

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ohio Democratic Party
Tape #2

Personal Experience

O.H. 954

FRANK O'CONNOR

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

April 16, 1975

C: This is tape number two of the interview with Mr. O'Connor. It is still being done on April 16, 1975.

You were talking about the mayor throwing a letter on there saying he bought you up.

O: So I was in the spot that they were going to let it stand on the record that I had sold out, and I did not like the implications of that. Of course, I had all these people angry at me, people I never even knew were in any way interested in politics. So I sent word back, I think, to John Farrell. They wanted to know whether they could give me any help or if anything could be done. I said, "No. Do not get anybody else to interfere. I will take care of that fellow and you can count on it." I was mad.

So later we used to refer to it as Hitler's Army, as a blitzkrieg type of campaign. I knew they had manpower. I knew they had the resources and it was an awfully big precinct. I figured my best chance of beating him on a write-in, with his name on the ballot, was that I get a good lick in before he woke up to the fact that I was going to do it. So I went over to my neighbor, Henry Lenner, who I helped on the other thing some years earlier, and a few other close friends. I told them all, "We wait until Friday night; election is on Tuesday." I said, "It is impossible for me to see everybody and tell exactly what happened." I made out slips of paper where I showed where to write my name in, put the X after it. Do you know what a precinct list is?

C: No.

O: I will give you one here. They are prepared by a print shop downtown. It costs you a considerable amount of money to get it for the whole county. Every precinct shows how people voted in the previous primary, and if you get a sequence of those, you can pretty well fill in the blanks. But it does not indicate on the primary whether they took out a Democrat or Republican ballot. Now, when you are dealing with hundreds of people and you have to see them in a hurry, only the ones that are going to vote in your party are important in the primary. Seeing the others, you are wasting your time unless you can get them to switch parties. Now, I did not know those existed. I had no list. I just had to go door to door. I did not know even who registered, which meant I had to see everybody. I knew so little about politics that I even went to the Republican precinct committee man and asked him to vote for me. He got angry and I did not know what he was getting mad at. Of course, it made it difficult, but in a way it might have worked out in my favor because there was only one in a hundred that you picked up at random that way. They would not have voted otherwise.

From Friday night until Tuesday morning, I practically talked to everybody in that precinct, and I am telling you, it is a man-killing job. I lost my voice. I could not talk over a whisper. I came home and, I think it was either Saturday or Sunday, I got this from Joe Gorman later, somebody reported to the fellow down at their headquarters. See,

he thought that he was not going to have any opposition there and he was out busy with something else. So he gets a call that there is trouble in his precinct and he grabbed his hat, ran out there and an hour or two later he comes back. It was a false alarm. Nobody gave me away. I had made considerable progress before he even suspected that I was going to run a race. I was told by the board of elections afterwards that I got enough votes, even on the Republican side, to have defeated the Republican committeeman. I had won both parties. There were a great number of them that wrote my full name in, but they did not put the X after it, which the state law says that when the intent of the voter is clearly shown they still have to count them. I was just waiting for him to ask for a recount because there was a lot of hidden strength there, that they had written the whole name in, and I think on a technicality of law, I would have gotten those too. I had more than enough. I think it was somewhere around near two to one, thirty-five or twenty-five or something, to win it on a write-in.

Well then, John Farrell sent for me. That night after the polls closed, I went down and brought the Youngstown Vindicator and found a two column wide piece headed by my opponent. What he proposed to do was to recognize the party with the editorial comment that he was the only leader in the county unopposed and therefore assured of election.

C: Who was your opponent in this election?

O: My opponent there was A.L. Bergstall. I think they tried again in that precinct and they tried a three way split and I beat him again, but it was not me running. To lead you into the story, John Farrell sent for me and, of course, he was pleased as punch. He told me, "O'Connor, in all my life in politics, I never had anything happen that pleased me as much as this." You see, he was the leader of the whole opposition and it was just finished, the whole county side thing. Even years later when he tried to run for other officers, they laughed him off the stage.

Out at the Canfield Fair, the story comes to me that the county sheriff and some other old time politicians out there and their telling stories about this. He had given a speech about how wonderful support he had in his neighborhood, and the guy in front that followed him said, "I will tell you what support he had, the milk man beat him." That they are referring to on the write in because I was not a milk man then, but I was later. I worked for Isaly's. In fact, I was their top salesman for four and a half years.

So the next time around, in the meantime the judge got worse and worse in this case. Now whether I told something that was not true or not, this is the way it developed to me: my attorney, I went to him because I was told he was an honest attorney.

C: Who was your attorney?

O: W.W, Zimmerman. He said it was the strongest case he would have in his fifty years of practice, but I was up against the judge.

- C: Can you mention his name? I am sure he can be located.
- O: I do not like to. He is such a popular and well liked man; you can go look at the record if you want.
- C: We would be able to find him that way.
- O: Yes. I said to the attorney at that time, I had letters that were direct contradiction of testimony, which at least in my point of view, I thought the prosecutor could do something. It is a one to one thing in court and they had their letters signed the absolute opposite. The judge had maneuvered in such a way that, well, one of his rulings, which may be legal, was that I could not testify. I could not present any evidence, any books, any letters, any checks, any receipts as to the ownership of my property.
- C: What was his reasoning?
- O: His reasoning was that I was adverse to a deceased party, but the people who would profit by it were allowed to testify. First, I talked it over with my attorney. I said, "Well, can you not go to the Bar Association?" He said, "Most of the attorneys get large fees and the judge has the final say on who gets them." We need a great deal of refund on the probate field in this county.
- Now, I will risk this. The judge finally took me into a back room with no witnesses and told me to my face, he said, "You might as well settle this case out of court because I am going to rule against you." Well I said, "Judge, all I want you to do is look at the evidence." He said, "Evidence means nothing in my court." I said, "All right. If that is the way you feel about it, you make your decision and I will appeal it."
- C: What did he say to that?
- O: He said, "I can keep you in court. I do not have to make a decision." I am trying to make this the exact quote. "I can keep you in court indefinitely and run up your court costs until you have nothing left."
- C: Now, this judge here, obviously he is out to get you. He was a Bergstall supporter?
- O: Only according to these guys in the car, and you can guess who they were.
- C: What other reason would he have for going at you like this?
- O: There were some other reasons. I also found that I was not the only orphan with nobody to back him up. There were probably numerous other people that had the same kind of situation. It is notorious all over the country, the abuses.

C: What does he have to gain for this?

O: It is too easy to say which judge it is for me to go much further, however, logic will tell you what the answer is if you just stop and think. A judge is elected. He is part of a machine. Now, I had just pulled off, or I will back a little, early in this case I had stood in the county courthouse behind two attorneys and one said to the other, "These are a couple of county kids and we can take everything they have got and nobody will be the wiser." It does not register on me who they are talking about. I am overhearing this accidentally, I was not paying too much attention. I heard what was going on, but when my family name was mentioned I knew they were talking about me. Forewarned, I suspected and probably avoided some of the worst things they threw at me. I just woke up to the fact that if they got their hands on my records, I would be in bad shape, so I took them to a safe place. I just thought of it one day soon enough because that night my desk was broken into and I think that is what they were after.

C: Now this judge, what I understand is, he was definitely not a Farrell man, not a Farrell supporter.

O: Now wait a minute, I will tell you a little bit more of the story and you can figure that out. Wayne Farrell called me in. He said, "O'Connor, nothing has ever happened that pleased me as much as this." I was giving you a little bit of background to why it pleased him. He said, "You want a job? You name it. I will get it for you." I said, "John Farrell, I am not interested in a political job. I have my little nursery and business and I am trying to hold on to it." I said, "You have been advised, very likely, as to why I withdrew." He replied, "Yes. I want to know more about it." I told him what was happening. He said, "Come with me." He grabs his hat and down out of the post office, he was a postmaster then.

Now another little aside, the law, I understand, requires the postmaster to take no part in politics. By that time, Craiver was chairman. I believe this is when it happened, or it did shortly afterwards. I heard Craiver say when you asked something, "Well, I will call the boss." He meant, he would call John Farrell, because the boss is not necessarily the chairman, nor may he even be known. There were times when I was not just sure that Syllogen was the boss. It could be a syndicate racketeer for all you know, but other times it is clear.

Now he marched me right over to the judges chambers, right in chambers. He says, "I want to know why you are threatening this man." The judge stammers and denies that he knew anything about it. That it was all this other guy, a cooked up story. Well what could I say? I cannot prove it because my chief witness is my enemy. In fact, had any way of connecting it. However, I honestly believe that they would have taken everything I owned complete, absolute, if it had not have been for that occurrence, because I think he got a little worried. In fact, a relative of his told me, I had a friend that went to social affairs, and he quoted the judge as saying he never saw a small case go grow into a big one. He said when it first started there was a fire on one side of me.

Meaning a political fire, and now there was a fire on both sides of me. He did not know which one was getting the hottest. Now it was one of his own relatives who said that back to me. So I had a little bit of a way of knowing what was happening.

C: But you never asked Farrell to take the heat off you legally?

O: No. In fact, I was so convinced that it was not legal or honorable to put pressure on a judge that I never went back to Farrell. I am sure that if I had, I would not have been treated quite as bad.

C: So Farrell just thought that everything was okay?

O: Yes. Now of course, I was very young. I was twenty-two years old and as I say, I was absolutely green about politics, going to a Republican precinct committeeman to write my name in on a Democratic ballot. I did not even know the difference at the time. As this thing developed, whether it is legal or not, my legal guardian had filed a sworn statement with this same judge that he had no expense in the guardianship of a savings account in the Home Savings & Loan Bank, and logic tells you there are no expenses keeping passbook. This was money that came from my great-grandfather Ripple and my mother's estate. They were both small sums, three or four hundred dollars, but they had been accumulating interest 5.5% and sometimes more at the Home Savings & Loan from back in 1918. Beforewarned it amounted, by that time my sister had an equal amount, about I suppose, I do not remember the exact figures, the original figures, but somewhere around fifteen hundred dollars each.

This judge, two years after the death of the guardian, says that he must have had expenses even if he swore he did not. He himself had accepted that and it was on the court record. He turns around and gives them another one hundred and twenty-five dollars for expenses they must have had. Then he said, "Because of the Depression, interest rates have dropped." He recomputes the interest back to the origin of the fund until it was illegally taken by the guardian. Now in the first place, the guardian had no right to illegally take that money. I had to ask the judge to give it back to me because it was paid on the mortgage of the property. What the judge wanted me to do was walk away from that court and let them keep everything and never bring it to trial. I told him, "You make your decision and I will appeal it. You want to rob me and keep it off the record." That is exactly what they were doing.

Well, during that period of time I nearly starved. They had every asset I had and no job was possible. I never went on welfare. I have never stood in the soup line, but I damn near starved before I finally got part of it free. It was three years. I operated the nursery for a year under contract with the estate because no one else knew how to run it. If you just walked away from it, it grows up to weeds and it is gone. So to preserve the assets of the estate while they were deciding this, they let me operate under a contract, which of course wasted another year, because I was in this spot. If I destroyed the business, I was destroying my own business, if they finally let me have it. Now, the

judge put the tools and equipment up for sale that were appraised at eight hundred dollars. To me they were worth three thousand or more. Even at sheriff's sale, at least the law was then, unless you get it reappraised for less than, I think, it was sold for two-thirds or the appraised value. He sold it for three hundred dollars. When I heard what they were going to sell it for, I offered to buy it. The judge would not let me buy my own tools.

C: What was your lawyer doing during all this time?

O: My lawyer told me that if he persisted in defending my rights that the judge would hold it against him in every other case he came in court and he wished he did not have to do it. So I said, "What do want me to do? Go out of town and get another lawyer." He said, "No, I will defend you."

C: He really was not defending you?

O: Well, what could he do?

C: Well then why would he not recommend going out of town and getting another lawyer?

O: Well you would have to get this judge to make a decision and he would not make a decision. He would just dangle it, see. In the meantime, he asked us to dissipate and I am carrying the load of running a business for not knowing whether I own it or do not own it. Now there is no question of the evidence. I had the canceled check. I had the receipt. Now for capital I had about three hundred cash and when the judge would not let me testify, I could not show my check or receipt. I went down to Hillhoore and Hooker and got their man to come and testify that was his signature on the back of the check, and I was getting into court in spite of him. After a couple of witnesses they, quick, have a conference and we do not have anymore hearing. Then time after time they send the witnesses home after I assemble them. It is hard to prove anything, but the picture that I want you to get here is that this and other things added up to a total breakdown of law and order. You had to be somebody, have influence, or you did not get the law par to you. I heard, not cases where I could prove it, but I heard of others that got the same kind of treatment. That result was I was very angry.

I got to the point that I was desperate. I was down to my last dollar. I remember I used to go down on Watt Street and get two doughnuts and a cup of coffee for a nickel and that was my meal. I was finally down to the last dollar in my pocket. I used to eat out at Foster's Restaurant on Market and Mrs. Foster was quite a kind woman. She offered me a meal ticket and I said, "No, I will not take it, because I do not know how I could pay." She tried to urge it on me but I would not. I finally got a job with Russ Construction and Engineering at forty-five cents an hour, down the mill, through a friend of mine that was connected with the company, which meant I was getting preference over three or four hundred men standing at the gate. Then I went in and got a meal ticket until payday. I carried that last dollar in my pocket until I went to the Army. It was a brand

new now when I had it. It was worn so bad that the First Federal Bank wanted me to take it over to the First National Bank. They did not recognize it as money. It taught me a lesson, not only how important it is to keep a reserve for the future, but how little we can rely that being right under the law means anything. Now of course this is what primarily motivated me to take a lot of time to attend meetings, to privately investigate what went on in this county, why we could get away with it.

In reference to some of the things I said the other day, thinking about it, it seemed inadequate to indicate some of the motivation that got me into this, but having rejected an offer of the Religious Priesthood, I felt that I could, as an individual, do more outside to modify some of the religious bigotry that I had seen between people. To try to accomplish something, make the world a little better place to live in. I felt definitely more responsibility to do so. I felt that when you go into some organization like that, you lose a little bit of your independence to think logically and independently. I have always felt that you were morally obligated to use the intelligence that God gave you to try to figure out what was best or right to make the world better. Of course, I never dreamed at that how superficial people's following the various religious symbolism was. Later in social science, I became aware of this, that other experts had long since recognized it. That people do not think deeply at all, they just follow symbols. Even the religious names, the various religious denominations became only empty symbols.

To go back, about the time that I was offered this in the eighth grade of school or seventh grade, I believe it was. The head of our family, my guardian grandfather, had a heart attack and was unconscious in the hospital. The result was I had to virtually support a family of four, a younger sister and his second wife. So shortly thereafter, I was virtually forced out of school except to go back and take examinations for credit at the end of the semester. I got a work certificate at the age of sixteen, finally. I took a job with the Ryan and Culver Company at twenty-five cents an hour in addition to running my own nursery, which some of the older people operated under the name Iris Place. I specialized in German Iris first. Most of the stuff I got, of course, with the money I earned, I bought new stock and expanded it. That was about the year that Al Smith ran for president against Herbert Hoover.

C: That would be about what?

O: 1928. I remember boys at the greenhouse writing me about Al Smith and his Catholic background and at least in this area, it seemed to be the dominant reason people voted for Hoover. Then I remember for years we had the first electric lights, long before public power was available. We had Delco Remi System in the cellar and we had a thirty cycle electric system. We got one of the early radios. I can remember sitting at the radio and listening to Herbert Hoover's speeches and getting furious when he told us that if we just sit tight, prosperity was just around the corner. Well, after four years, a lot of people got a little bit irked with that attitude. Hoover's failures seemed to have been not in what he tried to do. He got blamed for a lot of things happening before he went into office, but the fact that he did not give the people hope or leadership to do something about it. It

was a sit tight philosophy and wait.

As I grew up, my nursery expanded and I also had available, because granddad had put up money for Luther Burbank's Society to publish his works; the twelve volumes of Luther Burbank's experiments were in his library. When I was very young, probably only twelve years old, I became quite impressed with it and started to try to develop a new hybrid pansy. Well, after ten years I had one. There was no mistaking it, it was ahead of everything in the area and people heard about it and actually from coast to coast. That developed through a teacher's convention here. When I lost my nursery, probably more than the monetary loss, I lost the strain of pansies. This nursery meant more to me than just money, and to have my work destroyed after ten years of working day and night, literally seven days a week, all through the time other kids were going to high school and whatnot. I was much more provoked, perhaps, that it was taken away from me in the manner in which it was than if it had just been monetary.

C: Who took the nursery after you?

O: Well, without telling the whole story, which gets over into things that would seem to be private, yet it has a bearing on this that you cannot mistake, in that I was probably about twenty-two I think I was, twenty-two years old, yes. I was to meet somebody down in the county courthouse and was standing there waiting behind two gentlemen who were strangers to me, I learned later that they were lawyers, I heard them discussing how they would take everything a couple of country kids owned and nobody would be wiser. While I was only casually aware of what they were saying, when a family name was mentioned, I suddenly woke up to the fact that they were talking about me. They did not know me either.

Some time later I was tipped off that they were going to take their witnesses to school. First I ran all over town trying to get a recorder. In those days they were a rarity and I could not find anybody that had one or would loan me one. I tried to get neighbors to come in as witnesses and they were afraid they might be accused of trespassing. I ended up all by myself. The old farmhouse had boards that had shrunken from dehydration until you could stick your finger between the thing. You could actually see light through them and you could hear very well. You could even, if you got in the right angle, see through them. So I stationed myself with a flashlight and a notebook in the cellar.

C: Where was this place?

O: This was the old family home. For two or more hours, listened to two attorneys coached some five or six witnesses as to the questions they would ask and what answers they were supposed to give.

C: For example?

- O: I do not recall the detail. But if court records are preserved, you could get the exact words today. I doubt if those records exist though.
- C: Who were the witnesses they brought in? Do you know who they were?
- O: I know some of them. I would not want to use names. I do not know whether the stenographic record is preserved all those years of what happened in court, but what happened in court was precisely and exactly, almost to the word. Taking down some of these questions and answers of some five or six people were carefully coached over and over again so that I was able to get it to the exact wording. I turned this record over to my attorney weeks before the testimony was given in court. It seemed to be that nobody could do anything about it.
- C: Did they give any reasons why?
- O: You do not challenge powerful people and get any prosecution if they are in with the right set up.
- C: Who were the right people to be with?
- O: When you get the whole pattern of this, it does not happen to everybody all the time. If there is a weak party on one side and a strong one on the other side they will have the same experience I did when I tried to get the prosecutor to act on that previous occasion.
- C: What reasons did he give for not acting?
- O: Well, I do not think it was ever taken to the prosecutor. I think my own attorney felt that it was useless to try to do anything.
- C: Did he give any reasons why?
- O: Well, at times we discussed it. He just claimed that I was up against a stone wall as far as the judge was concerned. In fact, once he made it clear to me that he wished he did not have to represent me, he said, "The judge would take it out on him on every other case.
- C: Why did you not just get rid of him?
- O: Well, I did not know where I could find another honest attorney.
- C: So he was an honest attorney?
- O: As far as I was concerned, and I still think he was an honest attorney. He might have been deficient in the ability to make a spectacular defense.

- C: But he still said he would not defend utmost because he was afraid the judge would take it out on him?
- O: In fact, I asked him plainly if he wanted me to release him and I would go out of town and try to get another attorney, and he said no, that he would continue. So of course, I did not know the full consequences of what was going to happen. I would not even believe it up until the last minute that they could get away with anything like this. So, nothing ever came about. At the same time, I obtained letters signed by these same people that was indirect conflict with what they testified to.
- C: What did they testify?
- O: They tried to make out that I did not own a business, and some of them were absolute strangers that knew nothing about it.
- C: Did your lawyer not challenge those people?
- O: He went into the judges chambers and there was a big howdy-do about these letters. We received a letter to the effect that they had photostatic copies of the letters, which of course could not have been, because it was impossible for them to have anticipated this over years. There was nothing in the letters that incriminated them. The fact was, they wanted to try to compromise. I was not in on those conferences. The attorneys would go in and close the door and then after an hour or two, the judge would come out and put his hat on and go home and dismiss all the witnesses. Now, what went on in those rooms I do not know. I once received a proposition so incredible that I, at the time, could not believe.
- C: What was it?
- O: That they would settle it out of court if I would take all of the debts, the liabilities of the estate and they would keep all the assets free and clear of any encumbrances.
- C: How is this possible if you do not even have a business to support yourself?
- O: I was to run the business under their orders.
- C: Did they eventually get the business?
- O: No, it was done a little differently. Now, there is one other thing in this that shows how incredible it was and also reflects on the economic and political conditions of the day. This was about the time that, well let us see, the Depression was on, Hoover was in office. We were having the troubles with the farmers protesting. The banks had been closed. I believe that Roosevelt had just been elected. Yes, because I remember that my

guardian, who was in charge of trust funds of my sister and myself, came to me and said he was worried. In desperation, he had transferred the trust funds at the Home Savings & Loan Bank to his own mortgage account. He knew that he would have to account for those funds. He did not know what to do about it because conditions kept getting worse. I was over twenty-one and these funds were supposed to be mine and my sister's. I was operating my business on land that he owned, that I would buy the land under my business from him, use the trust funds to pay for them and he would be able to deed it to me and sign that I got the money. My sister's would probably had to have been handled with a mortgage or something.

He might have had to get the judges consent, but I was over twenty-one. He said, "How can you do it? The banks are closed." He owed the bank \$435 on a property that he had one time been offered twenty thousand for. It consisted of nine one-acre lots and at the time, most of the lots out through here could not be sold for the back taxes on them. The price I would have agreed to pay would probably have been far in excess of what the land was worth. However, to give me a clear deed, he had to have a clear title. I had a little endowment insurance policy that had a clause in it to borrow money. I sent to New York and borrowed the money on this after consulting to him as to what we could do. I said, "I can borrow the money, buy \$435 worth of passbooks in the Home Savings & Loan to cover your mortgage, and you deed me the property." So he agreed.

Now this, in essence, was a real estate deal. I was purchasing the real estate. I sent and got the money. I went downtown and got a broker who was offering these for sale. I could have bought them at twenty-three cents on the dollar at the time, but by the time I got the money, it had gone up to fifty-three cents. My guardian, broker, and myself, taking the check from the insurance company, went over to the Home Savings & Loan and transferred the \$435 to his account. Then grandfather and I went up to Russell McKay's office to get a release of the mortgage. This is old man Russell McKay. His son, I think, is still president down there. We spent over an hour in Russell McKay's office. He was adamant. He said the money was already in the bank, we could not use it, so we had to go out and get fresh money. We argued back that they owed us and we owed them an equal amount, but the courts ruled that the banks could not legally do that.

But in the meantime, I had \$435 in his account. The trust funds were illegally transferred to his mortgage. I owed the insurance company and then he dropped dead. Well, I had absolute proof of this. I had the broker. I had the photostatic copy of the check. Ultimately, after threatening to take everything, the judge backed off and returned the \$435 to me. Then he proceeded to sell the land out from under me in order to get the money to pay me. At private sale, at a price that they had agreed upon without bidding.

C: How much did he sell it for?

O: It was sold for an amount that was considerably above the appraised value, but he threw my business equipment tools and stock into the deal and credited me only three eighths of the appraised value. When I heard that this was going to happen, I wanted to buy my own tools. Well he claimed he had not decided whether they were mine or not. He

would sell them first and decide later who they belonged to. In spite of the fact that I was in the act of purchasing the property and that the funds were taken illegally, he sold the property out from under me to get the money to give back to me, which effectively put me out of business. Whether these things were legally possible I just do not know, but the records should still be there if they did not destroy their own records. Now the guardian had signed a sworn statement that he had no expenses in regard to holding this passbook or the guardianship. This was on record, approved by the same judge. But nevertheless, he disregarded it and said he must have had expenses, even though he swore he did not and gave the estate \$125. On top of that, the Home Savings & Loan Bank paid 5.5% interest and sometimes more. This had been on deposit clear back, I believe great-grandfather George Washington had left the estate of two or three hundred dollars into it, and it accumulated interest back in 1917 or 1918. The judge claimed that the money was directly transferred from the trust account into the mortgage account.

C: What did the bank say?

O: The bank, of course, was party to this knowingly, because they knew what they were. Granddad in discussing the problem he had got himself into, had no intention of cheating us and said that he had consulted an attorney who advised him that if he was unable to clear this, the only thing that would happen is that they would transfer the money back to the trust fund. It was a bookkeeping operation and we were in no danger of losing it. Of course, he had this real estate that in the end would guarantee the recovery of the money. No we never dreamed this would happen. I was effectively out of business. What has a bearing on this, is that it illustrates what you run into when you buck this thing.

C: Who did you really see yourself as bucking at this time? Who did you see yourself as going against?

O: As far as I knew, it did not extend beyond the judge who apparently was influenced from some other political angles that I could not quite fathom.

C: Was this judge considered a Democrat or Republican?

O: He was a Democrat. Aside from whether the judge was right or wrong, there was no way that I could find to get any semblance of justice as I would understand it to be. Nevertheless, the effect on it was that I lost my residence as well as my business. I was dumped out in the worst depression, no job, no formal education. While the trust fund was a small amount of money, the judge reduced it considerably by various tricks. In my opinion, they were just plain aberrations of the law.

C: By this time you were a precinct committeeman?

O: Yes.

C: What effect did this have on you now?

O: In fact, at the time, remembering the comment these attorneys had made about a couple country kids that nobody knew and nobody would be the wiser, and also having a source of information from inside of the social group the judge associated with, that he felt that I was unknown and of no consequence and that they could do anything to me. I had been planning to run for committeeman and this gave me an extra reason to go through with it. When John Hewitt came down with the forms, it saved me a trip downtown, I was very busy, I could not get away from the nursery. Nobody would relieve me. I had walked into this not being associated with any faction, knowingly. Of course, when it turned out that the man that was running against the county chairman, trying to oust the county chairman, lived in my precinct, this was pure surprise to me.

C: We talked about that last week.

O: So anyhow, afterwards, while John was chairman then and he told me that I could have anything I wanted, any job or anything. I was told that he was a man of his word. It was said that he never forgot if you crossed him and he never forgot a friend. The experience I had with him, this held through. He was infuriated when he heard of the threat that was made on me to withdraw. I told you before how we confronted the judge and he denied it. But undoubtedly, this big commotion which reached the front page of the Vindicator, the night of the election. They put out a special edition with a little block down in the corner, "Burgstiller beaten by unknown." I do not think they even used my name. This was late that night of election night. It was assumed, until after the polls closed, that he did not even have opposition. I felt that the chairman would have probably granted any favor. Nevertheless, I felt very reluctant to ask him to in any way interfere because I thought it was improper to pressure a judge. In spite of what I knew was going on otherwise, he did say that he would put me on the executive committee the next time around. You did not jump to the executive committee the first time you are elected.

C: Well, did you not explain to him that you just lost your residence? That there might not be a next time around?

O: This happened afterwards in those two years. Next time around I was in this position, I had lost my residence at that particular place so Mr. Raymond was justice of the peace in Boardman, neighbor, a Republican, but his son Robert Raymond was my buddy. I rented a room in Raymond's house for a dollar, hung my hat there, and understood at that time that was legal residence. I did not neither like to impose on him, nor was I in a position to pay anything, because I

was out of a job. I got a little uneasy for fear that being that I was funding against an attorney that did find some way of breeding that residency thing.

C: Who was this you were running against this time?

O: Burgstaller?

C: Again?

O: Again.

C: Did he change places too or what?

O: No, he ran again the next time. Well that time of strategy, they got one of my neighbors to try to split the neighborhood. It was three way. I am a little bit vague in the mind whether I served two terms. I remember we beat him, but whether I ran directly against him that time or whether it was the third time around. But anyhow, I got Mrs. Frank Yeany who lived across the street from me.

C: Yeany?

O: Yes, Yeany, to file for committeeman. I sent a letter to each Democrat in the precinct that he was taking my place and to support him and I withdrew. Of course, Frank Yeany won.

C: That is Y-E-A-N-Y?

O: Yes. Now something Yeany told me later is important to this. Anyhow, not then being on the committee, Yeany taking my place, I was down at the High Hotel the night the committee met and John Farrell was there. I said to Mr. Farrell, "You promised me a position on the executive committee." Mr. Yeany is taking my place." Farrell jumped up, ran out, and got a hold of the nominating committee. When the list came out Frank Yeany's name was on the executive committee at that late moment. So, while that is only a minor thing, it clearly showed that Farrell kept his word.

About the same time, I got a Mrs. Spore to run for committeewoman in old precinct two, which that was this area, the whole southern part of the township. It was more than a quarter of the entire township. I realized that one vote in the committee did not give you much power. It was then, oh, a couple hundred, I believe. It is now four hundred and some. Mrs. Spore's husband was quite prominent in, I believe, it was one of the steel mills here. I think he was well known as a Republican. He had been a Republican. This was the Depression and a lot of people were beginning to wonder

whether things were the way they ought to be. So she ran. I could not find another Democrat in the precinct at that time and I think she voted for herself and probably, that second committee meeting. Anyhow, she told me later that the thing was such an uproar, that the Democrats were all a bunch of hoodlums, and she quit the party. I understand for years she told the various Republican women's clubs that she belonged to about her experience with the party.

C: Did she ever mention what went on at that meeting?

O: Well, I think she was there. I do not remember whether it was the same time that I saw Judge Heffernan. From the other side of the hall, it looked to me like they threw him bodily out of the hall when he tried to make a motion that had not been approved.

C: Do you remember what the motion was?

O: No, it was too long since, but the typical tactics seemed to be that if you did not clear it ahead of time you would not be recognized on the floor. Pretty often the strategy would be, on nominations, the minute the approved candidate was nominated somebody would move to close the nominations. It was just outrageous, abuse of parliamentary law.

C: And this is with Farrell running it right?

O: I think that Farrell had given it over to Kraver then because I remember when I talked to Farrell it was in the post office. When you take the postmaster's job, by law, you are not supposed to be in politics. I also remember, and several occasions, of someone bringing something up in front of Farrell and hearing him say, "I will call the boss," which meant John Farrell.

C: Because Kraver said that?

O: Yes. In other words, you must recognize, the county chairman is not always the boss and he might not even be in politics in some cases, maybe the guy behind the throne that has the money.

C: When Vitullo was county chairman, was he the boss?

O: Unless some secret organization, which rumor had it, called the tune.

C: It is not too secret an organization is it?

O: You see, what is rumor, in politics, often times you have to act on a mere

suspicion. You see, some prominent racketeer that you know is in the racket, with his head together, with some politician, may from a distance, see things happen. That they are thieves, well, we need proof in court, see.

C: Who was it rumored was running the party when Vitullo was there?

O: This comes much later. I will give you more direct on that, by Vitullo's own direct quotations. Anyhow, Kraver then was chairman.

C: How was he different from Farrell?

O: The only thing I can remember of direct implication there, I think, I want to quote, get something in that Yeany told me later, but I think that was after Kraver. I remember that I was out of a job, desperate, and having worked in the nursery all my life, probably much better informed than the average fellow, experience. I was doing landscape work and I worked for the Ingallis Landscape Company. I heard that the State Highway Department, rather amateurish landscaping along the highways, that if you had any fundamental or rudimentary knowledge, it was sufficient.

I went over to Ravenna and I was told over there that they were way behind schedule, they could not find anybody that knew anything about it. They were overjoyed to see me, that someone wanted the job. I could go to work right away, but I have to clear it with the county chairman first, go get a letter. I came back to Kraver's office and I told Mr. Kraver what I wanted and he said, "Did you vote for me last time?" I said, "I certainly did," because he was Farrell's candidate. He did not accept my word. He goes over and opens the file case and he gets out the list. Now the importance of this is, on a role call vote, they take it down which way you voted and you are a dead duck if you did not vote the way you are told. How deep this was, I did not recognize until later. That was my first contact with it. I knew really nothing about Farrell, other than the things that happened up to them. He gave me a very nice recommendation letter, unsealed so I knew what was in it. There was nothing in it that in any way damaged my chances to get the job. Just as I went to leave Kraver said to me, "Will you vote for me the next time?"

Now here is where this moral principle comes in that has always bugged me, that I cannot give up my right to make a decision based on future knowledge, future facts that may take the act wrong. Being a representative of the people in my precinct, I cannot sell that vote in advance for favor or I cannot back off because of threats. I would resign the job before I would. The public attitude that everybody in politics is crooked is not one hundred percent true. I have met a number of gentlemen over the time, not large numbers, I can use my fingers to count, that I was sure felt the same way. Unfortunately, there are a bunch of dumb yokos that do not know any better, do not care, and they are there to be taken. Meeting after meeting among politicians, it is openly discussed how they fool the public, had no intention of being morally right. Being present, they just assumed that I thought the way they did and I heard things that I was not supposed to

hear. Anyhow, off the cuff to answer him, I think the way I said it was, "If you are the man best qualified at the time I certainly will." Needless to say, I never got the job.

C: Well why could you not have gone to Farrell?

O: Oh I could have, but remember, Farrell was the postmaster then and by law, was not supposed to be engaged in politics.

C: He was, though, was he not? He was still the power.

O: If that happened today, it would only have taken me one minute flat to get over to Farrell's office, but I was a naive young kid about twenty-two or twenty-three years old. There were a lot of illusions that I have lost over the years as to what the reality of the situation really is.

C: So the idea of going to Farrell, telling him to tell Kraver to give you that recommendation, never crossed your mind?

O: Yes, but I did not think it was proper. Actually, it would compromise Farrell's position because he was not supposed to be in politics. Reality of the fact was he was probably still the absolute boss.

C: So he would not have minded if you came over and asked him?

O: No, however, I would have maybe found out that he demanded the same kind of promise. In forty years I have never been able to get around that.

C: You are a personal contact with Farrell, do you think he would have demanded a promise from you too?

O: He might have, due to the enthusiasm over what had happened. He said nothing ever happened in his entire political life that pleased him as much as that. When you realize that there was a two column wide page on the front of the Vindicator: "How I Propose to Recognize the Democratic Party" written by A.L. Burgstaller, with the editorial comment that he was the only leader in the county unopposed and therefore assured of election. You can imagine the surprise when they opened the ballot box. It was a standing joke among politicians for years after that. I think it probably finished his career in politics. I do not know how far up he was at the time because I did not know much about what happened earlier than that.

C: When he ran against you the second time, was he much of a threat?

O: I noticed in the election statistics that said the prior year he ran for some other

office and got considerable votes. I think he ran for Congress.

C: How much of a threat was he the second time he ran against you?

O: Well the second time, I spotted the strategy was to split my neighborhood. He lived in the opposite side of the precinct where most of the wealthier people who had jobs in town. Down in my end was more of the old timers and the country farmers and whatnot. The strategy apparently was to try to split that neighborhood. A curious thing, it baffled me why this man who was an executive with a milk company would be interested. Then he hired the neighbor across the street. While the previous time when I ran, we were real close pals, but his family was Republican and I tried to get him to vote for me, he would not cross party lines. This time, he quickly took out a Democratic ballot to vote for the other guy who was his boss.

C: Burgstaller?

O: No, no, this third fellow. While it is not proof and in politics you never know. You see as straw in the wind and you make crude. Working for Isaly's Dairy some years later, I overheard some of the drivers complaining that the company this man worked for had the secret list of a government housing project that was supposed to not be available to the dairies, and was beating them out of all their business. Of course, there is no way of connecting the two to be sure, but it at least gave me a hint as to why that happened. You find behind, I would say, ninety percent of the moves in politics that there are hidden motives that are not. They will not be made public. Of course, in recent years, it has become a national scandal.

C: You mentioned something about what Mr. Yeany was going to say to you.

O: Oh, yes. Mr. Yeany then served, I do not know whether he served one or two terms, that is vague in my memory, but I think Shutrump was chairman when this was supposed to have happened. Shutrump followed Kraver.

C: About what year would this be?

O: I could look it up in here because there some news note of Kraver retiring, but to get it on tape would take too long. Anyhow, Yeany told me, that the county chairman, and I think this was Shutrump, although I cannot be certain, told him that there was not a man in Mahoning County that he could not get fired, whether he was in private industry or public. That he either voted the way he was told or else. Yeany was so infuriated by it, and by the way, his three sons had been active in the young Democrats with me, I think all of them have voted Republican ever

since.

C: Who are his three sons?

O: There is David and Wilbur and I cannot think of the other fellow's name.

C: George?

O: One is in the insurance business and one well it is of no consequence. Yeany quit the party. Now he was on the executive committee already. So this situation went on. I could not get a job anywhere. I did landscape work and tree trimming, tree surgery.

C: Where was Farrell at this time?

O: Farrell, I think, finally died as postmaster. I heard rumors that Shutrump was somehow related to him. I was told I was wrong about the relationship I understood it to be. There was some connection there that Shutrump was slated to be chairman and Kraver resigned or retired. In the meantime, I had been delving into the various organizations, joined the Young Men's Democratic Club. I held various offices in it. I cannot remember all the offices. I remember I was elected treasurer once the pattern that existed was that you could elect a president to get a political, and thereafter the organization was supposed to jump whichever way he was told to tell you. The members resented it and time after time, we were defeated in doing anything. Simply that we were like a tail on a dog that had no will of it is own.

I remember once in a speech I complained that the organization had no constitution, that anybody could buy a barrel of beer to win an election because they had no membership list. Anybody that walked in to me could vote and the result was that the average member had no real meaningful control. There were times when the election of officers seemed to be held in secret. Now here is a key to why the secretary of a political party can sometimes be more powerful than the president. By selective notification of members that are favorable, you are almost sure to win the majority at a meeting. There were times when we would find out about an election after the election took place.

C: What did you do when you went back to the next election? Did you not ask why you were not notified?

O: There were arguments. It finally ended one time there in a court fight. Two factions got into court.

C: What were these factions? What were the two factions?

- O: I have a vague recollection of how it came about, but I was treasurer at the time. I had no part in the decision to file these suits and I did not follow it close. There was some kind of a compromise worked out and there was a committee set up to draft a constitution. I was put on that committee. I do not recall who was on it, but there was, I think, five other members. This is a trick that I have seen pulled even on the executive committee. You would not address a committee so the public thinks it is fair by putting a couple leaders of the opposition whose reputation are independent or trustworthy, on your committee. But, you do not give them enough votes that they ever have any threat of actual control.
- C: Do you remember who these people were that they stuck on this committee?
- O: No. I have an idea that Marvin Traxler could tell you. I do not remember whether he was on the committee.
- C: Marvin who?
- O: Attorney Marvin Traxler. T-R-A-X-L-E-R.
- C: But who was this faction that you were opposed to?
- O: At first, I was just nosing around to find out how this was done. Now the pattern was this: even down to the Social Women's Club, where the average member does not even suspect that it is connected with politics, certain people who were connected with the political machine would go to the meeting ahead of time as a click working together and manage to elect themselves or whoever they wanted officers. Now it reached way out. This was to forestall any independent endorsements of candidates that might counter what the county chairman endorsed. As we get into this later, the whole endorsement thing is an absolute phoney. The party members have no voice in it, the County Central has little or none, and even the executive committee by its structure is set up in such a way that no effective opposition to what the boss wants can exist. It is hard to detect, but I found that these other organizations were mostly just used like the tail of a kite. They work at it full time. It is a business, highly financed, experienced experts, and a bunch of little amateurs like myself just wander in and do not know what the score is.
- C: Like when you say, "they," who would "they" be?
- O: It starts with the fact the chairman can practically determine who gets an endorsement because the big money comes in. Well, let us start on the legal side of it. If you wanted to come down to Youngstown or Mahoning County in those days, and it may still be to some extent true, smoother but nevertheless there, and

you wanted to operate a racket without interference, now it would be very nice to know that the policeman that came out was instructed only to arrest your competition. If he wants to make points with the public, he makes arrests, but not your organization. He can put up pretty good from this way of law enforcement. This means that you got to have a police chief or sheriff that works with you. Now, if you have absolute power on one man's hands to make these deals, the payoff money has campaign funds or even off the record, can funnel through the political boss, whether he be the chairman or someone else who has the absolute say as to what happens. Even in the best circumstances, the slip once in a while, somebody beats them, but the odds are they will not.

Now we were just coming out of the prohibition days, the Speakeasy, and big money was available. When they repealed the 18th Amendment they branched out into other things. Well they were in it too then. How much criminal syndicate organization that is nationwide or whether it is an independent group or a group that is only in this locality. Rumors had it then that there was, they referred to them as a Purple Gang from Detroit supposedly had some connections in Youngstown and no concrete evidence on it.

C: But they never contacted you in any way?

O: No, but I ran into some pretty rough weather later. I learned to be very careful because I was not about, in a town that finally got a reputation for murders and bombings. I think there is a list of some fifty unsolved ones, of various racketeers and whatnot in Mahoning County.

C: I would like to skip ahead right here. Do you remember when Sulligan's house was bombed?

O: Only vaguely. We have had mayors bombed and it got so bad that as far away as Australia, headlines in the paper called us Murdertown, USA. Now, local boys tried to cover the thing by appealing to patriotism. We have such a wonderful town, let us have it be known as Baseball Town, USA.

C: Who were these local boys? Do you recall who they were?

O: You can never sort them out. But it appeared to me this was an attempt to counter it, a counter propaganda move, PR relations.

C: You do not have any proof though that the people that were putting this on?

O: No, but some of the ones that were pushing it were, either through sports or otherwise, so close that you could almost guess. Various names were about. Sometimes, I found that these actually were the criminal element. In other cases, I do not know to this day. If a man is not actually arrested, brought to trial and

convicted, then you are in danger of slander of libel suits if you name him, no matter you might have been an eyewitness to it.

- C: The County Sheriff and the Chief of Police, were they on racket's back pocket right after the prohibition?
- O: I used to try to feel out, for my own satisfaction, whether I could trust certain law enforcement officers. I would make an anonymous call, tell them where a place was operating openly, and then watch to see if they closed it. In most cases, nothing happened.
- C: Is there any specific examples?
- O: One specific, again these are years and years ago and no occasion to memorize it and often times, the people, I really did not know. I remember once, while Sheriff Ralph Elster was sheriff, a man that I did trust and often times gave me much of my inside information, and verification of it that I could rely on, came from him and I never gave him away. Many times when I had serious doubts as to whether the rumor was in fact true, I would go to Sheriff Ralph Elster and ask him. Because he sat in on so much of the planning on the other side, he would either say yes or no that it was in fact true.
- C: He did have contact with them?
- O: Well he was holding the sheriff's office in town and a powerful vote getter undoubtedly sat in on a lot of the strategy meetings. Now this does not mean that he would know what they were up to. Often the political strategy was important for me to know in order to counter it.
- C: This is under Shutrump? Would he be sitting in on Shutrump's meetings?
- O: Yes, yes. I believe at the time he was in, but the point I want to make was that I thought, and I was convinced, that Elser was honest. In fact, in discussing the problem, even the sheriff has to consider the boss' recommendations when he hires his deputies. He gets a bunch of men in there from all over town that have been recommended by the machine. Some of which are the out and out members of the underworld. Maybe they have never been convicted and have nothing on their record, but Elser told me that when they plan to make a raid, someone always informed. In order to defeat this, he knew it was among his deputies but he could not spot who, he would get his deputies, and go out in a barn and meet, not tell him where he was going and then he would get them in the cars together, not stop, and go directly to where he wanted to make a raid. He said in spite of all his precautions, most of the time, they were tipped off. When he would get there,

all the evidence had been gotten away with. I believed that he was honest and many times he cooperated with me.

C: What type of information would he give you?

O: Well, I get ahead of the story here. When I got into a collision with the County Chairman myself, under Shutrump, I used to get considerable information from him. Anyhow, he had a heart attack or was very ill, at least it was reported in the papers. The slot machines begin to move in out around Boardman and Woodworth here, and I wanted to check to see what was going on. I made a call and discussed with a deputy, I do not know his name now, a certain location where there were slot machines. He openly asked me which outfit. He wanted to know what was on the machines and the discussion was very clearly that if it was the right outfit, they would not do anything about it. Some dumb deputy he had.

C: Did you report this back to Elser?

O: Oh, Elser was very ill. I did not want to go out there and cause him to have a heart attack. Even under the best of circumstances, employees within the department can sabotage what the office holder is doing.

C: Did Elser ever recover from his illness?

O: No, I think he died later from that.

C: But he never became active again as a sheriff?

O: No, I never was able to discuss it with him. Anyhow, this sometimes was a way I would find out whether or not I could trust a man in public office. Now of course, the Police Chief is appointed by the Mayor and the County Sheriff is elected. I am getting way ahead of the story here.

I found that generally, throughout this county that there was wholesale open racketeering going on. There is an old axiom that I will tell you is absolutely true. Large scale racketeering, where they have to contact large numbers of clients like they do with what is known as the boat racket, the south side numbers racket, and others, generally their locations can easily be known with the slightest investigation. If you want to bug, you got to find out if somebody is selling numbers, and you can follow them back to a source. Now it can be dangerous, but at that time it was so open that the biggest outfit in town operated right off the public source. The pickup men come in their big green limousines from all over town every afternoon. It was obvious to anybody who wanted to look.

C: Do you know who headed this group, this biggest outfit?

- O: Well, that particular one, a man was convicted later and paid a six or seven thousand dollar fine and got, I think, a jail sentence. The judge let him out on promise of good behavior in the future or something.
- C: Who was that? Do you remember?
- O: Well, you can take it right from the newspaper clipping there I have in my scrap book. There were thirty-three of them finally convicted.
- C: This is the group that operated right off the square?
- O: Yes, in fact, the address was the same address that we had in the Young Men's Democratic Club.
- C: Was there one man heading it?
- O: There were three brothers I understand.
- C: Well, if they are convicted it is not going to hurt you to mention them just for the tape.
- O: The legal implications are something I got to be a little careful because a man can be convicted one thing, they accuse him of something else and you are in the same kind of trouble.
Anyway the Grand Jury, I will come to this later, the Grand Jury named them.
- C: Do you know what connection these three men had with the party? Were there any direct connections?
- O: In order to operate openly without interference from the police, the sheriff, or anyone else, you have got to pay off to somebody. Now the people that we elect to office cannot be so bloody stupid that they do not know they are looking at. You are standing right beside them looking at the same thing. You can see it. Why can they not? Uniformed policemen in and out of the place. People say to me: why do you not go to the prosecutor?
- C: Yes, but they paid him.
- O: Well, I would not be a bit surprised that two seconds after I left the office he would have the racketeer on the phone and tell him who told.
- C: So you used to, yourself, contact the prosecutor concerning this group?

- O: In that case, I had come to the conclusion, after years of experience, that it was a very dangerous thing to attempt if they could trace it back to you. You would not get anywhere anyhow and if you did, you might go for a ride and not come back.
- C: So you did though, contact the prosecutor on a couple of occasions?
- O: I heard this prosecutor, then a candidate for office, on a public stage brag that if he was elected to office he would not enforce the law because people liked to gamble and he would not enforce it.
- C: Who was the man that made this promise on a public stage?
- O: I do not want to get into arguments, but I heard it. So I knew in advance that I was not going to get anywhere.
- C: But he was elected easily?
- O: I have argued with sheriffs, with prosecutors, with others to the point of anger over whether the law ought to be enforced and they absolutely would tell me and some of the political bosses. But let us get back to how this developed. I was put on this committee to draft a constitution. I quickly discovered that everything I attempted to do, I was out-voted five to one. I attended the meetings, I do not remember how many, all one summer while we drafted the constitution for the Young Men's Democratic Club.
- C: What were you attempting to do with this constitution?
- O: To write a constitution that would curb the ability of the president, once elected, to sell the organization to the boss for a political patronage job.
- C: You are talking about the Young Men's Democratic Club.
- O: Yes.
- C: They were just tools of the political boss, the overall chairman?
- O: Yes. No matter who we elected, you were defeated. You got a political job and that was the end of it.
- C: What connection was there between this club and the actual overall party?
- O: In order to stop political bossism and the subversion of Democratic Government to the underworld, you have to be able to carry the fight back to the public and

arouse enough public reaction to either get the laws changed, or to oust from office the people that are in collusion with the underworld. Now, to do this, you cannot, as an individual. No one will listen to you. You have to speak as the head of an organization and they carefully guarded every rampart because of professionals. They are not going to let anybody get a toe-hold. They watch it. Anybody who is a threat, suppress him. As Mr. Yeany had said, that there was not a man in Mahoning County that he could not get fired. I was told, not directly by the chairman, but many that no one dared ever challenge this, that it was brought here from Tamany Hall many years before. I never knew specifically who was responsible, but it was supposed to be patterned after the machine politics of Tamany Hall. Undoubtedly it was probably one of the strongest political machines west of the Alleghenies. I remember one of the boys went down east and I think he was in Mayor Curley's outfit and found out how they operated on the east coast. He was finally convicted. He came back all enthusiastic about the methods they used and it just appalled me, worse than here.

C: Like what?

O: Well there was a pretty large sum of money given to each precinct committeeman if not a patronage job. He had to have every vote in his precinct cast by a certain time or he had to answer to the boss and it really worked. You set up a dictatorship and here is where we go wrong even abroad. We talk about democracy, really what they are talking about is which local bandit is going to control. To be truly democratic you cannot have a one time choice of who is going to be boss. The principle of law, government under law, has to dominate or you cannot get justice for anybody because human nature, the bigotry, the clannishness, the national and radical hatreds. These political bosses are experts at playing one group against the other. It is almost impossible to beat them, they have the money, the position, the jobs, the manpower.

C: Did you ever watch them do this?

O: Oh, how many times.

C: Did you ever get a look at it and see how they did it?

O: Hundreds of tricks. It would take me hours. It is not always even restricted to one party.

C: Give me an example of say, how Farrell would do this.

O: Well, I did not know enough about it.

- C: Yes, but how about Shutrump?
- O: This is what I am coming to, because there is where the collision came. I was on this committee to draft a constitution and line by line, paragraph, I tried to write a constitution that the membership which would be fixed by the fact that you had to join and pay dues. See, when you had no dues anybody could walk in. A barrel of beer and you could get enough votes down there to control. In that kind of a fight, where you can dominate an organization by who puts up the most money, the boss has got it. There is no way you can stop him. If necessary, he sends a note to the governor and brings in political job holders from all over the state and it may even go national. You could not beat them in that kind of a fight no how. So pin down the membership. Who are the members of this organization? Do not let the constitution be changed unless the members are notified in advance. The meeting is to be held in the open. The members know where the meetings are. Let there be secret ballots so they cannot be intimidated.
- O: I saw in the central committee meetings, people in a large crowd, if you keep your ears and eyes open you see all kinds of things going on. Here is a guy that gets a bottle of whiskey to vote for the boss. He is an alcoholic.
- C: Under who did you see this happen?
- O: Oh, I see this happen, I do not even know who he is, see. If I did, I have long forgotten. A man works in the mill on three shifts. The meeting comes, he is going to lose a shift in the mill. They paid his wages to get him to the meeting if he was on their side. If he was independent and not on their side, he had to do it at his own loss. So, most people, not so deeply interested, they are jeopardizing their job to go down here and do the Democratic duty for the people that elected them in the precinct, and they do not show up. A lot of the committeemen never showed up for the meetings.
- C: On your first term, back in 1934, did you make most of the meetings?
- O: I do not think I ever missed a meeting of the executive committee. I was late for one. Something happened and I got tied up and I got there late, but I was there.
- C: In these meetings, these precinct committeemen meetings, how much actual politics is discussed, real politics? In the overall meetings.
- O: Practically none.
- C: What do you usually discuss at those meetings?

O: The chairman opens the meeting and reads the minutes. There is standard motions, standard adoptions of the rules to govern the committee for the next two years. And you are handed a typewritten copy, in advance prepared, one that they want to adopt, the motion is made. Sometimes you do not even get a chance to debate it. It was voted in block, the whole thing, which usually turned the entire power over to the chairman for the next two years. They dismiss the committee and thereafter, the boss is the only one that has any power.

There have been, in recent years, some laws enforced about replacement of appointees and whatnot, but they have been forced to come to the committee for a vote. But only because the law compelled it. Now, to get up and make a speech for the good of the party, oh, no. To discuss or debate an issue, it did not happen. By the time it goes through the nominations and whatnot, everybody is tired, the meeting has been too long, and it is all over. You do not meet again till the next election. The general central committee usually only meets once, and at that meeting the full power of the machine comes down on it. You know that if you do not vote the way you are told, you will never get a political job, you will not get a favor, and you may bring the house down on your head for having dared to buck it.

C: How important was, say, a simple precinct committeeman? How important was he to the boss?

O: He has to get a majority to be boss. But in a situation where most of the people in the hall are already on a public payroll and they are told they will be fired the next day if they do not vote right. I saw men back in the Depression break down and cry! That they knew it was morally wrong. They had children that would starve. They were told they would be fired Monday morning if they did not vote right. Now, you cannot appeal to people on such a situation by logic or reason.

C: Well, here you were, you did not have a job. Did they not try to say, "Well if we do not do something right by O'Connor, he might really give us some trouble." Did they not offer you jobs?

O: Remember that first. I was already on the side of the boss. When he asked me whether I wanted a job, I told him, "I am not interested in a job. I have a business. All I want is a fair hearing in court." He already knew that I had been threatened and what had happened and I had withdrawn. I told him what this strong arm group had, I know who was in that strong arm group, at least the main guy, but I did not have a witness to back me up. This would be enough to get any attorney disbarred if you could prove it, but how can you prove it when it is my word?

C: Is he still around?

O: I think he died since. But anyhow, that is when Carl grabbed his hat and

confronted the judge. But I never went back of course. If that would happen today with what I know, I would be better able to defend myself. But then I was a naive young man that had not the remotest suspicion of what was going on. Now on this committee to draft a constitution, I found that I was outvoted constantly. I had come to realize, I was the window dressing. Because I was on it, others were willing to accept that it would be a fair thing.

C: What was the vote? How were you outvoted? Did anybody support you?

O: I think it was generally five to one. But I debated with them and as I recall, some of them were attorneys, if not all of them, various points and bring out their viewpoint, and if I had a weak sister of a provision, I dropped it. They would poke a hole in it, I would drop it. But if I still realized that it was important and it was solid, I retained my copy. Although the majority, five to one, rejected every provision I tried to make. I want a secret ballot, on all elections of personalities or any issue that involved a personality or any serious issue, that a member could get up and say, "This is serious, I want a secret ballot," he can get it. The machine always wanted a roll call so they could use it as a club. Know where you stood, and, of course there is plausible arguments that the public wants to know how you voted as a committeeman. I never had anybody in four years, back in the precinct, ever ask me anything about it. It is just, somehow our educational system does not inform citizens to be effective in defending their liberty. It is incredible how little real interest there is.

If there is any, it is on the other side. Some political interest, special favor, some subversion of law. But the average citizen does not even know, and I have done this in college classes, ask forty students how many knew the name of the precinct committeeman. Not on in the class. Republican or Democrat. Now how can we have a public school system that tells us what a wonderful government we have and that democracy is better than all the other forms, and raise a whole generation that do not even know what it is all about at the very foundation! If you have got a rotten foundation, it is going to be rotten clear to the Presidency.

C: What could a precinct man do on his own, though?

O: Well, I think you will find, if you check the record that I am the only one that ever smashed the machine, in all those years, and smashed it so bad that they were staggering all over the place.

C: When was this?

O: In 1938. It has never been done before or since.

C: How did you do that? I think that is important enough to get at.

O: Well, that is exactly what I am leading into. Knowing that we were being outwitted, the independent thinking people were not organized, and this is the very nature of independence, you are not an organized force, and you can be so easily divided or fooled; so I knew that without an organization, I could not do anything. The committee was such that unless I could elect some two or three hundred men who were beyond being purchased, beyond being intimidated, there was no hope of stopping it in the committee. So to reach the public, I figured that some organization had to literally steal it away from the machine. Now, if I told them in advance what I was going to do, I would not get to first base. Unfortunately, sometimes your friends, who would stand with you, you do not dare tell them for fear one of them betrays you and you are defeated. So, it is a little awkward.

But nevertheless, I felt that if I could get a constitution adopted, then we could build a membership and they would not be able to buy off the organization, and they would not be able to intimidate it because a secret ballot, enough people will vote their conscience. In an open ballot that does not happen. Unfortunately, as too few people got guts enough to stand up when they know there is even the implied threat that they are putting themselves in jeopardy.

Not only the structure of it makes it impossible to appeal to the central committee, but if you did you would not get anywhere because you are not talking to free men. They are bought and paid for in advance in such a high percentage that there is a likelihood of being able to get a large vote. I have done it when I knew that I was going to lose, simply to put it on record where I stood and see how much support you could get.

Now this committee, of course, was meeting. So we got ready. About this time, the boss found out that I was going to run for president of the Young Men's Democratic Club, so I got a call to come down and see him. Now in the meantime, on numerous occasions before and afterward, he would pull out a roll of bills that was so big, he was a big fat man and the roll of bills would say choke a horse, you could not put your two hands around it.

C: Was most of this coming from his construction company?

O: I do not know where he got it, whether his own personal wealth or not, but he would show this roll of bills, and he would hold it under my nose and say, "Come up to my office, I want to talk to you." Well, that is not evidence in court. What crime was committed? But I did not mistake his meaning. This double talk, where there is two meanings, if you would testify to the exact words said, it would have no meaning in court and yet you knew perfectly well what they are talking about.

Then you get it by the grapevine. Like once I was told if I go to California and live, I would find that all my living expenses would be paid. He did not say by whom, just get out of town.

C: Who told you that?

O: An agent of the powers that be. All kinds of offers. Also threats. Some were delivered in public. One night at a meeting of Young Men's Democratic Party, a jobholder from the machine put it in no uncertain terms. He said if I did not quit opposing him that I would find my body in a county ditch with a bullet through my head.

C: A guy actually threatened you?

O: Yeah. And he is on the public payroll. He was a double crosser from our organization, he was on the public payroll till he died years later.

C: What position did he hold?

O: Well, Darcers family. But I do not know whether Cliff Passmore would remember that, but there was four or five of the boys around me at the time.

C: You have witnesses to this then?

O: Oh hell, that was right in an open meeting.

C: Are these witnesses alive right now?

O: To remember who stood beside me in that group at that particular moment, I think, it was Cliff Passmore came over and he said to me something, "You want us to throw him out?" He was trying to start a fight and get me embarrassed by being involved in a fight see.

C: So he was not just some rowdy?

O: No, they sent him over and there was no doubt in my mind that he came direct from, I could not be sure whether he was coming direct from the racketeers or the county boss. And there was the problem. You do not know exactly who sends who.

C: So in your opinion, what you considered to be the machine, was it a combination of both?

O: The machine extended as I learned later, and we come to it step by step, interlocked with the state machine and the patriots of the State Highway Department, the entire state government. Normally, it interlocks with the federal. But at that particular time, Roosevelt apparently had investigative reports that there was misuse of the old age fund money, and there was a battle on between the federal government and the state government so that hollering for help for the

federal at that particular moment I did not get involved. I found myself fighting the county, city, and state. But fortunately, maybe not federal.

C: But if you challenge the machine in this area, and we will be getting to that, do you also challenge the rackets?

O: Naturally, if you break the machine, then the payoff would not work. Now the principle involved was this: if I could recognize the power of the boss, be the chairman or someone behind it, he could not sit down with one man and take a payoff. Now, for example, say you were an agent of a national crime syndicate and you want the permission to operate in Youngstown, free of interference, and you are willing to put fifty thousand dollars or a million dollars on the line for that privilege. Now, if you can go to one man who can be the only witness against you, nobody to back him up, pretty hard to convict you on his word; the vice versa, it would be almost impossible to convict him on your word. As long as there is no other witnesses.

Now, this can be called campaign fund, donation, or whatnot. But if chairman can say which candidates get the benefit of campaign money, who gets the party endorsement, and all the other advantages that goes with it, it gives you about a ninety-nine percent chance of beating everybody else. Now, in order to break down law and order, you do not need to have all three things, judge, prosecutor and police. At any time they only have to control one of those three. At that time, it was obviously operating openly, the police were not interfering.

C: Again, the prosecutor came out and said he was not going to support it.

O: Well at that little later date, it became obvious the prosecutor was in on it, see.

C: So he helped too?

O: When we saw cases going to court and they get off on any technicality or very light fines, then you begin to suspect the judge. Now at one time, a certain prominent racketeer got let out of jail by the state prosecutor's office, I think it was under Saxbe, and Saxbe blamed it on an assistant and eventually they got him back in jail.

Sometimes it goes clear to the federal, and we had one case of a president pardoning a man for crimes that were not even listed, be it murder or what, in advance, without a confession or without a charge. So it reached the President of the United States.

C: What year was this?

O: Well, have you been asleep here?

C: I thought you were talking about Roosevelt?

O: No, no.

C: I know about this too, recently.

O: Well, in other words, it can reach that high. And it does not have to reach much higher.

Well, to get back to this, I was called in by the chairman. And he put it to me this way: If I expected to be elected president of the Young Men's Democratic Club, I would have to endorse certain candidates, and he specifically named Governor Davey. I told him, I said, "Davey has not announced he is going to be a candidate, and I would look like a fool endorsing him and he does not run." I was trying to duck.

Well, he says, "I can tell you, absolutely he will be a candidate. You better endorse him," you know fatherly advice, he put it in that context or I would have trouble with the Davey employees at this meeting. I said, "Not unless you tell them," because nobody knew where I stood or where I was going to stand. I never did commit myself in advance. A damn few, excuse the language, petitions signed because I was never quite sure. Sometimes you could not very well get around it because you make enemies. It does not mean much anyhow, because they get enough signatures anyhow. Nevertheless, I was very reluctant always to commit myself in advance because you do not know all the facts.

So the net effect was that when I walked out of his office, I knew I was in trouble. This was not the only time that I had been called in. They say he showed this roll of bills many times and others said to me, "Yes, he shows it, but he never lets go of it." I will tell you the case later where I caught him letting go of it.

At one of these conferences, he put it to me in these terms: That if I would just shut up and take my split; not that does not mean much on the surface of it, but I knew what he meant. Then I would get it by grapevine; that if I would agree to just drop this whole thing and leave town, or if I would accept a job or whatnot.

C: Now this would just be over the Young Men's Democratic Club?

O: Oh, yes. So, over these years that I have been checking this, I kept keeping a list of people who got boiling mad over being either shortchanged, double crossed, or beaten in some way, or got so outraged by the arrogant abuse of authority of the chairman in the meetings that they walked out and quit. Never said anything at the time but I used to put down their name and address.

C: Was it a long list?

O: Oh, we had a long list and I gathered them from other people. So this particular session with the political boss, and at that time, I suspect it was the chairman, you

are not always sure, because there is big money behind this, real big money. In those early years, I would hear, "Wait until you see where Smith's going to put his money." I never knew who Smith was. I think he was one of the utilities' men. You have got lobbyists that funnel this money through from various industries. Every industry has a lobby, special interest lobby, and they are wrecking the American system. Right down to the fact that inflation today of the economy is caused by the restrictive practices that special interest groups put through. That in itself is a whole story.

But some of the money flow from legitimate business either want the law changed, but they are not too bad; or they do not want the law enforced, which is bad enough, to the outright legalization of monopolistic practices. Then beyond that, the out and out illegal racketeers that involve everything from the exploitation of six to gambling, dope and whatnot. In almost all of these things, one way or another, I have either been in direct contact with a situation that I knew it was going on, or it was almost obvious to read between the lines just what was in the newspapers, as sometimes it is a matter of court record.

So I knew when I walked out of Shutrump's office that I was going to have trouble. He had put it in the terms of fatherly advice, but the threat was clear; either I go along with them or they would see to it I did not get to be president.

C: So they had no objections to you being president?

O: Oh, no. It was whether I would take orders. This is precisely what I had been watching for years and was in the process of trying to figure out how I could put a stop to it. So I met with some of the boys and we got this list together and we set it up this way: if you are going to beat them by law, they throw the law book out the door. If we would hold a meeting and make a political declaration of the strategy to who are you, who do you represent, this is not an official organization, it does not count.

So we had to capture the official organization recognized by the party. We had to do it legally and we had to do it in such a way that they could not discredit us. So we waited for them to announce an election of officers or an official meeting of the club. It was not election of officers, I do not remember, but official meeting of the club. We set it up that whoever got a notice first through the mail would call the rest of the boys. In this group there are five or six of us, and we would meet down at the Tod House. We had these cards all ready to go to, oh we must have had a thousand or two thousand names by that time.

C: This is on this list of dissatisfied people?

O: Yes, yes.

C: Who were the other men in the group with you?

O: I do not remember. I do not even remember I could tell you who probably was there, but I could not be absolutely sure, that early in the thing. They were undoubtedly among the officers we elected later. But whether the list would be inclusive or exclusive of the exact guys, I do not remember. I have even got some of those old lists of memberships there and many prominent names in politics are back on that, judges and prosecutors and everybody else. In fact, a great number of people who held office in recent years got their start when we broke that open. Tom Barrett was one of them, and I think Gilmartin was the prosecutor.

C: What year was this?

O: It was back in the 1930's. But on the list, I was even surprised to see some for those names I had forgotten myself. Well anyhow, the card notice of the meeting came out for a meeting in the YWCA, a room number given. We got the call. So we all rushed down to Tod Hotel that night and we addressed these cards at three o'clock in the morning. The card read, "The war is on." Psychological impact. We did not know whether these guys would be on our side or what they would be on, see. Get a crowd out, enough that they cannot dominate it.

Of course, they did not know what is coming. I do not recall clearly now whether the meeting with the boss came after those cards went out or before, but it was about the same time. So the night comes for the meeting. And they quick switched the meeting. It was not at the "Y". The old "hide the meeting" trick. Somebody got one of the cards we mailed out and they knew there was going to be trouble. So they switched the meeting. They had it in Marvin Traxler's office, the young attorney, then he will never forget it.

C: They had the whole meeting in a lawyer's office?

O: They had a suite of offices. I think Traxler was in with other attorneys.

C: Do you recall where the building was?

O: I believe it was maybe where he is today.

C: Where was that?

O: The building on the corner of the square. I do not know, it is not the Union of the square. I do not know, it is not the Union Bank Building, I do not think.

C: Mahoning.

O: Or Dollar Bank Building. I do not want to put it on here definite; I know where it is.

C: Is it on the south side of the square?

O: North.

C: North side of the square.

O: Anyhow, we posted one of our boys at the "Y" to catch the fellows coming in and send them to where the meeting was at, so we would not lose any that way. Traxler's laughed about it since. I do not remember whether he was on the other side then or not; I think he was.

The fact that this bunch that was on this committee to draft a constitution, what happened, you will understand why he laughed about me knowing more about law than they did. But you could not get in that suite of offices. There were two or three rooms. They were just packed in like sardines and they were out in the hall. I do not know how many were there.

So as the meeting opened I got up and took out this constitution that we had been working on, and made a motion that it be adopted as read, at the minority report of the Constitution Committee. They have not read the majority report yet! I think about a seven of ten to one majority.

C: This is after your people came?

O: Well, of course, we did not know who was with us or not. But the psychology of it was that if we hit all these people who had been sore in the past, we would get our percentage of them, and it was clear that what I was doing was putting an end to the monkey business been going on before. I read the constitution as I had drafted it, the minority report; it was adopted. Then they sent John Bannon over from the machine; there was an election that night. John Bannon was sent over to take over for the machine. He later became treasurer of the county. On the vote, he got swamped. I got elected. I set it up as temporary chairman, a technicality to prove beyond any question of a doubt that I was not going to use steamroller tactics, as had been the past. By example, I was going to try to teach the older organization that you could run a thing democratically. So I gave them thirty days to get their forces, to get everybody in as member, pay dues, but you had to be a member registered with dues, one dollar.

Thereafter, we set up a membership committee that would investigate each guy that applied for a membership, and if there were too many jobholders, we would wait till we had enough of them that were not. We did not bar anybody from getting in, but we just made sure that enough people who were not controlled joined at the same time so they could not take the power back. The organization grew by leaps and bounds after that. Of course, they did not still know what I was up to.

C: What was Shutrump's reaction to this?

O: Well, it was a "fait accompli" then. If they had known in advance what I planned to do, of course, I do not doubt they could have mustered enough force to stop me. They had sent even down to the State and every state employee in the state had been up here. But during this thirty days, I used it to build the organization because they were funneling in everybody they could get to join and we were out digging up more members to match it. So you can imagine how fast it grew. I still knew they could easily beat me.

So at the end of the thirty days, we had the meetings at the corner of Eight East Commerce Street on the third floor in a place that from time to time they had met before. They could, for five or ten dollars, get this fairly large hall. I do not know whether he owned the building or whether he just leased it, but Sam Rigas ran a pool hall on the second floor, and this quite large hall and couple of offices, sort of a loft. It was not full height but it made a pretty good meeting hall. So we later leased it from Rigas.

So anyhow, at this meeting, I anticipated that they could roll in enough votes to perhaps stop me. I knew I was on very thin ice, very dangerous ground, and I also found that quite a number of the boys had been with me, either got political jobs or suddenly lost their enthusiasm. There is a certain amount of attrition due to the fact that when we did try to make up a slate of officers, there are always two or three different guys want each position and they are a little irked and it is impossible to put everybody in. So you lose a little that way.

But this meeting was planned with a great deal of care. We knew what we were up against, we knew it was dangerous. We were even meeting in a place that was notorious. So we got rumors that the machine planned that if they could not out vote me, they would start a riot and then they would have the police arrest me for causing the riot. Now we did not know for sure whether these plans really would be carried out but a precautionary measure. Cy Turner belonged to some Slovak School, and I understand that he chartered two busses and brought eighty boxers.

C: From where?

O: Amateur boxers from this Slovak School. Each guy brought in all the force he could raise. As many people as we possibly could get.

C: How many people were here at this time then?

O: The newspaper does not indicate how many were there, but it was in the hundreds. There was no way of counting them because I was conducting the meeting inside and as it developed, a lot of them might have left by the time we opened the doors. But I stood there with some hundred applications for members. The motion was made to admit all of them.

The machine counted noses and figured by that time that I had them beat outside. They figured they had a better chance inside because they had whittled us down by that time. There was approximately thirty or forty members inside that had paid their dues

previous to the meeting. Unfortunately some of the guys did not know what was coming and let themselves outside because they did not get their dollar out.

C: At this time who was the one man you saw yourself as being up against?

O: The boss himself. Because I had been called in and told that if I did not knuckle under, I would not be elected president.

C: Yes, but he was sort of sitting on the outskirts, who was the man that was representing him that you were going against?

O: Well, every jobholder in town. Anybody that had a political job you could pretty well figure that he would not be there if he was not there on the boss' orders.

C: Who would put up the most opposition to you inside the meeting itself?

O: At that time, some of the previous officers, I remember Nicholas Ricci was secretary, I was treasurer, and the old treasurer I think was Nelson Bernstein. The secretary had gone to court to try to get the records back. The officers had split because the ones were going to buck, in other words we wanted an organization that was independent, we would make our own decisions. They wanted absolute "knuckle under the boss". So Nicholas Ricci, I remember clearly who was in the opposition. There were a number of others. So prior to the meeting, as a matter of strategy, we deliberately planted where it would get to the boss' ears. The story that I was cocksure that I was going to win because I had sixteen votes out of thirty men. Now we knew that the story had been planted and it was probably bought. Now the strategy was get enough down there that no matter what force they sent to take care of us, that we could still outvote them. That is where these hundreds came from outside.

Of course, I could not keep the door locked against new members or I would be accused of using the same tactics the machine had used, I made a sudden move, grabbed control and I was not going to let go. But what I did, instead of grabbing control, I gave them thirty days to go out and get all the members they could. Then when I got elected president, I would be president of an organization that could not be challenged or questioned. The I would have had more political meaning. So I was giving them enough rope to help hang themselves. They planted a spy in our group.

C: Do you know who he was?

O: Oh, we knew who he was.

C: Who was he?

O: I do not remember his name now, but I do remember this: that we set up a strategy. The

other fellows came to me and said that he is telling all our plans. They had him cold.

C: How did he give himself away?

O: Well, they caught him, overheard him, or someone was at one of the meetings when he was spilling everything.

C: One of your spies got him?

O: I said, "Oh, no." They wanted to throw him out of the club. I said, "Oh, no. He is our ace in the hole. Do not give a hint." We held strategy meetings with him present, but the real strategy was planned somewhere else.

C: Where were your meetings held, your ostensibly strategy meetings?

O: This place that we met at Eight East Commerce Street, we proposed to Rigas that he got no income, maybe once or twice a year he got a five dollar bill, we would pay him ten dollars a month if he would lease it to us.

C: That is where the ostensible meetings were? Where would you have your real strategy meetings?

O: Right there, we had three office rooms in the big hall. You could have three meetings going at once, see. The strategy had to be, when we were up against a thing as tough as this, to let them underestimate our strength while we planned a strategy they could not cope with. So while we were planting information to mislead them through their own spy, I was getting valid information from outside of their group from people as high up as Sheriff Ralph Elser.

C: So Elser was being your spy?

O: Well, I do not know whether he was playing politics but least I was getting cooperation that was politics and I have no reason to suspect that he was not honest.

End of Part 2