

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Steel Strike Project

1937 "Little Steel" Strike

O. H. 243

ANGELA CAMPANA

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

December 13, 1982

ANGELA CAMPANA

Angela Campana was born in Barrea, Italy, in 1904. She was a daughter of an architect and one of ten children. In 1924 she married Frank Campana, who was a worker from Rome. Angela came to this country in 1927 following her husband, a steelworker for Republic Steel. They left Italy to flee Fascism. Angela had three children and spent her life as a housewife. Her special contribution was an eyewitness to the June 19, 1937 shooting on Poland Avenue in Youngstown. Angela is presently 79 and enjoys needlework.

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INTERVIEWEE: ANGELA CAMPANA
INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy
SUBJECT: Strike, Shooting
DATE: December 13, 1982

B: This is Philip Bracy for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, today is December 13, 1982. I am talking to Mrs. Frank Campana, Angela Campana, about the events regarding the 1937 "Little Steel" Strike here in Youngstown.

First of all, Mrs. Campana, would you tell me where you were born and when you came to Youngstown?

C: I was born in Barrea.

B: That is Barrea, Italy?

C: In Italy, yes.

B: In what year did you come to Youngstown?

C: 1927.

B: How did you happen to come to Youngstown?

C: I came because my husband Frank came in 1925. His father was a citizen and he sent for me in 1927. I arrived in New York speaking no English. I had only a badge saying "Ohio." A man helped me to find my train to Youngstown. It took almost 24 hours by train and I didn't eat the whole time. I arrived in Youngstown in April, 1927. We lived on Myrtle Avenue.

B: What entertainment did you go to see?

C: The family went to the Regent Theatre where we saw cowboy movies like Gene Autry. Once in a while we went to the Palace Theatre where we saw Martha Ray, Frank Sinatra, and a few others. It cost about a dollar, I think, which was a lot of money in those days.

B: Was Myrtle Avenue mostly Italians?

C: Yes, and they all worked in the same mill, Republic Steel Stop 5. In fact, most people didn't have to learn English since all the merchants, church, and work had Italian as a language; English was rarely used. At work the foreman was usually Italian. To learn any English you went to the immigration people, who taught you enough to get your citizenship papers.

B: What did your husband do?

C: He worked for Republic Steel.

B: He was a steelworker?

C: Yes, that is right.

B: In 1937 there was a steel strike here in Youngstown, could you tell me a little bit about what happened the day that the event took place in the fields across from the mill on Poland Avenue, starting from when you first went down there that day till the event that took place later?

C: I arrived at 2:00 or 2:30 p.m. A truck tried to enter the Stop 5 gate, and people stopped the truck to check for guns, food, or material to aid the company people. The driver said he had no such thing. They checked the back. It was empty so it was allowed to enter the mill.

B: How did you know the time was 2:00 or 2:30?

C: I was told by a friend when I arrived.

B: Then what happened?

B: When I got to Poland Avenue there were pickets in front of the Stop 5 where the fence is today. Families were gathered across the road, men spoke to men, and women and children were a little way off.

We left about three o'clock for supper because there was a meeting at six o'clock p.m. Since the strike began speakers talked on various days to cheer us up, give us hope. That day we returned for the 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. meeting. It didn't get started until dark, so we talked

to friends in the area now occupied by a building and fence over across from Stop 5. On that hill was a flat-bed trailer with a microphone and two or three lights to show the speakers. The two hundred people faced the truck with our backs to the mill. When the speakers addressed the group, two men spoke, one in English and the other in Italian. It was really dark with only the three speakers lit up from the C. I. O.

B: Did you before, during, or after the gathering, see any guns?

C: No, at no time did I see any weapons.

B: How often did people go to the picket line?

C: Families usually went when their husbands worked the line. I only went with the kids occasionally.

B: Then what happened that night?

C: As one of the speakers addressed the crowd about fifteen canisters of tear gas and bullets began to flood the field from the mill; the lights were darkened, and panic followed. I saw a boy, about twelve, trampled to death from the confusion. We dropped, myself, my husband, and my two kids, and crawled like many on our hands and knees towards a nearby street. We had to get to the creek, where I lost my shoes on the stones, and pass the gas station first to get to the street. At the first house I banged on the door because Louie and Ida couldn't breathe because of the tear gas. The people wouldn't open the door. My husband pulled me away and we went home to Myrtle Avenue. It was about 9:30 when I got home, about two blocks from Pyatt Market. You could still hear shots.

Louie was bleeding from the nose, so I made an ice pack on his neck and it stopped. Ida was choking and scared, but not bleeding.

The next day the National Guard came early, not allowing cars to stop or pickets to block Stop 5. My husband told me it broke the strike.

B: Did your husband, Frank, go back to work right away?

C: No, for two reasons; first, they only called a few back at a time to show who really was boss; and second, my husband carried a sign in a demonstration downtown before the shooting. My husband did not speak or read English. During the rally downtown the union gave him a sign

saying something like, "We will show Purnell who is boss." When this happened a supervisor saw him. After the strike was broken the company didn't want to take him back because of this.

I called my brother Dominic, who explained the situation that my husband understood little English, didn't understand the sign, and was a good worker. He was able to go back to work in three months and retired from Republic in 1965. The funny thing is till this day I really don't understand why the strike took place. My husband came home and mentioned they had to strike for the union since the others, all from the same region and village in Italy, were striking; we had to strike.

B: Thank you for your time today.

C: You are very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW