

Don Stevens, Mill Valley, California  
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East: Mr. Stevens, could you give us a biographical statement regarding your early life, education, how you came into the labor movement, and the Newspaper Guild in particular?

Stevens: When I was a young newspaper man in Montana, I heard certain experiences which included, as a young reporter going out on the beat and collecting the news, going into the newspaper and writing a story and then putting on another hat so to speak, then editing it down and then maybe going out in the back shop and making it up into the paper. In all those successive stages it became less and less important, and what seemed to be important when I was taking notes to begin with it wound up with very short space in the paper. So that's my problem here today, how much you can stand. I'll try to go at it backwards and cut it as hard as I can.

My father and mother were newspaper people. My father was a small town weekly newspaper publisher in Montana. He had been a printer...He came to Montana as a printer about 1870, a little before the Custer massacre. My father was a Canadian and my mother was the daughter of Irish railroad workers, and learned to run a linotype. They met in Missoula and were married there. He was about 50 and she was 33. I was born in 1899 in Montana and I suppose I got into the newspaper work there because it was more or less expected of me. I've often wondered whether it was a good idea. When I was seven years old in 1906, my mother and father were separated and I went to Eagle, Alaska on the Yukon with her and her sister to live with her brother, John B. Powers, a resident of Eagle, He had been a railroad locomotive engineer who had been blackballed at the time of the last big strikes, in the 1890's. After serving in the engineers in the Spanish-American War he went to the Yukon, at Fort Egbert, and ran a sawmill for the Army and he became a contractor who supplied wood for the Army post, the river steamboats, and carried freight to the mine camps and eventually became a power in Alaska as a territorial senator. ~~The reason I~~

The reason I got into this is to indicate a little political leaning in the family. I always heard a lot of Irish rebel talk in my earlier years. We came back, after childhood on the Yukon, which has some bearing on later life, we came back to Montana and in late teens I became a professional wolf trapper for the Bureau of Biological Survey in Montana. There were a few gray wolves left then. I roamed all over the state hunting wolves, off and on, for several years, with brief service in the Army in the first World War, but never saw combat.

When I finally went to the University of Montana in 1919, I entered the school of journalism, and I put in two poor years there. At the University of Montana I met a young man named Lloyd Thompson, later known as "Tiger" Thompson, who had been an electricians apprentice in the Butte mines. He was born in Hamilton where I was born. We became friends and he influenced me very much in a radical labor direction. In fact, we soon, more or less sentimentally joined the IWW.

The first daily newspaper job I ever had was in 1920 on the New Northwest, which was published for a short time in Missoula. It was backed by,..for a short time the labor movement--a general conglomeration of people--farmer laborites, and people who were trying to storm up a rebellion against the Anaconda Cooper Mining Company's control of the University and the tax situation in the state and so forth. It was short lived and I went trapping again for awhile, I went to the University of Chicago for awhile and I went to work on the Butte Daily Post in 1923. I'd come out of the mountains that spring with some wolves and I sold a wolf pup to Jack Dempsey as a mascot for the Shelby fight. That was an interesting item because a few days later I was megaphoning the fight out of Butte in the days before radio much radio coverage. I was getting it off a telegraph operator who was getting the stuff off a Morse wire and using a cardboard megaphone I got it to the miners out there. The butte mines in the northwest generally were...the labor relations were pretty stark and pretty violent. I remember the office of the Butte Bulletin when there were 30-30's around

the wall, everybody had a six shooter in their desk. That was the labor paper which first made possible the elction of Burton K. Wheeler for Senator.

To briefly report the papers I worked on, the Butte Daily Post as a reporter; the Great Falls Tribune as a reporter; the Billings Gazette as a Reporter; the Montana Record Herald as a reporter; that was during 1924 in the hard campaign in which Governor Dickson was trying for re-election, he was Republican, and he had sponsored a referedum to tax the Butte mines, and tax the ACM, which was then paying taxes on a valuation of five dollars per acre for the richest hill on earth while the farmers of Montana were starving and paying the taxes. The ACM which owned practically the entire press of the state, as well as the rest of it, put on a terrific battle. In that campaign I was quite close to the Governor and drew a series of cartoons which were published in such papers around the state which supported him. He lost the election, but ironically his tax referedum won overwhelmingly.

East: The ACM, was that the Anaconda Copper Mining Company?

Stevens: Yes..... Dickson was a Republican. I went out to Astoria, Oregon, and worked for the Morning Astorian. Then I came back to Montana and went to work on the Great Falls Tribune, which was independently owned but which has now become the biggest paper in Montana and has been for many years. It was not owned directly by the ACM but was in a position to buy itself favors of the ACM let us say. On the Leader I became in effect managing editor. I worked there two or three years and then I went to the Associated Press in Denver for awhile. I worked for the Rocky Mountain News for awhile.

In the fall of 1926, I noticed a dispatch from St. Louis saying coyote fur was very high and I was in kind of a sad state with woman trouble and I decided to hit the trap line again. I went back to Montana, caught quite a lot of coyotes and made myself a stake, and then I went to San Francisco where Mr. Lloyd Thompson was on

the copy desk at the Examiner. I sat in on the rim of the Examiner in the spring of 1927 and Lloyd soon became drama editor of the paper and later was fired for union activities. I worked on the Examiner and then a bunch of us went to Times. I was over there for awhile as make-up editor and that folded and I went to Hearst's afternoon, Oakland Post-Enquirer, and worked there for about a year as makeup editor. I went back to Examiner along about 1930, and became telegraph editor then.

When the Blue Eagle soared, shall we say, the codes were being constructed and without having heard anything about Heywood Broun or anyone else's activities I was reading the dispatched one night about setting up the code and there wasn't any code for the newspaper industry. I got mad and shot off a telegram to president Roosevelt and "Ironpants" Johnson, that's General Hugh Johnson, the NRA boss, and maybe one or two others, I think earlier Goldberg, protesting. I tried to find that earlier in the files and I can't find it. It may be that it's in a book that was put out during the WPA about the San Francisco Guild. But I remember some of the lingo in it, I was protesting in the name of the most ironically exploiting and so and so workers of the world practically (laugh)..newspaper men. We began to organize the Guild, I wrote when I heard about it, the dispatches came through. Sometimes the dispatches were more or less sub rosa along the AP line. It's hard to imagine the fear and repression that was attained. I was the first Guild member west of the Rockies. I wrote in, I got a card saying I was a member of the Guild, from John Eddy. I wrote a thing, something like a petition, that is a statement, which signed up those who signed it that they agreed to form a Guild unit if, as, and when we had a majority of signatures. It was like a, / in later years, contract to sign a contract. Well, we circulated this sub rosa and it was on March 4, 1934, we came out from a meeting at the San Francisco Press Club. The history of the San Francisco Guild is pretty well known and pretty well documented.

East: You mentioned earlier that you, along with Tiger Thompson, joined the IWW and alluded to joining for sentimental reason. Did you join out of sentimental reasons or were you actively involved in the IWW in Montana or the West?

Stevens: No, I never was..Well yes I was, come to think of it,... When I joined, Tiger had been active in Butte. In the miners union and electricians union in Butte there had been trouble, I can't remember what the trouble was. He was associated with the Butte Bulletin, which was a radical paper, supported the IWW and had a lot of other support.

I attended IWW meetings which were on the second floor of a cubby hole down by the railroad tracks, attended by "stiffs" as they called themselves, migratory workers, "moving" people such as road graders and so on. But I think at that time for me it was still rather highly <sup>N</sup>romantic. We subscribed to the radical peridocals, I remember it probably would have been the Liberator--campus radicals really.

One time in the summer of 1921, I worked for a couple of months late in the fall on a road grading outfit in North Dakota where I was a skinner, I was driving a team of horses on a road grader. In those days there was no such thing as a bull-dozer, and that camp was solidly Wobbly and the Wobs had what we called train and jungle control all through the northwest, this was along the main line of the Great Northern. I paid dues to the IWW, when the organizers came through you'd hear talk of building a new society in the shell of the old..it was a tough job. The contractor went broke in early winter, we were out there in tents on the prairie with no paychecks and we did the best we could and I beat it back to Montana. No, I never engaged in any organized activities of the IWW.

East: You were in the San Francisco Guild and you said you went underground. What were the conditions that prompted people who worked for the Examiner to get together?

East: Was there any contact between this and Heywood Broun's efforts, with respect to what he was talking about concerning newspapers, or did it just arise in San Francisco?

Stevens: I think it was very spontaneous all over the country and I think it was helped a great deal when men heard about Broun and so forth. As a matter of fact, Cleveland started the Guild before Broun even thought about it. Garland Ashcraft, Lyle Kennen and so forth. In the Hearst papers, in particular, we had suffered during the depression firing waves and three consecutive pay cuts. There was no such time as overtime, the six day week, and once in a while, if you worked a lot of overtime you might get a day off or something. The conditions were pretty deplorable. Of course, during the depression, and this is well known, these self-considered wise editorial people standing on the other side of the stone from a union printer began to get their eyes opened when a printer had a contract in which they couldn't slash his wages like this.

If your question is intended to elucidate whether the Guild was instigated by some "outside agitators" I say the answer is no. But they got a lot of help afterwards.

East: No. I was referring specifically to the San Francisco situation in terms of was it somebody from Cleveland or New York who was a newspaper man interested in unionizing or was it something people in San Francisco took upon themselves.

Stevens: It was primarily Tiger Thompson, Louis Burgess and myself who were the ringleaders. Both of them later lost their jobs and this is well known history too. Why I didn't lose my job is a mystery. I had one of the best jobs as telegraph editor although because of the Guild thing I was stopped from receiving further raises. It was generally considered that I was so damn active, so openly pro Guild, and I was sitting right in the middle of the city room doing my job, that it would have been more difficult for them to fire me, it would have been more provocative and trouble than it was to stick Tiger Thompson out in another room as drama editor and Louis Burgess, the editorial writer, and Redford Mason, the music critic, ostensibly

because of something they did do or didn't do in their work.

East: You came out into the open in March 1934, and what happened, what did the publishers, owners do.

Stevens: Well, the Examiner, almost as quick as we elected Louis Burgess, the editorial writer, as Chairman of the Examiner chapter, fired him. We then elected Redford Mason, the music critic, a quite famous one. I don't think they fired him, but I think they put him on the police beat or some such stunt and he quite. It was in effect a forced resignation. They soon dumped Tiger. As I remember it was about something he did or didn't do about Marion Davies, in drama reviews.

The Hearst papers in general across the United States met the Guild with an axe. The Scripps Howard papers more or less rolled with the punch. Then of course we had the Jennings case on the Call Bulletin, the afternoon Hearst paper. But those things are all very well documented. I might make one remark. The Jennings case became famous because of a juxtaposition of circumstances, but Jennings wasn't much of a Guildsman. He fell into this martyrdom by accident. Guys like Burgess and Thompson didn't. Jennings was writing short stories, he was a re-write man on the Call Bulletin, the afternoon paper. He wanted to get back to New York to see some publishers. At a meeting of the S.F. Newspaper Guild, which incidentally was heavily Hearst, we tried to elect Louis Burgess delegate to the St. Paul Convention. The conservative reactionary and ignorant elements led by some very astute publisher representatives in our midst rebaited the hell out of Burgess and Jennings was put forward as compromise candidate because he was going to go and make a trip East and he could pay part of his expenses and the check from the Guild would help him make the trip. I don't think Jennings knew what a labor union was hardly except something possible to be aware of. As most of the people in the Guild membership did do, if you used the word union half of the guys would start out of the hall. But in order to make the trip East, Jennings, he was elected to this job that Sunday afternoon, and it was completely an opportunistic thing. Well, the next day at the Call Bulletin they informed him that they changed his <sup>vacation</sup> ~~vacation~~ days. He wanted badly to go, but he also wanted badly

to keep his job, and he was buddy buddy with all the executives and he used to say with tears in his eyes, "My God, I've been to these fellow's houses and we played bridge together and I can't understand it." We had a hard time getting Jennings to stand pat and beat them on it. John Eddy and I practically carried him to the publishers door and shoved him in to get the showdown which created the Jennings case. Of course he lost his job. He went to the convention. But we raised a private fund, amongst the guys we took up a collection and sent Louis Burgess to the convention also, and Louis made a famous speech that year which is a matter of record. I said at the time that we had <sup>e</sup> the wrong horse in the right race and the right horse in the wrong race. So, as with, and if you detect a little bitterness in my voice about this there's a little of it there. As in the case of various Guild martyrs and psuedo-martyrs, we got Jennings a job with the administration, the New Deal. Tugwell and some of the younger ones took on our martyrs and we got Jennings a job in the Resettlement Administration and we also got one for Burgess and several other guys. Jennings went on to become a successful writer of grand potboilers and in later years he came to work on the Chronicle where I was telegraph editor from 1940 to 1950, and he was an extremely conservative, reactionary, red-baiting, professionlist thorn in the side of them what brung him up as a Guild martyr. So much for Dean Jennings.

That's the way it often is with history. I'm not saying this because he's dead, I've said it to his face.

East: When did you become a Vice-President of the Guild?

Stevens: I was elected at the same St. Paul Convention that I was unable to attend because we did not have money enough to send everybody. That was what we called the Small Board. There were seven Vice-Presidents and I was Vice-President of the Western States.

East: That was Region XII.

Stevens: I believe it was Region XII, Federal Reserve region.

East: This was while you held a job here in San Francisco.

Stevens: Yes, while I was still telegraph editor.

Then we had a Convention in Cleveland in 1935 and I went to that as a delegate from the Guild. We had another delegate, Ed Johnson, the late Ed Johnson, E.D.D. Johnson, who was a brother of Earl Johnson, for many years news editor of the UP (United Press). At the Cleveland Convention we took a long step in organizing the Guild as a union without the name and I was very active there. I was on the Constitution Committee and led the fight there and on the floor for industrial unionism. I think this partly reflected my earlier IWW experience or interest. We were unable to turn the Guild into an industrial union at that time, but we did write a clause right up front that it was our intention to promote industrial unionism in the newspaper industry.

I came back to San Francisco and that fall, it was at the time of the Convention, around about this time, that I became closely associated with the Red leadership.. was recruited so to speak, in effect without having a card, and met with the Red caucus.

East: Was this because of your advancement of the idea of industrial unionism?

Stevens: No, just because of my general view of Guild activities. Because of my leadership in organization. By this time, there was in San Francisco a small faction of reds in the Guild, mostly coming from the labor press, the People's World and the maritime papers and one or two of the dailies.

East: They came to you for what?

Stevens: Well, in San Francisco, in my struggles to--I don't like this "my stuff" but I happened to be one of the main ones--a small group of us were struggling to promote unionism within the Guild, that the Guild as a trade union and as a militant organization, we were given the help of the radicals in the membership, that's what it amounted to. Most of them, as I say, coming from the labor press or the radical press. We would meet and discuss the affairs of the union and how best to carry forward a progressive line. Well, in the summer of

1935, after the Cleveland meeting, incidentally at that meeting the Board was enlarged and I was re-elected Vice-President, we conducted our business by mimeograph. It was a hell of an awkward thing—things went back and forth by mimeograph—a vote by mimeograph, a circulation of things and we got into some awful snarls. Our finances were terrible and our membership was being beaten hither and yon and we were having struggles everywhere so that question of how to finance the Guild came to the floor. We were in a critical situation at an Executive Board meeting that was going to be held in October 1935 and my presence there seemed to be crucial and I wasn't getting anywhere on the Examiner. I was trying to get a raise from Bill Renn, then managing editor. People were being raised all around me and I was being kept at my work which I was performing well enough so that I later got rough recommendations from various Hearst executives, but they wanted me to get out of there. So I wrote him an ultimatum to either give me a raise or I was going to New York, so I combined the two things. I thought I'd go to the meeting and be there for this crucial vote on financing the ANG and I'd also look for a job. I got<sup>o</sup> pass on United Airlines, a trip that took 23 and 3/4 hours on a 12 passenger Boeing. So I went to the meeting, quit the Examiner, went to the meeting, because I knew the Hearst rigamaro pretty well.

<sup>A</sup> I took a job on the New York American as makeup editor, though I could have gone to work on the Herald Tribune, I almost did, but didn't. So I stayed in New York and was very active and worked at night on the American, and that was when there was a Hearst American, a morning paper, long before it became the Journal-American. I spent the large part of my days up at the ANG office. Eddy was often in the field and so I sort of filled in for him and so in the summer of 1936 we went AF of L and it was the custom of the AF of L, it was then, when it took in new union, it would put somebody on the AF of L payroll as organizer, AF of L general organizer. This is partly to give the new union a boost in organizing, but it also was a mechanism by which the AF of L hierarchy had its man in the union. <sup>R</sup> This is kind of a funny story. We had got Bill Davy

working part time as an organizer and he was having all kinds of trouble, couldn't get back to his family and etc., he was involved in a strike we had got into in Milwaukee and he wasn't too popular with the Milwaukee labor leadership after things got pretty rought up there with the AF of L leadership in Milwaukee and the old time Socialist leadership in Milwaukee. So after the convention, at which I was elected International Treasurer incidentally...This is the trouble with this old man Yarning..too many rabbit tracks, but we had quite a business at the Convention where I was elected Treasurer and Ashcraft, as Treasurer, bowed out. Leab's book is full of that controversy, although I have just run across files today that would cast a lot of light on that if I'd only found it before Leab's book was published.

