

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

O.H. 1881

ANNA BIGGINS

Interviewed

by

Nick Tefakis, Jr.

on

May 30, 1997

ANNA BIGGINS

Anna Biggins was born October 31, 1933 in Youngstown, Ohio to Clifford and Aline Ash. She attended the local public schools and eventually received her G.E.D. in 1960. On January 16, 1960, Anna was married to Nathaniel Biggins, also of Youngstown. Since receiving her G.E.D., Anna has taken labor-related courses at Youngstown State University. Prior to her employment at General Motors, Anna held various domestic positions. In 1970 she was part of the first group of women to be hired at the Lordstown plant.

Anna has been an active member of the United Auto Workers, Local 1112, throughout her 28 years of employment. She has served on the women's Committee and been elected as a representative. Currently, Anna is an International Representative of the United Auto Workers, serving Region Two, consisting of northeast Ohio and northwestern Pennsylvania. Besides her work with the union, she is also a member of the N.A.A.C.P., the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Coalition of Labor Women, and Jobs With Justice. Anna has also received many honors and awards, such as Y.M.C.A.'s Women of the Year, as well as being inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in 1988.

T: This is an interview with Anna Biggins for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Nick Tefakis, Jr., on May 30, 1997, at the UAW union hall in Warren, Ohio, at 1:15 p.m.

Where and when were you born?

B: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio; one of nine children. And my father and mother were Clifford and Aline Ash, and we lived on the south side of Youngstown. [I] attended elementary, junior high and high school also in Youngstown. My elementary school was Cleveland, my junior high school was Princeton Junior High, and my high school was South High. Unfortunately I did not finish high school at South High. I later achieved my GED [General Education Diploma] high school equivalency. And the reason that I geared myself up to do that was because I wanted to push myself to be a practical nurse, and it was necessary, of course, to have either a high school diploma or the equivalent.

T: What type of family did you grow up in? Was your family pro-union?

B: Yes they were. My father was a steel worker, and he had worked for Republic Steel Works in Youngstown, Ohio. And a little bit later on, he worked for Packard Electric and was a member of the IUE Union, Local 717. So being involved with unions did not come as an accident. It was very much a part of our conversations in our home. And my mother, of course, believed in education and higher education. And back in the early 1900's when she left Kentucky, she went to Wilberforce, and in those years, Wilberforce was a boarding school just for young women. And how she met my father was, my father's sister also attended Wilberforce, and so on one of their weekend vacations, she came to Youngstown to visit the Ashe family. And, by the way, I would like to interject at this point, my grandfather, in the teen's and twenties was an entrepreneur. He had his own rubbish business.

T: Was that in Youngstown?

B: That was in Youngstown.

T: That is where your father's family was from?

B: My father's family originally was from Alabama. They came here from Alabama in the early teen's. And they had nine children, also. [Laughter]

T: Do any instances of discrimination, because you are a woman, stand out to you, prior to your employment at GM?

B: I really cannot say that it was discriminatory because of being a woman, but prior

to getting to Lordstown, I certainly did try to get a more meaningful, well-paying job, because being a young mother and having three children at that time, I certainly wanted to be able to, along with my husband's employment, afford better things for our kids. So I had tried to get in the post office, and it was certainly not discrimination because I was a female that I did not get hired there permanently. It was because I did not score high enough on the test, so subsequently, I only ended up working a Christmas period at the Youngstown post office. Youngstown does not have a large turn over like some of the other major cities. But I was so happy that I passed the civil service test, I just did not realize that you really needed to be up in the high 80's because of the veterans that come in, and they get the additional points and because of the low turn over rate in Youngstown. But I did not let that deter me from trying to do better.

I also tried numerous times to get in at Packard Electric. [I] stood out in lines four and five hours just to put an ap [application] in, but was never called there. [I] tried to get in Packard Electric, and also General Electric in Youngstown, but I would not say to you that the reason that I did not is because of discrimination. It was because of who knows who and, I found out much later, it is how you end up getting into these places. But Lordstown itself, I did not file the initial suit, but our union did, because Lordstown opened in 1966 and at the time they opened, they only hired males. So, in 1969, our union petitioned the government to hire females. So, finally, they got around to taking applications in 1969, which I, of course, put my application in. The funny thing and the twist of this thing is I did not even hardly know how to get out here. I got lost, I cannot tell you how many times, even though it is not that far from Youngstown. But I was successful in putting in an application in 1969, because of the thrust of our union, the UAW, petitioning the Federal Government, as I stated earlier, to get females hired.

So, in October of 1969, I did in fact have an interview, was given a hiring date of January of 1970, and guess what happened on the way to the ball game? The company came back, General Motors, and said that they were not prepared to take the women in in January, because they did not have restroom facilities. And I do consider this as being discrimination. Not discrimination directly at me, but discrimination as such. So, finally, they got around to hiring women at Lordstown in July of 1970. When I finally got in here, it was August 18th, because I did not put a big push on with anybody to pull any special strings after I had put my initial application in, because I was working. I was working for a private family, and for some very nice people, I must say.

And so after I did get in, it kind of ticked me off one day. I was on the line thinking, you know, they really did wholesale discriminate against us. And so I did file a suit against General Motors for discrimination at the hiring gate, because I was given a January of 1970 date of hire, but did not finally get in until August, 1970. So, yes, there was some discrimination that played a major role in that. And why they felt it was so hard in this particular area, to bring women into the work force, I cannot tell you what their strategy was because there had been women working in the plants, as you very well know, after the war kicked off in

1941 and the male work force had to go and fight the war. Then, of course, women came in. We were good enough to fill in then, but of course, as the males came back, a lot of women were kicked to the curb. So, that is the first discrimination, as far as getting into manufacturing that occurred where I was involved. But I do not figure it was a direct slap just at me, Anna Biggins. It was just the way that they did not address the fact that they needed to bring females into the work force.

T: What was the result of the suit you filed? How long did it take?

B: I filed it with the Equal Opportunities Commission, and they said that I had really not filed it within the time frame it needed to be, which I believe, back in that time, was 180 days. So the result of that was, really, nothing. But, I kept it as a bargaining chip for a lot of years, a lot of years. I just kept it in, knowing there was never going to be anything realized out of it, but it concerned General Motors very much that that suit was out there. And so, as I said, I kind of used it a little bit to benefit, not myself, but the female population at Lordstown.

T: What were your first impressions of your job when you first began working?

B: Well, when I first began working here at Lordstown, it really overwhelmed me, simply because I had never been in a place that large with that many people, but I will have to say to you, I am and I was one of the few women, in my estimation, that really walked into something very sweet. My first impression, which is a lasting impression to this day is, walking in there in the blind, not realizing what to expect. The good Lord put someone in my way that was young, as yourself, that was extremely charismatic. And I hired in with about 50 people on August 18, and if you can just imagine this scenario: all of those 50 people were dispersed, save for myself. All of a sudden, I am sitting there alone, probably for an hour. And I am saying, "Wow, what is the matter with me? I did not take my shower? What is going on here?" You know.

And so finally, this young supervisor comes in, who General Motors had hired from Michigan. I went into the van plant, I went into the van assembly. You know, they have passenger assembly here, they have van plant assembly. Well they had brought the van plant down from Pontiac Michigan. So, some of these young persons came with General Motors at supervisor positions. So in walks this young man, and he says to me, "Are you Anna Biggins?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And he said, "Well, I am going to tell you. I really got an excellent job for you." And of course, my response to him was, "I bet." That is exactly what I said. And he said, "Well, I am not kidding you. It is really great."

And guess what? He was not really kidding me. This job was created for myself and another woman that they had hired one or two days prior, I am not really sure. And it was excellent. It was hard to believe that we were actually doing this job. This job was an off-line job, which they called sub-assembly, back in those days. And what we really did was put a pattern on the big grill. A

pattern that you just pulled back from paper, like playing paper dolls, that is what it reminded me of. And Peggy did one side, I did the other side. And we could work ahead, you know, with these grills, and after we put the pattern on, then one of the men would come and they would spray-paint it. What we covered up was black, had already been painted black, so what they came by and done was paint white, so when you took the pattern off, you had a perfectly black and white grill.

That job lasted for 90 days. You have to serve 90 days in order to be a full employee, and that happened for me, and I considered that a stroke of luck that you could never believe, because other persons had gone to chassis department, they had gone to motor line, they had gone to the trim lines, and those jobs, of course, required a lot more activity and more work than what I was actually doing. So I say that that set the pace for me at General Motors, and it really did, because it gave me a chance, because of the out lay of the job, to get around and talk to other people and move around and be able to see what other persons were really doing. It really made me realize how fortunate I really was. And by the way, I was 36 years old when I hired in. I was not a young puppy. [Laughter]

T: Were you active in the union upon your being hired?

B: Upon my being hired? I must say to you, before I ever got this 90 days seniority, the first meeting that they ever had, yes. And in addition to that, I came to that meeting, but on September 14, which was about a month later, General Motors went on a 69-day strike. So you are talking about being active, you were certainly catapulted in to becoming an activist. And that is exactly what happened. So, immediately, in order to receive your strike benefits, you had to do certain things to qualify for that. And I did every one of those. And what they actually had the women do was not picket. They had us sign checks, strike-related checks, or work in the kitchen or do things like that that the brothers felt would not be as stressful for us, having just come into the system, and then again, not being full-fledged employees, we were still probationary at that time. But what did happen was that from September 14, 1970 when that strike ensued, and it was over right after Thanksgiving, November of 1970, our time continued. So during that interim, I did, in fact, come back as a seniority employee.

T: When you first began, was there any difference in the way management acted toward male and female employees?

B: Not in my particular case, I would say not, but there was a way that some of my own union brothers acted toward us because we were really a novelty. And some of them felt intimidated and also felt, which was said to me on numerous occasions that, "Hey, what are you doing here? You have got a husband, you have children. My friends could be doing this job." And of course, my response

always was to them, "Maybe your friend could be, but I am. I am the one hired. This is my job." But you would get that. It was not really a whole lot of that, but it was somewhat, which carried over to when, a little bit later on, when I started running for different positions in the local, there would somehow be that kind of response from a very few brothers because, overall, the brothers, in my opinion, were extremely supportive.

T: Are there different demands placed on male and female members of the union?

B: Different demands? You mean as far as what your strike activities would be?

T: Or any other type of activity.

B: In the UAW, I would simply say to that no, because our constitution, our autonomy as such has always been inclusive. Inclusive of male and female, inclusive of, also, the races, because I am a black woman, a very proud black woman. They took care of that in the constitution. But individual units, individual work sites, certainly. I would be remiss to say that certain discriminations did not come to fore, because certainly they would. And I can give you, what I consider, a fine example of that. In 1974, I believe it was, I decided to run for trustee of this local. Females had run, but had never been elected prior to that point. And my husband is a great big guy. He is 6'3. We came out one day and tried to figure out where would be the best place to put these signs, Anna Biggins for Trustee. So he brought this ladder out and, as you go down this Reuther Drive, you will notice there are a lot of telephone poles, so -- he is a great big guy, as I stated earlier -- he got on that ladder, which put him way up there on that telephone pole, and put some of my signs up, basically, all over, different places.

So we came out to a union meeting following that, and guess what. Every one of my signs were torn down. And am I going to say that anybody had a whole lot against me? I doubt it. Am I going to say they did not want women to be on the executive board? Yes I am. Yes, I am going to say that. And the proof has been, it took a lot of years after that, way up until the late 1980's, early 1990's that there were any females that were elected to the executive board of the UAW Local 1112. So I think that they, kind of like, wanted to keep it a Good ole Boys Club. But, as is evidence in this last election that took place about a month ago, there were two females elected, and I am very, very happy to say that. And in the late 1980's and early 1990's, there were also two females that were elected to the executive board of this union. So, yes, I think we have had some resistance in that.

T: What about the different demands on male and female employees within the plant itself? Were there specific jobs that were assigned to men and women, as far as allowing room for advancement?

B: You mean on the lines?

T: Yes.

B: Well, actually, some jobs probably were too heavy for females to do. But I want you to bare in mind that there was also a law in the state of Ohio that said that male or female could not lift over a certain weight. And believe me, that benefitted males as well as females. In the plant itself, there were some jobs that, physically, were too strenuous for females to do. And, of course, both things kind of dissipated as the years went on because something came along known as ergonomics, and those jobs were retooled or recycled or something that were really made for any sex to be able to do. But yeah, there was a lot of that type of thing that happened, and of course some of the men would resent it because everybody is paid the same thing under our contract. That was kind of worked out and there were injuries and worker's comp [compensation] claims as a result of that from both sides, male as well as female.

T: What do you feel are the major roadblocks that women face within the union, as far as participation, being appointed or elected to various committee's?

B: Really, in this day and time in 1997, I do not really feel there is very many, because we have been around each other long enough, and those who have proved that they have the union members' best interests at heart, I do not feel that there are any deterrents when it comes to that. I will take you back to 1976, and Marlin Ford was the president during that period of time, and I was chairperson of the Women's Committee and had been for, maybe, three or four years. Very vocal, we did a lot of innovative-type things in our committee, and things that were always helpful and supportive, not only to the women, but also to our brothers, to show that they cared about our interests, too.

So I was standing in the lobby one day and Marlin Ford walked up and said to me the sub-committee chairperson had just resigned, he said, "How would you like to have that job?" Well, it really took me by surprise, because I never solicited anything. And so I told him, "Well, I will go and talk with my husband and find out if he thinks that that will be a good idea for me to attempt to try to do this." So, Vic said, "Go ahead," because Vic has always supported whatever I wanted to do. He never stood there and said, "Hey, you have got to be home scrubbing these floors." Or whatever, in addition to working. He is not that kind of man, thank goodness. So I became the first full-time appointed person in this union, and like I said before, I did not solicit it. I had no idea that this president ever had me in mind, so I became, in September of 1976, the first female, fully appointed person in this complex.

That next year, I ran for convention delegate, and 86 persons had run for 11 positions to our constitutional convention. Guess what. I was elected first alternate simply because of being out there, working full-time in that capacity as a sub representative, and a lot of people came through that system because, in those years, the Trade Relief Assistance was a big part of what was going on in our country, and we were involved in it in Lordstown because we had had a big

lay off in 1975. So that gave focus to persons working with the TRA [Trade Relief Assistance], and that is what I feel got me elected as the first alternate.

Three years later, of course, the constitutional convention came up again. I was elected as a delegate and came in number five. And ironically, the person that was the recording secretary in those years told me, "You are going to be a delegate this time, and I would say about number five." Why would he say that? Obviously he had been hearing talk in the plant that women are doing something for this membership and they deserve to be elected. It happened. Three years later, I was elected number one. Three years after that, elected number one again. So that is why I say the barriers have really been broken down. And that was as a delegate, though, not as an executive board member. Did I ever run again for the executive board after that initial try for trustee? No, because at that point in time, I had become a full-time appointed sub-representative.

In 1979, the International union took all of the benefit reps, the sub and the insurance and so on and so forth, and made us all benefit reps, meaning that we did some of everything. We specialized in nothing. I held that position until June of 1988.

T: Since that you have held so many different positions within the union. Could you describe what your duties were?

B: As a sub-representative, primarily, we were working with TRA [Trade Relief Assistance] claims. And what that really did was, persons that were laid off, if they had periods of time that they were not covered by unemployment, then the TRA would come in and pick up and supplement those weeks. 95 percent of our earnings are guaranteed to us under our contract. So this is what we did: we reviewed each claim, initially in those days, and anyone else that might have gotten laid off that was entitled to trade relief assistance, then we made sure that they received their proper allotment of supplemental unemployment benefits, which supplemented their unemployment comp. So that is what I did for three years. I worked in that area. When we became benefit rep's in 1979, then our duties were to handle insurance complaints, supplemental unemployment benefit complaints, pension complaints, if there were any, which at that time there was not because no one had worked long enough at Lordstown to receive pension. So that is what I did, and did it on a full time basis. And how that process worked was, if one of the employees had a problem, then they would go to their supervisor. The supervisor would log that complaint and the areas that we represented, because that plant is so big that I had, in those days, just the truck plant, and on second shift. So whatever claims came in, whatever calls came in, then we would go to the area, find out what the problem was, if it required calling the insurance company, which most of them did, then we called the insurance company and tried to clear away the problems.

T: You were a representative to the constitutional convention. Was that on the national level? Was that to make changes to the constitution?

B: Absolutely. That is exactly what it is and yes, it is national in scope, even though I was elected to represent local 1112 and the region, which was Region Two, which has a regional director. His name is Warren Davis. And because of the activity of the local with the region, when you come to the constitutional convention, I stated to you that I was elected in 1983 as first delegate, out of 86 persons. Let me tell you what else that did. The shop chairman at this local was challenging that assistant director of the region for the directorship. I opted to support the assistant director of the region -- I want you to understand the significance of this -- over my own shop chairman. And doing that, because he was also running against the assistant director, and also running as constitutional convention delegate, yours truly, and because of the support of my members, was elected number one delegate. Now that holds a lot of significance. And I do not know how much you really know about the union framework, but within that framework, my own shop chairman is challenging the assistant director, who had been assistant director for 13 years.

T: And this is of the region?

B: This is of the region, which is on the international executive board. The director of the region, had moved up to vice president, so that put the assistant director in line to run for director. Well, in my mind, I am not saying that the shop chairman is not capable, but I know for darn sure that the assistant director is. He had been an assistant at doing this job, so Anna Biggins supports this assistant director and comes in as number one delegate. That represented the first time that a rank and file person had ever upset the leadership and also the first time in the history of UAW local 1112 that a female had won a plant-wide election. That is the first time that it ever happened, in 1983.

T: Did this cause any problems for you at all? Was there any animosity?

B: Yes, of course there was. There is animosity to this day because of that, but guess what. So what, because as a result of that support, I now sit as international representative on the UAW Region Two staff. I never waver because in my commitment of the director, Warren Davis, simply because knowing what I did know about the union and watching the union over the years, I knew that he should ascend into that position because he was capable of doing it. Why a challenge came from down here, I cannot tell you that. I do not know that. I do not know what is in anybody else's head. All I can do is what I know and I feel is right for my members. And I want to say this right now. This has never been about me as an individual. It has simply always been about what is better, in my mind and in my heart, for my union members, and it is to this day.

T: That shows a lot, that you would vote and support people with your conscience for the better whole, rather than trying to support people just because you are associated with them.

B: In sitting around that table with eleven people, being brought up as a child, it was always stressed to us that it is necessary to be a part and contribute what you can contribute, not for your own selfish reasons, but what is going to move the process. And I think that says a whole lot about us, as African Americans in our system. We were not always welcome into unions, as you very well know. In fact, there was a charter and books that were written against involving African Americans and females. It started out like that.

T: How recent was that?

B: You cannot say recent, because unions were really formed to protect trades, and for trades to be able to protect themselves, they decided to have it written into their agreements for their own protection, to keep African Americans and females out. Now that all happened in the 1920's. And so when the UAW came to fore in 1935, and the CIO under John L. Lewis, that was when those gentlemen had the foresight and the vision to see that, hey, this is for everybody, not just a select few. Not just the trades, not just the majority population of white men. It is going to take in African Americans and it is going to take in females. So when we were chartered as a union in 1935, that was a part of our autonomy from the outset, from the outset.

So, have I received a lot of discrimination within this union? Certainly not, because the autonomy says no. Did individual sites, as I stated earlier, try to inflict their own will? Of course. I mean, we live in a society, we know what the society is about. And to sit up here and say to you that it has been all peaches and cream and that I did not have some discrimination thrown my way would be a lie. But being a 63-year-old woman, being raised up in an integrated neighborhood, going to integrated schools and the such, there are certain things that you learn to deal with. Certain things that you learn how to circumvent and still get to where you need to be. And yes, that has certainly happened, not only for myself, but a lot of union women. And I am sure you have heard it before in your interviews. [Laughter]

T: Yes. What about the Women's Committee? What was your involvement with that?

B: My involvement with the Women's Committee when it initially got started in 1971 was just to come over and find out what was happening. To see just what we could do, because it is also part of our constitution. It is one of the 11 standing committee's it is mandatory to have. So the president at that time, of course, started it out. I stayed with it, but a lot of the women thought that it was going to be a committee that would put them on first shift because of us coming in so late, most of us were definitely on second shift. When they found out that was not going to be the venue for this, that they would have to go through their bargainers and so on and so forth, mainly get some time, a lot of them dropped off. But I stayed. And subsequently, I was elected the third chairperson of the Women's Committee. And I stayed in that position for twelve years.

T: What type of activities did they conduct?

B: Mainly, we tried to educate ourselves about our constitution, about our contracts, and we would have seminars to do just that. Back in those days, we would collate with the IUE and also with Local 1714 and have workshops for the same reasons, to get ourselves educated about how we can do things. We know that we have problems that are a little different than our brothers, that we might need different supplies in the bathrooms than the brothers need, these kinds of things. And then as we got ourselves more solidified in the process, than we would start doing activities that would say, as an example, take care of Linkirk Retarded School, do something for them, get a bicycle or do whatever, go out and sing songs at the senior citizen homes in the areas. And then we would start trying to have educational programs that would benefit our members' children. And those are the kind of things that we would do. We would also find out who was running for elections, not go out and really advocate a certain candidate, but certainly try to make whatever candidate's aware that we existed and that we had specific problems that needed to be addressed. So we were very active in those ways.

T: I guess we can move into your current position as an international representative. Can you describe how you came about acquiring that position and what your duties are?

B: As I stated earlier, being elected a delegate to the constitutional convention, of course, is what got the attention of the regional director, Warren Davis, because he was elected in 1983. And then he appointed me to his staff on June 12, 1988. In that position, I became a servicing representative, which means on the Region Two staff, that we go into the plants we are assigned to at the third step of the grievance procedure. That also means that you are responsible for the particular plants that you service, their contracts. So every three years, because all of the assignments that I had had three year contracts, so you would work with the in-plant committee's and find out what proposals and what changes they would like to see in the current contract. And we would usually do that by having proposal meetings.

As an example, maybe the vacation part of the agreement was not working the way the members would like to see it work. So we would write a proposal and try to get that changed. Always, you would be trying to strengthen the pension, strengthen the wages in those particular contracts, or the health care coverages. So after making up the proposals along with the bargaining committee's, then we would have meetings with management to try to get some of these things to become a reality within the framework of the contract. So that was my responsibility.

At third step grievance meetings, we would always, of course, because the grievance was not resolved in the first step, was not resolved in the second step, we would go into the third step to try to get something that was liveable for the union, as well as management, on that particular grievance. If that did not

work out, then the fourth step of the grievance is arbitration. If we had to have arbitration hearings, and I, as an international representative, work with the person that had the grievance and also with the committee, to take the grievance to arbitration, which happened in some cases, but in most cases, we were able to resolve it short of arbitration. In our region we have what is called an independent IPS screening procedure. Persons from different locals, other than the local that has had a grievance filed against it, would listen to this grievance to find out whether or not it had enough merit to take it before arbitration. That would always be the step. They would either recommend it for or against to go forward.

If it would go forward, then we would notify the FMCS, which would give us a list of arbitrators. We would review those to find out whether or not we would think this arbitrator would be in favor or against this kind of grievance. As an example, say it was discipline. Then an arbitrator would be selected and asked, then, by the strike-off method. You would call the person that was the HR at the particular unit that you are working with, and they would say, "Do you want to go first, or do you want me to go first?" And we would continue to strike-off until we would agree with an arbitrator. And then, of course, that arbitrator would be notified and then we would go to an arbitration hearing. That was really what my duties were for seven and a half years on the staff of Warren Davis.

A year and a half ago, he appointed me because the education representative had retired -- he had become the mandatory age, which was 65, to retire. And so, since then, I have been doing the educational programs for the region. The primary, big job of that, is putting on the summer school. And that summer school is for the delegates in Region Two, and we usually hold those at a university. We had been holding them at Akron University up until this year, which is going to be at Kent State. So, what my primary duties are for that is, to set up the whole program: the workshops, the speakers, to select the meals, to select a theme with the director, the whole nine yards, for the summer school. And in addition to that, we put on, for small independents, Steward and Committee trainings, which we just did one down in Lancaster, Ohio.

And then I work with the Education Department to see to it that the proper applications are made for Winter Institute that we have at our Family Education Center in Onway, Michigan, which is upstate Michigan. It is called the Walter and Mae Reuther Family Education Center. So we have six weeks of Winter Institute. We have scholarships programs which will kick off at the end of June. That is for four weeks. So Sunday, I will be leaving to go to upstate Michigan to our education center, and will be teaching core programs for the last week of the Winter Institute, which is leadership. Leadership persons will be up there from local unions.

So in addition to doing that, whatever else comes up in the region, like we have a worker's compensation initiative that is going on now, because George Voinovich, in his wisdom, has attacked the worker's compensation law in this state five times in seven years. And I am sure you have heard about that. And the law, now, is just absolutely horrendous. It is cutting workers off at the knees.

So what we are trying to do now is get enough signatures to put that on the ballot and let the electorate of this state decide whether or not they want a bill that is so punitive. And so I have been working with that, doing that.

And I just cannot tell you whatever else might come up, because we are very involved in politics in our union because we know that politics is the center of everything. So, of course, I work with the CAP Council. We work with organizing, if there are any plants organizing a department, are trying to get into the union, we go out and we hand bill. Strike activity is also part of the education rep's duties, and that is to go in and put on programs to educate strikers and to keep them stimulated and informed about exactly what needs to happen during the strike action. That is also a part of my duty.

T: Mentioning strikes, what action does the Local 1112 take to help support other unions?

B: That might be involved in a strike action?

T: Yes.

B: Well what we usually do is call them and find out how we can assist, that is the first thing. You do not just jump in there unless you know that you are really welcome to do that, which all the locals do welcome us. So what we usually do at that point is to get our members -- and that is usually done by the executive board and, also, the shop chairman -- to find out if they need us to come out and help them to picket, which is done very much with this local here. We do not let anybody hang out there that does need our support, financial or bodily. Bodily, we have been on very, very many picket lines. We have been in support way back when Trumbull Hospital, if you remember that, and WCI Steel, and there is another plant I cannot think of that has been on strike a lot. We have been out there helping them.

Of course, we help our own out when we need it [Laughter]. And other locals come in to help us, but primarily, food, money and through picketing. And when the coal miners were on strike, I am sure you remember that, we went down, a lot of us went down, including our director, he went down to assist Trumka when that big strike was going on, so we are very much involved with other unions as well as with ourselves.

T: From reading some of your publications for the union, I have seen that there are lists of certain products, certain companies that are non-union, and they would like the members to boycott them to show support in unionizing the shops. What kind of success has there been with that? Do the members support these?

B: Yes, they do, and that magazine that you are talking about, where it says to buy US-made products or avoid scab-made products, which you know scabs are

when persons cross picket lines of unions that are in dispute with their employers. And yes, it does. I think it has a very good effect, because you can just walk into a store, and maybe this person -- you do not even know who they are -- they say, "Well, I cannot buy this." You know, you see people looking at labels to try to make sure it says U.S.A., because that really shows, if that period is in there between the USA, that that is an American-made product. If it is just straight-out USA, and does not have that emphasis in there, then you know that there is somebody that is playing around. But I think it has a tremendously good effect. And it certainly has a good effect in buying autos, because everybody looks for domestic content in their cars. And if they do not just, straight-out, buy a General Motors, Ford or Chrysler, or whatever, they certainly know how to look for the serial number. That gives the real indication that it is domestic. But, yes, it works very well for us, and we spend a lot of money putting our ammo booklet out, to see to it that our members are informed.

T: Good. Is there anything more that you would like to add?

B: You had said to me at the start of this that you would like to know how I would like to see the union in ten years. I think that we are taking steps now, through education, to see to it that the high schools, the junior high schools, and our own workers, are informed of the importance of what has happened in the past with our history. How child labor is such a big part of the abuse of children in the world. On what happens, and the need to have everybody aware of this, and that a child of seven or eight years old in Bangladesh certainly has as much right as a child in the United States to be playing games, playing soccer, or whatever it is, and not be chained to a loom, not making soccer balls. And it is going to take this kind of education, it is going to take the American people coming back, realizing that because of unions, the quality of life became better. Not because of employers, because employers are only going to do what they are forced to do, as far as better living conditions, better wages, getting kids to be kids, getting workers to have the better quality of life that Americans have become accustomed to having.

And that is not going to happen because we sit around and talk about it. It is only going to happen because we step out, we get it where it needs to be, in junior high and high school, that, hey, unions are necessary. Unions are not here, as the newspaper writer did to Gompers back in 1908, when he told him that we need more education, not more jails. That we need more of this. And what did this guy write? All he could hear was that unions want more. They want to try to project us as being greedy, as not caring about social issues, as not caring about education -- which is a complete misnomer. It is only because of unions -- and particularly, I have to talk about my own union -- that we were able to change the quality of life in this country. And also, with that, the quality of work. So I should say the quality of work brought on the quality of life.

So, in ten years, I feel that we will have turned that corner, that the people will realize that it is not necessary for a CEO to make 400 percent more than the

average worker in order for his life to have quality and for the workers not to. And that is only going to happen through education. Do we still need businesses? Of course we do. Do we still need workers? You are darn right we do. Should the workers have the expectations that they should live as well as their wages would have them to live? You are doggone right. Why is it that the United States should be 13th in the world in the quality of life and wages? Why is that? Only because of corporate greed. And we have to continue to educate and to motivate our membership and the rest of the union membership, that there is a place for everybody. And in ten years, I feel that we will have achieved that, but not by sitting back on our duffs, because we are aggressive and because we know what it is going to take, and it is education.

T: Okay, great. Thank you.