BOOK 25

FRANK MEAD

Oral History Project

I, Frank Mead hereby direct that the interview

recorded 1970 at my home
Date Location

by Frank Ninkovich by the Roosevelt University Oral

History Project in Labor History be handled in the following manner:

USE BY RESEARCHERS

Open Yes

Closed Pending Instructions _____

Closed until _____

Permission needed to cite or quote

Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

x Frank Mead
Signature of interviewee

Interview with Frank Mead
By Frank Ninkovich
1970
Time - 2 hours

CONTENTS

	page
Early life	1
Work on the Railroad	3
Work in the Steel Mills	5
Work on the Milwaukee Railroad	6
Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen	16
1934 Convention of Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen	20
Depression	23
Union Corruption	26
Company Spies	36
Assessment of the results of unionizing the railroads	38
Yellow Dog Contracts	40
Ethnic Composition of railroad work force	42
Featherbedding	45

Interview with Frank Mead

By Frank Ninkovich

I. My name is Frank Ninkovich, I'm from Roosevelt University and I'm interviewing Mr. Mead. Mr. Mead could you give us some biographical information to start with.

R. I was born in New York City and came to Chicago in 1910 at the age of five. Our family had all been New York people. In fact my mother was very proud of the fact that she was a Brooklyn person although her parents came from the middle of Ireland. They used to refer to my father, who came from upstate New York, as that New York fellow, because the Brooklyn people felt that they were rather different. I should go back a little bit and state that my father had always told my mother about Chicago. He'd been here a few times. He talked about what a wide open town it was in the sense that there was lots of breathing space. In fact I can remember living near 70th and Stony Island when we first came here and people were raising pigs and chickens. I remember a rooster that would chase me whenever I would appear outside and this little banty rooster was around. Chicago was a much differ-, ent type of place in those days. It was much safer to live. The police-men walked beats. Once in a while you would see a mounted policeman. But it seemed to me a place where all the political corruption was rife. It was a little more open than it is now. It's taken on astro-nomical dimensions, the corruption, the graft, and so forth but it's all done, you know, rather sub rosa.

In the period between 1910 and 1920 the average kid who wanted to make a little bit of money-families were very poor. In fact I recall up until after the first world war many families had no bathtubs in their homes. Baths were once a week in the family washtub. I can recall selling newspapers at the age of nine and sometimes bigger kids

would come along and want to take your papers from you so you learned how to fight. And I recall the newsboys who used to go through the the street cars. They would get by the conductor and maybe they'd sell a few newspapers by working their way through the crowd, but the streetcar men had orders to keep them off. Well, I had always liked the country, I thought, and a few times we had been out to Iowa near Sioux City where my grandparents had come from Brooklyn, although they were originally Irish immigrants. And I might say here that having been to Ireland a number of times I've found that the Irishman is essentially a country type. In fact, in reading the British Broadcasting Corporation weekly, which gave a review of the type of prisoners who came to Australia, transported labor as they called it, they found these Irish were a different so-called criminal type in that they were rebels for the most part and not the criminal element which had come from the cities of England. Well, to go on to my period when I started work, I started work through the beneficence of a station agent who was a relative of mine on the Great Northern Railroad 32 miles north of Sioux City. And I worked there for a few years.

I. What year was this approximately?

R. This was between 1918 and 1920. I worked there and learned a lot about the farmer while I was there. I never felt that I fitted in even though I was very young. I was only thirteen when I came there, fifteen when I left. Later on I began work on railroads here, first as a yard clerk later as a switchman. And for pretty close to 38 years I was a railroad switchman on a number of railroads here in Chicago. The last one being what is now known as the Penn Central at a place

called Kensington or "Bumtown". The Michigan Central, which later became a part of the New York Central, that's where the Michigan Central gumshoes or railroad policemen used to put the bums off. So they established there at a time when there was much more wide open space than there is in the Pullman area today. Kensington and Pullman converged at that point. They had these jungles, sort of hobo camps. And so they called the place Bumtown. I worked there for the last 20 years just south of Pullman. And owing to an injury that I had received to one leg, I worked for years with a very unstable situation with the leg. Then I retired at the age of 60. Since my wife had come from England and I had always had a desire to go there and live, having been there a couple of times, I thought that we could go to that part of the world and possibly we could live a little more reasonably on our very modest pensions, you see. But I was unable to adjust to England. It so happens that the year after I retired the railroad pensions were increased by a supplementary amount which I do not receive, a loss of 70 dollars monthly. Nor do any of the other men who retired just before 1966, a most unequal situation and most unjust in my opinion. But that's what railroad unions do. They allow the railroads too much say when it comes to the matter of pensions and unemployment insurance. I worked in many parts of the United States, including my home town of New York. But I worked as well in the area between Kansas City and St. Jo, Missouri as a brakeman and at St. Louis as a switchman. I worked in Los Angeles for the Santa Fe Railroad as a switchman. I worked for the Southern Pacific between Roseville, California near Sacramento going east to a place near Reno and later at San Francisco. It's called working "over the hill," over the Sierras. I worked as a brakeman there. But mainly I worked in Chicago. And of course, at one time I recall how proud a lot of fellows used to be to say that they were Chicago switchmen,

which in very many cases they were not.

I. Where were they from?

R. They were from all parts of the country. We used to have these men they called the "boomers." Then there was this employment agency that the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen had, which was not in reality an employment agency at all. It was the local headquarters of the two vice presidents who were assigned to Chicago. Chicago was a rather volatile place. When 1 went to San Francisco I met men who admired the Chicago union activities so much. In fact, it was an attempt to develop conditions such as existed in Chicago so far as unions were concerned that led Tom Mooney to prison because the California people don't really run things. At one time Upton Sinclair said the Southern Pacific Railroad and the California fruit growers controlled the state. To a great extent I find that true. My children are living in California. I have a son who's a doctor and I have a married daughter who lives just outside Los Angeles. But the more I see of California living, I see that the financial interests are pretty much in control. Only now we have the real estate barons, you see.

But as to labor history, I worked in Gary, I worked in Indiana Harbor. I left Indiana Harbor where I worked for the Inland Steel Company and where we worked under very bad conditions, I might say. In fact, injuries were quite the thing in any steel mill. In Inland Steel the conditions were very, very bad.

I. When were you working at Inland Steel?

R. I worked at Inland Steel Company in the winter of 1935, going into 1936.

I. Were you there at the time of the CIO organizing drive?

R. Not at Inland Steel. I was at U.S. Steel at Gary then. I only worked at Inland Steel about four or five months when I heard there was employment at better wages on the E.J. and E., which is a captive railroad of the U.S. Steel Corporation. And so I went to work in June. The organizing drive was on. But of course, they never attempted to organize us fellows. We were independent of that thing. I 'understand in the east Bethlehem Steel, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, which is now part of the United Transportation Union, did organize there and they went out--the men went out on strike. But there was an understanding between the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, nationally, and the Steelworkers that we weren't going to be part of that. Our conditions were already better, they felt. In fact, I think it was a deal on the part of a very dishonest president we had. I think most of the railroad workers were in sympathy with the steelworkers, especially when you work inside of a steel mill and see the awful conditions. I think they would have been glad to go in with the CIO. We now are part of this thing. But in those times the unions we belonged to fought, actually fought one another; while pretending to have a "hands off" policy they went along with the managers. Well, I never thought that United States Steel would sign. United States Steel signed ahead of Little Steel. I had friends who had come from the Milwaukee Railroad where I had worked and they were struggling with Inland Steel at Indiana Harbor. I just recently got an inquiry from a lady who was the widow of the Pastor who spoke at the funeral services of the ten people who were killed by Chicago police on Memorial Day in 1937. She asked me for certain details because her daughter is writing a book about this strike. Her husband and I became acquainted early in the Depression. He was a Methodist minister and he spent more time trying to get people proper

relief than he did in the church. After several years of this the struggle became great. The directors of the church wanted him out all the time and we formed what would probably be called a phony congregation to keep him in. Many of us who aren't even religious came in as new parishioners to his church which was near California and North Avenue in the Humboldt Part District.

I don't have a11 the information I seek about the eventual out; come of these strikes. But I remember one in particular, the sit-down strike where the men stayed in for several days. In Waukegan I think it was, near Waukegan, North Chicago, a certain steel company, the Fan Steel Company. And while I was aware of the strike going on, I was commuting daily between Chicago and Gary. We weren't part of the CIO then but we are now. I think the failure of the railroad brotherhoods to come in encouraged the Little Steel people. And, of course, Roosevelt, now that he was safely in office for the second time, said a plague on both your houses, when John L. Lewis wanted Roosevelt to make the Little Steel people deal with the CIO. Of course, this was because under the Walsh-Healy Act anyone who has anything to sell to the government must deal collectively, you see.

