

Attn:

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Derber, Edalman

R. G. SODERSTROM

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5/23/58

I am R. G. Soderstrom, the President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. I was born in the state of Minnesota, in Wright County on March 10, 1888, and left that state at the age of 12, arriving in Streator, Illinois, where I lived with an aunt of mine for an entire year without seeing anyone from home. I secured employment in the glass plant where they made bottles by hand, which was quite an art in those days, and worked in the glass plant for two consecutive years. Following that, I secured employment in a printing (newspaper) office and acquired the trade of that of a printer. I became a Linotype operator later on and also a news writer and editorial writer.

(How old were you at that time?)

When I got into the printing business I was 14 years of age and I stayed with that activity until I was 43 years of age. However, in the meantime, the city of Streator was a mining town, and the atmosphere was charged with labor activities. The miners were organizing unions and trying to extend their local union activity into international unions during that rather early period of my life. And that type of atmosphere had a lot to do with arousing an interest in the movement of labor. I joined the Typographical Union as a two-thirder at the age of 17, and joined as a full-fledged member in the city of St. Louis a few years later. (Local #8 of St. Louis, the Typographical Union of that city.) I returned to the city of Streator where they elected me a delegate to the Streator Trades and Labor Assembly and about 18 months later I became the President of the Streator Trades and Labor Assembly where many remarkable people, particularly those in the mining field, the leaders often times paid us a visit. It was my privilege to meet people like old John Hunter, known as Dad Hunter rather affectionately, and William Ryan who were the first officers of the Illinois Coal Miners, District #12. I also had the privilege of meeting John H. Walker and Duncan McDonald, and John Mitchell who was the greatest of them all who came from the city of Spring Valley about 30 miles away. In that sort of environment I became interested of course extensively in labor activities and particularly in the possibility of correcting evils in industry by legislation. The leaders of the Coal Miners had an idea that many of these evils could be corrected by legislation, and they wanted me to become a candidate for the legislature and see if it was possible to enact that type of legislation.

A printer by the name of Ed Wright was elected president of the Illinois State Federation of Labor and served in that capacity for eight years. He was defeated by John H. Walker, my predecessor, and Walker came to the city of Streator to tell me that he was interested in building up and strengthening the Illinois State Federation of Labor. Incidentally, he stated that he had been president of the United Mine Workers of Illinois for six years and during that period of time had developed a program of legislation and he felt quite sure that that program of legislation could be enacted into law. With the many fine arguments that we in labor had for such legislation, if someone could be

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elected to the General Assembly of this state who would put in his entire time promoting labor legislation. He wanted me to become a candidate for the Illinois House of Representatives, and I was a little dubious about trying for that type of place not knowing whether people would vote for me or not, but Mr. Walker stated that he thought that they would. I tried to explain to him that I was merely a labor official and the president of the Streator Trade and Labor Assembly and that that didn't mean that folks generally would vote for that type of person. Well, he said, "I think you've got the ~~right~~ qualities, the temperament, and you are the type of person that they might vote for. Why not make the race." Acting upon his suggestion, I did. I entered the political field, and lo and behold, I was elected to the House of Representatives.

(How old were you then, Reub?)

I was about 24 years of age.

(I wonder if you would say something about your initial contact with the Republican organization in Streator. How did they feel about this when you first came?)

Well, the politicians generally were somewhat amused at the ambitions of a young labor official desiring to enter the field of legislation, and that no such thing had happened in that district prior to that time. I made an intensive campaign, visited a lot of homes, and discovered that people found it very difficult to vote against someone who had been in their homes, and lo and behold I was elected to the House of Representatives. I recall that I felt rather timid in that sort of a place and sat very still for about three months without offering any suggestions to the things that were under discussion until economic matters came to the attention of the Assembly and I discovered that many of the House members knew very little about some of the things that I thought I was pretty well informed upon, and I sort of lost my timidity and proceeded to outline the views that labor in my community had with respect to this type of legislation.

We finally began to make progress not immediately, but I recall the first old age pension bill introduced ~~and~~ received only 39 votes. The House members were more or less amused at the idea of having pensions for the aged. It was looked upon as a new innovation and the only agency in the state of Illinois which was advocating that sort of thing was the movement of labor and ~~XXXXXX~~ within that the coal miners of this state are entitled to full credit. At any rate, the 39 votes were the amount of votes that were secured the first time that this bill came to the attention of the Illinois House of Representatives.

We battled on and finally passed a blind pension bill which provided the pension of about 50 cents a day for those who were blind if they were citizens of Illinois. We secured the enactment later of a Mother's pension bill. It took some six years to enact that legislation in our state. Lawmakers themselves didn't seem to understand that children ought to be with their mother. The bill was finally passed. It provided \$15 per month per child.

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(Reub, I wonder if you could go back a little bit, now here you were a virtually young boy, and didn't have a great deal of schooling at that time, as I recall, where did you get the knowledge and the background? Did you do a lot of reading? Did you get it from books?)

Well, the print shop itself is a poor-boy's school. If a person has a retentive mind, and fortunately I had that, it's possible to pick up an enormous amount of information--not with respect to the philosophers of the past, perhaps, but current information that happens to be presently appearing in the public press; and the people employed in print shops, while they are not college trained, are at least well-informed, and information is a very good substitute for an education. A very bright attorney by the name of Arthur Shay who had a private library, permitted me to have access to that library. He was very proud of the fact that he had paid \$3600 for that library. But it contained the books that had to do with our forefathers. I had the privilege of reading all about John Adams and Hamilton and the early pioneers in our country's government through the help of this man, Arthur Shay.

Then, too, a man by the name of Johnny Williams, who was a sort of an author and writer, used to prepare a column for the Streator Independent Times, the newspaper on which I worked--I had the privilege of setting his column once a week. A thoroughly informed personality. However, he came from the mines, but he had developed into a musician and he was the manager of the Opera House in the city of Streator and also had charge of what was known as the Sunday Evening Forum, a Sunday evening course where a number of people appeared on Sunday evening. For 25 cents you could hear the lecture. We had folks come there that were famous ministers and famous priests and also famous rabbis and Clarence Darrow appeared many times and I had the privilege of hearing him. Johnny Williams, by the way, selected the books that he wanted me to read. And I secured these books from the Streator Public Library. Whatever early education I think that I came by, I was indebted to the library of the city of Streator, because on the shelves of that library ~~was~~ I was able to secure Ely's works on economics and had read the rather heavy type of reading, that kind of reading, before I had attained the age of 20. And through the help of Mr. Williams, and Mr. Shay, I think that I picked up something prevalent, prevalent at least to highschool training and perhaps even beyond that.

(How many grades of school had you actually gone through?)

I was in school until I was in the seventh grade. I didn't complete the seventh grade.

(What made you decide to go into printing as a career?)

Well, my father and mother moved to the city of Streator with the balance of the family, and my father was a very thoughtful sort of a person and had been in the ministry and he thought that the environment of a glass plant wasn't suitable to the growth and development of his son. He said that I either had to return to school or get into some sort of activity where there was an opportunity for education and training. So, not wanting to go back to school, I got myself a place in the print shop.

(That's a decision that you really made on your own?)

That's right. I have never regretted that. If I had to return to work today, I would want to go back to the print shop. There's something intensely fascinating about a print shop, especially a newspaper office where wage orders are actually free if the office is unionized.

(This was a unionized shop at that time?)

Oh, yes. I've never worked ^{IN} anything except a union office.

(Do you recall your father ever discussing workers or what his views were about labor?)

My father was intensely interested in proper care for aged people. He told me that the--in the Scandinavian countries--that the aged people over there were always rather happy and had smiles on their faces and worried about nothing because they did have an income, and they got that as a matter of right. At the age of 18 in the Scandinavian countries citizens are compelled to pay into an old age pension fund. And ^{at} the age of 60 no matter how rich they may be or how poor they may be, they must accept this old age pension. They have the right, of course, to return that to the fund, and many of them do who feel that they do not need that money, but they receive that as a matter of right. And that sort of thing has been in operation in the Scandinavian countries for over 60 years before it became accepted here in the United States.

(Was he born in---?)

My father was born in Sweden in a section of Sweden close to Stockholm in a county known as Smolan. My mother was born in the northern part of Sweden in a county known as Gemplaff, and they came to this country and met in the state of Minnesota. Which is as close to Sweden as one can get in this country, and were married there and I was born in the state of Minnesota.

(Were you the only child?)

NO, no, there were six children in our family, and two are still alive: my sister in Kankakee, Mrs. Arthur Hodson, whose husband is a railroad engineer; and myself. The balance have passed away. My mother is still alive, but in very poor health. She's 93 years old.

(She must be a very vigorous woman.)

Yes, Scandinavian stock apparently is good stock.

(Was there anybody in your family background who had taken part in labor?)

No, my father was interested in religious activities and, like most Scandinavians, he devoted a good deal of time to church work and activities of that type, although he was a shoemaker by trade and he had been in the shoe business, but a portion of his life, seven years in St. Paul, and a

year or two in Redwing, Minnesota, and a place called Lake Mary, he was in church activity and was the parson of the church. He built a church-- he was the pastor of a church in St. Paul on Seventh Street and Broadway, a structure that was built during the time that he was the pastor.

(Do you think that you may have gotten some of your social ideas through that kind of--?)

He was the kindest man that ever lived, but union organization was not in his field. He was interested in religious work.

(How about your mother?)

Well, she of course is the mother, probably more practical than father, don't you see? And had the responsibility of raising the family. My oldest brother wore the uniform of the United States for seven years and my younger brother, he was a member of #16 in Chicago and a printer by trade, too. I lost one brother when he was only 12.

(Were there any incidents of any kind that you can recall in this early period which might have influenced your thinking or was this a normal development, do you think?)

Well, one had to be born in an industrial community, or had to come into an industrial community such as the city of Streator was in order to catch the atmosphere necessary to lead labor. There isn't any question about that. The contribution which the community makes is a tremendous contribution and the development of someone who has a flair for that type of activity. As Streator was just suited for that. All of the unions that were in existence at that time seemed to have some sort of a local in the city of Streator, and all of that information--Samuel Gompers, the great leader of the American Federation of Labor, came there a number of times to--one time to invite the green glass blowers' organization to join the American Federation of Labor, and because it was that type of community and so many labor officials came to the city of Streator in the early days. The tendency was to pay some attention to what they were doing, and I, of course, was enthused by it--by what they had in mind.

(Were the people of Streator at that time of a special background? Were they mostly Scandinavian?)

No, there were very few Scandinavians in the city of Streator. We had-- the coal miners came from the British Isles. They were from Wales and from Scotland and from England, and they were the early settlers around the city of Streator. Later on the Slovaks came in, and they too worked in the coal mine, don't you see, and then later still the Italians came into the city of Streator. It's a very cosmopolitan sort of a community where they say that 17 tongues are spoken daily in that city.

