

TRANSCRIPT – JAMES WILLIAMS

Interviewee: JAMES WILLIAMS

Interviewer: KIERAN TAYLOR

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JAMES WILLIAMS: At one point, I was – chaired the West Virginia Chapter of the Workers' Education Local 189 (unintelligible), till they decided my stuff belonged (unintelligible).

KIERAN TAYLOR: I see. But it's a grouping of SSOC material?

JW: A little bit of everything, but a lot of SSOC material, SDS material, SSOC material.

KT: Well, tell me how – how did you become involved? Are you southern born?

JW: I'm from Louisville, Kentucky.

KT: What year were you born?

JW: Forty-two. So I got involved in 1960, as we had sit-ins in Louisville around – first around the university, University of Louisville, where I went. And then later downtown.

KT: Had you known the [Carl and Anne] Bradens before going to – being part of the sit-ins?

JW: No. No, I met them afterwards. And they were – they were an education. Carl had this huge library of radical books. I used to go in there and be awed by all his books.

KT: What got you involved in the sit-ins? I mean I'm just guessing there probably weren't too many white students that went down there and joined the sit-ins.

JW: Well, actually, it kind of got started at the university because the freshman class elected a young man from Kenya as class president.

KT: Oh, and I bet he was part of the Kenyan airlift.

JW: I don't know.

KT: I think a couple of years --

JW: His name was Amram Onyundo as I recall. And he went across the street to eat in a restaurant and they wouldn't let him in there, and so the entire freshman class viewed this as a grave affront against it. So there were probably more whites got involved than normally would have.

KT: And that was your freshman class.

JW: In that respect.

ANDREA SHAPIRO: But I guess, however, is that their attitude was he's not a Negro, he's an African.

KT: Wow.

JW: Whatever.

AS: Some of them anyway.

KT: Just as a side note, in 19-maybe-59, 1960, Tom Mboya, from Kenya, a Kenyan labor leader airlifted a number of Kenyan students. They called it an airlift, but I mean he arranged for their – for them to come to school in the United States, and I'm sure that student would have been part of that grouping. There were – I'm not sure how many – a couple of hundred that he arranged. And what he was looking toward was independence and wanting to train a leadership cadre.

JW: And labor, labor – he was a labor guy.

KT: Well, was there anything in your sort of background that predisposed you to political action?

JW: There wasn't a Red Diaper anywhere to be seen in my family. My parents were Southern Baptists. My dad was a bricklayer and proud for the union. My uncle Harry was President of the Woodworkers local at Mengel Furniture. And my brother was

on the board of the Coopers' union, the guys that make whiskey barrels, so it was a strong union family.

And you know, kitchen table talk, I absorbed a lot of knowledge about the labor movement in general. And there was this thing called (*source living*) that was talked about from time to time. And I asked – this is – I think it was around the Kennedy campaign. Maybe it was earlier than that, talking about socialized medicine, and I asked my father what that was about, and he said, “Well, any time they try to do something good for the working man, they call it socialism.” So, that was kind of – about as far as we ever got.

KT: That's pretty important, pretty substantial.

JW: But like the guys in Texas, it's really interesting. About the same time, we were – I was active in the Presbyterian Church, and we were starting to read Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and all these folks. And, you know, there was a sense that if you had some kind of Christian principles, you were supposed to do something about it. So, I guess that's what got me involved.

KT: Was there a campus ministry office that kind of facilitated your activity?

JW: The campus ministry was pretty conservative, but there was a student pastor at our church, a guy named Richard Moon, who was real influential on some of us. The first Weavers record I ever heard. Now, Richard Moon eventually went on to work with the Tennessee Council on Human Relations in Memphis. And he staged a sit-in the steps of City Hall the day Dr. King was shot. You know, he was a pretty good guy. And I met up with him again in '67 when I was down there organizing the RCA plant. He also died (unintelligible). So, you know, the Texas people, especially the people like the Burlages,

were looking at Christianity with – from this kind of a new perspective and then we had the example of Dr. King, a black church, what Christianity meant to them, in terms of social movements.

It was all pretty new stuff to us really. It was up in the (unintelligible) and pretty much every man for himself in the Presbyterian Church, but we developed a broader consciousness out of that. There was a Methodist magazine that came out of Nashville around that time, and it was also very influential, called *Motive*. And I remember we read *Motive* a lot, and they'd always have these great Fritz Eichenberg's drawings and thing.

KT: The Block.

JW: Yeah, block (unintelligible) stuff. So, those were kind of my motivating forces.

KT: So, from those sit-ins, I'm assuming spring of 1960, what sort of activity did you get into? Was that what led you in to (SSOC) or --

JW: Well, first, it led me into SDS. SDS preceded SSOC. It was founded in '62, and I had a student job at the University of Louisville Library. They finally fired me because I spent all my time reading books. I was supposed to be shelving books and I spent all my time reading them. I found all these pamphlets from something called the Student League for Industrial Democracy. And I was reading some stuff about the Worker-Priest Movement in France, different things. I wrote off to them. I said, "This all sounds pretty good to me; I want to join." And I get a letter back from a guy named Al Haber, who says, "Well, SLID is now – we're turning SLID into something called SDS and you can join that if you want to." And I said, "Okay." And so --

KT: This is, I'm guessing, about '61 or '62.

JW: Sixty-one, yeah. It is before Port Huron. And so, SDS was really the first thing I got involved in. And the Student Peace Union, which was around at that time.

AS: SPU.

JW: SPU, remember them?

AS: I sure do.

JW: We had a raggedy-ass group of students from (unintelligible) that were active in SPU and SDS, a pretty raggedy-ass group. But along in there somewhere, I met the Bradens. I think I got a call from – I got a call from a guy named Henry Wallace, who was actually not the Henry Wallace that ran for President, but the scion of an old aristocratic family in Kentucky that owned the *Louisville Times*. It became Louisville – the *Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Times*. And he was red as a beet, old Henry.

He had – his last job had been with the *Time Magazine* bureau in Atlanta, and he had watched everything unfold down there in Cuba. And so, he would send all these letters to the newspaper that were, you know, mind-blowing letters. And I met him – he gave a speech at the university and I met him, and he bought me a subscription to a paper called the *National Guardian*. I don't know, I think he and I were maybe the only people in Kentucky that got it at the time. Anyway, he calls me up and says, "I want you to meet these people called the Bradens." Well, I knew who the Bradens were.

We were scared to death of the Bradens, who were the antichrist. But there was a young man from the Church of the Brethren that came by, Paul LaPrad, who had been active in the Nashville sit-ins, came by and took me over there and I met them. We stayed in pretty close touch after that. Along about sixty-three – well, I'd been active in SDS, although I noticed that the SDS people tended to be big eastern schools and places.

KT: Right. Well, that's – Louisville must have really been a blip on their radar.

JW: Oh, yeah, they thought I was --

KT: Michigan, Wisconsin, Harvard.

JW: I was pretty exotic.

KT: Was there – I mean well, I'm thinking, were there other southern schools with any SDS presence, other than Texas? I'm thinking circa sixty-three, maybe North Carolina.

JW: Maybe North Carolina, maybe Vanderbilt. There was a lot of stuff going on at Vanderbilt.

KT: As early as sixty-three, maybe?

JW: So, along about sixty-three, somehow or another, I got – somebody told me about there was a group that was trying to organize white southern students that would be supportive of the Civil Rights Movement, but would not be SNCC or would not be SCLC. It would be a little easier for white southerners to join maybe. And I think maybe it was Anne Braden, Anne or Carl, one of them, put me in touch with Sue Thrasher. At that time, it was called the Southern Students Organizing Fund.

I think the fund was about \$700.00 they scraped together someplace, maybe Southern Regional Council or somebody like that. And we began to meet and talk about what we wanted to do, and what I found about SSOC was that they – they were more working-class oriented. You know, they mostly came from working class homes. They didn't come from intellectual families. And the stuff I had been talking about the labor movement in SDS, had kind of been falling on deaf ears for the most part. But the SSOC people said, "Yeah, that makes sense for us." SDS got some money from UAW in – I

think in sixty-three, that they wanted the SDS to use the money to educate students about the labor movement, about economic issues in the labor movement. And Todd Gitlin, and I think Lee Webb, approached me.

We had lunch. It was at the Iron Gate Inn in Washington, D.C. Restaurants I remember. And we talked about this project, and it sounded interesting to me, but I had another year to go in school and I wasn't going to blow that off.

KT: And they approached you because they knew that --

JW: I had a labor interest, a labor background. So, anyway, Tom Haden ended up getting his hands on the money and it became the ERAP, Economic Research and Action Project. Then SDS -- this was in sixty-four, and SDS established something -- well, there was something called the Political Education Project, and SDS and LID were still, I don't know, what you call 501C3 or something like that and they couldn't get involved in politics, so we set up the Political Education Project and I was named director of that, along with a guy named Steve Max, who I took to right away. He was a -- he also knew a lot about the labor movement and the importance of that. And so we tried to articulate SDS's vision in the sixty-four elections, which was pretty hard after the convention in August of sixty-four. It was kind of hard up until then, but --

KT: Was it the two of you that came up with the "part of the way"?

JW: That was Clark Kissinger. He put that -- Clark always had a wry sense of humor, and he came up with that. But we always disavowed it.

AS: Part of the way?

JW: Part of the way with LBJ. But Steve and I entered into a lot of discussions with the Industrial Union Council at the AFL-CIO -- I guess it was the CIO part of the

AFL-CIO – with a guy named Jake Clayman, trying to get some money to do campus organizing for the campaign. And we never got any money out of it, but we got a lot of literature, which we got distributed on campuses. And they got some – AFL-CIO put out some pretty good anti-ultra-right literature during that campaign.

KT: Now were you still operating out of Louisville at this time?

JW: No, I went to New York for this.

KT: You moved to New York in – upon graduation?

JW: Right. Right. This was maybe in the fall of sixty-four.

KT: So, you had the summer and fall of sixty-four Johnson campaign.

JW: Fall of sixty-four, yeah. Pretty much the fall. I stayed in Louisville for most of the summer. So, anyway, after that, I guess by spring, we hadn't raised any more money, and decided we'd better fold up shop, so I got a job with the IUE News, International Union of Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers because I'd briefly been editor of the IUE, *Local 761 News* in Louisville while I was in college. They were looking for some bright kid to do the paper and I went and did it for a while. So I had that contact, and so --

KT: Was this still Carey's union?

JW: I started work the day Carey got ousted.

KT: Is that right? He was carrying his boxes to the car?

JW: You know, we were all wondering, you know, are we going to have a job after this or not. It was really – but he kept – Paul Jennings who came in kept the staff of the paper on. So, I worked there for a couple of years and they were very good about letting me do stuff on the side. I think we began organizing this North Carolina

conference around that time. And I remember we had Wilbur Hobby, who was President of the North Carolina AFL-CIO. Jim Pierce was a real good guy who was head of the IUD down there.

KT: IUD for the AFL-CIO?

JW: Yeah.

KT: Who initiated that North Carolina --

JW: I think it was Peter Brandon. It was Peter Brandon.

KT: Brandon had been a Duke student?

JW: No.

KT: How did -- do you have any idea how he got (unintelligible)?

JW: I am not really sure. I think he went to like Cornell or someplace like that. He was also from an old left family. His dad owned a company called Brandon Films, which was a distributor of independent films and documentaries that nobody much wanted to see. But it was --

KT: See, somehow he found himself organizing first at Duke and then textile workers.

JW: Right, right.

KT: And you think he was probably (unintelligible) to push to --

JW: He was probably the pusher for that conference.

KT: Yeah. Which I can't remember the year that the conference was -- but I could check this out.

JW: Yeah, it was sixty-five or sixty-six. I can't remember. I tend to think '66 because I didn't start at IUE until around February or March of '65.

KT: And the purpose of the conference was --

JW: To interest students in the labor movement and becoming active in organizing. I think following that, I was working on the paper, but they needed to send people out sometime to campaigns to write leaflets and things like that. And I was the only person without a family, so they would send me out to these things. I was working down in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and got the SSOC people at UVA involved in some of the IUE organizing campaigns along in there. Howard Romaine and I think Tom Gardner. But we just tried to do that everywhere we could. And it became -- one of the influences in SSOC was -- well, there were a number of influences in SSOC, but one of the influences was a guy named Don West, who --

KT: Cofounder of Highlander?

JW: Cofounder of Highlander, yeah. One of the problems was that you couldn't get Carl Braden, Don West and Myles Horton in the same room because they all hated each other.

KT: So Myles politics being socialist, the Bradens being more in live with the CP, where would Don --

JW: Don was more out of the CP.

KT: That's what I thought. But he still didn't work with -- didn't relate to the Bradens.

JW: Well, I don't know. I don't know what their -- they were all three --

KT: They didn't need -- they were all very strong personalities, too.

JW: Strong personalities; you don't really need much explanation when you have strong egos like that. But, you know, Don had done a lot of union organizing in the '30s,

and had done a lot of organizing with the unemployed councils of the '30s, been quite active in that. And he was particularly helpful to SSOC in helping us come up with a story to define ourselves. He gave us a story. We needed an identity. And as we were – you know, we were from homes where people didn't really care much for what we were doing.

We didn't find that much support, you know. Andrea's one of the lucky ones. Her family supported her. So, we were looking for all kinds of examples and heroes and heroines that we could relate to. And Don came in with this wonderful history of the Appalachian south and its involvement in the anti-slavery movement. He told us there were more abolitionist societies in western North Carolina than there were in Massachusetts, things like that, and talked about the labor campaigns that he'd been involved with. So, this all, you know, was tremendously inspirational to us. And we finally began to feel that somehow or another we fit in, in the south. There was a place for us. And the southern labor movement was certainly a different labor movement than the north. It was much more embattled. And the question of organizing the working poor was not an abstract question. So, that was SSOC's big contribution, I think, to my life anyway. And Myles contributed to that a lot. See, Highlander originally was more of a union-oriented school.

A lot of southern workers and union people went to labor classes there. And you know, when the civil rights movement came along, they were ready to shift gears right into that. But of course, Carl Braden, he's from this whole family of global union men, these tough Irish guys on the west side of Louisville, in a neighborhood called Portland, sort of like Bridgeport here. Carl's father was a Catholic socialist. Carl kind of followed

along in that tradition. So, there were a lot of influences around, and probably some of the other people that were real influential on us were Ella Baker and Septima Clark.

What we learned from them was well, you really got to kind of distrust institutions, and really you've got to organize at the base. You know, Ella used to pound that into people. So, that was kind of the atmosphere out of which we came. I went to West Virginia after a couple of years at the IUE, and I worked for the West Virginia AFL-CIO, and I was still active in SSOC and various things like that. Not as active as before, but we did a number of students in labor kind of conferences.

KT: Can you remember in the – at the Chapel Hill conference, I mean can you remember – can you remember anything specific on the conference? You know, what – because at that time, I mean there were these tensions, I think, within the labor movement. You know after – you know, there's the coverage of Port Huron where some members of the labor movement felt burned by the students, that the students weren't sufficiently anti-communist. There was that, and then, you know, the students, I think had some mistrust – as you mentioned earlier. Big labor is not an engine of change, it's an engine of reaction.

JW: Well, now the Port Huron Statement said that the labor movement was the most liberal of the mainstream institutions.

KT: But I'm thinking among students that was not an unpopular perception.

JW: Right. But there was always a few people in SDS were pro-labor. Paul Booth was one. He's now organizing (unintelligible). And I remember in West Virginia, we have organized a students in labor conference. Well, not so much students in Labor, but new labor kind of things. We were getting a little long in the tooth to be calling ourselves

students. But the Paul came down (unintelligible) some people from that SEIU Oakland (unintelligible).

AS: That was 1199?

JW: No, no, that's hospital worker (unintelligible). This was a union that organized the social service workers – social workers in (unintelligible). But anyway, we just kept going along like we could, and after the changes in SNCC, you know, when most of the white staff had to leave, you know, the question was, you know, what do we do with ourselves now? And at least some of them began to drift toward the labor movement.

KT: Zellner.

JW: Bob Zellner.

KT: (Unintelligible) in the Mississippi and New Orleans.

JW: They did. There was – the labor movement in Atlanta had some good guys. There was a guy who was head of the Teamsters named Tony Zivalich. He was from Chicago, but somehow he ended running the southeaster Atlanta District. And he came out of a Catholic group called Young Christian Workers. There in the early sixties it was Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers. Mary Varella came out of the Young Christian Students. I remember some things in the Port Huron Statement are there because Mary Varella was a Catholic. Everything got in there for a reason.

KT: I didn't ask you were you at Port Huron?

JW: No. I had to work.

KT: Well, I think that fits. I'm sure the Ann Arbor people made it up there, and Madison students.

JW: I wasn't able to get up there for it.

KT: But you were aware that it was happening.

JW: Oh, yeah.

KT: By that time, you were identified as SDS.

JW: But Tony Zivalich basically integrated the Teamsters Union in Atlanta, and they – you know, there were black locals and white locals still, and they integrated them. And there was this great story of Jimmy Hoffa came down for this big ceremony, and the workers filed into this hall, and a lot of the black workers came in and sat down and there was kind of a crowd of white workers standing at the back, didn't want to come and sit. Jimmy Hoffa said, "Look, if there's any of you guys that don't want to come and sit by your black brothers, I'll take your union card right now. If you're tired of making ten bucks an hour, just come on down and I'll take your card right now." Well, they all came and sat down. The people that were there say that Hoffa gave one of the best Civil Rights speeches they ever heard in their life, a very contradictory fellow, Hoffa. There was another guy named Marty Moran, that was head of the Lady Garment Workers, the Southeast Region. And Marty actually came out of SLID, but he wasn't like the New York people.

KT: He was a little more open?

JW: He was a little more open and stuff. And he and Tony did a lot to get the labor movement involved in the movement in Atlanta, you know, to provide ways for student to get hired on as organizers. So, that's where a lot of the Atlanta people got involved.

KT: Were you still – I mean I don't really know this history real well, but it's my

understanding that kind of SDS sort of shut down SSOC. I'm wondering, is this a – were you still on the scene for that, and do you remember how that went down?

JW: No, I really was not involved at that point, luckily. No, at that time I moved back to Washington, I was working in the newspaper (unintelligible) on that paper. And I remember my boss was a guy named David Isaac, who was an (unintelligible) full-time. And we were reading all these reports from the SDS Convention, trying to make some kind of sense out of what was going on. None of it made any sense to us, and I was saying, "Well, at least SSOC isn't going to be affected by all this stuff." But it turns out that it was. We were at a SSOC reunion a couple of years ago --

KT: Oh, did you go to that?

JW: - down in Nashville, and that was a big topic of discussion, you know, what actually happened, and so on.

KT: Was there any consensus?

JW: Well, yeah, the facts were pretty clear. Whether it was a good thing or not was still up for debate in some circles. But I kind of think if SSOC would have kept going, it might have lasted a little longer into the seventies, than the rest of the New Left. There's a guy here in town who probably knows more about the later SSOC period than me. His name is Scott Marshall.

KT: He works for the CP?

JW: Yeah, he's the National Labor Secretary. He lives down the block from me.

KT: Is that right?

JW: And he was in SSOC in that last period.

KT: Oh, I had no idea. Yeah, I've met him over the years a couple times, but I had

no idea he was a SSOC person.

JW: Yeah, he --

KT: I could figure out how to get in touch with him. That wouldn't be hard at all.

JW: 374-5812.

KT: I might jot that down, too. So, but as I recall, one of the charges was that SSOC was a white nationalist organization.

JW: Yeah, this was a guy – who's the guy who came down and made all these charges? He's here now.

KT: Was it --

JW: Sandy used to babysit for him.

AS: Oh, yeah.

KT: Klonsky.

AS: Klonsky, I was going to say Mike Klonsky, yeah.

JW: Mike Klonsky apparently went down and convinced Lyn Wells, who was SSOC secretary at the time, that they were reactionary and they all needed to dissolve, join, I don't know RYM something or other.

KT: One of the RYMs.

JW: One of the RYMs, and they did. And a lot of the old-timers, I think were at that last meeting. They were – by that time, they just tuned out people like Guerrero and Sue Thrasher. None of this dialogue meant anything to them. They just saw this as craziness, and just couldn't relate to it, and really didn't see how SSOC could be saved. So, that also got to some folks, the Guerrero's particularly, and went up to labor organizers, trying to find something useful to do with themselves.

KT: This is about --

JW: Sixty-nine.

KT: Sixty-nine, probably. The irony of it – among the irony is just that if any white group on the New Left had genuine relationships with black radicals and black movement people it was SSOC, you know.

JW: Yes and no. There were some tensions and one of them was around SSOC's use of the stars and bars sometimes and its buttons and paraphernalia, and that turned off a lot of people. And I don't know, Scotty may know a little bit more about how it was toward them. You're right, but it could have done better. By that time, white groups and black groups just weren't talking to each other at all. I came back, as I said, to Washington, D.C. after the Dr. King riots, and all the people I knew just were no longer on speaking terms with each other. So, just totally a big wall had gone up.

KT: (Unintelligible) was heightened those years, but '68 to '70 or so –

JW: Yeah, they were tough times. I really felt isolated in D.C. when I came back. I was doing labor anti-war stuff, I guess enough of it to get fired.

KT: Which labor anti-war group was --

JW: It was called Washington Labor for Peace.

KT: There was a national grouping that sort of emerged.

JW: Yeah, and we were sort of part of that, but we started --

KT: Albert Lannon.

JW: Al Lannon, sure. Al was in Washington at the time. He was the Washington legislative rep at the ILWU, and he and a guy named Marvin Rogoff – Marvin, I think was with the AFGE, American Federation of Government Employees. Marvin worked

for the EEOC and I'd worked with him at IUE. They were the movers and shakers behind Washington Labor for Peace. And a more – it was an odd couple. They got along great. When Al came out of one tradition, Marvin came out of this old needle trades social democratic tradition and you really would have expected sparks to fly, but they got along famously, and as long as we kept on-topic, everything went pretty well.

KT: That's great.

JW: That time, I just had no contact at all with the African American movement. I really felt lonely because before, I'd sort of been in the middle of things, a different kind of time.

KT: It's also at this point that a number of the new communist groups are starting to emerge. How did you perceive that – did you stay with the Guild for a while then, or was that until you took the job with *Labor Today*?

JW: In between – after I got canned from Guild, I went to work for the National Education Association. I keep going to work for more conservative organizations, and work in their higher education –

(Audio cuts out 46:42 to 46:52)

JW: NEA was sort of on the cutting edge at that into because it was everywhere and it had a lot of resources. And the AAUP really hadn't made up its mind yet about collective bargaining, so we had things pretty much to ourselves in (unintelligible), and I hired Marty Moran, put him on staff. So, we had a pretty wild bunch of people working in NEA. And so, it was from NEA that I came to *Labor Today*. I got tired of living out of a suitcase because I was going around the country organizing, and I decided I wanted to stay put for a while. I liked *Labor Today's* line, which was essentially the CP line, that

basically said what Steve Max and I were saying in the early SDS, was that there's this kind of a natural coalition between the civil rights movement, the labor movement, and the peace movement.

They had these natural interests if they could only see them, and if they could just get together it would change America. So, that was kind of the perspective of *Labor Today*. It was a rank and file paper that encouraged rank and file organizing, but didn't necessarily shoot down labor leadership that we felt was moving in a better direction. And that made sense to me. I'm always kind of pragmatist. I said as you know long as Walter Reuther does something (unintelligible), there's no reason to denounce the UAW everything. So anyway, that was pretty much students and labor, end of that cycle.

KT: So, you stayed with *Labor Today* until --

JW: Must have been -- I was on full time until maybe the summer of '77. And I'm tired of living on dry beans and tomatoes, so I went and got a job in a factory. A guy from UE got me a job in a factory, and I went to work in a factory. Then I went to work in a steel mill where I ran into Scotty Marshall's (unintelligible), Roberta Woods, working at the same place.

KT: Was this --

JW: It was US Steel South Works.

KT: So, you were Local 65.

JW: The famous Local 65.

KT: Yeah, so you hired in, in what, seventy-eight?

JW: Seventy-eight.

KT: So, you couldn't have been there too long.

JW: Couldn't have been there too long. That's right.

KT: I imagine you were laid off in seventy-nine.

JW: No, I managed to hang on until eighty – eighty, eighty-one, around in there.

KT: Alice Peurala was the president.

JW: Alice Peurala was the president. It was a pretty wild local, just every known political group had a faction in there.

KT: And a lot of unknown political groups.

JW: So it was quite a – union meetings were probably the best show in town. I did that till –

KT: Did you get involved and steelworkers politics at all?

JW: Yeah. I got in – Roberta and her folks had this rank and file caucus that I got involved with, and again, I would write some for their paper. But it was pretty hard for me, you know, always changing. You know, steelworkers change shifts every week. I was a millwright, and that would just wear the old boy out. I tried to stay as active as I could.

KT: And these are – these would be the – Balanoff was the District Director at that time?

JW: Jim Balanoff became District Director and Eddie Sadlowski of course. Well first, Eddie Sadlowski was Assistant Director, and then Jim Balanoff. We just saw the Balanoffs – we saw them at the – there was a sneak preview of Fahrenheit 911, and we went in the theater, and there was a whole row of Balanoffs sitting there.

KT: I used to live in Northwest Indiana, so I got to know Betty while we were involved in environmental work and different things. She's still active. The whole family,

you know, Clem's wonderful.

JW: Clem, Jr. is an activist in Democratic politics here in the city. We see him from time to time.

KT: Tom, I guess.

JW: Tom is here with the SEIU. It's quite a family. Eddie, I see every once in a while.

KT: How's he doing?

JW: Doing pretty good, actually. When did we see – I guess it was at the DSA banquet last year. We didn't go this year.

AS: No, we didn't go this year, but it was a year ago last spring.

JW: The last one they had at the Congress Hotel.

AS: But before they went on strike, the solidarity picket line with the soon-to-be striking workers, the DSA Banquet. And the (unintelligible), too.

KT: Oh, was there?

AS: Yeah, it was great to see hotel workers being served by hotel workers (unintelligible).

KT: But then at some into you became a social worker?

JW: At some point, I went back to school and became a social worker.

KT: What – one thing I was wondering is, you know, a number of the people that I talk to became involved in – you know, one of them coming out of the RYM factions, got involved in the different Marxist Lenin – the new Marxist Leninist groups in the seventies.

JW: RYM, Max Elbaum's group. Max is a sweet guy.

KT: Yeah. Do you know Max?

JW: Yeah. That was a good book.

KT: Yeah, I knew Max from the Bay Area as well. I think he really lays out nicely how that all unfolded. But I'm wondering do you have any perceptions of the labor work that came out of that? I'm sure you encountered folks, you know, at Local 65 and I'm sure at other places.

JW: Well, I think we all made a contribution. At least, I hope we made a contribution, particularly in terms of organizing new workers in to unions. I calculated one time when you added in my NEA experience, those big units, I organized something like 40,000 workers, so that – to unit, so that, to me was a big accomplishment. And I think it really gave a lot of the southern movement people something useful to do after – you know, you can't be students forever, so as much as I tried. I just finished my PhD last year. So it was – you know, it was just a useful way to make contribution and it was sort of consonant with our values. The opportunities were there.

KT: Are there things that either the labor movement could have done differently in terms of engaging students, or vice versa, that the students --

FW: That's a whole other discussion. I'm really excited now, you know, about things like Union Summer, which my daughter Evelyn participated in.

KT: Oh, is that right?

FW: And now she's a union carpenter's apprentice in Seattle.

KT: Oh, fantastic.

AS: She'll wind up – she won't stay in the trade forever. She'll wind up a union organizer somewhere.

KT: But she'll have that trade. That's fantastic. She can take that anywhere.

JW: But the whole student sweatshop movement, you know, I – Steve Max and I used to say, you know, if we could only have gotten this going back when –

AS: That's a fantastic (unintelligible), and a successful one.

JW: But that was exactly the kinds of things that we would have like to have seen the student movement doing in those days.

KT: That's some of what – where I came to this project, is I used to work – at Stanford, I worked at a project. It was assembling Martin Luther King's writings, publishing his speeches and correspondence. And we would always get – the activist students would come volunteer and work for us. And a number of them were involved in either doing labor solidarity work or anti-sweatshop work. And I would tell them about just, you know, my bits and pieces of knowledge of what took place in the sixties and seventies with regards to students going into plants, you know, working – students working as textile workers, students taking jobs as steel workers, auto workers, to try to – you know, to broaden the movement and to educate for more democratic unions.

And it would never occur to these Stanford students to take a job as a – or, you know, like you're daughter did, take a trade. You know, they were becoming organizers after they graduated, or they were becoming labor lawyers or you know, staff reps, but they had no idea that – it just hadn't entered their vocabulary to – you know, to actually go into a refinery or a – and I thought that was interesting.

JW: My family finally made peace with me when I got a trade.

AS: Something they could understand him doing.

KT: So being a labor journalist didn't cut it for them.

JW: No, not really.

KT: It was still suspicious.

JW: Yeah, you were either a – teachers they understood, ministers they understood, trade unions and business agents they understood, but that was about the extent of it.

AS: You know, there's this very painful thing in working-class families, there's this painful paradox. You want your kids to do better than you. You push for them and you sacrifice for them to have an education, and then you don't understand what they do. And you're afraid of losing them, and you're afraid that they're better than you are. It's a hard, painful thing.

JW: When all assumptions are upward and onward.

AS: It's too far out of your own realm, and then it's frightening and threatening. A lot of the students, of course, went into the shops not to organize labor, but to recruit labor to various --

KT: Party building (unintelligible).

AS: Various parties and party building, and so it's a – one of my favorite old jokes about the student who goes to work on the docks. The first day on the dock, he says to the guy he's working with, "Man, you know you're being exploited." And the guy says, "Load your half of the skid."

KT: I'm sure there was a lot of that.

JW: There was a lot of that. Yeah, people that don't load their half of the skid don't get very far.

KT: Not going to get too far.

JW: They don't get any respect.

KT: Right.

JW: So, I don't know if I shed any light at all on what we're talking about.

KT: No, that's good. Particularly the stuff on the southern movement is interesting and important to me, and just – because I think it was five years ahead of the rest of the left because of what was going – I think in part because of what was going on in the civil rights movement. Also, you had your own sort of unique demographic, people who emerged --

JW: Yeah, I think that contributed to it as well. You know, we spent a lot of time patting us on the back at our reunion. We had a great time.

AS: Let me tell you, Kerry, there were – they were, as a group of people, one of the most impressive bunch of people I've ever met in my life. I'd never met any of them before. In fact, I had never been that – I'd never been south of Washington, D.C. before.

KT: Is that right? So, you'd never been to Louisville.

AS: No, no.

JW: (Unintelligible) first trip to Louisville.

AS: I had been through. I had been south. I had taken the kids to –

JW: Mammoth Cave.

AS: But just, you know, down and back again, not to be in the South, just tourists. They were beautiful people, still overwhelmingly dedicated, making contributions, thoughtful, generous, open. The self-examination, the searching and the openness, the process that they were going through, you know, in just discussing especially that last period in SSOC, was painful, but a very open and honest process.

KT: How many people turned out for that?

JW: Maybe a hundred or so – eighty, a hundred.

AS: No, no, not that many.

JW: Eighty – there was some coming and going.

AS: It seemed like an intimate group. That's amazing.

JW: There was some coming and going and a lot of the Nashville movement of people came around, too. Nashville was kind of a key place.

KT: Yeah. For white activists as well as black.

JW: Right. That was really one of the big junctures in the south. The white and black students began to work together. Vanderbilt (unintelligible) people and that was – it was good when you got that in Atlanta and went on.

KT: I'm wondering like – so you had had these nights of conversations with Steve Max, but were there other people that – you know, on the – from SDS that you were trying to sell the labor line to.

JW: Oh, anybody that would talk to me, I would – talked about it a lot. I wrote articles, I guess, about it.

KT: I saw something in *New South Today*.

JW: *New South Review*? *New South Student*?

KT: *New South Student*. Something that you had written, I think.

JW: Yeah, Max and I were pretty close in those days.

AS: They had to be. They were pretty lonely.

KT: Well, are there any other sort of – I know what I wanted to ask. So are there people that you would recommend that I talk to? You mentioned Scott.

JW: Scott, yeah. 374-5812. He travels a lot. I don't know, you know, you might have a hard time catching him.

KT: I'll give it a whirl and catch up with him at some point.

JW: He has – they have three daughters who are all active in the labor movement. One is in – finishing up at Loyola, down in New Orleans.

KT: So, Scott's a southerner?

JW: Yeah, he's from Virginia. He's part of that UVA crowd. But Gene Guerrero.

KT: Gene in D.C.?

JW: He's in D.C. And let me see, so I have --

KT: And that's with – what's the name of the group?

JW: Open Society Institute.

KT: Yeah, he's been on my list for a while as someone I should contact.

JW: He's a real good guy.

KT: (Unintelligible) to D.C.

JW: Got this machine here. Sometimes it works --

AS: You need to (unintelligible) your battery.

JW: 202 area, 721-5607. That's his work number. There's another guy in Louisville, still, names Ira Grupper.

KT: I've met Ira.

AS: Ira (Grupper). Spelled Grupper, pronounced Grooper. Was Ira in the labor movement?

JW: Yeah, tobacco workers.

AS: Was he really?

KT: But what – he got to Louisville kind of late, right?

JW: Yeah, he came in later, but he knew a lot of the same people. 502-459-2171. See, Carl Braden could remember all these numbers out of his head. That's where the movement has gotten to. Well, in the McCarthy period, I guess they were scared to write anything down.

AS: And besides, they weren't all numbers. They were letters and numbers, and it was easier to remember. It was two letters and five numbers. Anybody could remember.

JW: Ed Hamlet in Nashville, he's kind of the keeper of the flame of the SSOC people. Area 615-292-5588. He worked on developing a kind of a SSOC archive at Vanderbilt Library.

KT: Did he ever work textile?

JW: I don't know. I don't think so. But he knew a lot of folks who did. Nan Grogan Orrock, I think I have her --

KT: I think I've got her (unintelligible) for her somewhere.

JW: You'd probably have a hard time getting a hold of her between now and the election.

KT: The (unintelligible) were part of SCEF, too, right?

JW: I don't know what their contact with SCEF was. I know everybody was --

KT: Did that – was that talked about as the SSOC --

JW: Yeah, Anne Braden, in fact, came, along with Will Campbell, with the --

KT: Will was there.

JW: Yeah, and he and Anne made up and Will apologized.

KT: What was their falling out? I didn't know.

JW: Well, you know, Will kind of rebaited Anne back in those days. And he apologized for that. It was a pretty emotional time. Yeah, but we get the two of them in one room talking, you really hear some stories.

KT: I interviewed Will for something, another project I was working on, out at his house. He's really one of the wonderful (unintelligible) listening to him spin yarns. But I was wondering, did SCEF come up in SSOC?

JW: SCEF came up a lot.

KT: Particularly, you know, I think essentially Anne was kind of forced out, right?

JW: Well, everybody – everybody was afraid – SCEF was – and the Bradens were like, you know, the antichrist all rolled together. And SSOC went through this period where it decided it wanted to get money from foundations and support from the Southern Regional Council and all that, and they decided that working with the Bradens wasn't such a good idea. And they drew away, something which they later regretted, but that was where they were at at the time.

KT: I was thinking in the mid-seventies, too, some of the – there was kind of a takeover, I guess, of SCEF.

JW: Yeah, that was --

KT: I think a lot of bitter feelings about.

JW: A lot of bitter feelings about that when – and Bob Zellner was, you know – and everybody's bitter about it except Anne, apparently, who still works closely with Lynn and Bob and everybody. There's not a resentful bone in her body.

AS: Again, nature. Again, nature. She is amazing.

JW: But, you know, the south is changing a lot and when we went down to Nashville for this thing, it was a couple of years ago. We stopped in Louisville and hung with some of my old buddies. And I drove Andrea out to see my hometown of Cropper, Kentucky, which was over in Shelby County. And this was, you know, tobacco country, famers.

So, we're driving down to Shelbyville, which was the county seat, driving down the main street, and I count one, two, three Mexican restaurants. We see signs in store windows, hable espanol. I stop at the gas station and you know, I said there's an awful lot of Spanish signs and stuff here. He says, "Yeah, the INS come through here two weeks ago and rounded up two hundred people, and the farmers are mad enough to chew nails." By the time we got to Cropper, the only remaining business in Cropper, Kentucky, was the San Miguel Auto Repair.

KT: I've noticed the same thing driving around rural North Carolina. Some towns have actually been revitalized.

JW: Well, that's why the textile workers started winning elections, (unintelligible) mills and all those places we tried to organize in the sixties and got nowhere. That's made the difference. Where now there's what, 50,000 Latinos in Nashville. Yeah, and you know, those are just – who knows what the real figures are because these are not exactly people that sit still for census takers.

KT: Those are potential Democratic voters.

JW: Yeah. So even Louisville, again, we – probably one of the best Mexican restaurants we ever ate at is in Louisville. It's a – really not a Mexican restaurant, it's a Mayan restaurant. This guy started a – he ran a lunch truck, going around and selling

lunches to most of the bricklayers now, people that were Mexican. He was selling them lunches, scraped together enough money to open this restaurant. It's really up there, I think. So, there's hope for the south yet.

KT: Thanks a lot. I really appreciate you coming out.

JW: A pleasure.

KT: With your permission, I'd like to put a copy of this in the archive at North Carolina. Would that be a problem at all?

JW: That would be okay.

KT: In order to that, I'll have to get your express permission.

AS: I hope you get anything off of that, with the noise level.

KT: When we were talking earlier, too, when you were talking, there weren't as many people here.

**End of recording.**

**Edited: KWT 6/1/19**