

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Steel Industry Labor and Management

Labor and Steel of the 1930's

O.H. 52

THOMAS WHITE

Interviewed

by

Emmett C. Shaffer

on

July 9, 1974

THOMAS WHITE

Mr Thomas White, an area labor leader, was born on June 29, 1898, in Scotland. As a young man, he was active in the labor movement in Scotland and claims that he derived his labor education from his father who was a member of the executive board of the steelworkers union in Scotland.

Mr. White came to New York in 1923 as a professional soccer player. In 1930 he came to Youngstown and began working for the Republic Steel Corporation. In 1936 he joined the Steelworkers Organizing Committee to try to bring a union into the plant.

Later Mr. White was elected president of the local union of the Republic. During the 1937 steel strike he refused to go back to work after the company broke the strike and was thus discharged from work for three years. Attempts to work at other companies failed because he had been blacklisted.

While unemployed Mr. White persisted in working toward the signing of the maintenance agreement contract, signed in 1942. Immediately afterward, he was called back to work, with back pay. Since that date, Mr. White has worked at the Republic Steel, taking part in union activities. He has since retired from the company and is living at home with his wife Mary. They reside at 3407 Belden Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio.

Silvia Pallotta
June 23, 1977

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS WHITE
INTERVIEWER: Emmett Shaffer
SUBJECT: Labor and Steel of the 1930's
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S: This is an interview with Mr. Thomas White, conducted by Emmett C. Shaffer on July 9, 1974. Mr. White was active in the steel workers labor movement during the 1930's and was the first president of Local 1331 at the Republic Steel Corporation. Mr. White is now seventy-six years old. Mr. White, how did you get started in the labor movement?

W: Well, my father was a member of the executive board of the steelworkers union in the old country, in Scotland. It was from him that I got my education and I was in the labor movement in Scotland and that's where I received my education. I started working for Republic Steel in 1930. I joined the Steelworkers Organizing Committee in November, 1936. I was, as I was in the old world, actively engaged in trying to bring a union into the Republic Steel. We had the assistance of organizers who were employed by the national office and they were very helpful in assisting us, too, in our efforts for organization. We, later on, were successful in organizing a majority of the workers in the Republic Steel. We, then, held our first meeting in the Romanian Hall in Youngstown in the middle of May. I was elected president on the Friday of that month and when I went to work the following day, which was Saturday, I was told that I was discharged and no longer employed at Republic Steel for three years and two months. That was the penalty I had to pay. At the meeting of the executive officers, we also elected

a guy by the name of Ira Alberts. Shortly after he was in office, we began to have suspicions that someone was supplying the Republic Steel with the names of the members we had signed up. This went on for some time and our suspicion was getting more evident and we came to the conclusion that further investigation of Ira Alberts was necessary. With the help of one of the organizers, we were able to find out that Ira Alberts was a professional scab and he had been a scab during a taxi drivers' strike in New York. At the following meeting, I brought up the subject and without having too much knowledge, I asked him to resign. I further told him that if he didn't resign, I would exploit him. It wasn't until after he left the meeting that the whole story came out and Ira Alberts had to leave Youngstown. He had a woman with him, whom everyone thought was his wife, and quite a few of the guys were making a play for her.

During the appellate hearings, in Washington, D.C., we found out that the woman in question was not his wife at all, much to the surprise of a few individuals of Poland Avenue. The strike took place in June. It was, I believe, June 19. June 20 was my birthday so I think the strike was on June 19. However, when the strike was called, we had almost one hundred percent cooperation from the members who had signed up. During the strike, there were many incidents that took place. On one occasion, the Republic Steel, in order to get one of their locomotives from the Open Hearth to the Bessemer, hired an individual who had been in the Ohio Penitentiary for boxcar stealing. However, he was successful in getting in, but I may say he was unsuccessful in getting out. Other incidents took place, which we figured was self-protection. We had cooperation from the railroads, with the exception of the Pennsylvania. On one occasion, the Pennsylvania railroad brought a car behind the caboose and backed it into the coke plant. This car contained fuel. In order to see that this didn't happen again, it was necessary to see that the road into the coke plant was no longer available and we made sure that it wasn't. On another occasion, the Republic Steel was in darkness by some means or another. They also went without fresh water for a while. These were some of the things that the strikers had to put up with for self-preservation and therefore they thought these actions were justified.

An opening meeting was held at the Bessemer plant. The organizer was making a speech to the strikers when all at once, he noticed, in the crowds, an individual who was a spy for the Youngstown Streetcar Company. When he pointed

him out, this individual ran up the steps followed by many other strikers. When he reached the top of the steps, he fell down, claiming he had been shot. During the trial, he was carried in on a stretcher and after the trial was over, he miraculously recovered and was able to indulge on his previous encounters.

