

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike

Personal Experience

O. H. # 1215

ROBERT LEE MCCULLOH

Interviewed

by

Andrew Russ

on

November 11, 1988

ROBERT MCCOLLOH

Robert McCulloh resides on the South Side of Youngstown, Ohio, attended East High School, and was employed at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, Brier Hill Works, in the capacity of welder. In the interview that was conducted with him on November 11, 1988, he discussed the steel strike of 1952. He also held the position of Union Officer of the local contingent of the United Steel Workers of America, and it was from this position that he was intimately concerned with the steel strike.

Mr. McCulloh began his interview with his biography and then proceeded to discuss in detail the local union structure that he helped lead, the causes and courses of the 1952 strike, and the larger economic and political issue that faced American labor during the period of 1950-1980. He said that the local union of steelworkers had to agitate vigorously for the rights of better work conditions and pay. He also delineated just how the union was organized and some of the ways it went about achieving its desired goals. He traced the cause of the 1952 strike as related to the issue of a union shop, as the workers followed the dictates of its union and struck for approximately 120 days over this issue. During this period, he discussed the actions of Harry Truman in possessing the steel mills in order to prosecute the Korean War effort. He discussed the Supreme Court case of Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company vs. Sawyer, and showed how the fight over economic issues affected the steel worker of Youngstown, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT LEE MCCULLOH
INTERVIEWER: Andrew Russ
SUBJECT: 1952 Youngstown Sheet & Tube Steel Strike
DATE: November 11, 1988

This is an interview with Robert McCulloh for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, on the 1952 Sheet & Tube Strike, by Andrew Russ, on November 11, 1988.

ANDREW RUSS: Is your family from Youngstown? Were you born in Youngstown?

ROBERT MCCULLOH: I was born in Youngstown, but my family was from Alabama.

R: Where did you live?

M: On the East Side of Youngstown on Garland Avenue.

R: Where did you go to high school?

M: East High School.

R: What year did you graduate?

M: 1935.

R: When you graduated high school, did you start working at Sheet & Tube then?

M: No. I had some other small jobs. I worked at Coppers, a tar and chemical plant over there on Logan Avenue. There were city programs with unions and stuff like that. There were state and city and government programs that I worked on.

R: How did you eventually end up working at the Sheet & Tube mill?

M: They had a state program to teach individuals certain skills. They had it at Youngstown South High School at nights. It was a welding class, burning and welding. So I entered that. The government was financing this program and they had about 15, 20 people in this class. They had it at night from 9 in the evening till maybe 2 or something like that in the morning. At the end of a certain period of time, they graded the individuals. And I was one of the top seven in the class and, if given a chance, I should succeed. That was their recommendation.

The people who were running the program, they wanted to know why did I take the class and where could I get a job as a welder and things like that. I knew one place that was hiring welders, people that were trained as welders, was at Raymond Concrete Pyle on Andrews Avenue. So, they were satisfied after awhile that I was in there, and it was a legitimate thing because they figured, me being a black man, that it would be very hard to get a welding job in those days. But they were satisfied that I knew what I was talking about.

I succeeded and so I went to Youngstown Sheet & Tube in Campbell Works employment office down there and applied for work. There was approximately 200 or 300 people outside waiting to try to get an interview and for 99 percent it appears it was, "Don't call me, I'll call you." You were in and out of there in a minute or so. But I went in there and I stayed quite awhile. They hired me. It was just like that because I had the experience and they recognized my background, and I was hired. I started in 1941 at Brier Hill in the conditioning yard. I worked there till to total retirement in 1980.

I worked at several different jobs there. I did a number of different things. I started off . . . by knowing how to weld, I did not get a job in the weld department. I was sent to another department, the conditioning department, where they burned steel. I learned how to burn at South High School where I trained. That was acceptable. I started off as burner there, a crane follower, inspection, and ended up as a leader, a top job more or less. I could have gone on to be a foreman if I'd wanted to, but I became a union

officer. I felt that I could do more for my employees and myself and everyone else in the company by being a union officer.

I accomplished quite a few things. I became a union officer in 1960 and I stayed there until 1974. [That's] probably something that very few others ever did.

R: That was a long time?

