

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Sheet & Tube Shutdown Project

Sheet & Tube Shutdown

O. H. 149

GEORGE BINDAS

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

August 14, 1981

GEORGE BINDAS

George Bindas was born in Youngstown, Ohio on April 8, 1912. He is a graduate of Chaney High School and attended Army Air Force Technical School while on active duty from March 1942 until October 1945. He was employed by U.S. Steel from 1933 until 1947 (less the time for active duty), and in that year (1947) he went to work at Bindas Sparkle Market until 1962. In 1964 he was first elected as Mahoning County Commissioner, a post he retains today, (1981).

Mr. Bindas is married and has three children. He has been honored by the Mahoning County Federation of Sportsmens Clubs and has a safety certificate from the Ohio Highway Commission. Organizations he is a member of are: John Buckley Post 1271, Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee, East Gate Development and Transportation Authority and is a member of the Community Improvement Corporation. George is a member of Holy Name Church and his hobbies are, fishing, golf, hunting and bowling.

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE BINDAS

INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: Sheet & Tube Shutdown - Mahoning Valley  
Economic Development Committee.

DATE: August 14, 1981

BR: Can we start with, Mr. Bindas, if you would give us a little run down of your background and how you got involved in politics?

BI: Well, I was born and raised in this City of Youngstown, I live presently on the West Side. I attended Holy Name School and Youngstown Chaney West Side High School. I served in different other capacities like the Army. I attended some technical schools in the Air Force. I got a good broad view of some of the problems that we have in different areas. Like for instance in the grocery business and a broad view of some of the things that are happening in this Valley.

I got interested in politics and have voted ever since I was of voting age at 21. That was during the Depression years and of course there was no money around. I did a lot of little chores, like what they did in grass roots politicking like putting signs up and putting placards up and distributing literature and seeing that people are registered to vote and try to get as many people out to vote in their respective precincts. I did that for many many years until there happened to be a vacancy in the precinct committeeman. I guess the Party had seen fit that I should seek that job as a committeeman in the Democratic Party. I served in that capacity for about 26 years or maybe 28.

Through the work I did as a committeeman, I was urged to run for City Council. I was successful in that endeavor

because of the backing of the Party and the support I got from them. I was successful for four terms.

BR: About what year did you first run for City Council?

BI: Oh, that was about 1958 or around in there.

BR: You were elected for four terms?

BI: Yes, for four terms. Then, I ran for the County Commissioner's job. My chances looked pretty good and I had good responses from people throughout, not only the City of Youngstown, but out through the rural areas. For that simple reason, because I was in the grocery business with my brother in Austintown. I met many people over the last ten or twelve years before I aspired to be a county commissioner.

I put my hat in the ring and after some very hard campaigning and met as many people as possible because I was facing an incumbent. Through the generosity of the voters of Mahoning County, they saw fit that maybe I should be elected as Commissioner. They elected me and I'm here for my fifth term now. In fact, I'm in my seventeenth year and I have three years to go on my other year. So after this term, I'll have twenty years in as County Commissioner of Mahoning County.

BR: How did you first hear about the shutdown at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube?

BI: Well, personally myself I worked in the steel mill after I came out of high school. I worked in the Ohio Works. I worked in very different capacities there. I finally wound up being below the foreman. I was steel inspector and everything else. I always found steel industry was kind of fascinating work. I enjoyed the work I did there. There were rumors way back then that this Valley was going to be in trouble, but everybody took it lightly. Through my past experience of working fourteen years in a mill, I can see that the companies, even U.S. Steel, did not compete with their competitors in modernization and coming up with new ideas and pumping money back into the steel industry. I guess that not only happened here in the U.S. Steel thing, but also throughout the whole Valley.

We have an outdated mode of making steel. The new ideas and the complete revolution and changing ideas of how to make steel. I guess we just got caught back in a bind. We have some old plants that no money was pumped in. We couldn't compete with the modern technology of

making steel. No doubt that was a terrific blow to the Valley, because of my knowledge of my working in the mill we were noted one time as one of the second largest steel producing centers in the country. I think we were noted throughout the country as the Ruhr Valley of America. We had some good steel makers here. They made good quality steel and we progressed in that. For some reason or other leaders to be and all, I guess we kind of depended on the steel industry as a one industry town and I guess it kind of caught up to us. There were not too many efforts way back to try to bring back the diversification into our Valley for some reason. I guess they were figuring steel was going to be here indefinitely, but it's not.

When they did close down these plants, no doubt there was a terrific economic loss to the Valley. They lost fifteen or sixteen thousand jobs. That set us back tremendously. We, as the public officials, are suffering right now because we have lost a terrific tax base. We're caught into inflationary periods, the price of living is going up. I was appointed by my fellow commissioners to the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Corporation and its Community Improvement Corporation, to try to induce and encourage the diversification of our Valley.

No doubt I think the Mahoning Valley as a steel producing center is gone. So, I think our efforts now have to be redevoted into a diversification. I have the utmost faith and confidence that we will come back. We have a good road network. We have a good water supply. We have a good labor force. We are in a central part I think of two major metropolises between New York and Chicago. We are in the center. As I pointed out, we have good road networks and labor supply. We have some great advantages in this Valley that will come back as a diversified center of America. I think we can come back. We don't have to just depend on steel. We have the labor forces here and all the advantages I've already mentioned which I believe will lead to our successful diversification. So, our efforts are now trying to diversify this Valley and bring new industry, new business and new commercial development.

BR: When they initially announced that the Sheet and Tube was going to be shut down, they had an initial meeting that was called that morning. Did you attend that meeting, and if you did not, how did you find out they were going to close?

BI: No, I was not invited. I don't know how this happened, but I just heard it in a news media through the radio, television and newspapers. There were some rumors spread prior to that that something drastic was going to happen in the Valley, but nobody pinned it down.

BR: How did you become involved in the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee?

BI: There is, under the Department of Economic Development Administration, a federal program, where there are monies that could be had. We had people from Labor, businessmen, people from the financial field and public officials. We figured that we could form a development agency which could come up with an organization to bring new industry and new businesses back to this Valley.

Of course, we had to have some guidelines. Through the Economic Development Administration, we made applications for a plan. We hired one of the outstanding consulting firms in that field, Batelle Institute of Columbus. They do industrial development throughout the world. They assisted us in coming out with a development plan. This was approved by the Economic Development Committee and now we're in business. What the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Committee does is, I'll try to enumerate them for you:

1. Financial assistance - MVEDC has assisted numerous local firms in solving expansion problems in a confidential manner. The assistance on financing, including loans, loan guarantees, grants, bonds and coordination of State/Federal applications is available to all local industries. The Revolving Loan Fund that MVEDC operates is an active integral part of the financial assistance program.
2. Site information - including soil conditions, utilities, highway accessibility, topo maps, zoning, aerial views, and other important data.
3. Site selection studies - available in MVEDC files. Whether an interested business is local or from out of town, MVEDC will be able to assist in evaluating sites that exist on file or are otherwise identified.
4. Existing facilities inventory - an information listing of available industrial buildings is maintained by MVEDC.

5. Community data - MVEDC is able to present a broad picture of the area's advantages, including demographic, geographic, financial, governmental, educational, industrial, and other community related facts.

6. Federal grants - MVEDC coordinates many of the local public works grants for Trumbull and Mahoning counties that are awarded by the Economic Development Administration.

7. Assistance to industries interested in locating in the Valley - by providing all the above services and acting as liaison between them, local officials, State and Federal agencies.

BR: If I can back up a step, did somebody recruit you to serve on the original Youngstown Area Task Force before it was MVEDC?

BI: No, this Board of Trustees include, many community leaders from the public sector, private organizations and Labor. MVEDC has elected officials from both Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. So, I was picked by the Board of County Commissioners to represent Mahoning County. The City of Youngstown has representatives, Campbell, Struthers. The same thing in Trumbull County, they have commissioners and public officials that sit on the Board of Trustees.

BR: They had to put together a so-called C.E.D.S. plan. Who originally contacted the commissioners to participate in MVEDC?

BI: The Western Reserve Economic Development Agency developed the overall Economic Development Plan for Trumbull and Mahoning Counties. For some reason this agency, WREDA, never got approval for an Economic Development plan approved by the federal agency, EDA, so it was kind of stagnated. So, MVEDC took over the functions of that agency. For the simple reason, because we wanted good guidance to get it on the right track. That's why we received a grant to put an economic development plan together.

We used some of the material that WREDA had put together and we complied with the guidelines and regulations set down by the Department of Economic Development. After we hired Batelle Institute to help us out, we formed an economic plan. We submitted it to Chicago and then it went to Washington for review and acceptance. Once they reviewed our plan and they knew what we intended

to do and how we intended to do it, we were eligible to help these businesses out in getting loans, loan guarantees, bonds and coordinating all the applications between the state and federal government.

BR: Was there coordination with the Ecumenical Coalition's efforts to buy the Sheet and Tube plant?

BI: Yes, there was. In fact, some of those people from the Coalition are members of MVEDC now. But when this organization was formed it was a combination of many different agencies. Instead of having one, two, three, four or five agencies all throughout the county, we figured we'd have one. That was one of the prerequisites of the federal government. You have a strategy plan, one strategy plan, not five or six. The City of Youngstown would have one and the Mahoning County would have another. So, instead of having five or six different plans, they, EDA, wanted one. That's why we organized MVEDC.

BR: If, some day twenty years from now or when ever they reach a point where there is diversification, do you ever see a need for MVEDC to dissolve or is it doing so much good that it's worth keeping in place?

BI: Well, I could say MVEDC is going to be an on-going development agency, because to expand this Valley, the industrial base and to improve it we have to make contributions to this area as the years go by. Of course, we're still funded by the federal government.

From what I see and what I read in the paper, there are many of these programs. The President is cutting back on many of these programs. So, what effect this will have on this area if the federal government eliminates many of these programs has to be seen. We have to let Congress and even the President and all his Administration know that we're in favor. That Congress and the Administration should not cut down this development plan, especially not in an area like we are in where it means so much of this Valley.

BR: Can I ask your opinion of what you thought about the Coalition's proposal about buying the steel plants? Did you really think that would work?

BI: I couldn't say they didn't have a good idea. They only thing, I guess, they never had the finances for buying it. You just don't buy a steel plant and start going into producing steel, because then you have to have



customers and everything else. You just don't do that. You see they were shooting at a big \$20,000,000 loan from the federal government and different other grant programs that they thought would be possible if they could divide the plant. But, I guess it never materialized.

Into these programs there's a certain amount of local match money necessary. They couldn't raise their own local share to get that \$20,000,000 they were supposed to.

BR: Did you see more hope for, let's say, the Steel Research Center that was proposed. I think it was by MVEDC. Because I know in some instances you talked to some of the Washington people didn't you? I mean about the possibility of funding. Did you seem to get a positive feedback about the Steel Research Center as opposed to the Coalition's plan?

BI: A research center would be a great help to this Valley. Anything of that nature would be, because I think there is need for new technology. This would be a great boost to us, because we would still be a great focal point of making steel here. Somehow through the federal agencies we weren't too successful in our application. They just couldn't see our way of thinking, let's put it that way.

BR: Is there anything about MVEDC that I haven't asked you that I probably should have or that you think is important that I didn't ask?

BI: Yes, may I say this, they approved many grants through the Revolving Loan Fund. We retained a lot of jobs and we brought in thousands of new jobs.

Just last month, a group that bought one of the mills in McDonald, the Number 14 finishing mill, now are talking about expanding their facilities. They're coming in through MVEDC and asking for X millions of dollars. They're talking about building their own either electric furnace or oxygen type furnace and having a continuous casting. They could supply their own semi-finished material to operate this mill. Now, they're operating this mill at the present time, but they are getting the semi-finished material from U.S. Steel, Pittsburgh district, to operate this mill. They're looking forward to that if we approve this project, that they'll bring in a type of new furnace. There's a great possibility that they are going to open up three or four other

furnishing mills. That is going to bring back maybe about 500 or 600 new jobs to this Valley.

So, those are the things that MVEDC is doing.

BR: Is MVEDC intentionally looking for the smaller firm, let's say with a few hundred, as opposed to like five or six thousand jobs in the old steelmills?

BI: No, we have no preference. We have 100 jobs, 200 jobs we encourage them to come in, because that's what we're talking about, diversification.

BR: Would you encourage five or six thousand jobs as opposed to 100 or 200?

BI: Yes, we're hopeful we can induce either large or small businesses as long as we produce meaningful jobs for our citizens.

Finally, I do feel there will be an economic turn around in 1982. I base my facts on Jones and Laughlin has invested in the Coke Plant, and the Seamless Pipe Mill, \$60,000,000 in expansion and renovation; the Commuter Aircraft start up; Hunt Steel's reopening of the Briar Hill Plant and investment and reopening of the McDonald Mill, lead me to believe that this infusion of private capital shows confidence in the Mahoning Valley.

END OF INTERVIEW