

SIDE 1 - J.W. Anderson by Jim Coppess.

COPPESS:

... Briggs Strike. Today's date is February 26, 1975. (Both of 'em will be on the tape). O.K. uh- the mayor's Fact Finding Committee reported that discontent had been growing for some time in the Briggs plant and that it had reached a peak a few days before the strike. What was this discontent concerning?

ANDERSON:

Well the discontent was mainly over hours, wages, working conditions. The hours were irregular- some people might work twenty hours in a day but hundreds of people would report for work and be sent home. ~~No~~one knew how many hours they might work in any given day. Generally it was only a few hours. Many times the worker would stand around most of the day and probably earn a little more than enough for their streetcar fare and uh- and lunch. And the wages were- you couldn't figure out what your wages would be. Whether they - because it was paid on a bonus system, a piecework system and an hourly rate. Now there were other things: they charged you for lost tools, for broken tools per lost tool checks; the plant was extremely dirty. They ha- didn't hire enough sweepers to clean up the plant. But specifically, that- what caused the strike of

the metal finishers uh- of whom I was one- was the fact that we were hired for 52¢ an hour. After working a week and getting our first pay, we found that our wages was cut 5¢ per hour. We were paid at 47¢ or 45¢. The next week there was another 5¢ cut which I believe was to 40¢ an hour and the third week it was cut further to 35¢ an hour. And it was these wage cuts on the part of the metal finishers that precipitated the walk-out. When we tried to talk with the foreman or the general foreman, he would not tell us what our rates would be and that we wouldn't get further cuts. And when we stood around, milled around and argued, they finally told us that either go to work or get out. And they pointed out that there was a big line down on the sidewalk waiting for our jobs. Well that statement provoked us to walk out. Now there were metal finishers in other departments, but we were probably getting the top rates, but those working on news panel work, that is we were working on the body already assembled, but there were hundreds of metal finishers working on metal parts that were not assembled: on quarter panels, on fenders and other parts of the body before it was assembled. Now, when we walked out of course the word

spread throughout the plant and I wouldn't say that it was only the metal finishers that were out there. Of the three-four hundred people, I would say the majority were metal finishers. But there certainly were people from other job classifications.

COPPESS: Um- before the strike took place, did the discontent manifest itself in any way ? Did people just grumble or would there be short work staffages or-

ANDERSON: No there was no- there was no complaint in my group except on the question of wages- the cutting of wages each week. That we had all- none of us had worked there very long or I didn't know the man that I was working with and uh- you were so busy that you didn't have much time for conversation and people didn't grumble or complain because uh- we had a job and that was uh- that was very important. This was in January ,1933 and uh- many of hadn't been worked for two years or longer.

COPPESS: Um- about this time, that I think a few weeks before the strike if I'm not mistaken, work started on a new body that- for- a new model Ford that was coming out. Was that tied in in any way do you think with your wages?

ANDERSON: Well, every year they have a new model, but the 1933 model wasn't so different from the 1932 model that it was- make any difference.

That was not a factor, I would say.

COPPESS: So there was- there was ~~noone~~ in the plant that came forward as the shop leader or anything when you went on strike.

ANDERSON: No. There was none. No.

COPPESS: Do you remember any- If you just were hired at the beginning of '33 or late in '32- I don't know the date.

ANDERSON: I was hired in uh- I don't recall whether it was the last week in December or the first week in January. I had worked there three weeks when the strike took place so evidently I went to work there probably the second of January.

COPPESS: Do you remember any groups from outside the plant agitating around the plant, passing out leaflets or things?

ANDERSON: Not prior to the strike.

COPPESS: Did- did the victory of the strikers at the Briggs-Waterloo plant in that strike they had in mid-January have any effect on the workers in the Highland Park plant?

ANDERSON: No, not to my knowledge.

COPPESS: ~~No~~one talked about it or anything.

ANDERSON: No, there was no discussion of it.

COPPESS: Um- from what I understand this- the very first action that took

place in the strike was on a Sunday morning when about a hundred people walked out of the metal finishing department. This was the day before the entire plant walked out. Were these guys that walked out in Sunday morning leaders in the walk-out on Monday?

ANDERSON: That's right. They were the same people.

COPPESS: Was it just an entire work group or were there-

ANDERSON: Yeah. An entire work group.

COPPESS: Um-well I had already asked you before if there were any shop leaders so they probably weren't. Some of these people from reports I've read went to the Auto Worker's Union Conference in Detroit that Sunday. Um- did they do that just because they didn't know where else to go or did they have some ties with the union.

ANDERSON: There was no- a meeting was held at uh- a CP hall in Hamtramck after I had spoken to the strikers and we and Leon Pody and Lloyd Jones and I had gone up and met with M.L. Briggs. After we came out uh- John Mack or Weismann , announced that there would be a meeting at this hall in Hamtramck which the Communist Party- which was probably a Communist Party Hall. I didn't go there

but uh- and I don't know how many showed up. But I was told a Strike Committee was elected and although they didn't know my name because of my acting as a spokesman with M.L. Briggs they elected me, only referring to me as Shorty.

COPPESS: O.K. How did- how were the other plants called out. How were they notified of the strike. They what?

ANDERSON: The Communist Party had an organization-the Auto Workers- and they had a few people in all of these plants and that's as I- I believe that was the means of communication between the plants. Between the plants and the party headquarters they all uh- that's where the information was gathered.

COPPESS: Do you think Phil Raymond played an important role in the beginning of the strike?

ANDERSON: A very important role.

COPPESS: Could you describe what his role was?

ANDERSON: Well uh- he organized the Strike Committee and uh- he spoke and uh- arranged for the mass meetings at Danceland and he as the CP leader organized the soup kitchen, the Defense Committee and all the various committees that were necessary to conduct the strike. I think that his uh- he was a cool, courageous leader,

given the circumstances that we were in, and that's what was required.

COPPESS: And he became the leader almost immediately, right?

ANDERSON: Uh- at Mack Avenue. John Mack was at Highland Park.

COPPESS: Um-from what I understand the first committee that was chosen- was- I think it was the Strike Committee that you mentioned, and it had a hundred, from my reading anyway, it had 101 members representing all the various departments in the plants. Um- do you remember what the specific function of that committee was?

ANDERSON: Well, I have never heard that figure mentioned before. The only strike committee that I was acquainted with was first at Highland Park, and there weren't more than ten people there and the uh- man who insisted upon being elected chairman of the Strike Committee there turned out to be a stool pigeon for the Briggs Manufacturing Company. And uh- when we held joint strike committee meetings down on Mack Avenue, I would say at no time was there more than 30 members of the Strike Committee.

COPPESS: Um- the mayor's Fact Finding Committee that was appointed at that time issued a report on the strike and they said that there was a chain of command where the negotiating committee I think it was

called the committee of twenty-five had to be answer- all final decisions it had to put before mass meetings of the strikers. Do you remember how that structure worked?

ANDERSON: Well, that's a fabrication. There was no such structure. We held mass meetings each day but there was no negotiation and there was no negotiating committee until the very end of the strike when we held one meeting with Walter O. Briggs and a few top officials and that committee consisted of about, as I recall, of five people.

COPPESS: How many- how many strikers would attend these daily meetings?

ANDERSON: I would estimate that from uh- 3-5 hundred.

COPPESS: Were they usually the same strikers as far as you could tell?

ANDERSON: Well I - I don't know. I couldn't say but I imagine they were- from my experience in strikes the same people show up every day.

COPPESS: How was the picketing organized? Were certain people appointed as picket captains and lists drawn up?

ANDERSON: Well certain people just took responsibility for that- for the picket lines. I recall myself and a fellow by the name of Murphy taking charge of the picket lines in Highland Park but Leon Pody and Lloyd Jones also played a role in the organizing of

those picket lines.

- COPPESS: Was there ways that you could mobilize people to picket? How would you do that?
- ANDERSON: We'd only be able to get those who were eating or sitting around the restaurants in the vicinity of the plant. We'd get them out on the picket lines. But we had no way of communicating with people at their homes.
- COPPESS: Was there- were there rules connected with picketing? I noticed on uh- on some occasions for example, the Industrial Worker- the IWW paper referred to uh- rules about people with Briggs badges only being allowed on the line and things like that. Were there rules like that?
- ANDERSON: I had never heard of any.
- COPPESS: Um- how did the strike committees at the plants work? For instance what did the strike committee you were part of at Highland Park do?
- ANDERSON: Well, we got reports on the strike- how it was progressing but it was largely for the purpose of soliciting funds and uh- conducting the picket lines. I was a member of the Publicity Committee but after going down to the Detroit News and the ~~De~~ Detroit Times once or

twice, this committee pretty much folded up because the papers would refuse to give us any favorable publicity and we could uh- couldn't influence the paper in any way.

COPPESS: Would you pretty much say that the uh-way to strike was on the basis of who showed up at the soup kitchens to get food and who would come out to the picket lines or the mass meetings?

ANDERSON: I would say that was true.

COPPESS: Um- somewhere, I think it's either in your article in the Lenz book or else in your oral history down at Wayne State, you said that you've spent a lot of time at the strike headquarters on Mack Avenue because of your role as the leader of the Highland Park ~~S~~ Strike Committee. Could you, do you remember how the strike headquarters was organized? If there was any certain way?

ANDERSON: Well, I would say there was anywhere from ten to twenty-five people who would show up every day and discuss the progress of the strike. Various people report on how many people were going in the plant and what the uh- what the Welfare Department was doing or what other activity we might carry on in order to promote the strike and publicize the strike. But uh- we were all inexperienced

with the exception of Phil Raymond and I don't think that he had any previous experience of leading strikes. Not of that size anyway. Uh- these meetings were largely for the purpose of organizing the mass meetings, they were held before the mass meeting or after the mass meeting to discuss the problems of the strikers.

COPPESS:

I noticed that, on several occasions uh- there were public meetings held uh- you know explicitly inviting the public to come hear the strikers story . As being part of the publicity committee, do you remember how those went? If they were successful and what the purpose was?

ANDERSON:

Well, I recall one or two such public meetings. One was held in the Highland Park high- in a Highland Park high school where Frank X. Martel was present. I believe Larry Davadahl and a Methodist minister- I. Paul Taylor. But as I recall they weren't very successful. Probably a hundred people at most showed up at these meetings.

COPPESS:

Early in the strike um-when rumors were going- or when the press was reporting that the strike had been broken- Leon Pody uh- told reporters that the strike hadn't been broken and the reason he said it hadn't been broken was that skilled workers

were still out on strike. Did they provide the backbone for the strike?

ANDERSON:

Well, the skilled workers the uh- were the metal finishers and my impression is that uh- they were able to hire enough strike breakers for metal finishers who were unemployed to start the plants going. As far as having pulled other metal finishers out after the strike was in progress, I don't recall any such incident.

COPPESS:

O.K. I just- there were reports in the Strikers Press that there was a- at the end of February a special picket line was set up and there were leaflets passed out and that about a hundred metal finishers from Highland Park came out and some dingmen and um- and some other people- I can't remember their- hammermen I think.

ANDERSON:

It might have occurred. I don't recall it.

COPPESS:

O.K. Um- in the second week of the strike sporadic fist fights were breaking out especially around the Mack Avenue plant and the people from the Strike Committee that appeared before the mayor's Fact Finding Committee said that that was a sign of the

strikers' desperation. Do you think that that was the case?

ANDERSON: I think it was a factor in it. Yes.

COPPESS: Would- Would these fights- the people that would get in the fist fights, as far as you're able to tell, I realize it's probably hard to tell in that sort of thing- but would they be the same people that would be getting in fights or was it just something that occurred spontaneously?

ANDERSON: Well I don't recall those fights myself. The only fights that I heard was ~~those they held~~ were fights that occurred in the bars in the neighborhood of the plants. And we were told that some of the strikers were taking the wages away from the strike breakers. It was strong arm robbery you- one might call it.

COPPESS: Oh. Yeah, I hadn't run across- I hadn't run across anything like that but that might explain a lot of the fights. On February 13th there was a parade which I think you organized or at least you got the permit for it, and on that day also the picket lines were considerably strengthened at the Mack Avenue plant. Was this a planned offensive on the part of the strikers?

ANDERSON: Well, we tried to publicize the strike in that way. I went down

to the police headquarters and attempted to get a permit for the parade but Harry S. Toy- police commissioner- refused to grant us one. We held the parade without a permit.

COPPESS: How did the parade go? Could you describe it?

ANDERSON: Well as I recall, uh- I don't think there was more than thirty or forty cars. It was not a big parade. But they went down Mack Avenue down to Grand Circus Park and then out Woodward Avenue to Highland Park and uh- I was riding in the parade but uh= I couldn't- I don't recall- it was my impression that there weren't very many cars that drove all the way from Mack Avenue , downtown and then out Woodward Avenue to Highland Park.

COPPESS: Did things like that have much effect on the strikers moral or-

ANDERSON: Well, I'm skeptical of what effect[#] it had because it wasn't that successful.

COPPESS: Um- near the end of the strike in fact after most people considered it far over, in the middle of April, Earl Bailey who I think was on the Mack Avenue strike committee uh- said that there were 1500 still out on strike at Briggs. Uh- you and your oral history that you gave down at Wayne said that you thought about

a hundred people were still out in the middle of April. Who were those people that stayed out? Was it one particular trad of worker or one particualr group?

ANDERSON:

Well what actually happened I think was that a large number of metal finishers uh- remained out on strike and others left and got jobs in other plants around the city that hired metal finishers. To say that there was 100 or 1500 that stayed out would be very - would be pure guesswork because uh- there weren't that many people appearing around the plant around the picket line. The last mass picketing we had had was on Warren Avenue when the latter part- early part of April when the police used tear gas and guns and uh- drove the picket lines and broke up the picket lines - drove them away from the plant.

COPPESS:

From what I can tell, the oppositon to Phil Raymond's leadership in the strike was centered in the Mack Avenue Committee.

ANDERSON:

Why, I wouldn't say so that because the- really at Highland Park became most of them became members of the IWW and the oppostion. came from both. When the Communist Party held this meeting at Danceland and tried to recruit members of the strike committee into

the Communist Party. There was a lot of resentment against this act and this specifically is what led to the removal of Phil Raymond as the leader of the strike and the invitation of Frank Cederbahl to become the speaker in the strike.

COPPESS: Um- when Phil Raymond was removed from his position as strike leader were there changes in the way the strike was run?

ANDERSON: I don't think so.

COPPESS: Did any workers get disillusioned when he was removed as leader and go back to work?

ANDERSON: Well, it's my impression that the Communist Party told their members to return to work after they lost control of the strike.

COPPESS: Um- from what I can tell there were uh- there were three um- leaders or main leaders that were put forward for the position[#] you know of leading the entire strike and there were various groups behind them . And the people that I can see as being the main leaders, you know people being elected to^{be} strike leader or running for that position were Raymond, George Cornell and uh-Robert Daryl . Um- do you remember if that was the case? If there were three factions like that?

ANDERSON: Well, Robert Daryl was the picket captain of the Mack Avenue plant and he - he was a southerner as I recall and had a large following among the Southerners . Uh- George O. Cornell had been a foreman in the plant

and he represented the more conservative element, I would say. As far as Phil Raymond is concerned uh- he was there because of his ability and the support the Communist Party was getting for the strike through the collection of food, through the publicity they were able to put out and their uh- legal defense- International Labor Defense was in charge of their lawyers. Morris Sugar would get the people out of jail. Those who were arrested.

COPPESS:

Um- near the end of the strike, the strikers at the Mack Avenue plant and apparently some from the Waterloo plant, formed an organization called the American Industrial Organization and um- this encountered a lot of opposition from the IWW who, in their paper anyway, expressed disappointment that people like Bailey and Cornell and other strike leaders from that plant would join in this association. Do you remember what that association was?

ANDERSON:

Well, I would say this association was a sort of a revolt against radicals. Against the IWW and the uh- Auto Worker's Union and they had some illusions because of their uh- lack of radicalism and so on that they could recruit all kinds of people into that union. But uh- as I recall they had no outstanding leader and uh- they didn't last very long.

COPPESS:

There was an incident mentioned in The Industrial Worker where um-

some people passing out Machine and Metal Workers Union uh- leaflets, the IWW you know, Local 440 in Detroit um-leaflets at a strike meeting and were assaulted by members of the AIA. Do you remember that?

ANDERSON: No, I don't remember any such incident.

COPPESS: Um- why do you think it was that the strike at the Highland Park plant ended so quickly or the picket lines and things were dispersed so quickly anyway.

ANDERSON: Well there was a number of reasons. Uh- first on one morning two or three weeks after the strike was called, about twenty service men from the Ford Rouge plant came down Manchester Avenue and drove the pickets. They were big, burly guys and uh- they were ready to knock anybody down who got in there way and the whole, entire picket line were afraid of them and they scrambled. They ran away.

COPPESS: Do you think there was a special effort to get the strike over at Highland Park because of pressure from Henry Ford?

ANDERSON: Oh, that it- unquestionably was. And of course the picket line was harassed by the Highland Park Police and as I recall the state police were located in the fairgrounds and one afternoon while we were down in the uh- at Mack Avenue, we heard a report that the state police had uh- come to Highland Park to break up the picket lines. And when we

got up to the picket lines had been broken up and as I recall, after that there was no mass picketing at Highland Park.

END OF SIDE 1.

SIDE 2 - J.W. Anderson by Jim Coppess.

COPPESS: O.K. Um- Do you remember where they recruited strike breakers from? I've heard several different stories. One was that there were strike breakers brought in from the south. Another which I read in a Young Communist League leaflet was that some people were trying to recruit black strike breakers from the um- near east side in Detroit and I also talked to uh- Nick D.-

ANDERSON: Egotano?

COPPESS: Egotano and he said that there were uh- there were some people that were trying to recruit strike breakers from the Italian neighborhood. Do you remember any of that going on?

ANDERSON: Well I- I wasn't aware of any strike... the actual strike breaking because I wasn't well enough acquainted around Detroit but unquestionably there were plenty of unemployed who were on welfare and it was our information that the city administration were driving these pe- were telling these people who went on strike and applied for welfare- told 'em that you'll have to go back to work- we cannot give you any welfare. And people who were on welfare were told that if they didn't take a job at Briggs they would be taken off of welfare. So uh- they did- I don't think they had any great difficulty in getting scabs in the plant.

COPPESS: Uh- the Detroit News said that strikers were pointing out Communists and IWWs to the police on the picket line and asking that they be removed. Did this really happen?

ANDERSON: This did not occur to my knowledge.

COPPESS: Were the strikers- were the strikers hostile to the supporters they came up from the radical groups?

ANDERSON: Unquestionably there were some of them but I don't recall how it might have been expressed. It was expressed probably by people just staying away from the plant or going back to work.

COPPESS: Would you say-I- we talked a little bit before about Robert Daryl. Would you say that hi-the people that followed him[†]were especially conservative or not.

ANDERSON: Not to my knowledge. I would say they were mostly Southerners.

COPPESS: Um- two groups that were active supporting the strike were the unemployed councils which I think were close to the Communist Party and The Unemployed Citizens League. What were these two groups?

ANDERSON: I had never heard of the- I have never heard of The Unemployed Citizens League.

COPPESS: Oh, O.K. Would you remember what the unemployed councils would do in the strike?

ANDERSON: Well, they were uh- they helped picket the plants. I'm sure that a lot of those people were among the pickets. And they also went out gathering food and collecting money^{for} maintaining the strike kitchen.

COPPESS: I might- well maybe I have the name of this group wrong. This is the group that Amil Masey was active in at that time.

ANDERSON: Well, Amil Masey was not around the strike. If you talk to Fred Valle he would tell you that as far as his knowledge and he had been a buddy of Amil's at the time he had never known Amil to be on the strike. I didn't heard- had never heard of any of the Masey's at that time nor the Reuthers either although both of them claim they were participating in the strike, I think that's a pure fabrication.

COPPESS: O.K. Um- actually we've already covered this. Well, was Phil Raymond- did Phil Raymond uh- raise Communist Party issues a lot during the strike or did he⁺ more or less just raise the trade union issues?

ANDERSON: Well, I - as far as I recall, he largely raised trade union issues. But we were without any political training or knowledge and at that time we couldn't identify the ideology at any one particular speaker was expressing or conveying to the strikers. It was largely agitational, pointing out the hardships, the bad, low wages and uh-

generally along class lines, I would say.

COPESS: There were some other Communist Party members active in the strike. For instance, you've already mentioned John Mack as he was called in the press or Weismann I think you say- that you said his name was. Also a guy named John Shimes and another guy named Anthony Gurlack. Did they - was their participation in the strike different from that of Raymond's? Did they say different things or were they more-

ANDERSON: Uh- they took no part in the strike to my knowledge. The only time I recall seeing them was at the meeting in Danceland. They were full time organizers for the party. They were probably state or national leaders. Were not actively leading the strike.

COPPESS: O.K. At this Danceland rally, that we mentioned before, Earl Browder got up and gave what became a famous speech at least in Detroit for the time about how the Communist Party was proud that it had been leading the strike. Leon Pody in the oral history he did down at the Labor Archives said that this was the first time he had seen Mack and Gurlack come forward as CP' ers. Also previously, from what I understand, Raymond had been denying that he was active in the strike as a Communist Party member and saying that he was just active

as a man with organizing ability and experience. Did this rally at Danceland mark a change in the way the Communist Party approached the strike?

ANDERSON: Well, the fact that Gurlack _____ spoke there and called upon the strikers to join the party of course this in itself identified Raymond and the leaders of the strike with the Communist Party.

COPPESS: You spoke there yourself I think you said in one spot.

ANDERSON: I believe I did appear on the platform for a couple of minutes.

COPPESS: Just before this meeting I think around- well, actually maybe it was later- anyway at some point during the beginning of February there was a meeting at a hall called the Deutsches House where Raymond who had already been removed as strike leader appeared on the stand and Robert Daryl appeared on the stand um- and apparently a couple thousand people attended that meeting. Do you remember that meeting?

ANDERSON: I- I do recall that meeting I think but uh- all I recall is the meeting. As to who was spoke, I do not remember.

COPPESS: The- the press reported that there was a fight between uh- not a fist fight but an argument between uh- Daryl and Raymond over tactics for the strike and that Daryl supporters ended up walking out of the meeting. Do you remember anything about that?

ANDERSON : I dn't recall that.

COPPESS: O.K. um- was the IWW active in the Briggs plants before the strike?

ANDERSON: Not to my knowledge. They had a few members in the Briggs plants but as far as their activity, I wasn't aware of it.

COPPESS: Im- what would- what did their members do once the strike began?
ah...

ANDERSON: Well, they too- went^{to} got a truck and went out to the farms- uh
George Lutsi and John O'Neeka had a truck and they went out to the farms in the area around Detroit and brought loads of cabbage and potatoes and carrots and farm products uh- into the- for the strike kitchen. They also went around collecting money from the sympathizers and friends of the IWW.

COPPESS: Did they- did they put forward a certain line within the strike committee or within the mass meetings or anything on how the strike should be run?

ANDERSON: I don't recall that uh- what their line was. As I say, at that time I was not politically conscious enough to beware of a political line that was being put forth to the strikers.

COPPESS: Did the IWW have um- more influence among any particular group of workers than it might have among another. I notice in their press they talk a lot, at the time they were talking a lot about the metal

finishers. Was that just because they were active in the strike?

ANDERSON: Well, as I recall Lloyd Jones and Leon Pody and a half a dozen others- maybe twenty people in Highland Park joined the IWW. I didn't join at that time and uh- they greatly exaggerate their influence in the strike. The only person that played a leading role is that of Frank Cedarball and he spoke at the Fairview Gardens for a period of possibly six weeks.

COPPESS: Every day?

ANDERSON: Every- well, five days a week , yes.

COPPESS: Um- was the- the people you mentioned that the IWW recruited from the strike came mainly from the Highland Park plant and also when the Highland Park strike committee split away from the Mack Avenue strike committee they mentioned that they were planning on joining the Machine and Metal Worker's Industrial Union. WAS the IWW uh- mainly was its main influence at the Highland Park plant?

ANDERSON: That's right.

COPPESS: Why would you- think this happened because-

ANDERSON: Well that was mainly because uh- of uh- Lutsi and John O'Neeka who were oldtime members. They recruited Jones and Pody who had a lot of influence among the strikers in the Highland Park, at least

of the members of the strike committee and they opened a headquarters. They rented a second room flat on Gerald Avenue and there they served sandwiches and milk, coffee and food for anybody who came there.

And I suppose this in itself caused many people to join the IWW there.

COPPESS: If I'm not mistaken you were friends with Jones and Pody at least later. Did they ever mention or did you ever know how Jutsi and O'Neeka recruited them to the IWW?

ANDERSON: I couldn't say specifically. No, I don't know and I don't know just when they were recruited. Whether they were recruited before the strike was called or after. It was my impression that they became members after the strike was called.

COPPESS: Do you think that was on the basis of the work the IWW was doing in the strike or just on the basis of conversation and convincing and that way?

ANDERSON: I would say so. Cedarball was a very persuasive person.

COPPESS: Um- during the first seven weeks of the strike according to the IWW it didn't put forward IWW tactics or the strike at all and from reading Industrial Worker, that looks like it was the case. Do you remember what they did during that period? I realize you probably weren't aware of the IWW.

ANDERSON: All-all the IWW did ~~was~~ Frank Cedarball ~~spoke~~ on the ~~strike,~~ ^{like} but prior to that, their activity was limited to collecting funds and food and picketing.

COPPESS: After the seven weeks, did their activity change or did it stay pretty much the same?

ANDERSON: It stayed the same. It was -Frank didn't start talking for the strike until about seven weeks after the strike was in progress.

COPPESS: Um- you joined the Socialist Party around this time and from reading your article in the Lem book I get the impression that it was as a result of the strike or a result of meeting Socialist Party members during the strike. How did you come to join the Socialist Party at that time?

ANDERSON: Well, as I recall they held a public meeting at Cass Tech. which uh- they were raising money in it but if I'm not mistaken, Norman Thomas came to town and uh- he was a national figure and uh- I met some Socialist Party members at this meeting and they invited me over to their hall and suggested that I join the party.

COPPESS: Did any other strikers join the Socialist Party, to your knowledge?

ANDERSON: Not to my knowledge.

COPPESS: From what I can tell, the Socialist Party seemed to be most influential around the Mack Avenue plant. For example it was there that Norman Thomas spoke and he didn't speak at the Highland Park plant and also when they had their meeting in New York to raise funds, they had a mass meeting, I think in Madison Square Garden or something that people that came from the Briggs Strike were mainly or were entirely strikers from the Mack Avenue plant. Is that accurate? That that was where their influence was strongest?

ANDERSON: Well, these people came from the Mack Avenue plant. They had no influence at Highland Park and their influence at Mack Avenue was very limited. And just how these people happened- these people happened to be selected by the strike committee to go to New York. It wasn't that they were particularly sympathetic to the Socialist Party but they were the representatives of the strike committee going to New York to solicit funds.

COPPESS: I'm reading too much into it. Um- so they - the Socialist Party wouldn't have had any influence in the fight that went on to get rid of Raymond as the strike leader.

ANDERSON: No. They- they didn't as far as I- to my knowledge.

COPPESS: Um- later in the strike uh- I already talked about the American Industrial Association was formed out of , you know some workers at the Mack Avenue plant. The Communist Party and the IWW charged

that Socialist Party attorneys had a hand in establishing the AIA.
Did they to your knowledge?

ANDERSON: I don't believe that.

COPPESS: Another thing was Sydney Fine who's written a number of books on labor history in the book he wrote that covers this period, he says that it was Mustyites at the Mack Avenue plant that set up the AIA. Do you remember anything like that?

ANDERSON: I don't believe there were any Mustyites in the strike whatsoever. There was a group of proletarian party members, of which Fred Valle was one.

COPPESS: Right.

ANDERSON: And uh- as far as the Mustyites were concerned I had never heard of 'em during that period.

COPPESS: O.K. Um- what role did the police play in this strike?

ANDERSON: Well they played a very important role in breaking the strike both at Highland Park and at Mack Avenue. Uh- a quite a few of the active leaders were- in the strike were arrested. They were taken to police - uh- various police precincts and were shuttled from one precinct station to another so they couldn't be located and were held for forty-eight hours or longer. But uh- they actually broke up the picket lines and- at the Warren avenue plant. It was a provocation as I saw it that people inside the plant were throwing nuts and bolts down on the

picket lines and they would- the pickets would throw these back and break the window and at that signal the police moved in and drove the pickets away from the plant.

COPPESS: So you think it was coordinated between the people inside the plant and the police ~~out~~ in the street?

ANDERSON: I think it was- I think it was pre-arranged. I think the police was called there in numbers for that particular act that particular day. I think it was a pre-arranged affair.

COPPESS: Was the treatment given the strikers by the police any different at the Highland Park plant and at the plants in Detroit?

ANDERSON: Well, the only difference between the Detroit plant and the Highland Park plant- in the Highland Park plant , the D- Ford service men and the state police intervened and the Highland Park police were not particularly vicious . As a matter of fact I was brought into the station at one time and Dan Patch was then chief of police and he spoke to me in a very fatherly manner and didn't seem hostile at all. But the police were there for- to allow the strike breakers to go through the picket lines and go into the plant and certainly their presence there helped that along.

COPPESS: One of the first arrests that was made during the strike involved a man who the press said was passing out Communist literature. Did the police make a point of harassing leftists on the picket line?

ANDERSON: I wasn't aware of it.

COPPESS: Several of the strikers who were arrested were held by immigration authorities, once they had been arrested. Were strikers often threatened with deportation. Were there a lot of foreign-born workers?

ANDERSON: There were no doubt a lot of foreign-born workers. But I was not aware of any of 'em being arrested. That wasn't my uh- my area of activity and the Communist Party and the International Labor Defense undoubtedly handled those cases.

COPPESS: Um- Josephine Goman, I think I'm pronouncing her name right, who is Mayor Murphy's executive secretary at the time, said that the mayor's unemployment commission secretly handed out food to the Briggs strikers in the basement of City Hall. Do you remember anything like that taking place?

ANDERSON: I wasn't aware of it.

COPPESS: What role did the mayor's Fact Finding Committee play in the strike?

ANDERSON: They- I think they was a political camouflage and cover up for the role of the mayor or the mayor because the Welfare Commissioner,

Joseph Ryan, he obviously was working with the company to break the strike by recruiting and forcing workers to scab rather than accept welfare and the Commissioner of police was a reactionary republican by the name of Harry Toy and unquestionably he was completely with the company in favor of breaking the strike. And the mayor having these two people at part of his administration, he had to have this camouflage. He'd also uh- you will also notice they make some remark about Governor Comstock and the state police. Well he wanted to differentiate himself from Comstock uh- from the Comstock leadership of the Democratic Party. He was a liberal democrat and Comstock was a conservative democrat. But as far as I'm concerned this committee had no authority and uh- played no useful role as far as the strikers were concerned. I think they did set up this phony meeting that we had with Walter O. Briggs. Uh- they got us to meet with Walter O. Briggs but when we got there, they refused to even mention the strike and when I raised the question of the strike and recognizing the union, all the rest of 'em just shut up indicating they had a pre-arrangement with the Walter O. Briggs and management that the strike would not be discussed at this meeting but he couldn't announce to the press that he had met with the Strike Committee and the Strike Committee had no grievances, it brought up nothing so he tried to prove the point that

they were uh- and not unreasonable- they did what other companies had done. They met with the strike committee. But it was a complete fraud.

COPPESS: Why do you think the other strike leaders who were with you when you met with Briggs didn't bring up the strikers demands?

ANDERSON: Well, Cornell, who was the chairman of the strike committee at that time had been a foreman and he had political ambitions in the city and he later became a city official and I think uh- that he made this agreement with Briggs management and that he was able to intimidate or convince the rest of the people that what they were doing was the right thing. He never made any proposition to me and of course I wouldn't have accepted it had he done so.

COPPESS: What did the strikers think about Murphy and the Fact Finding Committee?

ANDERSON: Well, I would say that very few strikers were aware of it or they had any opinions on it. Of course many of us were probably flattered by the fact that the mayor and this committee called us down there and were interested in the strike and I suppose he gained a certain amount of favorable publicity for the setting up of this committee because it was made up of prominent individuals. As I recall they were principally leaders in the church.

COPPESS: There were two smaller plants among the four plants that were struck: one was on Meldrum Avenue and one was on Waterloo. Do you recall if there was anything significant that happened there or were they just so small that the strike was very peaceful.

ANDERSON: Well, the only impression that I have was I believe the Waterloo plant was a - largely a tool and die plant. These tool and die plant makers were skilled~~men~~ and uh- they possibly had more bargaining power than uh- the production workers in the other plants. As far as Meldrum was concerned, there they built the Lincoln. But it wasn't a large force - they probably a thousand or two thousand ⁶people working there. But uh- that it represented any special uh- in the strike I'm not- I was no aware there was.

COPPESS: Yeah, I didn't find many references to it in the paper. That's why I was wondering. Um- what significance do you think the strike had for later organizing in the automobile industry?

ANDERSON: Well, that strike caused a scare to go out through the automobile industry and uh- I learned later that the entire- all the plants- Chrysler , General Motors and supplier plants, as a result of that strike, fixed their wages much higher than we were getting. As I recall they raised it from ten to fifteen cents an hour. From fifty cents an

hour to sixty cents an hour. As a matter of fact I was hired at Fleetwood in 1962/at sixty cents an hour, at that rate, And of course there were many of us, maybe a dozen or so, who gained experience in that strike and we knew what power meant if the workers were organized and we lost the fear of the bosses. It was a psychological thing and we discovered that we could get jobs even though we were blacklisted by changing our name to taking an alias. We could go from one job to another without much difficulty.

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COPPESS: A lot of um- references in oral histories talk about the people that were in that strike later going elsewhere and leading other strikes. Do you think that was the case? It was obviously the case in your-

ANDERSON: Well, Pody and I and Lloyd Jones got jobs at Murray body after we had been- after I had been fired from Briggs. I- Pody and Jones and some of these people who were already working at Murray body urged me to come over there and get a job as a metal finisher which I did so uh-we all joined the IWW and the metal finishers at Murray body organized into uh- Metal Machinery Workers Industrial Union- 440 and uh- around the first of October when the company refused to meet with the committee, we called a strike there and uh-

that strike lasted for probably six weeks and of course this organizing and this experience sort of gets into your blood and you accept unionism as a faith and we were in a certain sense indoctrinated by the IWW and its history and whenever we went to another job after we got- lost that strike I went to other shops and began organizing wherever I went. And uh- I was fired from five jobs within a year after the Briggs strike and then I became a full time organizer for the IWW in July 1934 to the end of December 1935. I was organizing in Cleveland. I went to- from ~~there~~ to Bridgeport Connecticut and uh- Torrington Connecticut. I spoke in New York and New Jersey and Philadelphia- places like that . I spent uh- oh about nine months in the east as a full time organizer for the IWW.

COPPESS: Is there anything else that you think we oughta go into about the Briggs Strike that you can recall off hand? I've exhausted my questions.

ANDERSON: I don't think of anything more. The Briggs management stated that the strike was caused by some strangers ~~invading~~ the plants with clubs and driving workers out of the plants. And of course that's as big a fabrication ~~as~~ I ever heard of in my life. But uh- it did occur

as I said it occurred. It was provoked by the company when they repeatedly cut our wages and then told the men if they didn't like their jobs they could get out. And uh- that's when they went out. So that covers -

END OF TAPE.