(What was the population in those days?)

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In those days they had about 10,000 or 11,000 people and today we have 22,000.

(It is an unusual pattern for labor activity despite its small size.)

It was the main activity in that community for a long number of years.

(How do you account for the fact that you were selected as a delegate in that early period. After all, you were just a young man at the time.)

My association ~~with~~ the Typographical Union was selecting delegates to the central body and someone suggested that Soderstrom might serve in that capacity with credit to the union and perhaps the central body would be glad to have him. They felt that I had certain talents and certain abilities that might be appreciated in the central body, and so when I became a delegate up there they first elected me vice-president and then the president resigned, so I automatically became president of the Streater central body.

(Can you recall any incident in the Streater labor movement in which you were able to show qualities of leadership that made you a natural choice for a delegate?)

Well, they felt that anyone who was eloquent and who could put into words the feeling that these folks had in their hearts and who was faithful to himself and his real feelings with respect to labor's great cause would naturally become a leader and they wanted someone to--and the strange part of it was that they selected a young man. Most of these men that I've mentioned were 20 years older than I was, but they thought that if I could get into the assembly and if we could just pass this legislation. The only thing that makes me feel bad is the fact that most of these people died before they had the privilege of enjoying the legislation that they were advocating, don't you see.

(John Williams did live beyond the workman's compensation period, didn't he?)

Oh yes, the workman's compensation act grew out of that Cherry Mine disaster where some 283 people lost their lives and it was Johnny Williams who got in touch with the Chicago Milwaukee Railroad people, who own that mine, and encouraged them to help to set up ~~the~~ workmen's compensation act in the state of Illinois. He also coaxed them into paying the funeral expenses and to set aside a fund for the education of the orphans of these children whose fathers died in that Cherry Mine disaster. Johnny Williams acted later on as the arbitrator for the Hart, Schaffer and Marx people and he became their impartial chairman of that board that fixes the prices of all these operations in the clothing industry. He was the first impartial chairman to act in that capacity. Johnny Williams was a great man.

(You have a remarkable memory, Reub. You know we had a Master's thesis written on Johnny Williams. Apparently there was a big mass of his papers left over in historical libraries here and one of our students went through that--)

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The man was brilliant, and he liked people that could discuss matters with him. He used to come up with his column for the newspaper and there would be some point in there--something he would point up--and I was interested in and I'd discuss that with him. I got to know him pretty well, and it was Johnny Williams who wanted me to get into economic activity because he thought there was a chance to do something worthwhile, explaining all the time, of course, that you can't expect any appreciation and darned little credit for this type of service, but men in that field are so badly needed "why don't you go down to the library and get this book and get that book" and he had a list of them. I read every one of them that he pointed out, so I didn't waste any time in my reading. It was stuff that was really helpful to me.

(He had a group of men or boys who used to attend some classes--)

That was that Sunday evening course that I spoke of. He was the chairman of the Sunday evening course, and he would act as the chairman of these meetings and he knew all of the notables at the time who were on the Chautauqua stage and Johnny Williams was a friend of theirs but he was able to get the best talent in our country to come to this Sunday evening course, and the price was only 25 cents.

(Do you think he may have had some considerable influence on your--)

Johnny Williams and Arthur Shay and a very remarkable lady by the name of Mrs. Fred Leroy, who was the editor of the Streator Independent Times and once in a while when she ran out of subject matters for the editorial column, she'd come and ask me to write the editorial that day, and so I'd sit down and do it. I always had something current that was interesting for the public to read, and I could do that work very well. Folks have said that I'm a good speaker, but I think that I'm a better writer.

(You've been writing for a long time, since the early days. Have you kept any file of your writings over this time?)

No, only in the course--in here, now most of the officers' report to our annual convention is prepared in this office and that of course will be found in the official proceedings of each annual convention. The officers report, and that touches all of the current subject that we've had something to do with during the past year, in the Illinois State Federation of Labor.

(When you were a newspaper reporter did you cover all kinds of--)

No, I covered prize fights.

(Oh, is that so?)

I wrote the--I wrote articles for labor papers; Peoria Labor News was one of them. I did that for a long time--without compensation--just because I liked to write.

(This was after you became a part of the labor movement?)

That's right. And as a member of the central body I wrote two columns-- one general news for the city of Streator because the Peoria Labor News had the circulation in my community there, you see, and another column that I called "Doings in Printerdom," which was devoted largely to the activities in the typographical industry.

(Were these both listed under your name?)

Well, I think the column that had to do with the printers was, but I had a by-line there, but I didn't on the other. Some of it I don't think I wanted the by-line on.

(What kind of a man was this Mr. ^{Shay}~~Shay~~? Was he interested in the labor movement?)

His father was a minister and an attorney. His mother was also an attorney. ~~Arthur~~ Arthur ^{Shay}~~Shay~~ was a school teacher at the outset and then studied law and became a very very successful attorney. He ran for the office of Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois on the Bull Moose ticket back in 1914 and regarded as brilliant attorney. His father was a member of the Knights of Labor, by the way.

(Oh is that so?)

Yes. And a very active member and the elder Shay was one of those who invaded the South after the war was over and tried to carry out some sort of a program to heal the bad feelings between the North and South. A brilliant orator. Well, Arthur Shay himself was not such a brilliant orator, but a very capable attorney, and possibly the outstanding attorney of my community, ~~before~~ either before or since that time.

(Did he represent labor unions as an attorney?)

No, no Arthur Shay never did, but the father did. He represented the old Knights of Labor and was very active in there. The community was more or less wound up with labor organizations one way or another. There aren't any rich people in the community. It's a very democratic sort of a town because the owners of the plant do not live in Streator. They're absentee owners, don't you see, so the community is made up of supervisors and employees, don't you see, and none of them too wealthy, in fact they have to depend upon each other to such an extent that you have a democratic community. I've never moved out of there because I like that atmosphere.

(During your youth there before you became active in politics yourself, what was the political complexion?)

It has always been republican, in fact the whole county of LaSalle is republican, and that was one of the things that amazed the people after I got into the assembly. In fact Eugene B. Debs one time came to ~~me~~

my home and he thought it was strange that I should be seated on the republican side. In fact it amazed him. He said "I don't see how you can get along with these high finders on the republican side." He'd been talking about--that noon he had been discussing one big union. I said well there are somethings about you Mr. Debs that I don't understand either. I said you don't--you were discussing the possibility of one big union, now you don't believe that do you Mr. Debs? that you want to organize the thing on that basis? Well, he said yes he did. But do you believe that a section hand should be paid as much as the engineer. He said, "Why sure," he said "~~the section~~ costs as much for the section hand to maintain his family as it does the engineer, and without the section hand the engineer wouldn't have any job," don't you see. Well, I said that wasn't what you folks did. I know that you're a railroad man, Mr. Debs, and an engineer. YouX folks formed an organization of engineers. You're paid about four times as much as the section hand. And he said "Yes that's what we did, but that doesn't make it right. See, it ought to be one big union."

I kidded him about his socialism at that time, and explained to him that I didn't think he was arguing his socialism right. And he said "No? What do you think it ought to be?" And I said that in this community where I live there wouldn't be any change made with respect to the way people work even if we had socialism. Here we all live together. We go to the same schools together. We go to the same churches together, and we belong to the same lodges together. We work in these plants together. We produce everything together, except in sharing the profit. That part of the evolution hasn't taken place. Now why don't you argue your socialism that way? Profit sharing proposition.

I was amused here recently when Walter Reuther was talking about sharing profits in the automobile industry, and promoted the thing as a new proposition, when as a matter of fact it had been ~~discussed~~ thoroughly discussed and thoroughly understood years back ~~among~~ among the pioneers the labor movement, including Debs. Debs' idea of course was to take over industry. The government ~~can do~~ that sort of thing, but later on Mr. Olander was to visit the city of Milwaukee and he was to pay a man by the name of Victor Berger a visit, who owned the newspaper up there. So I told him of the talk that I'd had with Eugene Debs, and Debs didn't think much of that type of socialism. I said "you put it up in your way, Mr. Olander, to Victor Berger and ask him what he has to say with respect to establishing a profit-sharing or a public ownership proposition where people can share the profits." So he went up there and he talked to Victor Berger and when he came back he said he outlined the thing to Mr. Berger and said at that point part of the evolution hadn't taken place that people ought to share in the profits as well as the activities of these things, and he said "Do you know what he said, Soderstrom?" I said no. "He said, 'That's damn good socialism!'" So Mr. Berger agreed that that proposition might work out.

(How do you account for the fact that Streater was so strongly unionized at such an early stage of the game?)

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Well, the people of the United Kingdom, Great Britain, had established a labor movement that seemed to be effective in the British Isles prior to the time that they came to Streator. The influence of unionizing--the original influence--came from the people from the British Isles. By the way, Johnny Williams came from Wales, you know. He was born over there. The same was true of Manly Davis, and the same was true of many of the great leaders in the movement of labor. High grade, high minded people thoroughly honest which was refreshing to talk to--stubbornly on the square--those kind of people. They came from the British Isles and they were going to form unions in these United States like they had in old England.

(_____ ?)

We've been in existence of--the Typographical Union has been in existence over 130 years. And ~~XX~~ Horace Greeley was our first president, the man who said "Go West young man." Grow up with this country. We've had notables like Benjamin Franklin and others who ~~played~~ cards in the Typographical Union. *General*

(How far back does the local in Streator go?)

Well, we've been unionized--they had one local there that failed in the early days, but local #328, the one that I'm a member of has been in existence -- I'm not quite sure, it will be about 55 or 60 years.

(The ~~was~~ wasn't too much before you--)

No the union was in exist^{ence} and I worked under the supervision of Local #328 in Streator when I first went to work, don't you see. They take charge of their apprentices the minute you come into a print shop.

(Did you hold any positions in the local?)

Oh, yes, I was president of my local union, and ~~XX~~ thoroughly enjoyed that experience.

(For how long were you president?)

Well, I acted as president a number of years. The scale was very low. The printers were paid \$12 a week at that time. The foreman was paid \$15 a week and gradually of course we finally got the wage scale up to \$42 a week at the time that I --in 1930 when I became president of the State Federation of Labor, but prior to that time, I participated in all of the negotiations and we raised that wage level from \$12 to \$42 during the time that I was actively working at the trade. I'm still a member, and I pay my dues as do all other working members. Although I'm not called upon to do that, I do pay them.

(You were a working printer for a good many years, is that right?)

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I worked at my trade until I was 43. And I'd come down here and exercise my talents in the General Assembly for six months. Stay here for two or three days a week and then go home to my trade.

(And they would let you off--)

Yes, I'd be off on those days. The printers are free, they can select a substitute. If there's a substitute, ^{around} you don't even have to consult ~~the~~ authority in the composing room. If you walked into a print shop and you carried a card and I knew you were a competent printer, I could say well represent my job. Sit down here and go to work until I come back. And that's all there is to it. You sit down and go to work. There's no need to consult anybody except me. And you can stay there until I come back. I have to ~~work~~ work one day a year in order to hold my situation or to hold my position, don't you see.--Under the rules of the Typographical Union. But I can put on a substitute and he can serve in that capacity for me until such time as I come back. Now I can stay away for ten years, but I'd have to work one day a year in order to hold my position. But I surrendered my job when I became President of the State Federation.

(You had not held a position in the state Federation before that time.)

That's right. I was vice-president for a year.

(And before that?)

Just working under the direction of labor officials. I was very fond of Jack Walker and I thought no greater man ever lived and Victor Olander--he was my closest chum and associate for 27 consecutive years.

(When you were in legislature you didn't have any official position in the Federation at the ^{same} time, is that right?)

Yes, from 1930 to 1936 I ~~was~~ sat in that Assembly as the President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor.

(Oh, is that so?)

I did that until 1936. And I wanted to do that because there was always a sort of a feeling that a labor official couldn't carry on that type of work and still be a labor official but I wanted to demonstrate that that's possible. ~~XXXXXXXX~~ A person elected to public office, if he bankrolls himself, pays his own expenses, and he's obligated to no one, then he's free to serve whomever he pleases after he's elected to public office. I bankrolled my own campaign; every one of them.

(You mean you didn't get any support from labor?)

No I wouldn't accept a penny.

(Is that so?)

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We formed the idea of a political league--a league for political education--not exactly a new thing because in the county of LaSalle when I started to aspire for public office and antagonized those who have control over the affairs of men, I found it necessary to form a political league. We called it the LaSalle County Voters' Defense League. It was made up of representatives of about 70 unions in the county of LaSalle and we would meet each Sunday for seven Sundays before the election day, and I would address these people and we had about 75 or 80 people attend these meetings, and they would go back home and on election day they would act as precinct committeemen, don't you see. And they'd man every precinct in the industrial centers of the county and that was the way that I won. Two or three times the Republican party up there, they read me out of the party with their resolutions, their motions, or something of that kind, because they said that I wasn't a real Republican, which was true. I was running on the Republican ticket. I may have been a visionary, and an idealist, but I was practical enough to ride on the kind of vehicle that would get me to the place where I wanted to go. But if a politician will pay his own campaign expenses, then he's free.

(The first time you ran, how did you get the Republican nomination? Did you have opposition for it?)

Yes, serious opposition. The only time in my life that the fact that I was a Scandinavian was of any value to me, the Northeast section of the county was made up of Scandinavians. And I went up there and on the basis of the fact that I came from that element, and they were pretty clanish, they voted for me. And then I put up a tremendous campaign. Most of it was confined to visiting in the homes of people in the various sections, and I could pick out 25 or 30 homes that I would get into in a day, just talk to the people--"I'm a candidate for the office of State Representative. I need your help, and if you can help me conscientiously, I'll thoroughly appreciate it" you see. And that type of campaigning paid off. But I was busy doing that for seven or eight months, before the election date. When I was elected it surprised everybody, including my Republican associates, don't you see. I beat Ole Benson, who had been the sheriff of LaSalle county and who had been in the General Assembly for a long, long time.

(Oh, it was his seat that you were campaigning for?)

Yes, knocked him off. He was an enemy of labor.

(Did you have primary opposition after that?)

Every election for 20 years. I don't think there is a man in Illinois who has been through as many campaigns as I have. They cooked up campaigns every election, largely because--not because they disliked me personally,--but because they didn't like the labor program that I was advocating then. I would advocate the thing at home or in the meetings of the Chamber of Commerce or any place I happened to be. Churches, at men's meetings, Labor Day, at Fourth of July celebrations, it was just one constant agitation for this program of bills. They've been enacted into law.

(Who were the kinds of people who supported you? These 80 people for example you mentioned?)

No, they came from all of the local unions in the county of LaSalle. They formed my organization because I couldn't get support from the political organization, you see, and many merchants supported me. I belonged to the Lodge of Elks, and they often made use of my talents in their minstrel shows. I used to be their interlocutor and things of that kind; while they would say that I had the labor union viewpoint, and they felt that Soderstrom was a pretty decent fellow, and I had support other than labor support. I had a good deal of farm support--at times--at other times I didn't have. There were times though when they felt unions were doing the right thing and they backed us.

(Did you campaign in the farm areas?)

Yes, whenever they invited me out there, I was there. And then they got into an open shop fight there in Streator, back in 1923. The whole town developed into a sort of a Civil War. They tied up every plant in that community. They wouldn't sign an agreement with any labor union in that community, don't you see, and over 700 people had to move out of Streator. Since then the town has been reorganized again and it's still air-tight and bullet-proof so far as unions are concerned.

(Who was responsible for that drive?)

Well, the employers, they finally made up their minds following the First World War in 1923; they formed what they called the American Plan. It's a good deal similar to the agitation that we have today. And one of the spots that was thoroughly unionized where they were going to destroy the unions if they could, was Streator. That fight lasted over 18 months.

(Were they the local employers, or did the absentee owners--?)

Well, the absentee employers, the Manufacturers' Association, and everybody else concentrated on the city of Streator to destroy the unions. They ran into the darnedest opposition you ever saw. Labor can fight when they have good leaders.

(There were a good many strikes at this time?)

Every plant in town was struck--tied up.

(Is that so?)

Some of them never reopened. It took the town about 15 years to get over that fight. The manufacturers inveigled the merchants to join with them. They were going to refuse to enter into contractual relationships with unions in the future. They were going to establish what they called the American Plan, and that meant to wipe out the union shop and every labor contract in the community. Our problem was then twice the size of what it is now, because we hadn't had that experience in 1923, and today

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it's thoroughly unionized again. There isn't a single person who works for a living in Streator but what he belongs to a union.

(When did you reach that point again? Was it during the 30's?)

Well, yes, right after the--we began to reach it right after the election of Roosevelt. The unions were legalized following that Wagner Act, so we had become legal and constitutional, don't you see. We were all right.

(Why didn't the town go Democratic around that time?)

Well, I don't know. The town could go Democratic. Sometimes we have had Democratic mayors in the town. A Dr. Lester who came back after the First World War was over and ran on the Democratic ticket, and he was elected. Then they changed to the Commission form of government so I'm not so sure but what the present mayor, his name is Eutsy, but what he is a Democrat. But they have a Commission form of government, where you don't have parties. You're not supposed to have party activities in there.

(But as far as the General Assembly is concerned that Senatorial district has always been true Republican with one Democrat?)

Yes. It could change, of course. I've seen times in LaSalle County when if you had a primary vote in the--you'd have the election vote in the primary, where people would all turn out and you'd have everybody in the county voting in the primary. But the times that they have done that, they have all voted in the Republican primary, because some of the candidates that were running for office on the Republican ticket were supposed to have some connection with the Klu Klux Klan, and it excited the population to such an extent that we had an election vote in the primary because everybody ~~wanted~~ to see that these people that had Klan connections would be defeated, and they were. I've seen the county go Democratic. One time James Hamilton Lewis carried the county by 11,000 votes against Ruth Hannah McCord. But that's a rare occasion when things like that occur, but the people are intelligent people and they can vote any ticket that they want to vote, but the county politics have always been more or less Republican and they feel that their friends are running for office on that ticket so they vote for their friends.

*walked
in there*

(Were you ever involved in local community politics--)

No. I confined all my activities to the State _____. Of course, then sometimes you'd have a friend running for local office that you liked very well, I helped several--I talked for them, don't you see? If they were friendly, and I felt they were friendly to labor.

(How did your wife feel about all this?)

Well, she was a grand person and mostly interested in her home and her family and she rather encouraged me in most of the things that I did. ~~Maybe~~ Maybe my severest critic ~~was~~ on me was Mrs. Soderstrom during her lifetime. She was very proud and very glad to have me engaged

in this type of activity. She was of Scotch extraction and born in Scotland, by the way.

(Were you married in Streator?)

Yes. I was married in 1912 on December 2. She passed away seven years ago.

(And you lived in Streator all that time?)

Yes. They tried to move me out of there a number of times, but I never wanted to move. The facts in the case are that the city of Streator gave me my first chance to exercise my talents, my original friends were there, don't you see, and are still there, many of them, and my interests were there, my home was there, I lived there, and ~~and~~ ^{have} despite the fact that my associates in the State Federation suggested a number of times that I move to Springfield, I've always refused to do that. I live in Streator. My children were born there. My people, many of them, were buried there, and I intend to live there until I pass on.

One of the things that influenced my early activities was the contact that I was fortunate to have with Samuel Gompers. Sam told me at one time when we ~~WERE~~ needed money to help the people that were locked out in 1921 to 1923 in the city of Streator, that he felt that we were going to make progress. Gompers said that we would make progress day by day and step by step, and he turned to me and looked at me rather sharply, and he said, "Young man, you know you can climb the highest mountain if you've got the patience to do it one step at a time." That philosophy had a lot to do with the--guiding the activities that I've been engaged in. I also--in line with what he suggested that young labor leaders ought to do--I made a study of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence because Samuel Gompers believed that labor officials ought to be thoroughly familiar with these documents and if they allow ^{ed} these documents to guide them, that they wouldn't go far wrong in the labor field.

Interview with Reuben Soderstrom by Milton Derber, 6-4-58.

(D)

(S) I was⁹ vice president of the Illinois State Federation of Labor and a member of the Executive Board. The office of President was made vacant by the resignation of John H. Walker who had served successfully in that capacity for 17 years. This happened in the year of 1930. President Walker resigned during the month of June. Vice Presidents Robert Higby and Tom Kelly jointly filled the presidential office until the annual convention was held in September of 1930. As a member of the Illinois House of Representatives I had been very active as the legislative spokesman for labor on the floor of the House since 1918, a period of 12 years. Vice Presidents Kelly and Higby were not familiar with legislative work and the entire official family wanted someone active in that field to head the Federation. I was in legislative activity and seemed to be the logical choice. The Executive Board unanimously elected me President at the close of the Springfield, Illinois, 1930 convention. Up to the present time, a period of 28 years, I have never had any opponent or opposition for re-election.

(D) Now, in the early days of your presidency as I understand it the Federation faced some rather difficult problems. First of all there was the matter of the Depression, and then you had in the State of Illinois the controversy among the Mine Workers. What steps did you take to deal with these problems?

(S) I encouraged the President of the United States to provide proper care for aged people and those who were unemployed. Under the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt the United States Congress enacted the Social Security Act which provides pensions for the aged and unemployment insurance benefits for those who are unemployed and cannot find work. Under the pressure of the labor movement, particularly the Illinois State Federation of Labor, old age assistance legislation and the present Workmen's Unemployment Insurance Act were passed. This is and was federal-state cooperative legislation and required the setting up of 63 agencies throughout the industrial centers where wage earners could register when unemployed and apply for unemployment benefit checks. I helped State Director of Labor Martin P. Durken plan these agencies. Durken afterwards, years later, became Secretary of Labor on the Cabinet of President Eisenhower.

