

SS228.mp3

David Yellin- This is January 30<sup>th</sup> 1970 and we are interviewing T.O. Jones. We are interviewing T.O. Jones. No, Joan Beifuss and David Yellin interviewing T.O. Jones at the headquarters of the retail clerks for 3373 Poplar. (Tape Break)

David Yellin- Testing, testing, testing, testing. Right. Mr. Jones would you just say Mr. Jones?

T.O. Jones- Oh Mr. Jones.

David Yellin- Right.

(Tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- Ok Mr. Jones maybe before we even get started the last time we talked with you, you were with the sanitation union and now you are with the retail clerks, can you tell us when that happened?

T.O. Jones- This is true I returned to (muffled) of 1969 after a very hard campaign in New York and I returned to Memphis and found that it (muffled) AFCEM of E and it's local union here seemed aware of the problem. I was home some three weeks before anyone really knew I was home. Some of the men in the public works department had called upon me and there was quite a bit of dissatisfaction among them which there is still now today and they wanted to complain to me about different things that was going on and different problems. So after a long conference with them, several long conferences with them, I made a commitment to the men of the public works department that I would not meet with anyone unless some of them were with me. And this went for Mr. Epps or Mr. Worth or anyone else with regard to their stability with the union. I did attempt to meet with Mr. Epps some of the men and myself during the time of the school crisis and some more community leaders wanted to meet with us to see if we could hammer out some of the situations that were going on. We did meet, at the democratic club where the meeting was to be and some of the people weren't there that were due to have met. I wouldn't meet with Mr. Epps and his other co-workers. Some of the men from the public works department were there. Because I felt that if the community involvement where people from the community had been involved and wanted to know what was going on and they were entitled to know and this was the only way we were going to be able to let them know what was going on by sitting around a conference table and hammering it out. We didn't meet, and afterwards we attempted to try to meet with Mr. Epps, Mr. Epps refused to meet and said that he would not meet and I made commitment also to the men that I also wouldn't go to the minimum salary building or the Clayborne Temple church and I haven't been yet and do not intend to go unless the men and myself are together. So we are, never did come to any conclusion on this. Now when I was put on my vacation when I come to Memphis in August after returning from New York I was due vacation. I had some problems and I did talk to the international union in regards to it. International union seeing it fit that they didn't want not respond as I asked them to and it appeared to me that I was

just being used as a tool here and I felt that if this was being the case why should I stay and later I was going to be ousted anyway. So it was a long drawn out situation and I got a letter from Mr. Epps stating, I got a telegram from Mr. Epps first meet him at his office and I didn't respond to the telegram because I never got assignment from Mr. Epps, all my assignments had come from the international office.

Joan Beifuss- Ok can you hold just a minute, because I am a little bit confused here, at the end of the sanitation strike in 68 in say May of 68 after Dr. King was killed, what was your official position (muffled).

T.O. Jones- My official position was (muffled) was an organizer, and I stepped down as being president of the local and went full time with (muffled) to go on the road. Which I don't regret going on the road it was a good experience with me I learned quite a bit I came in contact with quite a few people.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell us some of the places you went when you were on the road?

T.O. Jones- Well, went into Florida, into Tampa Florida and we Jesse and myself had a little campaign there we had three day strike and we were able to come out of it. We also went over to St. Petersburg where there was some men who were out on strike who attempted to try to get this situation nailed down but we weren't able to have any success there with the hard core situation and some commitments had been made and people were just keeping those commitments as far as I can see. I was also in Baltimore during the time the election was held there, they had a situation with the school board and sanitation workers. I also was in Washington DC during the poor people's campaign, we were sent into assist SCLC in any way that we could. We worked with them now from there the 1<sup>st</sup> of the year I went into New York, the 1<sup>st</sup> of 69, they had an election state wide there for state employees. And I worked in New York in the Spring Valley area known as the Hudson Valley areas, Spring Valley city in the Hudson Valley at the hospital there and we had a campaign going and I stayed there until I returned to Memphis in August.

Joan Beifuss- Now were these the hospital campaign in New York was that successful, were they trying to organize?

T.O. Jones- It was an election coming up in June and we lost the election, we lost the election for many reasons. I would say, I don't think it was because we didn't do our job, I think it was other things that were thrown in the hopper that they really hoped to beat us and we were going against the civil service employees association which are normally not a union it is really a boss's outfit which you can understand.

Joan Beifuss- How about Tampa, was that for union recognition?

T.O. Jones- Tampa Florida, these people have been organized but they didn't have an agreement. The union will recognize that but it didn't really have a full scale agreement that the men can live with so the people had made up their minds up that they were going to strike anyways before Mr. Epps and I got there and the morning

that they did stay out we tried to persuade them to go back to work but they would not go. A public employee will go just so far and it appears to me when they get tired of the boss just kicking them around they will make a decision and they realize, a lot of public employees realize that when they stop working that their bread stops but they are willing to sacrifice if there is a bonafied union which will stand by them and will help them to you know get what they need and thus far (muffled) had done this and I have no squabble with (muffled) personally but I guess I felt that I could no longer want to stay around that is all.

Joan Beifuss- Well what I was trying to find out was how successful AFSME had been in St. Petersburg, Tampa, in the south since the Memphis crisis.

T.O. Jones- Since the Memphis crisis I would say ASFME has been very successful and ASFME will continue to be successful if it tear down some of its barriers and they would stop, I am not a critic but I think I can criticize because I was in the position and I know what happened. If they would stop using people and give people true identity and I mean by that is this, if a man has got a job let him know he has got a job and don't find a way to undercut him at a later date. If he makes mistakes I think he should be told he made mistakes and not wait until the final moments and then you know cut the turf right out form under. This is kind of disheartening to anyone if today you think you have a job and tomorrow you find out you don't have one.

Joan Beifuss- Well let me come up further, when you came back into Memphis then you were coming on vacation you were still an organizer for ASFME and you were on vacation right?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Well then how did you get with the retail clerks?

T.O. Jones- (muffled) I would like to explain the difference to you of what happened, I was here in Memphis and as I told you, stated to you I talked to some men in the public works department, I was very concerned about the union now and the department of public works no use in me kidding no one.

Joan Beifuss- Why are they unhappy?

T.O. Jones- Well there are several reason why they are unhappy. Number one after you organize people you have to service them and you must have qualified people to service them. If not, then the boss will take advantage of the people who service and that is if he doesn't know what he is doing or he doesn't show that he is capable of doing it. It is quite a job, with the public works department because you have got to be able to relate to them and they understand you, I am talking about the men first. Then you got to be able to relate to the bosses and the power structure and it is a difference in the power structure and the forming of supervisors out there. Because the forming of supervisors and the laborers come on about the same level, now

when you get to the point where you got to deal with the power structure this is a difficult situation.

David Yellin- Now one thing just to get back a little in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and so on were they sanitation strikers you were involved with?

T.O. Jones- In Tampa these were sanitation worse yes.

David Yellin- Right.

Joan Beifuss- In St. Petersburg also?

T.O. Jones- The men we were involved with indirectly not directly of St. Petersburg they were sanitation workers also.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones what was the union that went into that Charleston sanitation situation last year?

David Yellin- And the hospital wasn't it?

Joan Beifuss- Was it the hospital?

David Yellin- Yes.

T.O. Jones- I am 99B. This was 1199B out in New York, I really don't know too much about them and I wouldn't elaborate on it.

Joan Beifuss- Was that still ASFME?

T.O. Jones- No.

Joan Beifuss- it wasn't?

T.O. Jones- No.

David Yellin- Yeah well, I have a few questions to sort of get back in Memphis you mentioned the term of the power structure here your dealing with the men in relation to the power structure and the sanitation department. Specifically who is the power structure in the sanitation department?

T.O. Jones- Well your power structure in your sanitation department would be such persons as your director, your assistant director...

David Yellin- Now that is the director...

T.O. Jones- Of public works...

David Yellin- Blackburn?

T.O. Jones- Yes. This is where your power structure, the way you deal with the power structure. You have got to be bale to go into them and you have got to be bale

to make deals, let's face it. You have got to be able to say well I have John Doe here, who I realize is a bad employee what can we do to help the man. You have to be in a situation when it comes to the way you have to deal with the power structure to make your recommendation you don't force anything on them, but you make a recommendation to them. And most times when I make a recommendation I got good....

David Yellin- You made a recommendation to whom specifically?

T.O. Jones- Well I have made recommendations to the superintendents I made recommendations to the foreman's, I made recommendations to the director of public works in regards to employees such as if a man had a problem and he was you know might say he was laying down on the job or he was causing confusion, I would say well let's transfer this man to another unit over on Scott's Street from walker and see how he would do there and some of these men today are still employees of the city.

David Yellin- Now what kind of you say your relationship with the superintendents and the assistant and the director himself Mr. Blackburn and who are the other guys?

T.O. Jones- Mr. Meynard Styles, Mr. Rice.

David Yellin- Mr. Rice.

T.O. Jones- I have always had good relationship with the city, I never tried to you know mustle them or anything of that nature but I always do a stand and I tried to be right and just. And I was fair with the employer as well as the employee before we really had recognition in the public works department whereas if we had a union back before the administration changed from the commission form I was able to sit down and to discuss problems when management and we would get some concession from them.

Joan Beifuss- Well in essence are you saying now then that the union is not recognizing the workers properly?

T.O. Jones- Yes, I am saying now that today ASFME is not representing any of its members as it should, not only the public works department that goes for the inspection bureau, the housing authority, the hospitals and what have you.

Joan Beifuss- Why is that?

T.O. Jones- I would not comment on that.

David Yellin- Well...

T.O. Jones- It is an administrative problem this is all that it is.

Joan Beifuss- Let me comment then, let me say that Jesse Epps can't relate to the sanitation men the same way you could.

T.O. Jones- Well this is the, this is really the problem, since we are going to discuss it you see an administrator for a union, he can be the man that gets the contracts out and makes a silence, this is good. But when it comes to dealing with the employees which are the members of the union, this where the problem is (muffled). Mr. Epps personally I have nothing against but he is just trying to do too many things.

David Yellin- Too many things outside the union?

T.O. Jones- He is trying to do too many things within the structure of the union and he is trying to be in too many places for ASFME. He is also trying to do too many things outside of the structure of the union and the civil rights field. He is just one man he can't do them all.

Joan Beifuss- Who would be his immediate, who would come immediately under Jesse Epps here?

T.O. Jones- I really don't know, I have not questioned it because I felt that whoever it was from the people that he has they are on his staff, they are not capable of doing the job.

Joan Beifuss- So then you went with the retail clerks?

T.O. Jones- I am with the retail clerks because as I was stating to you my assignments were never been given from the field and my assignments always come from the national office. I had no bones to pick with the international but the international seemed they were getting ready to forget me. So therefore, I had to venture out and look for some place to apply.

Joan Beifuss- In other words, you never were under Jesse Epps' direction.

T.O. Jones- I never was, he and I worked together but I never would have gotten no direct assignments from him. I think if I am not mistaken I have the telegram here.

David Yellin- Could you or would you care to comment, and don't forget what the purpose of these comments are Mr. Jones, this is not to do anything but get the record straight so that when people are looking at this, we aren't here to find anything out except to try to keep the record straight. Why do you think the union in your words, was out to forget you?

T.O. Jones- Well number 1 you know there is always a saying that people want to control people and I think when you are a representative of the people, people as many as they have in Memphis in the union I don't think no one should control the person that has got to work for these people. I think they should have a free hand to work in the best interest of those persons and this is was not permitted by me, to me, for my high authority because there were commitments made that I would come

back to Memphis for negotiations and Mr. Worth just seemed fit that this couldn't be done.

David Yellin- Now the date of this the negotiations this is after he...

T.O. Jones- 1969.

David Yellin- The year was up.

T.O. Jones- Yes they were re-negotiating.

David Yellin- Yeah, so that he never told you that he wouldn't or would or...

T.O. Jones- Well what happened was this, the men of the public works department sent a letter requesting my stay in Memphis. And also, it was signed by several men of the department of public works and coming to negotiations they sent a telegram to Mr. Worth which I have a copy of in my fields at home in my possession, asking him to allow me to return to Memphis for negotiations. This he seemed fit not to do.

Joan Beifuss- That was last June when the contract came up again.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- And he, did he..

T.O. Jones- He ignored it, he ignored it, he ignored it. This is the only thing that really burns me up about the situation, as much as what put in it by the public and much was put in it by the city of Memphis I am talking about the public, I mean nationwide is what I am speaking about and then we had something to happen here that none of us could help, none of us could help this. So we don't use this as a fence, or a bridge to use as a crutch of his ill doing, to say that we should do certain things. But it appeared to me that only thing ASFME was concerned about was taking T.O. Jones and using him as a figure head for a number of days or months and this was be the end of it and I felt that I should no longer be used as a figure head, I felt that if I was going to be used as a reality to represent the national union then let me know that I have got a job, let me know that I am in the situation. There have been many occasions where the problems come up here in Memphis and just so happened that I was here and I tried to handle it the best of my ability, I never tried to do anything against any of the persons who were members of the union but there are sometimes that you have to take a different avenue from the avenue you were originally taking.

Joan Beifuss- Well are you, you are not saying though that the public works department people are no better off now than they were before the strike in 68 are you? Or are you?

T.O. Jones- I am not saying that but it is coming down to some problems they are not taking care of there are going to be some turmoil I will say that I will put it that way.

David Yellin- Just for my own information is another, the thing in 69 was that a year renewal of the contract?

T.O. Jones- 3 years.

David Yellin- 3 years?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- So that there won't be anything coming up until 72 then?

T.O. Jones- Not unless they reopen their agreement I imagine it has got some clause in it where they can reopen. With notification most industry carry this clause. I don't know whether they got it for public employees or not. I have the contract but I am not really pay close attention to it on that particular.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones let me go back even further because in that first tape that was done with you there was an awful lot of blank spaces, regarding the situation in 66 with Pete Sisson.

David Yellin- Because you were one of the first that our group talked with and you know we didn't know as much.

T.O. Jones- I would like to go back to 1963 if you really want to get the real crux of this thing.

Joan Beifuss- Fine.

T.O. Jones- We will go back as far as about 1959 on about December 5<sup>th</sup> that is when I become to being an employee of the public works department I was hired...

Joan Beifuss- What did you do before that?

T.O. Jones- Before that I was just a laborer, I was looking for a job and I went into the city office and I was hired and I was assigned to the Wellington street at that time division, which is known as south division and I was given to a superintendent by the name of Mr. Goodman. He was they called a hard boy man, they say but I didn't find that at all. In 1960 the Teamsters attempted to organize the city employees and they didn't get very much out of it for some reason, I don't know what happened but in 1963 many complaints had been going about the situation and the retail clerks moved out not to take their men as members of their union but to get some means of help for them whereas the men would have some type of vehicle. So in 1963 in June we begun meeting and..

Joan Beifuss- At least it was under the auspices of the retail clerk association?

T.O. Jones- Yes, several men were fired in June of 1963 some 33 men were fired.

David Yellin- Where?



T.O. Jones- Here a the public works department of the city of Memphis here.

David Yellin- And the retail clerks union was trying to organize.

T.O. Jones- They were really our standby, they come to our aid and I was one of those men who would discharge, I was discharge.

Joan Beifuss- Hold just a second, can you tell me anything, do you have any idea how many people belong to the retail clerks association at that point?

T.O. Jones- At that time?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- No I can't.

Joan Beifuss- How about now?

T.O. Jones- I really don't know what their membership is.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah because I have no idea.

T.O. Jones- And we...'

David Yellin- Excuse me you were fired what was the reason for that?

T.O. Jones- I am coming to that. We begun meeting and talking about the problems within the department which there were many. I have known men to ask for a tub and there tub would have a hole in it and the man would tell him he didn't need a tub, such things as this. Here is a man he is pouring this garbage from a can into his tub and his tub has got a hole in it and he has to carry this on his, at that time they were carrying it on his head.

Joan Beifuss- If he didn't have a tub he would have to carry each garbage can out individually.

T.O. Jones- No he would still use his tub with the hole in it this was a complaint (muffled) and also I have note a truck drivers to report that the trucks didn't have brakes on them. They would tell them to get in the truck and take it on out.

David Yellin- In any case.

T.O. Jones- Yeah. And known men to be off and actually be sick and supervisor would want the man to promise him he wouldn't be sick anymore and all this kind of horseplay. So this is the kind of situation the men faced, and I have known men who wanted to be off to take care of business and they weren't permitted to be off. If he would take off he was talked to the next morning kind of roughly. I have known men to be discharged for no reason at all. This is back in the early 60's. In 1963 when we begun to attempt to organize in June, we would hold meetings at the retail clerks union office where they had a hall there and we were permitted to meet. And

during the course of our meeting there would be people who would go back and tell the foremen's over there and for this many men were fired. We some 33 persons were fired and myself I was fired on June the 27<sup>th</sup> 1963. When I immediately begun then to get concerned about what was going on and I went to some of the negro leaders and also tot eh clerks and we sat down and we discussed this thing.

David Yellin- Do you remember who some of them are?

T.O. Jones- \_Well I went to Mr. Russell Sugarmon and Mr. A.W. Willis and Mr. George Holloway. I also talked to reverend Gladney who works at international harvester, I talked to Mr. Forrest Dixon who is with the wood works and I begun to become acquainted with the people in labor and I begun to get acquainted with the leaders of the black community and the white community in the city of Memphis and from there we just began to venture out. I was fired the 27<sup>th</sup> of June and from that...

David Yellin- Do you recall why you were fired?

T.O. Jones- Yes, they claimed that I was work wasn't satisfactory and this was the charge they put against us. At that time Mr. Ferris was the commissioner and Mr. Cole more or less you might say the director.

David Yellin- Mr. Cole?

T.O. Jones- Jimmy Cole yes.

Joan Beifuss- C-o-l-e?

T.O. Jones- Right.

David Yellin- And was mayor Lobe?

T.O. Jones- He was the mayor then and he would, Mr. Cole would send the foremen out or the supervisor would send the foremen for you to report that afternoon to him, or they would go and report they would tell you that your work was not satisfactory, this is what they would put on your slips. A couple of the fellows and myself were discharged on the same day and we didn't accept ours we knew this was for union activities and I told Mr. Cole that this was a problem and we knew why we were being discharged because we had been active in the union. He claimed that it wasn't but never the less we were still discharged. So we went on and we continued to meet and we continued to drum up support and we met with negro leaders, who some advised us to go back to work and we met with some that said we have got to find a way to fight this thing and what can be done and I begun to get acquainted with the people in the labor movement and I began to get some things some ideas of how to go about solving some of the problems we had.

David Yellin- Do you remember who were some of the negro leaders who said to fight it, we have to find ways to fight this?

T.O. Jones- Well you have minister's alliance here which we went before several times and they have always said there had to be a way to do it. They weren't for no violence or anything like that.

David Yellin- Did they do it, what was there, I was going to say what was their reason that is not exactly what I was going to say but they did it because they felt that the negroes should stick together?

T.O. Jones- The felt there was injustice in this department after we reported to them what was going on and how it was and how people were treated and we went to the alliance several times and we were never denied an opportunity to speak. We were always heard and this is the kind of relations hip that your need in a situation like this. The leaders very influenced by the power structure.

David Yellin- But they immediately recognized it in your opinion, as a black and white situation?

T.O. Jones- They didn't recognize it immediately as a black and white situation they didn't recognize it as that they recognized it in a sense that these were employees that were all black and there was some mistreating going on there. So they took on the study and wanted to know what could they do to help us and many of them were willing to help us and they did help us, many ministers of the city of Memphis here helped us black and white quite a bit..

Joan Beifuss- How did they help you?

T.O. Jones- Well several of them called on the commissioner in regards to these men going back to work and most of these men who desired to go back to work when commissioner Ferris allowed them to return back to work he and I discussed it and we worked it out and these men returned to work, there wasn't a question about a man going back to work he was not penalized or anything of this nature he would return in good faith.

Joan Beifuss- In other words the firing was sort of a warning for union activities?

T.O. Jones- Well more or less what I would say it was a warning but if you catch in a city governmental agency you are going to have these type of things I found out this was an experience I picked up. They are always going to try and find you a way to browbeat you down. This is just it, it is no different from any big firm.

David Yellin- Browbeat you down because of he union.

T.O. Jones- Right right.

David Yellin- So it could be considered that form the city's point of view it was a union matter as much as a racial matter or could you separate the two?

T.O. Jones- Well it went from a union matter to a racial matter we will put it that way. Because it really started out as a labor dispute, and it went from there to a racial situation.

David Yellin- So that you would classify the [people here I guess they were anti-union as much as anti-negro?

T.O. Jones- You mean the city as far as that time?

David Yellin- yeah.

T.O. Jones- Well they were both I would say, you see it has been a saying around southern areas that all the man care about is that if he can get the sweat form you to get his labor done and the city is no different form no other as far as I am concerned the same thing.

David Yellin- But can you separate the difference between anti-black and anti-union?

T.O. Jones- You could separate it on one basis, you can say that a man is against a man because he is a negro and then you can say on the other hand a man is against another man because he was a negro and wants to upgrade himself and this is many cases we have had this happen and we had this happen today. They are not ready, the city of Memphis is not ready to face the fact and upgrade employees according to ability, they are not ready. They are not doing it.

David Yellin- Not upgrade black employees.

T.O. Jones- True.

David Yellin- But what I am trying to do in your opinion is there anywhere that anybody can separate the fact that the union situation and the black situation, what I am trying to say is that in order ton kept he black s down if it is the union that is trying to get them up they will go against the union?

T.O. Jones- Well it has been in many cases that this happens that management would go against the union, this is because there was the possibility of majority black, this has happened and it is true.

David Yellin- But racial prejudice might be at the bottom of it or is it union prejudice?

T.O. Jones- I think it would be both.

David Yellin- Both, it is hard to separate.

T.O. Jones- It is hard to separate because you see racial prejudice is one thing and union prejudice is another. Here is a man who has got a multi-million dollar firm. He just knows that when the in union steps in there they are going to dip into his stuff..

David Yellin- He doesn't vary what color they are.

T.O. Jones- He don't care what color they are this is just it.

Joan Beifuss- Well now in 63 did you go back to work then?

T.O. Jones- I refused to go back to work I was offered my job along with the other men and I, my statement I believe to Mr. Ferris was that I wanted to see these men back to work I was concerned about them going back.

David Yellin- How come you went to see Mr. Ferris.

T.O. Jones- Out of these 33 men I guess I had a lot of mouth and I guess I was chosen as spokesmen and that is hwy I stayed into it and really why I had the job...

David Yellin- Were you chosen officially or in any kind of informal meeting?

T.O. Jones- I was chosen officially by the men that were officially discharged.

David Yellin- Not as a union just as a group of men.

T.O. Jones- No just as a group. You see we have a back history with this group that I don't thin has been brought out to anyone. The public works department employee didn't just sit and wait on someone to say we are the union for you. We attempted to organize independently which we have...

David Yellin- When was this?

T.O. Jones- This was in 1964, the 1<sup>st</sup> of 64.

David Yellin- But now we are back in 63?

T.O. Jones- Yeah well back in 63 more or less we were making our to becoming...

David Yellin- Where did you do this on the street?

T.O. Jones- No we had the retail clerks gave us permission to meet I their hall and they opened their doors to us and were very nice to us and they I can truthfully say this I had a key there and I could be there anytime I wanted and we had access to the office, we had access to the phones, we could meet any time of day or night that we desired to and they didn't have a meeting. I would look at the schedule and see where they were going to meet. I can remember several times I would not look at the schedule and I would call a meeting and I would have 7 r 8 hundred people there and Mr. Shepherd would have a meeting and he would take those people into the office with them.

Joan Beifuss- Now you were getting 7 or 8 hundred people as early as 63?

T.O. Jones- Well what would happen was this you had people were afraid to come to a union meeting and something like this you back in 63 we just couldn't reach the

people because they were afraid. Management had threatened them and all these kind of things.

David Yellin- Afraid of their jobs, they weren't physically afraid.

T.O. Jones- Not they weren't physically afraid but they were afraid of their job because someone would get up and say, some of you all went somewhere you didn't have any business going last night. And then everybody gets to trembling I imagine. So they would get to a man name and instead of calling the name he would tell him you wait here. You see they don't punch clocks they have roll call, alphabetical roll call. When they get to...

David Yellin- This is the sanitation department?

T.O. Jones- Yeah when they get to John Doe's name instead of calling John Doe's name they would say Bill Blaine, and when it gets to John Doe he said John you can stay here and then he go on to call maybe 5 more names and her gets to another man who was at the meeting who has been reported and he tell him he can stay here and all this kind of stuff.

David Yellin- Sot here were informers obviously.

T.O. Jones- Oh yes we had quite a few informers and some of them we knew, we knew them, we knew they were sent of the purpose to come back and tell the management who were there and we knew it. We were able to spot them out, and we had several incidents that happened that you just wouldn't believe.

David Yellin- Alright can you tell us some?

T.O. Jones- We had a man, I won't call his name, to come to the meeting and we knew he was sent, he is retired now naturally. This man we got him into office in regards to signing the card. The air conditioning was running and this was in June. When this man come out of the air conditioning office he was sweating like somebody poured water over him. You know we really talked to him and punished him a little bit you know. He was sent to find out what he could find out and I imagine he made a good report.,

David Yellin- Why do you think they did it, these informers?

T.O. Jones- Why do I think...well this is just, today you have the same thing, not only in the public sector of employees but in other sectors where there is always going to be someone, that is going to be nice enough tot tell the management what is going on.

David Yellin- Nice enough.

T.O. Jones- Nice enough you know.

Joan Beifuss- It is a kind of fact of life.

T.O. Jones- I don't thin this helps a man though, I think that it only degrades him with the fellow workers because once they find out you are that type of person they don't have too much respect for you and I have known alto of men to have animosity against a person because they knew that he did this thing. We had some fellows now that doesn't have time for a guy because he found he was committing himself to management this way.

Joan Beifuss- Well now is did you get another job then when you didn't go back?

David Yellin- Now we are back in 63.

T.O. Jones- I was an unemployed person from 1963 until of I am not mistaken on about 1964.

David Yellin- Now can we ask you and we are not trying not be personal but how did you sustain yourself?

T.O. Jones- Well the men of the public works department were very good to me, they really helped me financially and this is the reason I feel so indebted to them. There were meant hat would come to my aid and there were men that came to my rescue at any time of day or night that I would call them and also in many instances the (David Yellin- muffled) personally came to my aid and assistance and I wouldn't go into detail about that but I can recall many times that things, chips were really down for me and when I know the thing it was a bright day for me.

Joan Beifuss- Did the AFLCIO labor council were they of any help at all?

T.O. Jones- Yes, the AFLCIO labor council of it self was in a corner and I was stating to you we are organized independently which is the independent workers association. This is the first organization that is put together by the men and it was drawn up by us and we you know had our bylaws and all this type of thing and we tried to get the city to recognize the independent workers association but Mr. Sisson would not do it as he committed himself earlier before he got any votes that he as for labor. And we went to Mr. Sisson, the leaders went to Mr. Sisson, the labor leaders and leaders of the black and white community to try and get the situation cleared up but he flatly refused, he said he would be impeached and they were going to throw him out if he did it, this is the story.

Joan Beifuss- SO this would be about 66?

T.O. Jones- Yes this was later but when he went in he fired some men also.

David Yellin- Well now before we get to hat in 63 you went to see Mr. Ferris?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- And from what you said his attitude was friendly.

T.O. Jones- This was the position of Mr. Ferris was, that these men can go back to work, there is no reprisal and he was not going to recognize any union and he was not going to do any business with any union. But some of these men were just concerned and I myself personally was concerned and we continued to make contact with people in the public works department, we began to gather data, names of persons who were working and I would stay and the office in the afternoon and call them and find out what went on what was said, I would go to different ones homes and sit down and discuss it with them, we would call meetings and maybe we could get 40 today maybe 20 tomorrow.

David Yellin- Was your objective to form a union?

T.O. Jones- It was my objective after I had gotten into it yes.

David Yellin- Well then Mr. Ferris' attitude and Mr. Sisson's is somewhat the same in the at they both refused to recognize the union.

T.O. Jones- Well I can recall, yeah, this is true, I recall once when we had the pickets on the public works office out there and Mr. Ferris crossed the line coming from city hall if I am not mistaken from somewhere, and he said they could walk out there until they walked their shoe soles off, this was an early part of the game.

Joan Beifuss- This is still around 63?

T.O. Jones- Yeah this is when we had the pickets on. He did, he changed though because he instructed his foremen's to put these people back to work and he instructed Mr. Cole to put these people back to work. And several of the men went back to work.

David Yellin- Now would you say from what you are saying is that the pattern then in this city at the time, Mr. Ferris, Mr. Sisson it really didn't make any difference but Mr. Sisson later said that he would be impeached what he meant was that the whole power structure of the community was against a union being formed?

T.O. Jones- Well this is in one sense that he put it but he was speaking about the commissions and the mayor at that time.

David Yellin- Yes.

T.O. Jones- Would impeach him, this is really what he was...

David Yellin- So that the climate of the city in so far as the officials of the city, the elected officials of the city, was that they were against any union of public employees.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- I mean that was the climate?

T.O. Jones- This was the climate, yes.,



David Yellin- And these men whether they acquiesce they acquiesced because they believed it also because there might have been pressure from...

Joan Beifuss- Do you suppose that they didn't consider the fact that they didn't, that the city structure would have done better dealing with the small independent union than a union affiliated with national?

T.O. Jones- I think this was over looked and they would have found it to come in a national union but if they would have recognized it back in the early stage I think we would have had less problems.

David Yellin- But they didn't even want to give a finger.

T.O. Jones- No they didn't want to, and you see they had an opportunity to recognize it and we could have worked out our problem because further on as the years went by, the union in one sense was really recognized, there wasn't really a question about it. Because there were things we were able to do for the employees.

Joan Beifuss- Unofficially.

T.O. Jones- Unofficially. Only thing we didn't have was what we call the check off, the men were paying what we call over the fence you know. That is if you catch a guy he gives it to you and if you didn't then he didn't and it was hard to do, but unofficially we were recognized and the relationship was better than it is now.

Joan Beifuss- Let me go back so it was Bill Ross that got you onto the international payroll or did Bill Ross have something to do with that?

T.O. Jones- Back in 1964 Mr. Ross was going to Washington and I asked him to find a union an international union that would be interested in us. And this is why I asked him, and that is why ASFME is in Memphis today. ASFME did not come in and you know set up nothing, but that they did was this. I held a charter I my position and I should have brought it with me to show you. They issued us a charter for Memphis city Tennessee city employees. IWA which is on the charter which is independent workers association and this is on the original charter but se they are not using the original charter anymore and when Bill went to Washington he contacted these people and he got back and told me they were going to come in to see me and someone would be in to see me. Mr. Tom Morgan form Washington office who at that time was the director of organization.

David Yellin- Tom Morgan?

T.O. Jones- Yes, and John Hale who was director of a council over in Little Rock, they come in and my executive board and myself we met with them and we agreed to merge with the international union it was a merger.

David Yellin- Yeah but what were you then when you agreed?

T.O. Jones- At that time I was the president of the union.

David Yellin- Local what?

T.O. Jones- The independent Workers Association. I was the elected official president and we discussed it and the executive board and my self agreed to it and we took it back to the membership and they approved it.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now then did money start coming in from AFSCIO?

T.O. Jones- What they actually did was this they put me on their payroll.

Joan Beifuss- As an organizer?

T.O. Jones- As an organizer. And they began to pick up expenses, one expense check.

David Yellin- It is the 12<sup>th</sup> day of October 64.

T.O. Jones- That is true, you are an international organizer.

T.O. Jones- That is true that is the date that, that is the time that they come into see me and I was put on their payroll.

Joan Beifuss- Prior to that you were for instance you were getting no money from the AFLCIO local labor council?

T.O. Jones- No.

Joan Beifuss- Everything was coming form the men themselves?

T.O. Jones- Everything was coming form the men and from Mr. Shepherd.

David Yellin- Perhaps I missed something but the IWA you were then president of when was that formed?

T.O. Jones- That was formed on and about he 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1964.

David Yellin- 64 right.

T.O. Jones- And then on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1964, when the men went to work Mr. Sisson fired 5.. And if I am not mistaken it was in the paper because they became to officers of our organization.

David Yellin- They couldn't fire you because you weren't working.,

T.O. Jones- No but he did fire 5 of the men.

David Yellin- Then what happened?

T.O. Jones- Three of them went back to work immediately and then some years later I was able to get the other men back to work.

Joan Beifuss- Well now did they have to withdraw from the union board of directors to go back to work?

T.O. Jones- No.

David Yellin- How come they went back to work?

T.O. Jones- Well what happened was this, I think that what assumption that Sisson was working under was the same thing, Mr. Ferris left with you know that if you play tough and you play hard you will beat them down you know and they will forget about it you know. So he immediately fired the people who were elected officers of the union. The trustee and the vice presidents, he immediately fired them and through Bill Ross's office and other people I was able to get them back to work, three of them, two of them went back to work I think it was 1967 if I am not mistake.

David Yellin- That is three years they were out of work?

T.O. Jones- Yes, and I was able to get some assistance from Mr. Cole and they went back to work.

David Yellin- Ok now do you want to go chronologically Joan or?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I think so that by the end of 64 then you were, the union was in some way affiliated with the national and you are a union organizer?

T.O. Jones- In 1964 a charter was issued to us in November on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1964 at the (muffled) theatre we had a charter dedication. I come up with this idea, this was to encourage the men and also let the community know that we was attempting to do something and then Memphis AFLCIO is council itself they backed us strongly, black and white leaders of the city of Memphis leaders back us strongly.

Joan Beifuss- Black and white labor leaders?

T.O. Jones- Yes and the civil leaders they were on hand on that night of the 13<sup>th</sup> that they had the theatre.

Joan Beifuss- White civic people?

T.O. Jones- Yes. Everybody wasn't against us.

David Yellin- I mean like who, the workers or ....

T.O. Jones- I don't recall these people's names.

David Yellin- Butt hey weren't, what you mean by the leaders were they the people who worked at city hall?

T.O. Jones- They were people that were influenced and could possibly be some of the people in the power structure.

David Yellin- They were themselves influential people.

T.O. Jones- They were.

David Yellin- Some stature.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- Since we didn't have a council then they weren't elected officials there were only 5 elected officials and none of those were there?

T.O. Jones- No that's right and you see in a city government there are always people who can talk to the mayor or talk to the council men or the commissioner you know.

David Yellin- But none of the commissioners were there.

T.O. Jones- It was more or less a sympathetic thing that they would go on.

Joan Beifuss- Now Ingram is the mayor by when?

T.O. Jones- He become sot be mayor in64.

Joan Beifuss- He is mayor when this happens.

T.O. Jones- Who was the mayor then?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- Lobe.

Joan Beifuss- Lobe resigned.

T.O. Jones- Let me tell you about that, mayor Lobe was the mayor and I went out to see him and his statement to me was Tom, this is a matter that you have to talk with Bill Ferris on, he is the commissioner and I guess at this time that was true, and I think we had a lot to do with the mayor resigning I really do.

David Yellin- How is that?

T.O. Jones- Because we began to build up and we began to focus ourselves as a labor group and the group was getting support and they had it on the agenda on city hall in regards to this and you know they had a public hearing down there about whether the city should recognize the union or not. And the Memphis AFLCIO council took a stand there and other leaders took a stand in regards to it and so the mayor he resigned and that made the honorable commissioner Claude Armor become vice mayor and it was on the agenda in regards to what should happen about this one day, when the commissioner and the mayor was to meet and we never did get back and that day because we really got our supporters in you know, people form the community and labor people to help fight t his thing and he said, I see alto of labor people around today and it was really crowded but it won't come upon the agenda today.

David Yellin- Who said that Armor?

T.O. Jones- Yeah, vice mayor yeah.

David Yellin- I see this was a t a commission meeting?

T.O. Jones- Yeah and he becomes vice mayor after...

David Yellin- Mayor Lobe resigned.

T.O. Jones- Mayor Lobe resigned.

Joan Beifuss- That would be all 5 commissioners would be in a meeting like that.T.O. Jones- Sure, this you know they have always had these meetings on Tuesdays if you recall and at that time it was the mayor and the commissioners. Now it is the council and the chairman.

David Yellin- Now you went to see mayor Lobe and he was mayor?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- Is this the first time you had ever seen him?

T.O. Jones- In regards to the labor problem yes.

David Yellin- Well in regards to anything?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- How did he know you?

T.O. Jones- Well naturally from all the fuss that had been made and all the reports that had been going on and we were right on Washington street right in front of commissioner Ferris's office and they would be leaving their office going home and what not and I think I was well pointed out to him.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now Mr. Jones when you were out picketing in 63 what were you specifically picketing is that when the 33 men were fired or earlier than that.

T.O. Jones- Yes, that time.

Joan Beifuss- At the time they were fired yeah ok.

David Yellin- Ok now we are in 64 and you are an international organizer, you are now dealing with Mr. Ferris until the election of 64 and then Mr. Sisson became the commissioner.

T.O. Jones- Right.

David Yellin- Did you as international organizer go see Mr. Sisson immediately?

T.O. Jones- I did.

David Yellin- And what were your relationships with him?

T.O. Jones- (muffled) his position was that he could not recognize the union, the city wouldn't permitted to have a union. This was his position. If I am not mistake he took his stand and I took mine.

David Yellin- Before this, excuse me , in the election of 64 when Mayor Ingram ran for mayor against Ferris did the union take any official position?

David Yellin- We were not a union at that time but the persons that were discharged we took a position and we worked out of the Ingram camp yes.

David Yellin- Why didn't you go to mayor Ingram for help?

T.O. Jones- Well the thing, the thing that has happened in this situation is that we went to just about every person that would have been due to have been gone too. And there were political people who were in this situation also and there report was that they weren't going to recognize the union and this was the position that was taken by the mayor and the commissioner. They weren't going to recognize.

David Yellin- So it ways came down not hat, that the union was not going to be recognized...

Joan Beifuss- No matter whether they were friendly or not friendly.

T.O. Jones- Regardless, regardless.

David Yellin- They could help you up to a certain point.

T.O. Jones- And that's it.

David Yellin- So really it was the climate of the city at the time.

T.O. Jones- It was.

David Yellin- Did it change any time through 64 through your recollection?

T.O. Jones- Yes the climate did change about 66 I would say because at that time a gentlemen was sent in from the international union by name of Pete Brown and he come in to work with Mr. Sisson and myself in regards to an agreement. Now this is the way we would do it, Pete would go up....

David Yellin- This is Pete Brown not Commissioner Sisson?

T.O. Jones- Yeah he would go up and meet with commissioner Sisson and the same thing they would put into writing and he would come back and then the men and I would meet and we would agree whether we could live with it or not but as I stated that was an agreement in effect, but it just was not really signed sealed and delivered and this is what we were really working with in 1966 we attempted a strike in August about the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. It was on Sunday night and that Monday

morning at 12:01 am we were due to put our pickets up so they got an injunction against us. And I was asked to abide by the injunction.

David Yellin- Did you know about the injunction?

T.O. Jones- We knew that they were down there all that Sunday afternoon working on an injunction.

David Yellin- How did you know that?

T.O. Jones- Well, just the same way they knew how many men were at the meeting. I mean doggone (muffler)

David Yellin- Who were your informers?

T.O. Jones- I wouldn't care to name those but we had people that would let us know what was going on.

Joan Beifuss- Now did they call you down that Sunday did you talk?

T.O. Jones- No they didn't call us down.

David Yellin- What was your position then with the union?

T.O. Jones- I was organizer president.

David Yellin- Now on this card is it says that may 1<sup>st</sup> 1966 unless revoked, did you get a follow up card?

T.O. Jones- Yeah, I have a renewal, it was renewed yes.

David Yellin- I am not questioning you I just want not be sure, was there a local organization of which you were president of at that time?

T.O. Jones- Yes local 1733.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.

David Yellin- SO you were president and in addition to that international union organizer.

Joan Beifuss- Ok who, Mr. Jones who asked you to abide by the injunction Pete Brown?

T.O. Jones- Yes, hew said that T.O. said we can't go through it we are going to have to ask the men to go back to work. And this was an instruction to me from the international office.

David Yellin- Why do you think he said this?

T.O. Jones- Well this international union didn't want a strike, now that is beyond my knowledge I really don't know.

David Yellin- Well can I ask you something else in relation to this, do you think Mr. Brown, or were you aware of what the strength of the city was, I mean that they would have other workers if they didn't go back to work?

T.O. Jones- The strength of any city of governmental body is that they can get employees, this is going to be (muffled).

David Yellin- You are aware of this?

T.O. Jones- Sure, they going to tell you that we have got 4,000 applications and all they have to do is call them but they are dead wrong they are not going to get employees to replace employees that fast and it was proven right here in the city of Memphis.

David Yellin- DO you think they could of at that time?

T.O. Jones- In 1966? No, it would have been the same problem as it was in 1968, the pattern would not have changed simply because of one thing. The difference would have been that this was a summer project in 66. And was a winter project in 68 and meaning that was different in atmosphere and when you go to work on one of those trucks in a (muffled) you have many mind, if you go there in the winter and when the summer begins to come in the spring you are there with it. You know what I mean, because the odor and the waste and the way it is kept.

David Yellin- So you mean but in 66 they would have had a hard time?

T.O. Jones- No, I f we had gone through in 1966, we would have had a better time.

David Yellin- Because of he summer season.

T.O. Jones- Right.

David Yellin- Did the city indicate to you or Mr. Brown or through your channels that they had several hunkered people ready to go to work?

T.O. Jones- This was said, this is always going to be said.

David Yellin- It is a power play in other words.

T.O. Jones- Sure, if you strike and the employees don't show to work they will give you x amount of days and then they will make their statement with regards to it.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones were you familiar with that Alcoa case on which the injunction was based at the time that you called the strike in 66?

T.O. Jones- The Alcoa case we were very familiar with because the Alcoa case the city attempted to cite it during the hearings when the Memphis AFLCIO council and



other people were fighting for the rights of the employees of the city to be organized, the Alcoa case was cited.

Joan Beifuss- Oh this was a couple years before.

T.O. Jones- We were familiar with the Alcoa case for sure.

Joan Beifuss- How many men do you think you could have taken out in 66? Did you have any idea?

T.O. Jones- Well I would say the same amount that come out in 1968.

David Yellin- You think so?

T.O. Jones- Sure they were tempered more then, than they actually were in 68.

David Yellin- Why do you say that?

T.O. Jones- Because at that time you had more abusement going on than they had in 1968.

David Yellin- It was clear what the issue was that he men (muffled).

T.O. Jones- You see in 1966 both issue was more or less justice, it wasn't a money issue it was human decency and the way the men were treated.

David Yellin- What were some of the injustices?

T.O. Jones- Alright they had people working from 7:00 until 5:00 and all this kind of stuff you know. And they had people working 4 days being off on Wednesday all these kind of things and the men were tired of these things but they didn't have no vehicle in which to respond to so therefore they had to go along with the program you know.

David Yellin- How about some of the safety measures?

T.O. Jones- The safety measures were very poor.

David Yellin- Did Mr. Sisson get you rain coats and things of this kind?

T.O. Jones- Commissioner Sisson did get rain suits, he was the only commissioner that gave rain gear.

Joan Beifuss- Was this after the strike that he made some changes?

T.O. Jones- Yeah he made some changes, the attempted strike, the threatened strike brought some changes about and so this is the reason I say the climate changed from 1966...

David Yellin- Did he fire anyone as a result of the attempted strike?

T.O. Jones- No, no one was fired and no one was reprimanded. Men that did not report to work that Monday morning who was under the impression they would be out when they went to work on Tuesday they were not penalized the only thing is they were not paid for that day.

David Yellin- SO business went on as usual.

T.O. Jones- Right.

Joan Beifuss- Could you say what the average hourly wage was in 66? I know it is hard because there are different categories.

T.O. Jones- It is hard to go back but when I started to work out there I made a \$1.05 an hour and I think you would get a 3 cent raise twice a year.

Joan Beifuss- A three cent raise twice a year?

T.O. Jones- Yeah you get it in June and you get it in the 1<sup>st</sup> of the year so we are talking about 6 cents.

Joan Beifuss- 6 cents a year.

T.O. Jones- This is what happened and with the exception of wise Mr. Sisson gave a dime.

Joan Beifuss- You mean all at once?

T.O. Jones- This was after the 66 threat though, he gave a dime.

David Yellin- In your opinion what was the relationship with Mr. Sisson and the commissioners, did he have pretty much autonomy to do what he wanted up to a certain point?

T.O. Jones- I think up to a certain point when it comes to the point of the union he had the backing of them because they all were against the union men in the city.

Joan Beifuss- But they were not against having rain gear and things like that?

T.O. Jones- Apparently they weren't or either they didn't have the voting power on the budget that part of the budget and I don't think they had the voting power on the budget, that spot I think he could have went into his budget and gotten x amount of dollars that he could have set aside x amount of dollars for this particular issue.

David Yellin- Now all during this time did you have any relationship with the minister's alliance or those same leaders?

T.O. Jones- We have had continuous relationship with the minister's alliance and we still have it.

David Yellin- Can you tell who was your liaison whoa was the one you went to if you knew you had to contact the minister's alliance who did you contact?

T.O. Jones- I had several ministers that I used...

David Yellin- Can you name a few?

T.O. Jones- No.

David Yellin- Why can't you? Won't you or ?

T.O. Jones- I feel that should not be done and I don't feel that those people's names should be brought in?

David Yellin- Well there is no dishonor.

T.O. Jones- No it is an honor. But without their permission.

David Yellin- Well the point I ma concerned about..

T.O. Jones- In regards to that anything that you want to know further in regards to that I can tell you who the president of each (muffled) is if you desire to contact them you can.

David Yellin- I just want to make this statement, I think you understand this, for all you know we may be spies, I don't know for whom.

T.O. Jones- That is true.

David Yellin- But you see this tape (muffled) listen I just paid my income tax I am not.

Joan Beifuss- you paid it already?

David Yellin- Well the point is that this tape and this record is going down to the archives of Memphis state, somebody 50 years form now might want to know who it is and nobody is going to tell them unless you tell them that is the only thing...

T.O. Jones- This is true and I might sound pessimistic about the situation but I just don't feel like I should name those people because I have not discussed it with these people and I might have to go back and call on those people again

Joan Beifuss- Yeah because we have talked to reverend Starks and the alliance.

David Yellin- Yeah ok. Fine, but I would like to clarify that we are asking these questions as you know to see if we can get as much information as possible just as you have some curiosity I am sure let's say what Roosevelt said to Churchill in world war 2 started.

T.O. Jones- This is true.

David Yellin- And it would be so much better if somebody had asked him.

T.O. Jones- Well this is kind of like the fight they claimed they had with Casius Clay and...

David Yellin- Oh yeah Marciano.

T.O. Jones- You know they say that nobody will ever know. That is the way some parts of it is. It is not that I am trying to withhold information I feel that, this information need not be gotten to the schools and to the minds of the people but I just don't feel I would be justified to give names unless you know these people...

Joan Beifuss- Ok let me go on another tack here. If Ingram himself who seemed to have such wide support in the black community could Ingram have done anything about union recognition if he had chosen?

T.O. Jones- Yes I believe even with the commission form of government that the mayor if he had so desired could have helped us.

David Yellin- Did anybody ever try?

T.O. Jones- They claimed they did. I know several meetings were held with him in regards to it and I think what they did they met in their executive session that one day I am going to say yeah and the next day four of you are going to say no.

Joan Beifuss- Well you say you supported Ingram on the theory that he would help you?

David Yellin- We did.

Joan Beifuss- But he did not help you?

T.O. Jones- During the time of 1963 when men were discharged some of the men even went to Mr. Ingram's home and he felt it was a disgrace that this was happening and these men should have a union but after you come to be mayor he changed his tune, so this goes to point out that you can't trust anybody. I don't. I take them on the strength of what they do after they are elected and I don't want them to make no commitments to me and I won't make any to them. They are elected and we come down and we sit down at the bargaining table...

David Yellin- On this political note we will have to end this tape because we are coming to the end but we would like to go on because I think there is so much more.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah because I want to ask something else.

David Yellin- Thank you. (Tape End)