

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown Sheet & Tube Shutdown Project

Sheet & Tube Shutdown

O.H. 147

WILLIAM J. BRENNAN

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

April 8, 1981

WILLIAM J. BRENNAN

William Brennan was born in Boston, Massachusetts on October 26, 1932, a son of William and Regina Brennan. He attended St. Mary's High School, went on to Holy Cross receiving his A.B. degree in 1953. He attended the Gregorian University in Rome where he received his S.T.B in 1955. In 1961, Mr. Brennan graduated from Fordham with a Masters of Social Work. He has been with the Youngstown United Way since 1961.

He has been with the Youngstown United Way since 1961. Mr. Brennan is a member of Saint Edward's Parish, is married to his wife Florence and they have four children, William, Jeanne, Edward and Anne Marie.

Philip Bracy

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM J. BRENNAN  
INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy  
SUBJECT: Sheet & Tube Shutdown  
DATE: April 8, 1981

PB: This is an interview with William Brennan for the Youngstown State University's Oral History Program concerning the Shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube, by Philip Bracy at the United Appeal Office on Wednesday, April the 8th at 9:15 a.m.

WB: Okay, my name is Bill Brennan. I'm the Executive Director of the United Way. I did my graduate school at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. I did graduate work at the Gregorian University in Rome and the Fordham University in New York. I have two undergraduate degrees and one Masters degree.

I worked in the Kings County Hospital in New York in the alcohol clinic and prison ward.

I came to Youngstown in 1961 as associate planner on the planning council. I became Director of Health and Welfare Council in 1964. I became Campaign Director in 1967, Associate Director in 1967 and then the Executive Director of United Way in 1969.

PB: Would you please tell me a little something about the United Appeal Agency and what the purpose of the United Appeal is?

WB: Well, the United Appeal Agency is a central. . . Well first of all, the United Way and the United Appeal are kind of interchangeable names. We call the organization that name when the community agencies join with the

Red Cross for the purpose of raising funds. So in this community, they will now be known as the United Way to take advantage of the national publicity.

Some of the purposes of the United Way are to assess on a continuing basis the needs for human service programming. To kind of seek solutions for human problems and that type of thing. We try to develop as fully as possible the resources of the community, both governmental and voluntary that we need to meet the needs. This is usually done through a fund raising campaign. The United Way campaign is a very common thing throughout the country.

The third thing is we would try to use the support we get in that campaign to maximize ways to deploy the resources we have and the maximum way to try to meet the most current needs of the community through agency programs that we fund through the allocation committee.

So, that you can see some of the first three purposes that I talked about include the three main structures of the United Way. Besides the General Committee which operates the United Way, there are three branches. There's the Campaign, which raises money. An Allocations Committee, that budgets the money and allocates the money raised to the varied agency programs. And, (3) Filing Planning Committee that functions all year round that reviews the needs of the community. Through the programs we have, we try to meet the needs of the community as such.

PB: How did you personally find out about the shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube, or the announcement of the shutdown in 1977?

WB: Oh, I think we all found about it about in the same way. To be very frank, I don't know how long you've been on the committee, but I've been here for twenty years. There were always rumors that this type of thing could take place. So, I think the exact timing or something like that becomes a surprise. But putting it in focus, it really is something that was to be expected because the mills were not modernized. It wasn't expected at that specific time, let's put it that way.

PB: Were meetings held to determine the effect that the shutdown would have on the city?

WB: Oh sure. We met with the agencies and let them know. I think if we put this into proper perspective,

Youngstown has been changing dramatically since the late 1960's. We talked about the conglomerates in the country; many of those conglomerates touched Youngstown here. A lot of the companies that existed in Youngstown are now nationally owned firms.

So, we at the United Way have been taking a beating financially for quite a few years before the Campbell Works of Sheet and Tube closed.

PB: Was there any effort to contact the unions? I mean directly by the agencies or maybe through your office? I mean, I'm sure many of them knew the services were available.

WB: Okay, back to Sheet and Tube again adding up the fiscal loss, okay, if you're talking about that, yes. First of all, we have a Labor Participations Director on staff at the United Way. At that time, it was Archie Itts. He in turn laid out some plans relative to the union membership relating to agencies. We had plans anyway. Union people have fiscal problems on an ordinary basis. So if there is a plan laid out for somebody who comes in here try to review their resources and try to figure out where they stand relative to the future.

We also did some planning with the council and put out a directory of services that people could use in a crisis. We did this in conjunction with the 648 Mental Health Board. Then, we also did some planning with the University. Steve Redburn was there at that time and we planned with the Urban Affairs Department at the University.

So in continuing meetings we felt it would be better for planning to be held at one place. The University for the most part was able to plan in a general way for this area. I think they were pretty detailed records of what took place at that time at the University.

PB: So, there were contingency plans even before the shut-down took place?

WB: Sure. There are always people in need. When the need becomes widespread as it was at the Campbell Works it certainly becomes a much different type of problem. We have a referral system here. We are aware of people and their problems and how to get them in contact with the appropriate agencies.

PB: What overall impact do you feel that the Sheet and Tube shutdown has on the future of your agency financially and other ways?

WB: Well, that's already been had. Again, we lost a tremendous amount of money. Our agency in the last five years has lost over half a million dollars. So, you know the Sheet and Tube crisis there was one of many that has existed in this community. U.S. Steel last year was another example of this type of crisis.

So, we are perennially losing money in the major establishment areas and not replacing it or replacing it on a very slow pace in other places because there's not too much else being built.

There are two factors that hit the agency. One, the disastrous loss of money, and the other the inflation costs that existed during the last few years. These factors have certainly not enabled us to do any great expansion of the agency. I don't even know if we've been keeping pace in fund raising efforts with the cost of living. We certainly haven't been in that game.

PB: Okay, I'd like to thank you very much for taking time this morning for this interview. Thank you very much. Are there any additional facts that you feel should be brought out that I haven't mentioned or asked you about?

WB: Yes, I'll tell you about some of our efforts here were concentrated with the University. There were studies done at YSU, at least two I know of. One which profiled the unemployed worker in detail. Students went out and did interviews with the people who were laid off and came up with the profile of the workers. I think much of that would be very interesting reading, because it does have a lot of specific case information. It does have information on people who may have left the community or others who stayed in the community.

As you know, many of the people who were initially laid off went out of the community, 20 to 30% of the total from what I hear. Some of the next group went out to General Motors when they began to lay out plans of the J-car and that type of expansion. But, I think that document would make very interesting reading. Then, as I mentioned before, they do have a profile of services since central planning was done at that time with committees that Dr. Redburn had set up. These profiles are

quite detailed. The reports are quite well done.

PB: The committee, was it an inner agency?

WB: That's right. It comprised of representatives from the agencies from all over the community, I think you can get a great deal of information reading that report. In fact if I can find one, I'll show it to you. I have some here in the office.

The second thing I think we should touch on is the fact that Youngstown, through the conglomerates which I mentioned, but also through loss of steel production whether you're talking about the whole J & L complex, whether you're talking about U.S. Steel, whether you're talking about the tremendous cutback at Republic and the loss of Aeroquip and all these different firms, has lost a great deal of the city's industrial base. Relative to the United Way it becomes the loss of major employment areas through whom we raise a great deal of our money.

So when you're talking about these cutbacks, we're suffering this loss of money. You're also talking about there's no possible way the agencies can keep their services at the level they should be, both because retention of personnel is impossible because inflation is taking up any other minor increases that we may offset these major losses through. So, I think these factors cause great havoc on agencies doing planning.

PB: Then, you've actually through your allocations committee probably if I'm reading this right, had to cut back funding on some of your agencies on services that might have been needed?

WB: Sure, or we might have had to eliminate agencies through Planning Council. Certainly, we could have no frill agencies existing because we have enough trouble just trying to meet the needs of the community through the resources we presently have. Many of the agencies haven't got the increases that they've been entitled to. The increases meet inflation.

Because of this, agencies have programs that don't expand like they should expand, because when the need is greatest, you're not raising the money to meet the needs because of the plant closings and the economic situation of Youngstown. That becomes a very difficult situation for agencies and planning to meet the needs of people.

BRENNAN

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PB: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW