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Joan Beifuss- Ok go ahead it is on. I wrote out the questions because I thought that would be quicker for you.

Jesse Epps- Surely, surely indeed.

Joan Beifuss- First of all I want can you give me a real quick general thing on what is the unionism of the south what shape is it in now, do you still consider the south a violently anti-union area.

Jesse Epps- It is, I see I was growing out of the Memphis tragedy of a year and a half ago a new concept of organization has been the format of organizing the south. And of course as meeting completely head on with the very hostile community, one which is uncrested resolve to the premise that organization, union organization in particular is evil and they are bad and I know they are against it, is the premise on which they argue. On the other hand I do not think that they in themselves when they closely examine, they fundamentally believe that is true. The organization even in the industrial situation of workers, even in the industrial unions it is found that the only way now in the 1960's and particularly in the early 70's to be able to organize the working poor is to have a coalition of the community. Without a coalition with the community, without a community effort, dealing with the basic problem of poverty and want and hunger and the whole crust of things that bind this together then it is just a futile effort to try and organize in the south you are just aren't going to be able to go the conventional ways and organize and get justice for the employees.

Joan Beifuss- In the south you are talking primarily about black people? Or practically speaking right now are you talking about....

Jesse Epps- Yes we are, we are talking probably primary the (muffled) majority are black because the working poor, the jobs that the working poor has of the leftovers where the whites have moved up to better jobs in higher categories. So that it is in that kind of a context that while I, while gentlemen said to me the other day that you unions in Memphis is black unions and of course my reaction was of course not. We represent all workers in the area that we represent. If there are discrimination it is discrimination because of employment practices because we represent all of those employees in the areas where we are in fact involved.

Joan Beifuss- Is this happening to the union AFC I mea just in the south, in Memphis, the north and the west are you quite integrated usually?

Jesse Epps- Indeed we are, in fact our organization international is about 65% to 75% white.

Joan Beifuss- Oh is it.

Jesse Epps- In deed it is. I'm, of course somewhat proud of our record because I know of no other union in the AFLCIO international union that is, that have at the top helm of its organization as we have two blacks that have the kinds of authority that one of my colleagues and staff share in the international union and yet with a 65% to 75% white membership.

Joan Beifuss- Who is the other black man?

Jesse Epps- A man by the name of Bill Lucie.

Joan Beifuss- Oh yeah where is Bill Lucie.

Jesse Epps- He is in Washington.

Joan Beifuss- He was kind of great.

Jesse Epps- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- He was here a year and a half ago.

Jesse Epps- Yes indeed.

Joan Beifuss- Now does he hold the same position that you do, assistant to the president?

Jesse Epps- Right, the president has about 4 assistants to him, 5 in fact and two of us are black and there are white.

Joan Beifuss- Well then you, well I remember when we talked to you about would Memphis do anything you told us about Pascagoula?

Jesse Epps- Yes, there we have for example you know I say that..

Joan Beifuss- I remember when the hurricane hit Pascagoula.

Jesse Epps- Right we sent down our local here responded by assisting our brothers and sisters down there. Pascagoula is a typical example that working people, poor people will forget the colored line and will stand together for a common advantage for themselves. And Pascagoula was a good example of that. We went in and the majority of workers are white, the about 55% and about 45% black. And the white politicians in the community attempted to use the race issue in order not to order, for the employees not to organize. But those employees were smart enough and I think this is becoming the pattern all across the country now. They are smart enough to understand that the power structure and the politicians was not talking about white versus black but really was talking about control of the white poor as well as the black poor and they found themselves deciding that the only way we are going to get anything is by all of us standing collectively together and of course in that instance they did and they have gotten a good contract, this year was a renewal of it and they came almost again to a strike situation but they finally got it settled

but they bury another excellent contract. They have the offices of a local union pretty evenly decided between the blacks and the whites. In fact, I submit that in Pascagoula we probably have a far more integrated local union in terms of practical situation than we have in many other parts of the country.

Joan Beifuss- Is there any other place around here that it would compare to the type of union you have in Pascagoula in the south?

Jesse Epps- No, I don't believe so, the only other, in fact, I don't think we have any such situation even in (muffled)n unions. The only union that would probably in any manner resemble it would be the RCA local here in Memphis which is under IUE national union of electrical workers contract. They elected a white, a black president but I think as the information has come to me that the majority of the board is white. But I think that the issues as we looked at them from henceforth has to be on the basis on what is best for working people, what are their problems, and how do you go about solving them. I submit that when you talk about civil rights and labor organization that really the labor organization has been the only civil rights organization when there was no such thing as a civil rights organization in this company, even before the united states as we know it came into existence or way back even the 13 original colonies. You go back and it was the union of that junction really serving as a civil rights organization. They were the ones that fought the public schools, they were the ones that fought for social security, they were the ones that fought for all of the things that we take for granted today and then the unions became somewhat power structure in themselves and sort of waned away from the original objective of meeting the needs of ht e workers for which they were organized.

