

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Steel Strike Project

1937 "Little Steel" Strike

O. H. 222

FRED A. FORTUNATO

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

January 6, 1983

FRED A. FORTUNATO

Fred Fortunato is 67 years of age and a graduate of East High School. He was born and raised in Youngstown; and is active with several senior groups and especially the retired local members of 1331 steelworkers.

His special contribution is his report on the 1937 strike. He was an eyewitness to some of the events which took place during the strike on the evening of June 19, 1937. He later was present during the interview of the picket line participants, where officials were taking testimony on the deaths of two people killed during the strike.

Mr. Fortunato also mentioned a young union official, Attorney Arthur Goldberg. He asserted that Attorney Goldberg was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Johnson.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRED A. FORTUNATO

INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy

SUBJECT: 1937 "Little Steel" Strike, Unionism

DATE: January 6, 1983

B: This is Philip Bracy for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program and today is January 6, 1983. I'm talking today with Mr. Fred Fortunato about unionism and specifically about the 1937 "Little Steel" Strike here in Youngstown.

First of all, Mr. Fortunato, could you please give me some background material about yourself, where you grew up and so forth?

F: I was born and raised in the city of Youngstown. I went to school at East High School. I went to work for the Republic Steel Corporation in 1936. I've lived here all my life.

B: Was your father a steelworker also?

F: Yes, my dad worked for United States Steel and my stepdad worked for the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. My dad, who worked for the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, was involved in the 1937 Steel Strike along with us due to the fact that he was a steelworker and he had to be shut out like anybody else.

B: You attended schools in Youngstown?

F: Yes.

B: What schools did you attend?

F: I went to Roosevelt School then East High School.

B: One of the most often diverted questions I suppose is: Why was there a need for a union in the first place?

F: I look at it that the need for the union was due to the fact that there were people being denied some of the rights and knowledge of doing jobs that they were qualified to do. And due to the fact that it was like a family concern--brothers and sisters and uncles and that would get the better jobs and all the others would take what was left over; labor gang and so on. And they would deny the rights of any individual that had a knowledge of doing the job--deny their right to do it. This is the way that it came about and that your labor organizations came in.

And another thing is that people that belonged to the union and all that, wanted to organize a union. They felt that that was their right to do things that they thought was right and not having them being denied it.

B: Someone today, a younger person, would probably say, "Well, didn't you have seniority rights in those days?"

F: Oh no, Phil, there were no seniority rights. They had a union in there that was called a company union. They had representatives there that if you had any gripes or grievances, you would bring it to them and it never did materialize into your favor, whichever it may be. They just bought it due to the fact that they worked for the company and they had to take a position; they had to be either with the company or they weren't. So that was another sore eye because of the way things were handled.

If I had a grievance--let's say that I went to work this morning and this job here was a job paying two cents an hour higher than this other job and I knew this job--I didn't get it due to the fact of the seniority. I had more seniority than the individual that had got the job for that day or two, but I didn't get it. And I went to the representative and I would say, "Well, I think I should have had that job." He would say, "Well, we'll see what we can do about it." It never did come about, see? That created a little bitterness into the people. People running around people. Like the incident I just gave you there. If you had the knowledge, you didn't have the opportunity to show you had the knowledge.

So, when the union came about and the seniority clause came into the picture, it first said that you must be

physically fit, able, and have the ability to do the job. This is the way it goes still today--they don't run people around people due to the fact that you have seniority. You must have the knowledge and be physically fit and capable of doing the work. They just don't put you in there because they say, "Phil, you've got twenty years of service and Fred you've got five." Phil, you're going to go and do this job." And knowing that you can't do it, due to the fact that you've got the seniority, you're going to take the job anyways and deny this other individual from having it. So, a lot of that went on too. So this has been stopped.

B: What were the grievance steps under the company union? You went to the representative and . . .

R: That's all. That's all.

B: Then they talked to the supervisors?

F: They went over and talked to the supervisors, whichever it may be. You were never present with the interviews or nothing. And nine times out of ten, I doubt if they even brought it up to the superintendent; they just threw it away. That's the way I felt. That was my opinion because there was nothing done.

B: If, for instance, there was a slow-down because of a recession or something, how was internal pay, like pay raises and so forth, how was all that handled?

F: I don't remember a pay raise until after they started organizing the union. I never did remember a pay raise. I started there, in the Republic Steel, April 14, 1936, and I started to work at number four butt weld furnace. There I think I was making \$3.76 a day. Okay? The people on the shipment floor were making \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day more. Well naturally, everybody wanted to get these jobs. So, I went from the furnace floor to the shipment floor and was fortunate to get the job there. And I went to work there and I stayed there then until I retired. I put 42 years into Republic Steel. I stayed there until I retired and that paid a little better money and there was better provisions. But there, was no raises that I can recall until they started going with the steel strike and then they granted them a five cent raise. So, that's the only raise I ever remember.

B: What I was getting at was that some people I've talked to have said that if there was a skilled worker like

the engineers or somebody wanted a raise, what they would do was cut the pay of the laborers or somebody else to give them that raise. Is that true?

F: I've never heard of that, Phil, to tell you the truth. I've never heard of that.

B: What were the working conditions like prior to the union?

F: When the unions got organized and got into these steel plants, then with their knowledge of how people should be treated that is when it came about the working conditions improved 7.

They had the workman's compensation at that time--the company pays into it--but when an individual got hurt or anything, he would draw a very little amount of money. The working conditions were bad too because they never cleaned up the area; they just let it go. When you got hurt; you got hurt. And they had dispensaries there.

When the unions came in about then, they had the safety programs and everything and management had to make the place a safe place for an individual to work. What the unions believed in is that if you, Phil or Fred, went to work today for Republic Steel or Sheet and Tube or U S Steel; that if you, Fred or Phil, went into this plant this day with all of your limbs in good working order, this is the way we want you to come back out of that plant--with all your limbs and everything in good working order. And if you should be successful to retire, good. And this is one of the main plights that the unions had. See?

B: You mentioned that the companies, prior to the union, had medical staffs. First of all, how qualified were these people? Did you ever get hurt so you had to go? Maybe I should backup a bit. Were you ever injured, even slightly, so you had to go see any of these people? I mean, I was trying to get at their qualifications.

F: Yes, they had a good medical staff. They had good doctors. For the time that I was there, the only doctor that I can remember, from 1936 until such a time later, was Dr. Buchanan. Dr. Buchanan was a very fine doctor. He was a surgeon and all. They had a good medical staff as far as that. They took care of the workers the best they could.

B: What about workman's compensation? If someone was

injured in the plant, what compensation did he get in those days?

F: I really couldn't tell you, Phil, because I really didn't know how much they would get. I know one thing, it would be very, very small, about ten or twelve dollars. To tell you the truth, I just really don't know.

B: If somebody was killed on the job, do you know if there was compensation to the family?

F: There was some. The state law stated at that time-- I don't know--that there was some compensation, but it isn't as much as it is today because then these things would come about in the improvement from organized labor. In other words, a lot of people in this country, and even in the city of Youngstown--big business and little business and the small individual--think that labor people are a bunch of hoodlums and labor people are radicals. No, this is not so. The labor people are well-educated and sophisticated, the same as anybody else. Only thing is that we are bringing to the public all the knowledge to let them know that things are going on that shouldn't go on, that they should be treated the same as everybody else and they want their fair share of the product or whichever it may be.

B: How did you get your first job in the mill? Was your father responsible for that or . . .

F: No. I had to go down to Republic myself. They used to have a lot of that--that the uncles would refer them to the employment office and they would get jobs and cousins and so on and so forth and there was like a clique. And you go down there and you would lie. If the guy just liked the way you talked or things like that . . .

But I'll never forget the day that I went to get the job. I was talking about it last night up at the church with a couple of individuals; I had a meeting up there. Sam Pipino and I were talking about old times and it came about how we got jobs and how they got jobs and everything else.

I went down to Republic Steel on April 13, 1936 and applied for a job. At that time, the employment manager's name was Mr. Rose. And I was somehow thinking he was a good guy, but you know how a young fellow is: He figures he is just an old crab, see? So, he looked

at me out through the window and said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want a job, Mr. Rose." He said, "You look like you're too small for a job." I said, "You don't have a job in the Republic Steel that can kill me or hurt me. I can do any job this mill has got." And I'll never forget his remark. His answer was, "You're one of them cocky little kids, ain't you?" I said, "No. I'm just telling you the truth. I'm just one of them rough and tough kids." He said, "You've got yourself a job." He told me to go and get examined and all. Then he said, "You go to work tomorrow or tomorrow night, or tonight." I actually started work the same day on the 11 o'clock to 7 o'clock turn. That was on the 13th which went through the 14th. I put in a bad night, but I survived. I thank the Good Lord that I put 42 years in there and retired with 42 years of service.

- B: So, when the 1937 Strike started, you had been there approximately a year?
- F: Yes, just about a year.
- B: What was the reason for the strike? Why did the people go out on strike?
- F: Well, we wanted to have the union as a bargaining agent for us. We wanted organized labor; and management resented it and the steel strike came about, and that's it.
- B: What local did you belong to?
- F: I belonged to 1331 down on Poland Avenue.
- B: And you were rank and file. You were not an officer in the union?
- F: No, no. I was rank and file. Yes, I was a member, a dues-paying member.
- B: The individual who seems to be most responsible as far as management, I suppose, would be Tom Girdler.
- F: Yes, he was the Chairman of the Board. What he said went. The Chairman of the Board, he has all the say.
- B: You related a remark that he made about before there would be a union. Could you elaborate on that? Could

you tell me what he said?

F: Well, he said that he believed then that before he would sign a labor agreement with a labor organization, that he would go back down to the farm and plant potatoes. So then we took that up from there and made the slogan: "Let's Send Tom Girdler Back to the Farm". And this is what happened: We sent him back to the farm.

B: How did you first learn about the strike? Was there a mass meeting or something?

F: No, we were organized on the q. t. basis, getting people to sign cards and things like this. And then we presented them to the company. The union presented them to the company and said that they wished to have this, the CIO, as their bargaining agent. The company resented this. This is the way the strike came about.

The union and the workers set a date--I forget just what date it was that they went on strike--but they had set a date and went through the bargaining and this and that and everything else and they said that as of this date, if the company didn't give us a recognition of a contract, then we would have the right to go on strike. So, this is what we did because the company wouldn't do it.

Then the company union had their people come back in the plant again and it started playing a big role. They were going from department to department and telling them, "Now, don't go during the night and vote for that strike because you're going to be losing your jobs." And this is another thing that the people resented in the plant at that time. So, they said, "No, we weren't going to do that." So they turned around and went against their orders and went out.

The steel strike, as I can recall real well, it started in the afternoon shift. It seems like everything fell when I was working. (Laughter) It happened to fall on the afternoon shift and there was myself, Joe Simonero, and a few others that were on the afternoon turn. And we went out. And from that day on we were closed out. This is the way the steel strike came and we had set up picket lines and didn't allow anyone to go into the plant. But naturally, you would have people sneaking in and they would do anything they wanted to do to get back into the plant to go to work.

But my understanding was that the company had a lot of

supplies in there, food supplies, they had cots, and they had everything for the scabs that wanted to work. They had a place for them to sleep. They had some places for them to eat and all that stuff. As far as change of clothes, I don't know. They weren't successful too much in doing that. But they did keep some. Some of the foremen stayed in and some labor people stayed in there too, because the ones that were caught in there, stayed in there. They didn't want to come back out. A lot of them had the fear that we were going to do them harm, but we weren't going to harm nobody.

Our theory and philosophy for the 1937 Steel Strike was: Don't create any violence, back up. If any violence occurs, let them do it, not us. And this is the way it came about. Then the riot started, came about.

Before the riot came, I was on the afternoon turn on Stop Five, Poland Avenue and we got a telephone call that the scabs were down at Rosenbaum's Store buying uniforms to go into the plant.

B: Where was Rosenbaum's store?

F: Rosenbaum's store was right on the corner; the third store up from Basin Street and East Federal. It's not there anymore, no.

B: Now, who called you? Do you recall?

F: I don't know. Somebody got a call down at Stop Five and said, "The scabs are down at Rosenbaum's Store getting uniforms to go into the plant."

So, four or five of us got in a car and we went down to Rosenbaum's store to interview--see what was going on. And I recall telling the men; I said, "Now look, no violence. Don't get angry. Let's go in and see what it's all about and then we can talk. Don't start any problems." So they all agreed. We walked into the store and right away they seen us and I asked one of the individuals what he was doing here. We talked back and forth and then we went outside. I told them. I said, "What are you going in there buying? Are you getting a uniform so you can go and scab in the Republic?" No, no they were saying, they were going to be deputized. So we marched them up Federal Street.

B: Okay, maybe I should back up.

F: Go ahead.

B: When you say you marched them up Federal Street . . .

F: We walked them up Federal Street.

B: Did you kindly persuade them to go or did they come voluntarily? (Laughter)

F: Well, when they seen there was four or five of us and then some more came about, then the best thing for them to do was to leave or fight. But we weren't going to fight. If they threw the first punch, then we would punch back to defend ourselves.

B: So, they just left with you then?

F: They just left with us and we turned around and walked them up the street and that was it.

On our way coming back to Basin Street to get my car, there was a little scuffle. They had a little scuffle, bumped shoulders and things like that there and a couple of punches were thrown that I understood, but I didn't throw any punches. So, coming back down to get to my car, the sheriff's red cattle truck--I call it a cattle truck, it was a big red pickup truck--was parked there. And one of the deputies said, "He's one of them. Grab him." So, they threw me in that truck, and then a car came in between the truck and the street, the traffic, so they weren't going to let me go to jail. Who they were I just don't recall right now.

B: Were these regular police people?

F: They were deputy sheriffs, yes.

B: They arbitrarily just decided that since you were involved with the strike, you were going to go to jail?

F: Yes, something like that there. So anyway, they threw me in there and took me to jail and this truck was going to stop them from taking me to jail. And naturally, when violence came, the sheriff said, If they don't move, just shoot them down. Hey, let's not have this.

B: Was Elser . . .

F: Sheriff Elser was the sheriff at the time.

B: Are you sure that he was saying this or that was an order that somebody was giving?

F: That was an order that somebody was giving. I don't know whether the sheriff said it or not, but that was just an order.

So anyway, I went to jail. I stayed there three days. Then they let me out.

B: Now, this was before the night of the shooting?

F: This was before the night of the shooting. This all leads over to the night of the shooting.

After I got out, after three days, I had to go to Squire Martin's court to get released and we had attorneys and all to defend us. This is when Forrest Cavalier, the honorable judge, was our attorney for the labor organization and he was just coming up and this is when he really made a name for himself and was wonderful. Cavalier is a smart man. I had a lot of respect for him.

So, we came out the day of the riot at Stop Five, the big fight at Stop Five. The day of that riot, it was lady's day on the picket line. We had done things real nice and the way it is supposed to be done--no violence and stuff and raising all kind of Cain. We wanted to do things in a good, ordinary fashion. Okay? So, we had lady's day at the picket line. They came down and there was no problem. They just came down and they sang songs and they marched up and down with their husbands and everything else.

I happened to be home. I don't know what I went home for, but I went home for something. I got a call and they said there's trouble at Stop Five. I used to live on the east side of Youngstown. I was coming over Center Street bridge and my eyes were starting to water because the air smelled awful. That hit around about dusk. So here we couldn't get down Poland Avenue, so we had to go all the way on around and come on down the hill. I was asking people what happened. They said that one of the women said something and one of the policemen resented it and pushed her and she resented it and slapped him. She said, you have no right to hit me. And I'm going to hit you because I'm going to defend myself. Right? So this is what she did--she defended herself and I guess he must have resented it.

That's where the fight started.

Then they say that they had all the police run underneath into the tunnel of Stop Five into the plant for protection. So, that's when the fight started. In order to block traffic of anybody getting hurt on Poland Avenue, they turned a bus around cross in the street.

B: When you say "they", the unions turned the bus?

F: No, people. I don't know whether they were all pickets or what, but they turned it over, just crosswise--didn't damage it. They upset the cruiser car across the street. In other words, to save innocent individuals from getting hurt in case anything did happen. . .

It got to be around evening time and they started shooting. And I was up on Powerdale Hill. And this is where we were at.

B: So, they weren't shooting when you first got there?

F: No, no, later on.

B: It was just tear gas?

F: Right. And they resented it. So then, naturally, some of the strikers must have went home and got some of their ammunition too.

We did find out that in the Republic Steel, whether they were city policemen or whether they were Republic Steel policemen, but in all the cases and everything that came about, that Republic Steel had high powered rifles in there. And they would be shooting from the building facing Poland Avenue. That would be the shipping department building. The first crane there, that would be number one crane, and they got up on top there. They got an opening. They opened it up and they could see right out there. They shoot a picket and another one. I can't recall what his name is. I just forget it.

But anyway, one individual got hit right by Mike Evan's gas station. He was there. And this other individual was behind a tank of the Sohio gas station across the street, knelt down there. And everytime they shot a flare, they got one of these guys. And this individual that was by that tank, there was no way that he could have got hit in the dark unless there was light and he got hit right by that tank. There was a few other

individuals that got some shotgun pellets and got taken to the hospital. But that was the only violence we had.

B: You were telling me that you were driving your car. Did you get out of your car? From what you were saying, you had to see some of that outside of your car. Did you park it some place?

F: Yes, I parked my car on Alexander and Powersway and walked down to Poland Avenue. You couldn't get to far down on Poland Avenue because there was a lot of traffic. But I saw the cruiser car there and I saw the bus over there. It was in good shape when we saw it. And the only thing we can figure out is the way the automobile got burned, it had to be a shot of a flare that was shot into that car. That's the only way. And they had proven that there was holes in the car. They wanted to blame it on the pickets, but we didn't do it.

B: When you got out of your car, there were people fleeing up past you?

F: Oh yes. They were running all over the place. Oh, just like cattle with no where to go because you were out in the open and they were under cover. They were shooting at you and you didn't have a chance. So they were running all over the place getting away and stuff. And there were the two individuals that got . . . They got killed. And that was it. But the others, there were some that got hurt, but not that bad.

B: As you were going down, besides these people running, what do you remember taking place around you at that particular time?

F: Phil, the only thing that I remember at that time was that I was just as scared as the others were. I was telling them not to get excited, just keep calm and move back--move back away from the thing and get in a shelter somewhere where they couldn't get hit and not to panic and run out there. And this is what we were trying to do, was to try to get them off of Poland Avenue all right. Then they were up on Powersdale Hill and trying to get behind these little buildings--they had houses there and everything else--trying to get behind there to see what was going on until they cleared up.

B: But you and your fellow unionists were trying to

just basically get people reassembled so they wouldn't be injured?

F: True, true. Right.

B: Besides high powered rifles, did you hear any kind of other weapons other than single shots?

F: No, that's all. They were all single shots and there was a lot of it. It sounded just like the Fourth of July. That's it there, right there.

B: Your basic effort after that was to get people up there. Did you go back down? Was there any reason why you would have gone back down and did you see anything else?

F: Oh yes. Naturally, I was as furious as everybody else. I wanted to see what damage was done and stuff, but then I was very careful going down, because I didn't trust anything. As I was going down, I would get along side of Mike Evan's gas station and all I could see right there was the cruiser car and the bus, nothing else on the street. Everything was all right. Then it got sort of quiet in the morning and the next day and stuff, we continued to do as we were doing.

But the policeman had no right to hit this woman or slap her, whatever was done. And if he was a man, he would have ignored the remark. Say a remark was made, if he was an individual who would have ignored it, there would be no problem, but he didn't. In other words, I honestly think that they agitated it so that trouble would occur and work in the management's favor. So they tried to destroy us another way. This is the thing that I believed in.

B: So you think it was basically just to discredit the whole strike?

F: Right. This is what I honestly believed. That's what had happened, and these people wouldn't have got hurt. There was money made. I don't know who made the money, but somebody made the money for doing all this here, because it was a city police that done this. I'm trying to remember his name. I forget. I just can't remember the policeman's name that was in charge of the police at that time down there at Poland Avenue. They had like the captain of the police force with them down there; they would be in charge of the crews.

But as far as the steel strike was concerned, labor did

not instigate the strike in any way, shape, or form. And it was done that way and I honestly believe that it was agitated from outside so the unions would not have an opportunity to organize and hurt them within some other way. But they were not successful.

But the things is, I honestly believe in labor organizations. They've got to have labor organizations. I firmly beleive that management, labor, and federal government are three big powers of the country. They control. If they could sit down like individuals and negotiate problems and solve them without having any hard feelings and work together as a team--preach what you're saying but practice it too--you'll have a lot better place to live and work in.

Conditions that exist today in this country in labor organizations and in management are created by management, not by labor, by management. Labor never has enough money to carry them over; never, because of the waiting period that eats you up. They're making money today. Yes I'll grant you, they're making money, but so is management making money. If management wasn't making the profit, they would close the door. That's the same as you running the grocery store. If you had the same five cans of beans on the shelf today, Phil, and you have the same five cans of beans on the shelf tomorrow, and you're not moving one, you're going to close it, right? It's the same identical thing with them.

They go around and they preach--this is management preaching--they go around and preach: We want to get along with labor; we want to get along with our people that work for us because they're the backbone of the company. But it isn't so. Even when I worked down there, when I worked in the plant, the foremen were forbidden to associate with the men on the outside. If you were a foreman and you and I were good friends, I couldn't come to see you any more. I would have to come and see you on a q. t. basis. And you talk about Communism. I can't understand that, Phil, believe me.

They say: Yes, we're going to do this, we're going to do it; but they don't practice it. They want labor to give all the time and labor, labor, labor. Labor has been giving and bending over backwards. Labor and the unions want this country to operate and operate good because they think there is no other country in the world like this one. Believe me, we have an interest in it,

but we don't want to be cut short.

B: Just to kind of clarify a couple points, I'm going to back you up to the strike. From the time that you were on Center Street Bridge and drove around to Poland Avenue, I believe you said, approximately how long would that take you?

F: Oh about fifteen minutes, something like that. You came up Center Street and you couldn't come down Poland Avenue so then right there there was a side street. You came right on down that side street and you came right on into Stop Five. It didn't take too long, about fifteen minutes.

B: You didn't see the origin of the . . .

F: No, I didn't see how the fight started or anything. I didn't see that. I was only saying what I was told.

B: What did you see when you were talking about when you had gone behind the gas station? Were there people from the union? Well I won't say the union because I don't know who these people were. But were there still people opposite the mill when you came down behind the gas station?

F: There was nobody on Poland Avenue at the time--nobody. When I came on back down again and everybody moved up the street and management was there, the ones that were on the opposite side that were doing the shooting were on management's side and we were on this side. That would be the south side and the other one would be the north side. We were on this side.

When I got down to the gas station, where I told you I went after the shooting was done to see what was happening and everything else, there was nobody on the street. And all the shots had come from the mill side because there was nobody on the street trying to shoot this way.

B: When you say there was nobody on the street shooting this way, you mean towards the mill?

F: Towards the mill or from the mill toward us on the street. It came up from high, that's all.

B: Did the shooting, after most of the people were evacuated or ran to the higher ground, did the shooting continue for a long time after that?

F: I'll say it did for about ten or fifteen minutes, Phil, at the most. I mean that's exaggerating because when something like that happens, you figure it's a long time. But I don't think it lasted too long because after these two individuals got hit . . . One got hit one time and another one got hit after that. And then later on, like I stated that every time a flare went off one of the individuals got hit. And that's when it came about. So naturally, you get mad and you start shooting back or whatever you're doing. Who was doing it, I don't know because I didn't actually see it.

B: The people that you saw shooting where the union people had been, were there a lot of those people? I mean, first I'm assuming there were people there shooting somewhat towards the mill on occasion.

F: I think so, yes.

B: Were there a lot of people down there?

F: Right where he got hit, there was about four or five individuals there.

B: At the gas station?

F: Yes. And that's Mike Evan's gas station. Then across the street was the Sohio gas station on the Poland Avenue side and there was a tank on this corner. There was about five or six over there too. They were out in the open. The same way, how these guys got hit is a mystery because when they shot that flare off one of them got it. This one got it then this other individual from Campbell--I forget his name--he got it.

B: Was that Bogovich or something like that?

F: I guess so. I just can't recall what his name was, yes.

B: I mean, I don't want to tell you because I wasn't there.

F: Right.

B: During the course of that strike and even prior to the events that took place, I think it was June 19, what was the general means of telling everybody what was going on during the strike? How did you get everybody together and tell them what was going on? Did they all congregate to one place?

F: They all congregated there where they had a picket line

at Stop Five and then there were people down there at the Center Street Bridge. And naturally, when you're on strike the word of mouth gets around. Because of curiosity people came down to see what it was and how the strike was progressing along. But there was nobody there to agitate or hecklers, nobody. Everybody was going in a nice peaceful manner.

B: One of the people that I talked to mentioned that usually about six o'clock or so people would gather and there was some kind of platform across from the tunnel or whatever you want to call it.

F: Yes.

B: Do you know who some of the speakers were? I mean, did you hear any of them?

F: Yes. There was one there by the name of Chabby. He was an organizer for the union and he used to come in and give talks about labor, about the things that we should do and why and things like this here, and to do things in a peaceful manner. He would say don't agitate or aggravate nobody. If they're going to aggravate you just ignore it. Keep it peaceful. And he said that we would win the strike. Then there was a few others that came and talked.

The United Mineworkers of America--John L. Lewis--financed the steelworker's strike and helped them. They gave us a million dollars to get it going. And I figure, between Phil Murray and John L. Lewis, they were real close friends. So then, this is when Phil Murray took over the labor organization in 1937 when they were getting this started. And he even loaned the United Steelworker organizers money to organize the union and people on their staff that knew that labor movement. The United Mineworkers were there all the time and they were together. So the only way to do it, you have well-qualified people to do the job. And this is what happened.

They knew what to do and we followed their instructions when they came down and they talked to us and told us at every meeting we had and before when it ended: No violence. And this is what we did.

B: Did John L. Lewis himself ever come into Youngstown?

F: No, no. Phil Murray came into Youngstown and Chabby and then they had a few others. And John Mayo was the District Director. He was in town and a few others.

That's all, see? And Huey Casella was a staff man and he was into the Union Hall down on Poland Avenue.

We took care of the pickets the best way we could. We formed a soup kitchen and things like that and fed them.

B: Where was that located?

F: That was located at the Romanian Hall on Poland Avenue down by Gibson Street. That's that old Romanian Hall over there. It's not there anymore now. And that was right there. But we made sure that nobody went hungry.

B: Who was responsible for operating the soup kitchen? The union you mentioned?

F: It wasn't a soup kitchen. That was just a phrase, but we had people who were giving food out for the pickets and the strikers. There was food so they could feed their families.

B: One of the places that seems to be linked to the labor organizations that has been mentioned quite a bit was Central Auditorium. Did you ever attend any meetings there?

F: Yes.

B: Can you recall what the purpose of the meeting was and so forth?

F: The purpose of the meetings that labor held was to inform the membership, the people, of what's transpiring and how they looked at it, and if the union was progressing in negotiations with the companies. They would hold these meetings and inform us. This is the way we would know what's going on and how things were going. The people were well-informed and everytime they got done with a meeting, they always stressed no violence. This thing stuck in the people's minds to have no violence and to have a peaceful strike and this is this.

B: What did Phil Murray look like?

F: He was a big fellow. I would say about six feet or better. But he was a well-educated man and well-versed on labor organizations which are things that the people needed. Phil was an individual who believed in no violence. He believed that you could do better and get

things done by talking across the table and by negotiating.

B: Was he a younger man or was he an older person?

F: I remember Phil Murray. At the time he was a young man. I attended a couple of conventions and I remember Phil Murray at that time as a grey-haired and well thought of man. Oh, I would say that Phil Murray was in his early fifties or something like that there, or much younger than that. I think Phil passed on when he was close to seventy.

B: I understand that, I think it was Republic, used to operate a recruitment station on Public Square where the Dollar Bank Building is now. Maybe it's the wrong company for that matter. I thought during the strike that the company was trying to recruit workers to go back to work even while the strike was on. Is that information correct?

F: To the best of my knowledge, Phil, I really don't know. And if it was, I forgot about it. It has been so long. There's a lot of things that you do remember and there's a lot of them that you don't remember. Like the incident of the riot and the fight that we had near Rosenbaum Store, that sort of stays with you all the time because you were into it. But as far as Republic Steel recruiting the people to go back to work and things like this, I've heard some remarks made about it, but I wouldn't verify it.

B: It was mentioned that sometime during the day, the nineteenth when the incident occurred, that there was an incident with a truck that was trying to get in that supposedly had tear gas and other materials on it. Do you remember anything about that at all?

F: The only thing I remember there, Phil, is that they did say that a truck came down to Stop Five, Poland Avenue, and tried to get into the plant. And whether it was a truck . . . It wasn't a truck; it was a closed van truck and nobody could see what was in it. The pickets stopped the truck from going into the plant. They felt that there was food going in there because they figured that it was time that those fellows in there didn't have anymore food. They had to do one of two things, either come out or starve. We'll put it that way, okay?

So that is the only thing I can remember.

But the truck driver didn't give them any arguments or anything else. He just backed the truck on out and away he went. That's that. There were no arguments there.

B: When you say "closed truck", did it look like a moving van, those kinds of trucks?

F: Yes, something like that.

B: How did the company recruit their police as far as security and so forth?

F: Well, they had their own police department. And naturally they had everybody, all the police that were available, come back into the plant and stay there. That was to protect the plant.

B: Was there an organization that management had, either from the company or nationally, that recruited scabs? In other words, where did they get these scabs? Were they local people or did they bring them in from . . .

F: Local people. They would try to get them to go into the plant--things like this here. That's the only thing I know of. But as far as bringing in outsiders, I never saw any outsiders come in. I never heard of any outsiders.

If an individual wanted to go back to work and protect his rights and job and things like that after two weeks or a week or so with no money coming in, then the individual was going to have to do one of two things. If he was married and had obligations, he might think he had to get into the plant. When he would get down there, he would find a lot of pickets and he would either change his mind and go back home or be one of the stubborn ones that didn't want to go back home. The stubborn ones only hurt themselves.

But of all the problems and trouble that occurred, labor did not start it. And I'm as sure of that as I am sitting right here. No, labor didn't start it.

B: When the strike took place, did the company just lock the gates or were the scabs or people who were trying to break the strike, allowed to come and go? You mentioned that people would not go in because of the picket line and so forth, but did the company actually, physically, close the tunnel or whatever? Or were they

open so that people could go in if they wanted to?

F: The tunnel on Poland Avenue at Stop Five was closed. That is where the railroad track goes across. That is why it is called a tunnel. That was the main gate for the people that worked in the Stop Five area. Then there was a gate up there on Center Street that would come down to balance out the stretch. They would come in through there so we had pickets at both ends of the Center Street Bridge, the south side and the north side of the bridge by the steps. If they were going to try to go down there, we would stop them there. They had another entrance at Stop Five where the pickets were. Nobody would get through that.

They would also try to come in through Cedar Street. They would go up the tracks all the way on down to the plant, going through the JoJo Scrap Yard at that time, and try to go in through that way.

Then there were individuals that would try to come in from off the east side and walk over the New York Central tracks and come right on down across the B&O tracks and into the Republic Steel. We had the area covered off pretty good so they couldn't get into the plant. We would explain to them what was happening. We would say if you're going in there, you're going to defeat the purpose that we believe in. And this is what happened.

But there was never a picket or anybody that would try to get into the plant that was abused. I know this for sure because we made sure that everybody that was on the line obeyed the laws; the rules and regulations that we set down.

B: So basically, whoever was on the picket line would ask them not to go in, but they wouldn't stop them if they could get into the plant?

F: Oh, yes, true. But if you or I we're going into that plant and we saw about ten or twelve people out there, well naturally, you and I are not going to go through the plant. But then if we got stubborn and said, "Well, we're going to go through there." And then we started throwing punches. Well naturally, if the picket gets hit once or twice, he is going to hit us back. He is going to protect himself.

And this is what we did. We made sure that they threw the first punch then we weren't responsible after that because it is human nature.

- B: Some people have said--and it wasn't said of that particular spot or location--that there were some communists involved in the strike. To your knowledge, were there any communists involved in the strike?
- F: Phil, truthfully speaking, I really couldn't say yes and I couldn't say no. I have some knowledge of labor organizations and how they come about. The radical organizations like Communists and Socialists and Trotskyites work best when there is a lot of interruption. If there were communists there, they sure didn't create any problems.
- B: Most of the top union people, it seems, were either Irish or English or somewhere in that persuasion. How did they communicate with a mass of people who were either Italian or Slovak or whatever? When they had these rallies, did they have translators for the speakers or was there a group in the union who were bilingual that translated all this?
- F: Everybody that was there from the foreign element knew what the individual speakers were talking about. The speakers had some knowledge of English. And the individuals that came in and talked, they didn't use these big, long, ten-cent words. They talked ordinary labor talk because they were speaking to labor people and none of the speakers were highly educated, they were the same as everybody else. And they would speak to them in the language they knew. We had Italians, Poles; Polish people, and Slovaks. And they would come and they would talk in English. And the majority of the people understood what they were talking about.
- B: The reason I asked that was I was given to understand that a lot of the mills were specifically one ethnic group to another. If you were of one ethnic background, then you would work in certain areas of the mill. Is that information correct? For instance, if you were Italian, did you work in certain mills in different plants?
- F: No, they had all nationalities working all over. They didn't have any problems.

When they would promote an individual, they would be promoted like I stated before. Selected people like nephews, uncles, or cousins to the foreman or general foreman would be promoted. These individuals would get good jobs. And let's put it this way, the foreign element or the "hunkie", as they would classify them

at that time--we are all "hunkies" as far as that goes--they would get what was left over.

I still can remember to this day after the strike was over and I went back to work again. I didn't go back to work until February 13, 1940. I was locked out from 1937 until 1940. And my case, I was one of the individuals that the company did not want back. Between negotiations and between lawsuits and court rulings, why, the company had to put me back to work.

On April 18, 1938 the Third Circuit Court of Appeals-- I think it was the Third Circuit Court of Appeals or the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals--rendered a decision against the Republic Steel Corporation and all the little steel people to call all individuals back to work with top seniority, with their seniority back. So Republic called individuals back, but they didn't call me back. They still held me out.

When the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the decision of the Circuit Court of Appeals and said that they must call all of them back and reinstate them and give them their seniority and must pay them back money from the time that they were out, is when I got back to work again. The Union wanted them to get back money from 1937. Then through negotiations and all those million different decisions, they came to an agreement that anybody that got called back to work after October 18, 1938 would be eligible for back money. I happened to be one of the individuals that got back to work on February 13, 1940--three years. I got all the money that I was entitled to, which was about close to eighteen months. I was supposed to go back with full seniority and no discrimination against me in any way shape, or form, and I was recognized the same as I was when I first got hired into the plant.

B: Most of the people that were singled out were either union leaders or activists of some sort. Why didn't they want you to come back?

F: Well, they figured that I was one of the union agitators or something. (Laughter)

Yes, the ones that they didn't want back were organizers and people that were affiliated with the labor organization. They figured if they kept these individuals out, then they could weaken the chain. But the rulings were rendered in our favor, and we got back to work.

And even after I got back, the plant was still bitter towards its people.

B: Three years later?

F: Yes, they were still bitter towards these people. It wasn't a good relationship. They just showed that there was a relationship, but they still had that hate. They might say, "Hey, Fred Fortunato was an agitator, or John Brown was an agitator or Jimmy there is an agitator. You watch these guys. If you can get anything on them, go ahead."

But they failed to realize, the fact is, that if they were going to fire me or discipline me, they would have to have a just cause, and bring it in front of an arbitrator and between the labor organization, and the arbitrator and the attorneys on both sides. They would have to show a just cause to get rid of me. And they couldn't do it. They were waiting for Fred Fortunato to make a mistake, a big mistake that was going to hurt the company or something; then they would have a right to knock me out. But naturally, Fred Fortunato had to be on his toes and the rest of these individuals had to be on their toes at all times; until such a time when they lifted it and you could go ahead and do your job anyway you wanted. But you were watched and watched close. Don't let anybody tell you different there. These are the facts. They were watching you pretty close; and the company would deny some of this.

But I remember going back to work after 1938 or 1940. I went to work 21 turns a week to try to get a job. That was: 7:00 in the morning, 3:00 in the afternoon, and 11:00 to 7:00 at night. The foreman would come out and we would sit on the bench over there and he would say, "You, you and you go to work; you, you and you go to work. You, you and you go to work; and you, you and you go to work. The rest of you come back in the afternoon. I ain't got nothing for you." He hand picked people. These individuals were working five days a week. I, myself, and a few other individuals hadn't made a turn yet. And this is the beauty . . . And these are the facts. There was myself and three other individuals who hadn't worked a week, hadn't worked a day that week. So when it came to Saturday, well naturally, if you're single and you're young you figure: We haven't worked a turn yet, let's not go out Saturday night. We'll go out and have some fun, have a drink or two, and go out and have some fun. So that's what we did. But Sunday morning came; and

we went back to the plant to go to work. Right off the bat, the foreman came up and said, "Where were you last night? I could have used you." I said, "Well, we haven't worked all week so we decided that we were going to stay home." "Well, I ain't got nothing for you today," he said. So we came back again, nothing, same way.

Monday morning we were pretty huffed up then. We hadn't worked and these other individuals were making five days. These are some of the things that the public doesn't know that these companies used to do. So, Monday morning came and we had a little caucus amongst ourselves and decided if we didn't go to work that day, we were going to find out something. We turned around and we went out there Monday morning. The foreman put everybody to work and he said, "Now, you guys there have got a week off because you didn't come out to work." Well naturally, we got pretty huffed up and we knew what we were going to do. We told the foreman, "How could you give me a week off when I haven't even worked a day yet?" He said, "You got a week off." I said, "Now you answer the question. How can I get a week off when I haven't worked a day?" He said, "I don't have to answer your question." I said, "Okay." And he went away.

The other individuals and myself went down and saw the superintendent; walked into his office and we were storming pretty God darn mad. After all I was entitled to the same amount of work as this other individual. If you've got three days of work, give me three and give him three or give me two; give me something! So, we walked in and saw the superintendent. Our superintendents name was Allen. And his other buddy, Lawrence Hoskins, was the head of the shipping department of shipping and ordering. So Hoskins says to me, "What do you want, Fred?" I said, "I want to see Mr. Thompson." And he was sitting at the desk over there and he said, "What do you want to see me about?" I said, "We want to know one thing, Mr. Thompson. How can an individual get a week off who didn't work a day?" He looked surprised, shocked. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Just what I said, Mr. Thompson. Us individuals, right here--the other two didn't want to come in--us three haven't worked a day all week and the foreman gave us a week off." He said, "Now wait a minute." He couldn't believe this. So Mr. Hoskins says, "No, this can't be true." I said, "It is true. Now why should I lie to you?" And he asked the other two, Jimmy and Chuck, what

happened. He said, "No this can't be done." I said, "This is what happened. We went out 7:00 to 3:00 in the morning, 3:00 to 11:00, and 11:00 to 7:00. We went all week and didn't work so Saturday night we decided that we were going to go out and have a couple of drinks and have some fun. We're young. No problem in that, is there?" He said, "No." I said, "We didn't come out, but we came back out to work Sunday morning. And the foreman said he could have used us, but we weren't there."

He said, "I'll tell you what you do. You go to work right now. I'll call the boss and tell him to put you to work." We did. We went back down to the shanty. He had called him, I guess, because the foreman said, "What did you guys go down and see the superintendent for?" "Hey, that's the only place I could go," I said. I said, "You told me that I got a week off and I asked you how come, and you told me you didn't have time for the question. So I had to get an answer. I went to the superintendent and he gave me the answer. He said I could work." He said, "Therefore, you were playing pussy-foot with your friends." "I'm not here to make friends, I'm here to make a living," I said.

So, this is what happened.

See, Phil, everybody figures--and this is what I can't understand and I can't swallow it for the life of me-- that the union people and the labor organizations are a bunch of radicals and are a bunch of troublemakers. No, they're individuals that have been hurting so long that they want to get a piece of the pie; and they want a nice piece. They've got management's welfare at heart. Don't let anybody ever tell you any different, that they don't have management's welfare at heart.

If management had labor's welfare at heart as much as labor has management's welfare at heart, this would be one better country and there would be better steel mills and the whole entire world couldn't compete with it. And they still can't compete with it.

This is the way the things were running at that time. But thank God, they got a labor organization and they don't run this way anymore. They've got each individual as an individual and each one has a right to his opinions and his beliefs and there is nobody going to change it for him.

- B: How did you survive through this period from 1937 to 1940 when you weren't called back?
- F: Well it happened to be, Phil, that I was single and I was living with my mother and my dad. But it was hard and we went out and tried to seek work, working with contractors and different things like this, and pick up a few odd jobs here and there to try to keep the wolf away from the door. But that's the way we did it and that's all. We had to either get on welfare or what. But I was living with my mother and my father at that time. And my dad was still out on strike. He didn't get back to work until 1939 or something like that.
- B: Was the union able to help any of the families that were affected by that?
- F: Yes, they helped as much as they could help them and gave them food vouchers and things like that there. They made sure that nobody went real hungry. If they were down and out, they would take care of them. But then, a lot of individuals would go out and get jobs with different contractors and things like that there. But as far as I know, nobody ever went hungry during the steel strike. I know this for a fact.
- B: Were you black-listed during this period of time because it seems like some companies had lists of individuals who were either leaning towards the union or were union organizers?
- F: Well, by me not getting back right away to work, the only thing that I could figure at that time was that I was one of the individuals that was black-listed all over because I tried to get work in other steel plants and no, they wouldn't hire me. I tried to go to Sheet and Tube. I tried to go to Republic Steel after the strike was over and everybody was back to work and I wasn't working at Republic. No, they wouldn't hire me. This is when I figured that they had black-listed me right away. So, whether it was true or not, I don't know, but this was my opinion why I couldn't get hired when they were hiring them all over the place.
- B: I realize you weren't in the plant immediately following the 1937 Strike, but when did the plant hook back up then? When did the plant finally get union recognition in Republic Steel?
- F: The year after the steel strike when they got through negotiating all the cases and everything else.

And then the National Relations Board held an election into the plant. You had a right to vote whether you wanted a labor organization to represent you or if you wanted somebody else. The United Steelworkers of America at that time was the CIO. It won the election and the National Relations Board committed the ruling to the Republic Steel that these individuals, the workers here, wanted United Steelworkers of America, the CIO at that time, to represent them as their sole bargaining agent. And this is when the Republic Steel had to agree to it in all the steel plants of the Little Steel Strike.

B: And that was in 1938?

F: I think so, somewhere like that 1938 or 1939, or the latter part of 1937. But they recognized it all right. They did what they had to do according to the law, but they never practiced it.

B: Some people have suggested that one of the reasons that forced the election was the fact that a lot of the so-called little steel companies wanted . . . There was a buildup starting for the Second World War, evidently, that really swayed them as far as leaning towards unions because they would get orders that were building up in defense and so forth.

F: I really couldn't tell you truthfully about that, Phil, because I really don't know what management had in mind in those things. Whether that was true or not, they got their heads together. They all got themselves organized good, but they didn't want us to organize.

B: Do you know what happened to the people who served as company unionists after the election? In other words, were they just disbanded and that was the end of it?

F: Yes, they just did away with their titles. They did away with the company union representatives then. All of the individuals who were representatives were still on their jobs; they had their jobs.

B: You mentioned Forrest Cavalier was an attorney. He was a young person, I guess. Well, not new to the profession, but was fairly young in practice. You mentioned that a certain amount of notoriety came out. Was that because of the 1937 Strike that he handled, because of the case that he handled there? In other words, what brought Judge Cavalier to, well, presently, Judge Cavalier?

F: Like I said, he was an attorney and doing a good job, and naturally, labor figured that we were obligated to him for the job that he had done so well to represent the people that were out on strike that had convictions put against them and things like that. Naturally, every time Forrest Cavalier decided to run for office, why, he had labor's participation one hundred percent. He had labor's support, which he appreciated; no doubt he did. I still say that he was a fine judge. Ain't nobody going to tell me any different because I had a lot of confidence in the man and I still have a lot of confidence in him. Too bad he got old, but we all have to do that.

B: Were there other labor attorney's besides Judge Cavalier?

F: Oh yes, we had Lee Pressman for International. And under Lee Pressman, his understudy was Arthur Goldberg. And they were the attorneys that did all the negotiating during the 1937 Steel Strike and all that and all the negotiations and law suit cases of the Supreme Court and everything like this.

B: Arthur Goldberg, how old was he then? Was he young then?

F: He had to be a young man, yes, not too old.

B: Now was this the same one that President Johnson had?

F: As a Supreme Court Justice?

B: Yes.

F: Yes, yes. He was the legal staff of the United Steelworkers of America union at the time.

B: Was he active in Youngstown? I mean, was he here quite a bit during that particular time?

F: About two or three times. He would get all his information from the other attorneys and then they would pile it up together and then go from there. But he came to Youngstown a few times, yes.

B: But did he act as a defense council or was he just helping the union make its case for the National Labor Relations Board?

F: No, he was the defense council for the union, him and Lee Pressman.

B: But I mean, for instance, the Division of Labor--if you want to call it that--Judge Cavalier would handle the cases, but Attorney Goldberg would handle the cases for the NLRB. Or how was that?

F: The only thing that I can remember is that all the evidence that was gathered against, say, well let's take myself, okay? When I got picked up to go to jail, they charged me with inciting a riot and I forget what the other charge was. But anyway, naturally, I pleaded innocent to the facts and everything. Judge Cavalier was the attorney. He represented me there and got the decision and dropped the case. So then I came out and all the evidence was against me that the company held or whoever held it. They would, in turn, give it to Goldberg and Lee Pressman because Lee Pressman was the attorney. And he would keep this on file. When the other trials would come up, he would show the court that Republic Steel Corporation, let's say, didn't want to call Fred Fortunato back due to the fact of union activity and due to the fact that he was prosecuted and charged with these charges.

B: Because of the union activity?

F: Because of union activity, Republic Steel didn't want Fred Fortunato back. This is the way it went.

B: Now these charges were a result of the incident at Stop Five or that was the previous one where you were . . .

F: Those were charges made against me for the riot, the riot at Rosenbaum's store. During the big riot at Stop Five, nobody went to jail.

B: Okay.

F: It was on account of the riot at Rosenbaum's store, but I wouldn't call it a riot. I would just say it was a little misunderstanding I had. That's all it was because a riot would have busted up a lot of things.

B: There were two other questions I wanted to ask you related to the 1937 Strike. One was: Were just the vans used to supply the company? There was a recent article by George Rice about airplanes that were used at several plants. Were airplanes attempted or were they used to supply the plant?

F: Oh yes, they were used. Sure there were airplanes used.

They even used the railroad. That's as far as that goes. They were looking for stuff in railroad cars, refrigeration cars and airplanes--anyway they could drop them down, food and whatever they needed. Sure, they tried everything.

B: I mean did they use the planes at your particular plant? Did they have any place they could land them or did they try to supply them with food?

F: They could come on down into the plant real close and just drop the stuff right on down. We've seen airplanes time and time again flying across there, but whether they dropped anything or not, I don't know. But I do know that they tried to use trucks to get into the plant and they weren't successful. Then their last resort was to come in on railroad cars. When you're coming into the plant at Republic Steel, the B&O railroad comes into the Republic Steel Plant and it comes off the main line and goes right on down and comes into the siding of Republic. This is the way they did it. They could drop it off there. And on the other side of Poland Avenue, across the river, there is the New York Central system and the Erie system. The sidings are over there. They could drop them off there and bring the food in without having anybody hurting them and stuff like this because they could not get in there, because that was company property. We weren't allowed on the property and we weren't allowed on railroad property because then we would get picked up for trespassing. So we weren't allowed there. The best way we could protect our interest was to stay on this side of the tracks and stop anything from going in there.

B: Did it look like there were planes actually landing in the plant, like smaller planes; or did they just look like they were flying over?

F: There were smaller planes. Whether they were flying into the plant or not, I don't know. But they were flying kind of low. But this is the same thing that you were saying that you read in that article and I read the same thing. And I knew that they had airplanes, but whether they dropped anything, I don't know. But when it came out in the paper--they must have all the facts--this must be real, true stuff because they dropped some off in Warren.

B: They didn't identify whether they ever actually landed in Youngstown?

F: No.

B: Did you see any planes that looked similar to the ones that they had pictures of in the article?

F: To be truthful with you, Phil, I just can't remember.

B: Finally, after the event that took place that night when everything settled down, did you go home that night or did you go to the union office down the street? Or where did you go after all that took place?

F: After everything was over with, I stayed there all night long and I didn't go nowhere. Then on the way going home I stopped at the union hall and it was closed. Then they opened up and saw what was happening. We didn't know until we got everything that was going on. But we did know that there were two individuals that got killed. Then I went on home and I came back about five or six hours later, but everything was done and nobody was being harmed. The street was clear and everything else.

B: When you went to the union hall, there were people there. Do you recall who was down there?

F: No I don't, not at this time.

B: What was the basic activity? Were people just trying to find out what happened?

F: Yes, that's all. They were trying to find out what happened and who caused it and things like this here and we couldn't get any answer because we knew we didn't cause it. And to be truthful with them, we couldn't say, well, John did it or this one did it until we got the facts and found out just exactly what happened. And after we found out what happened, then we would let those people know that wanted to know.

B: Maybe it was just at random, but I'm assuming when you say that you were gathering information that they were bringing eye witnesses in and they were talking to whoever. Were they talking to Mr. White or yourself or other people? And how many people were there? That kind of thing. Like what was going on?

F: Well, there as a staff man, Hoey Scarcella. He would be at the union hall all the time and there would be some of these other officers. Tommy White would be there. I think people would ask him questions and he

couldn't answer them. And neither could I because I didn't know what to tell them. I couldn't say, well, this one started it or something. No, we wouldn't let them know until we found out the truth and everything else. Then when we found out that it was a misunderstanding and things, and this was the way it started, then that was it. And this is what we did. And we didn't condemn either side.

- B: What I was getting at was. How did they gather the information? Did they just pull in some of the people who were on the picket line or did the people that wandered over that way kind of just gravitate toward the office? In other words, who were the witnesses and how did they arrive at . . .
- F: The ones that were on the picket line at the time that the incident happened, the women and the men that were there and actually involved in this thing, these are the ones that testified. These are the ones that gave the information about exactly what transpired at the riot on Stop Five, Poland Avenue, and how it started. And the woman that was involved, whether she got slapped or whatever happened, she gave the story and a few men gave the story.
- B: But they all agreed on the result?
- F: It was all the same story from this woman to this man, to that woman to that man. They all gave the same story. They did not start any problems or have any arguments with the police or anything. Whatever happened, there was a misunderstanding and the cop didn't like it and he shoved the woman or did something and that is when all hell broke loose.
- B: Would you feel comfortable--I don't know the way you think--but would you mind telling me who the woman was?
- F: I really don't know, Phil, to tell you the truth. I really don't know.
- B: About how many witnesses were there from the picket line? How many people came in, roughly?
- F: About fifteen.
- B: And they were all the people that were actually on the picket line?

F: All of them on the picket line, they were all there.

B: What story did they tell you about how it actually started, and told everybody else of course?

F: The information that I got from the people that were telling me, Phill, was that they were walking up and down the sidewalk singing songs. Okay?

B: In front of the tunnel?

F: No, out on Poland Avenue. They weren't allowed on the tunnel because that was Republic Steel Property.

They were walking up and down Poland Avenue singing songs. There were ladies there at the picket line to get a little morale buildup. They were walking back and forth and singing songs and everything and the police were there. The police and the picketers were all talking. I saw that things were running real smooth, so I got in my car and I went home. And a few hours later . . .

B: Could you tell me what the eyewitnesses told either yourself or some of the other union people at the Republic office the night they opened fire?

F: They told me that they didn't start anything and that everything was peaceful. Whatever happened, it was a misunderstanding and one of the police shoved a woman and this was when it started. They all said the same thing, so naturally we had to believe all fifteen. All of the ten or fifteen people who were there came up with the same testimony, so therefore, it must have been true.

B: They claimed, then, how it started was that a policeman shoved a woman and then the woman, because she didn't like being shoved, pushed the policeman. And then what events took place until you got there? In other words, what did they see happening and how did the violence start and did the union attack the tunnel and that kind of thing? What were the events that followed this woman's incident with the policeman?

F: What was told to me, Phil, when I came back there, was that somebody had shoved a woman and she in turn and a few other individuals defended themselves against the police department. The city police ran in the tunnel of Republic Steel and went into the plant. There wasn't

anybody on the street then but they were defending themselves out of there. From there on in, that is when all the other problems started.

B: Did they say, after the police withdrew into the plant, when the shooting or tear gas started?

F: It started after that, right after that. They were protecting themselves; but they couldn't get down to the tunnel because there was a gate there that was closed. But all the police ran into the Republic Steel for protection and none of the policemen got hurt. None of them outside of that little shove or whatever occurred--that the policeman shoved the woman and then she and the others, in turn, went after him or something. If there were any punches punched or something or anybody got hit, I don't know. But I know one thing, they all ran into the gate and stayed there.

B: First of all, were there other people in the area that were union people? You mentioned, I think, that there were nightly gatherings to inform people about what was happening with the strike and then the union and so forth. Were there other people, either across the street or down the street or anyplace when this was going on--when the shoving took place?

F: Oh yes, there were a lot of people on Poland Avenue. Yes, there were a lot of people on Poland Avenue on the other side of the street. But all the pickets were on the Republic Steel side of the street. Naturally, the others were on strike, but they didn't want to make themselves seen so they would walk up and down Poland Avenue. But they were all walking down and there were no problems.

B: Did your union get support from other unions? I mean, were there other people who would appear, say, to speak or something in support of your strike?

F: They would have people come in from the United Mineworkers and give you encouragement so you wouldn't get disgusted or discouraged. They would say things like, It isn't as bad as a lot of people think it is, but we'll win if you stay together. They would come down and give talks and all.

B: So, to kind of set the stage, after the woman shoved the policeman, they withdrew, then the picket line moved across the street. Or did they stay where they were?

F: They stayed where they were for awhile and then they moved across the street when the shooting started. They started going up Powersdale Hill to get under cover. That is when the bus was turned over sideways and the cruiser cars were turned.

B: Now, when you say bus, was that public transportation?

F: City bus, yes.

B: Did the people say that from the plant tear gas came first, or did people just start shooting. In other words, how long was it from the time that the incident took place to whatever happened next, the shooting or the gassing or whatever?

F: They really didn't know what came out first. Whether the tear gas came out first and the shooting came with it, there was so much commotion that nobody could recall what came first. But there was tear gas shot there and other shots shot and everything else. Now whether they both were combined, nobody knows. And if anybody said, yes the tear gas came first, they would be lying. But I'm going to say to you that whatever came first, it seemed like both things came at one time. And whether it was the tear gas first or the shell first, I couldn't say either one.

B: So, the tear gas that you encountered probably was that immediate . . .

F: When it first started?

B: Yes. So when you first were pulling in, that's when it first started breaking loose?

F: Yes.

B: But you probably didn't know that?

F: Right.

B: After they took the testimony from these people--I don't want to sound rude--but when they took this information, did the union do anything with it? Did they file it with like NLRB or somebody? In other words, was there a written record, first, I guess I should ask you. Did somebody take notes or something? And second of all; was that information ever passed on to the National Labor Relations Board or some other organization--a follow-up committee?

F: All that information was gathered and it was submitted into the case of the United Steelworkers of America versus Republic Steel. The same thing with the National Labor Relations Board; when you build a case, you get all the evidence. This evidence was presented to both courts.

B: So there is some kind of record of the testimony of the individuals who were on the picket line or just the union side of it and/or the management's or whoever's side? For instance, if Jane and John Doe said, "This is what I heard," did they say, "This is what Jane and John Doe said?"

F: I really couldn't tell you, Phil, whether they still have the records or not. The only thing I know is they gathered all the information they could gather. They built the case and submitted it to both the courts. This is what happened and they rendered a decision. Now, whether they used each individual one, I don't know.

B: But I mean, at the headquarters, the night that that took place, were people taking down written statements from the people? In other words, did somebody from the union say, "This is what Jane and John Doe said?"

F: Yes, yes.

B: So there is some place--probably today still--a written record of what people had to say after the incident?

F: I really couldn't swear to it. But they took the information of what the people said and what transpired. If they were all the same, then they would just let it go at that.

B: Was Mr. Goldberg involved in either the NLRB proceedings of the United Steelworkers versus Republic Steel case?

F: I was never at any of the trials; but they were the legal advisors. Him and Pressman were the legal advisors for the labor organization. Naturally, in my opinion, I think that they would be there to represent the union and present the case to the National Labor Relations Board. Plus, present the case to the Supreme Court and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

B: And the fifteen or whatever the number was of people that were interviewed that night as eye witnesses because they were on the picket line, did you interview any of those people personally or were you just kind of there physically and that information was passed on to you?

In other words, what was your role?

F: I was at the hall when they came in. I didn't interview any of them. I didn't take any testimonies down from any of them. There was an individual there from the legal staff that did all of that. Who he was, I just can't recall. He took all of the testimonies down, all I did was to listen to what some of the conversation was and let them go by themselves. But I was there, and all I can remember was, truthfully, what the individual said after he had interviewed all these people.

B: Now this was the legal person interviewing all these people?

F: All the people that he interviewed had the same or almost the same response as the first one. The only thing that he could say is that it / would have to / come a long, long way before we could be accused of this thing because it was all the other side. That's the only thing I know.

B: I would really like to thank you for taking the time this morning to tell me what took place that night. I'm sure that other people who are doing research on it will appreciate it. Thank you very much.

F: Phil, I appreciate it very much. This was the story of the 1937 Steel Strike to the best of my knowledge that I can tell you because it has been such a long time. But it was a pleasure to have you and if I can be of anymore assistance, I would like to try to help you as much as I could. I do hope that these tapes will go and be of some value to the students of the school.

In closing I want to say: That given the good taste and good thinking of the public, the labor organizations are not what the people think they are--a bunch or hoodlums. They are not; they're first class citizens and their out there to win and gain the benefits for the individual to advance and come to be a good American and a good citizen.

B: There is one question--I'm sorry--I missed. Were you called by any of the committees that followed up after the incident at Stop Five?

F: Called for what?

B: To testify.

F: No, the only time I appeared in court was at the time of that riot at Rosenbaum's store. My testimony was that and they would take it from there. They presented my case all the way through. I never did appear, never appeared in any of the courts.

B: Okay, thank you very much.

F: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW