James Rademacher

This is Mike Smith talking to Jim Rademacher on November 16, 2009, in his home in Roanoke, Virginia. So your first office was when you were elected in July '46, station representative of Branch 1. Is that correct? I just want to make sure I have this correct.

A: Yes. Right.

Q: And then you became a delegate to Detroit and Wayne County. This would be for the Detroit AFL-CIO, and for the Wayne County Federation of Labor.

A: That's correct.

Q: And then -- your first job -- so I'd like to start from this point again. So you're elected secretary of Branch 1 in 1949. And this was -- was this the moment where they said to you, "Well, we're going to have a caucus," and you said, "What's a caucus?"

A: I was ambitious, and we had a convention in Miami in 1948, and I went to one of the charter members of Branch 1, Henry Hoeft. I asked his advice. I said, "How do you get ahead in this union?" He said, "Well, they're going to have a caucus when we get back." I said, "What is a caucus?" And he told me to just bring down a few friends to the meeting that sets up the slate for the next term. So I did what he suggested. I took down a few friends. My whole station. They were friends.

Q: (laughs)

A: There were 105 people at the caucus. There were 35 from my one station. I had no problem in becoming elected secretary of Branch 1.

Q: Now, at this point, though, Jim -- and one of the things I wanted to go back over, so -- maybe our technical difficulty is fortuitous here -- so, you asked Henry Hoeft: "What does one do to get ahead?" So at that point, you had made a decision that you wanted to work with the Union, and you wanted to move ahead.

A: Let's say, facetiously, I no longer wanted to be the rear end of that donkey in the Labor Day parade.

Q: (laughs) The donkey -- you marched in with your friend.

A: I wanted to move ahead in the Union. I was ambitious.

Q: Yeah, what was behind your ambition? You obviously made a conscious decision that the Union was for you, so to speak. Could you talk a little bit about this?

A: I had a family to support. And another child on the way. And I was getting nowhere on low postal pay. In those days, when I came back from service, I became a regular at 1700 dollars a year. And that's not very much money if you've got a family. So I was ambitious to move ahead -- not necessarily financially, but some kind of activity that

keeps me going and can lead me to something. Which it did. And eventually, as you know, I became president[of the NALC. And there's a reward there -- not only from a personal standpoint, but from a financial standpoint, too. So that's what happened, and one thing led to another, and we'll get into how President William Doherty helped me -- that's very interesting, too. I guess, it boils down to -- I was ambitious because I had a family, and I wanted to keep moving. I just didn't want to keep carrying mail all my life. Nothing wrong with that, but if I could move ahead, I was going to move ahead. So I chose the union route.

Q: So then your first taste of union work was -- I mean, the administration of the Union -- was secretary of Branch 1. And that was for -- according to my records -- about a year. 1949-1950?

A: Yes. I was elected in 1948 to serve in 1949, and then in 1950, was the election for president.

Q: So you went from -- in a fairly fast track -- from --

A: Yes, I did.

Q: I mean, before the war, and before you joined the Navy in 1944, from being a career -- a substitute carrier -- a temporary substitute-- to within a couple of years, within four years, then, secretary of Branch 1.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then, you decided to run for president of Branch 1?

A: Yes, I did. When the president was fired by the McCarthy Commission for alleged Communist activity -- and this man was a Jewish lawyer. Senator Joseph McCarthy was out to get these people -- not only lawyers, but also, he was anti-Semitic -- is that the word?

Q: And what was the name again?

A: James Nonen. Nonen. And we fought -- we got every congressman in Michigan and two senators involved. The Postmaster General involved. But McCarthy said, "This is it. He's going to stay fired." So he did, and I ran for election, and I won. And Bill Doherty [President of the NALC], the greatest, installed me. And following the installation, one member came up with a beer in his hand, and words in his mouth. And he said, "Who are you?" And I said, "You just elected me. You just saw me installed." He said, "I didn't vote for you. I voted for your father," who was a letter carrier in Detroit. So I felt a little disappointed at that. I thought I earned the right to be president. But here I am riding again on my father's coattails.

Q: Maybe at this point, you could explain -- your father was a letter carrier. And then, a brother, too, I believe?

A: Yes. My brother joined the Army when he was 17. He lied about his age. He went out to Mount Clemens, and then he was shipped out, and he had the honor of serving as the staff sergeant under General Claire Chennault, with the Flying Tigers, in China, before Hawaii was hit in 1941. He was in the Flying Tigers doing business in China before this. So then, when he came back from military service, he became a letter carrier. And then, my wife's brother, James Rice, was a letter carrier here in Roanoke. And my brother's two sons were letter carriers out in Arizona. My brother's son's wife is a letter carrier today in Arizona. So it's a letter carrier family.

Q: Well, you mentioned Bill Doherty. Maybe we could speak about him at this time. That he -- you felt he was the greatest president of the letter carriers.

A: Bill Doherty was ingenious. He had so many ideas. And -- he got in there because of Detroit, and that's the reason I got promoted, I believe, from the beginning -- is that he felt he owed Detroit Branch 1 something. We were trying to have the incumbent national president retire because he was in his 70s. And we had no age restrictions. We had a referendum that Detroit sponsored -- it went all over the country, and we won by a few votes -- but we won. And the man's name that we wanted to replace was Ed Gainer. He'd been president for maybe 20 years. I think I already told you the comparison. My father started at 65 cents an hour in 1925. Sixteen years later, I received 65 cents an hour under Ed Gainer's administration. Nothing was gained financially -- nothing. So Branch 1 circulated the petition referendum, and we won, and Doherty took over in 1941 from Gainer. And immediately we started moving on pay, and in other areas -- he had ideas -- for instance, he sent the state police in Illinois to look for a congressman, once, to come to Washington to get his discharge petition on the floor of the House. In all things like this -- he was just a great leader. He was highly respected -- he was vice-president of the AFL-CIO. After I was installed, he called one day, and he said, "Would you like to represent us in Puerto Rico?" I said, "Mr. Doherty, I have never been out of Belle Isle,[Detroit's main park]" (laughs) He said, "Well, do you want to go, or don't you?" I said, "Well, I'll be happy to go." So that started me off. And then he appointed me to a Board to put in the health benefit plan with NALC, which is now 60 years old. I was on a committee of three that put that in, way back in those days. And then he recommended me for the executive board in 1952. And then I kept going up. Then, in 1954, we regionalized, and Doherty was smart enough to put a business agent in each region. He gave me Illinois, which covered Michigan at that time. And then he wanted to take care of an officer in Illinois, so he gave him the job and moved me to the Philadelphia region, operating out of Detroit. And then when I got to Washington, I operated the Atlanta region, because we had nobody. So I had been a business agent in

three regions. No other person can say that. No other person would want that. (laughs) So then Doherty kept moving me up, and moving me up, and supporting me all the way to the end. And that's how I became vice-president and eventually president.

Q: Would you consider Doherty your mentor, then? Did you work closely with him?

A: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely he was, yes. Absolutely.

Q: Well, let's step back a bit. Because we'll go through some of these times you mentioned again. So you're elected president of Branch 1. You're 29.

A: Yeah. The youngest ever. (laughs)

Q: At Branch 1. And then you hold this office for ten years.

A: Ten years.

Q: But during the course of it, you're also doing other stuff, as well.

A: National office.

Q: Right. So -- but how was branch president? You had that job for ten years.

A: I felt that these letter carriers were not just members; they were part of a family. I arranged with people -- for instance, at Olympic Stadium. Olympia. It's down now, isn't it?

Q: Yes, Olympia was torn down.

A: I arranged that any empty seats would be given to letter carriers. And I would stand at the door at Olympia stadium, and letter carriers came down there with their families and got in free to see the hockey games, the basketball games -- filling the seats that were empty. We had theater in the round over there at -- I think it's called Southfield shopping area. Theater in the round. And I did the same thing there -- with empty seats -- letter carriers filled them. I took care of the people. And that's why I kept getting elected. Not only that -- in those days, the only grievances that we were allowed -- because there was no Union recognition whatsoever, were - "we need straps." "We need lockers." And this was -- when we met with the postmaster once a month, this is all we talked about. If somebody got fired, they were at the mercy of management. There were no appeals procedures at all. Nothing. Until we finally, through John F. Kennedy, got Union recognition.

Q: So during this whole era -- you were president from 1950-1960 -- and, of course, for all letter carriers going back to 1889 -- there was no official union recognition --

A: No recognition.

Q: -- of NALC as the bargaining agent.

A: No, no recognition.

Q: So you're just a bit of a club, at this point.

A: It was pathetic, really, because -- well, I'll give you this example. When I was station

representative at Redford Station, the first case I had -- a letter carrier with 25 years of service had gotten written up because he mis-delivered a letter. The supervisor there -- I won't name him -- he gave him a week's suspension for mis-delivering a letter. Well, having been on the service only a few years, I still respected efficient delivery. On the other hand, I thought one mistake in 25 years -- they should say, you're sorry, and get on with it. Well, he insisted on one week's suspension -- so I went in to him, and I said, "Mr. So and So -- do you honestly believe this man should get a week off because he mis-delivered a letter?" He said, "We've got to have good service in this station." I said, "Is what he did any worse than you did when you ordered the maintenance man in this post office to go down in this cellar and burn all the A&P ads at Christmas? Was that any worse?" He says, "I don't think that man deserves a suspension."

Q: (laughs)

A: And he did have those circulars burned.

Q: Well, tell me about that. What do you mean, burned the circulars?

A: In those days, we had a furnace down in the basement. And because Christmas mail was so heavy -- in comes the A&P circulars and the supervisor decided to get rid of them.

Q: Which are supposed to be delivered to every home.

A: Supposed to be delivered to every home. They were not addressed. And he ordered the maintenance man to throw those things in the furnace. So I had him. Now, another thing he did -- to show how anti-union these people were -- we had a merit system, where carriers are rated every six months. They were judged on attendance, on appearance, and so on. Quality of performance. And you were given 50 merits, or you were given demerits. If you got demerits, you wouldn't get your annual pay raise. Regulars got a pay raise every year for three years. In fact, it was sad -- you had to wait 21 years to get the top pay. That was one of the reasons for the strike, which we'll talk about. So this supervisor -- when I became station representative -- on my first writing, he gave me 100%. I never got 100% all the time I was there. I was in 85 and 90 percents range. I was not a perfect carrier. And maybe I didn't dress to suit him, but he gave nobody 100%. But when I became station representative, I got 100%. I thought, "This is strange." So one day I went down to read my personnel file, and there was a copy of that particular quarter. And it had 85% on there. What he had done was give me a copy that he did not send downtown, to try to impress me with 100%. That didn't impress me. Because we had grievances out there all the time, until he finally gave in. Now, we'll get into other things, I'm sure, but I want to be sure to tell you that I was ordered fired three times. We'll get into that sometime.

Q: Fired from this branch?

A: Yes.

Q: As branch president?

A: Yes. Yes. Three times.

Q: Well, now's the time. Let's hear them.

A: We had a supervisor at Joyfield Station who was miserable to carriers. A woman called in and said, "The wife of this carrier has been rushed to the hospital. Can you get her husband here?" He said, "Well, she's going to the hospital. She'll be OK. Let him finish his route." So I wrote an article in the branch paper that this man is sadistic. I got a letter of charges demanding my removal from postmaster Edward L. Baker because I called this man a sadist. I went over to the union lawyer, Wallace Temple, to prepare my defense. While I'm waiting for him, I looked on the bookshelf. This is an absolute truth. And there was a dictionary. And it was a Funk & Wagnalls dictionary, not Webster. And I turned over to the word "sadist," and what do you think it said? And it's in there to this day. "Slave-driving boss." I said, "Dear Mr. Baker, this is where I got the information to call him a sadist." I quoted Funk & Wagnalls. "Yours very truly." He tore up the charges. Number two. The Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield was an executive at General Motors in Michigan before he became Postmaster General. So he wanted to be in favor with General Motors and he ordered a lot of little three-wheeled vehicles with batteries. He brought them into Strathmore Station in the winter. Just try to get across the icy Grand River Street with a three-wheeler with a battery! You can't endanger employees this way. So I went to the newspaper, The Detroit Times, in business at that time. They had a big headline on the front page. Pictures. Management ordered them out of there, quick. Summerfield called Baker and said, "Fire this man. He's got no right to interrupt what we're doing." Baker said, "If I fire him, he'll become a martyr. He's in cahoots with the Detroit Times." (laughs) So he didn't fire me.

Q: What year was that?

A: I was president of Branch One in 1954.

A: And the third time. I objected to un-addressed circulars. The Union Resolutions Committee, in Cleveland in 1954, had a resolution, which they approved, that said that they would approve of un-addressed circulars being delivered by carriers. I got on the Convention floor, and said, "You're making postal pack mules out of letter carriers, and I'm opposed to this, and I hope this convention will vote it down." And they did. And Doherty shook his fist -- "You whipper-snapper." (laughter). But he loved me anyway. So the next day in the Wall Street Journal, on the front page, it says "Postal Pack Mules Out." (laughter) It mentioned this... so then, Mr. Baker was told again, this man is

interfering with what we're doing, and you've got to remove him. He said, "You remove him. I'm not going to remove him." In the beginning, Mr. Baker was rather hard-nosed. He'd only been in office for a month. It was customary for Branch 1 to give the postmaster a little Christmas gift along with other people. It was just customary. We're not trying to bribe him. So -- how can you bribe him if you have no rights? We didn't have any rights. So I left it on his porch -- a big basket of fruit. And I get home, and about 9:00, I get a phone call, says, "Come and get this package." I said, "You don't understand. It's just a goodwill offering. Just -- Merry Christmas." He said, "No. I don't want it from you." I went down and got it and took it to St. Francis Assisi Boy's School, and they loved it. The next year, he was more acquainted with us, and appreciated us more. We took him for a boat ride out to a little place to eat out here in St. Clair. And everything turned out fine. He treated everybody out there, and he turned out to be a pretty decent guy. It's all how you handle it. Especially if you have no rights. We had no rights at all. And not until John F. Kennedy was elected, did we have a union recognition. And that's a big story by itself.

Q: It's interesting, though, that you had to use extraordinary means, outside of the norm, that is. Such as going to The Detroit Times, and leaking this information.

A: Yeah, yeah. But I became a good friend of The Detroit Times. Because -- first of all, they're in opposition to any circulars being delivered. They want the ads in their own paper. (laughter) I try to maintain good relations with everybody. And I'm very proud that when I left Detroit in 1960, they had a farewell dinner, and every congressman from Lower Michigan, and two senators, were at that affair for me. And I'll never get over that. I was so humbled. You think, "Here these people are. They take the time out just for me?" But I tried to maintain good relations. People like Martha Griffiths. People like Soapy Williams. It just was amazing to me.

Q: How many members were in your branch?

A: 1500, at that time.

Q: 1500.

A: Yeah. Now, in 1949, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin come up with the idea of Muscular Dystrophy. Nobody ever heard of it. And they wanted the letter carriers to get involved. And they had a brochure to go to each house. Nobody knew what MD was. It was something new. So I thought that it would be a good idea for the carriers to deliver them, and then have a porch light brigade. At 7:00 one night, people turned on their porch lights and gave the letter carrier the contribution. Because the people didn't know what Muscular Dystrophy was, they give it to the letter carrier. You know -- they give them a couple bucks. So I went to WXYZ that night, and told people, "Now's the time

to turn on your lights." And I drove down Woodward Avenue, to my office in the Park Avenue building. I looked down the side streets and saw these porch lights on. I got quite emotional. To think that people would respond like this! We took in a quarter of a million dollars. Which -- today, is nothing to Jerry Lewis. : But it led the whole country, because of the way we handled it.

Q: At that time, it was a lot of money.

A: So, then, what do they do? They name me president of the local branch of the MD Association. (laughing)

Q: Sure.

A: I did that on the side. Didn't take any pay for that job.

Q: Are there any other accomplishments as president that are notable during your time as president of Branch 1?

A: Not in Branch 1. I can't think of any.

Q: So, at the same time that you're president of Branch 1, you're starting to branch out. So president of Branch 1 is your main job, but then I see that you were a member of the Letter Carriers Hospitalization Committee --

A: Three of us formed the Committee.

Q: Yeah, and that was -- tell us a bit about that. That was the first --

A: Yeah, we never had a health insurance. Everybody had Blue Cross, or didn't have anything.

Q: Right. Nothing was provided for you at this time.

A: No. No.

Q: What did you come up with on the Hospitalization Committee?

A: Well, we came up with a plan, and we were supported by other organizations. Other health organizations to get us started. And then we had offices in our NALC building. We had a building at the AFL-CIO -- the secretaries had a desk on the first level. They didn't even have an office. They were stationed on the first level. That's how bad off we were. And then we finally -- 1952, Doherty, once again, got the idea of a new building. And he went beyond that. There's so much to tell you. He formed a retirement center in Florida, which he called Nalcrest. It's still there. It's full. For less than 300 dollars a month, a retired letter carrier could stay down in Florida for the rest of his life -- and they do. It's a beautiful place down there. That was Doherty's idea. We got the loan for the building from the Teacher's Union in New Mexico. For 4%. They kept wanting to know, in recent years, "Don't you want to pay that up?" No. We paid it up in 1982.

Q: But this is in 1952.

A: 52, they started. Yeah. We built it. And then, for a while, we didn't get enough interest down there. And meanwhile, the clerks -- the Federation of Clerks -- built one beside us. They went into bankruptcy and they sold it. We didn't. We just kept plugging away. When Doherty left, the new president, Jerome Keating, was not interested in Nalcrest, because it was Doherty's pet project. So he wanted to sell it. I advised him, "This is political. You've got people down there representing branches from all over this country. Don't sell it. Let's just subsidize it." Well, he went to somebody, and told them about it, and that person had a customer to buy that place. We had to pay that person a big reward for finding a buyer which we didn't use. We kept it. He also told me, "We don't want to be involved with Muscular Dystrophy. I don't think it's fair to have one particular charity." I said, "Well,I can I handle it?" He said, "Well, if you want to do it on your own, OK, but don't implicate us." So then, I was the representative there, and Jerry Lewis opened up a television station in New York, where he had his annual telethon. But he only took in a million dollars. Today, it's over 100 million each year. One year, I invited every postal union around the world to send us a uniform. So every hour on the hour, I would dress up to a different uniform -- this is a Norway letter carrier giving you money for Muscular Dystrophy. A British letter carrier. A German letter carrier. Every uniform from all over Europe. Problem was, some of the pants of those guys fit above my ankles, and some of them wouldn't even fit around my waist. (laughs) But it still -- it caused Jerry Lewis to have a little joke on it all. But I kept the NALC involved in MD. And today, this year, they gave two million dollars. And we just had a bowl-a-thon for them that NALC President Fred Rolando sponsored. And they raised several thousand dollars for next year. So those are things that happened along the way. But when I became an officer in Washington, the president, I did become chairman of the Government Employee's Council. And I was a member of some group in New York that wanted clean literature. I forget the name of it.

Q: And then -- another thing I have listed is the National Sick Benefit Association Board of Directors. Is that an extension of the Hospitalization Committee?

A: We've had it since 1900, a life insurance office. We have a full time officer there, with a big staff. They're worth probably a billion dollars right now. And every letter carrier has a chance to get their life insurance, an annuity, or whatever they want. And there's no middle man, no profit. It's very reasonable. And I have it myself.

Q: And then -- the next step, in 1957, is, you're a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers Executive Board. However, there's also a little incident in 1957. I don't know if this is before or after you're an Executive Board member, where you sued the Postmaster General over Saturday hours. The Postmaster General was thinking about

wiping out Saturday delivery.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you sued him from Branch 1?

A: Yeah. And they ruled that we had no authority to do that. But that made them all the madder. They just hated me. But I didn't become president to just sit there, you know? My people were being affected and I did what I could.

Q: But this gave you national exposure?

A: Oh yes it did.

Q: Did you get support from the national board on this?

A: No, no. They didn't want to get involved in it.

Q: Is this before you became an executive board member?

A: No. That was in '57. By that time, we were all business agents. But let me give you a little anecdote here. My first meeting as a national officer. We meet -- we had dinner -- every night of the Executive Council meetings, we had dinner at the Hamilton Hotel in Washington. And I didn't know the difference. I went up -- they had a head table, and then they had side tables. I had the first seat beside the head table, because I wanted to hear what's going on. So the head of the MBA -- the life insurance group -- national officer from Omaha stood behind me. And Doherty said, "Why are you standing up, George?" He says, "This whipper-snapper better find out his place. It's not at the head of the table. He just got on the Board, he belongs at the end of the table." So (laughs) I walked down to the end of the table and he sat down in that chair. That was his chair. I didn't know the difference. (laughs) Sometimes you learn the hard way.

Q: Yeah. So then -- you know, during this period, from 57-60 -- actual, until 62 -- you're also Field Director for Chicago region?

A: Chicago.

Q: And Philadelphia.

A: Right!

Q: And Atlanta. Not all at once.

A: No. No, no.

Q: Why don't you explain a bit to us?

A: I was a business agent -- at that time, they were called a field director. They handled all the grievances without any recognition-- without any, any rights. They still tried to handle grievances. You had no one to go to. You were at the mercy of the postmaster. But any grievances that took place in the state of Illinois, or the state of Michigan, would come to my desk. And I would try to handle them, solve them. And then when President Doherty wanted to appoint another officer in the state of Illinois -- his name

was Edward Benning -- then they gave me the job of representing the Philadelphia region. So I operated the Philadelphia region, which consisted of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Anytime any of those people -- all those three big states -- had a problem, it would come to my office. And every now and then I would take a plane, or train, over to Philadelphia, where the regional headquarters were, and sit down and try to resolve grievances. I'd do that maybe once a month. I didn't become director of Atlanta until I became a Washington officer, because that was a side job. We couldn't afford another business agent. We didn't have the money they have now. When dues are only six dollars a year, per capita tax, compared to $400 -- that makes a difference.

Q: Big difference. So, you're a member of the Executive Board. And then you're a business agent for a couple years. Or -- Field Director, at the time.

A: We did our own work at home, but we are a member nationally. By doing that -- by being a member -- you're assigned to meetings around the country, to speak, represent NALC around the country.

Q: And then by 1960 -- all that we've talked about has all occurred within about a decade.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah. And then, in 1960, you get a new position, which is National Assistant Secretary Treasurer.

A: In Washington.

Q: Right. So you're on the Executive Council in 1960, but you're also National Assistant Secretary Treasurer. And for two years, Field Director for Atlanta. So you've got three jobs during those two years.

A: Yeah, yeah. I had more than that.

Q: (laughs)

A: I'll tell you about it, if you want to get into that.

Q: Sure.

A: First thing that happened. In 1960, John F. Kennedy was campaigning. He kicked off his campaign here in Detroit at Cadillac Square, on Labor Day. That's the way they used to do it. I met him. We talked about labor management relations. He promised -- he said he promised Bill Doherty, as soon as he got in, that he would have a union recognition order. And he did. But -- a lot of things happened in the meantime. I was running for national office in Washington. He was running for president in Washington. We both had something in common. I have some nice pictures that were taken of him, and you have a copy of one of them. So after that, then I got elected to the Washington office, and they assigned me -- well, the first thing that happened that people don't even talk about --

Q: Before we go there, you had to run for election to be National Assistant Secretary?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Assistant Secretary Treasurer. Oh, so even the assistants ran.

A: Oh yes.

Q: You ran on a slate with the Secretary Treasurer?

A: Oh yeah, with all the officers.

Q: I see.

A: But -- I say this critically, because I wasn't used to it. National officers were elected by proxy. We would have a meeting at midnight, the day before the election - at a convention. And the people with the proxy votes would come in and decide what the slate's going to be. You take an oath that nobody else would run. I didn't like that. Because I was always elected in Detroit. It's more fun running -- getting elected. So after I was elected national president, we stopped it. Now, my opponents think they did it. But I made the motion for the Executive Council -- let's put in an amendment that there will be one man, one vote. Well, the opponents then said they did it. Well, whoever -- it doesn't matter who did it. I didn't like the idea of a proxy vote. I wanted people to vote for me. Not just a few handfuls of people. I wanted to know I'm wanted. So -- we put the "one man, one vote" in, and it didn't do anybody any good for the first six years. (laughs) They were closing in, though. We'll get into all that. But, what people don't know and don't remember is that Bill Doherty was fired. Now, you wonder, how can a president be fired? The president of the NALC-- Ed Gainer -- in 1920, was fired by Postmaster General Burleson, and told to go home. He operated the union out of his home, because the Postmaster General would not allow any Union people to be off the payroll and have a national office. So -- Gainer operated from home while Burleson was the Postmaster General. That's how bad it got. But Doherty wanted Lyndon Johnson as president. So he signed a full page ad, along with many other people, supporting Lyndon Johnson.

Q: What year was this?

A: 1960... 1960. Yeah. When Kennedy was running.

Q: Right, OK.

A: And I'm surprised that Doherty did that, but the AFL preferred Johnson. But Doherty -- a very strict Catholic. And John Kennedy, Catholic. I thought they might want him, but he didn't pay attention to that. He wanted to go along with the AFL. So when the Civil Service Commission found out he signed that endorsement, they fired him. Under the Hatch Act, which was then in effect. It has been changed. You can not endorse any candidate as a government employee. They fired him. John F. Kennedy never paid attention to who

Doherty supported. And as soon as he got into office, he told the Civil Service Commission -- drop those charges. And they dropped them, quick.

Q: (laughs)

A: And then, as promised, 1962 -- John F. Kennedy issued a famous executive order -- 10988, which allowed for union recognition,[for postal employees], providing that postal employees voted for a specific union. You had to have that. We could not get union recognition until we got rid of dual charters -- another very serious subject.

Q: Explain, please.

A: There were a lot of black members in the South who had their own branch. As more white members became letter carriers, they wanted their own separate charter. So we had as many as 12 dual charters.

Q: Based strictly on race?

A: They worked together side by side, but when they had a meeting -- it's not only because they didn't want to meet together. They couldn't. The law.

Q: Well, much like different drinking fountains and different restaurants.

A: Oh yeah. Yeah. So I was assigned -- if we're going to have union recognition, we can't have the dual charters -- go to each of those cities and settle it.

Q: Is this in 1962?

A: 1962.

Q: So you personally were --

A: I was Assistant Secretary.

Q: And you were charged with --

A: Go down and do it.

Q: Handling this.

A: Yep.

Q: That's a huge -- huge --

A: The first one was Atlanta, Georgia. We couldn't meet anywhere except in a federal building. We walked in there, and then the whites were on the left, the blacks on the right. I said, "Now, close the door. We're not leaving here until you get over there, and you get over there. And that's it. If you want a Union -- if you don't want a Union, go -- now -- get out." I talked -- told how important it was. We fought hard to get this executive order. We don't want to lose it. We don't want you responsible for us losing it. By midnight, they're together. It's one of the best branches we've got, today. And it's led by a black man.

Q: That's the Atlanta branch.

A: Yes. The Atlanta branch. It wasn't so easy. The worst one -- you wouldn't believe.

Baltimore, in my opinion, is North. They gave me the hardest time of all.

Q: Is that right?

A: They gave me the hardest time of all. But they had to merge. Because -- if they want a Union, you go along with it. If you don't -- forget it.

Q: And Kennedy -- this was the basis for this action?

A: Absolutely. Only if you prove it.

Q: Only if you prove -- you get rid of the dual charters --

A: 90%. 90%. But we had opposition. We had a group called the National Alliance -- of just black postal employees. And they were in competition with us. We were in competition with them. A lot of black carriers preferred them because they represented one race.

Q: But this National Alliance -- you're saying, is, a competitor to the NALC?

A: They didn't have many members, but they're still were a competitor.

Q: Still.

A: When you're looking for union recognition. And they thought they would go there. But not many left us. So we ended up with better than 90%, and we got the union recognition. Washington, D.C. also had a dual charter. Can you imagine? Two charters? The worst case I had -- I won't name the city -- but, the newspaper got a hold of the idea that I'm coming down there. We met down in the basement.

Q: The basement of the federal building?

A: No. Of a man's house.

Q: Ah.

