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Oral History Number: 004-001

Interviewee: Burton K. Wheeler

Interviewer: n/a

Date of Interview: November 27, 1972

Note: Senator Wheeler was 90 years old and came to Montana from Washington, D.C., to attend the dedication of the placement of the bust of Joseph Dixon in the capitol building in Helena. He gave this lecture to K. Ross Toole's Montana and the West history class at the University of Montana.

K. Ross Toole: There are a number of ways in which I could introduce our distinguished speaker. If this were an earlier time I would introduce him as "Boxcar Burt." If it were about the same time I could introduce him as "Bolshevik Burt," but I would like to introduce him for what he is—one of the most distinguished Americans alive. I give you the Honorable Burton K. Wheeler.

Burton K. Wheeler: Well, when your—was asked to come over here and speak to you I said that I would wait over a couple of days in order to come down and talk to the students at the University here because I don't know of any group that I like to talk to better than a group of students who are studying history and particularly about the history of Montana.

You know, I must tell you a little bit, though, about Missoula itself. I'm always glad to come here because on one occasion, when I was United States district attorney, the Department of Justice, attorney general, wired me and said that prominent citizens in Missoula had seen a German airplane flying over the mountains. So I sent the United States marshal down here to check it out. He came back and said there was nothing to it. So, I wired them. But they said, listen—prominent citizens, must be something to it.

So, again, I sent the FBI man down here. He came back and said there was nothing to it. So again, I wired them but they still insisted. So, I came down here and I went out to the Fort. They had a little fort here with a captain in it and I said, "What is there to this?"

And he said, "Have you ever ridden, been up to Hamilton and ridden down through the valley at night?"

I said no.

"Well," he said, "you ought to do it, because," he said, "as your automobile is moving down through that valley you look up over the mountains and you see a star, a bright star." I don't know whether he said it was the North Star, but a bright star. "And as your car is moving that star seems to be moving. And," he said, "these good people now have gotten so they can actually hear, they can actually hear the noise of an airplane flying over them. That's all there is to it."

Well, I cite that to you as kind of intolerance and feeling that there was here in Montana at that particular time. [World War I era.]

On another time I came down here and I've forgotten just what year it was, but the United States marshall, Joe Ashbridge, came to me and said, "I've got some good news for you."

I said, "What's the good news?"

He said, "The newspapers are gonna lay offa ya." [Audience laughter.]

"Well," I said, "you don't call that good news, do ya?"

"Oh my goodness," he said, "I thought you'd be so pleased to have them lay offa ya after the way they've been after ya and calling ya everything."

I said, "Oh, no, no. I'm not gonna let 'em lay offa me."

He said, "What are ya gonna do?"

I said, "I don't know. But I'm gonna do something to make 'em talk about me!"

So I was invited to come down here to speak to a labor group and I took up the newspapers. I said, "First of all here's *The Missoulian*; supposed to be a Republican paper. The evening paper, *The Sentinel*, is supposed to be a Democratic paper."

"Well," I said, "they're both published on the same printing plant: both owned by the same company. The man that writes the editorials for them in the morning for the Republican paper writes the editorials for the Democratic paper in the evening."

"And," I said, "shades of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson—if they could come back to earth again they'd want to be buried deeper under the sod."

And then I took up, I took up the rest of the papers, *The Anaconda Standard*, and I said, "*The Anaconda Standard*'s supposed to be a Democratic paper owned by the Anaconda Company. The evening paper is supposed to be a Republican paper, but," I said, "they have a Republican editing the Democratic paper and a Democrat editing the Republican paper because they don't dare to let a Democrat edit the Democratic paper."

And then I took up *The Helena Independent*, *The Helena Record*, and the rest of the papers all over the state. Well, at that time—so, anyway, in the morning, next morning after the meeting, I came into the hotel and the head waitress came over and gave me a newspaper. She said, "I want to tell you," she said, "us girls don't agree with that newspaper." Course,

that was the best news I'd heard for some little time, but after that they started in with double editorials in every one of their papers all over the state.

Now I must tell you another story. Roy Alley, who was one of the head political chieftains—after I got out of the United States district attorney [office]—he had a little trouble, apparently, with a girlfriend of his and while I was out of the office she came up to the office and wanted to sue him. My partner told her I was there so she came back and saw me. And I said, "No, no. We don't handle that kind of case."

She said, "You won't have to sue him. All you got to do is send for him because," she said, "when you were United States attorney he used to be so afraid and he used to say every time he took me to Spokane or took me to St. Paul that if that fellow Wheeler could catch me he'd send me to the penitentiary for the rest of his life."

I said, "Well, we don't handle those cases but I'll send for him." I sent for him and I told him, I said, "We don't handle it. We told her so. I'm not going to bring suit but don't let her out of the office. I want [you] to settle with her."

Anyway, he settled with her, he settled with her. I said, "I won't charge you anything. I gotta be fair, I won't—"

He said to me, "I don't deserve this kind of treatment from you." He said, "We've done everything we possibly could to destroy you politically and to destroy you in business. And we could take," he said, "we could take the Democrat leaders away from you; we could take the labor leaders away from you; we could take the farm leaders away from you. But," he said, "we couldn't take the people away from you." And he said, "But from now on, anything you ask me to do I'd do it for you."

Then he said—he came to see me—he said: "Listen, I'm going to New York. I'm quitting because," he said, "I may want to bring a suit against the [Anaconda] Company and if I do I want to employ you as my attorney to sue the Company."

Well, he told me then who they—their stool pigeons [audience laughs] were, as we called them. And the Democratic party and the Republican party, among the labor leaders—he told me some of the labor leaders that turned out to be detectives and I'll get to that. [Audience laughs] And then he told me that not only did they own the daily papers, many of them except the Tribune and one or two others, but many of the county papers. They either owned them or they controlled them through donations or advertising, one thing and another. Well, that's kind of the history of that time.

And now, I wouldn't believe, and didn't believe, wouldn't believe, that the American people would so completely lose their sense of balance as they did during that war period, I—as United States district attorney—it was my duty to prosecute people who violated the law and I

had tried to do it honestly but not to prosecute those who didn't violate the law. But they wanted everybody who was a labor leader, who was asking for more money, or a farm leader who was asking for more for the farmers—they always said that they were Bolsheviks and so forth. And then I was accused of being Bolshevik and on one occasion there was every time I went into a store in Butte, cigar store to buy a cigar, this fella would say, "How's the old Bolshevik?"

I stopped him one day and I said to him, "Now, are you a German?"

And he said, "I'm German-Jew, why?"

I said, "Somebody told me that I have to watch out for you because they thought you were spying." [Laughter] There wasn't anything to it, but every time after that when I'd see him he'd take off his hat to me. [Laughter]

And then there was one lady came into see me one time and she said, "You know, there's a cobbler over here, she's always, always talking about the Kaiser—the Kaiser this, the Kaiser that."

I said, "I'll have her investigated."

She said, "I told that dirty old German I'd get even with him!"

Way over in eastern Montana, eastern Montana, a man came in. He'd had a fight with his neighbor over a dividing fence and he said that this neighbor of his had said that he was going to, he was going to kill President Wilson. The neighbor had a wife and seven or eight children and they were way up in northern Montana, in northeastern Montana. There wasn't a railroad within 15 or 20 miles.

Well, I didn't believe it. But I had to present it to a grand jury if they came to you. And in those days, all you had to do was to say that you suspected somebody of being this and when you did the grand jury would indict and then a jury would convict them. Well, I put this case up to the grand jury and they indicted him and we tried him. Course, he was convicted. Judge [George] Bourquin didn't believe it. Notwithstanding, they were—and he sentenced him to one day in jail and then sent him home to his family. And the papers all across the country came out and they said, "Judge Bourquin sentenced a man to one day in jail for threatening to kill the president of the United States." [Audience laughs]

Well, if I do say it, I went over to try a case and a poor fella was arrested. He had a son, a stepson. He worked in the, he worked in the factory or in the shops at Livingston and they took him—oh, there was some women came along that wanted him to sign up for some wheat, not to use wheat and not to use sugar, and he went right there with his apron on, helping his wife to get his boy ready to go into the Army. He shut the door in their face. He

thought they were just coming to sell something, he didn't know what they were about. Well, they immediately took the Loyalty League there, headed up by Bill Campbell [editor] of the Helena Independent. And of all the notorious— God—[laughter] was Bill Campbell. I told the story on him during one of my campaigns and he finally, to the bad—and he finally sent word to me and begged me not tell that story any more. But, he never stopped telling it.

On one occasion, they—when Bill—when [Frank] Little [an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World] was hung, in Butte, a strange thing happened. I was up at my home, summer home on Lake McDonald, and I came down the boat to Poison and then had somebody pick me up and take me over to the train, Northern Pacific station. And who should come in there at that time with [Cornelius] Con Kelly [Anaconda Co. president] and L.O. Evans [Anaconda Co. general counsel] from the—they had been up at their place and they were waiting to take the train. They asked me in to have dinner. I went in to have dinner with them. At that time, at that time, they, the miners—some of the companies in Arizona had driven the miners out of Arizona because of the fact that they were asking for higher wages. Well, when I got back to Butte somebody had told me that L.O. Evans had either said or given out a statement to the effect that I ought to prosecute Little. Well, I read his speech, so I cut out the clipping of what he said in the paper and I took it up to the sixth floor of the Hennessey Building and I went and saw L.O. Evans and I said to him, "Listen, you're a good lawyer. Now you show me where there's one sentence in that article in which he has violated the law and I'll prosecute. Now, you're a good lawyer. You tell me."

"Well, he said, "other people have done it."

I said, "Listen, I'm not asking what other people have done. You tell me, where it is." Well, there was a disturbance. I felt a funny feeling around there that night, that afternoon. That night Little was hung. That night Little was hung. You know, strange as it may seem, a neighbor of mine who was a conductor on a street car company and a next door neighbor of mine who was a merchant said to me, "Well, they did a good job last night."

I said, "What are you talking about? He was a good man." I went uptown; several people stopped me on the street and said, "Well, they did a good job last night."

I told them, I said, "Well, do you want something of that kind to happen to you? If they can do it to him they can do it to you; they can do it to anybody else." Well, after that they came out with a statement, circulated a statement where the list of names on it, Vigilante Committee, and said these people will get the same thing if they're not careful. Among the initials was a "W" there and I knew perfectly well [it meant Wheeler], they had Bill Dunne's [editor of the Butte Daily Bulletin] initial, they had my initial, and a few others. Well, that was the kind of condition that swept over this country.

Another occasion here in Missoula an organizer for the Non-Partisan League came here and I was stopping at the hotel and he said to me, he came up to see me, and he said that he'd

been notified—he'd been invited to speak to a student body here—but they'd served notice on him that if he spoke here that he'd be run out of town and tarred and feathered. Well, he came up to see me and I said to go ahead and speak, don't pay any attention to it. And he was quite nervous about it.

I remember old Ed Donlan, Senator Donlan [a Missoula legislator], came up, saw me, and so forth. I told him what—that I was gonna protect him. "Come on," I said, "go to the theater with me." [Speaking to the Non Partisan League organizer.] We started over to the old theater and as we did some people jumped up, some of your leading citizens, jumped out of the dark, came up and told him, said, "If you don't get out of here and stop that we'll tar and feather you."

I started in and said, "Now listen! He has a certificate from Secretary of the Treasury [William] McAdoo to speak for this bond issue and that's what he's doing through the country." Well, didn't stop them. I said, "Now listen, I'm gonna protect him and if I have to I'm going over to the fort here and I'm gonna ask the head of the fort to come out and see that he is protected."

"Well," they said, "if you don't stop, the same thing will happen to you."

I said to him after that, "Now why didn't you go ahead? Why didn't you go ahead and let them tar and feather you?" I said, "You know, it'd be a great thing for your cause." [audience laughs]

He said, "Yes," he said, "I love my cause, I love my cause, but I love my life better than I do my cause." [laughter.] But that was the spirit that there was then.

Well, over in Livingston, they took this fellow out and made him get down on his knees with a couple of German bartenders and made them read a portion of the Constitution and so forth and so a young lawyer in Butte brought suit against them, these leading citizens. Well, afterwards he came to me and wanted me to go help him, Jim O'Connor [James F. O'Connor], afterwards a congressman, at the time speaker of the Montana House and later a U.S. Congressman, was defending these people, And, oh, he kept taking a slap at me and afterward got to Bill Dunne and so forth and I said, "Well, when you come to Butte you always want to hobnob around with Bill Dunne, but when you get over here in Livingston, why, then you denounce him."

Anyway, he got up and this fellow was perfectly innocent. They also accused him of going into a restaurant and refusing to take sugar! And that was the charge against him—that he wouldn't, he refused, he insisted on having sugar in his coffee. They took him down and in defending him Jim O'Connor got up in his final, but before they—after the evidence was all in—it was at a night session—the courtroom was packed, jammed, and one of the defendants, a Democrat, who'd been half friendly to me, prominent

merchant in Bozeman and Livingston, asked me if I wouldn't go to dinner with him. So, I went to dinner with him. I told him, I said, "I'll go to dinner with you but I just want to tell you that when I get up and go make my argument to the jury I'm gonna be tough on ya."

"Oh," he said, "that's all right; don't pay any attention."

We went to the dinner at the hotel, talked about nothing. I kept saying to myself, what is this about? And then it struck me and I said, "Listen, I'll bet they're gonna steal that instruction." Because I got an instruction for the judge to the effect that they had to bring in a verdict in favor of my client. I went back up there, Judge [Roy E.] Ayres, afterward the governor, Congressman and governor, he was the judge. They'd taken him out and got him tight and they came back. I went into the judge's chamber. I said, "Let me see those instructions."

"Oh, " he said, "those instructions are all right."

I said, "Let me see them." Sure enough. That instruction had been stolen out. I went over to the jury box, I went over to the waste-basket box and I picked up a copy of it and said, "Put that back in there." And I put it back in and Jim O'Connor got up and, well, the language that he used! [audience laughter] The language that he used. He said—he called their mothers—he called them sons of bitches, meaning this and that.

When I got up to answer him, this boy said, "How're you gonna answer him?"

I said, "I'll answer it." I remembered what somebody had said, but I couldn't think of the party that said it, that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel, and I said Abraham Lincoln. Well, of course, it wasn't Abraham Lincoln at all that said it. [audience laughs] But, I said I knew they wouldn't know. They wouldn't know who said it. And then I turned and I said, "Abraham Lincoln said—" and I turned to him and pointed my finger at him and said, "Scoundrel!"

Well, after the jury went out and brought in a verdict of one dollar, I think, a lady came up to me and said, "How did you know about O'Connor? How did you know about him?" Because he had a rather, a reputation over there, that if I'd have known about at the time—but they knew about it. But anyway, finally that night, that night late, I had to catch a train and one of the defendants came up to this little boxcar two-story hotel where I was staying because I didn't dare stay down at the main hotel. He came up and he said, "Listen, a lot of people down there are drinking and celebrating, and they're saying what they're going to do to you." And I had to leave to catch the train that night late. He said, "I've come up here to go down with you to the train to see that you get off with no harm come to you." He said, "You know, I was dragged into this thing. I came to town"—he was a rancher—"I came to town and got

drunk and these people led me into the thing and I was ashamed of it." And he said, "You know, I'm from Massachusetts and you were from Massachusetts and I just came up here to protect you."

Well, speaking of the little thing, I went back to Washington and I went in to see one of the attorneys there. He was from Virginia. And he kept me waiting and waiting and finally I said to the secretary, "I can't stay any longer, I have another appointment." And then she called in and he called me into his office. He just kept me waiting there, and he said to me, "Why don't you get rid of that partner of yours out there, H. Lowndes Maury?"

"Well," I said, "I don't know. He's a pretty fine fellow."

"But you oughta get rid of him."

And I said, "Well, H. Lowndes Maury was from Virginia."

"Oh," he said, "was he from Virginia?"

And I said, "Yes, graduated from the university."

"Well," he said, "He ought to be all right." [Laughter from audience]

I went then to see Fitts [Assistant Attorney General William C. Fitts] who was from Alabama. A little—can see him now, his head, he wore a pompadour cut, and he said to me, "Who hung Little?"

I said, "I don't know who hung him."

"I'll tell you who hung him," he said.

I said, "Well, who hung him?"

He said, "Bill Haywood had him hung." He said, "He was getting so strong in the union that Bill Haywood was jealous of him and," he said, "he had him hung."

"Well, I said, "you are in a position to know more about it than I am, I guess, but if you want to know what I think about it I'll tell you that I think the Anaconda Company had him hung and they took him out of his room at night and they dragged him behind the car and hung him to a trestle. That's who had him hung in my opinion."

"Well," he said, "why don't you go after that judge out there?"

"Well," I said, "I can't go after that judge because the judge was a good friend of mine."

[audience laughs] I said, "I can't go after him but I'll tell you what you do; you come out there and you go after him. And," I said, "do you know where you'll be the second time that you went after him?"

He said no.

"Well," I said, "come on, go after him and the second time you'd find yourself over in the county jail. Now you come on and go after him." He didn't want to go after him after that.

But I'll tell you this: [Alexander] Bielaski, who was then the head of what is now the FBI, told me that he had read all of my reports that I'd sent in and he said, "I want to tell ya that you are right. I've read your reports," and he said, "I find—" oh, and then he asked me to go and see—he's still alive, still practicing law in Washington. He's 96 years old. I can't think of it, but he's a wonderful person. I went in to see him, and he said, "You know, the trouble that I'm having is to keep these district attorneys from prosecuting for treason when there isn't any treason. When there isn't any treason."

Well sir, I'll tell you after I saw him and Bielaski I felt a lot [better] about it, felt very well about it.

Well, of course, I went to speak in some of these towns and they wouldn't let me speak. In Dillon, after I'd been endorsed by the Non-Partisan League, for governor, I went to speak in Dillon. And they passed a resolution, the City Council passed a resolution, that nobody could speak in the town unless they got permission from either the Democratic or Republican county chairman. Knowing perfectly well that I couldn't get it from the judge down there who disliked me very much and was [unintelligible] the company, [unintelligible] that's what they called it. At any rate, I said, I'm going to—I'll speak on the street.

The sheriff said, "Don't do it. Don't do it. I don't want to have to arrest you." They were all brother Masons of mine. That didn't make any difference. [Laughter.]

We went out and we spoke out in the outskirts. And I had with me an organizer man, former minister he was. We spoke from the back end of a Ford truck and while he was talking I saw a group of men with white collars and I knew they didn't belong to my group; and they were coming. They had the old arc lights there. I saw them coming from town and as they came nearer and nearer finally they just came in and started cat-calling, said, "When did you get to be a farmer? They thought I was the one that was speaking, see. "When did you get to be a farmer? What do you know about the farm?"

I walked over to them and I said, "Why don't you let this man speak? Then, if you want to speak you go ahead and speak after."

Pretty soon they said, "This isn't the man we're after. It's Wheeler we're after."

Well, when I got up to speak, they started to come after me and when they did there was a barber in the group who wasn't any friend of mine, but he tried to stop them. When he couldn't stop them, he pulled out a penknife and stabbed one of them. That caused a commotion. The sheriff was out there and broke up the meeting. Well, I was going back to Dillon because I'd registered at the hotel, but a former soldier came up to me and said, "Don't go back." He said, "There a lot of drunken cowboys in there and," he said. "they'll mob you. Don't go back." So, he said, "Come go with me out to the farm."

I said all right and we went out to the farm. The train was to come in, the train was to come in about 12 o'clock that night and when the train was about to pull in we went—he took us over to the—just a boxcar, nothing but a boxcar for a station. He took us over there. And these men, I saw a group of cars drive around the station two or three times, and I said to this friend of mine, "They're after us." And this was in Dillon.

He said, "No, no. No, no, no."

I said, "Oh yes." Well, they saw a light, they saw a light burning in the farm and they drove in there. The soldier, ex-soldier, recognized them. He jumped in his car, took his gun, jumped in his car and beat them over to the station, left the lights on, his car running, and came into the station with his gun. They came up and rapped on the door and he said, "If you open that door I'll fill ya full of lead!" And he meant it. He was there, cocked.

And I said, "For God's sake!"

He said, "No, I will if they open that door." Well, they didn't open the door, but they waited around until the train came in, thinking they'd grab me as I stepped on the train. But we didn't go out. We stayed there all night. The next day I called up a friend of mine, the sheriff of Butte, and he came down. That's when they started calling me "Boxcar Burt. Boxcar Burt."

Well, at any rate they were great experiences that I had. I afterwards told Con Kelly, I said, "You know, you educated me."

He said, "We did a damn poor job of it." [Laughter from audience.] Well, and that was true.

Let me tell you this. A lot of people condemn members of Congress and the Senate, but when I went there in 1922 [actually 1923] there were a lot of—they were mostly conservatives. There were just a handful of us. There was [Smith W.] Brookhart of Iowa, there was [Clarence] Dill of Washington, of course there was old Bob La Follette, and there was [George W.] Norris and there was [William E.] Borah. But just a very comparatively few. At any rate—but many of them were honest and sincere. They'd been in business, big

business, and so forth, and they'd never gone through the experiences that I'd gone through in Montana. They didn't know anything about it. They didn't know anything about labor conditions or anything and they looked upon me as a wild-eyed radical.

Jim [James E.] Watson said to me, he was chairman of the committee, the Interstate Commerce Committee, and I was at the bottom—he went over to New York and he came back and he told me he saw Con Kelly and John D. Ryan and he said to them, "Did you send this damn fella Wheeler down to Congress?"

And they said, "No, we didn't. But we were damn glad to get rid of him out of Montana."
[audience laughs]

But, really, as I said today, so many times we're apt to condemn people and think they're crooked. They're not necessarily that. There are some of them crooked, but many of them are honest, sincere people who just don't know and don't understand and many of them never will understand what's going on in the world.

Of course, when I investigated [U.S. Attorney General Harry] Daugherty, [for failure to prosecute officials implicated in the Teapot Dome scandal] why then, of course, they said that I was a Red and had me indicted in Montana and then they said—La Follette asked me to run for vice president with him and I said no. He came out to my house and I said no. I said, "Listen, I've campaigned in Montana but I couldn't campaign in New York and these big cities."

"Oh, you can."

And I said, "You oughta get Justice [Louis] Brandeis or someone."

"No," he said. He wanted me.

Well, then at the Democratic convention I'd heard that they thought they were going to indict me again in Washington. So I got ahold of a man there that nosed around and I went out and he said, "Well, if you won't run with La Follette they won't indict you."

I said, "Is that so." When he left I called up La Follette and said, "I've changed my mind. I'll run with you." [Laughter] "I'll run with you." Now La Follette never knew why I changed my mind.

But—and taking it in the Non-Partisan League, I said to Mrs. Wheeler, one of the reasons, when I was United States district attorney, Dan Kelley had issued a statement to the Rotary Club in which he said—Dan Kelley had been attorney general for a short time and then went with the Anaconda Company. Bill Rae had been state treasurer and he went with the Anaconda Company. Then I had supported [Thomas] Walsh and Walsh had me appointed United States district attorney in 1913. Around 1918 the

Anaconda Company was so anxious to get rid of me that they, Dan Kelley, got up before the Rotary Club and said, "Well, the local federal authorities"—meaning me, because I was the only local—"are making Butte a haven and a refuge for the anarchists and the IWW's and the Lord only knows what."

Well, I gave out a statement and said that if he'd consult his own detective reports he'd find out who was making—he'd find out that the Company was making Butte a refuge for the anarchists and the IWW's for their detective agencies. Well, Colonel [C.B.] Nolan, Walsh's partner, called me up and he said, "Are you going to give out any more statements of that kind?"

I said, "Just as long as the Anaconda Company gives out statements of that kind about me, just so long am I going to give out statements again."

He said, "It won't help God, man, or the devil."

I said, "It may not help God, man, or the devil, but that's what's going to happen."

So then, they wanted to get rid of me and they offered me, wanted me to come to Washington. They wanted to kick me upstairs and have me prosecute the grain trade down in St. Paul. So I went down with them and they told Walsh that he had to get rid of me because if he didn't that he'd be beaten in Montana if he didn't get rid of me.

Well, as I understood it Walsh told them no. But he finally came to me. He said he was afraid he'd get beaten and I said, "Well, if you feel that way, I'll resign." So, I went up and handed in my resignation.

The FBI, not [J. Edgar] Hoover, but—said, "Don't you resign." He said, "I read your reports and you're not absolutely—don't you resign."

And I said no, no.

I went on and saw the Attorney General and he said, "You don't have to resign unless you want to." He said, "They have a vacancy on a judgeship down in Panama, a federal judgeship."

"No," I said, "I don't want a federal judgeship." I said, "I understand they don't live very long down in Panama and if you want to exile me, send me to Siberia someplace." [Laughter] But I'm not going down." I said, "I don't need a job. I'm going back to Montana."

Colonel Nolan said, "You can't go back! You've got to take a job."

I said, "Oh, no I don't. "

I came back here. I didn't know any of the leaders of the Non-Partisan League at all, hardly, but I sent for them and I made up my mind. I said, "I'm going to lick that crowd if it's the last act of my life." And I called them in and I said, "I'll help ya get organized." And I went out one winter, campaigned for the—they had repealed the primary law, not a real primary, but they had repealed the primary law and we organized the Non-Partisan League and other little—to refer to the people. I went out and spoke under the Non-Partisan League that winter to groups of 10, 20, or 50 or 30, whatever it was, all over the state. Then they finally had a meeting of all the farm organizations, the Equity, Farmer's Union, and others, in Great Falls and when they had this meeting they had me to speak there. I spoke and I took up the Company again and told them how they'd bribed legislators, and what they'd done. When it was over [Non-Partisan League organizer Arthur C.] Townley came to me and said he wanted to see me. He came up to see me and he said, "I think you're the man we want to run for governor."

I said, "No, you don't want me." I said, "Townley, they tell me in North Dakota you're the governor. You go in and pound the table, you tell the governor what he's got to do. But," I said, "you couldn't do that with me because one of us would be thrown out. But I don't want to be governor of Montana. I want you to be."

He said, "I'll admit I had to be governor." He said, "I've brought a lot of farmers in there and," he said, "the big interests came in there and they took them, with their whiskey and their prostitutes." He said, "They took them away from me like Grant took Richmond." He said, "I had to build a corral around them to keep the whiskey away from them—the big interests. No, no," he said, "I want you to be governor because I'm not going to have to do that with you."

I said, "Well, you can rest assured." But afterwards they called me up and I said to Mrs. Wheeler, God bless her, I said to her, "Listen. The Non-Partisan League's meeting in Great Falls. They may want me to run for governor."

She said, "If they do, I'd do it."

I said but they may want me to run on the Republican ticket. Because they felt that a Harding landslide is coming. I said they may want me to run on an Independent ticket. She said, if they do, I'd do it. I said, but if I do it'll be a very vicious, nasty campaign."

She said, "If you can stand it, I can."

I said, "All right."

I went over there, they called me up, asked me if I was running in Helena—I was before the

Supreme Court. Would I run on the Republican ticket? And I said no. They called me back and asked me if I'd run on the Independent ticket. I said no. They called me back and said, will you run on the Democratic ticket? And I said yes. But I never had any question as to, about being elected in that campaign.

At any rate, I made the campaign. Joe Dixon beat me in that campaign. Every Company paper, every great big billboard was covered with a big hand, dripping with blood, and women from the society sections of the cities went over to Butte and neighbors there and said if he's elected governor they'll raise your children in institutions. Then they said that there'd be free love—[audience laughs]—free love in Montana if I was elected, like there was in North Dakota.

Dick Kilroy was the editor of the paper in Butte, the Anaconda Standard. He had been the editor of [Augustus] Heinze's paper and when Heinze sold out he then went with the Company, as did a lot of other people I could name. And they went. So then the night before the election we spoke from the balcony of the Butte hotel, we called it Liberty Hall, and I said, "You all know Dick Kilroy. You know the kind of a life he led." I said, "Let me ask you one question: Would Dick Kilroy be living over in Butte if there was free love over in North Dakota?" [audience laughs]

I told that same story in Billings on Charlie Bair, who had a reputation. [Laughs] He had a reputation. But old Charlie Bair was in the audience and it didn't bother him—didn't bother him any. He thought it was good advertising for him. [Audience laughs]

Well, folks, anyway I was defeated. The next time, you see, they spent a great deal of money on [Joseph] Dixon that time. Con Kelley told me one time years and years later that he got off of the train here in Missoula—he'd met Dixon on the train—and he got off of the train because he thought Dixon was all right with him and the banks were closed. He said they had him open the banks and drew down \$10,000 to give it to Dixon to help in the campaign against me. When Judge [John E.] Erickson was the one that ran against Dixon and Dixon said to him, "How much money did the Company spend on you to beat me?"

He said, "Not as much as they spent on you to beat Burt Wheeler."

Well, of course, in those days—now they weren't for Dixon for the nomination. They were for an attorney in Billings. But when Dixon was nominated they didn't like Dixon because they hadn't agreed with him when he was in the Senate, but they hated me so much worse than they hated Dixon that it was a question in their minds of the lesser of two evils. Then after Dixon got in he passed the tax bill and I went over to Helena during the legislature and urged the legislators to put through Dixon's program. Two years later, because they said they were going to close the mines and the mills and the factories, and I used it against him. Because after he got in, after he got in, they did close the mines. They did close the mills, they did foreclose the mortgages on the farmers, and everything

they said that was going to happen, if I was elected, happened after he [was elected].

So, the people then turned against him and I ran for—two years later—ran for the Senate and was nominated. They ran three people against me. They ran Tom Stout, former Congressman; they ran Hugh Wells, the national committeeman, and they ran Jim O'Connor, speaker of the House. Well, I beat all three of them put together. And I made a bet and won a couple of thousand dollars that I would beat all three of them put together. [audience laughs]

Well, after that when I was campaigning, they wanted to have a Democratic legislature because they didn't want Dixon to have a Republican legislature. That's when they went out and worked for a Democratic legislature. I got way over to Malta, Montana. [W.W.] McDowell, Lieutenant Governor McDowell, had then—and also ran against me for governor in the primaries—but he was state chairman. He called me up at Malta and he said, "They say you're not speaking for the legislature."

I said, "That's right. I'm looking after my own interest."

Well," he said, "they'd like to have you speak."

I said to him, "Who's they?"

"Oh," he said, "you know, over on the hill."

I said, "Will you take a message to them?"

He said, "Certainly."

I said, "You tell them for me they can go to hell, will ya?" [audience laughs]

Then he called back and he said, "Can Lester Loble and another lawyer speak on the same platform with you for the legislature?" They had both supported Dixon as Democrats against me.

And I said, "Neither one of them can speak on the same platform with me."

During that campaign, they never dreamt that I was going to be elected because I'd been beaten so badly, but running with me on the ticket was Judge—from Butte—oh, I can't think of his name. Anyway, every night he wrote a letter home to his wife and I knew he was very close to her—had been in Butte, he was a judge, was very close to her. Every night he'd ask me how it was looking. I said, "We haven't got a chance." Every single night, night after night, night after night. But by the time I got away around to Glendive I could feel things were going up and I felt then we were gonna win. Well, I told him, "No, we haven't got a

chance." Cause I knew that his wife was telling the Company what we—they thought that—what I thought about it. I knew that if they didn't think I was going to win that they wouldn't spend so much money to defeat me. [audience laughs]

So when the campaign finally—and I was carrying Butte by 6,000—the problems of the Anaconda Company and the attorney for the Clark people, walking up the street, and the Clark lawyer said, "It looks like Wheeler's gonna win."

"Oh, no, no," he said, "wait 'til these cow counties come in."

These cow counties is where he was getting the report from the fella that was running with me to the effect we couldn't win. He said, "Wait 'til the cow counties." They bet \$50. When the cow counties came in I was carrying the cow counties. So, I won for that.

Well, they also tried to beat me, and Dixon finally gets me [as the Republican nominee for U.S. Senate] in '28 and that was when Al Smith ran and I was worried at that, but I finally beat Dixon in '28 although Al Smith lost the state by, oh, I don't know—1,000, running against Hoover.

But, since that time—not get into later history, when I was in the United States Senate. But if there are any questions any of the rest of you people want to ask—but I'm not going to cover any more territory because if I get talking on this subject of what happened in those days during the war hysteria I'd be talking the rest of the night to ya I'm afraid. [audience applauds]

KRT: Do you have any questions? Apparently they like you.

Question: What was your opinion of the women's suffrage movement? [audience laughs]

BKW: Oh, I was for it. [audience laughs and applauds]

[End of Audio]