(D) At this time did the Federation take any special action or pass any special resolutions with regard to the unemployment problem?

(S) A large number of resolutions were passed by the annual conventions of the Illinois State Federation of Labor directing attention to the destitution of unemployed people and we, the official family of the State Federation of Labor, worked constantly with all the groups that were interested in securing relief of some kind for those who were not able to find employment.

(D) What happened to the membership of the Federation at this time?

(S) The membership of the Federation of Labor dwindled until we had less than 200,000 members. But since that time, of course, it has been built up to its present membership.

University Archives
Milton Derber Papers
Record Series 22/2/22, Box 12, Folder Soderstrom, R. G. 1958-67

(D) What was the membership in---

(S) I'm coming to that.

(D) Oh, you have that later. What about this matter of the Mine Worker's controversy which was one of the reasons as we understand it for the fact that John Walker terminated his presidency of the Federation?

(S) I concentrated on legislative work, and I addressed endless meetings in order to relieve the, we're getting off--will you follow that thing there?

(D) Would you say that you functioned as president any differently than your predecessors? If so, in what ways?

(S) I concentrated on legislative work; addressed endless meetings; encouraged the membership to personally contact their lawmakers on needed legislation; intensified the work in the Illinois General Assembly by calling upon religious leaders, social welfare leaders and educational leaders to publicly support labor bills.

(D) You had a very intimate relationship with Victor Olander. How did you divide your functions, and what system of cooperation did you work out?

(S) Victor A. Olander was a great man. He possessed a reasoning mind which was constantly reasoning. He could analyze any situation accurately and evaluate the opposition to labor's progress in language that needed no translation. His memory was matchless and his judgment of proportions penetrating and entrancingly correct. Victor Olander was my constant companion for 27 years, and master-minded the labor strategy in court cases and in advancing highly controversial labor bills, both on the state and national level. He was a natural teacher and a dedicated leader of labor of the Samuel Gompers variety. He and I worked together and we always helped each other.

(D) As President what did you do to increase the membership of the Federation?

(S) As President of the State Federation I felt that my first duty was to build up and strengthen the Organization. A tremendous amount of time was devoted to this activity. It entailed visiting local unions, meeting labor officials on all levels--national, state, and municipal--pointing out that through an effective state federation of labor in Illinois we could work together more unitedly and in closer unity than ever before. As a result of this effort the Federation grew from less than 200,000 members in 1930 to over 800,000 members in 1958.

(D) During the Depression a local Unemployment Councils were formed to negotiate with various agencies like the CWA and the PWA. What position did you take with respect to these councils and the Illinois Workers Alliance?

(S) Many disturbing things developed during an economic depression. Human misery and human suffering is usually the basis for extreme red flagism. Poverty and suffering causes Communism. To relieve destitution during the Depression, labor supported WPA and PWA projects. They were public construction projects and gave employment to tens of thousands of idle wage earners. The State Federation

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of Labor had no official connection, however, with the Illinois Workers Alliance.

(D) Did you attempt to settle any jurisdictional disputes among affiliates of the Federation in your capacity as President?

(S) At the request of AFL President William Green, I acted as an arbitrator in a jurisdictional dispute between the Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen's National Union and the Retail Clerk's International Association. I also helped to straighten out a serious labor supply situation in Los Angeles, California, central body. Two other controversial matters were investigated and resolved at least partially through my efforts in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and in St. Louis Missouri. I was a member and for ten years ^{was} secretary of the AFL Committee on Resolutions and worked very close to President Green, Matthew ~~Wolk~~ ^{Woll} and other AFL officers.

(D) What role did you play during the original split between the AFL and CIO in the 1930's?

(S) I was in attendance at the AFL Atlantic City convention in 1935 and saw the fist fight and exchange of blows between John L. Lewis and William Hutchinson. This incident sparked the formation of the CIO. Charles P. Howard, president of the International Typographical Union, became the first Secretary of the CIO. John L. Lewis, of course, became President. The Typographical Union, of which I am a member, through President Howard contributed much to getting the CIO off to a good start. As Secretary of the Committee on Resolutions I made the motion ~~that~~ at the New York AFL-CIO merger convention two years ago which united these two great national organizations into one united federation on the national level.

(D) Did you ever get involved in campaigns to organize workers, either of federal labor unions or in locals of international unions?

(S) Organizational matters are conducted by our parent body, the AFL-CIO and by the international union. All organizers both paid and voluntary are commissioned by the AFL-CIO. However, when invited to participate in an organizing campaign, I always respond. I have been helpful to the United MineWorkers in this activity, and also the Cement Workers and the Glass Workers, all national and international unions. As President of the Streater Trades and Labor Council 45 years ago I organized the ^{of} Teamsters local union.

(D) Were you ever called down by any unions to help them meet their internal problems?

(S) As an officer of the AFL Convention Committee on Resolutions I participated in the solution of all jurisdictional problems which came to the attention of our Committee during the past 20 years. That is to say I acted on these matters until two years ago when my services on this committee ended to make a place for Brother Dave McDonald, President of the International Union of Steelworkers, who is now its Secretary.

(D) Have you taken any part in collective bargaining since becoming President of the Federation?

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(S) I helped to bring about collective bargaining between the U of I authorities and the academic employees at that great educational institution. I have directed the work and helped to unionize state and municipal employees and caused to be introduced in the General Assembly legislation designed to allow public employees to enter into a contractual relationship with governmental bodies including school boards.

(D) I suppose your main function in the Federation has been your work with the legislature in Springfield. What would you say have been your major accomplishments in this respect?

(S) Remedial and beneficial labor legislation is the aim, purpose, and objective of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. Our major accomplishment was the enactment of the Injunction Limitation Bill which meant an extension of freedom, liberty, and equality in the economic field. It gave wage earners the right to exercise the Constitutional guarantees of free press, free speech and peaceful assembly when they were out on strike just the same as when there was no strike. The Bill which outlawed the yellow-dog contracts can also be regarded as a major accomplishment in the field of human freedom and human right. The same is true of blind pensions and mother pensions legislation. The Workmen's Compensation and Occupational Diseases Act, the Woman's Eight-Hour Day Bill, the One Day of Rest in Seven Bill, a Permissive Free Text-Book Law, the entire Social Security program of old age assistance, old age pensions, and unemployment insurance benefits, and dozens of other labor bills. All of these bills were prepared, presented and supported by the President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. There is no exception.

(D) You have dealt with a considerable number of different governors. Have you noticed any differences in your relations with them?

(S) Contrary to the current opinion, labor was never popular in legislative halls. At the beginning of our legislative activity, one could feel the psychology of opposition. Strange as it may seem the public press opposed every legislative proposal. They helped to raise the ugly cry of Socialism against each and every proposal, regardless of its need and merit. Things are better now, of course. No attempt is made to tar and feather labor leaders or to ride them out of town on a rail; but the forces that were antagonist to the rights of labor at the outset are still in that frame of mind. Out of the 200 or more bills helping working people and enacted during my time not one of them were ever supported by either management or the public press. They were passed over the opposition of labor's enemies. In answer to your question, I served in the Illinois General Assembly under Frank O. ~~Low~~^{Low}, Len Small, Lewis Emerson, and Henry Horner. Since leaving the House of Representatives in 1938, I have worked with Governors Green, Stevenson, and Stratton. All of these governors when they finally understood the problems confronting working people honestly tried to help them, do something worthwhile for them. They signed the labor legislation which I have referred to in this interview.

(D) Apart from legislative matters, what proportion of your time is devoted to public relations and public service activities?

(S) By virtue of the fact that I am president of the State Federation of Labor, I have been called upon to serve on a vast number of state commissions and public committees. This I have been able to do successfully because commission and committee work of this character does not conflict with my duties as a labor official. In fact most of it is related to the welfare of working people and our citizenship generally. I have felt honored and proud to serve because activity often brings out the need for legislation. I am of course a true believer in legislation designed to correct the evils in industry.

(D) I wonder, Reub, if you could indicate the names of some of the public bodies that you have served on as a representative of the Federation of Labor?

(S) I served on a number of planning commissions and public committees of that character and also served on the State Council of Defense under Governor Green during the Cold War period. This commission finally was evolved into what is known as the State War Council. And a vast number of other public agencies.

(D) Going back to a question that I asked earlier, I wonder if you could recall just what took place in the Federation at the time that John Walker was involved in problems with the Mineworkers Union?

(S) The Mineworkers had developed a very strict procedure with respect to governing their various jurisdictions and somehow they had given to the officers of the United Mineworkers tremendous power. When anything happened to be wrong or disagreeable in some section they followed the practice of setting up a jurisdictional government. This happened in the State of Illinois, and some of the miners rebelled against that procedure. Facts in the case are that labor unions ought to be flexible; the United Mineworkers ought to be flexible enough to permit disagreements without a separation. In fact they ought to be flexible enough so that you could even have an explosion without a separation. But a setup was arranged in the State of Illinois that was not satisfactory to all of the miners and the group that John H. Walker was identified with sort of formed a new miner's union, at least it was a dual organization of miners, with the result that John H. Walker felt that he ought to resign and stay with his group. It was no fault of his at all. It was just one of those things that sometimes occur in labor organizations, and he remained with his crowd; that shifting of members into some splinter groups oftentimes occurs, and has often occurred in the miner's union. And they have no way of dealing with it except to expel them when it occurs, and he stayed with the expelled crowd and was compelled to resign from the State presidency.

(D) Did his members leave the Federation then, the State Federation?

(S) Yes, a large group of the United Mineworkers followed John H. Walker and left the State Federation of Labor.

(D) So that there was considerable dropping off in members at that time because of that?

(S) Yes, at that time the mining industry was a--I sometimes refer to it as a sick industry, sort of a vanishing industry. It is still however, a very important industry, but gradually fading out in the State of Illinois, and the fact that there was so much unemployment, and idle miners created a great deal

of uneasiness, and disturbance and dissatisfaction with the result that we had these splinter factions in the miners union here in the State of Illinois during that period. Walker was identified with one of them. His loyalty to the mineworkers and his friends in the mineworkers took him out of the State Federation of Labor.

(D) Did the Progressive Miners join the State Federation at any time?

(S) Yes, the temperament of John L. Lewis was such at times that he was willing to take on a scrap with almost anybody; he's willing to fight the employer or anybody else, and even to fight his associates in the labor world. The result was that John Lewis walked out of the Federation at the San Francisco convention. When he left the convention the Progressive Mineworkers came back into the AFL.

(D) And then those people came into the State Federation of Labor.

(S) John L. Lewis had been quarrelling with the officers of the American Federation of Labor. He was then a member of the executive council. John L. Lewis was opposed to the Taft-Hartley law, and had good reasons for it. He wanted his associates on the Executive Council to disregard the law on the theory that if all the unions disregarded the law which happens to be a permissive law, then the law would naturally become obsolete and unworkable. He got to quarreling with the members of the Executive Council over that issue. And because they wouldn't follow his program and his way of meeting the situation he walked out of the convention of the AFL at San Francisco.

(D) What kind of man was John Walker? Did you know him pretty well?

(S) John H. Walker was a lovable character. He was intensely human and was probably one of the best organizers that the United Mine Workers had at one time. Sort of an evangelist when it comes to carrying forward the story of labor and the true history and story of labor by the way has really never been written; and certainly couldn't be written without referring to the contribution that was made by the United Mine Workers and people like John H. Walker. During the time that he served the Federation of Labor, he was interested in building up the Federation but he also retained his loyalty to the United Mine Workers. And he felt that when the time came to make a choice between the United Mine Workers and the Illinois State Federation of Labor that all of the experience that he had had and all the training that he had gained during his lifetime and everything that had come to him that was good, he stated, had come from the United Mine Workers. He was going back to them, and he didn't care much what happened to John H. Walker personally.

(D) Did he spend as much time on legislative matters as you did?

(S) No, the Federation was smaller then. He had a great deal of imagination. He worked out a program of 47 bills and these bills have been passed over this period of 40 years in some form. Not in the form that they were worked out by John H. Walker, but the notion, or the substance of the bill, the aims and purposes of these 47 bills have been enacted into law in some form during these 40 years. John H. Walker had a lot of imagination. The Federation is certainly indebted to him for this program of legislation. He was a pioneer in the field of legislation as well as in the field of unionism.

(D) Well, now, when you say these 47 bills, he sat down at one time and actually set out these 47 bills that he thought ought to be gotten?

(S) When I first met John H. Walker, he came to the city of Streator and wanted me to become interested in legislative work and he told me that he had been the President of the United Mine Workers of Illinois for 6 years, and during that period of time he had worked out this program of 47 bills, and he felt that with the fine arguments that we have that that legislation could be enacted if they had someone on the floor of the house that could present these controversial bills without antagonizing people and without making people mad. And he turned that whole list of bills over to me after I was elected to the House of Representatives.

(D) I wonder if you could say a little more about Victor Olander who was one of the great figures in ~~the~~ Illinois labor. How did Olander get into the Illinois State Federation picture, do you recall that story?

(S) Olander was a Seaman, and was an officer of the Seamen's Union. He was active in the Chicago Federation of Labor and in the labor movement generally. He took a particular interest in the Illinois State Federation of Labor. ~~He~~ He served in the capacity of Secretary-Treasurer some 35 years. Defeated a man by the name of Arthur from the City of Peoria and became the Secretary-Treasurer of the Illinois State Federation of Labor.

(D) What are the different jobs that the Secretary does compared to the President of the Federation, handles?

(S) Of course all of the records and mailing out of notices for per capita tax and general office duties are carried on by the Secretary of the State Federation of Labor. That is the place where we keep track of all the details that have to do with the activities of a great organization such as the Illinois State Federation of Labor. We also produce a weekly Newsletter, the items and articles, stories for the weekly Newsletter are prepared and arranged in the Chicago office under the supervision of the Secretary-Treasurer. The President of course has the responsibility and it is a heavy responsibility, of supervising all of these activities, and he spends one day a week in the City of Chicago in order to keep in close contact what happens to be transpiring in the Secretary-Treasurer's office. The Secretary-Treasurer and the President are co-editors of our weekly Newsletter which is the official publication of the Illinois State Federation of ~~the~~ Labor. Our Executive Board has also permitted the President to have his partner, the Secretary-Treasurer, join with him in legislative work. It really requires two people to watch the two houses when they are in session. So every legislative session the Secretary-treasurer and the President work together for legislative objectives.

(D) In Illinois we have this Agreed-Bill Process on legislation like Workmen's Compensation. What role do you play in that process?

(S) Well, it's a matter of strategy with respect to the procedure that we have evolved in the State of Illinois. At one time just the representatives of labor and the representatives of the employer would get together, and try to work out an agreed bill. After I became President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor I refused to meet with the employer on Workmen's Compensation matters while the legislature was in session, unless the legislature was represented in these conferences. Following that we worked out a procedure of having representatives of labor sort of get together and incorporate in what I term a

very stiff bill all of the things desired by the representatives of labor in the state of Illinois. This rather stiff bill is presented to the General Assembly. We know that it cannot be enacted but it's referred usually to the Committee of Judiciary and the employers they appear before that committee and the representative of labor appear before the committee and they charge of course that type of legislation can't be passed, that it would be too costly for industry to try to meet the demands provided for in such legislation; and they themselves usually are agreeable to have a committee from the judiciary committee appointed to take charge of the conferences between the representatives of labor and the representatives of the employer. As a matter of fact the Workmen's Compensation and Occupational Disease legislation is so complicated that it would take the entire time of the Judiciary Committee of both houses to consider all of the details of proposals that are involved in that type of legislation. So the Committee is very glad to appoint a subcommittee and they usually instruct the subcommittee to take a hold of the situation and have the representatives of labor and the representatives of the employers meet under their supervision. The procedure works out very well because when the representatives of labor and the employers start to clash on some given point the subcommittee from the Judiciary Committees of the House and Senate usually make a decision for us, and in that way we attain what is known as an Agreed Bill. There are some people that say that that is a wrong procedure, but it is really a proper legislative procedure. All of it takes place under the supervision of the Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committees of the House and Senate.

(D) I wonder Reub, if you could, perhaps to give us a picture of just what it means to be the President of a big Organization like the Federation of Labor, give something of a picture of what you would do during a typical week. What kinds of activity you would carry on. Could you for example take any period that was particularly representative and describe for us almost on a day-to-day basis the sort of things you did, so we can build up a picture of what it means to be the President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor.

(S) Sometimes I think it's somewhat similar to trying to operate a large machine of some kind. You have to know just what button to touch to get the best results. In the first place we have a vast number of pieces of correspondence that come into the President's office. Sometimes they'll run as high as 85 pieces of correspondence in the day. So I devote my mornings pretty much to taking care of the correspondence. No letter remains in my office more than one day if I can help it. So that these people who take time out to write to me have an opportunity to have a reply. Then we have a number of meetings that we have to take care of. The Executive Board meets rather frequently, and we have to be prepared to take care of many matters that come before the Board. The Executive Board has the power to act for the Federation, between conventions, and many matters are disposed of by the Executive Board at our meetings. Then too, there are a number of invitations. Next week we will have a testimonial dinner in honor of ~~Don~~ Chamberlain, the newspaper man, that will be held here in the City of Springfield. There will also be a testimonial dinner for Father John S. Brockmeyer and we're going to have two meetings next week with the representatives of the CIO; we have been called in to a meeting by the Executive Council, ^{then} William McPetridge and Dave McDonald of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO will take charge of these meetings, or conferences between the CIO and the representatives of the State Federation of Labor. These conferees are to meet two days next week in the Palmer House in Chicago, and so it goes. There isn't a single week but what they there are two or three invitations to dinners, and meetings, and things of that kind and I try to devote my week-ends to that sort of activity. The first three days of the week are put in pretty much at the Springfield office. Friday,

of course, I spend in the Chicago office.

(D) How often, for example, ^{will} do you see the governor during the year?

(S) Well, I presume at least once a month you meet him either at some social function, or he may invite me over there. The facts of the case are that the matter which is now pending before the lawmakers in this state, the relief of the unemployed and the possibility of a special session, I discussed with the governor of Illinois as long as four months ago, it was in January when he invited me over to talk this matter over. We have approximately a half a billion dollars that has been checked off by the federal government and credited to the State of Illinois for the unemployed people of this state, and the unemployment benefits are paid for entirely by the employer. The federal government collects that money from industry and credits it to the state of Illinois and the unemployed people receive it don't you see. The thing that the governor was concerned about was the unemployed people who had received their full 26 weeks of benefit and was thinking about how to take care of them. My suggestion to him at that time was that he had sufficient money to take care of them for 26 weeks and that the additional 13 weeks if that sort of thing can be enacted in a special session, should ~~also be taken~~ be taken from that half a billion dollars because the money is there. And that's cash relief, and that's what I believe in.

(D) Has he indicated any position on that yet?

(S) Well, he's still a little dubious about it because the State of Illinois is in fairly good shape. He may make a decision within the next two or three weeks. I've been hoping that he would because he will then try to extend the 26 weeks of benefit 13 weeks more which would make it 39 weeks. That's a gain of 50 per cent. You know, Governor Stratton by the way, I think I ought to mention him favorably because many people have had an idea that he hasn't been the type of governor that he should be. Yet, so far as labor is concerned, we have secured more out of him during the same period of time than we have any previous governor. For example, in the Occupational Diseases act we made that a mandatory act; prior to the last session of the General Assembly it was merely a permissive law, or voluntary sort of a law that the employers could use if they wanted to, or avoid the provisions of the Act if they so desired. Four years and a half ago we received an increase in the Workmen's Compensation Act and Occupational Diseases Act of 15.2 per cent, and two years ago we received an increase of 18.3 per cent, and in the last session of the General Assembly we received an increase of 15 per cent in the benefits of both laws, with the result that there is an increase of 50 per cent in the benefits of these two laws during the past four years and a half, which I state is the largest increase that we've ever secured from any governor during that period of time, four years and a half.

(D) What would you say were your main problems during the thirties? as President?

(S) Well, I'd say that unemployment caused the greatest trouble that we were confronted with. In fact, I sincerely believe out of forty years of active work in the labor world that unemployment causes all of the economic trouble that we have. If we ~~could~~ ^{could} keep our people employed, everything ~~is~~ else seems to work out some way, in a fairly satisfactory way. But when folks are unemployed and home conditions become bad, and ~~people~~ ^{people} in a terrible state of mind; there's no income there; then things are really bad. And that's the thing that has caused the only real trouble that I've been confronted with during my entire forty years.

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If that problem of unemployment can be solved. And by the way I tried one time to find out just how to solve it. A great President of the University of Illinois by name of James came to the city of Springfield to plead for legislation for appropriations for his university and while he was talking to the appropriations committee he mentioned something about the economic situation. I thought I'd ask him a few questions, so I said, "President James, why is it, with all of these institutions of learning and all of these trained minds that we have been unable to work out some plan where things could run smooth, ~~that~~ smoother than they're running. Why is it that we have to have these periods of depression, and periods of prosperity. Why can't we have some plan worked out by these trained minds that would keep things running smooth all the time?" Well, he said, one man could do it. Of course in our country, we don't want that form of government. That was his answer, we don't want that type of government. in these United States, and so we have all these various difficulties to overcome. But we do overcome them in the American way, which means consultation and it means conferences, and it means honest effort to meet the problems as they arise and you do it not by issuing directives or by setting up a dictator, you do it by agreement between the various groups that constitute the citizenship of this great country and it is a blessed land.

(D) Is there much that the State Federation can do in this area do you think? The area of dealing with unemployment.

(S) Well, we serve one great purpose in letting folks know quickly what the situation is. In the State Federation of Labor we do not have a scientific way of analyzing the economic situation, but we know what the conditions are in each industry because in the State Federation of Labor, the unions pay only upon the members that are working. And we could count quickly when things became bad in the motion picture industry because they began to pay on less members with respect to their motion picture operators than their stage hands don't you see. We can tell when the industry goes bad because they only pay on the members that are working. And in that way we find out ~~that~~ quickly what the situation is. It's not a scientific way of analyzing the situation but it's about as accurate as the scientific methods that are used by the great economists in this country. I can tell by looking at the receipts, the per capita taxes paid what the conditions are in any craft that is affiliated with the Illinois State Federation of Labor. We serve that purpose of keeping the public agencies informed and of course when they are alerted we expect them to do something about meeting the situation and usually they do if we press our claims hard enough.

(D) What does an affiliated union benefit, out of the Federation. Why should a local union pay dues to the Federation, what's the advantage would you say?

(S) Well, it's the only agency through which ^{they} we can work together for legislation. The legislative accomplishments of course speak for themselves. They benefit both the unorganized and the organized alike, and only costs 40 cents a year per member to belong to the Illinois State Federation of Labor. And for that 40 cents they receive ^{benefits} a thousand-fold. The State Federation of Labor when they increase the benefits of the Workmen's Compensation Act they placed millions of dollars in the pockets of working people that otherwise would not have reached their pockets. During the past year there were 52,000 accidents in the state of Illinois that were compensated under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Many of them were fatalities. And we of course are trying to secure legislation and have secured some to prevent accidents and save lives, but the thing that I referred to just a few minutes ago,

the increase in the Workmen's Compensation Act of over 50 per cent will benefit these 52,000 people that met with accidental injuries last year.

(D) You would regard Workmen's Compensation as one of the major legislative achievements of the Federation. What about some other--?

(S) It all depends upon the--the--if you want to get into the field of human freedom. Then of course the restricting of the courts against the oppressive injunction methods that they ~~have~~ applied in the past would be the outstanding achievement. But with respect to actually putting money in the pockets of working people, then the unemployment insurance legislation, the Workmen's Compensation legislation, and the Occupational Disease legislation leads because it does as I stated before, put millions of dollars annually in the pockets of ~~these~~ people that never reached their pockets prior to the enactment of this legislation.

(D) Now on the human freedom side, were there any laws that you ^{put} pushed through the legislation which had a significant impact?

(S) Yes. The Injunction Limitation Bill. You see prior to the enactment of that bill they issued these restraining orders promiscuously. They issued eight of them one time against me.

(D) When was this?

(S) When I was a member of the House of Representatives, they made that tremendous mistake to ~~make~~ include me as one of the principals in this injunction procedure. It was during the 1921 Open Shop fight in the city of Streator, which was similar to what they're trying to carry on now, only they ~~have~~ changed the name to right to work, at that time they called it the American ~~Bill~~. They always secure ~~some~~ fancy misleading name. The objective of course is to weaken the organizations and to destroy them. I recall that I stood on the floor of the House waving these eight injunctions and explained to my colleagues over ~~that~~ that apparently I'm not a full citizen. I'm permitted to vote, I'm permitted to represent my district, but I'm denied the right to walk down certain streets and to talk about a strike situation in my ~~own~~ home town. And they also stated in the injunctions that I'm denied the privilege of coercing people, and I never coerced anybody, or intimidated anybody or slugged anybody. That was put in there merely to destroy my good name. All of that was done because I was a member of the Typographical union. And if I couldn't exercise my rights of free press and free speech and peaceful assembly, I wasn't a full citizen. And that type of argument passed the injunction limitations bill.

(D) Do you remember the date, the year?

(S) 1925. It was the most interesting ~~in~~ legislative procedure that ever happened I think, over there. The injunction limitation bill came up some time during the month of April, and it got some 74 votes, and I postponed consideration on the bill because ~~we~~ we needed 77 votes to pass the legislation at that time. And then I brought it up again some time during the month of May and it got 73 votes. I sat down and analyzed the two roll calls. And I found over two roll calls that 77 people had voted for the bill, but I couldn't get 77 people at one time. That meant that one group of people voted for the bill in April, ~~but~~ refused to vote for it in May. Another group of people voted for it in May, but had refused to vote for it in April, but they stayed under that 77, the constitutional majority. Well, we took the legislation then over into the Illinois Senate and Len Small was the governor of Illinois. I went down to the Governor's office, ~~the~~ and I was friendly with Governor Small, and I requested him to call

his group, or his, I think I used the word gang, in the Illinois Senate, and urged them to pass the Injunction Limitation Bill, see. The Senators over there are likely to pass it because they'll say it's been killed twice in the House and for that reason it can't pass. But Governor, here are the two roll calls, and on the two roll calls, I had 77 votes. I think if the Senate bill will come over with all of this information and the argument that I have for this type of legislation, I think that we could pass it. And he smiled at me, and he said all right. And lo and behold, the Illinois Senate passed the Injunction Limitations Bill.

tremendous And it came over to the house of Representatives as a Senate Bill, and after a ~~hand~~ *hand* fight on the floor of the House that lasted some two hours, the bill finally got 77 votes and the tenseness and the type of legislative fight that it was was so exciting that the members on both sides, both those who voted for the bill and those who voted against the bill, somehow ~~we~~ started to cheer. The House was a bedlam. The Speaker couldn't get order. He tried several times to gavel the thing into some semblance of decor but failed entirely and he had to adjourn the Illinois House of Representatives. I'd say it was the greatest labor victory in the ~~state~~ *state history of the state.*

(D) During the Depression years, what were you most concerned about in the way of legislation?

(S) Well, I was concerned about tax relief. I never liked commissaries, and the distribution of food, ~~can be a~~ *can be a* disturbing thing, it can arouse the animosity of people that are victimized by the Depression, and when people are unemployed, they do some thinking, and many of them feel that they're the victims of somebody's greed. They are easily excited. I wanted cash relief and I thought the unemployment insurance method was the most sensible method that could be worked out. I had trouble getting some of my own associates to join with me ~~in~~ *in* securing unemployment insurance. I paid Paul H. Douglas a visit at the University of Illinois, I should say the University of Chicago, and requested him to join with me in pleading before these committees for the advancement of unemployment insurance legislation and he came down to Springfield and Paul Douglas and myself stood up ~~for~~ before those committees and battled it through both the House and the Senate. He's entitled to a great deal of credit.

(D) Have you found since the thirties much of a change in the attitudes of the employer representatives that you've been dealing with, the manufacturing ~~and~~ *and* associations, ~~and~~ *and* so on?

(S) Well, they grudgingly and reluctantly make concessions. Somehow ~~we~~ *we* through ~~some~~ Federal legislation I have been able to definitely provide legislation *that makes* the labor movement and labor activities legal ~~and~~ *and* ~~Constitutional~~ *Constitutional*. As a result of that the employers ~~are~~ *are* compelled to respect the law. The Wagner Labor-Relations Act; and the Labor Relations Board ~~has~~ *has* under the Taft-Hartley Act makes it impossible for the employer to avoid entirely meeting with the representatives of labor. And as long as they will meet with us, if they'll meet often enough with us so they understand our problems and our difficulties, we can make some progress. Today too we have ways of finding out what profit these industries are making. I served for a long time on the Ford Foundation representing the American Federation of Labor. Some time ago they had accumulated over a half a million dollars that they didn't seem to know what to do with. And finally ~~decided~~ *decided* to turn that money over to the colleges and the hospitals. And there wasn't any strings attached except with respect to the colleges, there some of that money had to be used to increase the salaries of the teachers and the

instructors or the educators. in the colleges. I argued that the money really belonged to the people that had produced the tractors and the Ford cars, and that it was withheld wages and ought to be paid to them, that if they didn't want to do that they at least ought to cut the price of tractors and Ford cars to the consuming public. Well, they listened very politely to what I had to say and then went ahead with their program of giving this money to the hospitals and to the colleges. Which of course is a laudable thing to do but at the same time we have ways today of finding out with our own economists and our own people, sometimes professors from universities and other places help us, and I ought to state too that the Catholic faith, the Bishops in that faith are economists and they oftentimes will provide a plan or they will ~~plan~~ provide suggestions or they will give you the benefit of a vast information about economic matters. So the labor movement does have someone on their side, and we do get this information. And facts are stubborn things somehow. We've been making progress by ~~making~~ using the arguments that they afford to make things better for those who labor.

(D) Have you ever given consideration to setting up a research department for the State Federation?

(S) Well, we ^{have} our attorneys and the legal department of course. In fact we have some 6 or 7 attorneys that work with us that really give us the benefit of their use without charging the Federation anything, because they work with some of these laws, the Occupational Diseases Law, the Workmen's compensation Act the Unemployment Insurance Law and so on, so they are willing to give us the benefit of their experience, ^{so} we know where the act is weak, where we ought to patch it up, and all of that. We have no research division and we have no public relations division either. And if there ever was an institution that needed that sort of thing it's the movement of labor.

(D) Why don't you have it?

(S) Because the cost is prohibitive. We haven't been able-- We do have the benefit of the agencies of that type that are set up by the International unions and we do have the benefit of the services of expert people in that field on the part of the parent body, the AFL and the CIO, but state federations of labor rarely have that sort of thing. We've been thinking about securing the services of an educational director and have given some thought to that. But no personal relations agency and no practical economist has been secured. *To help us.*

(D) What about the war period, Reub, this was an ^{important} ~~unfortunate~~ period in the life of the country. How did it affect the Federation and its operations?

(S) Well, the only time that we disobeyed any of the suggestions with respect to the war effort was a request that was made that we discontinue our conventions. And

(D) Who made that request?

(S) Well, the request was made by some of the people ⁱⁿ ~~that~~ ^{of} ~~controlled~~ the war activities, but I didn't want to do that because we needed the continuity of conventions action every year, and we felt that if we didn't have the cars to get to the convention city that we'd somehow walk to the convention city, and if they didn't have the hotel accommodations to take care of us that we'd set up

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attention on Lake Peoria, or some other place and hold our conventions as we did in the past. The continuity of conventions has been held by the Illinois State Federation of Labor for 76 consecutive years, and the officers of the State Federation of Labor, conscientious officers, they need that convention. We need to get together once a year to talk with our membership, to take action on the things that are needed for the membership, and to review the things that have developed during the past year. It gives the officers of the State Federation of Labor an enthusiastic group of people in every industrial community familiar with the activities of the State Federation of Labor and that helps us to bring about and correct the evils that we are confronted with and in wartime some things develop that do harass people and disturb people and the Federation is called upon to straighten them out. We had splendid relations with all of the war agencies, in fact as I stated before, I served under Governor Green on the War Council, the Illinois War Council, and prior to that time on the Illinois Council of Defense, and it was that Council that initiated all of the blackouts and dimouts, brownouts, and when there was a shortage of work in some activity, we found some place where some people were unemployed, we made it our business to have the governmental contracts assigned to those communities and we kept our people busy. We worked along that if we had any idle person who was skilled and there was a job someplace for him in some war industry he was transferred to that. We carried on an endless program helpful to the government and helpful to the war itself. I might state in this connection that there was one agency known as the SeaBees made up entirely of union people. They were the folks that would fix up the air port so that these at these military bases, don't you see, do all of the rough work that was needed to set up barracks, and things of that type to accommodate the soldiers.

(D) You were saying about the war effort, were there any particular legislative or other issues that the Federation was particularly concerned with ^{during} those years?

(S) Yes, we supported every piece of legislation that was designed to advance the military possibilities of the United States. And contributed our time and our effort to popularizing that sort of thing. And after the war was over, Eybelwey, here in the state of Illinois, the proposal was made to provide a bonus for those who wore the uniform during the Korean conflict. And the first attempt made to pass that sort of bonus legislation failed, but in the last session of the General Assembly the Illinois labor movement in a response to the request that was made to it by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and others, we undertook to push that legislation and we were successful in having it enacted. It provides \$10 a month for those that wore the uniform during that conflict, and \$100 additional for those that actually saw combat in the service, and it provides a \$1000 for the dependents of those who made the supreme sacrifice. That piece of legislation was passed, I think, under the pressure of the labor movement more than any other agency, and as a recognition of that particular service rendered by the Federation of Labor the Disabled War Veterans under the Commander Warren Wright held a testimonial dinner in Chicago some five or six months ago gave me a citation because of the service rendered to those who wore ^{the} uniform during the Korean conflict.

(D) Reub, I suppose a majority of your members are in the Chicago area?

(S) No. No, that's a surprising thing, I'd say that probably 55 per cent of them are in the Chicago area, 45 per cent downstate. Again we judge that by the revenue that comes in. I have the Chicago ~~the~~ office check up at one time

and then the surprising thing was that the Chicago trade unionists, they only contributed about \$750 a year more than the downstate trade unionists, so that's about the way that it runs. They do have more trade union people in Cook County than they do in the other 101 counties, and it's about on that basis.

(D) You mean not all of those unions belong to the Federation.

(S) No, we have 3300 units, or unions, central bodies, district councils, *and* local unions of the AFL variety in the State of Illinois, and we have about 2200 of them affiliated with the State Federation of Labor. We do have a membership of about 800,000 people.

(D) Why don't the others belong?

(S) Well, I'm mystified myself at times, they-- I hate to use the word they chisel off the State Federation of Labor. Newspapers announced yesterday that the Teamsters who are not now part of the State Federation of Labor have a membership of 140,000 people. In fact brother Ray Shipling up there expressed surprise that the Teamsters had increased their membership ~~8,000~~ 8,000 people in Illinois, when some of the unions were losing members and other unions were losing members, but he said he had a total now of 144,000. Well, even when they were members of the State Federation of Labor, they never paid dues on more than 50,000 people.

pay only partially on the membership that they have. On the electrical Workers Union the city of Chicago, that its members are engaged in the work of producing parts for radios. This organization has 30,000 members. They pay on only a thousand members in the State Federation of Labor. About 93 per cent of the organizations however pay on their full memberships. Those who are working. But there are about 7 per cent of them that do not.

(D) You of course have no power, you don't really make any check, as to--

(S) No, they specify the number of members that are working, and then they pay on that number. It's entirely up to them. I'd say 93 per cent of them make an honest ~~statement~~ *payment* to the Federation.

(D) Are the central bodies under the jurisdiction of the State Federation or are they subject to control from the national...?

(S) All central bodies including the State Federation of Labor are chartered by the parent body, the AFL-CIO. So we have no real ~~hold~~ *control* over them, although they are affiliated with us and are a part of the State Federation of Labor. We have 84 of them, regular central bodies, we have about 50 more Building Trades Councils ~~that~~ and Allied Printing Trades Councils, State Conference organizations. They're all centralized *bodies*.

(D) Do you find that the unions from the Chicago area have different interests in the Federation than the downstate?

(S) Well, it varies some. In some ways we find that there is conflict and that's true too, of the legislative field. Sometimes ~~they~~ a proposal that fits into ~~the~~ a certain section of the state is not acceptable to another section of the state, and oftentimes the proposals ^{that} are presented to the State Federation of Labor are not really acceptable to other sections ~~in~~ of the state than the one that it came from, or that the representative who introduced the resolution came from. And the result is that those kind of resolutions where there is conflict

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are usually referred to the Executive Board to try to work out some sort of a solution. And we usually find one.

(D) Can you give me an example of that, ^{as an illustration?} ~~be a little pertinent?~~ What sort of thing you have in mind, where there's a different point of view.

(S) Well, the, I think the matter of extending terms of the officers at one time was looked upon as a controversial measure. It became necessary in order to remove the elections from the election year of the members of the General Assembly, to change the number of years or the term of office of the officers of the State Federation of Labor. That matter was referred to the Executive Board. Also the method of electing officers in our convention, resolutions that have to do with that--we elect by referendum vote in Illinois every member of the Illinois State Federation of Labor is ~~assigned~~ entitled to a ballot and has an opportunity to vote for the officers that he so desires. Sometimes those who are opposed to the referendum ballot will bring in a resolution proposing to use the convention method of electing officers. Those matters are usually referred to the Executive Board.

(D) Reub, as you think back over the years that you have been President of the Federation, who would you say were among the outstanding personalities in the labor movement? Who are the men whom you feel have made the major contributions since, say, 1930, 1931?

(S) Well, if you go back to 1924 the year that Samuel Gompers died, he ought to be included, he comes within the period of time that I have ~~served~~ ^{served} the labor movement.

(D) The State of Illinois, within the operations of the Federation.

(S) Well, of course, John H. Walker and Edwin R. Wright.

(D) What about Wright?

(S) Wright was a ~~Printer~~ Printer by trade and served the Federation as President for eight years prior to John H. Walker's time. Victor Olander who outshines most of us, he was the greatest amongst us when he was alive, and active. Matthew Woll who became a great national figure and who really directed the affairs, the controversial things within the AFL conventions from the time that Samuel Gompers died in 1924 until the death of Matthew Woll two years ago.

(D) Was Woll an Illinois man?

(S) Oh, yes, he ~~was~~ belonged to the Photogravers Union and he ^{was} an Illinois product.

(D) Did he take any part in State Federation affairs?

(S) In the early days he was one of the most active members of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. John Fitzpatrick, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor and Ed Noeckels ~~were~~ ^{were} very outstanding delegates and very prominent in labor activities during the earlier days. Also a very remarkable personality by the name of Oscar Nelson. He was the vice president of the Chicago Federation of Labor and who was the leader in the City Council of Chicago under the regimes of William Hales Thomson; and then of course we had people like Agnes Nestor, the wonderful lady who devoted her time to promoting the welfare of women workers in

Illinois, and who had much to do with the enactment of the Woman's Eight-Hour Law. Mrs. Allen who was her associate, constant associate, and Miss White of Bloomington, too, was identified with that crowd. Agnes Johnson O'Connor of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, ^{was a} very prominent lady member; and Lillian Herstein was really outstanding. She was a teacher in the Chicago schools, and devoted all of her spare time, a sort of a dedicated person to the advancement of labor's great cause. Then too, we have had a vast number of people who come from downstate in Illinois. There was ~~Ferd B...~~ ^{of East St. Louis,} ~~our~~ ^{our} director of labor. Martin P. Durken, prior to his time, who became our director of labor. And Charles McGowen, by the way, who was the President of the Boilermakers International Union for many years, who came from the city of Rock Island. And Petrillo, the leader of the Musicians comes from the state of Illinois, and also William McFedridge who is also a member of the Executive Council of the AFL.

(D) Did they take a part in the State Federation of Labor?

(S) Right. Also Bob Byron, who today is the President of the E Sheet Metal Workers International Union, lived here in the city of Springfield and is their international president. Illinois has made a great contribution to the movement of labor throughout this country. In the State Federation of Labor we still have a vast number of people that are very active, folks like ~~Wick de Petro~~, who was a member of the Illinois Industrial Commission and who is the Business Agent for the Chicago Typographical Union, of the 16th. We have Tom Murray who today is a member of the School Board of the City of Chicago and a Business Agent for the Electrical Workers Union. We have ~~Joe Keena~~ who really led the fight for the election of Truman. I don't believe that Harry Truman could have won if it hadn't been for the work of Joe Keena who at one time served as ^{the} Secretary Treasurer of the Chicago Federation of Labor, and who is now an officer of the International Union of Electrical Workers. There is a vast number ~~of~~ who would be tickled ^{add} pink if they could ever hear it. They are just ordinary business agents, but they've made a real contribution. We have about 500 of them in the city of Chicago.

(D) ~~What was there~~ ^{quite} constantly intrigued by the role that Victor Olander played in the Federation. What was there about Olander that made him such an outstanding person?

(S) I'll tell you an incident that will describe the man. He had a photogenic(?) mind, I mean, he was a human blotter. It didn't matter ~~to him~~ ^{damn} if you had a conference, say 20 years ago, that you sat into, that I sat into, and somehow the conference would be referred to in a conversation of today, he could tell you every single word that was spoken, and the things that you said, and the things that he said, and what the result of that conference was. He had a matchless memory. One time right after the Wagner/^{ACT} had been enacted into law the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the representatives of the ~~Manufacturers~~ ^{Assoc} Association wanted to bring about some modifications to that act. There were a few things ~~*~~ in that Act that labor was opposed to also, and so the Manufacturers they felt that they wanted to have a conference with labor leaders and make use of them in eliminating some of these objectionable things. So a conference was called in the city of ~~Rock Island~~ ^{Pelee Island}, and I, they came to me, they wanted to know if I would come to the conference, and I told them I would. And I said I'd like to have my attorney with me. So they said they had no objection to that, so I talked it over with our attorney, and he said, well, Olander knows more about this legislation than I do. Have Olander come in. Well, I said, Olander's sick. Well, he says, my stars, I'll take him sick as against any combination of men that will be in that conference. Well, I said I'll see if I can't get Olander to come in. Well, the conference was underway and Olander was in attendance and they began to talk about this labor relations act. Olander outlined the situation, stated that it was based on the Railway Labor Act, and the objective was to

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minimize strikes, don't you see. And of course it had many good points. He talked to them about the possibility of having things run smoother in industry because of this type of ~~king~~ legislation in that delightful Olander-esque way of talking. He seemed to have them hypnotized. And finally he said, of course the day is coming when we'll want a small Wagner Act in the State of Illinois and when that time comes, of course we'd like to discuss the features of that act with the representatives of the employers. Until such time however, we in Illinois have very little to do with federal legislation, that's in the hands of the AFL and their officers. But until such time, there isn't much that we can do about it. We'll be delighted and happy to sit in with you folks ~~to~~ work out the proper kind of a little Wagner Act in the state of Illinois. ~~Olander~~ Olander had a way of almost hypnotizing people, and I could see them nodding their heads and agreeing with him, because he was reasoning, constantly reasoning. And his type of reasoning was so engaging that he had the floor about all the time that we were in conference. And so the meeting finally broke up and I thought I'd be polite to the people that represented the Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturers Association and I walked with them down ~~to the~~ toward to the door of the hotel to say good-bye. When I got down there the leader of their crowd, he began to laugh. He ~~is~~ said, well, this is great. We came down here hoping to make ~~your~~ use of the representatives of labor to get rid of a portion of the Wagner Labor Relations Act on the national level, and he says, I'm damned if we don't sit here and agree to extend the darn thing into the state of Illinois! (laughs) under the charm of the reasoning of this man Olander. It gives you a picture of the peculiar qualities that the man possessed. Gifted; honest, ~~a~~ clean, not a vicious thing in him.

(D) He played quite a part, I understand, frequently being called on by unions to help them out with their internal---

(S) Not only to help out unions, but the great legal ~~one~~ ^{left} of our time, oftentimes consulted with Olander. Anybody that happened to be lazy and they wanted to secure some kind of a program or procedure to meet a certain issue, could call ~~them~~ over the telephone, he'd build a case for you, while you were listening to him. And you could take the argument over to the Supreme Court, that he submitted to you, and it would stand up in court. He had a very peculiar convincing quality. Not only argument, but convincing argument. Olander was a master, a giant intellectually. Clarence Darrow offered him \$10,000 a year to occupy a desk in the Darrow law office, merely to analyze situations for him, that he could make use of in his lectures and in his arguments before juries. They were great friends.

(D) Did he have much education?

(S) Only the third grade. He was just naturally--

(D) Self educated man?

(S) Yeah. Yes, Olander had read all the works of the great masters and he was familiar with all types of literature and he knew something about the movements not only of the ~~past~~, ^{but} of our time, but strange as it may seem, he knew the people identified with these movements, and when they came to the city of Chicago, somehow, Olander was one of the people that ~~they~~ they had to visit with and discuss matters with during their visits ^{in that city.}

(D) Did he spend much time in Springfield?

(S) Yes, he came down, he didn't come here until after the legislature was well underway. It takes about 6 weeks to properly organize the house and get the committees appointed and chairmen assigned to the various house and senate committees, and then of course they are ready to discuss bills and ~~xxxxx~~ consider legislation. That happens sometime along in February, about the middle of February six weeks after the session opened, Olander would come. And he stood with me before these committees during all the years that I have been identified as Federation President.

(D) Both you and Olander were highly experienced people by at the time that you became the President.

(S) Yes, legislative work is a highly specialized work and I've been regarded as an expert in that field. The facts of the case are that certain things developed over there in the House of Representatives that made me chairman of the Committee on Education. I hesitated in the matter of accepting that chairmanship because I felt that I had less academic education than any ~~person~~ person on the floor of the house, and that the people that had that type of education, particularly those who came from ~~the~~ educational fields, would object to having somebody without school training, ~~and it was not~~ ~~presiding over~~ don't you see, presiding over the destinies of the school system of Illinois. But somehow there wasn't any antagonism to that chairmanship, it was assigned to me, and I handled it for 8 years, and the members of the committee finally presented me with a watch and it was engraved of course, for the splendid service that I had rendered to the educational people of Illinois. Persons without education, school education have a flair and understanding for legislative activity. You understand that field. That was the reason that the presiding officer, Dave Shanahan wanted me to assume that chairmanship. You may not have any school training, but you've got a better understanding of legislative methods than most anybody here that has that, don't you see, and in handling controversial matters, we've never found anybody who was able to get into that sort of field and ~~make~~ not make people mad. He said, you've got that ability, and we want you to preside over that ~~committee~~ ~~committee~~. For four years I presided over the committee of Utilities and Transportation. And did it successfully; *and that was a controversial thing.*

(D) Reub, Dan Carmell was the was one of the chief attorneys for the Federation for a good many years. What kind of a role would you say that he played during his period with the Federation? What ~~was~~ ^{was} his main functions?

(S) Well, he was our legal guide, of course, and he was a very capable attorney. I was first attracted to him as a result of ~~the~~ strike that took place in the city of Decatur, there was a lot of police brutality over there. The Sheriff's office became involved in the thing, some of the people in the ~~xxxxxx~~ Sheriff's office were charged with throwing a tear gas bomb. The strike was conducted by the lady garment workers. ~~A lot of police brutality the strike was conducted by the lady garment workers over there.~~ And one of the girls was hit in the eye with this tear gas. Well, it blinded both of her eyes, and she was in the hospital. One of the business agents by the name of Harry Roper came in over here, and said you've got to do something about it. ~~Was~~ ^{was} incensed, disturbed about the fact that they were throwing tear gas ~~xxxxxx~~ onto these pickets who were on the picket line, and that one of the girls had lost her sight. She's in the hospital. I requested him to call a meeting, and call it tonight. I'll be over there at eight o'clock. Call it in the city hall. Well, he said, there's an injunction over there. I said, that's good. You call the meeting

and make sure that you've got a big crowd. Call it where the police are close because I'd like to defy that injunction. So I got over there at 8 o'clock and the place was jammed. People were sitting on window sills and hanging out the doors. I gave them a rousing talk on strike matters, inflamed the crowd, and then I finally made up my mind to defy the injunction. I so announced from the platform that I was defying that injunction. I hold that court in contempt, and I hold that injunction in contempt. And if I didn't hold that court in contempt, and that injunction in contempt, I'd hold myself in contempt. And I wrote to that judge that had issued the injunction, I felt that they were going to fight me before I got out of the building, but nothing happened, and I returned to Springfield. But about four days later, Victor Olander called me over the phone and he said were you in Decatur the other night? and I said yeah. And he said, "What in Hell did you say down there?" And I told him that I was over there and what the circumstances were, and that I defied that injunction, and he said that judge wants to see you. Well. He said you'd better be there. But he said he wants to see me too. So I said, well, all right, when does he want to see us, and where. Well, he don't want to see us in Decatur, he's coming up to Chicago. He'll meet us at the Sherman Hotel. So ~~one or two~~ days later we met the judge over there. I tried to cut into the conversation several times by saying that these people he had indicted and sent to jail shouldn't be sent to jail and be made jailbirds, and receive the odium of that sort of treatment because it's hard to live down; that they're good citizens temporarily excited. But the judge paid very little attention to me. But he paid attention to Olander who kept reasoning with him and talking with him, and finally the judge agreed to dissolve the injunction. And to put these people on probation so they wouldn't have to serve or something, if we would send our attorneys out and make the proper motions before ~~the~~ court. So we sent for Dan Carmell, and he went down there and he did the thing the judge said should be done, and the result was that nobody was ~~he~~ hurt very much as a result of that strike as far as the injunction was concerned. Well, a few days later I got to thinking about the situation and I always had a feeling that picketing was a form of free speech. I'm a printer by trade and in the print shops we talk about what free press, free speech. I think we know something about it, and I got on a train and went up to the city of Chicago and I told Mr. Olander that this thing called picketing is just a form of free speech. If a man has no other way of showing how he feels about a given situation, he has as much right to put a sign on his back and walk up and down the streets as the largest newspaper has to circulate in that same territory. I says, for heavens sake, Vick, do you have to have \$200,000 to buy a newspaper in order to exercise your right to free press and free speech? And he says, repeat that again. It caught his imagination. He said, I think you've got something there. He said, let's send for Dan Carmell and find out. Dan came over, and he said now repeat this situation, that illustration to him. And I did that. And Dan said, that's right, you can exercise your right to free press and free speech, it's ^{legal} constitutional, but you have to have some law, or some court decision to emphasize it. ~~You can't~~ I said, can't you carry the thing to the Supreme Court and lets get the court to say that picketing is legal. Constitutional. Well, he said, you have to have a case. Well, I said, I think I've got that too. Here's this ~~Barger~~ case, this case, a man by the name of Swingenhall, that's familiar with the case, and I think that you can take that case and really steal the case away from these people, they're not much interested anyhow. Well, he said, in order to get a good decision, you have to have a good case. If you start out with a poor case you'll get poor law from the court. Well, I said, take a look at this case. Well, he felt that it would do, so Dan agreed to carry the thing to the Supreme Court. I explained to him that we didn't have any money to pay his legal services. We did have enough money to pay for transcribing the evidence from court to court and we got up there. It took 14 months to get up there

Check
Swingenhall
to court

with the case. The only compensation that Dan Carmell was to get out of it was to come to our conventions every year. I agreed to introduce him as the chief legal counsel of the Illinois State Federation of Labor, and in that way it would attract business to him and in that way he would be paid. Well he carried the case to the Supreme Court, and the court stated that the picketing was legal and Constitutional, and they used my language, they said it was a part of free speech. Dan Carmell never lost a case for the Illinois State Federation of Labor. During all of the time that he served, and he was only a paid employee of the Federation since 1949. Up to that time Dan served without compensation.

(D) Most of the time he represented the individual unions I suppose.

(S) Yes, he did that. He had a tremendous law practice and it was a labor practice don't you see? ^{He was} A skilled negotiator, he was a professor of law at the Northwestern University, he taught a class out there.

(D) Did he take part in any of the agreed bill discussions with the committee?

(S) He always sat in with us and I think in all fairness that he was the spokesman and ~~xxx~~ we selected him each time to be the spokesman for the entire group, but we also had Mike Hanagan in there, the attorney for the United Mine Workers, and we have Hugh McCarthy in there, the attorney for the Building Trades in Chicago, Frank Gillespie, the attorney for Teamsters in the city of Chicago, and Abe Brussels, the attorney for the CIO. And also Harold Taft, a very magnificent type of person, sits in with us. ~~xxx~~ In addition to that the Progressive Mine Workers sometimes send their attorney in, don't you see. So we have a battery of some 6 or 7 attorneys that join with us who are experts in that field, and who serve without any compensation ~~for~~ the State Federation of Labor ^{is concerned.} _{As far}

(D) When Victor Olander was part of the picture, did you have ^{these} ~~xxx~~ attorneys in also, or?

(S) Not so many of them. We had Tom ^{Murphy} ~~Mooney~~ and one or two others, but the development of this battery of legal talent has been brought about largely through my efforts; each time when these bills are introduced I contact these attorneys and I invite them to come in and participate in these improvements, and they come and they serve all through the conferences. Magnificent conferees.