

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike

Personal Experience

O.H 1216

NELSON, ARCHIE B.

Interviewed

by

Andrew Russ

on

October 26, 1988

## ARCHIE NELSON

Archie Nelson resides on the east side of Youngstown, Ohio and was born on August 18, 1913, in Alabama. He eventually moved to Youngstown to find employment and, eventually, came to work at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, Briar Hill Works. In the interview that was conducted with him on October 26, 1988, he discussed his involvement in the 1952 steel strike at the Sheet & Tube.

Mr. Nelson went into depth regarding his work environment and how it affected his life. He felt the mill offered him a fine employment opportunity and wished that the steel industry did not have to leave Youngstown. He discussed the presidencies of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman in the context of how they hurt or helped the American worker. He saw Roosevelt as a great president and friend of American labor and Truman as a competent president that continually strived to create market conditions, that would allow the American economy to thrive. He discussed the steel strike of 1952 and his involvement in it. He participated in the strike as a union member and related the feelings that passed between the rank and file of the Sheet & Tube and the company's management. He discussed the Taft-Hartly Act, the Supreme Court case of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company vs. Sawyer, and [he stated that] Truman's actions were correct as steel was needed for the Korean War effort.

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1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike

INTERVIEWEE: ARCHIE B. NELSON

INTERVIEWER: Andrew Russ

SUBJECT: life in Youngstown before and after the steel strike, U.S. Presidents during the time of the strike and now, welfare, working conditions, the union

DATE: October 26, 1988

R: This is an interview with Archie Nelson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the 1952 Sheet & Tube steel strike, by Andrew Russ, on October 26, 1988.

The first thing I wanted to talk to you about was your background. Were you born in Youngstown?

N: I was born in Alabama.

R: Alabama?

N: [I was born] in Montgomery, Alabama.

R: When did you come to Youngstown?

N: I came to Youngstown in 1944.

R: Did you start working at the mill when you first came into town?

N: I came in and went straight to work at the Sheet & Tube.

R: Did you work the Briar Hill?

N: Briar Hill, right.

R: What was your job in the mills? What department did you work in?

N: I worked in the department that we called Conditioning. The purpose of our work was to clean the steel up after they make it and roll it. We had to take whatever scrap [that was] in, out.

R: How many men worked in that department? Was it a pretty big department?

N: It was a pretty big department. Our maximum amount was about 30 to 35 men on the turn, for four turns.

R: Another thing that I wanted to talk about [is] what turn did you work? Days, or did you rotate?

N: We rotated.

R: You rotated. When you first started working there, how did you get involved with the union? Was it an automatic thing?

N: When I first went in there, they had union men in there requesting you to join the union. They didn't have any trouble with me. I was ready to join the union. I read the background of the union, and I knew that you were better off if you did have a good union.

R: What was the name of the union?

N: Local 1462.

R: Was that . . . ?

N: United Steelworkers of America, yes.

R: How was the union organized? Did they have a lot of meetings?

N: Yes. They had meetings, back then, about twice a month. They tried to get everybody to come in and join. I would say they got about 95 percent of the men that were hired to join.

R: Did you go to a lot of the meetings yourself?

N: Yes. I started to attend the meeting . . . in the meetings.

R: When you went to the meetings, what type of things did you talk about?

N: We talked at times about . . . we would start off with old business, and then, come in with new business. Discussions were on how we could organize ourselves better and what progress we had made during that period. We talked about different things that might be coming up.

R: In 1944, who was president, Roosevelt or Truman, when you started working here at the Sheet & Tube?

N: Roosevelt was president when I started.

R: What did you think about him, Roosevelt? Did you like him as a president?

N: I think he was the greatest president that the United States ever had. That's what I think. Prior to Roosevelt, in 1944, the war was at its peak, then. Where I came from in Alabama. . . . One reason why I didn't go in the service is that I worked from 1940 until about 1943 at an air base. We had a training air base. They called it Gunners Field. That's where we trained our cadets in order to be pilots. As long as I worked there, I was exempt from any kind of service. I worked there until 1943, and that job got kind of tight, then. I left there and went to work for the railroad, then. I was working out there for about a year.

Finally, I heard that you could get a good job in this part of the country, so I left Alabama and came here, to Youngstown. I had a friend that already had come in. He wrote me and told me that you could get a job real easy. I came in, and the very next day after I got in this town, he took me to the mill; and they signed me up. I went to work in the next couple of days.

R: When you first went out to the mill from an interview, they pretty much hired you on the spot? You didn't have to wait a long time?

N: No. I ended up waiting a long enough time . . . as quick as they could give the physical exam. They put me to work the next day or so.

R: That's good, because nowadays, it's hard to find a job.

N: Yes. There are no jobs, now. Back in that time, we had about four or five steel mills around here. This was a steel town, you might say.

R: Right.

N: We had U.S. Steel, Republic, and the Sheet & Tube. And, we had several other, little steel companies, [such as] Commercial Shearing. Almost any of those places you went to, you could get a job then.

R: Right away.

N: They were hiring people as fast as they could get them.

R: So, you started working in 1944. You worked in the conditioning mill?

N: In the conditioning mill, that's right.

R: In 1944, they were putting out a lot of steel?

N: Oh, yes.

R: You were working three or four turns around the clock?

N: They were working four turns around the clock, in every department over there.

R: What happened when the war ended? Did the production slack off at the mill?

N: When the war ended, production did slack off quite a bit, for a short period. It wasn't too long before they got things going again. We were making materials for the war effort. We was producing steel to make--I forget what it was--some great big bullets that they shot in those cannons.

R: You were making ammunition?

N: Yes. They were making other products for the war effort, and as soon as the war ended, all of that went out. We had a low period for two or three months. Some of us got laid off for a short period, and some of us got knocked back to lower jobs. It wasn't too long because, in that department, we started making steel for pipe. There became a great demand for seamless pipe. They made the steel in open hearth, and they'd roll it in the blooming mill. When they rolled it, all of the steel had defects in it. Some of it had something you call seems. Some had dog bites. There were different kinds of defects in the steel. Our job was, to start, we worked with the torch. We used saline and oxygen, and we would clean the defects out of the steel. They were making the pipe for the oil fields, and that business was booming for a while, for at least 15 or 20 years. As much steel as we could get, they were making it.

- R: What happened after the war ended? You quit making ammunition and things for the war. Did you switch to making mostly steel?
- N: [We made] steel for the oil wells and things. That's what Briar Hill was primarily used for after the war, making steel. We made steel over there and conditioned it over there, and then, it was shipped down to the seamless mills. That's where they rolled it into seamless pipe. We had different grades of steel. We had some soft steel and some hard steel. They make different kinds of pipe for drilling.
- R: Do you remember when Roosevelt died and Truman came in? It was 1945. What did you think of Truman as a president?
- N: At first, I was kind of afraid. But at the time, shortly after the death of Roosevelt, Truman made a speech. He called the Congress together, and he made a speech. I listened to him very carefully, and I didn't think we lost much in Roosevelt's death, because he really seemed to have been a man that wanted to move this country forward.
- R: Do you remember when you were working at the Sheet & Tube, when the Korean War started? Did they change over to making more things for armor and ammunition and stuff like that?
- N: Yes. We were making all of the little stuff for the Korean War. [It was] nothing like what we were making in World War II.
- R: It wasn't as much, but you were making some stuff?
- N: We were making some stuff, yes. Most of the Korean War orders [were] in our department, where we were getting the steel direct from the blooming mill. The demand was so great for pipe that we discontinued making steel for pipe, for the oil fields.
- R: Okay. During that period, when Truman was president and when the Korean War started, how strong was the union at your mill?
- N: I would say that the union, from 1940 to 1960, was at it's strongest period during that time. The men were better organized, and most of them understood what the union was all about. I never will forget the day. It was in 1952, when our contract ran out, and they had wrote up some demands for what the union was going to ask for. I believe we called it a 22 in '52. In other words, the union had 22 demands that they were going to make on the steel company in 1952. Most of the little

things could be rounded out in just better working conditions, a wage increase, better vacations, and better sick benefits. Those are some of the things in that 22 demand. Well, the company didn't do very much negotiating with the union. They just held negotiating sessions, but according to the reports we was getting back in the mill and at the union hall, they weren't thinking about what the union was asking for. When time came for the strike. . . .

R: That was in April, right?

N: I believe it was in April.

R: [It was] April 9, I think, [in] 1952.

N: When the time came around for the strike, Truman took over the mills. Truman didn't like the Taft-Hartly Law, and neither did the steel workers. After Truman took over the mills, there was no way for us to go on strike when he seized the mills. So, we continued to work, but a few days after he took the mills over, the companies had their lawyers go up before the Supreme Court; and they ruled that he didn't have the power to take the mills over. The minute that decision came out, we walked out of the mill. (Laughter)

R: You quit working, huh?

N: You see that picture right there? The second one from the top?

R: Yes.

N: That's when five or six of us [walked out], as soon as that decision was handed down--I happen to be off that particular day that we heard the news. We drove right out to the mill. If you look at the back ground, you'll see the cars coming out of there.

R: Yes, okay.

N: That's when we shipped. . . . I believe that was the longest strike we ever had. Truman didn't like the Taft-Hartly Bill, but after a period of time he had to. He was forced to use it, because he didn't want the country to go down. It was forced back onto the Taft-Hartly Bill.

R: Right.

N: I think, we were supposed to work at least 60 days under the Taft-Hartly Bill. Well, I would say about 45 days after we went back in there, the company and the union had reached some kind of agreement.



R: Agreement.

N: Prior to Truman taking over the mills, he set up a fact finding board. He picked a group of men that was familiar with steel and what it was. When they came out, they said that the company could afford to give the steel workers as much as a 50 percent an hour increase without raising the price of steel.

R: I bet you the company didn't like that.

N: The company didn't like that at all. That's when Truman tried to negotiate with the union on the basis of what his fact finding board had found, but they weren't thinking about that. Even after he seized the mills for a period of time and the Supreme Court overruled them, we came out on strike. It was a pretty good period of time before the company had really negotiated to sell the thing, but they did sell it before the 60 days were up. When they sold it, they practically sold it on their own terms; because they gave us, I think, an average of 25 cents an hour wage increase. They gave little improvements. The working conditions and vacations and the retirement program. And they raised the price of steel in order to do that.

R: Oh, I see. So, they really weren't paying out of their own pocket.

N: No, they paid nothing out. Never did they pay anything out of their pocket. That's why they holler about this inflation and different things, but every raise or improvement we ever got in that mill, the price of steel went up to correspond with it. And I would say, if the wage increase cost them \$7 million, they'd raise the price of steel about \$1.5 million, so they were getting more every time. That's why the situation has always been like that.

R: During the strike, what were your feelings on the Korean war? What did you think about that, how Truman was conducting the war? Do you think it was necessary?

N: Yes, I think it was very necessary. I think Truman did a real good job on how he carried it out. There's no question about it. He was trying to stop the spread of Communism. The Communism was going to take over all of Korea, everything over there. So, he went in there, and he was sincere about it. There was no backlash from the Korean War like there was from this last war.

R: Vietnam?

N: Yes, Vietnam.

- R: That was pretty bad, yes.
- N: That was a different situation altogether.
- R: The guys that you worked with, when all of this was going on, what was the general feeling with the guys that you worked with? How did they feel about the war, and Truman taking over the mills and stuff like that?
- N: I would say, at least, 80 percent of the people that I knew and was associated with, all loved Truman. They thought he was doing a very good job. Of course, as you know, according to our system of government, Truman didn't have Democrats to work with during that particular term. He had a Republican [party] to work with, and it was hard for him to get anything through the Congress at that time.
- R: Right.
- N: But overall, I think history would prove that Truman was one of your greatest presidents. You take Roosevelt, when I mentioned to you that Roosevelt was probably about the greatest president we ever had . . . Roosevelt always did have Congress and [got] what he wanted.
- R: Right. He had Democrats in Congress, right?
- N: He had a Democratic Congress, and he got the bills through that he wanted. In fact, I remember when Roosevelt was first elected president. He started out with the N.R.A. and all these different work projects. Prior to that . . . were walking around bare footed. Now, you have a little insulation. You might say, when they put you out of the plants or shut them down, you can go over to the employment office and draw a little unemployment. But prior to Roosevelt, there was no unemployment. There was nothing but a bread line waiting for you. There was no welfare, even. Roosevelt changed all of that. In fact, I don't know how this country could exist without somebody like Roosevelt, because he really did a tremendous job. He cut the work week to 40 hours a week. There used to be a time when guys would work 70 to 75 hours a week, and there was no overtime. When Roosevelt got there, he had some bitter fights with Republicans. They didn't want that work week bothered. They wanted the right to make you work as long as they wanted to. He cut the work week to 40 hours a week, and that created more jobs, too.
- R: Exactly, yes. What do you think about the way the country is moving now? Since Reagan's been in, it's

been pretty conservative. A lot of people say that everybody's better off, but I'm not so sure about that. I think the richer people are a little bit better off, but people like me and you that have to go out and work. I don't know.

N: The richer people are all better off, but the poor people are worse. I would say truly, since Reagan got to be president, with his policies and the kind of government that he runs, he threw us behind time 40 years, at least that.

R: For the poor people, yes.

N: Reagan's plan was to break up the unions, and he did. Shortly after he got to be president, the first thing he did was to put an ultimatum on the Air traffic controllers.

R: Yes.

N: That's when it started. He fired a whole lot of them, and the rest of the places, they stopped still. Everybody was so afraid to go out on strike, then. You know, they had a little strike over here at this hospital in Warren?

R: Yes, St. Joseph's.

N: Yes, those people suffered, sure enough. He made it so that people were scared to try to organize.

R: I see, yes.

N: Whenever you get a lot of people who want jobs. . . . You know what I can't understand and never could understand? They'll tell you that employment is higher than it's ever been, and you have more people working than you ever had. But, if you look around at the jobs that the people got, most of them--unless there's some kind of specialized job. . . .

R: They're only making \$4 or \$5 an hour.

N: They're making the minimum wage.

R: The minimum wage. You can't even live [on that].

N: When I was a young man, back in the time when I came here, you could afford to marry, get a home, and have a family.

R: Right.

N: But, what kind of family can a man have, now? Most of the jobs--I was shocked when I heard--they don't allow the people to work 40 hours at McDonald's.

R: That's because they don't want to pay them benefits.

N: They don't want to pay any benefits, and they can't accumulate anything, since Reagan's been president. I feel that the worst mistake the American people ever made was when they put him in there the first time.

R: Yes.

N: He didn't fool me one bit, but the American people fell in love with him, I guess, because he was an actor. But, he's done nothing, as far as I'm concerned. They come out and tell you that our unemployment is down to 6 percent or 5.5 percent. If the true facts were known, employment hasn't ever been on the 25 percent or 30 percent.

R: That's right.

N: So many people, if they're drawing unemployment and reporting to the employment office, they're counted. But, the minute they run out of their benefits, then they're not counted anymore. So, if you had a place tomorrow, and you needed a hundred people to work, and you put it in the Vindicator that you wanted a hundred people, you'd have two or three thousand. Maybe ten thousand [people would be] there to try to get that job.

R: Right.

N: It's not only like that here. It's like that all over the country. The bigger the city is, the worse it is. Cities like Detroit--I go to Detroit quite often, I've got a couple of sisters over there--it's miserable over there.

R: Is it bad?

N: Oh, it's really bad. People are scared to go out of the house at night, because it's so bad.

R: That's terrible.

N: When you have plenty of work for people, there is less crime. We've always had folks that broke the law, thieves and stuff like that, but when you have more people working, it's not bad. I don't believe in welfare. I truly believe that this country is able to afford work for everybody.

- R: Yes, right. If they want to. . . .
- N: And people could make a decent living. I was telling some of these youngsters I know, "You better try to go to school and get everything you can get, because if you don't go to school, you are going to be in the lost world." There are no jobs out there. There used to be a time where they could get a job doing almost anything and make a living with it. But now, you can't get a job. You can't get a job doing nothing, now.
- R: See, it's really hard for me to imagine what it was like in the 1940's and 1950's when Youngstown was really prosperous, because the last 10 years since I've been out of high school, I've been looking for a job; and they only want to pay me \$3.50 or \$4.00 an hour. For me to go and work that much, it's not even worth it for me to go and put that much time in. What was it like to live in Youngstown when the streets were nice, the bridges were all fixed up, downtown was all nice, and everything in the 1940's and 1950's?
- N: Well, it was wonderful, to tell you the truth, and you weren't scared that you were going to get knocked in the head. I remember Federal Street here, about 20 or 30 years ago. You'd go down through there, and the town was full of people. [They were] going in them bars, getting a few drinks, eating, and then going home. Everybody wanted to work. I would say that, compared to now when jobs are scarce, you hardly ever see anybody. I would say most of the younger people left this place. They went somewhere else. There's a lot of them down around Georgia, Texas and Florida. They just blew on out of here. If they don't do something pretty soon, it's going to be a ghost town. If somebody had told me 20 or 25 years ago that all these mills were going to be shut down and there wasn't going to be any steel made in the valley, I couldn't have believed that.
- R: Why exactly do you think that the mills and the economy in Youngstown got to the point where they had to start shutting the mills down?
- N: Here's what I saw. I observed that shortly after. When the war ended, the federal government, Truman, got Congress to go along, and they allowed these steel companies great incentives, tax breaks and things to build new modems to your mills.
- R: Right.
- N: Take this company that I worked for, it was a small company, the Youngstown Sheet & Tube, at that particular time. They was making on the average--I bet you

for 20 years, they made an average of \$23 to \$28 million a year of profit. They were doing real good, and they were reinvesting some of their profits into the plants. But in later days, here come these conglomerates to swallow them up. They were buying these steel companies and not spending a dime in them for organization.

Even the city, [it was] the same thing. When you speak about how well it was 25 or 30 years ago, the city maintained bridges and things. Most of the bridges, right now, are worn out. If they would have properly maintained them, they wouldn't have to build new bridges. Those bridges would have been alright.

R: Right.

N: But, they just dropped maintenance completely.

R: They [are] not putting any taxes on them.

N: They're letting them rust out and everything. What these big companies did--you take the Sheet & Tube before it was in a merger--they got them a big place in Indiana Harbor. That's right on the edge of Chicago. They spent millions and millions [of dollars] down there, building up that new plant, and when they built up the new plant, U.S. Steel did the same thing. They went to another place and built up the Benjamin . . . Plant. Republic [Steel] did the same thing. They all went out and built new plants. These plants here, that had supported them so long, they didn't spend a dime around here, and all of these plants become obsolete. I don't care how hard these guys down work here in Campbell, in Campbell. . . . They had eleven of them down there. They can produce more steel in Anna Harbor in two days than they can produce in a week.

R: I see. They couldn't keep up.

N: They couldn't keep up. When I said you produce more, that meant it was cheaper. And over here, it was costly. So, the first place that went down here--before any of these plants went down, the Campbell works went down, because they can make all the steel they needed in the Indiana Harbor plant. So, they shut that down. It wasn't long before all of the rest of these companies [shut down]. Sheet & Tube shut Ohio Works down, and they shut U.S. Steel down. Then, Republic [Steel] followed. Republic had steel mills from Center Street all the way back [to] downtown Youngstown, and you could walk across some of the bridges; and you'd see hundreds of men out there working. But, all that left.

R: Were you surprised when they shut the mills down? Was it 1977 when they shut them down?

N: They started in 1977. I was very much surprised! I was shocked, to tell you the truth.

R: Were you still working there, or were you retired?

N: I was still working. I had gotten to be a turn foreman out there where I worked at. In fact, I would say [it was] about six or eight years before. I didn't exactly retire. They forced me out of there. By being a foreman, they had to fill out a chart. Of course, I had the option of going back into the union and working in the plant if I wanted to. I was 64 when they put me out of there. I just went on and accepted retirement. That caught everybody by surprise.

R: The workers in the unions didn't really know. . . .

N: They didn't know about it or know what in the world was happening. That's when they shut down that big--all the mills down in Campbell. Everything was down in Campbell, except the seamless mills, and we were making steel in Briar Hill for the seamless mill. The pipe business was still pretty good for a while. They struggled on until 1980 before they started shutting all of that down. This is when these big companies, the Lykes Brothers, or whatever, had taken Sheet & Tube over. They had also bought Jones & Locking Steel, and they were making a lot of steel in Aliquippa. If anybody had told me, "We're making the best steel for the best pipe that they ever could produce right here, in that one place that we had in Briar Hill. . . ." They tried it in other places, and the pipe came out lousy. We were pretty independent, you might say. But then, I guess, the oil business might have fell off, and they stopped drilling. Eventually, they didn't need any of that. But, I never did think that this town would go down like it did.

R: No. You really can't even believe it when you look at. . . .

N: I saw the handwriting on the wall, to a certain extent. I know one thing. If you put out all of the time and don't put anything back in, you are in trouble.

R: No investment.

N: No investment. They invested nothing. They ran that thing with a wing and a prayer. That's the way they did it. They weren't going to put any new equipment

in. They weren't going to put any new cranes in. They weren't going to modernize them any, either. So, that's what happened.

R: My own family, my mother's family, they're from Briar Hill. The name is Ropoli. They were Italians. I talked to my uncle about it. They used to live on Worthington in Briar Hill. He said, "Back in the 1930's and 1940's, that part of town was all built up nice, with nice houses and [nice] roads." Was it nice to work over there at the Sheet & Tube in Briar Hill when things were booming and stuff like that? Was everything nice?

N: Well, it wasn't so nice until we strengthened the union. There was a time in there where the union was weak. You had a union, but you were just paying union dues. They were working the hell out of you just like they wanted to. (Laughter) I remember, what made me spend more time at the union and learn a little bit more about it--I learned about everything that I could. I learned about the contract, and I learned about the union constitution. You go out there, and the man says, "Alright, let's get it." They weren't playing when they said, "Let's get it." That fire was hot! And, they didn't allow you to take a break then, for a period of time. When we all got organized to the extent where we could challenge them on that, then working conditions improved tremendously!

R: So, you think the unions have, pretty much, a lot of influence where you worked?

N: They did at that time, but as the years went by, the unions started getting a little weaker. Everytime they got weaker, the company took advantage of it.

R: Who was in charge? Who was the main union man? Who were some of the main people in charge during that 1952 strike? Do you remember their names?

N: Yes. One guy that . . . on my shoulder [was] named Danny Thomas. He was the president of the union. When I went out there, we had a guy named Jerry Beck. Shortly after I got there, Jerry Beck was put on the staff, and Dan Thomas took over his grievance committee and also got elected president of that union. He was the chief. We had other guys that we liked in the union [such as] Rocko Greco and Don Bernard. We had people all over there. In fact, the union we had was pretty strong. They had a pretty good organization. Like I was telling you, with some of the hectic days we had, we had shut the place down four or five times. They called it a wild cat strike. Whenever the management didn't want to talk to us right, we just walked



out of there. In our place, they couldn't run the seamless mills. They tried everything they could, but they couldn't run the seamless mills without us working; because they would try to run that steel without it being conditioned, and they would run into so much scrap until they changed. That changed their whole attitude about how they were going to treat us. They let up a lot. We made that a pretty good place to work, not only in conditioning, but in all of Briar Hill. It was a good place to work.

R: How many men worked at the Sheet & Tube Briar Hill Works when you were there?

N: I think at one time we had about 2,500 people.

R: [There were] 2,500 people.

N: Yes. That was the total force that we had in the union.

R: Everybody that worked there was pretty much in the union, all of the workers? Was there 100 percent?

N: It was at least 99 percent. When a union shop bill passed, everybody had to join the union. And we had a small group--in my department we were 100 percent union, but in other places, there were two or three that didn't want to belong to the union.

R: What did you think about the people that didn't want to belong to the union?

N: I didn't have much respect for them. A few years before I came here, they had a steel strike. That was in 1937, and they started to organize the union. I think the union got their first contract from the company in 1942. Well, I came on the scene in 1944. We were still organizing it, explaining to the guys what the union could do. As the men got together and got stronger, the union got better. The president of the United Steelworkers was a guy named E. Philip Murray.

R: Philip Murray.

N: Philip Murray, he was the president of the United Steelworkers. He was really a solid union man, and the people loved him. He helped organize the people, I mean, real good. As long as the men were well organized, the company knew they had to negotiate with you. It was like us saying, "If you don't do this well, you aren't going to make no steel." When they found out

that the union was organized well enough to do that, then they came in; and it was a different atmosphere altogether.

R: Because nowadays, you can almost see . . . it seems like the general attitude of our society is, they don't have a lot of respect for unions and working class for some reason. And I really can't understand the change in attitude. What was the attitude like when you were working? How did you as a working man and your union relate to the rest of the public? Was there a lot of respect and cooperation?

N: There was quite a bit of respect and cooperation, there for a period of time. There's a lot of propagan-da involved in that. The company would always blame the union. Every time the steelworkers asked for a wage increase or some kind of better working condition, the company would say that the union is driving the price up. Whenever the companies report their profits, then the union has something to negotiate on. They say, "You made \$50 million last year. Share some of the fruit with the people that work for you."

R: Right, exactly.

N: That's how it started out. As I told you earlier, the company never gave the union a dime unless they increased the price of steel. You take these company executives. The top named city chairman of the board, he was making maybe \$150,000 a year plus some kind of bonus.

R: Right, that's a lot of money.

N: The steelworker would come out and tell you what the average steelworker was making. To a person that doesn't know what's going on, they say, "That's a lot of money." But, they figured the chairman of the board in with that average. If I make \$100 a day and you make \$50 a day, our average would be \$75 a day. But, that wouldn't help you any, because you're making \$50, and I'm making twice as much as you.

R: Right.

N: That average throws people off.

R: Oh, so they would use that. . . .

N: But they would use that. They always used that. They said, "The average steelworker is making \$12 an hour," which was a lie. When they figured all of the superintendents and the chairmen of the board in there, a total came up to this. So, they divided and said,

"That's an average of \$12 an hour." But, the \$12 an hour didn't help the people that were down on the lower jobs, the labor type jobs and job class 5, you might say, or less. Job class 3, they weren't getting any benefits from the average.

R: Oh, I see. Two other things I wanted to talk about are: what do you remember about that strike in April of 1952 [and] when you were working, what was the communication of the union? What was the union telling you about what was going to happen?

N: Every report that we got, our president was automatically committed to negotiate with the company. The companies were all negotiating together. U. S. Steel, I would imagine, would set the pattern. Whatever they set, that's the way all the rest of them went.

R: Okay.

N: So, they would go sit in those negotiating sessions, and they came back and said they have no progress. They said, "We might as well start getting ready, because we'll have to shut them down." The company would sit around laughing at the union when they made certain requests.

In the department I worked, we had a chairman of grievance committee in that department, and then we had four or five more representatives of the union. Well, all of these people were pretty tentative. They go back and spread the word to the rest of the guys. Prior to the strike, they were well informed on what the issues were. The company was making so much money, and the union felt like they should share some of that money with the people. We didn't have trouble with the people. They knew that in order to gain any benefits, we had to strike. A lot of folks say, "You'll never make what you lost." We were out a little over a hundred days [during] the time when Truman couldn't take the mill.

R: A hundred days?

N: Yes. We were out, I think it comes to 117 days.

R: Wow!

N: That was the longest strike in the history. We lost all the wages and everything.

R: You didn't get paid for those days, that's right.

N: No, and back then, the union wasn't strong enough to give you a little extra to buy bread like sometime now.

R: They would.

N: Like the auto workers, they have a strike fund. We hadn't built up a strike fund.

R: So, you didn't have anything.

N: We had nothing. We just walked out, and you had to do the best you could, that's all. I would say, in the long run, the men benefited. When you say "benefit". . . . For instance, if you're making \$15 a day and they give you some increased raises that add up to \$20 dollars a day, when the company's got through raising the price of steel, that \$20 you got was no more of a value to you than the \$15. It was a terrible thing, because everytime you got a raise, they raised the price of steel.

R: Right.

N: Well, they'd still be in the same boat, or better off. They could give the executives a bigger bonus.

R: So, you were really giving them a cause to raise their prices even more.

N: That's right. If the union knew our contract was going to expire about four or five months from now, the company would automatically raise their prices ahead of time. They said they had to have more. When the negotiations were over, they granted you a few little increases, fringe benefits or something, [and] they would raise the price again. So, that's what happened. I don't think the union made them do that. Just like I told you about Truman's fact finding board that he set up. They said the companies could give the men 50 cents an hour wage increase, and they still would make an adequate amount of profit. But, the company wasn't going to hear that.

R: What did they offer to give you? How much did they want?

N: They didn't offer you nothing.

R: Nothing.

N: Nothing. They fought right down to the last minute. Well, they knew where this Taft-Hartly law was going . . . when we had corresponded with what it said, they knew that they had to move something in. So, they came in and probably granted you an average [of] 25 cents an hour wage increase. They might have added a little vacation and a few other things.

R: You were out of work for how many days, 117?

N: [For] 117 days.

R: That's a long time.

N: That's a long time!

R: During those days, did you talk with the people you work with, the other union members?

N: Oh, yes.

R: What did you talk about?

N: We talked. We had pretty good communication. We had it set up where all of us were working the picket lines at the same times. I was the captain. Most of us that were officers in the union, served as captains on the picket line. We would get many of our people that worked with us to help serve, and most of the men cooperated. They served good.

When the company saw that the union was well organized, that they couldn't break up the union, they wanted to try. But, they saw that the union was organized well enough that they weren't going to make any steel until they came to an agreement. Well then, they started talking right, you know.

R: Right. So, how was the morale during that time?

N: There was a lot of rebellion when we was out so long, because the men didn't think that they were going to be out that long. Nobody thought that. All of us were shocked. We thought it might last a few weeks to a month. As time went by, a person like me--I had a wife and three kids--didn't have any choice other than to try to get on welfare for a period of time. Welfare said, "We'll give you a food voucher so you can get some food, but we're not going to pay your light and gas bills. We have some bean trucks around there. You can get on the truck. Go out and pick some beans." (Laughter) That didn't sound good at all. But, I feel like, in order to get the proper recognition from the company, if the companies know that the union is strong, they deal with a different attitude altogether. If they think you're weak and they can break your union, then they'll try all they can. That's the way it's always has been.

R: So, when you came home and told your family that you were going to be on strike, what did they say?

N: I kept them from practically everything that was going on. The ones that would be interested in it, my wife knew that I was active in the union. I told her, "It does not look good. They're negotiating a new contract now, but according to the reports throughout the mill, the company isn't talking right; and Phil Murray ain't going to be satisfied unless we get a certain thing." They accepted it well, in most cases. We didn't have too much trouble. Of course, back during that time, you're much better off working. We wanted to work. There's no question about that. If Phil Murray said we needed something for a pension, you know. There was a time when there wasn't no kind of retirement. Prior to Roosevelt starting our social security, you worked 25 or 30 years, and you were just thrown out in the streets like a dog. We started trying to build up some kind of pension program. Every time the two or three year contract expired, we tried to get a little better improvement, put a few more pennies in the kitty, and that's the way it started. The average steelworker, when they shut them mills down, the benefits [they got were] real good. The average one was making \$500 or better in pension. Well, in previous years, they didn't have nothing, nothing at all. The company executives, they always did have a pension left for them.

R: Oh, sure. You talked about this Taft-Hartly Act that Congress passed. I don't really understand. What exactly did that do for you when you were out on strike?

N: That was a law that they called a union busting law, if there was an emergency and this strike was going to cripple the country, the law said you had to go back in there and work--I said--60 days--I think it was 80 days.

R: Eighty days.

N: I think it was 80 days. It has been so long since those things happened. I might not be exactly accurate. But, I think it was 80 days. You had to go back in there for the same thing you were working for [at] 80 days. That was the law. Well, that law didn't benefit nobody but the company. It didn't benefit the men at all. It caused us to lose 80 days, you might say. In that 80 days, after a certain amount of those days were gone, the company would then ask you. . . . They would say that they were willing to pay you 10 cents more an hour. They had a union breaking clause. If the union didn't want you to accept

that last offer the company made and you went and accepted it, that would destroy the union, see? That's why the union never did like it, and it wasn't fair to the working people at all. That's why Harry Truman didn't want no part of it.

After you worked the 60 days and you had 20 more days, they took a vote. They'd see if you wanted to accept the company's last offer. We were strong enough, I'm happy to say, that we rejected anything that the company might say they offered. We was in accordance with what the union said; the men went along with the union. We prevailed.

R: What was the public mood in Youngstown during the strike? What were the newspapers and the radio saying?

N: The newspapers and the radio, the Vindicator always has been dominant in this town. They was always in favor of the companies and against the unions.

R: Against the unions?

N: [They were] against the union. The Vindicator never, they got a union down at United [Steel] all of the time, you know.

R: Yes.

N: They always were for the company. "The poor company." That's the way you would hear it, and a lot of people listened to what they said. I would say that most of the public opinion was against the union, because the way the news people would put it. The news media would carry it out to you that the men were just trying to take advantage of the company, when that was nothing like the truth. But, so many people that probably were affected by working somewhere else, didn't know what was happening. It was hard, just like right now. The unions, I would say the people that run the unions, they would just about have surrendered right now. They have no strong union, now. They got a foundation there. If things pick up, if new opportunities come, the union might be strengthened, but they're weak right now. You know, just like this school levy that's on the ballot, I'm going to watch that and just see how it's coming out, because there are few steel workers left around here. Some work at Sharon and some work around the Warren area. That's the few. They haven't received a wage increase since Reagan got to be president.

R: Is that right?

N: They all have been given back. The companies don't wait. They say, "We're going to have to sit down and renegotiate this contract. You have to take a cut, or else, we're going to have to shut down." And that's the way a lot of them did it. If these workers in some fabricating plant suffer, if they didn't take cuts, they did shut down in a few cases. And most of the men have been taking cuts. These people that work for General Motors, at Lordstown and Packard Electric, they are the life of this valley right now. If it weren't for Lordstown and Packard. . . .

R: That would be it.

N: That would be it. I'm just wondering, what would happen. . . . The biggest trouble with the steel industry, what made them shut these plants down--the big boys, they got a hanging in the steel made in Japan.

R: Yes. It's cheaper for them to make it there.

N: [Japan] and West Germany and Korea, and they would bring in them cheap products that are made by cheap labor. All of these jobs are imported from here.

R: What would make people that own the steel mills betray their own countrymen, Americans, and go and export the production of steel overseas? Why?

N: I'll tell you. I think people love power. When you can stand up and talk to him on . . . of footing. . . . Say you have a strong union and you tell them, "Now, you know that you can afford to do this and do that." They don't like to be dictated to. Take General Motors. If this union tried to get some better benefits, they got a big place down in Mexico now, and they run them plants. Of course, these people here, the American worker is so much more skilled than most. . . . There might be one exception, Japan. I understand that they can produce, but these companies try to use other places; but they don't get the production that they get here. They don't get the quality that they get here. Once these companies get up to a certain point, then they invest in them foreign steel mills.

R: I see.

N: Just like Dukakis said, and just like Reagan, ever since he's been president, he don't give a damn how much the United States borrows from Japan. It's ridiculous.

R: I don't understand. Why would Reagan and his administration have a policy where, like you said, Japan sort



of just raids the United states and their pocketbooks?  
I don't understand.

N: That's right. They don't allow. . . . If you look at your recorder here, chances are it was made in one of those places.

R: Probably. I wouldn't doubt it.

N: Being a steel worker, I don't want a foreign car. I want a car made here in America, because that helps Americans. It's just common sense. These kind of things, too. I go out and buy a Magnavox or buy a Sylvania, and when you look at the small writing on there, it probably says "Made in Japan." And you don't know that when you buy it. I went and bought a little microwave not too long ago, and it's a United States company, Panasonic; and I just knew that it was made in America. But, when I got it here in the house and took it out of the box, you see "Made in Hong Kong." (Laughter)

R: You wouldn't have bought it if you would have known that.

N: No. I always want to buy American products, because I know that's what keeps the people going. It keeps the people working, but it ain't like that no more. There's something there that I haven't figured out yet. Say that Japan sent in 2,000 of those little Toyota cars. When they send them in here, they have to get something back for them. Well, I can see now that they're investing a whole lot of money in different properties in California. They say that they almost own everything in Hawaii. If they [Japanese] keep on, we won't have a country. It will be dominated by foreign lands.

R: Right, exactly.

N: That's why that trend needs to change. You hear that Reagan and all of them are protecting or whatever you call it. The unions won't produce this stuff here, and they want Americans to do it. Reagan is glad to help these big companies build up places down in Mexico, which don't benefit our people any at all. In Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan, the trade program that they have is pitiful for America.

R: Right.

N: Dukakis came out and said it plain as day. Bush said, "We have wonderful trade with Japan." He said, "Yes. It's wonderful, but it's just wonderful for Japan." It ain't wonderful for none of us when we have

millions of people in the streets that want to work and so many more than not that don't have homes. Even the Republicans will tell you that we have more people on welfare now than we ever had in the history of this country. They don't seem to give a damn about giving people a welfare check, because when you just get a welfare check, you're almost starving. You have to . . . them. Well, when they offer you jobs, you should be making \$12 or \$15 dollars an hour, but you're making \$3 and \$4 an hour. That does not help this country.

R: I watched on television, both of the presidential debates. I've been keeping a pretty close track on what Bush and Dukakis have been doing in the last couple of months. I really can't see why a lot of people support Bush, because, first of all, as far as his character is concerned, I think he's a liar.

N: He is.

R: He is. He was involved with the Iran Contra Scam, but they couldn't prove anything. And when he speaks, he isn't really confident. Then, I look at Dukakis, and he seems like he's really sure of himself and he really cares about people.

N: That's right.

R: My question is, I can't understand why so many people would want to support George Bush.

N: It's not that so many people want to support him, but we have a trend in this country--I don't know what you would call it . . . I don't call it real Americanism myself. Most of the people want to go with what they call a winner. They don't want to vote for a loser. And, when these newspaper distort the figures and come out and tell you that Bush is leading by 13 points, they say, "I might as well vote for Bush. I'm not going to vote for Dukakis, because he's going to lose anyhow." You'd be surprised how many votes can be lost. A lot of them say that they don't need to vote. That's how this man won on a landslide against Mondale the last time. Half of the people that were eligible to vote in this country, did not vote, and they don't realize the power they have. They could have changed it. I don't care what Democrat you have. They hollered about Carter being liberal, "Carter did this, and Carter [did that]." Carter may not have done everything, but he was a good president.

R: Congress has the purse strings.

N: That's right. They can come out, blame him, and brand him as being a liberal. I watched a program last night that he was on.

R: I saw that, too.

N: This Ted Copple asked him, "What was a liberal? Explain the word liberal." Then, he wanted to send one part of that little discussion . . . he tried to evade the issue of liberal. He didn't want to wear that brand. Then, Dukakis explained it to him, what he thinks a liberal is: somebody who cares about the people, somebody who wants to see the country moving. You see, that's what Bush gets away with. He's telling some lies and distorts some of the things about the name, and the people grab that. News people, they're the first ones. They come out, and you see where Bush said that Dukakis is a civil liberties, card carrying. . . . He's weak on crime, he's weak on this, and all that kind of stuff. All of those are distortions. The man is a clean, honest man that wants to try to help this country move forward. Reagan hasn't moved it forward. Since he got in there, he built up the Armed Forces a hell of a lot stronger, but he let everything else go dead. He spent more money than all the presidents that have preceded him. If you sit down and think about that, just like Dukakis said, "If you give me a \$2 billion check, a red check to spend every year, I can do this and that, too." He is doing nothing but spending. . . . He says he doesn't want to raise taxes. You and I know that, in order for the government to function properly and pay their bills, you have to have some taxes. But, they don't want to tax that big boy. This guy right now, he told us last night that he wanted to give a tax break to these great big conglomerates, the millionaires that don't need it.

R: Right.

N: We'll take all of Reagan's tax cuts. Here's what I don't understand--and I've been trying my damndest to try to figure it out. Reagan, prior to him taking office in 1981, he said, "I'm going to give you two tax cuts. I'm going to cut the taxes. I'm not going to raise the taxes. I'm going to cut them," which he did. But how much did the cuts help the average man? Very little. He cut my income tax by \$1.40 a year. (Laughter) To me, somebody that big, \$10,000 or \$11,000 of pension money a year, I got \$1.40 out of it. But, this guy over here who's making \$150,000 a year and on up, he get's big money out of that. The little men don't get a damn thing. As long as they have it like that, it just won't to work right.

R: The only other thing I wanted to ask you about is, when that Supreme Court case about the 1952 steel strike came down--I think it was called Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company vs. Sawyer--when the Supreme Court decided that Truman didn't have the power to take over the mills, what was your reaction, and what was the reaction of the people that you worked with? What did you think about that?

N: We all thought it was ridiculous. We knew that it was a strong Republican's doings. It was one of the rottenest decisions that had ever been made as far as I was concerned, because Truman had all of the power to take over the steel mills. They claimed that he did have a law. If he had put the Taft-Hartly Law in to start with, forced us to work eighty days if we hadn't come to an agreement, then it would have been proper. But, as long as you have a law, the Republicans passed that law, the Taft-Hartley Law. . . . Old Taft was from Ohio, and I don't know where the Hartly came from, but they did have that law; and the Republicans passed it. We tried to get it appealed several times, but we weren't able to do it. We did get a good law behind it a few years later, I forgot exactly what that law was. That law is still on the books. Everybody felt outraged when Truman was overruled, but we know when the Supreme Court, once they come down with a decision, it's the law of the land.

R: Right.

N: You know, I always say when you hear him talk about education, somebody in my category--when I came up, my grandmother raised me the best she could, and I was starving half of my life. I didn't have food or nothing. I couldn't go any further than high school. There was no way for me to go to college or nothing, because there wasn't no support groups back then like there are now. All I could do is go out and try to get a job making 15 cents an hour and help my grandmother finish raising us. Once you get to be a young man, you start thinking, "Why are things like this? Why should it be like that?" This land of opportunity, the land of plenty, the American dream, all of those things they talk about . . . there's no reason for people being on the streets now, [those] that have no home.

R: That's exactly right.

N: And, people have no jobs. They're going to get on welfare. I understand now, with the new law they pass, they're going to offer special training. The key to everything is education.

R: Right.

N: If you get an education, get all you can. Then, you can understand things plainer. It's going to take that to change the rules. To change this country, you've got to change the attitude of the top folks. When you cannot get up and contradict them on things . . . they believe that you're supposed to just listen to them, and whatever they say, you do. But when you get to a point where you're able to challenge them, they holler about it, but they don't want a lot of education; because they want to dominate. There ain't no question about it. They want to be in power and dominate the rest of the people.

R: Right. The last question I have, why do you think--to me it seems, today in our society, there's a lot of disrespect between people. Younger people don't have a lot of respect for older people, and [they don't have] certain American values. . . . I'm really at a loss to understand why people are treating each other this way. It seems, by talking to my father and my family and my uncles who are older in their 60's, when they grew up in Youngstown, there was a lot of respect for the government. There was respect for other people. And, we really don't have that today. I really don't understand why.

N: I'll tell you. We started losing that at a certain period of time. I would say, today, the reason why you find so many people like that is because of Reagan. He wanted to cut out every benefit program that poor people had in this country. He either cut it out or cut it down so low until it can't help people. Now, it's more or less what you call "dog eat dog." Kids don't give a damn about their parents. That love and that feeling that we used to have for one another, Reagan helped kill it. That's the way I feel.

R: So, as a working man who was very successful in the union--you worked at Sheet & Tube, and you've seen the best times of this country; and you've seen some of the worst times in the last 10 to 15 years--what do you see in the future of the country?

N: The future does not look good if the polls are correct. If these people put Bush in there, I don't see help for us. Bush is going to carry out the policies of Reagan, and Reagan is what I call a non-care administration. He doesn't care about the country. You see him laying these different . . . Bush wants to blame Dukakis and says that he's trying to divide the country on the race issue. He inserted the race issue, and he knows he did. All of his philosophers, all of Reagan's don't come out and say it, but the code is there. It's a hell of a thing when you say, "Race against Race,"

and when you say, "How much progress has the Black man made in America since Martin Luther King died suddenly?" Some of the laws that were passed to help promote equality under the law, Reagan ignores. And the people know that. He makes it where one group is ahead of another group, and Bush is going to do the same identical thing. We're going to have to live with it, because we are citizens of this country, and once we go to the ballot box and cast a ballot, it's final. I truly believe that these people are lying in all of the polls. Bush was a CIA man, and that taught him how to be a crook and do a whole lot of secret stuff.

This article came out in the paper a few weeks back, where some of Reagan's top people were trying to decide whether or not they should declare him incompetent. Did you read that?

R: Yes, I read that. He was watching movies on television, yes.

N: Do you know what caused that? Reagan was as guilty as Oliver North or Poindexter about this Iran Scandal. He knew all about everything. Reagan was a sick man. If you look at his picture, the news men would be trying to ask him [questions] . . . he was a sick man until Poindexter got on the stand and took all the blame. That saved Reagan. If Poindexter hadn't said that, Reagan knew that they would probably have impeached him. But, Reagan did know. My bet would be this: 10-1, prior to him going out of that office, whatever the decision would be if needed, he's going to pardon Poindexter and North. There's no doubt. Once Poindexter said that he didn't let the president know, once he told that to the committee, that was a blue day. Reagan, you could see him change and come back. He was a sick man prior to Poindexter coming before that committee. When Poindexter came before [the committee] and took all of the blame for everything, he said he didn't want the president to know, because he didn't want the president involved. That was a lie, and history, I believe, will tell us that it was a lie one day. From that day to this day, Reagan has been a bad man, but he was pitiful prior to that. They say that he didn't know whether he was going or coming. When you read those kinds of articles and hear things like that, I do know [that] anybody with common sense would know better.

I worked around this air base, I mentioned to you, for quite a few years. I got familiar with military sequences. I know you aren't going to disrespect your officers. You're going to do what that officer tells you to do. And, you aren't going to do anything on your own, especially when a man reached the point where

he was an admiral like Poindexter. That head man has got to know. He's not going to take chances. Most of the American people know that Reagan was guilty, but some of them just like him anyhow. They don't give a damn whether he does a thing like that, they just like him anyhow.

R: It seems like you could almost trace a line deterioration since after World War II as far as our society and politics. I wonder how other countries view us. How do you think they view us?

N: I'll tell you. Most other countries, especially since Reagan's been in there, most hate the American people, because the American people promote one thing, supreme superiority. The other people think, "That's an American, now." If you're in England, France, or East or West Germany, anywhere you go, they think that you think you're superior to them. For that reason, they don't particularly care for you. There was a time when I think we were loved everywhere. When you had a man like Harry Truman or John F. Kennedy, the people loved Americans. And, nobody would capture you and make you a hostage. When they go to capture an American and take them as hostages and try to make Israel free of some of them people that they got in slavery and different things like that, the attitude . . . sometimes, a few woosers can be the worst thing in the world. The way that Reagan treats these foreign affair situations, you know. . . . Somebody like Reagan, they got it in their head that they're supposed to be ruling the world. We got a great country, I think. I think our democracy, if it's done right, would be good.

R: But it's not.

N: It's not being administered properly. If it's done right, we got something to be proud of as being Americans, but when it ain't done right, we're going to find ourselves someday under the hands of a . . . you know, Nixon almost got to be a dictator. He made a few little mistakes. When he didn't burn those tapes. . . . (Laughter)

R: That was it.

N: That was it. That's what tripped him up. Even after that, he almost got to be a dictator, but I think some of the top Jones must have stopped him. He was getting ready to--he didn't want to come out of that office as president. He did wrong, and they even tracked him right down to it. We said, "We know. We've got you, now." So, he finally resigned, but that's because he couldn't get anyone to go along with him. If he would have gotten some of the big boys to go along with him,

he would have been a dictator. If we aren't careful in this country, we could get under a dictator. All the principles of our constitution and everything would be gone. That's the way I see it, and I tremble when I think about how bad it could be.

R: I see that trend, too.

N: Yes. It's just . . . when they said, "Freedom," you want freedom. When they're going to dominate you and you see that they're on the wrong track. . . . I believe, when John Kennedy got to be president and Johnson finished out, of course, what killed Johnson was the Vietnam war. Johnson would have been one of the greatest presidents that we ever had, but by him being so much involved. . . . He didn't start that. That was started when Eisenhower was president, sending observers over there to do this and do that. It started out little and then kept on [growing]. Johnson just got trapped in that. He didn't intend that. When Kennedy got killed, Johnson was a good president, except for Vietnam.

R: Okay. Thank you.

N: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW