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THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

MAIDA SPRINGER KEMP

International Ladies Garment Workers Union

by

Elizabeth Balanoff

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

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VITAE

MAIDA SPRINGER KEMP

Maida Springer Kemp was born in Panama on May 12, 1910 but moved to the United States in 1916. Kemp's mother, a licensed beautician, became involved in the Garvey Movement and the United Negro Improvement Association. As a young girl, Kemp was influenced by the black activists and intellectuals who frequented her home.

Kemp began working in the garment industry in her middle teens and in 1932 she joined the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). During the general strike of 1933, Kemp served on the strike committee and was immediately recognized as an activist for her organizing and educational work. In 1942, Kemp received her first union job as education director of the Plastic Button and Novelty Workers' Union, Local 132. In this position, she initiated weekend workshops and a local newsletter.

Three years later, Kemp was selected by the AF of L to represent the American Labor Movement in Europe in a government office of war information. Later, after arranging a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission rally, Kemp was switched to the complaint department of the dressmakers' union. In 1947, she became Business Agent, becoming the first black to hold that position.

Kemp's international activities are many and varied. In 1951, she received a scholarship from the American Scandinavian Foundation to study workers' education in Sweden and Denmark. She was an AFL delegate to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU) seminar and conferences in Africa. During 1956-57, Ms. Kemp worked in Tanzania to establish an AFL/CIO trade union scholarship program in Africa.

Kemp's work in Africa has been extensive. As a member of the AFL/CIO Department of International Affairs, she served as a facilitator of AFL/CIO efforts to aid African trade unionists particularly with the development of the ACFTU labor school established in Uganda. Kemp secured the support of President George Meany of the AFL/CIO and David Dubinsky of the ILGWU to develop in 1961 an industrial and trade union training program for Africans in the needle trades and related industries.

Ms. Kemp is a life member of the NAACP, and a supporter of NOW and CLUW. She attended the Mexico City meetings for International Women's Year as Vice President of the National Council of Negro Women.

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by

Betty Balanoff

Chicago, Illinois

INTERVIEWER: It is January 4, 1977. I'd really like to begin with your childhood, if you could tell me where you were born, and when you were born, and what your early family life was like.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well I was born in the Republic of Panama. I am a Panamanian by birth. I'm a naturalized citizen. We came to the United States when I was about six and a half or seven years old. I began school. The first school I ever went to was in the United States. But I could read and write when I came here. I had had some tutoring at home for I had to learn English, and I spoke English and read English and could write at a seven year old child's level. By American standards, I was far ahead of the seven year olds in the school system here.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you were an only child.

SPRINGER KEMP: No. My sister died when she was a few years old so that while I had a sister who died at age three, and I was four and a half then, I was an only child.

INTERVIEWER: You were the first.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, I was the oldest child.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do in Panama?

SPRINGER KEMP: My father came through the isthmus to work on the canal. And worked as a foreman, because this was a man who was extremely literate and had schooling in England and, as a matter of fact, I'm named for Maida Vale in London.

INTERVIEWER: You are?

SPRINGER KEMP: He liked that name and said that if he ever had a child, he would name her Maida.

INTERVIEWER: So he came from the United States.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: He came from England.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, he came from the West Indies.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, he came from the West Indies.

SPRINGER KEMP: And had some schooling in England, and he was the older brother and he did not finish. Then with all of the arrogance of some West Indians, he came on to Panama, with this sense of superiority of training and language. He married my mother. We are Panamanians three generations, so that, you know, people say, you know, you are a Latina. But I lost the language, and I don't speak Spanish well, and I regret that when I was a child, I just wouldn't speak Spanish, because in a new country you wanted to be what you were here. And in the United States, people looked down their noses at foreigners, and my God, a black foreigner to boot. A teacher in a geography class said in my first few months in the United States that the people from Central America were cannibals. They wore rings in their nostrils; they wore gold bracelets and gold earrings and gold bangles and the only thing I was missing, as she described it, was gold rings in my nostrils. As children are cruel to one another, so I began to receive cruel experiences in school.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live?

SPRINGER KEMP: We lived in New York.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in a community of people from Latin America or a black community?

SPRINGER KEMP: You know, we are a very mixed bag. Like the West Indians, you find people who spoke Spanish, and in this mixed community the southerner who has just come into the United States to work, come in to New York to work on all of the wartime things, this is post World War I. So that this is the mixture. We were all strangers. The black American, the black foreigner, and we did not like one another, and the white foreigner liked us less, and the white American hated all of us.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds dismal.

SPRINGER KEMP: But you learned, you know. But it wasn't vicious, really. It

SPRINGER KEMP: was a difference. And the kids would fight and they would call you names, but I just did not feel the sense of ugliness that I seem to see in the current young society today. We weren't as sophisticated, and we fought about our differences, but we weren't very ugly about them.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do in the United States?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, my parents had separated by that time.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. You stayed with your mother?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, your father didn't even come here?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, he came after we left the country, but that's another matter.

INTERVIEWER: All right, it's you and your mother, now.

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did the two of you live alone, or did you live with another family?

SPRINGER KEMP: Originally, we shared an apartment with a family, and then we struck out on our own.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been very difficult, to raise a child alone for a woman in those days.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, it was. But you know, by the time I was ten years old, my mother knew her way around, and it still was this kind of close community of people who came from somewhere or other and who were supportive of one another. It was a very close sort of an extended family relationship.

INTERVIEWER: Did she speak English as well as you?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: She was quite literate, too?

SPRINGER KEMP: She was bilingual. She was a very intelligent woman. Not in terms of a lot of book learning, but she was one of the smartest, quick witted women I have every known. Even in her eighties, she could out-think you; you had to keep running fast so that she wouldn't pull one by you. Very bright. Very bright. Very vivacious. A very, very interesting woman.

INTERVIEWER: The two of you must have been quite close.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, because she was a very young mother and she always stayed young. I always was old.

INTERVIEWER: You were always old?

SPRINGER KEMP: Always. Always old. But she was always young and we laughed years later. Young people would take her to do things in Africa and other places, always take her to do things, but I had been living there and working there for years and I never knew these places existed. She just attracted people.

INTERVIEWER: Did she go into the garment industry to work?

SPRINGER KEMP: No.

INTERVIEWER: She didn't?

SPRINGER KEMP: No. She did all sorts of odd jobs. She learned how to be a chef in the United States. Some of the stories early on about not knowing anything about American food and going in with all of the paraphenalia, you know, and, and have them drop chicken livers en brochette, and she held her head and she said what sort of things do these people eat? And you know, oysters a la somerset and this and that. But, as I say, she was very quick. Then she eventually trained as a beautician and for most of my life, my early life, she owned her own shop and was a beautician. Later, my son and I fought her to retire from the business, when the neighborhood got dangerous, when the dope business really began to flourish. We tried to stop her.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what were the major influences on your life when you were young? I suppose the school was one. What about church, or community organizations?

SPRINGER KEMP: Community organizations. The black church in the United States was a great learning process for me. The church in the United States was the cultural center because black Americans could not really show their talents in the theater, in the dance, in much of the cultural development in this country. They were shut out, unless for the few who wrangled their way through it. Shackled. So that you had the great talent in the United States performing in the churches. And you listened to Paul Robeson and you listened to Marian Anderson and you listened to Du Bois, or you know, just go the whole range. And the Negro schools.

INTERVIEWER: Was the school you went to a black school?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no. The public schools in New York City, that was something else. But I went to a black boarding school.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

SPRINGER KEMP: In New Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: At what age did you do that?

SPRINGER KEMP: I guess I was eleven. But the first year I went, attended a boarding school, and they sent me home because my mother had put my age up, and when they asked me appropriate questions I didn't know what they were talking about and so they knew I wasn't thirteen. I was tall. At age eleven, I was just as tall as I am now. And for that age, it was quite tall. But so that these, the role models of men and women of intellect and men and women who talked about what a social system should be. Some of the great influences on my life, for example, A. Philip Randolph.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you come under his sphere of influence?

SPRINGER KEMP: I guess about 1933. Later in the thirties, directly under his influence, because the Pullman porters were waging their struggle and when they did get that contract, I was then a young, married woman, and with my small child marched in that parade to celebrate the victory -- a union contract for Pullman porters.

INTERVIEWER: Did you?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. For the victory of the Pullman agreement. The Pullman Company had capitulated, and this was one man who could not be bought. So that for all of my adult life, he has been one of my role models. That is a picture of Mr. Randolph just behind you.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes.

SPRINGER KEMP: Last year, when he came into Chicago, DePaul University gave him a Doctorate. They called me as to how to reach him and I said, you call the New York office of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. After the ceremony, he came to our home and sat and reminisced with my husband, and talked about the March on Washington and some of the plans. My husband was just out of law school then, and was a young policeman -- one of those in plain clothes -- who was sent to observe and report the meetings. He and Mr. Randolph became good friends as a result of that encounter, and their friendship deepened later when Jim became a labor representative. Milton Webster, the Chicago-based first vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, helped to make this relationship firm as he had followed my husband's career.

You ask about influences. Randolph was a great influence on my life. The other, in terms of identity, was the Garvey movement. We came to the United States at the point that Garvey was really at the top of the mark. And my mother, of course,

SPRINGER KEMP: immediately joined the Universal Negro Improvement Association. I listened to men and women of the day passionately speaking, speaking a language that most black Americans were not speaking. These were passionate men and women, envisioned Americans, West Indians, and a few Latins, and they were talking about a society in which men and women, regardless of color or race, should share. And there should be a caring, and then you began the challenges: don't buy where you can't work, develop your own industry, develop your own initiative in the community, own buildings. We were one of the early stockholders in the Terry Holding Association, which was a building society. These were early influences. My mother marched as a Black Cross Nurse in the Garvey movement, and she had this child by the hand and I went to the meetings because there were no baby sitters. We were not sophisticated enough for that in those days. So wherever she went, I went. And so I listened to all of this. In our home, people from our part of the world, from the Caribbean Islands -- many of them congregated in our house. My mother's a marvelous cook and a joyous woman, so there was always a coterie of people and there was singing and there was talking, and beyond that, a realization of a role we had to play in this society.

INTERVIEWER: As you said, you never had an identity problem.

SPRINGER KEMP: No. It didn't matter whether on Monday morning you were scrubbing floors or doing base work or whether you were a porter some place or whether you were doing the most menial job. This was all the society would permit to be open to you. All of the doctors and lawyers, in that early period, were people who worked at menial jobs, and worked on the shifts in order to continue their studies. And it was only a very small percentage of black Americans whose families could support a fine education and the society did not have the social instruments they have today.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, well, that was good. Now what about this boarding school? This was, as you say, a black boarding school?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was it for boys and girls both?

SPRINGER KEMP: Boys and girls.

INTERVIEWER: Was it religiously connected, or was it . . . ?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, almost all Negro schools are religiously connected.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. How long did you go?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, there I put in four years. Four year, yes. If the name Lester Granger means anything to you....

INTERVIEWER: Of course it does.

SPRINGER KEMP: Lester Granger became a lifelong friend. He was the Commandant of this boarding school. His wife, Harriet, had an important post in this school. They had football and tennis and all of these things. And it was an industrial school; it wasn't a hoyty toyty school -- it was an industrial school. But they attempted to set a standard. They gave you the best that they could offer. The teachers were excellent men and women who had had very superior education. My history professor was a Harvard graduate. His father had been the janitor at Harvard.

INTERVIEWER: My goodness.

SPRINGER KEMP: And my learning . . . . seeing him stand there and talk about the ex post facto law. You know, these were great awakenings. You know, to see Paul Robeson standing on the platform in our Assembly at the school. He was then at Rutgers. And he was great. I think he was a three or four letter man in sports. These were the images I had. Dr. DuBois talking over our heads because he was always the elegant aristocrat and giving you a world view.

INTERVIEWER: You had quite an education.

SPRINGER KEMP: All right. This was my exposure. Yes, this was an industrial, a black industrial school. One of the professors there was William H. Hastie, later Judge Hastie, for a very brief time. He taught me science.

INTERVIEWER: He did?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. So that here you had compressed, in a school that would not be considered a quality school today, the best of the intellect. In the high school.

INTERVIEWER: Now where did you go after that?

SPRINGER KEMP: Back to New York.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you went all the way through high school.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any one particular teacher that was particularly helpful to you or that influenced you or was it just the whole milieu?

SPRINGER KEMP: Three influenced me. A teacher, Frances Grant, Professor Williams, and the third name escapes me. Miss Grant taught English Literature. It went beyond anything that you could ever hope for in, you know, the student-teacher relationship. They lived on campus.

SPRINGER KEMP: Every year Miss Grant spent the summer in Europe and every September she came back and opened a whole new world. Poetry had meaning. Medieval architecture had meaning. Rome, Switzerland, Africa -- all had meaning. I never pretended I was very great at history but I stayed in the top ten in my classwork in Professor Williams' class because he made history an alive and moving thing. The Civil War, its content, the laws that developed before and after. All of the black men who were in government in the Reconstruction, then when America went backward.

INTERVIEWER: You could never have learned that in a public school.

SPRINGER KEMP: Of course not. So that they, they, they crammed a great deal in a little, a short time. Then I came back and started . . . I guess I have been to a hundred schools. I've never graduated from any of them. Because in the meantime I got married and then I, so that I've spent a little time at the University of Ottawa, and I've been to Ruskin College at Oxford, England and all over the country. I've always tried to seek to find out more things because I always thought, oh my lord, there's so little I know. Then, of course, we had the trade union training things, like one had to go through something called the officers qualification course in the ILGWU and this was nine months.

INTERVIEWER: Let's backtrack a little bit and tell me how you got into the ILG in the first place.

SPRINGER KEMP: Depression. I'm a young married woman now.

INTERVIEWER: Did you marry right after school?

SPRINGER KEMP: It was a couple of years.

INTERVIEWER: You worked a little bit between, or not?

SPRINGER KEMP: I, yes. I had forgotten, I did work and, as I told you, my mother had a love for the work of beauty culture and I hated it, but for three summers I had to take or two summers, I've forgotten what it took -- but I became . . . I am a licenced beautician. And I have never earned three cents because I hated it so. However, I graduated from the Malone School of Beauty Culture, and this was one of the big ones, Poro College. And Mrs. Malone took a fancy to me and wanted to move me into the administration, so that I was employed on the staff of Poro College in New York City as a receptionist. I worked at that and I worked at other little odd jobs but that was the most concentrated employment that I had. I've worked in factories. When I was going to school, I worked in a garment factory and they fired me, and I think the man wanted to kill me.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the machine, you know, that cut those zagged edges, jagged edges on the garment. I'd never seen a pinking machine in my life, but one of my friends said well, you're tall and you know, you look like you're sixteen, and tell them you're a pinker. I'd never seen a pinking machine, but they used hand pinkers in those days, but I looked at it quick. And he said you turn this handle and you....I did that, but what I did was the fold of the garment. I pinked all of those, cut those open instead of the sides.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. You were fired immediately?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, he wanted to throw me out the window, but his wife was a very generous woman. She said, "This girl has nerve, and let's keep her." And so, he fired me but I went back, and I worked there the rest of the summer, doing some other work on the floor. And then became one of the fastest pinkers when I realized that you didn't chop open the other side.

INTERVIEWER: Once you learned where to pink.

SPRINGER KEMP: That was my job experience. I worked, as a matter of fact, when I got married. I was still working at Poro College, the Malone School of Beauty Culture.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

SPRINGER KEMP: They had hoped to make me a field representative to travel around the country for Poro College. And this was what I was there for. I had the presence, but I think I was not religious enough, so that she might have gotten disappointed.

INTERVIEWER: So you were working at the college when you were married. What were the circumstances? What was your first husband's position in life?

SPRINGER KEMP: He was, he worked for an international firm, a dental firm and he was clerk, and in these days you would call it a dental mechanic. And he fixed instruments and he was really an expert at repairing all of the instruments. And that too was very interesting experience because dentists from all over the country would write in for information about some little defect of the instrument, or even when it was packed and sent over from London, something did not function, had too much oil on it or something and he would write back and do all of the things, say what you have to do. A lot of these dentists would then come in to New York City. They would go to the office or over to their plant in New Jersey, and want to see Mr. Springer and so it was always quite a shock that Mr. Springer had a brown face. Because

SPRINGER KEMP: neither his voice on the telephone or his proficiency suited the stereotype that people had about Negroes.

INTERVIEWER: Blacks.

SPRINGER KEMP: Blacks.

INTERVIEWER: Was he West Indian?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. His parents, oh yes. The Springers of Barbados.

INTERVIEWER: Did you quit your job when you got married? Or did you continue?

SPRINGER KEMP: I continued to work for six months, and then when I became pregnant, I stopped working.

INTERVIEWER: And then the Depression drove you back? Tell me about that.

SPRINGER KEMP: I guess it was the Depression then, but my husband had what was considered in those days a very well paying job, I don't remember what it was.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like it.

SPRINGER KEMP: But sufficiently well paying that in the depths of the Depression, he got a salary cut of seventeen dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: A cut of seventeen dollars?

SPRINGER KEMP: A cut of seventeen dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: Many people weren't earning anywhere near that much.

SPRINGER KEMP: That sent me to work.

INTERVIEWER: I see. That sent you to work and you went into the garment industry?

SPRINGER KEMP: I went into the garment industry, because at least I had had the experience of pinking.

INTERVIEWER: You knew how to pink.

SPRINGER KEMP: The wrong way. And I knew how to sew, but I did not know how to sew the professional way. I went to an industrial school, and you learned sewing as a part of the curriculum.

INTERVIEWER: How old was your child? When you went back to work.

SPRINGER KEMP: He was about, maybe a couple of years old. He was small, maybe older than that.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you manage, did you . . . ?

SPRINGER KEMP: I lived in the same building with my mother-in-law, and my sister-in-law lived in the same building and she had several children. We lived on three different floors.

INTERVIEWER: So that was nice.

SPRINGER KEMP: So it was really very good.

INTERVIEWER: Convenient.

SPRINGER KEMP: Very convenient. But that didn't last long. You know, we sort of scattered. I moved somewhere else, and my sister-in-law moved somewhere else. To this day we are close friends. It's a wonderful family.

INTERVIEWER: Now, how long were you working before you began to get involved with the union?

SPRINGER KEMP: 1932, I went to work in a garment shop.

INTERVIEWER: 1932?

SPRINGER KEMP: 1932.

INTERVIEWER: Right at the pit of the Depression.

SPRINGER KEMP: The job I had then was working as a finisher doing hand sewing. And you worked as many hours as he said, and the industry was in chaotic condition. The union was very weak.

INTERVIEWER: What was your working day normally?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, we were supposed to go to work at eight-thirty in the morning, or eight o'clock in the morning, and you were supposed to end the day like five-thirty, six o'clock if you had something to do. And people came in very early in the morning, didn't have their lunch hour and all sorts of things. And if the manufacturer of the garments thought something was wrong with it, you fixed it for nothing. And, oh, just, it's hard to describe. And I kept threatening that I was going to the union. The cutter and I became very friendly and it was unusual in those days to see a Negro man a cutter, but he was excellent, and since they paid him next to nothing, and it was nonunion, he was able to hold the job. This was a nonunion shop. Most shops were nonunion shops. But I knew something about the union, and knew it was somewhere, and went around to see where this place was. And union people had tried to talk to us about organization, but the union was dead broke. I joined the union eventually. I went in and joined, and told them what was happening because it was just getting under my skin.

SPRINGER KEMP: I had moved from shop to shop trying to find my way, had observed some things that happened when the union tried to organize. Then came the general strike. I was a union member. When the general strike in 1933 of the garment workers, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, we did not accept the code for the garment workers, this is before (NRA) [The National Recovery Act] but, it would be standard set of fifteen dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: That takes courage. In 1933.

SPRINGER KEMP: In 1933, yes, and they did strike. No bank would even loan the I.L.G.W.U. a few thousand dollars. I was on one of the committees, on one of the strike committees, you know. Tangentially, because I was not close to the union, close to the activities of the union. The union was struggling. I had the courage to threaten the employer about our conditions. I had joined the union before the strike. In this small way, you come to the attention of the leadership of the union that was reaching out to try to get people who were likeminded, and so I was on the strike committee. Then when the strike was settled, industry-wide, then we had to begin. Oh, just hundreds and thousands of workers were enrolled into the garment workers union and this was great excitement. My own Local 22 was one of the bigger locals, and we immediately began, the union began focusing on educational work because you had all of these raw recruits. So they began all kinds of classes -- English for the non-English speaking, classes in parliamentary procedure, classes in all kinds of very simple, basic understanding of the union agreement. It was really the first important agreement that we had, and so that I began, on that level, as an activist.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still working in the shop, or are you working for the union?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, I'm a member; I work in the shop, I go and work in the shop every day. As a matter of fact, this is 1933. I worked in the shop from '33 until '41 or '42.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you continued working in the shop? All those years?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, sure. Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: But you became active in the union as well.

SPRINGER KEMP: Active, very active. Chairman of the education committee in my local during one period and, you know, all of the things that the union said it wanted me to do. I took all the courses that were required of me.

INTERVIEWER: Now, tell me about the courses you had to take. Is this the nine month series of course you were talking about?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, that's one of them.

INTERVIEWER: This is to train people to be officers?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't even think . . . there was no such offer.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no, no, if you wanted to be an activist, and you wanted to know about what you were doing, there was no offer of employment.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

SPRINGER KEMP: Subsequently in the late, in the forties, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union instituted a training course. Candidates qualified from all over the United States, which one design at the end of that year or two or whatever the period was, that you did become an officer of the union. But those early courses were for activists to be more intelligent and to be more informed. And for those who were, I suppose, more aggressive than I, they looked forward to becoming an officer. But on my life, this was not my concern. And I could not be a member of the committee on prices in my local union if I did not know what I was talking about. I could not represent the shop. So that I took the courses I did on the advice by my business agent so that I could be a better union member.

INTERVIEWER: So you're working in the shop full time, you're taking courses and you're actively involved in your union. Did your husband complain about the amount of time you spent, or was he supportive of your efforts?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, he complained about it however, not seriously. And I took the position that I can't work at this without knowing what I'm doing and what I'm talking about and the excitement of that period, this was a part of the social revolution. And, you know, there were Trotskyites and Lovestonites, and the Communists and the Social Democrats and the Anarchists -- one was involved in all of that because they constituted the opposition to the union leadership.

INTERVIEWER: Were they bickering with each other at that point?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, sure.

INTERVIEWER: Did this disrupt the union much? Or did the union just sort of thrive on all the....?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, the disruption came before the general strike.

INTERVIEWER: The worst of it was over?

SPRINGER KEMP: The worst of it was over.

INTERVIEWER: The worst of it was in the twenties.

SPRINGER KEMP: The worst of it was over by 1933. You still had lots of problems after that, and in the big local unions you had challenge and conflict. We had an active, active, active Communist opposition and Charles Zimmerman, the manager of my own Local 22, had been an ardent Communist. And when he turned against their ideology, he was their most bitter foe and target. The Communists were not concerned with the domestic life of the worker in America. They had a political ideology that was destructive to any development. So this is the context in which I grew up. You see, you go from the Garvey movement, the American church, the black cultural experience in a school, to the labor movement. And the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, one of the most exciting unions of the world, in those days.

INTERVIEWER Not now?

SPRINGER KEMP: No.

INTERVIEWER: We'll get to that later. All right. Did you ever get involved in any particular radical clique or did you try and steer clear of all of them? Or could anyone steer clear of all of them?

SPRINGER KEMP: All of them were radical.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, there were no cliques that weren't radical?

SPRINGER KEMP: That is correct.

INTERVIEWER: This was before....

SPRINGER KEMP: You were doing something that you were challenging the status quo.

INTERVIEWER: The establishment, I see.

SPRINGER KEMP: OK, and if you were fighting for legislation, my first lobbying experience was minimum wage. The minimum wage was thiry-seven cents, seventy half cents an hour. And I think we were asking for something like fifty cents an hour, or seventy-five cents an hour for the minimum wage. Well, the way those senators and congressmen talked about it, you would have thought we all had tails.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: And this was my first exposure to government. To what the government felt about the working man and woman.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember any particular incidents?

SPRINGER KEMP: This morning, no. They used to stick rather clearly in my head because I was so incensed for years, you know, because here I am, you know, a proud citizen, and these people talking to us as though we were scum. Yes, and we were talking about wages, hours, conditions of service that affected all Americans. One senator, congressman, I wish I could think of his name, he read a statement about mother love and how the wage, changing the wage structure would destroy mother love, and the family because, you know, the garment workers, the majority of the workers were women. Now what mother love had to do with wages, I don't know. Women still would have to go to work.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. Oh my.

SPRINGER KEMP: Rather a bad experience on government.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you were involved in your educational committee.

SPRINGER KEMP: I was involved in . . . I'm involved in the learning process.

INTERVIEWER: First of all, you're involved in the learning process.

SPRINGER KEMP: I'm involved in the learning process. I am being taught.

INTERVIEWER: You are being taught.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you go through this business of being taught? About a year?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, no, years.

INTERVIEWER: Years?

SPRINGER KEMP: First, you took, you know sort of a few weeks, and two months and whatever it was that the union was trying to cram into your head in order to develop a cadre of leadership so that they had you going, you know, great guns. That first period over, you go on to do something else. You go, you are sent to labor schools, you are sent to Labor Institute, you are sent to Labor Colleges.

INTERVIEWER: What colleges or schools were involved?

SPRINGER KEMP: Hudson Shore, Brookwood, Labor College, and The Rand School.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to Brookwood?

SPRINGER KEMP: Or the Rand School of Social Science. All of those.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever take time off from work to go away for several months? Or was it always shorter periods?

SPRINGER KEMP: Mostly for weeks at a time. Or weekends, or night courses.

INTERVIEWER: I think I'm going to turn this over because it's about to run out.

SPRINGER KEMP: Now this was that period of the thirties, you know, right after 1933, and from 1933 to 1945, there was always a tumult, it was a tumultuous period, and a great learning experience. And I would be called out of the shop, for example, to go to a meeting to represent the union at lunch, or whatever. On one occasion, it was a luncheon meeting at the Waldorf Astoria. You know, this was a great honor.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: OK. Example: I came to work that morning in my moccasins and working clothes,you know a heavy coat. I was a size ten then. The whole shop got involved in it. So that I was then loaned somebody's pocketbook; a dress was taken off of the figure and fitted on me, and somebody else gave me something else, a better looking coat than the one I had on, and I marched off to the luncheon dressed to the nines. The three women who were then in unity were Madame Chiang Kai Shek, Madame Litvinov, and Mrs. Roosevelt. So that here I was, you know, representing my local union, representing the ILG in solidarity. That evening I went to the ILGWU board meeting. I went back to the shop and stitched my dresses and at six o'clock, I went to the board meeting in my moccasins and my old coat and my tam o'shanter. And there was a great howl because a few hours earlier I had been so dolled up.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a dual personality?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, this was the kind of political and social atmosphere of that whole period. And then all of the things that went on in the Roosevelt Administration in which labor was so closely identified.

INTERVIEWER: What was the ethnic composition of your union at that period?

SPRINGER KEMP: Thirty-two nationalities. We prided ourselves on this. You still had the Italian workers belonging to Local 89, which was the language local. Local 22 had been a language local, but they had discarded that years and years ago, so that everyone who was not Italian belonged to Local 22, the dressmakers.

INTERVIEWERS: Did the Italians still conduct their meetings in their own language at that late date?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, It was the Italian local, Local 89.

INTERVIEWER: They were the only one who still had their own language?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no, there were some others, but within our joint board, they were the only ones. You think of Luigi Antonini with his flowing black tie who looked like a great opera impresario, and it was he who brought to the garment workers, I think, the kind of cultural content, because any celebration it meant going to the opera. Or bringing the greatest of the opera stars to the garment workers, and when we had our celebration in Madison Square Garden after we won the general strike, everybody from the Met was there to sing for the workers.

INTERVIEWER: No kidding?

SPRINGER KEMP: And you had the great freedom song of the Italian workers, Pan y Rosa, "Bread and Roses."

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's nice.

SPRINGER KEMP: So this is, that's why I say that for me the trade union movement was always a great love affair and a great excitement.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any racial hostilities within the union?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh sure.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me anything about that?

SPRINGER KEMP: I would be an awful liar if I said that there were not.

INTERVIEWER: You would have to make the union too much different from the rest of the nation I suppose.

SPRINGER KEMP: I think that we tried harder, but we suffered from all of the prejudices and disabilities in our society. For example, it was difficult, an employer did not want to take a black worker on, just generally as an operator, you know, and there were very few men, black men who were cutters in those days. They were among the aristocrats in the industry. They'd never

SPRINGER KEMP: dirty their hands. They wore collars and ties, and rolled the sleeves of their white shirts. They were at the cutting table and drafting board. So that we, the garment workers, were challenged about racial policies and you had to deal with it like the Constitution, all men are created equal, and the practice let us make them as unequal as possible.

INTERVIEWER: Yea.

SPRINGER KEMP: And we suffered from the same disability. But I do think that within the union, there were sufficient men and women who were concerned, who tried. But we suffered from the same problems and there were officers of the union who really could never see the black worker or the Spanish worker, moving straight across the board. Of course, that's history. Now it isn't true anymore.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SPRINGER KEMP: But you had that to fight.

INTERVIEWER: So you had to fight on two fronts. Within the union and within the industry.

SPRINGER KEMP: And some officers would be guilty of racial prejudice.

INTERVIEWER: Did the higher officials try to intercede when they were, or did it all have to come from the bottom?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, the higher officials, I would say, 90 percent of them agreed with the ideal. Thirty percent of them practiced. Sixty percent of them went along with the status quo. My own union leader, Charles Zimmerman, on staff representation, industry said to him, when I was made a member of the staff, the manufacturers association said that their officers would not be seen with me. I was the first black business agent. You know, sometimes you get sick of being the first of this and the first of that and the first of the other.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: And he said, all right, nobody will function.

INTERVIEWER: Oh?

SPRINGER KEMP: He said, that's all right, you don't want her.

INTERVIEWER: If they won't see you they won't see anybody.

SPRINGER KEMP: You know, she's an officer of our union. We won.

INTERVIEWER: That's what it takes.

SPRINGER KEMP: And he never told me.

INTERVIEWER: Is that right? How did you find out?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, I found out months later that the association had officially protested, and one member of the association, one of the officers on management's side felt that it was indecent. And he wrote a letter to Zimmerman and said I would be pleased to work with Maida Springer and I do not know, I cannot speak for the association, but I am one staff member tht does not share their views. This same association subsequently, when I decided to take the year off to study at Ruskin Labor College at Oxford and to take advantage of a scholarship with the American Scandinavian Foundation, then made speeches that there was never anything like me in the world, and nobody who was going to take my place could as well. So that you go to the extreme, I am extremely nothing, which was not true, and I am superior, which was not true. So, you know, on both ends of the spectrum, I was about midway.

INTERVIEWER: Well, once you have achieved, then you are a spectacular person.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Of course.

INTERVIEWER: What about discrimination on the basis of sex? Within the union or as far as pay was concerned. Were there, there were no sex differentials in pay in the industry?

SPRINGER KEMP: No. There were certain jobs you didn't get. But we received equal pay.

INTERVIEWER: Jobs?

SPRINGER KEMP: Across the board, where the bulk of the workers, maybe operators in the dressmakers's union, you got paid for what you made. It was a piece rate system. However, there could be discrimination because there were certain lines. The cheaper line, you know, you could get a job there where you just work and work and work and kill yourself and you, to make it. The better line, where you had to be more skilled, and make the whole garment. A case could be made, and a case was made, that people were excluded. That black people, or Spanish were excluded.

INTERVIEWER: That was on the base of race.

SPRINGER KEMP: On the basis of race. It was only 50 percent true. but....

INTERVIEWER: It did happen.

SPRINGER KEMP: Of course.

INTERVIEWER: But you don't think it happened on the basis of sex? Particularly.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well the majority of the workers were women.

INTERVIEWER: People who make dresses.

SPRINGER KEMP: Within the cloakmakers and some other sections, there were jobs that the men just said to themselves, you know, these jobs are not for women, and the employer and the worker agreed that we will not let women be the tailors.

INTERVIEWER: And the union didn't fight it?

SPRINGER KEMP: Eventually, yes. But sometimes these things are done so quietly. You know, women never applied for this job, to be a "schneider."

INTERVIEWER: To be a what?

SPRINGER KEMP: Schneider . . . Jewish, Yiddish, a tailor.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

SPRINGER KEMP: But there were many subtle ways that it could be done. But that broke down.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that racial discrimination was considerably worse than sex discrimination on the job? Or were they both in existence in different ways?

SPRINGER KEMP: They both existed. But when you have an industry where the majority of the workers are women, it is an open question where the emphasis lies.

INTERVIEWER: That's true.

SPRINGER KEMP: If you have four hundred and forty thousand people in a membership in an organization, or let me put it down to just the individual local union . . . you have twenty-six thousand people, members of the union, nineteen thousand of them are women. There is discrimination because there are certain categories which women do not work in.

INTERVIEWER: They still have to work in most of them because they're most of the workers.

SPRINGER KEMP: Of course.

INTERVIEWER: Now, when did you go on the staff of the union?

SPRINGER KEMP: 1942. My first job was as educational director of a small local union.

INTERVIEWER: Excuse me, but before that, you had served, I presume, various functions in your local.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Could you just list them? I'm sure you worked very hard.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, executive board member, Local 22. I was sent by my local union to learn first aid to become a first aid teacher. Chairman of the education committee of my local union, a lot of posts to represent the union in all kinds of committees. OK, a bread and butter one when I worked in the shop, I settled prices for, I was on one of the first committees and I was a hand worker there to represent workers in the structuring, our base, how we settled the garment, what we were to be paid. And I was elected by my shop to be the representative of the shop to go on the jobber's premises, the manufacturer's premises to argue for what we would be paid for making the garment.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been the toughest one you had, the toughest job, was it?

SPRINGER KEMP: No. It was first the most frightening, but you had the guidance of your Union Representative and you and other workers who represented other shops, you met together, but the employer tried to intimidate you. And this was a brand new experience and this was employer/employee, we were, this was the big man, not the guy that I deal with, the contractor in the shop. And so that you were self conscious about this, afraid that you didn't know enough, scared to death that you may agree to something which the workers would kill you for when you went back. But that experience stood me in good stead because later on, in later years, as business agent, I settled prices. Which was representing, very, very officially, the union panel around the worker. It was a terrifying experience.

INTERVIEWER: I would imagine. Had you had special training to do that particular job?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. The man who was my business agent, he told me, you have a good head. OK. So he said, you know, we calculated, he taught me the basics, because we had no real structure then. And this was early on. And so that the development that followed, everything that happened, I was a part of what the changes were. I had to relearn that, because I then left, was sent, at the request of my own manager. He said, "Now I want you to get some experience and training. We want you on

SPRINGER KEMP: the staff, but I don't want you with your feet cold. And they need an educational director in Local so and so and so. I talked to the manager who knows you, I talked to somebody else who wants you very much." If I'd had sense, I'd have known I was being sent to break my neck. Really. As it happened, I had luck, really. But I became, in 1942, the educational director of the Plastic Button and Novelty Workers' union, which was one of the accessory locals of the ILGWU.

INTERVIEWER: Of the union?

SPRINGER KEMP: Of the ILG, yes. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union. What had happened there was that 70 percent of the membership was male. 30 percent female because it was metals, plastics, etc. working in acetone and this kind of stuff. They were young men. And the war made a very sharp change. It cleaned out about 40 percent of that work force. So they then began to employ women, began to employ refugees, began to employ people who had recently come out of prison, employ people who had just come up from the south. I give you that combination. A lot of the old timers that remained, the older men, the molders, because they were the aristocrats and they were the higher paid people. They were all kinds of nationalities, Poles, Germans, Swedes, and Italians. And while they hated one another sometimes, they jointly hated anything black.

INTERVIEWER: And they made you the educational director of that local?

SPRINGER KEMP: I thought you'd be interested in that combination.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, wow!

SPRINGER KEMP: OK. And with all these new people coming in, the poor devils who had escaped the gas chambers of Hitler, the Negroes who had just come up from the South, who had never had a working experience in an industrial setting.

INTERVIEWER: In a factory?

SPRINGER KEMP: In a factory. Women, who were strange to mass employment, you know, housewives who were just coming in to work, and a part of the training was to make all of these people understand something about the union. So that we had classes, which I initiated, two or three sessions. We had lecturers who came down and talked about the union and the contract and the constitution and the rest of it. And at the end of this, they then had to get their union book from the educational director. Now, it was fine on the three sessions where they were lectured to, because all of these people were white. And, evidently, while I introduced the person they thought I was, the floor sweeper, or something, that they had permitted to say "Mr. or

SPRINGER KEMP: Miss So and So is going to do this." So, then, when the person was sent in to sit down and talk to me, I had men walk into my office and said, "I want to talk to Miss Springer." And I said to him, "Why don't you sit down." "Who, you?"

INTERVIEWER: Really? Just like that?

SPRINGER KEMP: Just like that.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure you won them all over.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, sure.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I hate to tell you but it's eleven fifteen. So I guess we'll have to stop for today.

INTERVIEWER: This is January 5 at the home of Maida Springer Kemp. Well, yesterday I think we left you with your first staff job. And you were educational director of a local with a very mixed group of people.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, that was the Plastic Button and Novelty Workers' Union, Local 132 of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union. If that isn't a mouthful, I don't know what is. A very small local union. But it had the mixture of the League of Nations, and its membership had shifted radically because of the preponderence of young men who had been moved out into the Army. We then had Hobson's choice what you could get. Old men and women, many of whom had escaped from the gas chambers of Europe. Young and old blacks coming up from the south, their first industrial job, prison . . . what do you call people who are released from prison and they're not given really an opportunity to work, so here were people who were given jobs. Spaniards of all persuasions, and every other eastern European country you could think of I guess. And this was the mixture that you had to weld into a work force, and to have some common bond of work with unions.

INTERVIEWER: How did you do it?

SPRINGER KEMP: That took a little doing. Well, the first thing you do is start out by indicating that they had one common bond. You didn't have to love one another, but you wanted decent wages, hours, conditions of work. You wanted those safety measures to affect everyone and that every worker had a sense of responsibility to the other worker. Because it's a highly dangerous, some highly dangerous materials that you worked on in the plastics and acetone and poisons and the rest of it. So that you had to be responsible for the other worker. And you used some heavy machines. You could stamp off a man's hand or stamp off a woman's fingers, and the rest of it. Also,

SPRINGER KEMP: the indoctrination had to include the good trade unionism, and coming from an individualist and previous community and a racial community that you had never been exposed to anyone else that did not look just like you, that required some doing.

INTERVIEWER: I can imagine.

SPRINGER KEMP: This was my first, my first paid responsibility.

INTERVIEWER: They started you with the toughest thing they could find, I guess.

SPRINGER KEMP: But it was a lasting experience since it was such a small local union -- five thousand members, and the staff was a small staff, so that, as the educational director, I also went to the plant doors and issued leaflets at four or five o'clock in the morning when the shifts changed. We interchanged and did all sorts of things together. It was a staff of five or six people. And we knew every shop steward. We knew every committee, and we did change some attitudes. I don't know for how long. For example, I would organize a weekend institute. And you know, you would have marshmallow roasting, frankfurters and after you had pumped trade unionism and workers' education and history of the labor movement over a weekend, each evening you tried to do some of the social things people did there. Country dances and the rest of it. A couple of young women came to me and desperately wanted to go, but the brothers in the family said that if niggers were going to be there that they could not go. And particularly if men were going to be there. And so how could I persuade their brothers, and start with the mother. So I developed some allies. Most of the mothers I won over.

INTERVIEWER: That's good. They probably felt if you were there, you were a proper chaperone for their daughters.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, not that. I think it had to do more with a belief that I was one Negro that maybe, that they thought met their standards. Their standards were much lower than mine in most instances, but again, these are the prejudices you had to deal with.

INTERVIEWER: They weren't worried about men in general, just black men, in others words.

SPRINGER KEMP: They were worried about men in general, but they were worried especially if black men were going to be there. As it so happened, that was not a problem. But just this mixing, or just mixing even with black women and, you know, sharing a room with them and you know, showers.

INTERVIEWER: But they did that sort of thing, though?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes. There were a few, of course, that did not go to those first, those first weekend institutes. But the interesting by-product of this, with the war on, we developed a labor newspaper. It was the worst newspaper in the world. I know nothing about editing a news sheet, but we had a committee in every shop, and back to your thought on workers' education, and they would gather the news, and we would then have an editorial session a number of times a month. And then, finally wrapping it up and putting it to bed. It was a mimeographed paper which you typed, and we had a hand mimeograph machine. And I can't draw, so that I would select pretty girls in magazines or lovely situations, and mimeoscope it for the top cover. And then underneath that, of course, the manager's editorial message. And the rest of it But what that paper did, it brought families together. It was maybe three or four sheets. Brothers who were in the same army, they found one another by the APO when they got this little union magazine, "The Voice of Local 132."

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Friends found one another. Fellows who had worked in the same shop, didn't know they were in the same outfit. We sent packages, each shop, you know, we'd pool, the shops would pool money, and send packages. Maybe they never got them, but the thought that we did that and the fact that they knew we were doing that from our little blurb sheet, it was a wonderful, warming experience and the men looked forward to receiving.

INTERVIEWER: Did other local unions do that sort of thing?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, they did it much better. You know, it was more professional, but I think, perhaps, we were the, you know, the first, we initiated this idea. If you are a small organization, then you pretty much have your own way about introducing things, and since I had no fixed ideas about being an educational director, I had been the chairman of an educational committee in the dressmakers' union, in my own big union, but we had all kinds of things at our disposal. And I was not responsible for running the show. But here I did all sorts of strange things. One of the things then, my manager went along with me on so much of this, Martin Feldman. We were all very patriotic. And the Red Cross had a blood bank, and so I refused to give blood to the blood bank for the reason that they segregated blood.

INTERVIEWER: They did?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes, in World War II.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't know that.

SPRINGER KEMP: So that you could die because you did not have the right color. And so the Chinese Red Cross had a blood bank and we, the major of Chinatown, Shavy Lee, the then mayor of Chinatown was doing some things with Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. And so it came to our notice and we were invited to participate. And so we put together, we raised the money for the first plasma machine. Now, it's very interesting story for the reason that Charles Drew, a black doctor, perfected this blood plasma. And he subsequently died in an automobile accident because they would not accept him into a white hospital.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, you know that story. OK. During this period, we then daily had numbers of workers, men and women, black and white giving blood. The American Signal Corps, they took pictues of this and showed it as American democracy at work. That's one of my educational stories.

I think part of the feeling I have had, my own constant passion about the labor movement with all of its bumps and warts is because I came up at a time when there were so many role models. I think of some of the women, some of them you have interviewed, I see that you have, and some have passed on. But Pauline Newman, who was then directing one section of the health department of the I.L.G., International Ladies Garment Workers' Union now, this women had been in the Triangle fire. She was a girl, and one of those shirtwaist workers in the Triangle fire. So that she was one of the giants, determined, articulate, volatile about workers' dignity, and the pursuit of excellence wherever you are. And so Pauline Newman was one of my mentors. Rose Schneiderman who headed the Women's Trade Union League and focused attention on women workers and brought the women of wealth and prominence to understand the concerns, the problems of working women, and some of her legislation that was passed in this country was a part of the efforts of the Rose Schneidermans and the Fannia Cohens and the Pauline Newmans who attracted that attention. Mrs. Roosevelt, I believe, as a social worker looked into some of the problems of the factory and working women.

INTERVIEWER: How close were your personal contacts with people like Pauline Newman or Rose Schneiderman? Were you involved with them?

SPRINGER KEMP: I was very involved with Pauline Newman because she was in the ILG. Rose Schneiderman because of the Women's Trade Union League.

INTERVIEWER: They were still active during the forties?

SPRINGER KEMP: Very, very active.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard that the New York Women's Trade Union League was the best in the country. I've heard this from Chicago members of the Women's Trade Union League.

SPRINGER KEMP: I do not know about others, but the Women's Trade Union League in New York City offered a forum for working women and an additional part of the learning process, an additional point of self respect. Because even though we were a majority, it was a male-dominated union leadership. So that the Women's Trade Union League, without ever saying so, attempted to fill a need.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of things were they doing? In this period.

SPRINGER KEMP: They were concerned with legislation. They were concerned with internal union programs, and they helped to teach you how to lobby so that if you were put on the delegation with your union, you were not the wart on the nose. But you went there prepared.

INTERVIEWER: Were they still offering separate classes under their own auspices?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Yes, they still had headquarters on Thirty-some street, on Madison Avenue, I believe, Madison or Lexington Avenue, and a lot of us regularly attended the Women's Trade Union meetings and many of us were given an opportunity -- you spoke about things, you were on a committee of the Women's Trade Union League, you went to represent the League, and your union and it gave you greater strength, and gave you support as an activist in your own union.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make acquaintances with women from other unions?

SPRINGER KEMP: Indeed. You met, so many as you attended the Women's Trade Union League, as a matter of fact, one of my dearest friends, she was much younger than I, she was going to college, but she was working in the laundry workers, Dolly Robinson, who's on your list of interviews. But was an activist with all the people for so long they thought she was much older. I think of Charlotte Adelman, whose name maybe is lost, in the history of the New York Laundry Workers.

INTERVIEWER: What did she do?

SPRINGER KEMP: Charlotte Adelman was in my judgment one of the giants of the laundry workers. She helped to organize. She was the mainspring of organizing the Laundry Workers Joint Board. Charlotte gave life, gave reason to an industry that people felt degraded and hopeless in.

INTERVIEWER: What was her background?

SPRINGER KEMP: She was a Trinidadian. She was a West Indian, she was a West Indian, and a fierce nationalist. There are some things being said that I believe in some of your interviews, her name has cropped up. And she was again one of my role models. Because Charlotte was on fire about everything that had to do with working men and women. Regardless, this was not color, but this social justice. Another one of my role models was a man whose name was written indelibly I suppose, in the socialist history of this country, Frank R. Crosswaith. He and A. Philip Randolph, they were among the street corner orators. They went to welcome Eugene Debs when he came out of prison. They were my introduction to a socialist philosophy that I was willing to accept. A lot of others had tried to suggest it to me, but it was through A. Philip Randolph, and Frank Crosswaith.

INTERVIEWER: How did you first come in contact with them? Do you remember?

SPRINGER KEMP: Frank Crosswaith was an organizer for the ILG.

INTERVIEWER: So it was within your union context that you first knew him?

SPRINGER KEMP: I first knew him as a speaker before I met him.

INTERVIEWER: Knew of him . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: I stood on the street corner in awe of his oratorical magnificence. No, he was something to listen to. And I had read Philip Randolph's pieces in The Messenger, you see, and never dreaming that one day I would know these men. And be able to sit and converse with them, even be assigned to bits of work.

INTERVIEWER: Did you become a socialist?

SPRINGER KEMP: No.

INTERVIEWER: You just, you . . . ?

SPRINGER KEMP: I was a part of the Union Action Group, you know, assigned all kinds of things. Jay Lovestone was one of the men I later in my life came to know very well. He had a marked influence on me in terms of widening my horizons on world politics. Now, he did not fashion any ideology for me, but as a mind to deal with a person whose word was good, he certainly broadened my horizons. Fannia Cohen, that name in ILG history, and even when she was old and walking around with a tattered notebook for me, she made sense and I respected and revered her, no matter how many times she told me the same thing over and over again.

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with her? Was that through your union?

SPRINGER KEMP: She was an officer of the ILG. She was the director of some education activities and the pamphlet and book department.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever work under her?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, not directly, Fannia was at national headquarters in the educational department of the ILG. Mark Starr was the education director of the I.L.G.. Fannia Cohen, Pauline Newman, and a host of others were among the rambunctious, tenacious women who made themselves heard. Talk about the Uprising of Twenty Thousand, and when the men in the unions wanted to settle for less, these women were prepared to go on and be hungry and to march in the winter.

INTERVIEWER: How do you account for this? I've heard different people try to explain that, how do you explain the fact that the women were more militant than the men?

SPRINGER KEMP: I can't explain. The only explanation I have been able to give myself is that most of the men had families or were in the process of having families, or had some other sort of responsibility. And felt that they ought to make the compromise and they had suffered longer, perhaps, than some of the women. But the women felt that they had reached the point of no return, and they could not do worse.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

SPRINGER KEMP: And you can only go up from there. And, I think, sometimes our madness is part of our survival. And all of these women touched my life and mind, and so I did come up at a time of great transition. Because the labor movement was then just beginning to get a kind of recognition and to be included. The yellow dog contract was getting a thrashing. You had thoughts of a National Labor Relations Board -- it was a conversation piece it was not a reality. People, it would be hard for them to believe that today. There was no minimum wage, social security, unemployment insurance, what is that? The fringe benefits that come into a union contract today that are negotiated as normally as breathing, it is an accepted fact, you wouldn't think of negotiating without including the social benefits which a nation ought to concern itself with. You drain the people you employ. Where do they go when they are useless? Frank Crosswaith used to say that the miners -- because he did a lot of organizing for the Socialist Party -- "that the horses, the mules that went down to the mines, were treated better than the workmen," and this was a fact, because they cared for the life of the mule.

INTERVIEWER: They had to buy mules and horses.

SPRINGER KEMP: But the men, the women and the children who were in the mines, they did not care, they were expendable.

INTERVIEWER: What about the clothing industry? How long were children working? Were the rules against children working being observed?

SPRINGER KEMP: We fought very hard for that.

INTERVIEWER: I know the Women's Trade Union League and lots of union people did fight for it.

SPRINGER KEMP: The ILG was adamant on that point.

INTERVIEWER: When you went into the industry, were they observing the rules on keeping children out?

SPRINGER KEMP: When I went in the industry, it was chaotic, you did not have a strong union. But after '33 and by '35 in the first place we were considered the wild ones because President Dubinsky demanded and negotiated and got a thirty-five hour work week. This was unheard of! Only the printers had a thirty-five hour work week. They said it would drive all the manufacturers out of business. This and that and the other thing. It didn't, of course, most of them got much richer. One of the things that the garment workers did was make the manufacturer responsible for the wages of the workers that the contractor employed. Now, prior to this, and I worked in one such shop, the garment industry, you know you didn't need very much money to start. You go to a manufacturer and ask him for work and if you had a reputation with a contractor for doing good work, the contractor would then come and bargain with the workers, and the only thing he didn't ask you to do is to bring money from home. But if the manufacturer then decided not to pay him for the work so there was no payroll, and you are desperate for a job and so you remain and you did not get paid the first week and you didn't get paid the second week, and the third week you had borrowed from everybody and you were really strung out....Monday morning when you went in, you would just as likely to find an empty factory.

INTERVIEWER: He just skipped, huh?

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And that has happened to you?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, that did happen to me once. This was in a nonunion shop, when you then had manufacturer's responsibility, not the contractor.

INTERVIEWER: . . . contractor . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: . . . but the primary employer. It changed the pattern for the worker, that the principal employer, the manufacturer, was responsible for the fixed price of the garment, so that he could not bargain with one shop against another shop and pay every contractor a little less.

INTERVIEWER: He had to pay a set rate.

SPRINGER KEMP: He paid the set rate because all of the workers representing that manufacturer settled the piece rates together, and there was a printed form book circulated to all of the shops working for that employer. All these things were quite a big educational process, and the innovative things that were done by the trade unions in terms of health, in terms of leisure. Unity House, for example, where could a worker go with a limited income? So that Unity House was a place where your money made it possible for you to go away the way a wealthy person might go.

INTERVIEWER: Your union seems to have done more of that sort of thing than most other unions.

SPRINGER KEMP: We did a number of social things. Other unions pioneered in other things. For example, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers pioneered in housing and banking.

INTERVIEWER: Your union didn't do that?

SPRINGER KEMP: We didn't pioneer in it. We subsequently . . . we have a lot of housing around the country. We pioneered in health and education.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the health conditions were worse in the clothing industry than in industry in general?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. For the reason that much of the work that was done in the factories, there were no regulations, in those early days and people did a lot of work at home, so that after a worker spent twelve hours in the factory, then took work home, heated with a coal stove, and lived on the lower East Side, it was a sweated industry indeed. And an isolated one, because most of the workers were foreigners. So that you had men of great genius and innovation who saw the need that workers' leaders had to create the climate of change, housing and health and recreation in addition to wages. Luigi Antonnini, a Vice President, always said, "Bread and Roses." Oh, I loved it.

INTERVIEWER: I can see that you did. You had role models from all groups, didn't you, and both sexes. (laughter)

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now, how long did you stay in that first staff job as education director of your Local 132, Plastic Button and Novelty Workers?

SPRINGER KEMP: Three years. About 1945, the AF of L was asked by the U.S. government to send two women workers, two from the AF of L, two from the CIO to represent the American labor movement as fraternal delegates to share wartime experience. I was one of the two women chosen for the AF of L, so this created some interest and excitement and we went on to Europe and did some things.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the trip to Europe.

SPRINGER KEMP: This was an office of War Information Exchange, an OWI experience. We then came back with four English women, officers of unions. We spent a couple of months in England. We could not go to any other country for the reason that the British government felt that they couldn't guarantee our safety, and the German "Y 2's" were coming over and knocking off parts of London.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to say you probably weren't too safe in England at that point.

SPRINGER KEMP: This is true, but I've always taken the view that if it's out there for you, you will get it and you take your chances.

INTERVIEWER: Now what exactly did you do while you were in England?

SPRINGER KEMP: In England, we were to meet with the working people of England and government officials and to talk with them about what was happening and to view some of the problems at first hand. For example, we thought we had rationing in the United States. Oh, that was utter nonsense. We didn't know what rationing was. We had a few cigarettes fewer and some minor discomforts but that was not rationing really as the Europeans and the British had rationing, which was severe. To see people living in a subway station, because English subways are very deep, and there would be a three tiered deck bunk, just the spring and newspapers that people were sleeping on.

INTERVIEWER: Was this just during air raids, or were people actually living there?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, I would assume that it really should only have been for air raids.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to get any impressions about women workers in England during this crisis period, or was the war itself the overwhelming influence?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no. You had an opportunity to really make some assessments. Women, of course, were pushed into all sorts of heavy industry and employment and were doing a magnificent job all over the country, in armaments, in munitions plants; they were welders. I went into one place where women were shoeing horses, just anything that you could think of. There was a sense of urgency and a determination to overcome. And the spirit of the people....I have been to meetings. I can think of one that I was in Ernest Bevins', Minister of Labor's office, and a B-2 came over and, of course, the building was shaking. I was the only person in the room who said, "Ahhop." Everyone else went on with their conversation and their teacups rattled a little bit and they went on and I think back on that period. Wherever you traveled you saw the strength of the people you met. The saddest experience I had during that period was to see the result of wartime damage psychologically on children. Anna Freud had a child care center, and I was invited to visit there, and we saw young children still suffering from shock with the terror in their eyes and twisted faces. Anna Freud and her staff were trying to bring these children back to a sense of normalcy with love and with her special training. That was a very moving experience for me.

INTERVIEWER: I would imagine.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. And an opportunity to meet the Queen of England was of course very exciting. And we had some interesting moments about that because the ladies-in-waiting had to tell you how to behave and we had to argue among ourselves the night before who was going to curtsey and who would shake hands. We were very strong about the democratic way of doing things. Queen Elizabeth was so utterly charming that it just put us at ease. The trade union movement, the British Trade Union Congress turned itself inside out, and from London to Scotland, there was not an area that we traveled in that we were not given an opportunity, not to be nice tourists, but to have a real exchange of views. And to go and to see and to visit and ask anything we want.

I remember standing up on a table in a huge factory and after saying whatever I was going to say, asking them to join me in a trade union song. And the factory owner, you know, two thousand workers, everybody stopped and people were waving their hands and singing. There was one man, this was in a garment factory, and he had returned from the war. He was one of the casualties. He had lost this much of an arm, but they had fitted him out with a metal arm and there he was back at his table, cutting these hundreds of garments. These are the kinds of experiences. You did not talk too much about some of the things that we were overly concerned with in New York City in the garment industry then. There were problems, and some of

SPRINGER KEMP: them that the workers pushed for. One of the things that my own union did, of course, for garment workers . . . we were involved in giving money and help to centers for working people. We contributed to recreation centers because people were moved in droves from where they were to work in another center as they were needed by the army, by the exigencies of war. We had a big sailors' canteen, a servicemen's canteen, and I went and endorsed something or other on behalf of I.L.G.W.U. President Dubinsky and spent an evening in that servicemen's club. So that there wasn't a facet of the war that we were not concerned with, because we were opposed to Hitlerism.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose that it would be hard to compare their trade union movement with ours on this visit, since they were in the midst of a war. Could you make any conclusions about, for instance, the positions of women in the British trade union movement as compared to ours? I know their Women's Trade Union League was organized before ours. Had they made any greater progress than we had, or were we ahead of them?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't even know whether you could call it ahead of them. Some of their women were among the strong militants in their unions, as were women in the United States. But insofar as being in the top leadership of the trade union movement, the British TUC was a male organization, just as the AF of L and CIO were male organizations. And you had women in their particular industries, some of the top leadership were women. But they had some of the same problems and they had one thing in addition. They had a more marked wage differential within the union. They had that battle still to win.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, not just in the industry, but in the union itself?

SPRINGER KEMP: In the union itself.

INTERVIEWER: What about your union? Was there a wage differential within the union, or just within the industry?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, there was no wage differential. You could put a job category, but if a man and a woman worked at it, you'd be the same wage. There were probably more subtle ways, but you still had the system of apprenticeship with a wage differential. You had a male wage and a female wage.

INTERVIEWER: Were the British women concerned about it?

SPRINGER KEMP: Of course, of course. But first things first. They were busy with the job at hand and were thinking about what they were going to do.

INTERVIEWER: They must have had enormous problems with child care if they had to use so many women in industry. Were you able to observe

INTERVIEWER: any of their child care provision?

SPRINGER KEMP: They did a lot of emergency things, and they made provisions for women with children.

INTERVIEWER: But it was strictly wartime. I suppose in that respect....

SPRINGER KEMP: No, they do have . . . I think even before the war there were considerations being planned, but you didn't have a Labour Government then. And it was after World War II that you began the whole expansion of education in Britain, because previous to that, it was at eleven years of age you had to determine what you were going to be. And at eleven years of age, since most of the people came from working-class families and poor families, you were relegated to . . . and early work life at about 14 years of age.

INTERVIEWER: So we were really ahead of them in many ways.

SPRINGER KEMP: In many ways, we were ahead of them. Now the rigidity of their system may have turned out more scholars, I don't know, for the elite, but after World War II, education was opened up markedly, and the whole British system changed. And I had the temerity in the midst of all this, the horror of the war and the minds of men and women so occupied with it, I had read the British education papers, you see, and I knew that the labor movement, the Labour Party was going to be a challenger. So I wanted to know from Mr. Ernest Bevin what he was about to do after the war about education, and the school leaving age, at 14 years of age. You look back at some of these things, and you know that people forgave you for your audacity.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe the British people were glad you asked.

SPRINGER KEMP: But you know, you're in the middle of a crisis, the bombs are falling all over the place....

INTERVIEWER: And you're thinking of the future. All right now. You brought some British women back with you then and showed them. What was their reaction?

SPRINGER KEMP: We were four American women, and four British women came back. Well, my colleagues -- they had problems. The CIO thought that it was the egalitarian organization of the world, and the AF of L was the reactionary organization of the world. And here you are with this black woman representing the AF of L. My partner, who had sat with Samuel Gompers in the discussions for the ILO after World War I, was brainy in exper-

SPRINGER KEMP: ience and very knowledgeable of the American and international labor movements. But she was horrified, I think, at first at the idea of having to share responsibility with this negro woman.

INTERVIEWER: Is this the woman from the CIO, or is this the other woman from the AF of L?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, this is my AF of L colleague, Julia O'Connor Parker. The CIO ladies were horrified that the CIO, in their view, had been upstaged. Julia Parker and I became fast friends and developed mutual trust and respect by the end of the tour. We were a good working team. Julia O'Connor Parker, who was my AF of L counterpart, I am indebted to her, because of her knowledge of the labor movement, and growing up with it as a telephone worker, and knowing that generation of leadership served me in good stead. As a matter of fact, when she died some years ago, her daughter was looking all over the country for me, to tell me, because we had developed such warmth and affection for one another. The four women that came back to the United States with us, one was a Scottish trade union officer, one was from the garment workers, one from the textile workers, I've forgotten what the fourth one was. We coming back on the boat, you speak the same language, but you do different things with it. As we were discussing how you settle grievances and other union problems for many days on shipboard coming back to the U.S.. And I said that in my union, we ended with what we called our Supreme Court, the impartial chairman, and this was the final resort, final and binding on both parties, which the union and the employer had agreed to, and which we paid for, this was not government financed. But the first level would be the chairlady or the chairman, the shop steward, as the British called it, and a committee of workers and the employer. Failing that, the business agent and management's opposite number, their representative, we went into the shop to try and settle the grievance because this is an industry that overnight, your style of the garment you work on, can be gone, and you know, we tried not to have work stoppages. If we failed, we tried to continue, people continued to work. We then brought it to the local. In my context, we brought it back to my local union manager and management representative went back to his office and they tried to resolve it there. We presented the situation to them. They called in the employer, and the worker agreed or the committee agreed.

My British counterparts sat there looking at me in rather pained silence and they said, "Well, it's all right among themselves later to go about having a drink" and I went through the whole process up to the impartial chairman. But, imagine, resolving your problems in a pub! What sort of unions do they have in the United States? Because the "local" is in Britain, is the

SPRINGER KEMP: word for the local pub! I did not know that. (laughter) They told that story all over the United States.

INTERVIEWER: I'm glad they got it straightened out before they went back and told it in Britain.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the next morning at breakfast, they asked me very directly and so we all laughed at one another, that here we are speaking presumably the same language, and yet there could be this kind of misunderstanding.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have any other strong reactions that you recall to what they saw here? Favorable or unfavorable or it was just a learning experience?

SPRINGER KEMP: It was a learning experience, but they were women of very strong convictions and strong points of view. There were all sorts of things that they disagreed with about the American system and all sorts of things that they did agree with. One that they were all in unity on was the fact that the American worker was not a member of the Labour Party. And they felt that much of the problem we had would be because we did not have a Labour Party, and that our minds were not oriented to nationalization, which was an article of faith in the British labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: With the British trade unions.

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right. So that was one very sharp difference. And as they moved about the country though, they began to see that you did not have the homogeneous small population. When you're talking about 50 million people, you're not talking about at that time it was 160 million people, with the diversity of many countries and potential for growth, because internally we were almost self-sufficient. So these were the kinds of discussions that we would have. And, of course, on international affairs there were differences within our own contexts. Myself and Julia O'Connor Parker, we were the conservatives. And I had never believed myself to be a conservative until that time. And the two women from the CIO, they were considered the more progressive.

INTERVIEWER: Who were the women that the CIO sent? Do you remember their names?

SPRINGER KEMP: Anna Murkavich was one woman. She was from the textile workers, one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen, and a lady. You could disagree without being disagreeable. Then there was a young woman from the auto workers, and I don't remember her name, but she was difficult. She was difficult be-

SPRINGER KEMP: cause she claimed she had been a union member before her parents had even conceived her, just after she was conceived, she had that kind of attitude, a fairly new union officer. But there was a kind of religion in the CIO, and auto workers in particular, which other than this disagreeable young woman, I admire, because the auto workers and my union the I.L.G. were compatible. The UAW, the Reuther brothers, they could do no wrong, they were our great friends.

INTERVIEWER: I see. There was less diversity among the British women, I presume, than among the American women, then, from the way you've described it?

SPRINGER KEMP: Their diversity was internal, within their country, their different sections. The Scottish trade union movement had a point of view about all the rest of Britain, and so you had that kind of regionalism, I think, is the better word. But in terms of the politics, in terms of a social concept, there was a united effort, a united concern. And for ourselves, we had no real problems on that because as American trade unionists, we have certain goals, But we were not, as two people from the AF of L, I did not think that we were bringing them the millennium and I was not proselytizing anyone. Again, both Julia O'Connor and myself, she knew who she was and I came from a union that I was very proud to be a member of, and had the kind of social progress that nothing, no union in the United States could put me down about. So that, on that level, you were either my peer, or I had no peer. This was my answer. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: But when you women talked among yourselves, did you think of yourselves primarily as trade unionists or women trade unionists. In other words, were there any feminist aspects to these meetings at all?

SPRINGER KEMP: Probably when we had little closed meetings and discussions, sure. But when doing any of your public discussion, the larger issue was the trade union movement per se, and as a social and economic force, what it represented to millions and millions of working people. This was the target, this was the goal, and how do you get a government and the employers to see that the worker is not just a pair of hands, that the worker has a mind, the worker has a home, has a family, or to be treated with respect, or to have wages commensurate with what they were doing, to have a decent standard of living. So that if this was our goal, we had no problems on this. We had little nitty things that, you know, people trying to upstage one another. Little ego trips.

INTERVIEWER: We won't worry about those.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, but I'm saying that the goal was clear.

INTERVIEW: Now, what was your next exciting experience? After you came home from all of this trip to England? Where were you now in the union, what was your position?

SPRINGER KEMP: I was still the educational director of our Local 132. Then a couple of things were happening. We were trying to get permanent legislation for fair employment practices, and so Mr. A. Philip Randolph called my union and asked that I be loaned out for a few months to do work in a campaign for a candidate for the City Council. My candidate got beaten terribly. (laughter) I worked sixteen hours a day.

INTERVIEWER: Who were you working for?

SPRINGER KEMP: This was for a City Council job. But right after that we were then involved in staging a Madison Square Garden rally, and so Mr. Randolph called Charles Zimmerman and called Dubinsky, President Dubinsky, and said, "We would appreciate it if you would allow Maida, we would like her services for x months, to help us to put this rally together." What do I know about putting a Madison Square Garden rally together? I was terrified and I promised all the religious and respectable and disrespectable folk I know that I would not do it. I was terrified at the idea. The only people who could fill the Garden in those days were the Communists. And, in addition, I did not think I had the administrative qualifications and the fund raising abilities to do it. You know, there were some things I was modest about.

INTERVIEWER: But Randolph thought you could do it.

SPRINGER KEMP: And so, everyone he sent to me, I said, "No, I would not do it." Then Brother Randolph called me. I walked in, he said, "Now Maida dear, the cause of social justice is at stake. We had had, as you know, executive order 8802." Since I marched about that, I said, "Yes, sir," and he said, "Now, our colleagues in the Congress, and so and so and Mrs. Roosevelt is going to lend her support and she will talk with Franklin." You know, I walked out of there with my head bowed, $3000 dollars, a check for $3000 to run a Madison Square Garden rally. The Garden in those days cost six thousand dollars empty.

INTERVIEWER: So you had to raise the money as well as run the rally?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, indeed you had to raise the money, and then on and on. We had good fortune. Helen Hayes, Orson Welles, and a host of others, they did a dramatic part of the program. But the building of such a program, I can't tell you, and, of course, no one had any faith in me. You know, I was twenty pounds smaller, twenty years younger, and terrified.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you know what to do? You said you didn't know how to do it, how did you figure out how to do it?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, well, when I say I don't know how to do it, you knew you were going to get help. But how do you stage all of this, and how do you keep the momentum going as you raise money and as you do the drudgery. One of the first things I did, which got me into a great deal of difficulty, we did a hundred thousand leaflets, and used the name of a company and there was, in fact, a company by that name, and our lawyer, Max Delson, who was a member of the committee, recognized the possibility of a lawsuit. Do you know what we had to do? A hundred thousand leaflets, we had to block out that name.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, my. By hand?

SPRINGER KEMP: By hand. You know, marking so that you then got the support of groups of trade unionists, young people from colleges, all kinds of, you know, Saturday and Sunday after work and that was my initiation. Then you were busy calling all over the country and you were busy with promoters. But with a dedicated staff of people to work with, it got so that you learned in the doing. In terms of raising the money, I had to carry the stick for this, union leaders used to say to me, "Well, Springer, how much is this conversation with you going to cost?" (laughter) We filled Madison Square Garden with 25,000 people, or twenty two, whatever it holds, and we had a 500 voice choir that no one believed was possible. And I used to hang my head because they would say, "What do you mean, a 500 voice choir, whoever heard of such a thing?" But there they were. Myself and my assistant would go to all the rehearsals, and a lot of these women worked as domestics. On the night of the rally, most of their employers were there to see them perform.

INTERVIEWER: How marvelous.

SPRINGER KEMP: And you have this backdrop in the Garden....

INTERVIEWER: Where did you get this choir? Was it an existing choir, or a combination of existing choirs?

SPRINGER KEMP It was a combination. There was a woman who was trained, a gospel singer or choir leader. I heard about her so that I hotfooted to meet her. She liked me and I liked her and she said yes, and we began to work. She did not have 500 voices but she began building and building around it. The Garden was the backdrop of these men and women, the women all in their dark skirts and white blouses and the men with their black suits and white shirts, was . . . a dramatic presence.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been impressive.

SPRINGER KEMP: It was impressive. All of the people who came to contribute and share in that occasion were extraordinary so it was quite an experience.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I would say a tremendous experience. So you became a success inspite of your unwillingness to try.

SPRINGER KEMP: (laughter) Oh dear. But so that, you know, if someone has faith in you and asks you as Brother Randolph did,you try. If he had told me to walk the water, I would have tried. I tell you, I would have tried. And with my own union backing me up, and saying yes, we want you to do this. They paid my salary for the period you know, and so that on the day of the rally, to see people standing in line for hours waiting to get into the Garden....and this was the meeting for the forward thrust on legislation for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, the catalyst of these laws around the United States.

INTERVIEWER: That's really a momentous occasion.

SPRINGER KEMP: I did not think so then. When you are in the midst of the work of a program, you do not see, you cannot see beyond the payroll, the performers, the seats being filled that night, the money coming in to pay about $25,000. But the trade union movement was superb and this was AF of L and CIO they worked at making the rally a success. I had learned early on, you have a disappointment, you get up, you wipe the blood away and go on to the next thing.

INTERVIEWER: Don't dwell on it.

SPRINGER KEMP: Don't dwell on it. Because I've had my share of bloody experiences.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you should tell us a few of those, too. I think that's important for other people, if they're going to learn from your life, to know those as well.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, you just don't start as a needle worker, a garment worker, without a good deal of discipline, and a good deal of disappointment. And a lot of inconvenience in your personal life. But if what you see as the goal when you see the first contract or limitation of contractors, so that you see that workers are not part of what they call the old auction block system. When you see workers going on vacation, when you see worker's children getting scholarships, when the labor movement itself institutes all kinds of special training programs to help families help themselves. Well, you know that you are priviliged to share in such an experience, and I've always felt that. I've had discrimination, I've had a lot of discrimination, I've had a lot of problems. I have been rejected, I told

SPRINGER KEMP: you a story yesterday about industry's view of a Negro business agent. We've gone to meetings, well there've been conventions where the union had to take a stand. On one occasion, I didn't attend that convention, I wasn't that much of an activist, but the union moved out of the hotel, because the hotel wanted the black delegates -- there weren't too many -- to go around to the back elevator, to go to the service entrance. This is what always creates my constant affection and love for what a workers' organization has done to raise the sights and to raise the sense of respect for the working men and women in the United States. Which industry on its own would not do.

INTERVIEWER: I think a lot of people don't realize that unions have done that, people who don't belong to them.

SPRINGER KEMP: It is the trade union movement that has carried the ball lobbying for legislation, which is not affecting the labor movement because for the most part we have union contracts which cover these things. But that workers who are not organized, the majority of them are not, get certain social benefits as employees. The minimum wage law, among them, social security, unemployment insurance, the fight for a health bill and here you had -- whatever they said the differences between the AF of L and the CIO -- joining in purpose for the concern of the worker so that there is a national health insurance. Most of our workers are covered by contracts, but there are all those other workers out there, and in a nation like this, as affluent as it is, and with the outrageous costs for facilities, there ought to be a national health insurance. And it is the trade union movement that has carried this policy forward. We have been at the vanguard on consumer issues and when we tried to get decent housing and tried to borrow money, the I.L.G. tried to borrow money from the banks to supplement what we have on housing, they would not lend us any money unless we had, either by tacit agreement or otherwise, agreed to discriminatory housing.

INTERVIEWER: Is that right?

SPRINGER KEMP: So with that, we became our own bankers and bought land and build houses all over the country. So these are the things that ought to be known about what we have done. In the field of international affairs, the garment workers are an internationally concerned union. My first trip to Africa was on loan to the AF of L to go to an international confederation of free trade union seminar in Africa.

INTERVIEWER: When did this take place?

SPRINGER KEMP: This happened in 1955. I went as the AF of L delegate and spent at that time six weeks in Africa, the seminar was three weeks, and the African trade unionists many of them were af-

SPRINGER KEMP: filiates of the ICFTU, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, there. The majority of the unions in the western world were affliated with it. And most of the African unions, affiliation came out of their relationship with the quote colonial government and their industrial development. So that their unions were patterned on whether it was England or France or some other country, their union structure was based on what that national structure was. And so we met with the leaders of the unions from many parts of Africa and it was a very good seminar, and it was my first trip to Africa.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been exciting in itself.

SPRINGER KEMP: I had worked with African students in London, and some of these men were senior labor officers, and they were down at Oxford, and I was at Ruskin, but I attended some of the international lectures at Rhodes House because I was interested in international affairs. So you had contacts with all of these men and women from Africa--mostly men, there were very few African women in the colleges in England at the time. Many of the men who were part of the revolutionaries, who while they had a facade of accepting the status quo, were busily working at changing the status quo.

INTERVIEWER: Were you aware of this at the time?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. We sat up at nights discussing the future of Africa. George Padmore, was the West Indian, the Trinidadian, who was the great pamphleteer. I met him in 1945 when I went over on that wartime O.W.I. mission.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you did?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, and so we became very good friends. And when I was studying at Oxford, if I felt I did not have all of my arguments set, or did not know enough about a subject that had to do with colonialism, I would go down to London and spend an evening, or overnight, with George and Dorothy Padmore and I would come back revived and informed. I have several of his books here.

INTERVIEWER: You have quite a bit on Africa. I was looking....

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, but going back to George Padmore, on some of those he would say, "Now let me mark this passage for you, and I want you to take a stand!" As a matter of fact, on my first trip to Africa, he sent a number of letters of introduction to Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who was then the leader of government and business. In addition to my labor responsibilities, I met Ghana cabinet members and other leaders. Of course, I had the added benefit of my relations with some former Africans whom I had met when I was a

SPRINGER KEMP: student at Oxford, so that it opened a lot more doors. Subsequently, the AF of L/CIO established the first African trade union scholarship program for Africans. The Harvard program was an established program and I believe many European students . . . but I began the program that brought African students over to Harvard. I was sent to Africa to develop this program. This hit a lot of snags. Everybody was upset about it, the British Trades Union Congress and there were some Americans upset about it. My office was in Dar es Salaam.

INTERVIEWER: What were the snags, exactly?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, my office was in Tanganyika, which in 1956-57 was trust territory under United Nations Mandate, and the British held the view that they were the ones who knew what there was to know about Africans. I had the disadvantage of being a woman. I looked like an African, and they took a dim view of this. And so propaganda went the rounds that I was an dictator, a communist and a demagogue. It got so bad, I was told that President Meany had to send a cable to say that I was in the country as a representative of the AFL-CIO.

INTERVIEWER: To the British.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yeah, to the colonial government, because the propaganda was being spread and spread I'm sure by some of my British trade union colleagues. Because if I was there, I naturally associated with the political leaders of the country and that, of course, was a no-no.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: But who were the political leaders? They were trade unionists; they were men who had gone abroad to study democractic institutions among other things. Julius Nyerere, for example, was the president of (TANU), the Tanganyika African National Union. He was and is a great scholar. He was the first university graduate in the country. You know, one of the constant discussions that went on in African circles was about the WW-II which helped fight for freedom, the then unanswered query was why can't we reap the benefits of that freedom you sent us to fight for? Rachidi Kawawa was the general secretary of the Tanganyika Federation of Labor and while in Tanganyika all of my activities, with the young Federation affiliates were directed by the executive council and the leader of the Federation. And so my first assignment in Africa was on the exchange program. The internal and international politics in the United States crushed that within a matter of a few months. The program was closed at the AF of L/CIO convention in 1957.

INTERVIEWER: Who was responsible for this? What were the problems here?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't know all of the problems, but among other things, Mr Walter R. Reuther did not approve of it. He had approved of it in a board meeting at some earlier time, but did not, I think, at the time believe it was going to move as quickly as it did, and that I would be the person, the assumption may have been that someone from the UAW would have been selected. I don't know the politics. It was larger than myself, because it had to do the free trade union committee Jay J. Lovestone headed, which Irving Brown worked all over Europe and Africa. And since the bargain was that they would shut down these individual programs and the CIO had something. This was unity '57. And....

INTERVIEWER: So that they could control all programs.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, the assumption was that all of the programs that we previously had should be scrapped.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't know the why, but I'm saying, as I was not here at that convention but the assumption was, that if we are a united labor movement, there shouldn't be a free trade union committee, and there shouldn't be the committee on political action or whatever the international thing, it should all do it under one head. Of course, that was a gimmick, and what we'd done was done as an AF of L/CIO project. But since it displeased some people within the politics, a number of programs were just projects like that.

INTERVIEWER: So the one you were involved with was just . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Mine was a little figment. The larger problem, no quite seriously, because it involved the free trade union committee, which went all over the world, Europe, Asia, Africa. And so I came back to the United States, and I then joined the staff some months later of the AF of L/CIO again.

INTERVIEWER: Now let me backtrack. I'm getting confused here in the middle. From the time you came back from England, you were again educational director of the local.

SPRINGER KEMP: As educational director of the local. From that point I was asked to come and do a variety of things.

INTERVIEWER: Then you did the pageant . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: I discontinued working . . .

INTERVIEWER: For the local. You worked for Randolph on the pageant, and then what did you do after that?

SPRINGER KEMP: That was not a pageant. That was a rally for a Employment Practices Commission for a permanent FEPC.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

SPRINGER KEMP: After that, I went to work on the staff in the office of the Dressmakers' Union.

INTERVIEWER: In the top staff.

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no. I worked in what they called the complaints department. Again, my mentor Charles Zimmerman said, "Well, now you've gotten your feet wet. You need to learn the internal mechanics." When a grievance comes in, any worker can aggrieve, a certain procedure and a whole department is geared to that, whether it's on wages, or whether it's treatment, or whatever. Also within this department, all of the regulations which have to do with the contract obligations of the employers were handled through this department, so that if the employer did not pay the health and welfare fund, did not pay some other things that he was required to do, this went through this machinery of the complaint department. This was really part of the vital organ of the machinery of the union. So that I spent about two years in that department, a year and a half, something like that, learning those instruments and then went on the staff in '47 as business agent. I was working in the complaint department and then went on the staff, so that by this time, you had moved in a variety of employment, learning the function of the union, as it was developing.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any particular major complaints, or did it just run the whole gamut in these two years that you were in the complaint department?

SPRINGER KEMP: Major complaints?

INTERVIEWER: I mean were there two or three major issues that kept coming up or was it just the whole range of every kind of . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: The whole range. You see, among other things that you did, you had the money. Payment. When an employer did not pay, a worker could complain, claiming that the employer did not pay the union the retirement and pension fund and the vacation thing, the whole business. So that we got it and then transferred it to the department of the accountants. But all of this comes to our department. The business agents, if they wanted to hold a shop meeting, all of those were taken care of, the shop meeting preparation was taken care of in the complaint department, so that we maintained a record of how many shop meetings were held, how many business agents call what. All kinds of special meetings that had to be registered through the department. The worker comes to the window to complain,

SPRINGER KEMP: "My shop had back pay, everybody in my shop got $13.02 and I only got $11.09, how come?" You then have to be sure you have the record and work with the accounting department that that worker evidently was absent or something, whatever that question was, you have to be able to give that worker an answer.

INTERVIEWER: So the bulk of it would be a lot of little detailed . . . small complaints . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: . . . and large . . . because it ran in millions of dollars.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. And you had to track it all down.

SPRINGER KEMP: No. The whole department did that. I was simply one of those working in that department, learning those mechanics.

Well, going from a chairlady in a shop, when you thought you knew what you were doing, to a business agent is quite a jump, because as a chairlady or as an activist, you think you know the instruments of the union, you walk up to the window, you want this, you want that. And if you were part of the activity, you got a lot of action. But as a business agent, you were then the responsible person and the person complained about.

INTERVIEWER: Oh dear.

SPRINGER KEMP: I had sixty shops; the shops were small. The section of the industry which I was given some responsibility for was called the Better Makers.

INTERVIEWER: The what?

SPRINGER KEMP: The Better Makers

INTERVIEWER: The Better Makers.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Because you began with the wholesale price of $10.75, so that within my district, the garments were wholesale, the shops made garments from $10.75 up to $100 wholesale. So that you had that wide range to cover, and you had to overcome the suspicion of the very talented and wise men and women who were the craftsmen in the industry. Now, they had to respect you, to believe that you could answer their grievance, and if you could stand up to the employer and to be able to defend them. Now, in the shop you had three major problems. The division of work was one; price settlements, the price of the garments, two; and who opened the windows and who closed the windows. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: We're back to all the complaints you handled.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, well a business agent's responsibility is to see that the shop functions, and to see that the worker is treated fairly

SPRINGER KEMP: by the employer, and to see that worker among worker, that the committees function properly. Because since it's a piecework system, you had to try to see that the slow worker had an advantage as well as the fast worker, because the employer's tendency would be to give all of the big bundles to the fast workers and all of the rags and tags and single garments to the slower worker. He would naturally lean to what would be more profitable to him, so that it was your responsibility to try to have a committee, a division committee that was that kind of fair. And with judgment.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like piecework?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, it's a horrible system. It dehumanizes you, but I don't know what the answer is.

INTERVIEWER: Do the workers prefer it? Or does the union think it's a good idea?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, it's a system that we grew up with, and it's now expanded because what you have, to the fact that the needle trade has become a multi-national corporation and you have fancier machines that make people work faster, and even expensive garments are broken down into little pieces and made in segments. So that the pride of craftsmanship is not as needed as it was years ago, when every dressmaker or tailor, he was a "schneider," he was an apprentice for years and the women were trained by somebody else, and they made a whole garment. Today, you seldom go into a place where a person makes a whole garment, unless you go to a custom place, for a very, very high-priced garment. But the running of a system, it was a small government, every shop was a small government, and you had to be cognizant of the personalities that you were dealing with. So that after you got over the suspicion that you didn't know what you were doing and you were black and you were a woman . . . after you had overcome that, then you had to overcome the suspicion that you were probably selling them out to the employer. Now, this had nothing to do with color or race. This just meant that you were authority and you were suspect. So that you make sure that you did certain things, when you walked into a shop, that you greeted your chairlady or chairman and that if there was a grievance, that you got the chairlady and a committee or the chairlady herself or the chairman, if you had that kind of respect, assuming that he or she had that kind of respect in the shop and the shop would trust them, and that you went in and sat down with the employer, but under no circumstances, and it could be for a very, very simple and honest reason, do you go in a hurry and walk in and say to the employer, "You have not paid your whatever, and would you let me check the books," or "Rosie Jones did not get so and so, would you let me see what hours she worked." In your anxiety to get the job done quickly, since you have a long list of

SPRINGER KEMP: shops to service, you may do that. When you walk out, the assumption might be that you have made some deal to the worker's disadvantage. So all of these things, one had to be cognizant of and work with. You had to know the union contract.

INTERVIEWER: Did all business agents operate the way you describe or did some of them go off on their own, I mean, is this something you figured out yourself?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh no, no. This is what a business agent should be about. That's why you're a business agent. Your business is policing the union agreement. Your business is looking after the workers' interest; your business is to see to it that that worker does not waste time. And, therefore, you go to the worker at the shop, you see the chairlady or chairman who is reimbursed for loss of time. But, of course, that's the ideal and the ideal never works out that way. You walk into a shop, and sometimes by the time you're through, you've created a riot. And if you had something which you wanted to adjust, you would very often meet with your opposite number in management and the two of you would go into the shop, call in the principals, the workers' side and the employer with the chairlady and maybe get it resolved, everybody shakes hands and returns to work.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you do that? A long time?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Thirteen years.

INTERVIEWER: Thirteen years. And while you were business agent, what other kinds of extra things were you doing? I know you had lots of little trips and extra involvements all through your....

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, you just couldn't be a business agent. Your responsibility to the union was every hour of your life. So that you were always sent off on representations of some kind, or I'd go off on some study program.

INTERVIEWER: When was your trip to Sweden, was that before or after your trip to Africa?

SPRINGER KEMP: This was before, this was in 1951. I got a scholarship from the American Scandanavian Foundation to study workers' education. I had been an educational director and you had directed a question at me, and I skirted it when we first started talking about workers' education. Now, I am an advocate of workers' education, I have seen the results of what it has done and can do. But very often workers downgraded it. For example, the old-timers would say, "Sure, they got workers's education, they go to classes by dancing." Now, if you had young people in the union, and other people for that matter, in addition to parliamentary procedure, you try to do some things that . . . would be more personal.

INTERVIEWER: A little recreation . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Right, you had theater tickets, and you did a lot of other things. This was a very future oriented union with great social consciousness. But there were many union leaders who saw workers' education as a very minor key on their blackboard. And an educational director did not have very much standing or status. And it reflected itself in both how the leader of the union approached it. Where there was a vigorous championing of it and where you had stimulating things, you had partial success. You could never have the kind of success you should have, when you have working people who are pushing a machine and standing at a cutting table and a pressing table all day long, and then expect them at five o'clock to come and be attentive for a length of time. There were those of us who had that kind of concern and discipline and who did, but for the most part it's a kaleidoscipe, another changing pattern. Some unions in the United States take workers' education seriously, the American labor movement is taking it seriously, now you're developing labor colleges which labor is investing in. The AF of L/CIO has its own training center in a Washington suburb.

INTERVIEWER: In Washington.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, which it brings in men and women from around the country. The nature of the labor movement is such that you very nearly have to be a lawyer, a psychiatrist, and a writer to be effective.

INTERVIEWER: . . . to be really prepared....

SPRINGER KEMP: To be really prepared. And I think this is what in this generation the labor movement is doing. And the old-timers of the labor movement are looking at their objective for the future of maintaining the labor movement, because you are dealing with a mass employer, you are dealing with an employer who comes into a meeting straight from the board room after a number of corporate decisions that affect people's lives in twenty countries, maybe. And so your leadership is also going to have to be trained in that way.

INTERVIEWER: Aside from the AF of L/CIO school in Washington, what other training grounds are there?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the UAW, they have Black Forest, that's a rest home, but they have always been in that vanguard of workers' education. And most of the big unions use the universities with extension studies. Cornell has a big labor school. In New York City, you now have a labor college which was, in the main, sponsored by the Central Trades and Labor Council and so that there is this concern, and associate degrees and graduate degrees

SPRINGER KEMP: are being given in this training.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that their education is adequate? Is this just for top leaders, this type of university? Is it for people at the shop steward level?

SPRINGER KEMP: They can be at the shop steward level. Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say that it's improved over the last twenty or thirty years from, say, the thirties?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, I think we're talking about two different things. The thing I originally was speaking about, workers' education, was the kind of program which the individual local union would have for its membership. What I am now saying is, there may still be the inherent weaknesses in that kind of training program, and it is limited. But what is happening is that the labor movement is looking at this as a national and international responsibility to prepare its leadership in representation with mangagement on that level.

INTERVIEWER: Now what did you find out in Sweden?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, in Sweden and Denmark, workers' education, this was a real eye-opener for me, you have government subsidy. The school leaving age was a lower one than the United States because when a boy or girl, which was the European system, they went off to work at fourteen. So that the young person going to work could study seriously. They had both radio study and they had correspondence courses which were intensive. You had the workers' education school, the workers' school would make your head swim. The kind of economics, world history, language . . .

INTERVIEWER: Language, too.

SPRINGER KEMP: They were beginning because, you know, there were a lot of people then they understood English but wouldn't speak it. But the documentation and the knowledgeability of their own legislation in their own country's history, and the knowledge of the labor movement in the rest of the world was astounding. We were, in my view, behind them on that.

INTERVIEWER: Are we still behind them?

SPRINGER KEMP: We were then behind them, but I think we are doing better.

INTERVIEWER: . . . now . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes. The nature of the multinationals . . . we are learning . . .

INTERVIEWER: We are learning fast.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: But you were amazed at Sweden when you . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Sweden and Denmark. The scope of workers' education, I had never been exposed to it. I knew something about the British system.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say theirs was better than the British system at that point?

SPRINGER KEMP: In 1951, I thought so, because, for this reason: the British system really had the authority to do some of the things on worker's education, really develop it, after the Labour Party victory. So one always has to go back to circle one.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

SPRINGER KEMP: Ruskin College is perhaps the best know British labor college. The very elite and privileged few could get through, you had locally ways in which the British worker could have the advantage of the so-called upper class after the first Labour Party victory. But in the Scandinavian countries, there was no issue. Workers' education was a part of the functioning of their social democracy.

INTERVIEWER: Now, in this workers' education in Denmark and Sweden, would all workers participate in it, selected workers, or self-selected workers, or how did that operate?

SPRINGER KEMP: It worked both ways. Self-selected workers and workers whom the leadership thought had potential. Many workers are just not interested, they want to go to work and they want to go home and they want to go and do whatever they want to do. But in any kind of leadership there is always that 5 percent who push forward. The leaders of the labor movement spent many hours with me. I loved both countries so I went back and they spared no effort in showing me and demonstrating what the programs were and what the potential was for the worker who could pass through all this. And if it did nothing more than give self-confidence and assurance as to what they wanted to do, which may be to go on to the university, the opportunity was there. They lost a lot of their leadership potential as a result of the national policy.

INTERVIEWER: They did?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, because after the young person worked for four years and had studied, then decided to go on to the university, and it

SPRINGER KEMP: was the logical next step.

INTERVIEWER: And then he might move into a profession or anything else at that point, and cease to be a worker at all.

SPRINGER KEMP: Exactly. Well, always a worker.

INTERVIEWER: Always a worker.

SPRINGER KEMP: Their system . . . you have trade unions and all kinds of categories in the professions.

INTERVIEWER: Now, the other day before we had the tape recorder on, I asked you a question about the women workers in Sweden, your intial contact with them, and you told me a story that I really think you should repeat.

SPRINGER KEMP: The social democracy was alleged to be perfect in the Scandinavian countries, except there was a male wage and a female wage, which I did not know until I got into the country. In 1951, there was a great thrust and movement to have the national policy of the labor movement changed to make equal pay for equal work the basis of the union structure. And I arrived in the country with greetings from the President of the International Ladies Garment Workers because among others the garment workers I believe were having a meeting and so I present my credentials and I do this. It's fine, it's translated properly. Then a group of women journalists invite me for a luncheon because they want to discuss the labor movement and U.S. women workers. Fortunately, my escort on that occasion was Esther Peterson, whose husband, Oliver Peterson, was the labor attache, and with whom I was staying because we were long-time friends in the United States. In the discussion that long afternoon, the women posed the question of the inequities of their social democracy. I stated very clearly that I didn't know that, but in the United States pioneering women had had equal responsibility and they had had to work though, we had not come through with perfect colors, unequal pay for equal work was still a pattern because we could get around it by categories. And so I thought I commended myself that afternoon in getting out of a very awkward situation. The next morning headlines in the newspapers said that I pitied the poor Swedish workers, their disadvantages. I don't read Swedish, and my first appointment that morning was in a factory, a very large factory, and as I walked into the factory, the icicles are hanging from everywhere, and I get a very perfunctory greeting from the employer, and as I walk through, the workers put their heads down and they don't even see me. They I learned what had happened, that I had insulted the Swedish workers and that the labor movement was up in arms. It required a meeting of nearly a hundred people in the labor attache's home, all of the various labor leaders, and the woman who headed the

SPRINGER KEMP: women's section of the Scandinavian Labor Movement in Sweden refused to meet me. She was out of the city on the day, the week I arrived, and when she read what I had said, first there had to be clarification with her that I indeed had not said that, and then the meeting of all the labor leaders at the Peterson's home when his wife verified that I did not do any of the things that was alleged. That was very embarassing, the newspapers then began making caricatures of me sitting like this.

INTERVIEWER: I think you said that you felt that someone had been attempting to use you in order to gain . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: The women, the women journalists had, because they said some awful things. What they thought were their disadvantages, I had no way of knowing that, and said that on the surface it seemed this way, but this is what really happened. So that they used me to put their issue forward in a way that they could not have done so just by arguing the case.

INTERVIEWER: Had they tried just arguing the case? Or were they . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Evidently. And at the convention, the trade union convention, I think the editor of the national union paper resigned. He supported the position of the women, and, of course, the leadership of the labor movement was trying to paper this over, but he was adamant and he spoke up against any separation of sex. That was my exposure to Scandinavian internal politics.

INTERVIEWER: You were afraid of their women . . . (laughter)

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no no, just some professionals. I just made sure that I had at least two witnesses who would be prepared to testify that I did not do or say insulting things. But it never happened again. This did not happen to me in Denmark, just I was in the wrong place at the right time, and they needed a catalyst and I was it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think inadvertently you helped the women's cause.

SPRINGER KEMP: I think I did, but for about a week I wanted to drown myself. How do you seem to go to a country and insult the leadership of the labor movement? And insult the workers?

INTERVIEWER: And the women workers felt insulted too? They didn't regard this as something that was to help them?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no. Because how could I come to their country and here they are with these big beautiful factories and fine conditions and....

INTERVIEWER: It was an unfortunate incident.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, but you have many of those, of course, with living, but that one was so large, and I was young and terribly humiliated by it. It really nearly made me ill. It took more than one day to wipe the blood from my nose on that one. I normally recover very quickly. (laughter) Translating this stuff and shipping it everywhere . . .

INTERVIEWER: You must have felt rather helpless.

SPRINGER KEMP: I did, I did. You couldn't combat it, you see. You had to have someone else act as your intermediary.

INTERVIEWER: It turned out all right. Well, it's noon, and I know you have to go some place.

INTERVIEWER: This is May the eleventh and we're at the home of Maida Springer Kemp. Well, I thought today, since you just returned from another trip to Africa, it might be a good day for us to pick up on your African experience. Would you like to start telling me about your work in Africa? We touched just briefly on your early trip there.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. My first trip to Africa was as a representative of the American Federation of Labor, and this was prior to the merger, so that there was not an AF of L/CIO, that came several months later, the end of that year. The international labor movement, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, of which the AF of L and the CIO were members, were invited to send, as observers, two American delegates to the first ICFTU meeting in Africa. And so this seminar in Africa was for about three weeks and trade unionists from all over the continent who were able to come, many of them had been in jail, and as a matter of fact, on that occasion, the Algerian delegates, some of them had just been released from jail and were present there. They were from all over Africa, the delegates, the emphasis on that was an exchange of views, and they were talking about agriculture, mining, wages, hours, conditions of service, workers' education, and the prospects of independence, and the role of labor in that world that was to come. You must remember, this is early 1955. Ghana was the country that was preparing for independence and even though its leader, Dr. Nkrumah, had been jailed, it was very interesting that the man who jailed him, the Governor General, was the man who was at the prison gates to welcome him out to form a government. These were very exciting times, and I think I was the only woman delegate.

INTERVIEWER: How many went from the United States?

SPRINGER KEMP: From the United States, two from the United States, one officer from the United Auto Workers, myself, and there was a delegate from Canada. I think we were three or possibly four Americans,

SPRINGER KEMP: not more than that.

INTERVIEWER: Were the others black?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, the men. Yes, a very prominent officer of the United Auto Workers. The discussion ranged about everything conceivable, and we talked about American legislation, workers' legislation, and the business of semantics, of what words mean. We got into a lot of difficulty about that because the way we phrase things, and the way the British-oriented trade unionist phrases things is very different, and so we had a lot of fun sorting that out.

But it was a time of very serious work and there were films, every day there was an agenda, and each representative took a turn in giving a background of the labor situation in the country. After that period, we, of course, in the evenings had discussions. In my own case, I had the unusual experience of having gone to school with some of the men who were now in government, as labor officers. I had met them in Oxford some years before. And so those labor officers were very interested in having me see the side of the work that they were doing, because when we were at Oxford I had challenged them, and said to some of them, if you represent both the government and are an advisor to the labor movement, that I saw a conflict there. But this was, of course, my being an expert in ignorance.

INTERVIEWER: They convinced you otherwise?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, they didn't convince me otherwise, but one saw some necessity for helping the trade union to understand, in lieu of anything else being there, because to have legislation which said that any seven people could form a trade union, meant that you had a multiplicity of unions having no strength, and unable to really bargain or discuss the wage legislation and the way it should be. Then you have the question of language and you have the question of tribalism, and these nuances, the ignorant expert from the United States had no knowledge of, and therefore I could be very profound. (laughter) So these were some of things that one had to learn about . . . the thing that struck me was the youth of the leadership of the labor movement all over Africa. Anyone who was thirty five years old was ancient, and I was much over that. And you looked at these young men, and marvelled that they grappled with English, but they translated very often two or three other languages in their minds in order to answer you in English. So that whenever I would listen to people who would talk about Africans as unintelligent or not educated, and I would very often say to them, "We barely speak intelligible English. The African to whom we speak, even if he understands, answers us haltingly, with a different accent, has translated what we have said three times

SPRINGER KEMP: in order to answer us." And I think one ought to consider that. One would see young people walking along the beach, barefooted and dressed very shabbily, but walking with a book, doing a correspondence course in order to qualify for something else. The legislation, the labor legislation, was based on the British system. To the credit of the British, unlike some of the other colonial powers, you had a leadership potential developing in the country and the British Government, not the British Government, but the British labor movement did not in fact remain in the country to control the labor movement. There was a limited freedom of development.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you were the only woman delegate to the conference. What about . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: I was not a delegate.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's right, you were an observer.

SPRINGER KEMP: We, the Americans, all the foreigners were observers.

INTERVIEWER: What about African women? Did they participate?

SPRINGER KEMP: In that particular ICFTU meeting, no women were members of the delegations. Now, that was entirely . . . that depended on the industries that were involved, and you had largely the people from agriculture and from mining, and government employees. And women, except for the very high professions, you had women who were doctors and lawyers and some judges, but most African women did not go outside the home to work and if they did, they worked on their small farms, and they were, of course, nurses that worked in the public sector, and the rest of it. But they were not a part of this delegation. That has changed. As a matter of fact, in July, I go to Nairobi to be one of the coordinators of a conference for women workers, and it will be a ten-day meeting. And there will be women from ten different countries in English-speaking Africa who will come and discuss their concerns and their role as trade unionists and the ways in which they can be more effective in leadership and strengthen the labor movement as they grow.

INTERVIEW: That's interesting, Now, what next, after this particular....

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, after this conference, of course, there were resolutions and a program. I came back to the United States and made some recommendations, reported to the AF of L, reported to the ILG, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, because I was an officer of that union, simply on loan to the AF of L. The end of that year, of course, the AF of L and the CIO merged, and a large delegation from the International Conferation of Free Trade Unions came to attend this historic occasion, of the merging of the AF of L/CIO. One of the delegates of the Inter-

SPRINGER KEMP: national Confederation of Free Trade Unions executive board was a young, a twenty-some year old African from Ghana, who was a member of the board, who was here in the United States for the merger. He then was the general secretary, his name was John Tettegah. He was then the General Secretary of the Ghana Trade Unions Congress. He was so young, as a matter of fact, that I said to my son, he is your peer, and for those occasions when he is not meeting with the board or doing some official function at the convention, I would suggest that he join you, with your college colleagues and do the kinds of social things that young people do, because of . . . what do they call it these days . . . our age gap . . .

INTERVIEWER: Our generation gap.

SPRINGER KEMP: Our generation gap is too great. But this training ground, many of these young men were seconded to the ICFTU office in Brussels, which was the headquarters, and were given courses in different parts of the world and training in Brussels. One of the problems that the AF of L/CIO had, was that we felt that some of the decisions taken were very good on paper, but they took so long to implement. A. Philip Randolph, as a Vice President of the AF of L/CIO and President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was one of the strong forces in the executive council of the AF of L/CIO, he championed actions which would more rapidly move programs to help the trade unionists be a social force for good, as we recognized and saw the transition in Africa toward independence. He made some of the most stirring addresses and worked within the council for change. Another one of the myths that I would like to lay to rest, many Americans looked at President Meany as the conservative who only saw the status quo. He was concerned with what was good for workers and what was good for the citizen and I don't think he's ever deviated from that. But he was an absolute optimist, and a challenger and a supporter when it came to working toward faster change in Africa. There is not a program with which I was associated subsequently when I was on the staff of the AF of L/CIO in the department of international affairs, that President Meany did not actively support and put his weight behind any proposition which he felt would give the worker a fairer chance on the continent of Africa. And they were very pragmatic reasons, as well as moral and ethical reasons, because if you undermine and if you underpay and overwork and . . . the black worker in Africa, we were just a few steps removed from that in the history of the American labor movement when workers in the United States were badly exploited, we've not finished the job yet. Because out of a work force of ninety million, you have perhaps twenty million organized workers in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel that Meany was equally concerned about black workers in the United States?

SPRINGER KEMP: I . . . yes. Most people would not agree with me.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard that . . . people say they didn't, but I don't really know, that was one of the reasons I . . . in fact, I've heard that he and Randolph differed about....

SPRINGER KEMP: I could tell you intimately about the differences between President Meany and President Randolph. They had very different approaches to it and I do not pretend that Mr. Meany saw the rapidity, the need for the rapidity for which it had to change. President Meany tried to point out that while he headed the AF of L/CIO, every president of every union was, you know, the chief in his own domain and the AF of L/CIO as a national body does not sign contracts and organize, and within the life of the AF of L/CIO, when President Meany came in to office, there were dozens and dozens of unions which had auxiliary clauses in their union contract and a lot of other unpleasant things. In the process, these were eliminated. Now, to eliminate it is one thing, and to get it really implemented across the country is something else again. And they had a difference in method and Mr. Meany had a fine Irish temper which . . . (laughter) is revealed over and over again in the press. But these two men had mutual respect and other people were angry that Mr. Meany and Mr. Randolph were not angry with one another. They disagreed on method, and Mr. Randolph felt that unions should be aggressively given action and thrown out of the AF of L/CIO and the rest of it, and Mr. Meany was not going to go that round.

INTERVIEWER: But on Africa you feel they had less differences.

SPRINGER KEMP: They had no differences. There was not an issue on Africa, because we were . . .

INTERVIEWER: You said they had no real differences at all on Africa.

SPRINGER KEMP: On Africa. No, they were solid on South Africa, they were solid on colonialism. Mr. Randolph's voice on colonialism was the voice that President Meany concurred with, so that there was no question. We irritated and annoyed some of our more liberal trade union colleagues around the world and some, the supposedly Socialist and socially-oriented trade union leaders around the world whose governments had colonies, were uncomfortable with some of the positions taken by the AF of L/CIO. However, within the framework of the international labor movement -- that's the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) -- there were certain programs proposed which the AF of L/CIO suggested, to the international labor movement, and on some of them, they seemed to be dragging their feet, and we were being asked by the trade unions in Africa to help them. For example, in Kenya (KFL) the Kenya

SPRINGER KEMP: Federation of Labor, Tom Mboya was the General Secretary and one of the most brilliant minds in Africa, was asked to help them in putting up a trade union center. This was an unusual request, for the American labor movement does not usually go in for putting up buildings.

They did two things. They not only talked about the labor movement and worked on behalf of the workers in the country but they talked about the whole principle of human dignity. The William Green Fund, which was an AF of L fund, gave to the Kenya Labor Movement the first $35,000 out of that fund for the building of Solidarity House in Kenya. We hope in July to have the opening session of this women workers conference at Solidarity House. I helped to organize the meetings in 1957 at which he discussed with various American labor leaders the needs in Kenya. The UAW is extremely active, an active participant in the work of the labor movement abroad.

INTERVIEWER: Which other unions were either helpful or foot dragging?

SPRINGER KEMP: It's unimportant now. The AFL-CIO set up a scholarship program in addition, a trade union scholarship program which was short-lived and was one of which I was the officer. It was the first time that African trade union leaders attended the Harvard Seminar.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about it, even if it was short-lived.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, it continues, to this day, in a three-month program, but I was based in Africa and in that first experiment . . .

INTERVIEWER: How long?

SPRINGER KEMP: . . . Well, for under a year, . . . with an office in Dar es Salaam. But the program was to work with the trade union movement, based on their selection, to select a candidate who would participate in the program. And that was in one of several countries. And so the precedent was set. As a result of that activity, which created a storm of protest, we then were able with the ICFTU to structure a labor college in Uganda, which for many years was the development center for African-speaking trade unionists from all over the English-speaking Africa. This was a residence school, beautifully appointed, and I think served a great need and a great purpose, but it grew out of the challenge which the American labor movement unilaterally began by offering training programs to leaders of the labor movement selected by the leadership of the African labor movement, no choice of the American labor movement. My function was the facilitator in terms of putting it together.

INTERVIEWER: Now, initially some of them came here?

SPRINGER KEMP: They came to Harvard. They spent their first six or nine months at Harvard.

INTERVIEWER: How long did that coming here last? Just a few years or a year?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, you still have people coming, but that particular program ended, you know, after that first group, and in the process, the development of the labor college, which was then an ICFTU labor college....

INTERVIEWER: How much education did it give, and what kind? You said it was a residence college.

SPRINGER KEMP: It was a residence college and it was from a few weeks seminar to a nine month or a residence. And it gave you what one would get on a university level, dealing with the complexities of the labor movement. So that you learn not only about your trade union in your country, you learned about the history of the labor movement around the world. You learned the relatedness of the ILO, the International Labor Organization; you learned the role of other international bodies, like the trade secretariats, which deal with the individual union; for example if you were a member of the union of Professional Workers Professors, that would be the trade secretariat from which you would have membership. And in Europe, they do have much more of the professional unions than we have in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: Who taught in this school. Were they mainly Americans?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, there were very few Americans teaching in this school. They came from Scandinavian countries, they came from the British TUC, Trade Union Congress, from Germany, maybe one American. And African trade unionists, they were men who had studied in universities who then came, Africans who came, as officers, lecturers at the labor college. It was a very great sense of satisfaction that one saw some of these things happen. Some of us had been thinking for years that while you taught the rudiments of trade union representation and the functioning of an organization because that has to function with officers and representation and writing letters properly and learning how to deal with management, but there was a second phase, which I was particularly interested in and that was in training for workers in employment. One of my experimental projects based on a discussion with some African leaders, one from the Rhodesias, which is highly in the news these days, and one from Nigeria. I developed a program for trade union leaders in the needle trades or related industries, and the International Ladies Garment Workers provided the school with

SPRINGER KEMP: a staff and that schooling involved classroom work for x number of months, work in a plant, in a factory, et cetera.

INTERVIEWER: In Africa?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, no. In the United States. And then returning back to the classroom, reviewing what it was that you had done, and at the end of that time, oh there was a great graduation ceremony, it was an innovative thing and a first.

INTERVIEWER: Where was this school?

SPRINGER KEMP: This school was in the International Ladies Garment Workers Center, national headquarters in New York. Prior to that, the reason the facility was there, the garment workers had had a training school for young officers because we were finding that what we called in the industry, you know I'm from the garment workers, I'm a garment worker, that the Alte Darssmachers, the old dress makers, their children were going into other professions, naturally they were not coming into the needle trades and so there needed to be a buildup of young men and women who could meet the new ways of bargaining and negotiation and National Labor Relations Board and the legal implications of what you were doing. It was not like the old days. And so we could not find enough young people who were the children or families, and so these scholarships were thrown open and a number of young people who were not trade unionists, but who had an orientation toward the labor movement, they came to this school. And they were guaranteed a job, an employment within the trade union movement. When that school closed down after many years, the facility was there and so that our timing was quite good.

INTERVIEWER: About what year was this, that you were, roughly . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: '61-'62. And you know, President Meany said, "Well, if you can put together the arrangement, this based on the request of the trade union movement in Africa, the AF of L/CIO will be supportive in the ways that we need to be. You just go and work it out with President Dubinsky and the rest of it." And I always knew that when President Dubinsky raged and stormed, if I kept quiet, I had won that one. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: The battle was with himself, not you. Did he rage and storm?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: What did you say?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the kind of thing he said, you know, "Springer , you always come with your unilateral ideas." And I said, "No, this

SPINGER KEMP: is not a unilateral idea, it's a recommendation. I've gone to President Meany with this, and he's approved it and you have the school and I have come to you to ask you . . . there are workers in our industry in Africa who need to improve the standard of their representation as well as the standard of their knowledgeability of our standard of work." Finally, he said, "you go ahead and act; you will talk to the I.L.G.W.U. education director, Gus Tyler and so and so and so." And so it came to pass. I have been singularly fortunate because the leadership of the American labor movement have always given me the kind of leeway for what was unorthodox and they have seen this.

INTERVIEWER: And they permitted it.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, it was a necessary next step. I've always considered myself singularly fortunate. I've paid a high price for my unorthodoxy, but so be it. Then, after this, in 1956, again in Kenya, the garment workers' weak, poor federation -- most of its leadership had gone to jail, and as I worked with the entire labor movement there, with the KFL's, Kenya Federation of Labor, Tom Mboya who was the KFL's General Secretary, individual union leaders would come to me, so naturally since I came out of the garment workers, the leader of the garment workers came to me and said, "This is our situation. No matter how skilled the worker is, if the worker cannot pass an English-speaking test, an oral test, that worker is not entitled to whatever that wage is." Now the English-speaking workers, the English workers, they were from Great Britain or some place and the Indian worker it didn't apply to, because in most instances, the Indian employer employed his kinsmen and there was no problem about what wages were paid. But the black workers were the majority and the legislation was a restriction on their upward mobility.

INTERVIEWER: Was it really intended to be a language thing or was it intended to be a restriction on their mobility, using that as an excuse?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, it was a restriction on their mobility and paying them decent wages.

INTERVIEWER: They didn't really expect them to learn a language.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, they learned it; they knew English. But you could not pass an oral test. Now you know about education....

INTERVIEWER: Is this like the literacy test in the South where no matter how well you speak it, you can't pass?

SPRINGER KEMP: Of course, it was in that kind of instance. But since most of the workers did not speak English well -- they perhaps

SPRINGER KEMP: spoke three other languages well -- now those men who worked at it and who had gone to the army and the man who then was the head of the union had been on the Burma Road and this and that and the other, and all of those men under the British tradition was highly skilled craftsmen. They cut a garment; they fit it; they put it together. I brought back samples of the work, buttonholes, that it hardly looked as though the hand and the eye could do anything that perfect. And so beginning in 1956, these trade unionists, these garment workers talked to me and said, "You are our sister in the needle trades; you see the need. We need to upgrade and we need to teach ourselves. Could you help us?" Well, I tried for years and we were getting nowhere with it, I did a memorandum. And President Dubinsky said he would do it, he would agree to support the recommendation provided it was not unilateral and that it could be done through the International Garment Workers' Federation. The ILG, as a member of that federation, was one of its principals because we had a large membership and we made a large contribution and one of our I.L.G.W.U. Vice Presidents in the U.S. represented it. Well, he sent the memorandum over -- this of course is with the concurrence of AFL President George Meany who, too, took the position if we do this, let us do it through our channels of the ICFTU and through the International Garment Workers' Federation, and if the Garment Workers Federation does not have the funds to follow through to structure such a program as envisaged, through the special funds in the ICFTU, through their solidarity funds, funds can be allocated, so that we would remain within the legalities and responsibility of the international labor movement. It would not mean that a single American would have to go over there. It would be structured through that international body. We would simply again be the facilitators, the innovators.

Well, the school is now fourteen years old. They agreed for a commission of inquiry at one of those international boards. We knew that it was dead when we were going to have a commission of inquiry to see whether it was necessary. Therefore, I was left then with, well, there was nowhere to go. There was going to be a commission of inquiry and so months and months and months passed. I then asked if it would be possible if I found a sympathetic ear, if I raised the money within trade unions here to at least give a start to this earnest group, would President Dubinsky have any objection.

What we wanted to do was to upgrade the African workers so that they could pass the oral exam. The school was structured so that you had to attend classes in English in addition to increasing your competences in the work. And also it was an open door for young women to come into the needle trades and to be given the basics so that when they entered into employment, they could start at a level knowing something about machinery, give them a little trade union background, and also

SPRINGER KEMP: they had to take English classes.

This was nation building; this was looking toward independence and looking toward a way that the trade union movement could work with the independence movement, for the second motive force in the independence movement in Africa was first the intellectuals who came back and were restive about the inequities in the system, and the second force was the trade union movement, no matter how weak, but it was then the other vocal and cohesive force. Government had structured most of these, because it needed a venue, a way to deal with hundreds and thousands of people who were doing whatever their services were. And so while it was very complex and weak, there was an opportunity for the labor movement of the world to help the workers strengthen their own ability to bargain on their behalf and to upgrade their skills. It was miniscule, but it was a beginning.

INTERVIEWER: Was this the beginning of women in that trade union?

SPRINGER KEMP: Again, there had been one or two, a few dozen women across the country, but the needle trades was big business. It's safari country in Kenya and there were very few women, and you must remember, you know, that the level of education, school was expensive and limited and if you could teach young women the beginnings of a trade, they could be self-respecting and self-supporting and help their families. And so this was my dream. I worked at this with the commercial workers in another country in Africa, worked with the motor drivers to set up a school in Nigeria. I saw the training of workers in their industrial competence as a second priority in their knowledgeability of treating with the employer and understanding in the contract and understanding the legislation in the country. And so....

INTERVIEWER: How did you get involved with the motor drivers? I can see how you got involved with the needle trade workers.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, by the same way I got involved with the commercial workers. You deal with a whole federation of unions. My workers were dealing with the leadership of the union and so, as you discussed needs in addition to educational programs and how you, you know, putting across your point of view, here were workers in every one of these industries who needed to upgrade their skills. In the motor drivers's school, for example, many of the drivers could not read English signs. Their driving left something to be desired and it was appalling. You've seen the pictures of many wagons and of people on over-loaded trucks. But this was the common carrier and the unions saw, not I, but the union leadership came in to me and said, "This is one of the ways in which we can improve the opportunities for employment as well as improve our membership."

INTERVIEWER: Who financed that school? You didn't have to raise money for that one, did you?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, I went around and begged. No, the union itself had started a little school and they were teaching English and they had made signs and the rest of it, but this one then got properly funded and through some of the international bodies, but at its outset, I just came back to the United States and started begging, and went to the Machinists' Union went to this one, went to that one, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Did the same people contribute to that who contributed to the needle trade?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, no, no, no. And then this became a part of the program which the African-American Labor Center, which has AID funds, and what we did in that first instance, I went around the country and we searched for a staff person through some of the Negro colleges where they had vocational schools to check with their graduates, with the leaders for some of their graduates to go and to work in this school.

INTERVIEWER: So you went to the colleges.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Irving Brown and myself, who was then the AF of L/CIO representative for Africa, he's now back on the European beat. We went down to Hampton University and I talked with a number of professors and said you ought to concern yourselves about some of the kind of things, the needs, in Africa. We would like to be able to send a first-class instructor in motor mechanics to Nigeria. So that the first teacher was from Hampton University, the first instructor who went to the motor vehicle school. By this time I was getting ready to retire actively, I thought, from international affairs, but we spotted all over Africa some of the kinds of needs.

INTERVIEWER: That was always the biggest problem.

SPRINGER KEMP: No. The labor movement . . . first of all I was always made available to do whatever it was. President Meany was consistent. This program, we believe, is a good one. Now if you put the other components together, this was the beginning of the building blocks for the kind of programs which have subsequently been part of the operation of the various institutes that have developed, which concerns itself with the cooperative movement, with educational programs, what have you. You have the African-American Labor Center, which deals with Africa. The Asian-American Free Labor Institute, which deals with the Far East. The American Institute for Free Labor Development, which deals with Latin America. These are all of the fingers, which deal with the labor movements in these countries and which now are funded and then you have money which is part of some of the housekeeping details which come from the AF of L/CIO.

SPRINGER KEMP: It has been an interesting period in one's life to have shared in so many of these things. Just recently, I worked with a group of women from Turkey. It was their first program in the United States, first trip to the United States for thirty days. I took them through the paces and with their opposite numbers, and these were the Turkish garment workers. So you know, you go back to square one.

INTERVIEWER: You never will really retire, will you?

SPRINGER KEMP: I hope I have sense enough to. You know, there is such a thing as knowing when that moment comes so that you are never in the position of being a hanger-on, and not being wanted.

INTERVIEWER: I don't think that will happen.

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't think it will happen to me either, because I will try to be aware. Today I am still requested.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. You've had involvement with Africa through other agencies than unions, right? This recent trip you said was an NAACP....

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the NAACP of course is not a trade union organization.

INTERVIEWER: But your interest in Africa goes beyond the trade union movement.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, sure, sure. Some of the people that I have dealt with in Africa turned out to be the heads of government and in some instances, some of the memorandums and the work they were doing was done in my house in Brooklyn. When there were petitioners.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of these?

SPRINGER KEMP: That's not a part of this.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's not a part of this, all right.

SPRINGER KEMP: And so I would just leave that out, because I am not interested in what could seem to be horn blowing. I'd like to stick with the work that one has done as a part of the labor movement, and its leadership around many countries in Africa.

INTERVIEWER: Could you comment at least on the changes in the lives of women in Africa as you've observed it over the past twenty-some years. You must have seen considerable change in your frequent trips. Why don't you tell us a little about that, since this project is particularly interested in women, as well as workers.

SPRINGER KEMP: All right. In the fifties, there were very few women in the middle schools and in the universities. After independence,

SPRINGER KEMP: when the African governments allocated large portions of their limited budget -- never mind what you read about they all put up big buildings and this and that and the other -- but education was broad-based so that opportunities for education and for training were without the strictures, and the doors were open to women. Families did not have to struggle as hard. A parent could look at a girl child and say, "Yes, indeed, she ought to have the opportunity for education." As you looked in the classrooms and you looked on the university campuses, and you looked in the vocational and technical schools, there were more teachers, there were more schools, there were opportunities for a few young women to go overseas. You had a very radical change, in my view. To the eye of the newcomer, it seems that it was not enough, and it isn't, of course.

INTERVIEWER: You mean African women are still....

SPRINGER KEMP: There still . . . not, not enough. There are not enough opportunities in the United States, so I can start here, you know.

INTERVIEWER: You can probably say that on the face of the whole earth.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, let us start at home, where we have unfinished business. But in terms of moving in and representation in their governments, and moving in on all kinds of levels, I saw a very, very radical change.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say independence was the major cause? What about a change from a different kind of economy to a more highly industrialized economy?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the change to a highly industrialized economy is not all that much.

INTERVIEWER: Hasn't taken place yet?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, it is not all that much. There is change but just the very services that the country needed. You know, prior to independence you did not have African men or women managing the airports, managing hotels, heading hospitals. All of these changes are as a result of independence.

INTERVIEWER: So that it's employment opportunities at a higher level.

SPRINGER KEMP: And a sense of -- to use an American cliche -- personhood. It's a word I hate, I can't think of one better at the moment. The dignity which the Africans always had about themselves and their country came into being at independence. Now you still have all of the tragic problems of fast urbanization, insufficient schools, all of these things, but everything that the African

SPRINGER KEMP: leadership saw as a need for social change. Just look at the Ministries, you know, who runs the governments, and all of the facets of this, which no African participated in except as a sixth-grade clerk. That change brought women, that change brought the needs for women who had been teachers. One of the first young women that we had in that early program, the training program at the ILG, out of the group of six, I think, there were three and four, three men and four women, something like that. One of these young women went back and eventually she was one of the principal labor officers in her country. I have seen great change. But African men, like American men, like European men, have many inhibitions about women when they even speak the role of equality. They have many reservations.

INTERVIEWER: You commented on this, I think, in our first interview, when you said that there were a certain number of men who talked equality but didn't practice it. Some who wouldn't even talk it and others who really believed it.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: This, of course, is true everywhere. Do you feel that within your own union that things have changed over the years that you've been involved in it?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, in the garment workers?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, well think in terms of both sex and race, because I understand that one of the things that's happened is that many more blacks and Puerto Ricans work in the industry. Have they achieved leadership roles, or is there a block?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, they had leadership roles, they have secondary leadership roles, you know. How many leaders are there on the top of the heap?

INTERVIEWER: Few.

SPRINGER KEMP: All right, but they're moving. All of the unions have dragged their feet in the United States. You know, it's a question of power. It's not even a question of color. It is power, color.

INTERVIEWER: What about sex, do you think sex is a harder barrier to overcome than color, or an easier one to overcome?

SPRINGER KEMP: It depends on the union. For example, the garment workers has been, the majority of its membership are women and deep down below I imagine there are those prejudices that women do not stay in the union and, therefore, it's harder to get them into leadership. But the majority of the members of the union most of them -- the women like myself -- were members for twenty-five and thirty years. It's a block one has to get over but the doors are more open, now.

INTERVIEWER: More open now?

SPRINGER KEMP: Out of pure necessity and some intelligent leadership.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that women in that union are asking for leadership, are they reluctant to take it?

SPRINGER KEMP: I can't answer that really. I think that the women are cognizant of their need to play a bigger role and you have women and staff people, you know, managers and the rest of it. But in the top leadership, out of the twenty-some international unions, twenty-some union vice-presidents, in my own union, there is one woman, maybe two. You see, Mattie Jackson is a Negro vice-president, first Negro vice-president of the ILG, and this year, there maybe . . . I think she was the only one. There may be two now.

INTERVIEWER: I've gotten conflicting views from women, including women labor leaders, but some of them seem to think that you almost have to twist women's arms to get them to be willing to undergo the hardships required to be leaders and other people think that women really want to be leaders and that they have to overcome so much more than men do to achieve it.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, they do have to overcome more than men do. You have the built-in prejudice that even though a woman has been a member and attended meetings and done all these things and brought up a family, there is the myth that she thinks like a woman. I don't know how women think. I never learned that one. And, therefore, she's going to be late,and she's going to be away from the meetings and she's going to be away from serious contract negotiation, which in fact is not so. But those are the prejudices which you have in government. We're still fighting about how many women are in what categories. How many women do you have in the category of, is it eighteen or nineteen, the top categories in government? Women who have been there for twenty-five years.

INTERVIEWER: Apparently, in the universities we're losing ground.

SPRINGER KEMP: Go to the universities. How many women are heads of colleges? So that whenever people pick on the trade union movement, I ask them to go to the churches; I ask them to go to the colleges; and I ask them to go to the U.S. Government, which has its affirmative action program. And when they have finished with all of those, then come and challenge us about the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: That's one of the things I'd like for you to talk about. Your view of current women's movement. Are you involved in C.L.U.W.?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, I'm not in . . . I started out being a member of C.L.U.W., Coalition of Labor Union Women, I paid my nominal membership,

SPRINGER KEMP: but I'm not an active member. I'm not active on the staff of any union. I'm a consultant on programs that I have strong feelings about and want to participate in and am invited to.

INTERVIEWER: All right, why don't you give me your off-the-cuff feelings about the current women's movement.

SPRINGER KEMP Well, what are you talking about? The trade union movement, C.L.U.W., or the women's movement?

INTERVIEWER: The whole thing. The women's movement in the unions and out of the unions. In other words, NOW and ERA and CLUW and the whole bit.

SPRINGER KEMP: Let's talk about the women's movement. The women's movement for me is like the trade union movement. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what the women's movement is all about and when you have people writing about burning brassieres and doing, just talking about the ridiculous things that are done. In any movement, there are extremes; there are demagogues, and there are people who will use that movement in order to get some point of view which they have across. The women's movement has a fundamental basis which I think is correct for them to bring to the attention of the rest of this country, that they share in the woes and the success of this country, and there are women with a multitude of talents that ought to contribute to the national good. Now I start with that. The early portion of that, of NOW, National Organization of Women for example, left the impression that those women were concerned only with middle-class values, and it had no relationship and bearing on other problems. It left the impression that they were the women who could talk about maids and checking accounts, and for a lot of the working women, the black women in this country, and the Chicano women, that just turned them off. They weren't talking about the same thing. But they did not participate and have the sense of what the whole thing was about.

So that I am a supporter of the women's movement and in the same way that I think that the labor movement is very often misunderstood, I think that the women's movement is misunderstood. As a matter of fact, you now have the head of the women's movement, a housewife. Originally, the feeling was that the women's movement was anti-marriage, anti-family and anti-the structure of what is considered the normal society. I don't think it was. I think in their anxiety to get a point of view across, some of their statements were really erratic and did not make sense if you sat down to analyze what they were about. The women's movement should be here to stay, and it's simply another step in our development.

Insofar as the Coalition of Labor Union Women, again there was

SPRINGER KEMP: a need for such an organization. But I went to a number of the meetings and went to that meeting in Chicago, that big meeting in Chicago, and there were a lot of young women there who had as much interest in the labor movement as I have swimming the English Channel. They were there with some special hang-ups which they used the Coalition of Labor Union Women to put across. And for those who were there and who claimed union membership, in my view, they are birds of passage who have no intention of participating in the growth of women in the labor unions and, as a matter of fact, castigated even some of those labor union women who were considered among the left-of-center within the labor movement. I think both NOW, National Organization of Women, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women is a training ground for building self-assurance and for participating in constructive ways. I think also, in the question of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, it brings into focus some of the nontraditional ways in which women can be a part of the labor force in the United States. So that while I am not an activist, I am a supporter.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think the major goals of either of those groups should be? You talked about them being used by people who have maybe lesser goals.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, but that to my knowledge is minimal and will pass.

INTERVIEWER: But it happens to every movement.

SPRINGER KEMP: It happens to every group.

INTERVIEWER: But what do you think, for example, assuming that you perhaps temporarily in your imagination could be the head of NOW, what do you think it ought to do? What do you think C.L.U.W. ought to do? To be most helpful to women?

SPRINGER KEMP: I think NOW is addressing itself to some of the things that I think are important. They're settled down, and no one writes very much now about hair pulling and screaming at one another. They write and think substantively. I think their agenda includes ways in which women can know more about one another, what they are doing around the country and around the world. There is a corporate concern, just as men have, women knowing about ways in which their development can go. I think out of NOW you have had . . . reach out into the colleges, reach out into special ways in which women can upgrade themselves without feeling self-conscious because of their age or because of their educational....I think NOW is beginning to do that and I applaud that. The Coalition of Labor Union Women, without question in my mind, once those bugs get out of it and that has happened, that they do an in-house training job, a self-education job, which can only redound to the good of the labor movement. It will make a lot of men anxious and challenge from

SPRINGER KEMP: them, but so be it. I've looked at some of their material and I've just looked at some of the women who were self-conscious within their unions and their leadership and I watched some of the things that they have done at which their men are appalled. (laughter) I think they just ought to do more.

INTERVIEWER: Just keep going.

SPRINGER KEMP: Just keep going. The fact that, just recently, they had a seminar at the George Meany Labor Center where women focused on concerns of the labor movement and the role of women within those concerns and, of course, there were gripe sessions, but there always are. I spent most of my life working with men, and I'm an authority on male rights. On this, I can do a doctoral dissertation.

INTERVIEWER: Give me a resume of that doctoral dissertation. Just briefly.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, men are just as insecure and can be petty and are. There are those who are loafers and complain all the time. They spend more time complaining than they do going about the business of overcoming whatever it is they think is an obstacle. Now, true, I have been blessed not to have had to work with too many of those, but if you are a person with some kind of official responsibility, you run the whole gamut of human strengths and weaknesses, so that I have seen great strengths in little people with no names and no authority to do things that just made me want to stand up and shout. I have seen men with some responsibility simply behave shabbily and do unseemly things. So that I cannot be frightened by the male/female variations, because I think as human beings we react under pressure in some very similar ways. Maybe we have shriller voices, that's not even so true any more.

INTERVIEWER: If you had a daughter instead of a son, what kind of advice would you give her in today's world, in terms of education, marriage, and trying to combine a career with marriage, or going for one or the other, just what kind of hopes would you have?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't think I would be any different with a daughter than I was with a son. Actually, because my son grew up in a period when there were still very limited opportunities for the young black intellectual, and the advice I gave him is pursue excellence, be the best you know how to be. Then whatever the context of your own capabilities, always remember that you give a helping hand to someone who is striving, because there but for the grace of God, there go you, and you are always one step removed from a grandmother and from a mother who was a factory worker and from a grandmother who eventually owned a beauty parlor and before that worked as a domestic in this country. Never forget that. And based on your interest, whatever field that you want to pursue, there is nothing I would not do to

SPRINGER KEMP: help you pursue that. But you have to want to; I'll never push you. I would tell a girl the same thing because I would assume that a girl today, if she were marrying, she would be marrying a peer. And that young man would have sufficient emotional security that he could look at her as a human being. My son's wife is a physicist, so she has a lot of brain power. And so they see one another with mutual respect. But my son grew up in a matriarchy so maybe he just . . . understood us, had affection for us and respected us.

INTERVIEWER: You wouldn't steer your daughter away from being a housewife or toward any particular career one way or the other?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, it would be very strange if she was a young black woman and was going to be a housewife. She'd have to learn how to do something else. Education, some basis of training, would be needed. Women are learning today that if they marry and if their lives dissolve, their husband dies, a woman has to go out and work at something. Life is too complicated and too expensive for the majority of us in whatever class.

INTERVIEWER: Would you try to influence her toward a black college or a women's college, or would you try to get her to avoid these?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, I would have, well, if I had a daughter, I would like her to have the experience of a black college, not to completely finish her work, but she needs, and he needs that experience because you are close, you are warm, sheltered. The young person, the twenty-five young blacks who go into a university of four thousand whites and survives, is a very superior human being, you can be shredded and shattered and humiliated in all of the subtle ways, for the majority dissects you even by being kind to you, you can be patronized to death. And I'm old enough to say all of these things out of experience.

INTERVIEWER: You wouldn't feel necessarily that it should be a women's college, or would you? Just a black college, in other words, which of the two . . . ?

SPRINGER KEMP: If it was a women's college, if it was a black college, it would need to be a coeducational college. I think one needs that experience. I would say either your beginning or mid-way that you go to a coeducational college. If you go to a women's college, a black women's college, you're isolated.

INTERVIEWER: What about just a women's college?

SPRINGER KEMP: A women's college, I'd have no quarrel with that.

INTERVIE Black and white mixed?

SPRINGER KEMP: Black and white mixed.

INTERVIEWER: Would you think that it would be the same kind of warmth and reassurance that the black college gave?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, no never! It couldn't, couldn't, couldn't. I think in women's colleges that the experience, from what I have listened to from my young black women, is not as traumatic as it has been for the young black male. For whatever reasons, it just is not as traumatic. Within the next generation, that will pass, but the majority of our youngsters are still going to be educated in the black colleges for some time to come. There is a richness and a history, a sense of knowing that the black college students know what college can give. And once the standards are there and you have very effective educators who care about the students, who care about them, that is what counts.

INTERVIEWER: You think that that's not true generally. You think in other colleges that that's less likely to be.

SPRINGER KEMP: How can it be as evident in large universities. You go up to a school with twenty-five thousand people.

INTERVIEWER: You can't even know them.

SPRINGER KEMP: All right. The majority, so you start with numbers, this is true for the white student who goes there. But he goes back home or she goes back to a social community and perhaps an intellectual community which is relative. Now the black college student may not have that. His parents may be poor dirt farmers somewhere and this youngster's gotten a scholarship and in that school there is, there are things that are very familiar. He doesn't have the additional struggle, the struggle of being <u>the</u> one, <u>the</u> ten, requesting a black dormitory in a black floor and this and that and the other, which eventually becomes isolation and nonsense.

INTERVIEWER: How would you talk to your daughter about questions of sex?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, good Lord, I'm so far removed from that, that's very difficult for me to project myself into that now, but if I had a daughter, a young daughter, a teen-ager, I would not present sex as something that should be hush-hush and make it unseemly. I would try to present sex as a function which one ought to understand and that one ought to have sufficient self-respect, and respect! not to go around, guitar playing and living in . . . that I'm opposed to.

INTERVIEWER: Guitar playing and living in, huh?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, the guitar playing is all right. The living in and the consequences of it. I think it tarnishes a woman spiritually.

SPRINGER KEMP: By the time she's twenty-some years old, she's been through a whole series of living in experiences. I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that it reduces that young woman's self-esteem. I admit my bias on that.

INTERVIEWER: How about marriage? You don't feel that reduces your self-esteem? Some women do, some women feel that they must remain totally unattached.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, I think that's silly. (laughter) Because you aren't totally unattached if you go in for all of these arrangements: you are very much attached, and I've looked into some of those who have gone into those arrangements: they find out that they are the housewife and the drudge and begin to resent it. They're both going to school and they're both doing this, but no, I don't see that. I think sex is not a hidden subject, and I would not go in for all of the Puritanism that really isn't Puritanism. But one has to live with one's self and this is what I really feel.

INTERVIEWER: You don't find the two-career marriage a problem, I assume, since you obviously have a successful one in which both you and your husband have exciting and demanding careers.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, there always a lot of things which create problems.

INTERVIEWER: Would you tell your daughter to be prepared to compromise between her career and her marriage?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, I would not! Oh no, if she's going to be married, yes, but if she is a young black women, she, of course, would have to go to work. And if they had certain standards that they wanted to live with and bring up their children in a certain way, it would be the rare young man, black or white today, that would be able to on a single income. Didn't they just publish something that it costs $64,000 . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . to send a child through college.

SPRINGER KEMP: Young people starting out don't have that kind of income. You have two or three children, so something gives. A young woman is trained, educated -- that education ought to be put to use. If this makes a joint income for their life, no, I don't think one should be sacrificed for the other. There are other compromises which have to be made.

INTERVIEWER: Would you tell her to make sure her husband helps with the housework or that she might as well face the fact that she's going to do that too?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, I don't think I would go into anything like that. You can't give people a guide.

INTERVIEWER: You'd leave her alone?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, I wouldn't leave her alone, I would try to tell her some of the basics such as, principles that marriage isn't, must not remain the way it is on the day that you march down the aisle, and there is a great deal of substance in marriage which can develop and bind that loving marriage, but it's not the idyllic thing, cause you then deal with houses and apartments and baby bottles and illnesses and what not. I can think of a brilliant young couple within the first three years of their marriage they dealt with the heart attack of a young husband, a Caesarian section birth, and some other almost fatal thing. Both of them very able and very bright, and they have lived with that and overcome it. No one had to instruct them. They were a team and they considered themselves as they against the world, that included their father, mother, mother-in-law and father-in-law. You could help, but only so much, and they thanked you very much for advice and did the things they needed to do. I think young people, if they are earnest with one another, have a better chance of making a go of marriage because they have more mutual respect. And I can say this with such authority because I'm not young and I don't know what young people think.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, but you have a merry time. (laughter)

SPRINGER KEMP: This is June 7, 1977 at the home of Maida Springer Kemp. Last time we spent practically the whole hour talking about Africa and I know that you have more to tell me. You promised that you are going to send me some documents that illustrate some of the work that you've been doing, and I believe you're going to send me something on training, especially.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. This will be a very special, deep and personal feeling for me to share with your archives some of my experiences with colleagues in Africa. I think I told you that Tom Mboya on his first trip to the United States in the Fifties, he was here under the auspices of the American Committee on Africa, and the organization had very little money and I always offered help in my small way -- a room (we had an old house in Brooklyn) a typewriter, and a telephone and food. We didn't have money, but these were the things we shared with dozens of young Africans who were in the United States for various purposes. Some were here on trusteeships, as was in the case of Tanganyika, and Tom was here as a trade unionist to meet with trade unionists in the United States.

At that time, the country Kenya was still in the midst of the quote Mau-Mau history. I can't call it anything more than that because Mau-Mau was a coinage of whomever wanted to leave an impression on the world that this was a country of barbaric people when, in fact, the repression in the country which did not permit workers to be employed at wages commensurate with their abilities.

SPRINGER KEMP: This was an agricultural country. By law, an African could not borrow money, more than five pounds which was the equivalent of fourteen dollars. To do the things one had to do. There were no such restrictions on the European community who were brought in and given loans and training to farm this rich land and to enjoy this beautiful country. So that the legislation was geared, and it is written in the early legislation, that the purpose of the legislation would be restrictive in order that the African would have to work on the European farm. And that in the industrial sector all kinds of legislation, for example, the purpose for helping to build a training institute for garment workers was because the legislation stated that unless you could pass an oral test you could not have certain wages and the rest of it. And secondly, that women were so minimally in the industry and we had hoped to give an opportunity for training so that young women could be prepared on this level to enter industry. But back to Tom. Tom was twenty-three years old when I met him. He was probably forty-six in terms of the sense, his sense of the fitness of things, his keen perception, his composure, and a rapid mind. He was a very rare human being. He never lost his sense of humor about the inequities in the system in his country or the colonial system all together. And he was tolerant of Americans who were so ignorant of the country and he understood why and he, therefore, was a patient teacher. Now when you have a combination like that in one young man, you should feel privileged to be in his presence.

He and my son were peer ages; I don't know who was a few years younger and so that I always thought that Tom was my second son. He spent his first night in the United States in our home, and stayed back and forth with us over a period of years. After that first time in the United States, of course, he was a celebrity, of course people recognized the talent that he had. The trade union movement worked with him and did many things in order to made it possible for the world trade union movement to see what they had in this young man. That he subsequently served several in ministries of his government was only the logical follow-up.

In the mid-fifties when I met Tom, preventive detention was still the way of life and Africans had to be off the street by nine o'clock at night unless you had a pass which, that you had some reason, that you were working somewhere or you were doing something. You could be arrested summarily. I have been threatened with arrest, because as I walked down the street, it was assumed that I was an African woman being on the street without a permit or some reason for being on the street. Tom's skill was a liberal education for me. I have attended many meetings of local trade unions in Kenya and was careful to protect the leadership of the movement, so that when it got to be nearly nine o'clock, he had already organized the ways in which everyone could get back home. One

SPRINGER KEMP: person had a car. You would pack everybody who was going in a certain direction, or in some other kind of conveyance to insure that they were not arrested. We have hopped up in the middle of a meal because we'd talked too long and everyone scattered, understandably why.

The hope then of the Kenya Federation of Labor was to do two major things. One, to find a way of building a trade union center which could house many of the trade unions, to find a way to give opportunities for education outside of the country, because they were looking to the day for independence, and wanted to be able to intelligently respond to an independent government in their labor management relations, in a way with confidence and with intelligence and not be just going off and having strikes and the rest of it. But to bargain in a peer relationship, which I enjoyed with the Kenya Federation of Labor, was never unpleasant. It was very often difficult, but never unpleasant because there was always an objective. There were individuals who were objectionable, but the goals that had been set by the movement gave us, in the United States, and to some degree in the international labor movement, but I can speak more freely about the American labor movement because this is what I was involved in, I'm talking about the American labor movement, whether within the AF of L/CIO or outside of it. We were one in the kind of concern and interest. A. Philip Randolph was kind of the catalyst, who was a Vice President on the Executive Council of the AF of L/CIO, and he was a standard for the young Africans as they attended international seminars and they saw him within the leadership of the AF of L/CIO in the international labor movement, and he gave a sense of dignity, courage and his intellect, and he was speaking on behalf of workers who had had the least, because the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had had a long and bitter struggle, and that he was a great example and I was fortunate to have been able to serve in some capacities as a result of the AF of L/CIO Executive Council, and Brother Randolph's help in saying that this young woman, I believe, can share constructively.

And so Tom and I worked on many projects. I suppose the one that stands as a memorial is Solidarity House, the trade union center in Nairobi, which the William Green Fund contributed the first $35,000 for the building. We in the planning process had gone around to the then colonial government with a simple statement of fact and the idea was that the workers in Kenya would do something like buy a brick, as their involvement and contribution to it. And so we tried to state this. We were suspect, of course, by the colonial government, but since we had nothing to hide, we gave the basis of the trade union of Kenya's, the Kenya Federation of Labor's rationale and its American counterpart supporting it, which subsequently became international support, through the International Confederation

SPRINGER KEMP: of Free Trade Unions. But this is a monument that in July, 1978 at Solidarity House in Kenya there will be a seminar of women workers and the first meeting, the opening ceremony will be held at Solidarity House on July 17th. So this tradition and the history of this workers' center . . .

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you tell us a little more about this coming . . . this is going to be mainly women, right?

SPRINGER KEMP: This is a women workers's seminar.

INTERVIEWER: Is it the first?

SPRINGER KEMP: It is the first that the African-American Labor Center, the Kenya Trade Union leadership and the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, the O.A.T.U.U., Organization of African Trade Union Unity, this is a kind of a partnership, but the African-American Labor Center is the principal co-ordinator of this. I'm a consultant for the African-American Labor Center and helping to put together a program. There will be three of us; there will be people from the ILO, there will be people from the U.N.D.P., the United Nations Development Program, there will be people from the Economic Commission on Africa, all sorts of resource people will be there, and the majority of them, the speakers and participants will be women. There will be trade union women coming from about fourteen countries in Africa. This will be English-speaking Africa, and they will be able to indicate their concerns and some of the questions, as it is in the United States. Why aren't women more active in the labor movement? What are the instruments which are still needed to help women participate more? What are the principal things that are common -- collective bargaining agreements; wages, hours, and conditions of service; pension plans, cooperatives. Running the whole gamut and having the women tell us in these sessions what they hope to get out of this conference. And finally, when the conference is over, not that we have had ten days of discussion, but concretely how this can be followed up in each of the countries so that women in their trade unions can present a program to their leadership in which the participation will strengthen both the labor movement and strengthen women's ability to participate in strengthening the labor movement of their country. So it's a very positive program and the responses that we are getting from the labor movement indicate that the leadership of the unions are concerned with improving the participation of their women membership. You know, in many unions in Africa some of the components of the membership, you have many unions where, like the United States, sixty five, seventy five percent of the membership are women.

INTERVIEWER: I noticed one of the questions you're going to discuss is: should there be women's committees in the union? Do most of those unions have women's committees, or is this an innovation?

SPRINGER KEMP: Some of them, I suppose, have women's committees, but the real thing we're asking the women . . we've had informal talks with some of them as one has moved around the world. In the United States and in some of the countries of Europe, there are women's sections within the labor movement. And we are saying to these women, do you see this as an effective instrument? Do you see that in your own union that there should be some specialized concern? You have, for example, in the United States the Coalition of Labor Union Women. We would like to explore with them some of the instruments that they feel would help to give them greater confidence. Some of the women have said, over the years as I have moved around, "We're ashamed to get up in a meeting and express ourselves; we have no sense of security about how we speak and approach a subject and we're afraid that we might be laughed at and we're afraid that we might be put down." Our hope is that through some programs such as this one, we can show women that men equally are self-conscious and when they stand up their knees shake and that you only learn by doing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that the African women's problems are really very similar to those here, or are there some really significant differences?

SPRINGER KEMP: I think there are some significant differences. The economies of Africa are mostly agricultural. The industrial complexes in none of these countries is comparable to the United States. What are common denominators are the problems of on-the-job training; child care; which is still a woman's responsibility; the problems of absenteeism; the problems of travel; transportation; the rest of it. And a good deal more concern about rural development, because for every one in the trade union movement who is working, maybe four members per family are a part of a small community, doing jobs that are subsistence levels and it is a concern of the labor movement in Africa. Cooperatives. Rural development. And women have a great stake in this.

INTERVIEWER: So the trade union movement in Africa is really going to be dealing much more with the rural part of it than ours is.

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes, of necessity, of necessity. Rural development has to be top priority. Nutrition is one of the big issues. It is in the United States also, but I think even more so when you begin to think of the early ages of the child, and as the countries diversify their economies, more and more women will be working. Therefore women will be innovative in many of the industries of Africa as they develop. An agricultural

SPRINGER KEMP: system which only limits the training of women to a subsistence level has to be reckoned with because agriculture is big business, will develop to be big business, and if this is the case, then women must be trained in all aspects of this as it develops.

INTERVIEWER: When you come back, will you send me whatever documents you can about the conference?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, I'd be happy to.

INTERVIEWER: All right, we like to have that, I'm sure, to add to your....

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes, we will be developing a body of material as we work with the women because our hope is to solicit from the women of these fourteen countries and I suppose we are optimistic from the interest being shown, if ten of the fourteen show, that will still be a very high percentage.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: But we'll probably do better than that.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we'll be interested in how it all turns out.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, one would have to look at this long range, because if the conference turns out well, it will mean that the women will have developed an agenda which says beyond the conference -- a, b, and c.

INTERVIEWER: It will be a beginning point.

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right. It's like graduation. Most people assume that if they get a certificate, that they are educated. In my view, a certificate simply has given you some tools on which to expand. We hope to put some tools in the hands of these women, and that we mutually share by our longer involvement and experience, share with them and they give us their experiences which we have not had, and if we can combine them and extract the best from them, and help them to do some of the things they want to do.

INTERVIEWER: What was your reaction to that women's meeting in Mexico where the Third World women and the American women seemed to be somewhat far apart?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, I attended that, you know.

INTERVIEWER: No, I didn't know. I'd very much like to hear your reactions to it and your feelings about that.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, let me start with my prejudice.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

SPRINGER KEMP: I think that IWY, International Women's Year, that meeting was a turning point in the historic development of the role of women. I think the press emphasized the conflict because that's what sells. At one of the meetings that I sat in for a couple of days, there wasn't a photographer. There wasn't a newspaper person writing down the story and this group was talking about small cooperative development, craftsmanship. No one was interested in that for the reason that, while this dealt with women from all over the world, there was no contest, no conflict, nothing but hard work, disagreement on ways in which it is being done, exploring, sharing, no one wrote that up.

But when you had a public, a larger meeting, and you had, of course, the women who came with their special agendas and some women from the Western World who were talking about checking accounts and legalizing abortion and such things, this was catchy, and this is what the press emphasized, when women became strident. That was no more to be horrified about than when the Italian Parliament throws chairs at one another. Relationships were developed there that are ongoing.

We had a particular concern. I was in Mexico City at a part of the program of the National Council of Negro Women, I was then a Vice President of the National Council of Negro Women, and we had within the conference our own program of meetings with women from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Twenty-seven of these women then traveled with us after Mexico City because this was again a part of the International Memorial Year and we were celebrating Mrs. Bethune's 100th birthday. These women went to Mississippi with us to look at rural development, at the kinds of programs which are very related to the kinds of programs in Africa, in the Caribbean, and in Latin America. They saw day care centers which we just ground out of the earth, and they saw how we turned communities around, the very community that the sheriff was riding herd on the council, because black and white women were meeting together. The sheriff was riding herd on the council, because black and white women were meeting together. The sheriff and the mayor of the town subsequently handed the keys of the city five or six years later, when we had demonstrated, white women and black women working together, their children playing together, and such training as could be given, given on par for all of them. They saw our rural gardens where women set up centers for canning food, not in a big extraordinary way like a factory, but a community in which all of the people shared with little money. For nutrition, our meat bank, our pig bank, which is a meat eaten in the South a great deal, these are some of the things we could demonstrate. Then they went on to Bethune Cookman College with us and celebrated the convocation and they laid the wreaths on

SPRINGER KEMP: Mrs. Bethune's grave which is right in the center of Bethune Cookman College in Daytona. And so this is my experience of Mexico.

INTERVIEWER: Why, that's fascinating!

SPRINGER KEMP: International Women's Year.

INTERVIEWER: Have you heard from any of these women since then, from their countries?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the National Council of Negro Women is working with some of these women around the world. Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And have they initiated any projects based on what they saw?

SPRINGER KEMP: The international division of the National Council of Negro Women is working in Africa, is initiating, they're doing the background of what you need to do, and by now, I suppose, they have constructed some programs, but it's ongoing and International Women's Year, as far as I'm concerned, was a very constructive way of reaching across the world to women.

You see, my view is that it was under-financed and some of the political implications which was not the intention was done for all the political reasons that people do things and we were in Mexico City and there was some special Third World concerns. But there was much that was substantive and what many people forget is that we are not talking about International Women's Year, and thank you very much it's finished. We are talking about International Women's Decade, which is a ten-year period, and there are meetings going on all around the United States now, regional meetings and there are meetings which are going on in many countries, and there are programs as a result of International Women's Year which are being structured, and possibilities for training for women through the United Nations Development Program, through ECA, through a number of the other specialized agencies. Like all international agencies, they're slow moving, but, however, International Women's Decade and the solidarity of purpose will outweigh some of the negatives that have been structured and been written about. Oh, I'm enormously pleased and fortunate that I was one of the minor participants in the International Women's Year.

INTERVIEWER: How much rapport was there between your group and the white women from America? Did you go your separate ways or did you also have overlapping . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. We were a part of what was going on in the second tribunal. There was the official delegation and then there was the big forum which anyone who wanted to go could attend and, therefore, some of the noisy things that went on we saw and I don't think anyone ought to be ashamed of that.

INTERVIEWER: I agree. That happens whenever you get a whole big crowd of people together. But you felt that it was quite a success?

SPRINGER KEMP: I felt that....

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever sense that people were trying to manipulate it into failure, some people were, or is this also an exaggeration?

SPRINGER KEMP: I can't speak to that. I think anything that's under-financed is vulnerable. A women's program is always taken with tongue in cheek and the assumption is that let's get on with it and perhaps we can forget about it after. But I think that the problem is that the women are not going to let anyone forget about it because every nation in the world subscribed to the document of International Women's Year and International Women's Decade. Now the fact that programmatically there has to be a great deal of effort made and funds provided for continuity, therein lies the tale. I don't think we will get 100 percent of our objective, but then nothing ever does. So that, on balance, I think we are in for a whole wave of social change and opportunities for women that would not have been possible without International Women's Year and without International Women's Decade. In 1964, the International Labor Organization at its annual meeting and at the '65 meeting had on its agenda, Women Workers in a Changing World. It took twenty-five years to put that on the agenda seriously. So that if we in International Women's Year can still be on the map a couple of years later and are focusing on International Women's Decade, I think we're on the right track.

INTERVIEWER: That's good. Now one of the things that I've never really asked you about is the other organizations that you've worked with. Mostly we've talked about your union work and now I find out that you've also been very active in the National Negro Women's Council and I'm sure in other things. You occasionally have referred to the NAACP or something else. Could you just give me brief run down on your sort of extra community activities, or would that take ten hours?

SPRINGER KEMP: You know, I've just returned from Africa, South Africa that is, as a member of a task force for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP at its inception in 1909, in addition to its deep concerns nationally, had its concerns and its sense of roots in Africa, since our antecedents were from there. The first international conference that the NAACP participated in, and we were the organizaers of, was the Pan-African Congress in 1919. W.B. DuBois was then the editor of Crisis and a theoretician, a scholar and a great historian. The next three international meetings the NAACP helped to organized and had participants in up to the meeting in Manchester in 1945, which was the turning point in the acceleration of the pace for independence. Now, World War II had something to do

SPRINGER KEMP: with that, sure, because you cannot have people from the colonies going to fight everybody else's war for democracy and freedom and social justice which is denied to them in their own country. I arrived in England at the tail end of that meeting and, at that point, began to meet some of the leaders of Africa. Subsequently when I went to study at Oxford, that relationship continued.

But the NAACP at its September meeting in '76 reviewed its policy on Africa, and while we were consistent on every resolution as documented, as to our view -- and individual leaders and groups have always participated in NAACP activities and we have given help to the degree that the Association could move away from its constant pressure of domestic problems. The board then authorized the Chairman of the Board, Mrs. Margaret Bush Wilson, to develop a task force. Sixteen people were invited and I was lucky; I was one of those invited to participate in the task force. The task force divided into four groups and visited fourteen countries in Africa. The task force that I was on, with Dr. Broadus Butler as the chairman of that task force, and the chairman of our sub-committee, ours was South Africa and since South Africa is the horn of the dilemma, this is the only country that we visited and moved across South Africa from Johannesburg to Praetoria to Capetown, to Namibia, Southwest Africa, then to Kimberley and we saw everyone from people who are in detention, namely Robert Sobukwe who was off of Robin's Island now, but is to be back in his home at six o'clock every evening, had special permission to be out until ten. When we went to Kimberley to see him, we arrived in Kimberley at eleven minutes to ten, he had seven minutes with us, but we met at six-thirty the following morning in order to meet with him. The NAACP will be putting out a documentation of our views with the leaders of these fourteen countries, with the leaders of the front lines, presidents, and from Liberia to South Africa the teams traveled. So that data will be available after it is presented to the board.

INTERVIEWER: Could you give a little resume of your view of what you saw, in terms of prospects for change, how bad the situation is?

SPRINGER KEMP: However bad one reads the situation is, it is worse. It is worse for the reason that this is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. It is one of the most viable economies in the world. It is a mini-United States because it has resources that could accomodate the human condition and give respect and dignity to all those. But this is a country that has 18,000 black South Africans, I'm sorry 18,000,000, close to 19,000,000, 4,000,000 whites, only whites have the vote, you have about a million and a half Coloreds, seven hundred thousand Indians, Malays et cetera. You have a three-tiered education system. You have a restrictiveness in that society that's hard

SPRINGER KEMP: to believe. And if you speak to people one-to-one, it leaves you with a nightmare because you can't believe that the same person you are speaking to, who almost makes the repression, they structure, they almost make it plausible. It's a religion. And you admire the Africans and the Coloreds who are not a nation of madmen and madwomen, their gentleness, well, not their acceptance. There will be change in South Africa; that's as much as I would say about that.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been a member of the NAACP? I suppose for many, many years.

SPRINGER KEMP: I'd guess thirty. I'm a life member. My grandchildren are life members. My son and his wife are life members.

INTERVIEWER: They're all life members?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, yes. They're on their way, even the baby. My husband, of course, is an activist. He's a member of the national board of the NAACP and his whole history and his family's history has been involvement in the NAACP.

INTERVIEWER: You know, one of the things we've never talked about is your marriage to Mr. Kemp. We had you married once, very early in your life. We never got around to your second marriage.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, we've been married thirteen years.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't you tell me about how you met him, and how this courtship developed and all the rest.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, sometimes we're not quite sure. I was working in the Department of International Affairs, the AF of L/CIO, and I lived part of the year in the United States and part of the year in Africa with my various programs. And we met on some occasion and then for a years, you know, I'm busy where I am, but whenever I was back in the United States, we maintained some kind of contact. And finally when I had to make a choice, I knew I was having to come back to the United States and remain more or less permanently because my own family situation, three elders, and I'm in effect the head of the family. My grandmother was here, who was ninety-four at the time. She had just arrived in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: From where?

SPRINGER KEMP: From Panama.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't realize that she had remained there all that time.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes. Oh, it took years of talking and begging. She had the belief that everyone in the United States lived in a closed

SPRINGER KEMP: brick cage and she was a rural woman with a farm and she couldn't understand anybody without green things and grass and the rest of it. But here were three elderly people, I'm an only child.

INTERVIEWER: Your grandmother, and your mother....

SPRINGER KEMP: My grandmother, my mother, my mother wasn't elderly and her husband, he was an elderly man, a dear. But I returned to the United States and Jim and I were married about thirteen days after I came back. So we had this long distance romance. I was in Nigeria working, trying to put together this motor drivers' school, and we did everything by either cable or a letter of some kind. As a matter of fact, on the first apartment we lived in after we were married, he sent me a slip with, that said, mail this back to me so that I can give it to the decorators. (laughter) What color you would like....

INTERVIEWER: So was it your common union interest that drew you together, or your common interest in many things?

SPRINGER KEMP: We have two major common interests. A concern for workers' equity, this is our principal relationship, common cause. Our second common cause is our involvement in organizations which are concerned with Negro institutions. I have been a board member of the Nation Urban League.

INTERVIEWER: We'll have to talk about that in a minute too.

SPRINGER KEMP: And I have never been an officer of the NAACP, but an activist, a contributor, a supporter from my youth.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't we, just for the sake of the tape, give us a little background on Mr. Kemp, too?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, Mr. Kemp is . . .

INTERVIEWER: You can call him Jim. I wasn't sure I should.

SPRINGER KEMP: He is the president of a local union in Chicago of building service employees. He was for sixteen years, thirteen years, from its inception, a member of the Fair Employment Practices Commission in the state of Illinois. He is presently a member of the board of the Regional Transit Authority.

INTERVIEWER: Did he grow up in Chicago, or did he come from some place else?

SPRINGER KEMP: He was . . . he grew up in Chicago, went to junior college here, to law school here . . .

INTERVIEWER: And you met him here?

SPRINGER KEMP: No. Because I had never been to Chicago other than for an occasional meeting.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet him? In Africa or New York?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, in Washington. This was my base and he was doing some trade union activity and we had some common interests, but we are so unlike one another that many people find us a strange....

INTERVIEWER: How are you unlike then . . . it must be complementary.

SPRINGER KEMP: Other people don't understand that we are complementary. He is big, belligerent, an extrovet. I am also good in groups. I care about people. I like working with people. But I am more reserved; I am more withdrawn. I do not have the ebullient personality that he has.

INTERVIEWER: You obviously find this difference rather satisfying, though. Do you feel that you bring out things in each other that are good for you?

SPRINGER KEMP: We are good for one another because in our private lives we each like to maintain quiet and sense of choice. We are supportive of one another's programs and activities. While we are very, very different, there is nothing that I'm involved in that he will not support. Even if he disagrees with it.

INTERVIEWER: Does he, sometimes? What kinds of things might you disagree about?

SPRINGER KEMP: In terms of program, he might just think that my involvement in Africa is excessive. But it's my religion. I may think that nothing he does programmatically is excessive. I may think that some of the things that for his social diversion, what you do for your relaxation is excessive. But if he is going to be doing a program of some kind where he wants some things done at home, and you know groups and the rest of it, we are as one.

INTERVIEWER: You sound like you have a modern marriage.

SPRINGER KEMP: Almost. This is not to say that we do not have dark days, as two very different human beings have.

INTERVIEWER: But you have two high-powered careers going, and with apparently very little friction.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, I think this happens because if you marry in maturity and you are not contending. He happens to be one of the men who is so emotionally secure and my own activities are limited, because since I resigned from international affairs, I work at the things that I choose and select within the labor movement.

SPRINGER KEMP: So that we have never been competitors; we've never had to make choices. I think this comes with marrying in mid-life.

INTERVIEWER: Was this a second marriage for him too?

SPRINGER KEMP: This was a second marriage for both of us.

INTERVIEWER: And are there children in . . . and no friction between the two families?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the children are adults.

INTERVIEWER: They're all grown up . . . sounds like a nice arrangement.

SPRINGER KEMP: And, in addition, it didn't have to be this way. We like one another's families.

INTERVIEWER: That's good. That's more important sometimes than anything else. (laughter)

SPRINGER KEMP: He has a daughter, I have a son.

INTERVIEWER: So they can't even be competitive, can they?

SPRINGER KEMP: His daughter has three children, my son has two children.

INTERVIEWER: And you enjoy all of them.

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do any of them live around here?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh, no. My son and his family are in Pittsburgh and Jim's family is in the suburbs where you bring children up properly.

INTERVIEWER: Out in the suburbs. Now tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Urban League, because we've never talked about that.

SPRINGER KEMP: No. Well, for years I was an active member of the Urban League. As a matter of fact, the Urban League was responsible for a partial scholarship. I am an Urban League fellow, and part of my studying at Oxford, Ruskin College at Oxford, was as a result of a special scholarship from the Urban League because their scholarships usually went for social work, for studies in the field of social work, which is the emphasis of the Urban League since its inception in 1910. But a group of people in the Urban League, Dr. Lester Granger and a few others, felt that while this was a departure, that it was important enough for them to raise some funds for a special fellowship for me.

INTERVIEWER: So you're in their debt before you even become their, one of their....

SPRINGER KEMP: So that I was very fortunate and I hope that I have given back at least a little in service and in a sense of social responsibility, the Urban League's faith and trust in me. If I find the report I did for the Urban League on my return to the United States, if you would be interested, you may have it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes, that would be marvelous, we'd love to have that.

SPRINGER KEMP: It was on a part scholarship from the Urban League that I studied abroad.

INTERVIEWER: And what have you done with them since then? I know you've been active in . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Nothing particular. Contributions, whenever asked to be present and to do . . . for many years I used to travel around the country to try to involve young people in broader based training. I was an industrial worker and to see that the instruments for social change had to be more encompassing than being a doctor, a lawyer, and a dentist. That the skills in technical training were as necessary as a limited focus on what is considered status employment because anything is status employment if it is done well, and if you pursue excellence in whatever you do. So that for many years I was a kind of a catalyst moving around the country and where there were conferences in the schools and in the universities around the country, we talked about ways in which you studied, fields that were open. So that in that way, I tried to serve the Urban League.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of special awards or honors have you received? It must have been a lot. Should have been a lot. We ought to get them down on your record.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, they're here, but I would have to look and remember them. I've received at least two awards from the National Council of Negro Women. One goes back to '45, '46. This was the year that Dr. Bethune gave out achievement awards to ten women internationally. In that year, I was among the women . . . Helen Gahaghan Douglas was given one of the awards. Dr. Pauli Murray who has just been made an Episcopal priest, and who is the constant scholar, she's a poet, she's a lawyer, a fine writer. She had the Brandeis chair, the Stulburg chair at Brandeis University in teaching political science, American history, et cetera, and one of the great civil rights activists. It was in that company that I received that, for me, first important award. I've received some awards from one or two of the sororities, and I've received labor awards.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe you can make me a little list when you go through your cupboard and find the ones you've forgotten. We can add that on.

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, I'm always embarrassed about that because . . . so many of us are on ego trips.

INTERVIEWER: I can tell that you are embarrassed. Well, let me ask you something. What do you think is the best thing you've done. Since you seem a little embarrassed about awards, if you could be your own judge, it may be something you didn't get an award for, but what do you think is the best contribution that you've made?

SPRINGER KEMP: I think the best contribution I have made is to have hopefully set an example for my son who is a lawyer, but who has never forgotten that his responsibility is not to himself and his family but that he has a social responsibility to give back something to the society which helped to fashion his life. To see his children now growing up with a sense of history and that even in their young lives, they're not teenagers yet, that they have, their parents are teaching them, that they have a commitment. That's my best contribution. The next is to have, the next is a privilege that in the labor movement, I have been able to learn and learn enough to make me humble, and always know I've got to pay back something.

INTERVIEWER: Aha, what is that?

SPRINGER KEMP: That, Jim and I got jointly. This is the Walter Reuther Award which the Chamber of Commerce I think, the Colored Chamber of Commerce....

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes. 1971, Cosmopolitan Chamber of Commerce presents to Maida and James Kemp its 1971 Walter Philip Reuther Humanitarian Award. It's lovely. See, that's one you forgot completely, wasn't it?

SPRINGER KEMP: I just happened to see that thing sticking up.

INTERVIEWER: All right, as you go through your cupboards, you'll probably find a dozen more and I really would appreciate it if you'd make a list of them.

SPRINGER KEMP: But I'm not the kind of person that people would go around giving awards to, simply because in the arena that I focused in and worked in, you did, you worked at what you were doing. Africa was a world that not too many people knew and, quite honestly, I laugh sometimes when young Africans have said to me, dear Mother Africa, and there ought to be a monument of you in every country in Africa. I always feel that I was privileged to share in that. I'm an industrial worker and I have had some of the

SPRINGER KEMP: best training and best experience in the world. I come out of a factory. And while, you know, I have attended a variety of schools, I always try to learn things. I've none of the snob labels, I've never took myself seriously.

INTERVIEWER: I sense that you also feel that your work in Africa is extremely important. One of the best things you've done?

SPRINGER KEMP: Oh yes. When you can carve something out of nothing, when you contribute and every day you can see something, it's not like being in the United States and winning a strike and being with a whole union, with mimeograph machines and this and that, the other, and the power at your disposal. You are in a poor environment and you have to innovate much of what you are doing and I haven't told you about my failures.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me about them.

SPRINGER KEMP: You know, you have a lot of those too. You make bad judgements.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think were some of the bad spots in your life when you look back on it?

SPRINGER KEMP: As I look back on it, the bad spots were being highly motivated, highly emotional about what I was doing. Very often you didn't see it outside, but so involved in what you were doing that you were blind to the motivations of others and a trust that was misplaced. This happens to everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

SPRINGER KEMP: To be so anxious about the program that you're doing that you could not take the time to think about it properly and to have all of the resources and the buttressing needed. Some of the things I did and begged the money for and maneuvered for, today people spend years doing it and have millions of dollars behind them.

INTERVIEWER: But it wasn't necessarily a mistake.

SPRINGER KEMP: It was. It was over-anxiety, to move in a certain direction . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . too quickly.

SPRINGER KEMP: Too quickly. I don't guess I could have done any differently, but in retrospect, I should have moved more slowly.

INTERVIEWER: That's one thing you think was wrong.

SPRINGER KEMP: In retrospect. We were not ready for those changes and I couldn't wait, and as long as I had the support of the leadership of the labor movement here, while they were not sure of the direction,

SPRINGER KEMP: they trusted me sufficiently to know that I had integrity. And so we wipe the blood off our noses and keep going.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you , in regard to your own union, you've expressed a good deal of admiration for the leadership and the people who helped you and who worked very hard and, on the whole, said that you felt they were supportive of women, not always, not all of them, but pretty good.

SPRINGER KEMP: Supportive of women, supportive of whatever the union contract says.

INTERVIEWER: Well, one of the things I wanted to ask you is, how do you feel about your union at the present? Some people have criticized the leadership in not opening up the ranks of leadership to the blacks and the latinos and so on, as they become a larger and larger part of the work force, and the older ethnic groups diminish. And I wondered how you felt about that. Is this something that happens in all unions? I'm sure it wasn't a conscious effort to exclude them, but do you feel that this is a weakness?

SPRINGER KEMP: Only a fool will say no, you're wrong, there is no prejudice and there is no discrimination in the labor movement. I would say yes, there is.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you always said there was. Do you think it's worse? This is really what I wanted to ask you.

SPRINGER KEMP: It's not worse. And whoever says it's worse is talking nonsense.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, but it is a weakness. You would say....

SPRINGER KEMP: But there is a weakness. You cannot have an entrenched system which changes overnight. In addition, you're talking about leadership; if you have four hundred and fifty thousand people, four hundred and fifty thousand members, and there are a thousand leaders, somebody is going to always feel left out and that they are shafted or whatever. You only have this cadre. Oh, yes, there's much that could be done. If this were a perfect society, but it's an imperfect society, and you deal with limitations and you deal with a sense of fear of the unknown. And let me not talk about color, let me talk about women . . .

INTERVIEWER: That's good. Which do you think is worse, or are they so equally bad that you can't make a distinction? In terms of being left out or excluded.

SPRINGER KEMP: I think there are two different problems. The whole structure of the American society has been an exclusion society, of Negroes, of minority, the whole structure of a society. Start with your federal government. Start with your church. You know, where

SPRINGER KEMP: did God say that a woman should not be a leader in the church? But the women have been builders of the church. And you have the wrath of God being called down to condemn some of the churches that have said the time has come for us to change, and that women can themselves, and should share in its highest.... The labor movement has not come out and said that.

INTERVIEWER: You mean they're better than the church. If you want to compare the labor movement to the church, then the labor movement comes out ahead?

SPRINGER KEMP: While they have not said that publicly, they've said we believe that everyone should have an opportunity, and when a girl is fully...when she is able, we'll select her. There are a lot of foolish, stupid men who are not able, and I'm not suggesting that we should have foolish, stupid women but if the criteria is only when you are able, then a whole lot of men who are not able to make decisions for us.

INTERVIEWER: Have to go back to work in the factory, huh?

SPRINGER KEMP: We still are struggling with it in terms of race, but the American society is a long way from the accomodation of a human being. You can have a riot about almost anything and during the period of great liberalism, one time, and people were contributing money and marching with you and the rest of it, and if you were talking about housing, "We believe there should be open housing but not next door to me."

INTERVIEWER: Everyone's willing to change his neighbor, but not himself?

SPRINGER KEMP: So that unless you have a sense of humor, you'd go mad. The labor movement is always singled out.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose idealistically we expect more of it than we expect of the rest of society.

SPRINGER KEMP: One wretched man once said he selected a union to argue against, bring a cause against a good labor union; and because it is a good union, we want to make an example of them because it should be better. Now, if you can answer that for me now.

INTERVIEWER: Actually, that's not uncommon; that's what they did back in 1850 with the Ten Hour Day movement. The liberals wanted to attack the better factories and the workers didn't want to. They wanted to pick the worst ones. That division is an old one. I don't see the logic of it myself, but. . . . I read the other day that women now are actually doing better in increasing their employment opportunities than blacks as a whole are, that there seems to be more problem with race than sex. Now, I don't know if that means that women are getting decent jobs, or if it just means they're getting more jobs. Do you feel that at any point

INTERVIEWER: the companies, for example, who have quotas to meet may be playing one against the other?

SPRINGER KEMP: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And is there any solution to that?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't think there is a solution to that. And the solution is wide of the mark as long as we have a scarcity of employment.

INTERVIEWER: That's the basic problem that has to be--the poverty problem, the employment problem.

SPRINGER KEMP: Unless this society is able to address itself to that, there's going to be a continued problem, exacerbated not only by black/white, but you are going to have all the shades in between. [tape interference for a few sentences. Ms. Kemp talking about a radio program on Spanish speakers in the United States that she had heard the night before this interview.] .

INTERVIEWER: Who was this, Dr. who?

SPRINGER KEMP: I think his name was Elpira. He's a vice-president of the Amalgamated Bank. He's an Ecuadorian and has a master's [degree] and a doctorate and a this and a that. He started Kiwanis Club.

INTERVIEWER: So, in a sense he said that a society almost forces you to behave that way before they will consider taking you seriously.

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right, and he said that the Spanish have to do some things for themselves, and he gave an intelligent rationale for the low registrations. Number one: you start with many Hispanics coming to the United States and the jobs they have here are certainly, give them a better way of life than what they had, many of them. And what he did not say, there are many Hispanics, particularly the Mexicans, who are here illegally. Who are living and working and want to be quiet and left alone. To a lesser degree, those from other cultures , and so that they do not want to be identified. [There is no] consensus of what the Spanish population is in this country. So that to say that these young people who rioted in their gang wars did so out of frustration about the social system here, that's the question. But it is still the country in the world where you can get up and be critical and do all the things and not be jailed for it.

INTERVIEWER: Immediately.

SPRINGER KEMP: And not lose your life that an election can pass, and you win or you lose and. . . .

INTERVIEWER: You still survive either way. You know, one thing I always meant to ask you and never have gotten around to is to ask you how

INTERVIEWER: important you feel color is within the black community, in terms of white acceptance. For instance, in this period when job opportunities were suddenly being opened up to blacks in the academic world and other places, do you think that color made a difference in those who were chosen?

SPRINGER KEMP: Mainly in this generation. Absolutely in the generation. Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: So that's been a real change there. Color is less important than it used to, used to be. It used to be within the black community quite important. But not so much now.

SPRINGER KEMP: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: In your own life, we've talked about a lot of different reasons for discrimination, and ethnic background is one, color is another, sex is another. And you've indicated at various times that all three had been obstacles. But just in your personal life, which do you think was the biggest, put the biggest barrier in your path that had to be overcome, or could you make that choice?

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, the first barrier is always race.

INTERVIEWER: Always race, always harder first.

SPRINGER KEMP: Let me give you two examples. The first job I ever tried for--or did I tell you this? I may have--was to work for the telephone company . . .

INTERVIEWER: I don't recall.

SPRINGER KEMP: At eleven--I was this high.

INTERVIEWER: At eleven . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: At eleven, I was five feet four.

INTERVIEWER: I was about the same. But you applied for a job . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: So my mother used to pray to her Spanish God that I would not become a giant. (laughter) And so all my little friends were going to the telephone company and making. . . . You know, all the Irish kids because they went to. . . . When you graduated from grammar school, you went to work and if you graduated from high school, it was a big deal. There were very few people in the working-class community that went to college. But the girls began, they were introduced, and they were fourteen, I was a couple of years younger, and by this time I was sufficiently acclimated in the United States; and so my little white friends, they were going down to the telephone company and I went to the

SPRINGER KEMP: telephone company, too. I wanted to show my mother that, you know, that I could help myself. And I was given the test, and the supervisor. . . . We were given a written test, we were given an oral test, and on both of them I did very well. My command of the English language was pretty good, and my voice is good, and this lady said to me that I had the best voice for it, the group of us that went down that morning. But she said to me, "What mother do you think would want you to sit beside her daughter?"

INTERVIEWER: Oh, my!

SPRINGER KEMP: This was my first crushing blow. There were some other experiences. I went to apply for a job at Alice Foote MacDougall, a very elegant coffee house. All of the waitresses were dressed in Southern costumes with their heads tied in a bandana. It was a plantation. And it never occurred to me that all of the girls were very light-brown skinned, very, very fair. And so I went down to apply for a job, and I was too dark to be a waitress in this place, and I was too dark to be the salad girl, and that was behind the counter helping to mix the salads. My neighbor, my mother's friend, her daugher was a waitress there. She went to college and made good money, good tips, and so she asked me to come down and I went. They were not secretive about it. I was too dark for one of the waitresses.

INTERVIEWER: So just that bluntly. It really was a decisive factor.

SPRINGER KEMP: So that you were made to know in all sorts of ways. But here were two experiences which stand out rather sharply. There were many more subtle things, but this is as a pre-teen and as a teenager.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that race is still a bigger hurdle than sex in this country, even now?

SPRINGER KEMP: If you're talking with totality, yes, because you get a great deal of lip service in the course of things, but some of the things we do, we structure them so that they're not fair.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what time it is? It's probably getting close to quitting time. Oh, about twelve thirty. I think I'd better let you go soon, I just wanted to ask you one little light question. What is your idea of a good time? What do you like to do to relax?

SPRINGER KEMP: To relax? I like to do nothing. To relax, I like to read frivolous things. I have a hobby, I collect cookbooks from all over the world. I think they have history and politics. The history and politics of food is fascinating. If I had my life to live over again, I would be a famous chef, a dietician or in some way related to food. Cooking is a hobby; I like to cook.

INTERVIEWER: Are you a gourmet cook?

SPRINGER KEMP: I'm a good cook. I don't know, gourmet . . .

INTERVIEWER: With your modesty, that probably means you're a gourmet cook.

SPRINGER KEMP: You see, I think the word gourmet for me is an over-used term because what I see in some restaurants being called gourmet food is peasant food given a fancy label. It's food that you don't know, and you doctor it up. The poor food of a country, for example, the, you go and pay a great fortune to eat causelet, which is beans and left-over meat and the skin of the duck. You go and you now eat gourmet food in Caribbean restaurants. Cat-fish was the poor food, the dried codfish is now a great luxury. It costs two dollars a pound. The vegetables that we do not know in the United States, that we [in the Caribbean] took for granted--avocados, papaya and mangos--these are gourmet items and exotic food. It was the food that we knew where we came from. On my grandmother's farm, she had many kinds of oranges and grapefruit, papaya, and avocadoes; it was just there.

INTERVIEWER: Just ordinary to you. And exotic here.

SPRINGER KEMP: People now take what the left-overs that the African slave used and seasoned, and seasoned pig-feet and chitterlings and greens cooked with the rest of it. That's very fancy gourmet stuff today.

INTERVIEWER: What do you like? What do you regard as excellent food?

SPRINGER KEMP: Good quality, properly prepared, served beautifully.

INTERVIEWER: What are your favorite dishes?

SPRINGER KEMP: I don't think I have a favorite dish. I'm a meddler; I like food from all over the world. I would take great pleasure, for example, in inviting a group of people to dinner and doing like the Indonesian rijstafel. You just have all kinds of meat and fish and chicken and vegetables and a great rice in the center, and people can just take what they want. We had ten Greek ladies here for dinner when I did a program--not Greek; Turkish trade union women--and we did lamb done the Turkish way and rice cooked the way it is done in Turkey. One of the women, she finished preparing the rice with currants and brown butter and pine nuts, and then lots of fruit and salad and good wine.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds great. I know it's lunch. That's your hobby. Do you have any other particular hobbies, or is that the main one?

SPRINGER KEMP: No, that's just one of them.

INTERVIEWER: What are your others?

SPRINGER KEMP: Language is a hobby. I speak none of them well, but I'm interested. I'm always fascinated by languages and other cultures, and Africa has taught me something which I always knew back here but it just emphasized it. So often in the United States when people spoke of Africans or they spoke of other cultures that they did not think was as high as the great American culture, what they did not know that our paucity of language made us so poor, as against the European and the African. Very often, when you speak to a European who may answer you in halting English, that person has translated three languages, very often, to answer you in the only one you can speak. An African will speak whatever is his local language, from his tribe, will speak the lingua franca, and will speak your language.

INTERVIEWER: How many languages do you know?

SPRINGER KEMP: I dabble at three, and have a smattering of one or two others.

INTERVIEWER: What are the ones that . . . ?

SPRINGER KEMP: I dabble at French, Spanish, and a little Swahili, and some English. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Oh, come, come. And what else do you like to do just for fun?

SPRINGER KEMP: For fun, my idea of fun is to be with a small group with an exchange of views, of common interests. You may argue, but informally and relaxed. I like to read.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of things especially?

SPRINGER KEMP: Not necessarily serious things. I like to read histories, I like to read about the politics of other countries, the social forces for change. I'm just curious.

INTERVIEWER: I guess we'd better quit for lunch. Before we quit, assuming that a great many young women will eventually read this transcript and that this may be one chance to talk to a lot more people you haven't yet reached, what kind of advice would you give a young woman in America today about what to do with her life, about what makes a life good?

SPRINGER KEMP: I would start out by saying first of all, in your own development, in whatever field, pursue excellence, learn as much as you can about your field; do not wear your ability across your chest. If you have it, you do not need to flaunt it. Have a sense of history and do not believe that you created the wheel, because you will always learn that there were wheels there long before you came along, and that what you are doing is building. Have a sense of community identity. Give something back to society; give something back to your forebearers. Finally, never be so single-minded that you think there is only one way to live and only one choice. Life is a combination of things: family,

SPRINGER KEMP: sharing, a personal relationship which does not rob you of your self-respect and your own identity; that's always important.

INTERVIEWER: OK, I thank you for your time. Go ahead, one more thing you wanted to . . .

SPRINGER KEMP: Well, finally, if a woman learns not to be bitter about defeats and not to be arrogant about successes, each of them, both your success and your defeat can limit you. But on bitterness, always remember that the person who has done something against you -- or the society, the people in that society -- they are lesser human beings than you are, or else they would not have to resort to a denying you the right to opportunity. They are smaller people than you are, because in order for them to be superior they must teach you to be inferior. Never let anyone do that to you. Always remember that if bruised, you hurt; if bruised; they hurt. If cut, you bleed, if cut, they bleed. They have an Almighty that they go to in their end, as you do, and if one can get a perspective on all of this, even though you're temporarily humiliated, look at the source from which it comes, and never stop respecting yourself.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

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