

SS252.mp3

Man – Second tape of September 24th, 1969 with Reverend James Lawson. Okay, we left you with the meeting with-

James Lawson – Well, right. I saw Jerry up (inaudible) Jerry Blanchard(?) up on the platform and I was down in the orchestra. I shouted out to him, you know, Jerry can you get us the microphone so we can have a meeting right here? He went off backstage, but he apparently could not do it, the mics were turned off and the building people refused to turn them on again. So for a few moments there, there were a number of then-people got to the stage, a number of people made different speeches from out there. You know, (inaudible) at how outrageous this was on the part of the city council. And of course Jesse had said some things. AW Willis was there, he said something. (inaudible) Smith said something. I've forgotten how many ministers (inaudible) but a number of people said some things from the platform. And then, in the mean time, again, a group of us were thinking when and how do we move. And we decided pretty quickly that we would all go outside and we would march down Main Street back to Mason, and down to Mason Temple where we would meet and talk about next steps.

Man – Did you make an attempt to get the microphone from the man who turned it off and kept it?

James Lawson – Sure. Oh yeah. We made an effort. In fact, that's correct, the captain did come on, you know, someone was there. And he said who he was, and I tried to get him then, and he did go back and apparently tried to persuade someone by trying to say to him that we just want to have a meeting, this will be healthy. I said the crowd is angry at this stage. It's important, I said, that we have some talking going on here. This will give us the chance to (inaudible) where we are and what the situation is. And he did also go back.

Man – Was Chief Lucks(?) there that they knew he was assisting for?

James Lawson – He was a (inaudible) Chief then, I did not see him.

Woman – So the meeting was conducted without a microphone?

James Lawson – So the meeting was conducted without a microphone. It was not a very long meeting. Maybe thirty minutes.

Woman – Had you seen that cartoon in the Commercial Appeal? That one for your (inaudible). Did you remember sitting on the garbage can? Anarchy (inaudible).

James Lawson – Yes, I don't remember if I saw it that morning or not. But I saw it.

Man – Yeah, well, then, okay, after everybody had their-had their say, you decided to go to march back to the temple?

James Lawson – Yeah. We made the decision then to march back to the temple where we (inaudible). Not back to the temple, but march to Mason Temple for a meeting.

Man – Oh yes, that's true.

James Lawson – Because we hadn't come from there.

Man – Yeah.

James Lawson – So we asked everyone to go on the corner of Main and Poplar. And that we would form ranks and that we would move on down back to Mason Temple. So of course, we filled up the intersection. In the meantime of course the police were saying you can't march. And a number of us-police stood there arms locked in front of us. And I know was I among everyone that went right up to the front ranks, and said to the police you know, that this is not your fight and we are not opposing you, and that on the contrary that if this group of men are recognized, (inaudible) wages increased. Your wages are going to be increased too. So, don't let yourselves be used as tools.

Man – Now, did you address this to-

James Lawson – Oh yeah. I addressed this to a couple of the officers and other the policeman who were standing there, I went up to the front ranks where they were locked arm and (inaudible).

Man – In front of City Hall? Or in front of (inaudible)?

James Lawson – The Federal Building.

Woman – They locked across the street?

James Lawson – Yeah, they were locked across the street, intending I assume to keep us from going-

Man – Were they armed in any way? With clubs?

James Lawson – Yes they had clubs and guns on. But they didn't have them out. They were this way. The group of them, the ones I was talking to had their arms locked like this across the street.

Man – Elbows up across their shoulders?

James Lawson – Yeah, and, and, and you know, it's a locking (inaudible), it's a locking (inaudible) you see.

Man – Was the idea of preventing anybody from marching through their ranks?

James Lawson – That's right.

Man – Down the street.

James Lawson – Of course, in the meantime, Jesse and one or two others were pressing, I didn't know if it was an assistant chief or someone over at the corner, and got direct communication with (inaudible). And said, you know, we're just going to march down the street, we'll be peaceful, and you know-

Man – And Halloman(?) was in his office?

James Lawson – Yeah, Halloman(?) apparently was in his office and Halloman(?) said yes, let's do it. And in fact, gave the command, this should be permitted. And, what I did not know at that time that somewhere along the line, someone had agreed to our half of the street. I hadn't. And we spread out across the street as we marched down Main, moving from that Poplar, Main intersection.

Man – And were you back part of the line or the front part?

James Lawson – Well, because there were so many officers on the side initially, we were trying to press people inward. I went along that side and got them to withdraw, in fact. And said to them, you know-

Man – The officers?

James Lawson – Yeah, we've got good control of this and you know, why try to get too close to provoke-

Man – Were you wearing your minister's garb then? Do you recall?

James Lawson – I don't completely remember. I may have had clerics on. I may have had clerics on.

Man – Did you have to identify yourself at all in this?

James Lawson – I may have had clerics on that day. I think I did, in fact. (inaudible) clerical on. So I didn't have to identify. But I got a number of these young officers to move over towards the street, in fact. And then, soon after this, because we passed the intersection of, what's the intersection there, we passed the intersection at the Claridge(?) Hotel-

Man – That's Jefferson.

James Lawson – And Lowensteins. Henry Lowensteins building. And up until about that time, you can see this-the march across the entire street. According to the pictures, now, we took a lot of pictures on this day, so that sometime between that intersection at Lowensteins, I think that's the intersection, I'll have to go back and look at the pictures, but sometime between that intersection and Monroe, I think that's right, yes, Monroe, the squad cars moved in to the east side of the street going with the march and systematically compressed the march into the west side of the white line on Main. Now the pictures clearly reveal this.

Man – Going south.

James Lawson – That's right, going south. The pictures clearly reveal this, because we had, we've had pictures. There are pictures available and they indicate very clearly the march is all the way across the white line, the Main street, we are (inaudible) at least so the intersection of Lowensteins and Main, whatever that intersection is, at least there.

Somewhere between there, and I think it's Monroe, the line changes and we-and you see the-you do not see the cars in those pictures. But somewhere in between there the cars appear. They did not appear in the front of the march first. They appeared, they came in from the back apparently. Because the next thing I knew, one of these cars was marching- was right alongside. And I went from-I was in the center of a rank about seven or eight rows back, and I went from there to the side. (inaudible) I went from there to stand against one of these cars and walk alongside one of these cars. And as these cars kept coming in, one time, a group of fellow directly behind me stopped and said 'get the car back and away from us.' And I went up and said 'let's keep marching, they're trying to provoke us and let's not let them provoke us.'

Man – Were the cars coming from behind you?

James Lawson – Yeah.

Man – (inaudible)

James Lawson – Cars were coming from behind us going the same direction we (inaudible).

Woman – (inaudible) was traffic going north on the east side of the street?

James Lawson – I think they were diverting traffic. They had to be because no cars- we were filling the whole street when we started out. We were all across that street. So they had to be diverting it up ahead of us.

Man – Yeah, their (inaudible) was that they wanted traffic to continue otherwise-yeah.

James Lawson – So, then of course at one of these intersections, I'm not sure which intersection it was, whether it was Union and Main or Main and (inaudible), it must have been Main and (inaudible), one of these cars trampled on the foot of a woman marcher. And the men afterwards said that they moved to try and push the car off her foot. And so they had their hands on the car. When I turned around, I saw it. And I immediately went back, because I'm here and the car was right there, maybe two ranks behind me. I immediately went back to the car where these fellows are stopped. And as I put my hand on the car, on the first fellow, one of two things to find out what the trouble was. The first can of mace hit me, and I saw-I'm facing-I turn around from the edge where I was because I was marching right in front of this car. I turn (inaudible) and when I do this, I get the first can of mace from here. And I can see then, all the way up the line, the police over their squad cars, out of the squad cars, using cans of mace on everybody.

Man – You mean they got out of the squad car?

James Lawson – That's right.

Woman – Even-

James Lawson – And the whole line of police-

Man – Where did yours come from?

James Lawson – Came from a guy-

Man – On a car?

James Lawson – (inaudible) right over there. No, right over here.

Woman – Did you hear-Jimmy, did you hear an order given?

James Lawson – I did not hear an order given. I did not order a-and that's why I'm saying it, they had planned to break up the march.

Man – Now, when you were marching along beside the car, did you look in the car?

James Lawson – Yes, a couple of times. I stopped and looked in the car.

Man – And there were four policeman in the-?

James Lawson – Well I don't know all these details.

Woman – And were they plain clothes or-?

James Lawson – No, no. They were uniformed policeman. There were no plain clothes-

Man – And you didn't see any indication of the mace cans or?

James Lawson – No.

Woman – Had you been maced before?

James Lawson – No.

Woman – Had you been-you'd been gassed before?

James Lawson – No. So, that first can-full hit me fully in the side, and then I tried again and I got another dose of it. And I had to go off towards the curb, which I did, trying to blink the stuff out. And I saw good enough to be able to turn back and I went back and that time I got a full face full of it. So I got three doses of it.

Man – You couldn't very well see all of the battlefield (inaudible)?

James Lawson – Yeah, I couldn't see the battlefield. There was-I did see a (inaudible) being thoroughly gassed. I did see a group of policeman at the car, apparently hitting and trying to get the people from there, arresting someone there. Of course I never got-the gas never incapacitated me.

Woman – Would your glasses have stopped the (inaudible)?

James Lawson – Well the glasses stopped some of it. Because a lot of it got behind my eyes, but I never closed my eyes, and I never touched the stuff in my eyes. Instead I kept blinking my eyes very severely and very rapidly to try and get the tears going. And even

after the third one, I did the same thing so I never really got blinded so I could keep walking knowing where I was going.

Woman – Was there a lot of shouting?

James Lawson – Yeah, a lot of people fled, fled the scene. When that happened, when that happened, the march broke up decisively and there were only a few of us left on the sidewalk in front of Goldsmiths on that block. And I rallied them and said well let's continue to walk, let's continue going on to Mason Temple. And I guess maybe about, oh, perhaps fifty or sixty or seventy I guess.

Man – How did you walk, in formation?

James Lawson – No, we walked slowly, you know, in twos and threes along the sidewalk. And we walked from there on down the street to Beale, and down Beale to (inaudible), and Danny Thomas over to Crump, and Crump down to-

Man – Were there police following you?

James Lawson – And the police walked along and (inaudible). I was followed all the way by patrolman number seventy.

Man – And you walked on the sidewalk?

James Lawson – Yeah. And he walked all along the sidewalk. He kept looking at me with his club, and the people noticed it, you see, the people marching. (inaudible) seems to be very friendly towards you. And joked and whatnot, and we were joking about it. You know, but he was looking at me steadily and at different times take that club meaningfully at me like this, number seventy. I watched him all the way. So he stayed in that gutter, and someone said 'man you really keeping up with him aren't you?' And he said 'yes I'm going to keep up with him all the way.' So.

Man – You would assume therefore someone had told him to do so.

James Lawson – Not necessarily. He may have spotted me you know, and decided whether or not this is going to be my baby. (inaudible)

Woman – How many of the leaders of the march were left at this point?

James Lawson – I don't really remember who all was there in that last, you know in that segment. You know what, this guy here, I was really thinking much more about next steps and (inaudible) talk of those of us who were going (inaudible) about. Where do we go from here?

Man – Well then, what did you say?

James Lawson – And this, and you know the great (inaudible) there was a real examination of what happened at that council meeting, and what happened you know, with the march, why the police did this.

Woman – Did you think you were being arrested (inaudible)?

James Lawson – No. I didn't think that. Because many people scattered in all directions. People went in all directions and I assume they went back to their cars and then drove around.

Woman – Does mace make you sick to your stomach?

James Lawson – I don't remember getting sick to the stomach, no.

Man – One other thing-

James Lawson – But people can have different reactions, I do think, I do feel quite definitely that it is a poison. And I think we made a real mistake in not suing the police department, given all those cases of people had rashes, reactions, and then suing the city and the police department for it. I eventually had to go to a doctor for it because I got, I got red, red rash all along my face, down around my eyes, and into my ears. It was a severe rash. A few days I went to the doctor and he given me some stuff.

Man – To get back a while, when you first went into the council meeting, earlier, and entered city hall, were there policemen there?

James Lawson – Well we couldn't go to city hall.

Man - Oh you went-that's right.

James Lawson - City Hall was like-had blocked and policeman all around there. They said the meeting's at the auditorium.

Man - Alright, now were there-

James Lawson - So we had to go to the auditorium.

Man - Were there-was there a line of police at either City Hall or near the auditorium?

James Lawson - No, at the City Hall yes. There were police everywhere.

Man - They weren't in any formation?

James Lawson - No, but they were there at the door and the doors were locked and they made it very clear, they were not smiling when they said it's at the auditorium. But they made it very clear, you know, they set the different mood right away.

Man - Did they have the long billy clubs?

James Lawson - Well I don't remember this, but they were all armed and whatnot.

Man - But at the auditorium there were no police?

James Lawson - I did not see police necessarily outside. But there were obviously a few officers around. Then particularly afterwards, we did not really see the lines of police until after we moved outside to the main street.

Man - So that when you were in, they are making the speeches and so on, and marched out, when you marched out the police were already lined up?

James Lawson - Police, right. Police were there in great numbers.

Man - So they had obviously been called to be there.

James Lawson - Sure. They were on duty. All leaves had been cancelled by this time.

Woman - Were the council escorted out of that meeting under police guard?

James Lawson - I didn't see it. They just disappeared.

Man - They went out the back and (inaudible).

James Lawson - Is that right?

Man - They said that (inaudible).

Woman - Okay, when you got over to Mason Temple, the remnant of the march, did you have a meeting?

James Lawson - Yes. We had a couple of meetings. There was a meeting of those people who got there, (inaudible).

Woman - This was about five o'clock in the afternoon did you tell me?

James Lawson - (inaudible). Then a smaller group of people went upstairs and started talking about next steps. Of course the next steps were clearly (inaudible) economic boycott of the downtown area and daily marches, the appointment of a strategy committee, the calling for a meeting of ministers on Saturday in order to get (inaudible) to announce what they hear on Sunday. (inaudible) decisions that were made. (inaudible)

Man - How many-do you remember how many were (inaudible)?

James Lawson - (inaudible).

Man - Who did it consist of?

James Lawson - Well, Maxine Smith as I recall, (inaudible).

Woman - Was there a mass meeting that night then?

James Lawson - Yes, there was a mass meeting that night.

Man - Then the next day-

Woman - Now wait a minute. You said the night you got (inaudible).

James Lawson - We did have the wrong meeting with them. Maybe it was that night, I don't remember. I, we may have met with him for a long time. I'm not sure. We met, somewhere in there we did have a meeting (inaudible). And at the Peabody (inaudible).

Woman - Do you remember how (inaudible)? Could it explain it at all?

James Lawson - Well, I don't really remember, (inaudible) We of course do not really remember that first session (inaudible). But it was totally unfair. He said he had learned that I had tried to keep the peace of the march. (inaudible) the point of that was, Jacques told him of his experience and then of course I told him. He said he had learned that I had made an effort to try to get-to try to handle the incident that the police used as provocation and then of course (inaudible) for my efforts. I clearly had my clerics on. (inaudible)

Woman - Jimmy, do you know how long (inaudible)?

James Lawson - I don't think so. (inaudible)

Man - And was he, did he give warnings about future troubles or future activity?

James Lawson - No, not particularly. We tried to say to him that we weren't fighting the police and we didn't want the police (inaudible) let the police become a buffer between the legitimate wishes of the people. We thought the demonstration was peaceful, they're legitimate, they're legal demonstrations of the constitution (inaudible). But you know, we made it clear that we'd essentially judge him by whether or not the police force, chief (inaudible).

Man - Did he solicit your help?

James Lawson - Well he was somewhat cooperative as I recall. He did say (inaudible). Of course we pointed out that (inaudible). He didn't invite us to come back and to stay in touch about what we planned to do.

Man - He didn't admit to you that they had the Memphis plan (inaudible)?

James Lawson - No.

Woman - Okay, so the next day (inaudible) was-

James Lawson - Was Saturday.

Woman - Was on Saturday.

James Lawson - Now, I left the meeting Friday somewhere around six-thirty or seven for some reason. And I'm not sure what it was I had to do, but something I had to do that night, I (inaudible) my calendar. But I left (inaudible). And I'm not sure that I got back to listen to the phone call, I mean to talk on the phone with anyone. Although sometime late that night, someone called me and said that-or maybe that was the night we went to the room with (inaudible). But in any case, somewhere along the line, I think that night, someone told me you were asked to be chairman of the strategy committee. And I got the names of the strategy committee members (inaudible). And I then proceeded to then-they told me telegrams had been sent out to all the preachers (inaudible). So I tried to get the strategy committee together before that group. (inaudible) And got the strategy

committee to approve of the idea of bringing in other elements of the committee into the strategy committee, expanding it, and writing a (inaudible).

Man - Was there any relationship in this activity between the strategy committee and the union?

James Lawson - Oh yes. Jesse Epton's on the strategy committee. The strategy committee was seen as the community agency representing both the union and the whole community.

Man - So it was done with the blessing-?

James Lawson - Oh yes, that's right. So Jesse was on the strategy committee from the very beginning. At different times, Bill (inaudible).

Man - By Jerry, you mean Jerry Worth(?)?

James Lawson - Jerry Worth. But the thing, I mean this was done with the blessings. Because see, from the very, very beginning, the union had black support and cooperation, very early in the game you see. Pickett formed the group for food and clothing and money, and provide some relief.

Woman - Over the years, has he ever been back to a meeting?

James Lawson - I know how publicly (inaudible) was working at that point. He may not have been working at that point. Because he really didn't come to many of these meetings.

Man - But he was at the council (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Yes, sure he was.

Man - (inaudible)

James Lawson - So from the very beginning there was support because it was acknowledged of course that this was a very poor group of men. And they were going to need real support if for no other reason for the food and clothing. So very early in the game, money was being raised and food was being made available, you see. Many was going over to Mason Temple for food, for the workers.

Woman - Was Pickett on the strategy committee then?

James Lawson - No he was not, he was preacher (inaudible). Certainly later on he was.

Woman - Okay, then the respond from the black ministers was what?

James Lawson - It was very good. We, about a hundred and fifty I guess, of the black preachers in the community showed up that afternoon I think at one o'clock, Saturday afternoon, and heard the report of the strategy committee and the events from Friday. And almost unanimously adopted the plan that they would each go to their pulpits the

next morning and would announce to their people that there was to be an economic boycott, that they were supporting the strike, and they expected their congregations to support it in every way, and that the mass meetings would begin Monday night, and that-to take offerings to send to a relief fund. They would give their support then to whatever the strategy committee did in order to see to it that (inaudible). So the ministers were overwhelmingly-they overwhelmingly endorsed the whole platform that was presented to them. That was essentially its essence. We also urged them to come to the noon-day, noon hall meeting of the workers and to say something to the workers to keep encouraging them.

Man - Now the name of the organization that came-

James Lawson - No, up until-at then it was still just simply the strategy committee. I don't remember the exact day when we decided to move in the direction of (inaudible). That I think didn't take place until a week or so later, where it was felt that we should, you know, proceed to organize ourselves into some kind of meaningful vehicle for community action at this time.

Woman - Jimmy, the ministers that came that Saturday, does this include (inaudible), Bishop Patterson (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Oh, it included a great variety of people. It included people like, like Roy Love, Dr. Hamlin, E.A. Campbell, S.A. Owens, Brother-what's his name, not James, but-of course Henry Starks, (inaudible), Patterson, Gilbert Patterson, it included Litefoot, (inaudible).

Woman - So it was pretty good (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Oh yes. It was probably the most representative group of preachers who ever gathered in Memphis (inaudible). Wide variety, Elder Hunt was there as an illustration. I mean, you know the older men were there as well as the younger men. So it was an extremely representative group of people. And not only was it extremely represented, but they made it very clear to me, as chairman of the strategy committee, and to the strategy committee, that they were expecting us to go ahead and do the job.

Man - Now these were all black ministers?

James Lawson - Oh yeah.

Man - And at this point, they're-

James Lawson - No, there were no white ministers.

Man - They were the concern wasn't it? The black ministers should move together.

James Lawson - There were were no white ministers.

Man - No question of it becoming integrated.

Woman - Let me go back to something else, those before evidently that are going to attempt (inaudible) and at least it was our understanding that you was trying to play that down?

James Lawson - For a time, it was, I understand, although I didn't go to any of those (inaudible) For a time there was the effort to play down, to play down the racial aspect of the union for the meeting. But of course when-by the time this march came, the boycott, this was forgotten. It became very clear to Jesse and everyone else that (inaudible).

Man - Now, at the boycott, where does the paper boycott come in? Is this at this time or (inaudible)?

James Lawson - It was, the newspaper boycott was one of the future escalations as I recall. It was not done immediately, but certainly within about two weeks we began announcing the boycott of the newspapers (inaudible).

Man - Did you, at this early stage, suggest or predict or forewarn that it might take a long time to settle the strike? Or was that never any ever a consideration?

James Lawson - Well, we didn't, we didn't necessarily try to make predictions when it would end. But of course, we did from the very beginning (inaudible) fight until we finished it. The struggle, we'd have to endure and do the job and bear the consequences until such time as we had an effective change to the redress of the wrongs. I mean, this was a theme from the very beginning, that there was no such effort to predict (inaudible).

Woman - Did you have any idea of the magnitude of the amount of money that would have to be raised to keep the strikers and families eating?

James Lawson - Sure, we began to see something from the very beginning. The heavy load of thirteen hundred families, now we knew right away that you know, it was going to be (inaudible) and we saw right away how heavy it was. However, I should say that we did not make the-it made a bigger impact on us when we began to process the families, family by family.

Woman - I feel like I could march with it in center though, can't you (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Now where were we?

Man - Well we were still at that-well we went on to the meeting.

Woman - I want to cut back into that. Is it possible that there was no tension between the black leadership and the union leadership throughout this entire period?

James Lawson - Well there may have been some tensions, but by February twenty-third, whatever tension were in the community among people, different groups of people, was not being expressed.

Woman - Did they know they were sunk without the black community?

James Lawson - No, I'm saying-no I'm saying something else. I'm saying this. If there were tensions, based upon feelings of anti-union, because of course blacks in Memphis did have some of the Memphis anti-union feeling. Also, some middle class blacks had very definite anti-union feelings based upon their knowledge of the particularly the craft unions, and those unions who had become racist unions. But whatever these were, by the week after the February twenty-third, they were not being expressed. Not only is that true, but the rivalries among people were not being expressed. The old enmities were not being expressed. About the only group that persistently kept up a static of discord would have been the so called militants. They were the only ones who kept up any kind of dialogue of discord, publicly and privately. But most other people were joining ranks and getting underneath the effort.

Man - Yeah. This climate of unity-

James Lawson - That's right, climate of unity began very much to pervade the whole movement in the whole city.

Man - Can you just dwell on that a little bit, Jim?

James Lawson - Well, you know, they say this is the whole part-this is the very important it seems to me for any idea of social change, this really is not something new and it's not that much of a phenomenon now. Because, for example, you would find the same climate of unity anytime there was a crisis situation. For example, when the vast brutality met the marchers in Selma, Alabama crossing the bridge, you had the same unity in Memphis. When Emmitt Till was killed, it was the kind of crisis that drew people close together. Now the only difference between those crises in '68 was that the '68 crisis was in our midst here, and we had a platform that we could respond to, whereas, I think this has been, very often, one of the problems when communities had had a crisis, no one had any kind of a platform by which they could direct that anger and that anguish over whatever it was onto a program of action.

Man - Well now, platform, you mean-

James Lawson - I mean by that, in Memphis you had something you could do. Not only could you support the strike, but you could fail to go downtown, you could proceed to boycott the stores downtown, and you could precede to support the relief effort of the strikers and whatnot. You could go to mass meetings. You could get on the marches. You could start spreading the word. In other words, there were things that we could get people to line up behind.

Man - And they could say I'm helping-

James Lawson - Sure, this is right. If you like. They could say I'm supporting it, they could express their point of view.

Woman - Did you want to be the head of the strategy committee?

James Lawson - (inaudible).

Man - Well now in the process of your taking over and doing this, did you have to cancel out some other activities?

James Lawson - Oh yes. Oh yes, I cancelled speaking engagements all over the country. I didn't leave Memphis from February the twelfth, until, until somewhere in April or May I guess. I didn't leave the city (inaudible).

Woman - The strategy committee-

James Lawson - (inaudible) the strategy committee back in (inaudible). Our strategy committee was not only responsible for the strategizing but the union quite specifically asked that we become responsible for a relief program too. Which meant that we had not only the problem of (inaudible) a movement, but we also had the problem of organizing and helping to coordinate and maintain the relief program.

Man - Well, this in a lot of ways, was a good decision.

James Lawson - Yeah, sure. It was a smart decision (inaudible). We began a vehicle for the funds, there's no way anyone could look back upon the funds and say well, you know, even the funds we were able to raise had an outside use, churches and unions. You know, (inaudible) number of unions, national unions gave in to five thousand, one thousand, (inaudible), put in major sums of money. But all that money came through the treasury which we established and then eventually (inaudible) and all the funds that were dispersed in terms of relief went through that.

Man - Did we ever have any assessment of all that funds or so on? I think we never finished with Ralph Jackson. I think that would be an interesting statistic if it were available, how much money was spent. Ralph Jackson was the treasurer, wasn't he?

James Lawson - Yes.

Man - Yeah.

Woman - Jimmy, (inaudible).

James Lawson - I don't know of any tension that went on between Jesse Epps and the union men, and Ralph, myself, or Henry Starks, or Malcolm Blackbury, or (inaudible), or JW Williams, or Harold Middlebrook, or Bill Jones, or Zeke Bell, now I don't know of any tension that went on at that period among us. I mean, we worked very much as a closely-knit team of trust, of community, we took each other's word when someone took an assignment of that group, we expected the assignment to be carried out and there was no doubt in any of our minds that it would be carried out. I mean, I don't know of any tensions between the union, as far as we were concerned, the welfare of the men and the welfare of the union were, were-was identical.

Man - So then the times that you were negotiating, and there were times that you were negotiating for some kind of settlement-

James Lawson - Yeah.

Man - You were negotiating almost in a sense for the union.

James Lawson - Sure. We were negotiating as one, sure. (inaudible)

Man - And at one time I understand-

James Lawson - Yeah, Jesse Epps could have spoken for the community. I mean, now, there may have been efforts to create some tension or divide. We were having none of that.

Woman - Who was the president of the (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Well at that time the only thing that (inaudible) had at that time was a strategy committee, which I was chairman.

Woman - It wasn't set up as an organizational president-

James Lawson - No. It didn't develop until afterwards.

Woman - So then, Saturdays, it was said around Sunday, it was that series of meetings that started at the Lemoyne, at the meeting (inaudible).

James Lawson - Was it that soon?

Woman - It was a week later.

James Lawson - I don't remember when it was, let's see, you've got a calendar there. It's on there. It seems to be it wasn't that soon because I was primarily engaged that week-

Woman - No, no it is. It's that Monday.

Man - You say you have the Lemoyne meeting that time.

Woman - Yeah, it was that-

Man - There were a couple of Lemoyne meetings.

Woman - No, this is the one with the, it's that soon, look.

James Lawson - I don't remember this actually.

Man - It had to be the next week was March. Because the next week was March.

Woman - Yeah, that's right. (inaudible)

James Lawson - Are you sure about this, because you see, I don't remember it being that early in the game.

Woman - Well there were two more.

Man - Well see, I'll tell you, excuse me, what came out of the Lemoyne meeting was the letter.

Woman - Yeah. And that was that-

Man - See the letter that (inaudible) that Loeb would write, because he said he would-

James Lawson - I went to the meeting at Lemoyne that Sunday, the Sunday afternoon where the letter was the main source. And it seemed to me, that I did some, I also did some phonecalling before this time. And I don't remember doing any that weekend on the issue of negotiation. It seems to me that I did some phone-calling with a number of people including (inaudible). Also, as I recall, prior to that meeting, prior to the meeting at Lemoyne, we had a meeting in Donaldson's office.

Man - Yes.

Woman - That was the sixteenth.

James Lawson - A group of us did.

Woman - That was way over.

James Lawson - Huh? Of March?

Woman - According to us, you've got a meeting at the tristate bank that Frank Miles was at about the eighth, Friday or Saturday on March eighth, and the following weekend was a meeting at Donaldson's office where the August referendum (inaudible).

Man - The first thing was the letter, 'cause Loeb said he would write a letter and everybody-and you were involved and Lucius Birch's office and so on, that's where it ended up. And the letter was acceptable to everybody.

Woman - Okay, well-

Man - And the papers had a copy of the letter, and so on.

Woman - Okay, well (inaudible) was organized that weekend. Everybody went to city hall (inaudible).

James Lawson - We went to the city hall frequently after that, of course, you know, every time we got a chance we went to the city hall.

Woman - Okay, how about (inaudible) black ministers down (inaudible), which was the Friday after (inaudible).

James Lawson - No, COM didn't get started that weekend, I don't think. You got your own timetable on COM.

Woman - We'll take your's in preference.

Man - Well that's why we want to get it straight. But, see, March comes pretty quickly right after this, and March fifth and sixth with the injunction and all that business, and then on it got real sticky. (inaudible)

James Lawson - Next time (inaudible) our last session, I'll dig up that file and see my notes on it.

Man - Well then, let's be a little more general then.

Woman - Okay, well can you talk about (inaudible), then whatever it was?

James Lawson - Well, there's not much to talk about.

Man - Did you ever meet with Loeb personally in all this time?

James Lawson - No.

Man - Did you ever try to?

James Lawson - No. Of course the only time we met with him then was when he came down to (inaudible).

Woman - Was he who asked him to come?

James Lawson - We did. (inaudible)

Man - Well now, why, if you felt that this-that they wanted to settle it was Henry Loeb. And you felt however, I guess, I infer that you felt you couldn't deal with him directly so you'd go to the business people and so on.

James Lawson - Well, no, we wanted to have a direct conversation with him. A number of the men wanted this. And that's been a usual pattern, when there's been a grievance for the negro ministry, he tries to talk with the mayor or the governor or someone like that, you see. So, this was sort of a traditional kind of session, meeting, or the invitation was somewhat traditional. And the ministers wanted this so we (inaudible). We, a number of men, I called a number of men, asked them various kinds of questions, of course he fielded these well, and he didn't really get stirred until, as I recall, Ralph and I, Ralph Jackson(?) got (inaudible).

Man - Do you remember what you said?

James Lawson - Well I've forgotten the issue. But he had said, he made a couple of statements which were essentially false. And I pointed that out. This was factually false about the strike itself. Then he pointed to the director. Of course he knew who I was, I could tell by him looking at me he knew who I was. And he also knew that I knew what I was talking about. I could see that in his eyes clearly. But then another question came up, and I don't know (inaudible).

Man - But who conducted the meeting with him? Did you?

James Lawson - No. I don't remember now.

Man - Well, okay-

Woman - Did it satisfy anyone (inaudible)?

James Lawson - I don't think so.

Woman - But he was reasonably cordial?

James Lawson - Oh yeah, he wasn't-

Man - My question before was, early on, you felt that Loeb was the one who could settle it?

James Lawson - Sure. And any time he could have.

Man - But you never-or did you ever think of going directly to him and trying to settle it man to man?

James Lawson - No.

Man - Why was that?

James Lawson - Well-

Man - Had you tried?

Woman - The union tried (inaudible)

James Lawson - Well he had of course broken off all negotiations with the union.

Man - Well you were a new force here, a new alignment.

James Lawson - Yeah. Well we invited him to that meeting to see what leeway there could be. And of course we had engaged with white businessmen to get to him and talk to him, see what that would happen. Both of those efforts didn't produce any real indication that he was going to budge. So in a sense we had to sort of concentrate on making the movement so strong that it could last and that he would eventually have to yield. So, we-you know, while all the time we were constantly throwing our invitations to the negotiating committee to negotiate, see, that was direct. That was constantly going on, we were constantly trying to get the city to come and sit down but they never would negotiate. So, I mean-

Man - Could you recall, now, in your conversations then, who you thought were the leading businessmen in this city who could have influence on?

James Lawson - Well we thought Cook did, we thought Cook could be influential.

Man - Yeah, that's Ned Cook.

James Lawson - Ned Cook. (inaudible)

Man - Were there any others? Now, when we first came to Memphis, we heard that Memphis was the kind of city in which decisions are made when a group of men sat down at lunch and decided that so on and so. Is that naive or is that correct? Is there any credence to this?

James Lawson - Well I suspect that's somewhat true. That could be somewhat true.

Man - But in this instance-

James Lawson - But in this particular case, no.

Man - Because they had to go to Loeb?

James Lawson - That's right. And Loeb was adamant. Loeb wasn't about to budge.

Man - Because it was interesting, someone did ask, two newspapers to drop a list of the most influential, who they thought were most influential. And they did, and they were kind of pretty close. You know, they were the same group of men, give or take about three or four I think, in each group.

James Lawson - Yeah.

Man - I mean, this was very late. Nothing happened.

Woman - Then you tried to go through the council, did you?

James Lawson - Yes, we continued to go back to the council trying to get them to move.

Woman - (inaudible)

James Lawson - After that letter compromise broke down, no efforts, you know, whatever efforts were being made to forge the issue and then push the issue were-were not able to get anything going.

Man - Alright. Now suppose the charge has been made that, this may be true, but you people really weren't very anxious for it to get settled because you saw this as an opportunity to really take over the negro community power grab.

James Lawson - That's stupidity.

Man - Alright. You know, I think you should have an opportunity to answer this.

James Lawson - Yeah, that stuff-sure. That's always the way it is when, whenever there's a movement for social change, then always the persons who come to the foreground in terms of the leadership of that effort, become the leaders for various wrong if not evil motives.

Man - You're putting those in quotes.

James Lawson - That's right. They can't possibly be men who are persons of integrity. Now, this, I'm talking of the point of view East white Memphis. Therefore, Lawson and Epps and Jackson couldn't possibly be people involved because they had deep feelings (inaudible) issues of justice they face, the welfare of these thirteen hundred people, they had to be doing for either 'cause they're communist, agitator, because they were trying to assume a power position in the community, was the way a lot of people function.

Man - Well now, one other thing that-I don't know Joan was-I have something that I-

James Lawson - I mean it's just like also in the black community, some people say this. They feel that Ralph was planning to run for an office or I'm planning to run for an office. (inaudible) That's nonsense.

Man - Well, now, let me see if I can phrase this. This is specifically the ministers and the trust between the negro community, or the trust of the negro community towards the ministers. And I think I can ask you because, in the things that I have heard you have never been accused of this. You've been accused of other things but not this, that the negro ministers were very susceptible to being bought off?

James Lawson - You mean during the strike?

Man - No. But before the strike. So that when, you know, so that in a sense the negro community, in this case most of the outer, you know, they never did trust them. (inaudible)

James Lawson - Right.

Man - So that this was a difficulty here that your group faced. Now as we say on the television program, what's your answer to that, sir?

James Lawson - Well, of course you have to understand that the black community like much of the white community of Memphis has long been the tools of the political machine. I mean, one of the realities of the forty year reign of Crump was that everything moved through Crump, both in the black and the white community. And certainly one of the residual consequences of the Crump machine was the fact that creatively, black and white either left Memphis or they yielded to fitting into the machinery. Now in the black community, the whole pattern of blacks taking handouts from the political forces has long been a pattern. Crump cultivated this. And certain black (inaudible) saw to it that so many votes got into the hot grip of the Crump machine, you received certain kinds of benefits for this. So what I'm saying is, this has long been a pattern. And with numbers of negro churches around, the churches were often used as a vehicle to get people out to vote and whatnot. So the negro ministers do well for that kind of plan.

Man - It was a lifestyle, unmoral or so on.

James Lawson - So, I mean, of course I think that the '68 effort has taught a lot of preachers that this style had to be broken. And certainly some of us, you know, never been at (inaudible) and were always thought to work against it. But so far it's the young saying, you know, it's the young saying we never have trusted that group, well, I suspect there are a lot of young people who have never trusted any leadership, period.

Man - Anybody over thirty anyway. And, do you have any other questions at this point? I think we can finish this.

Woman - Could you report on that meeting in Donaldson's office (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Yes, I vaguely remember that meeting. I don't really remember my reactions to it. I think I made it clear that there couldn't be any passing of the buck to the people, in terms of the rights of this group of men for forming their own organization and all. And I, as I recall, I turned the thing down personally (inaudible). Although I think I did agree that I would discuss it with Jesse and one or two others, but I said (inaudible). That's about all I remember about it. Then I think a few of the, a couple of the white liberals I think were disappointed that I couldn't-that I wasn't more what they would call flexible.

Woman - (inaudible)

Man - You mean he thought somebody had told?

Woman - Frank Miles thought you had been (inaudible).

James Lawson - It was already in the paper before I got back. As I recall, that's correct.

Man - How did you see, or recall, how did you see, you say white liberals, how did you see their position that they had been-were they of any use? Or who were they?

James Lawson - Well what I mean by that really-

Man - I don't mean those who accused you of that.

James Lawson - I mean the people who up to this time were seen by the white community as the kind of white spokesman who had entry into the black community. And in the other hand who were seen from someone like me as being the kind of buffer between the black community and the white community. And in some ways of course, this was quite correct because (inaudible). But not really identified themselves well enough with the needs of black people to be considered serious friends of the black community. Even though the white community thought they had much more authority and credibility that they did, and they didn't have that much with us.

Woman - Were there any white people who you thought were friends of the black community?

James Lawson - Well sure. I mean there were a number of people who worked constantly in the movement throughout to help different parts. Certainly Jerry Blanchard(?) was very helpful. And David (inaudible), Lucius Birch, (inaudible), different times they would act as an intermediary between me and (inaudible). In every campaign, you have to have various kinds of legs and arms and ears, you have to have white people who you could rely upon (inaudible). I mean, even in this thing, some white people have called wanting to help, I suggest that they come down and act as observers to make certain friends and so if violence took place we could call upon them to go to court with us. (inaudible) So be sure when I use this term, white liberal, I'm talking about a particular kind of style where there wasn't the kind of credible identification with the black community. That's maybe pseudo-liberalism, better word for it.

Woman - What about Frank (inaudible)?

James Lawson - Oh, he's not in our (inaudible). I never considered him anything near being a liberal. I consider him out and out racist from the first time I came to Memphis. I mean that was clear in this paper.

Woman - But he was kind of considered a white liberal by the white community I think, wasn't he?

James Lawson - That's exactly the point. He tries to pretend that he can talk to the black community.

Man - I know, I've talked to him. You see, and then I know.

James Lawson - I could understand this from the word 'go'. And to show you how much this is true, you see, when I ran for office (inaudible) wanted very much the newspapers to vote, support me for the board of education. And you know, (inaudible) you know, that I was competent, and also the idea that they needed to have a negro on that board. And he knew that much. Good instincts. And so he arranged for a meeting with-

Man - With Auburn?

James Lawson - Auburn, yeah. (inaudible) And out of this, of course, he still could hit that strike and still not see me for being Jim Lawson. And that takes an awful lot. I mean I disagree with you, I may not agree with you, but you know, if I sit with you for that long a time, I think I can at least acknowledge who you are and what you are (inaudible).

TAPE END