Joan Beifuss- Now when you are talking about southern are you mostly talking about working poor, or working underemployed or...

Jesse Epps- Yes, I would say that we are really talking about a tremendous amount of underemployed and underpaid. Now there are many people who are performing tasks that ought to be paid more for and they are being paid properly for the job they are doing. And there are many of them that even when the rate of pay is proper the skill for which those person possess is not being properly being utilized and subsequently they aren't employed and the reason for it unfortunately is the majority are black and therefore they are precluded from moving up a career ladder to anything more than where they are and of course to this end our union has been working with the labor department. We have a pilot program that is afoot that we hope to adopt as a policy for our union all across the country. It is known as the career ladder program where we sit down with management, in fact we are in the process of trying to arrange this in Memphis where we move along the career ladder ram, people from let's say a maid to something more than a maid and up in possibly as in an assistant, nursing assistant and perhaps as high as an LPN in the hospital situation. In the department of public works we are talking about men that are normally known as garbage men and some we are being able to give a proper labeling to those assignments and now we are trying to develop a career ladder

there where men who was a crewman who was normally talked about as a garbage man then can move from there to a truck driver and then perhaps to a crew chief, which is the man that is in charge of a group of men. And we have had since our contract with our city we have had a few to move up to foremen's in the situation. Not as much as it ought to be and not as fast we ought to be going but this is just a beginning and while we are trying to make this progress in Memphis it only hold up a ray of light as what ought to be done in Jackson Mississippi and whatever the city is in Alabama or Georgia or Little rock or what have you. Because here we still have unfortunately, most of these persons that work for municipalities and public agencies are somehow forgotten and everybody takes for granted that they are being paid properly, they are being treated properly, we pay our taxes and subsequently these people are being provided for and yet in public service we demand the best and like to pay the least. And the reason for it is because there has been no voice, no vehicle through which these people can project themselves and get a measure of justice. Of course I submit that in the public sector, the public service sector that our country as far as union relations wise stand where industrial unions stood in the early 30's.

Joan Beifuss- Well but now, for instance what is happening here in Memphis you are moving away form the public sector?

Jesse Epps- Well not really moving away from the public sector, St. Joe's hospital is a private owned non-profit agency organization, a hospital that have as its purpose to provide service to the poor of the community.

Joan Beifuss- Now let me clarify here, does the constitution of the AFSME that states as your area is public or non-profit are those the two?

Jesse Epps- Public...

Joan Beifuss- Could you go into private industry?

Jesse Epps- Well, the restriction, we could perhaps represent people in private industry but on the other hand our charter as many organizations charter, we are chartered for the purpose of representing public employees, state, federal government, municipalities, and what I always used in my own phrase, quasi public those that serve the general public in the manner in which we are talking about. Hospital that receives its funds from private and public donations that are for example in Tennessee entitled to the funds from the tax bond structure so that we feel that so long as the avowed service of the organization is to provide service, public service, then it falls within our jurisdiction.

Joan Beifuss- Then for instance foreign labor would not fall within your jurisdiction?

Jesse Epps- No because foreign labor persay would be a private form who owns a given situation and would be in, if he has enough volume of business ought to be covered by national laborwell it is not covered by national labor.

Joan Beifuss- Well no that was what I was wondering you are not going to be Cesar Chavez of the mid-south.

Jesse Epps- No we would help him in fact for example to do this. In fact, I am going this evening to a little town in Falco Mississippi where a group of workers from a 5 county area is wanting to meet with me to talk about what can they do to organize themselves against the eroding and fleeing jobs from the countryside and what kind of a defense mechanism can they develop for their own sales and for their family's defense against this thing. Of course we are going to go down and meet with them and do what we can to assist them in organizing so that they can have some defensive mechanism in this regard. I think that it is highly critical in the farm area. The farm area is becoming more mechanical however and because they are becoming more mechanical. It is going to become more easy to organize because then there are certain skills which you can then withhold and cause difficulties. The problem now is because how do you, how can you and how do you, organize and defend the working poor on the farm who is now the farmer is putting his farm in the sod bank and he is not planting any cotton any more and he is not planting corn therefore he doesn't need any services. I think this is a very critical area that our country has got to take a hard look and something has to be done to provide for these persons within this society, now what is...

Joan Beifuss- That was what I was wondering if your organization seemed to be the only one in this area even remotely interested in this.

Jesse Epps- Yeah (muffled) has been happening for example, I would say if we would take a poll of 90% in our area and I dare say it might be higher than that. But 90% of those employees, particularly in public works in Memphis are either off the farms of Mississippi or Arkansas. They have been chased from the farm because of migration. Now what we are about is that we need to find the ways and means of retaining these persons in the areas where they are so that they can share in the benefits that the government is sharing with the farmer in keeping him in operation. Of course, there is no quick and easy answer to this, I am going down and we are going to grapple with this problem and see what kind of possible solutions we could have.

Joan Beifuss- (Muffled).

Jesse Epps- This is going to be the first initial meeting where we are going to have this number of farmers together or should we say persons off the farm who are trying to find a way to better their lot or find some organizational structure through which defend themselves. Now I met with many farm people before and it has been in a different kind of context, it has been in connection with social programs, poverty programs, how they could be, how they could relate to it, how they ought to be participating in it, but this is the first kind of the meeting of the kind I am going to this evening that to my knowledge has even ever taken place in this area.

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you another thing, I am still on this unionism thing.

Jesse Epps- Alright.

Joan Beifuss- In a city like Memphis where now the black coalition is formed I see no possibility for you (muffled) integrated unions once you announce publicly as a part of the so-called civil rights movement you know.

Jesse Epps- Well I think you have to be, you have to make up your mind in the labor movement as to what you are going to do and I think the president of our union has sort of set the pattern and that is why I am working for this union because of the philosophy that we share. It has no regard to what its public image may be, if it is an issue that is bare and supporting as a humanitarian problem involved there has never been any hesitation by our union for rallying our support. Now when you talk about the hopes of having an integrated union in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Well lets say in the next 2 years?

Jesse Epps- Yeah, I would say because of our identity here by and large you are probably right in terms of great numbers because the great number of people that we would represent or potentially would represent are black and therefore by the nature of the employment we will (muffled). But we do have for example an inspection station. Despite our position and we made it clear to our men, they are all white over at the inspection station with the exception of one. They had marched and participated with us in the marches downtown and the boycott movement. They sit on our board, they are active in the union. I think that you have to be straight and they understand our participation on the basis of it is a humanitarian problem rather than one of race even though race is the major obstacle to what our difficulties are about. And if it is then we have to address ourselves to it, We have had some problems where we had discrimination against one of our white workers because he was white and we have had to process a grievance in that regard, by a black supervisor in a given situation who was an uncle tom in an incident. But I think that you know that our commitment is not that surface, it is far more rooted. Our commitment to the whole question is, what is right and justice for working people. Be they black or white but in this area of the country the most of them just happen to be black because they are caught at the lowest stratus of the situation. We will fight just as vigorously for these men as for example about 3 weeks ago I went up to Alcore Tennessee. There was struggling for a recognition, recognition of our union up there. 99 and 44% of the membership is white out of the hills of Knoxville and the whole area. Which normally one would think you know stooped in all the racism of yesterday. They requested my coming to speak to them and to go with them and demand recognition. I have never been so warmly received and it was not a superficial thing. I have been around long enough to know when it is superficial and when it is genuine. During the, my presentation and at the conclusion of my presentation I was given the sporadic and in fact I got far more encouragement in terms of standing ovation at the end of my presentation and since that time I have received at least ten calls wanting me to come back. We were able to achieve the purpose for which I went, the city agreed to meet and they having meetings now on recognition and I think we are going to get them behind us,. The point I make is that

we would and was quite prepared to go just as far there in that situation as we have here. Now my, however make no bones about it we recognize that if we are going to succeed and we must and we shall. In organizing the south and every hamlet and town, county and municipal government, is that there has to be a coalition of the target area people that you are trying to get representation for. And in the south those persons overwhelming majority happen to be black and of course it brings, it lifts them up two problems. One for which the power structure oppose just as vigorously as they are the other. They do not want to give to anybody economics stability and freedom and more surely they don't want to do this for the blacks. And we feel that a coalition of civil rights, civil rights activists, people that think justice ought to be brought about both black and white and you find very few whites in the south so therefore consequently the overwhelming support with have to be with the black community and I don't believe with the support of the black community on an issue of recognition that we would be overcome and subdued by any community with that total commitment of the black community working with us. It might take a little longer, somebody might get hurt and somebody might even lose their lives in the process but unfortunately record...history is not kind in this regard. There has never been any progress without pain. I just remember yesterday for example, my wife called and said that the manager of the project had just called her and said there were three white gentlemen's there at the office inquiring as to where I resided. He told them that was not information to be given out but then he went back to the car and saw that they had, all of them had rifles a piece and he called us so we could be forewarned and the point I only lift that up to point out the fact that when you are dealing with changing the whole structure of a society then it becomes an agitation to that society and subsequently it does not die easily, it does not give up easily and subsequently somebody has to be prepared to pay whatever the price is in bring about...

Joan Beifuss- Jesse has the threats and what not worse this time then say in June during the city of Memphis hospital strike?

Jesse Epps- It is a very strange and I don't know why. Apparently because I think, the power structure has made a decision that we have got to stop the blacks and this union somewhere and I believe they have chosen St. Joseph hospital as their standing bearer in this situation. Because here you got a woman which simply there is a woman. And in addition she is a nun, in addition this is a religious institution. So that they have the proper format to give encouragement to try and hold the line and try to beat us back. Now the evidence of this is as reported this past Sunday in the Sunday's paper there are daily conversation between sister Rite, this is the administrator of the hospital at St. Joseph, and the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I was kind of, there was no source quoted on that.

Jesse Epps- No and the this is evident, we had already known that but I was glad it was publicized and it didn't have to be quoted from us.

Joan Beifuss- Oh I am sure I had heard people, I have heard a number of people say it is about time they lost one.

Jesse Epps- Yeah and you see when you talk about, and see this is the thing that we have to always forever keep in mind that it is not the union or me or any personality that is involved in this situation, individual personality. But we are talking about the right of people being denied. But yet, in each instance the power structure try and find a way in which to escape a valve out of which they can deflate a movement for justice. I think that the mayor and the power structure think this is the place to be, to really stand. But fortunately this community is not (muffled) by it and they have made it very clear that they eyes on the occasion in the past and united with us in this effort and we will go down to the bitter end no matter how long it takes in order to bring this about. You know it is a real tragedy when an institution such as this that has an avowed purpose to help the sick and to provide healing for the lame and then of course in addition to that to put clothes on the back of the naked, to feed the hungry, to give dignity and decency and instill in the heart of men whom they have a privilege to have working for them. And yet an institution turn on the heel of that after it has had all of this in its ecclesiastical writings and deny all of these things by practice that they have in writing and this is why it becomes a real reason why we cannot at this time, I don't know how long the journey takes, and how difficult the path become we cannot give up the fight. It is not really St. Joseph hospital you are fighting it is really something far more rudimented than that. It is the same (muffled) we dealt with Lobe a year and half ago. Its recognition, and we said recognition of a union we are talking about recognition of the right of those men and women to have a voice in the affairs of that situation. And St. Joseph's has become a real, should we say the Berlin Wall for us , Methodists and Baptist hospital you see and this is why they are getting all the encouragement possible. Because Methodists and Baptists realize that if we are successful in St. Joseph that there employees are going to say that we ought to have a little measure of justice too.

Joan Beifuss- Well you are already partially organized at Methodist?

Jesse Epps- We are, in fact, if it had not been for sister Rita's overt action the strike probably would have been in Methodist instead of St. Joseph at this point.

Joan Beifuss- Would you relate again what the first set off was at St. Joseph? I have heard various stories.

Jesse Epps- The St. Joseph hospital problem grew out of the fact that we had over the employees had requested our representation over a year. Methodist Hospital employees also have shown an interest, and all of this came right out right after the strike at city of Memphis hospital had needed and so forth. And we had quite a number of employees at that time in greater number sign up in Methodist than we did St. Joseph and we were quite prepared to move ahead. In fact, we had made some inquiries at the hospital for recognition. The hospital fired, this is the

Methodist hospital, they fired a group of part time student employees because of bad activities.

Joan Beifuss- Is this the thing with the Tennessee human relations council?

Jesse Epps- That is correct, in fact, it was our union that invited them in, invited Baxton Bryant and the Tennessee council human relation in. Had asked our good friend the preacher to come down and write an article on them. While we were in the process of doing all these things several employees was fired at St. Joseph hospital. We then asked for recognition over there and suggested that those employees be put back and so on. And they said we are not going to meet with you because to do so would be (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- You mean prior, for what the union?

Jesse Epps- Well one young lady was fired, just for no reason at all. In fact, she asked her what was the reason and the woman said we just don't need your services anymore and yet they hired somebody else on the job the very next day. She was the only black in that area, it was in the pharmacist area of the hospital. Then there was about 6 other folk was discharged and two of which were our most vocal union activist in the hospital. So then we had no choice of trying to find a way to resolve this. We went to father Monsignor Leppert and asked if he would intercede on behalf of this young lady and perhaps the sister would talk to him as a monsignor of the church and as a fellow catholic and so on. She treated him very politely I understand but really did nothing about it and so the employees met and demanded that action be taken and if it was going to take a strike then we will strike. So then we had to sort of put Methodist on the back eye to go over and see, and we had a feeling because the catholic church was very forward in its written and vocal position on justice that perhaps this would even suffer our problem with Methodist hospital. Because we were reasonably sure that St. Joseph would if we demonstrated that we represented the majority of employees in certain categories that they would sit down and bargain with us and we could then use this as a wage for the Methodist hospital. But unfortunately we found a just as equally hostile attitude at St. Joseph hospital as we did at Methodist. In fact, in many instances even more so.

Joan Beifuss- Did you ever talk to sister Rita yourself.

Jesse Epps- I had one occasion by accident. When we first sent her telegrams and we sent her letters and ewe made phone calls and she retuned not a one. One day I went over to the hospital and stopped at the receptionist desk and the young lady at the desk told me that Sister Rita's office was down the hall. I understood her to say the third door on the right. Second door, third door on the right, I counted down three doors but she had said the second door on the right. I entered into an office accidentally. I should have been in the secretarial office. I apologized for having come in and in fact, I didn't know who she was and I said the receptionist desk had probably indicated that I could see Sister Rita can you give me some information. And she said well I am Sister Rita. Of course I apologized for having come into her

office in that manner and then I suggested that we ought to sit down and talk. She promised me that evening that she would check her calendar and call me back and arrange such a meeting and of course that has not been done to this day. That is the only conversation that I have ever had with her.

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you this and I am not sure to ask it. Do you really think that Martin Luther King died at St. Joseph's because of blatant racism on the part of the staff? And for god's sake why did you put out that printed material if you didn't think that?

Jesse Epps- The printed material that was put out was not put out by us.

Joan Beifuss- The letter on the backburner?

Jesse Epps- The letter that I wrote I wrote a letter on the reverse side.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I saw the cartoon I know.

Jesse Epps- The cartoon and this was done with the full knowledge of Sister Rita and the administration. The cartoon material being passed out were full knowledge and that, because that was with full knowledge it did raise a question in my mind.

Joan Beifuss- Are there (muffled)?

Jesse Epps- Because I am not saying that he probably would not have, they may not have been able to save his life because of the extent of the damage done by the gunshot. Because I don't know what the autopsy said and....

Joan Beifuss- Well the only thing I am asking you is do you really think there was a possibility that he could have been saved at St. Joseph's and he wasn't because of racism? Because at least it seems to me...

Jesse Epps- It is a question in my mind.

Joan Beifuss- Is it? Ok. Is there anything that would...

Jesse Epps- I am not sure, the reason why it is a question in my mind is that if she would permit this to be passed out with full knowledge than apparently there is far more racism in that hospital than even I anticipated.

Joan Beifuss- Oh yes, I understand that, I understand that there is racism in the hospital.

Jesse Epps- So therefore, this in itself has to pose a question in my mind particularly when they pass out and make mockery of his death and then suggest that there was a grave reserved for me and this is being done with full knowledge of administration.

Joan Beifuss- The only reason it struck me was because we had taped a couple of people from the emergency room when we did that taping series and I didn't think

you really believed that but it seemed like such an awful tactic to use if you didn't believe it.

Jesse Epps- No I would say that it was not an awful tactic I don't think, I think it points up, I hope it dramatized. I hope it dramatized the extent of racism at St. Joseph because you don't prod a gun, I don't prod a gun and throw it on you, and say I might shoot you. You don't know what extent how far I would go, whether I would do it or not at that point. The mere fact that I have a gun leveled on you makes you wonder whether or not I would shoot you or not. And if somebody had been killed the day before, in which I might have been in that present and said I denied I didn't have anything to do with it. I am sure it would raise some questions in your mind. I the reason for my putting a gun on you is basically for the same kinds of things for which the other person was allegedly killed and now I am making mockery of it with a gun cocked on you.

Joan Beifuss- Oh yes I understand what you are saying I don't mean to belabor this because it is such a minor point really.

Jesse Epps- Well it is not really I think it gets at the very root of many of the problems in Memphis. I think it goes back to something more even..

Joan Beifuss- I understand the racism but the thing about that you would think that King could have possibly been saved at St. Joe's this was the only thing.

Jesse Epps- It is a question I (muffled) god knows I am fair with my (muffled) forward with myself as I am with anyone else. It really is a question in my mind whether or not everything medically possible was done. Now maybe everything that could have been done to John Kennedy, John Kennedy or Robert Kennedy. And they still would have ended up in the manner in which it did. But there might have been some other things that could have been tried in the process. These are real questions in my mind.

Joan Beifuss- Ok the only thing I would say the basis of these tapes (Muffled).

Jesse Epps- Black folk you are speaking of?

Joan Beifuss- But you won't...no doctors, but you won't take it from that either.

Jesse Epps- Well I know of nobody who will condemn himself. I don't know of any man well few will be candid about themselves. I don't think it is a man, only a few men are going to face...

Joan Beifuss- Granted, god knows you can say enough about Memphis the trial alone was a mockery of everything but i just don't know, that trouble me some and let me go off that point because I do not want to....i hate to see that happen I hate to see (muffled).

Jesse Epps- I tell you it is a question in my mind surely is.

Joan Beifuss- Let me pick up some of the stories I am hearing from Jesse Epps out in East Memphis. You are building a political empire?

Jesse Epps- I have no desire for political empire in Memphis in fact I maintain, I purchased a house in Memphis, I have maintained my home residence in Mississippi and I am paying home exemption taxes down there. So I could not legally run for anything in Tennessee.

Joan Beifuss- But do you see politics as the (muffled) movement for black people?

Jesse Epps- Indeed so, no question about that. I think that our folk whether in Memphis or in Baltimore or Little Rock or New York, I think our people have to become a potent force in the political arena in order to get justice because you see our employer in this situation or the custodian of our employment are the elected officials and the employers are the public in general so we have to be organized sufficiently that we can communicate with that employer which is the general public and to have a voice with the custodian of our employment which is the elected officials and obviously the way you do this is to be politically strong and to become a potent force and getting at least the ear of those people that have power to do things on your behalf. And it is to that end that I make no apologies nor there is no way or no method of trying to conceal it that we are going to unquestioningly organize block by block and street by street and precinct by precinct and ward by ward. And we are going to do this in Little Rock, we are going to do this in every community where we have an organization because this is the only way in which our folk can have a voice in both side s of the issues in getting justice for themselves. But you are not talking , you are talking here about coalition...

Jesse Epps- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- You are not talking about strictly the union?

Jesse Epps- No, we are talking about (muffled) the song that was proposed so many year sago was so fitting and in our experience and applicable in our experience as an organization. That no man is an island in our organization is by no means an island. In fact, we are trying to build as many bridges as we can to all groups that are interested in doing some thing about justice in this whole question as you see. SO that I think, somewhat of a real overview of this whole thing. I see our union as a vehicle through which the poor, the working poor, the working and forgotten poverty. Overwhelming of which are black in the south, and throughout he nation they are white but throughout the south they are black. That the struggle for justice has to be shifted from the protest of breaking down doors, to the protest of getting the twos to somehow should we say open new doors. You see what I see is that the civil rights act for example has made it unlawful for public facilities to be segregated and made it unlawful for schools to segregate and some. But the economic inequities has made it impossible for the integration of which the law has asked to come about to be practical. And therefore, my little boy is expected to grow up to learn and then to compete as any other child, white child, from east Memphis. While he may not

have all the tools at his disposal as have that white child in east Memphis but yet when he becomes a man he is expected to make as much a contribution to society as anyone else and yet he has not been given the same opportunity to grow and develop that he can make that kind of a contribution that he has condemned because he is not able to do it.

Joan Beifuss- Was that your little boy whose picture was in the paper?

Jesse Epps- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Looks like he (muffled) pretty well, what do you have just one child?

Jesse Epps- No I have three, I have a little boy, I have one son and two daughters. A little girl that is 12 and a little girl that is 2 ½. I see our union really becoming in the few years ahead the really blow off against or should I say not really against but for bringing about economic and social justice in the south. I think that the civil rights movement as we have known it in the past has brought us to a plateau that is sort of stagnating at this point and there must be now a new forward thrust to carry us to a different level of a plateau. I see our organization providing that vehicle by which people can move from where now they are to a higher plane and a higher plateau in the economic and social development of the nation and subsequently really bringing into reality democracy and a democratic process which we boast about as being the ideal situation in the world.

Joan Beifuss- Well then in Memphis would you say that economically your union is probably a beautiful example of black power in the right sense?

Jesse Epps- Yes, I, when we talk about black power, white power, the slogans of the situation I think that we are talking about and I think the power that really counts and someone else is not the creation of minds by no means. What I think we are really talking about is economic power. If a man is able, if I have (muffled) I can go almost anywhere in Memphis today as much as I am being hated and condemned and called a rascal and gangster and so on.

Joan Beifuss- Does that bother you?

Jesse Epps- No it really doesn't because you see it is nothing, you become conditioned to this, it is a way of life with me now. You sort of live, well a man said to me, a man of the office, how can you live under this kind of a constant tension and fear. Well I moved back to Mississippi some 3 or 4 years ago about 4 years ago now. And we have lived under a constant veil of threats and intimidation and threats on my life and it just became the way of life. One, a coward dies a thousand deaths and I don't have but one life and they can, if I, if after I am gone someone can say that it is good I lived I think that my life has not been in vain. I have sort of resolved that a man is going to die for something or by some means and if I die struggling for justice for my people and for myself and for my family and for justice for this whole society then my life is not in vain. I sort of conditioned myself to that and so it doesn't bother me anymore. It used to bother me when I first moved back. It was a grave

concern, I still have more concern for the welfare of my own family than I do my own person. My wife has become more conditioned to it and my kids are, I am proud of my little son and my little daughter., They have learned not to fear what man might be bale to do to him. I think we have instilled into them their basic principles and this is what this whole thing is about. If you can supplant hope where there is hopelessness, and if you can supplant in the minds of the powerless that they have power by organizing themselves and bending themselves together then you are really breaking the cycle of poverty. You can dress a man up and give him a suit and give him a brand new car and a nice house and shiny pair of shoes and if you haven't, if his spirit has not been delivered then his children will still be stooped in the same chain that holds him. The chain that hold most of us is not the literal chain of slavery but we are caught it he worst kind of slavery and that is the kind of thing that I think. If Memphis served anything in the past and if it serve anything for the future, god judge us and forgive us all for the great tragedy down here, but it think that King's death said to the nation and said to poor people around the world that there is hope for you, that you can change your situation and you ought to be about it and I think that spark has engendered the restlessness in the public employment around the nation where you had too many strike sin the last year. In the last year, I bet if you would go and check the statistics, the most strikes many of them unorganized. People have jus gotten, they have gotten the hope that things can be and they are no longer willing to accept what is and I guess Barnett Shaw as the late Robert Kennedy quoted in one of his famous speeches when he referred to one of the statements he made. That some men see things as they are and that is why. I dream things as they had never been said Barnett Shaw and that is why I am not, and it is in this context that our union said, why can't we change these things. That is hwy I am proud to work for the union because we move not on the basis of what is expedient and economically in terms of numbers of on behalf, we move on what is, whether it is right. The investment for example we are making in St. Joseph's hospital in terms of numbers we would have been better off leaving it alone. We have the responsibility, more responsibility for those folk who can't help themselves than we do for 5,000 who can. And it is in that context that I see our road as first joining hands with the black community and liberal white community in a coalition faction and then moving with all haste in dispatch. And bringing about economic and social justice for working poor and that is what we are all about here in Memphis and across the south and Oklahoma City we have problems going on there.

Joan Beifuss- (Muffled) what does your territory, do you have a territory that you are responsible for?

Jesse Epps- Well when we wee here earlier I shared as a international general representative of the union. And I was for about the southern region of the united states, since that time I have been, I along with Mr. Lucie I am serving as the assistant to the president which takes up the entire, the country. My role in the union of course is, is more or less the community relation and community communication aspect of our union. Where and how are you union becomes the community and the community becomes us.

Joan Beifuss- Ok in other words in Memphis when you, is Memphis then almost your experimental thing in how this can begin?

Jesse Epps- Yeah I think we had the experiment last year and we are making it work again in the St. Joseph's situation.

Joan Beifuss- Is this, was the sanitation strike the first real breakthrough for (muffled) in the south (muffled).

Jesse Epps- Yeah in fact it was the first breakthrough in the public sector in a big, I guess in the country. It really represented. You see in the past there was not power there was nothing you could do to force a municipality to do anything but to withhold your services and so on and then if the community, if the elected official was smart enough they could then go out and hire other people and replace the strikers and subsequently you were gone. This was the experience of many unions in the past and therefore the area went unorganized. But we learned a whole new technique in Memphis that you organize the community and the union together. And that while they might be bale to be a the union on one hand or the community on the other they can't be the community and the union in a combination effort. Because then they, the community is working towards the same ends of social and economic justice on behalf of these workers and therefore, they cannot then go to the community to hire people to replace these people. And if you cannot get replacement hired, and the service is going to continue, then they got to sit down and work with the problem rather than sweeping it under the rug and it is a, not only is this a practical thing in that regard but we found that our goals were the same that we seek. While we differ, and we are privileged to have our president elected to the vice presidency one of the vice presidents of the AFLCIO. For many years he was kept off because of his kind of liberal and there wasn't too many other unions in the national presence. (muffled) whatever he believed he said and he said many things of what unions don't stand for. He spoke out very forcefully against the building trade unions even within the council of the AFLCIO in terms of them not moving as they ought to be moving that justice ought to be done of workers and we ought to practice what we preach and we fought for the civil rights bill on one hand and then we discriminate within our own forces. He has really been a moving force within the AFLCIO and has been reflective of our own union as to what he mean. And he has not just done it in words but he has practiced what he preached. And as I say myself and Bill Lucie and others are examples of that. Well then one might say, well you know they are always getting one negro or two negroes and they hold them up and say boy see what we have done. But one thing I have resolved in my heart that I will never be window dressing for nobody. I you give me the title I ma going to act with the authority, if I can't act with the authority then I don't want the title. I made some decisions that he hadn't agreed with but he just had to live with. I think I know him well enough now almost to know his thinking and I don't have to consult with him on issues that arise because I know what our general policy is and it is a policy that has been consistently with a policy that I have always been working for all my life. That is bringing about economic and social justice for working and poor

people. And it is to that end that we are about trying to get things done. I don't know of no other organization that is as committed to total participation in this society of the working poor of which include the working black poor. Which we find ourselves a thorn in our sides of our colleagues even here in Memphis. And other areas of the country.

Joan Beifuss- Are you getting labor support?

Jesse Epps- We are getting labor support in the same kind of way based on the kind of labor unions that are here.

Joan Beifuss- Well...what about the craft unions?

Jesse Epps- The craft unions obviously are probably some of the folk saying to Sister Rita you are doing right. Stop this nigger where you can, this is a nigger union and you ought not to let these niggers get away with it, There are perhaps other good trade unionists within the craft unions which would not agree with this but they are not the vocal ones. It is the silent majority that is causing our problems around the world, around the country, around the world in fact. It is a silent majority and particularly the white majority (muffled). Silent majority, the white majority in Memphis is causing us our problem. So that I think it is in that whole context that we are saying that whether you agree with guys or not, if it is right we want you to go with us and be our friends and if you don't agree with us, our friends of sorrow. This has been the policy of the union and we have been condemned by our colleagues in the labor movement and we have been condemned by people outside the labor movement. You ought not to do this, you ought not to use these kind of tactics you ought not to be doing this or the other thing. You see the only help and the only hope that people have, poor people that is, that is to somehow by the grace of god nonviolently we are committed to use an approach that will bring discomfort to the, enough discomfort to those that have power to make decisions to change their minds. You cannot be nice and be accepted in order achieve this thing. And that is what our struggle is about, I find myself all the time at odds about many of our folk have made movement about our philosophy but I think that they too are beginning to learn as in Pittsburgh as in Chicago, and that is the restlessness that is going around this nation. That no longer can you sweep this problem under the rug you have got to deal with it, not in a superficial sense by placing a negro here in one there but you have got to deal with it in fact and policy and procedures. And to that end I am committed, and that is hwy our union is committed to this end and that is why I am with it and that I s why I will stay with it so long as it is on its course. I believe I know him well enough to know as long as president Worth is president of this union his whole total commitment uncompromised in this regard.

Joan Beifuss- One question it has to do with (muffled). Were you at the national catholic conference for interracial justice?

Jesse Epps- Oh yes I sure was. You know I...

Joan Beifuss- I hear somewhere you were and I couldn't think what you were doing there. Well I mean I don't mean that the way it sounded, you are not catholic.

Jesse Epps- I understand, no I am not. I feel that our union has to related itself and work with any and all groups that are working towards social and economic justice.

Joan Beifuss- Ok in that sense did you underestimate what Bishop Durrick could do for you here. It seems to me that bishop Durrick has failed completely in trying to achieve what he...

Jesse Epps- Well he really hasn't, well I don't think so I haven't written he bishop off yet. I think that the Bishop's effort has not been in vain and I don't think he has quit at this point, I thin he is still trying.

Joan Beifuss- Wonder if you were asking for support from a frail reed there.

Jesse Epps- We are going to be and I have asked for a list of all the catholic diocese and across the country I plan to sit down with them in the next week and draft a letter as best we can and put what documentation we have in it as to what we have seen these issues that continue beyond this week. And call on the catholic sisters and brother around the country to help us at least provide some food to eat to these folk while we are struggling with Sister Rita that is standing against all of the ecclesiastical written positions of the church. We may get some respond and probably will get scattered support. I noticed in the last edition of the Tennessean, this is the catholic organ for the state of Tennessee. Register. They pointed out that there were some priests and one of the (muffled) in Washington D.C. that all voted unanimously to support the position of the bishop and the request of the union for recognition. So there is hope, there is hope.

Joan Beifuss- I was thinking about the official (muffled).

Jesse Epps- Well, I think that..

Joan Beifuss- There is always the movement...like St. Patrick's.

Jesse Epps- Right I think that the bishop despite some (muffled) laymanship in the church represent their official position of the church. I don't stone the catholic church for the actions of Sister Rita as I hope that people would not stone our union for some action of some of our, maybe a trade unionist that would mess up. I think here is a sister that is kind and gentle and I think she is doing what she thinks is right. I really believe that she feels that somehow she is right. That she feels that she is doing all she can for these workers and these workers ought to be eternally grateful for what she is doing for them. She is blind by the paternalism as which she herself is part of that she don't see. And this is the whole thing we are trying to break but yet because she is blind to it we can't go away. We have got to help by the grace of god remove those scales from her eyes, are you going to be (muffled) today or perhaps we could continue this on another day.

Joan Beifuss- No that is quite alright I appreciate. (Tape End)