

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

1952 YOUNGSTOWN SHEET & TUBE STEEL STRIKE

Personal Experience

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Augustine F. Izzo

Interviewed

by

Andrew Russ

on

November 14, 1988

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INTERVIEWEE: AUGUSTINE F. IZZO
INTERVIEWER: Andrew Russ
SUBJECT: 1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike
DATE: November 14, 1988

R: This is an interview with Augustine Izzo for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the 1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike, by Andrew Russ, on November 14, 1988.

Can you tell me a little bit about your background, were you born in Youngstown, where you went to school, and everything like that?

I: Well, I was born in Girard, Ohio in 1912. February 6th. I went to Girard through eighth grade.

R: When you graduated from high school, did you go work in the mill right away?

I: No, I went to work on the railroad. I started on the railroad in the car shop on November 4, 1928, and I stayed there until 1935. Then, I went to Youngstown State at night and took up welding. Then, after I got out of there, I started to work in the fabricating. The first job I had was under the Oak Street Bridge there at the Youngstown Boiler and Tank. Then from there, I went to Miles Boiler and Plate. That was all during the Depression, when you worked a few months here and a few months there. I worked up at the Youngstown Steel Doors. Then, in between times, I worked at Wilcox Scrap Yard, burning scrap. Then I got a job at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube. That was on July 16, 1936. You might

work a couple months, sometimes less, and then you would be laid off. Then, I got a job there at Commercial Sheering in Stanford. Then, I'd get called back. [I'd] go back, because when I left the railroad, I blew eight years. I figured, "Well, I better start staying some place." Then, I stayed with the Sheet & Tube.

We started to organize in 1937. A lot of people don't know this, but John L. Lewis was the man that spent a half a million dollars to organize the steel workers. Some people say, "Well, why did he do that? What did he get out of it?" Well, he didn't get nothing out of it except that he could see ahead. His theme was "organize the unorganized in order to remain strong itself." So then, he sent Phil Murry to Youngstown, and we had a meeting at Wick Park. After we had the meeting then, his organizers came in and they were all coal miners. We didn't know anything about organizing.

A fellow by the name of Huey Carselli and a fellow by the name of . . . I can't recall the other guy off-hand. They had this district here. He gave you cards. You went out, and you signed up anybody you could. It didn't have to be anybody from your plant. The cards were all fixed up so that, when you filled them out, you put the name and address of the individual and the company they worked for. On the bottom, they had another card that you took off with the name and address. They carried that, because that showed that they were a member of the United Steel Workers of America. But, when you signed them up, they paid five dollars.

Now, this five dollars that they paid, when you turned these cards in, three dollars went in to help defer the expenses and carry on and two dollars went to the fellow that signed them up. I never took two dollars because it was easier to sign a man up for three than it was for five dollars. In them days, it was tough, because money was scarce. I was very, very good at getting people, because three dollars looked a lot better than five dollars. Then, of course, it caused dissension when they found out. When they would start comparing notes, "Well, I paid five dollars." "Well, I only paid three dollars." "How come you paid three dollars?" Well, then they were told, "Well, the fellow that signed you up wanted his two dollars for signing you up, and the other fellow didn't want it." In a way, these fellows that took the two dollars, you couldn't blame them because they had families. I didn't have a family. I was single. I didn't have no responsibility. Therefore, I could afford to do without it. I couldn't very well criticize the ones that were taking the two dollars because it was hard work. . . .

R: How many people did you get total? How many members?

I: Well, I never kept track of them. But, I got a lot of them. It didn't make no difference where they worked because, when you turned it in, they would sort them out. At that time, before you could go out on strike, you had to have 50 percent of the employees. Or otherwise, they wouldn't recognize you. That was the reason for that there. They didn't hesitate--management didn't hesitate to keep reminding you that this is just a flash in the pan and, "when this is over, you'll be black-balled. You'll never work in the mill all you're life." They kept hammering that at you to intimidate you. I was pretty well out-spoken. I could afford to be, because I was single. I was told time and time again, "The only reason you're mouthing off like that is because you're single." I said, "That's right, and as long as you people got all the say, I'm going to be single so I could tell you where to go."

Another thing now, this is kind of hard to understand in a country like ours. Now, this company, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, built the tube mill. It cost millions of dollars, and they did not provide drinking water. We had no drinking water in the plant. You could still go up there today along the side of the road, and you could see the old plate from the pump. It had an outside pump, and this pump belonged to the farmer that owned the land when they sold it to Briar Hill Steel. They had water boys that would go out and get the water, bring it in, and set the water buckets on nail kegs. They didn't even have the courtesy of having paper cups--I mean paper envelopes because in those days paper cups were unheard of. They had paper envelopes.

R: Yes, right. You had to drink from your hands.

I: They didn't even furnish them. They had a rusty dipper, and, inside of a few minutes, you had all kind of tobacco swimming in that water. Another thing, you did not have a place to wash your face and hands when you got through working. You didn't have a place to put your clothes. You had to carry your clothes back and forth. They did not get a wash room down at our place . . . until after. . . . When I went into the service in 1941, they were just putting a wash room in. When I came back then, it was completed. Now another thing, they did not have a schedule. Well, you say well how did you work? Well the boss would stand by the clock when you were ringing out and say, "You work tomorrow. You work tomorrow. You're off. You're off. You work. You're off." That's the way we worked.

Then when we would have a change over on the mill, sometimes it was pretty hard to figure out exactly when they were going to start and when they would tell you to come out. Well, you would go out in the morning and stand around like a bunch of sheep. Then the boss would come out and say, "You, you, you, you. That's all," and you'd go back home. At three o'clock, you'd come back out for the next shift to try and see if you could get a day. Now, those are the things that existed, and people don't realize that. That's really kind of hard to take.

Then, when we went on strike, one of the best things that happened, I believe, that saved a lot of blood shed, was when they called out the National Guards. They had a rumor out that they were going to bring in five hundred scabs. Well, we had put too much in, and we weren't about to take it lying down. The sheriff at that time was Sheriff Hartman. He came down from Warren to tell us. . . . He said, "I know everything is okay, but I just came down." I knew the man. "The National Guards will be in here within about two hours." And he said, "So [you'd] better get every thing in order".

It was rough because, like I says, if they would have brought those scabs in, we had it all prepared, like what they called down here at Briar Hill. Before they put the new roads in, the entrance to the mill was just ideal for blocking. You had to go to an underpass, and we were prepared for them because we had fellows there. We had help from the outside, and we had a lot of gallons filled up with gasoline. We figured if they were going to come down from the underpass. . . .

R: You were going to light it on fire?

I: Well, hey, they were shooting at us down at the Republic Steel, Stop Five, at the gas station down there. It made every magazine in the United States and Canada. Republic Steel was the only company that their security guard carried weapons.

R: Is that right? Did they carry shot guns?

I: Oh they did. They shot, down there at Stop Five. That there gas station was full of holes like a sieve, from them shooting at us. They were lucky, because the fellows at that time didn't have the training that we have now. When you look around, I'd say 80 percent of the fellows all have had military training.

The thing that I used to try to tell the fellows, "When the police come, don't bunch up. Everybody has

got three or four good friends. Pick out a policeman and stand by him. Then, when he makes the wrong move, grab him and disarm him." But, you know, that takes a lot of practice and a lot of training to tell the person. The first thing they do, they get bunched up. Then if anything started, they start swinging the club, and we come out on the short end. You take what happened in Chicago when they killed those seven pickets. They claim they shot them in self-defense. Now, I'd like to know from anybody how you could shoot a man in self-defense when you shoot him in the back. They were all shot in the back. They weren't trying to hurt them. They were trying to get away. They hired professionals, strike breakers.

Another thing, right here in Youngstown, when you went to get a place to have a meeting, if you got a place like say an empty store room, the next time you went there to get that place, it wasn't available. Simply because. . . .

R: The people wouldn't rent it back out to you?

I: No, because they were tricked. They owed money on it. The bank would say, "Hey, anymore of that, then we'll foreclose on you." The only place they couldn't control was like the hall that we had at St. Anthony, the hall that we had at St. Rocco, the Italian hall that we had down at . . . Italian-American hall, the Karsky Hall on South Avenue, and the Salvenio Dome in Girard. Now, those were places they couldn't control. And, those were places where we held our meetings.

R: Okay, what period of time was this? Was this in the thirties would you say?

I: This was during the 1937 Steel Strike.

R: Okay, okay. Go ahead.

I: This was all happening during the 1937 Steel Strike. Then after the National Guards come in and they opened up the gates, well the fellows had to go back to work because they were hurting. But, some of us didn't, and I didn't go back until after the National Guards left. They called me up several times. They said, "Aren't you going to go back to work?" I said, "Yes, I'm coming back to work. But when I hired out to the Sheet & Tube, there wasn't no National Guards walking around with a rifle on their shoulder. When I work for any place that a man guards me with a rifle, it'll be in a penitentiary. When the National Guards leave, then I will come back to work."

R: So in a sense, they were trying to force you to work.

I: Well, they were, you see. So, I told them, "When they leave, I'll come back." So after they left, I did go back. Now when I went back and I rang in that morning, the boss come up to me and he says, "Don't go to work until you see . . . , " is it okay to use their names? They're all passed away.

R: Yes.

I: The superintendent, Mr. Prescott, he says "You have to talk to the superintendent." I says, "Fine and dandy." I walked over to the timeclock. I picked up my time timecard, and I put it in my pocket. Then, I showed it to him, and I said, "Listen. Now, you tell Mr. Prescott that, if I don't go to work this morning, I will go down to the post office third floor and register a complaint for discrimination with the National Labor Relation Board." He said to me, "You wouldn't do that." I said, "You try me. [If] you step on my toe fellow, I'll help you off."

So, I waited around, and the superintendent came in about nine o'clock. I went over to see him, and I guess the word got to him. He says, "You go to work this morning, but all I want you to do is take a walk with me down through the plant, so they could see us." Because, if you look back to when the people went back to work in thirty seven, down in Johnstown and in Canton--now, I didn't believe in this--they blew up some of the parts inside the mill. That wasn't right, because they hurt people. He was worried, and so was I. I said, "Listen, if I thought for a minute that anybody who is in here was going to do that, I wouldn't be here." I says, "I don't know what's in people's minds." I says, "That's another reason why I didn't come back until the National Guards left because I figured they cooled off a little." Those are the things that a lot of people don't remember.

Now there is one thing, now, that I believe was one of the best things that we got in our contract. [It] was the safety clause. Because, before we had the safety clause in the contract, you could talk, all day long, safety. They would listen to you, but they wouldn't spend a dime. They wouldn't spend a dime. So, what would happen see, like for instance, if an individual got hurt, they had what we called the blue book like these auto salesmen. So much for a finger, an arm, for an eye. If you went, here's what they would say, "We couldn't help it. We try to protect them. But, that was just an act of God. It was an act of God, see?"

But then, when we got that part of the contract they changed the story. Because, the way it was . . . it was set up, what I would say, fair. They way the safety contract was set up was you picked five men, like in Briar Hill. We had five men from the Union and five men from management. Now, these five men from the Union had the mill cut up in districts. Where I worked was at the electric weld tube mill . . . I had the tube mill. I had the finishing floor. I had the shipping floor. I had the welder's side, and I had what they called the plate mill side. Now, anything that happened in there, I tried to get to it.

Then once a month, we would have a central meeting, our five people with five people of top management. Anything that wasn't resolved . . . because they got so that they would have it was compulsory, as far as the company was concerned, to have one meeting a month in the plant. Then, we had one meeting a month with top management. The things that couldn't get resolved on the lower floor, we would bring this up with top management and iron them out. Then, if something was wrong, what would happen was you'd write up a grievance. When you write up this grievance, you had to make three copies. One copy went to your department, and one copy went to Industrial Relations. The other copy had to come back to the Union, and they had to answer it. Now, that was a different ball game because when we got this copy back, we got a record. Then if anything happened, it wasn't an act of God anymore. It was carelessness on management. And, believe me, they didn't want no part of that. When you've got it in black and white, then there's no excuse for it.

R: Did the management give you a hard time? They didn't want to see any of this happen...they didn't really want you to organize?

I: Oh, yeah. That was the last thing because they had things their own way so long that they just couldn't visualize somebody else having the right to say something. That was just out of the question. They were bound and determined, but they just couldn't stop it. This here safety . . . you'd be surprised how the fellows . . . although the way it was, you as an individual could go to the foreman and say, "Hey, this isn't right." But, the fellows had the impression that if they complained, then the foreman . . . then management would have it in for them. So, they would come to the safety committee.

I was on the original when it first became part of the contract. I was on that committee. I was on there for fourteen years! It was a thankless job, because

when you got on a company's back to make them straighten something out, they didn't like it. Then, when you got on the fellows' backs and told them, "Hey, straighten up and fly right, because that isn't right," you was known as a company man. Well, I didn't care. The only reason that I took it you . . . in the first seven or eight years we didn't get a dime for all them headaches. Then afterwards, if we attended the Union meeting, they would pay our month's dues. That's all we got out of it. But, it wasn't the question of what I got out of it money-wise. The only reason that I took the job was because when you take a job on like this, I'll tell you, you can't be partial. You can't be protecting a man if he's wrong. You don't criticize him in front of management. But, when you get him by himself, then you lay the law down to him.

The thing is this: I had the unfortunate situation to make a call on two homes where the individual was killed. When you have to go to a home, it's rough when them people . . . They know that their loved one isn't coming home no more, and he has been killed. It's tough. And, I made up my mind, because of all the fellows that I seen in the fields when I was in Africa and I was in Italy, human beings that had no parts on them. I said to myself that if I could ever take a hand in keeping somebody from getting hurt, I'm going to do it.

That was a big opportunity on that safety committee. At first, the company couldn't see it, but then as things went along, they found out that it was just as much to their advantage to have safety as it was to us because their insurance went down. As the accidents went down, their insurance went down. Now, I believe that we had one of the best safety programs in the Sheet & Tube, because I always advocated you cannot try to build something on threats. You've got to sell it to them. Why? That's the system we used up at our place. Now, for example, the superintendent up there--he's no longer around--Cliff Colbern, he spent a quite a bit of money. He had signs, neon signs put up in different parts of the mill. They were lit 24 hours a day. It said on there, "Safety is collective responsibility". That said it all. Now if we had an accident or a close accident, immediately, we would call a meeting. Then, we would try to come up with something to sort that out and see to it that it didn't happen again. Most of the fellows, they cooperated, because they knew that was to their advantage also. Because when you're hurt, there is no way that you could put a price on pain.

Now, the things that I used to bring up a lot of times down there was when he'd say, "We have a record

down here so many thousand days without an accident." I would say, "Well, the only trouble is we're kind of confusing records. This isn't baseball or football or whatever you might want to call it. I'd like to see any of you, when a serious accident happens, go to that family and tell them about your wonderful record. No, they're not interested in your record! Their loved one isn't coming home no more. What good is that record?"

So, for example, now some of the guys. . . . They had a case there one day where a fellow had a close call in a pocket. The company immediately . . . because as soon as something happened, if I wasn't at work, they would call me out. When I seen the situation, what it was, we come up with a good idea. The company held over electricians and paid them time and a half to put a switch in there. Now, when you went to hook up these pipe in this pocket, all you had to do is walk over there and flip that switch. Because, you see, this inspector that was magnifluxing electrically the pipe that went through, couldn't be looking around. He had to keep his eye right on there. When a pipe came by and it showed a defect, he would just automatically press a button on the side of him and that would kick the pipe into the pocket. So then, the hookers and the craneman would pick it up and bring it out for repair.

Now, in order to avoid that, was when we had this other switch put in. So that, when the inspector pushed that switch, this man that was going to work in the pocket pushed his switch in. That killed the other switch and the pipe wouldn't come in the pocket. It would go straight through, and then they would pick it up down below. No problem.

So, one day I was up there working and I seen this here guy, Danny, was up on top of the pipes going to hook up the cable. I seen this pipe coming towards him. I ran like a deer down there, but I got down there too late. As luck would have it, that pipe didn't come straight. It came sort of on an angle, and it didn't knock him over. It just knocked the hook out of his hand, and I was down there by then. He jumped out of there, and he was hollering at this inspector, calling him all kinds of names. So, I just stood there, and I just listened. Finally, when he got through, the inspector, he was dumbfounded. I says to Danny, "If I was that inspector, I'd put this fist right down your throat. It wasn't his fault. You're the stupid, because that's why that switch is there. All you had to do was walk two feet and put that switch in, and you know what would happen. The pipe would go the other way. Now, why didn't you do it? You're a fool. I'm going to tell you something fellow, if you ever do

that again, I'm going to take you into the office and ask them to give you five days off. I'd sooner have you drive out of this mill and call me names than to have you be carried out of this mill. You're a nut!"

Those are the things that you had to put up with. It's hard to explain why they would do something like that, but they would do that. Then you had fellows that were on the committee, and they took that job just simply to give the foreman a hard time. Then you had supervision also that if you pushed them about getting something fixed or complain, they'd have it in for you every time you turned around.

R: Trying to get you fired or something.

I: Just to give you a hard time. We had them on both sides. Those are the things that you had to put up with.

R: I see.

I: Now, we had one of the toughest cases . . . Well, I had one case. One morning, I went out to work, and this pipe fitter from down below . . . they was hanging up a steam radiator. Now, we was in the wash room there. That's where it was at, just before starting time. Just as the whistle blew, we were going to work. This here Joe, he was the pipe-fitter, he got on the ladder and he got a (?star?) drill, to use with a hammer, to go up there. He didn't have his goggles on. So, I just went up to Joe and I says, "Hey Joe, I'll buy you the tin cup, but you'll have to buy your own pencils," and I walked out. That's all I said to him.

So about dinner time he came over to where I was working, because he used to get a half hour off for lunch. He came over where I was working. He said, "Boy, you sure know how to hurt a guy." I said, "What's the matter, Joe? What are you talking about?" He said, "You know what I'm talking about!" I said, "No Joe. I don't know. What is it?" He said, "About you buying me that tin cup. Well, I'll tell you what I did. As soon as you went out, I went out to my locker, got my goggles, and put them on. I just had a half a hole to drill," he says, "but, I was just too lazy to go and get that there pair of goggles. But, because you made me feel so bad," he says, "I went over and got my goggles!" I says, "Well Joe, shake hands, because I got the point across. That's what I wanted." "You was right," he says. He says, "You was right. It'd only take a second to loose an eye." Now, the superintendent when he catch you doing something wrong, he had a little box and he had two glass eyes. When he

come to you, he says, "Look at them. They're real nice, but you can't see a damn thing out of them. Right?"

One of the hardest cases that I had, now, was a fellow that worked for shipping. Now, we had quite a few close calls and we kept changing them all the time. Finally, we came up with a system that was the almost fool proof. That is, when the railroad came in to make a switch the lights would be . . . on each column was a big flashlight and flashers would go on. Then, before the railroad would hook up, the siren would come on and blast, and it'd knock you out. There's no reason for you . . . as soon as that flasher went on, you're supposed to get out of the car. Then, when that siren went on, you better get out because they're going to hook up.

So, they had an individual there. His name was John. I don't remember his last name. But, I couldn't criticize him too much, because he was like an old fire horse. He was the type of fellow that has wanted to get his work a little bit ahead. Now, for example, like when the craneman put . . . or lift a pipe in the car, then you had to spread them out and put two by fours on there so that when they put the next lift on you could take your cables out a lot easier and also when they were unloading them. Well, they would put this pipe in there, if the lights went on, you know, instead of getting out right away, he'd be in there with this bar, straightening them out so you'd have that ready for the next one to come in.

R: Right.

I: See? He was told about it by his fellow workers . . . supervision told him about it! Well one day, I guess, one of the guys, they got kind of teed-off and he come up to me where I was working and he says, "Hey! Come on down and chew old Joe out. You know, we tell him and tell him, and he still insists on staying in the car 'til the last minute." I says, "Okay. I'll be down." But, I didn't go down. The reason I didn't go down was because I didn't know what to tell him, because I knew everybody had told him. What good was it for me to go down there and chew him out? So, I was thinking, you know, and finally a day later another guy comes up. He says, "Hey! [Was] Smitty up here about old man Joe up there?" I says, "Yes. He was here." He says, "Well, how come you didn't come down?" I says, "What do you mean. I don't have time." He says, "Since when, you don't have time?" I says, "Well, I just don't have time." "Well, you're the safe-boy!" I

says, "You see that sign up there? Safety is collective responsibility. You're as much a safety-man as I am."

So, finally toward the end of the week, I got the bright idea. I seen the flashers go on and I high-tailed it down to where the shippers was, but the son-of-a-gun he, he was watching. He spotted me. As soon as he spotted me, he jumped out of the car, and when the flashers were on. So, when he jumped out of the car, he just turned around. There was an overpass going over the roads and I got behind the overpass. He looked around like a rabbit, couldn't see me. He jumps back in the car! When he jumped back in the car, boy, I was down there in about five seconds! I just stood there with my hands on my hips, and I was looking at him.

Finally, he come out, and he started telling me how careful he was and everything. I didn't say a word until he got done. After he got done, I said, "Well Joe, how old are you?" He was sixty years old. He didn't look like he was fifty! He was in real good shape! I says, "You don't look like you're sixty!" He says, "I show you" I says, "You don't have to show me your driver's license. I believe you." I says, "Good for you! You look good! What's the matter? Don't you and your wife get along?" He says, "Oh, sure! Why?" I says, "Well, if you get hurt, your wife's going to have to take care of you. A lot of problem. Now, you got grandchildren?" He says, "Oh, yeah!" "What's the matter? Don't you buy them presents and take . . ." "Oh, sure! Who tell you I don't buy presents?" I says, "Well, I just asked. You know, if you get hurt and you was laid up or sitting at that rocking chair and they're out there playing, they'd say, 'Well my grandpa can't play with me. He's hurt!'" I says, "You know, Joe, I'm not going to go in the office and tell them you're doing this, because the office knows it. The fellows you're working with have told you. Now, I'm going to tell you. I'll feel bad, just a little bit if you get hurt because we've all tried to help you. But, for some reason, you won't listen. I'll tell you what Joe, I'm going to go. I hope you'll live to retire. The shape you're in, you should have some good, good days in the pasture. But, if you keep fooling around like this, I don't know, something might happen.

R: Right.

I: I walked away, and as I was walking away, I purposely turned around a couple times, waving at some of the guys. I was waving just to see . . . and he just stood there with his hands on his hips. He stood there until

I got out of sight. After I left, from that day on, that man never, never stayed in that car. As soon as them flashes went off, he was out.

R: That's good.

I: They asked me, "Hey, what did you tell . . . ?" When I was talking to that other fellow we were giving him a cat call. "Now, you old so and so. Now, you're getting it." Of course, they couldn't hear what we were saying because a lot of noise and we were away from them. All they could do was see some of the motions we were making. They come up and asked, "What did you tell him?" "Nothing," I said, "we just had a little talk." But, he never went in that car again. That's why I always told them, I said, "You've got to sell it to them." I guess that made an impression on him when he started realizing if he got hurt, what was going to happen.

Then, we had another case. Now, this fellow was very, very conscientious. You see, when they pulled the cars out and the switch was thrown, them lights would keep flashing. That meant, you stay out. Now, this fellow--and he was a leader down there--what he would do, he'd put the brick on the other end. The lights would go out and make it look like somebody had thrown the switch--the switch was closed--but the switch was open.

So, somebody come up to me and told me about it. "Hey, you better go down there," he says. I just don't recall his name, after you work with guys for thirty years and better . . . anyway, I went down there, and he was standing right by this switch. He had the brick on top of this other switch and the lights were out. Mike, that was his name. I don't want to say his last name. "Mike," I says, "what are you doing? You know that's not right." He says, "Well, I'm standing right here." I says, "Mike, I believe, that point's right. You're standing right here. Now, you've got three other guys in there that's got the same job you have. You know and I know that if you get into the habit of doing what you're doing, somebody's going to get killed because they won't stand here. They'll just put the brick here and walk away. Now, the way you're doing it, I can see it . . . but them other three guys won't do that. They're going to put the brick there and walk away, and as a result, somebody's going to get killed. They'll do it just because you're doing it."

R: What'd he say?

I: He says, "Well, I didn't look at it that way. I really didn't look at it. . . ." I says, "Mike, just between

you and I, don't do it anymore. Forget about it, and I'm not going to turn you in. You got the point." He says, "Okay, I appreciate it." So, he cut that out.

But, another case, where there's a fellow down in the welder side . . . they had a system there. If something went wrong with the welder, they had a man with a crane who would pull the plates off of the mill to pile them up. If something went wrong with the shears and the mill was going, if they didn't have plates, they'd pull them off the pot and put them on the conveyer and keep going.

So, this fellow was up in the crane. Something went wrong on the crane, and he went up to check it. It so happened that they needed plates to pull onto the conveyer. The foreman went over there and didn't see this craneman up there. He gets another guy that was a craneman. He sends him up to the crane to pull the plates on. Rex, that was running the (?pulpit?) seen what happened, and he sent and called me right away. He sent a fellow up there, "Rex says to go down there right away, because this is very important." So, I dropped everything I was doing, and I went down. Because I had an understanding with my foreman, that if I got a call to go anywhere, by rights, I should go up to him and tell him I was going. But, so many little things that come up . . . we had to work out that I would leave word with my buddy that I worked with, where I was going so, if he came over there, he'd know exactly where I was at.

This guy could hardly talk. He said, "That so and so," he said pointing at the foreman, "he almost killed Slim up there." "How?" I says. He says, "There's something wrong with the crane, and he went on top to check it. He sent this other guy to move the crane, to pull the plates on." So, when this guy went up there to pull the plates on, he tried his controllers, and the controllers wouldn't work. So, he went from the bottom where the controllers were to the top of the crane, to the main switch. When he went up the main switch, he seen the craneman that was supposed to be on there, on the trolley. So, he was froze, too. He realized how close he come to killing him. So, he called him over, and we went down.

I went up there--this was about fifteen minutes or a half hour after it happened--I went up there, and this guy was still shaking--this craneman. I says, "Listen, take it easy. I didn't come down here to give you a hard time. The reason I come down here is to find out exactly what happened, so we can put a stop to it." He says, "Well, something's wrong with the trolley, and I went there to check it out." I says, "Yes,

why didn't you have a safety lock on the switch down here?" "Well," he says, "you know, we always have a safety lock hanging." See, you have each man issued a safety lock. When you're working on any machinery of any kind, there's a tag on there with your check number stamped so they know who it belongs to. I said, "Where was the safety lock?" He said, "Well we had the safety lock hanging here. Somebody stole it." I says, "Okay, they don't cost that much. Why didn't you get another one?" He says . . . I just can't recall the name of the foreman anymore, but he told me, "So and so won't give us one." I says, "What?" He says, "He won't give us one, because he says that's the second one they stole." I says, "Since when are locks cheaper than human lives?" I says, "Okay, you know how close you come to getting it? When he came up there, if you would've been on the opposite side of the trolley, he'd killed you." He says, "I realize that." I says, "Okay, you'll have safety locks."

So right away, I went down, and I went into the office and seen Cliff. I said, "Hey Cliff, we got a bad situation here. I'm not here for you to chew out your foreman. All I'm here for is to correct it. Do you know what happened? We almost lost a guy." "What?" he says. I said, "We almost lost a guy," and I told him what happened. He was just a little fellow. Boy, he used to come up from. . . . (telephone rings) He got teed off and he grabbed that phone. The guy's name was Wallace, the foreman. Somebody answered the phone, he said, "You tell Wallace to come in here on the double, I want to see him." He pulled his desk drawer open--he had all kinds of locks. He says, "There's all kinds of locks here, Auggie. There's no reason for that." Well, I said, "That's what I figured, but, you know how it is. We don't all think the same way." That was another close call that wasn't necessary. That's why I say. . . .

Another thing, for instance, if you was doing a job here . . . because sometimes you can get individuals to work on the job. One person could perform that job without no problem. But, the other person, you have to make a little adjustment there because, he doesn't think the same way. In a case like that there, well, they'd have to make the adjustment. The company couldn't say, "Well, he's working it there. He has to, too." Oh no, if I'm fool enough to jump off the bridge, it doesn't mean that you have to jump off the bridge. That's why that was set up. I did the job and for some reason or another, you were doing the same job, it was kind of hazard, they'd have to make a little adjustment so you could perform the job the same way. By the same token, the foreman could not send you home or penalize you because they had to make them

adjustments. By the same token, I couldn't say, "Hey, don't do this," because I refused that. Because sometimes foremen would say, "All right, you don't want to do it?" He'd give you another job, and he'd put somebody else there. That was perfectly fair. It worked both ways. The company couldn't penalize and you couldn't criticize. I thought that that was one of the best parts of the contract.

Now, you have Tom (?Guigler?), president of Republic Steel. He made the boast when we was organized that he would never sign a contract with the United Steel Workers of America. He said, "I'll go dig potatoes on a farm before I sign a contract." That's how arrogant he was. Well, Mr. Tom (?Guigler?) signed a contract, and he was too cheap to go and dig potatoes. He stayed.

Then, I'll tell you, in 1947, after I come back from the service, and I got married, we went to Canada on vacation one time. I was up there and I had one of these charge cards for gasoline. I got the gas and showed them my card. He looked at it and he says, "Youngstown! Just a minute." He went in there, and he pulled out a magazine. He brought it out and showed it to me. He said, "Do you know where this is at?" I started laughing because he was showing me the picture of this here gas station, that I was telling you about, was all shot up at Stop Five. He had pictures of it. He started calling the guys over. He said, "Hey, look at this. This guy's from this place here. We shook hands and he says, "We want to thank you guys because, you made it possible for us to organize up here."

That's how them things went. That's the way things were, and you had no seniority. You had no seniority. They did just anything they wanted and what they wanted. Then, when we first organized, we had a little book and gave it to the fellows. It was fifty cents a month. You had to go up to them to collect. You would give them a stamp, and they would put it in the book. That was a pain in the neck because guys would get behind and then you had a hard time to collect. So, then we had a system where we started cleaning up our own respective departments. Every so often, we would have a drive. We knew everyone, "Hey, you can't go in. Either sign up, or go home."

So, after it was pretty well cleaned up, we got these fellows summer vacation from college. We had a situation down there, where this fellow come to work down there. I was on the welder side. He was working up there on the table, the inspection table. The fellow went up to him and tried to sign him up. No way. So, the guy come up to me and said, "Hey, why

don't you go up and talk to that guy up there?" He says, "I talked to him. He won't listen." I said, "Okay." So, I went down, and I says, "I'd like to ask you a question. Why don't you sign up? We'd like to have you sign up." T says, "No problem." "Well," he says, "Really, I'm only going to be here for three months. I don't see why I should sign up." I says, "I'll tell you why I think you should sign up." I says, "Do you enjoy drinking water out of that fountain?" "Why, sure. What's that got to do with it?" he says. "Well," I says, "for your information, we made it possible so you could enjoy that. That fountain didn't come there by itself. When we first started out, we had a water boy. Do you enjoy going to the washroom and changing your clothes and washing up? That didn't come by itself. We didn't have that. Now, if you come out here on the sixth day, you get paid time and a half. We didn't have that. Now, you look at the schedule, you know where you're going to work. We didn't have that. That was all made possible through somebody's hard efforts. All we're asking you [to do] is to help us maintain them." "Well," he says, "I can see your point. But, that other fellow didn't put it to me that way. He said 'Sign up or else.'" I said, "Wait a minute. I'm going to tell you something. You can't give me an excuse that I haven't heard. I've heard that before. Now, I'm going to tell you. Now, that fellow, you says, didn't ask you that way. You didn't like the way that he put it to you, and you're not going to be threatened by anybody. Fellow, I'm going to tell you something. For your information, I had a little part in the privilege to make it so people don't threaten anybody in this country. I spent a lot of time overseas. You was too young to go." I said, "Maybe that's the only way that fellow knew how to put it across. If he was a diplomat, he wouldn't be here."

Now, I'm going to tell you something. If you want me to believe what you're telling me, when you go home tonight, stop own there at the office and tell the girl, Tillie, that works in the office, that you want to sign up. Then they can't say that anybody signed you up. You signed yourself up. Just stop in there and sign up. That's all it is." "Well," he says, "I'll have to think about it." I says, "Okay, I heard that before, too."

So, the day went by, two days went by, I called up down there. I says, "Tillie, do you have a new customer from the tube mill?" She says, "No, Aug. We haven't had nobody down here." I said, "I was just checking." [She said], "Okay." I waited a couple more days. He didn't stop.

So, one morning, I told a couple of the guys. I said, "Let's stop this fellow at the gate." So, we waited for him at the gate. We flagged him down. I says, "Fellow, you can't go to work unless you sign one of these cards out. I'll tell you your rights. You could go up to the police in Girard and tell them about it. They can escort you through the gate here. Then we can't stop you. That's your rights. I'm going to tell you something else too, though. When you go up there to talk to the police, they're going to tell you that it's your problem because they depend on us," . . . because I was living in Girard at the time, "to pass the levy to give them a raise. They're not about to cut their throat."

R: That's right.

I: He was so stupid. I said, "Now think, you're going to college." I think he was going to be a dentist. "If you're going to open up an office in Youngstown, you're going to have two strikes against you, because this is a union town. When word gets around the way you acted, you're not going to get no customers. I said, "You better wise up and shape up." So, he went home. He went home, and don't you know it, come about eleven o'clock, a guy come up to me and said, "Hey, so and so is working down there." I says, "What are you talking about?" I go down there and sure enough, he's working. Well, I had a lot of connections. I finally got [word of] what went on. So, I find out that the superintendent of the welding side called him up, and said, "Them guys aren't there anymore. Come to work to the main gate. I call them up to let you in."

R: Right.

I: Well, I just looked at him, and he was laughing. He was the type of guy . . . he was alright in his way because he was a brain in electrical. He was who was who between New York and California. In fact, he came from Westinghouse and set up that place. He was laughing like a canary. My superintendant come up right away. He says, "I'll have nothing to do with it." I says, "Bill, I didn't say a word."

So, the fellows were all teed off about it, you know. He made a mistake, this fellow did. He pulled the block out and almost caught a guy. The guys shut the place down . . . unsafe working. So, the guy called me over and says, "That guy down there. . . ." They was all in a little room just about this big. They was all crowded in there. I go down there and the industry relation man was down there, the superintendant was in there. I says, "Well, I understand that there is something unsafe here." Oh, boy. That did it. The

supervisor said, "Wait a minute. Don't give me that jive. You know it's not that. The whole thing, in a nutshell, is you guys trying to force that man there to sign up. I won't stand for anything like that. This is a free country." I said, "Well, I'm always willing to listen to both sides of the story. You say it's not because it's unsafe. You're trying to tell me that the man pulled a wedge out of there, and them pipes weigh two tons apiece. If that guy would've got caught in there . . . it's okay." [He said], "You know I don't mean that." [I said], "I'm just going by what you said. Getting back to making it free. I'd be the first one to squawk if any body tried to force anybody. I know you're a veteran." He was a veteran of World War I. I says, "You know I'm a veteran. Now, I agree with you a hundred percent. He doesn't have to sign a card. That 's why this is America. He don't have to sign a card. But, we have a system in this country, the majority rules. That's how our country runs. He's the only guy in this department that don't belong. We all belong. He don't have to sign, but, by the same token, majority rules. If he don't want to work here, he can go. We don't have to work with him." "Well," he said, "Industrial management says you're making it kind of tough." "No," I says, "I'm not. I'll tell you what I'll do with you." I knew he couldn't do it. I said, "You put it in black and white that if he makes another mistake up there and somebody gets hurt, the company is 100 percent responsible for him." Leninger was his name. "Oh," he says, "you know I can't do that." Well, I just asked him, "Why can't you do it?" If he'd done that, he would've been looking for a job the next minute. He said, "I can't do that." I said, "All I want you to do. . . ." He said, "You know we'll take care of you." I said, "I know. You're trying to take care of us right now, too."

So, the guy was kind of getting edgy, you know. One guy says, to the shop store, "Hey, Hodge, what are we going to do?" As soon as he said that, that was it. I said, "Just a minute." I told the superintendent, "Will you please step out?" I go to the other guy, "You get out too." I told the guy, "I know you didn't mean it. But, when you made that remark, when you asked Hodge, 'what are you going to do?' You better go back to work right now, because, if you don't go back to work right now, they can get Hodge. We'll get him." I opened up the door and says, "The fellows are going to work." The Industry Relation Manager said, "Oh, I knew you could see it. . . ." I said, "Listen fellow, this is a checker game. We still got a move coming." [He said], "These fellows are going to get docked the time that. . . ." I said, "Okay, that's legal." He said, "But we're not going to dock you." I says, "You don't try to polish me, fellow. I was called here

because it was unsafe. Technically, you have to pay me, but if you don't want to pay me I won't quibble about it." So, he went to work.

So, what we did when we went on eleven to seven that following week, we had it all fixed up. I passed word to the stool pigeon what we was going to do. See how easy it worked? As soon as we worked eleven to seven, we worked from eleven to twelve o'clock. Everything was done. Everybody was changing. Everything was down. Boy, everybody and his brother met me coming up the steps. The superintendent, the industry relation man, their lawyers, everybody. So you know, the stool pigeon got the word to them. They said, "What 's going on here? What 's going on here?" I said, "Well, you know what's going on." He said, "Well, let's talk about it." I said, "I punched my card out. I won't get paid for talking now." [He said], "Oh, we'll pay you." I said, "Don't try to pay me now. There's the guy you want to talk to." (?Michler?), that was the guy that had called him in when he come into the west gate. The result was, the next day they told him. They said, "Hey, fellow. It's easier to replace one man than it is to replace all the men." They had a system [that] when they got hired, you had thirty days to sign up. If you didn't sign up in the thirty days, you had to quit. Of course, everybody signed up. Then how about that 1952 strike? If I remember right, it was a 107 day strike.

R: What did they go on strike for? Do you remember?

I: Well, usually the reason that you always go on strike for, mostly, is better working conditions and fringe benefits. That's what they always go out on strike for. One thing that I was in favor of, even when I was working--but I couldn't get it across to the fellows--and having as much contact as I have had with people, even if we got it, I'd say--and I'm allowing--eight out of ten wouldn't go for it. I was advocating, because someplace this is already in, instead of taking my money from my pension out of fringe benefits, which is ours, indirectly--we can't show for it. I wanted them to take it out of my pay. Then, what they tried to pull on us a few months back, about a year ago, that wouldn't have happened. Because, when I put . . . with the mathematicians you have today, they can figure it out right down to the tee, approximately how long you're going to live. The average. But take it out of my pay, and then you watch it--what you take out. Then, the company can't touch it. But, the fellows wouldn't go for it.

Because, we had a thing back there that we called the wild week. When you had twenty year's service,

every so many years, they'd give you what they called a wild week. It was just like a vacation. The first time that they came around with it, the company sent you a letter to come down to the office and see how you wanted to use that wild week. Whether you wanted to take it at the present or put it in the bank. What they meant [by] put it in the bank is, like if you got laid off and you needed one more week to start a new claim, then you could take that out and it would count as a work week and start a new claim. They did that the first time it was around. Do you know that the majority of the fellows, the majority of the fellows, wouldn't put it in the bank? They took it out. "If my wife dies, I don't want some other guy to spend that." That's what they said. I'm not stupid, because you could collect a lot more for that one week. That's the reason they wouldn't go for that.

The way I always figured, it should be both ways. You shouldn't have to do what I want to do, and I shouldn't have to do what you want. . . . We both should do what we want to do. If they would have had that system, that would have been a wonderful thing, but they don't have it. That was a long struggle. That was a 107 day strike. Those are the things that they always go for. Mostly, it was your working conditions. I had a fellow one time ask me when we was out on strike . . . when we first went out, he says, "Is it right that the company offered everything but the pension?" I said, "Yes." [He said], "Well, what are we waiting for?" I says, "Hey, fellow, I'm not worried about working when I'm young, because I can work either here or someplace else and make a living. What I'm looking out for is when I'm old and not able to work." You see, now, those are some of the things that the people look at. They don't look ahead.

R: Okay. Well, then, pretty much to sum it up, do you think all your activities, union activities, helped the working men out? During all of the years in the mills, do you think you got a lot of things from the company?

I: Well, I think the one thing that I believe, because one day we was having a poll. Just as . . . we got to talking and I told the fellow, "Call him over. We're having a poll. Why do you belong to the union?" [He says], "Well, because I have to." "Okay," I says, "now you call a guy over. Tell him we're having a poll." He says, "Why do you belong to the union." "Well," he says, "to get more money." Okay. We found another guy and told him, "So, why do you belong to the union?" He said, "If I live long enough, I'll get a pension." This guy says to me, "Hey, you're having a poll. Why do you belong to the union?" I said, "That's a good question. Now, I was just waiting to see how long it

would take one of you to ask that question. The reasons that you all gave are very good. But, that's not one of my reasons. My reason is, the reason I belong to the union and the reason I fought so hard to get one, is because to have the right when the foreman or supervision or who ever it may be comes out to chew me out for something, after he gets done, he's got to stand there and listen to my side of the story. To me, that's worth more than everything you've mentioned. Because before that, when they come up to you, they said their little story and they told you to walk. You didn't have nothing to say. To me, that's more than money could buy." I think that that means a whole lot, because, when you get paid for the job you're doing, that's just part of it. If it's not appreciated, that's not much of a pay. I think that. . . .

Now, here's what we should have. In order to turn this horse around--and the companies don't want it, the union don't want it, so it must be pretty good, because they both don't want it. What we should have, because the days are gone where you have to strike, because, as the battle proceeds, you change your plan to meet the situation. Back in the days when we first started, we had no choice. We had to. But today, them days are gone. What they should do, if they can get into a loggerhead--they can't agree, then you arbitrate. When you arbitrate, after the arbitration rules on it, both sides are binding.

Now, some people don't know how they go about to arbitrate. That costs us money. When you arbitrate, the union picks out a judge. The company picks out a judge. Then, the third judge has to be one that is agreeable by both the company and the union. You, the company, give these three judges all of your material. We, the union, give these three judges all our material. They go over them. Then they decide what is fair. They don't work cheap, believe me. They're not in no hurry. That would be the proper way to handle it; plus one other thing, because this has happened. It only takes one foul ball on either side. It seems, as nature is, they always manage to have one on each side. It only takes one to be bullheaded. In contrary to what is really good for both sides, and they cause a lot of unnecessary grief. If you find one on either side that they were responsible for this unnecessary . . . if it's management or if it's union, you don't fine them in terms of dollars. You give them a couple years in jail. Because, if you fine the company money, they just up the products and pay it. [If] you fine the union, they just up the dues and pay it. But, if you put them in jail where they have to sit down, they're not going to be bullheaded the next time.

R: That's right.

I: The next guy, the next time, they'll negotiate,
ninety-nine percent of our troubles will be over.

R: Okay, thank you.

I: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW