

SS230.mp3

David Yellin- This is the third tape with T.O Jones on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1970 Joan Beifuss and David Yellin at the headquarters of the retail workers.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now when Champa came in did you try to see Lobe at all that Monday?

T.O. Jones- Well did meet with him.

Joan Beifuss- Before Champa came in?

T.O. Jones- No, after.

Joan Beifuss- After.

David Yellin- on the 12<sup>th</sup> you mean after the strike was called?

T.O. Jones- On that Tuesday.

David Yellin- Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup>.

T.O. Jones- Champa got in here on a Monday afternoon.

Joan Beifuss- Who came with Champa did Lucie come by the way?

T.O. Jones- No Champa Lucie and we got a councilor from Nashville.

David Yellin- Yeah from Nashville.

T.O. Jones- Joe Paisley. He come in and then Jesse come in.

David Yellin- And you say you met with Lobe on Tuesday?

T.O. Jones- Yes this is when he and Champa got into it and Champa told him to shut his big mouth.

Joan Beifuss- That got him really off to a bad start public relations wise.

David Yellin- What happened there?

T.O. Jones- What caused that?

David Yellin- At that meeting yeah.

T.O. Jones- Well he was trying to get the mayor into a situation where he would recognize the union and we could get the people back to work. But the mayor was playing games let's face it he was running all over the park.

David Yellin- Were you at most of the conferences with Champa?

T.O. Jones- I was at all the conferences.

David Yellin- Was there, now I am asking you something that we had heard and would love to get some clarification. That at one of the meetings before they went on television with Champa and the mayor they agreed on something and they are agreed also not to disclose this and it is reported that the mayor did indeed disclose this and this is what angered Mr. Champa.

T.O. Jones- Well this is true, in many instances the mayor made commitments that he wouldn't reveal certain things and he did. He went after up in the strike further because there were certain things that we had a mediator in and the mediator was the only one that would due to make public statement but it leaked out and Mr. Miles say he didn't do it, and Mr. Worth didn't do it so naturally we look to the other side of the (muffled).

David Yellin- Now do you remember anything about the original conference with Mr. Champa and the mayor?

T.O. Jones- No I don't remember the only thing I remember was it was a very heated thing and we tried to get the mayor to do some things.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones, when Champa came in did he suddenly become the spokes person?

T.O. Jones- He and I were jointly spokesperson and naturally he had the know how they would claim, you know, what to do.

David Yellin- He was a kind of faster spokesperson.

T.O. Jones- He came to be the senior....

David Yellin- Senior spokesmen.

Joan Beifuss- Ended up you backing him instead of him back you.

T.O. Jones- I was backing him.

David Yellin- What was the strategy once they found what you were doing can you talk about that at all?

T.O. Jones- Well the strategy was to get a union in Memphis and our aim, we sat down and discussed this thing and reported back to the president, the situation and form that our intention was to build a union in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones on Sunday night was there when the night (muffled) was there a question then of union recognition or was that something that came in Monday Tuesday...

=This came in Tuesday.

Joan Beifuss- Was that because you didn't think you would get the other things satisfied unless there was a functioning recognized union.

T.O. Jones- Well you got to have recognition of the union as the bargaining agent for the employees. Now before if we had gotten into a situation, the union was recognized in a sense because we had been able to do this things as I have fore stated. But we were talking about putting it in writing, see what I mean.

David Yellin- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- And by putting it in writing then you got it in black and white.

David Yellin- Putting what in writing?

T.O. Jones- The recognition of the union.

David Yellin- The recognition of the union, how about the things that the men wanted?

T.O. Jones- This comes in your overall memorandum of understanding and your memorandum in the city and governmental bodies you don't get contracts you get memorandums.

David Yellin- Now suppose, do you think that the men would have settled with a letter of intent from the mayor that did not recognize the union but did promise to address all of the grievances they had?

T.O. Jones- I don't thin so, he made this statement when we went over to the auditorium and he tried to convince the men...

Joan Beifuss- When was that, that was when Lobe, when was that, was that on Tuesday/

T.O. Jones- I don't recall exactly what day.

Joan Beifuss- It wouldn't have been the first day because that was when Champa was in his office.

David Yellin- Later on he said he would do a letter.

T.O. Jones- This was at least 2 weeks after.

8yeah later..

T.O. Jones- Because we left the Firestone Hall and marched from the Firestone Hall to City Hall. We wanted to meet with him in City Hall but fire marshall wouldn't...

David Yellin- He in fact did indeed did write a letter, did later compose a letter.

T.O. Jones- Who?

David Yellin- The mayor.

Joan Beifuss- The mayor.

T.O. Jones- He compose (muffled).

David Yellin- Now we come with Champa and so on and then the 13<sup>th</sup>, and as I say the strategy was to get the union, to start a union.

Joan Beifuss- Was Champa stunned at mayor Lobe's attitude? Did he expect mayor Lobe to be as adamant as he was?

IT.O. Jones- I think in the experience that Champa had I think he was aware of the fact after he met the man what his attitude how he might react. He might not have figured him to be as hostile as he was but after he met him a couple of times.

Joan Beifuss- Ws he actually hostile when he first met Champa?

T.O. Jones- Well he was hostile towards the union I won't say he is hostile to Champa or us but he was hostile to the union.

David Yellin- Well let's turn this around, did Mr. Champa realize what mayor Lobe's reaction would be to Mr. Champa's attitude?

T.O. Jones- Well let's face it in this business we are in we know that we have got to take a stand and now the road that you play whether you play tough cop or the boss play tough cop the first one that can get the first bite.

David Yellin- Now I am not asking you to make criticism but there are certain people that if I say to Joan, hey Joan you look funny today. She may feel badly about it. I could say to the next person say you look funny and they don't feel bad.

Joan Beifuss- You are right I would feel bad.

T.O. Jones- I know you would because you look beautiful today but a lot of the trouble in looking back was because of the attitude of the people towards each other.

Joan Beifuss- Or at least it seemed that way from the outside Champa and Lobe just didn't hit it off.

David Yellin- Did anybody tell him about mayor Lobe and the kind of guy he was?

T.O. Jones- Well the first thing about it I think that Champa had been here before in February and he had met with the director and I think he had his mind of how the mayor would react. Champa has been in the business quite some time he has been dealing with mayors and management he knows.

David Yellin- Maybe not this one.

T.O. Jones- No, all of them are not the same but they all use the same strategy so he was aware of some of these things we would encounter with.

David Yellin- I mean you have no comment about how his strategy maybe was not the right one you say?

T.O. Jones- I wouldn't add anything to it or take it away we were together. Whatever strategy he used I was involved and so he was.

David Yellin- Now...

Joan Beifuss- Because if you will remember the reaction of white Memphis people to Champa was really bad.

T.O. Jones- This was true and even when the situation did come through we noticed they had bumper stickers out, Champa go home and all this.

Joan Beifuss- But on the other hand the white reaction to Lucie on the other hand was much more, for some reason was much more, so it is personalities.

David Yellin- Well this goes to show about personalities.

David Yellin- This is what I am getting at,

T.O. Jones- When Champa shook his finger in the mayor's face this is what insulted a lot of people let's face it.

David Yellin- It wasn't important that it insulted a lot of people it was important that insulted the mayor because the mayor didn't want him to shake his hand in front of his face.

T.O. Jones- It insulted a lot of his friends (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Right.

T.O. Jones- You wouldn't have gotten the (muffled) from it.

David Yellin- Do you think this helped or impaired or about the whole relationship.

T.O. Jones- I don't know I wouldn't comment on that because I wouldn't want to say either way but I will put it his way, that the thing that happened it probably prolonged some of the things that developed I would say that.

Joan Beifuss- Strictly off the record looking at Champa and trying to look at him as Lobe must have looked at him it must have looked like the mafia coming into Memphis really, the Italian the whole thing.

David Yellin- Easterner.

T.O. Jones- See well this has been a thing, let's face it you know it this has been a tradition with the southern white when someone comes in to help the blacks that you are just stirring up trouble you know so this is what was being said, and they are still saying it today.

David Yellin- Yeah we can take care of it we know them better than you.

T.O. Jones- We know our people it is just like the farmer said for years he know how to take care of his tenants and all this.

David Yellin- Yeah well when did the ministers which you referred to them before as the minister's alliance when did they get into the picture or can you trace...

T.O. Jones- We had already, we had always had the support of the minister's alliance here in the city of Memphis. The minister's alliance had always given us advise we had always been able to go them and discuss things with them and we have been able to make our stand before them, and the minister's just come out and really let the public knew where they stood, it was just a matter of that.

Joan Beifuss- When did the ministers stop speaking to the...oh another thing I wanted to ask when did Firestone start letting you use the meeting hall.

T.O. Jones- I contact Rick Clark who was the president of firestone at that time about meeting there.

Joan Beifuss- The first day you did that?

T.O. Jones- No about the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.

Joan Beifuss- And where did you meet prior to that?

T.O. Jones- 136 1/2 south 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

Joan Beifuss- The rubber workers union is that an integrated union here?

T.O. Jones- Sure.

David Yellin- Well then we get back to the ministers, did anybody ask them to come in specifically?

T.O. Jones- We had always invite the ministers in, the ministers...

David Yellin- Well now let's get specific.

T.O. Jones- These were our supporters you know they was, with the program.

David Yellin- But now you have got Mr. Champa and international in you turned to them, who turned to the insiders, how did they get into this.

T.O. Jones- We were still in touch with the ministers.

David Yellin- Did Mr. Champa understand that?

T.O. Jones- Sure he understood it he knew there was a community relation with the ministers of Memphis in the public works department.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones would there be working in the public works department men that were part time ministers?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- So you actually had ministers on the....

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- in the public works department yeah.

David Yellin- But do you remember when the COME organization and how that grew about, were you involved in any kind of way with that?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- Can you explain that please?

T.O. Jones- I went to spoke of the leaders of Memphis the black leaders and they advised me to touch base with certain people and I did touch base with them and after touching base with them a meeting was set up at the Sheraton Peabody and on that night the leaders joined me at the meeting Lucie and Champa and myself.

David Yellin- These are black leaders only?

T.O. Jones- Yes, and some white labor leaders were there also.

Joan Beifuss- Is this the first week or is this early?

T.O. Jones- This is, if I am not mistaken this is the first week about that Thursday possibly. But anyway they begun to meet and this COME organization was brought forth.

David Yellin- Well just a little bit because COME did not start officially until after the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

David Yellin- You know the macing and so on. But in other words and I think what you are saying and it is awfully hard to recall...

T.O. Jones- Well I think, what you are saying is right, but you see COME organization was an organization that already had been spearheaded before then before the macing because leaders had met and we had discussed what the situation was an they wanted to know what they could do and wanted to know what the union was going to do and you know...

David Yellin- What was your information to them, your advice to them about what they could...

T.O. Jones- Well our advice to them was that they could get involved and they could help us to spearhead the campaign for recognition for the union. And influence...

David Yellin- Why did you think you needed them at this point?

T.O. Jones- Because we need community involvement, we cannot discard the community, that is some of the problem today that the community has been discarded.

David Yellin- You felt that you needed community support and so on.

Joan Beifuss- Can you pinpoint all the leaders of that meeting you are talking about people like Evers and Pickett?

T.O. Jones- Influential leaders.

Joan Beifuss- Are you over people like Lawson? Or was that later?

T.O. Jones- We are talking about influential people in the black community who are leaders in the black community and these people I will not name.

David Yellin- Alright now I guess then the next thing if we could about on February the 23<sup>rd</sup> and following February 22<sup>nd</sup>, by that time the leaders were in and they went to the city council meeting remember this? Were you at the city council meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup>?

T.O. Jones- I definitely was, I had a fight with Fred to get the floor.

David Yellin- ON the 22<sup>nd</sup>?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- And is there anything you want to say about that meeting.

T.O. Jones- The only thing I have to say about that is that we went to make our bid to the council and lay the facts before the council. Number one the council didn't want to hear us really and Mr. Davis who was the chairman of the public works committee at that time I had to kind of fight him to get the floor so we were able to be heard and after we were able to be heard many leaders spoke black and white.

David Yellin- And this is where they called the Firestone and got them to come down here because the leaders were accused of not talking for the men.

T.O. Jones- What happened now?

David Yellin- The leaders were accused of not talking for the men they were just talking...



T.O. Jones- There were many rumors, what you are saying is that there were many rumors that we wouldn't allow the men to speak for themselves. This is what you are trying to tell me., This is not true. We permitted these men to talk.

David Yellin- Well first of all the men weren't there?

T.O. Jones- Why? At the council meeting?

David Yellin- Yes.

T.O. Jones- We had the council packed.

David Yellin- well when you were, when the council accused you of this somebody said well we will get the men.

T.O. Jones- What happened was this, there wasn't as many men the first time as there was the second time, what the council wanted to do the wanted to put us in a position that they wanted to prod the men, this wasn't about fixing the (muffled) because we represented these people and these people did not know how to react to the questions that the council was going to ask them, the same with some questions they asked me I didn't know who to react but Champa and Lucie they know how to react, so this was the atmosphere that we were in. I think if I am not mistaken, one of the councilmen I won't call his name was the one who made that statement and he was wrong because these men were permitted to discuss situations. We had a place for them to discuss them. We had an everyday meeting and this was the purpose of having an everyday meeting.

David Yellin- Right and then so the next day was the 23<sup>rd</sup> was when you were supposed to meet with the council and you met and then they called it off and you marched back.

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Tell us about the march.

David Yellin- Yeah can you?

T.O. Jones- We left at, this must be the same day that we left after the mayor tried to convince us wasn't it.

David Yellin- no.

T.O. Jones- You talking about the macing?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah the macing.

T.O. Jones- That is the same day.

David Yellin- Was the mayor there?

T.O. Jones- The mayor come over to the south end of city hall of the auditorium and talked to me.

Joan Beifuss- What that morning?

T.O. Jones- No, that afternoon.

David Yellin- Oh yeah that's right he talked out in the hall and said I have always been your friend...

T.O. Jones- Yeah, and then after that we wanted permission to go from the city hall to Mason Temple and they wanted to put restrictions on our march. I did not want the people to march on the sidewalk and I was asking this officer who was in charge to allow us to permit us to walk one half side of the street. They didn't want to do this but they finally did. The simple reason why I didn't want to walk on the sidewalk is because we come in contact bodily with the shoppers and then you had all these plate glass and I felt to the expense that I have had and the events I have sent that if we were off in the street then our people wouldn't come in contact with the shoppers.

Joan Beifuss- Were the men angry?

T.O. Jones- Well I wouldn't say the men were angry but naturally there were tempers and some sadness there, I wouldn't say they were angry.

Joan Beifuss- Could you characterize it or discuss it?

T.O. Jones- I don't know what you mean when you say angry you speaking terms of people getting ready to be violent and all this.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah that is what I am saying you didn't have that feeling at all?

T.O. Jones- No, they weren't, no they weren't. Because they had been instructed and asked not to be violent, these people were not to be violent. We instructed these people in every meeting that they were not to be violent and they were not to take to the street. That this was a problem that we were faced with and it had to be dealt with, with certain procedures and they understood this and they respected our leadership.

David Yellin- Now can you begin the march and kind of..

T.O. Jones- Well after the debate about how we would march it was finally given to us and we could go down the street and we were going in a south direction of Main St. And the police cars continued to move over the white line. Now this is a fact and this is where they claim they were night riding. I put my hand up I think if you get a shot of a picture you will see it there. I was the only doing one thing and asking him to get the officer back there and to get the police cars back across the line.

David Yellin- You were doing what?

T.O. Jones- Well I had my hand up there saying stop the march.

David Yellin- You had your hand up in the air not on the car?

T.O. Jones- I had one hand on the car possibly like this I had my hand up asking him to stop the march so that the officer would come back and we could get it squared back around. No they neglected to do this and before we knew anything things began to happen.

David Yellin- What things?

T.O. Jones- Spraying mace and hitting and going on and all t his.

David Yellin- What about the car being rocked?

T.O. Jones- I don't know, I didn't see no car rocked.

David Yellin- And the car running over a woman's foot?

T.O. Jones- I didn't see it.

David Yellin- Were you at the head of the line?

T.O. Jones- I wouldn't say I was at the head of the line but I was near the front.

Joan Beifuss- So that when the, when you were maced, were you maced yourself did you get it?

T.O. Jones- Yeah I was maced.

Joan Beifuss- What did you do?

T.O. Jones- Some of the men got me out of the way, more things than the mace happened.

Joan Beifuss- Were you hit also?

T.O. Jones- Oh no, more things than that happened.

David Yellin- What things?

T.O. Jones- Well there was a threat to shoot me, one of the men saved me.

David Yellin- You mean by the cops.

T.O. Jones- Yeah he had actually drawn his gun.

Joan Beifuss- Did he say something?

T.O. Jones- No.

Joan Beifuss- He pointed it at you?

T.O. Jones- I am not very much help to you on that I know.

David Yellin- Well it is not us you are helping or not helping t hat is the point.

T.O. Jones- Well I won't be more helpful on the future.

David Yellin- Well suppose that somebody had said that you were involved in the car rocking what is your answer?

\_T.O. Jones- Somebody did say I was involved and I did not.

David Yellin- Somebody did say it.

David Yellin- I will deny it, sure I was charged, they had a charge against me in the court.

Joan Beifuss- Was that for car rocking?

T.O. Jones- They claimed this was a night riding charge I was trying to help over turn a police car.

Joan Beifuss- I must have missed that whole section there. When was that charge brought?

T.O. Jones- It was the same day it happened.

David Yellin- Yeah they brought it against...

Joan Beifuss- And when did it, what happened in court when it came up.

T.O. Jones- They reduced it to something or something else.

David Yellin- Was it ever cleared?

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

David Yellin- Dismissed or is it on the record?

T.O. Jones- I don't know how the ting, you will have to ask Sabella.

Joan Beifuss- Well then so your people pulled you out of the way and part of the march did go on to the temple but you did not?

T.O. Jones- Not at that time but I did go to the temple later.

David Yellin- Now is there anything that you can think of about the strike from there on in? See then the ministers got into it.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to say Mr. Jones another thing has been (muffled) about quite a bit that the union was trying to make it a union matter but when the black leaders came in it then became a civil rights matter.

T.O. Jones- The union always tries to keep it a union issue. But where there are many blacks involved as (muffled) it finally becomes a racial issue let's face it because I don't know why but for some reason the civil rights group is going to get in there and you cannot tell them no. Especially when you are reaching out for support.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to say in fact you needed them though didn't you.

T.O. Jones- Sure you always need support this is a situation where you got to deal with these problems.

Joan Beifuss- So how did it end up who had the final authority to make decisions about how the food was to be distributed and all this.

T.O. Jones- The union had final authority on this.

Joan Beifuss- The union had final authority on everything?

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Could the union have ended the strike at any time if the civil rights leaders had not wanted it too do you think?

T.O. Jones- I want to say that the civil rights leaders didn't want the end of the strike I don't understand...

Joan Beifuss- No I mean if the union had decided that the terms were acceptable would the civil rights leaders have gone along with the union?

T.O. Jones- Well the thing about it is this, the civil rights people will go along with the union if the union felt that it was something the community could live with. The civil rights leader wasn't satisfied well we did go backward from where we went and I wasn't either as far as that go. I felt that there should have been more of the pie that we didn't get. I am talking about in 1968.

David Yellin- But they went with it because...

T.O. Jones- But we went with it because we felt there was something that we could live with and they went along with me and the civil rights leaders did because I said this is what we would do.

David Yellin- Do you think you could have carried on as long as you did without the civil rights leaders?

T.O. Jones- Well I wouldn't say yeah and I wouldn't say no because I wouldn't want to make a predicament on that because the situation was that it was a union matter a labor matter and you could see here in the city of Memphis now what happens when you get these civil rights people involved and somewhere down the road you have to have a splitting and the only thing about with us they stayed with us until we said that we were satisfied and we agreed.

Joan Beifuss- Did, were you in favor of bringing in...

T.O. Jones- That wasn't any of my doing and I don't know who did that and I didn't have anything to do with that.

Joan Beifuss- Had you met Dr. King?

T.O. Jones- I hadn't no. I didn't have anything to do with that, but some leaders were saying he would be here.

Joan Beifuss- Well you didn't sit in on the strategy meetings then?

T.O. Jones- No. I feel it was a mistake.

Joan Beifuss- Bringing Dr, King in?

T.O. Jones- I do. I am not saying that because the man was assassinated here I just feel it was a mistake.

David Yellin- Why do you say that?

T.O. Jones- Well, alright we had a labor problem and I feel we had enough people here that could have you know, spearheaded this situation.

Joan Beifuss- Without bringing in outsiders.

T.O. Jones- Yeah you catch a situation like that and everyone knows that for years they have been after Martin and I just think that he shouldn't have been in Memphis that is my opinion.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones how about, how are the workers doing financially wise during this period was there any hardship?

T.O. Jones- There were many hardships.

David Yellin- And how were they taken care of?

T.O. Jones- We had contributions coming form all over the nation.

Joan Beifuss- But that wasn't really enough was it by the middle of march? Kind of short on money?

T.O. Jones- We were short on money at times yes.

Joan Beifuss- Were, did some of them take other jobs to tide them over.

T.O. Jones- Some did.

Joan Beifuss- I know that thing was set up the picket I guess.

T.O. Jones- hmm?

Joan Beifuss- Was it O.W. Pickett that was handling the food.

T.O. Jones- Yeah at one time.

Joan Beifuss- And then somebody was handling rent and tithing payments I think.

T.O. Jones- We had individuals set up for food and rent and bills you know things like that. We had welfare what we called it.

Joan Beifuss- They were incredible they held out that long I think. Well now when King came in on that march on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The one that turned into the mini riot were you in the march?

T.O. Jones- I was.

Joan Beifuss- Whereabouts were you, were you up front?

T.O. Jones- Front.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell us anything about that?

T.O. Jones- Not much to tell about just some disorder on the end and it disrupted the march.

David Yellin- What did you do?

T.O. Jones- Same thing everyone else did I ran for cover.

David Yellin- Where did you run do you remember?

T.O. Jones- I don't know some of my men got me out the way.

David Yellin- Do you remember seeing Dr. King? I mean where did he go or?

T.O. Jones- When the disruption comes?

David Yellin- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- I don't know. Kind of like this, every man for himself. It wasn't that he wasn't forgotten or nothing like that I think he was taken care of.

David Yellin- Well yeah trying to get as many pieces together.

Joan Beifuss- Well then, did you after once Dr. King had come in and led that first march, did you want him to come back in again or would you rather that he didn't come back in?

T.O. Jones- Well this wasn't left to us, to me.

Joan Beifuss- No I know.

T.O. Jones- So I couldn't make no comment on that.

David Yellin- Well in essence al of this was not in your hands this was.

T.O. Jones- Right.

David Yellin- So it had gone away from what the original thing was.

T.O. Jones- This is what I am talking about.

David Yellin- Do you feel then even in retrospect if it had remained a purely union matter between your group here and help from the international however they could have done it that you could have carried on that land and presented as strong a front as you did?

T.O. Jones- I do.

David Yellin- Without, I mean could you have gotten community support just on the..

T.O. Jones- We would have gotten labor support.

David Yellin- Is that the same thing?

T.O. Jones- Yes because see the people that make up the labor movement in the city are the people of the community. And some of them are very civil minded and they belong to these organizations and when an organization is coming offering help how are you going to tell them no?

David Yellin- Did you get labor support from the other unions here?

T.O. Jones- Yes we always had it.

David Yellin- From the white unions?

Joan Beifuss- The building trade?

T.O. Jones- Always had it.

David Yellin- What kind of support?

T.O. Jones- Financially, and...

David Yellin- Well why are labor people so bitter about other labor people especially black labor people against the white.

T.O. Jones- I don't know I have never had that problem I can't say.

David Yellin- Whatever happened with you and Firestone. I don't mean you personally but why did you leave their hall?

T.O. Jones- Why did we leave after the strike was over...

David Yellin- No before the strike.



T.O. Jones- Well what they claimed to be doing was moving the meeting and what not close to the...

David Yellin- Why were heir letters in the papers from Firestone workers complaining about he fact that you were using their hall and they weren't in favor of what you were doing and so on.

T.O. Jones- Naturally you are always going to get criticism, people are going to criticize something someone is doing regardless of whether it is good or bad.

David Yellin- You don't feel there was any anti-negro against you in the white labor unions?

T.O. Jones- There was possibly some but we never knew it.

David Yellin- When you say labor support are you talking about leaders?

T.O. Jones- I am talking about labor period, rank and file.

David Yellin- They supported your strike.

T.O. Jones- Yes sir.

David Yellin- I mean do you have any indication of this, any testimony was there an illustration of it?

T.O. Jones- Way they illustrated to me was there was in support with us was financially and morally, many of them attended the marches and the meetings.

David Yellin- How about the newspaper guild which turned support down?

T.O. Jones- I make no comment on it.

Joan Beifuss- The newspaper guild is really not organized.

T.O. Jones- The people, you see what we get the papers and I am against the paper on a lot o things, the man that is out there scanning the news he takes it to the editor and then the editor is the one who cuts it down on whatever happens. So therefore, we can't really criticize, I can't what other people do, the particular reporters you know and this is the thing that is done at the top level. Now what do you think to gain or lose by telling the facts I don't know and some instances they have given it just like you have given it to them and in another one they....

David Yellin- Well how did you think your coverage was, things that you knew about personally? Coverage of the newspapers?

T.O. Jones- The newspapers and I never had much talking to do I don't have any comment on it.

David Yellin- You don't have any comment about how they covered things that you knew about?

T.O. Jones- As far as...

David Yellin- You think they were fair?

T.O. Jones- I don't say they were fair on everything but they did, the man on the street that was doing the writing was the man on the street that I am looking at. Now the editor is the man that cuts it out and that is the man that rips you.

David Yellin- I mean how do you know that?

T.O. Jones- Well this is a fact you can look at your editorials that is in the paper, on different things and you can look at different gossip columns that you got in the papers, and you are right here when the reporter is writing. And you know what he is writing and you see him writing and then when you see it the next day here it is you can't hardly find it. Now what happens? Did he rewrite or did the editor cut?

David Yellin- Well you are saying that the papers were unfair?

T.O. Jones- Hmm?

David Yellin- You are saying that the papers were unfair?

T.O. Jones- In many cases yes.

David Yellin- Do you think that helped or hurt the strike?

T.O. Jones- Well in some cases when they didn't tell things it helped and maybe it didn't depending on the situation.

Joan Beifuss- What about the charges that were made early in the strike that a few workers that were continuing to work were being intimidated?

T.O. Jones- Well in most large strikes that you have where you got many people involved and are involved in the public works department you have that.

Joan Beifuss- It is always so vague when they say intimidation I am never clear what they are talking about?

David Yellin- You mean the cab workers.

Joan Beifuss- Telephone calls and stuff like that?

T.O. Jones- Well they claim that people would threaten and they claim that people would call them and all this kind of stuff I don't know. You know I have gotten calls myself.

David Yellin- You mean you were intimidated, who would want to intimidate a nice fellow.....

Joan Beifuss- Oh I was going to did you get a lot of flack, a lot of anti-T.O. Jones phone calling?

T.O. Jones- I didn't stay at home?

Joan Beifuss- That's right you don't live here.

T.O. Jones- I didn't stay at home I knew they was planning on burning up my house you know but my wife and kids stayed there but I stayed down at the Peabody, I felt like they couldn't burn that up.

David Yellin- Did you get any letters?

T.O. Jones- I don't know, I really didn't get any letters that were wroth nothing.

Joan Beifuss- Let me, between the time that Dr. King came in and led that first march and there was the confusion and next week when he came back and when the whole city really got kind of panicky. Did the public works employees, did this scare them off at all I mean did it ever occur to them to stop?

T.O. Jones- Because of what happened?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.,

T.O. Jones- No, not to my knowledge.

Joan Beifuss- I just wanted to if they suddenly though good god what are we gotten into here.

T.O. Jones- It appear sot me and you would hear from what the men continue to do they weren't afraid, they could tell me...

Joan Beifuss- I know that I just meant personally if any of them you talked to hem.

T.O. Jones- They responded to marches they marched with these cameras and what pointed t them so therefore you couldn't say that the men were frightened off, t here is always going to be someone that is afraid to go let's face it many times you might take the second thought and say why am I doing this you know.

David Yellin- Why did you feel it was wrong for Martin Luther king to come inhere?

T.O. Jones- Well it was not the point that I felt it was a wrong, but I just didn't feel it was necessary.

David Yellin- Well aren't hey the same thing?

T.O. Jones- Well a lot of people tie civil rights issue and labor issue together and I guess they are right but I say a labor problem is a labor problem and it should stay in a labor context. This is my opinion.

Joan Beifuss- you feel this kind of muddies it up?

T.O. Jones- Well when you greet the civil rights people involved you get all types of climates of what you got. And it does muddy up things they come in with different ideas and they want to do different things and you got the militants that follow certain civil rights groups and so you got a problem.

David Yellin- Well how can you separate it, how could it have been separated?

T.O. Jones- You can't separate them.

David Yellin- Yeah in this situation particularly with an overwhelming majority.

T.O. Jones- You can't separate it, you cannot just tell a group of people that they can't support a group of people and if you tell they can't support them then the group of people that you are out there for say hey why? And you can't find an answer.

Joan Beifuss- It would seem then that in the south any time you are dealing with a predominantly black union you are also going to be dealing with civil rights?

T.O. Jones- Yeah.

David Yellin- So that it is a fact of life that there is a connection.

T.O. Jones- Well see the civil rights group always bring in and they exploit and they have been sitting back for years watching the thing go. Like here in Memphis the people in the civil rights group knew how the city had been treating us and they knew how long we had been trying to get recognition, they knew how long we had been you know marching or walking or talking and asking people to do certain things and naturally they reached out and brought in what they figured would be people that would be of help and power.

Joan Beifuss- Mr. Jones, where were you when you found out Dr. King was killed, or how did you find out Dr. King had been shot?

T.O. Jones- I was in the motel room. In the hotel.

Joan Beifuss- On the television?

T.O. Jones- I think we had the radio on. Or the television on.

Joan Beifuss- Were you in a meeting or?

T.O. Jones- No. We were just lounging around waiting for the night we were going to meet again that night at Mason Temple.

David Yellin- What were your reactions.

T.O. Jones- Well I just really don't know I was frustrated you know. Very sad situation. Unbelievable, I didn't believe it at first.

David Yellin- Well now, other than your personal reaction as a person, as a black man and so on, when did you first tie in his death with your situation here with the strike?

T.O. Jones- Well you I know...

David Yellin- Well did you feel that would help the strike be over or prolong it?

T.O. Jones- I really don't know what thought I had on that really.

Joan Beifuss- I don't mean then, I mean the next day or...

T.O. Jones- Well I really don't know I don't think, I just don't know, I don't have the least thought about that.

David Yellin- Then when Jerry Worth came in and so on did you meet with him?

T.O. Jones- Jerry?

David Yellin- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- It was then that you found out that there would be a mediator in and so on.

T.O. Jones- After several meetings with the mayor and his committee is when the mediator was involved.

David Yellin- Were you involved in any of the transactions when Frank Miles was originally appointed?

T.O. Jones- I was at all of them.

David Yellin- You were at the meeting?

T.O. Jones- At all meetings yes.

David Yellin- Now can you describe them in any way, what did you feel they were like?

T.O. Jones- I feel the meetings were very good meetings and we brought out some good points and the first thing they did was to set up some guidelines and mechanics you know how it would be handled.

David Yellin- Now we are talking about in March, early March, middle March, before Martin Luther King was killed?

T.O. Jones- Yes.

David Yellin- Who called the meetings off the city accuses the union of...

T.O. Jones- We didn't call them off, we was always ready to meet and willing to meet.

David Yellin- Well what happened can you recall?

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

Joan Beifuss- Did you, I was going to say we did quite a lengthy tape with Frank Miles, extremely lengthy tape with Frank Miles and for some reason I liked Frank Miles very much as a person I wonder if that came across in the negotiations that he was.

T.O. Jones- I take frank to be a very capable person, he knows his mediation and he knows his way around. He is a man that stays in the middle of the road and he did not lean one way or the other, whatever his position was for the union that was it and whatever the position in regard to the city that was it. He never showed that he was trying to make a favoritism either way.

David Yellin- And you had trust in him in his position as mediator?

T.O. Jones- I had trust in him sure.

David Yellin- Well anything else.

Joan Beifuss- I don't know what else....So that you thought in the final settlement you could live with it but it wasn't as good..

T.O. Jones- It wasn't as good as it should have been and (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Yeah, did the fact that there was so much racial turmoil in that period did that scale down your demands to some extent, did you want to get the whole thing just over with?

T.O. Jones- Well it wasn't the point that we were rushing to get it over with the point was this, that it was long over due thing that could have been settled before it was settled and we felt hat we weren't in there trying to buy time for a reason you know like maybe some people thought, we weren't trying to buy time for any reason. The only thing we were trying to do was to come out with something f or the men. And without something for the men we knew that we had made no gains you know so we had to get some of the demands. We always in situations of that type you are always going to over bid yourself, you know you are not going to get all you asked for.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah right.

T.O. Jones- So this was the situation we were in.

David Yellin- So now we have, I will tell you, we have films tapes, of when the thing was signed and can you describe how you felt?

T.O. Jones- I felt real good that day, I really did I was full of joy and it made me....

David Yellin- but you cried.

T.O. Jones- Yeah I am about to cry now. Just to think of it. It made me know that I had not worked in vain. You know that regardless of what had happened and regardless of the things we lost, the lives or what not that we had not worked in vain.

David Yellin- And you feel the fulfillment of what you had done.

T.O. Jones- Right.

Joan Beifuss- Now does this still hold true now that you find the men are somewhat disillusioned with the union? Basic gains still there..

T.O. Jones- There is something about this thing that is really bothering me because it is not functioning as I think it should function and the basic gains that the men got I see them losing them because certain things are not begin done. And I am not trying to put my foot on no one's neck but I just feel that something need sot be done it he way of service.

Joan Beifuss- But in fact the gains that were actually written into that contract the grievance procedure it is still in existence right.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- The wages are higher.

T.O. Jones- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Whether or not the union is taking advantage of what they fully got is another question.

T.O. Jones- That is it that is a different question period.,

David Yellin- I want to say this, obviously you have made it very clear you are personally disappointed, I say your relationship now and there has been a falling out between you and the union.

T.O. Jones- We won't say it was a falling out but when you don't believe in certain principles you just don't believe in them. Because I mean after all there are principles that all of us believe in now regardless of whether you want to see me become a millionaire or not there is a certain way you want to see me become to be a millionaire. You don't want to see me go out here and rob and kill plough and get his money you want me to get it honestly right?

David Yellin- Well if you are asking me yes.

T.O. Jones- Well that is what I am doing.

David Yellin- I am asking the questions, no...

T.O. Jones- Oh you are supposed to be asking me I am not supposed to be asking you, I see now you want to be personal about his situation.

David Yellin- Now and I think you have made it very clear explicitly and we can make implicitly to your feeling, I would like to ask you a question in regard to all of this. Do you thin that from 68 to now, there has been any change in and the only way I can put it any change it he attitude of the white community about?

T.O. Jones- I think there was change is 68 but I think there was also damaged in 69. I thin the attitudes had changed but I think it was damaged in 69.

David Yellin- In what way?

T.O. Jones- Well the school board thing didn't help the union at all by being involved in the St. Joe's crisis.

David Yellin- I see you mean the activity of the union and the education.

T.O. Jones- Right you see this is the same thing we were just discussing a minute ago about he civil rights part and the union labor part, see hat I am talking about.

David Yellin- Yes.

T.O. Jones- This is where we come right to the point of what we are saying, we are saying a labor problem is a labor problem a civil rights issue is a civil rights issue but they both gets involved together, they don't stay divorced from one another and then somebody comes and hurts somebody.

David Yellin- So you feel, is this what you are saying that this strike at the hospital and at the board of education hurt the labor situation?

T.O. Jones- it has hurt the labor situation period in Memphis.

David Yellin- Yes.

T.O. Jones- The action of AFSME has hurt the labor forces period in Memphis yes.

David Yellin- Now when you say hurt, is the damage or the reasons for the damage the same as they were before 68?

T.O. Jones- No the reason is not the same now, you see what has happened is this, the union has come in and the union has made a I don't know how to put it, but what has happened is the union has come in and it has become to be the bargainer for x amount of people in the city of Memphis alright. Now the union has moved into a private sector and it has hurt itself by moving into that private sector.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

T.O. Jones- I am not stating that those people shouldn't be organized, I am not criticizing that.



David Yellin- but this particular union or the union movement as such?

T.O. Jones- am talking about this particular union.

Joan Beifuss- At St. Joseph's.

T.O. Jones- And when this particular union did this made a criticism upon the whole entire movement.

David Yellin- You are not talking about the union movement itself the entire labor movement itself.

T.O. Jones- No I am talking about this particular one.

David Yellin- Right I see.

Joan Beifuss- Well is there anyway that just theoretically is there any way that once the St. Joseph's hospital strike was under way and once the NAACP launched there school board thing, was there any way that the two would not have been joined?

T.O. Jones- Well we talk about he strike first and really and truly I didn't go along with the strike. I don't feel that the strike was handled right and I feel that the timing was wrong and that the people that were involved in directorship of the St. Joseph's hospital that resigned were a part of the people of the power structure of Memphis and who needed to be there to be dealt with and I don't think they should have resigned to escape I am in justice's corner on that. I thin they should have stayed there and faced it and hoped to alleviate some of the problems we have had behind this and they could have done it each one of those men of the 4 who resigned were very influential men each one of them is know the goals of labor and each one of them more or less have some labor involvement in the firms in one way or another you know what I mean. So therefore, I say that they are, they resigned to escape and I don't feel they should have resigned to escape. I think they should have hoped to bring about a dialogue that would have been acceptable to the union instead of escaping. Now this position, my position of the St. Joseph hospital, my position about the school board is that I feel that the school board is a legislative act and it had to got to the legislature and I think they should have let the powers to be and the elected officials of the state of Tennessee know that the blacks wanted some change sand I feel that we shouldn't have gone as far as we did with them. We had innocent people hurt we had people expelled form school and they need to be in school. Now the position of the NAACP for the moratorium I was in a court with and I feel like they should have called a moratorium because they seen which way we were about to go here and I think what we got out of it might not have been totally what we wanted but I think we are in a better position now to bargain for the community than we were before and it is a possibility that the legislatures should look at this thing again and we got the word that some of them are not concerned on voting on it. Avery (muffled) something they got up there they are talking about it and then the school board and the AA and the city council worked out one and I think it is

very equitable for the time being. I thin the legislature should permit this to come into law and not come back without something.

Joan Beifuss- Ok I think that unless you want to make a final statement.

David Yellin- That is a good workout. Fine.

T.O. Jones- I would just like to say in my final speech that I am very concerned about he future of the labor movement now in this country period. It seems we are on the decline in an upward trend, we have been involved in many things and labor movement (muffled) from anything, civil rights issue has got to be something that we cannot keep away from labor forces I think that they should not be involved with being in the labor disputes, this does not mean that people who belong to the influential groups should not take part in helping labor support its goal. Labor is in an awkward position now in this country and if something is not done and done instantly we are on a downward trend.

Joan Beifuss- Well that is kind of gloomy note to end on.

David Yellin- Yeah.

T.O. Jones- But it is true you know.

Joan Beifuss- Of course I mean (muffled)

T.O. Jones- Look at this murder we had of the mine workers. Look at this thing with Walter pulling out from the AFLCIO you know (muffled). Look at the fight they have in the AFLCIO in the south, what are you going to do?

(Tape End)