

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Thomas Young
Local 32-B

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Service Employees International Union
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by

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for

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Tape 1.1.000

QUESTION: You might start with telling us how long
you were at this building and what was the address.
I forgot the address.

ANSWER: I was employed in a building in the garment
center. The address is 501 7th Avenue. I worked
there for ten years as an elevator operator and
during that period prior to 1934 the conditions
were terrible. Work as an industry was actually
at the bottom rung of the economic ladder and we
were exploited. There was no job protection. You
maintained your job at the whim of the employer so
to speak. And while working in this building in 1933
I happened to be walking on the sidewalk and I saw

a circular on the sidewalk and I picked it up and in that circular I read that there would be a mass meeting of Service Employees Union, porters, handymen, elevator operators and all of the people who serviced the building. This mass meeting was called by a gentleman by the name of Matthew Fiore, who had a charter from the International Local 58 and that covered greater New York and that was issued I think sometime in the 1920's, but he could not succeed in organizing the workers in the building. And he just discontinued and put the charter in mothballs so to speak. Then came the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the NRA and all of the other agencies that would develop at that time. And the NRA was an encouragement to labor to organize....Mr. Fiore felt that here was an opportunity to try again in view of this new condition so to speak and that's the reason he called this mass meeting. When I returned to the building from luncheon I spoke to my fellow workers in the locker room and told them here is something new. Why don't we go down and see what it's all about. And I was cautioned that if the superintendent or the managing agent had any idea that we were interested in our thinking in

terms of union we'd all be out on our ears. Nevertheless I was curious and as a matter of fact I'd gotten quite fed up with the way we were treated by our employer. I went to the meeting and I got there that night. It was held in what was then known as Labor Temple, East 84th Street and I saw hundreds of other service employees from all over the city; apartment houses, commercial buildings and I decided, well I'm going to join that night. So I paid \$2.00 and got my receipt for it as a member of Local 58. And the following day I described what happened at this meeting to my fellow workers in the building. They were still leary and naturally because it was in the heart of the depression. Jobs were scarce and they had to protect their livelihood and so they didn't want any part of a union. Well I persisted and sometime thereafter, this is 1933 incidentally, I got them to join Local 58. And after two additional mass meetings the new people who had joined this local, because they were none of the old members, they were all new, decided that it's time that Mr. Fiore called for a nomination, an election of officers. He said yes he would and

that nomination for officers would be held at the following meeting. The following meeting was held and when those in attendance reminded him that nominations would be held he decided that the officers who were elected in....had something like three years more to serve and therefore he cannot hold nominations. Well the young men at that time, primarily from the garment fur and military area where I was part of that group, decided we want nominations and we set up a hue and cry demanding nomination. Well Fiore's response to that was to take the Local 58 charter off the wall where he had it hanging, put it under his arm, walked out and left about 500 workers there high and dry. And, of course, we were all undecided what to do. There were five members, among them was Edward Poli, who was a handyman on the westside, and John Holly, two other lads and myself, we decided the only thing to do is to petition the International in Chicago for a charter from Manhattan to organize. We did that and the International, at the time it was Jerry Horan, President, wrote back and said that there was a charter in New York, Local 58 and that's the charter we should organize under. And we couldn't see it that way. So we decided, well if we can't

get to first base with the International, the next best thing to do is go independent. So the group of us, including yours truly, got a lawyer and petitioned the State of New York for an independent charter for building service. The AFL-CIO, or not CIO, I'm sorry. The AF of L at that time was strongly opposed to any dependent unions and a representative appeared at the hearing conducted by the State, but we had such a strong case that the State finally granted us a charter, Independent Building Service Union. Well we began to organize on that banner, this independent union, and we held our first election. And I know that poll. I was elected president, I was elected vice president and I have some documents here that can more or less explain the developments in that area because I can't rely too much on my memories, too much involved, but I have circulars and names of officers at that time that can supplement or substantiate my narrative this morning. However, after the election we realized that we were up against a tough proposition because any independent union at that time was suspect. They felt that you were communist dominated, communist oriented, you know. Quite frankly the members at that time, the workers

who joined, we didn't know the first damn thing about communism anyhow. We just wanted to improve our conditions. Well we tried organizing, but 58 stayed in the field. There was an actual communist organization that was organizing in the field and quite frankly we hadn't the money, we hadn't the experience to really make a go of it. But in the process my employers learned what I was doing. I was agitating the union, I was a dangerous person and the starter in the building, 501 in which I worked, was given orders that he's got to get rid of me. Preceding that, those instructions, a memo was sent out with certain rules, instruction as to how the operator should conduct themselves in the elevator, while operating the elevator. And one of those rules were that you must say "down please, up please" when you opened the door. Well this particular day while picking up passengers on the tenth floor, the car wasn't too level and I was more concerned with the safety of the passengers than just saying "up please, down please", so I substituted "watch your step please". The starter happened to be on the tenth floor at the time, heard what I said, stepped into the car and told me down to the lobby. Came down to the lobby and said you're

fired. You disobeyed the rules. You didn't say "down please, up please". I said well Mr. Flynn, I said watch yourself please. I think that was more important, the safety of the passengers. It was all cut and dry. They had to get rid of me somehow. So I was discharged that day.

QUESTION: What day was that?

ANSWER: The 19th of February, 1933. Now wait a minute now. No, the 19th of February, 1934. That same night there was a meeting of the independent union and I told all of my colleagues what had happened. We better go now in there and tell them what had happened. When we attended the meeting we discussed a matter that Young was fired because of his union activities and that's just the beginning. But the president said, Foley, we'll have to leave it up to the men of 501 what they want to do. Well the men had heard, how true it was I don't know, that the managing agents had intended to get rid of a colored employee. It was the only building of its size in the city that was employing colored to operate the elevators and porters. And it was known as a Class "A" loft building and that the boys of 501 will have to make up their minds. Well to sum up the boys decided well if we're going to lose our job

let us strike. So the following day on February 21st we struck the building. Of course, for a while pandemonium raised and a strange thing, management put white scabs so the fellas said you see that's what they had in mind right along. Well, we were on strike for about three days when Poli came alone, spoke with me and the other lads and said look, there's a gentleman by the name of Mr. James Bambrick. He's a member of Big Six, the typographical union. He's got lots of contact, labor circles in this town and, therefore, he could probably help us. Well at that time it seemed that Mr. Bambrick was hired by the superindentant. We had an apartment house superintendent's union at that time, Local 32. And Local 32 hired Bambrick to organize superintendents, not the other employees, but superintendents exclusively. Bambrick being a very smart man figured well we can extend this, why not the employees? So he took advantage of the strike in 501 to come over and see what he can do to help us. So he went to the managing agent's office Harris and Newmark and took us with him, the men on strike, you know we were picketing and so on. And he spoke to Mr. Newmark. Told him well Young has been working in the building so long. All the tenants like him.

Why not give him another opportunity? So Mr. Newmark says I'll take all the others back, the other 23 members. He I don't want. He's a radical. He's dangerous. I don't want him. So I said to my colleagues, look fellas if you can get back on the job go ahead. I'll find something to do somewhere. All the jobs, I said, were scarce because of the depression. But to sum up, Bambrick induced Mr. Newmark to take the matter to the regional NRA Board. It was headed up at that time by a lady by the name of Mrs. Pearson. We went down to her office and Mr. Newmark was down there. They went inside to talk with her. I was left outside like a prisoner on the docket awaiting my fate, but the net result was that after it was all over I was told alright we're putting all of you men. I want you, he directed his remark to me, he said Young I want you to go back and shake hands with the starter. No hard feelings? Not at all I said. I'll be glad to. And so we were reinstated so to speak to the job after four days on strike. Mr. Bambrick then got busy. This was a new class for him. There was 26 men, as a matter of fact 24 men because the two starters, the starter for the freight and the starter for the passenger were both white and they didn't

want any part of it. So that what galvanized the whole thing were these 24 colored men who went out on strike as independents and went back to work. So Mr. Bambrick immediately went to work to get in touch with the International in Chicago to request a charter for Manhattan and they finally decided that you can have a charter but with the number 32-B to distinguish it from 32 which was a superintendents local. They had their own charter. And shortly thereafter the charter came through, Mr. Bambrick employed two organizers. We had an election that July of 1934. Mr. Bambrick was elected president. I was elected vice president and we had an executive board and a recording secretary and a secretary-treasurer. To help in this situation I have, as I said before, certain documents and papers that you can get a clearer, more exact picture of what developed at that period, but I just wanted to more or less include by saying that after the election of July I was still working in the building as an elevator operator. Mr. Bambrick, a few months later, tried to negotiate with the owners in the garment fur and military area and that's where we had our strike. And he was actually laughed at. Who ever heard of

