enrolled in Wheeling High School, and that's perhaps the earliest actual drawing we have of Walter.

9A is the grade that he was in at Wheeling High School?

That's right.

Here is Walter's wife, May's membership card in the Detroit Federation of Teachers, 1936, and I would like a photostat of this returned to me also. I think this would be nice to have at Black Lake.

Well, this was something which Walter sent May on her 30th birthday anniversary. I don't know whether that is something that would be of interest or not.

That is Walter's writing?

Yes, that's Walter's writing.

Here's some early items of handicraft by Walter. This was done when he was in grade 6A in grade school. This is a candlestick and you will find written on the back in Walter's own handwriting, "Walter Reuther." I think that's a nice little item. And this copper ashtray was one of Walter's early school projects, handicraft, as was this somewhat larger bookend. This was made in grade school by Walter.

He had that interest even then?

Oh, very much so, very much so. He was, of course, fascinated by anything mechanical and in the field of handicraft work and he demonstrated that as a very small boy, and of course pursued it and moved on to become very skilled.

Here is the flag that flew over the Wheeling residence on all important holidays, up on the hill. That might be nice to take to Black Lake. And here is one of the maps which Walter and I used as we cycled throughout Europe those eleven months before we went into the Soviet Union. We bound these ourselves with a cloth backing so they wouldn't deteriorate and we carried them on our bicycles all throughout Europe and I have traced on here....I traced this actually back in the 30's.... I traced the actual route we travelled by cycle through Italy. This is, of course, just a map of Italy. We had sectional maps, one of France, one of the Lowlands and one of Germany and so on. But I thought this might be nice to put on display.

Is this marking here where the route was?

That is right. Yes, this is the route....I marked that route on there showing exactly where we cycled across and up into Austria and so

on. These were purchased in Germany in '33 and carried with us around the world. Now I have several others of these but I think if you have one example of one....eventually I'll turn all of them over to the Archives but I thought this would be nice to have on display.

Here are several little gauge blocks which are made of hard tool steel and tempered and ground to precision and were used by Walter. He actually made them when he worked at the Highland Park Ford plant. This was his second job after he got to Detroit. First it was Briggs and then Highland Park and from there he went to the Rouge. So he made these when he was working on the midnight shift and he has inscribed them with acid with his signature, and they need a little cleaning up, but I think these would be very, very nice to be put on display. I think they're going to have his tool box and it would be nice to put these with the tool box.

Now, I'm going to turn this over to you but I don't want this displayed until after my book is out, see, because I think this reflects an incident that is not generally known. Walter inscribed this himself. It says, "In memory of a forced landing made by Al Conklin," and as I can best make out the name, in the "Eagle Rock, on May 22, 1928, Sixteen Mile Road and John R, Detroit, Michigan." There was apparently a little private flying field and Al Conklin was one of the people that Walter met during his activities at the "Y" shortly after he arrived in Detroit. Walter was fascinated by flying and even considered becoming an aeronautical engineer with the Ford Motor Company which was at that time building aircraft and Walter had some conversations with people at the Ford Motor Company about the possibility of moving in that direction. Anyway, Al Conklin had an old World War I "Jenny" which he used to fly

occasionally for commercial purposes but mainly just for the sport, and Walter used to fly with him and they crashed one day, and this was the little souvenir. And of course I remember this because Walter used to have it on the wall in the bedroom which I shared with him for quite a long time. I had forgotten about the incident and came across it in his possessions and....it, well, it has a rather poignant point to it of course, since Walter should have lost his life in the plane.

These are two books from my dad's personal library which he gave to Sofie and me some years ago, but these were two of the books that the boys used to read and were part of the preparation for their discussions. I think they would be nice to have on display.

I don't know whether you have one of these photos or not but this is a photo of the great rally, Mayday, in Berlin which Walter addressed. I know we have a recording of his remarks, some of which were in German, at that big rally.

We have some pictures, but I am not sure whether it is this scene. Were all of the ones you had....in fact we have multiple copies of one scene but it may be from a different angle. But it is one of those wide view scenes.

Well, there may be several views, several shots that were taken. I have seen other ones of this. I think Willy Brandt is speaking here now, I am not sure that I could pick out Walter on this photo in the front here, but there are some where you can see Walter very clearly. I have two of these....Walter had these in his office and as I remember, and you might just as well have them.

All right.

Well....

6-13-02

AV folks -
transcript of VGR
reminiscing on
family ephemera
suitable for Black
Lake Exhibit -
probably old news
to Tom, but yours
to keep or pitch. MR