M: Yeah. While I was a union officer, I helped to break down quite a few things. I wasn't a militant or anything like that.[Laughter] I recognized problems and I was able to present good answers and solutions to the company. One of the very first things I did, there was no blacks in the city offices. They had several different road blocks that was put in front of them. Not only blacks, but of course some whites, too. I found out how to evade that, per se. They finally recognized and they started to hire blacks in the offices. Later on I helped out a lot of people on the outside by channeling them to Youngstown Sheet & Tube. Blacks and whites, I didn't just accept a one way thing, I always helped everybody in my actions. Later on I helped other people get jobs with the state of Ohio, wrote letters to governors and things like that to help them get jobs.

In the entertainment field, I helped a lot of people become singers and dancers and managers. One girl, she's still a singer out in Las Vegas and places like that going all over the world as a singer.

R: Now, in 1941 you started working there?

M: Yeah.

R: When the war started, was there a big step up as far as production at the plant? Were there a lot of orders?

M: Yeah.

R: What were your working conditions back then?

M: Work conditions were very poor. There was a lot of management demand that you produce more. The greed aggravated the men in the mill. There were a number of grievances and the unions were in the mills, but they weren't strong as yet, they were developing. The grievances that the men had, management many times just threw them out or ignored them or shouted them down and threatened them, and they went by the wayside. The department I was in was a wee bit different than so

many others. They would challenge the management, they would walk out.

R: Because you were a specialized type of skill where they actually needed you to be there, so they'd give you better treatment?

M: They needed us very much. They would give us a little bit more consideration. We walked out . . . I think I was in the mill two or three weeks. I think I went to the restroom or something like that when I come back, and the people were walking out. I said, "What are you walking out for?" They said, "Don't ask no questions just follow us." [Laughter] I think I was so surprised and excited by it, I stayed out longer than anybody. I was the last one to come back in the mill. They struck quite often, I don't know how many, 15, 20 times in a years time. They would walk out.

R: How many men might work in you department?

M: A hundred or 150 men or more.

R: Did you work all different shifts?

M: Yeah, four turns. There was grievances and complaints about working four turns, overtime. . . .

R: At that point you weren't getting paid overtime?

M: Yeah, there was overtime pay. Some of the things there was disagreement over was, there was a certain amount of favoritism as to who was going to get the overtime. There wasn't any real system as to who, and everybody was trying to get a favor, more or less. That hurt people. If you got a favor today and I didn't get it tomorrow then I'd be a little sore. I'd figure you were getting preferential treatment and I wasn't, and sooner or later, it would begin to nag. It built up to where I could tell this guy and that guy and everybody, and they would point fingers at you and all the other people that were getting favors. The next thing you know, you'd have a strike.

The wages and the incentive bonuses were very poor. The people were getting rates that they figured they should be getting a much higher rate of pay. Just the regularly hourly rate plus the incentive bonus on top of the hourly rate. They had this one rate where you gave the company two percent, or two tons, I think it was, of production before you started making any money. That wasn't fair. I know I was one of the main ones that really protested that, and we finally eliminated it in what they call step three meetings with your higher management. You know, you got your

management--your foreman, your superintendent and everything like that. And you have your industrial relations people, that's the place where you argued what you call a step three meeting there.

We finally broke that down, we got rid of that so called "bogey" that we were having to give to the company. They wrote us a new system. Under this bonus system, some of us figured the mathematics of the whole thing and we found out that the more you produced, it became a detriment to you. Just say for instance, you produced 50 pieces of steel, well that was okay. But if you went more than this 50, then your incentive would be retracting instead of increasing. It was a very difficult job trying to instruct people to change their ways. Everybody wanted to be macho and show how much they could do. We finally got it around to where we couldn't just go out and tell a person, "Don't produce anymore" and things like that, but we finally did it in an indirect way.

R: After the war was over, the economy slowed down. Did that affect you at all as far as work?

M: My department was one department that worked constantly. The steel pipe business was always good and Youngstown Sheet & Tube was one of the top three, I think. What they did was made some round steel, however big they wanted it, and they'd send it to us in railroad cars. We'd unload it and put it down on what we called beds. Then an inspector would look at this steel. If they saw any defect, like some cuts or other kinds of things that were in the steel, they take would some white chalk and they'd mark the steel. Then the people that were called scarfers, they had something like a burning torch but it was longer, and they cut the defect out of the steel so you could make a good pipe. After the steel was made, they'd load it back up into the cars and ship it to Campbell and make pipe out of it. The pipe business was good, so we worked all the time.