In 1928 I was working as a switchman on the Chicago-Milwaukee-St. Paul and Pacific, as it was known then. And we had a very bad labor situation in the terminal where there were approximately 600 switchmen employed, most belonging to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. Our grievances were being handled rather shabbily by an alcoholic local chairman who had ambitions to be a general chairman, to be specific. There's a local chairman from every lodge. I don't recall the exact number of lodges or locals the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen had at the time. They numbered somewhere around 900.

For every railroad there is a general chairman over all these local chairman. Now on the Milwaukee railroad the situation was so bad that the general chairman had what you might call nowadays a "sweet-heart" deal with the railroads. We couldn't get grievances handled.

I. Do you want to mention his name?

R. And... he became later the president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. His name was, W.P. Kennedy. Now owing to the schedules which are the working agreements effective at that time, anyone unable to work on the railroad could no longer function as the grievance man, either in a local or subordinate lodges, or as a general chairman. Now this man had been crippled by polio. Therefore, under that agreement which of course we didn't press from the union side, the company could have asked that he be set aside. But he was so favorable to the company that they never did this. In fact, when he was stricken by polio, in the old days the doctors hardly knew what to do about it. The general manager of the railroad sent his private car to Toronto where the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen was holding its convention, which was I should say somewhere around 1922 or '23, I forget the exact year. Of course, showing such solicitude for the man indicated that the company had him as their boy which he remained.. And the conditions were so bad that although I was only 23, I was asked to run against our local chairman who was always defending the company. It wasn't because they liked me so much but because they detested this local chairman. And so I consented. I regard this now, in the light of what I know about human beings, as an act that was very foolhardy on my part. Because the loss that I sustained and what my family

had to endure as a result of what happened to me when I did decide to run for this office was catastrophic. On the job that I worked on nights, I was followed by a trainmaster and another company official for two weeks in an effort to "get something" on me, as the phrase goes. And in their failure to do so they plagued me by making certain charges. We were allowed twenty minutes for lunch which is still the rule and some railroads are very liberal about it. They don't push the men too hard. But on the Milwaukee it had often been used as an excuse to fine men who exceeded the time by even one minute, because hardly anybody will finish up in exactly twenty minutes. Some will go over it by a minute. On previous occasions when they wanted to "get" somebody, emphasis on "get," they would charge they over stayed beyond the twenty minute period. We were working on an industrial job. An industrial job is one that goes outside the terminal. I was working at the Western Avenue yard near Grand Avenue, servicing places like coal yards, lumber yards, and factories. So we were down in a material yard and coming out of this material yard you were coming up a hill. If any cars separated,. came uncoupled, they would run right down this track which was only about ten freight car lengths long, run right down and go over a street car line. So we had to couple air hoses and have our men stationed at breaks. We coupled the air hoses and then after that we went to lunch, which ran into something like twenty-five or thirty minutes, including time for coupling hoses. Suddenly from out of the weeds came these two men who had been following us for two weeks. Now the single most important thing to bear in mind about railroad officials is that it's rare, and I repeat that, it's extremely rare for the railroad officials to be practical men. Most of the men who were appointed trainmasters served first as clerks. And you cannot, anymore than a man could suddenly take a job as head carpenter somewhere, you cannot possibly understand

the moves of a switch engine unless you've worked at it several years. So these men made this charge. Well, there was an investigation which took place at the Galewood Yard which is out near the 5600 block west at Central Avenue and Grand. All day long these false charges kept being reiterated, for example, that the merchants we served were complaining. Well, we had already taken the measure of going about and seeing these people to ask them if they had made any complaint. Sort of anticipating what would come out of this investigation. They all said that they were satisfied. They could hardly be else because we knew our work. We did it just as it had always been done. But the trouble started from the fact that I had announced that I was going to run for election. Of course my election was fairly well assured due to the dissatisfaction of the men. Now just to give you an idea of what this dissatisfaction was about: we had several four-man switch engines. In other words there were four switchmen working on the ground, (A three-man switch crew was normal.) In some cases these were absolutely required due to the great number of switches and the great amount of switching that had to be done. Now this was an established thing. And in the first World War, William G. McAdoo, who was director-general of the railroads, had put out an order to the effect any conditions that existed that were favorable to the men would have to remain. This didn't mean that if the work was less that we could maintain that we should have four men on these jobs. Now there weren't many jobs that had it. They were in what they call train yards where trains come in and have to be separated very quickly and sent out on what we used to call "red ball" trains, the fast trains. Trains that contained a lot of merchandise, for example, would leave Chicago today and would have to be in Kansas City tomorrow, which for those times in 1928 was a very

remarkable thing. I know the New York Central had a 36 hour schedule on livestock between Chicago and New York. This was an extraordinary thing, you see. So we had these men in these train yards. Well they would take them off and they would try and use a man whose duty it was not, a switchtender nearby, to help in the work. This was at a reduced rate of pay. In those days you saw many men working for the railroad who had an arm or a leg off. These men were usually switch-tenders. They weren't active in switching.

I. Was this generally due to railroad accidents?

R. Yes. They were usually due to a railroad accident. And there was a fiction to the effect that these men had lifetime jobs. Well some of those who abused their privileges such as over-drinking and so forth, found that they didn't have lifetime jobs. But these simple men, and of course people in those days were much less educated-than they are today, these simple men believed that now the company likes me and I'll settle for a very small amount which they did in those days. The amounts they get today are astronomical by comparison. example 80 and 100 thousand dollars for the loss of an arm or a leg, compared with what they got in those days. But because they wanted to use these men on "the cheap" as the British say, and undercut us, we protested. Now there was no overt action on our part. We didn't threaten to strike or anything of that sort. But there were men going home without work. All railroads maintain on the side what they call an extra board or a spare board. Now if somebody becomes ill, these men are pulled off the board, of course, and then put to work. Many of these extra men were showing up a couple of times a day carrying a lunch and going home without work-- the reason for, that being that when the road crews--that is the crews that operate between

places like Milwaukee and Chicago or between Savannah, Illinois and Chicago--these men were being asked by yard masters as they came in to do certain switching. They had no right in doing this switching. They got paid much less than switchmen, too. And the reason switchmen get paid higher rates is because of the danger of the work and because of the fact the work is much harder. A man going from here to Milwaukee, presumably, can sit in a caboose or engine most of the way. He might stop as they do sometimes to cool the wheels. Nowadays there isn't so much of that. But he mostly sits. He has a certain responsibility. If he's on the front end of the engine he has to help out to open switches in case they have to get out of the way of a passenger train or join the crew if the train should stop. This sometimes means what they call a broken knuckle with the coupling device, you see. He has to go back and help out. And the men in the caboose have to watch out for any sort of thing like a fallen brake beam which can wreck trains. The brake beams are so heavy if they fall on the rail the wheels behind the brake beam will ride over them and cause some of these awful accidents you see. And sometimes when you see the results of such an accident you wonder how in hell cars got way off where they did, especially nowadays where they have as many as 200 cars on a train. In those days a train of 75 cars was a rather large train.

I. How frequent were the accidents that you were talking about?

R. Oh, very frequent on the Milwaukee because of the very poor road bed. Sometimes they'd have to build almost a whole railroad, you know, to put the line back into operation. Some of these cars would go off into the adjoining fields as far as say a quarter block, which is quite a long way from the railroad. But to get back to what happened to

me. There was a first appeal before the full general committee which meant that the general chairman and all the local chairmen would assemble. It happened to meet in Minneapolis which was the home town of this general chairman spending the men's money. He would provide bottles, you, see, and there's always a coterie around him that helped him to put over the deals. Then our local chairman came out and in a friendly way told us that we should behave ourselves when we went in there and not make a bad showing. Well, through some swinging doors which had a crack, we had heard just what their plans were. We were pictured as desperate men from Chicago. Now if I might divert a minute. I had become acquainted with one of the local chairmen who was against the general chairman, who told me that when a local chairman was known to be in opposition to the general chairman, one of the railroad police would be sent out to start a quarrel with him. You see what I mean? And any sort of charge, such as his breath smells of whiskey was enough. In other words the company had the Indian sign on all these local chairmen all over the system because they knew the general chairman would help them. So you see, being a very young man, as I was, and the other man who was discharged with me. There had been actually three of us discharged on these phony charges, an entire switch crew. To show you how phony they were, the next day after the investigation the superintendent who had ordered this tracking down or this investigation accused the trainmaster, who had held the investigation of messing up the whole case, that there wasn't a leg to stand on. But you know, even he was naive because the company had the union behind him. In other words, they had this general chairman, they had this local chairman. And so even though we eventually reached Cleveland twice, going to the board of directors of our union who said we should be put

back to work, they removed the back-to-work-with-pay demand that we had made. Then, when nothing was done by this general chairman, we eventually got to the Board of Appeals which was our last avenue and they said-we should be put back to work. But some of the men on this Board of Appeals were these cornhuskers who had known the local chairman and had been told by him what a good man he was and how he was working so hard against these desperate people in Chicago. It's not very hard if you'll get out in the rural regions, you know, to be pictured as a rather bad man simply having come from Chicago. But be that as it may, we waited and we waited and nothing ever happened. Of course, we made individual appeals. Actually no harm had been done to the company. We threatened the "sweetheart" arrangement with the union, as they call it. The men were not aware, but they had a suspicion. There wasn't quite 600 men still working. Their conditions remain as bad today as they were at that time. Very bad on the Milwaukee Railroad,, whereas on most other railroads the conditions have improved vastly.

I. Could you go into some specifics about these conditions and relate them to conditions on other railroads?

R. Well you worked under unsafe conditions where the tracks were not looked after. I became very good at re-railing de-railed cars because of this. Custom is on most railroads, to take old mainline track that is considered obsolete and put it in the yards. This is alright if they keep the property up, but the Milwaukee Railroad did not keep this roadbed up and so consequently they had many accidents there. And there was not a toilet in the whole terminal with one exception. Now their really big yard was the Bensonville-Manheim yard which is

approximately two to two and a half miles long. This is where the greatest amount of traffic was. But there and in Galewood, which is the next largest yard, and Western Avenue there were no toilets. Well, the unsanitary conditions can only be imagined, you see. And toilets, etc. is what we had wanted. In that year, 1928, there had come out a directive from the Illinois Commerce Commission, not the Interstate, but the Illinois Commerce Commission, to the effect that where there are any great number of men railroads must have sanitary facilities. They must have a toilet, they must have hot and cold running water. And, of course, the superintendent who was one of these types who had been wished into his job--his wife had been close to some people who had been high on the Board of Directors of the Milwaukee. I think his wife arranged for him to be successively promoted. He was not a railroad man. But you see all these people who kept these jobs used the experienced men below them. For example, in those days a yardmaster's job was very insecure. Today the union strength is such that they can't easily fire them, but in those days the mere whim of a higher official could remove them from their job. So you could only have yard-masters and trainmasters who were pure lackeys. Despite the reactionary attitude of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen officials, who with few exceptions joined the newspapers and others in denouncing the CIO, most railroad men felt that the CIO was going through what the railroad men had been going through starting back a full century. Practically everyone, with the exception of these rural types, you know, who'll never understand unions anyway--speaking about rural types, I might say this: from my experience with the farm element, even the hired hand is against unions, which has been quite detrimental to those people who've had to be migratory labor and so on.

I. You were saying that you learned quite alot about farm people around 1918 or so. Did you see any evidence of farmworkers being organized at that time?

R. No, there was no evidence of farm workers being organized. You see the average hired hand is looking forward to the time he can save a bundle big enough to go and buy some land somewhere. In the first World War many were going to Canada. Some were buying land that the railroads had been given by the government after the Civil War. They were buying land way up in Minnesota--rocky land, where even today they use sleds drawn by oxen to pull these heavy loads of stone. And, of course, while the land in some cases is very good, it was then very, very cheap. And again, I learned about their attitudes. They have a very selfish attitude which is again a very old world peasant thing, you know, the idea that I'll get mine. In England the saying is, "I'm alright jack." You see, in the United States they say, "I've got mine," or "I'll get mine," and they use another four-letter word to indicate how the rest can be treated, you see. "The hell with the rest of the people!" Well, I'd meet these rural types and, while I was much younger, I didn't always recognize that they are essentially reactionary people because they had never known the benefits of a union. Now, much as 1 was oppressed later by corrupt union leadership and as much as I see there is such leadership in various unions, I continue to feel that the only way you can get anything from a boss is to organize.

I always get a laugh out of the ads that appear from time to time, especially the railroad ads, which state the benefits to be received on taking a job, such as the possibility of a pension which the railroads fought right up to the Supreme Court. In fact, the

Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen didn't help to put that law across until they saw that practically every other union was for it. And even the real old folks who were in old Dr. Townsend's club were going ahead in Congress; then the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen joined. But not before several other railroad unions.

The president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen was the late Alfred F. Whitney, a most corrupt union head who, for many years before becoming president, had carried on a campaign against former president V.G. Lee. Whitney hired so many organizers (really spies) that the grand secretary and treasurer announced publicly that he could see that great sums were being taken from the union's treasury for Whitney's benefit. Whitney hired one man I knew to spy upon any officers of the union who favored pensions--this before the Railroad Retirement Act was finally passed by Congress. So you see Whitney was acting on behalf of the railroads. When officers were found to be in sympathy with the pension plan, Whitney removed them from office. The organizers and other appointees of Whitney were obliged to go to poker parties at Whitney's home near Cleveland and let Whitney win at these games, really a form of salary kickback.

At that time there were 23 different unions on the railroads. Whenever Whitney found out that one of his officers had joined what was known as "the pension plan", a union formed outside of the railroad unions by men of various crafts, he removed him from office. Well, this is precisely acting as the railroads would do, I mean to say in absolute sympathy with the railroads.

I. What do you see as being his motivation?

R. His motivation was that so many of our railroad union people had been corrupt and in bed with the management. Now there's an old saying, "Where there's smoke there's bound to be fire." Now we can only tell by the lack of energy used that he was not in sympathy with getting pensions or unemployment insurance.

I. What was the reaction of the rank and file?

R. The rank and file quite broadly stated; you know, that people like our president and others were being paid by the railroads. You see what I mean?

I. But how did he manage to stay in office?

R. Well, it's due to the fact that we don't have a democratic organization. For example, each local lodge every four years sends a delegate to the union convention, you see. And it's the delegates who decide who the leading officers are going to be from the president on down. Now many of these delegates are progressive. They are new men who have come in there and they're going to put out the old guys. Well, they're reached, you see. There are various ways of reaching. One way is to ask them what they need and make promises. For example, a man close to the president will say, "Well, we'll send you out as an organizer." Well, you know, it gives him a certain prestige to go out. Of course, these poor simple-minded guys, even today they are not too well educated, they will fall for this. It means his pay being doubled and all sorts of travel allowances, etc. And he gets the picture that he might even go further in the union. But they come through with their promises. Of if he's a guy that's an alcoholic, why-they provide him with all kinds of booze and women, too. Millions are spent at the time of the convention. Conventions used to last as much as five weeks with delegates being paid 60 dollars per day at the time of the 1960 convention.

I. The next obvious question is why are men of this sort elected as delegates?

R. Delegates are usually the best known local officers of their lodge. When you consider that a poor boy, such as President Nixon was, absolutely devotes himself to financiers and the very rich, it's not surprising. The corruption in the unions is largely due to the employers themselves. You well imagine how when a large building which will cost millions of dollars has an expensive strike on its hands that they will pay a union leader who can stop the strike amounts up to $100,000 to save millions. You see what I mean? So poor boys have been selling out their brothers.

In fact, this is the whole reason why labor has not gone as far as it should. It's because we've been sold out by the people we trust. And it's poor boys who've done it largely. The employing class, I wouldn't say that I don't condemn them, I do condemn them, but they have corrupted and they have bribed so many people who. could be trusted. In some cases they have even killed men who could not be bribed. There's a classic example in the sandhog union. The sandhogs are the men responsible for putting in the tubes that subways run through. In fact, in New York I can remember a time when we called them the "tubes." The Hudson "tubes" even to this day many people call them, those subways that run between New York and Jersey City and Hoboken, etc. Well, the union leader there was one of these old line Englishman. Although he was a young man he was incorruptible and so he was killed. And Sam Rosen who was the man in charge of the work, the contractor, he was absolved, 'cause it couldn't be proved who had killed the man. It's obvious that somebody benefitted and so we can only deduce that the people who benefit from these awful crimes are behind them.

But to get back to this president Whitney. I attended the convention in 1934, not as a delegate but as a visitor. Relief had been cut off here in Chicago. Some social workers, included among them, Charlotte Carr was here at Hull House then and Harriet Vittum and other prominent social workers, contended there was sufficient money on hand. The politicians shut down the relief stations all over . Chicago, the object being to put over a sales tax. There hadn't been a sales tax before 1934. They put this sales tax over. Well here we come along several years later. I had returned to work as a switchman

on another railroad briefly, I was again unemployed. And I was with a committee of about 30 men from various trade unions, and women, too, to protest to the. then Governor. Horner about the mistreatment of the people on relief. They kept cutting the relief, finally restoring it, but it was always inadequate. They had cut it something 1 like 50% in the winter of 1937-38. Well, we got down to Springfield to see the governor. He was absolutely surrounded in his office at the state capitol by police as though we were rather dangerous people. In fact, one of our group who happened to be of Mexican origin and already helping to organize the stockyard workers, they searched him, thinking he might be carrying a knife, you know. The whole thing was ridiculous. But we asked the governor to do something about this big slash in relief and he said, “Well, I haven’t got a rope that I can pull to get you this money.” Well, the leader of our group who happened to be a crippled man said, “Well what is happening to the money?“ The Governor said, “You know you are already getting .9 of 1% of this sales tax., ” which was then 3%. Now I've given an account to various newspapers of this happening, meeting with the governor and what he said, but no newspaper has ever been willing to print it. This sales tax, I have no doubt it’s still being used the same way, didn’t go totally for relief. Only .9 of 1% out of the 3%. And when the leader asked where the rest of the money was going,- the 2.1%, the Governor said, Well, we need that for state payrolls.” So in spite of having caused all this misery for people who couldn’t get any relief, who had to resort to begging for several days, and their claims that the sales tax was needed to help poor people, the politicians immediately began appropriating the greater part of it for their own benefit, you see.

I. Did you want to say something about the 1934 convention?

R. Oh yes, that 1934 convention was so bad that a vice-president who was Canadian--you see, we have locals and general chairmen from the Canadian lines. In fact the whole North American continent has these brotherhood unions. We even have members down in Panama. But at this convention I saw this Canadian vice-president, Mondock, and Lifetime Senator in the Canadian Parliament.

I. This was the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen?

R. Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, yes. I saw this man forced out of the convention where he had been simply an observer. He had been deposed as a vice-president largely because of the fact that Al Whitney could never get the Canadians to go along with him. He had made various attempts to become president which preceded his election, oh, going back 20 years before he was elected. He had been trying to get the support of the Canadians. So this man was illegally and forcibly pushed out of the convention hall. Well, I was one of seven men who were picked up illegally by Cleveland police and put in jail. I was one of two men who were held for a week. First we went to the police jail where we encountered all kinds of criminals and after three days we were taken over to county jail. It's always a relief to be taken to the county jail because then you can bathe, you can be clean. The food is a little bit better.

I. What were the specific charges against you?

R. The phoney charges by the two detectives who came into our hotel room. Mind you there was no warrant or anything, and took us away. It was a suspicion--SP they call it there--suspicious persons, suspected of burglary. Now no specifics as to the burglary or anything of that sort. Well, the judge of the Court of Common Pleas happened to be a

decent type of guy. We witnessed a case where a policeman was trying to job a poor colored man and he claimed--if you have ever seen an overhead toilet tank, you might have an idea what they are. It's instead of having the water below, as you do now, you had them go above and then the water flushed down, you see. On a building that was being abandoned there was one of these water tanks missing. And this one policeman claimed that he had followed this colored man with this stolen toilet tank for two blocks. The judge asked him how he had followed the man and he said by the traces of the water. And the judge looked at him and didn't say he was a liar but he said, "I can't convict on that kind of evidence." I watched that colored man's face, our case was coming up next, you know, and you can imagine the relief on his face, because colored people thirty years ago had practically no rights in a white man's court. So on this charge which was phoney they held us under $500. bonds. Well, neither one of us had had $500.

To get back to the convention itself, I had come there with the hope, because the relief stations had been shut down, that I could get on as an usher. They employed not less than 20 ushers. But it happened that year they were employing old retired guys. The pension had already started. It was a very meager thing. But these old retired guys were working on the door, you see. So a Cleveland attorney who had heard of this case--we had managed to, as they say in prison, kite a letter out. When I got to the county jail I saw a man who was just going out. I said, "Say I know you. I used to see you speaking for the IWW at North Avenue and California." And I said, "Will you take this letter out for me," and he did. Occasionally, you know,

I write a letter to him or get a letter from him once in a while, this after some 38 years.

I. What's his name?

R. His name is Cederwall. There were two brothers who were highly successful around Cleveland in organizing small industries. When they came up against a large steel company, the company decided to frame them. They got several office girls to say he had threatened them if they didn't join the union, you see. They're very handsome nordic types, blonde sort of Saxon hair and so forth, but very sincere trade unionists. He'd been too successful around Cleveland which was well known as a non-union town. And so the charge of blackmail--you know this is sort of incongruous to us here. Blackmail in Ohio means that if you threaten anybody by means of physical coercion to do a certain thing for you, then that becomes blackmail, you see, instead of the common conception we have of somebody holding something over your head for money when they learn of something that's against you. Cedarwall was eventually acquitted when witnesses admitted perjury. But this Chicago preacher that I mentioned earlier who had done so much for the poor, he got into action for us and he got in touch with a Cleveland lawyer. This was a woman and she circulated a whole bunch of pamphlets among the delegates one day as they were going into the Cleveland auditorium, which is a large hall where conventions are held. And when the spies--this union employee many spies

I. The union employee spies?

R. Yes, they have spies. Many of them were ambitious to get certain jobs. When the union learned of this they got after these policemen. But I overlooked something that happened while were in the police jail. The president's own attorney, who looked

rather sheepish, was brought along by this big thug of a detective, who was the leader of these two detectives, Sgt. Wolf. This lawyer pretended to be an FBI man and he knew so little that he assumed it being an International union and a union which crossed state lines that he could intimidate us by saying that we had done something that would in some way or another make friction with the federal. Well, I knew this, but considering my age at the time, I didn't know too much about the law. But I knew this was phoney, you see. I reported this incident to the FBI here in Chicago, but nothing was ever done. And, of course, I was wise enough to know then that Roosevelt, if he had to choose between the big man and the little man, he would always choose the big man, in other words, those people who could bring the most pressure. So we even had one corrupt man, an official of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, to show you the kind of people they've always had at the top, who became the Secretary of Labor under Hoover. Now this was a deal made with the President of our union to make it appear--and Nixon is going through this same sort of calisthenics, right now--to make it appear that there's a small percentage of men going to work, in other words, that the unemployment rate is decreasing. In those days in making any sort of a pretended canvas, if they found a man who was getting one hour of work a week washing windows, they listed him as an employed man, you see. This is what the Hoover bunch did. When he got into office as Secretary of Labor, one of the most terrible things W.N. Doak did was to see that thousands of Mexicans were sent out the minute that they applied for relief and admitted that they were not citizens of the United States. They were deported to Mexico. I later worked for the Federal Writers Project and I met some of the people who knew the story. I worked among

Mexicans a great deal because I wanted to improve my knowledge of Spanish. But W.N. Doak had done this, the deal being that I can get this man Doak out of the way now and that'11 please the southern element of delegates, get him out of the way by giving him this prestigious job, you see. But Doak was an incompetent. You'd think that a man from the ranks of labor, and the only one in my time that actually has been--I think there was one exception,. This man from Massachusetts had, I think, been connected with the plumbers union. But with that exception Doak was the only man who actually understood labor at all. Still he being so corrupted, you know, did nothing for labor during his time.

Of course, Hoover didn't want to do anything for the working classes. But the delegates that I later met said that it was resolved when this came out on the floor, how these seven men had been mis-treated, put in jail, that it would never happen again. And we were taken from the county jail when we were released and asked never to come back. We were told not to come back any more and we were taken out to a place west of Cleveland called Rocky River. Many years later I attended a convent ion, I think it was 1960, and I was told by a lawyer I employed at that time to expunge any record that I had that this had happened to a thousand men, particularly the unemployed who came and wanted food. The police had orders to take these men out of town, you see. In Detroit, of course, I understand it was much worse, that they would hold them at a police station for almost 72 hours at which time they were supposed to book them. Just before they were supposed to book them they would take them to another jail, another police jail and they could run them around in this circle for as long as two weeks. This was what we called the "circus," you know. They would run around in this circle for two weeks or so.

Then, of course, when they left town they would send the word out, Detroit is too hot a town. Don't go there if' you are out of work. So many had gone there as Jack Conroy, author of The Disinherited, went during the Depression. He's an author now and resident of Chicago for many years before he retired a few years ago. He went to Detroit because Detroit had great need for temporary labor. In those days the automobiles were nearly all finished by March; there was no employment after that time. Done in a matter of a few months. Now it seems to be much of a year around thing. The lawyer went into the matter of my court record and we find that there is no record of such a case, you see. Now the whole thing had been arranged, although I believe that digging into the judges' files, if you were able to do that, you would come up with this sort of thing. But I spent $50 which I felt, well, you know, I didn't have 50 cents when I came to Cleveland in 1934. But by 1960 I had been working many years and had a little bit, of money.

I. What do you suppose was the reason for your arrest?

R. Well this was the president again, because the appearance of his lawyer at the police jail was an effort to intimidate us. But he did a very poor job. He said that this was sort of out of his line, etc. He may have been putting out words that he was supposed to remember if he ever did get brought up on a federal charge. But he was fairly safe because this was the way Roosevelt acted. Although I voted for him a few times, I know that Roosevelt always went where the pressure was. That's why he abandoned Lewis and, of course, the true story was never told. He put out the story that John L. Lewis wanted to become Secretary of Labor, Well, at that time there was

a Madame Perkins, a woman who wore silly looking hats. She was our Secretary of Labor and she didn't know up from down, but whenever there was any trouble she had to send out a couple of men to clear up the situation, labor conciliators, and so forth. And it wouldn't have been a bad thing had John L. Lewis become the Secretary of Labor, even though I knew that he was a dictator. We knew his history, you know, how he had helped to crush any rebels within his union. It wouldn'thave been a bad thing. At least he did represent unions and working men, which Madame Perkins did not. Madame Perkins had been at one time in the Political Science section of the University of Chicago.

I. Getting back to this question of corruption, you referred to earlier. On the one hard the rank and file seemed to be cynical, yet you yourself stated they were delegates, that is were elected, so once these men did get into office there seemed to be an apathetic resignation on the part of the rank and file to the situation that existed.

R. Well, the explanation lies here. Raving gone as a visitor, which I had a right to do being a member of the union, I noticed on those two occasions that from the platform, that either the president or one of his cronies would start off by telling the delegates that you must remember that you came here as a free man. Many had been told by their lodge, "Now we want that bunch out." You are absolutely independent here, you see what I mean? And the only thing actually that they had to fear was the roll call which, of course, since the minutes of the convention are printed afterward--and they are printed by a regular service, a professional service--would show any roll calls, you see. So roll calls were only made at the insistance of

any rebel group. It must not be said that there was no opposition. In fact, in the 1934 convention there was a group from Philadelphia headed by one of the members who had already become an attorney and he was trying to get into this matter of the corruption. But every time he would get up to speak in this large convention hall, the mike which was passed to each person speaking from the floor, was knocked over "accidentally" by some man sent over there to do that, you see what I mean? And when that happened the member wasn't allowed to speak on the speaker for some time. They pretended that it had to be repaired or something of that sort. It had been working all right up to that point. One of the president's cronies would get up and read a list of statistics that had no reference to the subject at the time. And so that's the way the convention went. And while there must have been at least a hundred delegates in opposition.

I. Out of how many?

R. Out of 800 odd or 900. And these delegates were at a time when switchmen were only. getting only about $6.48 a day, these delegates were getting $19 a day. And at the last convention I think they got something like $60 a day. Many of them weren't worth $19 a week, but they got, in addition to that, 5 cents a mile for all the miles they traveled. And some, of course, coming from the west coast on free railroad passes, got a nice bundle on that alone. So by using the men's money and using these tactics the same gang got in each time.

I. OK, in that case how did the so-called rebel delegates explain?

R. Well, they went back. to their lodges, but you see there was so much apathy. There was so much apathy which was largely tied up with the

history of American railroad unions. And you can see how the government gets into all these things. This is done largely at the behest of the railroads. They'll go along, they'll stall, the railroads will stall the unions along for years in some instances. And finally, when the unions get to the point that they can't take it any longer they will threaten to go out on strike. Then the Railroad Labor Act comes in where they have to have this cooling-off period. There's this committee of inquiry. A fact-finding committee is sent in. And there's this period of time which I forget off-hand that they must desist from striking. And finally when they are allowed to strike, Congress has been aroused and the men are put in a very bad light because the railroads usually get to the newspapers in such a way that the strikers appear to be inconsiderate of the public and all this sort of nonsense. So the grievances aren't properly gone over and it isn't explained that these men have waited years to alleviate this situation.

I. You're saying that the apathy of the men is somehow due to the federal government?

R. The apathy of the men is due to the fact that railroad unions have been so defeated way back in the past.

I. You're saying that it's the federal government that's always partially at fault?

R. Oh yes, the federal government or the courts. Now just for example, even in these times, in spite of the fact that there is an anti-junction law which I think the late Senator--

I. Norris-La Guardia?

R. Yeah, Norris-La Guardia. Well no. I'm thinking about old Bob La Follette but it might have been Norris and La Guardia that did it. But old Bob was in there at the time. That was the elder La Follette. Despite this the railroads are allowed to come into court and state that there are babies crying for milk, and there are old people suffering in hospitals, and there's an emergency on. And there's no emergency at all. So a judge will issue an injunction, you see. This, of course, is a delaying action and all these delays work for the benefit of the railroads who save enormous amounts of money. Of course, their propaganda is such that, even a relatively few years ago--in fact. I had a thousand pamphlets put out at the 1960 convention showing how the president of our union had done nothing to stop this Madison Avenue crowd or to explain to the public that this claim of featherbedding had no validity at all. I mean in all my life and I worked on a lot of railroads, about 30 in all, I never saw a real featherbedding job as they contended.

I . Well, what about the fireman?

R. It put the railroad men in a bad shape. Here you are a bunch of featherbedders, you know. And the public was calling us and all.

tape 2

I was then working on the railroad, a ridiculous situation. This was right around the Roosevelt era, because Roosevelt would not push charges against anybody connected with a large union who favored him, or any large corporation for that matter that had been going along with him. There were many cases that were squashed as being inimical to the interests of the people. The Department of Justice was advised not to push these cases during the war even. But as to the corruption,

the man I ran against for office, this local chairman who was an alcoholic, was caught padding the payroll, putting in for time that he hadn't worked at all. In those times he was one of the first to get on a salary; most local chairmen are paid for each day that they spend at committee work. And it is specifically understood that on the day that they put in for this committee work, they shall not work on the railroad, you see what I mean. It's been violated many, many times, but it isn't the rule by any means. He was caught at this sort of thing and so he was pushed out of office, you see. The two men who succeeded him could get nowhere with this general chairman favoring the company. So this was the situation. You could say that there may not have been any outward proof, but the fact was that we couldn't get anything done.

I. In what specific manner could you say that your chairman favored the company? In what sort of disputes would you say that they leaned toward the company's side?

R. Well, for example, in the matter of the four man crews, which had always obtained in areas where they needed them, he always took the company's side. We said, "Now here, he's putting in a crippled man to pass signals and otherwise work with the crew as much as he can." (A switchtender, working at a wage of approximately a dollar and a half less per day.) "This is cheapening our wages. They admit that they need these four men, but they're using this man, instead." And he would defend that practice. And when men who had been injured came downtown to the claim agent's office, they used to call it "going over the river." At that time the Milwaukee Railroad had its general offices in a building at Michigan and Jackson. But by my time, in 1928,

they were already in the Union Station. What was I going to say?

I. Regarding injuries I think.

R. Oh about injuries, yes, the claim agent was situated there. These men who were injured would find the local chairman there, he had no place there. He wasn't asked to be there and by law he couldn't act as a lawyer. But he would always advise the men to take the company's settlement on the cases when he was there. I talked with men who had had that experience. He wasn't there all the time. To tell you the truth, he used to pretend that he was home ill, but actually it was a result of his drinking bouts. -Because he put in extra claims for extra work that he didn't do, why the men had him removed. He died several years later.

I. Was persuading the men to accept company claims typical of solely this one chairman or was it typical of others?

R. Well, I can only speak for him, but I know that what we call scissor-bills, are these men who believed that if you prosecuted a claim against the company it was very unfair. The men, had been pretty -well brainwashed by the railroads and even the unions weren't very helpful. In fact, here's a union, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, that started off in 1883 with a declaration on the part of their president that, "We are not a striking union." Well, a union that never strikes, never asks for anything, gets nothing. And this was the type of history that we started out with. But of course ter-rible persecutions that followed after the men joined the union. For example, the men who started the union started in an old caboose in a place called Oneonta, New York on the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. (That caboose is more or less enshrined in a public part at Oneonta to honor

the charter members of the union.) These men met secretly in the caboose, you see. Now this was the way a union member was treated most times; if you were known to belong to a union you were put on the blacklist in addition to being fired from your company. You were put on a blacklist and wherever you went if you used your right name, which led to a lot of men using other names, you would not be able to obtain employment on the railroad. In those times you always carried a service letter with you, And so in the big strike of 1894, which was possibly the largest strike which was led by Eugene Debs, you know, the ARU, many of the men deserted the Trainmen and other railroad unions to join in this strike. And that strike put many men out as wanderers under assumed names. We had the case of a yardmaster who died on the Milwaukee Railroad in 1929 and he had worked on the Milwaukee since 1894 under the assumed name of Ryan, whereas his true name had been Davis. But he wouldn't have been able to get employment had he gone under his own name because under that name they had a central bureau where they could find out if you used your true name; just what your history had been. But do you want to get back to this matter of featherbedding?

I. Not unless you have some more specific instances of union favoritism toward the company.

R. Yeah, well, when you have a local chairman tell you to watch out, this company even employees their patrolmen, that is their private detectives, to hound any man who pushes the company on grievances, that was the history of the Milwaukee. In fact, several years later the Milwaukee company, after I left there, was found in the midst of the depression to be one of those companies who had had the revolution jitters and they had piled up a rather large stockpile of all

sorts of ammunition.

I. This was the Milwaukee?

R. Yeah, the Milwaukee Railroad.

I. I had heard of Republic Steel doing that,

R. Yeah, quite a number of companies were. This was one of a number of companies, you know, who had done this sort of thing. And to this day the conditions on the Milwaukee Railroad remain just as they were at that time, with a few exceptions. One being they can't discharge a man so readily as before. Because the type of local chairman who emerged, especially since the Second World War, won't collaborate to that extent with the company. Neither will the General Chairman, whom I have met. Won't to that extent.

I. What was the reason for the change?

R. Well, the reason for it is that these younger people who are a shade better educated, not that there are many college types among the switchmen today, therottenness had reached such a peak that it couldn't get any worse, it had to get better. And my case was just one of a number. It was thrown out but it was a worthy case. I mean, it was kicked around. And even though the general chairman there, who I consider a decent man today, and the local chairman, had their hands tied in many respects, they can't act as they would like to do because the headquarters of the Brotherhood remains in pretty much the same kind of hands as it did before.

I. Still under the old guard?

R. Yeah, the man who is president today was the protege of the crooked general chairman. His name is Luna, Charles Luna, and while he's not as rotten, yet we find that he is fighting what the men call the thirty year pension idea. Instead of helping to put over the proposition that a man, after thirty years of service, should be able to retire regardless of age, he's not doing anything about it. In fact, I introduced the resolution in my own lodge, which is United Transportation Union, in case you want to identify me, UTU Lodge number 168. I introduced a resolution and it was approved by the men several years ago and we never heard from it. After it was passed on to what we call the Grand Lodge in Cleveland, it was never heard of. The union has never fought to shorten the length of time or to allow the men to retire at an earlier age. And of course this is pretty much in line with its whole history of having fought against unions. Now the United Transportation Union is backing the plan, being somewhat more progressive than the old BRT, but still in conservative union leaders' hands. Let me say this about it, if I might for just a moment diverge. An engineer that I knew, who is retired many years, told me how he had first, in the late 1920's, proposed to President Warren Stone, who was head of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, that railroad men seek a pension. And Warren Stone said, "Absolutely not. This is unthinkable." Imagine, the head of a union! Well, of course, when you consider that this man Warren Stone had an interest in a coal mine in the South that employed non-union labor and even used convicts at times, you see. In fact the old New York World printed an expose of some of these mines, these poor devils taken from the penitentiaries.

Yes, this was quite common practice.

They were so badly mistreated as well as' not being paid properly.

I. Do you want to say something about the so called labor organizers,

union organizers, being used as spies against the union members themselves?

R. Yes, in every area, just as there are federal regional areas, every, area where there's any considerable number of railroads, there would always be at least one vice president. And he'd be assigned according to the president's wishes. For example, Bill Lee, William G. Lee, was president before Whitney became president. He always had Whitney up in Minneapolis. This later worked against Bill Lee, because being in Minneapolis Whitney became a buddy of the man who later succeeded him, W.P. Kennedy, but he helped him in many of his intrigues. Whitney used to live in Oak Park. He was married to some woman of means who used to periodically refuse to live with him and run off, etc. What was I going to say? They had two vice presidents here. And one was used as a spy as well as the occasional organizer who would drop in and visit lodges. Sometimes three of four of these organizers came in. They were very often from railroads that were not at all significant in the national scheme of things. They were from little railroads down in Texas, or lines that might have a few hundred members but were not very strong in the union sense. But these guys were used to go around to lodge halls and sound out the sentiment. And the members were always told by these fellows that you must back your local lodge officials and all this sort of stuff. The Brotherhood's just fine. We've done this here and we've done that there and so forth. Now, it's true, that even in Bill Lee's time, which was a very conservative time, they did have a few disastrous strikes. In fact a couple of Southern railroads, the Missouri and Northern Arkansas for one, I can't think of the name of the other one, but that was essentially an Arkansas railroad. The union was defeated on these railroads. But the two railroads themselves

later folded up after long, long strikes. But there was an effort, you see, at times. In the great Shopmen's strike of 1922 Bill Lee, BRT president, would not have the courage to face the president of the United States, who always used what we then called the Bureau of Investigation. (The F to FBI was added later.) But it was always used against the men. In fact, in that big strike William Burns, who was the principal investigator for the Bureau of Investigation at that time--

I. The William Burns Detective Agency?

R. The same one, yeah. He rode around spying on men who did operate trains. You see we were instructed we could not strike. Bill Lee told us we could not strike. The government had threatened to tie up BRT funds in the Shopmen's strike in 1922 if trainmen did strike. Conroy--if you read any of the reviews, he was in that strike. He tells about it in The Disinherited Railroads employed thousands of thugs throughout the country. And whenever thugs saw a few union men gathering near the railroad, they didn't have to be on the railroad, they'd beat them mercilessly. And of course there were-a number of instances of shootings. I don't claim that the strikers took it all laying down, but this was how the Bureau of In--vestigation went about. I think they caught one or two people, putting sand in the journal boxes. But this was not something that you could say was inspired by the unions. But all of us were scabs at that time because we were instructed that we couldn't strike and I can remember taking trains out. We'd wait until the air hoses were being coupled together. If you've observed, between every box car there are these two couplers and they are below the couplers. And these have to be coupled. I've had yard masters say "Frank, why the hell don't you get in here and couple a few of these?" And I'd say,

"Well, you're the one that wanted to be yardmaster." The yardmasters were intimidated and many of them belonged to the union, too. They were intimidated and told, "If you want to hold your job as yardmaster couple hoses," which is Carmen's work. The union wasn't very strong in those times but it wasn't very honest any more than it's honest today. But unions go as they're pushed, and this is not an original thing on my part to say this. Where the union leaders see the pressure from the members is great; they will finally advance and do something. What advancement we've got is due to the dissatisfaction of the men. In some instances they even jumped out of their union and joined another union, which was a dual sort of thing. I mean the men belonging to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen might jump out and join the Switchmen's union.

I. Row may instances of really great dissatisfaction have you found on the part of the members in your experience?

R. Well, of course, you constantly hear griping and quite often it's based on reality, But there were many who were behind me at the time I lost my job on the Milwaukee. Finally it got so they had a hard time getting a quorum at the lodge, which is five people, because they were all frightened that anything they might say at the lodge hall might be usedagainst them.

I. So instead of participating, trying to change things, they more or less just dropped out?

R. Well, there were a few who were behind me at all times. These fellows were later fired from the railroad when they got to them in a kind of an oblique kind of a way. But the men generally were scared. And this pretty much sums up the whole situation except recent times. The

men who have come out of the Second World War, that is to say the young men who grew up during and after the Second World War and went into railroad service, are rather more courageous than the old time unionists were because the unions had this long history of government oppression, state, city oppression, and so forth, you see.

I. To put this in some sort of perspective then: on the whole, in spite of corruption and everything else, would you say that unionization of the railroads has been positive or negative?

R. Well it has been positive in the long run, if you see what I mean. But the corruption has been the one single factor that has held the men back, so long. In my innocence, in my youth I thought that with all the rules we had in the union to protect the men, that these rules would be put into effect, which of course was never done. When you get a local chairman or a general chairman who won't work with the menhonestly, then of course they're of no effect. But in the long run the unions have prevailed far more than they did when I was younger. But it's a process that has taken far too long. Now, just to give you an idea, this business of raising a man to angelic proportions, such as in the case of President Kennedy, the one who was killed, is a very amazing thing. But it shows, like the work that this great windbag Winston Churchill did, that if you reach the right people you can get people beating drums all over you and so they think you're pretty big. The whole Kennedy family never had any history of doing anything for labor to speak of. In fact Kennedy himself had a very bad history.

I. Would you say this about Roosevelt too?

R. Well, I could say, we knew that the Democrats had made certain promises.

I. In the case of the railroad trainmen?

R. As far as Roosevelt was concerned, his early history showed that he had no feeling whatsoever for people who worked for a living. He was not for the people.

1. Well, regardless of earlier history, I'm referring specifically to attitudes and actions while he was in office, while you were working for the railroads during the depression and the New Deal. Did you notice any change in the situation other than the general change in the climate of the country?

R. Yes,- there was passed during his administration, and later it was dissolved by the Supreme Court, the National Industrial Relations Bill, called the NIRA.

I. The National Industrial Recovery Act.

R. That's right. And section 7A compelled companies to deal collectively. It wasn't as spelled out as the Walsh-Healy Act was, but section 7A permitted certain organizational work. And that was a very feeble thing. But, it in 1930, tramping around the country looking for work, I was in California, and I came to a lodge where they at one time had had 1,300 members and now had six or seven members and they were not working, on the Pacific Electric Lodge. It was a railroad, that was owned by the Huntington interests who then owned the streetcar interests of Los Angeles. This had a hook up with the Southern Pacific. Now Whitney had been sent out there in 1919 to stop a strike where the Southern Pacific, the Union Pacific and the Santa Fe had gone out

in sympathy with the men on the Pacific Electric. And the whole town was tied up in-so-far as the railroads were concerned. Nothing was moving. Whitney was sent out there as a vice-president by William G. Lee who was then president. It was sort of a trouble shooting operation. But he made a deal whereby the Pacific Electric men could stay out. At least he made this proposition, but he ordered the men on the Southern Pacific, Union Pacific and the Santa Fe to go back to work. And then the first thing you know they were doing Pacific Electric work. They were going over on the Pacific Electric where they had formerly not gone. Well, this beat the Pacific Electric men so badly, you see, they lost that strike. The men who went out on strike, many of them, could not return to work.- And when they did return to work, they had to sign a stipulation that they would not belong to the union. This is known as the yellow dog contract. I have signed such a thing myself on the New Haven Railroad desperately in search of work. And the examining doctor is the one who presented me with the paper. I had not signed it and of course I always regretted this thing, but I had a wife and child that were trying to live in New York at that time. And I thought, well, since I'm not supposed to be a scab I'm signing the thing. It goes against the grain. This was in 1926 that I worked out there temporarily while I was still holding my rights here. But when I attended this lodge, which was years and years after this disastrous strike, the men told me that no man who belongs to the union dares tell about it on the Pacific Electric. The Pacific Electric was called the "red cars." It was something like the IC but they went out in very many directions. Now it's all buses what they do have. It was a pretty big thing and they had extensive facilities around

Los Angeles and the suburbs. But this is more of the work that Whitney had done. Now, that man was not paid by the railroad, you see. The presumption of guilt is so bad it wasn't any good to the union. He wasn't any good to his own union, they lost hundreds and hundreds of members. And of course left a very bad taste in the mouths of railroad men. But this is part of the corruption of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. I was out of them for many years after this incarceration period in Cleveland.

I was so disgusted I swore I'd never go back into them again. But something like 21 years after the operation I was asked to come back in, in a place where the men needed someone who could write up grievances, someone who could help the local chairman to fight the company. And well, I did it. This was a sub rosa operation for me for a long time. I later went back into the union. But of course I still am not a loyal member in the true sense. I pay my dues but I don't hesitate to tell even the Grand Lodge officers that they're crooked and they're lousy and so forth. In the old days, if you said that to them, and I said it to them many times, you were likely to be expelled.

Nowadays they have to go to your own lodge to expell. This passed at the 1960 convention. They have to go into your own lodge and prosecute you and that's a very difficult operation because the men in your own lodge usually like you and see that you are in the right. On the ground level, the men still keep wondering what the hell happened at the last convention that they haven't got this or that condition that they might want. It's their ignorance as well as apathy in many cases. But the bunch on the Milwaukee I give up as a bad job. I saw a few of them on the death of my wife a few years

ago and I thought, "Christ, you guys just don't have any idea of what the good conditions are like on various other railroads." I worked on the Southern Pacific and I worked on the New York Central, as I said, and the conditions were vastly better. We always had decent provisions for washing up toilets and so forth. Railroad--officials never sneaked around with a watch and watched you with this twenty minute meal proposition. And quite often the men would go home early. When they had done their work they'd go home two and three hours early in a few places. That was never done on the Milwaukee Railroad.

I. This is sort of a question from left field. Generally what was the racial or ethnic composition of the workers? Were there any frictions among the men themselves that might have tended to inhibit any sort of union strength that they might get together? Or were they fairly homogeneous? Were there any blacks working there, for instance

After the great switchmen's strike of 1920, there was a great deal of bitterness because the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen had done the trick again. They had even gone out thousands of miles to bring men in, particularly into Chicago, to break the strike.

I. The union itself?

R. The union had done this. But it was an outside union that had started the whole business, the CYA, or Chicago Yardmen's Association, a rump outfit

I. What sort of people did they bring in?

R. Well, they brought in a lot of these rural types for one thing. And then there were others who had never even worked on a railroad.

I. Did they bring in any blacks to break the strike?

R. Oh, no. The blacks weren't identified with that at all. But I must say this, I often think about it, how there were, in my time, the men who worked on railroads were mainly Nordic, a great many Germans, Irish and Scandinavians.

I. Immigrants?

R. No, no. They weren't immigrants. You rarely saw anybody who had been from the old country, people from the first generation. You rarely saw that. But an Italian was always called a dago and he was always laughed at. I remember one Jew, I often think of his death, which occured while switching .

I. Those people didn't have the switchmen's jobs did they?

R. Yes, they got switchmen's jobs.

I. Well, didn't they generally work the road gangs?

R. No, the kind of people you're thinking about, I was writing about yesterday, the great number of immigrants who were sent in here to keep labor costs down. Vast hordes of Greeks were brought in; they worked on these gangs, as many as a hundred. I lived in Iowa in places where they came and I even met some of these people later, particularly the foremen, who told how they padded the payroll. There might be 100 Greeks on the payroll but only 70 were working so the money was split between the man who ran the crew and the man who was off. And of course the man who was the time keeper with them, he was in on the deal. But, be that as it may, the general consist was of people of Nordic strains. Germans, Irish, Swedes. The men, I must admit, were ignorant men. They resented

anybody with swarthy skin. There was one man I remember who I think was a passer, an excellent worker you know, a good man.

I. He passed for Nordic, you mean?

R. No, he passed for white. He had such a very dark skin.

I. I'm a little confused, do you mean he was a black or an Italian?

R. We never could be sure. But I think by his mannerisms--you see, one of the things you learn as you get older, you learn what people are. Now for example a man I know passed under a French name. I now know by hi6 mannerisms and later admissions of course that he was Polish. But in his day a Pole had a hell of a time. Some Poles managed to make it.

I. Were blacks purposefully excluded from the union?

R. They were not only excluded from the union but the employers wouldn't even undertake hiring them.

I. If the employer considered it the union refused?

R. Oh the union! They knew that they'd have trouble with the union but they weren't worried about that. They could get plenty of white people in the older you know. It's only been since the Supreme. Court has made various rulings in favor of the colored that they have to worry. The railroads today, if they had their way, would not have them. They had them on some section gangs. Now the IC on the track gangs had them because the IC goes through so much Southern territory and they had experience of them. Rock Island had lots of Mexicans. They knew they were very good workers, but no colored

when I was a young fellow working on railroads in operating service. Only in recent years they have managed to get a few colored in. Italians came in great numbers as well as Greeks, but for the track work. The Italians, in fact, had more or less a monopoly on the streetcar lines, that's working on the tracks that the streetcars used.

But in case you're interested in this matter of the featherbedding, at the time that the featherbed issue was still pretty hot, President Kennedy rushed into Congress in the face of a strike and had passed what I consider an absolute violation of the involuntary servitude act, which is that the unions must arbitrate long after they have the right to go out on strike, if the Congress decides they must arbitrate on a certain issue. The firemen's issue was still unsettled at that time. Now, what happened in the case of the firemen was this: the railroads were able, with bigger engines, faster engines with the coming of the diesels. to cover much more territory. The railroads wanted to change the working or scheduled provisions. But in the case of the firemen, they thought he merely sat up there. In fact they put it that way. The Madison Avenue advertising outfit told the American public that all that man does is sit up there.

I. What does he do?

R. He sits and watches on his side. Now when they're going around a curve, for example, he gets to look back, on the other side of the curves, he looks back and forward to see the condition of the train and for possible obstructions. If there's any dust back there, if he sees any dust accumulating in just one section of the train he knows what that means. And he can warn the engineer. The engineer can not observe both sides. I worked at Inland Steel when they used the first diesel, long before railroads used diesels.

Inland Steel, of course, did have Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen members working in this mill of theirs at Indiana Harbor, and they decided to see if they could use a one man engine, that is to say, with simply an engineer. So General Motors had set up a mirror on the left hand side which would be the fireman's side. They set this mirror up for the engineer to look at so he could observe on the left side. Well now, you can well imagine that a mirror would not encompass enough area to be a safe thing to go by on any lengthy train, but on short operations, such as switching operations, it might show the engineer.

I. What's the danger of the dust you referred to?

R. Well, the danger of the dust that I referred to when you look back means that there's something dragging on the train, you see. And that dragging could be a part of a brake beam, a piece of iron which often derails-cars and wrecks trains. I saw one example. of that in Pennsylvania last year while I was riding on the Pennsylvania Railroad. There were 26 cars containing new automobiles that had been "ditched" as the saying goes, as a result of a brake beam coming down. There are many mysterious accidents that happen nowadays, but they're only mysterious because these "spokesmen" don't tell the truth, which is that the tracks are not kept up. I can remember a time riding the outside of a train when you'd see track walkers in the night, especially in the mountain regions, going along, in the mountain regions-particularly on rainy nights to see that there wouldn’t be any rock slides and all that sort of thing. Every area had a track walker, In many places those track walkers have been either laid off or there've been too few of them. They've had too much territory

to cover. A track walker usually had enough in the way of tools to make a temporary repair of a small nature. Might be a cracked rail, he? could use spikes to hold it together-and then of course arrange later to have a section crew come. But the section crews, have been laid off wholesale and this causes lots of these wrecks. Where the rails expand, you see what I mean. If you watch the rail when a heavy train passes, you'll see the rail going up and down. The spikes eventually become loose and there's this widening and the trains leave the track for that reason. But, in the matter of featherbedding so many of the railroad officers are not practical men. Nowadays they're coming from the right kind of families or they come from families who have an influence with the right kind of families, so they're made what they call train masters. They very rarely dare to make them a yard master because a yard master has got to know his yard and he's got to know how to tell men what he wants done. In other words, it's as I mentioned about the carpenters, if you don't know anything about driving a nail or sawing wood, if you don't know how to lay out work, surely you couldn't be given a job as head carpenter. But these are safe men. You see the practical man is liable to tell the boss man on the railroad, from the superintendent on up, "No, this isn't practical, this won't work." Railroads don't want those kind of men. A while ago I was talking about this superintendent who used to tell these train masters when they'd complain about working as much as 24 hours for several days at a stretch, and they'd say that they can't do this sort of thing, he'd say, "There is no such word as can't." Well this man had acquired syphillis. He'd been a major in the First World War and he emerged with the title of Lt. Colonel so ha always insisted on being called "Colonel." He must have been

an awful ass in the army itself because in that section of the army called the Railroad Engineers it was always described as something like a picnic to the men that I knew that were in the Railroad Engineers. They always laughed at this fellow because of his ineptness. This superintendent had been made a superintendent at Milwaukee, Wisconsin first before he was sent down to Chicago. And he used to tell them, "There is no such word as can't." He used the New England "caahn't" you know. It was an affectation on his part because he'd been away from New England for Lord knew how many years. He was not a cultured person anyway. But he went to Mayo Clinic and they told the Colonel "We can't do anything for you." He had already become blind and for the last year of his life he was kept under pay. He had a walking stick, being partly crippled.

He was a sadistic person who delighted in the punishments that he gave to various men, but he particularly liked drunks. Now while he wasn't a drunk himself, he was a toper. The value of a drunk is this: when a local chairman who is honest, comes and pleads for a drunk, asks for leniency, tells of his family, it's suffering and so forth, the superintendent loves to say, "Well now, here, you've come in with a number of time claims with men that are claiming thousands of dollars." And these men are entitled to this money. "Overlook some of these demands of yours, and I'll put the man back to work." So drunks were always a horror to us. I mean I've protected them on the job and I've done some drinking on the job myself. But every payday the real drunk acts as though there'd never been a payday before. A big celebration. You have to hide him or tie him down somewhere. My father was one. He was killed with two legs off, but it wasn't a matter of payday, Another yard that I worked

in, they had to look all over for parts of a man's body, he'd come out drunk. I always preferred to put them in a shanty somewhere. That's all they ever afforded us to work in you know, a place where we might eat our lunch, we might have a locker. I always preferred to put them away because of course they're no good to you and they can get killed as many have done. But I wouldn't say it was a matter confined to that superintendent alone. Many officials like to have a drunk case hanging around, you see what I mean. Not that they'll fire them for drinking, but the thought is that we can now bargain in a stronger position with the grievance man who has certain grievances which have got to be attended to.

But Kennedy just practically a short while before he died rushed into Congress and had this law passed. I forget what its name is, but it's most unjust and I had looked long before this for the Supreme Court to knock this thing out because it defies the involuntary servitude law in the Bill of Rights, that you can't be forced to work. Now after all the provisions of the Labor Act had been lived up to, the companies want the privilege of going in and getting these injunctions. Failing that they want to get Congress into the thing. And the railroad men are always pictured as some kind of villains, but the story is never told about the years that preceded this where they're trying to persuade the company. You see, the companies have this long history of saving millions of dollars by prolonging all these discussions and all these other various delays that they have. But as far as Kennedy is concerned he had also, in collaboration with United States Senator Smathers of Florida, arranged to see to it that these temporary workers who came from Jamaica and Trinidad were paid less than the scale. What's the phrase

for it? Not the prevailing wage, the scale that they've set up. I can't think of the name for it but he allowed the Florida fruit growers to pay these men less. These poor guys that had nobody to fight for them. And Senator Smathers, acting on behalf of the fruit growers, went to Kennedy, and Kennedy let this thing drop. Very bad!

INDEX

Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen 4-6,16,20,23,34,36,37,40,46

Burns, William 36

Carr, Charlotte 18

Cederwall, Frank 22

Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad..... 6

Chicago Yardmen's Association 42

Churchill, Winston 38

Conroy, Jack .....,..... 25,36

Debs, Eugene. .....32.

Delaware and Hudson Railroad 31

Doak, W.N 23,24

E.J.and E. Railraod 5

F.B.I 23,36

Federal Writers Project 23

Hoover, Herbert 24

Horner, Governor 19

Inland Steel Co. 4, 46

I.W.W. 21

Kennedy, W.P. 7, 35

'Kennedy, President 38,49

La Follette, Bob 29

Lee, William G. 16,35, 36

Lewis, John L..... 25,26

Luna, Charles 34

McAdoo, William G. 9

Michigan Central Railroad 3

Milwaukee Railroad 13,32,47

N.I.R.A. 39
Nixon, President 17
Pacific Electric Lodge 40
Pennsylvania Railroad 46
Perkins, Madame 26
Pullman, Ill. 3
Republic Steel Co. 33
Roosevelt, Franklin D. 29,39
Smathers, Senator 49,50
Southern Pacific Railroad 34,39,
Stone, Warren 34
Switchman's Union 37
United States Steel Corp. 5
United Transportation Union 34
Vittum, Harriet 18
Walsh Healy Act 39
Whitney, Alfred D. 16,35,39
World War II 38