Interview with
F.W. Thompson
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Tape 1
Side 1

Q. Could we talk about some of the goals of Work Peoples' College, to train organizers and activists?

FT Yes, that was the intention of the college, and it really wasn't very well fulfilled, or only to a minor extent. The students who came there came there mostly on what were called stipends. Dances, other entertainments, would be held and a lottery connected with it, and a person could buy room and board and such education as was offered for maybe $15 or $25 for three months and so forth. Many of the people up in Minnesota, the farmers, figured that was a good way to get rid of their eighteen- or twenty-year old sons between fall plowing and spring plowing (laughing). So, they were there for that reason. However, there was a considerable outcome. We hadn't (emphasis) intended to train the personnel for the cooperative movement. There was a very extensive system of cooperative stores up in that part of the country. To a large extent, we trained people for the cooperative movement without that being our intent. To some extent, it was; we taught a bookkeeping system, the type that was used in the cooperative stores. Much of what we did in part was useful for a coop store manager, and the coop movement there wasn't neutral as regards to labor. Many felt very much that the cooperative movement was part of the labor movement. In fact, up there it got started because it was said the coop owned the company store in practically all mining towns. It had a definite class alignment. That was, I think, really the major thing that it did accomplish. To a minor extent, we got a few people who were really active, Bill Feczko, and to some extent Sulo Peltola. Oh, what was his name up in Washington? He later became an organizer for the steelworkers, but he worked for a while for the Wobblies, and so on. We did develop some capacity for people. Of course, some of them, one of them became a college professor; there's an architect in town I taught some... I helped him with his algebra when he was here (laugh).

Q. How did you end up at Work Peoples' College? What had you done prior to that?

FT Well, I planned to go there as a student. In 1927, I got out of San Quentin. I had been there for a few years for a criminal sentence.

Q. Is this part of the red scare in 1919?

FT Well, I got arrested there for being charged with being in IWW organizer in Maryville, California. It happened that District Attorney Manwell was rather prejudiced against me because his father had been

killed in that Wheatland hop riot of 1913. I know when I got into San Quentin, I think, there were practically at all times when I was there around 100 IWWs who were there on the same kind of a charge. I think there was a total of about 140 ordinarily who got four years. For good time off, that would be three years. But ordinarily we had some strikes over this, that, and the other thing, and we'd use a month's time in strikes.

Q. Strikes in jail?

FT Strikes in jail, yeah. Got out in March. I went in on the anniversary of the Russian revolution, November 7, 1923. Came out on March 7, 1927.

Q. How had you become linked with the IWW?

FT I had become a radical in 1913. It was the Saint John evening paper. But that would be getting way off there. Well, maybe to give you some background! I came home as a kid; I'm just as old as the century. I was thirteen years old and came home October, 1913, and my feet were wet because ordinarily I had holes in the bottom of my shoes. Seems to be typical of my early life. The soles were worn through, and they were wet. We had a big coal stove that my mother cooked on, and so I took my shoes off and put my feet in the oven to warm them up and got the evening paper and ordinarily didn't care much about reading. But here I saw a great big front page story about prosperity is coming back with wheat crops, wonderful crops, some of the best that has ever been in Canada, and so on. I thought that is nice because I know quite a few of my schoolmates used to like to come home with me from school because my mother usually planned, there would be something for me to eat when I came home. And they didn't always have as good luck at their house. So, I was thinking now everybody would have lots to eat with these big crops. And I went upstairs after my feet dried, my mother was talking with her great aunt up there and I explained how nice it would be. And they said, no, it doesn't work that way. They weren't radical by any means; they were very conservative people, but they knew that big crops didn't mean that everybody ate. I couldn't figure that out for the life of me. So, later on, my brother came home, he was about four years older, and he said the same thing. I have a still older brother that was studying to be a minister and he told me that there were economic laws about that kind of thing and somehow or other if you didn't have people starving to death, you would have overpopulation. I looked up -- we had a small encyclopedia -- economics, and I looked up there what it was about, they talked so much about Adam Smith and <u>The Wealth of the Nations</u> that I got a copy of <u>The Wealth of the Nations</u>. I would say my radicalism comes far more from Adam Smith than it does from Karl Marx (laughing). What Adam Smith wrote did more (inaudible) than I could observe in this small town that I was living in.

Q. This was in Canada?

FT That was in Canada, St. John, New Brunswick. That started me thinking about such things as that. I got, reading about economics, something

about socialists there; quite a bit about John Stuart Mill. I ran into a thing that John Stuart Mill had written something about socialism back in the 1840's. All of the utopian socialists he was acquainted with at the time he was writing, I got rather interested in those people. When I heard of socialists, I thought they were...that there were no more socialists. Then, when the war got going, there was a man by the name of Gribble, a Socialist Party candidate. He came to town and there was a circus in town. He went down on the outside of the circus and made some soapbox speeches, which is an unusual thing to happen in that part of the world. He said that your king and country bleeds you, that there are big poachers all around and your king and country needs you because they didn't have conscription and needed recruitment, your king and country needs you. He said your king and country bleeds you, and was fond of saying that a king is a puppet of rich people. It struck me that I was thinking some of the same things myself (laughs). So, when I came to his trial, I went to the court -- I played hookey to go there -- and I met some real live socialists. I found that there were still socialists in the world, and they had meetings every Sunday night up in the labor temple. So, I spent every Sunday night up at the labor temple. Pretty soon they let me be the organizer of the Socialist Party there, but I couldn't join it until I was sixteen (laughs). Later on, I became secretary of the local, things like that. Then, when the one big union got started, I went...in fact...how ridiculous these charges were. You would think I was a very criminal person somehow or other. I picked the St. John paper one afternoon and the big story told how these people were charged with overthrowing the government in the Winnipeg strike. All they had done was they had issued permits for bread wagons and milk wagons to serve the public during the strike, but they wouldn't be stopped from striking because they were necessary for living. They were accused of usurping government functions and so on, and tried to overthrow the government. They were charged with conspiracy. Their lawyer asked well, with whom did they conspire. Well, they had to come up with somebody and they said they conspired with Frederick Willard Thompson of St. John, New Brunswick (laughing). And I read that in the paper (laughs). The only thing I can connect it with is that the local socialist movement had taken up a collection a couple of times for their defense, and I had been the person who sent that money along. They never brought me to trial. But that's getting way off.

I was first active in the one big union in Alberta. From Winnipeg west, the unions, the AFL unions in 1919, had a conference, and they decided that they wanted substantially the same structure of the IWW. The IWW was forbidden by Orders of Council. Canada was governed by a system of Orders in Council; the laws were set aside. This Charles H. Kerr company books were all banned in Canada.

Q. You worked your way down to the America West, then?

FT Yeah. I left Vancouver in the spring of 1922 and came down, my first job was in (inaudible) Washington. Just, you know, coming across the border. There were no jobs up there. The last job up in Canada was to repair the tunnel that had fallen in the river. The paper said it had killed two railroad men and two hobos. I think it said two men and two hobos, if I remember right.

Q. Ok. You get out of San Quentin.

FT How come I went up to Duluth? I figured, well, I could probably get myself a good place to put in a winter. I wanted to study something, you know. I'm interested in what they're doing up there. See what I mean? So, I, from time to time, sent some money up there to be sure not to spend it. That wasn't an unusual thing. People coming there to school, if they were wandering around work, they would put money on deposit up there, if they had some, because otherwise they were very likely to have the snowflakes come down and no money in your pocket.

Q. How did you hear of work Peoples' College?

FT Well, let's see now. Of course, it was mentioned in IWW papers; amongst my fellow prisoners in San Quentin there was a Finn from Duluth, Lori Amani. He knew about it. It was mentioned quite a bit in IWW press and so on.

Q. Was it known as the IWW School?

FT Well, yes, I think so. Of course, the hope was that it would train IWW organizers. Actually, I am sure that the proper system, the one that I wanted, was conducting an organizing drive. Get some personnel there and some of the time they were busy with leaflets, going to visit prospects this, that, and the other thing. A couple of hours a day spent systematically studying labor history, labor law, a bit of economics. Well, whatever was pertinent. That is what I felt we should do. but here the Finns were supporting this Work People's College, and it was available. I think the organization could have found some ways and means to get hold of some of these lottery tickets, or what not, and assign them to young people who were likely, you couldn't require they be organizers, but people that their natural bent would probably make them organizers.

Q. So, it was mainly academic. They would just go into the classrooms and learn about the theory rather than, along with learning the theory, go out and do some field work?

FT Well, there was always the hope that these people would be concerned with organizing. I think that during the term that they were there probably that was the picture in their own mind; to some extent, this is what we might do, because of the inner stimulation of people that have a common bent. They all thought well of the labor movement, that was the important thing. Actually, as students they worked well, had lots of fun and so forth, but at the same time, we had such a range. We had people who knew very little English. We had people there who had a couple of years of college, and all the way in between. And they had me as an instructor who had never been to college. Some of our instructors had degrees and so forth. When I got there the first time, Clifford Ellis was supposed to be the teacher and something had stopped him from being the teacher, and he couldn't come. So, they asked me to take over the classes, and somehow we did that. They wanted somebody with Marx in economics for sure. Even as a kid back in Halifax, I got over to Halifax from my hometown. I put in a winter there...but as

soon as the Labor Party there found out that I had actually read all through the whole first volume of Capital, the only man they knew who had read Smith. You better teach a class in economics here every Sunday (laughing). So, you see, it wasn't altogether new to me to have something like that happen to me.

Q. So, you began by teaching Marxian economics at Work Peoples' College?

FT We taught people everything from elementary English, kids who knew English, composition work would be something relevant to the labor movement. Have people put on skits, have them practice soap-boxing and so forth. We would have forums and debates. I would say, in general, you had a schedule of classes. But, I would say that overall the purpose was to get people doing things that lead them to hunt up information. I found that one of the best ways to get people actually to use their noodle and find something else was to get them into teams for a debate. That way, they would like to win the debate (laughs).

Q. What kind of debates? What would be the topic?

FT We would debate all kinds of subjects. I remember a subject on whether the social security system would result in us always having the tax that the government could always keep an eye on us. What was its intention; unemployment insurance, social, your health guaranteed by the government. Topics would come up, somebody would say, "Let's debate this thing." Pretty soon, we would arrange a debate on that. In general, while we had classes that were named various subjects, I would say that as far as I was concerned, the whole thrust of the thing was to get people interested in finding something else and then getting on their hind legs and talking about it. That's what we were concerned (laughing) with, no matter what you named it.

Q. You presented them with a problem, and then they had to do research and work and study to find a solution?

FT I'll admit that every once in a while I would find that it was degrading into lectures, because the easiest way, if you didn't have a lot of classroom material and stuff like that, you tell it to them and put some things up on the blackboard. But I found that was the poorest way that you could devise to transmit information, a very poor way.

Q. The students that I corresponded with were very complimentary about your teaching style. They felt you knew the topic and injected a lot of humor into it.

FT I tried to get it so that they were doing it and and I was the instigator, rather than the lecturer. But we would have some of that. And from time to time we would have others there. I think it was a lively time. People didn't find it dull. That's more than I can say about it. So far as its intent of providing the IWW with a bunch of qualified organizers, that's the big disappointment.

Q. So you arrived in 1927?

FT Yeah.

Q. And you started teaching right away?

FT Yeah.

Q. How did you become director?

FT What?

Q. How did you become director of Work Peoples' College?

FT I don't think so. People called me all kinds of names and never called me that. There was a Board of Directors there, and they were all Finnish people from around there. They were all working stiffs. It was strictly a labor-oriented school. Some of the things we had, I recall, there was a labor school down in Kansas and what we had from that was the most beautiful book for teaching English. I hope, but I imagine that somebody walked off with that. It was a regular grammar text and composition text. But all the examples that it would give were quotes from labor literature, a beautifully prepared thing. We had only the one copy, but I would be referring people to that all the time. Then there was a group in New York that put out a slim little book on English for foreign-born workers. I have forgotten the title; it was a slim little thing and it had, you know, labor-oriented examples and so forth. Then, at the back, I remember it had how to apply for a job, things like that, letters you might have to write to ask for a job, and so forth. It was rather (inaudible). I've forgotten the name. It wasn't the Rand School, was it?

Q. The Rand School or Workers' Education Bureau.

FT One of those. I know I was hoping that they would put out an arithmetic book. I made a bunch of suggestions of very interesting material that could be... We used to study arithmetic, algebra. There were one or two seamen there that I taught spherical trig so they could plot great circle courses and so forth. Most of them there, they needed ordinary arithmetic, especially those that were figuring they might get in the coop movement. You have to know your arithmetic for that (laughs). We used to make up examples, you know, a little labor slant or something. We wouldn't undertake any systematic statistics, but I tried to get them acquainted, more or less, with what the terms in statistics meant and how they were prepared. Frequently get them their work to do from statistical abstract or whatever other thing there was around there to get some data; so, at the same time they would be learning facts at the same time they were doing some arithmetic.

Q. What about the students? How old were they approximately?

FT Well, of course, now you have got summer schools where they were varied. I think from about 10 to 17, along in there. Then, in the winter time, I don't think anybody was under 18. There might have been somebody 17. It would normally be from 18 up to whatever age they might be.

Q. Co-educational?

FT Yes. I would say predominantly in their 20's.

Q. Both male and female?

FT Yeah. When I first went there, it was predominantly male. There were some females there for the kitchen help and so forth. The kitchen work was largely done by students, who would be working part-time in the kitchen and part-time in academics. Gradually it did develop to have more females coming.

Q. Did they work in the kitchen to offset their tuition?

FT Yeah. Jenny, part of her time was in there, too. It was a socialable place, of course.

Q. How many students would you have in a typical class?

FT I think economics was our larger class and that would be the greater part of the student body. I know, for instance, we had a class in workers' education. There I would say I doubt if we had more than four people that were digging into that kind of thing, a range in between there. Actually, it was quite easy to get personal attention for each individual, what he was in a position to undertake, what he was interested in doing.

Q. You mentioned a Jack Parnac (?) that had been at Brookwood Labor College and Commonwealth College and Work People's College?

FT Yeah. From all over Europe, too.

Q. Is that typical for students to come from all over the country?

FT No, I think he would be the only example of that. There was one other student, Clarence Dowd (?), he would be down at Commonwealth, too. That's the only other student that I can think of.

Q. So, where did the students come from?

FT Most of them from up round that area. The people that came from the IWW were from New York, Chicago, anywhere that they happened to hold dances and auction off a raffle ticket. If you wanted to explain Work People's College, you have to figure it was those dances and raffle tickets.

Q. They used to open them to the public, those dances?

FT Yeah, yeah. And the winner of the raffle ticket often didn't want it, and he would sell it to somebody for some small amount. It seemed completely irrational, but (inaudible) who came there and why. I think that's what you have to look at (laughs).

Q. I read a number of things that there used to be weekly school meetings where you sat around and discussed policy?

FT Yeah. It was sort of a self-governing body. Usually, I guess, the serious thing they discussed was who were they going to get to play for the dance and things like that. There was one time there was a strike up there. It was the females versus the males. I forget just what led to it. I think some of the males had used some sexist terms in regard to the females and they didn't want to have anything to do with them and so forth. The eating was all done in a separate building. Originally, there had been three buildings.

Q. I only traced two at one point. I traced two, and one burned down.

FT One burned down, but then the power plant for heating the place and the cookhouse was all one unit. I remember one time we had a big chimney for that, a big steel tube, it got blown down and we had to just keep banked fires for a day there so that the pipes wouldn't freeze. We all put our overcoats on and we danced to try to keep warm (laughs).

Q. Were there any political conflicts? At Commonwealth, I found some conflict between communist students and socialist students at one point.

FT I don't know if we had communists up there. I think we had people who felt friendly towards them. But I don't think there was anybody that was there trying to maneuver things for the Communist Party or anything. They came from, you might say, a culture that thought well of the Wobblies, whether they were Wobblies or not. A good many of the farmers, who were fathers of these kids, had been blacklisted miners...

Tape 1
Side 2

Q. Did students ever object to some of the teachers? Did they ever just come out and say, "Hey, this person is just not teaching," or "We object to the way they are teaching."

FT I can't think of a real example. The nearest to it, there was one teacher who -- simply something in his personal manner -- sort of slighted some of the girl students, that led to some kind of... in fact, that's what led to the strike. I'd forgotten. That was the linkage there. It was just a mannerism. Some young fellows tend to be, I don't know whether they will attract the females by pretending to be completely indifferent to them or what.

Q. The students at Brookwood were termed by one person, Sara Cleghorn, as labor puritans, very serious of purpose. Do you think the same label would apply to Work People's College?

FT To some of those people who came there wanted to make it definitely labor. to those who came, here's a good way to put in the winter, no you couldn't apply that. I wouldn't say necessarily to all the others, but one or two of them, I'm thinking of Edith Cutler (?), for example. She was a girl, I think you will find in practically all social movements, people of such complete dedication, somebody might say fanatic or something. The other things in life don't count. This is the only thing that counts. She tended to be more or less that way. If you asked her if that was how a person should be, she would say no. But they tended to have that scale of values. One or two like that.

Q. What about some of the fellows that came in to just spend the winter. Were they disruptive at all or did they skip classes?

FT No. There wasn't too much else to do around there. Of course, there was some real nice places to skate on the lake there, throw snowballs. You could go skiing. There were hills there. There was a reasonable amount of physical activity. I can't recall anything, here's Jenny coming. (Jenny enters room) She was a student. The students knew things about the school that I did not know. To some extent, I don't know whether they went to school reluctantly. I don't think so. I think people tended to do what people do in that environment. Ordinarily, we tried to make it that the classwork was something that was self-activated. Usually, I would see some humor develop out of things and so forth. Maybe it contrasted a bit with the schoolwork as they know it in grade school, that might have been.

Q. How did students and teachers perceive the public schools? Why go to Worker's College? Why not go to another school?

FT I think that they came from families that had a scale of values that the labor movement was important. I think especially in the 1930s there was a fair feeling that the United States is due for some kind of major social change and so forth. And, it's important that people understand something about their past experiences, past struggles, and

so forth. I know a lot of our teaching there that people seemed interested in. There was a course in social struggle with everything from Locke, Tyler, to Spartacus and so forth up to recent times and so on. They seemed to figure that was interesting. The question is, how did they perceive Work Peoples' College?

Q. Why not go to a public school?

FT I don't think that we offered this as an alternative to public schools, that is, if a person wanted to become an engineer, you study engineering. If a person was interested in that, I could help with math and things that were interesting to them, if I could be of any help. In some cases, I couldn't. I had students there who knew things that I didn't know. I was ready to help them in the areas where I could help them.

Q. I'm really playing devil's advocate with you because I think it's a question people have asked me when I discuss the schools. Why did they need those schools? There were the public schools; they were free and so on. Basically, it appeared that the public schools didn't address labor issues.

FT That, of course, is the major issue. If you wanted to get some understanding of developing the staff of unions and so forth, that, I think, was the picture, you're going to become staff people. I think apart from that, otherwise, that you'd have some understanding as a rank and filer that you could be more effective; you would have some idea how you can approach your fellow worker to get him thinking. That was some of the things that we were very well aware of; that what we were discussing wasn't of much interest to most other and how can we get them interested? That was a question that came up repeatedly.

Q Was the community generally receptive to Work People's College? Did you sense any hostility?

FT I didn't sense any hostility, though I think one reason it folded up was that the prospect was that most of the students would be drafted (laughing) when we went into World War II. No. For instance, the dances that we had on Friday evenings, folks from the neighborhood used to come around and come in there and dance too. The kids wandering around there, they would make friends in the neighborhood. I think there was a friendly feeling toward us. They thought (emphasis) of it as the Finn school rather than as a labor school.

Q. Were there courses in finnish culture?

FT Oh yeah. There were always courses in the Finnish language, summer schools in particular. That's where you had your big crowd that mixed with the neighbors was the summer school. One of the reasons for that was parents wanting their kids to at least know enough Finnish so they could write them a letter. Whether you are Italian or whatever,you would like the kids to retain something of your national culture. There were teachers... I couldn't teach Finnish (laughs). I don't know Finnish. In fact, earlier (inaudible) if you want to get along

well with the Finns, just don't learn Finnish (laughs). They had their little arguments and so on. They will try to get you on one side or the other. I was always impartial to these little disputes that were among them. I didn't learn Finnish. I picked some before I ever went there in the mines. I think the first Finnish I ever learned was (inaudible), "Please give me a match." If something went wrong, we said (inaudible). That is "Satan and the little apes." That was the equivalent to "goddamit." That seemed to say it phonetically, (inaudible). I avoided learning Finnish. A lot of it was transmission of familiarity with Finnish plays and so forth. There were people participating in those Finnish plays that wouldn't have been facile enough in Finnish without some training.

Q. What were the topics of the plays, whether they were in Finnish or English?

FT They would be ordinarily, Jenny can answer that question better than I can. They would ordinarily be labor related. Quite a few were related to the big civil war that had been in Finland after the war. I think some of the plays had, in fact, come from Finland. They would all have some kind of a class struggle theme to it. They were humorous. I know when I went to Finnish plays the difference was that there would be a laugh in the audience over there. There were some that you could see obviously the man is killed and is lying on the stage. This is a tragedy.

Q. You arrived in 1927. How many teachers were there? How many students were there?

FT When I went there in 1927, I was the only one to teach anything in English. There were two of us in English and I think two in Finnish. I forget just what the enrollment was, but I know that the building was reasonably filled. In fact, 1940 was the only year that it was a very small...

Q. You were there all the way until the end?

FT No, I just was there... ordinarily they wanted me there, but I wanted to be out doing other things, too. In fact, sometimes I was up there and I didn't... somebody else would finish the courses. I know the first year I was at the Colorado coal strike. I got the school running well and headed out to Colorado. Some of the students and the Finnish teachers, amongst themselves, kept the courses running. I tried to set up something so that a bunch of people had work to do; here's the sources of your information, go ahead and do it. That's what I tried to set up as much as I knew how.

Q. You started there before the Great Depression. You were there after it?

FT Yes.

Q. Did you notice any difference in the attitudes or the courses taught or number of students?

FT Certainly, I think an interest in why is there a Depression so that the economics of that became the ... and how would various proposed remedies work. I think there was a far more substantial interest in that in the 1930s than there was before.

Q. What about the CIO? What was the attitude towards the CIO?

FT Partly hope. Partly that it was a false hope. There were (emphasis) quite a few Wobblies who helped to build the CIO. I think among the Finnish areas, in particular, the steelworkers and, of course, there was the mine, mill and smelters. There was quite a bit of radicalism amongst these people... I can't recall definitely. When you ask me a question like that, the answer that I tend to give is one that I'm making up now rather than recalling actually. I recall that there was a great deal of division of opinion chiefly, if you don't go where the crowd is, who will be listening to you. It's that kind of a feeling. It makes me think, well, they're back in Halifax there. The Irishman that was head of the trades and labor council. And he used to like to get drunk. I remember him one time saying, "Thompson, there's no sense getting so far ahead of the parade that you can't hear the band." (laughing) I often say that to myself, my tendency is why the heck don't you just scrap this whole darn thing and build a rational, economic order (laughs). I think that was my attitude. If the practical thing seems to be in your town,your industry, to go into the CIO, go there, but keep the notion that workers should (emphasis) have the complete say so about their lives.

Q. So, you would be pragmatic in a sense?

FT Yeah.

Q. Forty or fifty years later, I'm looking at the decline of Work Peoples' College. I'm looking for reasons for it. I saw a couple of reasons. First, the Finns began to withdraw their support little by little. They got into the third generation Finns, and they didn't utilize the school as much as the public school. They were acculturated, they were Americanized.

FT Of course, this was not an alternative. This was supplementary to the public school, not an alternative.

Q. But the Finnish kids, after the third generation, just didn't want any part of that, not being related to the radicalism of their parents and grandparents and so on.

FT A little bit of that. There has been, I would say typically, not only of Finns but of the children of the foreign born, feeling you grow up in America, you learn to speak good English. Your hopes are to work in an office with a white shirt on. Your father lived this way. He speaks this broken English and so forth. You want to avoid his style of life and have another. You associate with his style of life, the other people who don't speak perfect English and talk about strikes and so forth, and you know that if you want to get along well in that office you don't go talking about strikes. You pick that up fairly readily in life, I think, even without anybody teaching it to you. So,

I think that would account for some of it. But up there amongst the Finnish people I don't think there was pressures back then. Even those who were upwardly mobile, they were in an environment where the people that they associated with had relatives who had been radicals. I think up in northern Minnesota, in fact, a large part of Minnesota, has been radical. Radicalism isn't a bad word in Minnesota as it is in Kentucky.

Q. The other reason that I came up with for the closing of Work People's College was because it was an IWW school. As time went on the IWW became more and more isolated on the left. The communists had certainly expanded during the 1920s. The 1930s seemed to see the expansion of the CIO movement. Yet the IWW instead of joining up with the CP or the CIO just tended to maintain the same perspective. As a result, most of the people were going with the CIO or the CP. How do you respond to that?

FT Well, so far as the CP affected IWW, that would be back in the early twenties.

Q. During the twenties, the main thrust of the left was the CP, and during the thirties the main thrust was the CIO.

FT Quite a few of the Finns went over to Russia at the same time that Haywood did. That was the thing that I think people... you see, the Russian Revolution was expected to be backed up by a European Revolution until the Fall of 1920. By late Summer or Fall of 1920, it became apparent there wasn't going to be any revolution in the West. So, consequently, Russian policy shifted from seeking left wing support and asking people to become more radical, than you've been; rather, say please work within the major trade union movement and social democrat movement to minimize the military attack on Russia. So, that they frowned upon all the left wing unions and so forth. The IWW they had more or less cultivated in 1919, but by 1920 they wanted to kill the IWW. In fact, they made a decision that only the IWW should be allowed to organize only in lumber and agriculture because there were no operative AFL unions in those two fields. Otherwise, we were all supposed to join the IWW. Haywood had gone for that. That was one reason, even before his departure, he had been practically put into a decorated position where he had nothing to decide and so on, because he was trying to say support everything to the Russian Revolution. I think the same thing, myself, up in Canada. I wasn't with the Wobblies then. I was enthusiastic about the Russian Revolution in 1917; that was big hope. But very soon it became apparent to us that it just wasn't going to work. (Jenny brings in some documents from Work Peoples' College). Those are summer flyers trying to get people to come to work. Just wanted to "live and learn," that was it! That gives you more or less what our pitch was. "Terms are $30 per month, room board and schooling." (Reading from the documents.)

Q. They had a nice picture of the library.

FT That's (inaudible) standing there. The fellow that drew that little

cartoon that I'm showing you there.

Q. Was this the way the students dressed?

FT Girls didn't wear jeans in those days. Ordinarily, they wore dresses. I think that for some winter sports, I think if they went skiing....

Q. Knickers?

FT Yeah, something of that sort. Ordinarily, maybe except for skating or skiing, they ordinarily wore dresses.

Q. You had a library. How many classrooms did you have?

FT We had two large classrooms.

Q. Give me an idea. You walk in, here's the picture of the place. You walked in the front door?

FT On either side of the front door, there's a large classroom that could accommodate I would say, readily, forty people. And if you moved the furniture around and brought some extra chairs in you could accommodate more than that. You could get about eighty people or so. I think on dances and so forth, that was on either side. Then, down the hall, that was just library.

Q. Down the hall on the left?

FT On the left. Facing that was a stairway going down to the basement or upstairs or to a door going out to the kitchen. Adjacent to that was the manager's office. Then there were about four bedrooms down there. My room was usually down there. It was easy to reach. Upstairs there were three stories tall. Upstairs there was one big room, in the front upstairs that could, that was like the whole front of the building, I guess you could put in 300 people if you wanted. We made very little use of that room; the bedrooms the rest there. In the basement there was a large gymnasium as well as bathing facilities, laundry facilities and all that kind of thing, toilets, of course. But there was a large gymnasium. It did get rather extensive use. People used to go in for heavy lifting, there were horizontal bars, various kinds of catching balls.

Q. Handball?

FT Something like that. People were physically active, apart from going outdoors. Upstairs there were just rows of bedrooms. Ordinarily, it was two students to a room. If a person wanted a single room, we could arrange it. Ordinarily, there were two to a room.

Q. Dances would be held in one of those front rooms?

FT In one of the big classrooms, yeah. If we used the upstairs room, the bigger one, if for instance, there would be a play or something put on by the students and everybody invited, why then you would use the big room upstairs. That was ordinarily only used for that. Or, if

somebody needed an extra room because of more than two classes going on at a time, you could get a corner of that, or do something there. Ordinarily, there were only two classes running at one time. Often the same thing was being taught in Finnish on one side of the hall and English on the other side of the hall. If we knew some of the students would like to get labor history both in English and in Finnish to make it that, the classes wouldn't run concurrently.

Q. You would be teaching one whole curriculum in Finnish and one in English?

FT More or less. Not entirely so because I am not too (emphasis) sure just what was being taught in Finnish. I know that we put a whole range of different titles on things, for instance, a course in sociology. A bunch of us would study the literature dealing with the processes of social change and things like that, the perspectives, a little bit of summary, this person, that person, the other thing, what was his analysis. The idea would be so that people if they got out of there and they had taken that course would have an idea what different sociologists were talking about.

Q. Ward's Dynamic Sociology?

FT That's odd. That (emphasis) was used extensively simply because we had a lot of copies of it.

Q. Not by choice; it was just convenient?

FT Yeah. That had been there and, of course, there was very little about sociology and it's quite a summary of evolution and Spencerian philosophy and such things as that. We decided to do some reading to get acquainted more or less with Spencer's perspectives. Actually, as far as Work People's College, Ward I think is more devoid of a perception of the class struggle than any other sociologist I can think of (laughs).

Q. I found it interesting that that was among the books I saw used there was that one. Marx's Capital was used?

FT Yes.

Q. Volume One or all three?

FT Very few got past there. Ordinarily it was summaries. In fact, we mineographed a lot of summaries so that the essential points would be in the mineographed thing with reference to the chapters and the people would have to read the chapters and so forth. I think I wrote to you about people coming down and singing to me one night. (laughing and singing) Which gives you more or less (laughs)... this wasn't derisive (laughs). They made a nice play out of this, in the next chapter, going to Australia. Making it very evident that one group of people doesn't work for another unless there is social constraint that forces them to do so. I would say they got a fair understanding of the general philosophy of Marxism. I don't think we made... The Communist

Manifesto, if it was around there... I think that so far... there would be quite a few copies of Socialism, Utopia and Scientific... Engels thing. And that was used as sort of an overall picture. We had quite a few copies of Bukarin, Historical Materialism. I think that was in a fair amount of use.

Q. Any of Charles Beard's stuff?

FT We had that American history. That was about the only thing of Charles Beard that we had. But there were some students who were more interested in the debates going on about the causes of World War One, and I got them... we made extensive use of the Duluth Public Library too. Quite often for debates and so forth, which was one of my favorite forms of instruction. I think we had several different debates at different times about the causes of World War One.

Q. IWW, pamphlets and literature?

FT Oh, yeah. There was all that kind of thing too. Actually, the instruction...

Tape 2
Side 1

...to write a leaflet, not only from the viewpoint of English composition, but so that it looked attractive so that they could use a typewriter and a stencil and know how to make the mineograph machine work and so forth. The equipment was rather primitive; some practical understanding of how to prepare copy get it through a mimeograph. I think that was our intent.

Q. How did students respond to theoretical courses? Was it over their head?

FT Yes. Certainly, to most people, the first chapter of Capital would be bewildering. Eighty years after, it is still bewildering for me. I suspect, at times, that Karl Marx was a very ponderous humorist (laughs). He wrote this thing, and then at the end of it, his little section on fetishism of commodities, saying here they've given all the falderal and here's the way it is in real life. At least, that is my perspective.

Q. Did any students become discouraged with that?

FT I tried to find the things that were of interest in there. His chapter on the buying and selling of labor is good reading. I think that Mr. Sloan's experience in Australia was good reading and so on, various things in between. We took it, more or less, almost mathematical in a way; what proportion of the working day is the worker working for himself? How was that portion decreased as you increase in productivity? If you double our productivity and raise your standard of living ten percent, what's the advantage to the employing class? And along with that I tried to get some understanding of these advantages; the competitive character of capitalism dissipates these advantages practically to all who can lay claim. I think one trouble with teaching Marxian Economics, if you start at page one of Volume One and go all the way to the end of Volume Three, is that a great deal of fitting it into reality is there in Volume Three; things that were sort of patchworked by Engels at the end (laughing). So, trying to talk about the realities of the marketplace, there's very little of that in the first volume of Capital. Somehow or other I tried to give them some summary; if you look over on page such and such in Volume Three, you will find these; while he's talking in a very abstract way... and I think that they got some idea about the process of the marketplace make it less simple than this stark presentation you have there about the buying and selling of labor power. I think they all got some understanding of how the system works.

Q. Getting back to our discussion of the 1920s the difference between the CP and the IWW, and the Third International calling for a violent revolution really put down the Second International and the social democratic approach and the ballot box. Of course, the IWW's means of attaining the new social order was through the Great Strike. During

the 1920s the IWW is really isolated from the CP. Would that be a correct assumption?

FT Yeah. Certainly, there is a tremendous sympathy for the CP, once they pulled Haywood over and took position that we shouldn't organize, then you have the practical question. Are these people who don't know the situation here -- and it's very apparent Lenin wasn't familiar (emphasis) with the American situation; that was the same way we thought up in Canada, too. I know I was up in Canada when the Socialist Party was debating should we affiliate with the Third International or not. I was sort of vocal on why we should reject it because of its impracticality. The condition's there for affiliation certainly didn't fit what was in front of our noses. At the same time, we were fighting this affiliation we were raising funds in Edmonton for relief for the famine; there was a tremendous famine in Russia in 1921. We were raising all the funds we could for that, and at the same time fighting the idea that the Socialist Party of Canada, which I also belonged to, would have its policies laid out for it by people who weren't there and didn't know what in hell we were up against (emphasis). I don't think it was so much radicalism as we just thought you shouldn't have back seat drivers.

Q. The CIO, while it's an industrial union, it's still basically different from the IWW. The IWW ultimately wanted to change the existing social order, but the CIO wanted to work within the existing social order. But it's an industrial union. I'm surprised when you said that a number of IWWer's really kind of want to work for the CIO.

FT Oh, yeah. We had quite a few in the Detroit auto industry in particular. A large part of the personnel that built the UAW were former members of the IWW. In fact, Reuther used to come around once in a while, his wife in particular, Meg, she was my student at summer courses (laughing).

Q. In Detroit?

FT In Detroit. We used to have a Wobbly hall there. A bunch of young people used to come there Sunday mornings to discuss different things and she was one of them there. That was quite a connection there (laughing). We would have liked to organize in there, and I say the reason that we didn't get more in the IWW... very unfortunate in 1933, 1934, I spent the winter there in Detroit. We were leafeting; we were running that mimeograph machine. There was about six of us. Every day run to the factory and so forth, soapboxing, leafeting, visiting, and when we would get contacts and visit them at night and so forth. We were just gradually (emphasis) getting a handful of people that had been very reluctant, but that's what we want. So, the thinking in those shops was very much the thinking that the IWW had projected there. That isn't quite the honest way. We took the thinking (emphasis) that was constructive in the shops reflected it in leaflets,and handed it back to them in that way. The constructive thinking there was more widespread. Then we got entangled in the Murray body strike changing models... to go strike when the company doesn't need you is the most inadvisable thing you could possibly do.

I was the only one on the committee that voted against it; the only one that was against the strike (laughs). I know I voted against the strike, so I know I was the only one. Because I felt that we should... you just can't go on a strike when the boss doesn't want you (laughs). I forgot. We got twisted up there.

Q. We were talking about the relationship between the IWW and the CIO.

FT Certainly, you couldn't help but be friendly, with a lot of them were your own. And some still paid their dues in the IWW while they were in the CIO. Even today, I'd say most of our members are paying dues in other unions. Our policy never has been to try to bore within and capture offices; in fact, not to accept any office higher than shop steward. You look back at the labor history of the preceding century. Ordinarly most of the unions were built by people who were socialist or had some kind of social vision of some sort, maybe a single tax or what not. They wanted some kind of social change. They figured it's important that workers be organized. It's very seldom anybody starts organizing except... You find that until you find a situation where a person can see there's gravy in that for me. That is only to a minor extent in the 1890's and off and on in certain situations in corrupt unions in this century. I think you ordinarily find that even among CIO organizers that labor only gets active enough and solid enough, we will go beyond this demand for this. I think there must be somewhere where people were fighting for the eight-hour day a century ago and achieving it. Here our productivity doubles about every twenty years. We should get along with a half-hour day (laughs). This matter of international relations surely has something to do with markets, production and so on, too. But any thinking person hesitates to alienate his fellow workers by talking about these things.

Q. What would you see the reason, or reasons, for the demise of Work Peoples' College? Why did it die?

FT I imagine the thing you mentioned already that the grandchildren of the founders speak English. I would say that to some extent people thought it was a Finnish college so I think it collapsed as people became more and more English speaking, as in other Finnish institutions. Down in Florida they have a great big dance hall and very little to do with it now. A labor history group gets developed in Florida they try to make some use of it. I think that was it, that the Americanization of the Finnish People has something to do with it. Along with that I think there's a cultural difference. I think another thing is this. The Finnish radicals, and common with other radicals, had ordinarily so stressed (emphasis) the importance of their kids doing well in school that there is a social ladder. Very few of the Finnish kids that I know are doing the kind of work their parents did. Once in a while, they'd ask me to speak at friend of mine who has died somewhere at their funeral. I get invited to the homes of these kids. They are in management. Some are here and there in the business world. But I see on their bookshelves some of the books they have are books showing that they still have retained some interest in large social issues. It isn't completely lost. I expect that if the social situation became such that there was "how are we going to use the industrial resources

of America better?" I think you would find that some of that seed is still working on people in the engineering departments could have an input that is very necessary and that would, more or less, reflect values: "We should not be planning how do we let automobiles get out of styles as quick as possible; you should be planning how we could get along with so many damned automobiles polluting the air (laughing)." I imagine that must have occurred to people who design automobiles once in a while.

Q. The main reason you see, then, is the Americanization of the Finnish people and they turn then from social change to social mobility?

FT That's the major thing. There's another very unpleasant thought occurs to me sometimes. I remember old Austin Lewis. In his day many people talked about social evolution; that it was parallel to the chicken development in the egg, and when the chicken gets strong enough it can break the egg and come out. And he felt that sometimes the egg goes bad instead. I think that anybody looking back.... All of our earlier hopes that in the industrially developed countries, Germany, England, France, Holland, Sweden, and so forth, that there the thrust would be for the workers to create the kind of a world that was run for the good of the human race, and from there it was sort of spread out to the backward areas. And instead they saw the revolution that did develop was in one of the most spiritually backward and technically backward areas that you could think of. The subsequent revolt had largely been in the undeveloped portions of the world. I think that has made a good many people tend to question is the chicken going to bust the shell. Maybe in a more practical way for 1984, here I grew up, up to not many years back, took for granted that the working class would solve the major economic arrangements and then automatically the arms problems would be solved as a consequence. Now, today, my thrust is that the important thing is that we have a range of people who do not share our economic ideas; people who are hoping that capitalism can become a real nice capitalism instead of the kind of capitalism that it is. But with those people do what we can to resist the threat that we are likely to blow ourselves all up. To me it seems so silly. I can't see why you need to make anymore atomic weapons. There's enough atomic weapons to destroy the earth now. There's no point in making more. To me, this takes priority over these other things. I think that maybe because it's concurrent with: "What can be done by a union in America?" This is limited very much by what can be done by the world economy. The auto strike this year; I don't like their settlement but I think in many places the settlement was accepted because they figured the alternative was that the cars would be produced somewhere else. I think that was the major threat against them. Not always in another country but another part of the United States (laughs). I think all these situations have made it: "How do we muddle through?" Where my thinking used to be let's plan for the right way for the working class to do things. Now I wonder how are they going to survive our capacity to destroy ourselves. It's not merely the destruction by atom bombs. I think there's all kinds of other things, too much exhaust. There's hardly a day goes by where they find soil in the playgrounds of Chicago; is it safe for the kids to play there any longer? It isn't just the capitalists. Working stiffs are using cheaper gasoline,

regardless of what it's going to do to people. You have a subtle arrangement that motivates people do do absurd things.

Q. This has been very insightful.

FT Would you like to look at a bunch of that stuff I put on the table?

Q. Yes, very much so. Thanks.