

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Depression Project

Depression Experience

O. H. 102

LADDIE FEDOR

Interviewed

by

Mary Belloto

on

July 5, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

INTERVIEWEE: LADDIE FEDOR

INTERVIEWER: MARY BELLOTO

SUBJECT: Opinions on the Depression and Republican and Democratic parties.

DATE: July 5, 1974

B: This is an interview with Laddie Fedor for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Depression, by Mary Belloto, at the office of the Assistant Superintendent of the Struther City School System, on Friday, July 5, 1974, at 2:30 p.m.

Did you lose a job because of the Depression and if so when did you become unemployed, and how long were you out of work?

F: Now, I personally was too young to be working at that time but I recall my dad and my uncle both being out of work. My dad worked very few days during the month in The Youngstown Sheet and Tube, while my uncle was completely out of work. He came down to live with us from Detroit.

B: How did this seem to effect people? Were they largely bitter about it or did they tend to feel that, after all, everybody was in the same boat anyway?

F: I think the latter probably is true. It was a matter of futility really. They just couldn't do much about it. Everybody was in the same boat and they tried to make the best of whatever they had.

B: Sort of an acceptance of the situation.

F: Yes, that is right.

- B: How did people who were out of work feel about accepting welfare?
- F: Well, I remember in our family, it was a lot of pride involved in it. In fact, I remember my dad being very reluctant to even go for WPA (Works Progress Administration) work. As long as he was able to get a few days during the month down at the mill, we didn't accept any sort of free food or any other offers.
- B: Were there many local projects designed to help people out of work?
- F: Well, two that I know of; the WPA and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) were two that were prevalent at the time. WPA had some work projects right here down on Poland Avenue. They were putting the paving brick down for the road which is now Copland Avenue States Street. The CCC actually took care of naturally some younger students, young men, which seemed to be very effective.
- B: How did people feel about the federal government's unemployment measures, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps? You know if people reacted toward them in certain ways.
- F: Well, the Conservation Corps, as I said, many of the families that I recall, if they had a youngster who was of age to go there, they tried to get that youngster to go to the CCC. Because it meant that the youngster was going to be at work. It also meant that so much of his pay each month was being returned to the home, which was keeping the home going. It was in favor, I believe, that they looked at it.
- B: Do you know anyone who worked on local CCC projects, such as the one in Mill Creek Park?
- F: Nothing local, the ones that I recall were out of state.
- B: Did such people think that these were good things or not, generally?
- F: I think they did. They felt that it was worthwhile. Although there was a lot of talk about the people gold bricking on the job, and there were so many people around, they were falling all over each other and things of this nature of criticism were prevalent. At the same time I think it did what it started out to do and took care of giving them employment, and at the same time make them feel that they earned what they were getting from the government.
- B: What did people feel was the main cause for them being out of work during the Depression? Was it business

interests at home that were to blame or something else?

F: Well, actually at that age, as a youngster, we really didn't delve into the political end of this thing. I'm sure that there was probably a bit of politics and economics involved. That I can recall, naturally my parents, they always just criticized the President because he was the person in charge. They felt that the President wasn't doing the right thing, that is all.

B: Which president was . . . ?

F: President Hoover was at the time.

B: What view did people take of the state government's efforts to relieve the Depression?

F: I think you probably back up to question not only the state and the local government and the federal government. It was more or less sort of a pork barrel sort of thing; who could get the most from the other and to keep their particular area going. I think it was just one of those things. If you had enough politics or you knew somebody, why, you could get something for your particular area. That was a feather in your hat, enhance your particular position in the community.

B: Did you, or perhaps your parents, or your family feel that any specific individuals were to blame for causing the Depression?

F: Again, as I say, at that time economics and politics weren't prevalent for me. The only thing, as I said, go back to again it was maybe the President. Everything seemed to revolve around the President, President Hoover. Which we found later on naturally wasn't so, but still he was the gentlemen that got the brunt of it.

B: Does that, more or less, answer the question about what people tended to think of Hoover during that particular period of time?

F: Yes, they felt that he was the representative of the rich and the down trodden poor naturally were against him. He felt no empathy for them, that was it I guess.

B: What did people seem to think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the time?

F: Well, he was the savior, the person who came out and was going to be the common man's president and who was going to help bring security and economics back into this position.

B: Do you recall at that time if people worried much about

what was happening about the world?

F: Not really, as I say, Russia, and Communism, and Nazism were something that we never talked about, really, at that time, at my age of eleven.

B: The problems of the day probably were more pressing than what was happening around the world.

F: That is correct. Also remember we had no radio and no television. You weren't being bombarded every fifteen minutes with the news. Newspapers weren't being delivered house to house like they are now. Whenever something big happened they used to put out an extra and they used to come around and sell it for \$.02 or \$.03. That was what you considered news.

B: What did people seem to think about the Democratic Party during the time and the Republican Party?

F: As far as I can ever remember the Democratic Party was always the people's party, the poor man's party, and the Republicans were always the rich man's party. Those were the two distinctions between them, that is it.

B: Were there any times during the Depression when people sensed that things were about to get better, and if so, when?

F: I really can't recall any particular time. I suppose whenever employment started to rise. That was probably the turning point. As far as anything that was tied to the political world itself outside of when Mr. Roosevelt was elected, other than that, why, I couldn't really state that there was anything that happened special that would give us that feeling.

B: Could you remember offhand when employment picked up or seemed to pick up?

F: Well, I would say when Delano Roosevelt took over and things were starting to move then. From then on it seemed like the economy started to go forward again.

B: The stock market crashed in 1929, it crashed again in 1937, were people aware of any worsening of their lives as a result of that second crash in 1937?

F: Well, I doubt it very much. Naturally there were many people who were in the stock market and you would say the people of means they certainly would. The common people, the people like my parents who didn't own any stock or anything like that, that really meant nothing to them outside of they knew something was wrong. The banks were closing and so forth, there was no employ-

ment, and there was no food on the table. Other than that, that was the important thing.

B: You feel then that the people, the percentage of people that had stock, or that had investments of these kinds, were few then?

F: Oh yes, definitely. I feel that they were few in number yes.

B: How did people feel about industrial strikes during this period?

F: Well the strikes naturally, I think, started after the industrial revolution--I can't say--well, industrial revolution and the economy improved, as far as that goes. During the Depression I don't think there were any strikes to speak of as far as that goes. Anybody would work for anything if they could get a job. So, these strikes came about after people started working again. The older people naturally, they felt that they didn't want to go on strike, they wanted jobs because they had been unemployed for so long and feared for their jobs. The newer and younger people they saw something in their horizon that unions meant to them improvements to their welfare and therefore I think they were for it.

B: Do you recall anything about the little steel strike of Youngstown in 1937?

F: I sure do. I remember them setting up, the National Guard being here and setting up down here or the standard slag has his right now. That used to be our old football field and they came down to protect the companies and settle the problems we had here; the fights. That was a long drawn out strike and one that got kind of tough afterwards. People took things into their own hands, and there was some bloodshed and killing.

B: Were outsiders brought in?

F: Yes, outsiders were brought in at that time to help the strike, and also the strike breakers.

B: Were there any people who discovered surprising ways of making a living during the Depression? Did you know of anyone who was able to start a small business, or anyone who became a hobo?

F: Well, I'm sure there probably were some innovative people that were able to capitalize on things that happened. I personally at that age didn't know of anybody who started a business. As far as hoboes go I think that more people were probably traveling around.

In fact I'm going to say that maybe this is the start of the mass movement of people all over this country as far as that goes. During the Depression days, and at the CCC camp and so forth, people were moved here and there. People were moving around looking for jobs and just jumping freight cars. So, I think there were more people that were prone to do this sort of thing. That is probably one of the starts of our movement today.

B: Do you remember how well supplied grocery stores were during the Depression? Were there prices higher or lower?

F: I can't personally recall the supply nature but it seemed like you could buy anything that you wanted to if you had the money. The prices were naturally low.

B: The problem was having the money then.

F: Did the fact that some people raised a part of their food effect grocery store prices in any noticeable way?

B: Well, at the time I think it was very common. Especially in the smaller towns. Everybody would have a garden and in fact that was their own means of getting some vegetables and things of this nature, is just to have a garden. They had the time. So, I would image supply and demand would have a part in this thing. If you had a lot of people raising gardens and certainly who thought of going out and buying head lettuce and things of this nature in the Depression time. You either grew your own or you didn't have any, period. The supermarkets . . . I remember the first A & P moving down here in Struthers. It was a novelty to go in there and to see produce that was lined up for say fifty feet or something; length of produce with all kinds of carrots and all kinds of vegetables and so forth. That just wasn't hear of before.

B: Could you remember the garden supplies stored under the ground?

F: Oh, we used to do that ourselves. In fact cabbage, and carrots, and all that, we used to always make a little underground sort of place. Dad used to put that stuff in and then in the winter time we would go and take out the carrots, and the cabbage, and the turnips, and other things like that. That was part of the game.,

B: If people had regular jobs what did they do with their spare time and what did people who didn't have jobs do with their spare time?

F: I remember it used to be that people used to work longer hours for one thing. So, if they had a job it was more

than usually a six hour or eight hour day. Then, those who didn't have jobs, naturally they didn't have the means, the money, they didn't do much as far as moving around to much. They couldn't participate in a lot of sporting events because there were very few of those. Movies and other things, really were just coming into their own. So, they were limited with the type of entertainment they could take part of.

B: What about people who succeeded in earning and saving money? Did they usually put their money in banks or did they distrust the banks?

F: Well, I think the latter would be true because many of them lost money when the banks closed and there was a great distrust of banks. This is where you started, in fact years and years you would always find that somebody had stored their money in cans and so forth and buried them in the back yard or hid them in the cellars and things of this nature. You would be digging this up periodically if someone had money stored away like that. Banks were something that they were shying away from.

B: I think in this period of time many people had the idea that certain people that had more money were "in the know" on the fact that the banks might close and they were able to retrieve some of their money. Did you or people around you have this feeling too? I think this was a prevalent feeling during the time.

F: I can't honestly say that in my particular family it was so because actually we never did have that kind of money. If we had a couple a \$100 that was big money as far as that goes. To have \$1000's laying around that was out of the question. In fact if my dad earned \$600 or \$700 a year that was the extent of our income. Storage of money, of putting it to work for you like they do now in banks and other stocks and so forth, bonds, that was something that we just didn't dabble with, at our level anyway.

B: Did families try to get extra money? Were women and girls encouraged to find work, if so what did they find? What kind of work did boys do?

F: Well, actually girls were going out to get jobs and most of them naturally . . . I had two sisters and they were doing housework. They worked up in Wick Avenue at some of the peoples homes, or the manor of the time, and they did housework and that type of work; domestic type of work. In fact, they actually lived there during the week and just came home every one day out of the week. They ate all their meals there, they got their quarters there. They even bought them clothes. They brought home \$5 or \$6 a week and gave it to mother.

B: Is that what the prevailing wage was at the time?

F: Well, sure. \$5 or \$6 a week is what they brought home.

B: Do you remember how many hours that represented in work?

F: If you lived there you were on call twenty-four hours or whatever they had going just like your family would at home now.

B: Then during the weekends they came home?

F: No, not always the weekend. Sometimes during the week day they would come home. Like they would have an afternoon off maybe on Wednesday or Thursday or something like that. Weekends usually they were there because that is when these people would entertain or company would be coming and so forth.

B: Did many young people tend to leave home during the Depression?

F: Yes, in fact my one sister did leave home and she went to New York to try to improve herself and find a job over there.

B: Did she succeed?

F: Yes, she found a job over there. She stayed with an aunt there for awhile and found some work there. She ended up naturally, first of all, in restaurant type of work and things of this nature, in the stores; as a clerk in the stores and working in an area such as that.

B: Did you know some young people that tended to remain at home longer than otherwise would have been expected of them because of this period of time?

F: I imagine there would be some who couldn't find a job any place. So naturally they would lean on their parents and stay home. There were always young people around the homes, that just hung around. In fact I remember parents saying, "Geez, I wish I could find a job or so and so could find a job. He is just here all the time, sitting around here, doing nothing." This sort of thing.

B: Would you be able to say whether family life improved or suffered during the Depression?

F: Well, I would say both happened. It depended on number one, if the family was together. They probably spent a lot more time together. Probably gained by living together there and suffering and knowing the problems.

Those who separated, the family separated, or people left the family because they were going out looking for jobs elsewhere, I imagine those particular families didn't gain as much out of being together.

B: Do you remember church attendance during the Depression? Was it up or down?

F: Well, what else could you do? If you could afford to get to church, that is if you didn't have to go by some means of transportation, that was one place where you could always go and you could meet various people. Various groups in the church would meet in the evenings and on weekends. That was your social life because, as I said, there was no radio and television. Movies were just starting.

B: Social life without entertainment involved.

F: That is right. So, you had dances. I remember we had dances at the churches, down in the cellar. We also had plays that we used to take part in. They used to have picnics in the summertime and things of this nature.

B: Would you say that this applied to all church groups or only to some? If so, which ones?

F: I think it applied to all of them. To be honest with you, I couldn't say that there was any church group that suffered because of it. I think we all gained by lack of doing anything else but going to church.

B: Did many people not complete their schooling as a result of the Depression? Can you give any examples?

F: Yes, my sister, the one that went to New York, didn't complete her schooling because of the Depression. She went through the eighth grade and things were rough. So, she went to work here at Youngstown as a domestic. Then ended up going to New York afterwards and getting a job there.

B: Do you feel at some point parents felt that perhaps their children could cease going to school? In other words that they didn't have to go any farther during this Depression.

F: Well, during the Depression I think, if it was possible if the youngster wasn't really what you would call a good prospect for further schooling, I would say that they would say, "Get the basics and go to work." How many parents could really look forward and say, "Well look, this youngster is going to go to college or do something else"? They knew themselves that they couldn't afford to send the youngster to college and how many

could get scholarships, and who was giving scholarships at that time anyway?

B: Do you remember, perhaps, what college education cost at the time?

F: I wouldn't have any idea. In fact at that time I would say that college was just something that maybe somebody spoke of. It wasn't in the realm of our period.

B: Do you remember kids as being generally more or less independent of their parents and their parents' opinions during this period?

F: I would say that in most cases they were probably more dependent because they couldn't go out and get jobs as easily. They had to have a place to stay and eat and be clothed. So, naturally the home was a place to stay. After a while, when jobs became more prevalent, then naturally they would get out on their own and they would be less dependent.

B: How did people feel about obeying the laws during the Depression? Was there any decline of law and order or not?

F: Well, I think in Depression time that is when some of these rackets and things got started really getting in their own. Now "riding the bug" was a big item, I recall as a youngster. Almost on every street there used to be one or two people who would "ride the bug" and then you had the "bug runners." They would pick these up and people would spend pennies and maybe \$.10 or \$.25 a day if they could afford it. Take a chance on some dream that they had that was represented by a number. Maybe they would hit the bug for \$50, \$100 and that was a big affair. So, the rackets along that line, I think, flourished in that time.

B: How do you remember people felt about having to pay income taxes when the personal income tax was begun in the early 1930s? Do you know if many people tried to avoid the tax?

F: Well, I'm sure that it is the same in today as it was then. There was a dislike for paying taxes and if they could avoid it, they would avoid it. I guess it always will be that way.

B: Were Veteran's organizations active during the Depression? If so, what kind of things did they want?

F: Actually the First World War veterans would be the only ones that we are talking about really and the Spanish-American War veterans. I do not believe they were as

active as the present veterans were active the Second World War. I would say that offhand I didn't have too much contact with them. I was say offhand that I thought they would be less active.

B: Were mens' organizations active during the Depression?

F: If you are thinking of church organizations? What is the explanation of mens' organizations? Like Kiwanis and things of this nature?

B: Or Shriners or things like that.

F: I imagine there always were some but I would say the certainly they were at a minimum amount of activity. At that time again I believe it was more of fewer people having more wealth and then most of the common people that were coming into this area naturally were foreigners, foreign born people. Therefore they weren't accepted.

B: Do you remember any instances of there being talk about conservation in ecology during this time?

F: Yes, the CCC camps. That is exactly what their jobs were; planting trees and cutting trees, thinning them out, building bridges and things of this nature. They grew up in the woods working on some of these things, getting lumber, et cetera. Really, I think it was a start of it at that time.

B: Do you feel there was a particular area that was more predominate as far as the Civilian Conservation Corps?

F: You mean of people or where they worked?

B: In regions.

F: Well, I think that naturally out west they probably had . . . It seems to me, what I recall, that most of the people that were in it were out west, out in the forestry areas and so forth. More so than around here.

B: Who had radios during the Depression, everybody or just some?

F: I knew very few people who had radios. In fact, it was some time after the Depression that we got our first second hand set. So, radios were something that we heard about but certainly didn't listen to.

B: Did you know of youngsters building the . . .

F: I know what you mean. Those little types of things. Yes, I did hear about those but again it took money.

Some amount of money as far as that goes and some know how.

B: That was what I recall. Our first radio was a little built thing. What were the most popular radio shows during this period?

F: Well, I recall, it is probably just out of the Depression, was Jack Benny's program; "Jack Benny rides again," on Sunday nights was one. Charlie McCarthy and all that group, Burns and Allen or Allen Burns. Some of those shows I thought were the ones that we listened to.

B: Were these some of your favorite ones?

F: Yes. The thing is, I say, that was after the Depression because at that time we didn't have a radio. We listened to them afterwards.

B: Do you remember what movies were like during the 1930's?

F: I'll tell, I never watched a movie in the 1930's so I couldn't tell you that. Although, I know my sister . . . Both sisters would attend movies. In fact, when they were working as domestics sometimes their . . . The people they worked for would send them to a movie and pay their way. It was matter of \$.25 or \$.20 to get into a movie. Mainly these love affair movies that my sisters used to like to watch.

B: Who had automobiles during the Depression?

F: The only automobiles I knew was the police department or the fire department. I didn't know of anybody that had an automobile.

B: Anyone on your block?

F: Nobody on our block. If he had an automobile he would be living in some other block.

B: Do you recall what year it was when you had perhaps the first one on the block?

F: No, I couldn't tell you that. I'll tell you one thing, I know our first automobile was a 1929 Wicket which we bought in the junk yard and rebuilt more or less. That really . . . We didn't buy that one until about 1936 or 1937.

B: So that was the year that you bought a 1929 Wicket?

F: That is right.

- B: Did you take vacations during this time? If you did where did you go?
- F: The only vacations I recall as a youngster. . . We had a couple of cousins who owned some farms out here in Poland and we used to go out there for a week or two weeks at a time and kind of work with them. That was our vacation. So, we used to have a good time in the evening. They had children there too. We used to ride the horses and things of this nature. As far as vacations like we know now that was totally out of the question.
- B: Do you think it was popular for vacationers who were able to take vacations as such to stay at hotels? Or do you think at the time that many people camped out?
- F: I really think most people who were able to go any place for any distance, usually went with the knowledge that they had a relative or a friend or somebody and they used to stay with them. As far as going to a motel or hotel or camping out, I knew of nobody.
- B: Were you, or was any one you knew, in college during the Depression?
- F: No, I didn't know what college was.
- B: Were you, or any one you knew, a union member during the Depression?
- F: I doubt if during the Depression but right after the Depression in 1937 when they took over, the unions took over, my dad naturally had to join the union.
- B: What do you think the unions were most interested in during that period of time, economic matters or primarily interested in politics?
- F: I think economic matters were the big item and the two were indistinguishable really. Once you get the economic, and to get it you have to get a place in politics, and vice versa.
- B: Do you think the unions more often saw themselves as Democrats or Socialists?
- F: I think more the Democrats. The union people were always there, the working class was Democrats.
- B: Mr. Fedor was born 1924. He graduated from high school in 1942, received his Bachelors Degree in 1949 from Youngstown State University and a Masters Degree from Columbia University in 1951. He is presently Assistant Superintendent in the Struthers City School District.

END OF INTERVIEW