So. John Eddy, Morris Watson, and Broun went down to the AF of L headquarters and talked about an organizer for the Guild and nothing was settled. A week or so later Eddy went down and he put forward first the name of Bill Davy. Bill Green, the President of the AF of L, demurred and said he thought Brother Davy was involved in a lot of controversial situations in Milwaukee and blah blah blah and it might be better if somebody else took it. Eddy then put forward the name of perhaps Morris Watson. Well, Morris Watson was involved in blah, blah, blah,. And, I think he may have put somebody else forward. But Eddy finally comes back to New York and he's had a few drinks and a lot of leg slapping, and laughing and he says, " then I finally looked across the tale, and I said to Baptist Billy, as we called him, I said, well, we do have one man who was very active on the coast in organizing, he has a good record, he's a good newspaper man, he's working in New York and as a matter of fact he's a sub-executive on the American, on the Hearst paper, and he's displayed a great ability at the one time to carry on organization and to get along with the employer, whereupon, says Eddy, you old Wobbly son of a bitch, he leaned across the table and said, "Mr. Eddy, that's our man." (laugh)

Side 2, Tape 1

East: In 1935, you left San Francisco and went to New York for the important meeting that fall. How did the organization adapt to your leaving the West Coast?

Stevens: I had carefully refrained from taking any local office in the San Francisco Guild. There were other local officers. The San Francisco Guild went through some hard time along about then, but not because I wasn't there. I remained Vice-President for the West Coast until the next Convention at which Betty Ballintine of the San Francisco News was elected Vice-President and I was elected the International Treasurer.

East: You mentioned you left for an important meeting of the national Executive Board in October 1935. Why was this meeting of such importance that you believed you had to resign and devote your attention to the Guild at this point?

Stevens: The exact reason is a little bit vague to me and I'd have to check myself in the record. But basically it was about financing the Guild. Broun, Laughlin, and I, primarily, had been all summer discussing the issuance of some kind of bond which we would peddle to finance the Guild. I really can't remember. I remember it was a crucial financial decision and that Bob Buck of Washington had his forces lined up and it seemed my vote would be the swing vote.

East: Dues receipts were down in 1935 and there was an AIB debt that was due and they wanted their five hundred dollars and there was some talk of raising dues another .50¢. Buck had planned to write a letter explaining the assessment and having it in the Guild Reporter. Does this help refresh your memory?

Stevens: There was a big fight about dues in 1936, but I don't remember that. I'd have to look it up. Because when the meeting actually took place as I remember, things were not so inharmonious and while we did effect a bond selling scheme those of us who originally backed it had grown pretty lukewarm on the idea because we saw the possibility that some undue influence over the Guild might possibly be gotten through the purchase of the bonds. I am really improvising now. I really don't think there were ever any bonds sold although the machinery

was set up for it. There may have been one or two bought by local guilds.

About that time Broun raised the money from Dubinsky, from Lewis, I think,

East: This was right after the CIO was formed out of the AF of L in 1935.

Stevens: Yes, At the Atlantic City Convention. Broun, of course, personally joined the Committee (CIO) while the Guild didn't even think of itself as a labor union. But that particular issue sort of went away. The issue of dues became a big controversial issue in the spring of 1936. It was on this basis that I became Treasurer, pretty much by default of Ashcraft who not only became pretty <sup>cont</sup>contankerous about it, but was in Cleveland and had a difficult time being President and as I was in New York, I made the reports, I set up the dues structure, I made the report to the Convention and I was elected Treasurer. It was a programmed thing by the Red leadership shall we <sup>say</sup> say. Of course, when I went <sup>to</sup> the full time AF of L organizing I then resigned the treasureship and I think Victor Pasch took the treasureship, perhaps on interim appointment and then elected.

East: During the course of talking here today you have made reference to <sup>the Red leadership</sup> within the Guild, <sup>what was their position</sup> say on AF of L affiliation, on the dues receipts, on enlarging or reducing the size of the Executive Board, the centralizing of control and so on?

Is this too detailed for you?

Stevens: No. In the early years you could characterize the Red leadership as, I would characterize it, being pretty much in tune with the health and welfare of the organization as the American Newspaper Guild. This is for no sneaky, ulterior motive, but for the obvious motive that any radical movements would like to see the labor movement become strong, at least they did in those days.

Stevens: In 1934, 33-34, even early 35, the left attitude in the United States was pretty skeptical of the orthodox labor leadership so that there was a strong hangover of left anti-AF of Lism which the party had to struggle with, even within its own ranks. There was a strong dual unionism tract (?) left over

from the struggles of the teens and the twenties when there had been repeated sell-outs of workers struggles by this same orthodox leadership. However, with the burgeoning of the mass organizing under the New Deal, the rise of the CIO and industrial unionism in general, in which it is well known that the Reds took a leading part and as was very well known by John L. Lewis and all those guys, they knew who was doing the organizing, the effort, of course, was to get the Newspaper Guild into the labor movement and the labor movement then was the AF of L. The hope in those days was to transform the official labor movement into a movement that was more of a mass movement, an industrial union movement, and a more left movement politically. And this is something some historians, and even Dan Leab, can't seem to get through their head--that whether we were for or against the AF of L---well, it depended on the time and the circumstances. I think Bob Buck thought of it in those terms, that we were fighting the AF of L. We wanted to go in the AF of L. If we had tried to join the AF of L at a time when half of the men in the Newspaper Guild wouldn't let you say the word "union" in a meeting, it would have been a self defeating thing. We first had to get them slowly into the idea of joining something--we called it a guild. Then we had to slowly get them away from the professionalism, and then slowly get them to the idea that they would even have a strike, and then slowly get them to the idea to think of being a union, be any part of organized labor. Many of the reporters were counting on \_\_\_\_\_ fixing sellouts by the AF of L leadership all over the country. So this was a step by step process. All right, we finally joined the AF of L, it was correct, I think, and as history marched on we wanted to go further. By this time the CIO had vastly increased and we wanted to go CIO, we wanted to enlarge our jurisdiction through the rest of the white collar departments which, was no unmixed blessing by any matter of means. I remember talking all night on a train with Brown from Detroit to Chicago about this in the spring of 1937 and Brown said, and in retrospect I can see even more rightly than I realized at the time, that I wonder if we can digest these elements politically - these white collar departments which are ridden with salesmanship.

psychology, and what have you.

However, my own personal funny business in this, was after Bill Green picked me out on an unlimited expense account. It's ridiculous, you know, being an AF of L organizer, you've got a hell of a good job. I was getting about \$60 per week and an unlimited expense account. Nobody ever questioned an expense account. I could write it for practically anything I wanted to and any extra money I ever got on an expense account I put into hiring a hall for this poor, struggling newspaper guild or something like that you know. But those are of course cushy jobs. There were fifty two general organizers and I've got a picture of them in 1937. The first meeting that was ever held for all of them, were for 48 states and four loose ones, I was one of the Mavericks.

If you've got time I'll tell you a funny story about a meeting of the general organizers. In the spring of 1937, we were all called into Washington for an organizing meeting. (produces picture) Green, Frank Morrison, the old secretary-treasurer; and there's Uncle Don (Stevens). So we were taken into the meeting room upstairs at the AF of L building and the doors were locked and we were not allowed to take any notes. The whole thing was a meeting to instruct us on the Red menace, conducted by Green, but largely by John P. Frey who was, I think with the Machinists Union. He considered himself the John Foster Dulles of the great labor movement, the theoretician.....and he blatantly described how to take over the company unions, how the employers across the country would work with us in chartering AF of L unions to get ahead of the CIO in their plants, sign sweetheart contracts, and Frey bragged one morning, last night I was in a meeting with some of the top leaders of American industry, brothers, he says, men from the aluminum industry and blah, blah, blah, and we can do this and we can do that and when you go back to your baliwick Joe you can do so and so. And we were not allowed to take any notes. In the middle of one of these, we were there two days, I sat with a printer from one of the southern states and he was a pretty honest guy. I don't think he was a Red, but he certainly\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is this. I thought we came here to talk about organizing, how to fight the CIO, and I think it was on the second day and we had just got a long speech from Frey or somebody telling us the CIO wasn't going to get anywhere, we'd seen these things before, it was a flash in the pan and a telephone rang. They had a telephone booth in the room where a man could go and stand or sit and have a private conversation. So he surrendered the chair to somebody, he went to the telephone booth, he was in there a few minutes, he came out reassumed the chair, and he was kinda of half panting and red faced, and he said the CIO has just taken over Chrysler (laugh). Well, towards the second day...they began to read off lists of the Reds in each of our baliwicks and they named you know, half the organizers in the CIO, the unions and so forth. And someone said how are we going to go back, we all went back to our central labor council, how are we going to go back and fight these people if we don't know who they are, we ought to have their names somehow, so they huddled and they let us take notes on who were the Reds across the United States. Well, I took my notes very carefully, being one of them myself (laughs). I was offered the editorship of the AF of L newspaper at that meeting, that they wanted to get stronger editorship and some guy from New York said we have a brother here who is a newspaper man...and so anyhow I got out of that meeting, I had my little list, and I crashed to New York to get that word out across the country as to who was spotted, it was duly done. It was furnished to John L. and it was furnished to all the party chairmen in the country, but anyhow it's kind of funny .

...In the spring of 1937, the CIO was going, of course, going like the \_\_\_\_\_ tails of hell, and it was pretty generally decided by most of the Guilds, which had been through struggles and saw the need to organize the rest of the white collar workers, enlarge the jurisdiction, that we go CIO at the St. Louis Convention. But the question of instructing delegates came up...at the Chicago Newspaper Guild, which was then a flourishing guild, <sup>of</sup> several hundred members...a good big guild, a good big vote... I was still on the AF of L payroll...so when it came time to instruct the delegates I took the floor and made a pitch for the vote for CIO. Well, it immediately got back to

Green, some of his henchmen in the membership which was riddled with them, accompanying \_\_\_\_\_...well, I didn't intend to keep it a secret. So I went somewhere on an organizing dash and when I got back and here was a wire from Bill Green firing me. I wired back, I got this wire around here,...well the upshot was that I filed a National Labor Relations Board case, deadpan, straight faced, in Chicago charging him under the Wagner Act with firing a man for organizing. (laugh) And it went all over the country..one day's wonderment (?)

East: What did the NLRB do with it?

Stevens: They just lost it, I think.

East: They didn't take it seriously.

Stevens: They made some profound ruling that perhaps it wasn't a good case. (laugh)

East: You were fired as AF of L organizer?

Stevens: Yes, and immediately went on the payroll of John L. Lewis.

East: For the CIO. As an organizer?

Stevens: As an organizer very soon. It was very soon after that. When we went CIO, they put on quite a few of us men as CIO organizers--Watson, I think Henry Mickelson, myself, perhaps Morgan Hall, I can't remember...several on the CIO payroll.

For a short time I was just on the SBG payroll. Then I went on the CIO payroll and elected Executive Secretary of the Chicago Newspaper Guild.

East: You were Executive Secretary of the Chicago Guild until when?

Stevens: Until late 1940, <sup>when</sup> ~~which~~ I resigned just after the Hearst strike was over. The strike went on for 17 months. I left there, they had no more full time paid Executive Secretary, I came back and went to work on the San Francisco Chronicle. I worked there until 1950. I was in charge of all the news on the Chronicle outside of San Francisco and Sacramento.

East: You left the Chronicle when?

Stevens: I left the Chronicle in July 1950, at the time of the Korean War hysteria.

As the publisher said, not the publisher, but the then editor, Paul Smith, "we have come to the end of the road Don, it was bad enough having a Communist <sup>head</sup> handling our world news during peace, but now we are <sup>at</sup> war with the Soviet Union, you can either resign with full severance pay or you can go with the Guild and fight it." First, before this, I said do you mean end of the road, you mean you don't want me on the telegraph desk anymore or you don't want me on the paper. "Aw, we thought about putting you on the copy desk, but we're afraid you'd be a demoralizing influence." None of this was on account of anything I did or didn't do in the news, but because of my attitude about the Cold War I was a demoralizing influence to those young folks. I think my influence still extends to that staff, too, twenty years later. I hope so. So I thought for awhile, I said well I'll have to think this over, this was on a Friday afternoon and my wife was in town and we went to dinner and Larry Tinning, the managing editor, said he'd like to see me later in the evening so I hung around and we went over \_\_\_\_\_ to have dinner, some place on Market Street. About nine o'clock, after Larry got the paper straightened up, he came over and joined us, had a few drinks, and broke into tears about the god damn injustice of it and so forth and he wrote me a great big <sup>j</sup>, not a great big, but a very nice letter of recommendation. It seemed that Paul Smith, well he was politically ambitious, and he was afraid of the finger being put on him politically because he had a Red working on his staff, but that's a lot of balony. Anyhow so, I thought I can't go to the Newspaper Guild they'd throw their hats in the air and take a city wide referendum commending the publisher for firing a Red. They just got through doing it in Washington. D.C. with \_\_\_\_\_ of New York. Not that I was a thorn in the side of the then leadership of the Guild and most of the publishers in the country and I knew I couldn't get a job anywhere, I could get a job at certain places, sitting on the rim somewhere, but I had roots in Mill Valley and California, so I went to work as a carpenter and in three years I learned the trade and became a general contractor and here I am.

East: To hell with the newspapers.

Stevens: No, not really. I'm a lot healthier then, a lot of the guys are dead, I'm 73, and I feel in pretty good shape. I've probably got more money, but I'm not getting

rich. But I miss it, I think its a great calling, I think its...my friends say I'm still starry eyed about journalism and this was my real reason, of course for, in effect in "sacrificing" "career" in journalism, cause I liked it.

Most of the men and the women who led in organizing the American Newspaper Guild were the people who had the least to benefit immediately economically. Also, the Guild started in the editorial department which has its significance at least intellectually. Also, the Guild was pretty well company unionized in the 40's both by reason of the wave of, in the 40's and early 50's, red purges that swept the whole American Labor movement and by reason of the fact that a lot of the new membership was easily led around by the nose by advertising managers, circulating managers, classified department managers, business office managers. They voted those poor little gum chewing girls in blocs all over the country, the red scare. The church had a hell of alot to do with it, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists took a leading part in it. The final windup of the so-called Guild~~ed~~ leadership of Kaufman and company which amounted to a Red bureaucratic faction helped to red-bait itself out of business. This is wheels within wheels, but they made opportunistic alliances in the factional fight, which happens in all kinds of intercine red battles, and with allies who later turned against them and dumped them very neatly. They probably would have been dumped because of the conditions of the times. I think I drifting far afield.

East: No. I think its quite relevant.

This factionalism within the red group had surfaced much earlier had it not? Would you say it became localized in the New York area in the New York Guild or was this factionalism throughout the country within the CP element.

Stevens: It was factionalism...

East: Leab makes a point in his book about the factionalism within the New York Guild. They started fighting among themselves as early as 1936, 1937. He does not assess the impact he just merely alludes to it.

Stevens: The factionalism at the top among the Reds, and this is what I speak of as

factionalism, I'm not talking about red versus non red politics within the Guild. I'm talking about factionalism among the Reds...really began in the summer of 1936, fall of 1936, and flourished all that winter up to...from then on. I was, I might as well say it, the leader of one wing and John Eddy was at that time the leader of the other one to begin with. It was in those days, I think a quite principled fight, started as such, over strategy and tactics in the union. In retrospect, I think, that people who influenced Eddy may not have been so sincere as he and many of the others of us on both sides. There was a very strong element of bureaucratic jealousy and personal power seeking. This is the extreme difficulty, and after all this perspective we've had over the years with reference to the entire world left movement, extremely difficult to understand the twists and turns that the thing took. I mean, how much is attributable to "Stalinism", the fact that Joe Doaks or Pete Zilch was an official in power in America or in Moscow or on the moon or in Chicago? Hard to say, but it took the form of being sort of a Paris against the provinces, New York against the rest of the country. Now this is not new in American trade union or even political disputes. And as somebody once said it has its healthy aspects, some of it goes back to the old Populist days, the suspicion of New York as the center of, as a power center.

East: It's a myth that exists, perhaps.

Stevens: But I myself personally know that as any organizer, I certainly got a great swelled head. I was very successful in a kind of romantic, frontier, Wobbly, wolf hunter, cowboy way you know. I think I thought I was the second coming of Christ. I must of been insufferable at times. But I tried not to be. I thought that I was representing the rank and files wishes and I did everything...I think in public appearances I was pretty modest and effective, but in letters and in fighting with Eddy and others I probably got pretty rough. They accused me of being ambitious to set up a separate center in Chicago and move the headquarters to Chicago and become President of the American Newspaper Guild. Well, this is so foreign to anything I ever had, I never was ambitious for office, it was one of my failings. It was put

up to me; if you figure John Eddy is not running the Guild right, he's doing all this, that and the other thing, antagonizing the membership and the guys in New York, you're gonna have to take the lead and run. Well, I can see that was the logical thing, but it didn't occur to me then and it formed my \_\_\_\_\_, I guess. When we were out in the field--Fryman in St. Louis, Mikleson in Milwaukee, Ashcraft in Cleveland, and to some extent the people in San Francisco-- we were up against rougher times and we were closer to the grass roots and the entire outfit blocked facing Eddy, and I found later that, of course, many of the people around Eddy in New York had too, but as they said "he may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." This is ridiculous to talk about this factionalism in this short hand thing because bad impressions can be gotten and its not the way to do it. Eventually after Eddy had been pretty well destroyed, he destroyed himself with a great deal of help from some of the rest of us, then they dumped him, then they set out to destroy him. He came to me in San Francisco at the convention and asked me to nominate him for Executive Vice-President, which I couldn't do, but we became, we renewed our friendship and its lasted ever since, though I haven't seen him for many years.

When the Kaufman school hit and Pasch and Hull, those guys really had a real, full blown bureaucratic faction and anything they decided to do they went down to the headquarters and got the \_\_\_\_\_ case and that was it. Somebody would come up from New York and say "Comrades we're gonna have a discussion about so and so and so and so", and you'd have a meeting to discuss things going on ...it wasn't a discussion you were being told (laugh). I used to read all the books and everything else and study like a son of a bitch, Marxism, Leninism, Foster tactics backwards and forwards on what to do, the labor movement, and democracy, democratic centralism, the whole shiree and they were still selling some of those pamphlets, but they sure weren't operating according to what it said in the book.

East: Leab in his book alludes to the factionalism within the New York group

and he says if focused principally on number 1, how to handle finances and number 2, how to employ Bill Davy. And this was what I was indirectly getting at, as it seems to me that based on conversation with you here today and other things I've read and heard about the Guild, that factionalism in any group, of whatever ideology, is going to differ over subjects other than how to handle finances and how to use an organizer.

Stevens: There was a little beginning quarrel with Ashcraft over the dues and finances and about Bill Davy. Poor Bill Davy had never been a newspaper man in his life, he was a coal miner, but he was a Red and he worked around the loading chute or something of the Newspaper Enterprise Association. So he was wrangled into the job of being an international representative for the American Newspaper Guild because he was a pal of Ashcraft and those guys and he was a hell of a nice guy and a good man, but he knew nothing about the newspaper business, he didn't earn the respect of the guys he had to organize, he couldn't. But that was one of the small potatoes.

The big basic issue of the factionalism in the American Newspaper Guild was over trade union democracy and, I would say, the handling of the Hearst chain bargaining. And the guts of the issue on the chain was--I was the only Hearst man in the organization for years, I had worked on four or five Hearst papers. The Hearst chain was a bigger chain in those days, it was more powerful. It was my position that the chain, that we should act as a chain in our bargaining. Well, there was a certain amount of lip service to this, they had a chain council, but their approach was that we should bargain over certain general positions on the chain--the closed shop, make a better indemnity system and so forth, but we should leave wages to local negotiation. To my money this was exactly backwards. The power the employer had was his chain power and if we didn't use our chain power on the wages, we were doomed and that's exactly what happened. They settled the Hearst strike with the

so-called Hearst chain peace formula.

East: In regard to the first chain contract negotiations, this is not directly related to the Milwaukee contact in 1936 which was, in effect, the first big confrontation with the Hearst chain? The Milwaukee strike in 1936 at the Wisconsin News?

Stevens: That was the first strike, it must have been the first contract, such as it was. Then we had the Seattle PI strike.

East: Leab quotes you to the effect that beginning in 1936 the Guild had to do something, accomplish something positive and the plan that was taken by the board at that time was to confront a major newspaper, centered in an urban area, preferably Hearst, and then this Milwaukee contract came up, the Milwaukee situation. But your previous comments about the Hearst negotiations are not on specifically the Milwaukee strike? You're talking about a later period.

Stevens: Yes, that's a later period.

East: That's what?

Stevens: I would say 37, 38, 39 and 40. Of course, we had struck two Hearst Papers in Chicago in December 1938, and that strike went on until the summer of 1940. That was seventeen months. It was in effect lost. It was settled with a Hearst chain peace formula which was, as I described, the formula for peace, yes, for the publisher.

East: It was not a positive accomplishment for the Guild?

Stevens: I don't think so. I don't think so yet. Instead of suing the power of the organized membership on the entire chain to get the main thing which was dough, they used the power of the unionized membership to tie their hands, that's

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This picture I'm looking at is an interesting one. This is the signing of the settlement of the Chicago strike, this is Arthur Goldberg and this is where he

got his start as a labor lawyer; this is myself; this is J.P. Gortatowski, general manager of the Hearst chain; this is Charlie Johnson, President of the Chicago Newspaper Guild (not a strike~~r~~, he worked on the Times, Sunday editor of the Times); this is the labor board local examiner, I can't remember his name; this is Milton Kaufman, who was the Executive Vice-President of the American Newspaper Guild; this is a Hearst attorney actually sort of an errand boy for Ed Woods the main Hearst attorney in Chicago; this is Harry Woll, the President of the Chicago Newspaper Guild, formerly news editor of the American and one of the strikers and a hell of a guy and he later went to the St. Louis, /not the Post-Dispatch, and I don't know what became of Harry; this is the local head of the ITU; this is I think, the head of the mayors; I could tell you a lot of stories about Goldberg.

East: Tell me one.

Stevens: This is the beginning of the role as a peacemaker. A compromiser.

East: Was he in the employ of the Guild?

Stevens: Yes, he was in the employ of the Guild, We had an attorney, Ben Myers, who was doing all right, but he was a little too militant for the New York so-called Reds and Arthur Goldberg was hired as the recommendation of one Harry Reed. Harry Reed had been city editor at the Chicago American in the days of the gangster world and was a close friend of Al Capone's.

Harry was also a professional Catholic in his elder years. He was no longer with the Hearst organization and I have stories about that too, including stealing photographs and what have you, I don't know. He's gone to his reward. But as a result of Harry's activities in and around the strike and his intense activity with the ACTU, Harry went on from there to Detroit and got involved with the Auto Workers, and you probably know more about this than I do. Harry and Goldberg were collaborators and Goldberg wound up of course...Harry became, didn't he become, he had some leading position in the CIO press and Goldberg

then became chief counsel first for the Steel Workers wasn't it...I think it was the Steel Workers, and then he was picked for the labor secretaryship, and then to the Supreme Court and then to the U.N. and so forth. It's a commentary on our times that today (laugh) he's really one of the best.

East: You had an attorney named Myers.

Stevens: Ben Myers, who was conducting a labor board case, one of our cases against the Chicago Hearst papers, but they felt he wasn't doing a good job and he was dumped at the recommendation of Harry Reed. Goldberg took over the case and in collaboration with Abe Isserman from New York, ~~and~~ Abe was the finger of the International in the pie. Anything to do with the really decisive leadership of the strike was taken away from me and handed to an international organizer by the name of Vic Sellers. I was suffered to stay on around Chicago for the rest of the strike wound up and to do the \_\_\_\_\_ work. I was still Executive Vice-President of the Chicago Guild at the same time. If this sounds like personal bitterness, it is, but we all think it's for good reason in each case, I guess.

East: What specifically were the inadequacies of the settlement, in your view.

Stevens: Well, by the time it happened a good case could be made out for the fact that any settlement was better than nothing. But I think it would have <sup>been</sup> better, of course this is my radicalism, for the good of the Hearst membership all over the country, if the settlement hadn't been hitched to this so-called Hearst peace formula which effected the entire chain. It would have been better to let the strike be lost, which it was in effect, it got some of the guys back in the plant with no \_\_\_\_\_ some of them were dumped.

East: In other words it was a nationwide contract with respect to the peace formula, but it wasn't\_.....

Stevens: It didn't do any good in Chicago, the peace formula was something that tied the hands, that prevented the power of the chain membership being applied against local Hearst publishers for money. The local negotiations, as

with the local San Francisco-Oakland Newspaper Guild, depend upon such strength as they can organize in that time among the newspapers in that town. If to wit, until recently it was the Chronicle the News, the Bulletin and the Examiner. Now its only of course, the Chronicle and the Examiner, that's it. ~~It~~ Partly this was done by playing on the fears of the Hearst workers on the big papers that their wages might somehow be hooked to the level of those on the poorer papers, in the smaller cities. Well, instead of seeing it the other way around, which was if they had the chain power it would be all for one and one for all. Now organizing, a similar , it was a microcasm of a microcasm that you'd see in organizing. I could go into a town to organize a paper or papers and I can remember such things as this. I forget just where it was, some city in the midwest. We had a meeting and there was still a tremendous craft consciousness, you had to talk to the photographers with the photographers, with the artists with the artists, the reporters with the reporters with the reporters, this was even before we had the rest of white collar jurisdiction. There was clannishness and even within a department. I remember this one time, it was a fairly good size paper, maybe a dozen fellows there from the art department, and I was explaining that we could have a minimum schedule. And some guy says "You mean to say that we gotta have the same minimum for so and so and me and all he can do is re-touch, he can't draw." Well, I'd have to explain... see there was the element of being afraid that somebody might make as much as they did. Not that...you had to get it through their head that the thing to do was to establish a base, a minumum, the floor from which you gotta negotiate your premium. We're not setting a scale to bring somebody down \_\_\_\_\_

This of course has been the historic thing in all union organization, the same thing is a sense was used to defeat the idea of genuine Hearst chain bargaining for wages. That if you did it you'd be bringing them down, when as a matter of fact you'd be bringing them up with a floor, organized power applied on all of

them together.

East: Just an idea they wouldn't buy.

Stevens: They wouldn't buy it partly because it was Don Steven's adventurous, Trotskyist, power-mad idea. (Laughs) And they had some well paid Hearst papers in New York and San Frnacisco and that was it.

East: You mentioned that you wanted to talk about the role of Guild.

Stevens: Well, Leab in his book comes to the conclusion, he doesn't come to any specific conclusion as I remember, he comments on the fact that hours, wages, working conditions were raised to some extent and so forth. I think that the great thing that the Guild movement did was to give people in the calling of journalism a little more security, not a great deal, but some more, to get a little more truth to the people of this country. It isn't so easily to arbitrarily fire people, kick' em around. Publishers, editors have got to say why they fired somebody, what the did wrong, it's more of a public matter it's more of a thing before their peers. The attitudes towards truth in the news and truth in reporting, that have <sup>become</sup> almost commonplace in discussions of newspaper work today and in the practice of it, were god damn near unheard of forty years ago. Expecially on the Hearst papers. I know, I worked on 21 different papers of the Associated Press, and with very few exceptions you were shoveling coal and that was it. And such articles for instance in the Columbia Journalism Review, the attitudes, that approach would be almost impossible if it weren't for the existance of the American Newspaper Guild, There is at least some beginnings of law in that jungle.

East: It is a jungle?

Stevens: It is a jungle.