There was slow downs. Maybe you didn't have four turns all the time, we'd be back to three and even back to one turn. I know at times at Brier Hill, we were the only department in the whole mill that was working. We had one turn working. After the war was over, there was a cutback because they didn't need as many men. They had been rushing to get out all the production they could get because the war. Then we came into the Korean War.

R: Did production rise?

M: Yeah, production rose up again because you need steel for the boys at the front. We had different types of steel. We conditioned steel for shells and things like that. Billets and things. . . . Instead of having the regular size ballons and rounds (we still continued to have the ballons and rounds), we'd have some billets [that were], four or five inches wide. We would condition them. [We had] a different variety of defense orders. They still continued to go strong with the oil products.

Coming towards the end of the Korean conflict, the unions were definitely trying to assert themselves and gain more benefits and to control the flow of men in and out. They wanted a union shop, and the company resisted the efforts to force, what they [the company] called force, someone to join a union. At Brier Hill, we were at an aggressive place to work. We believed in the union shop. Our president, Danny Thomas, he had come from the war and come up the president of the whole local, and he was very vociferous in his attacks on any body that didn't want to join the union. "Why should you share the benefits and not want to pay the costs," so to speak. That was drilled into our minds. We were in the union and everything. Some of us were active and some of us were not very active, and some of us were just getting started with it. By our department being one that was constantly in the spotlight with walk-outs and other kinds of things like that, he [Thomas] was able to rise up quite a bit because he was able to come in our the department and settle a lot of disputes. The nature of the disputes were sometimes very different from what they were in other departments because of the way we saw things in our department. Union shop was a very big thing, it was something we all wanted. I can't say everybody in the Youngstown Sheet & Tube wanted it, because you're always going to have somebody who doesn't want something. They felt maybe it was an enfringemnet on some of their rights.

It came down to near the spring of 1952 when the contract was running out and there was no agreement on the union shop. The president of all the steel workers was Phil Murray, and the President of the United States was Harry Truman. By most steel workers being Democrats and the President of the United States being Democrat, President Truman believed in certain things that the unions believed in. He felt it was the right of steel workers to have certain benefits and gains because the companies were making huge profits, and they didn't want to share the profits very equitably.

The strike of the steel workers was impending. By being at the ending of the Korean War, the President of the United States was talking about seizing the steel industry. That was something that was spectacular. It had never happened before.

R: What did the workers think about that statement?

M: The workers were all for it because they felt if the President of the United States was on their side and we already thought that our position was correct, that just gave us a tremendous boost in confidence. Sure, we'll work for the government because we felt safe. So, possibly the first week of April, the government did seize the mill. We went to work under the government. We worked for a short period of time under the government. The companies protested. They were adamant in their belief that the president had no right to seize their property. They went to court, and the decision hadn't come down . . . we were on picket duty and 25,000 people were out then, approximately 40,000 in the next 24 hours. They tapped a lot of blast furnaces and banked open hearths. The picket lines were set up about April 8, 1952. There were charges back and forth between the company and the steel workers, but they [the company] thought the men would be back to work pretty soon. They were happy thinking that the seizure would be over-turned in the courts.

They actually did. They went back to work about April 9 or 10. We were only out a few days and then we went back to work. Then, they were waiting for the judge's decision. In the meantime, there were different moves being made locally. James Griffin, who was the district director of the steel workers in the district here, was rallying the city, trying to get the whole city behind the steel workers' cause. He got the city council, Youngstown City Council, to approve the seizure of the mills. But some of the other cities were rather reluctant. I think the mayor of Campbell agreed with the seizure, but the city council of Campbell, they more or less put it on hold because they weren't too sure, and I guess they didn't want to go too much out on a limb. You had maybe a few of the steel company stock holders who were somewhat in the union's corner. They more or less agreed that the seizure should have been because they felt that there were huge profits being made by the steel companies and they figured that they [the companies] should share and that a union shop wasn't all that bad. But, the majority of the company and the newspapers and the news were all bitterly against any seizure.

So that was the jockeying back and forth. Some of it was propogandized both ways. There was a letter that

was written by a company to its employees stating their position. The unions, at all times, were trying to maintain their confidence and their position. We went back and forth like that until about the end of the month. Federal judge, David Pine, ruled that the steel seizure was illegal. As soon as that decision came down--the men were working at this time when he ruled this way--the steel employees walked out and shut the place down.

Some men figured it would be a long strike and some of them figured it wouldn't be too long, they figured the government would do this, that, and the other. There was conjecture all the way around. Services in the city, bus services--the steel strike affected just about everything.

R: What was the public mood?

M: In this area, most of the public mood was favorable to the union. Even if they ruled that the steel seizure was illegal, the strikers position was favorable to the community. The steel strikers are buying the clothing, the jewelry, the cars, and everything like that. The merchants had to put on a good face because that's where their livelihood was coming from, too.

This was more or less a gray area. When Truman seized the mills, he believed he had the correct attitude as to what he was doing. Evidently his political advisors advised him to do that, along with, possibly, our [union] president Phil Murray. He probably had some discussions as to what could be done and how things could be done. The steel companies said that this was unconstitutional, and they thought they had the Constitution on their side. The federal judge ruled against Truman. In a side issue, he [Truman] wrote a letter to a farmer, I think, in Pennsylvania stating that although he believed sincerely that he had the right to do what he did, to seize the steel mills, because of the war effort, he would abide by the Constitution. There was a limit to his power under the Constitution. So there was a dilemma right there.

The steel strike was called off after a few days, because Harry Truman called Phillip Murray and the steel chiefs to Washington to have a meeting. They were going to see if they could sit down, all of those guys right there, and hash it out. They sat down there and talked and they decided that they were going to resume, the mills were going to resume. The men were going to be notified as to when they would possibly come back to work. So that's what they did along that time.

But there were editorials in the papers that the government was going to make demands on the Supreme Court, and that the Supreme Court must grant the government the power to raise wages. That's what the Department of Justice actually told the Supreme Court at this time.

R: The name of the case was Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company vs. Sawyer, right?

M: Yeah. Then the Supreme Court got the case and, they had to deliberate. As the steel men went back to work, the charges and the counter-charges in the press and other places were that the union shop was the stumbling block that broke down the steel discussions. But the union contended that the union shop was not the only issue that was holding up a settlement in these negotiations. So, we kept on working under these conditions and hoping that a settlement would come shortly.

There were some side issues that were comical in a way. They were serious and criminal, because there was a "gray market" in steel back in those times. You could call it a black market, too, to a certain extent. A couple fellows were caught dealing in this "gray market." They were apprehended, brought to court, tried, and found guilty. They were given certain conditions that they return all the money that they made from these deals, so they were able to get out of it. I don't think those fellows wanted to do that anymore.
[Laughter]

Some time before then, I think Harry Truman had sent a letter to Congress saying that they may, more or less . . . evidently they were thinking there was a loophole in the law that forbid him from taking the mills over. Congress could close this loophole, I guess, the way he framed his letter to them, so he could legitimately take over the mills.

The Supreme Court ruled the seizure was illegal. So automatically, 55,000 men in the mills left and went on strike. There were pickets up everywhere. Then the pickets got an order from Phillip Murray, and there was going to be a parlay between U.S. Steel, which was the major company. Whatever U.S. Steel did, all the other companies fell in line behind that, because U.S. Steel was the largest and they set the tone for everybody else. So, there was going to be a parlay between U.S. Steel and Phillip Murray of the union. Then the strike was, more or less, called off. The men went back to work.

They actually went back to work and then they went back on strike again. Then later on, they had another

meeting after they found out about certain things, because U.S. Steel and Murray were going to get together.

R: What was it like on the picket lines? Did you get harassed by the management or anything like that? Did you argue back and forth?

M: No. We didn't get harassed too much by management, not at Brier Hill. Now, at some other mills, there may have been a difference. The whole steel movement in this Youngstown area was pretty strong, so they weren't going to stand for any harassment. But one big problem was management was having so called "supervisors" inside the mill. I think U.S. Steel had quite a few, and U.S. Steel said that the picketers were holding their management as hostages inside. That created a certain amount of tension. They were in there doing certain duties and jobs that the steel workers were supposed [to do]. They were saying, at first, that they were just in there to try to protect the equipment. They had quite a few management people inside the mill at the time. The unions did not like that.

Since there were quite a few defense orders in this area--all these mills had them--many of them were already prepared to be delivered, but couldn't deliver them because of the strike. There was, more or less, a gentleman's agreement to ship some of this defense material to the rightful customers. So, they permitted a certain amount of that material to go out so long, I think, as union people were in the mill to see that everything went according to the agreement. So, a few union people were permitted inside. You had to have identification to go in and out, because we weren't letting anybody else go in there but union people or somebody that was duly authorized to go in and out.

I think around that time, too, some of the schools around here--Rayen or some place like that--they had some steel that they needed for some construction. They were doing repairs at their schools, and the union permitted that to go through.

There was a great deal of controversy as to why Truman didn't invoke the Taft-Hartley.

R: What was the Taft-Hartley Act basically?

M: It was, more or less, a law by which you weren't permitted to strike. You had to have a certain vote to strike. The union did not like the Taft-Hartley law. Most of the times, the older employees would want to stay in the mill, would vote against the strike, and the younger people would vote for a strike. So, you'd

have a split, and the unions didn't appreciate the Taft-Hartley because it took away what we felt was our basic right to grieve in any way that we felt necessary--legitimately.

Harry Truman would not invoke the Taft-Hartley law because he felt it was a concerted effort by the steel companies to trump up this whole thing and force him to use the Taft-Hartley law. So, he evaded the Taft-Hartley altogether.

Some of the steel companies were holding schools for their salaried people to keep them together. In the meantime, the strike was beginning to hurt the average person. Welfare, then, became a very important thing. The unemployment rate was soaring here and every place else. The relief and welfare rolls began to surge because people were out of work and out of their savings and out of their benefits. The city of Youngstown and other cities, they began to cut back services because they weren't getting the revenue they usually got because of the strike. The county commissioners were ready to float bonds to help out the relief effort. A lot of the smaller places were cutting back--fabricating plants and things like that--to three days a week. Commercial Shearing and [Powell] Press Steel were cutting back. A lot of city services and things that they were planning to do, they had to cut back.

The railroad strike was about that time. They were on strike, too. They didn't care too much for the steel seizure, but they were backing the steel workers. They were on strike, too. Our President, Danny Thomas of Local Union 1462, made comments on the news and in the newspapers about the newspaper people saying that the union shop was the only issue in this whole strike. The union shop was one of the major issues, and the dues check off. But the wages and some of the other issues were some of the things, too, that had to be settled. The district director, he was in on this whole issue, too, all the time. He kept up the morale of the people. He kept watch on all of the strike issues and how they should be handled with each steel company. There was a myriad of issues and problems that you had to watch day and night because we'd make an agreement now, and somebody would break it in an hour or two. There was always a potential for something to get out of hand.

Like I said, the welfare offices were jammed. This is moving along into about the sixth month, in June, July. The smaller places, they were hurting. I think they were about ready to settle up, make a deal. Around the end of the sixth month, there was an agreement with the

Pittsburgh Steel Company. They broke from the Big Eight or Big Nine--whatever they were at the time--and made an agreement. That was the first break in the steel line-up. Then, some more smaller companies wanted to do the same thing. They just couldn't hold out as long as U.S. Steel, Sheet & Tube, and companies like that. They broke away and made some interim agreements. If the wage increase came up to, say, 15 cents in the final settlement, if you give us 12 and a half now, we'll settle for that now. Then, we'll raise it up to 15 after the settlement. The union went along with that because we were looking for any show of weakness among the companies. After that first one, there were several more small companies that started breaking away. They were figuring that the strike was getting close to termination. Copperweld, they broke away. Sharon Steel, they were ready to break away, then they changed their mind.

The steel pinch was felt by a lot of different people and a lot of different businesses, cities, all throughout this area and throughout the country where steel was a dominant force.

R: Do you think that Truman's argument was basically correct when he said that it would hurt the war effort in Korea, not having the steel produced? Even though ultimately, the Supreme Court said, " You can't do this," do you think in reality it did hurt the war?

M: Maybe he was looking at it in the long run. I know the Constitution hadn't taken in an issue like this, but I was half way thinking that it was possible for him to do this. I thought it would hurt the Korean Conflict--it wasn't actually a war the way they put it. It was a police action and it wasn't a war. He, I think, was going on the fact that it was, in all practicality, a war. Whatever had to be done in a war, it was a total effort--steel, everybody else was contributing. I guess that's what he based his argument. I would say yes, I fully agree with Truman. I know many others agreed with him, but they also felt that the Constitution had to be protected. They felt his action was correct as far as the seizure, but as far as the Constitution, it was illegal. We were caught between, more or less.

But the men held up real well under the stress and the strain. You were daily getting bombarded from both sides as to what you should do. The men did not break line. You stuck with the union. Even when the Supreme Court ruled against him [Truman] and when things changed a little bit more, the men said, "We will not go back to work until our union offices tell us what to do." That meant, Phil Murray, who was president of all

steel workers. It showed a deep commitment to what we had done. Everybody was proud of the fact that we stuck together like that.

Then, after awhile, things started to change and they were going to have some policy talks in Pittsburgh. The union sent three of our local presidents; Irving Ryan, president of Local 3072; Charles Colby, president of Local 1331; and Steve Temko, president of Local 1418. They all went to Pittsburgh to talk about the nature of the agreements that were near and the conditions under which we . . . it was more or less an explanation of what was going on and how it should be implemented. All that time, strikers were still walking the beats. We maintained our position pretty well.

The strike, then, was finally broken. Just before the strike was broken, the question of union shop was a big thing. The companies were saying that a person ought to have the right to withdraw after, say, 15 to 30 days. Our district director and all the rest of them said, "No." They would not back down from their original position. That's what they were going to do, that's the only way to get things settled. So, the companies finally had to give in.

The strike was settled, we got the union shop, and we got wage increases. This was around the seventh month, July 25, I believe. We started going back to work. There were a few little glitches here and there--a dispute over the ore miners, they were in a strike, and that kicked pickets up at some steel places. After a while, a day or two, they were calmed down. So, everybody started going back to work. The union shop was in there. Each plant then started to negotiate the local conditions. There was national conditions, and then there were local conditions. So, the union presidents started to negotiate the local conditions. Our president, Danny Thomas, was always very good at doing whatever he could to get the best local conditions as he possibly could. Mostly all of the fellows appreciated his way of negotiating, because he did a good job a lot of times. It kept Brier Hill in the forefront of all other local unions, because the way we carried out certain things.

Later on, after the strike, some of us saw that different things were happening to steel workers. [We saw that] alcohol was a problem. The company would fire you right away for alcohol. You'd see people with 20 or 30 years working in the mill . . . you never know what happens to make people become alcoholics or start to drink too much. Maybe it's financial, maybe it's personal, or whatever problem it is. They get into it and the next thing you know, they can't work. They're

off all the time, or if they do come to work, you can't have a man around who's stumbling all of the time. He could hurt himself or hurt you. We had alcoholic committees, but they weren't very effective. They tried to help, but the attitude of almost everybody was, "The heck with those guys, they should know better," and things like that. [They would say] "I can hold my drink, why can't he?"

I asked to be on the alcoholic committee because I knew we had some fellows who were pretty heavy drinkers in my department. I'd seen some other people in another department being fired. I felt there had to be some way to try to do something. I had a foreman, Ralph Wolfe, he used to be an assistant football coach at Youngstown University under Dike Beede, I think. Anyhow, he was my general foreman. One Sunday, I called him up and asked him why we couldn't try something new, we didn't know if it would work or not, but we could try something I'd been thinking about for awhile that might save some of the people that were alcoholics. He said, "Okay, what is it?" I told what my plan was, and he said, "Okay, we'll try it." One of the fellows that was in our department was drinking pretty heavy. We got a hold of him the next day and tried our plan out. To our amazement, it worked! [Laughter] We were shocked because we never knew that something like that could work. The next thing you knew, we were saving everybody. The company's attitude changed because we were helping people right on the job. Sometimes we would go to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] with them, but, by and large, we saved everybody. Not only did it help there, but it branched out in this whole area. I was out all over the area trying to save people.

Then this fellow over at General Motors, he used to work with us, Robert Thomas, he had some problems. When he went to General Motors he had some problems, but knowing how things happened with us, he's been able to help a lot of people at General Motors. He's still on a committee there. I just saw his picture in the paper about a week ago. He's still at it. Then, other people went to other places. It was something that had to be done. It was a simple thing that probably nobody had ever thought could work like that. It helped out a lot.

I helped a lot of people. There were no black plant guards in the mills. Everyone kept hollering about that, both black and white were saying the same thing. I went to the company and I told them. They asked me, "Do you want to be one?" I said, "No." [Laughter] I went back down to my department and I told some of the guys and they went down there and passed the test.

They were so good, they [the company] didn't want to take anybody else but guys out of the conditioning yard. I got white guys and black guys in from our department. Puerto Rican [guys], too. They went down and got on as plant protection people. Later on, they said you can't discriminate against anybody so I went down and talked to them again, and got women on it.

R: Were you pretty shocked when in 1977, I think it was, when they closed the mills? Did you have any foresight? Did you think that would happen?

M: Just a wee bit. To a certain extent. I was a union officer all the time and sometimes I would meet up with some of the top management. I had some ideas before about certain things. I would talk with them, maybe call them up and talk with the top general manager of Youngstown Sheet & Tube. And after awhile, we became friendly. He liked my ideas on certain things so there were certain times. . . . The people in my department, the conditioning yard, have been having a banquet each and every year for the past 21 years out in Canfield, at the Skylark restaurant. We would invite some of these top management people and some of them would come. They would enjoy themselves because it was something different.

One of the people who would come was Ronny Towns. He was the district manager of Youngstown Sheet & Tube. He bought a car at Lincoln Mercury and so did I, so sometimes we would meet there while we were having our cars checked out. This one time he was there and he was telling me that he was supposed to go to New Orleans--this is when Lykes still had the place, before they shut it down--to have a meeting with the top officials and what some of the things that he was going to propose [were]. They were good proposals. He said, "I'll let you know how I made out after I get back." He went down there and had the meeting and came back, and I didn't hear anything from him. I happened to call him for something else and I said, "What about all these proposals that you were talking about?" He said, "Bob, those people down there have all together different plans. I don't think this place is going to be here for long." I was shocked. I never trusted Lykes in the first place, because I had made proposals to our top union people to see if they could protect our place. They ignored it because they felt that nothing like that could ever happen. But I never believed that a small company like Lykes . . . Youngstown Sheet & Tube had \$190 million in escrow, in an account. That was before Lykes came in.

Lykes was a powerful ship building place and were able to get hold of \$190 million and were able to make a

super shipping company. I figured they knew how to wheel and deal and they put their people in the right position after they acquired they company, got the money, sold it off, and went on back to New Orleans. I had that one inkling that something was going to happen. I mentioned it to some of our people, but nobody believed that they were going to close the place down. I never trusted them, and I had made several proposals to Chicago. I became so adamant when they were ignored, I insisted to our president at that time go to Chicago and see the chief negotiator. He went down there, but this guy would not listen. He ignored it. [The] Chicago part of Youngstown Sheet & Tube was a little bit more modern, and they figured, "Let 'em. If they want to close it down, close down Youngstown, it'll make it better for Chicago." That's the way they thought.

R: One last question. What do you think the future of labor is in this country? And also, the economy and that type of thing.

M: I think the future of labor is changing. I think that the steel industry, and all other heavy industry are going to revitalize. It's going to be a slow uphill pace for it. It may not happen all at once. There'll be a change in the competitiveness of the whole steel industry, because they are competing with foreign interests. [They will] just have to become more competitive. I think if they become more competitive, take a page from some of these foreign competitors, and do unto them as they do unto us, we'll be all right. I think the nature of consumer jobs will be such. As soon as the people become more accustomed to what they're doing, they'll become unionized, too. Because, to me, management sometimes makes some rather silly mistakes. They used to do it all the time and they still do it. They may get a good person that works for them, then he'll want to pile more and more work on him. Sooner or later, that person is going to resent it. Then he'll tell other people, and they'll see and the next thing you know, they're going to have a union. Management does it all the time. I see so much of it. You see the McDonald's, the Burger King, this store, that store. You hear the people that work, and those people talk. I know what's going to happen. As soon as everybody gets accustomed to it, a consumer economy, you're going to have unions come back.

R: Thank you very much.

M: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW