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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

GERTRUDE SWEET

Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union

by

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Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

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Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

GERTRUDE SWEET

Gertrude Sweet was born in Napa, California in 1890. Although her family was anti-union, Sweet became sympathetic to the labor movement when she saw what the AF of L Timber Workers Union accomplished for the loggers with whom her husband worked.

After being married eleven years, Sweet sought work outside the home to help support her four children. She began working in a unionized restaurant in Portland, Oregon, and became active in the union very quickly.

In October, 1921, Sweet helped to found a separate Waitresses' Union, because a number of the waitresses felt that the male leadership of their former union was not satisfactory.

She was elected Secretary-Treasurer of Local 305 of the Waitresses' Union in 1924. She became its president when the local received its charter.

In November, 1938, Sweet was hired by the Hotel, Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union as an organizer, and continued working in that capacity until 1957. Her territory included Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Wyoming.

She was the first woman International Vice-President of the union and continues her union activities today.

Oral History Interview

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August 2, 1976
Portland, Oregon

by Shirley Tanzer

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Sweet, will you introduce yourself.

SWEET: I am Gertrude Sweet. My maiden name was Balknap. I was born in 1890 in Napa, California. My mother was the youngest in a family of ten. Her parents migrated from New York State to California in 1850 and settled a few miles away from Napa which at that time was a very small settlement, ten miles up in the redwoods. My father was born in Michigan. I knew only my grandfather. He and my mother were married in Napa and I was the only child. I was raised in Oakland, California, and when fifteen, my parents moved to eastern Oregon, to the John Day country, and I graduated from high school in the John Day school.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents talk about their parents at all?

SWEET: I knew my mother's mother, and she was just an old fashioned pioneer farm woman, you might say. She was very young when she came out with her husband to Napa and had one baby while en route. The balance of the family was born in the redwoods.

INTERVIEWER: Did they farm in that area?

SWEET: They were farmers. My grandfather settled on a homestead there. He was there shortly after 1850 and could have made use of many opportunities that others did, but he was not the money-making type. He was a soldier enlisted in the California volunteers during the Civil War. I didn't ever know him. My father's father was a farmer and in his later years lived with my mother and father. I remember him always because he was with us.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father tell you about his boyhood?

SWEET: Very little. He was not communicative. I learned more from my grandfather than I did from my father. My father became a building contractor, homebuilder they call them these days. He didn't like the unions. He built small homes and didn't employ many men; one or two probably, but the unions were becoming active and he was asked to sign up with the unions and did not do so. Now I remember that conversation several times at home because it's something I often laugh about now, but he would have had a fit!

INTERVIEWER: What year was that, Mrs. Sweet, when he was building and was opposed to the union?

SWEET: All during my childhood I heard of it, until I was fifteen. That would be 1905 when we moved to Oregon, and then he came to Oregon to farm. He leased a farm in the John Day valley and was there several years until he and my mother moved here to the Portland area. And then he leased a small farm here until he died.

INTERVIEWER: Where was this farm?

SWEET: First he had a farm at what was called then Gray's crossing; it is now 82nd Avenue. That was in 1909 that he was there, and he eventually bought some acreage in back of Golbel, Oregon, and farmed that and worked in a logging camp until the time of his death.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother tell you about her childhood?

SWEET: She was raised on a farm about ten miles from Napa. They were a hardworking family. She was the youngest of the ten, and about all she would talk about was the fact that her mother was strict and that she was always the youngest one and not much appreciated by the older ones.

INTERVIEWER: Did she talk about chores or how early she had gone to work?

SWEET: No, because she was raised on that farm and I think was still living there at the time that she met my father, because they lived in Napa for a few years after their marriage before they moved to Oakland, where he engaged in carpenter work.

INTERVIEWER: Are there particular memories you have of things which you enjoyed doing with your mother?

SWEET: No. My mother was afraid of spoiling me because I was the only child. After I was grown, one of my aunts told me she always was sorry for me when I was growing up because my mother was so afraid of spoiling me, because my mother and my father were so much in love with one another that I seemed to be a little bit in the way. I did not have a particularly happy childhood. We didn't get along, my mother and I.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get along well with your father?

SWEET: Yes. Then, of course, I do not want to leave the impression that always was the case with my mother, because after I was married and had a severe illness I realized then that she was one of the reserved type of people who did not demonstrate affection. The only time I saw her demonstrate affection was with my father. I rarely was kissed or touched. I was scolded when I was growing up, but you see she wanted to be sure she did well in bringing me up, no doubt.

INTERVIEWER: She apparently did.

SWEET: I don't know about that.

INTERVIEWER: Were there some special activities that you did with your father?

SWEET: No.

INTERVIEWER: So you were really quite a good deal by yourself.

SWEET: Yes, I was, other than boys and girls of my age I knew, neighborhood children.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother do most of her life?

SWEET: Just a housekeeper.

INTERVIEWER: She never worked out of the house?

SWEET: No, she did not.

INTERVIEWER: Did she have other interests besides her housekeeping?

SWEET: Yes, she had her church. She was interested in her church work. Other than that, not at all.

INTERVIEWER: Did she have some particular aspirations for you?

SWEET: I don't remember hearing her express any.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of schooling did you have?

SWEET: Grammar school and high school.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents plan for you to go on with your schooling?

SWEET: Yes, they wanted me to go to a church college to finish my education there, but finances prevented it, lack of finances. I had wanted to become a medical missionary and was very greatly disappointed when it was not possible. So then I left the John Day country and visited an aunt in eastern Washington, and there I met a young man and later we were married, Earl Sweet.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you live in the house where you were born?

SWEET: Where I was born? Five months, and then my parents moved to Oakland.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you live there?

SWEET: I first lived in a house in Oakland my father owned until I was six, seven years old, and then they moved into a house that my grandfather owned which he deeded to my father, and we lived there till we moved to Oregon.

INTERVIEWER: And your grandfather lived with you in both houses in Oakland or just in the one house?

SWEET: In the one house.

INTERVIEWER: Did he move to Oregon with you?

SWEET: Yes, he did.

INTERVIEWER: Did he live with you?

SWEET: He lived with us till his death. He was ninety-four at the time of his death, right here in Portland.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you moved to Portland?

SWEET: Eighteen.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you had gone from John Day to visit the aunt. I just want to get the sequence. How old were you when you met Mr. Sweet?

SWEET: I was eighteen when I left John Day, went to visit the aunt, and then later in that year I came out to Portland, and shortly thereafter he came here and we were married in 1909. My parents also came to Portland in the early part of 1909.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your companions when you were growing up?

SWEET: Mostly they were my cousins and the neighborhood children. We all grew up together.

INTERVIEWER: Were these boys and girls?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What type of chores did you have as a child as you were growing up?

SWEET: Chickens to feed, rabbits to feed, help my mother with the housework.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever think that perhaps you had too many chores to do?

SWEET: I don't recall that. Oh, yes. My father had two cows and I delivered the milk. He bought me a bicycle and I had to deliver the milk every morning. I thought that was fun. I liked it.

INTERVIEWER: Aside from the medical missionary, you said you wanted to be that, did you ever daydream about wanting to pursue some particular profession when you grew up?

SWEET: My obsession seemed to be to be in the medical field as a medical missionary as I recall it now, that's all that I can remember.

INTERVIEWER: So religion was important to you as a child.

SWEET: Yes, it occupied a considerable part of my life because my parents were very religious.

INTERVIEWER: What religion was this?

SWEET: It was a small denomination called Advent Christian, not the Seventh Day Adventist. They called themselves Advent Christians, they were always a small church.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still affiliated with the same church today?

SWEET: Oh, no.

INTERVIEWER: What type of arguments do you remember occurred in your family?

SWEET: I don't recall dissension.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that your family was much like other families who lived in that particular neighborhood, or were you in some way different as a family?

SWEET: No, I never felt that. I recall no arguments, nothing of the sort. We probably lived somewhat to ourselves, other than the fact that my grandmother and two of my aunts lived in the neighborhood. And, of course, as I said before, my mother was occupied with church work, too.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of school?

SWEET: I liked school.

INTERVIEWER: What subjects did you like best and why?

SWEET: History, because it was very interesting; English, I enjoyed that. The only thing I can recall disliking was arithmetic. I did not like that until I was in high school, and then found algebra fascinating. Of course, in John Day country the high school was small. We were a country school, the principal taught the seventh and eighth grade in the high school with just one assistant. So you just took the best you could. It was not what you would call a complete education. I wanted foreign languages and we couldn't have them, you know. There were several subjects I was interested in we couldn't have. We just did the best we could, that's all.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have some favorite teachers?

SWEET: We had only the one teacher and his wife, all the while I was in the school. I take that back, there was another teacher. I can't say I had any favorites. I liked them, but that's all.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do well in school?

SWEET: Yes, I did very well. I was salutatorian, I believe we called it, of the class, when we graduated.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents have a particular notion of the kind of school a girl should have as opposed to the type of school the boys should have?

SWEET: No, we had no boy in the family, you see.

INTERVIEWER: Were your classmates from the same background as you?

SWEET: In John Day, mostly from farming or retired farming families, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Would they, for the most part, have the same ethnic background?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were they of similar religion?

SWEET: Yes, mostly Protestant.

INTERVIEWER: Was this true of the teachers, also?

SWEET: I believe so. I don't think I paid any attention to that.

INTERVIEWER: When did you stop going to a formal school?

SWEET: When I finished high school, and then it was that summer when I went to visit my aunt.

INTERVIEWER: Did you wish to go in for further schooling?

SWEET: Yes, I wanted to go to college.

INTERVIEWER: Would the opportunities have been available to you?

SWEET: No, they weren't, that's the reason I didn't go. I could find answers, but no opportunities. The school my parents wished me to attend was in Illinois, and that was very much out of the question. So, as I say, when I met Earl Sweet, I fell in love and then I gave up the thought of going to college.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything in your early life or early schooling that may have contributed to your later union activities?

SWEET: No, nothing that I could think of.

INTERVIEWER: Describe the community in which you lived, let's say the greater portion of your life; did the neighbors get together, were there many community organizations?

SWEET: No, not that I know of. Of course, when my children were small, I went to work as a waitress, and had no time for anything but home and the job.

INTERVIEWER: But before you were married, when you were still living with your parents, was there a good deal of community activity at the time?

SWEET: Not that I know of. They were not engaged in any and neither was I.

INTERVIEWER: Did you belong to any social or political group?

SWEET: No.

INTERVIEWER: What was the first political group that you joined?

SWEET: I didn't ever join any political group.

INTERVIEWER: Not in all the time that you were working for the unions?

SWEET: No, I didn't join any group. I was interested in things, and of course, as soon as women were granted the right to vote, I registered. I registered as a Republican because of my parents; my father was a Republican. Shortly thereafter I changed and I voted as a Democrat and that was because I was interested in politics, but I didn't join any group.

INTERVIEWER: What made you change from Republican to Democrat?

SWEET: Theodore Roosevelt was [a] President for whom I had much hero worship, and then he became what we call a Bull-mooser, he went out independently, and it was then that I changed my politics. But as I recall it, I did not register as a Democrat until the time of the election of Woodrow Wilson as president. I like what Woodrow Wilson stood for, and wanted to vote for him, so I became a Democrat.

INTERVIEWER: How did you later feel for Wilson and his lack of support for women's rights?

SWEET: I didn't give it any thought. I was more concerned with--what was it, was it United Nations--the movement that he was fostering with many of the other nations in America. But still it wasn't dominant in my thinking.

INTERVIEWER: The League of Nations is what you were. . . .

SWEET: My main thought and work in life was the children and my job. At the time they were small. We lived in the woods back of Globel, Oregon. My husband was working in a logging camp. In fact, that is when I first became interested in union activity.

INTERVIEWER: Before you were working?

SWEET: When my husband was working in a logging camp.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me how you became interested at that time.

SWEET: That's quite a story. At that time the I.W.W. was very active in Oregon organizing the men working in the logging camps. There was some activity in the camp where my husband and my father were working. However, they and the other men did not want to be affiliated with what they called the "Wobblies", and about that time an organizer from the American Federation of Labor came and talked with some of the men and they agreed to have a meeting, but they did not want the company to know that they were interested in union activity or organization. So the men selected a place way off in the woods, and they asked the wives, some of us, to break trails leading into this place so that no one other than they would go into this place for the meeting. There they met with organizers from the AF of L. Timberworkers Union, and eventually formed a union, obtained an agreement with the company which so improved the men's working condition as well as wages; that I was sold on the union. It meant a great deal then in our family to have these extra dollars coming in, and that my husband didn't have to work such long, long hours. So when later it became necessary for us to move to Portland because he no longer was working at the camp, I went back to work as a waitress.

INTERVIEWER: Had you worked as a waitress before?

SWEET: Yes, after finishing high school I worked a few months as a waitress before I was married.

INTERVIEWER: I did want to ask why the men did not wish to affiliate with the "Wobblies"?

SWEET: To my recollection it was because they felt they were too aggressive, and there had been much talk about some of their destructive methods. Who influenced the men, I do not know; I don't remember, but I know that they felt they wanted to be in the American Federation of Labor organization rather than in an independent one, such as the "Wobblies".

INTERVIEWER: Were the companies very opposed to the men organizing?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did they manage to convince them that they should be allowed to organize the AF of L?

SWEET: If I remember correctly, it was because they feared that the "Wobblies" would come into the camp and it was fear of the "Wobblies" that caused many of the companies, logging companies, to sign agreements with the American Federation of Labor.

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INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you about your first job. When did you get your first job and how long did you keep it?

SWEET: I was visiting an aunt in Berkeley, California, and wanted to stay there for a while. So I answered an ad for a waitress and was employed and worked there for three or four months before coming back to Portland to be married.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at that time?

SWEET: Nineteen.

INTERVIEWER: How much did you earn?

SWEET: [Laughter] I earned eight dollars a week for seven days a week, a split shift of eleven hours a day, working in the morning from six to two and going back and working from five to eight. But on Sundays I needn't work eleven hours, only nine hours, and that was not split, that was straight, and I received eight dollars a week, seven days a week.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work with men and women?

SWEET: Yes. It was a bakery and a restaurant combined, and there were men in the kitchen and women in the front end.

INTERVIEWER: Were your bosses men or women?

SWEET: Men. There was a man who owned the place, who operated it, who had much to say, and then a woman in charge of the front part of the place, in charge of the bakery and the restaurant.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get along with your boss and with your co-workers?

SWEET: Oh, very well.

INTERVIEWER: Did you socialize among them?

SWEET: No, you didn't have time.

INTERVIEWER: What was the worst thing about that job?

SWEET: The worst thing? It was the split hours which, of course, occupied all of one's time practically, because I was off work from two to five and couldn't do very much.

INTERVIEWER: At that point, did you make any plans for future jobs?

SWEET: No, because I knew I was going to be married.

INTERVIEWER: Did you stop working when you got married?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you a housewife?

SWEET: I started to work in 1920.

INTERVIEWER: And you were married in 1909. So, that's eleven years. Tell me how you proceeded to get the next job.

SWEET: When we moved to Portland I was sold on the union because of our experience in the woods; so I went to the union office and asked for a job, and they told me that they could not accept me as a member until I had a job, and that there were no jobs obtainable at that time. So then, I watched the ads in the papers, and a restaurant near where I was living was advertising for a waitress, and I applied for it and was given a job there. I learned that it was a union house soon after going to work, but was told by the employer not to join the union until a business agent from the union would come around. When I insisted on joining because I wanted to be a member of the union, he said "O.K., then you can go to work for me if they'll let you join the union. Don't tell them you are already working." I did that and they gave me an application blank to become a member of the union. Within thirty days then I was initiated into the union. That was January 2, 1921.

INTERVIEWER: What were the circumstances that made you go back to work?

SWEET: Financial. I had to help support the family.

INTERVIEWER: You had how many children?

SWEET: Four.

INTERVIEWER: How old were they?

SWEET: The youngest was eight months old, the oldest seven.

INTERVIEWER: Had you thought about another type of job beside looking for a waitress job?

SWEET: No, because I had hoped that this would be temporary work until my husband could find employment that would support us. I had not thought of it being a permanent job. Nevertheless, I wanted to be in the union, and very shortly after I became a member and

SWEET: attended a union meeting, I became the recording secretary, due to the fact that I was able to attend the meeting that day and a volunteer was asked for it and I volunteered. From then on I always held some sort of an office in the union.

INTERVIEWER: How long had you been a member of the union at that time?

SWEET: About five or six months, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you keep this job, Mrs. Sweet?

SWEET: I kept this job as recording secretary until the latter part of October 1921 when the Waitresses' Union received its charter. We were up until then, a Waiter and Waitresses' Union. Many of the waitresses were not happy with the way the waiters were conducting the business of the union. There were no waitresses serving as officers, we were in the majority, and we decided it was time that we ran our own union. So we applied for a charter and received it. Due to the fact that the waiters often were unruly at the union meeting and two or three times we had to call in police officers because they were not sober and they were fighting on the floor and we had enough of that; so we had our own union. We were chartered in October 1921. I now remember that when I said I joined the union in 1921, it was 1920, not 1921.

INTERVIEWER: So you were chartered in 1921. What was the name of that union?

SWEET: Waitresses and Cafeteria Women's Union, Local 305.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you keep the waitress job?

SWEET: I worked as a waitress in 1919 and I worked different jobs. Six months here, eight months there and a year in another place. I don't recall the exact length of time in any one of them; but I worked as a waitress until I was elected as secretary of the Waitresses' Union and took office in January 1924.

INTERVIEWER: So it was during the five years that you continued to work as a waitress in one place or another. Do you recall what you would consider the pleasantest job.

SWEET: I liked the work. I liked meeting people, and I liked being with people. I got along very well with my co-workers. Yes, I liked it.

INTERVIEWER: Was there one particular place that was accommodating where you really enjoyed being a waitress?

SWEET: There were two places where I particularly enjoyed working, one of them was called the Royal. It was on Morrison near Washington, no--near Broadway, and the other was the Acme Restaurant on North 6th Street. I enjoyed my work particularly in those two places.

INTERVIEWER: What were the reasons that they were so particlarly pleasant?

SWEET: I think because of the people with whom I worked and the type of customers we had. In the Royal it was considered what we called a 'service house' and there were many pleasant people there.

INTERVIEWER: What was a 'service house?'

SWEET: Where you paid more attention to giving good service. The food was better, the prices were more, and that is what we called at that time a 'service house.' The Acme was a regular restaurant, and they had mostly office people and working people for customers. It was not exactly a family restaurant, it was in a part of the downtown area.

INTERVIEWER: What was your salary at that time?

SWEET: When I first started to work, we received something like $13.20 a week, with six days a week. I worked a split shift then. Later the union consummated another agreement with the employers and then there were some wage increases. Never at any time, however, did we have the fantastic wages that we thought we should have had! As I recall it, the next job I went to, we received something over fourteen dollars a week for a straight shift, not a split shift. At the time I became secretary of the Waitresses' Union, the wage scale had improved to an extent--I think it was about sixteen dollars a week. Of course, improvements had been attempted at each time of the expiration of a contract with the employer.

INTERVIEWER: What was the worst job that you ever had?

SWEET: I don't recall any 'worst' job--I liked them all.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have a job that was bad enough that the union had to intercede on your behalf?

SWEET: No. I never had any trouble on my jobs.

INTERVIEWER: How did you manage the working and the family?

SWEET: My mother was with me part of the time and took care of the children. When she no longer was with us, I had a babysitter come in who stayed with me. I always tried to have morning shifts, so

SWEET: that I could be home in the afternoon after 2:30 p.m. and be there when the children would come in from school. My babysitter would come into the house at seven o'clock when my husband had to leave to go to work. So we managed very well. I was fortunate I had a very nice elderly lady take care of the children for me.

INTERVIEWER: How did your husband feel about your working?

SWEET: He was appreciative of the fact because it was a financial necessity for me to work.

INTERVIEWER: Was he helpful with the children?

SWEET: Only in the mornings when he would have to get them up and see that they were dressed before the lady who took care of them came in.

INTERVIEWER: During the war, women were encouraged to work, did you continue working at that time?

SWEET: Are you referring to World War I?

INTERVIEWER: I am referring to World War II.

SWEET: In World War II, I was working for the International Union as an organizer.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me then what the progress was of your working as a waitress to your union job.

SWEET: Being interested in the union as I was, I accepted the office as President when we first were chartered and then was very happy and very active in it, as much as I possibly could along with working on a job and having my home to take care of.

INTERVIEWER: We were talking about your job with the Union. Would you tell me about your job with the Union. Would you tell me about that, please.

SWEET: As President of the Union, one presided at Union meetings, signed checks and was in constant contact with the Secretary-Treasurer and the Business Representative. I thoroughly enjoyed that work. It was not a salary job at all. One was given the union dues, the monthly dues for the time taken, that was all. However, in 1923, a number of the members asked me to run at the next election for the office of Secretary-Treasurer which I did and was elected without any opposition and took office in January 1924. That was a salaried position, it paid $25 a week. One worked five and one-

SWEET: half days a week. I was then Secretary for fifteen years, during which time at two different elections there was opposition. I was fortunate that the members reelected me by a large majority each time and I continued in that work until Mr. Flory, the president of the International Union, appointed me as an organizer and I resigned as waitresses' secretary in November of 1938.

INTERVIEWER: And how long were you an organizer?

SWEET: Until the summer of 1957 when I had to resign because of ill health.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to the union activities. You were working when you became involved in union activities. Was this ever a source of conflict in your family?

SWEET: No, not any conflict there.

INTERVIEWER: How popular were unions at that time?

SWEET: Not very popular. In fact, my husband was a member of a fraternal organization and wanted me to join the women's auxiliary, which I did. At the first meeting I attended, a lady asked me what I did, was I a housewife, what did I do, and I told her I was a waitress, and she soon left her seat and started whispering with some other ladies, and I began to feel like an outcast because I was a waitress. I resented that and didn't ever return to a meeting of the organization.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel any hostility when you were working for the union as a secretary-treasurer?

SWEET: Hostility against the unions? Oh yes, one always ran into that. There were times when waitresses working in the restaurants resented having to become members of the union, and they would come up to the office rather with a chip on their shoulder. It was always my pleasure to talk them out of that ill feeling. I loved meeting them when they felt like that and making them smile and laugh before they left.

INTERVIEWER: How did you manage to do that?

SWEET: By being nice to them and agreeing with them that they had possibly reasons on their side. But we had much better reasons for them becoming members of the union for their own protection and good, and pointing these things out, nearly always they agreed with me.

INTERVIEWER: What were the community feelings, like the newspapers and media, towards the unions at that time?

SWEET: I'll relate an incident we had which would probably better answer your question. The police department for women was headed by a lady called Mrs. Baldwin. Mrs. Baldwin was always very kind. Whenever any of our people were in trouble they would go and talk to her and she was helpful. However, the press would invariably state when any woman was arrested for some misdemeanor, no matter what it was, she was a waitress. We felt that that was presenting a bad image of those who worked in restaurants to the public, and so we went down, two or three of us, to talk to Mrs. Baldwin. This was while I was secretary, and we asked of her that when she gives information to the press that she would make certain to state that the one in trouble was not always a waitress. She would say that she would ask the press not to say that she was a waitress, and if she were a waitress she would ask the press not to say that she was a waitress. There were not many occupations then for women, as I said, at one time about all there was being in Meier and Frank's store somewhere. So Mrs. Baldwin was most co-operative and for years the press did not name the occupation of whoever might be arrested. But of course, I have noticed now they give the occupation as it is, be it a waitress, saleswoman or clerk, whatever. We had wonderful cooperation for quite some time.

INTERVIEWER: Did the press approve of union activities?

SWEET: No, I wouldn't say that the press was sympathetic with the exception of one daily paper. At one time, you know, Portland had three daily papers. One was called the Daily News, seemed to report things more favorably, at least impartially, than did the other newspapers?

INTERVIEWER: In your union positions were you working with men or with women?

SWEET: With both. Of course I worked with women as secretary of the Waitresses Union, but then we were affiliated with the Cooks' Union which largely was men, with the Waiters' Union and with the Bartenders' Union, all of whom were men. And we worked together. We signed the contracts as entered into with the employers; they were contracts signed jointly by these unions, so we were very close together in the work we did in negotiating new contracts and settling grievances and such other work. And then, of course, we were affiliated with the City Central Labor Council movement. I was a delegate there and attended every meeting for many, many years, once a week. And then we had our state labor movement, and I was active there and interested in it. I was a delegate. So we had our good relationships. It wasn't a lot of talk about women's rights, and so on. We didn't give it a thought, we were just working.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other women in similar positions to you at that time?

SWEET: When I first went into the work, no. The garment workers union and the laundry workers union were the only two that seemed to have women in their rank. And when I attended, as a delegate, the Central Labor Council, from the Waiters' and Waitresses' Union, there was only one woman other than myself who was a delegate, and that was a woman from the garment workers union in Portland.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember who she was?

SWEET: Her name was Mrs. McGhie, I think it was Mrs. Dee. Then as the years went on, of course there were more unions formed, and more women worked within the unions and in the various industries. During the war years naturally, the women came by the hundreds into the labor movement. Then there were many more women until now, as was the case just recently, when attending the AF of L - CIO state organization convention, there were more women than men delegates.

INTERVIEWER: Now in wage negotiations, when you were working with the other unions, was there equity among the wages asked for the women and the men?

SWEET: Not at first. Women received less as cooks, as waitresses, than did the men. The waiter's scale of wages was higher than that of the waitresses. And women cooks doing the same kind of work as the men received lesser wages. That was corrected many years ago. It was something of a problem because women still were not receiving equal wages as men in many areas and the employers were reluctant to accept it as far as we were concerned. It took several years before it was equalized in all areas.

INTERVIEWER: How many years would you say that it took?

SWEET: At least ten.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in negotiations as it went along?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about this as a former waitress?

SWEET: I felt that we were worth more. The women work harder.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been very difficult for you to be a calm negotiator as men were saying that men were needing more money for this reason or another reason.

SWEET: It's always seemed funny to me. I didn't become disturbed about it. I just felt determined to equalize it, to keep persevering, and, of course, some of the arguments made were so funny to me. Having worked with waiters and with waitresses, worked with women cooks and with men cooks, I knew that the women usually worked harder.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the arguments?

SWEET: On the parts of the. . .

INTERVIEWER: Of the men.

SWEET: I don't know if they really argued. They just assumed that because they are men, they should have more. They were bigger and better than we.

INTERVIEWER: They could lift heavier packages?

SWEET: Right. When women first went into work as bartenders, that was a very big argument, that women could not lift those kegs of beer and do these things that the men did. Well, then of course the state had enacted laws protecting women, so that they could not lift anything over 25 lbs. I wish they still had those laws, but they don't. So because of the fact that women were protected by law, some of the men felt that that was a good basis for the argument that they should have more pay. But there just seemed to be an assumption that everyone accepted it that because they were men they should have more.

INTERVIEWER: When were women officially accepted into the Bartenders Union?

SWEET: After liquor by the drink became legal. It took quite some doing. There was great reluctance on the part of bartender organizations throughout the country to accepting women as bartenders. In fact, many of the women, too, were opposed to it because they felt that was not the place for a woman to work, in a bar. So it took many years. The women themselves, because of the fact that they did their work and did it well and did nothing to disgrace themselves, won the argument by their own activities as good employees.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved locally with the negotiations here for accepting women into that union?

SWEET: Only to the extent that I would have to inform the Bartenders Union as a representative of the International Union that they must accept women as members. There were times when I had that to do.

INTERVIEWER: In your position as secretary-treasurer were you ever in a position

INTERVIEWER: to settle grievances?

SWEET: You mean to settle grievances, yes, that was part of our work. There were always grievances arising between employee and employee and between employee and employer, and those grievances would be concerning the contract, possibly overtime pay, pension pay, matters of that sort.

INTERVIEWER: Now, would the business agent bring these to you?

SWEET: The business agents settled them as a rule themselves. When they could not settle them, then I would be asked to do so. Sometimes the employer would ask for me. When the employer became involved in an argument, then the business agent would ask me to step in or the employer would ask the business agent to come in with her and we would talk it out.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any particular cases that would be more interesting than others, or perhaps would be considered keynote cases?

SWEET: No, now I don't recall them. Usually they were grievances that concerned interpretation of the contract, or they would be personality conflicts, and those arose frequently, between a cook and a waitress or between the employees themselves, the waitresses themselves; all of which we could settle by sitting down and talking things over, nearly always.

INTERVIEWER: Were there benefits initially along with the wages?

SWEET: Not initially, no. It took many, many years before there were, before there was any consideration given to the request of the union for health and welfare benefits. I do not now recall just when they became effective, it was after I became an organizer and was no longer involved in the local unions. They did become effective, they first put in a health and welfare clause, fringe benefits we call them.

INTERVIEWER: Were there requests for fringe benefits before that that were not met?

SWEET: There were requests for many different years of contract renewals. At first they were just brushed aside, then eventually because all the unions, the larger and stronger unions, were having these benefits, the employer began to see that in order to keep their employees, they must also consider health and welfare benefits. They were very small at first, but they grew as time went along until they are good now.

INTERVIEWER: It would seem to me that this would be a very significant part of the Waitresses' Union.

SWEET: Right, and of course it was a very significant part of the work that I did as an organizer in dealing with various unions in the Northwest.

INTERVIEWER: I would like to talk about how you felt about your job as an organizer when you were approached to take the job?

SWEET: I was thrilled, it was quite a step forward. The salary was twice of what I was receiving as secretary, and, of course, travelling expenses were paid. So, when I went first on the job, my first assignment was to go into Montana to visit every local union, to become acquainted with the activities of that local union; in other words to build up a feeling of better understanding as to what the International Union meant to the local union. I was just thrilled. I would be riding a train, looking out of the window thinking, "I am getting paid to do this."

INTERVIEWER: How did you manage the family?

SWEET: By that time my children were grown; the youngest one was sixteen or seventeen, so they were able to take care of themselves.

INTERVIEWER: How much travelling did you actually do?

SWEET: For the first few years, I was on the road all of the time. I would be able to get home if I was within two hundred miles of it, each weekend, and then--no, I am mistaken, my youngest son was eighteen, I believe, when I went on the road.

INTERVIEWER: What was the composition of the family, tell me about the children.

SWEET: I had two daughters and then two sons. At the time that I went on the road as an organizer, my two daughters were married, my older son was in the service, he went into the CCC's (Civilian Conservation Corps) and my younger son was at home; he was about sixteen or seventeen.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband with the family at that time?

SWEET: No, I had been divorced then.

INTERVIEWER: Just your younger son was at home then. I would like to know what your approaches were as you travelled in getting other women organized into the union.

SWEET: I didn't go out to seek them. Frequently I would go into each city, look for the offices of the secretary of the union and would be told that they wanted to organize such a restaurant, and we would arrange for a meeting of the employees who are interested. Then I would meet with them and talk with them as a group and individually. We tried to sell them on the idea that it was first and best for them, because they no longer need to argue with the employer about a wage increase or about the pay for overtime work. All they need to do is to tell the employer and ask the employer for it, and then come to the union and we would settle the matter. Furthermore, they could be sure of a certain wage according to the agreement; they need not have to fight for wage increases themselves, and if they are treated unjustly, that the union would take up the matter. I tried to sell them the idea that it was to their own advantage first, and secondly it was to the advantage of all of us working in the food industry if we are a strong organization and the organization spoke for them, rather than to handle it as individuals. Oftentimes they accepted that, oftentimes they would listen to the employer who would say, "I pay you better than union wages, I give you vacations etc., but you don't have to join the union; you don't have to pay union initiation fees and union dues." Sometimes the employer would win out, sometimes we would win out.

Of course, today it's very different because under our laws we must get pledge cards before we talk to the employer about a union contract; and then, of course, the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] enters into it, or your state labor organization. It was awfully difficult to persuade women, particularly in the industry, to become part of a union, because they were afraid they would lose their job, and work was not too plentiful for many years. Then, during the war years, things changed very considerably because there are three or four jobs for every individual who would have wanted to work.

INTERVIEWER: So this is 1938 that you started by going to Montana.

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were there particular problems that you found as a woman organizer in Montana?

SWEET: The most difficult one I found was acceptance as a woman and an organizer. The majority of the membership preferred talking with men. However, many of the women would say to me: "Oh, I am glad I can talk with a woman, you understand our condition." Employers accepted me fairly well, I had no problem there. There was a feeling on the part of the bartenders in the state of Montana that they wanted no part of women in their organization. That was not truly a problem, but it was something of an obstacle. In time it wore off.

INTERVIEWER: Did it wear off or was it something that you had to overcome?

SWEET: I think a little of both. It is fun now to say that I represent hotel, restaurant employees and bartenders.

INTERVIEWER: It is a wonderful mental image of that very sweet, nice lady getting off a train as a labor organizer.

SWEET: Oh, I have had so many funny experiences travelling on the bus or on the train and someone sitting next to me. We would be in conversation, and finally the person would say, and I would mention having been here or there, "What is it you do?" "I am a labor representative," I would say. "I represent the hotel and restaurant employees and bartenders." And one time a lady said to me, "Why you look like too much of a lady, altogether like too nice of a person to be doing a thing like that!"

INTERVIEWER: How did you react to that?

SWEET: I laughed. It was funny.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have support within the community?

SWEET: Yes, in many areas. Some not so. Areas where I had the least support were in the state of Idaho.

INTERVIEWER: Why was that?

SWEET: Well, much of it I believe was because the areas were Church dominated.

INTERVIEWER: Did the Church see the union as a threat?

SWEET: It didn't believe they were necessary. There were two denominations of Churches which always have objected to having their parishioners becoming members of the union, and whenever we went into communities where they were prevalent, we had problems.

INTERVIEWER: And were these two denominations prevalent in Idaho?

SWEET: One of them was . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to enlist the help of any ministers?

SWEET: Yes, many times. We have been helped by Catholic and by Protestant ministers many times because of humanitarian reasons.

INTERVIEWER: I would think if they would sense the real need in families for

INTERVIEWER: work and make an equitable wage, for otherwise families would have to become the recipients of Church charities.

SWEET: That could be true. Furthermore, they would have had members of their churches who had experiences and they would have learned what the union did for them and naturally would be inclined to be favorable to union organization that would battle for the rights of its members and better living conditions for them, better wages and more time off and vacations and things that people need when they are working.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the only labor organizer that was sent to these communities or to these states, I should say?

SWEET: There were many organizers of different kinds of unions, and there were very few women, however. In fact, I don't recall any women. I was the only woman organizer in our International Union for years. That wasn't because there was a feeling against women, it was because women did not want to accept that kind of work. That has all changed now. We have many organizers who are women.

INTERVIEWER: What were your experiences in travelling in the other territories?

SWEET: Travelling during war years was terrible. I was bumped off trains and bumped off planes. No, I shouldn't say that I was bumped off trains, although there were times you couldn't board a train because it was crowded. But I was starved on trains, and I learned to carry the brown bag with me because there would be service personnel on these trains and they must be fed. I remember one trip from Boise to Portland, and we boarded the train about noon, and when dinner time came, we were lined up cars in back of the dining car waiting our chance to get into the dining room; and after standing there for about an hour and a half, the steward came out and said, "I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, we cannot serve any longer in the dining room." And I was nearly at the head of the line and I said, "Couldn't I please have a cup of tea?" And he said, "Sorry, m'am, we don't have anything left, not anything." I was mighty hungry, so after that I always carried my lunch or carried a snack of some kind. But on planes frequently I was bumped off because someone had priority. So I soon stopped trying to travel by plane and I had to fight my way many times to get on buses. Many people had to travel, and they didn't encourage travel, you know. Even on the train, when the conductor would take your ticket, he would look at you and scowl wondering why you were on the train, and the same with the buses. People would crowd out to get on the buses, and actually push at one another to push their way into those buses.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me the extent of your territory.

SWEET: What was the extent? The northwestern states, mostly, however, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and occasionally Alaska, and occasionally Wyoming.

INTERVIEWER: And you mentioned that this was just one district.

SWEET: That was called the Eighth District.

INTERVIEWER: And how many districts are there?

SWEET: Eleven in the International Union, two of which are in Canada.

INTERVIEWER: That sounds like really a very large territory to cover. Did you go to Alaska?

SWEET: Oh yes, I made several trips to Alaska. First trip I made was a get acquainted sort of a trip in 1946, and then, after that, I was up there on various union matters. They were well organized in Alaska because of the other unions, fishermen, miners and so on, building trades. We had some good, active unions there, we still do today. But we have been in the process of merging locals; whereas, for instance, in Portland we have a waitresses' union, a cooks and waiters' union, because waiters were merged some years ago into the cooks' union, and they have a hotel service employees union and a bartenders' union--four different unions with official staffs and office employees, all engaged in the same kind of work, and that is as far as the food and beverage industry and housekeeping, housekeeping in the hotels is concerned. It's much to the advantage of the unions to be merged into one organization with the administrative cost eliminated, and not such a lot of crisscrossing of jurisdictional rights. For instance, if a waitress does anything like putting a hotdog or hamburger on the grill, then the cooks feel she should be a member of the cooks' union; there is a certain crossover of duties in many places, especially the smaller ones that don't have business enough for fulltime cooks and fulltime bartenders, and so on. We are now in a process throughout the United States and Canada of merging local unions which will be much to the benefit of the employer as well as the employee.

INTERVIEWER: Now let me clarify, when you travel as an organizer, you were organizing for three, is that correct?

SWEET: Organizing for three organizations, particularly the waiters and waitresses and then the cooks and the bartenders. Hotel service people didn't become organized as quickly as did the others, and we didn't make an effort to organize them until the last twenty years or so.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that your efforts in organizing were successful?

SWEET: Many times, yes, not always.

INTERVIEWER: You were also in the business of informing, as you said, in Montana, as well as organizing.

SWEET: It was largely educational. My work really was not organizing as much as it was in training newly elected union members who were elected to offices in their local union; president, secretary-treasurer, business agent, executive board members, as to how to handle the work of the union for the benefit of all concerned. One of the things I have enjoyed greatly is establishing workshops for teaching those who didn't know how to handle the work, how it should be done. Many times somebody is well-liked within the union and that person says, "Why don't you run for business agent, and "Why don't you run for secretary." And it looks like very pleasant sort of work, and so they'll have nominations, and the next month, they'll have elections, and then someone may be elected who simply cannot grasp the work; who doesn't understand what it's all about, who doesn't even bother to read the by-laws of the union or the constitution of the International Union, and simply don't know what their duties are and what they are supposed to do, and the first thing they know, they are into trouble with the members, with employers, or they may be involved in a law suit.

I could see long ago that it was necessary for these people to have some instruction. When I first went to work, I would give it to them individually. I always do that, even now; to show them what the duties are, to sit down and talk with them and try to help them feel at ease with their work and to show them that they don't stand alone, that when they have a problem they can call me or call someone else associated with the International Union who will help them. Then, talking with the various officers of the union, we arrived at the conclusion that what we needed were seminars to present the problems of the unions to those who were now in office, those who planned to run for an office or those who were new in offices. So, we started in the state of Washington and we held seminars two days at a time, and then we soon had them in Oregon, and then a number of our people from British Columbia would come down to attend the seminars, and we now have them. And we have combined them so that British Columbia, Washington and Oregon are joined together, and once a year we have a two-day workshop prior to a convention, and we meet either in Vancouver, B.C. or somewhere in Washington or somewhere in Oregon. Usually when we meet in Oregon, we meet in Portland because it is more accessible than British Columbia and Washington. We have now for a number of years, probably between fifteen

SWEET: and twenty years, have had these workshops. They have been very helpful.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still conducting the workshops?

SWEET: I always conduct them, I am always the moderator. We set up committees comprised of people in the three areas, the province and the two states, and then we meet once or twice prior to the time for the workshop and work up an agenda for that.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Sweet, you are back at work again. Tell us about your newest venture with the unions.

SWEET: I don't think I would call it a new venture. It's just back into the work of the local union. In October of last year we merged four local unions of our International Union here in Portland, one of which was my old time local union, and I have been a member of it since 1920. It was the Waitresses' Union and then there was also a cooks' union, a bartenders' union and a hotel service employees' union, all of which were merged into one union now called Local 9, and I was asked to come in and aid in the merger and in the operation of the new local for the next two or three years.

INTERVIEWER: There are four unions that are merging.

SWEET: They are now merged, they merged as of October 1.

INTERVIEWER: And this is Local No. 9.

SWEET: Local No. 9. We began the work of the merger, formulating a merger agreement in August and worked on that quite some time, and then the merger became effective October 1.

INTERVIEWER: What constitutes this merger?

SWEET: I don't think I understand other than that it was these four local unions that I mentioned.

INTERVIEWER: Was it the need of strengthening one particular union and is that why they determined . . .

SWEET: It was decided that there would be much less administrative cost effecting our savings, or the membership, and the concentration of effort for organization of better wages and conditions for our members. It was felt that it was a move to make the union stronger. We now have those that previously had been elected as officers of these four local unions, now they are serving as officers of Local

SWEET: 9. We are working together and we are doing a good job.

INTERVIEWER: Were you instrumental in the merger procedures also?

SWEET: Yes, and then I was asked by the International Union as well as our local people to assume this office of executive vice-president.

INTERVIEWER: What did that mean in terms of your work schedule?

SWEET: Well, I put in at least three days a week in the office and the personnel is available, and at home I get phone calls, and often times I am here more than the three days.

INTERVIEWER: What year did you retire? You did retire before you started to work again?

SWEET: Because of ill health in '57, I was unable to work for several years. Upon regaining health I then accepted assignments as given to me by the General President, as we call him, of the International Union, and was busy from then on, although at home, well over fifty percent of the time. But now I am out. I love this work; it's a challenge, and I am happy to be where I am meeting people again, people whom I have known over years, and I am working with these people. I like them and admire them and we are just having a great time together.

INTERVIEWER: You mention that this was a vital and young new union, an amalgamation of the four unions. Who are the other officers?

SWEET: We have a president, a secretary-treasurer and a business manager who manages and oversees the work of the business representatives of whom we have seven. They do what we call the field work. They make the personal contact with the membership and the employers on the jobs.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other women involved as officers of this union?

SWEET: Our secretary is a woman. I think I should say that the president formerly was secretary of the Bartenders' Union. The secretary-treasurer formerly was treasurer of the Waitresses' Union. The business manager was formerly secretary of the Cooks' Union, and the four of us are called the general officers. We supervise and make decisions concerning the administration of the union. We meet once a week and then we report our recommendations to an executive board of the union, and this executive board then makes recommendations to the general membership meetings. We have general membership meetings once a month.

INTERVIEWER: How large is the general membership?

SWEET: Between five and six thousand.

INTERVIEWER: Do you find, Mrs. Sweet, that your position as a woman in an executive capacity of the union, has changed today from what it was when you first started your union activity?

SWEET: No, because at the time I first started my activities, we were a waiters and waitresses' union, and soon became a waitresses' union, having gotten our own charter from the International Union. I represented, you see, a group of women of the waitresses. I have never had any problem, such as some women in industry have had, because we were always recognized very well in the labor movement in the state, in the city and in the International Union.

INTERVIEWER: Was it difficult to get other women involved with the union, aside from joining the union?

SWEET: Not as far as the Waitresses' Union was concerned was it difficult because we were all women. It has been difficult as far as some other unions are concerned. In my work representing the International Union, and where I travelled over a number of states and tried to recruit members for work within the union. I did find it difficult many times because the women had other interests and they didn't want to devote all that time. Nevertheless, as the years went on, it was found that both in Oregon and in Washington and Montana, that we had more women officers in the union than we had men. I find that the women did work and talk and did as good a job as did the men.

INTERVIEWER: When you were travelling early in your union career in organizing, did you feel any particular discrimination against you because you were a woman?

SWEET: No, I did not. I never have felt that. I have been very fortunate. Sometimes they would be perhaps pleasanter to me because I was a woman than they would otherwise because I was representing something which was not always liked.

INTERVIEWER: Do you suppose you did not feel the discrimination because you were representing what essentially was a woman's union?

SWEET: I represented a woman's union only when I was secretary of the Waitresses' Union here in Portland. When I worked for the International Union, I represented all of them. I was a little bit timid at first thinking that the bartenders would not accept me because at that time bartenders would not accept women into membership, but I had no problem. Things went along very well.

INTERVIEWER: When you began your union work did you expect it to continue and turn into your lifetime vocation?

SWEET: Oh no. My only thought was that I work a few years and then I could stay home with my children. But I found it necessary to support them; it didn't turn out that way.

INTERVIEWER: As you continued in your union activities, did you feel it afforded you the kind of growth that you wanted?

SWEET: Yes. I like it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel that you needed additional education or additional training?

SWEET: I have felt the need of that many times, but there wasn't time for it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel that the union afforded you the kind of growth that you needed?

SWEET: Yes, it does. There are many avenues for education and help for the work we do. I attended some classes, some lectures through the union and talking with people; that's how I gained my education.

INTERVIEWER: Were there particular people who helped you in terms of your education or your organizational skills?

SWEET: I think the thing that helped me the most was being a delegate to what was at that time the Portland Central Labor Council. I was a delegate there many, many years, meeting about every Monday evening, and I listened to reports of those representing other unions, other kinds of unions, and their problems were very different. Also we had many speakers and I learned much in that way. I always said that really was my college education.

INTERVIEWER: What were the years that you were involved in the Portland Labor Council?

SWEET: From 1922 until 1938.

INTERVIEWER: Were there particular people that influenced you and afforded you those opportunities?

SWEET: No, I don't recall anyone particular that has. There were many people, but I knew no one in particular. The closest contact, of course, was the officers and people of the unions which I represented: the Cook's Union, the Bartender's Union, the Hotel Service and the Waitresses'.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose what I was seeking was the names of people who encouraged you to continue and those people who were models for you.

SWEET: No one seems to be outstanding in my memory with exception of an International officer who gave me much encouragement and urged me to continue on and seek higher office and so on. One of them was named Mr. Flory, who was General President at the time I became an officer of our union, and the other was a Mr. Sullivan, who was the General Secretary Treasurer. In 1927, we had an International convention in Portland, and I met them then and they became interested in me and gave me much encouragement.

INTERVIEWER: From the time you joined the union in 1920 and your early positions with the union, what were your national offices?

SWEET: I had no International office until I became an International organizer in 1938. I was then being a delegate to my own local union to the International convention. Oh yes, one time I was elected as one of three arbiters who are elected from all over the United States and Canada by the membership to serve as International auditors, and so I was one of three in the year 1939 who served as International auditors.

INTERVIEWER: What does an International auditor do?

SWEET: We really were not auditors. We met to go with the Certified Public Accountant over the records and the books of the International Union, so that we might obtain knowledge as to the methods of handling the membership records and finances. Of course, we checked the financial records along under the leadership of the Certified Public Accountant and then drew up a statement that all was well. Even to this day our International Union continues that. It is just an honor given to union members or officers of the union. They are voted on by members of the general executive board, and they are selected by their own unions, and a list of names is sent to the general office in Cincinatti, and they in turn send out to members of the general executive board who vote for two. Very frequently there is a very large list of names. So I was one of the fortunate ones at that time, long ago.

INTERVIEWER: Have you had any subsequent national or international appointments?

SWEET: No, only as an International organizer and I have been elected an International Vice-President since 1938 without any opposition at succeeding conventions. I have been pretty lucky.

INTERVIEWER: How did being part of the union affect your private life, especially at first when your children were so young?

SWEET: That was a problem, of course. My mother cared for them for a while, and I had a housekeeper. We didn't have any problem within the home. I just wanted to be there more with them, that's all. I had the four; we got along quite well.

INTERVIEWER: What are your children's attitudes today towards unions?

SWEET: They are understanding and very sympathetic. My son is a railroad engineer. One daughter was a member of the Waitresses' Union for a number of years. She is no longer working at it. The other daughter married young and never did work at all outside of her home. My grandson was in military service. They were always very cooperative. I had to be away from home a number of evenings, they understood it. They accepted their responsibility. I was very proud of my children.

INTERVIEWER: How do they feel now about your returning to work?

SWEET: They like it. "If that's what you want to do, Mom, that's what you should do."

INTERVIEWER: Were there other things besides your family that competed for your time?

SWEET: No, I would not say so. I was active in church work when I was not too active with the union, and I had time to devote to work within the women's organizations of the church, I no longer do that.

INTERVIEWER: When you first became involved with the union, did you think that you would have a leadership role?

SWEET: Not at first, no.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think that being a woman would make any difference in your union activity?

SWEET: I don't recall giving any thought to that.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been discouraged from running for a particular office?

SWEET: No, I have been asked to run for the office.

INTERVIEWER: I know that you did do a good deal of traveling in your union work, your organizational work, and I also know that you traveled alone. I wondered whether in your traveling you have felt any discrimination as a woman.

SWEET: I really don't believe so. I can't recall anything of the sort. There wasn't all that emphasis on being a woman in the work that I was doing.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever critized for your union activities, the fact that you were working instread of being at home?

SWEET: Oh yes, by people who were unaware of my circumstances, critized also by strangers for representing a union. "How could such a nice person as you represent a union?"

INTERVIEWER: How did you answer that?

SWEET: Because I believed in it and I knew that it helped women to obtain better wages and working conditions.

INTERVIEWER: How did they react to that answer?

SWEET: Sometimes with indifference, and sometimes a little bit argumentatively. When I encountered that sort of outlook, then I just didn't carry on with it.

INTERVIEWER: Did this opposition emanate from friends or can I presume that your family and friends were supportive.

SWEET: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: When you think back, can you think of other women who were active in your particular union or had comparable positions in other unions? Can you think of other women?

SWEET: Oh yes, there were many women who became secretaries to various unions as I was working. I encouraged many of them to become secretaries, helped them to learn their duties and so on. They were representing a mixed group, men and women of all the various crafts, the cooks, the waitresses, the waiters, bartenders and so forth. There were many women in the work, there are many today.

INTERVIEWER: Did many of the women whom you encouraged to go into union work remain in union work?

SWEET: Some of them have been in it for many years, but not the majority.

INTERVIEWER: Why did they leave?

SWEET: Oftentimes for health reasons or for family reasons. I would say that the majority left for family reasons.

INTERVIEWER: How was your particular union structured, I am talking about the time from the separation, when it was the waitresses' union; what was the structure like?

SWEET: You mean our present setup?

INTERVIEWER: No, the original union that you began.

SWEET: Members elected the officers of their union who served for a term of two or three years. Members were priveleged to nominate anyone whom they pleased and then there was the election at a stated time. I was elected to each office that I had with the exception of the very first one, and I volunteered for that. They needed someone to serve as Recording Secretary and they could find no one until finally I volunteered. And, as a result, I continued in that capacity until the waitresses separated from the waiters, and then I was elected to offices from then on.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a difference in the formal and informal setup in terms of structure of the union? I am talking about decision-making. Was the decision-making done by the formal officers or was it rather informal decision-making?

SWEET: Mostly the decisions are made by the Executive Board which makes recommendations to the membership and it is debated then and acted upon, and accepted or rejected and amended, and that still is the situation today.

INTERVIEWER: Have you always been involved in decision-making?

SWEET: Ever since I have been an officer, yes.

INTERVIEWER: In what period of your life do you feel your union responsibility was the heaviest?

SWEET: I believe they were the heaviest during the period that I served as Secretary of the Waitresses' Local 305. There were more decisions to be made, more problems to be met on a local level than there were later on the international level.

INTERVIEWER: And they were heavier at that time than when you travelled and were doing the organizing?

SWEET: They were heavier, yes. They were of a different nature, of course, but they caused me more concern than they did later because when you are travelling you go in to help people. And when you solve a certain situation, then you go on to another one somewhere else, so that you never stay very long at any time at any place. Probably a week

SWEET: would be the most, and consequently you don't become involved personally as you do when you stay in one place.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say it was the difference between handling long range problems and handling more immediate crises?

SWEET: I would.

INTERVIEWER: What about your relationship with people as you travelled, since you were in places for shorter periods of time; were you able to develop good relationships?

SWEET: Oh yes. I enjoyed the work very much. I enjoyed meeting people, and after I had made the initial trip to any place, they were always happy to see me, and I was happy to be there, so we got along very well. Of course I did have some unpleasant situations to meet too.

INTERVIEWER: Can you recall any of those?

SWEET: Oh yes. I remember one of the first I encountered was finding that a Secretary of the union was not depositing all the money that was collected. He didn't seem to know which pocket was his and which pocket was the union's. Consequently, I had to check him, and when I checked on him, I found him several hundred dollars short. He, of course, was bonded as all of the officers who handle money, they have to be bonded. So, first I called him in and showed him, and he didn't want to admit this, but figures spoke for themselves, so I had to be very firm and tell him that if he did not repay this money within forty-eight hours from the time I was talking with him, that I would report him to the bonding company. Furthermore, he could no longer serve as Secretary of this union. It was the first time I had to do anything as unpleasant as that, and it wasn't pleasant. He was the kind of a person who had a family, but it had to be done. That was one of the bad things I had to do.

Another time, at another local union, the workers were determined to have substantial wage increases, and along with the local committee I met with the committee from the employers and we arrived at what we considered a fair and reasonable compromise, one of the middle of the road ones. But they rejected it and voted to strike. I did my utmost to persuade them not to strike, but they went out on strike for six weeks and finally with the help of the mediation service of the state of Washington, we were able to work out a compromise and the members returned to work. It left a very bad feeling between the restaurant operators and the union officials for a long period of time. Strikes are abhorrent to me, because I think there is always a way of settling things. But there had been several times in the work that I did where it became necessary to strike. Those are things which I don't like.

INTERVIEWER: Have there been strikes or close to strike situations that you have been able to settle?

SWEET: Many more than there were strikes. That was one of my responsibilities, to prevent strikes if at all possible, if we could effectuate a settlement that was reasonable. However, there are those within every organization who are what we call hotheads, who want everything, and when you can't obtain it for them, they will persuade their members to go along with their ideas. And sometimes it's a struggle to persuade the membership to accept a sensible settlement. I had many of those unpleasant things.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of settling strikes, do you remember any particularly pleasant situations?

SWEET: They don't remain in my memory as much as the unpleasant ones, because I always remember those. The pleasant ones, you settle them, you forget them, but you are glad that you have a good relationship and let others feel that you are being fair and not unreasonable.

INTERVIEWER: There is a struggle going on at the present time in Florida, and that is a particularly unpleasant one.

SWEET: Not knowing enough about it, I am not going to comment on it. Talking of unpleasant experiences, I can tell you some. I was in a small town where a number of restaurant employees wanted a union because of their low wages and their long hours of work. On my second visit into this town at which time we were going to have a meeting of those interested, I went into a restaurant for dinner and noticed that the waitress didn't stand close to the tables, she stood out at least two feet away from the table to take my order. Then I observed that the wife of the owner was the cashier. So I thought the waitress did not want the lady to know that she knew who I was or knew me. However, I gave her the order for my dinner and she went into the kitchen to give the order to the cook, and the owner's wife followed her and reached in her dress, pulled out a little vial and said to the cook "put this in that order." It was crotin oil. The cook was a member of the union from another city who had been instrumental in telling these girls in the restaurant that they should have a union. So he was not about to put the crotin oil in my food, and he told her so, he wouldn't do that. He told her, "No, I will not" and "I will not put that into anyone's food, I would be in trouble if I did." So she gave up. Later he told me of it. I was very grateful that I didn't have that crotin oil.

INTERVIEWER: What does the crotin oil do to your food?

SWEET: Well, it just makes you very ill. It upsets your digestive process.

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SWEET: Well, it just makes you very ill. It upsets your digestive process.

INTERVIEWER: I should think that that is a rather violent way, quietly violent. . .

SWEET: In that same town, the hotel clerk (there was only one large hotel in the town) was ordered not to give me a room when I came back. I made the reservation before leaving and he told me, "I am sorry, but we don't have any rooms, the hotel is always full on Monday." I said, "Well, I can come back another day." "I am sorry there won't be any rooms." I met a number of the waitresses later who said, "Don't pay any attention to that; we will see that you have a room when you come in, and we want you to come back as we want another meeting." So I returned, went to the hotel, registered in and was given a very nice room. The waitresses had talked with the clerk. This being a small town, everyone knew everyone else, and they had talked to the clerk and told him that he should see that I have a room and that they are interested in my being there. Everything went along very smoothly from then on. I never kept a record of anything. I now wished I had kept an account of the things I did and that were done while I was working, but I didn't and now my memory fails me, I don't recall these things.

INTERVIEWER: This is a record of one sort, and all that you remember we will tape! There had been a history in the Northwest in terms of violence in labor organizing. I am not familiar with it in the particular unions that you were active in, but I was wondering if you were subject to any of this.

SWEET: I haven't encountered any of it, and I am glad to say, "No, I did not." I think you find that sort of thing comes from stronger organizations, mostly the men's organizations, and furthermore, our General President was always opposed to anything of that sort. In the Northwest we have not had that. We have been accused of it in other areas in the United States, but not in the Northwest.

INTERVIEWER: What is the highest position a woman has ever reached in your union?

SWEET: The one which I now hold, an International Vice-President.

INTERVIEWER: During the years that you have been active in the union, did you devote much time or energy to what is referred to as women's issues?

SWEET: No. When I worked with the union I did not engage in any activities concerning women.

INTERVIEWER: Were there concerns though in your union work with the equality of women?

SWEET: In upgrading your work, you mean? Surely, and helping them wherever possible to obtain better work; to improve the waitress' ability to serve as a waitress, to train her so that she might hold better

SWEET: jobs; to do what we call the service houses where there would be more renumeration in the way of tips.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of training was employed?

SWEET: We had schools, various classes. Oftentimes employers would work with us and we would have a committee to set up a training course at school. We have done that many times in many areas.

INTERVIEWER: Is that still in existence today?

SWEET: In many places in the United States, yes, particularly in New York City. We have some very good class work there.

INTERVIEWER: The situation certainly changed from your early experiences as a waitress to the present status of a waitress, and I wondered if there were any other benefits in terms of the union aside from wages and hours.

SWEET: No, with the exception that all officers within the union are elected, nominated and elected to an office, perhaps a salaried one, perhaps they might start in on a non-salaried office and later run for an office with a salary attached. Now that the unions pay good salaries, they feel waitresses are not paid nearly enough money for the work they are doing.

INTERVIEWER: What additional benefits is the union working toward now?

SWEET: We have established health benefits for all members; medical and hospital benefits and in many, many areas we have established pensions. In Portland we have a good health plan and a good pension plan, and the pension plan is increasing as the trust fund increases. The employers pay so much per hour into a fund which goes into a health and welfare fund, which takes care of hospital benefits, doctor's fees. It has been very beneficial. In some organizations it also reaches into the dependents of the employees. This applies not only to waitresses, but it applies to all of the people working in our culinary industry.

INTERVIEWER: How long have these benefits been in existence?

SWEET: In Portland they have been in existence for a period of about twelve years, that is the health benefits. They have been increased from time to time. They are much better now than they were in the beginning. The pension has been in effect for six or seven years. I am just guessing off the top of my head. I could get you the exact figures, but I don't have them.

INTERVIEWER: Was it difficult to initiate these benefits?

SWEET: Yes. We had to start in on a very small way, and now in Portland we have dental care too for the membership. That is also the case in nearly every large city. We have a new objective and that is optical care. Perhaps we will reach that some day.

INTERVIEWER: From whom was most of the resistance?

SWEET: Well, it was not from the membership.

INTERVIEWER: Would this have been then from the employers?

SWEET: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were these negotiations done in contract time?

SWEET: Yes. Most contracts run for three years. In Portland they have a three year contract which will not be up until '79. We will then commence to negotiate another contract.

INTERVIEWER: Are you the negotiator in these contracts?

SWEET: I have not been involved in these here in Portland. As the International Organizer I was very active with other local unions throughout the Northwest.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find this kind of negotiating would change according to the state you were in because you had more than one state?

SWEET: In some areas we found a more receptive attitude than we did in others, particularly where economic conditions were excellent, especially in Montana where there was a strong labor force from other unions, the miners and so forth. Some places in Washington and Oregon were alike. There were areas where there isn't much of a union sentiment or sympathy, and there negotiations would be difficult. We found them particularly difficult in two areas, in college towns and in state capitols.

INTERVIEWER: To what do you attribute that?

SWEET: The type of people who lived there were not aware of the union and were never interested in the unions. When they became interested and realized what we were striving for, we frequently had assistance from them or at least sympathy.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find this to be true in college towns?

SWEET: I am thinking of state capitols, I can't cite college towns particularly.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder in college towns, if there wasn't the availability of cheap help from young people.

SWEET: That is correct. Young people who needed to earn their way through college who would be willing to work for just most anything, so the pressure could not interest them in striving and sacrificing to obtain better wages and conditions. We have always been sympathetic to those young people. We do not demand of them the full initiation fees and dues. We try to help them in any way we can and not ask of them any contribution for the union when they are working short hours or part time. We feel we should help them, so we have not made that one of our issues.

INTERVIEWER: Have you found that the attitude of waitress work or bartender work as temporary work as one which you confronted?

SWEET: Yes, very much so. Frequently we heard "I am only going to be working till school starts" or "I am only going to be working till I have my son through college," or something of that sort. However, most of them continue on. It is temporary work in many areas. People move from town to town and when they take a position in a town, perhaps his work is for six months or a year, and his wife will go to work. But they do not stay there, and so she does not want to become a part of the union; he doesn't encourage her to. "Oh well, we are not going to be here long." But nevertheless, they are taking a job that some union member feels should be his or hers.

INTERVIEWER: So, when a restaurant is organized by the union, it becomes an all union restaurant.

SWEET: And the employees receive a scale of wages that is in conformity with the union contract and they ought to receive health and all the benefits if they work eighty hours in any one given month, then they are entitled to benefits the employer pays. They do not pay, but the employer pays premiums on these benefits.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been involved in any protective legislation?

SWEET: Not lately, because I had not the time for it other than talking to membership and encouraging them to vote and talking about the issues at the union meetings or to groups of people, but not to the extent that I would go to the legislature, except occasionally to lobby for something.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any particular occasions that you can recall, not in terms of what the issues were?

SWEET: No, not particularly, something that involved working conditions, betterment of people who were working. It was always along those lines.

INTERVIEWER: Was your union affected by wage and price controls?

SWEET: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: In what way?

SWEET: There were wage controls during the war years, during World War II. We were greatly affected because our people had their wages set at a certain range and the employer could not pay over that, and our people, for years, then did not receive any wage increases. In fact it did affect us greatly.

INTERVIEWER: What were the effects on your union during the war, aside from the wage controls?

SWEET: During the war the membership increased very greatly. There was far more employment than there had been and that's the reason for the increase. We didn't have anything in the way of promised wage increases because wages were frozen. We could protect the members when differences arose on the job; we could work to settle them, to adjust them satisfactorily, and there were many ways in which we could be helpful to the people.

INTERVIEWER: Now there was a considerable war industry which came to this part of the Northwest, and I know it included food services. And how were you involved in this?

SWEET: We were involved in working out a contract, and the contract provided for better working conditions, shorter hours, overtime pay, vacation pay and things of that sort. We couldn't negotiate as far as wage increases were concerned.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in Kaiser shipyards?

SWEET: Yes, I was. Many of our restaurant people, you see, went to work as shipyard workers. The pay was so much greater. They left by the droves, you might say. Nevertheless, their places were filled by others who came into the work and needed jobs. Not everyone could work at the shipyards. But the pay was so much greater that much of our people went to work there during the time the shipyards were in operation and came back into the industry later.

INTERVIEWER: How was your union affected after the war?

SWEET: Well, we had problems, many of them, but we continued to grow. We have not lost any ground. I attribute it to good, fair leadership, particularly in Portland and in Seattle, Tacoma and various areas, and we have gotten along very well. We have grown considerably. We have not grown in some areas in the state of Oregon, particularly where there is now no longer any industry. Let me mention Klamath Falls, Roseburg, Medford; various places where at one time we did have union organization. And the union is no longer as strong as they were because there isn't a labor force within the area. The industry is no longer there. Lumbering had a great affect as far as we were concerned because nearly all those working in the timber industry were sympathetic to the unions or union people, and then they would rather spend their money eating in a union restaurant than they would go to where it wasn't union. They knew those people working in the union places were getting a fair wage, and that when the industry no longer was active, then there wasn't that support.

INTERVIEWER: So the lack of industry in an area does really reflect on the activity in your union work.

SWEET: Yes, it does.

INTERVIEWER: Even though it is not industry bases.

SWEET: You see, we are a service union, and we are greatly affected by the industry in any area.

INTERVIEWER: Now was this one of the bases for the problems after World War II as well?

SWEET: Yes, to some extent.

INTERVIEWER: As the shipyards diminished their activities, then . . .

SWEET: People scattered. They were no longer here and they had gone elsewhere to find employment. So there wasn't all the activity there had been. Nevertheless, as I said, we did continue to grow, a slower growth than we had during the war years.

INTERVIEWER: There were a great number of what one would call unskilled workers who came into this area during that time, and then were willing to work. Did these people affect the work of your union?

SWEET: I can't say that they did in large cities, but they did in smaller areas, because they were willing to work for most any wage and under any conditions. They needed jobs and they did hurt us in many areas. We were particularly hurt by the way they would behave in any military base, because the wives of the men who were in service

SWEET: would be wanting to work. And they would work for any wage and they didn't want to join a union, because they were only going to to be there temporarily. And we had a number of problems with those people who would be glad to work in a place which was on strike, but the strike was because the employer wouldn't pay the wage according to the contract. They were willing and glad to take the jobs. They did affect us considerably. That no longer is the case because we are not at war and we don't have all these military bases.

INTERVIEWER: But this may still be true in and around the Seattle and Tacoma area because of the military base up there.

SWEET: They haven't been badly affected in either of those areas, but there are other places in the United States where the cities are smaller, where there are military bases. And yet we usually don't try to organize unions where there is much resistance unless the employee within the restaurants asks us to come in and start work towards organizing a union because they feel they are not paid properly. That often happens.

INTERVIEWER: As you go in and organize the area, you also develop levels of, let us say, professionalism, within the restaurant that you have organized.

SWEET: Yes, we try to do that.

INTERVIEWER: What type of community support did you receive in the twenties, thirties, and forties from groups like the National Consumers' League or Churches, or settlement houses?

SWEET: Almost none.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find them in opposition to the organization of unions?

SWEET: I never had the experience of working with any of them. I am only talking for myself now, not in general.

INTERVIEWER: Would you know if there was cooperation in this general area, and while working conditions were bad and people were in need, supposedly many of these organizations helped in answering these needs or correcting them, I should say; I wondered if they had worked along with the unions?

SWEET: Not that I particularly know of. The union has helped them many times when asked to. We have been on the giving not the receiving end.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of one particular way that you were on the giving end?

SWEET: Like furnishing volunteer help, from the Salvation Army, the volunteers. When they call for help, they will call us and ask us if some of our people would volunteer to help. We have often done that. We are glad to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still do that type of thing in this area?

SWEET: If asked to, we have not been asked to, as far as I know, recently. This would be at the Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners. They would ask for waitresses to help and come serve.

INTERVIEWER: Would you consider yourself as being a union activist?

SWEET: That's all I know. My home and my union and my Church.

INTERVIEWER: How would you define a union activist, Mrs. Sweet?

SWEET: Well, one who really is with heart and soul with the union and tries to sell the idea to others. A union activist is someone who is getting out and battling a bit for a cause they believe in. I am not a battler, I like to be a persuader.

INTERVIEWER: Has a special comraderie developed among the union activists in this area, those people who have gone out to develop unions?

SWEET: Yes, I am sure of that.

INTERVIEWER: Is this true for you in terms of your long friendships?

SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What do you see as the future of unionism in this area, within your particular union?

SWEET: I see a growth, I see a better understanding of the unions. We have a very fine relationship with the employers group, because we do try to be fair. To me this work I am doing now is a challenge. I enjoy it, because we are engaged in building up a stronger union and to work toward a better understanding between the employer groups and those who are employed, and we want to build an understanding of our aims in the public eye. We like to be thought of as people who are working for the betterment of this, not as people who are here to agitate and cause trouble and have strikes and so on and so forth.

INTERVIEWER: What are the aims as you see them?

SWEET: Just those that I enumerated, better conditions, better wages, better understanding, more trust in one another.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder how much more and what can be done, because so much has been done in terms of improving the working conditions and the

INTERVIEWER: wages; I assume there are built in things within contracts for the inflationary scale. That's why I try to be very specific about asking you what else can be done.

SWEET: Well, as I stated formerly, I do not believe that our people are paid well enough for the work they do; none of our people, the hotel service people, the people working in the kitchens and those working in the dining rooms. After all, when you look at the wages of a building laborer, an unskilled man who digs ditches and you compare them to the wages of a waitress, it makes us feel pretty sick, because we are not highly paid people at all. The only highly paid people are the chefs who are responsible for the menus and the well being in the restaurants and the hotel dining rooms, but the average worker in our industry is not well paid at all.

INTERVIEWER: What is your general wage scale?

SWEET: I would have to give you a wage scale book. To go into that, you see there are many, many kinds of gradations in the wage scales, so I think the best answer that I can give you there would be to give you this contract and I quote from that the wages. A waitress, for instance, now receives a scale of $2.63 for an eight hour day. A bartender receives a scale of $4.10 an hour for an eight hour day, that is where they serve the hard liquor. If he works for where they serve beer and wine only, his scale is $3.23 an hour.

INTERVIEWER: Is this the national scale?

SWEET: Oh no, this is Portland scale.

INTERVIEWER: How does it compare with the national scale?

SWEET: Scales in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and on the East coast are much higher.

INTERVIEWER: How is the decision made as to these scales?

SWEET: The economic condition of the industry. For instance, Portland has not been a restaurant town that San Francisco and Seattle were for years. However, that has been overcome. Now Portland has many good restaurants, so then we were able to get better wages for our people. These wages were negotiated last year and became effective in August of last year.

INTERVIEWER: How active are you in the decision making in terms of the wages?

SWEET: Not at all. In Portland I have not been active at all. It was a local committee that handled that. The secretaries of the various local unions were the negotiating committee. You see, I have not been working locally other than counselling with our

SWEET: people, discussing their problems, helping educate newly elected officers, and so on. I have not been involved in negotiations in any way.

INTERVIEWER: Will you now be more involved?

SWEET: Yes, that is one of my responsibilities now.

INTERVIEWER: What are your responsibilities now as Executive Vice-President?

SWEET: To preside at the meeting of the general officers, to be what one International person told me, is to be a stabilizer, to help our people work together in the settlement of their various problems and to help them make further growth, to progress for the benefit of the members.

INTERVIEWER: Can you foresee that this growth will come through the merger of these four craft unions?

SWEET: I do indeed, I am very enthusiastic about it.

INTERVIEWER: Do the various union representatives feel the same way, that this is their opportunity for growth?

SWEET: In fact, I want you to meet the secretary of our union, and then you can form your opinions in talking with her.

INTERVIEWER: Is she a woman who has been in union work for a long time?

SWEET: Yes, she worked as a waitress for many, many years and then became a business representative of the union, or as we commonly call them, a business agent, and then was elected as a secretary.

INTERVIEWER: How many women are active in this new union as executives?

SWEET: Half of our business agents are women, half of our executive board are women, and of course of the general officers, half of them are women. There are four general officers, you see, two are men and two are women.

INTERVIEWER: And this just happened, or was it an arbitrary decision to have it happen?

SWEET: No, not arbitrary. These people were already officers of the union at the time of the merger with the exception of me.

INTERVIEWER: What about the general membership, how is that divided among men and women?

SWEET: We have more women than we have men, because there are more workers in the dining room with more needs than there are men.

SWEET: Among the cooks, the men outnumber the women, also as bartenders.

INTERVIEWER: Are there stewards that are employed by the hotels?

SWEET: In some areas, yes. We did not have a stewardship that was active here.

INTERVIEWER: What is the relationship between or among the men and the women in terms of organizing this new union, have they been cooperative?

SWEET: Yes. Our meetings are very well attended. Members are interested.

INTERVIEWER: I want to ask you a few general questions, Mrs. Sweet, and that would reflect back on your own personal life. What would you say is the most exciting part of your life?

SWEET: My work within the unions.

INTERVIEWER: And if you could relive any particular part of your life, which part would that be?

SWEET: I think my present work.

INTERVIEWER: What you are doing right now. You are reliving it then, you are living it.

SWEET: I am living it, I am enjoying it.

INTERVIEWER: Would you want your daughters to live through your experiences?

SWEET: If they wanted to.

INTERVIEWER: Would there be any parts that you would want them to avoid?

SWEET: No, because we must have the good with the bad. We can't grow unless we have problems. My daughters haven't cared for that, but if they wanted to, I wouldn't stand in their way.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been more comfortable working with men or women?

SWEET: There isn't any difference. I like to work with groups of women; I love it. And yet I like to work with the men too. I find them very interesting to work with. And they have cooperated. I just don't feel about the woman thing as some people do.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been active in getting women to actively vote, to be involved in other activities besides the union?

SWEET: No, because my work has always been within the union, and working with union people that's all I have known since I have been in

SWEET: the union.

INTERVIEWER: So this has been your preoccupation as well as your occupation.

SWEET: You might say so, other than my family, my home.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember reading anything or seeing anything that has particularly influenced your life?

SWEET: You mean as far as the union work is concerned?

INTERVIEWER: As far as your life is concerned.

SWEET: My life has been greatly influenced by the readings of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. I presume I am what you might call a religious person. I wouldn't have succeeded as I did had it not been for my deep belief in God and knowing that I had guidance when I needed it. That's a part of me.

INTERVIEWER: Do you support the Equal Rights Amendment?

SWEET: Yes, if it doesn't mean that the men are going to shove women around, and I have found that there has been so much agitation. When I board a bus at night, men, young and old, are in a hurry to get ahead of the women to get the seats, and I have seen them let older women stand, when young men sat, and women in their seventies would get on the bus and have trouble standing there, and they just sit, and that makes me mad. And I blame equal rights agitation on Equal Rights Amendment to some of that.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you blame ....

SWEET: Because men didn't ever act like that before until all of this agitation about equal rights for women, and they were o.k. All right, equal rights, I may have a seat and they can stand.

INTERVIEWER: But you do see equal rights to go beyond that kind of an attitude.

SWEET: There used to be more deference for women by far in the public than there is now. I don't say the agitation for equal rights is to blame for it, and I believe in equal rights when it comes to equal pay for work done. For many, many years women cooks and waitresses did not receive the same pay for exactly the same kind of work that men did. When I first went to work, waitresses received less than waiters for doing the same kind of a job. We have corrected that within our union, and we have had quite a struggle in correcting it as far as women cooks were concerned because the contention was that they couldn't lift things that the men did, and so they thought they shouldn't be paid as much and yet the woman cook worked every bit as hard and was just as capable as was the man. That has been done away with and now they receive equal pay for the equal kind of work. So, of course

SWEET: I always felt very strongly that women should receive the same pay as men when they work, and we know that even today they do not in many areas and that's why I favor Equal Rights Amendment because it will correct that, but on the other hand it has changed the attitude of the men. They are not as deferential to women as they used to be. I used to never get into a bus but that some man would get up and give me a seat. Now I can jolly well stand on my own two feet while he sits on his stern end.

INTERVIEWER: He knows that you are standing on your own two feet, and that's perhaps why! Do you think that organized labor today is sensitive to women's needs?

SWEET: In most areas, there are some where they are not, but the average are.

INTERVIEWER: What are the areas where you think they are particularly sensitive?

SWEET: In service industries particularly, in ours, in the building service employees, in the office employees, in those industries where you serve the public, where you are in the public; in some of these where they work particularly with their hands, they feel that men are stronger physically and women shouldn't be part of their work force.

INTERVIEWER: Factory work.

SWEET: Right.

INTERVIEWER: How does organized labor counteract to that?

SWEET: They are working all the time to bring more women into the work and encourage them, and you have recently publicity about women welders and women machinists, doing work they never thought of doing a few years ago. If they are physically able and capable there is no reason why they shouldn't do that work if they want to.

INTERVIEWER: As a professional labor person, would you be the person to fight for the rights of women to do what they want to, to be firemen, policemen?

SWEET: Yes, vote for it and work for it. As I told you, I am not a feminist, just because a woman is a woman I don't think she should have any preference over any one.

INTERVIEWER: I think that women working in the labor movement are more or less affected because they are women.

SWEET: I wouldn't say so; to my knowledge they are not. I don't think there is any difference. I meet so many who work for the Ameri-

SWEET: can Federation of Labor in their fields, travel all over the United States who are equally interested in the same position. There are fewer of them because many of them don't care to travel like that and leave their homes, but they are very good when they give themselves to it.

INTERVIEWER: Are there more women becoming actively involved in the labor movement today?

SWEET: Yes. There are more women in industries of various kinds, working women before they become involved in a labor organization that represents them.

INTERVIEWER: Are the unions actively interested in recruiting women, not for membership alone, but for higher position for organizing?

SWEET: I will speak for my union and I will say, "Yes, we are". We have many women on now as organizers, whereas when I was an organizer, I was the only woman on the staff in the United States and Canada, and I was the only woman for many years.

INTERVIEWER: How many women labor organizers are there in the state of Oregon today?

SWEET: I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: There certainly are more than one.

SWEET: Yes, there are and quite a number in the International Union. I think there are about 35 percent now from my knowledge of it.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say was the most satisfying part of your work within the union?

SWEET: Great satisfaction to me I am being of help to someone, helping to obtain better wages or solve a problem for them at work, and many times they come to me with personal problems, they want someone to talk to, and so counselling, advising and so on, has always meant much to me, to be able to be of help.

INTERVIEWER: So you utilize your many years of experience at the present time. I detect, Mrs. Sweet, that you tend to look at your work on an individual basis rather than just collective unionism.

SWEET: I presume I am inclined to too much so. I think of it helping a certain person solving a grievance, contributing to better understanding between people than the general thing, although it helps the overall picture.

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