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This is the oral history project, The Sanitation Strike Project. We are interviewing Dan Powell, who is Regional Director of COPE for Six Southern States. We are recording this November 19, 1971. The interviewers are Joan Beifuss and Carol Lynn Yellin. We are at Dan Powell's home on Revere Road in Memphis. This is Carol Lynn Yellin.

Carol Lynn Yellin: We have just been setting up the equipment. I think just for the record it would be interesting to note that once again, 20th century technology has failed us, and we are using Dan Powell's own recording equipment.

Joan Beifuss: I don't know that that was technology that failed.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Human error.

Joan Beifuss: Dan, to start off, could you name the Six Southern States?

Dan Powell: Yes. Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Florida.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And maybe my identification of COPE is certainly not enough. This is what the...?

Dan Powell: Committee on Political Education of the AFL-CIO.

Joan Beifuss: Do you want to in one sentence describe it's function?

Dan Powell: It's function is to activate union members, working through city and state councils politically to activate these members politically.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And, when did you come to Memphis? This would be, I think...

Dan Powell: I came to Memphis, I think it was 1936.

Carol Lynn Yellin: For goodness sakes. You've seen a lot.

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Joan Beifuss: Dan, when was COPE, what was the year that COPE began?

Dan Powell: COPE was formed in 1955 at the (muffled) convention of the CIO and the AF of L.

Joan Beifuss: Okay then, so...

Dan Powell: Before that the CIO had an organization, which was called PAC, Political Action Committee. The AF of L had an organization, which was called LLPE, Labors

League for Political Education. The two organizations merged, and COPE was the political arm that came out of the merger.

Joan Beifuss: Was that when you started? Were you in political education when you started? Under some other name?

Dan Powell: I started in 1945 with CIO, in PAC, Political Action Committee of the CIO.

Joan Beifuss: And what were you doing the 10 years prior to that?

Dan Powell: Ten years prior to that? Well, that'll take you back to '35.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What brought you to Memphis?

Joan Beifuss: Yeah, I'm not asking your age, you noticed that?

Dan Powell: All right.

Joan Beifuss: You were in high school the 10 years prior to that.

Dan Powell: No, no. I was born and reared in Goldsboro, North Carolina, a little town down in Eastern North Carolina, about 15,000 people. And, I went to the University of North Carolina. I left the university in 1931, right in the beginning of the Depression.

Joan Beifuss: Had you graduated, or did you...?

Dan Powell: No, I got suspended for gambling, playing poker, and being involved in campus politics, too.

Carol Lynn Yellin: For goodness sakes.

Joan Beifuss: What kind of campus politics.

Dan Powell: North Carolina, the University of North Carolina was a very political institution. The president of our fraternity had been the campus political boss the year before, or two years before. And, there was a lot of fraternity politics involved.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So, you got involved in political education right from the beginning.

Dan Powell: Yeah. In other words, if the side that I was on politically had won in the last student body election, we would have had enough members of the council so that I wouldn't have been suspended for playing poker.

(laughing)

Joan Beifuss: Well, so then what when you left the university?

Dan Powell: When I left the university I sold magazines. I sold magazines over the country, all during the Depression. I covered about, oh 35 states, selling magazines.

Joan Beifuss: Want to name the magazines?

Dan Powell: Well, at first I sold *Pictorial Review*, and then I went with a publishing company that handled, a circulation company that handled all of the magazines. It was called American Circulation (muffled).

Joan Beifuss: I thought maybe we could bring up *Liberty* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Dan Powell: They were being published at that time, and we sold those, too. We had cards that had most of the magazines published were listed on this card.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, what, the one other thing I think we haven't covered, when you were at University of North Carolina, what was your field of study? Were you into political science or that sort of thing?

Dan Powell: Well, I was going to major in journalism. I had worked on newspapers prior to going to the university.

Joan Beifuss: Where did you work on newspapers?

Dan Powell: I worked on the local paper, the *Goldsboro News-Argus*. Then I went to a Presbyterian junior college in Maxton, and I handled the news bureau down there. The summer after I graduated I ran a weekly newspaper at Maxton called, the *Scottish Chief*. Then, before that, while I was in Goldsboro I served as correspondent for the *Raleigh News & Observer*, and also for the *United Press*, in Goldsboro.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Your family, is North Carolina, I mean had your family been in North Carolina for some time, or? Are you an old tarheel from way back?

Dan Powell: Well, the Powells were very a prolific family from the time of Jamestown on, and they lived in North Carolina for a good many years, and also Virginia, South Carolina. Powell is a very old name in this history. I was at Jamestown a few summers back, and in one of the graveyards there I found 3 different sets of Powells.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is that right?

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, were you the first in your family then to get into labor? I think maybe that's the next thing that I want to know, is as I have said, how did a nice

North Carolina boy like you get into this business?

Dan Powell: Well, after I settled in Memphis while I was selling magazines, I was about to burn out. After 4 years in that job you will. And then, too, I was getting along where it was hard to convince women that I was working my way through college. I had slowly outgrown the college. Look, so I settled in Memphis, and shortly after I settled here I went to work on the *Press-Scimitar*, and we organized a guild down there.

Joan Beifuss: As a reporter, Dan?

Dan Powell: No, I was working in advertising. By that time I had learned the best way in the world to starve to death on a newspaper was in the reportorial end. The money was in the advertising end. That was, of course, before the guild. After the guild came in, why wages went up. But, we organized the guild on the press, and that's when I first became a member of the union.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So your first involvement was the newspaper guild?

Dan Powell: Right.

Joan Beifuss: What year would that be, like '36?

Dan Powell: This was about '37 or '38.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And when the guild was organized, was it throughout the newspaper? Did it include editorial?

Dan Powell: It included editorial, advertising, and business office. It did not include circulation.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And, had they already had the typographical union?

Dan Powell: Oh yeah. The typographical union was already there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: They couldn't have put out the newspaper unless they had had the typographical.

Dan Powell: Well, they could have. The paper was organized. The mechanical end of the paper was well organized. They had the typographical unit, the press room, the stereo typists, and then the circulation department had a circulation union. The guild was actually the last newspaper union to come into the *Press-Scimitar*.

Joan Beifuss: As a matter of fact I think I remember Bill Ross saying that the typographer's union here was one of the very early unions in the South.

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Joan Beifuss: Extremely early.

Dan Powell: Well, the typographical union is one of the oldest in the printing trade, and one of the oldest in the South. Incidentally, the typographical union has probably furnished more leadership for the labor movement in the South than almost any other union that I can think of.

Joan Beifuss: Well, then in general in the South, are the newspapers, is the guild in most of the newspapers in the larger cities in the South?

Dan Powell: No, the guild is -- the editorial end of the business is not as widely organized as the mechanical end.

Joan Beifuss: It's still not?

Dan Powell: No. In Tennessee, for example, we had the guild, and off-hand I would say outside of Memphis the guild is in Chattanooga at the *Chattanooga Times*, and in Knoxville on the Knoxville papers, I believe on both papers there; and, outside of that I don't think there is another guild in the state.

Joan Beifuss: Not in Nashville?

Dan Powell: No, neither paper in Nashville is organized, no.

Joan Beifuss: Neither paper in Nashville?

Dan Powell: Sometimes you find that the paper, the editorial that is the most liberal, is not the most liberal when it comes to permitting their staff to be organized.

Joan Beifuss: Well now, when you were organizing, who was the publisher/editor here at the *Press-Scimitar* in '37?

Dan Powell: Ed Meeman was the editor. It was owned by Scripps-Howard then, and this was about the time that Scripps-Howard bought the *Commercial Appeal*, too.

Joan Beifuss: What would Meeman's attitude have been toward the guild?

Dan Powell: Meeman did not seriously oppose the guild. I don't recall. We bargained with Meeman and some of the other representatives of the paper. Meeman was tough to bargain with at times.

Joan Beifuss: But, in organizing here then you had no extraordinary trouble?

Dan Powell: No. You see, the newspaper guild was the first CIO union in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss: Oh was it? I didn't know that.

Dan Powell: The second union was Rubber Workers. The guild was here before the Rubber Workers. In 1937, I believe it was, Crump was elected mayor, and he ran as a stand-in, and Chandler then was brought back from Washington as a congressman.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Walter Chandler?

Dan Powell: Yeah, and Crump resigned and Chandler then went in as mayor. I think he was elected by the council. So, Crump was sworn in as mayor on the observation car of the Illinois Central Railroad on the way to New Orleans to the Sugar Bowl game.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That's a nice touch.

Dan Powell: And, Mr. Crump in his inaugural speech made the assertion that the CIO would never come to Memphis, and the next year we held -- well that same year in the spring of that year, spring or summer, we held the first CIO Union National Convention here. We held the American Newspaper Guild National Convention in Memphis.

Carol Lynn Yellin: What year was that, Dan?

Dan Powell: That was either -- it was around '38; '38 or '39. I think it was '38.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Now, and at this point you were still with the newspaper guild.

Dan Powell: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And still with the *Press-Scimitar*?

Dan Powell: Correct.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And, how long were you with them?

Dan Powell: About, as I recall, about two years. I left there to go with O'Callahan Advertising Agency, as an account executive, and worked with O'Callahan about a year, and then I went with Hederman Brothers out of Jackson, Mississippi.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The ones that put out the *Clarion Ledger*?

Dan Powell: The *Daily News* now. At that time (muffled), but I was not with the publishing division with the Hederman interest, I was with the printing house. I called on banks and colleges, and schools, courthouses in the northern part of Mississippi, selling and printing programs, record books, annuals.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And were you living in Mississippi then?

Dan Powell: No, I was living in Memphis, but working down there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Still living in Memphis?

Dan Powell: Yeah. And, I left Hederman Brothers in '42 to go into the Army.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me ask, because I know Rachel, and I know Rachel, too, comes from North Carolina.

Dan Powell: No, she comes from Georgia.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Oh does she? Well, and it was, I think that's Rachel I hear who has just come in now.

Joan Beifuss: I hope that's Rachel.

Dan Powell: If it's not we're being robbed.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Were you married at the time? Where did you meet Rachel? Was Rachel with you when you came to Memphis?

Dan Powell: No, I met Rachel after World War II. I was married at the time, but during the war and right shortly after I got out of the Army.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You didn't meet Rachel selling magazines?

Dan Powell: No.

Joan Beifuss: That's too bad. That would have been a nice touch.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well, there goes another idea.

Dan Powell: Well, you did meet a lot of women selling magazines.

Joan Beifuss: What part of the Army were you in?

Dan Powell: I was in the Air Force, and I ended up as a tail gunner on B24s.

Joan Beifuss: In Europe?

Dan Powell: No, we didn't actually get into combat.

Joan Beifuss: Okay, well then let me cut back before the war then. In point of fact then, after Mr. Crump said that the CIO would never organize in Memphis, how well did the CIO do from say, '38 to '45? How much organizing did they...?

Dan Powell: Oh, they did remarkably well. The first big group that we got here, was the Rubber Workers out at the Firestone plant. Now, you know when Firestone came into Memphis, it is rumored that Mr. Crump in return for jobs, agreed to keep Firestone out of the city limits, and as I recall, the city limits circle the Firestone plant, but Firestone was not in the city limits. This was in the middle '30s.

Joan Beifuss: Why would that be?

Dan Powell: Taxes. And in return for not being brought into the city limits, Firestone was supposed, and I can't prove this, but this is the common rumor here, is supposed to have required that Mr. Crump or his precinct captains approve everybody that was hired in Firestone before they would hire. See this was in a period when jobs were very scarce.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So, it became just another patronage.

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: An outlet for Crump lieutenants and Crump workers.

Dan Powell: Well, this is of course the way the Crump machine, and every other political machine is built on patronage. You can't have -- well, it's very difficult to have (muffled) precinct organization, an active political organization without patronage.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And what did this do, as far as unionization?

Dan Powell: Crump allowed the AF of L to organize here, particularly the building trades. And, in those days the building trades and the AF of L were in Crump's hip pocket politically. He saw the CIO as a menace, as something he couldn't control. So this was...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Why would he see this? I mean, what would be the reason that he couldn't control it?

Dan Powell: Well, if you recall -- you all may not be old enough to recall the beginning of the days of the CIO in 1938, but this was a radical departure from the trade union organization for that time. Up until the, until John L. Lewis pulled the organizing committee out of the AF of L and set up the CIO, the bulk of organized labor in this country were the crafts, the building trades, not the mass industries. And, it was John L. Lewis's idea with the organizing committee, which for a while was a part of the AFL-CIO to organize the mass industries -- automobile, steel, rubber, and others. Now this was a radical move, and this brought into the unions a completely different type of worker than had been there before, and the CIO was really a radical movement in its earlier days. Hell, even a few communists had helped us organize in the CIO.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did this, was it it's radicalism that scared Crump? And made it...?

Dan Powell: I think it was it's radicalism that was a part of it. I think that because of it's radicalism Crump felt he would not be able to control the CIO politically, as he controlled the AF of L. You see, nearly every organization of any significance in Memphis, in the heyday of Crump, was controlled by Crump through his lieutenants, who held office in that organization. This is particularly true of the American Legion.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Is that, (muffled) the American Legion?

Joan Beifuss: I have even heard of the garden clubs.

Dan Powell: The garden clubs, too, but even more true of the Legion.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And the PTA. Oh that's right. Someone said that the PTA, you had to be in the Crump machine to get an office, be an officer in the PTA.

Dan Powell: Crump had greater control in Memphis, in my opinion, than any other political boss in America. In Crump's heyday, he could deliver in Shelby County -- at that time your vote ran between 50,000 and 60,000 poll count, which again was the biggest vote in the state and constituted a sizable portion of the total state vote, but Crump could deliver for his candidate -- if 60,000 votes were cast, he could deliver 56,000 for his candidate, and he would let the opposition have 4,000, just to make the election look honest.

Joan Beifuss: In the early days -- in early days I am thinking about just prior to the Civil War -- what kind of opposition was there to Crump here?

Dan Powell: None. The opposition to Crump could not exist. The person would be squeezed out economically. Now there was a fellow by the name of Collier, whose family was an old family here, and he was considered by some sort of a sentry. He used to get out and run in the mornings, five or six miles. At this time the man was in his late 50s, early 60s.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He invented jogging, didn't he.

Dan Powell: And he opposed Crump, but I think Crump took him almost as a, pretty much as a joke. So, he wasn't squeezed out, but I remember there was a Negro druggist here -- this was in the late '30s, and he incurred the wrath of Crump for some reason. He may have made some slighting remark about the "Red Snapper." Anyway, Crump decided to put him out of business.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The "Red Snapper" was one of Crump's nicknames.

Dan Powell: Yeah. So, all he did was to place two policemen in front of the drugstore. This was on Beale Street, and every person who went in that drugstore, 99% of whom were black, were searched for concealed weapons. Well, it wasn't more than two days

before this man had to close up and leave town. And, this is the way he could apply economic pressure to you. Another way, you couldn't get a loan in this town if he didn't want you to have it. Or, it was difficult to get a loan, let me put it that way.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well now, how did the -- I know that Meeman opposed Crump.

Dan Powell: He did.

Carol Lynn Yellin: How did this all match up, the unionization of the papers, and where the union stood with Crump and where the paper stood with Crump? Were there any cross-currents there?

Dan Powell: Not at that time. Now, the thing that eventually upset Crump, well several reasons. First, during the war, an influx of new people came into Memphis, and they didn't know that Mr. Crump was holy. Again, a political machine always operates at it's strongest, as it's best when jobs are scarce, when there is depression. Now with the, our becoming the arsenal democracy, even before we entered the war, there was an improvement in employment, and then came the war and the prosperity that came with the war.

Joan Beifuss: Was Memphis, though, a center of defense during the war? Other than the military installation.

Dan Powell: The military installation was here, and then there were several, there was a munitions plant out here off of Jackson. Memphis was probably as much involved in war manufacturing as any city in Tennessee, or in this part of the South. And, as the new people came in, as the jobs no longer were scarce, in fact there were more jobs during the war than there were workers, then Mr. Crump's power began to wane. After the war...

Joan Beifuss: Now hold a minute, would that include, what about black workers? Were black workers hired here in the defense industries, do you know?

Dan Powell: Black workers were hired, but they were hired in menial jobs.

Joan Beifuss: So you still had black unemployment.

Dan Powell: Yeah. The unemployment in blacks in this town has always been at a minimum of 2:1 of white unemployment. And most of the time it's been much greater than 2:1.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But even so, as the employment opportunities improved for whites, even though they had one-half the unemployed the blacks, as unemployment decreased among the whites, it also decreased among the blacks.

Dan Powell: It decreased among the blacks to the extent they were able to get janitors

jobs, sweepers jobs in the plants. And, in a place like Firestone they were able to get even better jobs than that, but there was still -- in Firestone for example, two separate seniority rosters, one for blacks and one for whites, and there were certain jobs that blacks couldn't fill.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Was this within the union arrangements? Or the union, was it officially a union arrangement that there were these two seniority rosters?

Dan Powell: The union was opposed to it, perhaps not as vigorously as it should have been, but in those days, you see in the middle '40s and the late '40s, the labor movement and the NAACP were the only two organizations in the south in the Southern Regional Council that were speaking out against segregation and its practices and discrimination. Now, the CIO -- I said the labor movement, the CIO (muffled), and even in the CIO we were not able to push as fast as we would have liked to push because you can, if you get ahead of what your workers want, you're in a bad position. For example, when they broke discrimination in jobs out here...

Joan Beifuss: Where, at Firestone?

Dan Powell: At Firestone. This was done, as I recall, through a court suit, court order. And, the union wanted, the union was a defendant in the case. It was filed, as I understand as I recall, by a worker out there, who may have been backed by the NAACP.

Carol Lynn Yellin: The legal defense fund?

Dan Powell: Yeah, well at that time I don't think there was a legal defense fund. Anyway, he filed a suit against the company and the union under the, some act, it wasn't the Civil Rights Act. No, it wasn't the Civil Rights Act, but he filed a suit against...

Carol Lynn Yellin: The war time, maybe the Fair Employment Practices.

Dan Powell: No, this came after the war. He filed a suit against the union and the company claiming discrimination. Now the union wanted him to file that suit because the union, like many school boards down here, wanted to be under court order to take this (muffled) and this protected the officers, see? Because if the officers of that union at Firestone had gone out and said, "Let's integrate the plant." In those days they wouldn't have been in office, probably not the rest of the term of which they had been elected, because the mass rank and filers didn't feel that way.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This reminds me, I will just interrupt because I don't know whether we even have this story, but it reminds me of a story I heard of when the First National Bank, I believe, was being asked to hire Negro tellers, and someone told me, Margaret McCullough told me this story, that they made the negotiations I guess with the NAACP, then they said, okay it's all set, we will certainly hire some, but look, send some people down to picket us for a while before we do it. And they did. They picketed for two days and then the First National Bank said, "All right, we'll certainly hire Negro tellers."

Dan Powell: Well, this is true not only for the banks, it was true for the unions, it was true for school boards. There were many school boards in the South who, the majority of the members had no reluctance to integrate the schools, or at least have token integration, but politically it was suicide unless they did it under a court order, and even under a court order sometimes it was suicide. The same thing existed as far as the union was concerned. Had the officers of the Rubber Workers local, or any other local in this town in 1950, '52, '53 had gone in and said now we are going to advocate complete desegregation in the plant, unless the union was more than 50% black, they would have been voted out of office. And you find, as a rule, in the CIO and in the AF of L, with one or two exceptions, that the unions who took the lead in the fight against segregation and discrimination were, as a rule, the unions that had a substantial portion of their membership that was black. Unions that were nearly all white, were not in the forefront of this (muffled).

Joan Beifuss: Were there in Memphis, unions that were primarily black?

Dan Powell: Well Rubber, for example, has got a substantial number of blacks in the local. They don't have a majority, or didn't at that time, but they had a healthy minority.

Joan Beifuss: Even in 1950?

Dan Powell: Yeah. The steel workers had a strong black membership from the very beginning in this town.

Carol Lynn Yellin: That, too, being is CIO that came in after the Rubber Workers.

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Joan Beifuss: What else came in then under the CIO by 1950?

Dan Powell: Oh, we had the Automobiles here, Rubber Workers, Electrical Workers, Textile, Furniture Workers, Wood Workers.

Joan Beifuss: Can you make any kind of an estimate of, say in 1950, how unionized Memphis was? What percentage was organized that was possible to organize? Any kind of figures like that?

Dan Powell: Relatively speaking, I expect it was about, not quite as good as it is today. Now I can't give you the exact percentage, I don't have those figures, what percent of the workforce was organized here in the city of Memphis. I can tell you approximately the number, but from 50,000 to 60,000.

Joan Beifuss: That's today?

Dan Powell: Today, organized workers.

Joan Beifuss: But you don't know how many potential.

Dan Powell: There were less than that in '50 of course, because there were fewer number of jobs. Now whether the number organized in '50 was a higher percent of the workforce than it is today, I don't know. I would guess off-hand that it was about the same percent of the workforce, though numerically it was smaller.

Joan Beifuss: How, again back in 1950, how does this compare then with other southern urban centers, say Atlanta, or New Orleans? Was labor organizing going along faster in Memphis than it was in other sections of the south? Was it slower, or?

Dan Powell: Roughly I'd say it was about the same as it was in New Orleans and Atlanta.

Joan Beifuss: I assume Birmingham was rather (muffled).

Dan Powell: Birmingham was hot, and because the steel industry had been organized and steel accounts for steel and mine/mill, ore mines count a high percent of the mass industry down there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: How about coming closer to home, how about say other cities in Tennessee, or how about Little Rock?

Dan Powell: Chattanooga about 1950 in proportion to its work force was probably the best organized city in Tennessee. Chattanooga, Knoxville, and up through the East Tennessee section.

Carol Lynn Yellin: There you'd have what, furniture workers, and textile.

Dan Powell: Well, in Chattanooga you had steel, you had Allied industries, you had mine/mill. You had heavy building trades organization up there. You had some textile workers. You had Amalgamated Clothing Workers. You had the railroad workers.

Joan Beifuss: That's kind of interesting because I have always thought of that as the republican end of the state in so far as...

Dan Powell: But Chattanooga was the first major industrial center.

Joan Beifuss: Industrial center. But then Nashville never, Nashville is more like Memphis in that respect then.

Dan Powell: Yeah, Nashville is probably, was probably the last city of the major cities to become industrialized.

Joan Beifuss: Is that because the manufacturing isn't there, or because of the attitudes

against organizing.

Dan Powell: No, I think it's because the manufacturing wasn't there. I don't think it was any vast difference in the attitude towards unions in Nashville than there was in Memphis. There was probably more resistance in Memphis even than there was in Nashville.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Dan, I want to backtrack one minute. We never did get you from Jackson from selling advertising for the Jackson, Mississippi, the Hederman people back to labor. What was this transition, and did you come back to COPE, specifically.

Dan Powell: No, the transition after I left Hederman I went in the Army. I got out of the Army in January of '45. And, after I got out of the Army I went to work for OPA, as...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Office of Price Administration.

Dan Powell: Yes, as Assistant Information Officer. This part of the state, our area went from West Tennessee to Nashville. As Information Officer, I did a promotion in Jackson, Tennessee, called "A Victory Over Inflation Week" that *Time and Life* magazine covered, and the Nashville office of OPA used as a model for the rest of the nation. So, after we finished the "Victory Over Inflation Week" in Jackson, they had me to come to Washington to talk about doing one in Washington and one in Chicago. So, while I was in Washington I met Sidney Hillman, and Ted Dudley, who was his assistant. And, as a result of that meeting, I went with the CIO Political Action Committee in late November of 1945. And with CIO I had all of the South. I had everything from Virginia to Texas, and I was in...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Had they done any work at all? Had the Political Action Committee done any work at all here, or was this just totally, it was your baby?

Dan Powell: Yeah, well you see PAC did not come into being until 1943. And, the first election this operated in was in 1944. So, at the time I went to work the PAC was just a little more than a year, almost 2 years old. In the '44 election of course, it -- the newspapers gave PAC the idea that this CIO was organizing industrial workers all over America -- they were going into politics now, and they were going to take over control of the country. And in 1944 PAC got more newspaper lineage than any other institution or person in America, except Franklin Roosevelt. And, every newspaper, every commentator painted us as a new political (muffled) on the horizon. We were going to support Roosevelt, we were going to support the liberals. It scared some of the conservatives so bad that they didn't even run. For example, Martin Dies, who had been Chairman of the Dies Un-American Activities Committee, who had...

Carol Lynn Yellin: In Texas.

Dan Powell: In Texas, out of Texas. He was a congressman from Texas. Dies was so

frightened by the prospect of being defeated by this new giant that he didn't run. There were several other congressmen that didn't run that we were going to oppose, and we defeated Starnes in Alabama who had been the Vice Chairman of the committee. We defeated a number of congressmen that we had opposed in the '44 election. Then, after '44 and '46, the opposition to labor in this country, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers realized that they had made a fatal mistake of strategy in '44 picturing us to be the power that we were. That they had scared their friends, and had given us greater strength than we possessed. We never were strong as we were pictured to be. So, now they decided to go the other route. They pictured us as the kiss of death. So, between '44 and '46 PAC went from the strongest political force in America to the kiss of death, see? And, beginning in the early primaries in '46, every candidate was endorsed by PAC and was defeated. This was played up as the kiss of death of the CIO. Well now, the actual facts were we never as strong as we were pictured to be in 1944, nor were we a liability in 1946. In fact, by '46 we were actually doing a more effective job in terms of political organization than we did in '44. In '44 the major job was the public relations job, a leaflet job -- a mass distribution of leaflets. We had little real political organization in 1944 because we were too new. There hadn't been the time to build it. But by 1946 we were beginning to build political organization, and beginning to become a factor in politics.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well now, who did you find as your allies here in Memphis and in Tennessee, specifically, or were you working on such a broad area did you get down into the local situation?

Dan Powell: When I was working all over the South...

Carol Lynn Yellin: You were living in Memphis?

Dan Powell: No, after I went with PAC I moved my headquarters to Atlanta, Georgia.

Joan Beifuss: Well Dan, then in general across the South who was allied with COPE?

Dan Powell: Mainly the black voters, and the liberals, college community.

Joan Beifuss: Was the liberal group very large throughout the South at that period?

Dan Powell: No, it wasn't. There were some liberal organizations.

Joan Beifuss: Smaller no, of course.

Dan Powell: No, it's actually larger now than it was in 1946, but we were beginning to develop allies in the black community, some loyal democrats, the Roosevelt people, the staunch Roosevelt people. The Southern Conference for Human Welfare was operating in the South in '46, it began to fold shortly after that. And, this was about it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Well then, I'm going to get you back to Memphis now. When did

your headquarters, or when did the PAC become COPE, and when did you come back to Memphis? Or were they concurrent?

Dan Powell: Well, I came back to Memphis in 1947, in March of '47, and from then on my headquarters were in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss: Were you still covering the entire South?

Dan Powell: Yeah.

Carol Lynn Yellin: How did you happen to come to Memphis? Was this your choice? Did you feel you could operate more effectively from here?

Dan Powell: Well, Rachel and I were married in December, about a month after I went with PAC, and she was working in Memphis at the Kennedy Hospital in personnel, and she used to...

Carol Lynn Yellin: The Veteran's Hospital.

Dan Powell: Yeah. She used to fly down wherever I was working every weekend to be with me. And, then in December of '46 our son was born, and she took off, I think it was about 3 months, and then she came back here to go to work, so I moved back here, and made my headquarters here.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Because it made just as much good sense for you to be here as to be in Atlanta since you were covering this large region.

Dan Powell: That's right.

Joan Beifuss: Well then, Dan, when you came back here, then...what changes did you find here in the 7, 8 years you had been gone?

Dan Powell: Well, actually I hadn't been gone 8 years in a row. See, I was gone from '42 to '45.

Joan Beifuss: That's right, you were living here when you were working in Mississippi.

Dan Powell: Except for during the period I was in the Army, except for brief trips back here. Then I was here for about a year, not quite a year, after I got out of the Army. Then I was out of here for about a year. So there were not really great (muffled). The time was beginning to grow, but...

Joan Beifuss: Was Crump's power going then, or was he still?

Dan Powell: Crump's power was beginning to wane. It weaned -- what was happening in the state legislature was part of the reason. See, in 1946 or '47, they passed a sales tax

in this state, which Crump had always been against, and he split the Shelby delegation; half of them voted for it, half of them voted against it. And, they passed the Right to Work law in 1947 in the state, which labor violently opposed.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Had Crump had labor support from both the AFL and CIO until that point?

Dan Powell: He did have the support from the AF of L, but not from the CIO. So, in 1946, McKellar was up, and Ned Carmack, who had run in 1942 against Tom Stewart for the Senate; Ned Carmack ran against McKellar. The reason Carmack ran, he got a false picture of what his chances were. In '42 Carmack came across the Tennessee River into Shelby County, leading Tom Stewart by, as I recall, 20,000 votes. Crump gave Stewart in Shelby County better than a 50,000 majority, which defeated Carmack and elected Stewart, and this was in '42. So then in '46, McKellar came up, and McKellar then was in his (muffled). His mind was going, and Carmack ran against him. McKellar was much better known than Tom Stewart had been. Tom Stewart was an unknown in '42 when he ran for the Senate. McKellar was not, and he beat Tom Stewart very badly. We were active in that campaign in support of Carmack. I said McKellar beat Tom Stewart, McKellar beat Carmack. Tom Stewart was still senator. In that election, McCord was reelected governor. We didn't have a good candidate for governor against McCord in the primary. Then, '48 came along, and this is where this marked the beginning of the downfall of Crump. In '48, Browning ran for governor. Browning had come home from Europe from the Army, and ran for governor. Now, Browning had been governor of the state before for one term with the support of Crump. He broke with Crump, and Crump then defeated him for governor, and this was before World War II. There was a great bitterness between Browning and Crump. So, Browning came home and ran against McCord, who was then governor. And McCord was running, as I recall, for either his second or third term. The sales tax had been passed; the Right to Work bill had been passed. Estes Kefauver ran for the United States Senate against Tom Stewart. Now, there was no question what Crump was going to support McCord, because Browning was running against him. Browning was the only serious candidate against, the only major candidate against McCord. Much to the surprise of many people, Crump said he would not support Stewart, that he did not feel...

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