

Maureen and Mike

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Lucile Speer, Tape #2, Jan. 20, 1981

DW We're going to talk about some of the main points in Montana that were actively involved in the Institute. Whoever you want to start off with will be fine.

LS I think I did talk some or made a reference to members of the University Teachers Union, who contributed a great deal. I and was the Executive Secretary. He managed the institute for several years after I quit. I think I did it for four years. And then as I recall, Pete Rudiman did it for a year, and then John Swackhamer, who was a member of the Economics department. Of all the people I ever have known in the labor movement, or in our union, I think John was the most thoroughly versed in union affairs, and he was a foreigner, he had a foreign background. He knew what the working class was. He had just a natural understanding of those people, and they realized it. And he had wonderful rapport with them. He not only carried on the Institute, he was invited by the unions and the Farmers Union to go to their gatherings and assist them in various ways. He, I would say, of all the individuals, probably contributed more than any other to building a strong relationship and understanding between labor and the university. And I have already told you of his tragic deal, oh about four or five years ago.

DW Yes, that was very untimely for him too, wasn't it? Was Leonard Kenfield a member of the faculty?

LS No. No, I don't know whether he had taught any classes or not. I remember him when he was a student at the university. And he began working with the Farmers Union rather early. And I didn't know much about him for a period, until I saw him again in the labor Institute. He began to come, and I can't tell you what officer he was first, but then when Don Chapman retired, Leonard Kenfield took over as president. Leonard probably had a greater diversity of interests in the state and local government, and national too. He contributed a great deal to the development of our programs and the broad range of topics at his acquaintance. He was killed in an auto accident, it was ten or twelve years or more than that, probably, It was the same time I retired, 1968. So he's not so far back, but he was president for a long time.

DW And Chapman was president a long time before him?

LS Yes. I did mention, I guess, some of those who were members of the Teachers Union at Bozeman: Karl Kraenzel, who was on the faculty, and Paul Dunbar, who was a Political Science professor. Karl Kraenzel was a sociologist - I don't know whether you call them rural or not - but he was concerned about

of the people who lived on farms, who produced our crops. He

did participate in many of the institutes who came to them, whether he was on the program or not. One of the features of the Labor Institute was the good discussion, exchange between the speaker and the people attending.

DW Lucile, who were the main participants in the audience? who attended?

LS Leonard, our president, was not scheduled as a speaker very often, but he did more than anyone else to develop a subject and keep our discussions going, introduced new angles and new points of view. It was very general, but I would say that Edmund Freeman was consistently in this a great deal. He was a charter member of our union. WP Clark, of course too. When someone like Kraenzel was here . . . . he didn't come all the time.

DW Would you say, then that the audience was [made up] most of union leaders in the state?

LS I would say this. I think that on the whole, the Farmers Union members had more experience and were more trained in communication, exchange of ideas through discussion, than were the union people. I went to union meetings for eleven years, and you didn't get very good discussion from the members. It was settled up by the officers too much.

DW Would a local union, like here in Missoula . . . their top officer's called president, isn't he? Would there local union presidents be at the Institute?

LS Yes, they were the ones you usually sent. Actually, the unions usually sent one or two, and they paid their expenses.

DW I see. And then all these people would be involved in discussions after a speaker?

LS Yes. But there were many of those officers of the labor unions around the state who never uttered a comment. They, I think, enjoyed it, got benefits from it, but they had not background in their experience for participating. You could tell that orders "came down" as these decisions "came down" far more than in the Farmers Union. Of course, I was never a part of the Farmers Union, but judging from their officers. . . Now from the Farmers Union, there was Dan Catland and Leonard, and there was a Mr. Cook, I can't remember his first name, but he was a vice-president of the Farmers Union, and a very good man. He was a very helpful person on discussions. Their educational leader, Mildred Stolz, was a good person.

DW Yes, you mentioned her last time.

LS Now there are poor exceptions in the labor movement. Harry

and Gretchen Billings, they were editors of the People's voice. And they contributed tremendously to the Farmers Labor Institute. I mentioned, I think, what they did through their paper, arousing interest through their publicity, and also wring out afterwards.

DW Good coverage.

LS But they also. . . . Gretchen in particular. . . . would often head discussions on various things like public utilities and so forth. And then there was another labor man, and he was rather notable, Perry Melton. He was an officer in Kalispell. He was an ambitious fellow. He really wanted to have a leadership position, but wasn't quite trusted by Jimmy Graham and some of those. He tended to be too liberal for some of them.

DW was he a lawyer out of Kalispell?

LS No, he wasn't. He didn't have a great education. No, he belonged to the painters Union. But he did start a paper, the Treasure State Labor Journal, and did a pretty good job for quite a few years. And he really had quite a gift at communication. He could formulate ideas and get them over, but he didn't have much of a following was the trouble, and I thought he was kind of a frustrated person, because he wasn't recognized, and didn't get the opportunity to do what he wanted to do, what he would like to have done. And that community college was opened in Kalispell, he later was put on the board. And some of the community protested, and the kicked him off. But he took it to court, and got put back on. He did a capable job, so I don't know about him. I used to hear from him for years and years, but. . . . He had quite a family of children, and they were all very good students here. So I guess his wife contributed some of the genes. It shows that they had some of that good background in their family. I say he was liberal, I can recall that some of our University Teachers Union members, trying to get resolutions and our activities and Vietnam. They couldn't get them through the Union or the state convention. Perry would support them, but the rest of them kind of stayed out. Well, you know the reputation of the American Federation of Labor under Meany. We had the same thing here. Oh, the only thing I'd say, and I don't know much about Meany, but Jimmy Graham, he was a very gentle and very kind person. He was very adamant about the techniques and the tools of labor, but he was really a socialist in the sense that he was trying to promote more equalization of opportunity, and he was for insurance plans and medical care and unemployment compensation and all those things that were slow to come to the United states on a national level.

DW Did he eventually retire from office, Lucile, as president of state?

LS No. I think I said at the beginning that Jimmy Graham was

someone who really had a great regard for education. His [family] believed in it, and yes, Jimmy Graham believed in greater equality economically too, but that wasn't where he placed the emphasis. It was the benefits of our society. And it was the obligation of Government to see that all people shared . . . .

DW What did you say about the benefits of society?

LS He thought that it was the obligation of government to see that all people shared in the benefits available from government, like a decent education or medical care. Another person who was not a member of our union, but I think he should be mentioned is another person in Montana and a prominent person who really helped us, who gave his support to the labor institute and probably his help made an impact is what he did, made an impact among the faculty, I think. That was Joseph Kinsey Howard. He came and participated in our first Institute, and I remember him complementing us, or congratulating us, I think it it's better to say, on initiating it, and urging us to keep working. And he did! We owed to him the pressure which brought really a strong support, both from the Farmers Union and labor in the Great Falls area, because he was a member of the Newspaper Guild, which at that time was quite strong in Great Falls. Maybe it still is. It was, of course, a member of the CIO, and so Jimmy didn't think very highly of it. But then in a few years, why the CIO and AFL merged. But to have a man of the prestige of Joe Howard in this state supporting the Labor Institute and speaking at our meetings was a definite plus on our side. I don't remember what year he died. He died quite young. Just plain overwork, I guess.

DW The housekeeping that we needed to do from last time, Lucile, was the date of the first Institute, it was 1944.

LS Was it?

DW Yes. And that's according to your article. Then was we were saying about Norman Thomas, and we couldn't think of his last name?

LS I was talking about Don Chapman, who was the president of the Farmers Union, and how helpful he had been. Jimmy Graham did not want the Farmers Union. It was all right to invite them, but he didn't want them to be part of the organization. Near the conclusion of the first Institute, some members of the Farmers Union and some members of the State Federation wanted to continue this. Jimmy had in his mind, well, the AFL State Federation will just keep on having it. Then they wanted both to be a joint affair, that they would be in on the planning. And it took a year or two to solve those conflict. I spoke of the Norman Thomas incident in connection with the contributions made by Don Chapman in smoothing out these differences. If it hadn't been

for him, we would of had to iron out conflicts. And here was Jimmy, a socialist, supporting Norman Thomas. And he, under cover, got him on the program. And the Farmers Union, who were supporting Wallace . . . . If it had been Jimmy who had been undercut that way, he would have thrown up his hands and pulled out, and that would have been the end of it. But when I called Don Chapman to tell him what had happened, he said "well, it's done." He said that unfortunately for agriculture, we can't do anything about it. some of his members, particularly Mildred Stolz were a little unpleasant about it, but it didn't cause any rupture.

DW You were the first director of the Institute or first executive secretary?

LS Yes.

DW When it was started in . . . . well, you first originated your plans in about . . . . I don't know, maybe 1943 or 1944?

LS Yes, I think it took us two years, anyway. And I think the actual initiative in establishing a labor Institute was taken by the University Teachers Union. I said Jimmy Graham had been bring to the state conventions of the Federation for quite a few years these resolution calling for the establishment of a labor Institute. And they passed. But nothing was done. He had a state board of older men. they didn't know anything about it. They ;didn't even have an idea of what the labor Institute was supposed to do, or how it was organized, or anything. Jimmy did know that, as I told you, from his knowledge of the British-English Labor Institute, and from around the United States. Burt I don't think there was general knowledge. And I know it wasn't generally known in our state.

[Break in Tape]

DW We were talking about receiving some information.

LS Yes, this Workers Education Bureau, it was organized in, and was an affiliate of the National Federation of Labor, and it was financed by them. And it was for the AFL only. It didn't include railroad workers or Farmers Union in it. And I don't know whether Jimmy Graham knew them or not. I just don't recall. He never knew any of those that came. But he did help us, Jimmy Graham did, in getting speakers on many issues... labor issues like social security or working-man's compensation and things like that, which the National Federation had subdivisions on, and they had good speakers on those.

DW But that's where you got your information to being your . . . .

LS No, I wrote directly to the Workers Education Bureau.

DW That's what I meant to say is you got it from the Workers Education Bureau.

LS But I think Jimmy helped us to get speakers and assistance on our programs, conduction classes and other things, because he knew labor officials in the country.

DW Right. Well, Lucile, how would you evaluate the effects of the institute on the people that took a part, and on the state of Montana as a whole? Have any thought on that?

LS The Labor Institute came at a time before we had all of these fragmented groups on environment, pollution and conservation of resources, energy and so many of those things. And I think while there was education, I wouldn't put it that way, because we did often discuss educational matters too, but then the field of education did have its own organizations, although it was too often left to the teachers themselves rather than the public. But it created a forum which drew people from all parts of the state. I know we had them from Livingston and Billings, Kalispell quite a few, and up at Libby, and I imagine just scattered around. Of course a major part of them came from Missoula and Butte. Helena was not as strong of a labor town as Missoula. I brought together these people and with them outside the organized labor movement who were concerned about these matters, into an informal organization that discussed and formulated plans, but did not engage in political activity.

DW Is there anything that parallels that sort of set up today in the state, in your opinion?

LS I don't know. All that I can think of are more specific, more fragmented special fields. Now you take Common Cause, because that's the nearest, I would say, it is organized not for the sake of information, it's to get action, political action. And that was up to the unions when they went home and got their own organizations to take action. It was to inform and to get people to thinking. And yes, we discussed political issues, matters that needed political activity, but it was not necessarily limited to that. There was a good many people who came year after year because, as I say, this was the best discussion that they knew here they could engage with others in the discussion of these issues.

DW Did we talk about state legislators being involved in the Institute last time? Were they very often, to get information for themselves?

LS I can recall that we had have state officials some times, quite frequently, in fact. I can't remember that we had

legislators, not that we excluded them, but we didn't pick them because they were . . . .

DW Too political for that. I wondered if they made up a small part of the audience, for their own information.

LS No, there were just a few of them. Now, Lee Metcalf came more than once. And we had him as a speaker. He talked about public utilities. And of course, Lee was the one who believed in the public ownership of utilities. So he was advancing that. The problem of water resources was discussed more than once, but I can't remember any . . . . except that was a time when, well, they were planning many dams. They never built the one on the Flathead? we got Hungry Horse, but I thought there was another one on the . . . . I don't remember. Paul Harlow was a Farmers Union man from Thompson Falls. He was a man who came every year. He was a good discussion leader. I can't say that any changes in state government led to the Constitution Convention, writing a new constitution . . . It didn't, but it did get people to thinking about these issues. I think we selected, in general, topics that had a topical interest at the time in Montana, and that might be because of the political activity, the leaders involved in it, as I say, like Lee Metcalf. Now they never invited Mike Mansfield, as far as I know. I never heard of him. Senator, they thought, was just too much of a political title. Your question on where it did lead, I think that it filled a gap.

DW I think I asked what effect it had, and I think you've answered it very well in saying that it was an informational tool for the citizens of the state in particular. And if it's all right with you lets move to another fascist of the Teachers Union, since they were the major moving force in this coming about. Let's talk about the Teachers Union itself, and we can come back to this, if something occurs to you. The Teachers Union of which you were a member had some trying times as you described it. And I think that was centered around the time of Professor Keeney, was it that he was dismissed, or was it in relationship to something else that you mentioned?

LS That's the only related to personnel problem area, we never went through the university or state library, like banning books and that sort of thing. There was some criticism of Keeney because of that. I mean it was that one person, one librarian. And that wasn't limited to . . . .

DW I'll have to get you to give me some background on why he was fired, why he was dismissed and what role could he have played in this, if anything. First of all, I read some newspaper clippings about him, and his policies in the library. He took over after Gertrude Buckhouse died, didn't he? And it sounded as though he wanted to run a pretty tight ship in the library.

LS That he did.

DW It sounded like he was pretty conscientious, and this was all I could get from the newspaper clippings. He was a little upset with student behavior in the library.

LS They didn't say anything about his open shelf, and the freedom and the Vardis Fisher books and all?

DW It didn't say anything about the Fisher books. I do believe I read something about open shelf, but I didn't realize the significance of that. What policy was initiated? How did it differ from the old? How did it work?

LS I was hired by Gertrude Buckhouse, and I just took the library work here and there was a year of apprentice work, and then Miss Buckhouse hired me and she died, as I recall, in May. And so I don't know just when Keeney got here, but I then began my work under Phillip O. Keeney. He came from the University of Michigan, and he was a bibliographer to the University of Michigan. That indicates a person of some scholarship. I'm saying these things because I don't think it was ever put in the paper that he had qualifications. He was not a prepossessing-looking individual. He didn't look very sturdy, and he was not a very energetic person. I don't think he ever came with any idea of inauguration a new er. My impression over the years is that he just had a few things that he wanted to do, and not any of them were major things. I suppose you could put them together, and they indicated a certain philosophy, but they had no particular unity in the program. I say that at the time he came, I don't know that we had any faculty, or there were not any predominant number of liberals on campus. Dr. Clark was president, and everything had been very pleasant. There was no reason for the unions to organize, and that was the reason the first one sort of folded up, the first union. And there was a good feeling between the administration and the faculty. I don't know just how, except Dr. Underwood, and he was dead by that time, was the last liberal, and Edmund Freeman. They were really very mild. Keeney and his wife also were very liberal, and in fact, very definite, but this was in the period of the .....great strength of the communist movement. Many colleges had organizations. I don't know that Phil Keeney was ever..... I'm not suggesting that he ever had any affiliation with Communist activities. However, I do know that he had a regard for the goals of the Soviet Union, and he was an admirer of the socialization which they were working for. It's something, I guess, like China. We're recognizing China now. There wasn't any question of China at that time. I don't know, he let that be known but he didn't bother reading those economic books. But Phil Keeney did see that some more literal books, economics and social problems were bought for the library than had been, in the he last year or two. He also inaugurated that open shelf, which

was a case where new books of general interest were put out and they could circulate a little bit longer. It was supposed to lure the students or the faculty to reading more. And it did. On that shelf were such things as, all I can remember is Vardis Fisher's novels. And Vardis Fisher, he was an Idahoan, and had made quite a name for himself as a novelist. He used some language that was not liked by the , oh, purist, shall we say... and it just makes you realize how we've changed. You hear it on the radio now and TV. Anyhow... I think there were not many faculty who felt congenial, I think that Phil and Mary Jane didn't how their interest in other faculty very much. There weren't many liberals on our faculty that they cared to associate with very much. So I always felt that lack of rapport experienced some was a great many. And there was a general lack of sympathy that was due to that they weren't comfortable. He had gone to the University of California. That would be a different atmosphere. Now the thing was that in the meantime, Dr. Clark had died. He was the one who brought him here. The man who took over as president was George Finlay Simmons, who had been assistant professor in zoology. He was not well liked by the faculty, who felt that he was really not a man of great scholarship at all. He was definitely not the choice of the faculty, but had been the chose of the downtown interest. Then there were various intrigues through members of the board and the government and that's how he got appointed. The downtown interest didn't like Keeney, and so they got together, and that was where the troubles began to arise for Phil Keeney. those were the sort of things they point to: the open shelf, the Vardis Fisher book, they referred to sexual matters, and another thing I remember they criticized, they didn't like, because he sat at his desk, he bought his New York Times to our library and read that kind of paper, and his dog came to the office with him too. That was another thing. Then Keeney was not, so far as I've ever heard, the initiator for this second union. He participated in recruiting members for this first meeting, but he was singled out the one who started it. You couldn't say that, I never felt that. But he was blamed for it by a lot on the outside. Did you ever read anything that HG Merriam's history of the university? Did he say that the organization of the Union had been behind the firing of Keeney. No, all the rest of those people were fired too by Simmons. Simmons fired anybody that didn't like him, and who was vocal about it.

DW How long was Keeney head librarian before Simmons came in?

[End of tape #2, Lucile Speer]