That wasn't all. One day, while sitting in the office on Poland Avenue, along with the organizer, we were suddenly confronted with an individual who was on the picket line accompanied by a somewhat voluptuous lady. We were then asked if she could accomodate us and where and when it would take place. Well, first of all, will we avail ourselves of this opportunity, as we hadn't been home for some time? We started to roam things over in our minds and we agreed that we should not go there. Next morning, we found out that had we been there, there were enough policemen around that house to see that when we were in an incriminating position, the raid would take place.

During the strike, at Stop Five, on Poland Avenue, two steelworkers were killed and as a result, there was a riot that was instigated by the security forces of the Republic Steel. One of the picketers had a camera and he was taking pictures with the camera towards the entrance gate at Stop Five, when a policeman assaulted him. When the striker's wife, who was also on the picket line, started to interfere, she was assaulted too. This ended up in a riot. The security forces called the sheriff, Sheriff Elser, and the sheriff's deputies came up to Stop Five and were surrounded by the strikers. For some reason or other, the deputies felt that they had no right there in the first place, so then they left the car in which they were riding. The strikers upset the car and the gasoline started to flow on the ground. Someone threw a match, which lit the gasoline and lighted up the whole place. During that time, shots were coming from the security forces at the Stop Five entrance, and two men were killed. They were rushed to the hospital, but both were dead on arrival.

It was shortly after that that Governor Davey sent in the National Guard, which was done at the request of the Republic Steel Corporation, and had an effect, no doubt, on some of the strikers. However, other methods adopted by the steel corporation I think should be noted. Tom Gibler, while I was called many names by this gentleman, I always give him credit for calling a spade a spade. Tom did spear the horses, but at least you knew where you stood. The Sheet and Tube

in a church in Boardman, was able to see that the minister there was quiet. He ultimately was made an organizer for the steelworkers union.

S: Do you recall the minister's name?

W: I can't remember. Eugene Grace, of the U.S. Steel, was the first to see the light. He signed the contract with the steelworkers union because, I think, he was more far seeing than the individuals in the corporation of Republic Steel or Sheet and Tube. It is a well-known fact now, that the steel companies have made more money since the union came about than they ever made in their entire history.

Gradually, the workers began to go back to the Sheet and Tube. Republic was still holding fast. The Sheet and Tube opened an office in the Dollar Bank building and anyone that wanted to go back to work, could sign up there. Before too long, streetcars by the loads were headed towards the Sheet and Tube. Shortly after that, the strike was broken. And the workers at Republic Steel went back to work, except some who were kept out for six months, some for eighteen months, and as I said, for myself, I was out for thirty-eight months.

Anywhere I tried to get a job, the Republic Steel was there. In one place, I went to look for a job after the strike was broken. I was told to come out the next morning. Well, when I went out the next morning, the boss told me that the rush was over. No doubt the Republic Steel was there before me.

S: Where was this place?

W: Out in Hubbard. Let me see if I can go over the year.

S: What was the name of that company in Hubbard?

W: The Valley Mold, in Hubbard.

S: What was their excuse for not hiring you?

W: They said that the order had been canceled. I went out to Columbiana and was hired there and after a few days of employment, the Republic Steel sent an emissary out to Columbiana and endeavored to see that I was discharged. I must give credit to the Orders of the Burke Ed Foundry inasmuch as he told these individuals from Republic Steel, "As long as this man is able to do his work, he'll remain here." Well, that didn't last too long, and I was back again on relief.

S: That was the Burke Ed Foundry in Columbiana.

- W: Yes.
- S: How did the strikers block the Pennsylvania Railroad and turn off the electricity and water in Republic?
- W: (Laughter) I don't think I should elaborate too much on that. The idea was to do what had to be done, regardless of the records, and they were successful.
- S: But did the strikers really do these things?
- W: Yes.
- S: The attempt to put this man, Alberts, into the union, and to get the strikers associated with the unknown redhead, was this a company effort to discredit the strikers?
- W: Anything that Republic Steel did was an effort to discredit the strikers.
- S: Who instigated the violence that started at Stop Five?
- W: No one instigated the violence. As I said, the organizers recognized them on the clock and pointed them out. That's when he made up the stairs and was shot.
- S: Was he shot?
- W: Oh, yes. Where he shot himself is the problem.
- S: Did the strikers do any shooting during the strike?
- W: No, no.
- S: Did the Republic security forces do any shooting during the strike?
- W: I already mentioned the Stop Five, where the riot took place, and the men were killed. It certainly came from the gate entrance at Stop Five. Definitely.
- S: Did the steel mills bring in any outside strike breakers?
- W: No. With the exception of the one who drove the locomotive, I can't recall any other. There were some individuals who tried to break up the plant, but they were unsuccessful.
- S: How was the militia used to break the strike?
- W: Well, as I said, when they came in, it certainly discouraged a lot of the people that they were with. Then, when the men went back at the Sheet and Tube, then the Republic Steel position was somewhat weakened. The National Guard were

young guys who were there not of their own volition, but had to be there on their orders. There is no denying the fact that when Governor Davey sent the National Guard in there, it was up to heads of the Republic Steel in order to break the strike and they were successful.

S: Well, I mean, did the militia protect the people wanting to go back to work?

W: Oh, yes.

S: Did they keep the pickets away from the plant gates? Just how did they operate?

W: When the strike started, the parking lot, at that time, did not belong to Republic Steel but during the strike, they purchased that lot and chased the strikers off of there onto the street. Every move they made was to discourage the strikers. He was being beat, and as I say, it was when the tracks started back toward the Sheet and Tube, then gradually, the Republic opened the gates and it was piecemeal at first, but gradually got bigger and bigger.

S: Did the strikers go back to work of their own volition or due to the economic pressures?

W: They were given the option of being back by a certain date or they wouldn't go back at all. Some still refused to go back, but the National Labor Relations Board sent them back to work.

S: What was the date that they actually broke the strike and the back-to-work movement started?

W: Oh, I can't tell you now. I would have to get my records for that.

S: But the strike was definitely broken with the help of the National Guard.

W: Oh, yes.

S: And the people that didn't go back to work, including you, were blacklisted. Who were some of the more prominent local people on the picket lines and in the union organizing activities?

W: In the coke plant, we had two members there, Curly Jackson, who is now deceased, and D.R. Moore. At the Bessemer, we had Jerry Beck, we had a guy by the name of Fletcher, we had Tony Ross, who is now deceased, and little Angelo Formarillo, who is deceased, too. At Stop Five, we had Greely Busson. They were captains of the picket line.

- S: Was Paul Langley one of them?
- W: I don't know about the Sheet and Tube. I'm talking about the Republic Steel and he belonged to Sheet and Tube.
- S: Perensky?
- W: Perensky?
- S: Earnie Perensky?
- W: He was from Sheet and Tube.
- S: Hank Dively?
- W: As far as I know, he's still around there. A little Johnny-come-lately.
- S: How about John Mayo? What was his role in the strike?
- W: John Mayo was a district director. At the beginning of the organization, there were certain individuals that were sent into Youngstown to help with the organization of the steelworkers. One or two left and gave up the ship. However, John Mayo, who became the district director of Youngstown Steel, had to help. Now he had three of the best organizers that were possible to get. He had Bobby Burke, Shortey Stevens, and Gus Hall. These, my friend, were organizers.
- S: Where did these people come from?
- W: Shortey Stevens came from New York, Bobby Burke and Gus Hall, were local.
- S: Are Bobby Burke, Gus Hall, and Stevens still living?
- W: Yes, to the best of my knowledge.
- S: To which group did the outside organizers belong? Did they belong to another union or something, these outside organizers, such as John Mayo?
- W: Well, John Mayo belonged to the United Mine Workers. When John L. Lewis was approached by individuals from this district, to organize the steelworkers, he appointed Phil Murray as head of the steelworkers organizing committee. He then sent John Mayo into Youngstown as the district director. This effort to organize the steelworkers was possible because of the fact that the United Mine Workers of America paid into the organizing fund every month. Only because of the finance given by the United Mine Workers were we able to organize the steelworkers.

- W: I don't think that most of those who took the responsibility of each local in order to organize the people in their plant were too well acquainted with the labor movement as a whole. The result was that not only did we get a self-education, but certainly we were given a full education by the efforts of Burke, Stevens and Gus Hall. No two ways about it.
- S: Were Gus Hall and Bobby Burke identified as Communists?
- W: They admitted it. So did Charlie Stevens. And I say this to you, in all honesty; Had it not been for these three individuals, the steelworkers wouldn't have been organized in that period of time.
- S: What was Gus Hall's main role in the strike?
- W: His main role was as an organizer, and a good one.
- S: Did he participate on the picket lines in Youngstown?
- W: Oh, yes, sure. He was always close to the workers.
- S: Where did the strikers meet on Poland Avenue?
- W: Their meeting place was in the Romanian Hall. That's where we held our meetings when we worked together, first of all. They had an office in Poland Avenue, a little two-by-four there, that was all we could afford. But nevertheless, a lot of work was done.
- S: Did you have any dealings with R.M. McCoy of the Republic Steel?
- W: McCoy, oh, yes, yes. He was a pretty old guy, you know. I'll tell you an anecdote about him. You want to hear it? At one time McCoy belonged to the union, the railroad's union. At that time, the Bessemer was part of the local on Poland Avenue. We had ten committee men, grievance committee men, and we used to meet periodically in McCoy's office. This day, a loud mouth from the Bessemer, who will remain nameless, challenged McCoy as to what he knew about labor unions. That was the mistake he made. McCoy, mad as hell, jumped out of the seat, tore back this individual's jacket, and saw the label of an old union company, namely Richmond. He, my friend, was quite an individual.
- S: Who were the main opponents of the strike locally?
- W: The corporation.
- S: Could you give any names, the press, the radio?

W: Oh, I'll say this. As far as the press was concerned, I can't say too much. The guy who covered the strike was Clingan Jackson and Clingan was pretty fair. Certainly, some of the stuff that he gave the newspaper wasn't published, in fact, he told me so and I believe him. But Clingan Jackson was there on many occasions, so that The Vindicator was in our favor, and congratulated the United States Steel Company for signing a contract with the steelworkers union. So I, in all honesty, can't say that the newspaper, The Vindicator, did us too much harm. Some of the people downtown weren't too familiar with the local mail. Other than that, it wasn't too bad. No, it wasn't too bad.

S: Was the Youngstown Telegram favorable to you?

W: I don't remember it.

S: That was one of the other papers.

W: I don't remember it. I know Clingan Jackson was the reporter and Clingan's still in The Vindicator.

S: Who were some of the major businessmen that were opposed to the strike?

W: I don't think that it encountered any real opposition from any of the tradespeople in town. They were willing to count on these people over a period of time during the strike without having to pay their obligations and then there were Gus and White, who, I think, were pretty fair towards the strikers. If one individual got in any pinch, then we paid his gas and light. But one time I remember, over on Center Street, an old guy who worked in the labor gang came and told us that he was going to be put out of his house. The guy who owned the house also owned a beer garden. So when he put the guy out, the old guy, who had nobody but himself to look after, after this individual left, we put the guy's furniture back in again and put a picket line around his joint over in the beer garden. That was the end of that.

S: When did you come to Youngstown?

W: 1930.

S: Directly from Scotland?

W: No. I came from New York. I came here, first of all, in 1923. I was a professional soccer player and got the chance to go to New York and play there and so I went. I came back in 1930.

- S: Could you describe the workings of the company union in the steel mills?
- W: A company union's a company union. One of the things I can remember was that the head guy in the U.S. Steel Company union was asked and was willing to come along with us in order to organize the workers in the United States Steel. That took place in Pittsburgh. As far as Republic is concerned, it was like all company unions; they give you five and take ten. I remember an election for individuals in the company union, but a company union is a company union. It's owned and controlled and if you want anything, you'll get to thinking you're entitled to you. Now whether you're entitled to it or not, you may be entitled to it and you still won't get it. Right?
- S: Did the company union have a name in the Republic?
- W: They all have a name, but what they called it, I don't know. I never paid too much attention to it.
- S: Did the Amalgamated Steel Workers do anything for the workers prior to the formation of the CIO?
- W: IWW.
- S: Right.
- W: Oh, yes. Sure. To those who have been active in the labor movement, it is a well-known fact that someone lays the groundwork before you go there. That certainly was the case here. Not only that, but I must give credit to the mine workers who were working at Republic Steel at that time. Also I should give credit to those who were on the WPA. These men, while they received a handsome sum of sixty-two or sixty-four dollars a month, most of them paid their dues every month.
- S: How many union members were there in the Republic Steel as opposed to the total number working in Republic Steel prior to the strike? Do you have any idea?
- W: What do you mean?
- S: How many union members did you have before the strike?
- W: We had to have a majority of those in the Republic Steel in order to justify our claim for a union. We had a vast majority of the members signed up when Tom Girdler graciously agreed to sign a contract with us. Tom Girdler knew that.

