

INTERVIEWEE: Walter Bergman

INTERVIEWER: Warner Pflug

SUBJECT:

DATE: 24th June, 1981

TRANSCRIBER: Linda M. Swiderski

TAPE #1, SIDE #1

P: This is Warner Pflug at the home of Mr. Walter Bergman in Grand Rapids. We will be doing an interview with Mr. Bergman. The date is June 24th, 1981. Perhaps you could start, Mr. Bergman, by giving us a little brief introduction with your date of birth, where you were born, and then we can check the level of the tape and then we'll start in on the interview.

Bergman: I was born in a small town in northwestern Pennsylvania, Youngsville, Pennsylvania in 1899. I left there 16 years later to enter Greenville College. That was a sectarian college run by the ~~Free~~ Methodist Church to which my parents belonged and at the age of 16 they could consider my going (to) no other place than the church school. I was there for two and a half years until I entered the army in World War I.

(pause to check tape)

. . .college until several years later. I graduated in 1921. Then I taught for a year and a half in southern Illinois and went to the University of Michigan for summer school. While I was at the University of Michigan I met a summer professor who was Dean of Detroit Teachers College. He asked me to come in and work with him on his Ph.D. dissertation, which he was completing, for the summer. At the end of the summer he asked me to take a double job, half-time teaching at Detroit Teachers

Bergman: College and half-time continuing my work on the statistical part of his dissertation. I stayed in Detroit partly at the Detroit Teachers College and partly at the Research Department in the downtown headquarters until 1925. Then I was asked to come to the University of Michigan as an instructor and (as) an assistant director of their Bureau of Reference and Research which was the organization that ran the state-wide testing program in those days. I stayed there until I finished my <sup>DOCTORAL</sup> ~~doctor's~~ dissertation and left in 1929 and returned to the research department in the Detroit schools.

P: Well, in 1929, then, is this when you went with the Detroit Board of Education?

Bergman: Yeah. I went back to the Detroit Board of Education.

P: Did you continue teaching at Wayne at the same time, or were you just teaching at Wayne for that period?

Bergman: No, I did not ~~teach~~ for two years. I was connected with the. . . . For two and a half years I was connected with the, I was head of the, research department. But during that time the depression came on and I had gotten acquainted with a young lawyer who was like me, a member of a luncheon club of 53 Brother. But we probably would be called radicals now what we called progressives in those days, a group that was much more concerned with social problems than some of our colleagues. The mayor of Detroit was recalled at this time and <sup>ANew</sup> ~~no~~ election was held and this young judge, with whom I was acquainted <sup>through</sup> ~~to~~ the luncheon club, became mayor of the city. Shortly after he took office he became concerned with the growing unemployment.

P: This would have been Frank Murphy?

Bergman: That's right, Frank Murphy who later became Commissioner of the Philipines, governor of the state of Michigan, Attorney General of the United States, and, his last post, <sup>A POST</sup> which he held at the time of his premature death, was a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

P: So, were you working with his administration as mayor from almost the beginning, then, when he took office?

Bergman: Not at the beginning. I was with him for the better part, worked with him for the better part of a year in this position. When he first organized the committee I went in and helped in the organization of the committee and did a great deal of the organizational work as the committee progressed.

P: This is the committee on the unemployed?

Bergman: Yes.

P: What exactly was that committee set up to do?

Bergman: The committee was set up to do everything it could to alleviate the distress that was caused by the widespread unemployment. It was a committee that originally had as chairman, G. Hall ~~83~~ Roosevelt, <sup>a</sup> cousin of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and had had a number of members from the automobile manufacturing elite, one of the Fisher brothers was a member of the committee. The top man <sup>was</sup> from Chrysler, named Kaufman, <sup>790</sup> was a member of the committee, ~~we~~ we had many of the religious leaders in the city. We had Frank Martel who was the head of the American Federation of Labor in Detroit.

P: Was he the only labor representative on the committee?

Bergman: He was not the only member. In fact, I was a union member at that time. But, actually, Frank Martel, at that time, was

Bergman: organized labor in Detroit. Organized labor was very, very weak and it consisted almost entirely of the craft unions. The automobile workers had not yet been organized, and, at that time, there was no attempt being made to organize the auto workers. So when you say that Frank Martel was the only labor man, he was really the only person who stood out in the city as a labor representative.

P: He was really the sole spokesman for organized labor, *then, at that time*

Bergman: Yes. This was before the days of the CIO, ~~before the days of the CIO~~ *BEFORE* ~~the~~ the growth of industrial unionism.

P: This committee, then, again, was operating in about 1932/33.

Bergman: No. We started in *(THE SUMMER)* 1930.

P: You had mentioned that you were a labor union member at the time you were on this committee. Was this your membership in the American Federation of Teachers.

Bergman: Yes. I, now I guess I am incorrect of *my...* when they, the Federation of Teachers in Detroit, was organized in April, 1931. I, at that time, was still working out of the central office. I was a so-called higher-up and they were not taking people with administrative positions. So when the union was organized I was not one of the original members although *well* all of them, were people with whom I was closely associated and so when I went to Wayne on the first of July, 1931, I immediately joined the Federation. So I'm mistaken in saying that I was a union member at this time.

P: Perhaps we can get back, and I want to return to your work with the Federation of Teachers, but, getting back to mayor Murphy's unemployment committee for a few minutes. . . . Were you working,

P: I guess you would have left the committee or perhaps the committee had ceased operating by the time of the Ford hunger march, then, is that right. That would have been in 1932.

Bergman: Yes. Frank was out of the office by that time. He had, I think he had, become governor or. . . .

P: I think he was still mayor.

Bergman: Was he mayor?

P: At least the accounts I've read, the march was able to get through Detroit without any difficulty because Mayor Murphy did not give them protection, but at least made sure the police did not interfere with the march. When they got to Dearborn, of course, at the city lines, the Dearborn police had a different attitude. ~~So I think he was still. . . . In fact, he was. . . .~~ I'm sure he was. ~~But, anyway, back to the committee.~~

Bergman: When Roosevelt became president, which was in '33, he appointed him commissioner of the Philipines and he spent a couple of years there.

P: Do you think the committee was of any value. I have a feeling that they really weren't able to accomplish an awful lot.

Bergman: The committee was an attempt of well-intentioned people without any real skills in handling the situation. There were very few people in the United States that had skills in handling a situation of that kind, and they were sticking their fingers in the ~~dyke~~<sup>DYKE</sup>. There were not <sup>EFFECTIVE</sup><sub>165</sub> . The situation got worse and worser for several years after the organization of the committee. They did do some things that were of use. They established feeding stations for homeless men, feeding and sleeping stations for homeless men. They were not able to do anything very realistic in taking care of the

Bergman: hunger of people, of the unemployed.

P: But, I gather that they depended primarily upon private sources for the monies to operate these homes.

Bergman: Yes.

P: There was no organized governmental welfare or unemployment ~~checks~~ <sup>insurance</sup>.

Bergman: This was during the administration of Hoover and this was before any governmental activity on any major scale came in. The government really shifted the problem <sup>over</sup> to the wealthy of the city who were largely the manufacturers who had created the problem by not being able to sell their automobiles and, therefore, not being able to employ their workers.

P: Were you involved at all in Murphy's attempt to get Henry Ford to provide some assistance <sup>job</sup> ~~to~~ the residents of Detroit? I've heard that he tried to get Mr. Ford to do this and Ford's reasoning was that his plant was in Dearborn and the problem of the people in Detroit, that was a Detroit problem even though most of his workers lived in Detroit.

Bergman: I wrote an article for a magazine that discussed the problem of

Ford's ~~the~~ <sup>TREATMENT OF HIS MACHINES & OF HIS MEN.</sup>

Ford had no property to speak of in Detroit. He had a factory in Dearborn, his main factory. He had one that he had abandoned, or largely abandoned, in Highland Park. But the taxes that he paid were to Highland Park and to the city of Dearborn. He did not contribute to the community fund in Detroit at this time.

P: And yet the vast majority of his workers at that time were living in Detroit, isn't that so?

Bergman: And so I, in this article, I had figures on the percentage, 64% of the workers at his plant lived in Detroit and he was paying

Bergman: considerable money to put protective coating on all of his machines and to cover them with canvas, and while he was able to spend this amount of money on protecting his machines, I compared that with his disregard of the workers. I said that it's too bad that his workers couldn't be treated as well as his machines were. Now this article came out in the New York--this magazine <sup>that</sup> was published in New York--and it was picked up by a paper that probably disappeared before your day, it was called The Mirror.

P: I've heard of it.

Bergman: It only lasted a short time. A friend of mine, who was Frank Murphy's secretary, called me up in my office and said, 'Go out and get a copy of The Mirror.' I went out at noon and picked up The Mirror and looked it through thoroughly and saw nothing of particular interest in it. When I saw her that night I said, 'Why did you direct my attention to The Mirror today?' And she brought <sup>OUT</sup> her own copy and it said ~~that~~ <sup>A</sup> Detroit Board of Education executive accuses Ford of callous treatment of his workers.'

P: Were you in trouble with the Detroit Board of Education then?

Bergman: Well, let's say, it happened ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ that the president of the Board of Education was a vice president of a bank that Henry Ford owned.

P: <sup>(laughter)</sup> You were in trouble.

Bergman: Well. . . .

P: This secretary of mayor Murphy's, would that have been <sup>GOMAN</sup> Josephine ~~Goldman~~?

Bergman: That was Josephine <sup>GOMAN</sup> ~~Goldman~~.

P: <sup>Who</sup> Later during World War II worked for Ford. . . .

Bergman: . . . . worked for Ford and developed a very good relationship with Harry Benadine. (sp!)

P: That must have taken some doing.

Bergman: Well, I think she did it without compromising her integrity. Josephine <sup>Goldman</sup> Goldman was a very wonderful women.

P: Yes, and she was with Frank Murphy for a long time, wasn't she

Bergman: She had known him for a long time. What happened when Ford heard about this newspaper article, he hopped in the taxi and went down to The Mirror's office and said, 'If you don't yank that story, you'll never get another cent of Ford advertising.' So the story was yanked.

P: So it never appeared in the papers? Or just a few. . . .

Bergman: It appeared in the first edition.

P: I see. But old Henry himself went down there and. . . .

Bergman: That's what they say. He went down there and pounded on the desk. And then <sup>about</sup> my situation with the Board of Education at that time, really nothing was said at that time. <sup>But</sup> Later, I repeated the same charges at a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union, a comparatively small group at that time, but a newspaper reporter was present and he, again, had a headline: 'A Detroit School Executive Lambastes Ford.' <sup>ASSOCIATE</sup> I was called into the office and offered a position of ~~a social~~ professor at Wayne State University.

P: Why, did they think it would be better if the headlines read, 'Wayne State Professor Lambastes Ford', rather than 'School Board Executive.?'

Bergman: Yeah. Wayne was not the power that they. . . . Wayne was. . . .



P: Of course, at that time, they were still called the Detroit College. . . . <sup>what</sup>

Bergman: College of the City of Detroit.

P: And later became Wayne University. . . .

Bergman: Well, first it became Wayne University and then, still later, Wayne State University.

P: In fact, we, just a few months ago, celebrated our 25th anniversary as a state university.

Bergman: I see. You see, for a long time the president of Wayne, of the University, was the superintendent of schools and the man that really ran it that was David Henry at that time, the man who retired as chancellor of the University of Illinois.

P: So when was this then that you went to ~~Wayne State, excuse me,~~ the City College of Detroit?

Bergman: 1931.

~~P: I see.~~

Bergman: They offered me a chance to go up to ~~the~~ Wayne. This was not that they didn't show their ~~me~~ whip, you know. They just offered me the chance ~~and~~ and, I said, 'but I have a rating here.' You see, we were ~~we~~ HAVING THE ~~have no~~ same rating scale. The administrators had ratings that corresponded to professor, assistant professor, associate professor, and so forth. I said, 'I have a rating of assistant professor. I don't move sidewise. I might move up, but I wouldn't consider a sidewise move.' So if Wayne would like to have me as a full professor, that would be something that I could consider.

P: Did they take you up on that then?

Bergman: A few days later Dean Lesinger (sp?) came back and. . . .

P: He had been the Dean of the College of Education.

Bergman: Yes. He came back and said, 'Alright, you can be a full professor and so I became a full professor a few weeks before my 32nd birthday despite the fact that I spent two years in the army during World War I. So that was one way of moving up the ladder.

P: So you were at, what was <sup>the</sup> in the City College of Detroit, from 1931 until. . . .

Bergman: 1933.

P: '33. So you would have been there at the time. . . Victor Reuther was there, and Walter. . . .

Bergman: Yes.

P: They would have been there about that time.

Bergman: Yes. They were there and I was the one who introduced them to the <sup>to me</sup> first socialist movement and then the labor movement on the 13th of November, 1931.

P: So they were not all that involved with the socialist movement.

Bergman: They hadn't been involved with anything.

P: How did you come to meet them? They weren't in any of your classes, were they?

Bergman: No. They weren't in any of my classes, but the liberals in Detroit were <sup>A COMPARATIVELY small group</sup> (few in Michigan) and we knew each other then. So I heard about this man who worked at Ford's and went to Wayne at night school, and I went up to his apartment on the 13th of November--it was Friday, the 13th, by the way-- and invited him to attend a meeting of the socialist group.

Bergman: Walter had been in Detroit <sup>for</sup> a number of years as a worker at Ford's and at Camay, that tool and <sup>DYE</sup> dye maker. His brother was a full time student.

P: This was Roy?

Bergman: Victor. Roy had not yet come to Detroit.

P: Well, were you <sup>involved</sup> involved, then, in the setting up--what was the name of the club--the social problems club that they organized at the university? I believe that was the name of it.

Bergman: No, that was the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

P: There was that, but I thought they had organized another club, ~~but~~.

Bergman: No, that was the only thing that they had at that time, and they were, both of them, active in that. They invited me to be a speaker, ~~at~~. I was, by the way, faculty sponsor of the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

P: Well, that must have put you in trouble with the administration at the college, then, too, which <sup>is supposed</sup> was really the Board of Education.

Bergman: Yeah, it was the Board of Education.

P: How were groups like the Student League and <sup>others</sup> ~~that~~ what would have been considered ~~xxxx~~ radical groups at that time, how were they received by the administration?

Bergman: I'm going to tell you that, but I'm going to sidetrack a bit.

While I was down at the Board I organized an American Legion Post. It was a rather selective post, only pacifists were asked to join, and we called it the Thomas Jefferson Post. ~~(LAUGHTER)~~

We adopted a number of resolutions and <sup>at that time</sup> ~~we~~ sent to the President of the United States, and one of them was

Bergman: concerning the disarmament conference that was then going on in Geneva, Switzerland, and we had received an answer from the White House. "The President had instructed me to express the gratitude of the President to have the support of the members of the Thomas Jefferson Post." Well, I one day in December, very shortly after I had first introduced the Reuther boys to this socialist group, there was a meeting on a proposal to establish ROTC at Wayne State University and we had two speakers at that meeting: One was the secretary of the Detroit Council of Churches; and the other was myself. There was a newspaper reporter present and I think the reason was I had gotten <sup>really</sup> ~~already~~ quite a lot of newspaper publicity when I was secretary of the mayor's committee and so I was someone <sup>that</sup> they could follow on an off day, a slow day.

P: They <sup>had</sup> figured you would have something quotable to say.

Bergman: Yeah. I had spoken, of course, against the establishment of the ROTC. We had a member of the Board of Education who was a veteran of the Spanish-American War, and he came out with a statement in the paper, 'While I'm not a member of the American Legion, I am very sure that there is no serviceman in our city that would agree with Dr. Bergman's charges against the establishment of an ROTC unit and that would agree with his plea for disarmament.' So the next issue of the paper came out with a quote from me, I said, 'I speak not as a member of the American Legion, but as <sup>a</sup> commander of the Thomas Jefferson Post, and I want to quote from a letter from the President's office in which he has instructed his secretary to express to our Post the appreciation that he has for their members'

Bergman: support on his attempt to secure disarmament.' The older Dr. Shurluy, do you remember when there use to be a Shurluy Hospital?

P: I know the name Shurluy, yes. It's S-H-U-R-L-Y.

Bergman: L-E-Y, I believe. Well, he had brought charges against me before the Board and we had ~~a~~ the biggest meeting that the Board of Education had ever had up 'til that time. We had the Reuther brothers. Victor Reuther represented them and he made his first public speech in my defense down there. We had Pat O'Brien, who later was attorney general of the state of Michigan and Frank Martel from the Federation of Labor, with whom I had worked on unemployment problems, and ~~the leader of~~ the secretary of the Council of Churches.

*Shurluy* had brought charges, calling for my dismissal from the Board. We had a large, very large, meeting, the largest ever held to date with people from the community, from church groups, from labor groups, leaders from both of those, and when it finally came to a vote, even Dr. Shurluy did not vote for his measures.

P: ~~So you weren't . . .~~

~~Bergman~~: So I was not fired.

P: You continued then at, what was then, the City College for another, for about two years.

Bergman: Yes.

P: Getting back to the Reuthers and ~~to~~ <sup>various</sup> the student groups that were on campus at that time, how were they received by, <sup>the</sup> the rest of the students, for example. Were they looked upon as somewhat different?

Bergman: This was. . . The depression was beginning to make radicals out of conservatives, and so on. Well, it was much like the sixties compared to the previous decade which was perhaps like the seventies.

P: Right. So there were a lot of people who I suppose were at school at that time who had somewhat the sort of problems as the Reuthers and others and perhaps, <sup>saw that</sup> ~~were~~ at least in sympathy with what they were trying to accomplish.

Bergman: I wasn't an outcast on campus because I had spoken out against the ROTC. I mean, the general feeling on <sup>the</sup> campus was against the ROTC.

P: Well, then in 1933 you went where then?

Bergman: In 1933 I <sup>THERE WAS AN</sup> ~~was in~~ election for the Board of Education and there were 3 professors up at Wayne that supported, <sup>CR</sup> that spearheaded <sup>CR</sup> the campaign to elect some <sup>LIBERALS</sup> ~~of the rethics~~ to the Board of Education. We lost, of course, and then, it was interesting, the punishments that were meted out. One professor had had night school classes, and they were very popular. He always had a hundred or so in his night school class; they transferred him to the day school. Another man had been teaching in the School of Education; they transferred him to the Liberal Arts College. And me, they transferred me to a principalship of an elementary school. When I saw the minutes of the Board recommending this, this is before the action was taken, I merely wrote two words after it: Public Hearing, and <sup>LAURA</sup> I sent it to my friend on the Board of Education, ~~Lora~~ Osborne. Well, then I went on a vacation, on a canoe trip up in the Canadian woods and I had left word where I could, the first

Bergman: place <sup>that</sup> I could pick up mail, and when I got there I had a letter from the Board saying that there had been a change in their plans about my future and I was to be returned to my position at the Detroit Board of Education.

P: So then you returned to where you had originally been at the Board office.

Bergman: Yes. So I was back at the high visibility downtown office of the Board. So I came up smelling like a rose. <sup>again</sup> I've been lucky in my, some of my. . . .

P: Yeah, one wonders how one can make waves, if you will, and still keep popping up. Did you ever have any second thoughts about all this? <sup>About</sup> Maybe you better <sup>really</sup> ~~not~~ not speak out.

Bergman: I might have said there was somebody else, it was somebody else's turn, <sup>only</sup> there wasn't anybody.

P: Nobody else was there to do it.

Bergman: We had a very small teachers union, but none of the people in the teachers union <sup>had</sup> ~~have~~ prestige and I had prestige, well, partially, because I'd been a full professor. I had a doctor's degree. I was well known in the city because of the publicity I had ~~had~~ in the mayor's committee. I was known as a friend of the mayor and <sup>later</sup> ~~of~~ of the governor and, well, I was catapulted into leadership.

P: You mentioned the attempt by you and some other professors to get, I guess, socialist representatives on the Board of Education.

Bergman: Not socialist representatives. In fact, one of the people that we had, one of our candidates was the sister of a man that later was mayor of Detroit. She was the daughter of old Judge Jeffries.

Bergman: You remember Judge Jeffries.

P: I remember Mayor Jeffries.

Bergman: Well, Mayor Jeffries' father was Judge Jeffries and Judge Jeffries was a veteran of Cox's army.

P: And his daughter was one of the candidates, then, that you were trying to elect.

Bergman: Yeah.

P: She didn't get elected either.

Bergman: No she didn't get elected either. The other was more properly, was more nearly ideological kin <sup>of</sup> ~~in~~ ~~mind~~ ~~that~~ Mrs. Hanna, which is the married name of Jeffries' daughter.

P: Well, I read in one clipping that you ran as the socialist candidate for mayor in what, 1933, is that right?

Bergman: Yeah.

P: What was that like? What came of that. . . . I know what came of the campaign, but. . . .

Bergman: Well, there were 12 candidates that were running. I finished ~~in~~ <sup>THE</sup> with top flight. I was number six out of the 12.

P: Who would have been elected then? Who, <sup>finally</sup> ~~I mean~~, was elected mayor, then, at that time?

Bergman: Mayor Murphy was re-elected.

P: That's right. But you, part of that time, and I assume after that, you were still actively involved with the socialist movement in Detroit.

Bergman: Well, I <sup>have</sup> ~~had~~ been a member of the Socialist party for over 50 years.

P: Was it about this time, then, that you became more involved in the activities of the Federation of Teachers.



Bergman: I was elected president of the Michigan Federation of Teachers in September, 1934. I was elected vice president of the American Federation of Teachers in August, 1935.

P: What ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> the membership of the Michigan Federation of Teachers? I know in numbers it must have been very, very small. . . Who were some of the people that you ~~had~~<sup>would have</sup> been working with? Was Arthur Elder, for example, part of it at that time?

Bergman: Yes, Arthur Elder came in a little later and he was very active and he followed me as vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, and Francis 59 <sup>Infant</sup> and Florence Sweeney.

P: These are all familiar names.

Bergman: Yes, they were probably the leaders of the Federation.

P: But, you then were president of the Michigan Federation of Teachers, am I correct that the great bulk of the membership probably would have been in the immediate Detroit area, perhaps Flint, places like that. I wouldn't think that there'd be much out-~~of~~-state membership.

Bergman: Well, we had ~~some~~<sup>a good little</sup> local here in Grand Rapids. And the man who later became superintendent of schools here was the chairman of the group when I was president. There are several people that I still know that were members of the Federation ~~during~~<sup>before</sup> the days of my presidency.

P: What sort of issues would the Federation have been working especially hard on at that time?

Bergman: One thing ~~that~~ we were interested in was, well, of course, the money issue always. And another issue was nondiscrimination

Bergman: against married teachers. Well, at that time, almost every city in the state except Detroit fired a teacher upon marriage.

P: This would be a female teacher.

Bergman: A female teacher, yes. And mostly a much larger share of teachers were female in those days. In Detroit, we did not fire them, but we put them on the shelf as far as promotion was concerned. Now one woman that later became regional superintendent was kept in that place for about 20 years <sup>MERELY</sup> really because she was married.

P: Was the union, or the Federation able to do much about that, at that time?

Bergman: Later we organized a group, it was called S.O.S., Save Our Schools. First it was to win the millage campaign. Then we realized we were able to get labor which had been the hub(?) power and we were able to get the church groups, and so forth, that our committee had the power so that for a number of years we picked the candidates that got elected to the Board of Education.

P: So that's where you were able to bring about some changes was through the political process of electing sympathetic people to the Board of Education. Obviously you had no contracts at that time, which negotiated. . . unionwide contracts. I guess that was to be many, many years later before ~~the~~ <sup>long</sup>

Bergman: Well, not until we had a representative ~~in an~~ election and that was after my day. That was after I retired in '58.

P: Yes.

Bergman: They had the election that chose the Detroit Federation of Teachers as the bargaining agent for all teachers.

P: And they even won the agency shop at that time.

Bergman: Yes. The teachers did not have to join the Federation, but they had to pay dues. I didn't mean dues. They had to pay a...

P: A service fee.

Bergman: Yes.

P: In fact, I believe there's a court suit that some of the teachers are trying to bring against the DFT about that.

~~However, I'm not quite sure.~~

In your activities on the national level with the AFT, were you very active within the AFT in your role as vice president?

Bergman: We had regional vice presidents. We had 12 or 15 vice presidents and we had a territory assigned to us for which we had supervision.

P: Wh<sup>at</sup> ~~was~~ was your territory then?

Bergman: Michigan and Ohio and West Virginia.

P: So you would be in contact with various locals and people trying to organize locals.

Bergman: Actually I did not, I never got to West Virginia as a vice president, and not too often to Ohio, but most of the work was in Michigan and Michigan became a fairly well organized state. We had in all the larger towns, we had Michigan Federation of Teachers locals.

P: ~~Well that brings us up.~~ What were some of the other activities then, before we get into your service in World War II. What else were you involved in, ~~in addition to the...~~

Bergman: I mentioned the organization of an American Legion Post.

P: This is probably the only American Legion Post made up entirely of pacifists.

Bergman: There was one other.

P: Were you <sup>de-</sup> chartered by the national organization?

Bergman: Yes, but that was <sup>a</sup> very good publicity stunt because we appealed to every ~~at~~ *level* and every time that we appealed we got a chance, and the newspapers were very good to us. We got a chance to state our views and to tell what we were being fired for. And so it actually was one of the smarter things I ever did, I think, was to organize an American Legion Post. Then later after that we carried our appeal to the Legion headquarters in Indianapolis ~~and, by the way, . . .~~

END OF SIDE #2, TAPE #1

Bergman: We, Walter Reuther went with me that time, we were going to a meeting in Washington and saw it was on our way to go to Indianapolis.

P: So Walter ended up at the American Legion meeting with you as well?

Bergman: Well, he was just accompanying me. He wasn't in the meeting.

P: I see.

Bergman: <sup>Oh no.</sup> Walter had <sup>never had</sup> service in neither war. He was much too young for World War I.

P: Was the American Civil Liberties Union becoming active in Detroit at this time? Or is that a later period. I know you've been very involved with their work. I'm not sure. . . .

Bergman: I joined the American Civil Liberties Union almost as soon as I came to Detroit in 1930. In fact, they had a 50th anniversary party for me up here a couple of years ago, a year ago. And, then, in Detroit, as in many other places, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the decision the <sup>ACLU</sup> ~~American Legion~~ took with Mrs. Flynn's case. Mrs. Flynn was a union representative who was elected to the executive board of the ACLU as a union representative. I think she was from the miners union, the ~~amalgamated~~ copper miners. While she was on the board she joined the communist party.

P: Would this have been Elizabeth <sup>(sp?)</sup> Gurley Flynn?

Bergman: That's right. That's the girl. The American Civil Liberties Union took the position that no official, not a member, but no official <sup>of</sup> member of the executive board could be a member of the communist party and expelled her from the board.

P: Did they have that rule just about the communist party? Or any

P: and all political parties?

Bergman: Just about the communist party. And, at that time, in Detroit, the wealthy, most active people, in fact practically the entire membership of the ACLU ~~deserted~~ and formed a local Civil Liberties Federation that operated for a number of years.

P: What was the title?

Bergman: Civil Liberties Federation. And Milton Kimnetz was the executive secretary of it for a number of years. So I was out and many <sup>other</sup> people in other parts of the country left the ACLU at that time. I did not rejoin the Civil Liberties Union until after I returned from World War II. It was entirely dead then in Detroit. Both organizations were dead. We re-established the Civil Liberties Union in Detroit and I was secretary of it for most of the time, I guess, after the first year. I became secretary and until my retirement I involved Ernie <sup>MAZZEY</sup> ~~Mazie~~ who became my successor when I retired. We built up the union and now we have Michigan as one of the strongest states in the American Civil Liberties Union.

P: Getting back to the mid-thirties, prior to World War II. . . . Were you involved at all, I'm sure you at least came in contact, with the people who were trying to organize the auto workers during that period?

Bergman: Yes. I walked many a picket line. But perhaps the most unusual service that I did was during the Flint strike. I organized a patrol of ministers who went off to Flint every day of the strike and no matter what their religious preference was for their own pulpit they borrowed, if they didn't have

Bergman: them, these dog collars ~~(laughter)~~ that Episcopalian ministers wear.

P: They would clearly be identified as men of the cloth.

Bergman: So they would be identified as men of the cloth.

P: What would they do? ~~Were they there merely as a . . .~~

Bergman: They would walk around the picket line and any time that they saw a policeman go near a picketer they would just stroll over in that direction. I took a number of people up there to visit the picket line and toward the factory where they were sitting in; two of the people that I took up were members of Parliament from England and both of them later, when labor came to power, became cabinet members. One was Eileen Wilkinson, and one was Jenny Lee.

P: Yeah. I've seen photographs of them going through the plants and talking to the workers.

Bergman: The first floor doors were all barred so they had to climb a ladder to get in. Jenny Lee is the widow of ~~Mr.~~ Bevan who was one of the outstanding left wing leaders in the labor party.

P: And these two were here then, to what, just to sort of observe the sit down strikes?<sup>?</sup>

Bergman: Yes. Oh, they were on speaking tours.

P: I see. How about the work being done in Detroit even prior to that period? I'm thinking about people like Phil Raymond and events like the Brigg's strike in 1933. Did you have any contact with these people ~~on this~~ . . . ?

Bergman: I know Phil. Phil was an ardent communist at that time and

Bergman: well, I knew him more from his communist activities than his labor activities.

P: I see.

Bergman: I went to Flint + I went <sup>to a good</sup> ~~to~~ many other places in the Detroit area and participated in picket lines.

P: I guess one of the bigger events of that early period would have been that strike at Briggs when so many different unions from the IWW to the communist party to, I think even the AFL got involved to some extent. Did you have any contact with that?

Bergman: No. I marched in the picket line in front of Briggs, I didn't have any major part in it. I was on the Board of the Federation of Labor. I recall one time when the <sup>ON THE</sup> ~~procedure~~ procedure of the vote, Martel recommended that local 800, the Ford local, be expelled from the Federation of Labor because it had less than the required 15 members; they only had 14. I recall making a speech that seemed to bring down the house and change some of them that had been hostile and the body of all of it, which was very unusual for them to vote against Martel, ~~but~~ they voted not to expel Walter Reuther's local. Now this was before the CIO had broken with the AF of L.

P: I gather that the AFL, especially Martel and others in Detroit, really weren't working that hard to help these groups trying to get organized at places like Hudson's, <sup>or</sup> Ford's, <sup>or</sup> Briggs, and so on. I gather they received very little assistance.

Bergman: That is right. Martel's interest was in the craft unions. He was very much a craft union man and, of course, until the CIO, which was organized largely elsewhere, until that came in he



Bergman: didn't show very much interest in the unorganized auto workers. Labor was very, very small in Detroit when I came here in 1923, 1924. They held a national convention here and it is the custom of the AF of L when they hold a convention to send out their best speakers to respond to invitations from churches to speak at their church services. And in most cities they would have dozens of invitations and in Detroit they only got four invitations from the churches.

P: So at that time then the, at least, organized labor was really a very minor part of the city's activities.

Bergman: And Martel, and Ed Bernard, that name is that before your time?

P: I'm afraid it's before my time.

Bergman: <sup>HE WAS</sup> A conservative labor lawyer. Well, they ran a republican party in Detroit and the republican party ran Detroit. Now, of course, our mayor and our concilmen were always elected on partisan basis.

P: Now, ~~I'm trying to think of other activities before getting~~. At the beginning of the second World War then ~~you became~~, you were with the army again. is that right?

Bergman: Yes. ~~I was not~~. I originally registered as a conscientious objector and <sup>THEY</sup> when ~~we~~ changed my registration and volunteered when they organized the military government which was to take over the civil administration after <sup>THE</sup> war. Now, that may seem a little strange, but I never, well I thought about whether it was, to question myself whether I was doing the right thing or not and about half the time I'd come up with the answer I did the right thing, half of the time I'd come up saying I blew this one.

P: Your service consisted of working with the American military government as an educator <sup>is</sup> ~~getting~~ school systems back in ~~Berlin~~.

Bergman: Yes. I was in charge of the. . . Well, I was the opposite number to the Bavarian secretary of education. ~~They call them the~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~minister~~ over there.

P: Why do you say that you ~~were~~ still <sup>are</sup> not quite sure <sup>whether</sup> you did the right thing? I'm ~~curious why you would have~~ some. . . .

Bergman: I was under military rule until the war ended. Now when the war ended I had had a number of contacts with UNRRA. In fact, I had been loaned to UNRRA by the military to be an instructor at their training school. And, in fact, I was there when the war ended, and so I had lots of those points that you had to have and I had enough for immediate discharge. So I was discharged in September and for a year I worked for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation in displaced persons camps.

P: This was still in Germany?

Bergman: Yes. This was in Germany. Well, ~~I was,~~ <sup>for a while</sup> ~~I was,~~ we had a training school in Holland, but most of the time I was in Germany. After I left the training school I had charge of the educational activities in all of the camps in the American zone in Germany.

P: That must have been a horrendous problem. You must have had to build a major school system from the ground up I would imagine.

Bergman: Well, we had some very fine talent there from particularly the Baltic countries, and the countries that have now disappeared entirely from the map. But we had this, what we called, the Baltic University. Now I did not have anything to do with that. That was started

Bergman: by my associate. He was a young professor from the University of Toronto. I was stationed in Frankfurt and he was stationed in Munich and he established this in Munich. Later the two headquarters were combined and I came down to Munich, but I let him continue with the entire operation because he was the one who had started, often got <sup>him</sup> all the credit for it.

P: But this was a United Nations activity. Outside of the United States and Canada were there many other nationalities involved in this?

Bergman: Oh yes, we had French, we had Polish, we had several from the Baltic countries. We had Australians and New Zealanders.

P: I get the feeling you feel more comfortable about that than your work <sup>with</sup> ~~for~~ the American military government in the same area.

Bergman: I was very comfortable working with them, but when they opened up for civilian workers I felt comfortable working <sup>WITH IT,</sup> in military government as a civilian. I didn't find it too pleasant an operation when I was under the army, but most of the time that I was in the military government I was on loan, as I said, had been loaned to UNRRA. I was also loaned to the French government for five/six months.

P: Were you doing similar sort of work then?

Bergman: They were starting a military government school in Paris and, <sup>by</sup> ~~so~~ a way I got 25 points toward my discharge because the outfit to which I was assigned was in the battle of the Bulge. But I was in Paris all that time.

P: <sup>I see.</sup> But you got the points anyway.

Bergman: I got the points anyway because it was my outfit. Well, Paris was not such a glamorous place in those days. The Germans took all of the automobiles out of Paris when they left. The taxicabs were several different kinds that winter. You could get, if you were really flush, you could get a tandem bicycle with a side car and have two pumpers to carry one person. Or, if you wanted to ride double you could get a side car that held two people. That wasn't quite so luxurious. ~~Выхихихих~~ And then you could have just one pumper and one person riding in it, and the lowest in the rank was when two people were riding the bicycle that was pumped by one person.

P: ~~Particularly for the person doing the pumping. How did . . .~~  
I gather you must have worked closely with the Germans, particularly the German educational structure. How did they react to all this? How were your relations with them?

Bergman: Well, the first minister of education I worked with became a very close friend and we still correspond after all these years. When I've been in Germany, I <sup>'ve</sup> see him sometimes and telephoned him other times.

P: I see.

Bergman: The second one was, he was a social democrat so we were philosophically quite united. ~~Then~~ Then they had an election where the christian democrats were the conservative party and when they took power then I did not work with nearly as much pleasure and satisfaction with that man.

P: When did you wrap up your work with UNRRA then and come back to the United State?

Bergman: I left UNR~~RA~~<sup>RA</sup> to go back as a civilian in the military government.

P: I see.

Bergman: And then in 194<sup>8</sup>~~9~~ I came back to the states and went back to my job at the Board of Education.

P: And you stayed at that job then until your retirement?

Bergman: Until my retirement except that I took a sabbatical leave and went to Denmark and studied in Denmark for a year.

P: I<sup>ve</sup> read about your problems in Denmark, at least getting back from Denmark.

Bergman: Well, they took my passport.

P: Yes. This would have been in 1951?

Bergman: '52. I went in '52. It was in April of '53 that they took my passport.

P: This would have still been at the height of the McCarthy period.

Bergman: Yes.

P: What was the school that you had taken the sabbatical. *F.R.?*

Bergman: I was attending the International Peoples College which is a Danish folk school that is very popular in the Scandinavian countries. It is a school that takes people who have been out of school for a time. They're all adults. You take some without the normal requirements of previous studies and I was studying and teaching both.

P: This <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ a government run school? Or is it private?

Bergman: It's a private school.

P: What was the reason that the state department gave for lifting your passport?

Bergman: I have the documents back here. They gave me 20 items that all of which, with one exception, were some 20 or 30 years in the

Bergman: past. The only thing that was current was that I had signed a newspaper advertisement asking for the repeal of the Trucks Act, and the Trucks Act <sup>was</sup> ~~would~~ not repeal but before it got around to being repealed the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional.

P: Now I'm not quite sure how this operates, but when the State Department lifts your passport, does that mean all you can do is get back to this country or you have to come back immediately? *END SIDE #1 TAPE #2*

Bergman: No. You do not have to come back. After a bit, they asked me to indicate what my travel plans were and they issued me a passport that would allow me to go everywhere <sup>that</sup> I said I wanted to. But I insisted upon a passport without any restrictions at <sup>all</sup> and so when they sent me that passport then I came back to the States.

P: So they finally did restore, or give, you, your passport.

Bergman: They gave me a passport that allowed me to go every place that I said I wanted to go.

P: So that really they were just harrassing you <sup>probably</sup> more than any thing else.

Bergman: So <sup>then</sup> when I came back to this country I started legal action and demanded a hearing in the State Department. I went down to Washington and had a hearing and two months after that I got my passport back in its original shape. Now there was one <sup>of</sup> ~~an~~ exception that was on the original passport that I was not to go to Yugoslavia.

P: At that time that would have <sup>probably</sup> been standard for most passports?

Bergman: Yeah. It was standard for all passports.

P: Did other Americans at this school in Denmark have the same sort of problems?

Bergman: Well, my wife and I had gone over on one passport and she had gone in to have it changed to get a passport of her own.

P: Were there other Americans though at this school?

Bergman: There were others there.

P: And they didn't have any problem with their passports?

Bergman: No. They were people that had<sup>ly</sup> . . .

P: . . . Hadn't made the headlines.

Bergman: . . . hadn't made the headlines.

P: So then you retired from the Board in '59, '58?

Bergman: '58.

P: 1958. Is that when you then became actively involved in the civil rights movement.

Bergman: Then I began working with CORE, Congress for Racial Equality.

P: Right.

Bergman: Then in '59 I went to Vienna and was the founding principal of the American International School and I stayed there for a year until we got the school going. Then I came back to Detroit and I taught a couple of courses that semester at Wayne and then I went on the Freedom Ride in May. ~~Then~~ I didn't take any work at Wayne.

P: Had you been actively involved in <sup>the</sup> civil rights movement though prior to that period?

Bergman: Yes, I had. I was not an original member of CORE. There had been a CORE chapter in Detroit and I think <sup>it was</sup> that during the war years, I think that's when I was away.

P: Yes, I was going to say I suspect many of the problems and some of the solutions from ~~the~~ <sup>came</sup> to the forefront in Detroit during the war years there was a large influx of more blacks from the south to work and so on. . . .

Bergman: One of the things that the Reuthers were really very, very interested in and did a great deal of very good work was in keeping down the animosity of the southern whites against the negroes within the plants. ~~I mention the Reuthers, I also know~~ . . . .

P: ~~You were talking about.~~ . . . .

Bergman: Oh, ~~I say~~ another person that I knew from the early days was Leonard Woodcock.

P: That's right. He would have been a member of the socialist party. In fact <sup>I guess</sup> most of those people had been at that time.

Bergman: Yes.

P: What was he doing at this time?

Bergman: He was a clerk. Why he was just a teenager then. He was married, but he was 18 or 19, something like that.

P: ~~I see. We're sort of backing up. . . . I keep thinking of some loose ends that we haven't.~~ . . . / I wonder if we can return to the thirties for a minute. There are a couple of things that I meant to talk to you about. <sup>that slipped by</sup> . . . One of my notes indicates that, among others, Roy Reuther came to live with you for at least a short period of time. I guess you had some extra space in your home.

Bergman: Well, my family <sup>went to</sup> took a cottage for the summer and I think all three of the Reuther brothers. . . .

P: This would have been when they were in school?



Bergman: Oh, no, no.

P: This is later.

Bergman: That's true. I don't think Roy was ever in school, and. . . .

P: I think you're right.

Bergman: and Walter was never a full-time student, and I think that Victor was only a student for a year.

P: But they and some others lived with you for this summer, then?

Bergman: They didn't live with me. They lived in my house.

P: Oh, I see. <sup>S</sup>You were gone too?

Bergman: No, I was living there too. Well, I had six bedrooms, five baths. It was a big house.

P: According to the notes that I uncovered that I guess that Tucker Smith was there too and Carl Haessler.

Bergman: Yeah.

P: That must have been quite a group of people.

Bergman: They weren't all there at one time.

P: I see.

Bergman: There were two or three summers when Carl Haessler rented a house that I owned right beside my. . . .

P: Where was this house at?

Bergman: On Connecticut, 74 Connecticut.

P: Oh, off in Highland Park.

Bergman: The second street in Highland Park.

P: In fact I think he continued living in that area until he died.

Bergman: No he moved up on Massachusetts.

P: <sup>Here</sup>In the same city, general area.

Did you have much contact with Tucker Smith?

Bergman: Yes. I had a lot of contact with him. I had known him long

Bergman: before he came to Detroit.

P: Did you know when he was with Brookwood? ~~Wasn't he~~. . . .

Bergman: Yes, that's where I met him.

P: Had you been to Brookwood ~~or~~. . .

Bergman: I haven't attended it. I visited it.

P: I see. I guess I'm particularly interested about Brookwood because we have the files of the school at the Archives and we have their course outlines, student records, and so on. And, of course, going through ~~the~~ the list of people who attended there in many ways is like a Who's Who of people who then began to get the labor movement going in the mid and late thirties.

Well, that's Lynn's Young Repetent Radical. I have not read it but I know of it.

~~Bergman: He's a very interesting fellow.~~

P: According to also the same notes, you worked with Genora Dollinger at this time, ~~or at least you~~. . . .

Bergman: I worked with her up in Flint. She was Genora Johnson, ~~of Oak Park~~. I talked to her on the telephone a week or two ago.

P: After the sitdowns then she came to Detroit.

Bergman: No, No. She broke up her marriage with Johnson. He was a no good lush. I don't know when she married Dallinger. I don't know if <sup>whether</sup> she is Jewish or not. Dallinger is Jewish and works for a Jewish organization. She came to Detroit only in the sixties, early sixties, and then she worked for the ACLU for two or three years. Then they moved out to California.

P: Well, getting back into the civil rights movement. I assume you were not in Detroit at the time of the '43 riot. Were you with

P: the military. . .

Bergman: That was my last week in Detroit and my office was on the ninth floor of the downtown building.

P: This is when you were still with the Board of Education.

Bergman: Yes, my last week with the Board of Education before I went into the army. I parked my car beside the building and I could see riots, bands of riots, beginning to attack blacks all during that week. One evening that week I was driving on Gratiot and I was just about to enter the last block before you got to Woodward and I saw a crowd chasing a black man and I opened my car door and said, 'Get in.' Then I turned south on Library, I think it is, and the mob followed me for a while and, of course, I speeded up. Well I got through the next stop light and then they were outdistanced. I took him to a police station. That was the closest association I had with the riots.

P: ~~You~~ You had mentioned earlier that one of the contributions that particularly Walter Reuther had made had been the ability to get the southern whites to at least work side by side with the blacks in the auto plants. I've heard it said that while all the rioting was going on in the streets that within the plants, themselves, things were fairly peaceful. That blacks and whites were working. . . .

Bergman: Well the time that I'm referring to, when the Reuther brothers, and I don't think Walter deserves any more credit than the other brothers. Later they had some ideological splits, but at that time they were operating as a team. I don't think there was ever bad feelings between them, but they disagreed on some things

*P: No more...  
Bergman*

Bergman: in later years. You read ~~V~~Victor's book of course.

P: Well, yes. I guess what I was getting at and, and maybe you can tell me if this was so or if indeed it was true that people were able to work side by side in a plant, white/black, but once they got out in the street then something else would take over and indeed they would become part of this riot. I'm not sure you would have. . . .

Bergman: I don't know whether. . . . I do know that four/five years before the riot, the riot was in '43, it was in June. I believe it was in the last of June.

P: It was in the summer.

Bergman: Yes.

P: It just occurred to me. A curious cycle that the sister or the brother of somebody you tried to get elected to the school board then was mayor of Detroit at the time of the riots. That was Jeffries.

Bergman: Jeffries was never as liberal a man as either his father or his sister.

P: Well you would have been gone by then. I was going to ask if you had had contact, or any involvement with the interracial committee that he set up after the riots.

Bergman: No, I had only heard about it. I knew two profs that wrote the history of that. They were two Wayne profs.

P: Right. Did you know a Presbyterian minister by the name of Claude Williams at that time?

Bergman: Very, very well.

P: He's another one whose papers we have in the ARchives. He died just, oh, about a year or two ago.

Bergman: Yes, that's very recently.

P: He was telling me, I guess, he was attached to the Detroit Presbytery at this time.

Bergman: Well, I think they gave him a heresy trial and kicked him out.

P: I think it was a little after that, but it was shortly after the riots and indeed he was kicked out of the church. As he put it he was mainly kicked out because he was trying to put a Marxist interpretation on the bible and that was a bit much for the leaders of <sup>the</sup> church.

Bergman: Claude Williams was the only man whose communist party membership card I ever saw.

P: Is that right?

~~Bergman: In 1935 I was attending a convention with him and the. . . .~~

P: Talking about Claude Williams gets us back I think to where we had been, just before we got back to the '30s and '40s, and that's the whole civil rights movement and particularly your involvement in it. Before the Freedom Rides what was your involvement in the civil rights movement. I gather you just didn't wake up one morning and decide you were going to go down south. . .

Bergman: No, we had had quite a bit of involvement right ~~here~~ in Detroit and, in fact, I remember one building that was picketed quite frequently, the headquarters of the Kresge Corporation which, at that time were, I think they've moved since, they were located in the Cass corridor right near the Masonic Temple. And I think there were other places that we had picketed. We gathered at the Episcopal Church or the church house just south of Montcalm and I recall, I don't know why now, we picketed the Free Press. I know why generally. I don't know the specifics. It was that the labor was not employing blacks.

P: How did you reach the decision to participate in the Freedom Rides? Did both you and your wife. . . I'm sure you agonized over this for quite some time.

Bergman: We were both at the conference in February of '61, at the CORE conference held in Kentucky. I think it was Lexington Kentucky. We participated in, there they did not permit blacks and whites to sit in the same area of a movie theatre. We picketed a place there. Then we came back. This was just a couple months after the <sup>N</sup>Bayton decision of the Supreme Court that said that there had been a previous court decision, 20 years or so before, that interstate travel must be open to all regardless of race--but then the <sup>N</sup>Bayton decision <sup>and</sup> that the ancillary facilities; that is, the rest rooms, the coffee shops, waiting rooms, and so forth, must also be open to all. Now one thing there. . . The blacks in the south and their <sup>AVOIDED</sup> THEMSELVES OR THAT of the and our purpose in going down was to show that it could be done.

P: How many people participated in this?

Bergman: We started out with a group of 13. Now some people. . . .

P: I'm surprised <sup>AT</sup> that the small number, ~~guess~~. . . .

Bergman: Well, we figured that we didn't need a large number. This was no mass demonstration. Each place we went to we had a testing team consisting of two people.

P: Excuse me, what kind of team?

Bergman: Testing team.

P: <sup>to see</sup> So what was the testing team to be doing? That team, they would test the facilities to see indeed if they could get served and that sort of thing.

Bergman: Yeah. I remember I was in the first testing team. After we got into dangerous territory, well, not really dangerous territory, but where they began to react to us, Danville, Virginia, and there I sat down beside a black person in the white territory and he refused to serve me. He told me I should get over on the other side. And I said, 'I want to stay here with my friend.' (He said,) 'We can't serve you here.' (I said) 'I'm going to stay here until you do serve us because we have quite a wait until our bus leaves.' So eventually they did serve us.

P: Did you have any sort of preparation or training for this <sup>?</sup>  
~~before you~~ . . .

Bergman: Oh, yes. We had gone to Washington, the 13 people that participated in the ride, and a number of <sup>CORE</sup> ~~poor~~ people, and (our) four attorneys were all there. Not all of them were there for four days. *But most of them were.* And we talked over situations that we thought might arise: What to do in case of an arrest; what to do in case of bodily violence, and so on. And most of the entire program, was suppose to be nonviolent. Then we did a lot of role playing and acting out the roles that we might find ourselves in. And then at the end there we said, 'Now can you go through this?'

P: Did anybody back out?

Bergman: *NOBODY BACKED OUT!*

P: How long did the training. . . .

Bergman: I think it was four days.

P: Then the whole group went as a body did they on one bus? Or were they scattered around?

Bergman: We went with two busses. ~~This was many years ago, I don't know who may have gotten~~ ~~away~~ ~~from~~, but

*end of tape #2 Side #2*

P: Now about, I guess, the conclusion of the training session and the group of 13 split up into two teams.

Bergman: Oh yes, we had two busses, had two bus systems then in the south, Trailways and Greyhound, and so half of our group went on the Greyhound and half went on the Trailways, but we went to the same towns. We had several people with us that weren't in our group. We had Simeon Booker who was then working on the \_\_\_\_\_, the head of the Washington Bureau of the Johnson Publications.

P: What was the name again?

Bergman: Simeon Booker. And the Johnson Publications after they had. . . .

P: I see.

Bergman: Then he had a photographer with him, but he kept his ear pretty well on the side most of the time. And then we had Charlotte DeVries (sp?) who was covering it for one of the women's magazines, Harper's.

P: So the plan was, then, to just ride these busses on their regular routes and what observe. . . .

Bergman: Two people would go in and do a test. We weren't going to commit our entire group, and one person was to stand outside. Now, for instance, at one place where we had an arrest was in Winnsboro, South Carolina. There Jim Peck and Hank Thomas went in and sat down side by side. The waiter came up and said that they sat down on the black side. And the waitress came up and said, 'I can't serve you here, you'll have to go over on the other side.' He said that, 'I don't want to leave my friend.' And apparently they had it all set up. There was a policeman there \_\_\_\_\_.



P: What charge were they arrested on? A local ordinance against this?

Bergman: Yes. You weren't allowed to eat together in the south (back) then

P: Well then what would the police do? For example, in this case they were arrested, were they then taken to the local. . . .

Bergman: They were taken to the local <sup>station house</sup> and stayed about 10 hours and then, after dark, they released them.

P: So there was no fine, no trial, or anything at this. . . .

Bergman: No. My wife was the third part of the party. She was the first one to stay in the town and report to national headquarters and get whatever information she could from the police what the charges were, and so forth. The police tried their best to get in the police car without seeing that she She went back to the bus station, hailed a cab, took a cab to Columbia. I had left her there, a hard thing to do. Our rules. . . You can't break the rules. So I went on and waited for her then in Columbia.

P: How was this group made up? Was it both, I'm assuming, both black and whites? About 50/50 whites and blacks.

Bergman: Yes. There were 7 whites and six blacks. And. . . <sup>You want</sup> the character of them. . . Jim Farmer, the leader, was a man who attended, I don't know whether he graduated, I don't think he had ever preached, but he had attended a ministerial training school at the University of Chicago and was there when the CORE was founded. Then there was, next door to this man, was a naval captain. That wasn't his naval rank, but he was captain, he was the skipper of a boat during World War II. Then later he skippered a boat that attempted

Bergman: to break the ban on coming close to the nuclear DISCHARGES  
in the Pacific.

P: Well how old were you at this time then?

Bergman: 61.

P: A little old to be engaged in that sort of activity. Were you  
the oldest. . . You were the oldest.

Bergman: I was the oldest. I guess the naval captain and my wife were  
about the same age. And we had a number of college students.  
We had one from Atlanta University. We had one from Howard  
University, Hank Thomas who had sat down with Peck and was  
arrested with Peck. We had an entertainer from New York City.  
We had a minister from a southern black church. We had a  
college <sup>student</sup> who had just graduated from a divinity school in  
Nashville; missed his graduation to be on the Freedom Ride.

P: So it was quite a mix of people, backgrounds, and so on.

Bergman: Yes.

P: Did you encounter much violence then--before we get into your  
own particular situation-- were there other acts of violence?

Bergman: The first act, it wasn't violent, it was the first arrest  
occurred at Winsboro. A black man sat down at a shoeshine  
chair ~~where they were~~ <sup>AND THEY REFUSED TO</sup> shining <sup>his</sup> shoes and he refused to leave.

P: But this man was one of your party?

Bergman: Yeah. And so they arrested him. He spent the night in jail  
and was turned loose the next day. One thing I didn't men-  
tion in telling you who the people were. There were several  
people that were field secretaries for CORE. This Joe Perkins,  
the man who sat down in the chair and got the shoe in, was a  
field secretary. There was a woman, was her name.

Bergman: Since she married, she changed it. But she was also a field secretary. And then we had some people that weren't with us but had gone on ahead and made <sup>the</sup> arrangements. They were a day or so ahead of us. But the *, it was* made quite a difference in the crowd. I suppose I have found an affection for college people: College students or college graduates.

P: Was there any violence on the part of the local police as they were arresting these people? Were there any reports of the people getting back <sup>(from)</sup> to the local stationhouse of getting roughed up before they were turned loose?

Bergman: No. There was no violence by uniformed people.

The violence that occurred was all by people who were dressed as civilians. Now I'm making that distinction because we understand that there were a good many, in the *(place)* where we had major violence, there were a good many police that worked with the Ku Klux Klan.

P: So you say there was no violence by uniformed people but it's not inconceivable that when they took the uniform off that they then...

Bergman: Now that I don't know. I'm not making that accusation.

P: Sure.

Bergman: Now what happened when we got to Anniston as our first stop in Alabama. We were in the second bus. We were in the Trailways bus. The Greyhound bus had gone out about an hour before. We came to <sup>the</sup> town where we were suppose to have made our stop, Anniston, and the shades are drawn in the bus station and the signs ~~and~~, hastily concocted signs that said 'closed.' I went out.

P: This was after the first bus had gone through?

Bergman: The first bus had gone through. We didn't know anything

Bergman: about the first bus then. But later we learned that the first bus had had its tires slashed in Anniston and then when they got out on the road and had to stop on account of the flat tires, suddenly bombs were thrown into it.

P: Was anybody hurt?

Bergman: No. Well, a number of people were treated for smoke inhalation, but no other injuries

So when we came in and saw these signs I got out and went to the restaurant, got sandwiches and drinks, and went out the back door. When I got back there were three policemen standing outside the bus. Later they were joined by another one who was obviously their superior on account of the greater amount of braid he had on his sleeve. They stood there outside the bus and ~~they~~ went in and distributed the sandwiches and when it was time to leave the bus drive got ~~up~~ and said, 'you're in Alabama now. You'll have the rear exit seating <sup>in</sup> according <sup>to</sup> local custom.

P: This was the bus driver saying this?

Bergman: The bus driver. And nobody moved. So the Ku Klux Klan then bus and then they started to pick up the black people and threw them to the back of the bus.

P: You say the Ku Klux Klan, were they in their full regalia?

Bergman: No. They were in the <sup>pe</sup>civilian clothes. We never saw them in uniform. Then they came, when they threw the blacks in the back, and assured that they just 'assisted' then with \_\_\_\_\_ the blacks in the back. Peck and I went up and protested that with the leader and then they started on us. They beat us both to the ground, to the floor of the bus and

Bergman: and then they started kicking us. That's where I got the injuries that destroyed my sense of *EQUILIBRIUM*.

P: Did anybody try to come to your assistance? The bus driver or anybody? They just, everybody, stood back.

Bergman: And then it was all over and we had gotten back to our seats. The chief came in and said, 'You can sue if you want, but we didn't see anything.' They were the width of the bus.

P: So the police were there at the time?

Bergman: Four policemen were standing outside.

P: Of course, at this time you didn't realize the extent of your injuries. I gather it was sometime later before. . . .

Bergman: No, it was four months later. And then we went on. We did not pass the Greyhound bus but we heard various stories about it, that the otherbus had run into trouble. One woman came up to my wife and said, 'Don't ride on this bus, there's going to be trouble. There's going to be trouble.' But we rode on to Birmingham. And in, <sup>Birmingham</sup> we arrived in, Birmingham there was not a policeman to be seen. Later O'Conner,      *O'Conner* the police chief explained that--The Commissioner of Public Safety I guess was his title--explained that it was Mother's Day and that he thought all the policemen wanted to go home and have dinner with their mothers. And at any rate there were no police at the Trailways station and there were a lot of roughly dressed                      at least not dressed in Sunday uniforms, with many of them with their little brown bag which obviously didn't contain sandwiches we discovered were *heavily* *of* pipe. Jim Peck and (Charlie) Persons went in and tried to get to the

Bergman: lunch counter but they were attacked by the mob before they got to the lunch counter. Peck was the older man and probably didn't move as fast and, he may have stood his ground, but Person was an 18/19 year old college student. He evaded the crowd, <sup>RAVING OUT THE</sup> <sup>(STATION)</sup> OTHER END OF THE BUS and got away. But Peck was beaten very badly. I was the outside man this time and I went to \_\_\_\_\_ a bit and I went down the corridor, it was a closed corridor, to the loading platform and the luncheon facilities. I found him half sitting and half lying with his face all bloodied on the ground there. I got him to his feet, cleaned him up as much as I could, got him out to the street. We tried time after time to hail a cab.

Finally we did get a cab that picked us up & ~~TOOK US TO~~  
I.S. 's PLACE, →

leader of the Civil Rights movement in Alabama and his home was right across the street from this church. We went first to his home and then after it began to get dark we went over to this church. We had a rousing rally there. Unfortunately there was no one \_\_\_\_\_ . Peck was in the hospital. Some of the people were in the hospital back in Anniston and I guess I was about the only one who was able to speak, and after hours I had a terrible black eye as you can see in one of those pictures and (my jaw) was so-so that I drank my food for a couple days <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ I did talk <sup>to</sup> I.S. talked \_\_\_\_\_ we had a meeting that lasted probably about four hours because in the meantime a crowd of whites had surrounded the church and we had to wait until they got tired and went home.

P: This was still in Birmingham? This is where the ride ended?  
This was the end of the ride?

Bergman: The ride wasn't suppose to end there. We didn't intend to have it end. We talked it over. We discussed the possibility of ending the ride and decided against it.            says, 'We'll go down the next day and try to get a bus to take us to Montgomery which is the next, our next, scheduled stop where we had this big ~~speaking~~ *engagement* arranged. And ~~the~~ <sup>NO</sup> bus driver would ~~take~~ take us. After four *or five had turned us* down we were            transportation to take us out to the airport and there the police did do something. After we got out to the airport a crowd started to gather there but the police kept them outside of the airport.

P: They wanted you to get out of town probably?

Bergman: But the first airplane we got on sat for a little while and they said that there was a bomb scare and they wanted to unload the plan and go back to the waiting room. They never did call us back. The next flight that was scheduled was cancelled and we got in touch with the Attorney General's office and he sent down one of his deputies with a plane and instructions to get us out of Birmingham.

P: This was the United States Attorney General?

Bergman: Bob Kennedy

P: He finally got your transportation out of Birmingham,

Bergman: Yeah. Seegan? is now the editor of the newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee. And so it was finally about midnight when we finally did get out and flew on down to New Orleans. Now in New Orleans there was no trouble at all.

P: Well how long then did this whole ride take? I gather it was<sup>a</sup> fairly short period of time.

Bergman: Nearly two weeks. We left Washington on the fourth and it was on the 17th of. . . . we had our last \_\_\_\_\_ on the 17th. We left New Orleans on the 18th.

P: So then your return to Detroit, then it was not too long after that that it became evident how seriously you had been injured.

Bergman: No, not ~~until~~ <sup>before</sup> September and I was very active for a time. I spoke in various parts of the country: In New York; *a speaking sched. down in Virginia.* I spent about ten days in Chicago and spoke to all sorts of groups there and

*a Freedom Riders School, training individuals how to act. They took about*

That was where they took some 300 people and put them in the

I went back to the south and had a Freedom Riders School in New Orleans itself. So we were sending people<sup>in</sup> both ways. And a good many. . . We had not been able to continue the ride. A good many people from southern colleges began to make the same trip. They were, *maybe they were*

The first group was turned back at the border of Alabama.

After they made another attempt they got in. They got down to Montgomery. Some of them were very glad they made

Montgomery. Then they went on to Jackson. There weren't so many arrests.

*the leader of group*  
(Farmer) Although he was not



Bergman: with us on the day that we had the difficulty in Birmingham because he had gone home to be with his father. Ben Lewis was the man who \_\_\_\_\_ his legs broken.

*End of Interview*