INTRODUCTION

This interview with Harry Conlon was conducted at the International headquarters of the G.A.I.U. in Washington, D.C. on March 8, 1973.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Conlon was executive-vice-president of Chicago local #245. He describes in the interview his apprenticeship as a photoengraver working for the Chicago-Sun Times. He discusses the impact of technology upon the trade and how this influenced his thinking with respect to mergers in the printing trades.

He was local union president of the Photoengravers Union in Chicago and in that capacity, played a significent role in effecting the merger both as co-chairman of the merger at the International level and also at the local level in Chicago.

He also discusses the unsuccessful attempt to merge with the Printing Pressmen and subsequent merger with the Bookbinders. In the later merger, he was co-chaiman representing the LPIU representatives, while John Connelly was co-chairman representing the Bookbinders.

The interview also gives Mr. Conlon's views on the nature of trade union leadership, polical activity, and the future role that mergers will have to play in the trade union movement.

Interview with Harry Conlon

March 8, 1973

Interviewers: Irwin Aaronson
Greg Giebel

Conlon: My name is Harry Conlon and I'm executive vice-president of Chicago local 245, GAIU. I was born July 30, 1928.

Giebel: Mr. Conlon, when did you make your first meeting with the labor movement? How were you first introduced?

Conlon: Both unions, prior to the merger, had the requirement that one had to be actively engaged at the trade before they were eligible for election to office. That was a requirement. I began my apprenticeship at the Chicago Sun Times newspaper in Chicago; and subsequent to my finishing the apprenticeship, I became active in union affairs on local negotiating committees. I was a shop steward, shop chairmen we called them in the old Photoengravers' Union. And then I was elected a member of the executive board. After serving in that capacity for a few years, I was elected president of the Chicago Photoengravers' Union Local 5. I served in that capacity for 4 years until we merged with the Lithographers Union in 1966 on a local level. I then assumed the position of executive vice president in that union, which at this point is the largest local union we have in the Graphic Arts International Union.

Aaronson: What were working conditions like when you started in the Chicago Sun Times?

Conlon: They were very good, as far as standards and

conditions, as far as unemployment was concerned, they were very good. The industry at that point was prosperous; it was the post war years. I started my apprenticeship in 1949, and the economy, as I recall, particularly as it related to our industry, was in good shape.

I had my apprenticeship interrupted for three years when I was drafted. We had a six-year apprenticeship. I was drafted half way through it. I served three years in the service, served overseas in Korea as a first lieutenant in the artillary. Upon my discharge, I then went back and finished my apprenticeship. So, considering the military service, it took me nine years actually to become a journeyman photo-engraver as such. But I developed a keen interest in the labor movement, attended seminars, went to labor courses at the University of Wisconsin , for example, and many of the local seminars that were established by international unions in this city. And I just developed an interest in the entire movement, studied it somewhat, and decided that was my bag, the way I wanted to go. I made up my mind long before I was the president that someday I was going to be president of that union. And I worked toward that goal. People always somehow say, "Well, the job seeks the man. If you've got the ability, people will come to you in the labor movement and hand you the mantle and say, 'O.K., you're the guy.' " That wasn't the case with me. I wanted to be a union official and I worked toward it hard. I fortunately was successful, and still am to this point.

Giebel: What was the journeyman classification like in relationship to working with regular photoengravers?

Conlon: What was the journeyman like?

Giebel: The journeyman position. You said you were allowed to go to meetings. Did you have full rights as a union member as a journeyman in those days?

Conlon: Oh yes, yes, certainly. The status of a journeyman then and now hasn't changed much. In fact, it's much more liberal now. When I was in apprenticeship, you couldn't vote on an issue. You couldn't--how archaic the rules were in the old Photoengravers' Union--they were just simply horse-and-buggy as they could be in many respects. They were the result of constitutions that were formed in the early 1900's and carried on from decade to decade. For example, I had a six-year apprenticeship, and I couldn't get up on the floor and speak at a union meeting until the last year of my apprenticeship. Mind you, then I still couldn't vote. Not until you became a journeyman. And it wasn't until we finally merged with the Lithographers where we took constitutions that had been in existence on both sides for 50 or 60 years and completely streamlined them that we did away with some of those ridiculous conditions. Now in our union, an apprentice can speak or vote on any issue the day after he starts his apprenticeship. So they're much more liberal in that regard.

Aaronson: Maybe it would be well at this time if you could tell us a little bit about what a photoengraver does.

What the job entails.

Conlon. O.K. The photoengraver makes plates for the letterpress process, the letterpress process of printing as opposed to offset lithography or rotogravure. They produce photo-mechanically on metal, photographic images. For example, when I worked in the newspaper, it was strictly a black and white printing in those days. You didn't even see the color then that you see in newspapers now. Just to give an example: a photographer would take a picture, would take a picture on the street of a news event; that picture, in terms of a glossy print, would be developed and retouched by an artist and then go into the photoengraving department where a big camera would be used to make a negative. That negative, that image would be transferred onto a plate with an arc light and photo-sensitive material and it would be etched. That photo-engraving plate, which was done on zinc in those days, would go down to the typographical department where they'd set it in an type chase , with all the type that had been set by the typographical people. Then it would go on from there. A mat would be made by the stereotypers and a stereotype plate would be put on that press. That's a simplification of it, really, to say nothing of the color work. Color wasn't done in newspaper shops; it was done in what we call commercial shops where they do high quality color work. That's basically the photoengraver's operation.

Giebel: What was the relationship with the other unions at that time? In the Sun Times?

Conlon: Political relationship?

Giebel: Yes. And just on-the-job, day-to-day relationship.

Conlon: At that time on the newspaper it wasn't very good, because there had been a long protracted strike of the Typographical Union, an illegal strike, really. In 1947 when the Taft-Hartley Law was passed, it provided that the closed shop was illegal. And the Typographical Union, very imprudently, as far as I'm concerned, had a long 2-year strike, basically in protest over that provision. We were working all the while, as well as all the other unions, working and doing--not doing their work--but producing the newspaper without the use of typographers. We were making photo-engraving plates to do it. So relationships at that particular time between the Typographical Union, which was the biggest, and all the other unions was very strained and had been for a number of years. Still is, to a certain extent.

Giebel: Because of this strike? Or just the long-standing jurisdictional. . . .

Conlon: Well, it was long standing, but that really aggravated the situation. The Typographical Union has always felt that all the unions belonged with them, that they were the big fathers of the printing industry. And indeed we did. Several unions broke away from the Typographical Union in the early 1900's or late 1890's, and as a result of that (they) feel, you know, we never should have done that. We should have stayed with the Typographical Union. So condi-

tions weren't too friendly at that time.

Giebel: What were the conditions with the other shops in Local 4? Or was it 5?

Conlon: Local 5. Good, the photo engraving process at that time was flying high, as opposed to now. It's really deteriorating rapidly now as a process. That's reflected in drastic loss of jobs. But photcengraving process was good. Our union at that time was gaining in members; the work volume was high; the members were making an exceptional wage in relation to other workers, working a lot of overtime; people really were making money in the industry. Photo-engraving was at that time recognized as the best letterpress process of producing high fidelity printing. Things have certainly changed since then. Offset AND lithography since have really grabbed ahold and captured the majority of the work, and the volume is growing and the membership in that segment of the industry is growing, while the photoengraving industry is dropping dramatically. For example, in the last nine months, we've lost 585 PHOTOENGRAVER members; and that's not unusual. I say that because we have a good finger on it by virtue of our pension records. We're under 12,000 members now, while probably we had about 18,000 or 20,000 in the period I'm talking about, which is almost a 50% reduction in about 22 years, which is indicative of what's happening in the printing industry.

Aaronson: Could you describe for us some of the technological changes that took place? That are causing photo-

engravers now to lose their jobs?

Conlon: What's happening is the production of sophisticated offset presses that take rolls of paper. Do you know what a web press is? As opposed to a sheet-fed press? Offset presses used to be fed one sheet at a time and the image would be printed. Now, web presses are manufactured that run faster and do better quality work and as a result they can produce cheaper and [redacted] better quality work than they used to. And, as a result most of the customers are going to the offset process, as opposed to letter press. I'm not talking about rotogravure, now; that's another ball game altogether. I think that's the thing that's coming out strong now. But I think it's just a question of economies and improved techniques that produce a better offset product. As a result, people don't invest in letter presses anymore. So if there are no letter presses to run jobs on, then there's not the need for photoengraving plates. What you need is offset plates. Newspapers, for example (the Washington Post that you have here on the table isn't included), but many newspapers, averaging about one a month, are transferring over to the offset process, and using offset presses. When that's happening you don't need the photoengraving plates anymore, as I've said.

Aaronson: The rotogravure process used to be very popular a long time ago, didn't it?

Conlon: Rotogravure? Not near as much as it is now. It's becoming more and more popular. That's the segment of the industry that's growing probably more than any other now. It's

getting automated to the point where the cost of making rotogravure cylinders is going down dramatically, and with that more and more people are buying rotogravure. Unfortunately, that doesn't benefit us as much as the other process because we don't have jurisdiction over the presses in rotogravure. The International Printing Pressmen's Union have that. Not to say our people aren't capable of doing it, or wouldn't do it if we had the opportunity. But most rotogravure printers are under contract with the Printing Pressmen's Union, so we don't benefit by that to the extent that we do in the offset process where we have jurisdiction over the presses.

Giebel: In addition to the technological changes, company changes have probably influenced the employment picture also within the Photo engravers' jurisdiction.

Conlon: You mean the mergers, company mergers, and things like that?

Giebel: Company mergers, particularly newspapers, I guess is a prime. . . .was that a factor in Chicago?

Conlon: Oh, yes. The photo-composition process really hurt the Photoengravers. and it helped the Typographical Union at that time, although now the thing is running full cycle and the Typographical Union is really getting hurt now because the Guild is doing work that they feel is theirs--the Newspaper Guild I'm referring to. When the photo-composition process came in in the early 50's--about 1954 I believe it was perfected--much of the work that was formerly done by

photoengravers in the photoengraving department--that is, stripping, assembling of negatives after they come out of the photographic gallery--was done in the typographical department because they'd operate pho-tons, photo-typesetters, and the product of that was a paper tape. And they'd set that up in position along with Velox images of an ad for example, and that would all be done in the typographical department. And all that has to be done in the photoengraving department is making one complete shot of the whole page rather than making several shots of several elements and assembling them all in the photoengraving department. I think that the leadership of our union at that time could have done a better job. Let's face it, I think they did a lousy job.

Aaronson: Are you talking about the Chicago area?

Conlon: No, I'm talking about the International Union. At that time it wasn't aggressive enough in pursuing the issue so that we could maintain control over that work. I think we should have been more aggressive and fought it all the way down the line to gain and keep jurisdiction over those operations. But, in defense of them, we didn't have (I'm talking about the Photoengravers)-- we didn't have the financial resources nor the staff that the Typographical Union had. [They were] much larger than we were, had more money, had much more staff, legal and otherwise, and they just came up with the operation. That seriously hurt the Photoengravers. There's no question about it. But now the situation is turning around to the point where the Newspaper Guild is doing work

prior to it's even going into typographing. So they're faced with the same thing now. Technology is having a very divisive effect upon the relationship between unions, which is one of the primary reasons we're merging. Rather than cut each other's throats and grab each other's jobs, we decided to get together so we can eliminate these fights.

Giebel: What about the concentration of corporations? Newspapers? Have they merged? The Sun Times. . .

Conlon: Oh, yes. When I served my apprenticeship we had four newspapers in Chicago. Now there are two. Well, there are still four newspapers on the streets, but there are two publishers. Each publisher publishes two newspapers; which had an adverse effect, too. We lost jobs when the newspapers merged.

Giebel: How did that merger come about? Who lost the jobs?

Conlon: Well, people that lost the jobs were with the smaller paper, generally. Well, no, I'm not sure that's actually true. When the Tribune, for example, bought the Chicago American, I think they kept all their own employees, and they chose the others on the basis of longevity with the employer. But, if I recall, I think we lost about 35 jobs on that one newspaper alone as a result of that. And when the Sun Times bought the Daily News, they handled it pretty much the same way. But in both mergers, we lost a large number of them because there simply wasn't enough equipment or space to accommodate all those people.

Giebel: So the corporations determined who was going to stay and who was going to go.

Conlon: Right. We had nothing to say about it. We had no provision in the contracts at that time for any contingency like that.

Aaronson: What year are we talking about? Roughly.

Conlon: Oh, we're talking about the mid to late '50's.

Aaronson: Let's get back a little bit to your personal history. Your first union office was steward?

Conlon: Yes. Shop delegate. I left the newspaper and went into the rotogravure industry. And I was a shop chairman, that's what we called [redacted] shop stewards.

Aaronson: So you changed jobs?

Conlon: Yes. Right. I wanted to get out of newspaper pretty damn fast. Because there's no future in working in black and white engraving. It's a limited skill, and I wanted to broaden my skills so I could be more productive and, let's face it, make a better wage.

Aaronson: What led you to seek this first union office?

Conlon: The shop chairman ?

Aaronson: Right.

Conlon: Well, I just like representing people. I got exposed to it in the service. I think that really kind of squared me away. Everybody has to reach a point in life where they pull themselves together and define what they want to do. Some people unfortunately don't do it soon enough; some people never do it. [redacted]

I felt that my experience in the service gave me the background to represent people, and I wanted to utilize the experience I'd gotten. I went through Officers' Candidate School when I was in the service, and I was used to speaking in front of people, communicating with them, And after I'd worked in the shop for a while, people wanted to know if I was interested in the job; and I said, "Certainly." So I ran for it, and the people in that shop elected me as their representative.

Aaronson: Tell us a little bit about how you came up in the union through the local.

Conlon: In my capacity as shop delegate I naturally learned--it was my responsibility to learn--more about our contracts, learn more about our consitution, our by-laws. And I did that. I attended union meetings regularly, never missed them as a matter of fact, spoke at them. Whenever I felt I had something to say at a meeting, I said it. I should tell you that I was finally impressed by the fact that I had the capability to influence people when I spoke. They listened to me and I was generally, certainly not all the time, able to sway people toward the objectives I wanted to reach, Having done that, then I felt I was in a position to run for the executive board, which was the policy-making body. The first time I ran, I got elected.

Giebel: How do you put a candidacy together? Do you decide independently, and put together your own candidacy? Who do you check out with?

Conlon: Well, the Photoengravers' Union wasn't a highly politically-oriented organization. The politics were subtle. It wasn't the political party type of thing that exists in the Typographical Union, for example. You don't get up a slate, or anything like that. If you want to run, if you have any ambitions, you talk to people--at the bowling alley, at union meetings, in the shop--you tell them you think you're going to run for the board. It was a low-key thing, really. So that's the way I put the candidacy together.

And the first time I ran, I got elected. As a matter of fact, any election I ever ran for except the very first one after I finished my apprenticeship, and that was the election for the delegate to our first convention. But subsequent to that, everything I ever ran for, I always ran first on the ballot. That is for the executive board (we had yearly elections, yearly elections, even for full-time officers --talk about archaic). You'd just get elected and all of a sudden there's almost another election coming up. But I was successful in running, and every year I'd get elected as a convention delegate, and I ran number one on the ballot. The same thing when I ran for the executive board.

So I was in a position, I felt, that if the opportunity arose some day that I could run for president of the organization. So I just waited till that opportunity came along, because at that time I was on friendly terms with the head. . . let me put it this way: the administration of the Chicago local. . .I was on friendly terms at that time, and I didn't

want to oppose them. I felt I'd wait until the opportunity arose if there was ever a vacancy and then run for one of the two top jobs. So I waited and eventually that opportunity came.

Aaronson: What were the two top jobs in the local?

Conlon: At that time they were the president and the secretary-treasurer. They were the only full-time jobs. The rest of them were part time.

Aaronson: How many people were in the local?

Conlon: At that time there were about 1900 to 2000. It was the second largest Photoengravers' local in the International Photoengravers' Union.

Giebel: What year was this again?

Conlon: That I ran? 1962.

Giebel: Let me ask another question about that yearly election of officers. As you look at that. . . .you were explaining that as archaic. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that as to what the problems were with yearly elections?

Conlon: Well, not only in our organization, but I think the bad thing about a yearly election. . .I've never been in favor of long terms, such as four or five years. I don't think that's right either. But some of the problems involved in a one-year election is that you feel you don't really have time to establish and implement programs without the pressure of another election breathing down your neck. People are always sitting there, saying, "Let's watch him."

I felt that many, many things were wrong with the Photo-engravers' Union at that time because in many respects they were backwards; they had a strong feeling of unionism inherently, but as far as administratively and constructurally, I think they were really slow. And I wanted to change things like that. Very frankly, we plowed ahead on it, because I got elected with another young guy at that time and we plowed ahead on it. And fortunately we were re-elected. But I should tell you candidly that you're a little bit inhibited about doing some of the things because of the fact that you don't have two or three years to do them. You've only got one year, and you better not fumble the ball or you'll be out on your rear end. Particularly when you're dealing with an older group of people. I was the youngest guy ever elected as president of the local. I was just 34 at the time, and we're talking about an average age of maybe 12 or 15 years older than I was. I probably would have moved faster, very frankly. I probably would have moved faster in bringing about the changes I felt had to be done if I felt I had more time to do it without the pressure of election facing me.

Aaronson: What does the local union president do in Chicago Local 5 of the Photo-engravers'?

Conlon: What did he do? Nothing, of course, (Laughter) He's the chief administrative officer of the local, as most presidents are. Although it wasn't always the case in the Photo-engravers' Union. Some local unions had a system where the secretary-treasurer was the full-time man--going back to the turn

of the century again--and the president was merely a part-time man. But that began to change in recent decades as well. I was the chief executive officer of the local and responsible for negotiating all the contracts, overseeing the investments, solving shop problems. Just about everything. The responsibility of the other officers was primarily in the area of employment, the placement of employment. I was responsible for overseeing that as well. You might say (that) I was the chief cook and bottle washer. Anything that flew my way I had to field.

Giebel: You became President in Chicago at a time when New York was the other big local. What were your relations with other locals, smaller locals probably in the Chicago area, that you had a more dominant relationship with? I want to see how you would characterize your relationship as president with the other smaller and then the other larger locals.

Conlon: My personal relationship at the time I took over?

Giebel: Yes. Personal and political.

Conlon: My personal relationship was pretty good. I assumed the presidency at a bad time. Unemployment was higher than it's ever been. We had well over 240 people unemployed out of an active force of about 1600-1800. So personal conditions were very, very poor. Finances weren't in the best of shape. But my personal relationship with other locals was pretty good. Our local's relationship with some other locals wasn't so good because my predecessor had been opposing

the incumbent international president for three consecutive years--those were annual elections as well on an international level. As a result, Chicago, depending on who you spoke to, were the "good" guys or the "bad" guys. I don't know what color hat. . .

Aaronson: Who was the international president?

Conlon: William Connell was the incumbent and the president of the Chicago local. Bill Hall had run against him for three consecutive years. In fact, he ran against him three straight times until he finally beat him. The time he beat him was in Chicago, where we had the convention in 1962. In those days you didn't have a referendum vote of the membership to elect your officers; it was done by the delegates at the convention. So it got to be strictly a numbers game. Who could get the most delegates to vote for him in a convention.

Giebel: What were conventions like then? You probably saw this whole transition with Hall running three times. . . what were they like? Did you play an active part in it?

Conlon: Politically? Yes I did, I certainly did. You see, it's much easier to sway people at a convention like that than it is when you have a referendum vote. It's merely a question of getting together with a guy in a room like this and criticizing the incumbent, pointing out his drawbacks and where you think he's not doing the job, and talking about the capabilities of the candidate that you're supporting. So they were highly politically oriented in that respect.

Giebel: Did you map out a strategy each year that you would go into the convention ahead of time--who you'd talk with?

Conlon: Oh, yes.

Giebel: How you'd approach them?

Conlon: Sure.

Giebel: Could you describe a little bit about that?

Conlon: Well, I felt at the time [that] the incumbent wasn't doing the job. I felt he was getting along in years to the point where he was letting things slide. It wasn't just a question of me opposing him so there would be a vacancy in the local. It really wasn't. I was genuinely convinced that the man wasn't doing the job. He was a very sophisticated person, a very intellectual guy. But I didn't think he had the drive nor the stamina to run an organization at a time when so many things were changing in the printing industry. I just want to preface my remarks with that.

As far as the political operations were concerned, yes, sure, we would know who was coming to the convention prior to it. And certain people you knew you could write off right away, and certain people you knew were in your camp. It was the neutrals you had to convince. Just like in any political convention, I suppose. So there would be shots taken on the floor, not really bad bnes. Then when the convention was over, there'd be the rooms, the "smoke-filled rooms" as they say, the bars, the dinners, and people would just go out and try to drum up the support for the votes. Hall came very

close the first two times he ran--'60 he lost by just a few votes; '61 he ran again and lost by a few more. I'm talking about maybe 3 to 5 votes each time. And then in '62 finally, his third shot, when they had the convention in Chicago, he made it.

Aaronson: Did having the convention in Chicago have anything to do with his being elected?

Conlon: I think so. Yes, oh, yes. I think so, because. . .

Aaronson: How did the convention get to Chicago?

Conlon: The executive board selected--approved--the site, but it had to be by invitation of the local, and the Chicago local invited the convention there, in which Hall was instrumental, I'm sure. I was on the executive board at that time. And as I recall, we made the decision a year or so before to invite the convention there. Because at that time it was a considerable expense to the local union to entertain a convention.

Giebel: Was there a difference between Connell and Hall in terms of merger? Was that a question at all in terms of change of presidents?

Conlon: [redacted] Well, Connell. . .you mean with the Lithographers? Yes, Connell had been involved in a series of talks with the Lithographers about the question of merging the two unions, and Hall was highly critical of that while he was Chicago local president. He opposed the idea vigorously. Of course, it was a little different ball game once

he became the president of the International Union. Then he had an opportunity to sit down and talk with the Lithographers, and there was a change of heart. We moved fairly quickly after that toward the merger. As a matter of fact, in less than two years. Hall became international president in 1962, We merged in 1964. So we moved very quickly after he got to be president. Prior to that he was opposed to the idea.

Giebel: Let's spend a little time and see if we can't get into that. Connell with regard to merger, was talking with ALA?

Conlon: Yes, they had a three-man committee. As I recall, it was Vice-president Walter Risdon, Connell, and Ben Schaller, who was our secretary-treasurer--a three-man committee. They had had a few meetings with the ALA to explore the possibility of merging. And while these meetings were being conducted, Hall was highly critical.

Giebel: What did you know about the discussions? Did Schaller and the other two gentlemen come back and report?

Conlon: They reported to their executive board. I wasn't on the board. They were international people. But as I recall, this wasn't too far in advance of Hall's election; maybe six months or a year--when they had these exploratory talks. But I recall very clearly that Hall. . .

Giebel: Was Hall's objection to the question of merger or to the conditions of merger?

Conlon: The question of merger, the question of merger. That it wasn't necessarily good at all for we Photoengravers to get locked up with an outfit like that. That was generally

the attitude.

Giebel: What was that "outfit" like in those days?

Conlon: Well, I didn't know. I had no exposure at all on an international or local level to any lithographers. I didn't know anything about them. I wasn't keen about the idea myself at the time, but I wasn't in a position to know that much about it. I was merely making my judgments on what I heard from Hall and some other people. So I wasn't in a position to take any strong views at that time.

Aaronson: How long before Hall assumed the presidency did the notion of merger first come up?

Conlon: Oh, about six months to a year. Very close. Wasn't too far in advance. But at that time Hall had to have political issues to talk about. He always has had for that matter, and that was it at the time. When you're running for election for an international office every year and you lose twice, in order to "keep 'em flying," as they say, you have to have another issue. And at that time that was one of the issues. That, and the fact that Connell wasn't doing the job.

Giebel: So what about the merger then? [What] changed Hall's mind? [He] seems to have been elected on a position of not merging, and two years later t he merger takes place. What was so irresistible about the ALA that he would want to turn. . .?

Conlon: I can only give you my personal opinion on that. I think he was in a position to feather his nest a little bit. He was in there, and he could not dictate but work out

the terms of his own position. And I think he did that. Yet, to be perfectly objective, not to say that he really wasn't interested in the welfare of the membership as well, I think he felt, he really felt deeply, that the people he represented would be in a better position by being affiliated with the Lithographers. But he wasn't about to say that prior to the election while Connell was involved in the same thing. He probably deeply felt it while Connell was involved in the merger talks, but for political purposes he took the position that it wasn't good. Simply put, that's my opinion.

Aaronson: As local president, was that the time you started to build up some kind of relationship with the international office? Or did that happen prior to that?

Conlon: Which international are you talking about now?

Aaronson: Photoengravers.

Conlon: Oh, no. Relationship? Well, no, I'd been active in conventions, as I said. I'd been at every convention since 1958, which was my first, through '64. That's five conventions, and I became pretty conversant with the international matters as a result of that.

Aaronson: Did you have much contact in the conventions with the international officers?

Conlon: Oh, yes, oh yes, sure. I liked Connell, even though I opposed him. He was a gentleman, certainly. But he wasn't a well man. He died shortly after he was defeated. Well, not shortly, a year or so. He was a diabetic, very bad, and he used to drink on top of it; not excessively, but you know, when you've got diabetes bad, you're not supposed to drink

anything. And he liked Manhattans, as I recall, But he just wasn't doing the job, and that was why I opposed him.

Giebel: Before we come back to this whole question of merger, let me step out of this context and ask you what's it like for a guy to come back from the service. . . .were you married then?

Conlon: Oh yes. I got married while I was in the service.

Giebel: What are those transitions like? With a family. . .

Conlon: Very tough, very tough, because the pay. . . at that time the pay was miserable, and the hours were miserable. The newspaper had the latitude in the contract where they could have you work different hours every night. I got out of the service, and we didn't have a home and I had two children at that time. (I never saw either one of them born. One I was in Korea, and the other I was in Officers' Candidate School.) It's a tough adjustment to make. We had to get an apartment. I worked from 8 o'clock in the evening until 3:30 in the morning, if you can imagine those hours--taking a bus home and trying to sleep with two little kids running around the house. It was a good thing I didn't have. . .I was oblivious to noise. You know, it helped a little bit.

Giebel: What does your wife say, then, when you tell her you are going to start getting more involved in the union? Have to start attending union meetings?

Conlon: She didn't mind a bit. Didn't mind a bit. She, I think, understood and still understands the type of guy she's married to. And she never gave me any static on that. Not a bit. She was very helpful in those tough days, you know, when I was working for a living. (Laughter)

Aaronson: What great amount of money did they pay you for working this. . .?

Conlon: Oh, I think I got out of the service. . .well, I started at about $26.00 a week, and I think when I got out of the service, had the two kids and the apartment--no car--I think I was making about $87 or $90 a week. Of course, it was a heck of a lot more money then than it is now.

Just one sidelight I should tell you: one night, to show you the kind of people we were, or liked to think we were, one night I was walking to the bus and coming out of the Sun Times I saw a canvas bag lying there on the street. I walked by it. But I thought, "That's a funny place for one of those little handbags." So I walked backed. I looked in it, and there were some old shirts and some laundry; and there was about $1200 in it. I think we had about. . .I don't think we had anything in the bank. We didn't have any money at all. You know, it was a day-by-day operation. How the hell do you save money with two kids and an income like that? So I took the money home, or I took the bag home and opened it up and sat there with the wife and counted it up. It was $1200. No identification, none whatsoever. So, you know, that was a lot of money to us. The thought crosses

yourmind that "Gee, that would pay a few bills." But I called the cops the next morning and turned the money in. They traced the owner through a laundry mark. Guy was a skid-row bum, who'd saved up his money and gone on a binge, I guess. But those were interesting days. They really were.

(End of Tape 1, Side I)

Giebel: You, as president of a large dominant local in the Photoengravers', obviously played an important role. Maybe you want to start with your relationship with Hall, which you probably still were maintaining during this period and just pick up the whole merger question.

Conlon: O.K. Well, at that particular time Hall was the president of the International, and I was president of the local. And as I said, after his election, it wasn't too long that they began pursuing merger talks again. I wasn't particularly enthusiastic about the idea initially, as I said, because I didn't know that much about it. But the more I learned, the more I investigated, the more I thought about it--although I certainly had no personal ax to grind in the thing--I felt it was a good move. And we began working toward that objective.

I was appointed on a committee along with several other officers of fairly good-sized locals from the Photoengravers' side to meet with a similar committee from the Lithographers' side in conjunction with the international officers, of course,

to begin exploring the possibilities of merger. And the international officers, who would be meeting on a regular basis, would then come back and report to us. And the thing got in gear very quickly to the point where we actually planned to have a constitutional convention where we would get together and, hopefully, approve a merged document that had been drummed out by these committees and the officers and the attorneys. Sam Edes, an attorney from Chicago, was extremely instrumental in drafting the document. He did a fantastic job. He had a feel for picking up one's thoughts and putting them in writing.

So we went ahead with the constitutional convention. And I was the co-chairman from the Photoengravers' Union, of the entire committee, along with Harry Spohnholtz, who was then the president of the Chicago local Lithographers. We were co-chairmen of the entire committee who met a full week in Twin Cities in advance of the convention. Then when the committee made the final changes in the document, the modifications and amendments, we then had the convention. Spohnholtz carried the ball in the Lithographers' convention, and I did the same in the Photoengravers' convention. Not by myself, of course; but whenever questions would come up, it was my responsibility to answer them and explain just what the various provisions of the constitution meant. And, as you know, I'm sure you've heard in other interviews--it was approved, and we were then the LPIU.

Aaronson: What were some of the things that lead you to believe that the notion of merger wasn't a bad thing? Might

be beneficial?

Conlon: Well, I quickly recognized that administratively, philosophically, the Amalgamated Lithographers were a tremendous outfit. They were so far ahead of us in those terms it was pretty apparent that if we were going to continue to be a bargaining organization, we couldn't do it standing alone as a Photoengravers' Union. Not only for that reason, but for technical reasons. It was becoming apparent then that the letterpress process was suffering from technology, and to best protect the job security of the members, we had best get involved with not only a progressive, vibrant union, but one also that would conceivably have the jobs to provide for our people if the letterpress process continued to deteriorate. I was very impressed with thier leadership--Brown--the first time I met him, I thought to myself [that] there's the guy that ought to be leading the union. Let's face it, he was extremely instrumental in convincing me, not with a hard sell either, that they had really shaped up a tremendous organization. Under his leadership, mind you. I felt that if we ever get together with anybody, that's the organization it ought to be, with a leader like that.

Giebel: What kind of things could the Photoengravers' bring into the merger? Why were you attractive to the ALA?

Conlon: I think they recognized that unions, in general, in the printing industry, had to get together because we were fighting one another--jurisdictional problems, competing for members. Our employers were competing with

their employers under different standards and conditions, and I'm sure they felt that the way to help eliminate the problems within the framework of the graphic arts was to merge. What better place to start than the Photoengravers' Union because our skills were so similar, almost identical? And it was just simply a logical first step to take if you want to bring about a merger in the graphic arts union.

Aaronson: So there were some jurisdictional problems?

Conlon: Oh yes, sure. Definitely. It was very common in all graphic arts unions at that time. Because what happened is [that] technology evolved in the industry. It crossed old historical lines, and as a result, the unions saw thier jobs were going down the drain with a subsequent loss of membership. They'd go grab something they'd never done before, and as a result there were court cases and. . .

Aaronson: Can you give some specific examples around Chicago jurisdictional disputes?

Conlon: We didn't have too many in Chicago. Organizationally, for example, too, you'd go to organize a shop, and another union would be in there trying to organize it too. And you'd be fighting each other trying to convince the non-union members which union they should join. By merger you don't have that. At least we eliminated that competition between Lithographers and Photoengravers.

Giebel: The Photoengravers' have a reputation of being a more militant union than the ALA. Some ALA members see the Photoengravers as having contributed a history of more

militancy. Did you see yourselves as a. . .?

Conlon: Frankly, I did. But there's a reason for that. The old Photoengravers' Union was embedded in unionism and the old Matthew Woll type of leadership, and they were a little closer knit in that regard; they were more militant. The ALA grew so fast because of the increasing use of lithography that they really probably didn't have the time to pull everybody together, to convince everybody that they brought into the organization that, you know, "we're a union and the reasons we got our standards and conditions were because we fought the employers for them many, many years ago. We got hit over the head.". . .you know, the old basic unionism. They just grew so fast and expanded so fast, they didn't have time to pull themselves together like a smaller organization had been doing for many decades. But I think that may be overexaggerated to a certain extent. It depends on who you spoke to.

But I think that's a fair assessment, generally, that we were a more miltant organization, and I think the average member in the Photoengravers had a better understanding of unionism and what it was all about. But certainly in terms of being able to administrate and progress and do an effective job for their membership, as far as their leadership was concerned, the ALA, I feel was far ahead of our International Union on an international level. No question about that. As a matter of fact, most of the systems and procedures and policies that were adopted and implemented subsequent to the

merger were things that the ALA had already been doing. They really led us the way as far as administrating a union is concerned. There's no question about that.

Aaronson: So how did you get into this position as co-chairman of the constitutional committee?

Conlon: Well, Brown appointed me. Ken Brown appointed me to be the co-chairman along with Spohnholtz, with the approval of the international executive council.

Giebel: This grew out of this first committee work that you were appointed to by Hall?

Conlon: Right.

Giebel: And at that time the kind of broad outlines of the merger were sketched?

Conlon: Right.

Giebel: That Brown was to become president, Hall the executive vice-president.

Conlon: Correct.

Giebel: And what other kinds of things were discussed in this general. . .?

Conlon: Oh, the executive council structure, all the basic provisions of the by-laws; everything was done in rough draft form from cover to cover.

Giebel: Pensions?

Conlon: The whole works.

Giebel: Local autonomy.

Conlong: Dues structure. The whole business. We had to have a verbatim form to take to the consitutional convention.

We couldn't just whistle into the convention and say, "O.K., here's the broad guidelines, fellows. Vote on them and we'll work out the rest." We just couldn't do that. We had to have all the 'i's dotted and 't's crossed when we walked into the convention. And those things had to all be worked out in a series of meetings prior to the meeting of the constitutional committee.

Giebel: Was there any concern that you might have serious objections within some of the influential locals, either on organization. . .?

Conlon: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact we were getting strong opposition from the New York locals of both our unions. And some other unions, too, but those were the most prominent ones. And, as you know, the lithographers seceded as a result.

Giebel: What was the problem with the Photoengravers in New York? What objections did they have. . .?

Conlon: New Yorkers always got problems! Basically, it was lousy leadership. There was a heavy turnover in officers at the time, and again, they were one-year elections. They had a strong leader for 15 or 20 years, Denny Burke. When he said, "Go to the toilet," they went! And when he retired there was a series of turnovers, poor leadership. And the guy that was in at the time, on a one-year term, when the issues of merger came up, I think he was opposed to it just because he was scared of his job. He was an incompetent jerk, really. He never should have been in the job.

Giebel: Who from New York was on this pre-merger committee that met with the ALA committee?

Conlon: I think it was Frank McGowan, who was the president, and he didn't last long. He was defeated for office by a guy who was defeated a year or two after that.

Giebel: The problem was developing continuity from year to year within the talks. . .

Conlon: Any time you have a local like that, it's a bad situation and you never get any leadership. So when the issue came up in New York, they just said, "It's not good, we don't want it, we're opposed to it." It was a problem because the New York Photoengravers. . .well, it was the biggest Photoengravers' local.

Aaronson: Did you have a relationship built up between the Chicago local and the New York local?

Conlon: Over the years it was always a pretty good relationship. While Denny Burke was in office, and Hall was in office, they were close friends. We had a good relationship for many, many years until the situation got so chaotic there with all the changes in office that you never knew where the New Yorkers were. You still don't to this day. They're nice guys, you know, it depends on what day you talk to them, if you want an opinion or view.

Giebel: They were the largest local. As such, did they feel they had a relationship with the union that was different than how the second largest local or other locals saw that relationship of New York? Did New York lead. . .

Conlon: New York and Chicago generally did. Our relationship was good in that respect. Sometimes many of the smaller locals felt that we were a little high-handed, sometimes a little too colorful in running things. As a matter of fact, it wasn't that way at all in the Photoengravers' Union. As a matter of fact, the small locals ran the thing in terms of the convention, because you had a limitation on the number of delegates that you could send from large locals. So proportionately the smaller locals had more representation in the convention than the [large ones]. They were the ones that could effect policy more than the bigger ones, and elect officers. They had a bigger influence in that respect.

Giebel: So during this period you're meeting with the ALA, striking out bargains. Now how are bargains struck out? Do you strike up a friendship with Spohnholtz? During this period, do you. . .?

Conlon: In working out the terms of the constitution?

Giebel: Is it a pretty candid thing? Or do you fellows go back and have a caucus and then come back in and say you're willing to do this? Or is it all discussed?

Conlon: No, there was very little of that caucusing business. Most of the important items, the framework, were worked out by the international officers. You know, Brown was the kind of guy who never turns anything over to anybody half-done. It's worked out here. It's shaped up before it goes to any committee anytime. It was our responsibility to look at it, and if we felt something was wrong

or something had to be added to it or it had to be modified, to say so, and then talk amongst the group and come to a joint decision on it. Most of the items, almost all of the items were worked out by Edison. Edison would come in with a draft, and we'd go through it and make recommendations. [There were] some pretty good guys on the committee, some pretty intellectual guys, despite the fact that they came from the trade, weren't college graduates. They were pretty smart people, and many of them weren't the kind of people you put anything over on, either.

Aaronson: Who were some of these people?

Conlon: Spohnholtz was one, Eddie Donahue from Twin-Cities, Pat Peterfesso--I could go all the way down the line. There were some guys who just occupied seats, to be sure. But some of them were pretty sharp people because they were the chief officers of the larger locals, and you don't stay in office for long periods of time representing people if you're a babbling idiot. You know a little bit about the language; you know a little bit about contract; you know a little bit about what constitutions and by-laws should say as they relate to the membership. Generally speaking, that was the composition of the committee.

Giebel: How did you, then, as president of a large local, turn around and present the merger to your members? You wanted to get their support. After all, it was something you participated in. Could you count on them all the way along? You knew they tended to support it or did you expect to find. . .?

Conlon: No. It was a little difficult at first because Hall had been bum-rapping the thing prior to me getting to be president. Then all of a sudden there was a quick turnover, and it was my responsibility to try and convince the members that "Whoops, well it's not a bad idea after all, fellows." But that was done over a period of time through communicating with them in writing and talking to them at the shop delegates' meetings, talking to them about unionism and pointing out the need to merge because of the threats upon their job security. People understand that. I pointed out to them that if we're going to progress, we've got to protect our job security and not go down the drain as a receding organization because of technology, which was happening at that time. That was plain. All the people had to know were the facts. Over a period of time we convinced them, and they voted overwhelmingly in our local to approve the merger. It wasn't even close.

Aaronson: Merger on an international basis?

Conlon: Yes. We had a special meeting of all the membership at McCormack Place in Chicago and laid the whole thing out to them prior to the vote. They got the ballots the next week, but a week before they got the ballots we had a special meeting of the entire membership, mandatory meeting which they had to attend or pay a $5 fine.

Giebel: That's a long tradition, too.

Conlon: Mandatory attendance at meetings?

Giebel: Yes.

Conlon: It was in most of the Lithographers' locals as well, but not until the last ten years or so.

Giebel: So then you pack your bags and go up a week in advance to Minneapolis-St. Paul, get two big rooms, one for the. . .

Conlon: No. Joint at that time. For the committee it was one big room, where the Lithographers and the Photoengravers both assembled as a committee. It was a big committee. Gee, I don't remember, I think we had 40 to 50 people on the committee. And you know, that's sitting on one side of the aisle like Republicans and Democrats in the Senate, but they were co-mingled and we got through it without too much difficulty because at that time we had eliminated what we thought would be the controversial issues. There was some controversy in the committee; we had some people taking shots at us, saying we were trying to cram the thing down their throats too fast. One guy from Pittsburgh made that statement. Aside from that there were just some. . .

Giebel: This Pittsburgh guy an ALA man?

Conlon: Yes.

Aaronson: Ted Meyers?

Conlon: Yes. Right. Who was a sidekick of Swayduck, the guy that seceded. He was opposed to it all the way down the line at the time. So he was looking for something to shoot at. But aside from that, we had done such a thorough job of eliminating anything that we thought to be controversial, done such a thorough job on what we thought was a

fair document that would be acceptable to both parties, that we just got it through with a minimum of problems, both that week and the week where we met separately in huge rooms to work it out.

Giebel: What were the hardest things to swallow about the merger for a photoengraver?

Conlon: Well, the photoengravers were generally older, and older people, as you know, have a tendency to be more fixed in their views and less flexible in change. And the biggest thing, adverse feedback, that I got from the people I represented was, "We're in danger of losing our identity as the old Photoengravers and we're getting too big. There's not the personal contact that there was." I think that was the hardest thing for the average photoengraver to swallow. It didn't bother me one bit because I saw that, if we didn't do something progressive, we were going to be in deep trouble. Deep trouble. And I think if we hadn't merged, well, I don't know where the hell we'd be now. We'd just be either bankrupt or really wallowing around. I don't see how we could have sustained the finances to successfully function when the letterpress segment of the craft is going downhill so rapidly and our membership is. . .I shudder to think, simply put, I shudder to think where the Photoengravers' Union would have been today had we not merged nine years ago.

Aaronson: One of the mechanical difficulties, I understand, was the problem of pensions. Could you describe what that was all about?

Conlon: While the LPIU was functioning as a union? Gee, have you got all day? (Laughter) That was the most explosive political problem that existed in the LPIU. If I think back and try to place in my mind a dozen of the most violent arguments I've ever heard since I've been a union official, probably eleven of them were over the concept of merging those pensions. And I was involved in them. I was appointed on a committee with other photoengravers by Hall, who was the chairman of the Photoengravers' Pension Fund, to meet with representatives from the Inter-Local Pension Fund, which was the Lithographers', to try to merge them in much the same manner as we did the unions. But that really never got off the ground because I'm convinced that Hall and Streeter and some of the other officers on the international level of the Photoengravers' never did want to merge that program.

Aaronson: What were some of their objectives to merging?

Conlon: I don't think they had any valid ones. I think the influence of professional people dictated that. I think because of personal interests, financial interests, professional people or persons, the investment counselor, a guy named Sid King, I think he convinced Hall and Streeter that it wouldn't be advantageous for them to merge. Because many individuals, and I don't want to (even if this tape is never going to be heard) mention names, but let me just say some international officers in the Photoengravers' and their families and their friends and some of their help, employees, had money invested through the investment counselor, who was

the same investment counselor for the Photoengravers' Pension Fund. I think it was a clear conflict of interest in the matter. And I've said this at a convention, so it's nothing I haven't said to people's faces. The only thing I didn't do was mention names. It was clear that this guy was giving stock tips and having them sink heavily in the same mutual fund that the Photoengravers' Pension (Fund) had most of their money in. And they were fearful that if they were merged with the Lithographers' Union, there would no longer be that kind of relationship. Sid King wouldn't be in a position to be making the moneys he was making on the investments and then in turn having them invest their own money. I think it was just purely a case, on the Photoengravers' side of some influential officers just deliberately frustrating the thing because they didn't want it. Because anybody even doing a cursory study that has any expertise in the field of pension programs could easily just look at the situation and in 15 minutes tell you that it would have been a great thing for the Photoengravers'.

Giebel: Because of the age of members?

Conlon: Certainly. Sure. Increased ages; the pitiful pensions that the Photoengravers are going to get in comparison to the Lithographers. On the Lithographers' side, I do think there were a few people who were just going through the motions. I don't think they really wanted it, either. A few, certainly in the minority because they felt it may be detrimental to the benefits to the Lithographers that they

represented might get. But it was purely intellectually honest, I think, on their part, as opposed to the reasons for not merging on the other side.

Every time we'd begin to make a little progress on the merger talks, a new roadblock would come up, if you'll pardon the expression, some horseshit issues. (My apologies to the gal that's taking the dictation). But that's the best way to term it--some horse-shit little issue would come up to frustrate the thing until finally, over a number of years and violent arguments--oh, you should have heard some of those sessions we had; you just wouldn't believe the name calling and the accusations. It just got so bad that Hall wouldn't accept the motion that was made. He'd just pound the table. It just got to be a scenario. 'Til finally, things were prolonged and frustrated so long that actually the Lithographers felt the boat sailed, because to try to bring about a merger on the original basis then would mean lesser benefits for the Lithographers, and they felt it was too late.

Giebel: Should an issue like this have been incorporated into the general agreement between Brown and Hall at the beginning of the merger? Was it the kind of thing that should have been negotiated as one of the conditions of merger?

Conlon: I think, if it was a condition, we might not have merged. And Brown wasn't really in a position to do that in any case because the Inter-Local Pension Fund is a separate entity. It's not technically part of the international union; it's a voluntary thing on the part of 25 locals or more that came into it, so it really wouldn't have been a proper thing

to do to make that a part of the conditions of merger.

Aaronson: You were at Minneapolis and presented all these things that you had worked out as a merger procedure for the two unions. What was your reaction to the New York local of ALA's objections to the whole merger question?

Conlon: Well, I was certainly disappointed. We were really thrilled about the idea of getting two unions like that together. Then to have a block as big as that not be a part of it was not only a moral blow, but it was certainly a financial one as well. We were keenly disappointed.

Aaronson: Do you think it was all Swayduck or was it the whole local?

Conlon: Oh, I think it was Swayduck. The local would have gone along if he had wanted it. He had such control over that local at that time, it was unbelievable. You don't rattle his cage or you're in trouble. He really is a powerful man. He probably came as close to being a union dictator as anybody I've ever seen. You put out an issue on a referendum vote, O.K.? And a secret ballot on a referendum vote that goes to the place of employment where the members worked, to vote and put in a sealed envelope. And you get votes of 6224-6 on issues. You know, what the hell, who wants to mess around with a guy like that? So, I think it was through his influence that the entire local pulled out.

Giebel: Let's try to recreate that moment. That must have been an interesting moment in your life. Your convention is moving along; it seems as if everything is going to

fall in place. Your big New York local is coming along. Now, how do you hear that there's trouble?

Conlon: He was never there. They were never at the constitution [convention]. They never showed up. They had voiced their objection within the framework of the ALA at their convention. I think he (you can check with a lithographer on this), but I think he got up and walked out of their convention, his entire delegation, when they were squaring away that the move to go ahead. . .

Aaronson: In 1963?

Conlon: Yes, I believe so. Year before or so. He never showed up. I think he showed up at one of the first group meetings we had, the smaller committee that I mentioned, and he never showed up after that. He never showed up at the constitutional convention. And as soon as it was adopted three months later, he was out of the union. He didn't pay his per capita. He tried to bankrupt the ALA by witholding the per capita so they wouldn't have enough money to function, and he came damn close to doing it. The Lithographers had to put out a special $15-a-man assessment, an emergency deal, and go all over the country convincing the members how they needed the money to operate; otherwise they'd have gone down the drain.

Giebel: Were you afraid the merger wasn't going to take place during this period, or were you going to go ahead anyway?

Conlon: Oh no, no. We felt that he wouldn't be part

of it, but, what the hell, we wouldn't let him frustrate it. We went right ahead. And, as it turned out, it was the wise thing to do.

Aaronson: Did you have any contact with Ben Robinson?

Conlon: No. I never met the man. Certainly heard enough about him though. He was, I suppose, a terribly big influence on Swayduck. His legal fees were substantial at that time. They were well in excess of $100,000 a year, which was a lot of money ten years ago. Still is!

Aaronson: Word has it that Mr. Swayduck and Mr. Robinson were in another motel in Minneapolis at the time of the convention.

Conlon: If they were, I didn't see them. I never met Robinson in my life. I've always been conscious of the sense, about the influence of professionalism upon union leaders. I've learned a lot in that regard in eleven years. I'm talking about investment counselors, bankers and lawyers. That was one of the reasons that we initiated a code of ethics resolution at our convention because it became clear that there's a wide difference of opinion amongst our fellow officers of what constitutes a conflict of interest and what does not. So the Chicago local introduced legislation to make it mandatory that officers follow a code and make annual reports. Because as far as I'm personally concerned, if a guy has his own personal money invested with the same investment firm that's handling your pension program and you're a trustee of the program, I think that's a conflict of interest.

Other people didn't. That's why we plowed ahead and got that thing adopted, although I have some strong reservations if any of the locals ever adopted it on a local level. We did in Chicago. But we had some violent arguments over that whole question, too.

Giebel: How did that begin to come about? The mergers of the Chicago locals of the ALA and the Photoengravers'? That set off a whole new set of meetings?

Conlon: Right. What we did after the merger in '64, we began meeting--myself, the vice-president of our union, and the secretary-treasurer began meeting with Spohnholtz, Gundersen, and Benshop, who was their financial secretary in Chicago. Spohnholtz and I had had the experience, you know. (Well, it wasn't easy, I don't want to imply that.) But because we had had the experience of going through the whole thing on the international level, we made good progress in a comparatively short period of time when you consider we're talking about the problems of bringing two fairly good-sized unions together. The officer structure we went through very quickly, generally on the same lines as the international. The biggest problem we had was finances. The Lithographers had a big building that was paid for, had much more money in their general funds, while our big monies, traditionally, as in most Photoengravers' locals, were locked into benefits. The Photoengravers' were always heavily benefit-oriented, sick, out-of-work, as opposed to the Lithographers; and most of our monies were there, which of course weren't going to

do the Lithographers any good. But to the Lithographers' credit, to their everlasting credit, Spohnholtz and Gundersen particularly took the position that if merger is right for the people we represent, let's not get hung up on the fact that we don't have the same assets per capita that they do. If they'd have taken that position, as many other locals did, which is the reason they're still not merged, we never would have merged in Chicago, because they had ten or twelve times the money in the general fund that we had and only about two or three times the membership.

Giebel: Was all the staff guaranteed that they'd have the jobs in the new merger or was it necessary to let. . .?

Conlon: Full-time people?

Giebel:. . .and representatives go?

Conlon: No, you don't bring about mergers that way. You just don't bring it about. We never would have had this merger with the Bookbinders if people felt that they were going to lose their jobs. That's why they had to build in the attrition business because in order to get a successful vote on the merger, you have to have people go out and sell it. And you're not going to get a guy to go out and sell it if he thinks [that], O.K., the day or the week or the year after he sells the merger he's going to be out of a job. So it was the same way on the local level. Of course, we didn't have that many people. We only had three-two full-time people and an organizer. They had four full-time people and an organizer. But everybody maintained their jobs.

Aaronson: What sort of problems did you run into on selling the merger on a local basis?

Conlon: Not too many. As I said before, over a period of time we were making reports and pointing out the problems existing in the industry and how we could best solve them collectively by being together. The only opposition I got was from the older die-hards, who felt, as I said, [that] we were going to be swallowed up by a bigger organization and who thought we should do things today the way we did them 30 years ago. You can't operate a union that way. And we convinced the majority, a heavy majority, that the best thing for us to do was to go ahead and merge. The local merger came easily because the international merger had been adopted and the people were used to the idea. It was just a question of going ahead with it.

Giebel: What have been some of the advantages now, or, let me put it more objectively, some of the results of the merger? I'm sure there are some disadvantages also that have occurred.

Conlon: Well, I don't know that there are too many disadvantages. I'd really have problems coming up with that. Speaking for myself, I don't think there have been any disadvantages. The notion that we were swallowed up and lost our identity is ludicrous as far as I'm concerned because what we've done is really to enhance the job opportunities for the Photoengravers through the merger. We've been able to place photoengravers, who would otherwise be unemployed,

in lithographic shops because of the much larger number of shops avilable to work in and because that segment of the industry is growing while the photoengraving, excluding the rotogravure, as I mentioned before, was decreasing.

We have been able to exert far greater strength at the bargaining table. When you sit down across the table from the employers and you're representing 8,000 people as opposed to 2,000 and you have the financial resources behind you, they have a tendency to listen a little more. We've made tremendous progress in establishing better wages and conditions and the establishment of better benefit programs, such as the early retirement program and things like that. So we've done some really exciting things--health and welfare programs and things like that that we've been able to make great progress in. I think individually we would have had far less success.

Giebel: How could we go about documenting that? Better conditions, better wages? Now, you've been very involved in the merger movement, and as such you have an investment of yourselves and in the future. Now you have a feeling because you bargained before and after merger, about this strength. What kind of evidence could you cite that would help someone else draw the same conclusions that settlements have been better for the members?

Conlon: Well, first of all, that's a very difficult thing to do because you have to operate on the. . .well, you can't say that. . .you can't pinpoint what the settlements

would have been if you weren't merged.

Giebel: That's what the critic is going to say. And I'm trying to anticipate the critic's question here and just give you an opportunity to speak to that. It's, of course, a feeling that you have, but. . .

Conlon: I think the only real criterion you can use is the settlements made prior to the merger, average-wise. And look at the benefits existing and programs existing in the respective unions prior to the merger, and then look at the settlements afterwards. Of course, when you do that, the question of the economy and inflation comes into play. So it's really a funny area to get too deeply involved in, but I think that's the only criterion you can use. Prior to merger, for example, the Photoengravers didn't have a health-and-welfare program. The employers paid a premium to an insurance company. Subsequent to the merger the Photoengravers (I'm speaking about Chicago now) got involved in the jointly-trusteed health-and-welfare program that the employers paid totally for in the Chicago local. Prior to the merger we didn't have an early retirement program that the employer now pays 3 to 4 percent of gross wages into. We had it afterwards, and it's probably one of the best things we've ever done in terms of the retirement benefits for members. I think that's the only evidence you can point to. What did we have before the merger and what did we have afterwards.

Aaronson: After the merger, how did your role change? In the union?

Conlon: The local merger? Well, the responsibilities sure as hell broadened. Initially, my duties changed very little because if the Photoengravers had a problem or there was a problem relation to the Photoengravers' segment, they'd come to me or the other Photoengraving officer. But that very shortly changed because if somebody had a problem involving lithography and the Lithographic officers weren't in the office, they had to have an answer from somebody, so I had to start learning about press operations (something I was totally unfamiliar with) and preparing myself to the point where I was conversant about all the Lithographic contracts and operations to the same extent the others were. So that now my role is completely changed because the lithographer looks upon me as the guy who is representing him, not just photoengravers. If they've got a question, they'd just as soon ask me as anybody else.

Aaronson: I understand that soon after the merger there were a few pretty serious strikes in the Chicago area. Could you talk about them?

Conlon: Yes. Right. In 1969 we had the first strike in the Lithographic industry in Chicago in 47 years, which is a pretty doggone good record. We had a two-week strike, which was a bad one. We had been caught up in a '66-'69 three-year contract at puny increases--I think $4, or something like that--$4.75. At the time, inflation was going wild where contracts like $25-30 a week were being settled, and we were sitting here on a 3-year contract looking like a

a bunch of mopes, really. We went to the employers a year prior to the expiration of that 3-year contract and asked them to give an increase, irrespective of the terms of the contract; and we literally got the back of their hand. They said, "a deal is a deal." So politically and morally and everything else, when we went to the bargaining table in 1969, we had a hell of a lot of catching up to do. The employers were making those increased profits for three years while we were getting those small wage increases and the other unions were pulling ahead of us, or up closer to us, so we had a lot of catching up to do. And the employers didn't see it that way. We finally had a strike. After the strike was settled, we got $43 in wages plus fringe benefits; and we did catch up. But there were some militant employers which I think influenced the others to the point where that precipitated the strike.

Aaronson: Were there any divisions between Photoengravers and Lithographers during the strike?

Conlon: No. That was strictly a Lithographic strike in that area. We had a strike in rotogravure in 1970, the following year. We had a 5-week strike in the roto segment for pretty much the same reasons. But that was the first strike we'd had in rotogravure in Chicago in 30 years as well. So labor-relations-wise, we've had a pretty good record in terms of strikes.

Giebel: How did you run strikes? Now these two strikes [are] in the new GAIU. . .?

Conlon: Well, it was the LPIU at the time. Well, everybody comes out of the plant. The shop delegate in each shop is responsible for the conduct of the strike in that plant. We have picket signs printed, and we stand around the plant and try to stop trucks from delivering supplies. The strike was very effective, very effective, because a strike of that magnitude, INVOLVING that many people, you just don't whistle in 5,000 scabs to continue doing the work. So for all intents and purposes we shut the plants down completely. Some of the work, naturally, went to other areas in the country to be done, but. . .

Giebel: You have a funny relationship in that, as you try to get information about the strike out to the press, you're often coming into contact against employers. And in many cases you've shut down the vehicle through which information would be getting out, so. . .

Conlon: No. No, we weren't striking the newspapers. That's a separate contract altogether. Our newspaper employees were still continuing to work. So there was no interference in that regard.

Giebel: Well, how did you handle the public relations and press relations during this. . .?

Conlon: Most of the exposure unions get when they're on strike in the newspapers is adverse. Let's face it, the people that generally own newspapers aren't friends of the labor movement. So that in most cases, I don't want to generalize, but in most cases, any publicity you get is bad. They dis-

tort the facts, half-truths, you know. The only real publicity it got was when the strike started and when it was settled. The settlement was publicized in the newspapers--the fact that we were meeting in federal mediation conciliation. But generally speaking, most of the coverage when it was there was adverse--big bad unions are striking the poor employers again! That routine.

Aaronson: What were the steps after the merger with the Lithographers that moved toward the other mergers--the merger with the Bookbinders?

Conlon: What were the steps?

Aaronson: Yes. How did that all progress?

Conlon: Well, in my view the merger of the Lithographers with the Photoengravers was tremendously successful. I'll say that without hesitation. It has been extremely successful. And it's always been the objective of many of us to move toward one big graphic arts union. So that that hurdle having been crossed, we tried to merge with the stereotypers and electrotypers. But they turned it down on two occasions because they had to have a 2/3 vote; they got a majority in both cases, but the merger lost. So then, with Brown taking the initiative, we moved toward merging with the Bookbinders as the next alternative.

(End of Tape 1, Side II)

Giebel: (mid-sentence). . .Printing Pressmen's would be the most logical merger because the similarities of the skills, you were saying.

Conlon: Right. But for internal political reasons, I suspect, that's why that merger didn't come before the Bookbinders. We did meet; there was a long series of meetings held with the Printing Pressmen which at this point, as far as I'm concerned, only served to give the Printing Pressmen the opportunity to pick our brains and learn how to successfully run an organization. But there was a lot of internal political strife existing in that organization. They're split right down the middle between the skilled and the unskilled people; they call them the specialty workers. And as a result that thing really never got off the ground. So what do you do then? You turn around and look for another large organization that will give you comparable numbers to go back to the Printing Pressmen and say, "Aha, we're as large as you are. Now let's try to work something out." And the Bookbinders were a good organization, a fine reputation. Although their skills weren't as similar to ours, they're still a printing industry union and that thing worked out very well. It was extremely complicated, but certainly not as complicated as the first one, because, having gone through a merger once you really learn a great deal and you follow pretty much the same format.

Aaronson: Were you very much involved with negotiating the merger with the Bookbinders?

Conlon: Yes. I was co-chairman again of the LPIU representatives, and John Connolly, who was their president, was the other co-chairman. Although logistically it was

far easier, because what we did in 80-85 percent of the cases was we just merely pulled the language out of our constitution and by-laws and put it in the new one. And we didn't get much argument from the Bookbinders in that regard because theirs was a constitution going back to the turn of the century, which was really outmoded, while ours was a result of the opportunity for two unions who had similar constitutions to draw up a new one as recently as 1964. What really had to be done was, again, the personal problems. Who's going to have what on their calling card, what's the dues structure going to be, what's the council structure going to be? The Bookbinders weren't in the habit of having a council system where people really got involved. But I don't know how deeply you want to get into that. We're talking about the LPIU merger, not the GAIU, I don't think, are we?

Giebel: Sure. Sure.

Conlon: Oh, you are? You're following the continuity all the way through? Well, the Bookbinders operated much like the old Photoengravers used to. You had a president; you had a secretary; they made the decisions, right? Come and report at the convention. The ALA and the LPIU always had a council board system where local officers are elected to an executive council body to formulate policies and then see that they are implemented. I think that's been a key to the successful function of the LPIU and the ALA. You don't have people sitting in an ivory tower making all the decisions. Although I'm always conscious to keep my eye on that person-

ally, because I think the larger a union gets the more of a tendency officers have to start getting away from the contact, and I watch that all the time--as recently as this week. I think the key to the success of those unions has been the council board system, and I intend to see that the thing is perpetuated.

Giebel: You're really getting to be an expert in terms of merger. You participated in the ALA, LPIU,. . .

Conlon: I dislike the word expert. I don't think anybody's an expert at anything. Let's just say I've got some degree of expertise in the field and experience because of having gone through it.

Giebel: Now, when you're talking about a situation like the Bookbinders and President Connolly representing as he does, his union, the old head of the union in which he has a lot of force, and you tried to bring the progressiveness of the LPIU. . .

Conlon: Into the GAIU. There's no question that it's needed. The Bookbinders were, as I say, pretty much in a comparable [position] in many respects, to what the IPEU was before we merged. Even though I'm a photoengraver, or was a photoengraver, I candidly say the administrative talents and ability and the genius, if you please, I'll use that word, of Brown has resulted in the success of the organization. And it was sorely needed with respect to the Bookbinders. They've got to learn how to function as an organization. They've got to learn how to get out and work, travel, do

things, be places. That's what the old LPIU and ALA were all about. You don't pick up a phone and solve problems over the telephone all day. You've got to have the finances to whistle out to Omaha, Nebraska or Kokomo, Indiana, and have a representative there to solve the problem across the table with his legs under the table. But this juncture--I think the Bookbinders are perfectly happy with that. I think they're perfectly happy to let us show them how they should function, because they are a solid organization structurally. They're honest people, intellectually honest, good trade unionists. It's just a question of knowing how to run a business. That's what it is when you've got that many people.

Aaronson: Is the Bookbinders local in Chicago merged?

Conlon: No. They have three locals in Chicago. And that's characteristic of many areas of the country in the Bookbinders. They haven't merged themselves. They lease space from us in our building; one of their largest locals is our tenant. And somewhere along the line I suppose we'll start working in a merger with them. But it's not. . .

Aaronson: Are you hoping they'll initiate merger between themselves first?

Conlon: That would be helpful. That would be helpful. But if they don't, then possibly we'll move along and try to work out a merger with them.

Giebel: Now, the Bookbinders were attractive to you because of their membership and because they were another jurisdictional dispute that no longer had to appear and also

because it's another step in the process.

Conlon: Right. Let's take them in their priorities. In my view, (Brown or other people may have different views), but I see them, number one, as another step toward further unity in the graphic arts. You got to cross hurdles one at a time; and if you can cross a hurdle that big by getting them in with you, that's the first thing. Number two, we didn't have too many jurisdictional problems with them to the extent we had with the Pressmen. And number three, it certainly puts you in a far more advantageous bargaining position to work out a better position for yourself (I'm speaking collectively as an organization) in subsequent merger talks. You know, people have a tendency to listen to you a little more, as I was saying about negotiations with an employer. We sit down with the Printing Pressmen's Union who have about 130,000 members (they say), and we come in with 130,000, and we're pretty much on equal terms. Certainly a lot different than it would be if we were walking in with our 50, or whatever it was. So I think those are the three primary reasons. I think there will be one more merger in the graphic arts. I think there will be a merger with the Printing Pressmen, and I think that's as far as we'll go in our time.

Aaronson: Do you think that's coming soon?

Conlon: I wouldn't be at all surprised. Again, this guy Brown is something else! I think he can damn near do anything he sets his mind to do. I really mean that. He's the guy that's engineered and masterminded the entire thing, right

from top to bottom now, and it's his leadership and his ability to convince people and communicate with them and lead them that has brought the thing this far. I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if within another two years we'll be merged with the Printing Pressmen's Union. As I say, I think that's as far as it will go, and that's all right with me. I don't think we'll ever merge with the ITU because of their political structure, because of their attitude of invincibility. I think they've got themselves up on a mental plateau to the point where they're not going to be messing around with us.

Aaronson: ITU is pretty much unique in the labor movement, is it not, in terms of their political organization?

Conlon: Yes. They actually have parties where you're a progressive or you're independent, and they campaign and distribute scurrilous material and posters and knock each other at meetings. It's really not a good system at all.

Giebel: Well, I want to thank you. . .

Aaronson: Wait a second. Hold that. Let's go back to Chicago a little bit for a couple minutes. What role, if any, have you played with the unions you've been involved with in politics?

Conlon: National politics?

Aaronson: National and. . .

Conlon: Local?

Aaronson: Yes.

Conlon: Myself, personally?

Aaronson: Yes. Well, representing your union.

Conlon: Yes, well, our union, and most locals in our union, don't make firm political endorsements of candidates. We invite candidates to our union meetings. I've always been a firm believer, and I wrote an article in this regard about six months ago in our union newspaper, where I said [that] I think it is the responsibility of a union official to stand up and support candidates that he thinks are the right legislators or representatives regardless of the political ramifications as far as he's concerned. I think too many union officials are afraid to get up and say what they think about a local or national candidate, like McGovern. For example, I got up and said, "I think McGovern is the best man." That wasn't a too popular thing to do in an organization like ours. I supported a Republican Senator in Illinois, Senator Percy. (Yeah, I just met with him yesterday afternoon and had a nice chat. He's a fantastic guy.) But now, most union officials don't want to do that because they think that by getting up and supporting a McGovern or a Percy, you're alienating somebody who's going to have to vote for you next year. So they'll sit on the fence and be neutral on the issue, like that fathead was--Meany--but, you know, I think it's their responsibility to do that. I've always taken a very active part in local politics, inviting candidates, including Republicans like Percy, to the union meetings to talk to our members. And if people don't like it, well, that's tough. I think the average intellect of our members is such that they

recognize that if a union official is going to do his job, he has to get up and say what he thinks. If he's not, if he's a political Mickey Mouse, then he's probably doing the same thing with the employers. He doesn't have the guts to say what he thinks is right. As far as political involvement, I'm totally involved.

Aaronson: Have you had a great deal of impact on the political scene?

Conlon: I think so. I think so, personally. Yes, I really do. Most legislators in the state, on the national level, who come from Illinois, know who the LPIU are. They know me. They know Gundersen. And very often on a first-name basis. I think that's very important, very important, because you can have the best contract standards in the world, but if you don't have some kind of political influence, some guy can sit down at a desk and pick up a pen and literally put you out of business by enacting some law. Then you better get off your asses and start being able to influence them. If not, then our society is going to be in a lot of trouble as a viable trade union.

Aaronson: Do you see, in terms of the future of the labor movement, as a whole, more of this merger notion coming about? A need for it?

Conlon: Oh, yes. Definitely. Not only within the framework of the graphic arts. Yes, sure. That's part of our society today. Not only on the labor movement side, but on the company side. Company mergers, proportionately even,

not in terms of numbers, far exceed the mergers of the unions. In order to combat that type of thing where you're dealing with conglomerates, I think it's imperative that unions merge and get bigger and get more powerful so they can cope with them. And I think most intelligent union leaders understand that. And you're going to see more and more mergers.

Giebel: What other future things do you see for the labor movement being involved with? If you had to look forward five or ten years, what kinds of things do you think the labor movement is going to have to address itself to?

Conlon: Well, I don't see any radical change in the labor movement's objectives. I think the main problem that labor unions are going to have to deal with is the question of the potential bankruptcy of the United States. What I mean by that is this: I think, unless the unions have an influence on doing something about the balance of trade deficit in the United States, that commodities that we're running short of like oil, our natural resources, our potential energy shortage, is only going to aggravate the situation, where the products we're short of are going to cost us more money. Oil, for example, copper, lead, zinc--basic things the average person never thinks about--steel--are going to cost us so much money that the balance of trade deficit is going to continue to the point where we could really be in serious financial difficulty in this country by the year 2000. And I think labor has got to do what we can do, even in terms of re-evaluating our own "restrictive" policies, to see what we

can't do within the framework of government to do something about that because, quite apart from us representing workers, we're representing citizens as well. And personally speaking, I think that's going to be one of the biggest problems confronting us as people who represent workers that we are going to have for a long, long time.

Aaronson: Do you have anything else that you'd like to get into? (To Giebel)

Giebel: No. No. I think we've pretty much covered it.

Conlon: I think you've done a very good job. Sounds like a couple of TV professionals. Continuity of it was good.

Giebel: I want to thank you, but I always try to ask a question about looking backward through your experience in the movement. If you could just kind of sum it up and give it your own personal impression of your experience.

Conlon: Well, looking back, I suppose you'd find very few people who would ever be intellectually honest to the point where they'd say if they had to do it over again, they'd do something else. I think most people would say that, if they had their life to live over and carve out a profession, they'd probably say I'd do the same thing. And I think some people lie when they say that. I don't think they're being honest with themselves. But I certainly wouldn't do anything else. I don't make a lot of money at this job. I'm never doing to get rich, and I've had the opportunity to take other jobs since I've been in this position. I've had offers from management people, but the thing I like most about a

job like this is that I've always liked speaking for people, being their representative, being able to walk up to a bargaining table, put my legs under the table, and sit across from a corporation president and have him listen to me. He's not going to listen to me when I'm a worker in the plant. You know, I've always drawn a lot out of that. I've got a good feeling about being able to speak for people. And while it's frustrating and mentally tiresome at times, it's been a good thing, and I'm happy with what I'm doing. And it sounds corny as hell, but if a guy's in a job, a life-long job that he really doesn't get something like that out of, then what the hell, he might just as well be grinding sausage or doing something else. I really get a lot of enjoyment out of it. Just being able to speak for people, represent them, being in front of them, and getting a feeling of leadership. Not power. There's a difference. A feeling of leadership. I hope I'm around to be able to do it a while longer at least.

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Harry Conlon