A: Somebody said, "Look out on the lawn." A cross was burning. They drove me through all the alleys, back ways, to get back to the airport and get out of town quick. So I did. But that was the worst, as far as my personal being was concerned. But I'll tell you -- being from Detroit, where my own my letter carrier was a black letter carrier, we had him in for coffee and Coke, whatever he wanted, on a hot day. He was a good friend, he was George to me. And as little boy -- you know, we loved him. I'm not used to this. When I get off the airplane in Atlanta, I couldn't believe what I saw. Whites only. Blacks -- water fountain. Black, white. I couldn't believe it. It was an education. And then, after seeing that, and then to go to the meeting and try to get people together. And the law says you can't get together. It's not their fault.

Q: The state law.

A: Yeah.

Q: See, that's something that is sort of lost on a lot of people today, I think. I grew up in the 60s, so I have some memory of protests and student protests, which is quite a bit

removed from what you were doing. I think people today forget about how that was. Because you had to worry a little bit about your physical safety at certain points. And just the different cultures -- trying to pull them together. But -- so you were the point person for all the entire letter carrier craft.

A: I had to go. Yep, I had to do it.

Q: Well, this couldn't have hurt your reputation nationally, within the letter carriers.

A: No. They all knew me then. And when it came time to elect me president, they knew me. In 1962, Bill Doherty retired, and Lyndon Johnson took over when Kennedy was killed. Lyndon Johnson appointed Bill Doherty Ambassador to Jamaica. Which is a wonderful appointment. He was the first ambassador to Jamaica.

Q: That's the second Union person I know who was an ambassador. Leonard Woodcock -- was the --

A: Oh, Woodcock.

Q: Right. First ambassador to the People's Republic of China.

A: China. Oh. That was a good deal.

Q: Yeah, still, I did not know that a letter carrier president was...

A: So in 62, then, when Doherty retired, I became vice president.

Q: Were you elected vice president?

A: Yeah. Well, proxies, again.

Q: Proxies, right.

A: But I had happened to be in the chair because Jerome J. Keating, the next president -- moved into the presidency Doherty stepped back, and let Keating run the next election. So then I'm next in line, and I have to ask for nominations. So I said, "Nominations for president." Guy in the balcony raised his hand. I should've known better, but I just called on him. "I nominate Jimmy Rademacher president." I said, "Oh, gee. (laughing) Oh no." I look at Keating -- "I didn't do it. I didn't..." (laughter) I said, "Thank you. Thank you for the honor. But I respectfully -- I respectfully decline. So then, the next motion was Keating, and that was unanimous, and that was it. Well then, in Boston in '68, when I became president -- there were no problems. But they were getting a little bit ambitious for recognitions for more money and other things. And we'll get into that. That's when the strike took place. We'll talk about that again, but -- what's next on the agenda?

Q: Well, tell me about your time as vice president. Now, you say you were elected by proxy, so representatives from different branches vote. Not a direct membership vote.

A: Yeah. For instance -- in Michigan, I had the proxy votes for everybody that could not afford to go the convention. I might have had 200 proxy votes. And it was the same way

it was with all the other officers. Every officer had a lot of support, or he wouldn't be in office. But I still want somebody to say, "I want you."

Q: Direct member vote.

A: Yeah. On the other hand, Doherty opposed that. And, some of the logic makes sense. The incumbents have the advantage. It would cost a half a million dollars for anybody to campaign for president of this Union. Half a million dollars. Once you're in, that's it. You've got to get to the membership. And the postage alone -- you've got to get to everybody's home. So that's the bad thing. The good thing is that every member has a right to vote. They don't do it, you know. We might get a -- might even get 50% if we're lucky. But you'll offer them an opportunity. I favor that. So there's two ways to look at it. But when I became vice president - I automatically became editor of The Postal Record. This is when my journalism experience took over. And I tried to do too much. I know that now. But I didn't know it then, because --

Q: As editor?

A: Yeah. Well -- as president, also. I did -- I tried to do too much. And today they've got dozens of people around headquarters that do all these things. I had nobody. Imagine taking a 100 page convention proceedings -- read a proof, and paste it up, and still do the job of vice president. It's tough.

Q: That's a lot of work.

A: I should never have done it. But I had the experience, and -- you get to feel that you're the only one that can do it, you know? And it's -- when I retired, a guy gave me a song that Sinatra sent to me -- an autographed song. "I Did it My Way." And I did. And as president, you like to do it your way. You like to get advice, but you like to do it your way. That's why you're the president.

Q: That's why you were elected.

A: That's right. So, I did a lot of things my way. And that's where I got caught up, when I met with Nixon, and I didn't communicate properly. That's why a lot of people opposed me. But that's a long story -- we'll get into that.

Q: Yeah, let's save that for a little bit, because -- what we've discussed so far this morning is working up to you being president. So you're national vice president. And then, at the same time, you're editor of The Postal Record.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then --

A: So then -- while I'm on the Record -- The Postal Record had the same cover from 1900 until 1945.

Q: (laughs)

A: The same cover. And it was sent to every post office, not to the home. So what does that mean? "Hey, I saw that last month. Don't even bother picking it up. Can't be bothered with it." We didn't have the readership that we should have had. When Keating took over, he changed the cover every month, so that people will think it's a new issue and look at it. And then he decided to mail it to their homes. That's where it belongs. Not in a bundle in a station where you're working. You're not looking at that. You're trying to deliver the mail. Then I became the editor, and did the best I could. Today they've got a regular staff. And it's a lot improved. But -- one thing about The Postal Record. And I don't know whether I started it or not. We allow everybody to speak out. If they don't like what's going on, they say so. And it's printed in there. You saw that -- that article I just read. There might have been a time when they wouldn't print such a thing as that. But they printed -- they print any -- there are articles in there against the incumbent president. But -- that's democratic. I believe in that. If you're afraid of it, well, get out of the business. So that's another story. The articles can come in from any branch. The scribe is appointed -- he can write anything he wants, but no foul language. And that's got a democratic tone.

Q: So, you're the national vice president for six years. And then -- I noticed, though, that you were editor of The Postal Record throughout your presidency as well. Which is interesting. You kept control of the, the main organ for the NALC.

A: You think it's interesting? How would you like to print something that blasted you?

Q: (laughs) Did you? Did you publish issues blasting yourself?

A: You're supposed to limit it to 300 words. And my friend, Vincent Sombrotto, insisted on 600 words. And the only thing I could do was print it smaller. Smaller type. And then he blasted me for printing his article in smaller type. (laughter) But I printed it -- it was an attack on me, constantly. But that's all right. You know, if a carrier has an objection, and he doesn't see somebody else objecting, he wonders what kind of democracy is this? But if you print something that's against you, then the carrier says, "Oh, they're taking both sides. Good. I believe in that." You know. It's the only way to go.

Q: Well, let's wrap up national vice president. Were there accomplishments during this era that you're particularly proud of? Or battles, or -- what did it mean to you to be national vice president?

A: Well, actually... we had no right to negotiate. And actually, the vice president just travels around the country representing the president. That's all. I'm assigned -- you know, you answer mail, and handle grievances. That's another thing about the NALC, is that if you got a serious grievance in those days, before we had stewards and business

agents -- you would pick a national officer to take a complaint to Postal headquarters, and try to settle it. Because there wasn't any procedure, We were just at their mercy. So you have to settle things locally, because nationally, it's very difficult. People were fired, and no appeal, nothing. That's why this Postal Reorganization Act is so important. And we'll get into that. How it's so important to the carrier today.

Q: At the same time, or shortly after you became national vice president -- that's when the NALC also gets union recognition from the President of the United States.

A: From John F. Kennedy.

Q: Right.

A: In 1962 we got the union recognition and NALC had some kind of tentative agreement, but no final appeal. They set up a Board to listen to grievances. But the Board was appointed by the Postmaster General, so what do you get? That's what they tried to do in the Reorganization Act. Let the Postmaster General's Board decide your grievances. We now have binding arbitration.

PART II

Q: OK, we're about to start part two. Mike Smith with James Rademacher. On November 16, 2009. At Jim's house in Roanoke, Virginia. We've spent a considerable amount of time this morning talking about your rise to a national office. And at this point in 1967, you are vice president for the National Association of Letter Carriers. So what I'd really like to hear about now is how you became president. The election, the campaign, and just how you became president.

A: Well, Mike, the president was Jerome Keating. And he decided in 1967 not to run for reelection. So, I think we've discussed the proxy system, which I did not care for, because I wanted people to vote for me, not by proxy. And it's also good to have 200,000 votes behind you. Gives you confidence. So I was elected by proxy, because we saw to it nobody else ran. That was changed as soon as I took presidency. So, the mood of the convention was like it has never been, ever, since 1889. Even though our forefathers -- letter carriers -- were concerned about overtime and working 12 hours a day and so on, we still, I still believe, that the 1968 convention was one that's been most noteworthy of all, because they came to that convention loaded -- for bear.

And they had two resolutions that were the first to be considered. One was to look into the possibility -- feasibility -- of the right to strike. And the second was to eliminate from the civil service employment records, a statement that every letter carrier had to sign that says, "I hereby state -- that I will never assert the right to strike." Those are two resolutions. When I took my job as president in Washington in 1968, I immediately started to see if we couldn't get those resolutions adopted. The

right to strike was very difficult, because it was a historic federal policy. But we immediately were able to win the elimination of the assertion statement, because, you know very well, Mike, that the Constitution of this country allows you to assert anything you want to assert. So the court knocked that out, and there was no appeal from the Civil Service Commission. So when we announced our victory, the members thought they had the right to strike. But it wasn't. It meant you no longer have to be stopped from asserting the right to strike. Which I asserted in June of 1969 before Congress. And one congressman said, "Send for the sheriff." That was facetious on his part. I told the Congress very clearly -- our members have reached a point that they can no longer sit still. That they're going to walk out any time unless you do something about wages.

Q: Now, this was 1969.

A: '69, in June.

Q: Right. And -- so, tell me about the situation for letter carriers at that time. You've just stated that letter carriers were going to walk out on their own. So what were the circumstances for letter carriers?

A: Many letter carriers, Mike, with families, were receiving food stamps and welfare checks. Imagine carrying the mail -- visiting every home in this country, and knowing that you'd be receiving food stamps or a welfare check -- is humiliating. Besides that, they were working two and even three jobs, and their wives were working. So there was no wonder that they were up in arms. And a comparison for you would be that a letter carrier's top salary was about 6500 dollars annually, after 21 years. And a comparison would be the man that collected the trash in New York earned $13,000 -- or, $7000 dollars more than the letter carrier. So it was no wonder they were upset. And that's the way it was throughout most of the nation. So we got that one thing taken care of, -- assert the right to strike. But then the rest of it -- we reached a point where we had every letter carrier calling in -- one station in New York, called in sick. They had to take leave without pay for their actions.

Q: This was in 1969, as sort of a pre-strike protest?

A: '69. As we're heading towards the strike. This was the first sign of it -- it was a strike by itself when they didn't show up on sick leave. So I had to settle that. And then I further warned Congress -- something's got to be done. So then, we put on a campaign that went into 400 cities. We had an ad made up, given to each branch, that said "Save Our Service." It had a picture of a letter carrier holding out his hand. And on a letter he was holding out, it says "SOS - 'Save Our Service' Notify President Nixon right away to sign the pay bill." The White House got 3 million letters. And on December 5 of 1969, I got a phone call from the White House, saying "We'd like to discuss

this with you. We got your message. When can you come over?" I said, "As soon as I hang up the phone." "Well, can we set it up tomorrow?" And I met with Charles Colson, who was the executive official with President Nixon. We went down in the basement of the White House. And --

Q: Was this the first time?

A: First time I've ever made contact [with the president], yeah.

Q: -- you've had contact.

A: Yeah. First time ever. And we went down to the basement of the White House, where there's a cafeteria. And Colson provided me lunch. And then he said, "Do you hear those footsteps?" And I said, "Yeah, I hear them." He said, "That's the president." I said, "Yeah, well, let me tell you. Last year I was up there, not down here. President Johnson had me for dinner up there last year. Now, let's go on from there." "OK, let's start from fresh." So we went through the bill that was proposed by the Postal Commission to Reorganize the Post Office. And we reviewed it. He said, "What's your problem with it?" I said, "I want a labor management program that gives us the right -- if you're going to deny us the right to strike, the alternative is binding arbitration. To me, you save money that way, and we're assured of an honest result of arbitration." He said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that. So let's put that in the bill." We talked about a few other things, including maintaining civil service status. Because our members were scared to death that they're going to be eliminated from civil service -- because they've got pensions built up, and everything else. He says, "That's easy. Take that." So what I did, what nobody knew -- I went to the Congress -- to the halls of Congress -- and I met with Congressman Morris Udall, who was the Vice-chairman of the Post Office Committee -- and told him everything that I learned at the White House. And he and I sat down and wrote the bill that was going to be presented from the result of my meetings with Colson. We didn't care what they did in other areas -- regulations of mail service -- that's their business. Our business is labor management. So each day I did that, and then I also went to the Senate Committee Chairman -- Gale McGee of Wyoming -- and we sat down in a little place I didn't know existed in the Senate basement -- a little room down there. We sat in there in privacy. We went over it all. And they were ready. Then, nothing happened, except other unions were very unhappy to know that I had a chance to go to the President of the United States.

Q: Other unions such as --

A: APWU [American Postal Workers Union] -- there were seven unions -- mail handlers. Truck drivers. Maintenance workers. They were all unhappy. Who am I? So Colson gave in and invited them to the White House, but on a different floor than the president. They never

got a chance to meet with the president. Well, Congress then stalled, and the Chairman of the Committee -- Ted Dulski of Buffalo, New York -- had a bill that he wanted to put in, which was different than the bill that we agreed to at the White House. And there were two people that were unhappy about me meeting at the White House besides the unions. One was the Postmaster General -- "How dare you go over my head to the president?" And, "How dare the president talk to you?" Well, the answer was that when President Nixon asked me "Why can't you discuss this with the Postmaster General?" I said, "Mr. President, I could, if he'd ever meet with me. He's been in office two years and refuses to meet with me." So Nixon called him a few of his favorite expletive words, and we discussed other matters. The second problem I had besides the Postmaster General was the Chairman of the Post Office Committee, who wanted his own legislation, for that credit. So we had problems there. I went to Buffalo to visit him. And took care of him nicely, financially, and also, all the beer he wanted in his bathtub in a motel. Walked through seven inches of snow at the airport in Buffalo -- and he agreed with me that he would use the Nixon/Rademacher bill, which provided for postal reorganization, which provided for collective bargaining. When he got back to Washington, he changed his mind. So we had to go through that. So then, things were getting worse. Nixon said that he was going to put a clamp on price increases -- all wage increases -- and our members felt that then --

Q: Across civil services.

A: All the way across, yep. So our members felt that let down again and I sent out a letter to every branch, and I said, "We've reached a point where I'm going to have to make a decision. And I want to know that I have your support." 400 branches answered me -- "You've got our support. There's a few in our membership that are National Guardsmen that are afraid of strikes, but other than that, we've got from 80%-100%. We're willing to do whatever you want to do." So I get a letter similar to this which has just happened -- just coincidence -- just happens to be from South Bend, Indiana. "We, of Branch 338, have voted unanimously to support you in any action that you may deem necessary." I had 400 such letters and telegrams in my hand. I put out a weekly bulletin that said, "Cool it." We're making progress." The House Committee then voted on a bill that Udall and I had proposed earlier, that allowed for a Federal Pay Commission to discuss federal pay, and go accordingly. I sent word to New York that that was happening. They got the same letter, asking for my support. And people got up at the meeting, which -- later on, the president of the branch and I said, were the SDS group, who were at that meeting. They took postal jobs, and they screamed out, "Strike, strike. That's not enough! Strike, strike!"

Q: (laughs)

A: So. Gus Johnson, the heroic president from Branch 36, said, "All right, we'll have a strike vote on the 17th, St. Patrick's Day." Lovely day to have a vote.

Q: March 17th. 1970.

A: And they took the strike vote. But, to me, that was a vote like the other branches took -- that they would give me support. They [Branch 36] didn't feel that way. They voted 1500 to 1000 to walk out! Now, bear this in mind. 2500 votes were cast. Out of 8000 members. It showed disinterest on the part of the rest of them. But it also showed 1000 said no strike, right? So it was 3 to 2 in favor of a strike, and they think this is enough to walk out. And they walked out at midnight, that night, after the votes. Gus Johnson, the president of Branch 36, called me at home, and he said, "They voted to strike by a 3 to 2 margin." I said, "Let it blow." And when it went, everybody thought this was part of my deal, and they walked out. Approximately 200,000 carriers around the country walked out. And they heard about it on the radio in their post offices -- they just thumbed their nose at the supervisors and walked out. They didn't care. Their job was at stake, they could go to jail. They didn't care. Because they reached this point of frustration. And I didn't tell you this, but when my father went from Ford Motor Company to the Postal Service, and my mother asked him why he did that, he said "For guaranteed security." And later on in life, my mother reminded him, it was guaranteed poverty. So that's what these carriers were living under. And I felt for them. I didn't know what to do, but on the other hand, when you're elected to serve, you either serve or you get out.

Q: You've brought us to the point where the strike started. So I have several questions here, so I'll try to ask them one at a time. One is - presidents of the letter carriers before you -- did they have access to the President of the United States -- or, if not access, did they work with the President of the United States, or just the Postmaster General?

A: No... Bill Doherty had access to John F. Kennedy. Jerome Keating was a very good friend of Lyndon Johnson's. But Lyndon Johnson gave Jerome Keating a heart attack because we were seeking a 5% pay raise, and Johnson called Keating over to his office and said because of the budgetary conditions in the country -- we used to be under the budget department -- it was different. Because some of the taxpayer's money went to subsidize the post office in those days. Not anymore. So he told Keating, "I can't give you more than 2%." And Keating had a heart attack right there.

Q: Literally had a heart attack right there?

A: Yes, he did. Yeah. So, that's the access we had to them. In 1952, when Eisenhower was

running, he came to our convention in New York. And he said, "Bill Doherty, if you ever run into a problem, I will not have you sitting on my doorstep. You come right in and tell me the problem." When he got into office, he didn't recognize Doherty at all, and he vetoed four pay raises of postal employees. That's how you could count on him. He was a great general. I don't deny that. But he was an unsympathetic President. And we took care of him in the 1954 convention, when my people in Detroit carried a casket down Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, symbolizing the dead pay raise. That was another reason why they wanted to fire me. (laughs) But, as far as access, that's the total access that they had.

Q: So, your two predecessors had met with presidents to a certain degree. But it sounds like you had -- because of the circumstances of the strike -- you had --

A: Well, because, 3 million -- Mike, 3 million letters influenced Nixon - "that you better call this guy up." Because people all over the country -- and, in fact, New York -- to all their credit -- New York said, "You send in a coupon, we'll put the postage on." They spent thousands of dollars in postage, out of the union money, to send letters to Nixon. So it was a wonderful thing, and it was the greatest effort we ever made, to do that.

Q: So you're negotiating. And you let the members know you're negotiating. And, you ask for their support through a letter. So then, at this point, the strike begins with Branch 36. Now, you've been talking with the president of Branch 36; give me a perspective regarding the role of Branch 36, New York, in the entire postal system. I want you, of course, to speak about the details of the strike -- but it begins in New York, sweeps the country spontaneously, which you've spoken about a little bit. So if you could give me a perspective on the power and role of Branch 36.

A: Well, you can imagine -- it went out all over the radio -- and by 6 AM, when carriers went to work, the radio, all over the country, was saying, "They're on strike in New York." And the people that I had sent letters to thought this was their signal. And they went out. But immediately after New York went out, Hartford, Connecticut went out. Brooklyn, New York, went out with them. And then, sooner or later, Detroit... San Francisco, Los Angeles... all over the country. Except down South. Down South waited for me to officially say, walk out. So they did not go out. Nobody in the South went out. Now, when that happened -- 7:00 the next morning. After the call at midnight, when I told them to let it blow.

Q: When you say, "Let it blow," you meant, let the strike go on?

A: Let it go, yeah. Sure.

Q: OK.

A: Because the -- what good would it do me to tell them to stop it?

Q: (laughs) But at this point, technically, it's not official.

A: No, it's not official. No.

Q: It's a wildcat.

A: It's a wildcat.

Q: Maybe one of the few true wildcats.

A: But -- when the Postmaster General called me in at 7 AM on March 18, he told me this: "If you do not get those people back to work -- I'll immediately discontinue the dues check off" -- which John F. Kennedy put in. On that subject before I go further…

Q: Sure.

A: We used to have to go around collecting dues. And it was hard to do. When the President of the United States vetoes a pay bill, how do you collect money from people that are hurt by that? It's hard to do. But they maintained loyalty and faithfulness in the Union, but they suffered four times during Eisenhower's administration. But when Kennedy went in, we got a dues check off. So the first thing the Postmaster General threatened me with -- "I'll immediately discontinue the dues check off. There'll be immediate discontinuance of the government's share of health insurance. There'll be immediate discontinuance of life insurance. The federal government will abandon its participation in the Civil Service Retirement Program. The Post Office will use every means on its command to punish, fine, and imprison leaders of the walkout. NALC will no longer be recognized as a union." That's the threat I carried with me when I left the Postmaster General's office.

Q: This is --

A: It was a bluff. That's all it was. So I sent word --

Q: At the time, did you believe it to be a bluff?

A: Oh, I looked very sincerely at him. (laughter) "Oh, yes. Well, I understand what you're saying." You know. So I immediately sent a mail gram to New York -- the post office was on strike -- but I sent a letter to New York, telling them to go back to work.

Q: (laughs) A letter that couldn't be delivered because of the strike. But you did your duty.

A: Yeah, sure. (laughter) So. So then, I called together branch leaders from 300 of the largest branches in the country, to Washington.

Q: How many branches were there at the time, do you recall?

A: 6,000.

Q: 6,000.

A: Yeah, but some of them had five or six members. They wouldn't come. They couldn't

afford to come.

Q: Sure.

A: But the 300 largest, that represented 80% of the membership, were there. At the Continental Hotel in Washington, D.C. So it's scheduled for 11 AM.

Q: What day?

A: On -- on -- I think March 19 -- two days after the strike.

Q: Two days -- second day of the strike.

A: Yep, yep. Give them time to get there. And it was due to start at 11 to allow people from the East Coast to get into Washington in the morning -- they didn't have to stay overnight. So at five minutes to 11, I went in the closet to get my coat on, and my secretary says, "The Secretary of Labor is on the phone." I said, "Oh, OK. Hello, Mr. Secretary." Mr. Shultz -- George Shultz -- Secretary of Labor. He said, "We'd like to meet with you as soon as possible to try to settle whatever the problem is." I said, "I'm sorry. I'm going to a meeting now to let you know what the problem is." And he said, "Well, can you let them know that we're ready to sit down?" And I said, "I'll tell them." I got on my coat, went to the meeting. I got up before them, and I said, "In this hand, I've got 400 letters and telegrams telling me they'll support whatever action I take. In this hand, I've got a message from the Secretary of Labor declaring he is ready to meet with us." A delegate in the audience arose and says, "I move we give you five days to settle this. We'll go back to work." It was almost unanimous. Because they didn't want to stay off, but they trusted me, that I was going to do something. So I left that meeting, and told them, "I'll be back at 1:00." I went over to see Shultz. He set up the motions for a meeting the very next day -- Saturday. I went back to the Schultz meeting, and said, "This is it. You got five days, and we'll have to have an answer." Well, I didn't negotiate on Good Friday. I refused to negotiate on Easter. It went beyond five days, and they were stalling, so I put out this message. I'd give this message to the -- the people on the other side of the fence. And also to my membership. This is addressed to "My Fellow Americans: I sadly report to you that negotiations which we were led to believe would lead to a prompt and substantial alleviation of the pathetic plight of postal workers has been ended in miserable failure. Instead of a wage increase retroactive to October of '69, which, according to the government's own statistic, is minimum necessary to enable postal workers to keep pace with the cost of living, and provide a decent level of subsistence for their families, the administration's final offer was a total of 6% retroactive to January. Accordingly, I call upon all postal employees, as of next Monday, April 6, to petition Congress and American public for a hearing of their grievances. Instead of delivering mail, address their congressmen. "On

that day, postal workers will demonstrate their solidarity and determination to obtain justice. There will be no picketing of federal buildings, no parades, no displays, only the customary postal employees will be lacking." Our demonstration will be accomplished with the utmost concern for needs of pensioners. The poor, the ill, and our servicemen overseas. Compassionate mail can and should be delivered by our members on their own time with agreement with postmasters. Each and every local union will meet on that day and on succeeding days to draft and send the appropriate resolution to their congressmen and senators, and to the press. In the meantime, each and every postal worker will visit available congressmen in person at home. Service will be resumed when you, the American public, so will it." I didn't have to issue that statement because when they saw that, we sat down and said, "Let's get it settled."

Q: When you say "they" saw it, you're speaking about the government.

A: The Secretary of Labor.

Q: Right. Now, what was the Secretary of Labor's role in this? Because you're dealing with the Postmaster General. That's who you negotiate with. And there's the Commission -- so what was the Secretary of Labor's role, jumping into this?

A: Nixon didn't want the anti-union postmaster general, Winton Blount, to get involved at this point.

Q: This was the Postmaster General.

A: And he never met with me for two years. Nixon didn't want him involved, because he knew what would happen. Threaten to get back to work or go to jail. Because -- we don't want that. We want to sit down to talk. So Nixon assigned Shultz to it and said, "Keep the Postmaster General out of it." So we sat down, and talked about -- first of all, we did not accept reorganization as Nixon and I agreed. We only wanted a pay raise. Nixon waited patiently, and then finally he said, "I'm going to have to order the Army in." I said, "Give me one more night." It's in the history books that the Army -- I've read it in their report -- it says they held up in New Jersey because of the request of the president of the Letter Carriers Union, hoping that they'd go back to work. They didn't go back to work. So they -- the National Guard went in to deliver mail, but they didn't know how. With due respect to them, they just couldn't case and deliver. So that fizzled. But New York would not go back. But because everybody else did, they gave in and reluctantly returned to work. Then George Meany got upset because I was on TV all the time. And he sent James Gildae, his assistant, to the meeting of the unions. At the meeting, Gildae got up and says, "You are off TV." I said, "Who are you?" And he told me and I said, "Doesn't make any difference. This is a letter carrier's strike, and we're going to settle it ourselves. If you want to assist us, we welcome all the

assistance we can get. But I'm not getting off TV. I'm telling the public our story." So he settled down, and then we got together as to what we were going to do. Well, then it came to the fact that they were going to give a 6% pay raise to all federal employees who didn't strike. I said, "That's not fair." So they said, "How about buying postal reorganization for cash?" And I said, "Well, let's talk" -

"Let's talk about it." "Well, we'll give you an additional 6%." And Meany said, "How does that sound?" George Meany -- the head of the AFL. I said, "It doesn't sound good." "Well, why doesn't it sound good? It's better than nothing." I said, "It doesn't sound good because it sounds too close to the 6% they gave to those other federal employees. We've got to have at least 8." "OK." So we bought reorganization, which was what I was fighting for years, but I opposed it constantly because I said, "We're not going to give them this for nothing." So we got 8% in addition to 6%, which is 14%. But -- in addition to that, they agreed that no longer would a letter carrier have to go 21 years to reach top pay. We agreed on 8 years to the top, with the help of President Nixon.

Q: To go from the lowest rate to the top rate.

A: That's right. Can you imagine waiting 21 years? You're almost ready to retire, and you're finally getting to the top step? Ridiculous. So Nixon agreed to that, and they agreed in the meeting. So we go back, then, to the Nixon meeting, which -- that's the reorganization plan that included real labor management relations and it even included the Taft-Hartley act, and so on, which allowed the union shop if Congress approved of it. And that's when we had interference from some of our own members, telling congressmen we don't want it. So we lost it. We don't really need it because our union is powerful. We got 93% voluntary unionism. There's no other union like it in the country.

Q: That was the counter-argument.

A: Yeah. Now, now then, we start -- we agree on April 6. The strike was March 17. We agreed on April 6, in front of Meany, that we would accept it. We went to the White House, sat around a big table with Nixon. All the union leaders and labor leaders, congressmen from all -- sat around there and reached an agreement. Notified the press, notified Congress, we've reached agreement. Then we waited. Nothing happened. People in New York said they're ready to go out again. Gus Johnson, despite his friendship to me, brought a group down to Washington on May 15 to strike again. I said, "You do it and you're expelled from the Union. That's all." So they couldn't get any votes for another strike, because they knew we were doing the best we could do. So because of this anxiety on the part of -- especially New Yorkers -- I went to Congressman Arnold Olsen, of Montana, good friend on the Post Office Committee. And I said, "I don't want another strike. You don't want another strike. Do me a favor. Put a resolution before your

committee to make it retroactive to April 6, no matter when we get it." He said, "I can do that." He does it, and what do you think happened? You wouldn't believe what happened. George Meany wrote a letter to every member of Congress telling them not to vote for the retroactive pay because he was a member of the committee that agreed to the contract. When we went to the Hawaii convention the same year, there was a motion on the floor to get out of the AFL-CIO. I fought it. I said, "Don't take it as -- just because one man did what he thought was right." I said, "I don't agree with him, but he had principle. But we needed the money." So I said, "Don't -- it barely lost." The motion barely lost. We almost pulled out. So I had Meany come over and address the Board of Officers later on to settle things down. And it was a bad thing for him to do, but Congress didn't pay attention to him, they paid attention to us. That if they didn't give us retroactive pay they would walk out again, because we're not afraid. So we'll go back one minute to -- what Walter Reuther told me. After a veto by Eisenhower. I was on a plane going back from Washington to Detroit. And Reuther was sitting beside me. And he said, "You look depressed." I said, "I am. We've suffered the fourth veto of the pay raise." He said, "I'll tell you your problem. You've got to unionize your association." I said, "I never thought of that." Well, it took from 1954 to 1970 to unionize it, but we're unionized now. We've got a grievance procedure, we've got collective bargaining -- not collective begging - and we have binding arbitration. We've got a strong union behind us. We've got respect at the bargaining table, and we're far away from the $5500 dollars I promised Detroit in 1950.

Q: (laughs) What was -- how did Meany get involved in the first place? Because all of a sudden he seems to appear.

A: Because all seven unions involved were members of the AFL-CIO, and he felt they needed a spokesman. Now, besides Gildae, who incidentally, as soon as this was over, accepted the job as Assistant Postmaster General, which smelled, to me. But Meany got involved because he represented the seven unions. I didn't mind. He got in at the end, that's all, to make sure everything was OK. But he shouldn't have sent the letter, but he did, and...

Q: Sounds like he was somewhat jealous that you had a moment in the spotlight.

A: Well. The press turned to me because it was letter carriers on strike.

Q: Right. But Meany didn't like that?

A: No. For instance -- you mentioned -- we have mentioned, Moe Biller [APWU] once. Moe Biller had some of his people in California go on strike on Saturday and come back on Monday. Great strike. (laughs) But we were the people behind it, and the other union leaders just tore me apart for allowing it to happen. I said, it didn't happen.

Congress and the president and the situation has existed to let it happen. It's been happening for years. We've been under poverty. And now we finally have won something. And they won it with us. And they did very little to gain it. But I think the best stroke was the 8% for buying postal reorganization, which we benefit from, by having collective bargaining. See? I'm not saying I'm shrewd, but I'm saying it was -- it was a method of my madness from the very beginning. I opposed the reorganization constantly for various reasons. One of the most foolish things I ever did was a statement to Congress that the AT&T would take over the Post Office once they reorganized, and a corporation formed. One thing I did at the White House -- they were going to call it a corporation. We changed it to US Postal Service. We didn't want a corporation. No. So anyway, that's the story of the strike. It was successful, and today letter carriers are benefiting.

Q: But --

A: First thing we did -- excuse me -- first thing we did immediately after this -- we got the law passed that a letter carrier would reach the top step in 8 years. That was the first thing. That was November 1970. Then, we met in July of the following year, 1971, for the first contract. And there's a little brief story to that. We had reached a stalemate. We didn't want to go to mediation; we didn't want to go to arbitration. We wanted to prove we could settle it between ourselves. But there was nothing happening. It was my birthday -- July 18, 1971 [I was only fifty years old]. A knock came on the door. I opened the door and it was Bill Usery's assistant. Bill Usery was the Secretary of Labor after Shultz. He was a big help to us as a mediator. At the door was his assistant, who said, "Mr. Usery sent you a gift for your birthday." And it was a box -- I don't know if you've seen it before -- but it was a lot of laughter. And you open it up and you squeeze it and people are laughing hilariously. I opened it up and it just -- it was hysterical. Everybody got in tears, laughing. And finally the head of the negotiating team for the Postal Service says "What the hell, let's get this thing over with. What do you want?" And we said we wanted a 1500 dollar pay raise. "OK, let's get the thing over with." On my birthday. we settled it. Because at midnight, we were going to mediation. It was about 1:00 in the morning. We set the clock back. We laughed at the box. We settled it that night because of that little thing. That's another good story.

Q: That's interesting. Well, you said that you had opposed reorganization?

A: I opposed it from the very beginning because on the labor management end of it -- the first part of it, I didn't care about. I didn't care what they did about rates or whatever they want to do. But I cared about labor/ management relations. And the way

the original bill was written -- they provided that the Postmaster General shall appoint a committee of three, who will decide grievances. "I want none of that." None of that at all. That is what I worked out at the White House. That changed it. So...

Q: You opposed --

A: I opposed it, and there was a big headline in the newspaper. "Mr. Rademacher, see the wisdom of reorganization." Big headline in the Washington Post.

Q: This was after the strike?

A: Washington paper.

Q: Just after the strike, or before --

A: Before the strike.

Q: Before the strike.

A: They kept after me all the time, offering me -- another thing is this. Psychological. I don't want any credit for anything -- I'm there as president, I want to do what's necessary. But the Post Office wanted this badly. It started when the Postmaster General, Larry O'Brien, said, "There's no overtime at Christmas." That's ridiculous.

Q: When? When did he say --?

A: 1966. So the mail piled up. So then he comes to Congress and says, "We're having a lot of trouble. We've got to reorganize the Post Office." But he caused it. So we fought it in '66, '67, '68, and Lyndon Johnson put it in first. And then Nixon put it in second. The same thing, same language. And then we opposed it -- Keating opposed it, I opposed it, because we didn't like what they were going to do for the unions.

Q: So you're opposing the Congressional-generated reform. Yet you would have liked to have seen reform right along.

A: I wanted reform, but not that kind.

Q: Yeah.

A: It eliminated the Postmaster General from the Cabinet -- used to be in the Cabinet. It eliminated subsidies -- the Post Office could control its own cash reserves, cash money.

Q: This is the new --

A: The new Post Office.

Q: The Postal Service.

A: Everything was fine -- it needed reorganization -- but all I cared about was the labor management part of it. Until they treated our people properly, I wanted no part of it. And I was the strongest voice in Congress about it, and we had a vote -- the best vote we got was 17-6. Against it, because of NALC. Suddenly becomes 15-11, and I'm getting nervous. Because the Postmaster General was building post offices in cities of the Congressmen on the committee. I couldn't do that. I couldn't offer even a dinner to

them. We couldn't afford it. But he offered them a post office and we lost several votes -- and you'll find post offices around the country with the names on them, that he put up to get votes. We got to 15-11, I'm getting nervous. The final vote before I met with Nixon was a tie vote -- 13-13. I said, "This is it. We got to move or get off the pot," you know. "This is terrible." Because they're buying -- they're buying this reorganization. And they're going to show us. So I was eager to get reorganization, and to settle it before they settled it for us. And that's the way it ended. But we got our great labor management policy, with binding arbitration in lieu of a strike vote. Which is the best, I think.

Q: So the strike worked to the letter carriers' benefit, in your opinion.

A: Oh, no question about it. But -- but the reorganization did not result as a part of the strike. It resulted as part of our negotiations.

Q: After the strike.

A: Because -- it's my own fault -- I had taught our membership -- we don't want any part of this reorganization. And that's why they were mad at me when I come out of the White House and I put out a bulletin that these things are going to be in the reorganization. "Wait a minute, we didn't tell you to do that." So I got in a lot of trouble. And a lot of nasty things were said, at the time, about me. But sometimes you have to work secretly and privately to gain the benefits of the people you represent. And I did. Took the flack for it, but look at them now. $55,000 dollars annual salary top pay. You know what that means down South? That's another thing we have fought for years, is pay raises according to area. We do agree that Hawaii and Alaska -- get a 15% benefit, because it's the cost of living. But our argument has been, the mail sack has been just as heavy in Atlanta, Georgia, as it is in New York City. That's just -- not a very sound argument, when it comes to money. But anyway, everybody's satisfied now. Nobody's complaining, nobody wanting to strike. They're very happy. The two things that we put in the contract immediately -- to settle things down: One was the cost of living allowance. One of the reasons we were so poorly paid, and received such low wages, is the cost of living had soared, and we did not benefit from it, so we needed a cost of living provision. COLA, as it is known today, has meant more than $18000 annually to top grade carriers. And the second thing we negotiated was no layoff. But I didn't do it because of what's happening today. I did it because our members were fearful they would no longer be in civil service. And so we have two clauses in there today. That there will be no layoff of any employee. And an arbitrator upset that, and I'm very unhappy they didn't appeal the arbitrator's decision. Because he had no right -- the President of the United States declared that after 8 years, you're given top pay. The arbitrator

ruled after 12 years. I don't think he had any right to do that. But he did it in 1982. You have to have 6 years of service, now. So now, the Post Office's hands are tied. They can't lay off anybody with more than 6 years. And nothing they can do about it. Unless they want to go to court. The other thing -- as I told you before -- putting in that cost of living allowance -- they put a cap on it, of 166 dollars the first year. The second year, we won the removal of the cap. And now, as I told you, $18,000 since the start of this -- 1971 until now. $18,000 of the 55,000 is because of COLA. And that's really something. They'd have been without it. For myself, my civil service pension was 700 dollars a month in 1977. Because of COLA -- today it's 2700 dollars a month. 2000 dollars a month -- a month -- increase. We never got 2000 a month in 20 years. The other thing that has resulted from this: From 1925 to 1943 -- we realized, zero pay raises. From 43 to 70, we averaged 300 dollars a year, in pay raises. Since the contract, we've never gotten less than 1000 dollars a year pay raises. That tells you something. Now, another thing that we can't overlook, is -- part of the contract provided, in the first place, that the government would pay half of our health insurance. The first of the federal employees benefited because once we got it, they got it. So we did better. Then in the next contract negotiations, we asked for 75%. We got that. The life insurance is free. We don't pay for that. So, all those things have come along. And the new carrier today -- has a nice job, nice pay. They do not understand, where does this come from? The sweat and tears of the past -- where did it come from? We would have rallies in Washington. Congress would come there and say, "You need 10%. We support 15%." The Bureau of the Budget sends them a letter and says, "We're not going to pay more than 3%." So what do we do? I'll give you a little humor. One conference in Washington, where we're asking for a 15% increase, and congressmen coming there, saying, "We're going to give you more than that". So we adjourned for the luncheon period. And we always announced the caucuses that follow. The Illinois delegates will caucus at the Statler Hotel. New York delegates will be at the Sheraton Hotel and so on... The little guy stands up and says, "The two delegates from Utah will meet in the phone booth across the street." (laughter)

Q: That's pretty good.

A: No, we've come a long ways. I'll tell you. And the strike put us on the map. Not only with the membership, but with our fellow trade unionists. That we're a union now. Walter Reuther would be proud. Proud of the NALC, that we're a union, at last.

Q: So you were president another seven years.

A: Yeah.

Q: So obviously, as you've just described in good detail, the strike was a pivotal moment

for the NALC itself. And pivotal in terms of contract, in terms of being a real union, as you put it. So how did this affect your job as president during the next seven years?

A: Well, there were always people that find fault with the contract. But what has been overlooked, even until today, is that the threats that were made -- if I didn't call the people back to work -- and if they didn't go back to work. All those threats?

Q: From, the threats coming from the --

A: From the Postmaster General.

Q: From the Postmaster General?

A: Not from the president, but from the Postmaster General. None of them happened. They handed out a paper for us to fill out, that we would agree to a meeting to determine the punishment, the discipline that will be meted out when this is over. I tore it up right in front of him. I'm not agreeing to any punishment. And I talked to Colson to get to Nixon. And Nixon agreed, even when I was with him, there, that certainly those low pays, for the people that face the American public every day -- it's reasonable -- he said he didn't support a strike, but it's reasonable that we do something about it. And he said, "I'm not going to give anybody discipline." And out of the entire membership, one person was penalized and disciplined. He was told by a judge in Hartford, Connecticut -- the president of Branch 86 at that time -- "Don't you dare go back on that picket line." And he went back. They took his picture, showed it to the judge, and he got fined 2500 dollars. I wanted to pay that money privately. The judge told the striker, "It's coming out of your pocket." NALC lawyer said, "Don't get involved in it, for your own sake." So we didn't do it. I'm sorry we didn't do something ,take up a collection or something, because he's the only one out of all the thousands that struck that was disciplined that way. And I credit Nixon for that. I know -- you know, a lot of people feel differently about Nixon. But in my working with him, he was very reasonable. When you stop to think of this -- and I'm sure the union people think of this -- for what he did for us there, in that agreement -- and even in seeing me -- and then, after seeing me, had the people strike against him -- compare that with Ronald Reagan, what he did, when he fired 12,000 air controllers because he gave them so much time to get back to work and they didn't do it. And he took 12,000 jobs away. Compare that with Nixon's treatment of the NALC. And you can see -- whether or not you agree with Nixon -- that it was pretty fair of him, what he did. And I appreciated that, too. Now -- what did I do the next seven years? We've got an excellent contract, and that's another thing that's not understood. As we sat down from scratch, and wrote 36 articles to start this postal service -- 36 articles that they had to sign. Start from scratch -- that's what took so long. And as I said, it hasn't been changed since, except the pay raise figures that are in there. There are

a lot of memorandums of understanding, because things do happen that you don't expect when you write a contract. But the original language is still there. But then, every two years, I had to prepare for the next negotiations. And what do we do? What -- you know -- what do we need? What's the next thing? And I tried something that I mentioned at the convention -- that today's Postal Record shows -- no, another paper there quotes me, at this late date. But I wanted to get in a contract that a supervisor responsible for a grievance that the arbitrator sustains, should pay for that grievance. Then it wouldn't happen. Because the grievances are so petty today -- it's unbelievable. The UAW may have had major grievances, but they don't have the grievances we have today. Overtime -- we've got grievances right now, which are totally illegal actions of management- and the people doing it could even go to jail. Supervisors are erasing overtime, rightfully earned by employees. Today.

