

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Sheet and Tube Shutdown Project

Sheet and Tube Shutdown

O. H. 166

WILLIAM SFERRA

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

April 16, 1981

WILLIAM F. SFERRA

Mr. Sferra was born in Youngstown, Ohio on September 6, 1937. He attended Ursuline High School and graduated in 1956. He was employed by Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company for twenty-one years, since 1959, and is the former President of 1418 United Steelworkers Union, Campbell Works, an office he held from 1976 to 1979. Mr. Sferra belonged to various steelworker organizations and has attended their schools.

He is married and has two children, Linda and Lisa. Bill enjoys officiating at baseball and football high school league games.

Mr. Sferra related the fact that his father was unable to attend the event of his birth because he was locked in one of the local mills because of the "Little Steel Strike" of that year (1937).

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM SFERRA
INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy
SUBJECT: Sheet and Tube Shutdown
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B: This is an interview with Bill Sferra, former President of 1418 United Steelworkers, Campbell Works, for the Youngstown State Oral History Program concerning the shutdown of Youngstown Sheet and Tube, by Philip Bracy at Mr. Sferra's home, on April 16, 1981 at 9:00 a.m.

S: I'm Bill Sferra. I was Union President from 1976 to 1979 and I think we're talking about September 19, the day of the shutdown. How it occurred to my knowledge was, about 7:00 in the morning I got a call from Gary Wusluck, who at that time was head of Industrial Relations who we dealt with in almost all different affairs. Gary called me about seven in the morning and he asked if I would come to an important meeting at Industrial Relations at 9:30, and I found out later that all the union presidents were called in the morning around that time and we all gathered there. I can give you the names if you want it. I think I can remember them.

B: Yes.

S: We all gathered there right at 9:30. Myself, Russ Baxter, who had the other side of the Campbell Plant, Eddie Mann, the President of the Brier Hill Local, yes I believe Eddie Mann was there, Bill Ballack, the small clerical local, Frank Gidero, the bar mill local, Walter Swierz, the Public Protections local. There were six of us, I believe that covers, there were six of us gathered at Industrial

Relations and at that time we knew something was up. They gave us coffee and nobody seemed to give us any direction. Then they told us about ten till ten to go across the street, the District Manager had a message for us and that was at ten o'clock that meeting. So by the time we got to the District Manager's office, which is maybe a three to five minute walk, he came out very nervously, this is Ron Towns. He handed each of us a sheet of paper and he started out with, it was only about a total of two minutes.

He said, "I regret to inform you that by the end of this week this will be shut down, that will be shut down, and so forth," and he gave us a chart of what would all be shut down by the end of the year.

And the jurisdiction that I had was the strip mill and they told me that it would be phased out completely by the end of December, so I probably didn't have as bad as news as the other gentlemen. Russ Baxter, for example, had the open hearths and I believe they told -- I believe this was a Monday morning. Russ Baxter's news was that the open hearth would be shut down on Friday, he had had about a three or four day notice there.

Frank Gidero from the bar mills I believe was told his place would be phased out, which would be by the end of the year like mine. Then they gave us a schedule of approximately who, what, where and why and how it would be phased out. And we found out later, ten o'clock really rings a bell because we found out later, I can't think of who the delegation was, but we found out simultaneously there was a delegation from the company to tell Frank Lesaganich at the same time at the district office. I guess that had a planned meeting at that time.

Simultaneously also we found out later that there was a delegation in higher levels naturally telling Lloyd McBride, our International President at Pittsburgh, that was also at ten o'clock, and we also found out later that it was broadcast on the news at ten o'clock in the morning. While we were hearing it everybody was hearing it and we found out they seemed to be a little bit congenial. We found out they, I believe, they had a meeting on a Sunday afternoon, somewhere, Pittsburgh airport or something. That's when they got the final message to deliver to us the next morning. That's all on that right now.

B: You did not attend the ten o'clock meeting though, you heard about that or that Frank Lesaganich and the others attended?

- S: No, like I described we had our ten o'clock meeting with Towns, the District Manager.
- B: Okay, following that did Mr. Lesaganich or did you call a local meeting or was there any action at that point? I mean obviously you would have to do something?
- S: Yes, we were naturally stunned. I believe that it was a Monday and I know I was scheduled to go to Washington Wednesday for a legislative conference, myself, Ed Mann, Sam Myers and our recording secretary. I believe Gidero from the other local was going, also Bill Ballack from the Clerical Union was going. It was a legislative conference which really had nothing to do with this. I had a meeting the same afternoon. I called my officers out of work, things you were getting at, around three o'clock that day or maybe a little bit earlier. I think I let them come out of work early and I really couldn't decide whether I should still go to Washington or not because this was like a little different ballgame and we knew there was going to be a little bit of turmoil by the local unions. And I more or less asked the officers if they felt I should still go or not. And we knew a little about TRA at that time, very little; that's Trade Readjustment. And at that time the head of the legislative conference was Jack Sheehan and John O'Shinsky. Those two were running the legislative conference so that I felt that it would be worth my while to go to that legislative conference since we're dealing with the same two people, not even for the legislative end of it, but to get some information on TRA, which is more bucks for the benefits for the laid off workers.

So then Sam Myers and I still went there and about the second day we were there, of course I left our place in good hands. I believe we had a meeting that Thursday night, that's why I was really hesitant to go and found out later that we had probably five hundred people that they couldn't even get them in the door at our meeting and there really wasn't that much information. But I did have some information that I called back to the Vice President, Jay Koutsourais and I gave him enough information to tell the people just to hold off until we got all the details. What I did find out on the TRA, we had a meeting with O'Shinsky, we had a luncheon with him and he gave us a lot of valuable information. That's why I believe it was worth our trip. That's when we found out, I think we were the first in the area ever to get TRA. I believe Lordstown got it, auto workers, but for some strange reason, I never got the details, they had to pay those back. I got all the information on that. It was real simple. The Labor Board decides if you're laid off

on account of foreign imports and the company doesn't contest it, it's as simple as that and the Labor Board decides. Well when I did come back, which we had no problem on TRA, I was like a crusader in the area because I heard all the information first hand. I was going to other local meetings. I believe I came back on a Monday, and Russ Baxter had a meeting the following day. (2163 Local)

B: That would have been the Monday after the announcement.

S: We had a meeting on Tuesday and I got up and told what I had to know about that at that time.

B: Well, what we want is as much information as you can give us, so if it's important. . .

S: I'm going to be getting off track about the TRA and I don't think you want to hear about that.

B: There's one aspect that I'm sure a lot of people don't understand. Under TRA the company also benefits, does the company get certain benefits under the Trade Readjustment Act?

S: No, not to my knowledge. The company doesn't contest it for the simple reasons, no bucks out of their pocket. They'd have to be really rotten to contest it and the Labor Board decides. I know we had a couple big meetings here before it was instituted.

B: Now when you say Labor Board, that would be a regional board?

S: Yes.

B: Okay

S: Yes, they send a representative and it's really big and I can remember, I will say this for the company, that I made a phone call the day I came back to Ron Towns and to Mr. Cleary, Vice President of the company and I didn't know if they had any idea of how this TRA works and they both gave me their word that if you're making it sound as simple as it is, then there's no problem with us and there wasn't.

B: Following those events were there any meetings immediately following your union meeting?

S: In other words, you want to know what we did more or less?

B: Right.

S: Okay, there's so much information on benefits that we had acquired, we were learning it as we were explaining it. What we were doing was calling department by department meetings on Sundays. Naturally I was available, I was putting in probably twelve hour days then. So rather than repeat myself to two or three individuals I finally wised up and started calling a couple Sunday meetings. I believe we had two in a row on like Sunday for example, we'd have the strip mill at one time and have the shops at another time. It didn't really affect the finishing floor so we didn't call them in, but then naturally everyone was welcome. But we had two meetings on just all the information we had for the individuals and we had overflow crowds of probably, maybe over 400 each time. We had to explain about pensions. I'm a little rusty right now, it was a few years ago, how the pensions kicked off, the seventy-eighty plan, the rule of sixty-five. I believe at that time we had \$300. supplement, it's \$400. now, \$300. supplement. I'll never forget any of this. For example, if a person made the number of 80 and if his age plus service reached 80, naturally there's a lot of individuals that were in their early fifties, they would get their regular pension, plus \$300. extra until they reach age 62, which money-wise they were in good shape. But a person didn't have to retire, his options were, this is what we had to explain, his options were either to retire or take layoff or severance pay. All right, severance pay naturally is you break complete ties with the company, but according to the number of years you get, you can get up to an eight-week payoff and you're done with the company. You still remain laid off and you still get your unemployment and you still get TRA, but you have no rights to go back to the company. I would advise an individual, unless you really had a decent job to go to, I would advise them to stay off severance because it cuts them off of their insurance.

B: How did they arrive with the formulas for severance pay? Was it based on years, service or. . .?

S: Yes, severance pay, I could just give you a rough idea. I know it finishes with eight weeks, it's the most you can get.

B: Okay, then there is a formula?

S: Yes, there is a formula that has been set up, this is nothing new.

B: This was standard?

S: Yes, it's only available if your department shuts down. Now you can have an individual who can't just take severance pay and walk out.

B: I believe that at the same time you were in Washington there was a steelworkers march on Washington, did that take place?

S: Yes.

B: Was your local involved?

S: Yes.

B: Okay, initially there were four busses with 250 steelworkers on September the 23rd, which was a Friday.

S: That was the same Friday, right?

B: Yes.

S: I forgot about that. Okay, we also moved real fast. as I mentioned before, I was in Washington for the legislative conference and we were on the telephone with our local unions arranging the trip. Eddie Mann I know made a phone call back. We felt that we should have busses right away up there and myself and Eddie Mann met the busses. I believe we filled up four or five busses and that was just with phone calls. The part that I had in it was I called our local union, I believe with only about a day's notice and that was really one of the more pleasurable times when I had the response. I believe I called in the afternoon, a few people and I had them motivate other people and I was really well pleased that there was that many that turned out. Now these were mostly from our local and from Brier Hill Local. A few retirees, many of the workers lost a days work to come there which we felt kind of good about. We met the busses while we were there.

B: When you were in Washington, were you getting any support-aid from the AFL-CIO council or anybody. I don't know for instance, do you have, do the steelworkers have a legal council in Washington?

S: Yes.

B: Helping you at meetings or anything or did you already besides the hearings themselves, did you visit like the senators or the congressmen?

S: Well, at that time we were there for legislative conferences for other areas to meet with senators for different things, but myself and Eddie Mann and Sam Myers, we used it for our own benefit and we leveled with them. We told everybody what we were doing. We told conference leaders Sheehan and O'Shinsky who were very, very good to work with, we told them we were going to take advantage of seeing Metzenbaum and Glenn and so forth for our own reasons if they didn't mind us doing it. I don't even remember what they were promoting because we had nothing else on our mind but the shutdown and they said they understood. We met with Metzenbaum, we met with Chuck Carney and we met with Glenn. We saw them all. But, at that time, we were only a few days from it and we didn't really have a lot of information to give them. It might be worth mentioning that I admired and I always supported McBride (International Steelworkers President). I can remember McBride calling us up to his room. We told him where we were from and everything and he told us in real easy to understand everyday language, Brier Hill, keep in mind, wasn't affected at all, maybe a hundred jobs eventually in the beginning. But Eddie Mann was a good supporter of us and at that time I remember McBride told me and Sam Mayers, "Now you fellows should concentrate on saving what's there." I remember what example he gave me, he said, "It's just like if I owned a store," he said, "If I wanted to shut that store down nobody is going to stop me." He gave a real easy illustration and we had about seven or eight other individuals with us from the Youngstown area. One was Marve Winestock, a staff man, he wasn't our staff man at the time and he didn't seem to be too impressed with McBride and later on he was an opponent politically of McBride's.

B: He supported Stodowski.

S: Who?

B: Winestock?

S: Right, they were on the same ticket. But I didn't want to get involved. I was always the type of individual that I felt if you're in office and you don't support your superiors then you shouldn't even be there. You know, at least

cooperate with them.

B: Do you remember the date approximately or specifically of that, the meeting with McBride?

S: Well, it had to be right there.

B: Was it on that Friday or before Friday?

S: It had to be before the march, yes.

B: But it was during that week?

S: It might have been Thursday, I got there Wednesday, so it had to have been Thursday.

B: Okay, I was just trying to put it into some kind of time period.

S: Yes, it had to be, maybe the day before.

B: Okay, what kind of support did you get from District 26?

S: I felt they made a decent effort. I felt Lesaganich made a decent effort. There was a lot of criticism of Lesaganich from some of our fellow officers, but not from me. I felt whenever I called him on anything major he was there. It's easy to criticize him now, he's not even there anymore. But this is going down the road some, maybe three-four months later when we were getting formalized on the Coalition. I personally felt, I didn't agree on the way it was going and I asked the Director to get us some legal help and he got us Attorney Dan Thomas Jr. from Warren.

B: Now when you say the Coalition, which way it was going, are you talking about the Ecumenical Coalition or the Steel Communities Coalition?

S: You better tell me, there were so many.

B: There was one with the priests.

S: At this time I think when I asked for the legal help, there was just no direction. In other words, there was a bunch of union people would meet at our hall, and also other halls, and I was even calling some of the meetings. I'd tell everybody to bring about five of your top people. We just wanted to get some kind of a direction and it seemed like the direction that the majority of the people

wanted to go in was highly critical, radical, we're going to sue the company. I just felt it was ridiculous.

B: Now these meetings took place approximately during what period, over a couple of weeks?

S: Do you have the date of when the Coalition started with this Coalition?

B: That would be, the phone call from Bishop Burt was September 20th, the day after the shutdown. The actual meeting, the first meeting they held was October 28th and 29th. They had a steel crisis meeting, if that's the one you're referring to.

S: No, when it really got organized. They didn't really publically get organized until about, I'm just guessing now, maybe six months later.

B: Okay, their incorporation took place. . .

S: See, what I'm trying to get at is when it was legally documented it was signed by, I do believe they got a \$300,000. grant?

B: Right, it was September of 1977 when it was valid.

S: It seemed like we were all over the lot and it seemed like the majority, which my style was, let's settle down and get what we can and I didn't have too many people agreeing with me, I'll level with you. The average union person that was involved there out of the group of about maybe forty or fifty, they're all saying, "Let's see if we can sue them, sue the company," and all this and that. I felt it was ridiculous because I did a little research and I found out if you did, which I found out really from Attorney Thomas, later, if the class suit was won, I believe I think every individual would have maybe gotten a few thousand dollars and the company would have been completely down the drain. The direction we were going was ridiculous. That's when I asked Lesaganich, "You better get us an advisor because these people are going down the wrong road."

B: Do you remember approximately the date or the specific date that you requested that?

S: I'd like to think it was, I really can't say for sure. It seemed like they might have gotten involved, signed,

sealed and delivered December 1977, but before they got us involved it doesn't seem like we were involved that quick. It seemed like it was a lot later than that, like maybe six months from there. But I know when we did get involved with them we had Attorney Thomas as our advisor. I remember we had private meetings with Attorney Thomas and I felt he was very good with Lesaganich. I felt that, I remember we agreed to a couple pacts. We were getting interviewed all over the lot and we agreed at that time that we would only come out with statements through our attorney, through Danny Thomas, or if there were any interviews before we made them public or whatever, we'd make sure we would ask Danny Thomas first.

B: Okay, I guess what I was asking for and then I wasn't clear on this, did Frank Lesaganich serve as a kind of focal point, of coordinating District 26, maybe not just itself, served to kind of pull the unions together? I mean you're saying that in the interim there seemed to be just the locals trying to get their act together, but nobody. . .

S: Well, when I called, okay, I thought I made it clear to you. But when I called, Frank, he would always say, you know, "What could I do. Whatever I can do you let me know." And I felt that it was my suggestion to get us an attorney to make sure we wouldn't be saying something wrong or doing something wrong and he came through right away. He also got hold of a Jim Smith from Pittsburgh for us. Jim Smith, I believe he's still in the same position, he was assistant to President McBride, I felt was very good. Jim explained--we had a few private meetings with him--he explained all the pensions and they really get deep. And mostly what everybody wanted to know and it didn't even come out yet, what the average worker wanted to know, if the whole place shut down what happens and this was the real question. We never had to deal with it. But Jim Smith explained it to us step by step and even went through a lot of research. There was a lot of documented papers on how it worked. The bottom line I would give you, our sister plant would be Indiana Harbor at that time, that would have to shut down too before anybody would lose their pensions and I think this pleased a lot of people to find that out.

Frank Lesaganich you know, he answered his call. There was criticism of him from a lot of the guys. I don't know what they expected out of him. I think they expected him to be at the union hall every day and deal with the

day by day problems, but keep in mind that he covered a lot of area and whenever I asked him to get to me he got to me, so I have no complaints. We had this Jim Smith who was very thorough. Also at the time we had a couple other meetings that I can remember at Ramada Inn with Jim Smith. This was when we were just starting to get to this buying. . .

B: Worker buy-out?

S: What do you call it?

B: Community worker buy-out.

S: Yes, the community worker buy-out. This was when we started to get a little information and we were enthused on that. They never told us no, but I think in my own opinion they wanted to give us all the details they can and for us to figure it out ourselves. For example, the only worker, community owner place that went off was Southbend Lace in Southbend, Indiana. I believe it was about 500 people and we heard the story from William Sullivan. Sullivan had, I can't think of the owner's name that was there, Sullivan had the owner there for us and in Bill Sullivan's office the picture was painted real rosey of how simple it could be.

B: Now do you remember the approximate date of that meeting?

S: No.

B: I mean, would it be in 1977, the latter half, or early 1978?

S: I can't remember. You could probably figure it out with the sequences, but it had to have been before this Jim Smith came in now because the guy that Sullivan brought in, I'm not being critical of Bill, I think he really meant well, but the guy he brought in was the owner of the place and he made it sound like there was just nothing to it, it could be done so easily. The guy was very thorough and everything. But there was a gentleman there also, I don't know if it's important or not, named Norm Kirkland, but he was interested in getting the whole package, but Gar Alpervitz ended up getting it. But anyway he was at that meeting with Sullivan. So anyhow, later on when Jim Smith, you know I personally told Jim Smith about the meeting we had and this and that and so he said, "Okay, let me do some research." So Jim called us up to the Ramada Inn and he brought the union staff

man from that area, from Indiana, to explain it to us and we found out that it just wasn't that easy as it originally sounded. Some of the drawbacks were; they wanted no union and that was never mentioned to us before and the steelworkers, this is why the steelworkers feared a new company, the higher levels and I can't possibly blame them. It was like considered a new company, new identity. I believe they had an elections whether they wanted the steelworkers or no union and the steelworkers barely won to have a union, and I think this is what the higher levels feared on the new company. And Jim Smith explained it to us. For example, the union president at that time was on the board of directors there and there was a lot of things that we didn't agree to and they gave up a heck of a lot on their pensions. There was a lot of give aways and when we got all the details you know it was just completely reversed of how we originally heard it.

B: Okay, what was the first contact that . . . okay let's say like your local had with the Ecumenical Coalition? For instance, were you invited to the Steel Crisis Conference that they held in October of 1977, the 28th and 29th?

S: I can't remember, I believe I was. Father Stanton was a real good coordinator. Father Stanton would call me and I assumed he called Baxter. I assumed he called Eddie Mann and we would get the other union presidents from the smaller locals on our own. But Father Stanton always kept me in on everything, but I couldn't get away during the day that often, but if it was evening stuff I would participate. Whether it was that event, I don't know if I was there. It seems like I was invited to everything. You want to know how we got started?

B: Yes.

S: Once Father Stanton had called these meetings, I can't exactly remember who, what, where, when and why, how it really got started. I know there were several meetings at the Coalition office with Father Stanton and he always would just explain to us what was going on. He came to the union hall on his own I believe, once or twice. I had a lot of phone calls, but the first big meeting together I can't even remember when it really was.

Yes, Mike Carney was our coordinator for a while. I can't remember exactly when, but they would go through Mike, then Mike would call us. But Father Stanton always

made it clear, he said whenever anything was going on that all the union presidents, there was nothing hidden from us, we were always, always welcome. I was available for the majority of them if it was in the evening, but during the day I just couldn't cut loose that often. But on this, you asked what I spoke on.

B: Okay, just as an intro this is September 28th, 1978 meeting.

S: Right. When the different religious leaders from all over the country I should say, they were not just the State, they had like a two-day seminar and it started off busses leaving the motel because I can remember I was a tour guide there for the first time and the briefing was at our local. What I spoke on was how it happened, as I mentioned earlier.

B: Now where is your local hall?

S: That's in Campbell.

B: The address is?

S: 125 Walhurst Road, I'll give you that before you leave. I spoke on just how it happened and what we are currently doing and that's about it. Then I believe a few of the other speakers were just saying how sad it was and what effort we're making to save some of the jobs in the Valley, that was that theme. I believed the religious leaders were really interested in how we were holding up more or less, what could be done. There was a good effort.

B: From the period where you found out about the shutdown with your involvement with the Coalition, did you hold let's say like weekly meetings of the locals to inform them of what was going on. Once they knew about the benefits, was there any effort to kind of keep them charged up, moving? I mean you've identified certain dates and so forth.

S: Yes.

B: But was there an ongoing, let's say the first Friday of the month for instance, where you would meet. . .?

S: Well, first of all, we have two meetings a month.

B: So they continued even after?

- S: It was continuous. Almost any new information was continuous. I personally had flyers out to the grievance man to give to the individuals in the plant if they had a problem or whatever. But it seemed like we touched I'd say, from the turnout, I believe we touched almost all of the membership and then anything that I thought was, like for example there were a few times, I know I had Vindicator articles a couple times to make sure, I thought I'd might not reach the people that were in New Castle. I had the same article written in the New Castle paper, for example if one of these meetings would take place and some of these articles I think they had to sign up for a certain time for the benefits and what jobs were available in other places, you know, to contact me.
- B: What were your two monthly meeting dates?
- S: Well, we would have every other Thursday opposite payday, so this was routine and everybody would always know that.
- B: So it would be approximately . . .
- S: So we would have, oh excuse me, meeting dates were posted in the plant by sign and anytime you had anything a little out of the ordinary you always put down what was on the agenda. I had speakers from the employment office, I had speakers from the insurance, I had speakers from the Social Security office and I made sure everybody had an opportunity. Then there were a couple times on weekends when I had them all at once, you know, allowed each one a half hour or so. If anybody was interested at all the information was there.
- B: Do you think there was a feeling at least in your local that the proposal that came forward from the Coalition, do you think that people believed that that would work or do you think that they were resigned to the fact that they were just going to shut down and that you should go on from there?
- S: Good question, real good question. No, I'd say in my opinion, I was involved because I think we really did come a lot closer than people realized. Just one grant at that time, April, 1979, I believe was when we were really shut down completely. There was really a lot of mistakes made. Okay, let me get on the track as far as what the people believed. I think maybe twenty or thirty percent hoped the plant would open, but everytime I was always careful. I didn't want people to think that I was cracking up and thinking that it was really going to open that easy. Everytime I would give any kind of a

talk or talk to anybody one on one, I was always saying, "There's not much hope, but it's the only hope we have." And I was a fanatic on that because I was more or less one of the first guys that tried this and I was always real clear on it, that it's the only hope we have. Then once we got rolling with this Coalition we got involved in all these feasibility studies.

I think if we didn't, I might be a little off track here, but I want to get it in while I'm thinking of it. My original idea was not for the whole mill because I felt that it was just too ridiculous. I shouldn't say ridiculous, but just too big of an order. I can remember Chuck Carney, I don't want to be critical of Chuck because I admired his decision when he told me. I can remember Chuck Carney telling me, he said, "You guys better concentrate on a smaller portion or something." He more or less gave me the idea that rang a bell. I represented the strip mill, which had about maybe, including maintenance, about six hundred and fifty people. And everybody always, I'm not a facts and figures man, but everybody always told me that the strip mill was a profit making deal, could be fenced in and the research I did, which was making coil strips. My idea from the beginning was strip mill only. Let's go for a strip mill only, get our foot in the door and then try to expand.

B: Would that have been the newest part of the mill that was still left or at least the most refurbished?

S: Well, it's all so old it's a good question. I don't know, I don't know if it is or not. I kind of think it might be.

B: What I was trying to get at, was it because it was your section?

S: This is why it didn't go over that good, because even the other union leaders felt, "Well, here's Sferra singing the tune for his area," see. But in reality everybody had a job and I'm not familiar with open hearths, somebody else would have to explain that to you, but I know open hearths have wide open spaces and a lot of room. Now strip mill, it's a much more complex area, a smaller unit and everybody seems to be producing and we're talking six hundred and fifty men where open hearths you're talking furnaces, electric furnaces have to be replaced. You're just talking just millions and millions from what I understand, but at the strip mill you wouldn't have that overhead. And you're talking about, I have no idea, but it seems like it was reality and then later on when

this whole program came down in the end, they were thinking in that direction. But I couldn't sell it for the simple reason everybody thought I was blowing the horn for what I represented.

B: In March of 1979 the Steelworkers United for Employment was officially, at least on the surface, came forward. Could you tell me what you know about that particular effort?

S: The Steelworkers United for Employment, it was good. It seemed like at that time we were really clutching at straws. It was a good effort I believe. It was like a tailspin from the Coalition, but I think it was too little too late on organizing that. I can remember it wasn't my idea, I don't want to take the credit for it. I remember Eddie Mann one time at a meeting where we had all the agencies together and Eddie was always pretty critical and simply made the remark, "Where's the steelworkers, where's the workers?" You know, just the leaders were there and it was advertised for everybody to go there. And Eddie got up and said something which I agreed with. He said, "We don't want meetings, we want jobs. We don't want seminars, we want jobs, you know, the workers want jobs." So this is why I think this thing seemed to be in a tailspin. Good honest effort, John McNeil and Len Ballick were really sincere, but it seemed like when they got organized there wasn't much left for them to really get at.

B: Yes, because it was followed by the May 24th announcement that. . .

S: Yes.

B: Did your local support the Save Our Valley Committee or effort putting money in the bank to show support?

S: Oh yes, well, I'm kind of proud of that one, to be involved with the Save Our Valley accounts. I'll have to blow my horn. First of all I thought it was very complicated, hard to sell and the individual I'm going to give a little shot here is a bishop from Chicago or something. All right there was a bishop, I believe that's his title. I'm Catholic so I'm not sure of the other denominations, but he was Bishop Fernandez. I just couldn't quite understand. I felt it was too big of an order just too complicated of an order to sell it. But I felt whatever the majority wants, we went through it. We had a couple of meetings and he personally told us how it would work and he made it sound like it was going to

be real easy. I didn't like the idea, I thought it was complicated, but I personally made a sincere effort. In fact, one of the things I was really proud of is the effort we made, it was a show of strength by numbers. We wanted numbers of accounts, the amount wasn't really that important. Well, it was important, but the more people involved was just as important as the amount. I motivated our senior citizens group who I was very closely associated with and proud to be with and it's a long story, but to give you the bottom line it took a lot of red tape. I had the banks come into our union hall which was a first. At first they said there's no way they're allowed to do that, but we straightened it out. In one afternoon we had about 150 bank accounts open and I believe this was the first big individual effort anywhere, but most of them in one shot. From that meeting we moved in different directions. We used the idea, I believe Youngstown city workers had it, Campbell city workers had the bankers come in. I personally had it at Campbell High School, but the timing was bad. It was prom day or something. We had it moved to about maybe ten different places, but this was the only way we were really moving. But I think to sum it up we had about maybe 700 accounts opened by that method by the banks going to the people.

- B: All right, am I understanding also as a result of that your local effort that the visitations at like the high schools and stuff, was that also a part of the spinoff from . . . ?
- S: Yes, the idea.
- B: Were you responsible or did . . . ?
- S: No, I just had the idea because I don't think they followed it up properly. I just didn't have time to line it up because I was just really running. But I gave the idea to Fernandez and I wasn't satisfied with his efforts because it should have worked a lot better. But I didn't have time to line it up or follow it up. I just had time for our own local stuff. But the one thing I should mention now, these were retirees. I mentioned the same thing at our own local union meeting that we accomplished through the retirees and the response was zilch. They didn't want to hear opening accounts, the workers themselves.
- B: Now when you say retirees, is that retirees from your local and plant?
- S: The majority from our local.

B: But it wasn't like Dorothy Ryan, senior citizens committee?

S: No, 1418 retirees.

B: Okay, fine.

S: They should have used this idea more. Fernandez mentioned that he would and I couldn't believe they didn't take advantage of this idea more because we were pushing for five dollar accounts, you know. I just want to make one little remark on it, some of the things were almost at the point where they were ridiculous. I can remember Fernandez directing the--we had a T.B. sanitarium out here on Kirk Road. They had approximately 100 telephones installed.

B: Now when you say they, the Save Our Valley?

S: The Save Our Valley Campaign. They had a big expense there installing the telephones and could you imagine you calling up a person at random almost and telling them to open up a Save Our Valley account. You know, people on the telephone, I never liked that. I would never buy anything on the telephone. You're telling them to open up an account and they can't lose their money. It just sounded like a scheme and it was just so hard to sell. I was against it one hundred percent and I believe I was real critical of it, although I made the effort, I called. I called people, I had my daughters call people, and I had my wife call. We spent two evenings there. I believe at that time the account number only moved maybe a couple hundred. Then I can remember making a remark at a public meeting that I think we'd be better off standing in front of the banks for what it cost us and give everybody a five dollar bill and tell them to open up an account.

B: What were your feelings toward the National Steel Research Center? That proposal came forward that if the mills could not be reopened per se, utilizing the facility, well, they would be reopening it, but using the older facilities to generate information if you will, on steel and the technology end of it, as Mayor Richley entered it.

S: I'll tell you I never really got the details completely on how that would work. I hate to even comment. Richley sent us a note when we were going to a convention one time. I never really had a chance to get into it. It seemed like the people who were more experienced in the union were against it. They felt that it wouldn't be union, they felt that it wouldn't really help our own workers, it

would create jobs for workers, but not our own people.

B: Finally, do you feel that religious leaders, church leaders should be involved in the kind of efforts that the Ecumenical Coalition was involved in?

S: Well, I can just say that for this effort I believe the local people were excellent. Father Stanton, Bishop Malone, the girls, Bert Campbell, a fellow named Weisheimer.

B: Ed Weisheimer?

S: Yes. I felt there might be a few, there was a minister from Warren, an older fellow, I can't remember who. I mean they were really really excellent, but I also down deep felt that I wouldn't believe that Gar Alpervitz's group, and I'd tell them so, I didn't believe they were one hundred percent sincere with our people. I believe they outsmarted them. This is my personal opinion, I could be way off. But I felt the local people were sincere and good and solid. We couldn't have done it on our own, they more or less kept us together.

B: And then you say the Coalition contributed?

S: Yes. The religious people I think kept us together.

B: Do you feel that there should have been perhaps more consultation or do you feel what Father Stanton and what the others were doing was adequate?

S: Oh I'll tell you, Father Stanton opened some doors you wouldn't believe. Father Stanton had us meeting with top people. I don't know how he did it. We never had to pay anyone. Some top people, attorneys from Cleveland, we had access to them. He arranged with Tip O'Neil's son I remember who's a top flight attorney in Washington. We had access you know to tell the story to really a lot of people to see if there's any chance. At that time we were filing for the grants you know.

B: But you didn't feel that the steelworkers were slighted because religious people were more or less running the show, I mean aside from . . .

S: No, we had as much voice as we wanted to.

B: Okay.

S: We had as much voice as we wanted. There wasn't a public

gathering that Father Stanton didn't ask me to talk or ask Baxter to talk. It seemed like he was walking on eggs to make sure he didn't slight us. He always asked our comments or if we agreed with him.

B: Is there any specific either event or any item that you feel that is important that I haven't asked you about that should be part of the record that you would liked to at least to have said, if nothing else?

S: Well, I always felt that it was one time in my life that you don't feel bad about losing. It seemed like it was a real honest, sincere effort and personally it was an education for me and I got to meet a lot of people and be on the level with them. The religious people locally were just, more so than you think, there was a lot of criticism, but they were more solid than you think. Father Stanton would always say something to the effect that he would bring the people in. I can't remember the names now, but the guy that did the feasibility studies and they were top flight people from Boston, New York and wherever.. He never tried to talk above us, he'd always tell us he doesn't understand finances either, but we always had access to these people and I thought the local effort was good. But I think overall, my one final statement is that they maybe moved too soon and they just accepted everything that Gar Alpervitz's group would tell them. I believe they just accepted it without really having anybody to scrutinize it. That's the only criticism I have.

B: Okay, thank you very much for taking this time this morning.

S: We had a meeting previously to the September 19th shutdown. I'd say, we had two meetings previously, one was with our District Director Lesaganich who came with all the presidents and at that time Company President Jennings Lambreth. The next time we just had a little more people involved instead of just the presidents. We had, I brought some of my officers and we heard the same thing from Jennings Lambreth who was President of the Company and from Ron Towns who was District Manager. They both went into a big spiel about how things are getting financially a little rough, but the bottom line from both individuals was, we might see some slow periods. They were really trying to motivate us to motivate the workers to do a little more productivity. But the bottom line was really in reality, things might get slow, but if we tighten our belts we can make it and we were left with the impression that somebody might be laid off for a month or two or three

but so what, layoffs don't hurt us anymore as long as you get back.

B: Approximately how long before the shutdown?

S: Probably about a month before that took place because we had a meeting with Lesaganich up at Kent at our union school and asked him if he would do a little research and he did and I believe Frank and myself were the ones that called the company to get us another meeting on it. The bottom line was just that we were going to tighten our belts, things might get a little slow, but there was no indication. We used this later on, that we felt they deceived us when it went to arbitration. Danny Thomas the attorney would have that. That might be good for you to get the arbitration case. And we used that then that we felt the company deceived us by telling us a month or so before that everything is a little slow, tighten our belts, with a little more productivity we can make it, but in no way, shape, or form did they tell us that it was going to be shutdown.

B: Okay, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW