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Bill Sader- This is August 14th 1968 and we are in the office of Mr. Pete Sisson, hysteric building in Memphis Tennessee. Bill Sader and David Yellin.

(Tape Break)

David Yellin- And the way Mr. Sisson that we like to start is several ways and if you don't mind a kind of a short biography of yourself and where you were born and so on and where you went to school, primarily working up to how you got into public life. Because that is what we are concerned about here. Your life in public life. You know and anything that you can think of the human interest side, you walked down the street and got tripped by somebody and there you were and this thing. So if you would just as you would tell where you were born and we may stop to ask questions.

Pete Sisson- Well my full name is Thomas Edwin Sisson. I have traveled under the nickname of Pete and in fact very few people in the city of Memphis would know Thomas Edwin. I was born in Memphis Tennessee, in August 28th 1927. Went to high school at Southside high school then on to Memphis state university with a B.S. degree in business administration. I attended the university of Memphis law school, finishing in 1959 with a bachelor of Law's degree and was admitted to the bar in 1960. I spent the first 10 years of my working career with the U.S. Rubber company in the cotton purchasing office. Then I moved into the insurance field for the next 5 or 6 years. I was definitely grabbing an associate who represented the pan American life insurance company here in Memphis,. I was elected to the postal commission of public works and took office on January the 1st of 1964.

David Yellin- Fine a brief outline, did you play football.

Pete Sisson- Yes.

David Yellin- I mean you are a big fellow.

Pete Sisson- Yes. In high school I participated in 5 sports. I was selected as an all-state basketball player, I won 3 wrestling championships.

David Yellin- They had wrestling in high school?

Pete Sisson- Wrestling.

David Yellin- Do they still have it?

Pete Sisson- I don't believe they do. I won three wrestling championships, I was an end on the football team. I was president of the student body, and very active in my high school activities. I was selected as the outstanding ROTC first year ROTC cadet at Southside my junior year and was selected the outstanding ROTC cadet for the city of Memphis my senior year. From there I had numerous scholarships offered, some 60 or 70. I signed a grant made to the university of Mississippi on a football

scholarship. Incidentally I had the opportunity to go to Yale but being a poor boy I chickened out.

David Yellin- Oh really they just offered you a small share?

Pete Sisson- No this was I have forgotten the terms but it was a scholarship based on activities conducted in school plus my standing in the class and it was a competitive thing.

David Yellin- Did they want you to play more than football?

Pete Sisson- No football wasn't involved.

David Yellin- Oh really?

Pete Sisson- No. And in fact they may still do this I don't know but it was a number of the, it was either one or two of us from Memphis that was selected but I came from as I like to say is that we were so poor back in my day that it makes the poverty people look rich.

Bill Sader- Was that a scholastic scholarship that was offered to you?

Pete Sisson- Yes it was a combination, it wasn't purely scholastic but it was based on being a well rounded student I guess. I rated in the top ten in my class I remember plus a large number of activities in the class like I mentioned. I was selected outstanding ROTC officer. I am not sure this but I believe I was president of the honor society.

Bill Sader- So just generally all around everything sports scholarship so forth.

Pete Sisson- This is really what the basis of the thing was.

David Yellin- It is kind of interesting I wonder if you wouldn't mind some questions on that. You say you were poor but was that really the only reason?

Pete Sisson- Yes this was the reason.

David Yellin- You mean you felt you couldn't afford it or?

Pete Sisson- Yes I felt I would have been out of place really.

David Yellin- Ah in a sense that is, this was another society...

Pete Sisson- Right and it may of, it was maybe it was an introvert characteristic of an extrovert, I don't know but this is true. Back in the days of growing up and most people particularly in the south end of town were far from being declared rich. I mean they were middle income or maybe the lower income. Well my particular financial situation was much lower than this.

David Yellin- But was it going to the north Yale that had almost this kind of almost a frightening...

Pete Sisson- Well it was society, the rich people, I didn't feel that I could fit in from the standpoint of participating here the rich boys were able to do all these things and I couldn't fit in. This was the feeling I had then, these things have changed. I know from my standpoint going back to when I was in the 8th grade and incidentally I went to Cummins Elementary school. I was a student leader at Cummins, but I remember I was selected and looking back it was a big thing but now from this side it really wasn't all that much. But I was selected to be a prince or a paige or something at the carnival that required a white coat and I couldn't accept because I didn't have the clothes. Now this is (muffled) now but this was part of our growing up. I worked for the park commission ever since I was in the 10th grade through school. In fact I remember very well that my freshmen year at Southside I worked at a drug store. I threw papers in the morning and then I worked at a drug store after I got out of school and then on my supper hour I would pedal real quickly over to the gymnasium and practice basketball and then as soon as the practice was over I would whip back over to the store and work until 10, 10:30. But these were times that the times then were much different than they are now, because money wasn't available really. But as I start to tell you I accepted an athletic grant made to the university of Mississippi which was brought about because most of the people in my school were going to the university of Mississippi. During the summer, the summer of 45 I was working with the parks commission. At that particular time it was about two weeks before we were going to report to school and I enlisted in the marching marine. I never did go to Ole Miss. I came back from the marching marine.

David Yellin- Why did you do that Mr. Sisson do you remember?

Pete Sisson- Yes I remember very well. This was at the tail end of World War 2. And the pitch was going to be drafted, serve your country and I wanted to get in on my own volition. I wanted to go to the marching marine, come on in honey.

(muffled)

(tape break)

Pete Sisson- This was the reason was because I wanted to do something for my country and this was the trade as being the thing to do and like most young boys you are persuaded to do things and this is one I probably wouldn't do again in fact if I had to do it over again.

Bill Sader- How did you happen to pick the merchant marine as oppose to the navy or the army or some other field?

Pete Sisson- This one I can't answer but I know that there was a big advertising campaign I guess is what did it. I had in mind of trying to go to the merchant marine academy which I didn't ever make. And by going in the merchant marine supposedly I had a better opportunity to get into the academy which didn't develop.

David Yellin- You were 18 at he time?

Pete Sisson- 18 Yes sir or almost 18. I guess I was 18, but anyway while I went to St. Petersburg Florida to Maritime school. And then the war ended in the latter part of August if I remember right and I shipped out and came back in 46. My dad was sick at that particular time and I came back and I enrolled out at Memphis state instead of going back to Ole Miss. I went through the summer course myself paying my way which was very cheap at that time.

David Yellin- It wasn't even \$85.

Pete Sisson- No I forgotten what it was but anyway then in the fall, I received a scholarship for basketball at Memphis state. Or what was considered a scholarship, they started the scholarship program back and if I remember it was \$75 was the scholarship plus a meal ticket.

David Yellin- Oh really.

Pete Sisson- The next year all the time I had to work and, I say I had to I don't know if I really had to at that time I felt that I did which I worked at (muffled). Then the following spring, they started football back at Memphis state and I went out for football. I was running on the first team the offensive right end and during a scrimmage, a passing scrimmage I got hurt and fell on my head and as a result this knocked me out of the rest of spring practice and I didn't go back into the sports field the next fall. Instead I worked. During my freshmen year I was president of the freshmen class and was selected as I forget what the title was.

David Yellin- Well I know what it wasn't, you were a Kansas Queen.

Pete Sisson- No this was they called it not the honor roll but the hall of fame.

David Yellin- Oh yes.

Pete Sisson- I was in the hall of fame.

David Yellin- And you didn't even play basketball anymore because of the injury?

Pete Sisson- Well it really wasn't because of the injury. The injury stopped me from finishing that spring practice and then I started working and I needed to work at least I felt like I did.

David Yellin- Now I am trying to find somewhere along the line where you are going to tell us how you got the name Pete?

Pete Sisson- Well the nickname Pete was, I gather that this came back when I was a baby from what I been told my grandfather used to call me P-Tiddy or something like this and Pete stuck.

David Yellin- Were your folks, were they born here or did they come from somewhere to here?

Pete Sisson- My mother is from Mississippi and my dad was from up around Jackson, or Lexington.

David Yellin- Fine. Well I think we got a pretty good biographical material if you could you said you were elected commissioner was this your first post?

Pete Sisson- Yes after coming out of school I had been active too in a number of community activities too. I had supported candidates on a number of occasions. I served as the president of the Memphis Jaycees. I guess these were probably the cabinets that pitched me into the political field. I was selected as the outstanding Jaycee from Memphis and then the outstanding Jaycee from Tennessee. I served as the campaign manager on 3 separate, in 3 separate elections I guess plus participating in a number of others.

David Yellin- For whom?

Pete Sisson- Yes I have supported Lewis (muffled), for commissioner and congress and for the state senate. Also participated in the estes department campaign, the inaugural campaign. I could name several others I guess but I really lose track of those.

David Yellin- So for the record you could be called a democrat?

Pete Sisson- This is right. (muffled) Another thing that in today's terms I may have been class listed as a young (muffled) because I was opposed to the machine rules if that is a good term to use. Growing up in the latter stages of Mr. Crump's domination of Memphis. I was always into the causes that were supposedly perpetuating freedom or where in opposition to him. Or unnecessary to him because it turned out as far as I was concerned a pretty nice guy.

David Yellin- Did you ever meet Mr. Crump?

Pete Sisson- Yes. I had the privilege of being advised in his office and being told I was a pretty nice guy and had a future.

David Yellin- Ok you mean the man himself.

Pete Sisson- Yes but anyway the way I actually ran the public office and this sounds corny but at one time I just decided that I was going to show them how to be done. This is right, I was in the insurance business I paid the price to get in it. I had gotten where my income was, I was much better than the average in fact you could see a couple plaques that I had saved (muffled) back here man of the year and as a result I was making much more money than the salary of the commissioner paid. But as (muffled) I had decided that I was going to show it and I was tired of this stuff and it should be done a certain way.

David Yellin- Do you remember anyone thing that turned you or was it just an accumulation can you put your finger on it?

Pete Sisson- I can't from my standpoint I know that I had worked for a number of candidates and I believe at this particular time I had just been out of a losing race. But I had supported candidates against the establishment and we had gotten our brains beat out a couple times and this really is the reason that I ran for elective office. Another thing a philosophy that I would always follow and it was something that my parents have taught me and that is there is always room to top the guy could perform or if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well. This may have had something to do with (muffled) because I have always strived to be at the top of whatever I entered. Whether it was on the football team or whether it was class president or in ROTC or what it was I tried to be at the top. But anyway...

David Yellin- Was there anybody in political light that was an inspiration to you while we are on this?

Pete Sisson- I won't say that there was any one in political light, there was an inspiration from the standpoint of seeking public office. There were a number of people that during my lifetime that have been an inspiration or a guiding hand or so and they are people that normally you wouldn't think about.

Bill Sader- When you ran as commissioner of public works at that point did you have the mind of using this as a stepping stone to a higher political position?

Pete Sisson- No. This we can talk about later. I know that first I was in scouts and I had probably a double silver (muffled) 50 or 60 merit badges. Some people that have helped besides my parent I know I had a scout master by the name of James Wisemen. I think now he is president of Welch plywood or some company. I don't know if you knew Hope Forward who was a counselor at Camp Courier and was a tough old man but he was a fine person. I had a preacher that was a pretty dedicated person but as far as politics this really didn't have anything to do with politics. One day I woke up and said that somebody has got to do it and I was going to do it and I found out that this wasn't the best thing for me and my family really because I don't have nay money and I had just gotten to the point where I was beginning to earn a decent living, in fact I was earning a pretty doggone good living after starving to death for a couple of years. And then I think seeking office that the pay was way higher, I didn't realize how way down it was until I got in. But at the time that I ran oh I will take this back, 4 years prior to running, no 5 years prior to running, and Mr. Ed Niemann called me from New York city. He was on his way to the (muffled) union meeting and wanted to know if I would run for commissioner of finances and institutions. (muffled) was commissioner at that time and for some reason Mr. Niemann wasn't too far (muffled) and I think this was because he was part of the old group. And this didn't (muffled) they sent a reporter out and ran a big story on the front page or so and but I couldn't run at that time. The reason that I ran was because I thought that I could do a good job. Now everyone told me that I was crazy, that I was going to get my brains beat out. During this particular campaign we had a

lot of people, a lot of little folks and people that had never been in political campaigns before that supported me. And as a result I believe I won by a majority even though it was a 5 man race.

David Yellin- In other words all of the commissioners ran...

Pete Sisson- Separate races.

David Yellin- and the first 4 ran against?

Pete Sisson- No, at the time that I ran I had to run for a particular position.

David Yellin- And who was this run against?

Pete Sisson- And I ran for the commissioner of public works. The reason that I selected the commissioner of public works was that it was an open office, there was no incumbent. If you remember commissioner Farris had run for mayor. And this was the reason that I (muffled) because as far as the duties as the public works commissioner I was as well prepared as my secretary out there really. From that standpoint.

David Yellin- But do you remember who you ran against?

Pete Sisson- Oh yeah. I said, John Ford Tumalley was my major opponent and the year preceding was the (muffled) year and he was the Shelby county campaign manager fro Frank (muffled). And then he ran for commissioner. Another opponent was Charles Oswald who has a machine hop and was running on the basis that he was an engineer and blah blah business man etc. Then we had Woody Leatherwood, who was a heavy equipment operator and union man. And then we had another fellow I forgot what his name was.

Bill Sader- In other words you felt that the city government needed leaders that could be much more beneficial and you picked this particular commission because it was the only one that was open.

Pete Sisson- Right, it was the one that I felt I could get elected to with the least amount of difficulty.

David Yellin- You had as much right to it as anyone else that would be running against you.

Pete Sisson- Right well if I had ran for public service in which Buddy Dwire was the incumbent even though there was a lot of controversy involved in that office you were still running against an incumbent. And one of the political effects of life is an incumbent has an advantage no matter how badly he has aligned at the time he still has a certain ability or advantage. But this is the reason that I selected the public works commission.

David Yellin- Now if we could Mr. Sisson, obviously our main concern in this project that we are engaged is the period of time between February 12th and April 4th or April 16th when the strike was settled. But also quite obviously it is so important what happened before. If you could, could you kind of trace and recall in any order that you want chronologically if you wish, or by incidents or events what you inherited, what the situation was and where you took it and what you left. This is what we are after.

Pete Sisson- Yes I will try to and I will try to bring it into vain that you want it and pointing to this specific period of time whether it has any direct bearing I don't know. We at the department was a different department, it had been run fairly well prior to coming into office. There was some dissension and there always be because of the, I would say maybe the educational background of a number of employees. First there are public works department at that time had approximately 2300 or 2400 employees. It covered most of the operating departments in city government such as the one that you are specifically concerned with is the sanitation department. But along with this we have the street maintenance department the sewer maintenance department, the engineering department, the plumbing department, (muffled) department, traffic engineering, we got but it is a conglomeration of people but they were the city shops and the department the employees were mostly workers instead of professionals. Although we did have a number of professionals. Some of the things that we did was to try and reorganize and base the department on a professional basis. I know that we increased the number of licensed engineers in the department by 7 or 8. And this was done by suggesting that those who have been doing these jobs qualify and by taking their license exam and I thought this was a big accomplishment. In the sanitation department itself we went into a thorough revamping. We purchased quite a bit of equipment. In fact when I went out of office I think we had converted at least 98% of our pick up trucks from open bed trucks to enclosed mechanical packer trucks. We went in to improving or standardizing employee benefit plans under the commission form of government. Now the commissioner had a large say so in the benefits of the employees see.

David Yellin- Do you recall what they were when you came in specifically?

Pete Sisson- I can give you some ideas. The first thing our classified employees were covered by civil service and followed the civil service procedures. Our unclassified employees which were the bulk of our employees really didn't have a standard. Some got off and some didn't and the pay was erratic.

David Yellin- And this was sanitation workers it was all...

Pete Sisson- Yes they were called unclassified. We went into a very detailed study of operations in other cities and we tried to standardize our pay deals. I believe that the pay of a laborer in the department was \$1.27 an hour when I came into office. When I went out the minimum pay was \$1.60 and it was closely to a \$1.90 now.

David Yellin- And that was above the federal minimum wage.

Pete Sisson- Yes, in fact this was the thing that I really shot for was to, not to just meet, but to exceed the federal minimum. Now this could have caused conflict with some of the other departments and (muffled) park employees and hospital employees.

David Yellin- you mean not under your...

=They were not under my jurisdiction. I brought my employees up and brought them up rather quickly. Another thing is that there was an option for an unclassified person to participate in pension plan. As a result more than half of them didn't belong.

David Yellin- This was an option?

Pete Sisson- Yes it was there option but they didn't accept their option.

David Yellin- Now is this a pension plan in which the city contributes and they contribute?

Pete Sisson- Yes, yes. It is the, a civil service employee it was mandatory that they participate. Unclassified had the option of participating. If he wanted to he could get in the plan if he didn't want to he didn't get in the plan.

David Yellin- You sign an agreement?

Pete Sisson- Yes you sign an enrollment card and all this kind of stuff.

David Yellin- It just occurs to me that if they did that and then were part of the (muffled) this was something that was done by the city for these people.

Pete Sisson- This was available to them.

David Yellin- Do you recall how many you say about half?

Pete Sisson- About, I would say about half actually belong to the pension plan, maybe not that many.

Bill Sader- The reason for those half not belonging is it because they didn't understand it or they didn't want to give up the deduction in their salary?

Pete Sisson- This was the thing they didn't want to put in the money and this would probably be true with the other employees except it was mandatory. Well this to me was something that was real heartbreaking.

David Yellin- You mean they hadn't been under the pension plan in previous administration or...

Pete Sisson- They were eligible but they had to exercise the option. But anyway as far as the pension benefits were concerned well there was a move for social security and it took us about a year and half to qualify them. We ran into so many legal loopholes or stumbling blocks that we had trouble doing but eventually we had for unclassified employees a social security requirement.

David Yellin- In other words in your administration the sanitation workers as well as others...

Pete Sisson- City-wide unclassified employee had to belong to social security.

David Yellin- Now this was a city thing.

Pete Sisson- Yes. This was one of the things that we did.

David Yellin- Now here to fore how many, well enough for you to answer to others but for this certainly the sanitation workers weren't included in that as you call the unclassified.

Pete Sisson- No one in government was covered.

David Yellin- No one at all?

Pete Sisson- Under social security. They had the pension plan. Governmental employees were not compelled to be in social security this was something that had to be negotiated.

David Yellin- Now whose option was it was it the city's or the workers...

Pete Sisson- No this was something the city had to do. They elected to have the pension plan instead of social security. There are a number of ways that pension plans are developed. You can have a combination of social security, private pension and what have you. Outside the public sector you are required to participate.

David Yellin- I see, is this still true within the public sector it is still the option?

Pete Sisson- Not in the city of Memphis it is not.

David Yellin- I see but in other cities.

Pete Sisson- This is one of the things that we did, after going up and down we finally developed a plan for social security for unclassified workers. We had three classifications. If the person was in the pension plan he had the right to elect to stay in the pension plan, to get out of the pension plan, or to get into social security. And he had when I say election this was following on the federal procedures and they had to actually sign a card stating what they wanted to do. The other people on the payroll had the option of deciding whether they wanted into social security or not into social security and this they had to sign But all new employees as of that day it was mandatory that they be in social security.

David Yellin- And they also could be in the pension plan if they desired?

Pete Sisson- No, no. One or the other. But now all new employees they can't join the pension plan they have to go in social security if they are unclassified.

David Yellin- So the sanitation workers after 1965 then...

Pete Sisson- Or 66. Now they are all on social security.

David Yellin- But they are not on the pension?

Pete Sisson- No. There may been a few. Now the strange thing was when this election was conducted when it was conducted under the auspice of the state people and the social security program. Now of the ones, sanitation employees now, of the ones that were in the pension plan they, most of them and I would say all but maybe 3 of 30 elected to get out of the pension plan and get into the social security because they got a refund of their contributions under the pension plan which gave them a couple thousand bucks spending money.

Bill Sader- Was the cost to the employee the same for both plans?

Pete Sisson- No, actually was a little bit cheaper in social security. Eventually it may be the same coverage.

David Yellin- now just so...

Pete Sisson- Now let me, in adding onto this in some cases it was tot the employees detriment to get out of the pension plan and in this case I tried to use my office of supervisors to try to explain and convince and in fact we went so far as to having a citizen's committee from the negro community to talk to some of these people and tell them what they were doing.

David Yellin- These are people outside of your department?

Pete Sisson- Yes such as Hollis Price was one of them, Jay McDaniels was one of them I have forgotten but it was 5 or 6 leaders of the negro community to let them know that the commissioner wasn't trying to do some thing to them.

David Yellin- now just so that I am clear because we certainly don't want to miss this. Up until social security was instituted by the city and specifically the sanitation worker was allowed to be in the pension plan.

Pete Sisson- Yeah they could be in on the pension plan.

David Yellin- Then when the social security came in he had to be in social security. Well if he was already on the payroll when social security came in he had to make one of three choices but he had to do one of the three. He had to be on the pension plan, he could be in social security or he could be out of either one of them.

David Yellin- Oh he could.

Pete Sisson- But he had to do one of the three things. Now any new employee that was employed after the effective date of the plan it was mandatory that he would be a member of social security.

David Yellin- But he could not....

Pete Sisson- But he couldn't be part of the pension plan.

David Yellin- So that sanitation workers in 1968 in February were who had....

Pete Sisson- Were basically covered by social security.

David Yellin- Right and those who had started employment after 66 were not part of the pension plan.

Pete Sisson- That's right.

David Yellin- Ok. This is perfect.

Pete Sisson- This applied to all new unclassified people in the government.

David Yellin- Now your sanitation workers particularly were they considered on the payroll even though they were as I understand it were working by the hour. Pete Sisson- Yes now the policy that I set up when I came into the department was that all employees whether they were classified or unclassified would follow the same basic rules of the civil service commission. Even though they were not minding on me as the commissioner this was my policy. In doing this we set up, they got the same vacations that a person that was under civil service. At that time it was one week after 6 months, 2 weeks after a year...(Tape Break) But they received the same vacation as anyone else. We set up a sick leave policy that stated that they receive 12 days per year sick leave. It could be accumulated up to 90 days that, let's see what other policies. We established a policy and there was some instances where it was not complete was that on bad working days the employee had the option to decide whether he wanted to work or he didn't want to work. Prior the policy when I came into office was that when the weather was bad we sent them on home and give them two hours for showing up for this effect. But I felt that every man had the right to earn a living and to support his family. So I set the policy that we were going to work whether the weather was good or bad. But I wasn't going to require a man to pick up garbage in the rain, but if he didn't pick up garbage in the rain he didn't get paid. But if he wanted to work he could work and it was his option not mine.

Bill Sader- But if he didn't pick up garbage did he still get paid the two hours you mentioned before?

Pete Sisson- Yes, no, no, no. Take that back he didn't get paid for two hours, he did not. In other words he could work if he wanted to or he didn't have to. He wasn't penalized if he didn't have to except for the pay. We set up another policy or another program and this applies to the sanitation department is that we set up a procedure of the route schedule that when you finished your route you got to go home. And as

a result we were paying for a 44 hour work week and we were actually working 32 to 34 hours a week. Now right about 6 months before the end of my term we converted this 4 hours bonus pay or incentive pay and placed it into the regular hourly rate. But they were paid by the hour but in essence they had a monthly pay check.

David Yellin- In other words then if a man went out to work when they finished their route they were finished as the conclusion of the route or did that include time back to.

Pete Sisson- Well they got paid for the full day now we let them get off the trucks and catch a bus if they wanted to but normally most rode back.

David Yellin- But they were not paid....

Pete Sisson- I (muffled) it was from the time they left the lot, in other words we paid them to ride to the route. And it was paid until the time they got back on the lot.

David Yellin- Regardless of whether they came back with the truck or not?

Pete Sisson- Right.

David Yellin- So for instance if it took 30 minutes to get back to the lot and 5:00 was the quitting time they would quick picking up at 4:30?

Pete Sisson- 4:30 or 4:15.

David Yellin- If they finished at 4:00 and go back to 4:30 they were still paid as if it were to 5.

Pete Sisson- Yes.

David Yellin- So they were penalized for doing an extra job.

Pete Sisson- In fact if a for some reason though they had to work over. They got paid extra for working over.

David Yellin- Now this had not been the system previously?

Pete Sisson- No.

David Yellin- They got paid for how much they worked at the end of the pickup or then they came back.

Pete Sisson- No they were paid from barn to barn.

David Yellin- Portal to portal I guess that is called. Again to finish this.

Pete Sisson- Something else we did along this line in relation tot h bad weather we supplied them all with rain wear.

David Yellin- You were the first one to do that?

Pete Sisson- Yes I supplied them with rain coats, rain pants, rain caps.

David Yellin- Now the city paid for it?

Pete Sisson- The city paid for it entirely.

David Yellin- Did t hey have to return it in good shape?

Pete Sisson- Well we this was never enforced. We tried to say you had to take care of them and if it was torn up within a certain period they would have to pay for it.

Bill Sader- In other words they took it home with them as oppose to checking them in and out.

Pete Sisson- Right in fact you could see them running around time at all times during the bad weather with the yellow suits on. Another thing that we did we attempted to do but it didn't go over, we bought propane heaters and put them on the back of the trucks that had radiant heat for them to have a place to warm their hands in the wintertime. But it was something like unless they saw a blaze they didn't get warm.

David Yellin- You mean they didn't think it was worth it?

Pete Sisson- That is right, you know some they got to se that blaze to get warm.

David Yellin- Ws this part of the truck or you had to put it in the truck and start it or?

Pete Sisson- No we had it attached on the back end of the truck and it looked like reflector of it. If you have ever seen an outside cap or reflector of it and then the fuel was on the side of the truck. This was some thing that we tired to do for them. Of course we had got into the little three wheel push carts that you see to take the load off their head.

David Yellin- When did that come in do you recall?

Pete Sisson- That was about...

David Yellin- It was during your administration.

Pete Sisson- It was about I guess it had been about a year and half.

David Yellin- About 66 or 67.

Pete Sisson- Something like that.

David Yellin- but they hadn't anything like this before they carried on their heads.

Pete Sisson- That's right.

David Yellin- Right now again..

Pete Sisson- This incidentally was the best thing that had ever helped them as a fact to the garbage men. Because this took the really heavy work out of this job.

David Yellin- Particularly in the area of long walks and so on. Just again to clear up these two things that we might., The option that the men had I bad weather if he came and reported to work and decided not to work he was not paid the two hours.

Pete Sisson- He was not paid. Now if we called him in and for some reason he wasn't able to go out then he got paid at least two hours.

David Yellin- Well if you called them in and you decided that they couldn't work then two hours.

Pete Sisson- That's right.

David Yellin- So was there any question of the time that a man would have come to work he wouldn't have called he would have come and then he would decide when he got there whether he wanted to go or not. Then he would decide when he got there whether he wanted to go or not.

Pete Sisson- No these people were real good about this. There may be a few. For instance if it would start snowing you didn't have to call they just automatically come in because they knew they would need to work.

David Yellin- I see, not he other just again to clarify it, even though the sanitation workers were at all times essentially part time people they were still considered as being on the payroll.

Pete Sisson- Oh yes they were fulltime people but they were hourly pay and they were not classified. The non-classification what this did is tip away job security. In other words if I wanted to discharge one I could discharge him without having to answer to anybody. It was still a full time employee but he did not have the protection of the civil service.

David Yellin- And when a person was discharged from the sanitation was he given what two weeks or as of the moment?

Pete Sisson- Actually from a practical standpoint we didn't discharge anybody, Our turnover in the department was almost 100% from either people quitting or going to jail and not being able to come to work.

David Yellin- It was almost voluntary.

Pete Sisson- It was voluntary. I, this was something that we guarded because no one was discharged until they came through my office and I looked at all of these forms that came through and if there was anything in it at all that I detected that we had conference on this thing.

David Yellin- What about the union activity during your term of office what was the union we are still trying to find out, was it weak, strong? Did they meet with you and make any demands?>

Pete Sisson- Oh yes in fact there were 2 or 3 unions during the time. Well I can start it off this way. Commissioner Farris had quite a bit of a problem under the heading of the retail clerks. When I came into office the second day there Mr. T.O. Jones (muffled). T.O. came to see me and he started pointing out that Bill Farris had discharged a group of people for union activity and I told him at the time that if this was the case that we would certainly consider their applications and put them back on the payroll but for them to come and see me.

David Yellin- Each person?

Pete Sisson- Yes for them to come and see me. I mean I wanted to be sure what the situation was. And T.O. told me at that time that wasn't going to happen that he represented those men and I told him well he may represented them but that I was the commissioner of the department and this was my responsibility. And I will never forget this he told me he was going to show me who is going to run the department. And so we parted company at that particular time. For the next and I don't know how long maybe the next year or so we had continued agitation, everything that come up was hollered to be management against union. We had dissatisfaction, we had number of (muffled) in the car increase tremendously, and the various problems that you have when you have an organization of precision. But at all times I met on a fairly regular basis at our barns. I used to go around and it was tough I guarantee you too, have to get up early in the morning and stay up all night too. I would speak to the employees and give them a chance to ask questions you know and this was brought about some of the changes, these were suggestions that they made. A I said on the discharge and I followed this real closely. But anyway the union was weak. I would say if given an opportunity they were for the union but they weren't for doing what it took to have a union if this makes any sense to you.

Bill Sader- Well do you think a lot of this was brought about by Jones talking to them. In other words the problems that you experienced for that year you say.

Pete Sisson- Yes there is no doubt about this. T.O. told me and I have to assume that this is true that he joined the sanitation department for one reason and that was to organize it. This is what he told me himself whether it is true or not I don't know. But anyway he is a pretty tough little character. He gets around quite a bit. I had a good repore in the negro community at this particular time Jones was going to all of the civic organizations in the community casting stones at us and I was falling right in behind him man putting out showing our side of the coin and I think on a whole I think more than on a whole that the laborers in the department really liked me and respected me. Now I was tough but when I say I was tough if I say you can do this you bet your bottom dollars you can do it, if anybody tries to interfere they have to deal with me. If I say you can't do it I meant you can't do it.

David Yellin- Did it ever come up in this relationship that it was a basic philosophical point here about whether a union should exist in this department or not?

Pete Sisson- Yes this developed too. My position all along was that I didn't care if they belonged to a union. This is fine, this is an individual right that was guaranteed them and I am certainly not wasn't going to penalize anyone for belonging to any type of organization. The only thing I asked was that they don't do it on company time. Now if they had a grievance and I don't care how big or how small they could certainly come to my office they could come as an individual they can come as a group and we would set down and we would work it out, This was my philosophy all along and as, I think I had a real good repore with the department and I know that I did with the negro community because the leaders in the sanitation strike this past period we are talking about from the negro community were the people that assisted me in keeping this thing running well, this sounds funny but this is true.

David Yellin- Minist4ers and some of those...

Pete Sisson- Yes absolutely I went to them and tried to point out what we were doing etc. I even offered to them you can represent them if you want to I remember real well that NAACP had gotten onto me early in the game about different complaints they had and they wanted to talk about one or two I said fine come down, the only thing that I ask is that you bring the person we are going to talk about with you so that he can sit in and we can, so....I was able to communicate with these people a lot better than I could communicate with many of those other people. We set there and started batting he thing around and the full story came out from an employee telling it see, with me talking with hi and just like we are doing here and so he walked out (muffled) shook here head and myself I never had any major trouble form the NAACP. Because I think that they felt I was trying and now as far as the union itself we finally, they made contact with the American federation of municipal state.

David Yellin- That long name.

Pete Sisson- And they came in to see me.

David Yellin- Now is this still T.O. Jones or is this someone else?

Pete Sisson- No this is from the national office.

David Yellin- Was it Mr. Champa at the time?

Pete Sisson- No, no, but anyway he lost his job as the result of the Memphis situation. But anyway...

David Yellin- You mean the man who came to see you?

Pete Sisson- James Seely. But anyway I had a little prior to this I had a group of the representatives from the labor council come to see me about 15 of them. And man they really put the heat to me.

David Yellin- This is the CIOAFLO.

Pete Sisson- The CIO AF of L. So I went around the room and I went around the room to each one of them and told them how I had assisted them, their union and labor in general. But anyway they left. And finally they sent a man by the name of Pete Brown in. I don't know if you remember him he was negro, one of the finest guys I ever met to tell you the truth. He had been an auditor for the state of Ohio before he had gone into the union field. And anyway he came down and a number of time s and we developed a communication lines so to speak and we sat down going over the various policies. Well first the government civil service commission, we set out some work routes.....

David Yellin- Can I ask t his one question and then we sort of stop with this tape if you don't mind take another 20 minutes. What was the [purpose of your talk with Mr. Brown?

Pete Sisson- Mr. Brown was here to organize a union period.

David Yellin- I see and you were here to at least indicate to him to assist?

Pete Sisson- No I was here as the head of the public works department and as the management representative I guess.

David Yellin- Were you willing for him to start the union?

Pete Sisson- Well the union had started, I hadn't, as far as people belonging to the union this was no problem with me never had....(Tape End)