

SS109.mp3

Joan Beifuss- Testing 1, 2, 3, 4. 1, 2, 3, 4. (tape break)

Joan Beifuss- Testing 1, 2, 3, 4. 1, 2, 3, 4. (Tape break)

Joan Beifuss- Ok this is Joan Beifuss and Bill Thomas we are talking to Bill Ross secretary of the AFLCIO Labor Council in Memphis we are at the CIO building at 136 ½ S. 2nd. This is June the 4th. Is it registering? Are you getting registration?

Bill Thomas- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Ok Bill first can you tell us what the labor council is?

Bill Ross- The labor council is an organization composed of some 110 different local unions with a co-membership of about 35,000.

Bill Thomas- (muffled)

Bill Ross- The area covered it limited to Shelby county.

Joan Beifuss- Now you were the secretary of the labor council right?

Bill Ross- I am the executive secretary.

Joan Beifuss- Executive secretary ok now, where does COPE fit into that?

Bill Ross- COPE is just a committee of the labor council, it is a committee on political education.

Joan Beifuss- Now let's start first off with you can you tell us just real quickly your background in labor and how you came into Memphis.

Bill Ross- I came to Memphis 16 years ago as a result of a avoided organizational effort in Jackson Mississippi. We attempted to organize a clearing ledger there and I was asked to leave the state.

Joan Beifuss- By whom?

Bill Ross- By the publishers of the Jackson clearing ledger, Robert Hedderman.

Joan Beifuss- Well now how did you get to Mississippi, you didn't start out in Mississippi?

Bill Ross- God. As a newspaper printer I started out in Jonesboro Arkansas where I learned the trade. From there I worked various weeklies and dailies up and down the Mississippi. Two years in Helena, 8 years in Clarksdale, 3 years in Jackson. My first encounter with organized labor was an effort made in 1947 or 8. We tried to organize the newspapers at Clarksdale, Greenville, and Greenwood Mississippi. And after that to Jackson and the failure there and then to Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Now did you come into Memphis to organize the newspapers?

Bill Ross- The newspapers in Memphis had been organized since before the civil war. The Memphis typographical number 11 is the oldest labor organization in Memphis. I remember typographical union number 11.

Joan Beifuss- So you came into Memphis then as a member of the typographical?

Bill Ross- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Ok then what?

Bill Ross- I have been very active, and I was active in the local affairs of the local (muffled) from the first day I got here. Not only on the local level but on the regional level. In 1957 I was elected secretary treasure of the southeastern (muffled) trades conference. A position that I still hold. And in 1962 I was selected as executive secretary of the labor office, which is not an elected position.

Joan Beifuss- Ok can you give us any of the background of organized labor in Memphis?

Bill Ross- Just general facts?

Joan Beifuss- Just give me, anything that would throw light on the fact that this is or has been such an anti-labor area, or anti-organized labor area.

=Well the growth of the labor movement to be perfectly honest in Memphis paralleled that of the nation, up until the CIO and Mr. Crump said the CIO would never come into Memphis. When they organized, when the CIO was doing its organizing in Memphis in the late 40's it would still have to meet in people garages out in fields still not allowed to meet in public. Mr. Crump satisfied the craft unions, particularly the building trade by giving them practically all the work in the city amongst public buildings. Also seeing that at least one member of the legislature representing Shelby county came from organized labor. This is the way papa Crump satisfied the labor movement prior to the birth of the CIO. After that why he still tried to pacify the old craft union. And this carries on still today, this is one of the reasons why we did not get the help like we thought that we should here in the sanitation strike from the craft union because the city had always favored them and...pretty much gave them what they wanted. They still aren't paid up to scale, and they paid scale but they don't get some of the fringe benefits.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now can you tell us about the organization of the sanitation workers here?

Bill Ross- The sanitation department as the conditions had prevailed it he sanitation department that made organization necessary were brought out in the open during the administration of commissioner Farris. At this time a group of employees attempted to form an organization of their own. The teamsters had tried it one time, O.Z. Edwards tried it one time to form an independent organization, and then

several AFLCIO unions, more or less took the organization under their wing and advised them but at this time under commissioner Farris is when several of them were discharged for union activity and one among them was Thomas Oliver Jones.

Bill Thomas- Do you know what year that was?

Bill Ross- That was in 1961. Then came the election with commissioner Sisson. He made some very definite commitments to Thomas Oliver Jones and other members of organized labor in regard to recognition of the union, grievance procedure, dues check off and many of the other things. As soon as he was elected, however now, if the commitments that were made by both parties, one of the commitments was that the commissioner would be allowed to get on his feet so to speak before any attempt was made to bring about respective organizations. The sanitation department employees got impatient after some 6 weeks and tried to force the organization on the commissioner and he took this as them renigging on their commitment they had made to him. At that time there were other discharges due to union activity, 6 to be exact. 3 were finally put back to work. And it was only during the latter part of the commissioner's term were two others were put back and one was never replaced. The conditions that existed in the department, were such even then that it was almost unbearable. All the tubs were carried they had side loaders, they didn't have end loaders, they didn't have packers, they had open trucks. About this time in order to relieve some of the pressure an ordinance was passed limiting the size of the garbage containers but was never enforced. Back injuries are still prevalent.

Bill Thomas- Because they were too large?

Bill Ross- Yeah. A lot of them are still using the 30 gallon drum which is against he law, (Muffled). The largest legal contained is your 30 gallon, the oil drum is 55 gallon. One of the cases that was brought to my attention was the fact that one of the employees jumped off the back of the truck and broke his foot. He was sent to John Gaston hospital and told by the doctor's at John Gaston hospital that his foot was not broken it was merely sprained and they taped it up and told him to go back to work. He went back to work and in two days time he foot was swollen completely out of all proportion. He went back to John Gaston hospital and they told him his foot wasn't broken again. Told him to go back and he was able to do light duty. There is no such thing as light work in the sanitation department. The condition was called to the attention of my office, I instructed the man to see his own private doctor and he did. He found that his foot was broken. In the mean time a foremen made a personal call to his home and told him if he didn't return to work he was going to be fired and he was fired. So when all of this was brought to the commissioner's attention, he finally agreed to reinstate the man but didn't say anything about any back time at all. We were finally able to get most of his back pay. But through pressure from the union during commissioner Sisson, many improvements were made in equipment such as end loaders with the packers, carts to sue in hauling he garbage out of the yards.

Bill Thomas- Up until that time they carried the tubs...

Bill Ross- Yeah on their head or anyway they could carry it, most of the time on their head. Then all during this time the organization was just staying alive and membership was fluctuating up and down depending on the settlement of the grievances that came up. Thomas Oliver worked with no set salary, with just whatever he was able to get.

Bill Thomas- Bill can you go back just a little bit when Mr. Jones was discharged and then I understand that you put him on or how that (muffled).

Bill Ross- In 1964, the early part of 1964 after Sisson's election and we thought there was a possibility we could reach a formal agreement with the commissioner. I made a trip to Washington at my own expense and contacted Jerry Worth and Tom Morgan who at that time was field director for the American Federation of states and counties municipal employees. Morgan came here and made a survey of the situation and immediately put Thomas Oliver Jones on the staff.

Bill Thomas- And this was shortly after he had been discharged by the city?

Bill Ross- It was two years after he was discharged by the city he was discharged in 61 three years almost, this was in early 64 when they put him on. The boy worked 3 years holding this organization together with whatever he could get and sometimes it was damn little.

Bill Thomas- There was no official sanction that you know if.

Bill Ross- No official sanction, he had no connection what so ever with any group organized.

Bill Thomas- Obviously we wonder how Jones made it.

Bill Ross- That's right here is a guy that is truly dedicated and I mean we see so damn little of this now. I mean he went through family stuff and he went through 3 years of not knowing what he was going to make if anything. He even acted as a janitor in one of the union halls during that period. Anywhere he could pick up a little extra money in order to keep the organization together. Dodging creditors and this is that and the other, borrowing money from the first money to another but this was true dedication and I have seen him refuse pay off money from politicians as desperate as this man was financially. Here is a man that was truly dedicated. Now after the change in government when mayor Lobe was elected the negro community knew they were not going to get anything what so ever out of the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Is this mayor Lobe's first term?

Bill Ross- No this is present right before the strike.

Bill Thomas- One thing do you remember real briefly that these conditions were just as bad when Lobe was commissioner of public works.

Bill Ross- Oh definitely yeah.

Bill Thomas- Sot his was nothing new?

Bill Ross- Nothing new we are seeing the same thing come out right now with the firefighters. 72 hour weeks, who in the hell ever heard of this within even firefighters working 72 hours a week. But prior to mayor Lobe's election, let's go back though and talk some during the Ingram on that one during Sisson, get some of this other stuff in here. On November the 13th 1964, the American federation of state and county municipal employees issued a charter to local 1733. And as all that date they became a officially a part of the labor movement in Memphis. Then immediately after the union was chartered international union sent John Hale from Little Rock to act as the international representative and assist Thomas Oliver Jones. The commissioner allowed certain grievances to be processed but would never agree to recognizing the union. Then in June 24, 1965, the conditions were still unbearable and they picketed the public works department and at that time Sisson issued a statement that the city's position is prevented by law from negotiating with a union. He also said at the same time I don't care what you join we are not going to have agitation on the job we are going to pick up the garbage. Anyone who refuses to work will be replaced.

Bill Thomas- That sounded like a few months ago.

Bill Ross- The same thing. This was another of his public refusals to recognize the union. At that time he claims they have only 900 employees. During the time several proposals were submitted to the commissioner. Grievance procedures, dues check off, seniority (muffled) and so forth. All of this was turned down. One public hearing was held where many local citizens appeared on behalf of the sanitation department employees. Charlie Poole of the personnel department and the post office department appeared in their behalf, Charles Aldman of the federation of postal clerks, other labor leaders appeared before the entire commission on several occasions and then in 1966 an attempt was made to reach an agreement with commissioner Sisson and at this time a strike was threatened by was stopped by an injunction by special Chancellor, what in the hell was that guys name.

Bill Thomas- We have got it.

Joan Beifuss- We have got it.

Bill Ross- This is, was an injunction of the original injunction.

Joan Beifuss- The one they kept referring to in March.

Bill Ross- Yes. This effort was stopped and then after the election of mayor Lobe, sanitation department felt like they had reached the end of their rope. And let's face it the New York garbage strike did have a psychological effect on the garbage collectors here in Memphis but the fact that in another department of the public works, the sewer department, where employees, negro employees, were sent home on account of bad weather and the white employees were allowed to work, allowed to work full time. Well it was the straw that broke the camel's back so to speak.

Joan Beifuss- That was in the sewer department and not the...

Bill Ross- Not the sanitation department. It was in the sewer department.

Bill Thomas- Now what I understand this had been going on for time to time for a long period, this was sort of policy.

Bill Ross- That's right.

Bill Thomas- Why this additional straw.

Bill Ross- Well basically everybody knew Henry Lobe's segregationist view and they knew that this was going the way that they were going to stop it and bring something about like t his.

Bill Thomas- So (muffled)

Bill Ross- That's right.

Bill Thomas- But do you believe honestly, the New York garbage strike had violently ended for all effective purposes the night of the (muffled).

Bill Ross- That's right.

Bill Thomas- It had been going on for 9 days and (muffled) some type of psychological effect.

Joan Beifuss- What about the two men that were killed?

Bill Ross- Now right prior, let's go back again and fill in on the background on this other. Also realizing that mayor Lobe's position hadn't changed a great deal, C.P. Champa came to Memphis on, I reckon, he came to Memphis on February the 1st and met with director Blackburn and on the 8th he wrote Mr. Blackburn a letter outlining 4 points that he felt like they should sit down and discuss. Well during this meeting Director Blackburn assured Champa that they would settle grievances. Champa left there feeling like an agreement could be reached. In the meantime though, two employees of the sanitation department were killed in an accident involving faulty equipment and the city's policy has never been to give any compensation or too participate in any workmen's compensation program for the employees. Consequently, the only compensation the families of these two people received was one month's pay and burial. Which amounted actual cost to the city was about \$900.

Bill Thomas- For both each \$900, the whole thing or each?

Bill Ross- No, each.

Bill Thomas- I see.

Bill Ross- Month's wages.

Bill Thomas- month's wages for each and burial.

Bill Ross- And burial. Which amounted to about \$900 each.

Bill Thomas- And no other settlement.

Bill Ross- No other settlement what so ever.

Bill Thomas- There was no insurance?

Bill Ross- No insurance. The only insurance available to any of them was \$2,000 and they had to pay a major portion of the premiums themselves and it was not costly.

Bill Thomas- So these employees (muffled).

Bill Ross- They had only been working for the department a short time.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell what kind of quality of equipment it was?

Bill Ross- Electrical apparatus of the packing (muffled) on the truck shorted out in some manner, nobody knows exactly how, they just assume that a shovel or a rake they would carry on the truck jarred lose and shorted out the controls. This is only assumption, there is no proof. But what the public doesn't know, they have never been told by any of the mass media just how much the settlement would make. You have never seen this in print anywhere.

Bill Thomas- Bill have seen where the safety council did an investigation on that, at the request of the city?

Bill Ross- I knew that they did one, but I knew they didn't come up with anything conclusive.

Bill Thomas- I understand that it was a very critical report, I haven't seen it, but I understand it is very critical (muffled).

+I don't see why the report shouldn't be available.

Bill Thomas- I don't either.

Bill Ross- From the national safety council. At one time I was on the board of the national safety council, I would imagine that we have somebody on there now, I think (muffled).

Bill Thomas- Do you (muffled) interested in the accident do you by any chance know the whereabouts of the two widows?

Bill Ross- I wasn't in personal contact with them at all.

Bill Thomas- Then there is one other thing, as I understand it in the points that were presented by Mr. Jones to Mr. Blackburn the night (muffled) included a request that

they be allowed to participate in a safety program. Now was that the reason for that class was or do you know?

Bill Ross- That was one of the reasons of course commission Sisson had at one time started a safety program or wait a minute to my knowledge it was a safe driving program where he was training drivers, as far as safety in connection with the operation of the equipment. I don't know anything along that line.

Joan Beifuss- Let me go back to those two men again, were they actually kind of ground up in that accident.

Bill Ross- I don't know how badly mutilated their bodies were but I do know that in those packers there is just no way in the world once a man gets in there they are coming out alive.

Bill Thomas- I understand that (muffled) no time to jump out of the way.

Bill Ross- Once it starts in action there is nothing that stops it, I don't even think there is a break on the equipment at all. Let's see this is the original 9 points. This was made after the strike was called.

Joan Beifuss- Well what about the 4 points that Champa discussed with Blackburn on February 1st.

Bill Thomas- And this if we can, Bill let us use this for a copy.

Bill Ross- In fact I will give you a copy on my machine.

Joan Beifuss- Ok fine.

Bill Thomas- Because that is a letter from him.

Bill Thomas- So that brings us to the (muffled).

Bill Ross- Down to the strike situation.

Joan Beifuss- Well let me go back another minute. Barrett Ruston in here on February 6th or February 5th, which was reported.

Bill Ross- We had nothing to do with this.

Joan Beifuss- He did have anything to do with.

Bill Ross- No, I know what you mean now Barrett Ruston was in here for a two day area wide committee on political education institute. Incidentally this was oh, a little squib in the paper was, the paper questioned or somebody wrote into the paper questioning why, representative Anderson and who else was on the same platform with Barrett Ruston. Hell I was there and I can't even remember.

Bill Thomas- Ruston became the hate...later on.

Bill Ross- Now this shows you how the newspapers, the Daily Press was prejudice and still is prejudice, why they would print something like that with no news value what so ever. There is something to cloud up the thinking. Just pure, well mud slinging.

Bill Thomas- I think in all indications it was looky here Barrett Ruston...

Bill Ross- Smear campaign.

Joan Beifuss- Well let me get something else straight I don't understand. How many men were actually in the union on say February 1st?

Bill Ross- That is hard to say I doubt if anybody actually knew how many dues paying members.

Joan Beifuss- Or approximately or any..

Bill Ross- I imagine on February the 1st it was less than 100. Because by adding collect dues as they did why there was no accurate way..

Bill Thomas- Every creditor had his hand out.

Bill Ross- That's right and we called them piss collection.

Bill Thomas- What?

Bill Ross- Piss collection, go out there and just take the money and piss when you can get it.

Joan Beifuss- Then the night before the strike started there was a meeting.

Bill Ross- The Sunday before the strike a committee met. Or rather the membership instructed Thomas Oliver to meet with Blackburn and see if they could not resolve this problem with the sewer department.,

Bill Thomas- On the short pay.

Bill Ross- On the short pay. Blackburn refused he said. This is when Thomas Oliver went down with the jail clothe and changed clothes in Blackburn's office. When he told them that he was ready to go to jail in spite of the injunction or in the face of the injunction. So when the committee went back and reported to the membership that night, and they couldn't say, the next morning when the fellows went to the barn they didn't go out.

Joan Beifuss- Hold a minute do you know anything about a negro minster being in that meeting with T.O. Jones and the stewards?

Bill Ross- No I don't.

Bill Thomas- (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Yeah ok.

Bill Ross- Hell the damn thing is full of ministers.

Joan Beifuss- Was it that early?

Bill Ross- No I mean the part time ministers in the membership.

Bill Thomas- Ministers on Sunday and laborers during the week.

Joan Beifuss- Ok.

Bill Thomas- There was or had been many accounts of that Sunday night meeting though which referred to 22 sanitation employees and a minister, I was wondering..

Bill Ross- Well I don't know who the minister was. I don't. I don't even know whether it was really important or if it was one (muffled) became active.

Joan Beifuss- Well that was what I wondered.

Bill Ross- In fact I am sure it wasn't one of the ones that we regard as the leaders now such as Jim Lawson or Fred Jackson, possible it could have been Middlebrooke in that he has had more of the background than any of them I know of. He has been active in organization campaigns in Chicago.

Bill Thomas- Oh reverend Middlebrooke was?

Bill Ross- Yes. It is possible that he could have been. Well let's face it any time these people had trouble they couldn't get themselves the first place they turn is the minister, this is typical. This is the reason that the ministers were called into the situation in the first place. It just a part of the negro thinking. And when he has trouble and he can't get it solved, the only place he has to go is his minister. This has been the whole picture of the south, the only place that a negro can feel that he had any dignity, can readily participate is in his church. This was the reason, the real underlying reason of why the ministers became so involved in this. Now of course after the injunction was served and it was such a wide sweeping injunction even to the extent to where the union officials are not allowed to speak at a union meeting. And the very thing they got Jerry Worth for was even speaking in the city council. This is what he was charged for contempt of court. Then the sanitation workers through their natural instincts turned to the ministers.

Bill Thomas- Well if we could go backing time a little but do you have any more questions on this?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah did they try to see mayor Lobe that first night, there was some kind of a story that they sent word for Lobe to come down?

Bill Ross- I don't think an attempt was ever made at that point to see Lobe, I wouldn't say for sure but I don't think so.

Bill Thomas- When did you first hear, when were you first aware of what was going to happen or what had happened...

Bill Ross- Monday morning when I got to the office the first time I was aware that any real trouble was brewing.

Bill Thomas- Had you known that some Sunday night meeting..

Bill Ross- I had only heard on the radio. I talked with Thomas Oliver and wit Champa and Champa was in town but I had not talked with Thomas Oliver prior to the truck thing.

Bill Thomas- Was Mr. Champa in town at that time?

Bill Ross- No Champa was in town February the 1st.

Bill Thomas- Yeah, ok and then you came down Monday morning.

Bill Ross- Monday morning and the hall was full of sanitation people and Thomas Oliver came in here and said I have a track on my hand and I said yes it looks like it. And at that time he had not called Champa or anybody working and told them the people were out.

Joan Beifuss- When did they decide to go out then, when was the mass meeting?

Bill Ross- The first mass meeting was held at 10:00 Monday morning back here in thee two halls. I spoke to two different groups one in the back hall and they had the rest of the, in here.

Bill Thomas- How many roughly?

Bill Ross- How many can you get jam packed in this place, 500 at the most. And that is when I made arrangements for them to start meeting in Firestone.

Bill Thomas- There was just to many of them here.

Bill Ross- Yeah we would have a fire (muffled). So we talked to them here called Champa and the first words that Champa said, good god almighty I need a strike in Memphis like I need another hole in my head.

Bill Thomas- Now where was Champa?

Bill Ross- Champa was in Washington. In fact when he got T.O. on the telephone he chewed him out, literally chewed him out. T.O. or anybody else couldn't have stopped people from coming out. Hell if you had gone back there Monday morning and told all those people to get back top work they would have killed you.

Bill Thomas- They were ready.

Bill Ross- I mean they were determined, I have never seen a group more determined.

Bill Thomas- You remember Bill what you said tot hem that morning.

Bill Ross- I have no idea what I said what do you say to any group when you find in that frame of mind. We over pay the face in the group. No I imagine though that and as much as I had spoken to the group so many times before, that just looking back now I am sure I reassured them that everything was going to be alright and we were going to win this, The typical...

Bill Thomas- Were you surprised at the numbers, the force?

Bill Ross- Definitely, anybody in labor that would tell you that they weren't surprised to hear an organization was with no assurance whatsoever, or I should say a group of people with no assurance what so ever that they would have anything, even have their jobs, or would have any welfare help, any assistance what so ever. You are telling me that you could get that many people out is unbelievable.

Bill Thomas- That is pretty unique in labor movement.

Bill Ross- That's right. And then to keep them out without a picket line., what we call a formal picket line.

Bill Thomas- This is where it would be difficult to cross, a big (muffled) to cross.

Bill Ross- This is almost unbelievable, unheard of. Have a ten week strike, originally came out on the second day and the first day they came out all but about 75 came out. I think it was. Maybe it was more than that. The second day all but about 30 came out and stayed out. And at no time did they ever get more than I think at the time they signed the agreement, there was 75 including the original 30 that stayed in. That is 45 that went back in plus another 60 or 65 that they had hired. This is all I am telling you they were talking about. This is something that is absolutely unbelievable. In fact the business, I figured that after a week with as much unemployment as we have, among the unskilled. In February there is no work available, I would have bet anybody they could have hired at least 5 or 6 hundred. And this is how solidly the entire black community was behind this.

Joan Beifuss- Now did Champa and Worth come in immediately in the first couple of days?

Bill Ross- Champa came down Monday afternoon, Monday night.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled).

Bill Ross- Yeah Worth didn't come in until a week or so later.

Joan Beifuss- Now at the beginning what kind of assurances could the union give them as far as food and..

Bill Ross- Well Champa came down and looked the situation over and saw that he had the people behind him and he had a legitimate strike on his hands it just wasn't a walk out. It wasn't a walk out as far as that goes because it wasn't an authorized strike. What I am talking about (muffled)_ was he had people with general complaints and they were thoroughly determined they were gong to stay out and meet down there the attitude of the people, And he assured them that all efforts would be made to see that their essential needs were met such as food and bills that had to be paid such as utilities so forth and so on.

Bill Thomas- Now how did he (muffled) a meeting that night when he got in?

Bill Ross- No he didn't meet with the membership until Tuesday at noon.

Bill Thomas- That was after the city council confrontation between he and Lobe. Tuesday morning is that correct?

Bill Ross- Did he meet with Lobe Tuesday morning?

Bill Thomas- I don't know there was a....

Bill Ross- There was so damn much going on.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.,

Bill Thomas- I thought there was.

Bill Ross- I would have to go back and check the papers on that because..

Joan Beifuss- He met with the membership people, but he may have met with Lobe.

Bill Ross- I am sure he did because this would have been the proper thing to do.

Bill Thomas- But then there was a meeting with the membership on Tuesday at noon at Firestone.

Joan Beifuss- Now at that point it was just union leaders speaking at the meetings at Firestone.

Bill Ross- Yeah. It didn't develop into anything else until oh they had few outside speakers in. Until, no until after the blow up with Champa and the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Now were you there when Champa saw the mayor?

Bill Ross- I wasn't. But he held 4 or 5 meetings, oh rather lengthy meetings with the mayor before they finally broke of and that's when the ministerial association started holding their meetings and at the time when they broke off was when Champa called worth in.

Joan Beifuss- Now the Lobe's said immediately that the strike was illegal.

Bill Ross- Oh yes.

Joan Beifuss- Now was it illegal?

Bill Ross- Based, he was only basing it on our court case which simply states that it is against public policy for public employees to strike. This is purely a court decision and not law by legislation, this was law by (muffled). It was (muffled) in the supreme court as far as it has gone.

Joan Beifuss- As far as trying to second guess Lobe, right at the beginning, why do you think he was so very adamant from the 2nd day on.

Bill Ross- He felt like so many that he could either break the strike behind the strike breakers. And he from the very beginning and he still underestimates or refuses to recognize that he had a labor problem and a racial problem. Henry still refuses to recognize this thing.

Bill Thomas- A labor problem and a racial problem.

Bill Ross- And a racial problem. He had very serious labor problem within the city government.

Bill Thomas- Let me ask you this since you brought it up, as you say from the labor man's standpoint, the for instance sending the workers home short houred and this sort of thing and all the other conditions was this racial discrimination of was it labor discrimination.

Bill Ross- Well where do you draw the line in discrimination in labor policies. Whether it is the way you treat one group of employees as far as policy and wagers and so forth and so on. There is no distinction here. If you discriminate you discriminate whether it is black white green or yellow. It just so happens that this is discrimination against black people and it has made, which compounded the grievance. But we are seeing, since all this happened we are seeing the real bad labor policies that this plantation (muffled) had read all through the years. The situation in the fire department is unbelievable. Back during the election I walked into the fire department and identified myself, this is on election day, but I identified myself as being with the AFLCIO labor council and the firemen at the Indian house left me like a plague huddled over there in the corner like a bunch of scared rabbits.

Bill Thomas- They didn't want not be seen talking to you.

Bill Ross- Absolutely not.

Bill Thomas- Yeah.

Bill Ross- This is (muffled).

Bill Thomas- Bill is the Memphis newspaper guild is it under this organization?

_Memphis newspaper guild is affiliated with the council yes.

Bill Thomas- Then you are aware of the Jim White situation over there and the you have seen a copy of the (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- By the guild?

Bill Ross- Well let's face it the reason for that was that the advertising sale company are members of the guild too and a boycott on the newspaper was seriously affecting their financial situation. (Tape Break).

Bill Thomas- Alright here we are again.

Joan Beifuss- Alright so the first week of the strike then was kind of essentially Champa talking to the mayor and getting no place and then what happened?

Bill Ross- Then negotiations were broken off and Champa found out, he realized he couldn't get anywhere, particularly trying to negotiate in front of television cameras and the press. He called in Worth, and this was when, when did they start, excuse me, when did they start the demonstrations downtown.

Joan Beifuss- I am trying to remember they went to the city council the following Tuesday.

Bill Ross- The following Tuesday was when they went to the city council. No it wasn't the following Tuesday it must have been the second Tuesday.

Bill Thomas- It was, I think yeah however the demonstrations day by day started on Monday and they continued every day after that.

Bill Ross- But the demonstration doesn't start until after the macing.

Joan Beifuss- Till after COME was formed.

Bill Ross- After the macing.

Bill Thomas- So that would have been the beginning of the 3rd week.

Joan Beifuss- Second week then they went to the city council.

Bill Ross- Let's see the first Tuesday, the second Tuesday, the third Tuesday of the strike was when they went to the city council.

Joan Beifuss- No.

Bill Ross- That is when they had the city. They moved it to the auditorium on Thursday and then they had this committee set up and they met again on Friday in the auditorium, this was when they completely ignored the recommendation of the labor committee. They got in their and they met for about ten minutes and read this statement supporting Lobe. Took the microphones away and that is when they planned to march from the auditorium down to the Mason Temple.

Bill Thomas- Mason Temple.

Bill Ross- And that was the day of the macing.

Joan Beifuss- Were you there that day?

Bill Ross- I was there that day, also I made a portion of the march. Jerry Worth with his bad foot couldn't make all the march and I had to go back and get my car and pick him up.

Bill Thomas- What was the matter with Jerry's foot?

Bill Ross- Jerry had a club foot.

Bill Thomas- Oh he did? I didn't know that. And so but he did march.

Bill Ross- Oh yeah, about 3 blocks.

Bill Thomas- And then he went back and got your car.

Bill Ross- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- So you weren't there for the actual macing.

Bill Thomas- The macing took place after that.

Bill Ross- After that. But form the time those people did get the mace and walked down to Clayborne Temple you couldn't get within 10 ft of them, saturated in it.

Bill Thomas- Well now did you go on to the temple?

Bill Ross- Yeah we went ahead of the march on ahead to the temple, and waited at the temple for them to come.

Joan Beifuss- Now was there a mass rally at the temple when the marchers got there.

Bill Ross- When the marchers got there we had a mass rally. And then out of that was the formation of COME.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell us, I suppose it is not necessary, can you tell us what the feeling was at that mass rally after the macing.

Bill Ross- Indignation. Anger, the people were downright indignant. This was when Ralph Jackson made his famous speech that he spent 30 years in the ministry and he lost all of his religion in 5 minutes on Main St.

Bill Thomas- There has been a lot of speculation as to whether this was a labor situation that was turned into a racial situation, do you believe at that point that something had changed?

Bill Ross- Oh again my own thinking. I have never been able to in my own thinking differentiate between a labor dispute and a civil rights dispute. I can't make a clear distinction.

Bill Thomas- This all seems like one to you.

Bill Ross- That's right it is.

Bill Thomas- And it did from the beginning.

Bill Ross- Yes, because what is a civil rights movement, it has been the labor movement from the beginning. I mean even going back in history when in labor history when the Irish immigrants came over to build the railroad and they formed unions for their protection. Well this is civil rights. The people out in central Europe, the Poles and the Czechs, and the Slovaks. When they were brought in by the coal barrens to the Appalachian region and the steel barrens and they finally threw a hell of a lot of trouble (muffled)...(Tape End)