- S: How many people were working in the Republic Steel at that time?
- W: There must have been about, at that time, close to six thousand people.
- S: This is 1937?
- W: Today, you have over 3500.
- S: So the strike was broken in July, 1937.
- W: I think it was July. I'm not sure. It was on for six weeks.
- S: And then what did you do from 1937 to 1942, when they signed the maintenance of agreement contract? Can you elaborate on that?
- W: I was on relief.
- S: The whole time?
- W: Yes. I got food from the government. I got clothes from the government for the family. We got shoes, we got dentistry work done, and that was all done through the government relief. We had six children and the road wasn't easy.
- S: Was this for the entire five years?
- W: Not five years, three years.
- S: Oh, three years, from 1937 to 1940?
- W: Yes, with the exception of Columbiana.
- S: When did you get called back to the Republic?
- W: In 1942.
- S: Did you receive back pay when you got back to Republic in 1942?
- W: I received a handsome sum of \$1500. Now, during the strike, we had been under the misapprehension that it would be a larger amount. However, one way or another, the method of figuring up the back pay got side tracked somewhere. I believe that they were over cautious in their ideas of what constituted back pay; \$1200 for three years and two months wasn't enough.
- S: Were you mentioned in that law suit brought by Tom

Girdler against the strikers and John L. Lewis? Were you a party in that law suit?

W: Oh, yes. We were all cited then.

S: Were you served by a federal marshall with papers?

W: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I have them down somewhere.

S: Then, from 1937 on, could you describe the union activities up until you got the maintenance agreement contract in 1942?

W: Well, it was mainly a matter of survival. The only people that were paid at that time were the organizers. As far as the president of the local union or any other officer of the local union, this service was gratis. We were, I think, inspired with the idea that here we were, fighting back, after the strike was broken. I think it gave us more encouragement to know that someday the contract was possible and from there on in, the road would be a bit easier. Purnell, as I say, worked through the churches, very, very obvious. Tom Girdler came out and told me what he thought of me. I told him what I thought of him, too, and we seemed to get along pretty good now. (Laughter)

S: Did J.C. Artsinger have any part in it?

W: No, that's not the guy I'm thinking about.

S: Bennett?

W: No, that's not the guy.

S: Powers? Manchester?

W: No, no. They were downtown. However, the steelworkers certainly came a long way.

S: Who were your major friends in city hall?

W: We had no enemies there that I know of. I used to have to report every morning at ten o'clock to the chief of police. At ten o'clock every morning I met with the chief of police.

S: Why was this?

W: It was to go back over the day before and look forward to the day ahead, and try, if at all possible, to keep things peaceful. Now, I remember during the strike the pickets were stopping the mail and I knew that was a federal offense.

Well, I went down to the post office. I'll show you how these guys worked, even in the post office. They asked me to come down there because there were some parcels that they thought were too big or too small and we didn't know what was in the packages. So I went down there, myself, and the post master and another guy said something to me. I didn't hear so he started to question me about a package. I said, "Just a minute, I came down here in the best interests and if you think you're going to confront me with this, you're crazy. I will come back with my attorney at your convenience." I never went back. They never asked me back. However, I did make an agreement with them that the men could not stop the mail because, as I said, it was a federal offense. So I painted a sign at Stop Five, "Please do not stop the mail. This is a federal offense." However, one guy decided to stop the mail anyway and I don't think he ever got back.

S: Was this during the strike that you met with the chief of police everyday?

W: Oh, yes.

S: Who was the chief of police?

W: I forget who it was.

S: Who was the mayor?

W: Now you got me.

S: Lionel Evans? A Republican?

W: I'd have to check up on that.

S: What was the main issue or the main bargaining point, in your estimation, that forced the company to sit down and sign a maintenance of agreement contract in 1942?

W: When we reorganized, that, and the fact that Eugene Grace had seen the light was responsible for Tom Girdler sitting down. He was with the Sheet and Tube; recognized the fact that we were determined to be organized. I say that they had seen the light because they could see more profits and they must have been dumb as hell if they didn't because they used them to make money, and they still use them today to make money.

S: Well, was there any coercion after 1937 to force Girdler to sign the maintenance of agreement contract?

W: Oh, Phil Murray was after him all the time to sign the contract.

Phil Murray was an idealist and a good, honest labor man. I think the company began and this is my own observation, but I think they felt that in Phil Murray, there was something they could negotiate with, in good honor. I think that was one of the things that sticks in my mind now that here was a guy that they could depend on to keep his word, to keep things going, and so forth. One thing I remember about Phil Murray and I think you should know this, that when Phil Murray took over first, we didn't have the support of the Catholic Church. It came out in the Vindicator about Phil Murray being the upright Protestant, and so on, but it wasn't until it came out that Phil Murray was a Roman Catholic, that the Catholic Church began to support them. That's a fact. But I say again, when you sit down and talk to Phil Murray, you feel, well, here's a guy that you can sit down and talk to. He wasn't radical; he wasn't a patsy for anybody, but he knew what he was talking about and I think these people realized he knew what he was talking about. He was determined that he was going to organize the steelworkers. I think that was one of the assets that Phil Murray had.

S: And the steelworkers.

W: Yes.

S: Because the companies trusted him?

W: Well, he couldn't go in there without the support of the steelworkers.

S: From the end of the breaking of the strike in 1937 to 1942, were there any sit downs or walk outs or violence or work stoppages of any significance?

W: No. Most of the work had to be done inside after we went back. Most of the work had been done inside and outside. After work, you'd see people at their homes and try to get them to sign up. That was the trouble in the first place. You know, Bobby Burke, regardless of what his political affiliation was, could persuade you that what he was saying was correct, without too much effort. I was wrong about Bob Burke for years, and it was night and day. On pay day, he would go to a beer garden and tell the guy to shut off the drinks. He would give a speech and I'd go out and sign them up. He was rambunctious, boy, I'm telling you. That's what I say. Other guys have come here and left. Now Warren was hard to organize and John Mayo had sent three or four organizers in there and they couldn't organize Warren and I was in John Mayo's office in the Erie building when they called Gus Hall in and they said, "Gus, can you organize Warren?" Gus organized Warren.

S: Did Gus Hall and Bobby Burke use booze to buy the boys drinks to get them to sign up?

W: No. Gus Hall wasn't a guy like that. Gus Hall wasn't the worst guy you'd ever met in your life. If he couldn't convince you, with this here, then he figured you were no good if you didn't have it up here. He had to persuade you that what he was saying was correct. Bob was different altogether, but achieved the same things through different ideas. Bob figured he could thump it into you. He'd say right in the beer garden, "Now, you listen here. Shut off all the drinks". Gus Hall would never have done that. I followed Bob Burke from beer garden to beer garden and he just shut off the drinks, and then he rapped on the table and then he would start and I went on and signed them up. But, you see, Gus Hall couldn't do that. He wasn't built that way.

S: Did they recommend violence?

W: No, never. Anything that took place was a surprise to Gus Hall and I could tell it.

S: Did the picket captains recommend violence?

W: No. That was the funny part about it. None of the picket captains were involved in anything later. None of them. I know that.

S: One day there was supposed to have been a bunch of women and men and everybody else going down Poland Avenue with crowbars and pitchforks and clubs. Do you recall this day?

W: Who was?

S: Supposedly, there was a bunch of men, women, and children storming down Poland Avenue with clubs and crowbars.

W: To do what?

S: I don't know.

W: That's a goddamn lie. I was there all the time. I ought to know. I never left Poland Avenue six weeks. Who the hell told you that? Boy, that's strange. Any demonstration was organized, believe me, because I helped organize them and I know what the hell I'm talking about. There was no disruption or anything else. They were told to be there at so and so because we're meeting at Stop Five. They were there, men, women, and children, and they would try to get across their ideas to women because we knew that we had to satisfy the women, too. After all, they were the ones

that were suffering most. They had a family and no money coming in. That was pretty goddamn tough.

S: What major offices have you held in 1331?

W: I've been president three or four times. I've been vice-president three or four times, and that's as far as I'll ever come anymore.

S: How long were you president?

W: Off hand, I couldn't tell you. I'd have to look in the records for that. I know that during the war, the guy that was president, he got promoted to a foreman and as vice-president, I had to take over during the war. I remember a saying then that you'll remember and I'll never forget it. They came out with a saying at that time, that "A last loaf of bread will win the war." Do you remember that? You don't remember? That was the cry. "The last loaf of bread will win the war." Well, I thought that I could go them one better. I told them down at Center Street, down below there, that if the last pound of steel won the war, then the steel workers would make it. I remember it like it was yesterday. So I pounded the hell out of the podium.

S: Do you think there is any validity to the statement that the steel industry, at one time, tried to control the labor market in Youngstown?

W: They always did.

S: In what way?

W: It's a steel town. What else was there? At one time, you know as well as I do, they stopped the Ford motor company from coming in here.

S: What year was that?

W: I don't know what year it was, but they did. Why? Because they could control the labor market. When they started laying people off here... what do they call this place out here, the motor place?

S: Lordstown.

W: Lordstown. Why do you think Lordstown came in here? Because of an influx of labor. Because the steel mills were laying them off. They shut down the open hearth. As I said, they used to take certain people out until there

were thirty-five hundred. That's what they have there.

S: What do you think have been the major accomplishments of the labor movement in Youngstown when you were in it?

W: I think what is true then is true now. Seniority and job security are two of the main achievements that we went on strike for. Today, of course, we have many things we didn't have in those days--vacation, health benefits, and all other benefits that have been accrued by the steelworkers. But I think that things have changed and have brought about a different conception. Today, the average guy in the steel mills is looking out for himself. What took us thirty-five or forty years to get, they are not prepared to wait any length of time to get what they want now. They're imbued with the idea that anything they want belongs to them in the first place, but they fail to realize the sacrifices that were made by their fathers, by their grandfathers, to get where they are today. They have lost sight of this. Certainly, I don't disagree with them. There are certain things that they're entitled to. But here we have the guys who built this union. Now this is my gripe. We have the guys that built this union, who were starving because of the low pension and low social security, and these people who worked so hard and were willing to sacrifice for it are forgotten about. The pension when I retired was around eighty dollars. Today, it is between three hundred and fifty and four hundred dollars. Who the hell built this for them? But yet, in the negotiations, we were given fifteen dollars every three years. Then, when the steelworkers tried to negotiate for the pensioners, the companies took it to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court ruled that the company didn't have to negotiate for pensions of those who were retired. Nevertheless, they're doing it now because the pensions are gathered so what it is now will be raised to one hundred and sixty-five dollars on August 1, 1975. Why the hell wasn't it done before? This is my gripe. This is the oldtimers' gripe. Today, he is going from hand to mouth. When a guy retires now, he is in pretty good shape, if he retires when he's sixty-five. I have no regrets of the efforts that I put into this, not at all. But I hate like hell to see other people, who made no effort at all, the person who went out and bought in, when I know their parents made the effort are being neglected by these people who are working in the mills today. To hell with the old guy. I want mine now. And that's not right.

S: Mr. White, who would you recommend by name, that would possibly submit to an interview on these subjects we've discussed?

- W: I'm talking about guys who are familiar with it, like myself. Most of them are not around today. I feel very fortunate that I'm here to talk to you, because I can't recall one or more who were officers at that time that you could talk to.
- S: Well, you gave me one name, J.R. Moore.
- W: Yes.
- S: How about Danny Thomas? Mr. Beck gave me J.R. Moore, Danny Thomas, Ernest Pennesky, Hank Dively, Edward Humphrey, and Tommy Moore. Who would you recommend for a further interview on this subject?
- W: I would recommend Tommy Moore. He's the only living president besides myself who was there in 1937.
- S: Were you active in the labor movement in Scotland?
- W: I certainly was. I was the head of the apprentices union of the moulders.
- S: What are the major differences between the labor movement in Scotland and the labor movement in the United States?
- W: Let me put it to you this way; You have at least half a dozen labor leaders in jail here for misfeasance and malfeasance et cetera. In Scotland, there's none in jail. That's the difference.
- S: Has the labor movement in Scotland been as successful in raising the living conditions of the workers as it has been here in the United States?
- W: Oh, yes. After all, the labor movement in America was formed after the labor movement in Great Britian.
- S: Mr. White, you lived during the depression in the 1930's. Would you describe the depression of the 1930's in Youngstown?
- W: Well, the depression, of course, affected everybody. The only thing that disturbs me now as a senior citizen, if you want to call me that, is that there is a feeling among senior citizens today and I don't like to hear it. If they're asked what the steelworkers or the railworkers need now, it is hard to relate that the first thing they say is, "What these guys need is a bloody good depression". That I don't agree with, but, nevertheless, that is the feeling among the majority of the steelworkers of Youngstown who are senior citizens. It's a sad commentary, but there it is. You go down and meet some of these guys downtown,

as I meet them, and they always come back to the fact that what these young fellows need is a bloody good depression. They figure that would solve the problem of why the young fellow wants everything now. He gets married. He buys a home. It'll take him thirty years to pay for it. He buys furniture and it'll take him another five years to pay for that. He buys a car and he has to buy one every three years. So he's in the position today that the senior citizen wasn't in at the same age because in his day, he only bought what he could pay for. So he never was in the same debt. The young guy today is a prisoner of the system. He has to have what he has to have. The senior citizen today remembers when he was their age and that he never placed himself in that position. When the depression came, he wasn't hit to the same extent that these young people today would be hit, if there was a depression today. And I hope I never see it. But, as I say, when you hear oldtimers figure that a depression would solve the economy of the world and the times and perhaps straighten around a few of the steelworkers and their ideas, it's sad. But that's the way it is. I don't care where you go. You go downtown and meet some of the oldtimers and I'll tell you, before you're there fifteen minutes, one will say, "What these young guys need is a bloody depression". Then come back and see me.

S: Why do they say that?

W: Because the senior citizens feel that they [the young guys] are placing themselves in a position that makes it tough on them [the senior citizens]; the more they upset the economy of the country, the more it affects the senior citizens. Why do you think twelve percent interest on a home came around? Today, and since World War II, we're living on a war economy. If you want to stop buying things on credit in this country, it'll go bankrupt in a week. They are prisoners of their own fate. They're not willing to do with less than what they can afford. You know as well as I do they can't afford it, or they wouldn't be in debt so much. And they are scared. That is one thing that a steelworker or any worker is scared of, "What would happen to me if I would go on strike"? This is a fact. He's bound up today, hand and foot. He's scheduled to do a day's work. He's scared to go to the doctor in case he tells him to take a week off because he knows perfectly well that his family or himself is going to suffer for it.

S: Do you think that the working man today would accept the depression as they did in 1930?

W: I think they would because I don't think they're educated enough to do anything else. What would he do? Revolution? You don't think that's going to come about, do you?

- S: What were some of the bad parts of the Depression as you saw?
- W: Everything.
- S: Well, what were some of those things?
- W: I was affected by everything. I can't imagine anything that didn't affect me during the Depression. I know I went hungry. You know and I know, and lots of people my age know, that they had to go without sometimes because they had to feed their family. We have six. I lost a son, but nevertheless have a good family. I would hate like hell to see them have to go through what their father went through and they're a good family, the best in the world.
- S: Did you ever stand in a soup line?
- W: I haven't stood in a soup line. I don't think they were in Youngstown. But I had to stand in line to get government relief, believe me. I had to stand in line over on Glenwood Avenue to get clothes for my kids. I went to Brodies; we got the shoes there. I happened to know the guy that was head of the relief, but I forget his name. Then we went to the dentist and we got our teeth fixed. These were things that they provided, but you couldn't eat those things. That was all right as far as it went, but when night time came and you didn't have anything to eat, then what? What could we do now?
- S: Was that your biggest problem in the Depression, getting enough to eat?
- W: Wasn't that everybody's problem?
- S: Did they ever give you any money?
- W: No, sir.
- S: What did they do, give you chips or bills or slips to go and buy shoes and get dental work?
- W: No. All we got came through some agency. What was the name again of the relief agency?
- S: Allied Council?
- W: No, no, no. They weren't around then. Anyway, I used to have to go to work for some of the relief we got, up in Pemberton Park. There used to be an old guy up there who planted flowers and oh, he had a hell of a nice garden up there and we had to go over there and work for our relief.

There was nothing good about the Depression, nothing.

S: Do you think F.D.R. helped the people of Youngstown with the New Deal?

W: He helped everybody. At least the laws that the Congress passed at that time helped everybody.

S: What is your reaction to the statement that American's labor is producing less, resulting in higher prices?

W: You know, it's an old fallacy that prices chase wages. It's an old time excuse for these guys in Washington that ought to know better. Today, prices are higher than wages. But, it's like everything else. You lock the door after the horse is gone. I remember after World War II, or was it the Korean War? When was Eisenhower in there? Was he in there during the second world war?

S: He was a general in the second world war.

W: Or was it the Vietnam war?

S: Nope. He was president from 1952 to 1960.

W: I remember when Eisenhower took the freeze off prices and he said that competition would bring the prices down. Well, ever since that time, prices have gone up. The difference in Canada was that they did not take off the freeze in price for many years afterwards. Wages always chase prices, but the average man on the street thinks otherwise. "Well, I get a raise and then they boot prices'." And that surely shows him that wages chase prices. Right? Well, it's high time. There's something wrong with the economy in this country. You have the farmers kicking. You have the middle man kicking. You have the grocer kicking. Where the hell has the money all gone? Somebody's getting something and we're paying for it. This is the thing that's a hard fact about the guy on Social Security. I say that pension is to blame, because if pension had been there today, this year, let's leave it alone now. Well, go downtown and tell an old timer downtown, "Listen, if we increase your pension to three hundred dollars a month," you'd have to throw water on his face. With the rate now he's making one hundred and sixty-five. But, why the hell wasn't it now? Oh, it was a year ahead, but the pension for the steelworkers comes in, but why the hell does that have to come in now? They're going to be so many people that helped to build this union, we'll be dead by that time, for Christ's sake. This is what I say about the steelworker's union. I had high hopes, believe me. After you've been with the labor movement for fifty years, you have some idea of what is going on.

S: Would you do it over again, knowing what you do now?

W: This is a question I've often asked myself. I hear people talking about if they had to do it over again, they'd do the same thing. I don't believe them. I say this and I can't get away from it. When I was two feet high, I was certain to be a part of the labor movement. Well before I put myself in the position I was in before, it would have to take some thought because my family suffered and my wife suffered. I would have to sit down and say, "Well, we'll go through this again." It will be food for thought. But, today, I just wonder what would happen if they were placed in the same position now.

END OF INTERVIEW