elevator operators and porters joining a union? Pay no attention to it, but we'd reached a stage where Bambrick felt he had to move. At that time we had about 15 or 1700 members in 32-B. The treasury had something like \$250. But he decided that we had to do something to make a move. Before doing so he contacted a gentleman by the name of Saul Metz, who was president of the Garments Center Truckers Union. It was part of the Teamsters union, but separate because it operated in the garment area. And the gentleman who headed up that union at the time was Mr. Saul Metz, an old socialist. And when Mr. Bambrick contacted him he said I'll help you all the way Jim Bambrick. Jim decided he'd call a meeting of the officers and board and said we move on November 1st. We have the support of Saul Metz. I'm sure we'll get the support of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Well to make a long story short we moved on November the 1st. We struck. And about 1500 men went out. At the end of the day we had about 5,000. So those 1500 men acted as flying squads to go to different buildings. You come out voluntarily or you could be paid for it. But the net result was that day, before the strike was over, 5,000 men. The second day the damn mayor

of the city, Fiorello LaGuardia, decided he can't have this happening in his town. The buyers couldn't get up, goods couldn't get out. So he decided he'd put his foot down and said I'm going to arbitrate this. And he appointed a gentleman, at the time, Judge Mahoney, Walter Mahoney, as arbitrator. Judge Mahoney arbitrated the case and his decision came down and it was the first time that workers from industry had anything to safeguard them and to safeguard their working conditions. The contract that was written called for classification of buildings A,B and C and wages according to Class "C" commercial buildings was \$20. The Class "B" was \$22.00 and the Class "A" was \$24. But what is important to remember is that in most of the buildings the wages ranged anywhere from \$14 to \$18. So that when the contract was finally signed men were getting \$14 a week, suddenly found they had \$20.00 in their pay envelope. There were no vacations. There were no holiday pay. There was no over-time pay. The contract provided for double time and a half for holidays. Time and a half for over-time. One weeks vacation with pay and several other things, but that was the beginning. We went back to work and then, of course, from there on in it was hard work. And

I should inject at this point that before the strike was called on November the 1st, in October Mr. Bambrick said to me, Tom we're preparing to move. See if you can get a leave of absence from your job. I was still on the elevator in 501 7th Avenue and I asked the representative managing agent, Mr. Artem Meyer, could I have a leave of absence. He said no. If you leave you leave for good. I told Jim, I said Jim I can't get a leave of absence. He said well Tom are you willing to gamble? We don't know how this will land, and you've got a family. What are you willing to do? I said I'm going all the way. I've gone this far and I'm going all the way. If I had the courage to even think in terms of joining any union I should have the courage to see it through. And so I left 501 in October, went over to the little dinky office on 42nd Street and as I said before the strike was called. It was successful. By any standard it was successful. Then we started to move. Then, of course, came the general strike of 1936. After this contract we began to organize the apartment houses now. And, let's see now, so many things happened in that period you know that it's difficult to recall, but as I said I have documents

here and leaflets to give you a better background and more details than I'm able to present orally. But the general strike of 1936 was something to remember. We were out for 17 days. We were broke. We called on the International to help. They had press releases we're going to give Local 32-B so many thousands of dollars. We didn't get a farthing from them. But apparently somebody up there liked us because the real estate people's money also ran out. I think I'm ahead of myself. The real estate people decided that Local 32-B was getting too big for its britches. We had to do something now. We can't let them take over. And as a result all of the real estate owners taxed their members \$10.00 per employee per building into a fund. I understood that they had gotten pretty close to \$3 million and the \$3 million for the purpose of employing scabs, goons, special officers and a strike was called in 1936. Quite a few of our members got hurt because we had to do our own fighting. We couldn't depend on other people. And we gave as good as we took in those days. And after the 17 days, I'm trying to recall now who suggested that the matter be arbitrated, but we did have arbitration. And the scale of wages

and work conditions also set up for apartment houses in 1935 in our A,B,C and so on. But what I'm trying to point out is the difficulty in those days of organizing the hardship of the workers, the lack of protection and nobody cared what happened to you. As a matter of fact this should probably, I don't know what you're going to do with this part, but I think I should tell you or I think I should relate why I became interested in organized labor. In 1932 while working at 501 7th Avenue I became ill and I just felt I couldn't finish the day so the superintendent, we used to refer to him as chief, happened to be coming through the lobby while I was in my car and I said chief can I speak to you for a minute. He came over, "Yes, what is it?" I said chief I feel very ill. I don't think I can finish the day out. Can I go home? If you go home you stay home; meaning you have no job. Now what was facing me then, this was the depression, a wife and two kids, no money, no resource of any kind. If I lost a job where am I going to get a job and in those days you hadn't relief as you have today where you can apply for relief or unemployment ... There was nothing of that kind, you know. So I said oh God help me to finish the day. I got off that

elevator at 5:00 that afternoon and I was so sick that a couple of the men got a cab and took me home. And when I got home the doctor found that I had a fever of 104. I had pneumonia. And while in bed my only thought was am I going to get the job or aren't I. You know, the worry this is what people don't seem to realize. You know the worry that these things caused, you know with your responsibilities, but fortunately I did get the job back and that was when I made up my mind something had to be done for the people in this industry. And how did I start it? I got the 24 men in my building to form a little club, the Tomyou Club. They named it after my first, you know, Tomyou Club. What was the purpose then? To contribute a certain amount each week into a fund. We were to elect officers and have a bank account. As a matter of fact we had a bank account in Dime Davings Bank. And that was for the purpose of one if you were sick you don't have to worry, you at least get two thirds of your wages while you're sick. The money was also to permit us to get a weeks vacation after 51 weeks of work, because we had no vacation, and things like that that would help us. But in the back of my mind I didn't know that I was thinking in terms of trade unionism because I was not exposed then

and I didn't know anything about trade unionism.

While this Tomyou Club in 501 was operating....

Side 2

Question:

Tell us about the 1940 convention in Atlantic City.

Answer:

In 1940 the International held its convention in Atlantic City. Among the delegates from Local 32-B were myself and three other colored delegates. When we got to the hotel to check in we went over to the desk, spoke to the clerk and told him that we were delegates and would like to check in. The desk clerk took one look at the four of us and said I'm sorry gentlemen we do not accomodate colored in this hotel. That's the policy in Atlantic City. We were abashed at that sort of a thing because reservations had been made for all the delegation in Local 32-B. My first impulse was to return to New York and say forget about the convention, but on second thought I asked if Mr. Tom Burke, who was then vice president of the International, to discuss the matter with him. Mr. Burke came out, we explained to him what had occured that the clerk did not want to or said he was unable to accomodate our colored in the hotel. That was the policy of the hotels in Atlantic City. Tom Burke became riled and said to the clerk these gentlemen are going to be accomodated

because they are delegates to this convention. And if you can't accomodate them we're taking the damn convention out of here. Shortly thereafter the manager was called and the conversation took place between Mr. Burke, the clerk and the manager and it was decided then that the poor colored gentlemen, delegates to the convention will be accomodated. It was the first time that any colored person, delegates or non-delegates had been accomodated in this hotel. And credit must be given to the stand taken by Tom Burke, enforcing an issue that eventually forced other hotels to accomodate colored people in Atlantic City.

Question: Well what other source of happenings like that have you run into during your life. Now I imagine as a black person or as a colored person you've had that happen many times.

Answer: Oh, many times. In 1942 the officers of Local 32-B, Dave Sullivan, Tom Shortman, Arthur Harckham and myself, had reservations at, I think it was the Mayflower or one of the big exclusive hotels in this city, for accomodations over night. The following morning we had an appointment with a Colonel Fleming in connection with a wage matter. When we got to the hotel at 6:00 the clerk informed

Mr. Harckham that he and Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Shortmen will be accomodated, but he would not be able to accomodate Mr. Young because it's the policy in Washington, D.C. not to accomodate colored in the hotel. Mr. Sullivan became very angry and aggravated and in order to avoid a scene I took him aside and I said Dave I completely forgot that we were in Washington, D.C. which was similar in some respect to any southern city so forget about it. I'll find some other place to stay over night until we complete our business tomorrow morning. And that was another experience. And there was a similar experience in Miami, Florida at, let's see now was it an AF OF L or as it, yes I think it was an AFL-CIO convention and there again I experience a similar situation going to the dog track. Reservations were made for the entire Local 32-B delegation and there again the question of color came up. Mr. Sullivan, who was the president at that time of Local 32-B, became rather angry and told the manager that we had taken everybody out of here, all of our people. We don't want to be accomodated at a place like this. We had already ordered supper and all of the other things, drinks, but Sullivan wouldn't tolerate it and he called all

of the delegates and their wives and we took taxicabs and went back to the hotel.

Question: How do you feel about the way the labor unions and trade unionism, itself, has responded to discrimination over the years.

Answer: Well, from my experience a lot of changes have taken place. There's no question about it, but we're still having difficulties with some unions, principally the building and construction trades where they try to bar or have barred blacks or colored, call it what you may, from membership. In my estimation, in my opinion, I think it's more a question of economics. These unions want to provide jobs for their own white members and I don't think color per say is that important. It's a question of jobs, it's a question of economics. But even in that area progress has been made and I'm an optimist. I'm sure and I hope that a third of progress will be made until the labor movement can hold its head up high and be the representative of all working people regardless of race, color or creed. I have hope and as I said I'm an optimist and I've seen so many changes in this country since I've lived here for the past 55 years and I have to be optimistic about the future.

Question: Now you've talked somewhat about the International Union. You've mentioned the International Union early in our first conversation about the strike at 32-B. Could you tell me more about 32-B's relationship with the International Union? Perhaps starting with the time that they were to pledge support for your strike?

Answer: Well that is more or less the family secret. Actually, when 32-B conducted that general strike in 1936 all of the buildings, practically from South Ferry to Spartan and Darville, northward down, it was a tough and a bitter fight because at that time the real estate owners in the City of New York had made up their minds. It came to a determination that Local 32-B pose a threat to their interest and as a result they were determined to wipe us off the face of the map. I remember quite clearly that large sums of money were collected from the building owners for this purpose, to get rid of 32-B once and for all. At that time the International promised that they'll give us all the support possible in terms of money. Unfortunately the International was in no better position momentarily than we were so it was that was said more or less for the press

for whatever psychological effect it would have had on the strike at that time. The strike lasted for 17 days. It was bitter. The employers at that time employed scabs and goons from as far away as Pennsylvania. Brought them into New York City to man their buildings with sawed off billiard cues and black jack and other weapons. And as I said it was a bitter fight and the members of our union had no one to depend on or rely on in this bitter struggle than the members themselves. We fought. Many of our members got badly hurt, but I can tell you that we gave as good as we took and the City was almost in chaos. Patrol cars, PD cars and ambulances were running up and down the streets and finally the matter was taken to arbitration. The only reason that the employers agreed to go to arbitration because their millions of dollars that they had collected had ran out. And our money ran out too. I know for the officers and business agents of 32-B we weren't paid for two weeks. We were just living on what we were able to, but in the end a contract was signed. The men went back to work, but as in all strikes you sometimes are faced with the problem of lockout. When we thought the strike was completely settled and all the men were told to go back to

work, 5,000 of our members were locked out. And it required weeks, many weeks, before that matter was resolved, but in the end we prevailed. And after 1936 the real estate people in the City of New York recognized and realized that you're dealing not with a weakening union but a strong and determined union. And we were never challenged on that scale after that. We've had strikes, of course, last week, but was limited to certain buildings; for example apartment house strikes, we've had that. But nothing on the scale of 1936.

Question: So at that time the International, during that strike, the International lent some public support in expressions of support, but they as you had no money to help you out. Are you aware of what was happening at the International at that time?

Answer: Well no I have no direct or personal knowledge but things weren't going as they should have been as was proven in later years, but the International then was nothing like the International under Sullivan, Dave Sullivan who was the International President here as you know and George Hardy. It's as different as chalk and cheese. You have a progressive, on going honest organization and you have excellent officers in your International. But in those days

in the 30's the same cannot be said for the operation and the caliber of officers that you had then.

Question: How do you think the change came about?

Answer: Well the change came about because of the type of officers that were elected to the International and it also came about because of the insistence on the local union, especially large locals like Local 32-B, who as a matter of fact set an example by the conduct of their officers and the conduct of the business of the union, and much of that, apparently, rubbed off on the International. And they just simply had to change their ways of doing things and the concept of what trade union should be; that the membership comes first and over the years not only local unions but the International has made great progress. And I'm very proud and happy that I made some modest contribution to this change for the better.

Question: Would you like to talk about that? Your contribution towards building the International as well as 32-B?

Answer: The International since I was not a vice president I can't speak too much about how they ran their meetings and just what their thoughts were with

respect to the whole trade union philosophy, but in so far as my own local is concerned as I've said we had honest, dedicated officers. There's nobody better than David Sullivan, Thomas Shortman, Arthur Harckham and myself. We had a sense of dedication, a sense of decency and recognized our responsibility to the membership and their families. We operated on that thesis. And in the process, of course, I was concerned and occupied with legislation in Albany to help not only Local 32-B members, but workers in the State of New York generally. I was fortunate to be elected as a vice president of the AF of L before the merger of the AFL-CIO. It was the AF of L at that time and I was elected a vice president, the very first colored person to be elected to that post. It was news worthy and most papers had it. And there in that position I was able to influence certain things within the state body. And much depends, in every facet of life much depends on certain things, the individual, his conduct, his behavior, his relationship with all the people and his integrity, and above all his honesty. That may sound rather old fashioned. As I recall many years ago a labor leader said to me, look Young honest labor leaders die poor. And I replied, well I remember what my grandmother told me in the old country before

coming to the United States, keep up your integrity. Be honest, even if you have to wear patches on the knees of your pants. So if honest labor leaders die poor, I said, well then I'm a pauper. But these are the things that are so important. The integrity of the individual, his honesty, his dedication to the labor movement, his dedication and responsibility to his members. And if you lose sight of those principles then you have nothing.

Question: You served as a member of the International Executive Board at one time. When was that?

Answer: Yes, I served, when was that now? I served three years as a member, as a vice president of the International and my experience at that time, let's see what year was it not I'm trying to recall. I have to have notes. Unfortunately I have no notes. I'm just speaking off the cuff and relying on my....

Question: Was that when David Sullivan was president?

Answer: Yes, Dave Sullivan was then president and I served with him under him as a vice president of the International. And the reason I had my service was discontinued because of the provision in the International constitution mandatory retirement of 65. If it wasn't for the age factor I suppose I would have continued, but not only myself but Charles Levey who

was also vice president, Thomas Shortman was a vice president. All three of us were all taken off because of the age factor. Since then I devoted all my time to my local union and there's quite a lot to do. When you have a membership around 40, 45,000 members there's quite a lot to do. I also engage in civic activities and human rights affairs and things of that nature.

Question: You have done a lot of legislative activity over the years, a lot of political activity. Could you describe some of the activities you pursued as part as political activities, political parties?

Answer: My primary concern then, or interest in politics, was with one thought in mind; what politician or what present public service can do the most for the members of Local 32-B and workers in general. I had no ambition for office. As a matter of fact I was offered two jobs at two separate times, as workmen compensation commissioner. I was offered that job by Governor Dewey, who was then governor at that time. I turned it down because I can only serve one master. And my master was the labor movement and I didn't want to compromise my principles to any politician. And, again, when Nelson Rockefeller became governor. In his third term I was again offered a job for six years as

workmen compensation commissioner. And I politely turned it down and I told the then industrial commissioner Dean Catawood my reason. I said, commissioner I'm too old in the game and I said my allegiance is Local 32-B, the labor movement first and I prefer to remain in the occupation that I know best and from which I derived great satisfaction. I would said this, and not very many people in New York State or New York City know about this. We have under statute books, the State of New York, a disability benefit law. This is off the job disability. We hadn't that prior to 19, let's see when the disability law was, oh I'm trying to recall. It was turning Governor Dewey's term in office. This is back in the late 1940's. I recognized that while workmen compensation, that's on the job disability or injury, was covered by the law there was no provision for a worker who got hurt off the job or who was sick for a bout with pneumonia or things like that, and I joined with my colleagues in the old AF of L before the merger of the CIO, the CIO had a separate state organization, impressing Governor Dewey for a law that would cover off the job disability and I recall now there were five persons who sat with the Governor on this proposal. There was Tom Murray the president,

Marty Lacey he was a Teamster vice president, a lady by the name of Betty Hawley Donnelly who was a vice president and we met with the Governor in his office and we explained the situation to him. And I took it upon myself at that time because of the relationship I had with Governor Dewey and the fact that he knew so much about 32-B he was like a godfather to 32-B. He was responsible to a great extent in keeping the gangsters from coming into 32-B so he was like our godfather. And I explained to him, I said Governor you know our local union better than anybody else in this town. You know what their wages are. You know what their conditions are. And I said the thing that bothers me Governor is when one of our members is off sick maybe has pneumonia or he got injured on the street and he's off one week. I said he's in trouble, no money to even go to the drugstore to buy medicine. And I said that is the situation. That's why we're here, to provide some kind of help to these people. And Governor Dewey had his counsel draft a bill, the disability benefit bill to bring about a change in the workmen compensation law to provide for off the job disability benefits. And the law was passed and it has been improved over the years. But I think it's

important to know that no matter what they said about Tom Dewey, the Republican, he had a heart. It was a Republican governor who was responsible for the drafting and the passage of the New York State disability benefit law as to augment the workmen compensation law casualty related injuries. And, of course, I was active in the state law against discrimination and I attended a lot of hearings in Buffalo and Albany. And it was interesting when the public hearing was held in Albany, it seemed that all of the merchants from New York City and all of the important people, business people, utilities appeared at the hearing and said that it was a bad law, that the governor shouldn't sign it, that if the law was enacted where white people have to work with colored you'll have a resolution in the street and as far as the department stores were concerned there'll be boycott by buyers because they would not want to or wish to be served by colored clerks; the same old red herring that they always do, you know, when a law is proposed to improve the social conditions and the economic condition of workers. But the law was passed because Governor Dewey was determined that the American negro, as he termed it, had a right as any other American for jobs that he is capable and competent

of filling. The law was passed and I had occasion to talk with the Governor about four to six months later and we both had a laugh when I said Governor I haven't seen any revolution in the streets yet. And I look in department stores and the colored girls are serving the white customers and they seem to be very well pleased. So there you are. He, well there is so much that can be said it'll take volumes.

Question: Would you share some more recollections about him?

Answer: Well actually I found him, my dealings with him and association to be a very honorable person. But what is even more important is that he adopted Local 32-B as I pointed out before. And as a result of that no gangster or hoodlum dared bother 32-B. When other local unions were having their difficulties with gangsters, the garment center, the ILG, the amalgamated clothing workers, nobody bothered us and we could always depend on him. And I can recall one situation where we had a strike in 1945. It was just before the end of the war. We had then, what's that organization that was controlling wages, the wage and or what is it now. As I said I should have notes, but it is sufficient to say that the panel that they had in New York to hear the dispute between the real

estate people and ourselves would not agree to give us what we were then seeking; deduction in hours and wage increase. This panel decided that we weren't entitled to it and the net result was we struck. While we were on the street after seven days we spoke with the Governor and told him what the situation was at that time and what we were asking. And we don't mention he perhaps assumed it was reasonable. So he worked out this plan that he would send a telegram to the real estate owners, Reality Advisory Board and Labor Relations, that's the collective bargaining agent for the buildings, the building owners and he'd also send a telegram to the union, put the men back to work and he would appoint an arbitrator. He did appoint an arbitrator in the person of Judge Frankenthaler, I just can't remember Judge Frankenthaler's first name. And believe it or not, I don't know, I suppose this is a secret that can't or shouldn't be told, but the fact remains all that we asked for was given to us by Judge Frankenthaler; a certain aspect that you just can't divulge or reveal, but that was not an accident you can be assured. We got what we were asking for because it was reasonable and that ended that. So in many respects Tom Dewey, Governor Dewey, was very helpful

to Local 32-B.

Question: What sort of activity took place at 32-B during election years?

Answer: Well are you referring to any election or the last election or what election?

Question: Well, for instance, when Mr. Dewey, Governor Dewey ran against Mr. Truman?

Answer: Oh, we supported him all the way down to the hill, because I convinced, prior to that, I had convinced, when he was running for Governor, I convinced Dave Sullivan, Shortman and Harckham that here's a man who has been in our corner and we should support him. We need a friend in Albany and they did go along. They did support him and right up to the time that, well when he ran for president I'm not certain what the position of my fellow officers were, but we had an agreement among ourselves we're not going to tell each other who to support politically. You're entitled to your political views and if there is something that we can all get together on for the benefit of the local, fine. But I campaigned in that election when he ran against Truman. And quite frankly we thought he had it won until....but it's one of those things, nothing is sure in this world. But I've been active in civic

affairs, serving on the board of the National Urban League. As a matter of fact, at one point I was a vice president of the National Urban League and other civic organizations. Wherever workers are involved, wherever minorities are involved you'll find me there slugging it out. I'm just that way. And this may sound strange, but when it comes to workers' interest that's where I draw the colored line. A worker is a worker. Don't tell me your white or your black. It's all accidental birth. None of us asked to be what we are. And if anybody disputed or disagreed then there is only one thing to do. Talk to the Master upstairs and say why did you make her or him. Why didn't you make them all white. I don't concern myself with color persay^e because then I'd be ... the face of God. I'd be ... the face of history. I'd be ... the face of evolution, anthropology and all that sort of thing so it's nonsense. I'm concerned with the human person you see. And thank God the members of my union know that over the years. I never worry about election or re-election because I have more white members supporting me for election than I had colored simply because the colored was a little bit apathetic to come out and vote. But up and down Park Avenue,

Fifth Avenue, the garment center what have you. We got to go out and vote for Brother Young. My own action is primarily responsible for that as I pointed out. The action of the individual, integrity, descency, compassion, fair play; those are all the ingredients that tend to make a person what he or she is and if you adhere to these principles it will have its effect on all the people and they will trust you, they'll believe in you. And that has been my good fortune, my good fortune over the years.

Question: Let's talk a little bit about the workers you represent. In our initial conversations you talked about the poor working conditions building service people had to endure at that time.

Answer: Prior to the formation of Local 32-B and as I might say, prior to the strike of November 1, 1934, well my dear conditions were deplorable in many respects. For example, in the apartment buildings I was as anywheres from 72 or more, not even a full day off in seven, just a change over. Wages ranged from, ranged at that time, from \$40 to \$60 a month, \$40 on the westside and Park Avenue and high class area it was \$60 a month. In the garment, fur and milinary area it ran anywhere from \$14 a week to the top was \$22, just for a few buildings. But I

would say that on an average the wages in the garment center was about \$17 a week, loft buildings and so on. The hours, let me see I used to work, it ranged anywhere from 54 to 65, the hours at that time. There was no overtime pay, no holiday pay, no vacation and in addition, in the commercial buildings, in the loft buildings that I worked in, 501 7th Avenue, you had to put in a trick of 12 hours on Sunday. It rotates. If it's a three man building it's 12 hours every three weeks. If we had more men in the building it stretched out to maybe every fourth week, every fifth week. But the point I'm trying to make you get in there and you work that 12 hours and the only compensation you got for that was a day off, the following Saturday. Now holidays, you put in your shift of 12 hours, the same thing happened, and over time, nothing. Sick pay, forget it. As I pointed out earlier, I almost died on the job because of the callousness and lack of compassion on the part of the superintendent. I was so ill until I was taken home to my house by two of my fellow workers in the building and found out that I had pneumonia and could have died on the job. So that conditions were beastly. You had no protection.

Question: Did women work these jobs as well as men?

Answer: No. At that time there were no women. The women came into the industry during the war, during World War II, because of the shortages, shortage of manpower. That's when the women came in, but not in large numbers.

Question: Did wives sometimes have to come to help their husbands who were say janitors in certain buildings?

Answer: No. That happened in the smaller residential buildings like in Washington Heights and Harlem where the wife generally would come in to help, but in those days the super himself were able to handle the situation. But it wasn't uncommon for wives to be helping their husbands, you know the superintendent in these buildings. The members or the workers who were members of local unions today should know that it was no bed of roses, that no one gave the union, especially 32-B, anything on a platter. We had to fight. We had to sacrifice and we had to work constantly in order to build an organization from which the members are benefiting today. Why the benefits that we're receiving today was not even gleaming in our eyes, such things as pension, hospitalization, healthcare,

clinics, was no where on the horizon at that time. All this came about in the process of building and the process of good management, good leadership. That's how this all came about.

Question: How did automation effect workers in the building service industry?

Answer: Well at first it, actually automation began around 1937 and it started in the smaller residential buildings in parts of Manhattan, like Washington Heights, Harlem, where they installed self-service elevators, which meant those operators, the elevator operators, were out of work. And it was very threatening at that time. We tried to combat it through legislation in Albany, but we weren't successful, because of the real estate lobby. And at each session of legislature our bill would die in committee. It was never reported.... because it was too much money involved, you see. And it spread from the smaller buildings to the larger apartment buildings where at times several men would be out of work because of automation and it gradually overtook the commercial buildings. The only thing that saved us, membership wise, was the buildings of large apartment houses and loft buildings, and office buildings that required more workers to

service so that we were successful so to speak in maintaining a good membership. One time we thought we were done with. Discussing this matter with some of my fellow officers, I remeber Tom Shortman said to me, Tommy if we can hold on to a maximum of 30,000 members in Local 32-B we will be doing well, because we didn't forsee these high rise buildings going up that would employ more men, you see. And that's what actually saved us up until now anyway. But we have suffered too from the reduction of force. Whenever there is a wage increase after negotiation you can rest assure that the building owners are going to reduce staff. It's all a question of economics, a question of profit. And we suffered more in the apartment buildings than anywhere else because of rent control. The landlord hasn't got the full play because of the rent control law I think. The only city actually, New York is the only city where we have this and it restricts the landlord, you see, from recuping his expenditure that he paid out in wages and oil and maintenance and all that sort of thing. But we have lost quite a few members from reduction, of course, Never the less we're in a pretty healthy condition, despite all of these things, we're still in pretty

healthy condition. What the future holds, who knows. I wouldn't even speculate at this point.

Question: You're not going to speculate what some developments might have been in the occupations which you represent?

Answer: Well, there's nothing more that can be done now. There are no elevator operators. Porters they must have. The building must be clean. Mechanics and handymen you must have them around. Somebody has to do the repairs and fix the plumbing and you know. But we've suffered our great loss from firemen, and the building used to have firemen at one time and they brought in the oil burners and all you had to do was click a switch. So firemen became as dead as a doodoo. Elevator operators, just a few buildings around you find where they have manually operated elevators. They're a novelty actually. But by and large, elevator operators have been wiped out. More than half of the door-men that they used to have in these residential buildings have been wiped out. But as I said, despite it all we have survived and are pretty healthy condition at this stage in our history.

Question: What do you think, looking ahead particularly, do you think the trade union movement has ahead of

itself in general?

Answer:

It's really difficult to predict, but I feel certain that the trade union movement is here to stay. It's a question of whether automation and new technology is going to reduce the workers in various fields. I can't predict at this point. The one thing that is certain the trade union movement is an intricate part of the whole social economic society. And it will be here. And I'm hopeful that it will be a healthy part of the whole society, but trade unionists and trade union leaders have to be very careful how they approach this whole business of jobs and we see what's happening now to building construction trade. It's dangerous to price itself out of a market. One has to be objective and realistic about what's happening. Now because of, and I don't think I would go into that aspect.... we all have to be very careful how we proceed and approach our respective industries and what the traffic will be and don't go over board because we simply price ourself out of a market and it's a whole lot better to take a couple of dollars less and have a job than insist on having a certain amount and then have no job. It doesn't add up. So a great deal of consideration has to be given by the labor movement, its

leaders, because unquestionably the economy has changed. And there's going to be additional changes in the economy. We see it every day. Imports, that's something that's effecting workers in this country, perhaps hundreds of thousands of workers in this country, because the American consumer is not an educated person. Selfishly the American consumers are concerned with one thing, how cheap can a buy this product. I don't care who made it. I don't care where it comes from. And as long as there's a market for cheap goods made by workers whose wages and working conditions is no where near the American standards, then you're going to be confronted with this situation. Now what our government can do about it, I'm not in a position to say. It's hurting, unquestionably and I feel that something has to be worked out because the government in Washington and the governments in these other places like Taiwan and Hong ^KGong and some of the other places that are flooding us, within Japan and so on. Something will have to be worked out. We have to be very careful in that area because we don't want a repercussion, or we don't want retaliation.....we'll shut out your goods. We don't want your goods. And they'll say, well we won't take

your goods. So it's one of those things. Can we afford to have these countries not import our goods? If they don't import our goods the net results will be American workers will be out of work. So it's a very critical area and very important and we have to be very careful how we approach it. But one thing is certain, we have to protect the jobs, many jobs, of all workers in this country as possible.

Question: Could you tell me something about your family?

Answer: Yes, I was born on the island of San Christopher also called ^{St. Kitts} Sanquist in the British West Indies. And I went to school there, parochial school, grammar school and I came to this country at the age of 18, with all good intention of furthering my education and dentistry. I thought I would return to the island and practice dentistry, but it didn't work out that way. My mother was from one of the French islands known as San Bartholomew, as St. Bart's, a French descent. And my father was born in Sanquist like myself. They were married there. And my father used to work on a steam ship at one point as a baker, next time as a chef. So I didn't see too much of him and my mother, more or less, had the

responsibility of raising me to the age of five. Then because of economic circumstances she left me with my grandmother, my father's mother, my paternal grandmother and she went to Canada. So I was raised, actually, by my paternal grandmother, and I remained on the island until she passed on. After school I got a job as a clerk in one of the business places there. It was a combination of grocery, liquor, hardware store, owned by Absente, English concern. So I clerked there and at a pound a week, which then was equivalent to \$5.00. Of course, the poor pound is shot, unfortunately. And my mother wanted me to come to America because she had moved then from Canada to New York. And finally I made up my mind, well I'll go to New York. And I came here, as I said, at the age of 18 and lived with my mother. Then in 1925 I got married and the best job that was available to me during those years was running elevators, because I wasn't a husky, strong type and I wasn't equipped educationally for anything else than something like white collar job, you know clerk, and I don't know whether I mentioned I applied for a job in one of the large stores here in 1920 and I had a very good reference. So when I approached the

manager of the store and told him what I was there for and showed him my reference he looked at the reference, read it, and apparently he was impressed. He said you have a very good reference here Mr. Young, but unfortunately, he said, we don't hire colored. So I was a bit perplexed to say the least. Coming from the British West Indies where we have a class problem rather than a race problem I just couldn't understand, you know. So I wanted to know what in the dickens the accident of color got to do with my ability to sell goods and to be polite and to, you know, all of the other relevant or requisite things that the human person should have. And I couldn't understand, but I was new. I didn't know anything much about American history or the whole social economics, conditions andand the salary and the emancipation. All that sort of thing you see, I didn't know anything about. I knew a little bit, but I wasn't, not too much. And so I went home and I told my mother I can't understand these people. I applied for the job and I showed a gentleman my reference and he told me that they don't hire colored. So I said, Ma what the dickens does color got to do.... And she replied, my dear son this is New York. You

live here long enough you learn that the only thing these people are concerned with is color. That if you're just released from prison from committing the gravest crime and you're white you have a chance. If you're an educated person, if you're a decent person, morally and in other respects, and you happen to be colored, you have a problem. And I was even more puzzled by that. I said, where's the sense of value. Where's the sense of ethics, decency, civilized behavior? And I was very resentful so I told her, Mother I think these people are crazy and I'm going back home to the islands. Well, of course, like all mothers and being the only child she broke down. You're the only one I have. Your father's out in the country. He was a chef somewhere out in the country, upstate. And so I said, all right. I guess I'll stay and try to make the best of it. And so I stayed on and stayed on. And here I am talking to you.

Question:

You have brought a number of things with you and I wonder if you could tell me something about this book. This is a pink book and on it it says, "Building Service Employees Union Membership Book and Working Card". Could you tell me what this....?

Answer: This is the first book that was issued, this type of book, issued to members of Local 32-B and it's not generally known, but the first 26 members of Local 32-B, as a result of a strike at that period, being independent, I already described that, the first 26 members, 24 were colored and two were white. That's the white starters that we had in the building who joined after everything was settled. After I was put back to work.

Question: Well, it has your name on it and it has the local and it's signed by, what does that say?

Answer: M.L. Potter.

Question; And who was he?

Answer: Mr. Potter was the first secretary-treasurer of Local 32-B. When we had a first election of officers in July, I think, as I matter of fact I have some material that would say when we had that election. As a matter of fact....

Question: This is dated October 6, 1933, and it says "Right of workers to join unions will be upheld", says Johnson. Who was Johnson?

Answer: Johnson was the, that's when the NRA came into effect and Johnson was, General Johnson. I forget what his position was then, but he was in charge of this part of the Roosevelt Administration, a different

organization that came up at that time.

Question: And this is, was this a flier for Local 58?

Answer: Yes. This was a flier. After the law went into effect the NRA, he resurrected, or dug up the old 58 charter and put these circulars out. That is a circular I found on the sidewalk and decided to go down and see what it was all about.

Question: So this is actually the piece of paper that first got you interested in unions?

Answer: Yes.

This has to do with active in the FEPC.

Question: This is dated March 4, 1945, and it says, "Thomas Young Active in FEPC". What's the FEPC?

Answer: That's the Fair Employment Practice Commission at that time. Ah, yes here it is. Here is what I've been looking for. Now this is June 22, 1934, the very first election in Local 32-B, after we got ourselves together and got the charter from the International. And that will give you the list of officers at that time.

Question: It says "Vote the Straight Progressive Ticket, Build Your Union Into the Strongest Organization in the United States with Powerful Leaders - Election Day is Friday, June 22, 1934 from 8 A.M. to 9 P.M.

at the Labor Temple, 247 East 84th Street"

Answer: Yes, that's where we used to meet.

Question: And James J. Bambrick is president; Thomas Young, vice president; Ed J. Poli is recording secretary; Luke Potter is financial secretary-treasurer.

Answer: This is when we were reaching the point of the strike of November 1, 1934. Bambrick, the president, then sent me that letter.

Question: This is a letter to Mr. Young, dated October 22, 1934 that says, "Please go to the field at once as my special representative. As the pressure of business is so great I would deeply appreciate it if you would take up your duties tomorrow morning", James J. Bambrick.

Answer: That's when I had to leave my job as an elevator operator.

Question: And you went full-time with the union?

Answer: Went full-time with the union.

Question: What was Mr. Bambrick like?

Answer: Oh, he was a husky person. He was about five foot eight, weighing perhaps about 190 pounds and he was, I think he was Irish-Scotch descent. He was a great orator and a great....Oh, he was a terrific organizer. And he spoke well and was sort of persuasive. He had to be in order to really lay a

good foundation for the building of 32-B. He was a very competent person, no two ways about it. And he had little things, for example, when we received the first wage increases for apartment buildings in 1935 during the negotiations some of the real estate people who were on the negotiating committee, we were asking for wage increases, the same for all men and women and what have you, so that we were ahead of women's lib when it came to equal pay for equal work. And we were told by one of the big real estate representatives that it is ridiculous to ask for the same wage scale for colored and white and female. And they proposed a three scale of wages; a higher wage of white male, a lower wage for colored male and still a lower wage for female; no matter what you were, white, colored. Of course, that was an insult and I was sitting next to Mr. Bambrick. We were on the negotiating team. And I said to him, Jim if they get away with this we'll never be able to get our local, because I saw it for a picture right away. And these real estate people, they weren't interested in color or white workers. They were interested in profit. And if we had accepted that sort of an offer what would have happened? They would simply hire colored, and not

white, because it was a matter of profit. So the arbitrator at that time, I think it was, I can't remember now, anyway the arbitrator turned it down and he said to Mr. Bambrick, don't get excited Mr. Bambrick. That's not acceptable. Then in rebuttal, or in defense of their proposal, this real estate man said, Mr. Bambrick if we have to pay the same scale of wages to white and colored than we prefer to hire white. We have no particular liking for colored workers, but we're able to get them cheaper. So he exposed himself right there and then. But anyway, after the contract was signed in February or March of 1935, I note that gradually some of the agents and owners in apartment houses were gradually getting rid of colored and replacing them with white. At that time the contract did not provide for replacement of union people, regardless of color. It wasn't a union shop, it wasn't a closed shop. So that legally we had nothing to base the replacement of union men with union men. We were quite weak at that time. And I brought it to the attention of Mr. Bambrick. I was trying to bring that memo here, I can't find it. I have to wait until my secretary comes back to find it for me. I said to Mr. Bambrick at that time. I said, Jim

if we permit these owners to eliminate, gradually eliminate colored from the industry, the apartment houses primarily, what we're going to have is potential strike breakers who, if we attempted to call a strike, would certainly scab on us. I said, because if the colored members of the union, those who are not yet members, feel that they have no protection, that the employer can discharge them. Well anyway, Bambrick pointed out to me, well the contract didn't provide for this and if we did anything they'll take out an injunction, you know. So I said, Jim I understand your feelings on the matter, but I said, there's only one thing I can see. If we permit these people to do what they're doing now....we would not be able to organize the colored workers and I said if we concentrate on organizing whites, and should there come a time when we call a strike, I said you have all of these colored from north of 110th Street coming downtown to break your strike. So he said, well take the matter up with Edward McQuire, who was our attorney. I went over to McQuire, I said, Ed do you remember the threat made during the negotiations from, I forget the man's name now, about if they had to pay the same scale of wages to white and colored they'd prefer to hire white? I said, well the boys are making good their

threat now. They're laying off or discharging colored workers in these buildings and hiring whites, non-union whites. I said that's a definite threat. I said we have to do something about it. I said we can't afford to let them get away with that. We'll never be able to build. So Eddy and I was talking and he said, well Tom I agree with you, but what can we do. It's not a closed shop. It's not a union shop. And I said, I know what I'll do. I said, I'll picket the damn places. So they'll take out an injunction. So what you're saying to me Ed don't do anything, just let Local 32-B stifle and die. I said, God damn it I'm not prepared for that. So what do you suggest. I said, just this. I'll call John Forlenco, our printer, and have him print some placards. The same as we have the strike cards, you know. And this is the way it's going to read, "The owner and management of this building" and there'll be a blank spot for the address of the building, 110 West 34th Street, "is unfair to organized labor. Practices race discrimination." And every time they discharge a colored worker and put a white worker in I'll slap one on and if they reverse themselves and discharge any white worker and put a colored worker in I'll put the same picket

on because it serves both purposes. He said, do you think we could get away with that. I said, I don't know, but I'm going to try. In Washigton Heights it happened. The Sun Leasing Corporation kicked out two colored men. They didn't do anything. They put in two non-union whites. I got in touch with Conroy of the contract department. Bob Conroy was I said, you better call this guy up and tell him if he doesn't straighten that matter out what I'm going to do I'm going to picket his place. So Conroy called the agent. He said there's nothing in your contract that says I have to hire colored. There's nothing in your contract that says I have to replace union with union. He had something there. I said, okay I'll handle it my way. So I got a couple of pickets and then put them right in front of the building. You know, in the picket regional, Local 32-B, Building Service Employees International Union, AF of L. Unfortunately, or just peripherally, he happened to be Jewish. And he couldn't stand that, a picket sign in front of his building. He's Jewish and he has Jewish tenants. He's unfairhe practices race discrimination. He screamed like a stout pig. And he called Conroy and Conroy said Mr. Young is in charge of this department.

Talk to him. So I spoke with him. And he wanted to know what the hell this was all about. We don't discriminate. Of course you don't. You simply deprive colored workers of their job to put in non-union whites. What do you call that, fair play. I said, I want you to be straight on this, Mr. whatever the hell his name was, I'm telling you now wherever the occasion, wherever there's an occasion that you have to dispense of the services of a colored worker I want you to replace him with a colored worker. The same holds good with a white worker. If you discharge and dispense of the services of a white worker he has to be replaced with a white worker. He couldn't understand the reasoning or the logic. But the logic was simple. This wasn't a one way street. If you're going to protect the jobs of the colored you have to protect the jobs of the white. You're not going to have employers picking one against the other. We had too much of that in this country, like in the south, you know. So finally I got one of the original men who was discharged, got him back and got another colored man in. I had several instances of that, I had a church on 174th Street and Broadway. I think it was a protestant church of some kind. And he had a superintendent from Kentucky. There were nine

colored guys working there. And he decided this job was too good for niggers. So the first.... was three men, three colored men. Zing, three white men. The guys came down complaining and I had a complaint department then too. I called Bob, I said Bob this is getting tough. Now there's three men in one building owned by a church. I said, what do we do? He said, well I guess I'll call them and see what the situation is all about. So Bob called them and the good reverend said he had nothing to do with the operation of the building. The superintendent was in charge and he does what he deems necessary. Well, that's it. I said, Bob you tell them this for me if those three men are not replaced with colored men he doesn't have to take the three men back. Perhaps they weren't working well. Perhaps they weren't behaving themselves, but I want three colored men back in that job, union men. And if he doesn't comply I'll picket the building and Sunday morning I'll picket the church. This sign that I had made up by Forlencio was becoming well known all over the city. So Bob said, you wouldn't do that. I said, Bob as God is my judge you better tell that preacher because I'll fight every SOB from here until hell freezes over. That was changed. The preacher

got damn quick to the superintendent and told him that the church is threatened with pickets because, because, because. So two men got their jobs back, one went because he wasn't good anyway. But the same amount of colored men from the employment bureau in there. So three down and three back. And my dear Tony I had to fight that thing all through 1935 until finally I had a conference with some of the big operators like Wood Olson, about three or four of them. They wanted to know Young what's this all about. I conferred with them. I said, look fellows when wages were low conditions were rotten colored men were perfectly all right. They served you, they served your tenants and everything was fine. Because the union has improved their conditions you feel that the job is too good for them. I said, after all they're human beings. They're workers. They have families. And I said, for your information if you had fired me I'm an alien and I wouldn't protest too damn much, but see you're firing fellow Americans. So I said, that's the policy. Wherever it's necessary to dispense the services of colored you put them in. And this thing spread all around town. Of course, I was everything else but a child of God and you know. But that was immaterial to me. But I'll give you a

classical one. So then they said all right. We'll call our superintendents and we'll tell them what the policy is, just as you.... I said, fine gentlemen. We'll get along fine if you do that. So that was in effect. And there was a meeting at every time it raised its head, bang. I had pickets on the damn place. Well 110th Street, the superintendent decided that he was going to get rid of the white handyman and put a colored porter in his place. So I asked the business agent Cambridge. I said, how come? He said well he wanted to promote this colored porter and this damn handyman is no good anyhow. I said, well you tell him for me that if he wants a handyman he hire a white handyman. He didn't comply. I put a picket on the damn building. The Amsterdam News, which is a black newspaper in Harlem, heard about the situation, came down to interview me. What the hell is going on here. A man bite dog, you know. I said, that's right man bite dog. And I explained to him what the policy was. I said, look. And he said, you're standing in the way of promotion of these guys. All the colored fellas are going to raise. I said, they'll rise, but as of now that's the policy. I said, if everything was fair where

these people were hiring anybody who is suitable or competent it would be fine. But I said, what I'm trying to do at this point is hold on to the half a loaf of bread that these fellas have. There's no way they're going to get any better.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Thomas Young
Local 32B

by

Anthony G. Weinlein
Pat Thomas

May 2, 1977

New York

for

The Oral History Program
The Service Employees International Union

Tom Young Tape

TAPE #4.1.000

QUESTION:

This is May 2nd and I am doing a follow up interview with Tom Young of 32-B. As I was looking through your file of memoirs I came across this handbill and it had no date on it and it reads, "Attention to all members of Local 32-B, who have positive information that Brother John Holly, Chairman of the Progressive Group of 32-B has been placed under surveillance by Scalese's mobsters and threatened with assassination if he dares to continue his activities in behalf of the CIO. Could you tell me something about this?"

ANSWER:

John Holly was what we can term progressive at that particular time. It was during the time that George Scalese was President of the International Union. It seems at the time that John Holly was interested in having Local 32-B join with the CIO, which Scalese was opposed to, and for that matter, Mr. Bambrick, the President of 32-B. It was more or less of a jurisdictional situation in which the CIO at that time was recruiting members and locals of the AF of L. I'm trying to recall the date. I think, perhaps, it was somewhere around 1936, or 37. And in opposition to the efforts of

John Holly, this circular was put out among the members. Now I think we'll have to tell that. Well, now I'm trying to recall the incident then. Yes, this was put out by the Opposition Group within Local 32-B. Let me correct myself. This circular was put out by the Opposition Group within 32-B in which John Holly was the leader. And the purpose was to call to the attention of the so-called progressive element in 32-B that Scalese and Bambrick were opposed to John Holly's activities and more or less wanted, the Progressive Group wanted to point out this fact to the members at that time. He didn't get very far quite frankly. And had I known I would not have included this in portfolio, but since it got in, that is the situation. And it didn't really amount to a great deal, because. . .

QUESTION:

So the members of Local 32-B didn't have a big interest in wanting to join the CIO?

ANSWER:

No, no. It was a small group, what they call themselves progressive. They thought that the CIO at that time with John Lewis. . . was more progressive. But as I said it was a small, a very small element which didn't get to first base as future developments indicate. It still remained 32-B. It still remained AF of L until the merger

of the AF of L-CIO.

QUESTION: What happened to John Holly?

ANSWER: John Holly left 32-B later on and went to work for the CIO out there. If I'm not mistaken I think it was in New Jersey or someplace. My memory isn't very good at this particular score. But it is sufficient to say that he did not achieve his objective in 32-B and then he just fell by the waist ^{way} side. He didn't really accomplish anything through his efforts.

QUESTION: And you think this was about 1937?

ANSWER: About 1936, 1937 around that time. You see during that period, from 1936 to about 1939 we had a very strong. . .

QUESTION: You were saying it was inactive?

ANSWER: I started to say, I began to say that around 1936 up to about 1940 we had a very strong communist element in 32-B and fortunately for us we were able to come back then. They disappeared. They did not achieve their objective of getting 32-B to go with the CIO or to be taken over by the leftist element that was operating in the labor movement at that time. So that didn't account for much quite frankly.

QUESTION: The other thing I wanted to ask you about was that in our first conversation you talked about

Governor Dewey of New York and what a friend he was to Local 32-B. Could you tell me something about Nelson Rockefeller when he was governor.

ANSWER:

Well Nelson Rockefeller carried on more or less the tradition of Governor Tom Dewey with respect to Service Employees in the State of New York and the City of New York, and particularly Local 32-B. And I suppose it was a carry over, let us say, from the Dewey days because of my personal relationship with Governor Dewey at that time during his administration. And the fact that he was very helpful to 32-B as I pointed out in my previous discussions. And, well Nelson Rockefeller, quite frankly, was friendly to labor generally in the State and City of New York. As a matter of fact he was primarily responsible for providing a number of jobs for the Building and Construction Trades Council. And we, in 32-B, always had a friend in the executive mansion, the executive offices in Albany. As I said, it's sort of a carry over from Dewey to Nelson Rockefeller. But I gave you some of the specifics in so far as what Governor Dewey did for Local 32-B with respect to the Disability Benefits Law, with respect to strikes we conducted here and he intervened when

things looked dark and really helped to bail us out of a difficult situation a couple of times. And what I admired Governor Dewey for, one of the things I admired him for was his stand on the Anti-discrimination Employment Law that he actually supported very strongly, the . . .Quinn Law to outlaw discrimination employment for the race, creed, color, nationalization and so on. The merchants of this City and other large employers brought pressure to bear on him to veto, not to veto, but not to sign the bill. But he was a man of character and statute and very fair and he decided come hell or high water he was going to sign it. And he did. And at that time there were cries going up that if you sign the bill you're going to have riots in the streets of New York because whites are not going to work with blacks. And there will be customer resistance in the stores and so on. Not of that came to pass. It's just the same old. . .So that our relationship from Dewey to Malcolm Wilson, the last Republican Governor who served out the unexpired term of Governor Rockefeller, was very good. Contrasting then and now labor has had a most difficult time in Albany getting any legislation passed, any labor legislation and social insurance legislation.

And I suppose one of the reasons for that situation, or the situation is that where you have a legislature divided along political lines labor never seems to accomplish much in labor legislation, progressive, social legislation. Because each group is looking at the other and one does not wish to concede, but in the end the work is of the state and city and labor suffers as a result of that situation and that condition.

QUESTION: What influence does the present governor, Governor Carey, have upon the situation in the legislature?

ANSWER: Well he, thus far Governor Carey has been very ineffective and that all stems from, as I said previously, the division. You have a Democratic control Assembly and Republican control Senate and when you have that situation the governor can do very little. But aside from that he has never really, he hasn't today, initiated any program and followed through on that program that would help labor and help working people. I reported to the Service Employees Council No. 11, and Local 32-B in my last report, that the situation as far as legislation is concerned is not very encouraging for our group. We have some specific pieces of legislation that has to do with the racetrack and

safety for the window cleaners and those builders still rested in committee and I'm afraid that's where they're going to be at the end of this current session of legislature. We never ran into that situation during the Dewey and Rockefeller. . . I don't want to seem biased or pro-Republican because frankly or philosophically I'm not a Republican you know. STOP

. . . He was a very progressive sort of an Irishman and he was in the . . . of the early days during the formation of 32-B. He worked on Wall Street, the Wall Street area. But then John thought that the AFL, as it existed then not much has changed today if I do say so myself, wasn't progressive enough. And he wanted to, 32-B to affiliate with the CIO at that time, John Lewis' outfit. And that's where the battle, at that time Scalese was then president. Between him and Bambrick, you know, they put the pressure on Holly. In the early formation of labor you had that, groups within trying to take over. You get smacked around a bit. . . And I know what it is to feel a cop's billy in my rear end and I couldn't sit down for a couple of days. . . smacked me so hard. And I've had the experience of sitting in a jail cell during a strike. . . But it's one of those things.

QUESTION:

Tom, I wonder if you've ever thought about what would have happened if labor had, I mean the political parties in the 30's had followed the English pattern rather than followed the American pattern. Do you think we would have been better off?

ANSWER:

No. You see, you have to take into consideration the American spirit and the American independence. And after all we're not . . . people. That's what would have prevented us from achieving that. We are not a . . . people. We all want to be little capitalists. We could not have a successful labor group that we have in England for instance, or the Scandanavian countries, because of the way we are constituted ethnically and nationally and along all kinds of lines. So, therefore, any sort of a labor political group would not have gotten to first base. The socialists tried it. The IWW tried it. And everybody else tried it. But the American, per ^{se} say, is an independent political animal. And he, also, wants to be part of the system, the hope of being a little capitalist some day, you see.

QUESTION:

. . . we still have the time we really could. . . You know, we had the Democratic and Republican parties. But if we had a labor party, with not

socialists, but just labor, labor only, wouldn't that have effected the Democratic party, probably limited its power, cut in on its power, and possibly help the Republicans. If there had been three parties, in other words, instead of two?

ANSWER:

Well, what we have here in the State of New York, it's strength is really in the City of New York, is the Liberal party. They've been around since when, 1936. No, first it was the American Labor Party, which started around 1936 to support Roosevelt. And then the communists came in and took over. And those of us who didn't want to have any. . .with the communists, a communist dominated group, formed the Liberal party of Alex Rose and Hillman and. . .and that group. And they've been struggling for years now to really establish a real working people, a working man's party. But all that they have achieved thus far is to be, what would I term, a party that negotiates more or less with the Democrats for their own advertisement. That's what they've turned out to be. But if we had a labor party with the same philosophy or objectives as the Democrats or the Republicans they'll say to you well why join you, you see. I could join the Democrats or join the Republicans. But as I

see up to the present an independent labor party or a party oriented towards labor would not succeed because of the American. . .

QUESTION:

I was reading in the New York Times that in Turkey yesterday in relation to a May Day celebration, that there was a battle with leftist groups on the one side and the police and unions, union people on the other. So it sounded from the story as though the union people are completely in support of the government and vice versa. The government is. . .

ANSWER:

Where is this?

QUESTION:

This is in Turkey.

ANSWER:

In Turkey, oh yes. I was surprised to read it myself because you know Turkey is almost a dictatorship there. And leftist people can't get to first base.

QUESTION;

Well, that's what was going to be my question, whether, with the kind of support that labor people give here to the government it might wind up here sometime, but that situation in which the labor movement becomes the chief support of the government. And that reminds me, I just got through reading Jack London's, the Iron Heel, and he invisions the period of American history in which the capitalist classes will take over and

form a dictatorship, but then they need support from some segments of the population, so what they do is they pick out some of the trade unions, some of the bigger trade unions, iron and steel. I've forgotten the other. They pick out these big trade unions and they give them special treatments, special wages and benefits and so on. And then these unions become the support of the, the popular support, of the government. The other unions, like Service Employees, I guess would be in that category, the poorer unions, they're down below and they get nothing at all.

ANSWER: That's far fetched. I don't know who this guy is. He's far fetched.

QUESTION: Jack London?

ANSWER: Yes. He had a dream. You'll never see that develop.

QUESTION: You can't imagine that kind of a . . .

ANSWER: The United States is a distinct animal, political animal. And you cannot compare it with any country. And that's because of its . . . population. . .The emphasis in the United States is on profit, no matter how poor. You take, for example, these people who run to play the numbers and gamble. They all have one thought in mind. I want to make it, you see. They all want to be little capitalists.

And I think we're better off in a way. The only thing I'm concerned with is the working man getting a little piece of the bread. Since I have to produce it for you I want my share. Now capitalism or industry in this country will have to wake up to that fact gradually. You're going to find that's happening. The employer group, the manufacturer they'll have to be sharing. They'll be compelled to share. And they'll find that in the end that it will be more profitable to be in business rather than to be sitting around the table and giving wage increases and as they increase the wage costs go up. And you'll have this situation, inflation. But when they realize that it's best to have an incentive for the workers to stay on the job and to do a good job because they have vested rights, you see. There again it brings out the capitalist philosophy of the workers. Well, hell I got to do a good job because at the end of the year I'm going to get a bonus or I'm going to get a piece of the profit. And there you are. And, what the hell, these manufacturers and big businesses and so on, what are they going to do with all the money. You might as well give those who are producing for you some of it and have a happier relationship and an overall

better economy.

QUESTION: And survive.

ANSWER: And survive.

QUESTION: I'm talking about the survival of the capitalists.

ANSWER: Yes, well I wouldn't, I like to sort of tone it down and say the free enterprise system. Capitalism sounds too opposite, using the communism phrase, capitalist. It's the free enterprise system. You got it, you go in and get it, you know. But I don't know. It's a great country, I'll say that. And, personally, what I resent very much, you know, a convert is always worse than the one who was brought up in the faith, or something like that, and I hate like hell to see any group within the United States who proceed in any way that will hurt the United States per say. I think we've got the greatest country in the world. We've got a great. . . , never mind our domestic hates and biase and so on. We'll get over that. Education, in time, will change that. But we have to realize that the minority of people, when you look around, let's say we have about 220 million people in the United States. You look at China, you look at Russia, you look at India. For God's sake, we've got to think in terms

of conserving our people, no matter where they are, if he's black, white, pink, Catholic, Protestant. You are an American. This is our piece of real estate. And hell we better get together and preserve it. . .So don't waste your manpower. Don't waste your talent. If that little black boy over there, that little white girl could do something give them a chance. Because it's going to rebound to the benefit of the United States. So I always think in terms of the preservation of our system here and the preservation of this piece of real estate because there isn't a damn place on earth any better. I know, I was former guard to the king, so I know something about that bloody thing, you see. And I'm mad about. . . you know. When I came here I said well let's see now the only thing that was bothering me as I pointed out some time ago, would the United State and England go to war? And I couldn't see that at all. . .I had to become a citizen of the United States. . .because I couldn't perceive or conceive at that time that we had a revolution, that's past. But we're cousins now. We've got to protect each other. So as long as I didn't have to take up a gun to kill some English person. . .

QUESTION:

If we're going to kill . . .

But you brought up a point then when you talked about all the . . .and so forth. . .it got down to Africa. You've got all these new states that are coming out and many of them are very poor. They're in poverty. But here we are a rich country. We've got, as you said, a piece of real estate, and we're going to hang to this piece of real estate for ourselves and our children. What do we owe, if anything, for those people in these new emerging states that are coming out impoverish. They have nothing. And we have everything. Do we owe them something?

ANSWER:

Yes, we owe them something, not only from a humanitarian stand point, but self-preservation. I remember when I toured Africa in 1960. I was in nine African countries, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Ughanda, Ganda, . . .Liberia and some other one, I can't remember. I was over there at that time as sort of a fraternal delegate, labor delegate from the United States to be emerging trade unionism in these countries. And I can recall, you take for example Sudan. . .speaking to trade unionists there. It wasn't much of a trade union movement because they still had somewhat of a dictatorship. But in my conversations with these

trade union people, they said to me, "you know Comrad Young," they used the word Comrad there, you know it's not the word the communists use, "you know Comrad Young why we admire the United State? America was never colonialist power. And in addition, you got the greatest concentration of our own sisters and brothers living in the United States." All of them are Nigerian. The greatest concentration of blacks is in the United States, as you probably know. "And that's why we like it." In Kenya, I was in Kenya with Tom . . .at that time, but what I found in all of these countries that there was a definite leaning towards the United States. And when I got to . . .I spoke to the council general there at the time because I was . . .my protection of the United State Department of Labor and so I reported to these people. . .And I told this gentleman, I said it's remarkable, I forgot his name, now, I said the feeling of friendship that I found in these nine African countries among these blacks for the United States. I said we've got a damn good thing going for us as a country. We should stretch out our hands and help them to develop and in the process of development, strengthen that friendship and make certain that we have a place we can get

raw materials. We don't have to depend on Russia, we don't have to depend on Europe or anybody else. Strengthen ourselves. You see, then he said to me, his reply was, Mr. Young I agree with you wholeheartedly but unfortunately state make policies, meaning State Department, and not the ambassadors and the council generals in this country. See what has happened now? If we, at that time, in the 1960's, . . . little something, develop your education, develop your agriculture and so on, we wouldn't have to worry about. . .

TAPE No. 4.2.000

QUESTION:

You were telling us something about your travels in Africa and about State Department policies.

ANSWER:

I'm glad you. . . No, what I'm saying in effect is this. We were somewhat short sighted and I'm wondering at this state whether we're still not short sighted with respect to our position with the continent of Africa. Because in the 1960's I had stretched out a hand of friendship and helped these developing countries in a material way. We would have had from the Indian Ocean, we would have had Tansania, Kenya, Sudan. On the Atlantic side we would have had Ghanda, . . . We would have all these Atlantic

countries, African countries. And the Soviet Union would never have gotten in there. But I think we missed the ball somewhat. Now the Soviet Union is approaching, is getting in there. And it's going to be at our expense, eventually if we don't wake up, you see. And now I just hope that we can recover the ball in time, because I would hate like the dickens to see the Soviet Union ruling the kind of influence over the African continent that would sort of bar us out, push us out. And there's no reason for it. We've got the talent. We've got the money. We've the technology and we have every damn thing to be first in Africa, not the Soviet Union. But that's what the situation is today. I can only hope for the sake of my adopted country that we'll get out of it. And one of the things, incidentally, I believe up to the time of Kissinger, our legislators in Washington Senators, primarily those from the southern part of the United States, has always thought in terms of color. And that is, the Africans are black why do you want to be bothered with them for. Now as I see it the question of racial bias could be a very dangerous thing. We see in our own country what happens. And to extent that, let us

say the continent of Africa, isn't going to help us. We have to think in terms of what's best for this piece of real estate that we're living in. We've got to keep that in mind. So if you can get a black friend in Africa to stop Russia from. . .we'd do that. I mean selfishly. What the hell do we care about color. I mean we want to protect the U.S.A. and if it means going to Africa and getting friends there and helping them to build up to stop the Soviet Union, we'd do that and forget this childish idea because God made you this color and. . .I think it's alot of nonsense. I mean I can understand certain biases, of course. We're all human subject to these things. But don't ever let it get the best of you. Because when you permit that then you're in trouble. I don't mean alone, personally, but the nation. But I'm happy to say in conclusion of this discussion that I've seen a great deal of improvement in the United States since I first landed here in 1920. I've had my experiences. I've been denied jobs, denied eating here, denied. . .but in the . . .we've done a pretty damn good job. We've got alot to do and still a long way to go, but we don't,. . .we don't have to be ashamed of what we have achieved in the

last 40 or 50 years. You know, we're gradually getting there. But it's going to be up to the individual, the American citizen. And I'll come back to the same idea that I expressed to you. This piece of real estate is ours. And God damn it, we're going to protect it with every thing we've got. And we cannot permit. . .yes religion, race. You talk about race, I said to a chap once, oh he was a great Christian, very Catholic and he was very prejudice, color prejudice. So I had him in the office one day and I said to him, look John you're a Christian, right? Of course I am. I said, you believe in God? You bet I do. But do you believe that what ever God has done is the correct thing, that He knows what he's doing? Sure. I said, well how come you hate this person because he is black? Don't you think God made him black? Don't you think He knew what He was doing when He made him black? He said, well. I said, no well. Either you believe in God and believe that what He did and is doing is right or don't call yourself a Christian. I said, I prefer to deal with an atheist than a hippocrit. . .The point is he would go to church on Sunday. . . But we don't seem to realize that the man that we're supposed to be worshiping and respecting,

He's the guy that made the black people, the brown people, the white people, the different colors of the flowers, and things of that. . .He did it. So if you don't like, if you don't like me and I don't like you, don't argue. Just say to Him, look fella You didn't know what the hell You were doing. It's as simple as that. So you can't have it both ways. Either you believe in Him and His works or forget it.

SEIU
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview with:

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Local 32B, NY
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II Arthur Harckham
Local 32B, NY
May 2,3 1977
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ARTHUR L. HARCKHAM

President Emeritus, Local 32B-32J, SEIU

President Emeritus, Greater New York Council 11, SEIU

President Emeritus, New York State Council, SEIU

President of the Eastern Conference, SEIU

Vice President, New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Vice President, Union Label Service Trades, State of New York

Board Member and International Representative, SEIU

Board of Directors, Freedom House, New York

Board of Directors, Verrazzano Institute of Justice, New York

Board of Directors, Vera Institute, New York

Trustee, Building Service Pension and Welfare Fund

Joined SEIU Local 58 in 1930, Starters and Elevators, New York City

President of Independence⁺ Building Service Employees 1932-1934

Merged with Local 32B, August 4, 1934, elected Executive Officer

Retired February 1975. To date, served forty-seven years in labor activities.