Q: They're erasing it?

A: They're erasing it. So -- there's a case in New Hampshire right now. They're going to get all that money back with interest. Back before I retired, some letter carriers in California were working more than 8 hours a day -- they'd come in and ring the time cards -- the supervisor would erase it and put the 8-hour ending time. We took it to the next level up, next level up. Finally got into arbitration. The arbitrator said, "Everybody in this country who finds a time card erased will get money." So rather than try to find out who they were, the Post Office gave everybody that applied for it millions of dollars -- I don't know how much -- 6 million dollars, maybe, involved because of that. That's what the grievance procedure we won did. Without a grievance procedure, what do you got? Handpicked people decide the fate. So that's where we are on the strike. And you can see the value of it.

Q: Yeah. Well, what'd you do with the rest of the seven years?

A: Well, every two years, it was negotiating. And then, again, my own problem of trying to do everything myself, including The Postal Record -- as president, of all things. I had a lot of grievances. I had going on what was called a pre-arbitration meeting with a certain member of management. And I'd go over there once a week. And I'd take some of the worst grievances we got, and try to resolve them. Some I lost because they had no merit whatsoever. Others I won. They put people back to work. But people that were involved in fighting with patrons or stealing the mail -- I couldn't support that. No way. So that's what I did with a lot of my time. And then, we'd have meetings. I was on the first council that was established by the Postal Reorganization Act. It was a council of 11 people which included union officials. I was on that. Then, after I retired, I was on the Postal Service Commission as the vice-chairman -- committee of

seven people. We went all over the country finding out, what's the mail service like? So that took some time. But during my seven years -- there was a lot to be done, to make sure everybody understood the contract. Our Branch officers had to then negotiate local contracts. And we had to observe and watch over that. And make sure that they get everything they're entitled to. But... you know, to me, it's not because I'm involved in it, but because it was the greatest, most accomplished thing since our 1889 history -- was the strike, and the result. Again, the people did not strike for reorganization, because I had put up such a fight against it. "Then why are you supporting it?" I had to tell them -- tell them why. And the average guy who doesn't get into trouble doesn't understand why I would want a sound labor management program. "What do you care about -- I don't get in any trouble." No, but a lot of people do. Not only that, but there's a word: "respect." When that station steward goes before a supervisor, there's got to be some respect shown. And that respect is the contract. That's it. And if he violates the respect to the contract, then we have a way of handling it, and doing business with it. So... that's -- makes a long story short.

Q: Well, I've got a couple other questions, here. One is -- during the strike itself. You had mentioned something to me about a bomb. Which -- well, tell the story. It's pretty interesting.

A: Well -- after the strike began, I was bombarded with telegrams and personal letters, threatening my life. I had a bodyguard for the whole time of negotiations. Some of them would even threaten my family. My wife was in the hospital as a result of that. I lived in a hotel as a result of that -- where nobody knew my number, except my wife. That's it. Threats came mostly from the public.

Q: Your wife was in the hospital?

A: She was -- yes.

Q: It affected her?

A: Yeah. Her nerves -- nerves couldn't take it. She didn't know about the threats, but she knew what was going on. On th humane side of President Nixon was an incident involving my wife's stay in the hospital. He arranged for his doctor to visit her. So I had a private room in a hotel, which only the top officers knew, if they had to get a hold of me at night. Now, what happened there -- the threats were not just by the membership, even though I was hung in effigy in Times Square, New York. And I made them all the madder when I said; "You could have at least put hair on that effigy." That -- they didn't appreciate. But the reason they were mad at me -- I didn't lead them. If I had led them, this would've happened, what I told you. The ten items the Postmaster General gave me. That's what would've happened. And he's that reactionary of a person. just as the

Air Controllers' union was wiped out by Reagon, NALC coukld have been out of business had I led the strike.

A: At least one or two of them would start taking place. So I let them hate me, and did the best I could. When I went in there to explain the contract, they started throwing chairs up there, and Sombrotto had to -- he was branch president then, he had to stop it.

Q: This is at Branch 36, when you went to speak to them?

A: 36, in New York City. He had to stop them from attacking me. And I had three large members-- 6'5 or more -- leading me on the way back to the railroad station, back to Washington. (laughs) But anyway. One day, a big package arrived at my office. And it had no postage on it. Well, in view of the threats that were made, I start worrying -- well, the Army was within ten minutes of my office -- in Washington. I called the Army Bomb Squad. They came in there -- within minutes they were at my office. They took the package down into a tank, and blew it up. They came up and told me, and I was never so embarrassed in my life -- it was copies of our own union publication, The Postal Record, which were undeliverable as addressed. All blown to smithereens. (laughter) I apologized to no end. And he said, "Well, it could have been worse. So don't worry about it. That's what we're here for." But that was the one (laughs) -- that was one threat that did not turn out to be a threat.

Q: But, it's understandable when you're receiving death threats.

A: What do you do? Yeah, when you're being threatened.

Q: And, I mean, if you look through union history -- I mean, there was a bomb at UAW headquarters -- there --

A: Oh yeah. Walter Reuther got shot.

Q: Walter Reuther was shot. His brother was shot. So, I mean, those are tough times.

A: Yeah.

Q: But it must have been kind of tough on you to have your -- having union members throw chairs at you when you're on the dais.

A: Yeah. At the convention, I had a bodyguard. But the funniest incident was -- maybe it wasn't funny, but it was at the Seattle Convention.

Q: What year?

A: 1972. After the strike. And my suite -- the Presidential Suite -- was on the top floor of the hotel in Seattle. So we visited all the various state convention dinners and came back. My wife and I got in the elevator. Got to our top floor. Open the door. And there's a Secret Service man on each side -- "Wait a minute, where are you going?" I said, "I'm the president here, and this is my suite." "Let's see some identification." I said, "Well, sure. Who are you?" "We're the Secret Service. Let's see

identification." I had to show identification, and then my wife had to show identification. I said, "Would you mind telling me what the problem is?" I said, "I thought you were a couple people after my life." They said, "Well, right down the hallway is the King of Jordan. "The King of Jordan is down there and waiting to buy airplanes in Seattle. And so we're watching to see who comes on this floor." I said, "Well, I'm not involved in that. Just let me go to bed." So it was the first time I ever slept with the Secret Service of the United States guarding my life. (laughs)

Q: Because you happened to be on that floor.

A: Yeah.

Q: But, I mean, this must have changed things for you as president, after the strike, threats and some displeasure of the membership. You stayed until 1977. But it was a rough time?

A: Yeah. Well, it got rougher, and we -- I got closer and closer in elections. Which I even permitted myself. I wanted a reelection. But I did not get around the country like my opponents did. Saying things, you know, that things could be better. But, like I told you earlier, that the people that said things could be better have not changed the contract. So -- they weren't too bad. When they looked at that salary -- but the salary isn't everything. Working conditions today are just terrible. My own letter carrier in this building has lost his route, lost his route -- because he didn't have enough seniority. Routes are now being divided. They're being pivoted. We used to get our mail at 10:00. You just saw the mailman pull up here -- at 2:00 in the afternoon, we get our mail. Because they're -- carriers have to take other routes, and they're not filling any vacancies. And it's really a hardship. But -- the alternative is a layoff. We don't want that. I tried to protect that in the very beginning. So, it's -- like I say -- pay is one thing. But if there aren't good working conditions -- even pay is not an influence. And in regard to pay, I used to say; when we used to struggle with the collective begging -- and I go before Congress -- you asked me what I did as vice president -- I used to appear before Congress on various subjects as vice president. With a statement and everything. And incidentally, when I mentioned the strike, one congressman -- a Republican from Maryland -- walked out of the meeting on me. Said, "I will not listen to that." Well, then, do something about it. Working conditions are -- are very important. I -- well, what I used to say: It's not what it costs -- but what is it worth -- to have a faithful, trustworthy letter carrier at your doorstep every day. What is it worth? Not what it costs. The cost is insignificant compared to the worth -- the value of having that man or woman at your doorstep every day.

Q: I've got a couple more questions for you, but why don't we take a break for a second?

A: Yeah, you want a glass of water or something? (break in audio)

PART III

Q: OK. This is part three -- Mike Smith with James Rademacher -- November 16, 2009, at Jim's home in Roanoke, Virginia. So -- we've discussed your presidency. And then at the end of 1976, you decided not to run again. Could you maybe tell us something about that decision, and what were your thoughts?

A: There was a lot of pressure -- management was getting very tough on route adjustments, and membership was getting a little bit unsteady. They listened to a lot of complaints. And I felt that maybe they needed a change. And I qualified for retirement, so why not take it. I retired at 55. But I had given the union a good 30 years. And I thought that was enough. But it's because of the pressure, and I didn't know why I was doing that. In fact, my wife said, "Why are you doing that?" And I didn't know. I went to a convention in Grand Rapids and made the announcement, and everybody said, "Why?" And I got all kinds of mail. "Don't do it, don't do it." But something told me -- and then, I found out the reason why, is because my wife became ill. And she needed me, you know. So that -- that was a good reason. But I had enough of it, and there was nothing more I could do. They got the reorganization, and they got the rights that they never had before. Collective bargaining, and what else could I do, except stay there and take abuse. So...

Q: OK. Well, a couple other things about your presidency. You had mentioned earlier something about mergers. That you had approached the Teamsters, for one, about a potential merger. And the Communications Workers of America [CWA]. What was your thinking on that?

A: Well, perhaps it began because the APWU merged with all other postal organizations, and left us out of it. We had a silly set up where a special delivery organization decided to join with the clerks. They were letter carriers, really. In fact, the Detroit branch is named after a special delivery messenger. And that's OK with me, but when they merged, they had a merger with all those other unions with them --

Q: What other unions?

A: The transportation people, maintenance crew. The mail handlers. Special delivery. They all joined the APWU. That left us alone. Well, we can handle it alone, but I thought, "I'll get even with them. We'll talk to the Teamsters." But I knew we'd get some publicity, because I arranged for that. Mr. Frank Fitzsimmons [President of the Teamsters] said, "What is it you wanted to talk about?" I said, "Well, I'm really here because I told somebody I want to talk to you about mergers. But if you don't want to talk about it, that's OK." (laughter) But I said, "You know, it occurred to me, Frank,

that all my people are on wheels. So -- it never used to be that way. We used to walk. Since we're on wheels, and you're on wheels, a merger would be in order." He said, "We'll give it some thought." I talked it over with our Board, and there was a little envy there. They wanted to be the letter carriers, not Teamsters. And the other reason was that because of this merger, of the other unions, I wanted to show them we could merge too, but something bigger. And that's why I even went to CWA, which is a great organization. And we started comparing balance sheets, and we found out -- because we got that life insurance, we got the health insurance, and assets, it wouldn't be advisable. My actions were more of a public relations thing than sincerity.

Q: Well, it's interesting. Another question: I noticed that the interview you did with The Washington Star. Sort of an exit interview, if you will. It was shortly before your presidency ended. And one of the things that they had asked you about was options for the Postal Service. One was privatization. And, of course, one hears conservative folks say quite often, those things such as the postal service or lighting or whatever should be privatized. I wondered if you could address that?

A: I had that battle from the time I became president -- and we haven't discussed yet the Independent Postal Service of America. In 1972, they [The IPSA] announced -- their corporation published stamps from five cents to a dollar. And it became necessary to put them out of business, because they became a threat. They would only deliver, like all -- any other private delivery that you would get to replace the post -- the letter carrier -- they would only deliver to certain areas. They won't go out in the country, it's too expensive. We go everywhere. We have mule-back carriers go down to the Grand Canyon. They would never think of it. But this IPSA guy got a little bit too popular, so I took our attorney and went out to Oklahoma, where the offices of the Independent Postal System were located.

Q: Who was this? What's his name?

A: His name is Tom Murray. And we got an injunction against him. And we got a ruling that we are a public enterprise - that we have priority over all mail delivery. And no one else could get in there. Mr. Murray was quite upset, and he offered me a job. At 10,000 dollars a year, if I would work for him. I just laughed. His future was very short, and mine was very long. (laughter) That was the end of him, but it was a serious situation. Especially when he got to printing the stamps. He did deliver a few Christmas cards that year, with the five cents on them. But that was illegal. And we never sued him or took any other action. The amazing thing, Mike, is that the Postal Service did not join us in that suit. They didn't -- they just let us handle it ourselves. They should've been there as a co-sponsor of the suit. It affected them more than us, really. But they

didn't. But I also have had debates. I went out to the University of Arizona with a congressman, who constantly pushed for privatizing mail, and I forget his name now -- he's from Illinois. And when I went out there, a side joke is, while I was there, before I was waiting to speak, I went to a swimming pool -- and this was a college, where I spoke. And I had on trunks. And you know how swimmers jump in and out of the water? Well, I jumped once, and down went the trunks. (laughter) I got the biggest applause I ever had in my life. (laughter) So we had a debate that night. And after the debate we asked the people, "Do you think it's better to trust your letter carrier than somebody you don't know, somebody that could be picked up off the street to deliver the mail?" And we got unanimous response -- they want the letter carrier.

PART IV

Q: OK, this is Mike Smith. Part four with James Rademacher on 11/16/2009, at Jim's home in Roanoke, Virginia. When we ended the last session, we were talking about privatization. So I wondered if you'd address that again for me, Jim. The feelings about whether privatization would work, and the attempts in the past to try to privatize.

A: There are those -- especially in Congress -- who feel that privatization is the answer to mail service. They don't understand what that would mean. And briefly, I would tell you what it would mean, because we've had an example of it already. We just get over one hurdle, and in comes another one. And as mentioned earlier, the attempt to privatize the mail service in 1972, when Tom Murray started up the Independent Postal System of America -- IPSA. He went as far as to dare to print stamps -- postage stamps, he called them, from 5 cents to a dollar. He convinced a few people to send Christmas cards at cheaper rates than the postal service, but we stopped him in his tracks, when the lawyer for the NALC, and I -- went to Oklahoma, the base of privatization, and entered the federal courts, proclaiming that there should only be one postal service, and that should be the US Postal Service. He didn't have a leg to stand on. The judge let him know that. The judge ruled in our favor that the postal service is the only one that shall deliver the mail. That was quite a victory that we didn't fully appreciate at the time. But the more that we hear about privatization, the more concerned we get about it. I attended a meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, at the University there, where a couple of Republican congressmen wanted to take us on, citing the need for a private postal service. At the end of the meeting, the audience was in unanimous agreement, other than the congress people, that only the letter carrier and the postal service should be responsible for the mail that enters their mailbox, and that their mailbox should be kept private. Fortunately, we have a law that no one may enter the mailbox except the letter carrier. An example of what privatization would mean, would be what's happening where my son

lives, in New Zealand -- where anybody can go in the mailbox, and anybody does. If you got something that's monetarily valuable, you're risking having somebody come in there with a drugstore ad or a hardware ad, and take out the investment, or whatever you've got in the mailbox. They don't like it over there, but they're stuck with it. So I think we're pretty safe, and I think Congress understands that -- at least the majority of Congress understands it. Only the letter carrier -- the respected letter carrier, who is trusted with the U.S. Mail -- millions of dollars a day are going through the mail -- should be the people that enter their mailbox. And I hope they'll always keep it that way. Regardless of the arguments that can be made against it, there's nothing like a letter carrier in uniform approaching that mailbox -- people can depend upon for service. They're very fortunate that they have people that are trustworthy like that. And, in fact, as I've stated many times in the past, it doesn't matter what it costs for that service. It matters what it's worth to have a dedicated, loyal, faithful, trustworthy carrier at your doorstep everyday. And they are at your doorstep. They do many things. Each day of the year, some letter carrier somewhere saves a life, or protects property along the way. He's part of the family on many routes, and they love him. And I'll never forget when -- back in Detroit -- when a letter carrier served his route for 25 years happened to die. The people on that route asked the undertaker to drive the hearse up and down that route, while they lined the curbs crying, bidding farewell to this letter carrier because they loved him. Letter carriers are part of the family. They know people from womb to tomb. And they deserve the credit that they're getting. Unfortunately, at the present time, there is anxiety about the mail service, but anybody with six years or more need not be concerned, because we do have the no layoff clause that people laughed at in the beginning, but are now happy that it exists. We also have the continuation of COLA but there is concern about layoffs, and there is concern about the reduction of delivery. As long as we have a Congress the way we have it today -- this administration, the Obama administration -- is not going to be responsible for eliminating mail service. And I cannot guarantee that, but my hopes are in that direction. So they needn't fear about having reduced mail service. I don't think the public will accept it and I don't think the administration's going to accept it. So that's one worry that we might forget about. But we've had concerns in the past -- especially in 1950, when the Postmaster General, a former postal inspector, decided to reduce deliveries from two to one.

Q: Two days -- or, two times a day?

A: We used to deliver mail two trips a day. And he reduced it without any notification to the union, to one delivery a day. That caused terrible inconvenience with letter

carriers being stranded out on their routes, having to eat lunch, try to find a place for personal service. It was a terrible thing that went on, but we survived it, and there was a blessing in the end because prior to that, we would deliver mail in the morning, swing for two hours on our own time, and then come back and deliver the second trip. With the elimination of that trip, as a hardship as it was, we only worked eight hours a day. But I'm hoping that the day will come, when as long as we've got that mail satchel or that mail vehicle with us, the postal service will be responsible for paying for the lunch hour. That should be their responsibility. And while I'm on the subject of the future, I hope the day will come when the management that's responsible for grievances will have to pay for whatever the arbitrator decides is a penalty. That may stop some of these petty grievances that are occurring throughout the postal service today.

Q: Well, when you speak about the letter carrier, you know -- I think all of us understand the point you just made. One of our main contacts with the federal government is the letter carrier. And he or she is the person on the street, and I've noticed letter carriers are about as diverse as you can get --

A: That's right.

Q: In terms of who delivers the mail, now. It's no longer just, you know, mailmen. Do the letter carriers think of themselves as having a special cause? Do you find, among the letter carriers, that they have a sense of pride?

A: Most of them do. And while you're mentioning that subject... the postal service is one of the few places where the wages of women are the same as men. And that's going to be for the remainder of their careers. And that's one thing that's outstanding about the postal service. And you're so right about respect for the letter carrier. A recent survey showed 75% of the public favors the letter carrier as the only government servant that is beneficial to them. So they got the highest respect for them. As I've said before -- they rescue people -- and, lately, it's a risky job. We've had a few carriers killed recently. A few carriers robbed recently. But they go on about their business. We still have dog bites. And we've had one lady who had her face smashed because she put mace on a dog that was about to attack her. So those are some of the risks involved. But beyond the pay that's involved, and beyond the guarantee of employment, the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you're anticipated everyday at a doorstep in America -- I think that comes as a big satisfaction over anything else in the postal service.

Q: Well, when you think about the future. What do you think the future of the postal service is?

A: We're having a difficult time because of the use of e-mails, which substitute for regular

mail. But there's still mail. There's a promise that there'll be no increase in postage next year. And perhaps when the economy changes and improves, the postal service will improve with the volume of mail. That's our problem today. Carriers today -- and these final months of 2009 -- are troubled because of what's called pivoting. And that affects the public as well, because where you used to get mail service at 9:00 -- they're doubling up on routes because they're not filling vacancies --

Q: Is that what pivoting means?

A: Yes. A letter carrier will be asked to take the part of the route of somebody that retired, whose job is not filled. And that makes an extra hardship on the carrier. So -- while the union is the greatest that I know of, and the job is the greatest that I know of, the benefits are the greatest I know of -- there are still some hardships involved. There are still some problems that we experience day after day, that the public is unaware of.

Q: Well, what about the future of the letter carriers?

A: I think that the future is great because of the right to collective bargaining. We probably, at our next contract negotiations in 2011, are going to have considerable impasses. There are going to be demands on us -- they're probably going to demand to eliminate that COLA, which is costing them money, but which we've earned all these years. As I've told you before -- 18,000 dollars of the letter carrier's salary comes from COLA -- one of the greatest things that ever went in that contract. But as long as we have that contract, and as long as we have the right to go to arbitration, I see a very meaningful future. We have one problem, that's happening, at the present minute. And that is an amendment that's been attached to a Senate bill, by a Republican senator, who says that an arbitrator should base the decision upon the financial status of the postal service. Why do we need an arbitrator if that's going to be the case? We know what the answer will be. We're doing everything that we can to delete that amendment from the pending legislation. And I know we're going to be successful. Because it's certainly immoral, unethical, and everything else -- if you're talking about an arbitrator, don't tell him how to rule in advance. Let him rule based upon the facts. And we're going to be under great pressure in 2011 because of the situation. But we're strong. We've been through the mill many times. And we have a strong union to back us up. We've got arbitration to back us up. And I think everything's going to work out in the end. We just have to be patient, like the American people do, during this present economic situation.

Q: Now, it occurs to me, from my knowledge of labor history, that the president of the Letter Carriers probably spends more time dealing with congressmen and senators and

presidents than your average union leader because, of course, you have one employer, which is the US Postal Service. Can you tell me a bit about -- just your working with Congress and your philosophy on what you need to do as a labor leader, in terms of your experiences dealing with Congress?

A: Mike -- when I was vice president -- you asked me what I did. Sometimes I had to testify before Congress. The congressmen are not fully aware of what's happening. They're too busy. It's up to the union to relay to them the specifics of the problem. So that they know how to vote. As they're voting for you, they want to know why. And it's up to us to tell them why. The new NALC president, Fred Rolando, has done that already. And I'm very pleased that he's got the job, and that's he a dynamic leader. And I think we're going to be very successful with him. But I've testified before Congress probably 40 or 50 times. The one time that one congressman ran out on me was when I suggested that the letter carriers are ready to strike. He didn't want to stomach that so he left the meeting. But it didn't matter or bother me. He was defeated the next year by letter carrier votes. A congressman should listen, whether he agrees with you or not. And he should find out why he doesn't agree with you, or why he does agree with you. That's the importance of hearings. You place before Congress what you consider a legislative package. And Congress has a right to ask you what you mean by this. And they go deeper than that. By the time that they're through with the hearing, they know where you stand, and they know whether or not they're going to stand with you. Fortunately, because of the high respect that Congress has for the letter carrier, they believe what we're saying. Because they're also aware that we reach every home in this country every day. And that means something to a politician. Believe me. (laughs)

Q: Yes. I want to ask you, before we end, about something that intrigues me. And it's not important in the large scheme of things. I go to a number of union functions, and I go to quite a few union conventions as director of the Reuther. But the only one where there is a schedule for brass bands is the letter carriers. And I understand -- now, you can tell me if my impression is correct or not -- I understand that there is some fairly fierce competition regarding which brass band gets to play at what time during the convention.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about this?

A: Well, first of all, let's go back to the Detroit band, which no longer exists. My father was in there as a trombone player, he thought. He was asked to play solo once, and that was the last time he was in the band. (laughter) The bands are very important. I'll never forget -- when I first was on the road speaking for the NALC as an officer, I went

to San Diego. Before the meeting, they took me to a Mexican restaurant and fed me pretty well. I was called upon to speak, and they had the San Diego letter carriers' bands in the audience. I was called upon to speak and I started to get a bellyache from the Mexican food. "What am I going to do? I'm just starting to speak," you know? So I thought quickly, and I said, "At this point in my speech, we usually introduce the band." So the band started playing and I ran down the hall. (laughter) But -- several branches have bands at their meetings, and at their state conventions, and so on. And they came in handy at my convention because we'd get into a heated debate over something, and to calm them down, I'll say -- just, what I just told you -- "Now it's time for the Pittsburgh band. If you don't mind, let's hear the Pittsburgh band." By the time they hear all that beautiful music, the rumpus is over with and we're back to normal. (laughter) The heated exchange has gone cool. No, they're wonderful additions to our program. And the letter carriers programs are more than just conventions. They're like families getting together. I'll never forget the Boston convention. I didn't expect the kind of --

Q: 2008 convention?

A: Yeah, 2008. I was there because 40 years earlier than that, I was elected president in Boston. So I was there, and I had the privilege of witnessing President Sombrotto get the recognition that he got. And he got that in the form of the NALC Headquarters building being named after him, and he got a bust, placed in the lobby. And later, I found out, there's a little park across from the NALC building that's named after him, too. So they've done a good job in recognizing his efforts through the years. But the Boston convention was wonderful to me. The first one, where I was elected, there were two women present. That's all. And both of them were rural letter carriers that belonged to the NALC. At this convention, there may have been 2000 because of what's been happening. After we got the right to bargain, and after the strike, more women came in because they found it's a better job now with good pay and benefits. And we now have a large number of women -- and not only that, not only do we have women -- but it's amazing how many women now are the leaders in their branches, state associations, and even at headquarters level. Which is fine progress.

Q: I suppose there is a great degree of equality there because a female letter carrier can get bit by a dog, or run down by a car just as fast as a male could.

A: You'd be amazed -- the average dog bites per year are 8000. 8000 -- yup.

Q: Wow.

A: But I was very pleased to see you, and representing the Reuther Library, at the Boston convention, because so many people commented to me that they didn't know about the

strike. And now that information is available [through the Library exhibit]. That was very helpful, I thought. We have to acquaint the younger people that are coming in. And not only those, but people that have come in since 1970 -- we've got to acquaint them that -- how did we get where we are? We've got to know how we got where we are to know how to be successful in where we're going. And it's an education program. And things like what you're doing will be very helpful. Branches ought to do more of this. And get more interest in branch meetings. It's a shame that we hold these branch meetings to explain what's going on, and we don't get the turnout, because many of our members take for granted benefits and union policies and so on. So I wish we could get a -- more interest in what's going in this union because that's their life. The union affects their life. And what the unions can do for them affects their career. So I just wish we could maybe -- what you're doing here today could help that cause along.

Q: Yes, I hope so. I hope so. Are there other issues or events or experiences that you'd like to have on the recording before we close out?

A: I think I poured out my soul to you. I am very proud of the accomplishments of the past. I'm proud of this union. I don't know of a greater union that's done more, since 1970, since we followed Walter Reuther's instructions -- to convert to a union from an association. And I'm proud of the people that carry the mail. Because these people, in many places, are the only person a lot of people ever see. When I carried mail, a lot of little ladies that had no one, were waiting for those Christmas cards from someone. And they couldn't wait for my delivery. And I thought that was really wonderful. And I felt good about it. You know, you just feel that you're part of those people. They wait for you and are happy to see you. And you make their life, especially at Christmas. But all year long. So many of our carriers find mail piled up -- they know something's wrong, because the lady always has taken her mail out of the mailbox -- they call the police, and they find some poor person laying on the floor that's fallen down, or something's happened to them. So they become more than just letter carriers. It's indescribable what that job can do. And I'm reminded of this wording over the post office in New York. They're talking about a letter carrier. And I believe it is so true, having been one, and having represented proudly several hundred thousand. This symbol, on top of the New York Post Office, says this -- that the letter carrier is a "messenger of sympathy and love, servant of parted friends, counselor of the lonely, bond of the scattered family, enlarger of the common life, carrier of news and knowledge, instrument of trade and industry, promoter of mutual acquaintance of peace and goodwill among men and nations." You can't beat that for a motto for a job like being a letter carrier.

Q: You mentioned Walter Reuther. A question I'd like to ask before we close out is, who

would you say are the most memorable people that you have met over your career, including Congress as well as labor leaders. And maybe who had influence on you?

A: Despite the fact that some people feel that Jimmy Hoffa's actions were was a little bit maybe unlawful, or whatever they might think of him -- I don't think of him that way. I look at what he did for the people he represented. That's what he's there for. Not to satisfy the public. I gave a sermon in Detroit way back in 1974. And I called people like Walter Reuther an apostle of labor. And John L. Lewis -- apostle of labor. Labor unions really identify what labor is for, and they did something about it. Many people forget about the overpass bridge where some of UAW union members were beaten by goon squads. Many people forget that some of our members sat down in General Motors, factories, on the floor, waiting for their wives to bring them food on what's called a sit-down. A very successful sit-down. These are the things that have happened to bring us where we are today, where there is respect for unions. There's no respect for union in Right to Work states, or in conservative attitudes. They just don't understand. Whether it be the letter carrier or the automobile worker. It's tragic, what has happened to my own state [Michigan]. [The UAW] was one of the largest, most professional unions of all time, because of Walter Reuther. But what's happened to it is the saddest thing that could happen in a labor movement today, it's tragic. And I just hope -- I see today that General Motors is going to start repaying the taxpayers. Good. I hope a lot of people will buy those cars. Ford Motor Company didn't need a bailout -- that's good, too. But the problem is, and we can't convince people, because money's involved -- the problem is that too many people are driving foreign cars. Before we had foreign cars, we had full employment. Now we've got lots full of foreign cars. That's the problem. And I think Ford and the whole auto industry should have realized what was coming, and done something about it before it's too late. But I do feel it's very sad for the people in Michigan right now. But you ask me the greatest, and I think that was Walter Reuther -- not because you're doing this for the Reuther Library, but I've always felt that way, that he brought the union movement to the surface. Sort of a dying movement that people knew nothing about and they cared nothing about -- people that labored until it was pointed out to them -- who are these people? They're your neighbors, they're your relatives, they're your friends, they're the unions. That's who they are. They're not somebody from outer space. So that's how I feel about it... and John L. Lewis did the same thing for miners. Maybe not to the extent that Walter Reuther did, but he was very helpful in the labor movement. But all that a lot of people know about the unions is what the biased, prejudicial press tells them. And if the press tells them that they're being naughty boys and girls out there, some people believe that. They don't really know

the heart of a laborer. So -- but we've come a long way in the labor movement. And they really have raised the prestige and the economy of the country, and if people only understood --here in Virginia alone-- the salary of the organized person in the labor movement, in this state, which is a Right-to-Work state -- is between 15 and 20% higher than the non-union people. People say "Well, yeah, but nevermind what -- nevermind, yeah" -- the union's done this for people. And they ought to realize. And get rid of this Right-to-Work business. Right-to-Work laws here mean little to NALC because 90% of the letter carriers in this state belong, whether Right-to-Work or not. But that's a sad situation that exists, and I know I experienced that when we were trying to get the union shop in during the reorganization plan, when the President of the United States said that he didn't mind as long as Congress passes it. But Congress didn't pass it for reactionary reasons. But we don't care, because we got the best voluntary union in the world. And I don't say that to brag. I say that because it's a fact. And I'm very proud of this union. And I'm very pleased and grateful that you people at the Walter Reuther Library are doing collecting labor history for the letter carriers and other unions, which allows young people, especially in the college, to go through there and see what unions have accomplished. What are they? Like I say, they're people. And what you're doing is an indication of -- that you care about exposing what the union does to the American people. And it's wonderful.

Q: Thank you very much. Now -- along those lines, then -- so, a historian comes in to the Reuther 50 years from now. Or 100 years from now. And they review the history of the letter carriers. What do you hope they'll say about you? If you could write the history books 100 years from now on -- how would you characterize James Rademacher -- what would you hope they'd say?

A: That he did the best he could do. And the evidence is there that he did something.

Q: 1970. Reorganization.

A: Well, I did more than that. I mean, I worked -- like you said -- from age 29, on and on. But the most difficult part was overcoming the problem that our members had in getting welfare checks. That was sad to me. I would be willing to go to jail. And that statement that I read to you, which we were going to tell the people of America -- there will be no postal service because their letter is going to be visiting their congressman to do something about the conditions. I didn't have to do that, because we settled at the bargaining table. But I'm glad it wasn't necessary to do that. What they -- what people are going to think about me is, only if they know what went on. If they don't know what went on -- that's why I was very pleased at the reception. I didn't know what they were going to do in Boston. But when I got that opening reception, the first thing

I said was, "I better quit while I'm ahead." (laughter) Apparently, they remember, and they look at their paychecks, and they see that, you know? I didn't do it alone, because we -- I only served as the messenger. It's because, when I appeared before Congress, or I appeared before the president of the United States, I represented several hundred thousand people. I wasn't me. But I represented them -- I was the messenger. And I think President Nixon realized that. But when he found out that we had the power to create 3 million letters to him -- "Hey, this organization, we better look up to." And that attributed to the no discipline -- when he saw that support we got. ABC --TV -- it was Huntley and Brinkley, back in those days. They took a survey. 80% of the American public favored what we did. 80% favored not getting mail service to protect their letter carrier.

Q: That's phenomenal.

A: Yeah. And that is great. That's because of the respect they have for them. So I hope the letter carrier will respect his own job, respect his union. We're there to protect him. Because -- especially today, when postal service is trying to save money -- the pressure is on to remove people at the drop of a hat, and they're going to have to realize that the contract is there to protect them. They've got to do a job. But the postal service has got to do a job also in recognizing who these people are. They're the people that reach America every day. That's the great thing about this union. Other unions make automobiles. They make tractors. They do other things. But this union visits every home in America. Do you realize what that means? About 160 million homes today. And businesses. Businesses count on it, too, you know? Businesses -- people in buildings -- just amazing. I'm trying to teach them to respect their job and respect the union that's there to protect them. We've got a contract now that I think takes care of every need. It was very difficult, sitting down, in the beginning, to start from scratch and write 36 articles of a labor agreement that would be acceptable to the union members. It wasn't easy, because management opposes everything because they know it will cost them. But they knew, also -- these are the guys that walked out. And they can do it again. (laughs)

Q: It's one of the few strikes in American history that literally shut down the country.

A: Well... that's why when they told me to get off TV, the more I got on TV and talked to people, the public -- why are we doing this? Not to hurt you? We don't want to hold up your mail. In fact, if we had a national strike, as I said, we would deliver pension checks. We would deliver to the poor, the ill, and we'd get permission to do that off the clock. Well, it wasn't necessary, but we were ready. And this converted us, as Reuther wanted us to do, from a Sunday School Society association that begged -- begged

Congress constantly -- to a union. And that's what we are today. There are times in the past that you wouldn't believe what happened with some of these reactionary congressmen that led these committees. We had several discharge petitions. That's a petition that, if you get 218 signatures, you can discharge the committee from handling your legislation and bring it right to the floor. Because the chairman of the committee, Tom Murray from Tennessee, did not believe letter carriers deserved more money. He said they're overpaid. So he would bottle up the bill in committee for a pay raise. We had friends who had introduced the discharge petition, including the one in Illinois. But whoever introduces the discharge petition has to be present when they get 218 signatures on there so he can bring forth the bill. The man who introduced the bill, the discharge petition, was in Illinois at a convention. Bill Doherty, NALC president, sent the state police to get him. Took him to the airport. Got him back to Washington. Rushed in before Congress adjourned that night. He brought the bill forward and the chairman of the committee said, "Wait a minute. It's not necessary, I'm bringing that bill up tomorrow." And we won. I was in Texas the last time Eisenhower vetoed a pay bill. And, again, I say that he was a great general. But he was a bad president, taking the advice of men who have bitterly opposed the unions. And I was in Texas at a dinner. And I got a phone call telling me, "Congress has just overridden the veto." Only the second veto over-ride of the Eisenhower administration. I stood up on the chair and said, "We won." And I fell off the chair, over the dinner table. (laughter) I was so happy. And so was our membership -- happy that, at last, we overrode the veto. But, I told you earlier, Eisenhower came to the 1952 convention: "Bill Doherty, you will never sit on my doorstep." He never was allowed inside the room. Never. That's how they talk. But he listened to his Postmaster General, and there was a little joke we had in Detroit that when he -- Mr. Summerfield -- was in the hospital -- the secretary of the Detroit branch sent him a telegram, allegedly: "Get well wishes. The executive board of Branch 1, Detroit, wishes you a speedy recovery. The vote was 6 to 3." (laughter)

Q: (laughs) That's good. That's good. I like that. Well, any last things, for the record?

A: I think I've told you everything I know. Some of that stuff had never come out.

Q: Well, it's on the record now.

A: Yeah.

Q: We'll preserve it at the Reuther Library.

A: I think if more and more people hear about it and read about it, that we can get more people interested in what this union's all about, and that they're here to protect them. Including now. If that no layoff clause had not been in there -- and I didn't do it for this reason, I did it for another reason -- I'll tell you about the reason. But if that

weren't in there, right now, the carriers would be laid off. The reason we put that in there was because there was fear that by going into the postal service department. -- instead of the post office, they were going to take away our Civil Service status. So to satisfy our members, I put in the contract the no layoff clause. Whether you're under Civil Service, or what you're under. And that's in there. That's still in the clause 6 of the contract. Still in there. And it's going to stay in there; they'll try to get it out of there, next time. And an arbitrator will have to decide. The arbitrator's going to do a lot of work on that next contract. But there are three arbitrators who decide the fate of the contract: One representing management, one representing the union, and the arbitrator himself. And incidentally, when I retired, I applied for arbitration. I became a full-fledged arbitrator. My first case was with Eastern Airlines, which no longer exists. They invited me -- they knew my background -- they invited me to come down to a hearing and be arbitrating. And I'm all ready to go. And they cancelled it. So then, a month later, they said, "We'd like you to come down again." I said, "I'll come down there. But if you cancel, it's going to cost you 100 dollars." They wrote back and said, "We don't need you." So, I didn't -- I went to become a volunteer in the hospital with my wife, and I didn't bother in arbitration anymore. Because I thought, with my background, it would be hard to get people that would want me. (laughter) Because I would be dealing fairly. Not prejudicially.

Q: That's good.

A: On the Kokomo plan in 1972 -- which is one of the -- outside of the strike, the Kokomo plan was the worst hardships I suffered. Management wanted to measure the footsteps of the carrier, whether you're 60 years old or you're 20. And they measure the guy at 20 -- and ask the guy at 60 to compete. And things like that went on -- time studies and so on. So they put it in Kokomo, Indiana, and they put it in Portland, Oregon. We went to arbitration. And while we were in arbitration we had a convention in Seattle. The first resolution was, if they put it any further, and if they don't discontinue it, there'll be a walkout. And I'm -- the resoluter says, "I am to notify the Postmaster General when the resolution passes."

Q: When was this? What year?

A: 1972. They still had strike on their mind. But they knew what this Kokomo thing would do. So I picked up the phone in the back room and I called the Postmaster General -- not the same guy, because he quit. The reason he quit, because no striker was disciplined. He got so furious that Nixon would not fire anybody, he quit. So we had a new Postmaster General named Ted Klassen. I called him on the phone and I said, "I want you to know the resolution just passed." He said, "You can't blackmail us like that." I said, "I

didn't. The convention just -- I had to carry out their orders. They voted to do this, so I'm just telling you what the idea is." Well, they didn't go any further with it. And the arbitrator eventually ruled that the Kokomo plan is dead. That it's illegal, and they can't do it without consultation with the union and so on. However -- today, the Kokomo plan is in effect, and they've done it secret -- we've got time recorders that the carrier has to use to record wherever he's at. And if that isn't a spy system, I never heard of one. You know, if a carrier has to leave their route and go to a restroom - it's recorded. Then he gets back -- "Where were you between 12 and 12:10?" "I was in the restroom?" Why do you have to answer questions like that? Get the job done, that's all. That's why -- when I started, the idea was, letter carriers would come in at 6:00, case our routes, and leave. That's it. We had to get out by 8:00 A.M. We did it. And there wasn't any pressure on us. We got out. That's it. But today, they look around to see what they can find wrong. Now, the UAW never had these kinds of grievances. Grievances that might be 20 or 30 a month. A grievance at the UAW would be something more profound, deeper that affected a lot of people, not just a couple of carriers. So these supervisors have still got a lot to learn about the contract. They brought people in from the outside that don't understand the background of the post office. And then another type of supervisor is the one that used to carry mail, and now he's a boss? Look out for some of these people. We used to have a group -- of letter carriers get promoted to a 204B -- he thought he was the Postmaster General. After I had a heart attack, a month after I got out of the hospital, NALC had its 100-year celebration in Milwaukee. And I was invited to go there. And I spoke, and I said, "When I was laying there in the hospital, I had a dream." I said, "I dreamed that I hung up my satchel for the last time and I was heading to heaven, and all of a sudden this 204B stops me and says, 'Wait a minute, you're on overtime.'" (laughter)

Q: I bet you got a good laugh off that one.

A: That was a good one, yeah. Yeah.

A: Well, we can't take each other too serious, but when it comes to unionism, it is serious business. Because there's always people ready to find ways to violate the contract. They're waiting. All the time. And they do it. And our good people catch them and do something about it. As long as we got a contract, we're going to be protected. As long as the carrier understands what's in the contract, we're going to be protected. That's where education comes in. It's so important. But I'm very happy that the hands of the union are now in Fred Rolando's -- and I'm very impressed with his appearance before Congress. He's done a very fine job. We won as a result of his testimony here. We won what's called HR-22, which allowed the postal service to get more money. Otherwise, I

don't know what they'd have done. Because they were asked to put in advance billions of dollars for retirees for the future, which is very unfair. The Civil Service Commission used to do that. So, because of the testimony of Fred Rolando, Congress voted almost unanimously to give the postal service that money. So I'm very pleased that he's in control now. And I watched him at their most recent seminar. And he not only talked, but he listened. As people got up there, to explain some things that were happening. He listened. And he said -- and he wrote it down -- he intends to do something about it. And that's what you need, is a listener, and somebody that's going to do something about it. And that -- I think that's Fred Rolando. I hope it is. But anyway, we -- all of us -- appreciate what you've done over there at the Reuther Library.

Q: Well, thank you.

A: We're honored and privileged to expose to the public, especially to the young people at Wayne State University, what we stand for. You know, we're not some ugly beast on the street corner, mailbag in our hand. We're human beings, like I said. And we're in a union because we want to be organized against the powers that be. So the more people understand that, and the more our members understand it, the stronger we're going to be, period.

Q: And that's a good way to conclude. This has been a real pleasure. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW