

SS050.mp3

Anne Trotter- Office Project, Memphis garbage strike. Date. (muffled) Interview with Mr. Downing Pryor, chairman of city council. Interviewers Anne Trotter, History Department, Carolyn Yellin and perhaps Thelma we will Ed Angus from political science I don't know right now. (Tape Break)

Anne Trotter- Downing do you want to start with your biography. Are you a Memphian?

Downing Pryor- Well we recording? Are you picking up there? (Tape Break)

Anne Trotter- Are you a Memphian?

Downing Pryor- My great grandfather came to Memphis back in the 1820's. He was buried in 1848 and it was in Shelby county quarterly court, which I am now a member. My family, both my grandmother and grandfather have been here that is my paternal grandmother and grandfather they have been here since the 1820's.

Anne Trotter- But the name Pryor this was your paternal. So the actual Pryor family goes back.

Downing Pryor- Yes I have gone down and looked up the old county records with Squire Pryor and I didn't even know he was on the court until I was a candidate, some cousin called me from Texas and said you may be the second Squire Pryor there.

Anne Trotter- What was the population in 1819?

Downing Pryor- I have an old Tennessee map of the county populations in each county in Tennessee and it is very interesting how some of the largest counties in are now the smallest. Just over 300 people in Shelby county. 200 white and 103 slaves. It is interesting that this same portion of population since Memphis hit 300 people. Now it is 600,000 it is approximately the same scene of negro and white. 2:1.

Anne Trotter- That is fascinating. This is for the record, when were you born?

Carolyn Yellin- I have to get this you know.

Downing Pryor- Sure 1917. I am 50 years old.

Carolyn Yellin- You missed the first World War.

Downing Pryor- Born in the middle of it.

Anne Trotter- Did you all know there was going to be a strike?

Downing Pryor- No, this was a thing that surprised the out of town news people who had been here to say at what point did negotiations break down. It was absolutely

and surely a wildcat strike the city had one complaint, one grievance expressed, which went to their union, they have had a union here for a year or more and the union agent brought the grievance to department of public works and it was immediately resolved and that is the only time we heard from them until they walked out a couple weeks after that.

Carolyn Yellin- They talked with Mr. Blackburn.

Downing Pryor- Blackburn, T.O. Jones took the grievance to him, and he said it would be corrected and it was.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you recall what the grievance was?

Downing Pryor- This is the one about the sore workers who reported to work one day and the weather was bad and they sent them home and gave them two hours pay. He complained about this and he was assured that anyone else who made roll call in the future would receive a full days pay whether they worked or not.

Anne Trotter- Well why did Jones call the strike?

Downing Pryor- This is one that when somebody can really get to the bottom of it, it is going to be very interesting and I don't think I have a suspicious mind but I really have worked quite a bit today to try to get to the bottom of this and I haven't passed. People who are very prominent in the strike in the very early days of it, went out of prominence as the thing went on.

Carolyn Yellin- Such as Mr. Jones?

Downing Pryor- No, he is remained right along, the union had to carry him because he was their agent. But Ozzie Evers was one of the early leaders in the strike and every time the strike has appeared or went to the temple or came to city hall Ozzie Edwards was right up front.

Carolyn Yellin- As an attorney?

Downing Pryor- No he is a political hack who is for sale and been known to local politicians, he contends that he can produce votes and he was very prominent in Ingram's campaign.

<He is the head of the unity league is that not right?

Downing Pryor- No, no. I don't know, well I am not sure what his role. The get up these organizations and come to you and say I have 1,500 votes if you can give me some money to print up some sample ballots I will get you some votes. He has been in this business for a long time.

<Did this lead you to suspect, that maybe this was partly an Ingram association with Evers involved initially?

Downing Pryor- Well Ingram was just determined as he could be that this form of government wasn't going to work., He fought it bitterly and he had a real thing about it. It is beyond coincidence that Champa came to town on February the 13<sup>th</sup> and there was a city council meeting that day and he went to the mayor's office and they (muffled) ran it all morning until about 4:30 in the afternoon the council meeting adjourned and as the councilmen were leaving Champa came racing down the aisle and wanted to see me and wanted me to call the council back in. I asked for what good reason. And he said he wasn't getting anywhere with the mayor, that he wanted to talk with the council. I said I think I am speaking for the council and I think this is an administrative problem, this is an employment, or personnel problem and the council doesn't deal in these things, I sort of pissed him off at that point, but that was on a Tuesday night. But on a Thursday night he admitted and Ingram admitted that they met at the Holiday Inn Jr. on Lamar which they said was coincidental. Of course everyone hangs out at the Holiday Inn Jr. on Lamar you know. For the man from the international headquarters, 48 hours or so rather h is second day in town he has a conference with the former mayor and with the mayor's right hand man being up at the front of all this is certainly at least suspicious. Now whether this has anything to do with the beginning of the strike I don't know.

Carolyn Yellin- When the strike started was it....When did you begin to think that it was racial?

Downing Pryor- OH it didn't become racial for while, I think I can get a date on that. But the strike started on a Monday morning and the news people that were there.

Carolyn Yellin- February 12<sup>th</sup>.

Downing Pryor- February 12<sup>th</sup>. The news people went to the Labor temple said it was absolutely chaotic and Jones didn't know what to do and he is not a capable leader of a group,. He can give orders or directions but he cannot get up and conduct a meeting. Jus tin a great state of confusion and he finally said we ain't doing nothing until we get them here from Washington. And that was it, meaning go home and come back tomorrow,

Carolyn Yellin- Meaning, the other business people.

Downing Pryor- The international headquarters people. So the next day Champa and Bill Lucie who is a Memphis negro who lives in, well he is making too much money to live in Washington, that is where his office is, he lives in Maryland. I thought the most intelligent man in the group was Lucie and he brought a man named Paisley who I think is the state agent for his union, from Nashville and he is a white man and a negro man named Epps from Mississippi who is also very intelligent man and a very fine speaker. So these 4 came in to represent the union.

Carolyn Yellin- So in some ways curiously enough you would say, or perhaps curiously is the wrong word. You would say that the most capable union people that you encountered at this point were Lucie and Epps?

Downing Pryor- Like Lucie...

Carolyn Yellin- As opposed to Champa and T.O. Jones the local man.

Downing Pryor- It is very interesting that perhaps 5 or 6 weeks later on successive nights, or succeeding nights Lucie spoke to an evening meeting to St. Louis catholic church which was in East Memphis Parish. On behalf of the strikers and what they stood for and mayor Lobe went the second night to speak to pretty much the same crowd. The consensus I gathered from the people speaking there is that Lucie made more sense to the people perhaps than Lobe did. Lobe had a very hard time with the crowd whereas Lucie had convinced them that their demands were reasonable...

Carolyn Yellin- We get into a lot of these sort of if this, if that. Which of course half the time of history people had. Have you ever considered, if Champa had not been sent do you feel there was a personality of (muffled) there that almost prejudiced the chances for early settlement. There was so much publicity concerning his word with mayor Lobe and did this prejudice the chances of an early settlement. Say if Lucie or someone might have done a better job of arriving at an early settlement. Perhaps not Lucie, to send a very black negro, a very intelligent man, to send him into Memphis in spite of the progress we think we have made, people would not have reacted at all well to television picture of Lucie talking when Champa was the same way. He acted like a Sicilian anarchist or a hood really. A mafia hoodsmen. The mayor would not meet him unless the press or the television was there.

Anne Trotter- Why was that decision made?

Downing Pryor- Mayor Lobe has a thing about this. An absolute thing. There is no way you can negotiate with the spot light in your face and I, no question about that once real negotiations began the press was certainly cut out not a word was passed on to them of what was happening. And this is the way it perhaps should have been from the beginning. I definitely think mayor Lobe is very very sensitive to the last man he talked to and the last 10 or 15 people he was a lot more impressed by 5,000 letters saying we are with you than he is with 15,000 people saying we are not with you. Those letters really get to him and the wires and the people that he talks to that he wants to hear from. So Champa gave the union a really tough image with the average Memphian. And they were indignant because mayor Lobe was very popular, brand new mayor, brand new government. That this man came in and told him to shut his big fat mouth right on 3 television cameras and I suppose everyone in Memphis say it and everyone was indignant that our mayor was talked to this way and so the situation was established right there.

Carolyn Yellin- The next day you began to see the bumper stickers, go home...

Downing Pryor- Champa go home.

Anne Trotter- There was a meeting with the council, was it just Champa?

Downing Pryor- No.

Anne Trotter- Laying down the series of demands?

Downing Pryor- No Champa seen the mayor a wire of his demands.

Anne Trotter- Alright but wasn't there, Mrs. Awsumb (muffled) talks about a meeting in which Champa talked to the council only and made statements that nothing else mattered except the dues check off.

Downing Pryor- That was Worth from what I recall.

Downing Pryor- I believe she said the union, there was a definite statement from the union.

Carolyn Yellin- It was later, it was sometime....

Downing Pryor- Worth came to us and said that the check off was their only demand. But from the council adopted a resolution at an early date, very early date, wherein they met all but 2 demands of the recommended to the mayor that all but two demands be met, one was the union check off and the other was a contract. We agreed that the union would be recognized in fact we were recognizing the union before they came. There are two unions in the sanitation department and we have been recognizing for a good while the operating engineers who are the heavy equipment operators, bulldozer people. When they have a grievance they come in and express it and get the thing worked out.

Carolyn Yellin- Now is that, this thing has turned out it seems to have racial implications, would that union be predominantly white or the operators union.

Downing Pryor- The operating engineers are predominantly white.

Carolyn Yellin- Would they have any negro members?

Downing Pryor- Possibly I can't answer that but I would guess that they would run 85% Tom Beckner- or more white.

Carolyn Yellin- I wanted to go back to this thing because in the material we have gathered we see things for instance I think of the southern regional council which makes a great deal of that first complaint of the sewer workers and the fact that the ones who were sent home were negro and the ones who stayed on were white. Did this enter in to the original grievance which T.O. Jones entered.

Downing Pryor- No.

Carolyn Yellin- There was no mention of racial...

Downing Pryor- All that we know is what the department of public workers reported is the thing.

Carolyn Yellin- This was the one question we are asking everyone, was and this was getting to a person to person. When did it cross your mind that it might have had,

not you personally, because this is, did a thought come to you at any point, and I mean in any form I mean either that this is awfully crafty of the union to come in and choose these workers that are mostly negro or did it, as an apprehensive thought that this might take on something that had nothing to do with it. Did this kind of thought ever come to you personally?

Downing Pryor- I suppose as a business man and reading a lot of trade papers and all if I had not been involved in political affairs I would have known that this was the organizing of municipal workers is today at the same stage as the organizing major industries was in the middle 30's when the general motor sit-in strikes began. We have been told last year that this is the new field using the same methods they did before. Certainly the easiest is to go in and get those that really are downtrodden and get your predominantly negro departments in city government and they will cling together in a more adhesive manner than other people will.

Carolyn Yellin- The reason is someone somewhere along the line said just there had been 10Tom Beckner- white garbage workers, I mean it is complicated enough anyway the New York garbage strike proved that. Where there were no racial...

Downing Pryor- No, of course that is another union too, that is not this union. I presumed it was at the beginning.

Anne Trotter- The first weekend Champa was in town was there any attempt by the council to try to work things out?

Downing Pryor- I thought that the first weekend was the time that we worked on this but I have check my notes and check the newspaper clippings on it and it was the second weekend, I thought it was the 8<sup>th</sup> day. But the second weekend Worth had come to town and at this point some effort was made. In fact, for what Worth would have settled for at that point and what he finally settled for is such a slight difference. It really is sad to think of all that happened from the end of the second week until the strike was over.

Carolyn Yellin- Have you any personal feelings about why? The answer to why it took so much in between, why Worth wouldn't settle for less. Not assessing blame or anything.

Downing Pryor- Well Worth wasn't in a very good position at the end of the second week, there was snow on the ground and he had no support except for the 1,000 strikers who were out and at this point the negro ministers had not made a real move. He was in a tough situation and he wanted out and it is sad that we didn't let him get out when he wanted out.

Carolyn Yellin- Where they under legal injunction or?

Downing Pryor- No the injunction didn't come until the 12<sup>th</sup> day, yes the injunction was imposed on a Friday. Anyone who with a city who talked to Worth after that was violating the injunction and this becomes a sensitive situation to those who got

in on this. Now Worth asked to come to a city council meeting, he sent the council a wire and I replied he was welcome to come and we would reserve 30 minutes for him. I wired him this and (muffled) got him on the phone and ask him if this was agreeable. He said yes that was plenty of time. We were then advised and if you talk to Louie Donelson, Councilmen Donelson he will tell you that we were advised by the city attorney that by bringing him to the meeting we were violating the injunction.

Anne Trotter- Will you back up a second. Why was the decision made to issue an injunction knowing that then you tie everything up?

Downing Pryor- I heard the, and this was not a point that is embarrassing to anybody it is a case of misunderstanding. I was in the mayor's office after this several times when the particularly the first time the mayor realized he had tied his own hands. Or had handcuffed himself. Frank Gianatti the city attorney told him in these words. Henry I told you a dozen times that when you took out that injunction you gave up your initiative in this thing. I will say this and again this is because I will have the privilege of reading this before it is written, in 1965, and 66' when we put together the charter to change the government in Memphis, Frank Gianatti was the attorney for this and he is an authority on municipal government and is a fine a man as I have ever known, but I will have to say and people who have worked with him there are times where it is difficult to communicate with him or to fully understand what he is trying to tell you. He is so wrapped up in law and has such a great knowledge to it that to try to talk to a laymen he doesn't always get the message across. I think this is the case here, the mayor did not understand that when he took out that injunction that he completely removed himself from any authority, The mayor thought, to my way of thinking, that he was gaining a weapon. That he would have something in his hand he could walk around with and he could bat people over the head with this injunction. He was astounded because I was there when he realized Hoffman, Chancellor Hoffman who granted the injunction was on the verge of locking these people up and the mayor was shocked. He actually went to a hearing that the Chancellor had as a witness and recommended and urged that the Chancellor take no disciplinary action against the people. But the injunction froze the negotiations.

Carolyn Yellin- Now I want to leap ahead, and this maybe, or I want to see if there is a relationship, when mediation was finally arranged when Mr. Miles was brought in and then the city made the point they couldn't talk to the union representatives because they were under injunction. Did this come before or after...

Anne Trotter- How did you get around the injunction?

Carolyn Yellin- Henry Lobe's realization, I mean did he go into those mediation talks with this realization that he couldn't talk to these people.

Downing Pryor- No once Frank Miles was officially appointed as the, he was appointed as a conciliator which means the same thing but officially that is what the

council appointed him to do. This was only after Chancellor Hoffman had agreed he would waive his injunction so far as the union people and the conciliation team ....

Carolyn Yellin- But didn't it take one more trip back to his court to determine that, was it really the city cleared, (muffled) they wanted to be sure that what then did agree upon would then stand up.

Downing Pryor- They did not have a hearing but it was cleared with him, that he knew they would be meeting secretly and that of course by this time the situation was critical and in fact Chancellor Hoffman early after the injunction made some mediation attempts himself. Now he is the only person to talk to both sides. He did make some effort, didn't get anywhere.

Carolyn Yellin- How about the, thinking of the mediation the ministers group that was attempting to hold. Did that come at this period? Rabbi Wax, and ministerial association was there some talks? Do you remember that?

Downing Pryor- Yes this was on the February the 18<sup>th</sup> and the strike started on the 12<sup>th</sup> so that is the 6<sup>th</sup> day that was Monday. Monday was the 12<sup>th</sup> 6 days later was Saturday night? It would have been a Sunday night. They had a meeting at St. Peters Cathedral the first Sunday night that the ministers called. Rabbi Wax and...

Anne Trotter- How did the ministers get in?

Downing Pryor- Well nobody was doing anything. Nobody. Every attempt that the union made and the mayor made to get together and talk there was a bunch of cameras and people there and it just wasn't getting anywhere and they quit meeting. So Rabbi Wax and Dean Demic of the Episcopal Cathedral here and some other ministers got this meeting together and they met all night. They started early in the evening and until about 5 am as I recall.

Carolyn Yellin- With representatives of both the city and the union?

Downing Pryor- Yes, the mayor was there with Frank Gianatti and Myron Hallie an assistant city attorney. For the union it was Champa and Bell and Epps.

Tom Beckner- Isn't this also, Downing you are a southerner, isn't this also sort of typical way of trying to resolve things sort of behind the scenes with the ministerial or...

Downing Pryor- No I think contrary to that in the south the preacher has pretty much told to stay the hell out of things.

Tom Beckner- I don't mean in the public limelight.

Downing Pryor- Behind the scenes?

Tom Beckner- Particularly in the Episcopal church in terms of trying to bring some type of indirect influence or try to work..



Downing Pryor- If that's so but the Episcopal church is relatively small in the south and Jewish churches too and yet Demic and Rabbi Wax were among the leaders. There was a catholic priest there as well I don't recall perhaps brother Joseph since he was in the catholic church I suppose he was.

Carolyn Yellin- But there was no great crowding of Methodists and Baptists and not many more of the majority protestant denominations.

Downing Pryor- No there weren't. I think Lawson was there the first meeting?

Anne Trotter- In fact, the Methodist cherish the (muffled)

Downing Pryor- Well I don't know that much about the Methodist church.

Anne Trotter- Where else would they write a letter apologizing for the actions of the Methodist church.

Tom Beckner- Downing let me ask you something that you may choose not to comment on,. From several sources I have heard both directly and indirectly that the time the council was getting ready to take some action and passed a resolution urging some settlement or agreeing to bring about the settlement, but the mayor said to you collectively or sent word that if council passed such an ordinance resolution that he would veto it and if it passed over his veto, the council would have to take him into the courts to enforce it.

Downing Pryor- Yes this is very true. First of May the council had...well wait a minute. On February the 25<sup>th</sup> the council had a meeting which occasionally we try to have a really private meeting. We got o someone's home to hash out some problems we don't want to discuss in front of the press. That night we knew that t he union was ready to settle for a 10 cent, and an additional 5 cents on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Also, that they were content and I know this for a fact, and can tell you to handle the check off through the credit union. With that knowledge we agreed that night, 8 councilmen agreed that we would recommend to the mayor that he give this 10 and 5...

Carolyn Yellin- Could you tell us who the 8 councilmen are or who was not present in that meeting.

Downing Pryor- I think we were, I think we were probably all there perhaps 12 there.

Carolyn Yellin- Specifically did the negro councilmen all agree to...

Downing Pryor- Yes they did and I am, I don't want to try to recall that because I don't want to put somebody in a situation there, so I would rather not answer that but I will say it is true that later on when we, on March the 20<sup>th</sup> which is a good deal later, some serious attempts were made at that time to get an ordinance put together. One that was acceptable to the mayor but one that we already knew would be acceptable to the union that would end the strike. Patterson had one we knew would end it. Then we took this to the mayor and all of this is during a regular

council session we would recess and go up to the mayor's office and he didn't, he wouldn't go for the Patterson ordinance so Louie Donelson sat down and wrote one. He wouldn't go for that, and yet it was so close to the final thing he agreed to that it began and said. He told me that he would veto it and he would run his veto out and he would take us to court.

Carolyn Yellin- And this was the March 20<sup>th</sup>.

Downing Pryor- This was, yes at that time, or within a day or 2 after that. He looked these over and we didn't get anywhere with him, we tried to write one...

Carolyn Yellin- Was this a, this is what I was trying to recall, was this after the snow storm? Was this during that week, when was that snow storm can you recall.

Anne Trotter- That is the last.,..

Tom Beckner- (muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- March 28<sup>th</sup> was the first violence with the march with Martin Luther King.

Tom Beckner- That was later.

Downing Pryor- Kind came in on the 14<sup>th</sup> and then he came back in here on the 18<sup>th</sup>. He was invited on the 14<sup>th</sup> and he came on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

Carolyn Yellin- He was to come back and the snow storm intervened and the march was cancelled and wasn't that around March 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>?

Downing Pryor- Yes that sounds right.

Carolyn Yellin- So this was before the march was to have been and before it was cancelled by the snow storm.

Downing Pryor- In fact, it was anticipating King's coming here that we began to make a real move.

Carolyn Yellin- And at this point is when the mayor said...

Tom Beckner- Well I was going to say I want to get something else Anne and I are both interested in going back to pop and trying to pull in, but I want to can you say anything and do you want to say anything why did the mayor take this type of position, in terms of it seems to me this was a way out for him in terms of trying to settle this.

Carolyn Yellin- Was it that he thought he was afraid he was a power to the council?

Downing Pryor- Well this perhaps entered into his thinking but his stand in this situation surprised no one that really knows the man. He is pretty stands pretty hard and fast on any decision he ever makes.

Carolyn Yellin- It is difficult for him to change his position would that be a fair I mean once he has taken a position?

Downing Pryor- That is anything is an understatement.

Anne Trotter- Can we go back to the first of the strike for a minute.

Downing Pryor- Yes.

Anne Trotter- When did it become obvious that it was no longer simply a labor (muffled) and it became a racial issue, when did you first begin to see this?

Downing Pryor- On February the 22<sup>nd</sup> perhaps foolishly I don't know it would have happened sooner or later, I guess in retrospective it was better than happening in (muffled). Sooner or later these people were going to make a massive march on city hall during a council session. Had they gotten there with the council in session they might have sat aside, it would have been much more difficult to say no officially than the way it turned out. I called a meeting of the public works committee of, Fred Davis is chairman of it, Louie Donelson is on it. I believe...

Tom Beckner- Is Billy Hammond on it?

Downing Pryor- I believe Billy Hammond may be on it.

Carolyn Yellin- Was this the one where someone was out of town, I believe it was Neders...

Downing Pryor- I substituted Neders was the third man on that and he substituted for Hammond who had to be out of town you are correct. You have better memories than mine. This was on a Thursday and was simply a hearing in city hall. And we wanted to hear and three or four more councilmen sat in and we wanted to hear some workers tell us what their problems were, but at this point the ministers came and they held forth at great length that this matter was becoming racial and Tommy Powell, president of the local AF of LCIO council who is a white man about an hour after the meeting started we kept asking for some sanitation workers and there was several dozen in the room and in fact we had sent people to ask if they wanted to say something. But every time we would send a person to ask if they would say something and they would agree that they did want to, someone else from the union would go and speak to them and they didn't say anything. So all we heard for the first hour or so are things from the labor leaders or from the ministers. Now before, I think this was the day it turned because before that day was over, the tirade was led by the ministers.

Carolyn Yellin- Why didn't they want the strikers to talk.

Downing Pryor- Well first of all if you take the average sanitation worker, he is sort of a frightened man to be walking on thick red carpet and all the splendor of the new city hall and these middle aged and older man and really would be hard to find one that could express himself. These people do need spokesmen. And during this time

they sent back to the labor hall and they brought about 700 people over and they came in such numbers we couldn't get them out, this was the disturbing thing. At one point we said let's move this meeting to the auditorium. I bail out the side door, we have a side door right out to the left of our sort of judge's benches we sit on. Went around to the lobby side and while they were being urged from inside to go to the city auditorium a block away which would seat 2,500 people we are violating fire ordinances here and I must say for those from out of town that are here Memphis has always very rigidly enforced fire ordinances so far as crowds go even in open area like a football game there never been any aisle sitting or standing room in Memphis that I can remember.

Carolyn Yellin- Sort of like the enforcement of the anti-noise statute.

Downing Pryor- Yes, so I was at the door getting people that way and we had them moving until somebody and I don't recall who stood up and said we ain't go nowhere, we are staying right here. And that turned it.

Carolyn Yellin- That would have been one of their spokesmen not one of the sanitation workers?

Downing Pryor- Probably, I don't recall, I am not sure. I don't recall, I was in the back of the room and there was 700 people packed in the room that holds 400. The situation was very tense to say the least.

Anne Trotter- Can I go back to something for just a minute?

Downing Pryor- Now this was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and this was when the ministers came in so this is on the 10<sup>th</sup> day.

Tom Beckner- This is when you say it takes the racial?

Downing Pryor- Yes it became completely racial.

Carolyn Yellin- By this time were the union leaders under injunction and not allowed to talk when the ministers came in or are the ministers coming in before the leaders are under injunction?

Downing Pryor- No the injunction didn't come for, wait a minute, the injunction came two days later, it came the next day, no this is a Wednesday, I thought it was a Thursday. This was on a Wednesday and on Friday February 24<sup>th</sup> the mayor took out an injunction over Chancellor Hoffman. Same day they had the march and broke up into a fight and a bunch of...

Tom Beckner- Workers were maced and...police cars rocked.

Carolyn Yellin- That was after a meeting in the auditorium wasn't it?

Tom Beckner- Coming back from...

Downing Pryor- They organized...

Anne Trotter- Why did they breach the meeting of the auditorium this time since they wouldn't do it the first time.

Downing Pryor- This was on a Wednesday and we got them to agree to come back to a meeting at the auditorium, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 23<sup>rd</sup>. And quite frankly, I said it was lucky that this was a committee meeting because the committee only went back in and persuaded them to come back to the auditorium when they were determined to spend the night there and this was about 6:30 at night. They had been down there since morning and we got them to go out.

Carolyn Yellin- This was when they brought in the sandwich material...

Downing Pryor- They sent for food and bedrolls.

Carolyn Yellin- They came in and made sandwiches...

Tom Beckner- You think the fact that two of the three formal committee members in terms of those who were serving (muffled) had an affect in this instance here you had a majority...

Downing Pryor- No this is one of the things that is very disappointing and it just doesn't happen here the minute a negro becomes a member of a white group that is in the sense of a councilmen which is predominantly white, they gave Fred Davis who was chairmen of that meeting a negro, a councilmen, a harder time than I have ever seen them give anybody. They do this and they even tell me that their own negro leaders who come to me almost secretly they had to talk to me we have got to get things talked out, I can't let my people know that I am associating with you, talking with you. He said, the rip is so wide and so deep it is just not good for us to do this. So these councilmen, just by virtue of sitting on the councilmen are suspect and it really doesn't help the situation.

Tom Beckner- I just saw the regional report on this whole thing that Fred Davis is never identified as (muffled). By the third or fourth page it is talking about Davis is holding the committee hearing and everything and he is never identified, it is either Patterson or Neders or later on and then they later on also talk about three other councilmen.

Downing Pryor- I didn't notice that, it is a good account off the situation I thought.

Tom Beckner- But they never did, that is just something that stood out in my mind because I kept looking for some identification that (muffled)

Anne Trotter- What were your relations with any of the councilmen?

Downing Pryor- Very good. They were hopeful they were going to find enough support to get up to the point that the council would take the initiative and settle it and it got pretty close to that. But we went back to February 23<sup>rd</sup> that the council voted 9 to 4 to support Lobe. That is the day we went to the auditorium and walked out really. We made our statement and adjourned our meeting.

Tom Beckner- Can maybe I go way back, back to impossible and I am not familiar with what took place prior to the sort of the organization of POP what preceded, what was the citizens for progress, I think this is the correct title. Did this have any later relation with the POP committee?

Downing Pryor- The citizen's association? That is the big one that had been trying for a long time just to endorse candidates. It was a large organization made of up of very good people, who nothing political about them except they wanted good people to run and to support good people. It really goes back 3 years before let's see I guess in 62', 1962, 1963 when an effort was made to consolidate city and county governments, and to rewrite the charters of both of them.

Tom Beckner- What about this group that was active in the late 50's which ran a set of candidates pretty much in opposition of Crump people. This is of course really the end of the Crump machine in terms of delegation of Shelby county.

Downing Pryor- The only ticket I recall having been run was one for county court. 6 men ran for county court together. I think he elected 4 or 5, he elected 4 of them. That is the only real ticket I have seen put out.

Tom Beckner- There was a group that ran pretty much in opposition I guess it was 59' and 61' legislature. How I recall this is that I always assume at that particular time that we were looking at factional slating. At that time the Crump ticket had been successful and was challenged for one of the first times and they met with very little success the first time and I think the second time which was maybe 1961, they won a number of seats and I wondered (muffled), just trying to sketch in my own mind here. So predecessor is a problem in terms of...

Downing Pryor- Well whatever might have happened then it didn't register on me, I wasn't active in politics at the time. I voted and that was about it. W

Tom Beckner- Well going into POP, perhaps then because I think this somehow ties in with the changes in the government, and some of the relationships maybe with the council?

Carolyn Yellin- Roger, do you mean the fact that this was so new and had starting only in January 1<sup>st</sup> so nothing had gelled as far as how much authority was here.

Tom Beckner- Well not only that but I think that in terms of how did POP really come about? Was it really from the citizens association or?

Downing Pryor- No it was, I firmly believe it was by this time I got into politics in 64' supporting George Gratto, my first entry into politics when he ran for conference. I just thought he was a kind of man that needed support of people who probably hadn't been in politics before and I got in and worked in his organization and really starting in January went on a diving trip to Mexico. He surprised me, we spent about 8 or 9 days on the boat together and not one word about congress. But immediately after he got back he decided to run, so in February I got into his organization.

Worked up to August or September. By that time he had built up a big organization. But George had to resign from the county court in order to run for Congress. I had sat around for his seat that he gave up so 65', Jack Morris had a sabbatical from the Commercial Appeal, he is a writer. Sent to the university of Wisconsin to do graduate work in political science. He followed this with traveling to 7 cities about the size of Memphis. Pretty much in close radius to us, Cincinnati, Louisville, Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, perhaps Houston and Dallas. Cities like that and wrote a series of articles in the paper, particularly he went to cities that had changed their government some of them. Talking about the best of council management form and best of the mayor council form and these articles caused more interest than people perhaps thought they would after the first columns appeared. I don't know who did it but right along about the time these articles ended somebody called, got on the phone and got 8 people together.

Tom Beckner- This was when about?

Downing Pryor- Late 65', November 65'. The whole time talking about municipal government and now was the time to do something. And really these articles did have the city really talking. I think perhaps a great deal of displeasure over mayor Ingram and his methods was causing people to be more sensitive.

Tom Beckner- Wasn't so much the thing of the reform, the typical reformer ethic as probably more reaction...

Downing Pryor- No, no it wasn't. In fact they very carefully avoided using the people who had tried to establish the metro government they were kept off the scene. They had very little to do with this.

Anne Trotter- And a new government there is a period of fluid and everybody is trying to decide what power that branch has...why didn't the council push harder to take more control, did you all see this purely as an administrative matter until it was too late.

Carolyn Yellin- And before you, another thing, was there a feeling that you wanted to act with a certain unanimity before you acted at all.

Downing Pryor- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- Arrive at a consensus.

Downing Pryor- Which started right at a conflict with the mayor this would be very contrary of the theory that this form of government that you are on the administration with running the legislative function and when a guy quits his job that has nothing to do with the legislative body, or if a bunch of people quit or don't come to work. I still say as far as that goes at that point we had no right to give it to them.

Carolyn Yellin- Now Mrs. Awsumb was quite definite about her feeling that this was always a union labor and a question of municipal government and unions for municipal workers. This was the primary and definite and still is the most important factor in this and we keep coming back to this question of the racial factor. Was there a discussion that, was there a discussion of the racial overtone in executive session? Was there an apparent, was there any time at which you felt there was changing of attitudes where some were perhaps hardening, some where changing, we are trying to chart any reactions to these things along the line and this is something of great interest.

Downing Pryor- Well on March the 1<sup>st</sup> the council had a knock down drag out fight. I mean a real one it. One of the few times we closed our doors and the paper did something I don't appreciate it. They sat close enough to the door to hear not words that were going on but boy there were some real expressions that way and I think definitely on March the 1<sup>st</sup> lines were drawn. Had the first that first riot the thing where they shook the police car did that frighten people.

Downing Pryor- No that didn't disturb the council too much I think at that point we were becoming more apprehensive about what might happen. I certainly was in the first weeks it was the worst period I have ever been through in my life and I have had some rough periods in my 50 years. But I have never worried about anything as much as I did and I don't know exactly where sometime in March I was talking with a man one day that I had worked very hard with on this thing. He is not in government. He said, well you have done all you can do, I really know that you put out your last ounce of effort, no more can be done you just have to be philosophical about it and we will just have to roll with the bunches, ride the tide, see where you land.

Carolyn Yellin- Well now I want to follow through on something else that we are asking everyone it concerns because this is a person to person sort of looking at things. What were your personal feelings when you, do you recall when you first were aware that Martin Luther King might be invited, or brought, or come to Memphis, do you recall when you first heard it and could you remember or recreate what were your feelings?

Downing Pryor- Let me go behind King and tell you what, they are beginning to bring people in and I know this. This is true. International union all of a sudden realized that they had lost control of the situation. Even to the point of the negro ministers saying that they didn't care what the union settled for they might not let the men go back to work, they said not let them go back to work. I was in some sessions with them, I happened to know Jim Lawson very, very well and I have ever since he came to town. I have very close association with Jesse Turner and Vasco Smith and strangely enough two of the most prominent negroes in the last few years A.W. Willis, and Russell Sugarman. Well never seen in any of these things Vasco White. But I know all of these people intimately and I had lots of conversations with them. This began to disturb me because I knew the union was getting worried about this and Ruston was the first man called in and I am certain the union called him in



to try and persuade, I am just certain of this, to try to persuade the sanitation workers to listen to the union people, if they wanted their problems settled.

Tom Beckner- They thought they were really losing control...

Downing Pryor- The union people definitely were very worried about this. Jerry Worth brought Ruston in here, I am just certain of that.

Anne Trotter- Why did the ministers get in?

Downing Pryor- The negro ministers?

Anne Trotter- Yeah

Downing Pryor- They had been leading the civil rights, they are the only civil rights leaders. Oh there are a few others but they are the key people.

Anne Trotter- Alright when do they join in with the labor people do you know?

Downing Pryor- Yes, I gave that date, the day of the sit-in on February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Anne Trotter- And that was before the (muffled) had been pulled out? They actually were into it before the union leaders were unable to speak before of the injunction.

Downing Pryor- The union leaders love singing come in it at this point. On February the 22<sup>nd</sup>. By the time they invited Ruston on March the 15<sup>th</sup>. On the 13<sup>th</sup> so you have got 9, 13, 22 days, 3 weeks later from the time the ministers came in and 3 weeks later the union had enough of them they were about like having snow on the ground.

Anne Trotter- What was that fight about on the 1<sup>st</sup>, I am sorry I interrupted you.

Downing Pryor- Well this was the question about when the council sort of began to take sides on the racial issue and I said on March the 1<sup>st</sup> we had a real knock down drag out fight, purely on the racial situation.

Anne Trotter- What reciprocated this?

Downing Pryor- The strike itself and we had just gotten to the point where we better get together and put things out on the table and have at them.

Tom Beckner- This is sort of going back, how much (muffled) and from your own experience and from talking to other council members how much mail and pressure were you getting personally from people calling you sending you letters this type of thing? Where you getting very much to stay out of the strike or to settle the strike, how was your mail?

Downing Pryor- It began building up around the middle of March. People, it got into the paper a couple different times that the council might take a hand in it, that the mayor's great following began writing us to back the mayor.

Tom Beckner- Pretty much back the mayor and it was his people rather than...

Carolyn Yellin- Did you feel that this was truly an expression of pretty much unanimous opinion, or certainly predominant opinions.

Downing Pryor- It was predominant, considering the sources...

Carolyn Yellin- Did you feel there was a silent group that you weren't hearing from?

Downing Pryor- Oh yes, that is the unfortunate truth of all matters that those who may have feelings and don't express them are apathetic one or the other. I had a lot of communication from people whose judgment and opinion I really respect and they felt we should get the strike settled. Now I have on my desk and there are still too many to try and answer, communications from people. My stack saying back the mayor and my stack saying settle the thing are about even. I would say the quality if you can put any citizen in the community on a higher or lesser quality than the other I would say according to position in life those people have achieved or according to their education or one thing another like this, I would say from the standpoint of intelligent communications I received, there were right along a par and the stacks were about even saying back the mayor, and get the strike settled. Now the mayor on the other hand, his campaign committee late in the day got together and just as they organized to get him elected, they had telephone campaigns going and great men I guess to write the man. Particularly after the assassination and good gosh if a guy ever needed something to boost his morale at that point or pick up his morale, he certainly needed I don't begrudge that at all, except the fact that he is so sensitive to..

Carolyn Yellin- But even at that point, after the assassination was this urging him to still not settle the strike so that the support and the moral boosting to perform (muffled).

Downing Pryor- Those that communicated with him but the communications I got I said were predominantly, well not predominantly, they went about half an half.

Carolyn Yellin- I want to go back to the question of Martin Luther King because this question of how he happened to become involved (muffled) as subsequent and tragic events showed is a point of interest. Do you remember when you first learned he was coming?

Downing Pryor- I didn't...

Carolyn Yellin- Was it the newspapers?

Downing Pryor- No, no. Jim Lawson told me he was going to get him up here. You see two of the most prominent members of the southern Christian leadership conference are Memphians. Judge Ben Hooks and reverend Mr. James Lawson. I went to the King funeral and was surprised to see the prominence of Hooks within the funeral. He is within the top 3 or 4 people in the hierarchy. Lawson is very

strong in there. So they had called on King. I mean there association was such...Lawson said the day after the assassination when I expressed my regrets and he shook his heads and said I have given 13 years of my life to this man, and I really realized, knew how close they were, but I realized then how much closer than I ever would have thought.

Carolyn Yellin- This was (muffled) as you were having this conversation did you have the feeling of real grief on the part of Lawson, this was said with, do you thin he felt any responsibility for having brought...

Downing Pryor- Jim Lawson ought to have had some awful second thought about this whole thing but it is all part of a great plan and program that these people have had. I suppose the revolutionaries and we are in one where people don't like the word but people don't like the word but we are in one nationally. We are part of it here. There, them to hell with their association with people whose backgrounds are not exactly those that most Americans like to thin about or associate with. But I can see that if they know they are going to become leaders of a great up with the chains, if you are going to find a school go look at schools. We are going to run our city better, we go to other cities and see what they done. These people were going to lead a major change and attempt to change they stood up to the methods that have made changes. These people had gotten pretty expert in it, Lawson is an expert in it. He was deeply grieved. I don't know, I haven't talked to him much since, he has almost gone underground. People who have been very close to him before that, unable to get him to answer his calls or can't get in touch with him. I have no particular occasion to communicate with him sense.

Tom Beckner- Can I ask you this real right here. Do you think maybe reverend Lawson and some other people were in touch with King this entire period in terms of maybe some advice or what should we do or this type of thing before they really invited him to come.

Downing Pryor- I think so and King was known to be a pretty good strategist as far as planning these things. I am going to tell you something astounding about king before it is over remind me to. Of what happened the night of the assassination, Abernathy is a good organizer, Ruston is a genius at organizing.,

Anne Trotter- Were you bothered when Ruston and Wilkins came in?

Downing Pryor- No, Ruston's record is not exactly savory when you consider that but what the man can do, I think if he had been here for the first one we would not have had trouble. Lawson had his trouble moments with King after the first strike broke up because Lawson thought in all good faith that the knew how to organize this march and how to contain it. When it broke down, I understand and have reason to believe that King gave him some hard moments about he thing because King has had his experts with him on too many occasions where they did not have trouble, not within the march itself. If Ruston had been here for the first march I am

convinced there would have been no trouble or if King had brought his people in, he did the second time and these people know how to organize things.

Tom Beckner- Nonviolent school (muffled) of course you just indicated the lack of planning in that first...

Downing Pryor- They thought they pretty well had it put together but they didn't. Then the daily demonstration after the first one though David Caywood and Jim Lawson then got their information from some place and they very very carefully saw that the daily marches from then on are beautifully controlled, that perhaps is not a good word but they were, I am military man, 10 years, 5 years in the air force and 5 years military training before that and quite a number of years reserve after that, so I have a appreciation for the thing (muffled) In that sense it was beautifully handled the daily marches after that. They were almost like they were on command. When the first man stopped for a traffic light up the street, spaced 5 or 6 feet apart every man stopped like a military order. They started them out that way when they left and if somebody came out of the temple they didn't think ought to be in that thing, they discard them. The daily marches that went on for a number of weeks after that were really well controlled.

Carolyn Yellin- But the march that turned into the mini riot was so much larger than any other previous march wasn't this the case?

Downing Pryor- Well the daily demonstration before this we were lucky we didn't have any trouble with it. In fact, there were a few incidents but the on after the day of the mini-riot, the macing down at Goldsmith, should have been an indication that the locals couldn't really handle it.

Carolyn Yellin- With that before, well was that before King was called in?

Downing Pryor- Yes this one was a month before he was...

Anne Trotter- Yeah February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Tom Beckner- This is pretty early in the days.

Downing Pryor- Yeah. That is on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and King was invited until March the 14<sup>th</sup>. We knew he was coming, word was around.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you feel that the black militants or the black power group perhaps really secretly organized black power groups were deeply involved in this.

Downing Pryor- I think in looking back on it we were afraid that they were but I don't think that they were. What really started the first glass breaking and looting were perhaps some fringe black power people. But I think the black power people themselves had a little more feeling of responsibility although they don't agree with the others I don't think they would go out and deliberately destroy a demonstration like this that early.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you think that I read in several places and some of the pictures we now look at them we see some of these young very militant looking negroes behind Martin Luther King in the demonstration, the march that turned into violence and the indication being that he was under great pressure from these young militants. That they were and I believe it was either one of the New York Times or one of the national press somewhere that the word taunting was used, that these young black militants were taunting King and that his grim appearance during that, would you have any reason to comment on that?

Downing Pryor- No, you going to interview Jared Blanchard?

Carolyn Yellin- Yeah.

Downing Pryor- He was there, he was in the middle of it. Here is a picture of King as we marched toward it and there is Baxton Brown.

Tom Beckner- We know Baxton.

Downing Pryor- What's this fellows name, oh it is a very English name. I didn't see any black power people around though.

Carolyn Yellin- Now there was one in one of the papers where there were after they got further along and where Martin Luther King is being held very firmly...

Tom Beckner- This is when they began pushing and he kept saying I heard in the reports and some people well one of my students Allen Ungma said he was there and reverend Lawson and people said that they are going to crush us, stop those people from pushing. These were some black power students or some kids who may not have been black power.

Carolyn Yellin- I think it was in the commercial appeal, I just saw that the other day where I really began to...

Downing Pryor- No this is the schools. They all are supposed to be in here. No. Just the schools. Of course I don't know about this but Blanchard is going to be your man on that because Blanchard has a faculty of forgetting in the middle of these things. I called him the day the riot broke out, I was in Nashville. He said, get the hell home. He said, I stood and watched two liquor stores cleaned out in minutes, every bottle gone. He also marched, or I think he marched I know he was down there in the big march the one that was without trouble.

Anne Trotter- Did Wyatt (muffled).

Downing Pryor- Oh yes there wasn't any question about it.

Anne Trotter- May I ask you a question that you may or may not want to take out. Which councilmen was the most helpful in the situation.

Downing Pryor- What situation?

Anne Trotter- Like trying to solve the strike.

Downing Pryor- Well this is one that I will have a crack at later as I want you to print it.

Anne Trotter- Ok.

Downing Pryor- It started out with the three negroes and the first vote as a 9-4 vote and Blanchard did not vote to support the mayor. Later on Blanchard and, I mean Donelson and I moved over towards trying to get something done. We got up to that point 6, but before that we had that vote at Fred Davis' house one Sunday and we had 8 people vote, now you going to have to find out who the other two are, I am not going to put it on other councilmen. I know that those 6 did, the 3 negroes, and Donelson, (muffled), and Pryor who is known by (muffled)

Anne Trotter- Do you have a copy of that?

Downing Pryor- You know these things are important to have, I will dig it up, I have all the hate stuff that is going on.

Carolyn Yellin- This is one thing that we feel for the archives is of real value.

Tom Beckner- The thing that was going around town about Jim Lawson for instance.

Carolyn Yellin- Also the mail, if you have no plans for your mail, we could add...

Downing Pryor- Personally I throw away my anonymous mail, I just won't read it. When I turn it over and there is not signature on it I just drop it in the basket. I have all my mail and you are welcome to it.

Carolyn Yellin- Wonderful because I feel sure...

Downing Pryor- I have two stacks that I am going to throw away.

Carolyn Yellin- Well one of the things that we want is not only hate mail, we talked of hate letters and love letters too. We want to collect, I think sometimes when people take the trouble to do this kind of personal communication with a person who is in an official position that this says more strongly than any survey the way public opinion is running.

Downing Pryor- I have even had mail telling me how to find Dr. King's killer. Some of them had to be, I immediately turned them over to Frank Holloman. I am sure they had to be checked out.

Carolyn Yellin- I want to just ask something, this is very much inspired by that question. In fact, I will just say it. Our maid today, the most faithful line of communication between the community, but her concern is that they aren't catching Dr. King's killer, what does that mean? And this was my first indication, have you had any indication that there is now unrest a feeling in the negro community.

Downing Pryor- Well in the beginning..

Carolyn Yellin- That they aren't trying very hard and why haven't they and there must be something wrong.

Downing Pryor- Particularly among people who don't understand things like this.

Carolyn Yellin- This is a very innocent group.

Downing Pryor- This kind of person the really innocent. Of course in the very early days I heard from some of them that heard about it and asked some of them directly. You know the basis, one of the real basic things in this that I don't know if you, digging it out of people or working it in, the great distrust of mayor Lobe by the negro community. He doesn't get a handful of votes from the negros. Because of political position he took on the racial situation. And it was a political position when he ran against Edmund Orgill, 8 years ago maybe 9 years ago. He took a position, Orgill dropped out of the race and he was left hanging with a position that instinctively he is not that kind of person. Because he went through that administration and (muffled) when he was director of public works or commissioner of public works he did more for the neighborhoods during that time than had ever been done for them.

Anne Trotter- He did a great deal with the garbage men too didn't he?

Downing Pryor- This was his main department. He did fine things for them he really, the record is really fine in his favor, but he took this position of anti-negro and running against Orgill. Orgill was very definitely identified with the negros as a liberal who was trying to help. Orgill was forced by his doctors to get out of the campaign and left open to Lobe to walk into the mayor's office. While he was mayor there wasn't anything in particular that upset the negros by his attitude but images are established. Just as contrary to this as Ingram's image which held up in the last Mayor's race, here was a man that was mayor, did not do one doggone thing for the negros. He paralyzed any poverty program for 7 months because he wasn't allowed to run it. On occasion being in the middle of county court and meeting from time to time in joint sessions with him observed the man for 4 years. Didn't do one blessed thing to help the negros and yet they think he is there champion. So this in the age of imagery, Lobe comes back and runs again with (muffled) that he has. They don't like him and they suspect him in (muffled) early in February, 6 weeks after he is in office we have a wildcat strike on our hands and Lobe is the over.

Carolyn Yellin- Now was this ever discussed among the council. I mean that there might be escalation of this problem because of Lobe's...

Downing Pryor- OH we knew it, it went without saying it was discussed but privately, but we knew we had a much worse situation on...

Carolyn Yellin- Now had another man been there it might not have had quite the implication..

Downing Pryor- Yeah that's right they could polarize very quickly on this because the mayor says this is an illegal strike so already they can..

Carolyn Yellin- And it being this particular...

Downing Pryor- Well go back to what they were saying about him, about the assassination which we got started on. Was that hey said, and negros said this, and I mean it would be frightening to find out how many negros did believe this at the time of the assassination that Lobe had one of his policemen kill King. This is a terrible thing but this was said and you are putting it down for the record that it was..

Carolyn Yellin- We would love, we would wish that they had been a rumor (muffled) in Memphis.

Downing Pryor- Oh I have been reading about the (rumor clinics?) in Wisconsin, Chicago.

Carolyn Yellin- We rode across so many things that it is impossible for us now, when I say so many, but this kind of thing that almost clearly should have been so apparent to someone is a rumor and a wild rumor and yet how wide spread it was and how wild...

Downing Pryor- We have some people that worked on that here because last year when we had this thing...

Carolyn Yellin- Do you know who could help us on it?

Downing Pryor- Lucius Birch told me about it that when we had this riot scare last summer they traced that right back that day to open mic on WHER. And they ready blamed Charlie Sullivan for letting these people saying there is a busload unloading out here in my neighborhood.

Carolyn Yellin- Going into the station?

Downing Pryor- Yup.

Carolyn Yellin- Oh that would be fascinating.

Downing Pryor- There is some group here who does this sort of thing and of course they can't handle anything that is as big...I was reading a report in the Wall street Journal today about (rumor clinics?) (muffled) municipal league, on how many calls they have handled in Chicago in a 24 hour period.

Tom Beckner- Yeah this was while I was in the Washington after the assassination. They had a half hour of news coverage going on about the (rumor clinics?) in Washington. You still had a lot of looting going on, not so much rumors in this case but just they had some commentary on the criminal types and they were showing Chicago and some other cities that were doing this type of thing.



Downing Pryor- But this was the one that sat in, there is unrest and...the reverend Mr. Neders on the council, this is a very intelligent man, a man very close to the situation as well as Patterson and Davis. Patterson doesn't communicate as much with the other councilmen as Davis and Neders does. Others that I know, Gerald Fanion, who is now with the Tennessee...

Tom Beckner- Council on human relations.

Downing Pryor- Council on human relations. I have been very close to Gerald for several years and get frequent calls from him. Poor Gerald his story is sad, he got very upset about the situation and I got him down to see Frank Holloman that day and there was a big meeting that night and Frank asked him to go and report back to him what was going on and try to keep him informed and some police lieutenant arrested him down there for jaywalking you know and the next day was a picture of Gerald and Holloman in the front page of the paper. Then he got all upset, he got upset before the first little trouble. He had to see the mayor and I got him down to see the mayor privately very quickly and the mayor put him in the march to come back and report to him and he got maced in the face. So poor Gerald, every time he tries to help he gets in trouble.

Carolyn Yellin- What is the reaction when these things happen, when someone like Gerald Fanion is maced.

Downing Pryor- Well Gerald was working for the county, the county commissioner, (muffled) the only people who have made any effort in this human relations field. They hired him and he had been on the payroll just a year or year and a half until he joined the Tennessee human relations council a few weeks ago working in this very area. And as member of the county court he felt some responsibility to me to advise me of what was going on as well as to advise the county commissioners. There is two different bodies, somebody else is going to want (muffled) commissioners are the operators of the county, the daily operators. The country court is the legislative body.

Anne Trotter- May I jump to the very end and ask you a question? Why do you think the mayor finally decided to accept?

Downing Pryor- I was in the mayor's office when the report came that Dr. King was killed. I had been in a meeting before that and this again I am going to have to be careful when I review this. This is what I was going to say was going to be very very interesting to you. I was talking with some people and we were trying to get something going, what day of the week was the assassination?

Carolyn Yellin- Thursday.

Downing Pryor- Thursday, that's right.

Tom Beckner- The snow, the march, the riot and the killing.

Downing Pryor- We met, we had been in city hall in another meeting all afternoon and 5:00 we adjourned and with some other councilmen and some other people we went to another place close by and went into another meeting and the purpose of this meeting was the man who had the most information on the subject was the fact, it doesn't make sense, but I get it directly from one of King's closest people that he wants out of the march. He does not want to have the march. He says it doesn't make sense, he is in court fighting the injunction and yet we have got to go with this and he says if you can see meaningful negotiations resume that he will call off the march (muffled). He did this last summer in Chicago, they had a big problem up there and I recall that and it makes a little bit of sense to me because...

Carolyn Yellin- It could even be regarded as a technique.

Downing Pryor- yes.

Carolyn Yellin- One of the councilmen present who never ceases to amaze me with the inside information he has on things. It doesn't make a difference what the subject is and he is right, consistently right. Said he had the same information but from another source. I am going to have to clear this with the man who told me, before I use it but I am going to use it now. One of King's attorneys who went down to argue the case to get the injunction lifted the few days after this, I asked him if this could be true and he said he knew it was true, King told him that he did not want to march that he wanted to get the negotiations going again and delay it.

Anne Trotter- Why didn't he want to march?

Downing Pryor- I don't know. But I called home while we were talking about this and while we were talking about this and while we were trying to get things brought about to get the negotiations going again, see the union walked out on us, on negotiations two days before. We were trying to get the thing cranked up again with this information that he wanted to get out. I called home at 6:20 and say I was late and didn't know how much longer I would be downtown. And my wife said there is an awful flash on the television were we could turn the set on. We were close to city hall so we took off for the mayor's office.

Carolyn Yellin- You did turn the set on first and you did see the flash that he had been shot.

Downing Pryor- We saw it and of course we ran over there and the mayor had posted security on city hall that was just terrific at that point. It had to be. We knew what was going to happen all over the country. Two negro councilmen were present and I guess King was probably dead a good 20 minutes perhaps 30 minutes because I had the privilege of hearing some reports that weren't getting to the public before it was announced. News wise I don't, I probably will take that out of your report, that is probably what occurs.

Carolyn Yellin- I will say that we had heard from another, we have heard, and this was labeled as rumor or what not, but that there was real concern among the negro

leaders that this would cause, that it was among the negro leaders that there was reluctance to face up to the fact that King was really dead. Did this jive with what?

Downing Pryor- No. I don't know just how you mean that.

Carolyn Yellin- Maybe I'm, and maybe I haven't got it straight actually I was just speaking. But that there was concern at the hospital that there was a group of negroes at the hospital where King was taken.

Downing Pryor- I never did here anything about that.

Carolyn Yellin- And that there was concern first of all..

Anne Trotter- (Muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- Was that it? Well do you remember it what?

Anne Trotter- Some of the people that were there, medical students, talked to him and they said they had trouble because so many were convinced they were going to callously let King die. And they kept crowding around.

Downing Pryor- This was said because I talked to some surgeons who weren't present at the time but are staff surgeons at St. Joe's said the man was dead before he hit the ground. He had to be..

Carolyn Yellin- I think this was the sort of thing of putting it together. He obviously was dead but that there was this concern and therefore because of it, there was almost this unsophisticated group of negroes and that there were negro leaders there, I think this is the thing (muffled). That there were negro leaders that were concerned because they saw this happening almost at the hospital and people were so suspicious. And so ready to accuse the doctors of letting him die.

Downing Pryor- I am going to clear this before I let it go in, but. Because that information I had and knew was happening is the reason for the delay in announcing the death was, to secure that hospital and boy if they have ever thrown some security into anything they really piled it into that place, before the announcement was made. I think this was good police work for the welfare of the patients in the hospital...

Anne Trotter- Had the trouble when Meredith was shot and remember there was the big march in the hospital.

Downing Pryor- Yeah, yeah.

Anne Trotter- (muffled)

Downing Pryor- There are situations like this that I think it is very questionable when you have a man with Holloman's background, not that the people before him couldn't have handled it but since (muffled) White is going off the scene and Chief

McDonald had tried to resign, and mayor persuaded him to stay. But we had people like this to make these decisions at a time of great crisis.

Anne Trotter- What was Henry's reaction?

Carolyn Yellin- Yes back to the scene in the office that was a rather dramatic moment for you to interrupt.

Downing Pryor- Well, Ed was real trauma there when Henry likes this telephone device he has exemplified. He got the call the Dr. King was dead and Jim Neders, Henry asked Jim Neders if he would there were 4 councilmen in the office and this is the surprising thing what a lonely spot this was, the few people the mayor staffed, very few mostly security people. In fact, outside of security people there were only the 4 councilmen there. There was awful shock in the room. My shock came as a horrible tragedy not only the man's having to die but what this was going to do to the world. I have been abroad, I have been in Russia when things have happened, this is almost the thing you shouldn't say anymore because of by association. But I was there...

Tom Beckner- When the butcher spots you...

(Muffled everyone speaking)

Carolyn Yellin- You have been to England.

Downing Pryor- I have been to England that is right. But in fact I went from London to Moscow to Rome, we were going to the Olympics and I realized what they do with bad news, racial bad news in Europe. There was a riot in Detroit while we were in Russia and I saw the English translations of the papers, I looked at the Russian papers what the pictures are. My thought was an international thought not Memphis but the tragedy and America was going to be damned to hell all over the world for again coming up with the man who was recognized as the negro leader of all the leaders was again assassinated, just a modern form of lynching. I don't know what other people thought that was my thought of not only the tragedy of the man having to die which I thought was a great waste, I thought he was serving his cause in a manner I would like to see perform some of the other people. The mayor, Jim Neders couldn't, he started out to say something and he just sat down and broke into sobs. Fred Davis just broke completely down.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you feel they had a feeling of personal devotion to King first of all as a negro leader, because do you mean that what would be the most distinctive and understandable I am not accusing them of being racist or anything like that, that here was one of our great man, they must have felt some pride....

Downing Pryor- I wasn't a Kennedy fan but I had this same feeling that they killed our president.

Carolyn Yellin- Yes. A sense of oneness with other negros.

Downing Pryor- I think there feeling that day was their leader had been killed and they were terribly grieved about it.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you think (muffled)

Downing Pryor- For a few days it did, once negotiations started again then he had to go back to, we had to deal with the problem itself. Yes it did. Even by the next day I heard him say things about we have got to wrap this thing up, just things like that.

Carolyn Yellin- Let me ask you this, did the strike itself at that point did it seem trivial? When I say did, when I say this, the feeling when you look at it with hindsight why you can see all of these things and all this for a 15 cent race as someone once put it.

Downing Pryor- That was a trivial thing to me at that point. I was convinced in my mind as I was when Oswald killed Kennedy. I think I had been hunting in Montana that...the month before that and with another man and I we killed four large animals that perhaps 4 or 500 yards, and King was shot from 200 feet. Kennedy from...

Tom Beckner- Couple thousand.

Downing Pryor- Yeah. So the distance is by here we were shooting many, many times, and being familiar with a scope and high powered rifle it is a very simple thing, if I wanted to kill somebody and get by with it. Anybody could kill anybody anytime they want to if they are not seen. That is the only thing you have to do. Open these windows and sit back in here where nobody can see you and shoot somebody on a deck over there and go get in your car go get rid of the gun and close your door.

Carolyn Yellin- You think of it, you know it is incredible that, incredible it doesn't happen more often, with the nuts running loose.

Downing Pryor- Sure, sure. We told some negro leaders about this thing about trying to get this thing headed off before violence broke out and I used the very words talking to the top leaders here in a discussion one time, I can't reveal anymore about this than that, and the conclusion of this meeting and I simply attended as one of, and this was a concerned citizens meeting. Half the people called themselves that but some people were really hip are really forcible leaders in this community. Got the negro leaders together got the white leaders together and sat down and said what are the alternatives, where are we going. Awful statement was made that day that was almost true that they began talking about violence breaking out and chairman of this meeting said the unfortunate thing about this is that what it does is all the people in the room are not going to survive that. He said, when the boys from the north end of the city come up from the south and they carry those deer guns and the back of their pick up trucks and you see them everyday. He said, when they start out with those plunking around here they are really...and he went on and named people who very well might be shot at. I said that day I have a gun at hanging on my rack with a telescope, simplest thing in the world it will kill

somebody from two blocks away. We talked very specifically about this, not about King but about how easy it is to pick a man off.

Anne Trotter- Did you all ever have police protection?

Downing Pryor- I never had it and never asked for it. I was sort of a, well I won't say that much about it. The mayor was placed under security from about the second day of the strike.

Carolyn Yellin- By his request of by a decision of the public safety officials?

Downing Pryor- I would think that they did it because I bought him out a couple times for violating the thing and taking some chances against their advice. I told him one day, I said either get rid of these guys or do what they tell you because they are experts you don't know, you don't know about security.

Carolyn Yellin- Now this may be getting into something that you can't discuss but I want to ask anyway, speaking on this. What official action that you know of to protect King's life...

Anne Trotter- Is it fair to criticize the police on this?

Downing Pryor- No.

Carolyn Yellin- The fact that it was his own decision to go to the Lorraine motel because he was under criticism for having stayed at the Rivermont.

Downing Pryor- Negro only....It's a whiteman's place.

Carolyn Yellin- So he felt he himself made the decision to go to the Lorraine motel.

Downing Pryor- I am sure he did, they had already started the boycott here and this was consistent with it. And see this is another thing that is so obvious, the night before the assassination the same scenes of King were shown of King coming out on the balcony and it was very obvious the assassin, in fact I told Holloman, if you think about it, the assassin, I told the mayor, I said tell Holloman this thing was television last night on local television so the assassin had to have been within range of the local television station and I did some thinking, I am not a sleuth or anything. And I said he had to know how simple it was, it was just beautiful, just look at that thing across the way there. You know somebody is in that room sooner or later he is going to walk out, you just sit here until he does. Jus exactly the same...

Tom Beckner- (Muffled question)

Downing Pryor- Yes I forget which channel it was on but it, wasn't my idea Jean Dolen told me about it Carolyn Yellin- She said guy had to have been raised in that state.

Anne Trotter- And Jean is clever enough she has masterminded the whole thing.

Carolyn Yellin- That can be expunged.

Tom Beckner- Let's go back to something else I may, you may not want to answer this but you are talking about some of the people who are working such as yourself, and Jared Blanchard and Louie Donelson about trained (muffled) who was the opposition. Who are the people...

Downing Pryor- We had taken a 9-4 stand very early in the thing to back the mayor and most of the others felt they were obliged to abide by that and, I have no argument with them, they have a perfectly good point. It is a case of whether or not we, the council should take the issue away from the mayor. Had we done it and prevented all this we would have still been severely criticized and very unpopular for a long time. Of course that wouldn't happen but I was terribly afraid, I thought it was going to be local violence. I thought we were going to get some people killed locally.

Tom Beckner- In your own and this really gets in the way and I don't know how you are going to separate these (muffled) That terrible incident aside, what about other issues, maybe the mayor's failure to act on something as you own, chairman of the council and councilor. Don't you feel that perhaps there are situations or times when the council has an obligation to move in terms of what may be for the administrative matters but what you do you divide administration and policy?

Downing Pryor- Well I think the council has already done some things that I don't know how they set with him there but we did them. We have a city employment resolution that they are going to have to answer before too long on fair employment in the city, I think it is perhaps as strong as any city in the country has but it hasn't been publicized.

Carolyn Yellin- And where you actually, you are setting a policy, you are then, it is the mayor's obligation to carry out the policy as set by the council.

Downing Pryor- Yes, and we are not going to go with lip service on this but I am anticipating, we have tried and had no applicants. This is a, I see that the mayor of Los Angeles has a real recruiting program, mayor of Detroit is the one. Detroit has a real recruiting program to build up the negroes in the police force. Only 5 Tom Beckner- of the Detroit police force is negro. And this is a problem. A negro has his own problem in considering becoming a policeman as to what kind of relationship he will have after that with his neighbor. We need to do that here though.

Carolyn Yellin- I want to ask the terribly complicated thing of financial problems of the city and I know this is asking for an easy answer to a hard question. A quick answer, but what weight, if you were weighing problems, what weight did the financial problem that perhaps the councilmen and perhaps the mayor himself was more aware of than certainly the general public. And the financial bind the city was in. Weighing this against the feeling of apprehension about a wildcat strike and possibly setting labor policies that the city would be straddled. How would you rate these things, Then the possibility of racial disharmony. Did this, before the

assassination did you ever consciously make a, try to make a weighing of these varying factors in which you take priority and now to finish the hard question, since then. Would you weigh one against the other now?

Downing Pryor- No I don't think the financial situation before or after the assassination is the attitude of the council towards the cost of these things and considered the financial situation in light of these things, has changed at all. Not a case of willingness to raise taxes higher than we might have. I don't think this had one bit of influence what so ever with the council's approach to the financial problems of the city. We are going to raise taxes higher than they have ever been raised in the city before.

Carolyn Yellin- And this would have happened in any case.

Downing Pryor- Would have anyways. I am convinced. We knew this, before we took office. We talked about it dramatic announcement of a great big increase in taxes immediately after taking office. Gave them a few weeks to shake the thing down and take a good look at it and then announce to the public, we are very sorry but this is the situation that we have inherited and you are living with as we are. Perhaps we should have done it there are too many people now associated with a strike and the demands of the hospital workers and the school custodians and all.

Tom Beckner- (muffled) What do you think the influence of the days of Crump had on all this whole situation in terms of for years and years and years you had one central political figure that pretty much "ran" the city. Do you think this intermediate period has some effect on how the old commission operated and now you the new council and the mayor have had to fill this...

Downing Pryor- The greatest influence it has had on is two ways. One is the holiness of the tax rate. That it is a holy thing keep it low don't give them much give them what they do like and want, this was the Crump Credo. Also, of the one that is carried over and I have stated the paper before when Jack Morrison was interviewing people about whether or not we should change our leadership. I am using someone else's term but one I like very much. The civic and business leaders the city of Memphis for the most part live in the rear view mirror. A lot of looking over back to Crump's days of so far as making changes and taking a practical look at the financial situation. I got a wire from the president of the chamber of commerce today encouraging us to give the police and fire department all of the raises that they want. But Tuesday the head of the downtown association, the head of Future Memphis, the head of the homebuilders, and the head of mortgage bankers. Four different people came down and said this tax raise is going to ruin Memphis. The chamber of commerce says give them what they want, these other people said you going to kill us. They have no solutions, they just come in with broad statements but this is the leadership of the city. I would say by and large they are living in a rear view mirror, they will not look at arithmetic. They won't look at simple arithmetic.

Tom Beckner- (muffled).



Downing Pryor- I even heard one of them say who had the worst times at all, man don't you wish you had a Mr. Crump. I mean seriously you know...

Tom Beckner- For one he wouldn't have let this happen.

Downing Pryor- This was a man my age, I just was shocked.

Carolyn Yellin- One of the business leaders you mean?

Tom Beckner- Once again is this a sense of Mr. Crump would never allowed this to happen?

=That's right. Sure.

Tom Beckner- (Muffled) never would have allowed this to happen.

Downing Pryor- Truth of the matter it probably would have. No he wouldn't, he could never have dealt with this militant situation of this day.

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to ask you a question. How would you assess the negro leadership? I mean to me an interesting thing and this is just personally, that the boycott definitely was effective and the boycott of the newspapers, one thing that astounded me, was to hear again through this (muffled) that the negro community was so unified, evidently. For instance the carrier boys for the newspaper. That even among the poorer sections of the negro community if they had taken one of the newspapers that they word had gotten to them some how or another and I don know how but that they were paying 10 cents a week to the carrier boy not to deliver the paper. A sense of responsibility or of so this boy shouldn't suffer but because of the news that there own negro carrier shouldn't....

Downing Pryor- I hadn't heard that they were that well organized.

Carolyn Yellin- But this was when the thought occurred to me you know there is some organizing going on here and this is what I was wondering.

Downing Pryor- I would seriously doubt that, I don't think they were that well organized. I am sure they were terribly disappointed the first march they expected 30,000 people and how many did they have? 5,000?

Carolyn Yellin- About.

Downing Pryor- And it was that day they emptied the schools to get kids down there just to have numbers. Lawson was intent on having great numbers in that march and they didn't show up.

Tom Beckner- Yeah sort of black mail (muffled) Do you think that had any effect in terms of the turnout that day and what then decisions were made in terms of getting them maybe asking Ruston and Dr. King to try to build up the crowd?

Downing Pryor- Well I think that march, what was the date of it? Well King led the aborted march.

Carolyn Yellin- That is the 28<sup>th</sup>.

Downing Pryor- Well Ruston and Roy Wilkins had already been here they were here on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Tom Beckner- I guess my question really was how much effect might have this had on later decisions in terms of that they didn't get that much support.

Downing Pryor- Well I don't....(Tape End)