

SIDE 1 - Fred Valle by Jim Coppess.

COPPESS: My name is Jim Coppess and I'm interviewing Fred Valle on the Briggs Strike that occurred in 1933 in Detroit. Today's date is February 19th, 1975. O.K. you can just start by telling us something about yourself.

VALLE: My name is Fred Valle. I'm 62 years old. I was born in Michigan in a little town called Hoxville between Cadillac and Manistee. My dad moved down there during the time when that area was a lumbering industry. Later on, he moved back into the mining areas, an occupation that he was familiar as most immigrants were. My dad and mother both were born in Italy, immigrated to this country in the early turn of the century. All of the members of our family were born in the United States. My dad spent most of his time as a miner; my mother strictly as a housewife raising six children. The type of ideology that I have can be said to have begun in my family environment. My dad was a class conscious worker and in the early days of the formation of the IWW considered himself, if not a card carrying member, a member of the IWW. He subscribed to their industrial organization type and uh- always had a deep suspicion of the capitalist politicians, particularly Democrats and Republicans. So it's under these

conditions or this environment under which I received my ~~my~~ ideology of being class conscious and of being conscious of the different economic interests in our country. I grew up in this environment. We moved to Detroit in- around 1925 or 1924 and uh- in the early days, even at that time, there were a few strikes that took place in which myself, my brothers actually tried to engage ourselves in the picket lines and we were a bit surprised to see how they conducted the uh- their strike battles over here in comparison to the minor strikes that issued from the class struggles in Illinois where bombs, uh- were used to blow up railroads that were transporting scabs to the uh- use of strong-armed men on the part of the companies of ferreting out strike leaders and uh- beating them up with whips, tar feathering them and doing things of that nature is going as far as actually uh- seeing to 'em that they were killed if necessary. The picket line strike struggle was a mild type of thing in comparison but we ^uadjusted ourselves to that if that was the method in which they carried on their activity . We were not terrorists by any means by ideology. In 1934 now to come down to the Briggs Strike, and that was the year of the strike wasn't it?

COPPESS: '33.

VALLE: 19-

COPPESS: Before we get into that why don't I - mention where you worked and things.

VALLE: For myself, I never did work into the shop, until 1942. Somehow or other I couldn't get a job in the shop and um- by the time I was old enough for a job in the shop there were so many unemployed workers, it was during the depression, I only graduated from high school in 1931 and I was so small physically at that time that I looked like a thirteen or fourteen year old person. I would never had been able to get a job even if they had been available. But jobs were not available; there was a large unemployed that numbered into the millions that reached as high as 30% of the employed force. So I didn't have a job in any of the shops. My dad also when he was a miner, had a ^a part time job in the front of our house as a barber. He was a licensed barber. When he moved to Detroit he bought a barber shop and uh he had sent his first son, my brother Primo to a barber college in St.Louis , who also became a barber. And when we moved to Detroit, he bought a barber shop and that's what he was and so during the depression where there were no jobs available we scrounged enough money around for me to go to go to barber college and I became a barber also. So I worked in the barber industry from the

time after my graduation to around 1939. It was during this period too that I became disenchanted, even more so with the system and I became acquainted with a radical group known as the Proletarian Party through the uh- series of forums that they conducted at Northern High School on Sunday afternoon. My brother Primo and I attended these forums and we listened to their criticisms of the system and uh- after a while I saw fit to uh- to join the Proletarian Party as a member, attended many of their classes. Primarily the Proletarian Party was a political organization, radical, communist in its ideology, attempting to build a party along a Marxist-Lenninist line that uh- copied, or tried to copy the Bolshevek Party of Russia of 1917. That was the norm to which most of the parties were attempting to build except the reformist type of parties like the Socialist Party and those to the right of it. The Proletarian Party actually in the main was an educational party. It was born at a precisely the time that the Communist Party and another Communist group were being organized here in America after the Russian revolution, after a split from the Socialist Party there was a left wing group that organized these two organizations. The Proletarian Party was also

born at this particular time and the main person around it was, a deceased person now by the name of John Kerriger. He was the main stem, the main person of the Proletarian Party. It remained from the time of its birth to the time, I would judge even now- if it does exist now- I don't really know- uh- an educational type of organization. It's stressed mainly the idea of attempting to educate the working class to the ideas of the need of socialism. The activities of the Detroit branch of the Proletarian Party , the only branch that I ever belonged to for a few years, their main activity was conducting classes on economics where we dissected the nature of uh- the labor, the theory of surplus value, what is a commodity and its attributes and so forth. Of course it also went into the political aspect. We had classes on the Communist Manifesto socialism, utopian and scientific; we had classes on Lenin's imperialism, the last stage of capitalism; we also had uh- a restricted group who studied the philosophy of the dialectics of uh- of Marx. Primarily this was the entire activity of the Proletarian Party other than having a social on Saturday night to raise a little money to carry on this type of activity. Whenever a struggle came out into the open as this Briggs Strike of 1934, did you say '34? '33. Early '33.

COPPESS:

VALLE: '33- the party found itself isolated from the point of view of being involved within it. And the reason was not difficult to figure out. Most of the members of the Proletarian Party were unemployed workers. We just didn't have anybody working in the industries. So we found ourselves on the outside lookin' in so to speak. The Communist Party, which was a much bigger party not only nationally but in Detroit, was the party that primarily had the controlling sat on the strike committee of that particular strike. And I know that it's already recorded in a thousand and one ways that the- I think the principle person involved in the head of the strike was a man by the name of Phil Raymond. I had occasion to meet Phil Raymond during one of my escapades of the strike. I found him to be a very sensitive person. I found him to be fair. I found him to be a person that listened to another person's point of view and not vindicative and that was my personal experience of having met with Phil Raymond who, I think, I have no positive way of identifying him⁷ as such, but I think he was a member of the CP which was alright with me. They're the ones that controlled the strike committee. Now I'm sure also that you have obtained from other sources a general

picture of the conditions in the shop that precipitated the strike. Like I indicated I was not an employee; I can't speak from first hand. But all of the general conditions that precipitated strikes were present at the Briggs Strike. Whether you had to report to work and if there was no work to be done you just didn't get paid for it. You had a copy of that leaflet that was issued by the Proletarian Party for 49¢. On that leaflet it was described how many times a person had to go to work, how many hours he had to put into the shop and his compensation at the end of the week or maybe it was a two-week period, I don't quite recall- was a check for 49¢. And the conditions in the shop I would judge, from a general point, were speed up and the typical abuses of the bosses to the workers. The disregard and the disrespect- all of these things create conditions that generate animosity and create conditions for wanting to go on strike. Now, generally speaking, that was the cause of the workers going out on strike. The fact is they had no rights at all in the shop and they wanted to establish conditions of a little more pleasant working conditons plus better working - plus better pay. Now we were isolated from it- that it we didn't have anybody in it. By we, I'm talkin' about the

Proletarian Party because I already said I didn't work there. We tried to inject some type of class consciousness in this strike by comin' out with these leaflets that I mentioned. The one with the 49¢ check which was very well received amongst the workers. Then there was another leaflet that just spoke generally about the conditions in the shop and it ended up by asking the workers on Briggs and all of the picket line to rally around the strike committee even though the Proletarian Party was aware that the strike committee was composed primarily of CP'ers. That made no difference to us. They were the legitimate leaders of this strike and uh- the leaflet asked them to rally around the strike committee and their instructors. This is where my personal experience comes in and during this strike. I was on the picket line that one morning- colder than blazes so to speak- and I was passing out this particular one leaflet when I was grabbed from both sides and behind by three- three persons who immediately began to holler out in loud tones , 'strike breakers! Strike breaker !' Well, strike breakers weren't very popular then, particulary with people who are walkin' the picket line. So they begin to drag me as if to create a commotion. Yes, I was frightened, I was scared, my heart beat fast-

I wondering what was gonna happen. I didn't know whether I was gonna get a kick between the groin or kicked in the face. That's generally what happens to strike breakers when they are caught in the process of breaking strikes. And I can't say that some of 'em might not deserve it. But nevertheless in this particular case without bein' a strike breaker, while in sympathy with the strike, passin' out a leaflet that indicated that these workers should support the strike committtee and so forth, I 'm bein' handled in this manner by what I concluded to be, and I don't have any positive proof, members of the CP. It was generally this more class conscious politically developed type that would react in this manner than the more passive type who are just walking in the picket line not understanding all of the political facets of the strike. So they begin draggin' me in the manner that I described and they dragged me all the way down to the headquarters of the strike committee which was not too far- it was just located there on Mack Avenue right nearby the picket lines where they were walkin' the picket line. The picket lines were, I would say rather massive. They extended maybe two or three blocks and they were solid around. Well, they took me down to this headquarters and the strike committee was in session at that time and so they just sat me down and one on

either side of me to make sure that I wasn't gonna run away which I didn't have any intentions to do anyway. I was welcoming my encounter with the strike committee because I was interested in seeing their reaction also to the kind of leaflet that I was distributing. Well, after about an hour of waiting I finally appeared before the strike committee who were in session in a small room filled with smoke, as usual and um- the persons that took me in there told the chairman of the strike committee who was Phil Raymond, the way I recall it, that here was a strike breaker and he was passing out this leaflet to the picketers. Phil gave me a look, and I can't say whether it was good or bad, I was probably a little too nervous, he gave me a look and he says 'where's the leaflet?' I still had a couple inches of leaflets in my hand all rumped up by the type of treatment that I was given and I says 'here's the leaflet'. And so Phil took the leaflet and read it all. The leaflet contained a mention of the conditions in the shop like I indicated and it ended up asking the workers to rally around the strike committee 100% and then at the bottom it was signed that this leaflet was put out by the Proletarian Party and so forth in order to give ourselves as much coverage or publicity as possible. That was the purpose of the leaflet. It was

two-fold: to help the workers in their struggle to win their battle against the company and also to propagandize the existence of the Proletarian Party. After all, that's the nature of politics. Phil Raymond looked at me and he says, ' how many of these leaflets have you got yet?' Well I think the Proletarian Party had mustered enough money to publish about five thousand of 'em. I don't know whether I had 'em all and I don't know whether I was the first person of the Proletarian Party to pass out that leaflet. That part I'm not familiar with. But I says ' I still got about six inches of these things in my car and there's a stack about that long'. And I indicated with my hands and he looked at the two persons that brought me in and he instructed them. He says, ' you go to the car with this man and get the rest of these leaflets and help him pass these leaflets out to the picketers'. I was as surprised as you might imagine at this instruction and the men who dragged me in there looked a bit chagrined I guess but I think that they felt self-satisfied that they had done their duty figurin' if I was a strike breaker that's what they should of done. But then again, there was always a political rivalry between the CP'ers and other radical groups. They didn't view other radical

groups in the manner that the PP did as competitors for the same thing. They felt 'em as competitors but also at the same time as enemies and it wasn't uh- it wasn't, how shall I say, it wasn't adverse for them to cause physical harm by beatin' up their opponents or takin' out their papers and tearing 'em up like they did on a number of occasions when I was selling the Proletarian News which was the monthly paper that we published in fun of any of the meetings that they may have held with important speakers where we tried to get our point of view across. They would threaten us with bodily harm and take our papers away and tear 'em up. Well we of the Proletarian Party never did do things like that. We always thought that, if in the exchange of political ideas, if you've got an idea that's better than ours, come out with it. And uh- the more people that read it, the more people would believe in our ideas. But their opinions were different. However, I'm not trying to exonerate the activities of these people who dragged me into the meeting. We went to the car and we got these additional leaflets and we passed 'em all out to the picket line after which I took my car and drove to the- back again to the headquarters of the Proletarian Party to relate my experiences and I think- I think actually I wrote about this experience and it was

published in uh- in the Proletarian News- one of the issues of the Proletarian News. There were other political tendencies involved in this strike but none of 'em with any degree of uh- prestige or importance that threatened in any way the fact that the CP'ers had control of the strike. The Proletarian Party, like I said tried to interject itself with a few leaflets but we didn't have anybody on the strike committee, we didn't have anybody in the shops. We were an organization of unemployed workers, you might say. The Wobblies were attempting to stick out their heads a little bit and held meetings in support of the strike. Held meetings at their headquarters or participated in syposiums that bein' held to get some political ideas across on the strike. But uh- by and large they played an insignificant role for the simple reason that they, too, the way I recall, didn't have anybody on the strike committee or they could've had a person in the- involved as a rank and filer of the strike that part you never know. Uh- the SB I don't recall, I don't recall them ever hav^{ing} come out with any leaflets or participated in any of the discussions or syposiums- I don't recall. I'm not sayin' that they didn't; I just say I don't recall. And primarily between the CP, the Proletarian Party, the SB and the Wobblies- they were the primary organizations that were politically

involved in Detroit at that time. Other than them, if there were any uh- small, sectarian grouplets that were split-offs from some other ones uh- I didn't know about them and they didn't make themselves heard so they would have to, if you were able to contact some of 'em, make their own experiences known in their- in their participation in the strike.

COPPESS: Well, why don't we go through , being we're on the left groups that were in the strike, why don't we go through 'em one by one and I can ask you some things that I was wondering about. O.K.?

VALLE: Alright.

COPPESS: Um- the Communist Party- you know Phil Raymond was leading the strike at the beginning, but in one issue of Proletarian News, um it was the issue after the uh- no actually it was the issue that had the article you talked about . About you getting pulled off the picket line-

VALLE: Yes.

COPPESS: ...said that the CP was ousted from leadership eventually because they wanted to uh- they wanted to submerge the real strike issues to issues that they wanted to bring up themselves. Um- one of the things that occurred was there was a rally at Danceland Ballroom where Earl Brauder and a bunch of other big CP'ers came in and talked and that apparently made some strikers angry. But I was wondering if you

could think of any other way that the CP did that. 'Cause my impression always was was that Phil Raymond just was talking to the issues of the strike and was just acting as an organizer. But you may have a different slant on things.

LE: No, I think that you're correct in your conjecture there that Phil Raymond conducted himself on the issues of the strike more than uh- more than uh- any other thing ^h although politics there's no question is involved in the thing, the fact that Phil Raymond was a known member of the CP this high, prestigious place that he's holding would certainly have a lot of people looking up to the CP as uh- leaders of the strike and so forth and they were ac- naturally would gain sympathy or at least they uh- some type of eye from the non-political workers- well, here's a party that look like is representing us and so forth and so on. But Phil Raymond, like I indicated, seemed to be leading the strike as honestly as he could on the issues involved. It wasn't a question that he was trying to- well what uh- advantage would the CP have had except to try to settle this strike gaining as much economic concessions from the company as possible. They were not, at that time, class collaborators; they were having a policy of class

struggle and uh- the political line of the CP uh- ran directly in- with the needs of the workers to find out- to find a solution to the problems in the shop as much to the interest of the workers as possible. And it was always a contention that whenever workers won some concessions from the uh- companies, the companies on the other side would adversely be affected. It was a question here precisely of the class lines in this struggle and Phil Raymond I think acted in a manner that suited both the needs of the strikers by trying to settle the strike on the issues of the problems in the shop as well as uh- adapting himself to the political line of the CP.

COPPESS: Well what about, there were other CP'ers that took leading roles in the Briggs Strike too. There was a guy named John Mack, I don't think that's his real name- I think that's a party name. And a guy named Anthony Gurlack um- and others. Did they take a different line than Phil Raymond or do you remember?

VALLE: I didn't know these individuals.

COPPESS: They maybe weren't as prominent as he was.

VALLE: That's right. I didn't know these individuals. The press of uh- Detroit at that time just centered around mainly Phil Raymond and when they mentioned Phil Raymond that was supposed to be synonymous

to the strike committee and uh- there were no other names that I can recall although it's possible that they did mention these names that you indicated that I just don't recall them and I wouldn't say a word that I'm not sure that fits my experience.

C PPESS: Yeah. Also in one article in Proletarian News they mention that- that CP members on the picket line were pointing out members of the Proletarian Party and fingering them as reds. Do you remember anything like that happening?

VALLE: Well they weren't fingering them as reds that I know of because I don't think that uh- what they would have done is- what they would of done was do what they did with me. They would have been fingering them it would have been fingering them as strike breakers rather than as reds because uh- well it was just more in their political line I would judge. I would judge that the activity of those who grabbed me uh- whether it was instructed by the party-that is the CP - or whether it was an instinctive response that just came out of their generalized knowledge of what they should do from the teachings that they hear and the comments that they hear in the party meetings is something that I don't know but uh-I would judge that they would of reacted if they could like they did with myself. Just grabbin' you out of line. But if you were just walking in the line, I wouldn't

see how they would of had much sympathy by just sayin' this guy's a red or- because that didn't mean too much I don't believe.

COPPESS: Um- also in Proletarian News they mention that after the CP was taken out of leadership, at one point the strikers voted to not have Phil Raymond be the leader anymore. Um- that the Auto Worker's Union send its members back to work. This was in the April issue of Proletarian News. Do you remember if that's true or not. You know from / ^{your own} experience of the... ?

VALLE: No, I don't remember if that was true or not.

COPPESS: O.K.

VALLE: I don't remember.

COPPESS: O.K. Well, let's talk about the IWW a little bit. Um- there was a lot of IWW's around in the strike. For instance Frank Cedarbahl spoke at I think at the hall at Mack quite a bit. And John Anderson and Leon Pody and Lloyd Jones all from the Highland Park plant later became involved with the IWW. I don't know whether they ever joined -or not but um- followed it for a while. Do you remember personally coming in contact with any IWW activity?

VALLE: Well, I knew Cedarbahl. He was a very capable young man. He was a member, and if not the principle member, organizer of the IWW here in Detroit. They had a headquarters on Woodward Avenue, no more than a few blocks away from the headquarters of the Proletarian Party

which at that time was located on Woodward Avenue and Alexanderine. They were located just a block or so south towards the river and on the opposite side of the street. They had a beautiful headquarters upstairs and uh- I can recall also that we had a joint meeting of uh- Proletarian Party- of Proletarian Party members along with IWW guys where we had a sort of syposium on the question of um- of the strike where we talked things over. Phil- uh- Cedarbahl was a very articulate person, very capable speaker and uh the IWW at that time was making a few inroads in the labor movement because of their militant stand, because of the capable people that were around them, like Cedarbahl; they were gaining a few members and uh- they were making their position on the system known. Generally, that's about all I could say about the uh- IWW. They were involved you might say in a manner like the Proletarian Party was involved as a radical group. I would judge that in their stance they were attempting to do the same thing. Trying to gain a foothold within uh- within the labor movement to establish themselves as the best spokesman for the uh- radical left and build themselves up into a large industrial organization that was ultimately going to supplant the capitalist system by their system of industrial democracy. I would judge that that was their line and they attempted to do that

with the limited forces that they had just as the Proletarian Party with its very limited forces and talents tried to do the same thing along thieir political view point. We had debates back and forth between the Proletarian Party and the uh- IWW on political questions along theoreticallines which was the best way of gettin' it- bringin' about socialism. One time Cedarbahl debated uh- Stanley Novak who at that time was a member of the Proletarian Party. Later became a state Senator here in Detroit and- for Michigan rather under the democratic party. They debated the issue, I think at St. Andrew's hall and they had a very good crowd there. That was the nature of the times where debates of that nature drew rather large crowds in comparison to what you might get ten years ago or even maybe today. I don't know. But the IWW, these other persons that you name, I don't know if they were IWW. John Anderson uh- came from the IWW initially. I think that was the uh- his first contact with the uh- with the left. But uh- I don't recall that he, at that time, was here in Detroit or not. He was generally on the road doin' IW-some work for the IWW sometime in Cleveland or in Ohio somewhere but I don't recall him bein' and I didn't know him at that time anyway.

COPPESS: From what I can gather, the Socialist Party didn't- wasn't directly involved in the strike but they did a lot of relief work. Like they had a big rally in New York where they brought some people from the Mack Avenue plant anyway to speak. Um- and they had- there were a lot of attorneys that were doing legal defense work that were in the Socialist Party and Norman Thomas spoke once at Mack Avenue. Do you remember-

ALLE: No, I don't remember that, even though I was uh- my ears were tuned to the ground to this thing, uh- I don't recall that. I would judge that if Norman Thomas had spoken, I'm sorry that I missed it because I certainly would of gone and participated in that meeting. That is, to listen to what he had to say. But uh- I'm not saying here that he didn't because uh- there's a lot of things that went on during that strike, that uh- that probably found me active doing something else that was also germane to this strike or germane to the politics of the Proletarian Party that uh- where I just missed it.

OPPESS: Um- well, the IWW and the CP both claimed that the um- that it was attorneys from the Socialist Party that were active in- Industrial Organizationalist formed at the Mack Avenue plant called the American Industrialist Association. Do you remember that? I think it's

near the end of the strike.

VALLE: I don't recall that at all, no.

COPPESS: Oh, O.K.

VALLE: I read that on your thing and it didn't register anything to me at all.

COPPESS: Well it was really late in the strike. I think after the picket lines had died down and everything. Um- the only other party we haven't touched on is the Socialist Labor Party and the only thing I found that they did- well I found a newspaper reference to one of their members trying to speak at a meeting and not being allowed to speak. Do you remember if they did anything?

VALLE: No. No. No. I even forgot to mention the Socialist Labor Party. They've been in existence probably longer than any of the other groups. There's a Socialist Labor Party goes back, even prior, I think to the organization of the CP. It sprang naturally as you know from Daniel Delien and uh- they've had individuals- individual members in a number of cities and primarily the SLP always just came out with some type of leaflet. They never did have any type of um- of uh- participation in the struggles of the people for the simple reason that their political line uh- orientated them along

different- along a different course. They never did support, as I can recall, the organization of the UAW, CIO or any of the other unions because they themselves were interested only in building their own type of industrial unionism although Daniel Delien- and it was through this industrial union that they were going to establish industrial democracy. And I don't think uh- that their political line has changed even today.

OPPESS: No. Was- I found one reference in an oral history that I read to a meeting that one guy who was working on the- who was on the picket line's witness where the- all five of these groups were speaking. And he said that ^{if} they were five different rallies and that most of the time was spent up- was spent with the groups criticizing one another. Did a lot of that go on during the strike with groups aiming their remarks at another group rather than at the strikers?

WALLE: Well generally yes. This- I don't recall that particular instance that your talkin' about but if your askin' about did the uh- that these political groups snipe at each other in that manner? Yes. That was the nature of the political struggle at that time. Each one is attempting to proselytize his own political philosophy- his own political line and in a lot of the cases the line differed

so greatly that uh- you would spend your time not only telling about the good points about your own political philosophy but you would dissect the opponent's political philosophy to show how falacious it was. And uh- how impractical, how utopian or however their line uh- was at that time, depending upon whose political line you were debating against. If you're debating against the Socialist Party, for instance, who thought perhaps that you could come into power with the- through the ballot you'd speak about their utopianism. Or if you - on the other hand you were speaking' about debating against the SLP you were talkin' also of their utopian methods of coming into power through the large industrial unionism that they were attempting to build at uh- that the class struggle at that particular junction- it was completely ignoring and has done so even until this day, where they've never been able to construct any important unions to correspond to their theory. But uh- in this world we still have people who think this world is flat like you know even though we got pictures of the world. But that's uh- that type of sectarianism and stubbornness and doctrinaire attitude uh- well, that's up to them. If they want to remain along that line, that's their privilege.

PRESS:

I'm gonna flip the tape.

END OF SIDE 1.

SIDE 2 - Fred Valle by Jim Coppess.

COPPESS:

O.K. Um-let me see- where are we. Well, why don't you describe your role in the strike. What sort of activities you were engaged in, in supporting the strike.

VALLE:

Well my role was very limited. My role was just as a person who was interested in seein' the strike bein' settled in favor of the strikers, but I played no individual role other than what would be known as, what we used to call the Jimmy Higgins role at that time. The Jimmy Higgins role was a person who would uh- carry out physical activity. Mine was peddling leaflets, uh- to the strikers, trying to interject some type of class consciousness into them. I didn't work in the shop; I was a young man at that time. Probab- let's see- I was 2- 22 years old. My political uh- I had just become acquainted with politics other than the fact that uh- I was class conscious which I received from my home environment like I told ya. But I had no political theory behind it or political knowledge behind it. I was just class conscious from the point of view that I knew there were two classes that existed in society: one rich and one poor. And the rich lived off the poor and I didn't think that that was- that was fair and my father fought against it and if my father fought against it I can fight against

it too. In my own time I expanded my political knowledge about the class struggle and so forth, but my role in the strike was just that of Jimmy Higgins uh doin' the kind of work that was necessary to win a strike. I participated in no way in the leadership of the strike; I had no influence in the strike and my only connection was passing out leaflets and participating as a spectator in debates- things of this nature. Otherwise, my role was uh- was very inconspicuous you might say.

COPPESS:

Um- the Detroit Council of Labor Youth Groups, I think it was called it was a coalition of the Ipso and I think the Proletarian Youth League and the Junior Wobblies and people like that, went out and gathered money and food and things for relief. Did you have any part in that activity?

VALLE:

I can recall that organization and uh- the Proletarian Party and the Proletarian Youth League that was part of that particular group, we had a- in the Proletarian Party we had a Proletarian Youth League and uh- I was an officer in the Proletarian Youth League. And uh- yes we participated in that. (Interruption). Yeah- the Proletarian Youth League did belong to this particular council that you mentioned. Uh- I remember a few of the joint meetings that we had with all of these people. I think we were at Cass Tech. in the auditorium where

we generalized some type of program and we also had mass rallies concerning other phases of activity against fights against fascism- things of that nature. But um- in the PYL we had a division of work : It was uh- we had- we had quite a few members in the Proletarian Youth League who were more interested in the social aspect of their membership than they were in the political side- but that's- the social aspect is always a bait that you get a lot of people involved in political activity and you educate them along political lines- so there's nothing wrong with that. But uh- we had a division of work and the persons who were directly active in this group that you mentioned wasn't myself, I had to do other types of work and uh- while we did receive reports that the meeting concerning the uh- the activity along this united front or whatever it was- I just don't recall any of the particulars about it. It's just too long .

COPESS: Did you picket a lot? I noticed in one of the um- in an article in Proletarian News, uh it says that the Proletarian Party went to the strike committee and asked if they wanted support and the strike committee said O.K. Yeah, We need your support. And from- the article says that from that time on there were always party members on the picket line. Did you picket?

VALLE: Yes. That that was- this is part of the Jimmy Higgins work that I might say. You see uh- but this doesn't- doesn't put you into any leadership-

COPPESS: No.

VALLE: ...category. Yes. members of the Proletarian Party were encouraged to go into the picket line and talk. That's uh- after all, a strike is one of the forms of class struggle and if you're going to be serious about building the party, you go in there and you not only picket but you talk issues. First of all, you want to assure the picket that it's proper to be here on strike and picketing for the conditions in the shop. You ferret out their opinions and then from there uh- different types of discussion comes up and sometimes it's political- then you get a chance to talk your political line and advance the political inference- uh- influence of the party if not its membership. Certainly that was part of the uh- plan and uh- it's two-fold. You not only help the workers in the workers in the picket line- you help them in their struggle to win their just demands from the company but at the same time you're uh- giving political education to the masses of the people who are here engaged in a struggle and you're helping them to understand the nature of their struggle. And uh- yes- we picketed and that was part of the policy. Perhaps not only of the

Proletarian Party but I would judge of the other groups who were serious about their political philosophy.

OPPESS: What plant- Were you active at one particular plant or did you just travel around?

ALLE: No, I was just mostly active in the Mack Avenue plant because I just happened to live nearby at that - at that shop. It was easier for me to participate in that particular plant at Mack Avenue which was located right by the headquarters- that was the bigger of the plants and uh- that's where my activity was involved. I picketed almost every day, you might say and uh- passed out leaflets on two occasions where we had this leaflet with the .49 and this other leaflet that I got caught distributing and uh - indicated the experience that I had on that. But otherwise, from that just uh- participating in the uh- picket line and that was the uh- extent of my particular participation. I wasn't uh- political enough to offer any larger contribution from the point of view of leadership or anything else because I wasn't involved in the shop in the first place and it would have been a little bit dreaming to think that you could participate in the shop committee or the strike committee without bein' a member of the uh- working force. I would judge that all of the members of the strike

committee were a part of it except maybe the top were uh- like Raymond himself. I didn't know whether he was a Briggs employee or not. But it isn't important that that- that all of 'em has to be. Sometimes the leadership springs from a number of sources. In fact the leaders of the UAW now- none of 'em work in the shop and haven't been in a shop for long damn time. And there's a consequence. They've lost complete touch with the workers and have rubbed so many elbow^s with the bosses that I think that its affected their entire outlook as far as the workers are concerned. They have become what I call- uh Daniel Delien's favorite phrase in mentioning these people- labor lieutenants of the capitalist class and uh- starting from Woodcock down all the way down. In my opinion that's what they are.

COPPESS:

Um- could- do you remember how the strike was organized at the plant you were^{re}active. How picket lines were set up and things like that? Just sort of nuts and bolts type things.

VALLE:

Well, it seemed to me that it happened once the workers were on strike that between all of the forces of the uh- political left that they were able to put a pretty big picket line almost immediately. I don't recall that the picket line starte^d out with something scrangy and then developed again to something

that was big. It seemed to me that from the very first time that somebody hollered strike and that the workers came out into the street, that uh- that there was a large picket line. The CP was uh- rather a large political organization and I would judge that uh- they were uh-poised you might say for the word to get out and that- for their membership to get out there and uh- create a picket line if it was necessary, but I would judge also that the conditions in the shop made the workers very receptive to the strike. It wasn't something that uh- that was difficult for the workers to do. They had nothing- they had nothing to gain as you can see from this check that we had for 49¢ . I would judge that if that was a norm-checks of this nature-that they would have welcomed bein' - walkin' the picket line for all the time because most of the time they didn't get paid for goin' to work anyway. No I would say that uh- the strike, right from the beginning from the point of view of the workers involved, was popular, was supported by the workers in the shop, and uh- from the point of view of having any attempts of strike breaking from people walkin' through the picket lines and goin' to work to give you the adverse side of the coin, there was no such activity as that. Not that I can

recall at all.

COPPESS: Um- the picket line you were on at Mack Avenue, from what I understand, a guy named Robert Daryl was the picket captain. Do you remember him?

VALLE: I don't remember him, no.

COPPESS: Um- well did you- would you ha- when you would show up at the picket line were picket lines organized in a particular way? For example, I read in some newspapers that the picket line at Mack Avenue- they wanted all the pickets on the plant side of Mack Avenue to be wearing Briggs badges and the people that were'nt to picket on the opposite side. Do you remember anything like that? That sort of picket organization?

VALLE: No. I don't remember two sets of pickets, in other words.

COPPESS: Well, Yeah. The unemployed were picketing on one- this is at least in the beginning of the strike.

VALLE: No I don't remember anything of that nature. Nor do I remember that you had to wear any particular badges. Perhaps- the people who worked at Briggs had their badges yet and wore them but to indicate that they were members of- actual working members. But there were no uh- double picket line so to speak that I can remember because I peddled leaflets down there and I don't remember goin'-

workin' both sides of the street like uh- like the prostitute in Venice you know.

COPPESS: Um-did you go to any of the strike meetings? From what I understand they had- they often had meetings at the hall on Mack Avenue, Did you go to any of those?

VALLE: That hall in Mack Avenue was very small from the point of view of having strike meetings there. It was in a basement and there were only two halls in it. One was probably no bigger^t than if you were to tear the walls down of this house and the strike committee room was probably maybe just as big as this one room here. So to have meetings, that is open meeting that the public was uh- at that particiular place was not practical.

COPPESS: Is this Fairview Gardens you're talking about?

VALLE: No. No. I'm not talkin' about Fairview Gardens, I know Fairview Gardens where they got that rolling rink there now. No, that wasn't that - the strike- the strike headquarters was located uh- just opposite of the Mack plant on Mack Avenue and if anything it would have been a beer garden up on the top and down the basement is where uh- was where they had their headquarters.

COPPESS: Well, I found references to um- their being frequent meetings at Fairview Gardens.

ALLE: That's very possible. But I don't remember having attended one of those meetings. If uh- if they had meetings, Fairview Gardens would of been an ideal place to have it. It was a large hall up there where they got that skating rink, but I don't remember attending any meetings at that uh- at that point. You have to understand that uh- that while I was active doing my Jimmy Higgins work uh- I also had to work to make a living. And that probably during the day when they had these meetings I might of been workin' as a barber in my own particular place.

ALP: Um- We already talked about some of the activity of the Proletarian Party in the strike, the leaflets you passed out and just some of the support work that you did. And also I found a reference to a benefit that was held during your office for the strike. In one of the issues of Industrial Worker they refer to- it's in late March- they refer to people from the Proletarian Party making speeches during that week to the strikers. Do you recall? members from the Proletarian Party doing that sort of thing?

ALLE: Well, it all depends on what you mean by makin' speeches to them. Now, I'm damn sure that the Proletarian Party conducted forums at Northern High School all the time. And this is the way I got in contact with the Proletarian Party was through their forums at

Northern High School. Later on, we weren't able to use Northern High School as a forum place, but we had a headquarters that would hold, that held at least a couple a hundred members uh- people at forums and I would judge that we did have forums explaining the issues of the Mack Avenue strike. It certainly would have been remiss on our part if we didn't do that. We probably passed out some other leaflets, announcing a Proletarian Party forum in which uh- certain speakers, either Al Renner or any of the other prominent speakers that we had uh- that were known here in Detroit as the principle speaker in which they were going to explain the central issues of the strike and uh- encourage the strikers on and ask people to participate in the strike and to raise money for the strikers. All of these things were part and parcel of the Proletarian Party activity. Uh- I don't remember any particular forum that we had on that case, but we had a lot of forum, but I would judge that we did. But in absence of any spectacular event that did not occur at those forums in which they just ran in a normal manner uh- there's nothing there to remind me of a particular forum. But, yes, we had forums and I'm sure that we must have had forums uh- explaining and trying to

get as many of the strikers at the Proletarian Party headquarters to let them become familiar with our headquarters and our position as possible because that's the nature of a political party if they're serious about their business.

OPPESS:

But you don't recall any speeches on the picket line or anything like that.

VALLE:

On the- No. there were no- I don't remember any type of Hyde Park speeches on the picket line. I would judge that the strike committee would have frowned upon attempting to hold radical meetings on the fringes of their picket line in that manner and uh- the way I can recall it, the Proletarian Party uh- never attempted to do any of this kind of stuff. We used to have speeches alright, in the summertime at various parts on a regular scheduled basis in which we uh- expounded our socialist philosophies, but that was in the summertime. This strike as I recall was in the wintertime. It was cold. And like I indicated, I think the strike committee would have frowned upon political groups. And I think they would have been correct in their opposition to this type of activity of trying to interject open communist influence on the picket line as they're struggling in the- against the Briggs. I think they would of been correct to ask the

workers, ' now, look, if you want to have some parties or speeches, have 'em down at your headquarters and in that case that's your business. But over here on the picket line, what we're trying to do is we're trying to win a struggle against Briggs for specific needs. We're not trying to uh- create a revolution'. I think they would of been correct to ask the workers who were doin' that to leave, That is those political speeches. But I don't recall any political tendency. Whether it was the IWW and the PP- I'm pretty sure the PP didn't do it. But I don't recall any political tendencies attempting to uh- get people out of the picket line or stop them from moving to listen to any speeches.

COPPESS: Did the Proletarian Party do any other sort of support work than what we've talked about that you remember?

VALLEE: Well, it's very possible that they uh- had a social or two to raise money for the strikers. It's very possible. I don't remember any specifics of that but if they had done it, it wouldn't have been adverse to their method of thinking.

COPPESS: Um- well, you mentioned that you had regular meetings and educational. Were you able to recruit any of the Briggs strikers to uh- these people that you won to the Proletarian Party as a result of the strike- stayed on afterwards?

That might be pretty hard to remember.

VALLE: No. I can answer that question. As a member of the Proletarian Party, we didn't gain very much- we didn't gain very much at that uh- from the strikers themselves. That is they- those who were non- political. And in fact it was around that time, where we were having conventions where there was an actual split in the Proletarian Party and our forces were actually cut in half. So if uh-if one member or two members might of come into the party from the Briggs strike, I didn't know that we recruited anybody from the particular strike. And I don't know, whether or not, I think that perhaps the IWW might of scored better than we did on that.

OPPESS: There was a group called the Unemployed Citizens League that was active and I think they were expecially active at Mack recruiting unemployed to help picket. Were you involved in that or were you aware of that group?

VALLE: I was involved in one uh-unemployed group at that time, yes. I think that the organizer of that particular group was Amil Masey. We used to have a small office on Van Dyke and uh- around the Berl's intermediate school. I'm not sure of the name of the street. The name of the street that comes into my mind is Nodell. But I'm not sure whether that's factual or not. But it was within the vicinity of

the Burl's Intermediate School between Georgia and Grinell. Amil Masey was very active and in fact probably the organizer of that. And uh- I was a little bit active in that but uh- ,not bein^g unemployed myself, like I said I had a job and I had to work in order to sustain myself and whenever I found time I became active in any particular group where I could offer some assistance and uh-and I would judge that uh- if Amil had anything at all in this, I don't know whether his was the unemployed citizen's group or not- there were two different types of uh-

OPPESS: His was that. Yeah.

VALLE: His was that?

OPPESS: Yeah.

VALLE: Alright. Then, I'm sure that Amil certainly must have solicited from that Unemployed Citizen's League all the assistance that he could in order to buffer up the picket lines as part of their struggle also. I'm pretty sure that he must of done this. But uh- I don't recall any specific instances where that was done. But that also was the nature of the Unemployed Citizen's League that whenever they could assist in any way, not only to better themselves by getting something from the powers that be, but of helping the other forces of the working class. Because these- the Citizen's Leagues and all of these were organized primarily by class conscious groups. The SB, I think had a pretty big hand in this through uh-, I think

through the Reuther brothers if I can recall. Walter Reuther and Victor I think were also heading some unemployed group on the west side. So I think the SB was uh- had their hands pretty full in unemployed organizations and uh- it was all part of this left philosophy to integrate the struggle of the unemployed with the employed if they had struggles with their particular company. So I would judge, yes, the Unemployed Leagues did what they could but their funds were absolutely depleted all the time. They were unemployed themselves and whenever they- whenever one of us had a quarter in our pocket that was something big.

OPPESS: Was this unemployed league that you're talking about on Van Dyke by the Burl School connected with- was one particular group especially active in it or-

ALLE: No. No. It was organized I think primarily by Amil Masey and at that particular juncture I don't think that Amil Masey was connected in any way with political grouping.

OPPESS: So it was just simply an independent enclave.

VALLE: That's right. That's right.

OPPESS: Well that's interesting 'cause I didn't know that before. Um- I' on a lot of the accounts I've read especially at the Highland Park plant but: also some at the Mack plant indicated that some strikers would

point out people who were agitating on the picket line, you know from various political groups: the IWW, the CP are the ones that I've seen mentioned. And asked the police to remove them from the picket line. Do you remember anything like that happening?

VALLE: I don't remember anything like that happening . It didn't happen when I was particularly around, but I can't see why it would not of happened from the point of view that I'm sure that uh- there were forces in the struggle that would of been interested in trying to stigmatize the movement as being strictly radical and red. It emanated from the public press for instance and then there were political grouplets organized uh- in Detroit at that time. I think that the Ku Klux Klan had a large organization at that time. They used to hold meetings in uh- vacant lots just outside the city of Detroit and they had a large attendance. Then there was, if I recall, a black legion that was organized and had a few members to it. And uh- this black legion they probably got in there much in the manner that you might say that uh- this individual who was the head of a breakthrough right now-

COPPESS: Lobsinger?

VALLE: Lobsinger would uh- interject himself and did interject himself in- at the anti-war demonstrations that we had here in Detroit. He

would have a number of his followers with flags on the opposite side of the street hollering out 'traders' and whatever it is that they holler out. At that time you also had this uh- type of right wing radicalism or counter-revolutionary activity about and uh- between the Black Legion and the Klu Klux Klan and a few others that might of been organized it's not impossible to think that they didn't try to interpose their type of reasoning in the picket line by doing exactly what you're mentioning. But my personal experience- I didn't see it and uh- that's what you're interested in. I didn't see it. Uh- the only one that I saw was the one where I was involved in.

COPPESS: Were the strikers then generally friendly to uh- radical groups coming in and supporting the strike?

VALLE: There seemed to have been no problem with them. From what I recall, I walked that picket line on a number of occasions on the Mack Avenue plant and uh- I talked politics with a number of workers and there was no dissension from the picket line. They were interested, I think, in winning their battle from Brigg's and the picket line was the uh- their bastion, you might say- their barricades. And they were busy on their barricades doin' their thing to win their battle against the company and if it was, I would judge from thier point of view if it wasn't necessary to receive the assistance

of the left wing groups why they weren't going to bring that into question. And they didn't as far as I know. There may have been those who would of hoped, in preference to the left wing groups, that perhaps the American Legion would of come up there with their flags to build up their picket lines and to help them in their struggle against the bosses, but uh- in that case, again maybe they learned a political lesson that uh- if you're gonna depend upon someone leading your strike or assisting in your strike you gotta depend upon more on the left rather than the organized uh- right wing organizations that are actually sponsored by your class enemy.

COPPESS:

Do you remember there being much violence on the picket line?

I know a couple of times there were arrests made and one particular instance some street cars were attacked by the Mack Avenue plant. Were you around during any of that?

ALLE:

I wasn't around. I can- I think I- that was printed in some of the papers in uh- the papers exaggerated much of the uh- I remember talkin' to some of the guys about what happened but I wasn't there when it happened and from what I gathered the papers exaggerated quite a bit about the uh- about that type of activity. Whenever there was a little skirmish, the papers, in order to discredit not only the left who was participating in there but to di^Scredit the uh- the strike

itself as bein' inspired by the left and having no justifiable cause to exist, naturally they take the side of the bosses all the time and the slightest provocation, they see it with a magnifying glass in order to divert and to win the opinions of the general population against the strikers. But uh- there wasn't much of that and if there was, I didn't see any and if it was, like I'm sayin' I'm sure that it was exaggerated by the capitalist press playin' upon them in order to discredit the manner in which the strike was bein' led and by even the basis for which the strike was bein' held in the first place. Probably not justifying it that the workers should be content to go in there and work for two weeks and receive checks for .49. After all their philosophy is don't bite the hand that feeds you, you know.

COPPESS: Yeah. Do you remember what role the Detroit police played at the Mack Avenue plant?

ALLE: Well, they were there all the time, the way I can remember. But most of the times that I was there, and I walked the picket line a lot, there were no skirmishes and therefore the police just uh- just stayed at a certain distance in order to act as a uh- container for the uh- the way the pickets were walking around. If they didnt want you to go over a certain area then they had

two and three cops stationed there and then naturally as the pickets got there they made their turn at that particular juncture. Outside of that I don't recall any heads having been busted by police clubs. Uh- not meaning to say that maybe their clubs weren't ready to break some heads under certain circumstances because that's what they're there for. I participated in strikes where that did occur but I don't remember nor any of that happening.

Q PPESS: Do you remember if there was any racial division among the workers?

I read in a leaflet put out by the Young Communist League that some people were trying to recruit blacks to be strike breakers on the east side and also in some of the incidents that the papers reported um- people that were attacked who were strike breakers, were blacks. Do you remember if the company tried to use racial divisions to recruit strike breakers or not?

A WALLE: Well, I don't remember but I can generalize that when the struggle is going on between antagonistic forces that each force uses the weapons that comes most naturally to themselves. A division of race hatred and racism is something that works always in the favor of the bosses. They have always used this particular type of activity in order to divide the workers and have them fighting amongst themselves rather than uniting and fighting their principle enemy.

While I don't recall what you're sayin' I would say that the capitalist and the bosses would of been remiss in their own duties if they had not employed this type of activity uh- during the Ford strike, for instance or during the time that they were trying to organize Ford's into the UAW uh- there was quite a bit of that type of activity where they tried to get the blacks from the South to come down there and acting as strike breakers and that was one of the big problems actually that existed during that particular strike and it was necessary in order to come out in the open to defeat that policy of the bosses of interjecting blacks to be strike breakers and by this time there were enough blacks into the movement and in Detroit to have generalized that they were'nt going to be used as strike breakers anymore for the simple reason that at that juncture all of the other plants were already organized and this could of been also an - a fact that influenced your decisions of whether it's condusive to act as strike breakers or to uh- or to say that now is the time to actually join them because the rest of the shops are already organized and so the efforts of the Ford to utilize this black issue failed. Now I'm sure that the- that it's possible that the Brigg's - and during the Brigg's strike they

did try to employ this strategy but it didn't work and I don't recall- I don't recall any blacks attempting to go through the picket lines by my personal experience and I don't recall uh- any of the left organizations like ourselves and the Wobblies raising that as an immediate problem. Therefore I would say that if it was introduced it was a seed that died uh- even before it came into bloom.

COPPESS: Um- what do you think the significance of the strike was as far as organizing the automobile industry. A lot of people that- it later became active, you know in uh- organizing the UAW- both people that later became official leaders and also people that just were, you know rank and file organizers were somewhat involved in this strike. Do you think the strike was at all important in teaching people lessons or getting people involved or things?

VALLE: Well, from ~~that~~ point of view, yes. Uh-every struggle has a tendency of educating certain people along certain tactical lines. It uh- just as a boxer has to box every day in order to uh- to become a proficient boxer, uh- with all proportions safely guarded- just as the revolution of Russia of 1905 was a preparatory political event that prepared the Bolsheviki Party for its seizure of power in 1917- all of these things that occur, even the smallest, that creates some education value, that educates certain leaders, these certain leaders can draw upon the experience of - experiences generated, to future

while uh- I would say that the 1933 strike there had some uh- educational effects on everybody. How to lead a strike; how to prepare a strike; the things that are necessary to uh- if your strikers are on strike, how you gotta prepare to feed them or how you gotta prepare to generate enthusiasm in a strike; how to prepare to fight for any efforts on the part of the bosses to create racial divisions; how to prepare picket lines; how to prepare picket captains who are responsible for certain segments of the picket line; how to prepare public relations. All of these things uh- come from experience. If the UAW was able to act in the manner that they did in their uh- subsequent struggles of sit downs and so forth it was all an accumulation. An accumulation of the past struggles. You just don't get up and in one fell sweep uh- generate all of the knowledge that you have about strikes. You start out from uh- crawling and you end up. Yes, I would say that the 1933 strike had some importance in educating a number of leaders even if it's uh- in a real small proportion. But nevertheless, it's part of the the accumulation of experience that most of the left wingers, at least who still remained within the folds of the left wing because they are the principle ones incidentally that uh- were the principle leaders in the organization of the UAW outsi- if you

were to have uh- taken away this left wing leadership; the CP , the SB uh- some of the Trotskyist from the organization of the UAW as it exists today it's very possible and there's no question about that it would have eventually have come into being anyway but it may not have come into being at that particular juncture because of the lack of expertise that was needed . And this expertise and experience is obtained from minor efforts like uh- like the Brigg's strike. That was probably only one of the uh-many of the strikes that went on on a nation-wide basis because these left wingers not only gathered experience form the Brigg's strike ubt reading their one periodicals they gathered the experiences of the strikes that have occurred in Paterson, New Jersey all the way down to New York and San Francisco. They read about these strikes and as a consequence they elevated their understanding. It made this understanding to be used in future strikes in the organization of the UAW.

END OF TAPE.