International Union,
United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America,
UAW

International Executive Board
Oral Histories

Martin Gerber

Interviewed by Glenn Ruggles
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RUGGLES: Mr. Gerber, let's begin at the very beginning with your early childhood. I know you were born in New Jersey in 1916. Tell us a little bit, if you can, about your parents and your childhood.

GERBER: Well, my father was a milkman and delivered milk seven days a week ever since I can remember. He worked hard and died at a relatively early age. He died when he was 39 years of age. I, at that time, was 14 years old, the eldest of four children. As soon as I became old enough, I went to work. I went to work after school and on weekends until I finished high school in 1934. While I was in high school, I did engage in some athletic activities. I played football and basketball on high school teams and at that time, I must confess, had no concept of the labor movement as such.

It was not until I got a job at General Motors . . . I left high school in 1934 in the midst of the Depression and got a few odd jobs. I worked part-time and took a few odds and ends jobs. I wasn't regularly employed until I was employed at the General Motors Linden plant in 1937. The plant had just been completed and I was one of the original workers at that facility. Reminiscing about back then — in two years that facility will mark its fiftieth anniversary — the thing I remember most about my job at Linden was the backbreaking, almost body-destroying fatigue which I endured as a result of working at that job. It was a pace which was almost impossible to maintain. Had it not been for the fact that I had been in . . . At the time I went to work there I was in good shape. In fact, I had just won the New Jersey golden gloves heavyweight championship, so I was in good shape. I was trim, lean and I was in good condition, so I could stand the strain there. Many others who worked with me couldn't stand the strain. They just had to drop out and quit their jobs. They needed their jobs desperately in 1937 in the midst of the

Depression, but they had to leave because they just couldn't stand the pace. It was really a backbreaking speed-up.

Many years later while I was attending one of our summer schools, I did some research on the results of the LaFollette investigating committee — that was a Senate committee that was investigating industrial espionage in General Motors in the 1930's. I remember vividly one woman saying, "My husband, he's not a man anymore. He comes home and he just shakes." That's the way I was in those days. The work was so brutally hard that it was almost an impossible task to perform. If any one thing motivated my interest in the union, it was the need for some organizations to protect us from the brutal oppressive speed-up that existed in the plants.

RUGGLES: What particular kind of a job did you do?

GERBER: I worked on the assembly line. I put the frames on the assembly line, the bare chassis from the trucks, which were delivered in the general vicinity of the assembly line. I had to haul them from the trucks, drag them over to the assembly line and place them on the assembly line and designate whether they were Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac — those were the three models of cars they made. Each one of those cars have different size frames, for the small model, medium sized model and the large model. In addition, they had the Buick convertible, which was a fourth frame.

All of them required several manual operations. You had to put spring clips and other things on them. Also, designate what kind of accessories were needed. In those days the only accessories were radios and heaters. If a car took a radio, I'd have to mark it "R." If it took a heater, I'd mark "H" on the front of it. But I remember what a physical toll that job took and a mental toll, too.

I read about the union organizing in Detroit and I hoped and prayed for the day when we would be union-organized. Unfortunately for us, in those days the union was engulfed in a factional fight between Homer Martin and, at that time, the Reuther-Addes-Thomas forces all on one side, the supposed CIO forces. They were so busy here in Detroit trying to establish their own bases, they didn't have much time to send organizers to the East. Finally an organizer arrived on the scene. I remember an organizer arrived on the scene in 1938. We said, "Just give us the membership cards, we'll get them signed, just give us the cards." One day I came back with about 400 signed cards. Almost everybody in the plant would sign a card. They wanted a union so desperately.

RUGGLES: You volunteered to do this?

GERBER: Yes.

RUGGLES: Nobody recruited you?

GERBER: No. We looked for the union as a matter of survival. The interesting thing — talking about the conditions of employment — we had six holidays a year: New Years, Decoration Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. They were not paid holidays, just days off from work. We celebrated the holidays by getting four days pay for the week rather than five days. There were no benefits at all then, no sick leave, no insurance program.

As a matter of fact, I remember one of the first social gains we made in the plant was when we had a battle to get General Motors Corporation to permit workers to join Blue Cross and Blue Shield. Not that the company would pay for it, but in order to enlist in Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we had to have a check-off, and I think it was 50% or

60% of the workers in the plant had to sign up in order to be qualified for group participation. The General Motors Corporation refused to permit the workers to check off their pay for Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

We threatened to strike. It was during World War II and Walter Reuther was director of the General Motors department. Walter told the story later — everybody got a big kick out of it — of how we were about to strike and President Roosevelt called Walter Reuther and said "You can't strike the plant now at General Motors. They make a lot of essential defense parts for the Allies — we were then supplying England, particularly, with war materials during World War II — and you can't. Why are you striking?" He said, "Well, we want the General Motors Corporation to permit the workers to sign up for Blue Cross and Blue Shield by checking off their paychecks." Roosevelt was flabbergasted. He couldn't understand why the company would refuse such a decent, modest request. Then he went to Charlie Wilson, who was president of General Motors, and he said, "Charlie, is it true that they're going to strike General Motors because you refuse to permit the workers to sign up for Blue Cross and Blue Shield?" Charlie said, "Yes." As Walter told the story, Franklin Roosevelt said, "Why?" "Well, if we agree to let them sign up for Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the next thing you know they'll want us to pay for it." Walter said, "You know, he was right."

RUGGLES: He didn't know what the future held.

GERBER: He didn't know. Those were the kinds of struggles we had in the early days of the union to establish any kind of decent base. As a result of the struggle to get these necessities, like insurance and sickness and accident pay and paid holidays, the union was in constant struggle with General Motors Corporation. But the cost . . . We

needed so many things, we had so little. We were always able to make gains. In each succeeding contract, we would get something which others regarded as common decency, which the average employer would grant to the worker. That wasn't so in the auto industry. Each year we would struggle for paid holidays, paid vacations, paid sick-leave days and relief time.

I remember relief time was one of the issues I was particularly concerned about, since I was an assembly line worker and I knew what it was to work on the assembly line and not be permitted to go to the toilet when nature called, how difficult it was. Most of the time when the workers had to urinate, they just rushed over to the well, which was the side of the plant where the railroad cars came in to unload the wheels and tires and automobile parts. The place had an awful stench, because that's where the workers urinated — they had no time to go to the bathroom.

Finally, we had a big struggle and we argued that the only way the workers could be assured of some amount of personal time was to be given so many minutes off in the morning and so many minutes off in the afternoon. I used to raise that question on the executive board month after month after month. Walter got tired of my raising this. I knew where Walter was coming from and the rest of the union was coming from was that we had great economic issues to overcome. There's no paid holidays or paid vacation or paid insurance and all the other things which we were able to wrest from the company, be it by strike or a threat of a strike.

The assembly workers, strangely enough, were not a majority of the union. Most members of the union either worked in the parts plants or the stamping plants and worked on jobs where they controlled their own pace of production. It was possible for a person

who was assigned to a punch press or assigned to a maintenance job or a millwright job or a janitor, it was possible for them to speed up their pace sufficiently to get a little bit ahead to go to the bathroom and come back and still maintain the day's work. But on the assembly line, if you missed 50 seconds you missed the job. The job used to go at the rate of 65 cars an hour on the assembly line. You just turn away for a minute and it was impossible to catch up, because the other workers were waiting for you to finish so they could complete their operation, so they had to have somebody to replace them or shut the line down.

I argued and finally, after years, we got six minutes in the morning and six minutes in the afternoon. Then we got eight minutes in the morning and eight in the afternoon. Then we got twelve minutes.

RUGGLES: So even by the time you were on the executive board, the men still hadn't gained relief time.

GERBER: No, still hadn't gained relief time. Since I was an assembly line worker, I always carried that with me in the executive board. It was one of the things that I held most dearly — the right of the assembly line worker to have a few minutes off to call his or her own in the morning and in the afternoon. That had to be gained.

As a matter of fact, we hadn't gained a number of things when I was elected to the executive board in 1944. I remember the difficulties we had with getting some kind of guaranteed wage, because one of the problems of the automobile industry was that . . . When I was first hired in the plant, the workers stood outside and if the plant gates were open, they went to work. If something happened, if the assembly line broke or parts were missing, they were sent home. I didn't live too far from the plant, but workers would

travel hours to get to the plant. They'd travel an hour and a half or two hours to get to the plant. When they got there, there was no work for them. They were sent home.

The first thing we did was we were able to negotiate a call-in pay, which if the company workers weren't advised in advance not to come in, they got a minimum of four hours pay. Then the company overcame that by simply saying that there was no work tomorrow or no work in two days. We never collected our four hours pay because the company, with very few exceptions, always saw to it that if they couldn't operate the next day, they would just notify the workers not to come in. So we'd work one day a week or sometimes two days a week. We'd never know from week to week how many days we would work. So guaranteed annual wage became a big issue.

Walter Reuther led a fight for a guaranteed annual wage. He did this in conjunction with Nat Weinberg and many other people he brought into the union. That's a different phase of my recollection, which I will go into later. There was a kind of spirit and enthusiasm and social objectives that Walter brought into the union when he was elected president. For the moment, I will try to repeat my thoughts of the conditions of employment, which will always have a big impact on me.

Walter devised a program which was called Supplemental Unemployment Benefits, where the company would be required to grant so much money in addition to unemployment benefits to provide the workers with 80% of their take-home pay if the company did not provide work for them. It was their obligation to provide work and Walter argued that they saw fit to pay their salaried workers, the people who didn't do the production, but worked in the front offices (we always called them the front office,

because the offices were always in front of the plant). But autoworkers didn't receive a salary; they worked by the hour.

I don't know if you saw the old picture of the UAW, one of our old pictures called "Solidarity." It started off by saying the autoworkers grew rich by the hour and poor by the year. That was because while the hourly pay rose pretty good compared to other companies, the number of hours per year were so uncertain that there were years when workers never averaged three days pay a week. As a result, one of the major drives was to get some stability in wages, so we negotiated for SUB.

Finally, we had a conference where we were negotiating the SUB plan and Walter explained to the conference what we obtained. He opened the meeting by saying, "We made those SOB's give us SUB." Then there was a great cheer. Walter was quick to criticize the corporation officials. He never lost an opportunity to needle them or jab them. He used to say, "Here's the General Motors Corporation with headquarters on Wall Street and hindquarters all over the world."

RUGGLES: Let's go back for just a minute to 1939. A couple of years after you were in Linden, you were chairman of the Bargaining Committee for Local 595.

GERBER: We organized in 1938 and the company, as a result of the tool and die strike in 1938, recognized the UAW as a bargaining agent in a number of plants including Linden. So we were recognized and we had an election of officers. I was very young then and inexperienced, but I did run for local union executive the first year. I was elected executive in 1938. In 1939, 1 was elected shop committeeman and was elected chairman of the shop committee.

RUGGLES: You were only 23 years old.

GERBER: Yes. I went on the staff in 1939. You asked me about some interesting events. During the years I was committee chairman, 1939 and 1940, we took one of the earliest cases in arbitration with General Motors. Dr. George Taylor was the arbitrator then. The case was about the discharge of one of the workers in the plant. We presented that to the arbitrator. Then for the first time in the history of General Motors, the arbitrator directed the company to reinstate the worker who had been discharged with full back pay. It was a glorious victory for us in those days.

RUGGLES: Where did you stand on the dispute between the Martin and Thomas forces in 1938-39?

GERBER: That's an interesting story. When we organized the facility, our main thrust was organizing. There were a few people with whom I had been associated in the plant whom I found out later were Communists. I don't like to red-bait, but they were Communists. They were insisting that we join up with the CIO. A few others in the plant, people whom I knew who were respected and helped organize the local, didn't want to go with the Communists and said let's go with Homer Martin. My position was that we would organize the plant. We had nothing to do with the affiliation. I was middle-of-the-road. At that time my concern was to organize and build a union. I said, "We have nothing to say about that. Let the workers who were involved in the struggle determine who they want and whoever they want, we'll go along with it." My position was neutral.

But later on, I went to a meeting where Homer Martin spoke at the Moose hall in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I was chairman of the committee. I was still neutral. I wanted to hear what both sides had to say. At that time I had not met, well, I had just met Reuther

once or twice and the other officers. I was just a newcomer. I went to hear what they had to say. I remember Cal DeFillippis got up and began to heckle. A couple of Homer's goons came over and were going to throw them down the stairs. I intervened and I wouldn't let them do it.

RUGGLES: You physically stepped in?

GERBER: Yes. I had a few others with me. I wasn't by myself. But I wouldn't let them do it and I gradually shifted. As soon as I saw what Martin stood for, after I was personally exposed to him and heard the arguments, I became a strong CIO supporter. But I also was able to take with me a lot of the people under Homer Martin. I didn't alienate them. I did not jump on the bandwagon. After they saw the facts themselves as I saw it, we all came to the CIO. So, there was never any division in the local after the original hesitation to judge sides, based upon what we saw, not what we heard from somebody else. When we became a local union, there wasn't any question that we were CIO. We were chartered by the CIO. We were caught in this fight before we were organized. At that time I was sufficiently concerned about maintaining unity to avoid any division inside our local union. And it succeeded.

RUGGLES: Before you became international representative in '41, as a bargainer or as chairman of the Bargaining Committee, in the early days with the companies, did you actually negotiate the contracts?

GERBER: We negotiated local agreements. We had some good agreements in those days. Unfortunately, they didn't last long. As a matter of fact, we had an agreement in our plant that workers would not be required to work overtime unless they agreed to it. That was really a signal victory. Unfortunately, for the local union and for

us . . . I remember one incident vividly. Workers came in one morning who worked in the cushion shop. The cushion shop is where they prepare the cushions for the upholstery. Those jobs were done off the line and they were put onto the cars as the cars move along the assembly line. Somebody the night before had sabotaged the whole area and had cut all the cushions open. When we came into work that morning, there was no stock of cushions, so they worked feverishly to catch up and were behind all day.

That night, the supervisors asked the workers in the cushion room to work overtime to replenish the stock, because in order for the company to operate efficiently, they had to have a cushion supply, in the sense that they had to have a reservoir. I use the term "a reservoir of cushions" because the colors were different, the combinations were different and they could not make them up at the time they were installed. They had to be made up in advance so that the installers could select the proper color combinations. In any event, they refused to work overtime. The company insisted they work overtime, but the union said they're not going to work overtime and they were teed off at the boss.

So we refused to work overtime, which was a big mistake, because the company penalized several workers for refusing to work overtime. In that case, the umpire ruled that the company was justified, since it was an emergency and the workers could not refuse to work overtime. That was a great mishap for us. It shouldn't have happened. The workers exercised bad judgment. Nevertheless, that was the end of one of our signal triumphs we gained at Linden.

We also had gained at Linden a line gap — the desire to have time off for jobs. The company knew they couldn't shut the line down, so they provided an opportunity for four or five vacant spaces on the line — a gap. That gap could permit workers to get

some coffee or take time off. Those are the kinds of fundamental things. In retrospect, they don't seem very important, but to the workers they were very important.

At the time I was chairman, Walter Reuther was severely attacked by the opposition group in the union. The first conference I went to, I was accompanied by this fellow, Cal DeFillippis. I first mentioned him to you as the fellow who interrupted Homer Martin when he was speaking. He had no business heckling Martin, but I don't think these guys had any right to throw him down the stairs, either. In any event, he came in and made a vicious attack on Walter Reuther at the GM conference. He wouldn't give him any support — he wasn't doing this and he wasn't doing that. I was chairman of the committee. I knew these things weren't true. So I said, "Look, I'm chairman, he's not the chairman. He's not even a committeeman." He was a committeeman, but he wasn't involved with the things he's talking about. I challenged him and I rebutted him. There's where I think I gained, well, where I made by debut in international circles by my first speech. I must say I was very, very primitive, but at least I got my point across.

RUGGLES: Was it a speech defending Walter Reuther?

GERBER: Yes, Walter Reuther. I was forced into it by this man making these false accusations. By the way, at that time I was allies with him. We were political allies in the plant. But when he made the false accusations, I got up and said, "That isn't so." Really, he was appalled because I said that, but he had so distorted the truth. I found out, by the way, all through the time of the Reuther-Communist fight, the Communists and our allies had made all kinds of vicious attacks upon him, entirely unfounded. I read histories of the UAW and read histories about people outside the UAW and they accuse Walter of red-baiting. Well, what he did was call a spade a spade. When he said that Cal

opposed him because Cal was a Communist and that was a Communist line, he was exactly telling the truth.

I had another experience with Cal DeFillippis later, after I had this break with him at the GM conference in 1939. I was chairman of the committee and we had a rule, because the previous chairman frequently went into the personnel director's office and used to chat with him. What he chatted about was of no consequence, but the workers were suspicious, so we made a rule. From now on, nobody can meet with the personnel director by themselves. They must have two committeemen.

I had an occasion to meet with the personnel director and I was looking for one of my people whom I was a political ally with to go in there to be more comfortable with him. I couldn't find him. I then went to a man named John Spillane, who was then the protege of Cal DeFillippis. He was the alternate committeeman. I said, "John, will you come into Snyder's office with me? I want to talk to him for awhile." (It wasn't Snyder then, it was . . . I can't think of his name.) John came in with me and we had this meeting. Later on, Cal heard about it and he thought that John would deny being there, so he accused me of violating our rule of meeting with the company personnel director by myself. John said, "That's not true, I was with him." Cal said, "No, you weren't. You told me you weren't there." John said, "I said no such thing." He tried to frame me and he thought that John would go along with him.

John, later on, became one of my best friends and most loyal supporters inside the plant, became a staff member. But that's the way they operated. These are simple things. These are not matters of philosophy or political doctrine. They're just matters of how

they operated. They were liars and schemers and I got so that I had no use for them, because for them the end justified any means.

RUGGLES: Being as young and as green as you were, didn't you have to develop some strategy or some techniques to combat the Communist influence?

GERBER: The one thing I did — and I must say that I worked hard as a committeeman — I was aggressive and I was concerned about the well-being of the workers and the conditions under which they worked I fought hard against. The workers knew that and I think they respect me for it. They respect me for the fact that I was really concerned about improving conditions inside the shop. There was nothing that the Communists could do, although they attacked me, to destroy the confidence the workers had on my convictions that the conditions should be improved.

I worked day and night, creating many family strains. My wife and I had many spats over this. I used to work hard all day and in those days, people were young and we used to go to beer gardens afterwards and carry on about politics all night. One thing in my favor too, I believe, was that I was very well known in the shop, because I won the golden gloves before I worked there. During the first lay-off — we were laid off during the GM tool and die strike — I boxed some more. I was an amateur boxer and many of the people from the plant used to come and watch me box. So, I was pretty well known from that respect. I became well known inside the facility and I was fortunate that I had a lot of people in the shop, including my cousin Mike Gerber and a few other friends, who were great supporters of mine. I had a whole coterie throughout the local union and throughout the plant who would support me in my election. So I fared very well.

RUGGLES: By the time you were 25 you were an international representative. How did you get that job?

GERBER: Let's go back to the history a bit. We organized in '39, but we didn't attend the South Bend convention. I know the South Bend convention was the forming convention, but I wasn't there. I actually became active in the union and became involved in the union just prior to the 1940 convention, the first convention where Local 595 participated. We were organized in '39 but we weren't organized long enough to get credentials. But we did elect delegates to the 1940 convention. We had two delegates, I remember distinctly, George Morgan, who was my friend and president of the local, and, again, this man Cal DeFillippis. I must have a phobia against him because I've mentioned him several times today. Cal and Morgan went to the convention.

At that time our region did not have a regional director. The former regional director was ousted in 1938 — Frank Tucci was the director who stayed with Homer Martin. He was with Local 664 in Tarrytown, New York. But the Homer Martin faction had been obliterated by then. The CIO appointed Alan Haywood to act as regional director. In 1940, for the first time, our region was going to elect a regional director under the CIO auspices. I had gotten to know Alan Haywood really well by then because I was chairman of the committee and we had met at meetings together and he was all of 65. I was impressed by the fact that a man so old had so much vitality. He used to stay up all night and drink with us and the next morning attend conventions bright-eyed and alert.

The 1940 convention was the first time we had a chance to elect a regional director. Our forces had agreed upon George Morgan. As a matter of fact, I sent him a

telegram saying that he'd be the next regional director. Unfortunately, Cal DeFillippis betrayed us and voted for another of our supporters, a guy who was approached by the opposition and couldn't resist the temptation of being elected as regional director. He was a man from Buffalo — Peter Zanghi became regional director in 1940. Zanghi really was a minority candidate. He didn't represent anybody. He was repudiated by his own local union.

In 1941, we got all of the crew and forces together and elected co-directors. Charles Kerrigan was elected director for the aerospace locals in the region, because aerospace had really expanded rapidly a great deal. He came from Brewster Aircraft Local 365. Alex McGowan from Local 664, the same local as Frank Tucci, was elected co-director. I was at the convention and head of our delegation. We had a lot to do because our local was the largest local in the region then. We had control of the delegation, so we had a lot to do with electing these two men as directors.

After the convention, I remember Alex McGowan asked me if I'd go to work with him on the staff. George Morgan, who thought he'd be director in 1940 and was a much older man than I and a good friend of mine, was president of the local, and I wouldn't leave the local union and leave him behind. I thought he'd be heartbroken. I told McGowan, "I will not go on unless they put Morgan on." So Charlie Kerrigan agreed to put Morgan on. Morgan and I went on the staff in 1941.

I was in charge of the War Labor Board cases. I handled the arbitration cases for the region and I made the presentations to the various locals union that had disputes before the War Labor Board.

RUGGLES: This was as international rep.

GERBER: Yes. We also had an assignment and I became familiar with the larger local unions in the region. I was successful in getting good settlements for them. I wasn't the only one who did it, but we were successful in getting substantial wage increases. I found out that the War Labor Board would not grant wage increases as such, because that would be inflationary, but they let jobs be re-evaluated. The evaluation system is as phony as the three dollar bill. Each particular skill or each particular facet of the job is allocated so many arbitration points. So, all the jobs were re-evaluated upwards and everybody got more money. It was a great thing. Because of that loophole we were able to get some substantial wage increases. Everyone wouldn't get the same amount of money, but most of the workers got substantial increases. They were happy. I was looked upon as a very able negotiator, because I was able to develop this formula. I didn't develop the formula, I just expanded on it. So, I did gain popularity in the region.

In 1943, Alex McGowan, who was the director, died suddenly. He was operated on and he died unexpectedly. I remember R. J. Thomas, who was president, calling together myself, Ed Gray, George Cramwell and Bill Hilger. Bill Hilger is retired and Ed Gray is retired, but George Cramwell, who was a dear friend of mine, died many years ago. We had a meeting in May of 1943 and he said that we could have a regular election in September or have an election for regional director now.

Well, Ed Gray, who was a good friend of mine — he was my assistant for many years — insisted on having the election now because he thought he had the votes then. He did have the votes. He was elected director from May until September. But I told Ed, "Ed, I know how these guys work. I know what they did with George Morgan in 1940." They didn't have the votes themselves, so they went to one of our supporters and just

offered them a job. Peter Zanghi succumbed to that kind of temptation. If you give them a chance to count noses now, they'll do the same thing. It's not worth it to have the election for three months.

Ed insists upon having the election and sure enough, three months later, they did exactly the same thing. They went to Bill Blakely, who was president of a Ford local that had just been recognized in 1942. They hadn't been in the union long enough to get running straight. Well, Bill Blakely, a newcomer, literally a nothing, was president of the local and one of our chief supporters, but when the opposition offered him a job as regional director, he took it. So he beat Ed Gray in 1943.

Well, he didn't beat Ed Grey. There is a very interesting twist to that. In those days, the directors and people who were on the staff weren't entitled to be in the room when the delegates were electing the regional director. We knew that they had the votes. Ed Gray said, "I'm not going to run." I said, "Ed, don't give up by default. Don't let Blakely win by default." He said, "Well, I don't want to get beat." I said, "Listen, if you won't run, let me run." He said, "Okay." So, I sent word inside the caucus room that since Ed Gray would not run, I wanted someone to nominate me. I didn't win the election, but I came within a few votes. Several people came out of the caucus room and said, "Look, why didn't you tell me you were going to run. I would have voted for you." They made excuses.

In any event, it was so close then that I made my mind up to run in '44. By the way, by that time, after Ed Gray lost the election In 1943, he was drafted into the Army. I had been deferred because I had a bad right ear. My hearing is impaired in my right ear. Ed Gray was drafted, but he returned after he was in the service and he said he would

support me for regional director. As a matter of fact, I remember he did come to Grand Rapids in 1944 in uniform, as one of my active campaign managers. I did recruit enough support among the local unions there to win a clear majority of the locals of the Reuther faction, the so-called Reuther caucus, and beat Bill Blakely hands down.

I had been very careful to not let the opposition pull the same trick three times in a row by getting one of our supporters and urging our supporters to vote. We insured against that because the margin of our caucus was so great that any one defection would not have affected the outcome. That was the only way we were able to stop the tactics they used to recruit one of our supporters to become director, rather than letting the local unions support who they thought would serve in the interest of the membership. They thought that they would at least keep the Reuther forces from gaining further control. At the 1944 convention, I was one of the few men elected that was a Reuther supporter.

RUGGLES: You were visibly an outspoken Reuther supporter by this time?

GERBER: Yes. I was a supporter. I was the only one on the staff. One of the things I mentioned in terms of my history of the UAW, and I think that it is very important, after the 1943 convention, when Bill Blakely beat Ed Gray for regional director, he insisted that I change my alliances and at least become neutral and not speak in favor of Walter Reuther. I said, "I'm not going to do it. I think Reuther is the best man for the job and I want to support him." He said, "Well, you won't last on the job." I said, "So be it." And sure enough, I was discharged from the staff in 1943.

In early 1944 I returned to the plant in which I originally had worked, the Linden plant. At that time, they were making airplanes. I worked in the plant for a couple of months until the election of delegates at the convention. Fortunately, for me at least, the

slate of delegates to which I was attached — my supporters from the plant — won the election. Again, we won by a large majority. It was the largest local in the region. So, when I came to the convention, I came as a head of a delegation which was one of the largest in the region. I had political clout from my own local.

Beyond that, as soon as I won the election as delegate, I was hired by some of the local unions I had been working with on labor board cases to represent them before the War Labor Board. So, I became the business agent for the Mack Truck local in Allentown, the Bell Air local in Buffalo, and a few other locals hired me on a part-time basis. That gave me a chance to be in all three parts of the region. Our region roughly consisted of New Jersey, the eastern half of Pennsylvania and western New York. So, the Allentown base provided the opportunity to work in the campaign in Pennsylvania. The part-time job I had in Bell Air gave me the opportunity to campaign in western New York and I was located in New Jersey. I had a pretty good base of operation. That helped a great deal in my campaign. I was elected by a big margin in 1944.

RUGGLES: Let's go back a minute to the discharge. Was it made clear why you were discharged as international rep?

GERBER: Yes, because I supported Reuther. I mean it was made clear in the sense that I was threatened with discharge if I didn't tow the line or follow the director's orders. I defied him and told him that I wouldn't follow his orders. I was discharged without any reason. In those days there were no reasons to give. I was just a victim of political wars. That happened very often. As a matter of fact, Bill Hilger, who developed into a real close friend of mine, was part of that operation, part of the opposition group then. He told me that the reason I was discharged was because Bill Blakely was assured

by the opposition people from our local union — I won't mention all the names now, they're not important, they are still there — assured the regional director that I would not get elected as a delegate at the convention because the plant had changed its work force considerably. Once I got back to work at the plant, most of the workers who were formerly employed there were gone to the Army and those that remained told Blakely they would be his supporters. They were wrong again and I was elected to the convention.

I recall what the reason was now. There was a local union election in my local union. I remember this because I argued against it, one of the memorable occasions in the history of the union. The election committee determined that they would make clear which political faction belonged there. There were two factions, which they labeled "lefties" and "righties." The "righties" won the election. As soon as this was made known to R. J. Thomas, he threw the election out. He voided the results of the election and directed a new election.

The people who were "righties" weren't my political allies. I knew that the new election would not be allowed under those circumstances; it was a mistake. I tried to persuade the election committee, but they were hard-nosed about it, not wanting to do such a thing. They did it. This was while I was a staff member in 1943. They had a new election.

Before they had a new election, the "righties" went to the courts and claimed that the executive board did not have the right to throw out the election results and negate the election results without a hearing. The constitution of the union clearly states that in the event of a protest of an election, there would be a hearing by the executive board and the

board would make a determination based on the facts and issue a ruling. In this case, no hearing was held. They just summarily rejected the election on the grounds that the balloting was improper. Well, I don't question that the balloting was improper, but nevertheless they were entitled to a hearing and the judge did stay the new election until a hearing was held.

The new election was held and the "lefties" won the election because the men who won the first election were sort of prejudiced by having the election invalidated. They were disgraced. When this happened, I was charged with directing this whole operation and I was fired because this local went to court. Not only was I discharged, but I was prohibited from ever again holding a post as international representative. When I went to the convention, one of my campaign points was I can't be international representative. The only way you can get me to serve you is to elect me as regional director. So I was elected regional director.

The very first meeting I came to on the executive board, my expulsion was expunged from the records. There again, I argued I was discharged and barred for life from holding the office of international representative without a hearing. Again, that was a violation of the constitution. But, you know, they took shortcuts and I must say, those who voted to oust me had short lives on the International Executive Board. Every single one of them was ousted in a few years, with the exception of George Burt.

RUGGLES: That was the left wing?

GERBER: Yes. At that time, they were by far the majority on the executive board. I got elected in 1944. The only others on the executive board who were Reuther

supporters were Jack Livingston, Tom Starling, Dick Gosser, Bill McAulay — five of us besides Walter.

RUGGLES: They were lean days.

GERBER: Yes.

RUGGLES: Let me go back to the New Jersey area for just a moment. Were the problems in organizing different in New Jersey than in Michigan? The UAW base seemed to be in Michigan and you were pretty much out on your own in New Jersey.

GERBER: Organizing was far different in those days. Organizing was a mass movement. People were not exhorted to change their convictions or to change their attitudes about the union. The union was something eagerly sought after. In all the basic industries, like steel, auto, textiles, rubber, workers who worked in the factories were mistreated and paid low wages. I don't know if you recall pictures of those days. Workers were lean and hungry looking. They — I shouldn't say this — they almost look like inmates of a concentration camp. People were ill-paid, hungry and ill-treated.

RUGGLES: So, it wasn't a geographic difference. It was an economic condition.

GERBER: I think the workers who worked in the General Motors plant organized just as readily as the workers who worked in the other plants. The conditions weren't fair. If there was any difference, it was in the location; it was a matter of isolation. We weren't in constant contact with people here. We were visited once in a while by an emissary. But we weren't part of the mainstream at that time.

RUGGLES: The international reps didn't come out of Detroit; they worked for the regional director, didn't they?

GERBER: In those days when we were organizing, there was no regional director. There was no structure in the region when we were organizing. Frank Tucci, who had been a director, was at least interested in organizing. He was a non-entity then. He had been ousted. So, there was really a vacuum in the region from 1938 or 1939, at which time Alan Haywood was appointed regional director. I was chairman of the committee then. So our organizing efforts were made directly from the standpoint of the few contacts we had from Detroit. I remember in those days a few emissaries came out. One was George Merrelli, who was appointed to the staff very early and who was one of our contacts. Another was Ben Blackwood who was a good friend of ours and a loyal supporter of Walter Reuther. He died many years ago. There were a few others, but those were the ones that I remember particularly well.

RUGGLES: You're an early supporter of Reuther. When did you become a member a the so-called Reuther caucus?

GERBER: I became a member of the Reuther caucus following the incident at the GM conference with Cal DeFillippis. I attended the meetings from then on in.

RUGGLES: How did the caucus function?

GERBER: The caucus, then, was a group of union representatives who met occasionally to discuss political strategy, to discuss candidates and hear Walter Reuther give his great orations. It was, in effect, a political party. It functioned as a political party in terms of supporting candidates who were faithful to the Reuther tradition. The caucus principle was that anyone was free to participate in the caucus, but everybody had to agree to outcome of the caucus. As a result, it created internal discipline.

RUGGLES: Were there any attempts by anyone to infiltrate and pretend to be a Reuther supporter, like the Thomas-Addes . . .

GERBER: There were severe ruptures in the Reuther caucus. As a matter of fact, in 1944 Dick Leonard, who was a member of the Reuther caucus, ran against Walter Reuther as vice president. I would not have been surprised to see some people infiltrate, but the political identity of everybody in the union was pretty widely known. People who were chosen to come to the caucuses were people who were officials of the local unions whose reputation and record and position on issues was pretty well known. So it would be pretty difficult to infiltrate.

I remember at the 1946 convention we had counted the votes and we knew that Walter Reuther would win by 50 or 60 votes. That's how close it was. As a matter of fact, when Walter Reuther came to the 1946 convention, he flew to Newark and I picked him up in the car and his family and my family drove to Atlantic City to the convention. His wife and my wife and kids were waiting outside the convention hall for the outcome of the election and sure enough, our prediction was almost right on the head. It was that close. Out of thousands of votes, we knew exactly how it would come out.

RUGGLES: There have been some comments made over the years that the Reuther caucus could have been more aptly called a Reuther Catholic caucus because of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists.

GERBER: The ACTU?

RUGGLES: Yes.

GERBER: Well, it could have been called the Reuther Schactmanites caucus. It was a strange conglomeration. The Reuther caucus consisted of Masons from the South;

most of the people who came to the delegations in those days were Masons from the South and they weren't Catholics. People from the East were a strange combination: socialists, Shachtmanites. All of the left-wing, anti-Stalinist Communists were part of the Reuther group. On the other side of the picture, Jay Lovestone and others created the Communist Party opposition, the CPO. They were part of the Homer Martin faction. So, there were all kinds of various groups. There was a group in Detroit, ACTU, who opposed the Communists. They started with Reuther, no question about that. But they were not the dominant group in the East. There were only a few members there. There were more socialists and Shachtmanites than the ACTU'ers.

RUGGLES: So, one of these groups could have claimed the margin for victory.

Martin: We could claim the margin for victory was our region that went from a pro-Thomas region to almost solidly a Walter Reuther region. It was all kinds of combinations that made it possible. Really, it was a coalition of people who were attracted to Walter because Walter was a dynamic speaker, a great orator. He could motivate people. He didn't hesitate to lambaste the bosses. He fought the companies on broad social issues. He had a great following among the so-called intellectuals in the country, in the universities, in the New Deal. He was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and many of the people in Washington. He was a frequent speaker at universities and they loved him. In those days the universities were sort of in social ferment anyway. So, he was a great figure. He could speak very well and motivate people.

He was also militant. At the 1943 convention in Buffalo the big issue was speed-up and piecework. I remember in Local 595, the Commies wore buttons that said (before June 22, 1941), "The Yanks Are Not Coming." I may actually have one. They

may be very valuable. After the Nazis invaded Russia, they changed the buttons to "The Yanks Are Not Coming Too Late." It was a matter of a few days. Then they immediately started a program of adopting the no-strike pledge, instituting piecework to increase production and all kinds of things to help the war effort. Well, these men turned from the hawk-like militant workers to doves. They let the company get away with anything.

We had a big argument in 1943 about adopting a no-strike pledge. Walter argued and we argued and Emil Mazey argued that to adopt a no-strike pledge would be tying your hands before the negotiations. If the company knew in advance that you weren't going to strike, we couldn't negotiate. As far as the incentive system in those days, the incentive system was just a substitute for a speed-up. We wanted a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Everything we argued for was contrary to our opposition.

So, Walter really was the militant. He became a spark plug or a symbol of militant unionism, whereas the Communists had to reverse their roles and instead of becoming the great champions of the workers, they became great champions of Russia. So, the game was fairly evident. Sure, we used to red-bait, red-bait in the sense that this was the Communist line. Walter was called a red-baiter. Everybody called him that; it was a defensive measure. I won't say he wasn't a red-baiter, but he would argue with them on issues on which he was much more militant.

As a matter of fact, during the 1943 convention we helped coin the song called "The Gruesome Twosome." My wife once described Addes-Thomas as the Gruesome Twosome. I wrote a few verses to the tune of "Reuben, Reuben" and it spread through the convention.

Who are the boys who are for piecework
Make every worker a machine?
No one else but the Gruesome Twosome
George Addes and Frankensteen

Who are the boys who take their orders
Right from the office of Joe Stalin?
No one else but the Gruesome Twosome
George Addes and Frankensteen

When it comes to political action
Who's worse than Willie Green?
No one else but the Gruesome Twosome
George Addes and Frankensteen

The other workers have their twosome
One is fat and the other is lean
Who are they? No one else but the Gruesome Twosome
George Addes and Frankensteen

We sang that all through the convention. It drove those guys crazy.

RUGGLES: You're the author of some of these verses?

GERBER: I made some of the original verses up. Some others added verses, but the original concept was mine. That was the kind of thing that was going on there. We drove them crazy. I guess I contributed to the story that we were red-baiting. Neither Addes nor Thomas were Communists, I'm convinced of that, or Frankensteen. None of these guys who were in the leadership were Communists. What did happen was that many of the people they had in the position of decision-making, like Maurice Sugar who was an attorney, and others, like the man who was educational director, Francis Wishart, were Communists. We knew all the Communists in the union supported these guys. We knew that; it wasn't by accident. While the leaders themselves were not Communists, a lot of their supporters were. They acted in counsel with them and followed their line and argued for their policies like instituting piecework and adopting piecework as a method

of pay and for the no-strike pledge and other issues. So as far as we were concerned, if they were champions in these issues, they were dupes for the Communists.

RUGGLES: Someone has suggested that if Addes had been able to work it out in '47, the Reuther-Addes combination would have made a fantastic team. What are your thoughts on that?

GERBER: I was told by someone who was an Addes supporter . . . As a matter of fact, that sounds like George Burt. I won't pass judgment on that, because Addes is a decent man. I have nothing against him personally. Addes was approached by Reuther In 1947, before Mazey ran against him, to work out a combination. Addes turned it down. I think Mazey's influence in the union was good and helped a great deal. Mazey was a socialist. Mazey had a great social philosophy. He was right on so many basic issues. He was against the war — the Vietnam War. He was active in the peace movement. He had a social philosophy which I think contributed greatly to the posture and development of the UAW. I think he helped greatly in influencing the policies of the UAW.

He was more outspoken on socialism than Walter. Walter never espoused socialism. He espoused socialist causes but never espoused socialism. Many of the newspapers called him the socialist because his ideas on welfare and social programs were identical to Norman Thomas's. But so were some of the programs . . . If you look at Democratic platforms of the 1960's and 1970's, they were very close to the Socialist Party platforms of the 1940's. But that is a different phase of development. I don't believe that the position of the UAW would have been improved or enhanced anyway if that happened.

RUGGLES: Let's take a look at your role as regional director in the late 40's, '46 to '47. You had a lot of trouble with the United Electrical Workers, the UE.

GERBER: The UE. That's right.

RUGGLES: There's one incident where a lot of the workers in the UE were coming over to the UAW. There was one local in particular, 411, where a charter had been granted, then revoked by Addes at that time. Do you recall that?

GERBER: There was a revolt inside the UE led by Jim Carey, who was secretary-treasurer. Fitzgerald was president of the UE, then. A number of people, including George Collins and others, used our regional office in New York as a base for their operation. We befriended the group of people in the IUE or the UE who were fighting with the Matles-Fitzgerald operation. Some of the local unions requested shelter inside the UAW. We issued a charter to one of the local unions, although at that time Jim Carey didn't want to see his local union within the UE absorbed by international unions. He wanted to fight inside the UE and create a rival union. He succeeded in that. But there were UE local unions that wanted out of the UE and some went to other unions and some went to us. Ours was just a temporary shelter with the understanding that when the IUE was formed, they would go to the IUE.

RUGGLES: There were charges of the UAW raiding the UE.

GERBER: Yes. There were charges like that. There were charges made that we were raiding the UE but we didn't really go out and solicit membership. They came after us. As a general policy, the union doesn't raid. Our policy has always been that there are so many unorganized workers to organize that we should not be cannibals and cannibalize on other unions. The UAW, later on, raided the FE and took a considerable

part of their membership away from them. I don't know if anybody told you about the FE merger.

RUGGLES: Did this take place at the same time?

GERBER: The FE merger took place in 1946 after Walter was elected president. The opposition sought a way to get additional votes at this convention and beat Walter by merging with the FE.

RUGGLES: Were you involved with the FE merger?

GERBER: Yes, I was involved with it. As a matter of fact, one of the highlights of my career in those days . . . We had a referendum vote on the FE merger. In the spirit of overexuberance I said, "We'll win unanimously." Walter said, "I'll bet you ten to one you won't win." Walter wasn't a betting man. I knew that there were two big locals in the region that we couldn't convince to vote against the FE merger. That was Tarrytown and Lockport. As a matter of fact, I debated R. J. Thomas and several locals about the FE merger. Each one voted unanimously against the FE merger, but both the Tarrytown and the Lockport votes were canceled out because they voted too late. They had to vote by a certain date, but they couldn't get around to it. So the net result was that every local in the region voted unanimously against the FE merger. Walter had to pay me off something like ten dollars to a dollar, which I contributed to the Reuther caucus. Later on, many years later, we raided the FE, because we took them into the UAW. It was an out-and-out raid.

RUGGLES: The Communist influence in the UE was similar to the Communist influence in the FE also.

GERBER: I would say it was greater, because the Communist influence in the UE was more widespread. Many of the leaders of the UE were very close to the Communists. But the UE was a militant union and they had a great loyalty from their membership. I think it became more of a personality conflict. I also think that the ACTU played a greater role in the IUE than they did in the UAW, a much greater role. Most of the men I had been working with in New Jersey and Long Island in those days who were opposed to the UE were Catholics — some Jews, but most of them were Catholics.

RUGGLES: The conflict continued on for three or four years between the UAW and UE. There was the case of UE Local 416 that moved from Bloomfield to New Brunswick, or vice versa.

GERBER: The Delco plant.

RUGGLES: The UAW was accused of raiding that, when actually the UAW's position was that it was a vacant local. Do you recall that situation?

GERBER: Local 416 was in Philadelphia, a local that we raided from the UE, I remember that. That was a raid. It was an out-and-out raid. But in many cases, later on, we took many locals from the Mine, Mill union, even before that group merged with the UAW. It was a constant process. Once the unions were expelled from the CIO, we felt they were fair prey.

RUGGLES: Let's take a look and the Bell Aircraft struggle in '49 where you were attacked.

GERBER: I really wasn't attacked. I was hurt.

RUGGLES: Could you describe that for us? I had one description that said you were severely beaten and I don't know how accurate that is.

GERBER: What happened was I was severly injured. The Bell strike in 1949 was one of those struggles that should have never taken place. But we got involved in the strike with the Bell Aircraft Company. The company attempted a back-to-work movement. They took many of the people who were outside of the bargaining unit, people who were in technical and engineering, and assigned them to work on production. So, the back-to-work movement really wasn't so much a back-to-work movement; it was an assignment of the work force that had not been previously engaged with production work. It tried to keep production up and it didn't work very well.

There were a number of incidents on the picket line. The company was very close to the sheriff of Niagara County. They used all kinds of aggressive tactics to create incidents. Their horses would run down the pickets, just run right over them. They hired a bunch of thugs as deputy sheriffs and it became a conflict. As a matter of fact, one of the deputy sheriffs was arrested because he was found breaking into a home. The workers there had all kinds of ingenious methods to protect themselves against the horses. The horses were big and strong. If they hit you, they knocked you right over. So, the guys got all kinds of fumes which would cause the horses to rear and break away. They'd jab the horse's side with a needle and the horse would jump. They took ball bearings and put them on the concrete, so the horses couldn't maintain their footing. One thing after another. Everyday it was a pitched battle on the picket line.

Finally, the company started to bring the strikebreakers in with armored buses. They had buses with steel plates protruding over the wheels so the wheels couldn't be punctured and had real sharp edges so you couldn't pick the bus up and tip it over. So the workers got bags full of liquid shoe polish and threw it against the windshields of the

buses. When they turned on the windshield wipers it just made it blacker and blacker. All kinds of things like this were going on. It was a real pitched battle because the company had discharged some of the workers during the strike. Then they came to fight for the survival of the union and the return to work for these fellows.

One day, the company had advertised and urged all the workers to come back to work. So, we devised a plan so we could see who was working inside the plant. We had a plant gate meeting which I was to address in order to divert the company. The great majority of the workers were going with Ed Gray and would go to a different gate and enter the plant. Sure enough, the strategy worked with perfection. We had this plant gate meeting outside one gate and all the guards came out there and with all their deputy sheriffs were surrounding us. The rest of the group went into the plant through another unprotected gate. They counted the number of people working there and there weren't that many of them. I must say that they weren't exactly gentle with the ones caught working in there. They really bruised them up a bit and discouraged them from going to work any further.

But that created a lot of headlines and a lot of incidents. The papers screamed: MOB ENTERS BELL PLANT AND CREATES HAVOC INSIDE THE PLANT. We said they were merely following the company's invitation. They invited the workers to come back to work. They did accept the invitation. As a matter of fact, I remember they were so upset — the workers inside — they called for reinforcements. They called for more deputies and they called the National Guard to come down. They went and started to lock all the gates. We knew the designated gate where the workers were going to come out, so we would protect that gate. Sure enough, the guards came out there and

they went to lock the gate with chains. We said, "You don't want to do that do you?" He said, "No." So I said, "Give me the chain." He gave me the chain and I walked away. They came out that gate and after they were gone, the police and the deputies and the National Guard couldn't find anybody. It was a good strategy. It worked wonderfully.

We tried to continue, but they kept on bringing in strikebreakers. So one day we decided to have a mass demonstration. We had pickets at each gate to keep them from coming in and we knew that numerically we were outnumbered if they would concentrate on one gate, so we had a flying squad. We had about thirty of the toughest guys there. I was on the running board and a police car came screeching down the road and cut us off. Just cut the car right off the road. I went hurtling through the air and landed on my back and skidded along the road and my head hit the pavement. I fractured my skull and broke my collar bone and was hospitalized and incapacitated for six months.

That's how I was hurt. I think it was a deliberate act by the police to cut the driver off the road. As a matter of fact, while I was in the hospital, I was arrested and they tried to take me to jail. They tried to move me from the hospital, but the doctor gave strict orders that I wasn't to move, because of the fractured skull. If it hadn't been for the fact that my wife was in the hospital room at the time . . . She literally had to fight off the deputy sheriffs. She wouldn't let them take me. It might have created a serious injury, because I wasn't supposed to be moved.

In any event, I was later arrested and charged with conspiring to incite a riot and violence. I was arrested and tried and prosecuted and the prosecuting attorney was Bill Miller, who subsequently ran for vice president with Goldwater. At that time he was the rising star of the community. He got elected to Congress afterwards. I was found guilty

by the jury on a count of conspiracy. At the time I was in the hospital, so it was impossible for me to conspire with anybody. It takes more than one person to conspire. It was subsequently reversed by the appellate division of the New York State Supreme Court. They determined that there wasn't sufficient evidence in the first place even to indict me and therefore, I should not have been tried. They threw out the count against me, so I was cleared on that count.

But Bill Miller later ran for vice president of the United States and was held in such disdain by his citizens in Lockport that he was the first candidate in the history of the United States to lose his home state, his home county, his home city and his home district. We were delighted at that.

RUGGLES: When he prosecuted you, did he reveal any strong anti-union sentiments?

GERBER: No. He was just an actor. He played to the crowd. By the way, I wasn't even on the witness stand. My attorney told me that there is nothing in the record which substantiates the charge against me and if I get on the witness stand and answer questions, I may very well open up some new field. So he told me, "Don't go on the stand." So I chose not to testifly on my own behalf. I just pleaded not guilty. Sure enough, that strategy did work. Miller played up to the audience and at that time Niagara County, where Lockport, the county seat, is, was a strong Republican area and he did play an anti-union role.

RUGGLES: He was playing to the wrong audience as far as his political career was concerned.

GERBER: He played to the right audience then, but later on we organized a Lockport General Motors plant, a big bastion of UAW support.

RUGGLES: I would like to ask you about the internal workings of the regions. There were several names that I came across and I wasn't clear about the situation. Paul Phillippe was an international rep and John Livingston was trying to get rid of him?

GERBER: He was director of the General Motors department.

RUGGLES: It appeared that Livingston was trying to meddle in local regional affairs where he shouldn't have.

GERBER: Paul Phillippe was very headstrong and he decided that a grievance should go to arbitration and he would pursue it, regardless what the General Motors department thought. In that situation, he had my complete support. I thought Phillippe was sometimes headstrong and arbitrary, but he was militant and I always felt that a union representative should be an advocate of the workers. If the workers had a grievance, that grievance should be pursued, not necessarily to arbitration, but at least the worker had a right to his day in court. That's my philosophy and Paul carried it out.

RUGGLES: I came across another name, Frances X. Omealia.

GERBER: He was a colorful organizer who also was discharged the same time I was. He was from the local union I came from and we were good friends at that time. He was a very good friend of John Spillane. John Spillane was a man who testified on my behalf when Cal DeFillippis was trying to frame me and John Spillane brought Omealia, who was his buddy, into our political camp. He's a flamboyant man who did a lot of organizing and made a lot of headlines.

RUGGLES: He resigned?

GERBER: He resigned and came back to the staff.

RUGGLES: I came across Omealia several times, but I wasn't sure why his name was always popping up, except that he had resigned along with a secretary, Ann Slattery?

GERBER: They went into an office supply business in Syracuse and that business failed.

RUGGLES: She was a secretary in a sub-regional office.

GERBER: I guess they had a romance going at the time and they went into business. Neither the business nor the romance lasted.

RUGGLES: Do you remember Abe Carter?

GERBER: Another colorful gentleman, who was president of Local 1173, GM Forge in Tonawanda. Abe was a street man. He was affable, personable, but loose with a buck. I don't think he was evil. Most of the money he spent was on a good time and entertainment for himself and his friends. He was careless with the finances he handled. That local had a very, very tragic situation. One man, who was a financial secretary, tried to straighten that local out. Phil Davenport was shot and killed in his office many years ago by someone we weren't able to find. Abe Carter was not involved in that, I'm sure. Abe Carter got into some financial difficulties. We never prosecuted him. We just removed him from office because of his inability to control the finances.

RUGGLES: There were situations of racism. I'm thinking of such things as the Bear Mountain incident. Do you recall that?

Martin: Yes. The Bear Mountain incident was an incident where Matt Adams, who was a black, part-time staff member, went into a staff meeting with some staff

members from the South and they told us that they were using racial slurs against him and we raised it before the executive board. Really, it was racism in a sense. I'm proud of the record of our region and in bringing about an end to racism. We were the first region to take a census of workers who worked in the skilled trades. That census proved convincingly that the number of black workers in the skilled trades was low. We had plants where 40% of the work force was black, but only one tenth of one percent were in the skilled trades group. We prepared that and presented that to Bill Oliver and the companies that we dealt with and there was enough hard evidence that there was no effort made on anybody's part to improve the number of black workers in the skilled trades.

We had the first Fair Practices Council. One of the first black members on the staff. Generally speaking, it's a good record. This thing, here, was a racial incident. Bear in mind, what this was was one of our staff members was insulted by a staff member, a Southerner, and we reported it to the International Executive Board in an effort to stamp it out.

RUGGLES: Were you there at Bear Mountain that night?

GERBER: Yes, 1 was there.

RUGGLES: Did Adams become a thorn in you side later on? He appears in several other situations.

GERBER: Matt Adams wanted his job on the staff of the UAW. I wish I had kept some letters I had from Matt Adams. Matt Adams got into some financial trouble. I don't want to get into any personal problems.

RUGGLES: I was thinking of a case with the hod carriers union in Philadelphia a few years after the Bear Mountain incident, where it was almost racism in reverse. He tried to keep any white official from winning in the election.

GERBER: In the hod carriers union? He subsequently went to work for the AFL-CIO. He is bright and able in many ways and had some shortcomings like everybody else does. He was a minor figure in the UAW. He did have the episode in Bear Mountain that put him on the spotlight and did some other things. I'm sure these were errors of his youth.

RUGGLES: Did the organizing and the negotiating become different after the Reuther success in '47?

GERBER: I think that once there was unity, we achieved a great deal more cohesion in collective bargaining. We were able to negotiate better contracts. We made a lot of improvements in the contracts. The improvements we made in the social and economic aspects were made possible by the unity on the board and unity in the rank and file. I think organizing is affected more by outside influence than it is by inside influences in terms of the union's approach. For example, when the large industrial facilities and their workers are mistreated, it becomes a cinch to organize. The thing that's happened with organizing over the years is that companies have realized through their own discoveries and through the teachings of the so-called social scientists that the unhappy workers are the workers who will be organized. The best way to keep workers from being organized is to keep them contented. Treat them well, pay them well and give them the things that the union promises them.

I think that outside of the fact that the unions have organized so many workers, our influence upon the way workers have been treated in this country has a profound impact on many, many companies, like IBM and others. They knew that the way to keep unions out is by treating the workers superior to those than that of organized workers. Once companies raise wages and treat workers well, they're really removed from competing with union workers. They're not taking advantage of low wages and inferior conditions to stay in business. As a result of that, they're no threat to us in terms of economic or social inequalities. Many plants we've not been able to organize, not because our organization efforts weren't as thorough and effective as plants that we organized, but because when the companies recognized the union would organize them, they granted workers increases and benefits, salaries and so forth that took away the desire of the workers to join the union. So, ours is a continuing struggle. Companies who pay their employees the same wages or better wages as organized jobs don't get any economic advantage by being non-union.

I think, too, that organizing has changed in this country from organizing the basic industries, which are pretty well organized, to fields where workers are not subject to the fatigue and the physical ordeals which I described earlier. Many places the companies have not dehumanized the work force. They're trying to find out what makes workers happy and they keep them happy. As a result of that, organizing has become more difficult. Their techniques are different. We seldom find a place where workers organize themselves. In our case, the workers wanted to be unionized. When the workers want to be unionized, organizing is not that difficult.

I recall once when I first went on the staff and I was in the Local 595 office and a worker came in and said that he wanted to be organized. I said, "How many workers in the plant?" He said, "Two hundred and twenty-five." I counted out 225 application cards and gave them to him and said, "When you get these signed, come back." He came back two days later with 223 cards signed. He apologized; the other two members were on sick leave. Organizing under those circumstances really doesn't require a great deal of skill. You take advantage of the situation. Organizing is a great deal different today.

When I was director of the Organizing Department in Solidarity House, we were organizing the Blue Cross and Blue Shield workers. They were mostly women who depended on a weekly wage to feed their kids and pay their bills, who were definitely afraid of a strike, who had different concerns, such as child care. Their concerns were not so much the conditions inside the facility but the fear of insecurity, the fear of being told that if their kids are sick and they're out of work for a day or two, they will be discharged. These are things we found that motivated them, so that's the way we directed our campaign. We were successful there. It's a great deal different than organizing blue-collar workers whose concerns are money in the pocket and more paid holidays and who, for some reason or another, have a different set of values.

RUGGLES: You were director of TOP [Technical, Office, Professional Department].

GERBER: Yes.

RUGGLES: You must find that in the ranks of the professional people there might be people who need a union, but they don't want to be identified with the union.

They think, perhaps, that joining a union is almost unprofessional. How do you overcome that?

GERBER: There is another problem too, and that is that they think that they're being disloyal to their foreman. I think most companies today that keep unions out train their supervisors to become friends with the workers on a social basis — they try to get to know them. I know many of the plants where you read about these executives who come out to the plants and know every worker by their first name. They're there every day. They make personal contact rather than being in isolation in the front office. So one of the problems in organizing white-collar people, particularly professionals, is that we can't overcome that personal touch. If you are a worker and I'm your supervisor and I see you each day and talk to you each day and ask you how you are and share a personal interest in you, you would feel, if we went to organize that facility, that you would be offending me. You would be alienating that relationship if you were active in the union. That creates a problem.

Another thing is that I find in the professional fields, workers value their own skills and abilities and feel that they don't want to be inhibited by seniority. They feel that if they have something on the ball, they want to be able to show it to their boss directly and, hopefully, that they'll advance in the company ranks.

The relationship between employers and supervisors and workers in the professional fields is so much different. Employers I talk to want to resist organization in these fields, because they want the freedom to be able to place the person they think can best do the job in the job they want. They want the flexibility. They don't want to be regimented by union rules. My feeling is that in organizing these fields, we have to

change our position and realize that the things workers are looking for in the professional ranks are different from what workers in the shop feel. Where you're in an operation where the rate is determined by the work you perform and it can be measured in identical quantities — not so much your ability to perform other jobs — but if you're working on the assembly line and you're producing the same that I'm producing, then there is no reason why I shouldn't receive the same pay as you. If there is a promotion to a job that requires a limited amount of skill and ability, so long as each worker can do the job reasonably well, we argue that the person with the greatest seniority should have the job.

There have been too many abuses in the past where workers were kept on the job and promoted, not because of their ability to perform the work, but because of their friendship with the supervisor. That's been the history of the UAW. People retained the work in the plants in the days of the shape-up because they did a favor for the supervisor, like painting their garage or dating his sister — all kinds of reasons. There was really no objective criteria for determining who should work and who should get promoted than by seniority. The higher a person goes in managerial skills and ability to perform a job, I say the greater the variation in skills are. The supervisors recognize that. We recognize the same thing in our union. We don't promote people from staff members to regional directors; they're elected. Promoting people from one job to another in the union is not done by seniority; it's done by ability to perform the work. We have to change our attitude in that regard, too, if we're going to be successful in organizing in the field that we're talking about. But I'm drifting . . .

RUGGLES: Have you been successful in TOP?

GERBER: We were successful here in Detroit. The two signal successes that I can look back on when I was director of TOP was Blue Cross and Wayne State University, two substantial units that we organized in TOP. Today the UAW is engaged in a serious campaign to organize Michigan state employees. Whether that can be thwarted by a back-door agreement with SEIU, I don't know.

RUGGLES: I'm going to ask you about Volkswagen. You were director of the Volkswagen Department. Wasn't that the first foreign car plant in the United States?

GERBER: Yes. That was the first foreign car manufacturer that the UAW dealt with.

RUGGLES: That gave you some unusual problems. Could you discuss them?

GERBER: One of the major problems with Volkswagen was that when the workers were organized, they were told they would be treated the same as General Motors and Ford and Chrysler workers. The company's position was that they were a small plant and they didn't have the resources like General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. The General Motors, Ford and Chrysler wage structures were built up over the years and all their benefits weren't piled on at one time, but gradually over the years. They were willing to eventually meet the standards, but they needed a few years to get organized, have the dust settle and overcome the bugs and inefficiencies and difficulties in integrating their assembly line.

And they did have some problems. There weren't fits, the parts were not coming in properly. There were all kinds of problems that they had at the new plant that the other plants didn't have. Besides, they didn't have the economies of scale that the other plants

operated on. So one little error resulted in a shutdown of the facility. There was a conflict between the expectations of the workers and the concerns of the company.

It was compounded by the virtual collapse of sales of Volkswagens. At one time Volkswagen was the car for economy of gas and a well-made small car. But they had been outdistanced by the Japanese imports, plus the whole series of American cars that were made the same size and served the same purpose as Volkswagen. They had been beset with a lot of competitive difficulties. The company had a good attitude towards the workers. They were essentially fair. I don't think we had any problems that were insurmountable, except for a long time the workers felt that since they were automobile workers, they should be treated the same way as the General Motors workers on the street.

RUGGLES: Before you became vice president, you were regional director for 33 years. That might not be the record, but it has to be awfully close. To what do you attribute your longevity?

GERBER: I started very young. Bear in mind, I think that it is the record, because I began in the union when it was first starting in the region. We had no union there — the CIO — until 1939. The first regional director was elected in 1940. Between 1940 and 1944 there were four directors: Peter Zanghi, Bill Blakely, Ed Gray and Alex McGowan.

RUGGLES: Were you ever challenged seriously?

GERBER: Never seriously after the first election — in '44 it was close. In '46 1 had the substantial majority and ever since that time, I was either elected by acclamation or with just token opposition.

RUGGLES: They must have been happy with you. You must have been doing something right.

GERBER: I said earlier, I don't think you'll ever see a situation like that again in that it takes years for a person to develop the stewardship in the union. You're elected to a local office and participate and work your way up the ladder. I was fortunate because the union was young. There was nobody to push aside. The field was open. I got on the staff in 1941 at a very early age. There are some staff members that have been around a lot longer than I've been around. I was elected as regional director at the age of 28. That may happen again or that may not happen again. I don't want to be immodest and say that it was a combination of good luck, circumstances and hard work. I worked hard as a regional director. I put a lot of hours in. I was always willing to respond to workers' calls when they needed me. The workers knew that and the union officials knew that.

RUGGLES: I've been impressed, as I've been interviewing the former directors, with the social consciousness that's very evident in the UAW, not only in a broad general way but in a particular light, as I notice you're a member of the NAACP and a lot of other organizations — the Democratic Party. I see that a lot of other directors serve their communities outside the capacity of a UAW director and that's quite impressive. You had a great concern for education. You established a labor education center at Rutgers.

GERBER: I helped establish it. I was recounting things that I was particularly proud of in the UAW. We always had an ongoing educational program in the region. We had one of the first summer schools in the UAW at Hyde Park. It was a labor school. We've had some great summer schools and it was well attended. We had a passion for developing workers and leaders through education, on the basis that the better informed

workers are, the easier they are to govern and lead, because they are in a better position to make judgments. It was great for the directors to meet the new people in the region, to get to know them personally by attending summer school and by going to functions where people who were learning more about the union have an opportunity to observe their leaders in action. We've always had a great passion for education.

We also have been leaders in the fight for social justice in terms of economic and political issues. I'm a member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. I'm a avowed socialist. I say so to the members. I told our convention that. I'm not a socialist in the sense that I'm a member of a Socialist Party or the British Labour Party. I do believe that the first concern of the government should be the well-being of the people and not the well-being of industry. I believe that the concepts of social justice and democracy and the need of the government to serve the interests of the people should be paramount in the minds and hearts of any trade unionist. It is difficult for me to conceive of a person who is a genuine trade unionist who doesn't have at least some socialist philosophies.

We've also been active in the field of civil rights. I told you earlier our concern for improving the number of blacks and women and minorities in better paying jobs. One of the things we're particularly proud of is many years ago, shortly after the decision for equal schools was announced, there were a group of people from Clarendon County, South Carolina who told us that the banks had foreclosed and they wouldn't give them money for agricultural equipment, so they couldn't harvest their crops. We conducted a campaign in the region and raised money to send tractors to Clarendon County. That was many years ago, in the 1950's. The region participated and I'm very happy to see that the

local unions in our region gave so generously for this kind of cause. It gave them a better understanding of what the issues were. We had always had a very effective, functioning Fair Practice Committee/Council in the region. We always had a very active political action program in the region. I do think we did involve our membership in a number of activities and thus contributed to the well-being of the region.

RUGGLES: So the social involvement is a natural spillover of the UAW philosophy or trade unionist philosophy. Did you support the Black Lake educational center when that was established?

GERBER: I supported the concept of it. I was a little disappointed. I was hoping, when it was first established, that we could come up with our original concept that there would be a series of regional centers that would be more accessible to the outlying regions such as New Jersey, the South and the West Coast. When Walter first developed that idea, it was the concept. We got so enmeshed in the expenses of this one, that other facilities were abandoned. I still think it's a great opportunity for workers to live in an environment that is peaceful and rural and bucolic and see firsthand what is possible to accomplish by working together. This is a good example of how people can accomplish great things by working together.

RUGGLES: Let's talk about Walter Reuther's death and the changes that occurred in 1970. It wasn't a very pleasant situation for anybody.

GERBER: I would prefer to talk about Walter Reuther's life for a moment, if you don't mind, before I talk about his death. One of the things that I was so impressed with Walter Reuther from the very beginning was his ability to attract people who had great social knowledge and perception and ability to create, in my opinion, a social

crusade. Walter enlisted people like Don Montgomery, Paul Sifton, Brendan Sexton, Nat Weinberg, people who were respected experts in their own fields, who brought into the UAW an infusion of ideas and colorful slogans like "wooden nickels of inflation" and "too old to work and too young to die," wage increases without price increases." The kind of concepts that Walter talked about really gave great excitement and verve to the UAW and made the UAW the center of hope for a great section of American society.

There was a fountainhead of ideas. Walter would poke fun at the magnates of the auto industry and would attack them and talk about unfair profits and how the magnates of the industry would sit around a big corporate table and they'd feast on all the good things of life. Then all the crumbs would fall off and the workers would eat the crumbs. He followed the theory that if you feed the horse well enough, the birds will have plenty to eat. He said things like that, which were very colorful and imaginative and would provoke in his audiences great enthusiasm.

So, he led a movement. Walter Reuther led a movement and he did it by having enough courage and enough ability and enough standing to go outside the union movement and recruit people to come to work for us who were great men in their own right. Nat Weinberg was a great economist, a great social thinker. He used to be the gadfly, not only the gadfly, but a constant irritant of the company economist. He could poke their theories full of holes. There was a whole cadre of people. He recruited people into the UAW, people like Jack Conway and others who came into the UAW and made a great contribution. I hesitate to name names, because by naming some, I may offend some whom I neglect to include, but there were people whom he brought into the UAW who helped shape the UAW and make it the innovator it was.

At the time, there was a fat goose on the table and plenty of meat to be carved. He carved that meat and he built a social and economic foundation brick by brick. One hundred dollars a month pensions he talked about, social welfare he talked about, unemployment insurance and SUB and vacation pay and time off. All these things were building us an economic foundation. He did what Phil Murray once described, "We put music in the home and we put pictures on the walls and rugs on the floor." He helped do that. When Walter Reuther became president of the UAW, the workers lived in tenement houses. They used to live in six-story walk-ups. That changed a great deal. He helped develop a movement. It was carried over to Leonard Woodcock who was one of his disciples. It was carried over to Fraser. Now for the first time, the UAW is under the leadership of people who really weren't directly under the mantle of Walter Reuther. They knew Walter Reuther from afar. They weren't officials on the executive board when he was the president.

RUGGLES: There aren't many left.

GERBER: There aren't many left around here. I haven't taken a census of it, but it would be interesting to find that. Among the officers, I don't think there are any of them on the board. The union is different. It's become more self-contained now. I don't know if that's good or bad. I sometimes feel that it's a mistake to simply exclude from the inner councils of the UAW anybody else but those who served an apprenticeship under the UAW. I think new ideas and new concepts and innovative thoughts are always refreshing. They may not be accepted, but we should be exposed to them. I think the union has to be constantly exposed to new ideas and concepts and where we're coming from. A lot of that can be done by seeing people and the challenges. From that

standpoint, I think the union is not better off than we were before. Beyond that, the economic climate is such that we can no longer go back to our members and justify our stewardship by showing the huge gains they made.

RUGGLES: We were talking about Walter Reuther before 1970 and his influence which was obviously immense.

GERBER: Yes, it was immense and it was a permeating thing too. I think his influence was so great in the union that he virtually headed up the union in terms of his desires, wishes and objectives. Fortunately, for the most part they were well-intentioned and well thought-out and easy to follow.

I didn't quite agree with Walter on the course he followed in relation to the AFL-CIO. I was against going out in the first place when we left the AFL-CIO. I was for going into the AFL-CIO and I was against us going out when we did. There may have been some times when our relationship might have been a bit strained, because I felt that his departure from the AFL was ill-advised. The tactics were ill-advised. I was for going back when we did go back. I'm for a united labor movement despite its shortcomings.

RUGGLES: Did you say that some of his tactics were ill-advised?

GERBER: I think some of his tactics in AFL were ill-advised.

RUGGLES: What particular tactics?

GERBER: When Walter left because of a disagreement with Meany over a couple of things, including international affairs, organizing and the rest, Walter sent a telegram to Meany asking for a special convention to discuss these issues. At that time I asked him, "What would you do if Meany says he'll have the convention, providing you abide by the outcome." He said, "He'll never do that." But that's exactly what Meany

did. He sent a telegram back which said that we're prepared to have the convention, provided . . . I had a feeling that Walter made a mistake there and he knew it. It was too late then to correct it.

Since that time, he'd become entirely enmeshed in Black Lake. After we left the AFL-CIO, we saw all of his energies and focuses were directed at developing Black Lake. It was a good thing that he did, but nevertheless, I always felt as though our experience with the AFL-CIO was a great disappointment to him and it was a great disappointment to me personally. Walter could have become a very, very important factor in the AFL-CIO had it not been for his personal difficulties with George Meany.

RUGGLES: You disagreed with Reuther on a couple of other items. The Public Review Board, you didn't want to continue that, did you?

GERBER: I expressed my disapproval with some of the things the Public Review Board did. Although I think the concept of the Public Review Board is good, I do believe some of the decisions they made were contrary to the best interests of the union. But they were short-lived differences. They made some decisions which I thought were entirely improper. For example, in one case we removed a person from the local union because of his improper financial practices. There was no question that the the PRB recognized that there were improper financial practices, but they reinstated him because of a technicality. I argued that the purpose of the union is to serve the membership and protect its integrity. It was clearly demonstrated that the person used the union for financial purposes to enrich himself rather than protect the union. There is another court of law where we had to pursue the letter of the law. We had to give the person a hearing. He never disproved that fact that he was guilty. He simply said that he

was a victim of a political animus and that one of the staff members didn't like him and consequently, they pursued him more vigorously than they pursued others. Well, we caught this fellow. We didn't catch the others. He was guilty of it and we removed him from office. The PRB reversed us. We lived with it, but I was critical after the decision.

I had been in opposition with Walter on a few things. For example, during the days when the Taft-Hartley law was first adopted. we were required to sign a non-Communist affidavit in order to utilize the facilities of the board. There was a time when the CIO, under Murray, refused to sign those affidavits. I said that it was a mistake, that we have to utilize the board in order to get the elections. I said that we could sign them under protest and show our disapproval of a loyalty test only upon labor unions, not on other segments of society. I think that was wrong, but I wasn't going to deny the use of the board because of that. Subsequently, the CIO came around to our point of view. But there have been times in the past when I was in difference to Walter. I always respected Walter because he could permit those differences and still not let it interfere in our relationship.

RUGGLES: Could the UAW be more democratic than it is?

GERBER: Could the United States be more democratic than it is? I heard someone describe the United States as a real but imperfect democracy, that we have some real shortcomings. I think the same thing can be applied to the UAW. Given the structure of the UAW and the widespread membership, it is very difficult to conceive of a procedure that would provide at least the opportunity for democracy in the UAW without having complete anarchy. It is possible for the people in the UAW to get their point of view across. It is possible for a person to set forth a particular philosophy. A person can

get elected to office and go to the convention and he can espouse it there. But because of the size of the UAW and because of the location of the regions, it is difficult to get enough support over a short period of time to muster a serious challenge. I don't know how that can be overcome.

There have been people over the years who propose a referendum ballot to make it more democratic. I don't believe it would be the case. As a matter of fact, some unions who have the referendum ballot are doing away with it because it hasn't proven to be democratic. With the Mine Workers, having the referendum ballot all the years John L. Lewis was president didn't make it democratic. The Steelworkers had the referendum ballot and there were many charges of stolen elections. The IUE has had several serious disputes over the election results and the way they were tabulated. They're now considering doing away with it. The referendum vote really doesn't contribute to democracy or against it. There are still the same problems of getting a person's story across, getting a candidate across to the entire membership or to the elected officials.

I prefer the system of delegate elections, because I prefer to have those people whom I worked with over the years judge my competence. If I'm a union official and I'm engaged in negotiations or I'm engaged in arbitration or in education and I meet the approval of the people I work with, they vote for me at the conventions. If I have to depend upon 120,000 people I don't know in the region to vote for me, I don't know how I would reach them except by a letter. Somebody else could write a letter, so they could have two letters. They could compare my letter to their letter.

I think in terms of the structure, the union is essentially democratic. The Public Review Board is an instrument which really distinguishes our union and protects the

interests of the memberships. As far as the structural aspects of the union, it is very, very democratic because of the size and the nature of the regions and the ability of the union to appoint many of the promising young people who come into the union. The staff recruits the best. The staff is immediately part of the institution and becomes self-perpetuating. That doesn't make it less democratic.

RUGGLES: Were you the only one who argued or disagreed with Walter at the board level?

GERBER: Oh, no. I don't think I was. I don't know where you get the idea I argued or disagreed with him. There were so few arguments with Walter. George Burt would raise a point once in awhile and others would do it. I always felt I was free to do it. I was the only member of the Reuther team, by the way, that was a board member before he was elected president.

RUGGLES: Did they give you a little advantage?

GERBER: I think so. More freedom and a little more security. Most of the people who got elected to the board were elected under his auspices. He sort of tapped them on the head or accepted them and they became elected. I think, in terms of political security, they were much more obligated. I always prided myself that I helped elect him.

RUGGLES: Did you consider yourself the rebel on the board or a freethinker?

GERBER: I always considered myself a member of the rank and file.

RUGGLES: I've put together a list of names of people whom you probably came in contact with, especially in your years as regional director in the East. I'd love to have your comments on them if you could. I have Herbert Lehman down here.

GERBER: A very able and distinguished senator and governor. An able man. I met him and knew him very well.

RUGGLES: Did you know Victor Riesel?

GERBER: Yes, I knew Victor Riesel very well. I knew him very closely at one time. He was a pro-union newspaperman wasn't he? He was for many years pro- union. He became embittered in later years. Among my possessions are some nice columns he wrote about me in the early days. He wrote some less flattering comments about me later.

RUGGLES: He had a horrible tragedy in his life. Wasn't acid thrown in his face?

GERBER: Yes, acid. There were conflicting stories about that. The stories were something about a racketeer or it was done by someone he betrayed or someone . . . I knew him very well. We still exchange greetings at conventions. But he writes so many scurrilous things that I really have very little use for his columns.

RUGGLES: Did you know Carmine DeSapio?

GERBER: Yes, but Charlie Kerrigan was director in New York City and he always was much more involved in New York City politics than I was. By agreement, Charlie Kerrigan was director of 9A and worked with the New York City politicians. I worked with the upstate leaders and New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

RUGGLES: How about Fiorello LaGuardia? Did you know LaGuardia?

GERBER: Yes, I knew him. He was really a very colorful man. He was a spectacular politician. He was forthright, humorous and jocular and down-to-earth.

RUGGLES: Did you have any personal contact with him?

GERBER: Not too much. I knew him well and I saw him once in awhile. But he was going as I was coming.

RUGGLES: How about Thomas Dewey?

GERBER: I knew Tom Dewey. I knew who he was and I remember him as being described as the little man on the wedding cake.

RUGGLES: Is that the way you describe him?

GERBER: Yes.

RUGGLES: John Lindsay.

GERBER: Colorful and personable. A Republican-turned-Democrat, and I liked him very much. But again, he didn't last long on the scene. He was elected mayor and then he faded out of things.

RUGGLES: How about Jacob Javits?

GERBER: I knew Jake real well. We were always on opposite sides of the fence. I endorsed the Democratic candidate against him. Finally one year, I'm happy to say, towards the end of his career — because he had a great career — we endorsed him for senator. Of course, he was very grateful.

RUGGLES: As your generation began to retire and new and young union members began to come in, their demands must have been different. They wanted different and more things. This, aside from the professional and technical worker, must have changed the whole role of the union. It might even have been annoying for you to deal with this kind person.

GERBER: No, it's not annoying. It's difficult, but not annoying. I understand it. First, of all, new union members come in with a higher level of education. They come in

with higher expectations. They take things for granted that we never had for granted. There's a great difference between having worked in the plant before the union and being able to observe firsthand the difference the union brought about and a plant where most workers believe that the conditions they enjoy resulted from the company's good will and benevolence. So, there isn't a kind of association with the union of doing great things socially and economically.

The workers today are no less intelligent but they come from an educational background that does not favor unions. They come from a climate where the newspapers and the government and many people have the concept that unions were okay in their day but they've served their purpose. These are the same people who we are working with now who join our union, who we are trying to organize. They don't realize the union still has that social purpose to perform. I think that one of the reasons why I'm a socialist is because I think that the union has to perform a social purpose as well as an economic purpose. Failure to accomplish a social purpose when we're on the skids in economics impairs our ability to win from the membership the kind of confidence and loyalty that we require to make further gains to keep the union sufficiently together.

RUGGLES: You just retired. Just before you retired in 1982 you had a big hand in organizing the National Academic Council. Are you still involved in a lot of these groups?

GERBER: No, I'm not involved in them directly. I go to see them once in awhile. I'm not involved in any functions of that kind. Usually, when people retire from the UAW, they retire. I do other things, but I'm really not very active in the inner circles of the UAW.

RUGGLES: Are you still involved in the Democratic Party?

GERBER: Yes.