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Interviewer: Bob Brown
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Bob Brown: Okay, I'm interviewing Jim Murry. Jim, you were the executive secretary of the Montana AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] from when until when?

James Murry: Well, I went to work for the Montana state AFL-CIO in 1966 as the COPE [Committee on Political Education] director. Then in 1968, I became the executive secretary. Then I served in that position until I left in 1991 to go to work for the Steelworkers International Union.

BB: You had some involvement in the union movement even before you became the executive secretary, maybe back into the 1950s?

JM: Bob, I grew up in the labor movement. I joined the Laborers Union when I was 15 years old. That was 56 years ago.

BB: And that was in Laurel?

JM: That was in Billings. I was a Billings local, but I worked at the refinery in Laurel on construction work. From there, I was going to school at the time. I ended up following pipeline construction. Arlene and I lived back in Ohio and back in that part of the country. Our two oldest kids were born there. I was always a member of one union or the other, laborers or the teamsters. I came back to Montana in 1956. I joined the OCEW, which my dad had organized, the local and the refinery in Laurel.

BB: That's oil and...

JM: Oil, chemical, and atomic workers. They later became affiliated with the paper workers and then now they're with the Steelworkers International Union.

BB: So your dad was active in the union when you were a kid?

JM: My dad organized the local union and was on the state AFL-CIO Executive Board right after the merger of the AFL-CIO.

BB: During that period of time, there was some turbulence in terms of organizing labor unions. The management perhaps wasn't enthusiastic about what your dad attempted to do. Is there a story there?

JM: One of my clearest memories...and I was just a youngster, I was probably about five years old when my dad and his friends organized the local refinery in Laurel. They met in my dad's garage. They parked all over the neighborhood because they didn't want to have the cars around our house. They parked around the neighborhood and met in the garage. When they signed up for the union, they signed a round robin so management couldn't see who signed it first.

BB: Really?

JM: I just have a real clear recollection of that. Yes, those were some difficult times. Those were also some of the...in the '50s, were the best. In 1953, that was the year that the labor movement had the highest percentage of workers in unions ever in the United States. That was about at 33 percent. Montana was always one of the most highly unionized states. We were always in the tops or the top three or four. When I was with the state AFL-CIO for all those years, we were always in the top 10 states at that time too. That began to change, of course, when the changes came.

BB: Do you remember an experience or a conversation with a union leader or someone in your early life that helped to kind of focus your philosophy?

JM: You're going to be surprised with this with our personal friendship and background and everything. Probably the last thing I wanted to do was become a union activist. In fact, when I was going to school, I was working toward a business degree. I was not going to—I just wanted to get away from all of the controversy and the angst, everything that went with that. I had seen my dad go through that. Those were hard times. After Arlene and I came back to Montana from Ohio and I went to work at the refinery in Laurel, Chet Blaylock really played a role in getting me involved in politics.

BB: Chet Blaylock, of course, was a longtime state senator.

JM: That's right, and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and a giant in so many ways. Chet really put it on me about not making much of a contribution after everything that my mom and dad had done. I wasn't doing very much at all. I had gone back to school at Eastern [Montana College]. I was working nights and going to school during the day. He talked me into becoming the president of the Laurel Democratic Club. With that, I said, "Okay, I'm going to do this." I didn't say this to Chet, but I thought, "I'll do this. I'll be the best they ever had." My dad was the first president of that club also. He organized it. So my thoughts were that I would be the best president they ever had and I would walk away and wouldn't do it anymore.

Well, I got a little carried away. In the process of that, I also ran for the presidency in my local union. I got seven votes out of 174. I was defeated worse than anybody in the history of the local. So that kind of hurt my ego. So when the terms were up, I ran again. I was elected to the

presidency. I was excited about all the opportunities and the things that had to be done. I was becoming more and more active at the state level, coming to Helena during the legislature and things like that. That precluded my going to work as the COPE director for the Montana state AFL-CIO in 1966, which was the year that Lee Metcalf and Tim Babcock ran against each other for the U.S. Senate. So I always tell people that I really didn't stand much of a chance. There wasn't much of anything else I could do. I almost had to become an activist in the labor movement. There wasn't anything else that was going to work for me.

BB: Just your family roots at the time?

JM: That's right.

BB: So your philosophy, your political philosophy would have probably been based in that same—because of your experience as a young person.

JM: Exactly. I grew up reading publications like *The People's Voice*, *The Pink Reporter*. I don't know if you remember that. A guy by the name of [Delos] Tip Reynolds published *The Pink Reporter* from Lewistown [Three Forks]. It was printed on pink paper too. The information wasn't always the most accurate. That was the stuff I had to read. I went to Farm Labor Institute. I wasn't a very good student in the school. I didn't pay very close attention. I had to pay attention when I read *The People's Voice* and when I went to Farm Labor Institutes because we had discussions around the dinner table about those things.

I better damn well have paid attention when I was doing that. What I wanted to do was I wanted to get away from doing all that. I wasn't going to be putting posters and election campaigns and standing at plant gates handing out handbills. I was going to be like other people. Well, it didn't work out that way. I became too excited about it. I really felt that there was a need to make things better for workers. I really felt that I had a responsibility to participate in that.

BB: Did you ever have any conversations with Chet Blaylock in terms of philosophy and what your core beliefs were and that sort of thing?

JM: Chet and I had many, many conversations over the years. We used to exchange ideas. I always remember just another story about Chet that comes back to me. When I first got started, Chet was an English teacher. Chet would write letters to the editor for me that I would sign. That's not unusual. That happens in political campaigns. So anyhow, [Duane] "Doc" Bowler was the editor of *The Billings Gazette* at the time. Chet went down to Billings and had a meeting with Doc Bowler. When Chet came back he said that Doc Bowler accused him of writing my letters to the editor for me. He said that Jim Murry couldn't do that on his own.

Well, it bruised my ego to such an extent that I said, “I’m going to get to where I can do this. I’m going to be writing my own letters.” That’s what forced me to be able to learn those skills and be able to do that.

BB: Because those communication skills helped you, I’m sure.

JM: As years went by, I can remember when Chet was—you were in the Senate then too—complimenting me one time on a presentation I had done somewhere. I responded by telling him, “Chet, I have a confession. I’m back to where I was in Laurel all those years ago when you were putting things together for me. I didn’t write that. One of my staff did that. I went over it and made some corrections, but they were the ones that put that together.” I think it hurt Chet’s heart because he thought I was writing everything that came out, which I couldn’t have possibly done because we were so involved and so active at the time. Those are great times. That was a great learning experience for me. That was really a wonderful time. It was a difficult time. It was a wonderful time.

BB: You played an important leadership role in the union movement in Montana certainly from the ‘60s to the ‘80s. Then you were involved importantly back in the 1950s as we’ve discussed. I’m just curious to know, since I’ve done a number of these interviews, as you know, and have not really talked to someone with your background before; if you could maybe summarize from your point of view the importance of the union movement in Montana, how it helped workers in Montana and how it helped the state?

JM: I think that really goes to maybe a discussion about the legislation that I was involved with, along with a lot of other leaders and people in Montana, including members of the legislature and governors, folks like that. During those years, we had some of the best worker protection laws in the nation. We passed collective bargaining for employees. That was a big issue at the time. It was very, very controversial. Now that is particularly important as the percentage of workers and private industry in unions is dropping. The percentages holding it up are the workers that are in public employee unions. During that same time, we accomplished collective bargaining for nurses, collective bargaining for teachers. Those were all really big issues. We passed the first minimum wage law for the state of Montana during that period.

BB: When was that?

JM: That would have been in the ‘70s. I can’t remember the exact date. We had a fight over minimum wage for years and years. That didn’t benefit union members so much, but it was a social kind of a correction that had to be made. We were very much a part of that. Our opposition to unfair taxes and especially the sales tax—that fight went on for years and years. In a sense, it was culminating in the fight in 1972 when it went on the ballot, when we were instrumental in putting cost together. It was citizens that opposed the sales tax. SOS, “Save Our State,” was the other side. Harry Billings was the director of cost.

We subsidized that effort, very openly by the way, and we were very successful. It was a tremendous battle. The corporations made the case that all the money supporting sales tax came from little old ladies and retirement and folks like that. Well, we were involved in disclosing the fact that the money supporting that effort came from the major corporations in Montana. They had bankrolled the whole thing and got caught in a lie. It ended up in the courts, remember?

BB: What I remember about that too—we're further into our interview at this point than I thought we were going to be, but this is exciting stuff. I think I remember you found a briefcase?

JM: I didn't find it.

BB: Tell that story.

JM: I'm not so sure the story should be told. Jim Lucas was Speaker of the House and was a Republican. He was an outspoken supporter of sales tax. I guess I should preface these remarks by making this clear: Jim Lucas and his dad were very good friends of my family. Jim Lucas used to play ball in Laurel. He was a tremendous pitcher in the Midland Empire League. Jim Lucas was really a hero of mine. I pitched later on. He was an outstanding athlete. When we used to go to Miles City, my folks always stopped at the Met Café to see Jim's dad and had this wonderful relationship.

We just didn't agree on anything regarding politics. That was all. When I came to work for the state AFL-CIO, Jim was in the legislature. He was really working on the sales tax issue, which led to this incident in 1972. What had happened was he'd left his briefcase at a radio station in Missoula. Somebody else found it. It had all the information and the list of contributors and the amount that they had contributed.

BB: To support the sales tax.

JM: Yes. The person, by the way, that got that information was—I'm not going to tell you who it was, but—he was not only a former Republican, but very active in the Young Americans For Freedom, which was a very right-wing organization. It was closely aligned with the John Birch Society and all of those groups early on. He made that information available to some of us. Of course, that ended up leading to the court case.

BB: So you were able to prove who was paying for the—who the contributing supporters for the sales tax effort were?

JM: Almost all of the money came from Montana corporations.

BB: I see.

JM: Of course, this had all been denied up until then. We really worked to make that a big issue. So that was the year that we elected the delegates to the Con Con [Constitutional Convention] and we also had the sales tax as a referendum issue. As I recall, that was right. So the sales tax fight had a decided impact on the election for the Constitutional Convention. Those were non-partisan elections.

BB: Years ago, when I worked for the University of Montana—the first time I did—I was asked to help raise some money for the University Foundation. I traveled around the country a little bit to do that. I was in Connecticut briefly interviewing a couple of people, talking to them and asking them for money. There was a big demonstration on the grounds of the capitol building in Hartford, Connecticut. People were demonstrating against the income tax. The governor of Connecticut had forced an income tax through the legislature. There were people all over the place, thousands of people demonstrating. A friend and I went over and took in this demonstration. There were union signs throughout the crowd; AFL-CIO, Food and Commercial Workers, whatever it was.

I went up to one of those guys. I said, “What’s your problem with the income tax?”

He said, “The income tax is a terrible tax because rich people find loopholes through it.”

I said, “What’s a fair tax?”

He said, “A sales tax. Everybody pays the sales tax. Those guys can’t get away with anything with that.”

I thought to myself, how ironic, because back here, there seemed to be substantial opposition to an income tax and a support for a sales tax, where my experience in Montana had been that the unions favored the income tax as a tax that was more based on the ability to pay. They opposed the sales tax because they felt it was regressive.

JM: That’s right.

BB: This guy had the opposite interpretation. Any comments on that?

JM: That’s no so unusual. There were conservative—especially conservative—building trade unions all over the country that liked the idea of the sales tax. At times, we had some internal difficulties in the labor movement here in Montana over that.

BB: This guy seemed to think it was simple and obvious, maybe fair that way, and that the income tax was complicated enough with loopholes and that sort of thing, that his suspicion was that if you were smart enough to hire an accountant, you could probably figure out a way to not have to pay it.

JM: Our logic and our reasoning always was that if we had the impact on the legislature, and we felt that we should have the workers, we weren't going to allow those loopholes to exist. Those were part of the thing that we fought so hard on; fighting for what we felt was fair taxation for the middle-income people.

BB: Your philosophy was basically that the sales tax was regressive, is that it?

JM: That's right. The idea that people made a lot of money, they didn't pay a sales tax on the money they had in savings. Low-income people and middle-income people that virtually had to spend all their income just to live and survive, they pay the sales tax on their entire income.

BB: So with a large income, you were able to make the case pretty well on the basis of what you found in the briefcase and found out who the contributors were.

JM: That's exactly right.

BB: I suppose the money from the sales tax would have been used to reduce property taxes?

JM: Yes.

BB: Which would be then why?

JM: As we looked at that, whenever there was a reduction in property taxes, the people that were getting a significant reduction wasn't a homeowner. It was a company that had hard large holdings. So it was like the tax fight so often, who do the tax breaks go to and who realizes the benefits of that?

BB: Jim, when you first came to the legislature as a lobbyist, do you remember when that was? Was that the early '60s?

JM: The first session that I came to Helena was 1959. That's a long time ago. I came from my local in Laurel. I was up here in sessions following that. I would come up on one or two bills. Then in 1966, I went to work for the AFL-CIO and became a full-time lobbyist for the State Federation of Labor every year. I left in '91. The legislature was in session and I left at the beginning of that session.

BB: You know, I'm interested to know your impressions. The Anaconda Company still owned the newspapers in Montana in 1959. I think probably the culture of the legislature changed enormously from your first experience in 1959 and '61, and your last experiences with it in 1989 and '91. I would just be kind of interested to know if you could describe your initial impressions as a young fellow from Laurel showing up and maybe the things that stood out in your mind about the Montana legislature.

JM: The thing that was always clear to me was that the Anaconda Company and Montana Power Company, the railroads, the major industries, pretty much had their own way. There was a lot of good reason for that besides the newspapers. That had a lot to do with it. We responded to the problem with the newspapers with *The People's Voice*. I was on that board for a lot of years. *The People's Voice* was very important to us as a vehicle to get the message out about our issues and workers, family farmers, and ranchers.

BB: Just because some future historian listening to this recording might not know, describe just briefly *The People's Voice*.

JM: *The People's Voice* was a co-op. it was a newspaper that was put together by Lee Metcalf. Lee Metcalf was very instrumental in putting that together. Harry and Gretchen Billings were the last people to run *The People's Voice*. Harry was the editor. They concentrated on our issues and our position on those issues. When I say "our" it was in response primarily to the Farm Labor Coalition, which had so much to do with progressive politics in Montana at that time.

BB: The idea was that this goes back to Senator Metcalf. He was involved in it. Maybe it goes back to the '30s or something?

JM: You know, I'm embarrassed that I can't answer that. I think it probably was in the '30s.

BB: It was in reaction to the fact that most of the major newspapers in Montana were owned by the Anaconda Company.

JM: Yes. We couldn't get our word out.

BB: I see, okay.

JM: The state AFL-CIO didn't have a lot of money for educational kinds of things. So as an example, when I showed up in the Montana legislature, we would go in on bills. We were on the side opposite the Anaconda Company, the Montana Power Company, all of these corporations that had staff. They had well-educated, well-trained people working in the background doing research, putting information together for them, and doing all of that. We'd work on the hill and when we got done at the end of the day, we'd go to the office and try to figure out what bills we had to appear on the next day, and put some semblance of a testimony together so we could go there and deliver. That's an impossible task.

As I saw that, I said that I wanted to do something about that. I was able to do that. We had a good research staff and people that could put things together that leveled the playing field at least a little bit. Early on, I just remember how tough it was to go before—especially—the House Labor Committee. They just beat the bejesus out of me. There was just no possibility of being able to move anything through there. So we said, "We've got to do better politically.

We've got to elect friends to the legislature." We'll have some influence over how those committees behave. The rest is history.

The collective bargaining laws that I was talking about came about—minimum wage. Our role in the Constitutional Convention was a significant role; the role of the labor movement in the hearings in conjunction with the Constitutional Convention, because we were there every day. Then when it went to the people for a vote, we played a significant role in taking the information to our members at the importance of why that constitution should be adopted. When I showed up, we had some of the poorest worker's comp laws. There were only two or three states in the nation that had a lower benefit schedule than Montana. We changed that. We ended up with some of the finest worker's comp laws, unemployment comp laws. In the process of that, we had a major scandal over worker's comp. You might remember that. That was a tremendous thing to go through. We played a role in exposing that. That was during Democratic administrations. There were some Democrat legislators that got into some trouble.

BB: Could you tell about that?

JM: How that all happened for us, we got into a major controversy over enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. With the passage of that law at the federal levels, states were encouraged to put advisory committees together to advise on a law that would apply to each individual state. Then the states would enforce the law instead of the federal government. At that time, the labor movement had tremendous influence. We were very successful politically.

BB: This was in the early 1970s?

JM: Yes. It was in the early '70s. As all of this information was coming down, we were trying to sort out where we had to go and what we had to do. We had an effective advisory committee on that issue. They put together recommendations for probably—if not the toughest—one of the toughest state laws in the nation. George Meany was the president of the AFL-CIO at that time. The idea began to develop that if we go back to where corporations had the kind of influence they did in these states during the time that I was just talking about, there wouldn't be any enforcement of the law. The law would be there, but there wouldn't be any enforcement. So we went to the legislature and took the position that we didn't want state enforcement. We wanted federal enforcement.

I ended up in a tremendous argument with the then-director of the worker's comp division. These were during Democratic administrations. I'll never forget. We didn't realize [Lee Capitol Bureau reporter] Art Hutchinson was right around the corner taking notes on our argument. A big story broke out on the front pages of all the newspapers about—

BB: Who was the guy?

JM: It was Jim Carden. We went from there. We simply took the position that we wanted federal enforcement of OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration]. The other thing we wanted was we wanted a fair worker's comp law. That led to the reform. Pat McKittrick introduced that legislation that brought about the worker's comp judge and an independent appeals process for those cases.

BB: Now Jim Carden apparently went to jail didn't he?

JM: He didn't end up going to jail. He left the state. He ended up in Oregon.

BB: Wasn't he convicted of something?

JM: No, there were some others that were. Luke McKeon went to jail. Luke McKeon was a state senator from Anaconda. He was a very good friend of the labor movement. He had really made some mistakes on how he handled worker's comp. There were some folks up in Great Falls that got in trouble. It was a bad thing.

BB: How were they getting in trouble? What were they doing?

JM: They had runners that ran worker's comp cases. There were even some labor leaders—

BB: What's a runner?

JM: They were making sure that the attorneys knew that—these attorneys specialized in worker's comp cases. They made them aware of people that were injured or hurt or made sick, whatever. Then they would finagle that so they'd get the representation of those workers. Then there was also a too close of a relationship with the worker's comp division. There was evidence that the information on workers was being sent out to worker's comp attorneys. If they were attorneys that got along well with the system, they got good settlements for the workers. We said that whole game was playing with workers' money. It was all being played with workers' money. We said, "We're not going to have that anymore." The Montana legislature supported that. With that, we had the major reform. That was a big issue in those days. That was a tremendous issue.

BB: And not particularly party-line as I recall.

JM: That's absolutely right.

BB: Do you remember, did the Anaconda Company or Montana Power Company play any kind of a role in that?

JM: No. I always kind of admired—in a way I had to admire their effectiveness, the way they worked. When I worked up there and I talked to you as a Republican, Bob, you always knew

where I was coming from. There was just no doubt about where I had been in campaigns and where I was going to be in the future. That's all there was to it. You just kind of had to accept me for whatever the hell I looked like that day. On the corporate side, they didn't handle it that way. They had people that worked the Democratic side and people that worked for the Republican side of those aisles. They raised money. They helped legislators get money in campaigns, did all kinds of things to help. They were very effective in that regard.

Many times, you wouldn't see them in hearings. With us, I always felt that we had an obligation as trade unions to make sure everybody knew where we stood—friends and those that didn't particularly like us. So if you'll remember, not only did we appear in committees, we'd send letters to all of you in the legislature stating our position and the reason why. If the legislator was opposed of what we were doing, they just threw the letter in the trash or maybe kept it to develop a response on the floor. Our friends would then use some of the statistical information in the debates that went on. That was exactly the way that was done. We wanted to make sure that everybody knew where we stood on those issues.

The corporations didn't—we put out our voting records. So because of our voting records, we really had an obligation, at least I felt, to let people know where we stood on those issues. Corporations didn't always do that. They'd be working in the background and you wouldn't know exactly where they were because they'd have ties with other corporations and the Chamber of Commerce and all those groups. Our approach was totally different.

BB: So your impression was that when we talk about corporations, we're basically talking about the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power Company and perhaps the Northern Pacific Railroad, banks and that sort of thing that they maybe had kind of a cooperative network that functioned during the legislative session and also between legislative sessions?

JM: Yes.

BB: They cultivated friendships among Democrats as well as Republicans.

JM: Sure they did. As a matter of fact, that was one of the things that got to be really difficult in my role as the executive officer of the Montana state AFL-CIO because corporations became very adept at driving wedges between unions. The Western Environmental Trade Association was formed to split the labor movement. We had supported progressive environmental legislation. We had supported progressive tax legislation. Some of the corporations saw that as an opportunity to split us within the labor movement because the corporations were making the argument that the position of the AFL-CIO was essentially wrong. So what they did, and they were quite effective, in many instances was develop the strategy for unions that were really close to them. Those weren't union strategies. Those were corporate strategies. That created a lot of internal friction within the movement. In fact, you might remember reading about some of those battles that we had in the newspapers because they were pretty tough. They were pretty tough.

BB: Remind me, when you talk about the battles, you're talking about the WETA group you mentioned earlier?

JM: Yes, Western Environmental Trade Association.

BB: So there was a battle between them and the...

JM: With the state AFL-CIO when I was there.

BB: And it was mostly over environmental kinds of things?

JM: Yes. Primarily environmental issues, but tax issues entered into that, and some other issues. They formed what they did as corporations formed even closer relationships with some union leaders. In the process, it really demeaned the rest of the labor movement. As that was going on, that was going on all over the country. Corporations really learned to do that quite effectively.

BB: From your description, that's wrong and bad? That's how I see you see that. Could you see though, that there could be another side to that?

JM: I have a hard time with that. Now, let me confess something. As I say that, Bob, when I left the AFL-CIO I went to work for the steelworkers. I went to work for a joint program on my board were the top officers of the Steelworkers International Union and the top officers of the major steel companies in America. It was a cooperative program. Those cooperative programs will always work okay. They can be beneficial to workers and to companies, to everybody involved, as long as unionists maintain their own identity as unionists. What happens in all of that relationship too many times, is that union leaders don't maintain their identity as unionists. They become too cooperative with corporations and end up selling out. They just sell out completely. Now I'm not just talking about in a legislative sense. That also happens in the collective bargaining process all over the country. International unions fight that all the time now.

BB: There seems to be something almost necessarily adversarial in the relationship (unintelligible). That's what I think I hear you saying.

JM: That's a good point. That has always been my contention is that there should be somewhat of an adversarial relationship. Now that doesn't mean a nasty, mean relationship. You and I, for the most part, have always been on the opposite side. That didn't mean that we couldn't be cordial to each other, didn't even mean that we couldn't be friends. It just meant that we disagreed. I think the disagreement, for the most part, is a healthy kind of a thing. We disagree. We have our differences in the legislature. Voters would make the decision as to who they thought was right. That's the way the system is supposed to work. When it gets to be too

comfortable, the system doesn't work very well. It hasn't worked very well in the American labor movement, I can tell you that.

BB: Are there examples of that recently in the American labor movement? I guess I'm not familiar with that.

JM: I guess there are examples. For example, when international unions go into the collective bargaining process, one of the things that happens in that is that corporations will make a great effort to woo the officers of local unions so they won't be so hard on them in a collective bargaining process. It's the same thing that goes on so that you have—in effect, what you end up with is you end up with union people making the case for the corporation. I never did take the position that corporations shouldn't have a position and we should just have our own way. My position was simply that they had some of the best and the brightest representing them. They didn't need me. They had people that could make their case with them and do it in spades just simply because they had the money and the staff to be able to do that. We had limited resources. I had to just work my tail off to represent the interests of the workers and their families. That's what I always tried to do.

BB: That was your focus, I'm sure. What I'm thinking about though is that—what I think I remember reading about George Meany, who you brought up earlier in our interview, was that some people think that Marxism could have infiltrated unions like they did in Europe had it not been for his leadership. His idea was that capitalism was wonderful. Let it flourish, but we want unions strong enough to be able to bargain collectively to get our share of the profit. The more money the corporation made, the better it is for us as long as we're strong enough to bargain for our share of it. If we can't do that, if we don't have the right to bargain collectively, then there could be Marxism or something taking over.

JM: That was a tremendous battle that went on in the labor movement. George Meany was out of the building trade unions. His father was a business agent for the Plumbers and Fitters in New York. His name was Michael Meany, Honest Mike. That was George Meany's background. I thought the world of him.

BB: Did you know him personally?

JM: Oh yes. We were friends. I really thought the world of him.

BB: I remember. I shouldn't intrude on your interview, but I remember when I was a little kid I heard him interviewed on the radio. He was talking about the *woykas* [mimicking a New York accent]. I asked my dad, "What's the *woykas*?"

He said, "The workers!"

JM: He was a great guy.

BB: He had a heavy New York City accent.

JM: He was a great leader. Sometimes he was inclined to be pretty conservative. The AFL-CIO took a strong position on the Vietnam War. There was a lot of disagreement within the labor movement on that. I was one of those people that had a lot of questions about that. I was always a good soldier for the AFL-CIO. I remained loyal. I was careful how I disagreed. The thing I loved about George Meany was he didn't mind sitting down and telling me that he really thought that I was wrong. We would part and still be friends.

BB: You have a deep commitment and I don't question it at all. Where you're coming from here and that you want to represent the best interest of the workers has got to be a fundamental union leader. At the same time, as I think about George Meany, I wonder if he was confronted with a situation where he thought, "If we're not careful here, this corporation might not survive. We're going to lose the jobs with it." So you commented earlier that sometimes union leaders could be too close to business. Maybe sometimes in the long run, there needs to be some kind of a...not necessarily adversarial...working relationship.

JM: Again, if the leadership maintains their identity, and I can say this about George Meany, you always know that George Meany was a worker and a worker representative. There was no question about that. Now you could question some of his decisions because like everyone, he made some that were wrong. That just happens. He always had a very strong identity as a worker. He was always concerned about workers and their families. He was concerned about their welfare above everything else, no question.

Lane Kirkland was like that. He was a very good friend. I had disagreements with Lane. I was really closer to Lane than I was to Meany. I guess it was probably because of age more than anything else. I always remember, I had some questions about AFL-CIO policy in Central America when we were going through the bad times there. So there was a delegation going down there to do some work. Tom Donahue was the secretary treasurer. He worked for George Meany and then when Meany died, Lane Kirkland became the president, and Tom Donahue became the secretary treasurer of the AFL-CIO. They were having a meeting and talking about who should be going down to Central America. Tom Donahue was another good friend of mine from New York. He was a New York Irishman. He was just a great guy. He said, "We ought to send Jim Murry so at least he knows what the hell he's talking about when he disagrees with us." That's kind of a neat kind of a relationship and reputation to have. So I had some wonderful experiences. I always tried to be really open-minded on the direction that we were taking and all of that.

I guess what I'm saying is that on one hand there has to be somewhat of an adversarial relationship with employers; to an extent there was somewhat of an adversarial relationship that existed between me and some of the people that I admired the most. I didn't want to just roll over. I felt that I had to read and had to pay attention. I had to understand the issues. Then

when I made the decision that we were going to go, then we would go. Then the workers of Montana—we had elections every two years. If they didn't like the job I was doing, it was like you when you were serving in the legislature [or] when you were secretary of state. If people didn't like the job you did, they voted for somebody else. I kind of like that system myself. It's hard on the nerves and a little tough on families at times. That's a pretty good system. Always make your case to let people know where you are. So that's where I came from. In the process of that, many times I know I was too shrill. I could have maybe been more effective had I not been quite as...I can't go back and do it over.

BB: Your reputation, as you say, was always for being forthright. I think there are probably some people who would criticize the union movement for perhaps backing, I'm not so sure about the tax laws you commented on earlier, but maybe environmental laws and in some cases as far as like the timber industry is concerned. Maybe you lost some lunch buckets, lost some jobs, contributed to the closing down of some sawmills, I don't know how easy it would have been to make that case. There could have been economic factors that were greater.

JM: The point is that there are two or three sides to every issue. So what we should do is we should facilitate input into that decision-making process. That's where I've always come down. I've really felt quite strongly about that. By the same token, you understand that we all have political loyalties. So when things start going badly, or if it starts working against the position that we take, we put our spin on it. That's a political reality. That isn't always really good. It's a reality that the system has to deal with and voters have to be able to see through. They don't always see that. We saw what was going on in the timber industry and in the mining industry and great debates raged on it about environmental issues.

BB: Those industries are—if not dead—awful sick in Montana. There are a lot of men that used to be union men who are no longer unionists.

JM: See, one of the things that we can never—in terms of spin—one of the points that we could never make very effectively was technology put a hell of a lot of people out of work. We were doing as much work, but we were doing it with a fraction of the workforce that we once had when we had this labor-intensive kind of work. I went to work for the steelworkers. I put together a national education program for them. The idea was that we had to do something about helping workers to make the adjustment in the new industry. When they went to work in the industry, it was labor intensive. They had to have a strong back. That was a prerequisite. All of a sudden, the steel industry became one of the most highly technical and highly automated industries in the world.

The steel workers felt that there should be a place for these workers that had given their lives to the industry. What was decided was that we had to upgrade basic skills. We developed schools right at the steel mill sites and union halls to improve math skills, comprehension, reading, writing, communication skills, and all of that. This was so they could compete. What we found out was we had just a fraction of the workforce turning out just as much steel as we

ever turned out before. I'm talking about steel mills that had 35,000 or 40,000 workers that were down to 800. The whole industry just changed over night. I submit to you that it happened in the mining industry here. It happened in the timber industry.

BB: I got you.

JM: I've thought about that so much because I always thought I could have done a better job of making that argument. I used to talk about it, but I didn't talk about it as convincingly as I would have...

BB: I think we weren't as aware of it when it was happening. I don't think we were aware of what was happening. You did mention that probably with your leadership—because it was in the early 1970s—the AFL-CIO did come in the legislative process as a proponent of bills, progressive legislation as you mentioned, to protect the environment. Technology may have had a lot more to do with the economic difficulties of the mines and the timber industry. As you think back, do you think—maybe a better question to ask you would be; why as a union leader you felt it was important to support that legislation?

JM: I'm smiling as you're asking that question because I think we've had these discussions before, haven't we? You know, I guess my feelings were always that plants that were dirty on the inside, operations that were dirty and unsafe to workers, were also the same plants that were polluting the communities and making unsafe conditions for the communities in which those workers lived. I know about that. I grew up right behind a refinery. So that was always the thing that motivated me when it came to environmental kinds of things. The other thing is that I saw what was going on with manipulation by corporations.

I remember, for example, the Colstrip unit was going to be built. We had a great controversy about that. Do you remember the environmental rigs and everything? It was really quite a time. We didn't get deeply involved in that, but we kept asking questions more than anything else. In the process of all that, the Montana Power Company had really developed a relationship with some of the building trade unions. The building trades were flying around. They were giving presentations and talking about the need to buy the plant. This was the company line. What they didn't know was that Montana Power Company had reached an agreement with one of the unions, the operating engineers. They were going to do that with an industrial union agreement. They were going to gut the building trade union's agreement. They weren't even going to pay the building trades guys what they should have had, and under the contracts that they had negotiated.

That's the most offensive thing in the world. In fact, I had a memo in my drawer here some place. I still have that. I made that available to the press. I had a lot of friends that were really upset with me at the time. What we were saying was, "Hey, let's put all the cards on the table here. Let's see what the motivations really are." The motivation of the Montana Power Company wasn't to give our people a lot of jobs. That wasn't their motivation. Their motivation

was profit. They wanted to maximize that. Unions have a responsibility to make damn sure that's done fairly too, and to protect each other.

BB: Certainly the purpose of a union is to be an advocate of the workers. That's the fundamental purpose. I don't know whether—we don't need to beleaguer this any longer if you don't want to—but at the same time you wonder if the union is an advocate of the workers and the worker's rights, salaries, clean working environments, and that sort of thing. It doesn't also need to be an advocate in terms of trying to have sustainable jobs.

JM: Oh, yes.

BB: So you wouldn't argue with the idea that the adversarial role is important and necessary and that was really what and how unions came into being. At the same time, if we don't have employers, we can't have any work.

JM: Yes. I wouldn't argue that. I wouldn't argue that. I just think that the system that you're talking about—and I don't question you at all in your motivations and your feelings about this—the system doesn't work unless you have trade unionists that have a strong identity. Those corporate guys all have strong identities. They're never mixed up about what their motivation is—never.

BB: When you think back in all the years that you were involved, and the issues, are there some legislators or lobbyists that stand out in your mind? Do you have a story about a legislator or a lobbyist that might kind of typify the Montana legislative process?

JM: Before we did the interview, we were telling stories, and just one thing came right after the other. In fact, we couldn't get to do the interview because there were so many stories. I'm hesitant to talk about legislative leaders that I worked with that I really had a lot of confidence in and we were friends. There were a lot of them. If you get to talking about people like that, then you leave someone out. I don't want to do that. One of the things—and we talked about this a little bit—about the legislature that really strikes me is that back in the days when I was there—I had been gone from the legislature for 15 years—there were great debates. We had emotional differences of opinion.

We could shout and we could rail and do all kinds of things. There was a civility with all of that that made the experience, for the most part, pretty pleasant. At least I thought that was the case. We were talking about our friendship over a lot of years as the best example of that, that I can think of. Tim Babcock and Betty have always—I don't know if I ever agreed with them. I did everything I could to beat him when he was running for governor [and] when he ran against Lee Metcalf. I have some of the nicest visits with Tim and Betty when I see them. They are very involved with the Historical Society and some things like that. I have wonderful visits.

Betty used to serve on the House Labor Committee. She was really tough on me. There was no question about where she stood. There wasn't a lot of talk about compromise and a cooperative kind of approach. That was okay because I understood where she was coming from and she understood where I was coming from and we could be friends. It's absolutely delightful to spend a few minutes visiting with them. I always love that. Tim kids me about things I did. That makes it better to do that. We don't have that kind of civility anymore, or at least that's my observation.

BB: This interview is being conducted in October of 2006. I think you and I have a similar experience in the legislature. It goes back a similar amount of time. We overlapped quite a bit of that time. Certainly we agree that in the '70s and '80s there was more civility and gentility in the legislative process than it has in the last few years. Jim, of the people that I know, you've had a unique opportunity to meet and know personally Senator Metcalf, who we've talked about before. Congressman Olsen, Senator Mansfield, I'm sure you had conversations with. Just for the benefit of some future historian that might listen to this interview, do you have any observations or a story or something that might kind of illustrate the personality, or how these guys were as individuals?

JM: Lee Metcalf was the reason I went to work for the AFL-CIO. He was a warrior. He was a fighter. He and my dad were very close friends as Mike Mansfield and my dad were. Lee was always the champion of little people, family farmers. He was great. So I came to work for as a COPE director in 1966 to work in his campaign. He was a guy, geez he was intense. He was very intense.

BB: COPE is Committee on Political Education of the AFL-CIO?

JM: That's right. I was the director of the Committee on Political Education before I became the executive officer of the executive secretary. Lee of all was really my favorite. We had a very close, personal relationship. One of the reasons we had such a close personal relationship is with Lee, you could disagree with him and he'd just come right back at you. Lee didn't go cry nor did I. In fact, I remember one time when Lee spoke to a banquet for the OCAW's district council meeting that was held in Laurel. It was nine states involved and it was during the Vietnam War. Edith Green was there from Oregon.

BB: Congresswoman from Oregon.

JM: Yes. She was there with Lee and Donna.

BB: Donna is Senator Metcalf's wife.

JM: Yes. I just loved Lee with all my heart. I had been drinking a little bit, which had quite an impact on my thought process. There's no question about that. Anyhow, he was almost apologetic about what was going on with the Vietnam War. He had a great question about that

war. He was struggling with trying to develop his own direction on where he was going, how he could disagree with some friends and still be supportive of troops in Vietnam. That was a big issue, unlike the Iraq situation that we have today. I thought Lee was very apologetic and I'll never forget when he finished. Arlene and I went up to talk to him and he said, "How did I do Jim?"

I said, "Lee, you don't have to be apologetic to this crowd. Everybody here is with you."

So this conversation goes on. One thing leads to another, Donna grabbed Lee and Arlene grabbed me to keep us apart, because he was so upset.

BB: Why did that upset him?

JM: The discussion became more heated than I just described it I guess. I always remember at that time, Arlene and I were moving to Helena. We were coming up Last Chance Gulch. Lee had just come out of his office there. I remember I looked the other way hoping that I wouldn't have to see him because I hadn't talked to him since we had the disagreement. He yelled so I pulled over. He came up to the car. He was a big guy. He asked Arlene how she was doing, if she was able to find a house. He didn't say a word to me. It was wonderful. He did things like that that I thought were just great. We were friends. The other thing Lee used to get such a big kick out of was I was inclined not to return calls to Arlene when she would call the office. I would tell the secretaries to tell her that I would get back with her right away. Then I'd forget.

Arlene would call and say that Lee Metcalf had to talk to me. Then I'd get right on the phone. When Lee found out about that, he was so tickled and he dropped by the Globe where Arlene worked and told her that she should feel free to use his name any time she wanted to. Those are just great memories. He was such a supporter of the movement. Mike Mansfield, on the other hand, came from the labor movement. He was a mucker in the mines in Butte. I remember the Butte Miners Union. He went on to school and taught at the University of Montana. He was involved in organizing the Teachers Union at the university. He was one of the founders. In the process of that, he was a secretary of the Missoula Trades and Labor Assembly. When Mike Mansfield was out, there wasn't anybody better on (unintelligible) than Mike Mansfield. He just exuded this worker kind of a personality. It was amazing.

I always remember when he ran for the Senate. Was that in 1952? He'd been in Congress from the western district. He came to Laurel. He and my dad were friends. My dad used to hold all of his meetings in Sonny O'Day's bar. My dad suggested that Mike and he meet at Sonny O'Day's. He neglected to tell Sonny that Mike was going to be coming in. Mike came in. He took a booth and had a newspaper. He was wearing a ruffled old coat and a beat-up going to town hat. He sits down over there and he starts to read his paper. Sonny sees him over there and he thinks that it's some bum that got off the freight train and came in to get out of the weather. He goes over and grabs him and marches him out the door. They get all the way out to the sidewalk

before Mike convinces him who he is and that he was there to meet with my dad. Sonny O'Day was always so embarrassed about that.

I think every time I met with Mike, he would always tell that story. Sonny always told that story. When I did the eulogy at Sonny's funeral a couple of years ago—it was a great funeral at St. Anthony's in Laurel—I told that story. I told the story about how I got all my political training at Sonny O'Day's bar through incidents like that. Mike Mansfield was a guy that could really work plant gates. He was really an amazing a guy. He wasn't as aggressive in many ways as Lee Metcalf. I have a great admiration for him. Mike Mansfield, when he was Senate Majority Leader, would always see people from Montana. A lot of times he wouldn't see other lobbyists. So George Meany would have me go back and just camp there to talk to Mike. I remember George Meany used to talk about how he didn't understand why they had so much trouble talking to him. They were all very Irish Catholic, yet Mike didn't have time for them.

That's just an interesting time in history. I was very fortunate to have been a kid. These were giants in the political movement. I knew about them and I was friends with them when I started. That made a big difference. There were two generations of my family that had worked with them. Arnold Olsen was another very good friend. He too was a person coming from Butte—

BB: He was a U.S. representative from about 1960 to about 1970.

JM: Yes. Arnold was a great friend of the labor movement. The thing I always remember was that when I first went to work for the AFL-CIO, Arnold was a congressman in the western district. Jim Battin was the congressman in the eastern district. So when I'd go back to Washington, I'd always go see Mike Mansfield, Lee Metcalf, and Arnold for sure, sometimes drop by Congressman Battin's office. We didn't have the relationship with him. There was a real competitive thing among Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf and Arnold Olsen. You had to be a little bit careful about who you went to see first. You didn't talk about having seen somebody else first. I learned about that. Those were wonderful times. It was a very important part of my educational experience.

Years went by and of course guys like Pat Williams emulated Lee Metcalf in so many ways. Pat and I had been friends since we were practically kids getting started in the movement together. I happened to be their youngest daughter Whitney's godfather as a matter of fact. We're very close. There are many others.

BB: I'd like to have your impressions of governors too. If I asked you to use three words that would best describe Lee Metcalf, what would they be?

JM: Intense, loyal, and very committed to the people of Montana.

BB: If I asked you to describe Senator Mansfield with three words?

JM: That's unfair.

BB: How do you mean?

JM: Mike, I think of him as a statesman, extremely knowledgeable, and he had a rare ability to work with different parties.

BB: Similar philosophies but different personality types.

JM: Yes.

BB: Metcalf was probably more passionate.

JM: Yes absolutely.

BB: Governors?

JM: I guess Forrest Anderson was a great guy. He was a feisty little guy. We became very good friends. We didn't support him in the primary. We supported Gene Mahoney. We didn't make a formal endorsement, but most of the labor movement worked for Gene Mahoney because we were afraid that Forrest was too close to the corporations, especially the Montana Power Company. After Forrest won the primary, I remember he asked for a meeting with me. He said, "All right Murry, I beat you. Now what are you going to do?" He said it just like that. He was very direct.

I said, "We're going to go to work and work our cans off for you in this general election campaign."

He said, "Good, that's all I wanted to know." So we went to something else. Now we had some differences of opinion on appointments. God, he could really be tough. One of my best friends, Ron Richards...

BB: Who was chief of staff.

JM: Yes. That was not an easy position for Ron to be in because Forrest, from time to time, would maintain that Ron's friendship with me was greater than his loyalty to Forrest, which was not the case. It wasn't the case at all. In the intensity of what goes on around an office like that, those used to be things that were discussed. As Forrest became ill, and he used to call me and we would get together, we had some really great discussions about the direction politics was going in Montana and the nation and how people felt about issues. He was really pretty acutely aware of those things. He was much more so than people gave him credit.

Tom Judge was probably, for the labor movement, the best governor. We went through those very progressive, liberal times. It was a lot easier to be with us of course. Tom had some personal flaws. He was a friend of workers. There was no question about that. I was, for one, always completely grateful.

Ted Schwinden, I had known Ted Schwinden longer than anybody because he came up in that farm labor thing. He was active with the Montana Farmers Union. I used to see him at Farm Labor Institutes before, I guess when he was first in the legislature, and he tended to be conservative. He came from a fairly conservative area. In fact, he had some problems because he was so supportive of labor positions when he was in the House. He lost an election over that. So he always remembered that and watched me like a hawk. He didn't want me to push him too far. When I got into trouble a couple of times, remember we had audits over the federal programs we administered and ended up with a grand jury investigation, Ted Schwinden was publicly supportive of us and in effect said, "Jim Murry will do about anything to win. He won't cheat. He won't steal money. He had never mishandled workers' money."

I always remember another thing about Ted was we went through the first session of the legislature and we killed a lot of his legislation. He had a cabinet meeting. He was telling his cabinet that he knew that several of them there had a friendship with me. He wanted to remind them that he and I had been friends longer than I had been friends with any of his cabinet members. That was the case because of age more than anything else. He went on to explain. He said, "There's one thing you've got to always know about Jim Murry is his loyalties. His loyalties are always going to be to workers. If a fight comes up between his mother and workers and for some reason the workers are wrong, Jim Murry is going to be with those workers. So you better put that away and remember it."

I thought that was one of the [best] compliments in the world. That was really good. I wasn't very close to Stan Stephens. When he was in the Senate, Stan used to vote with us once in a great while. I had a good relationship there. When he was in the governor's office, I didn't have a relationship with him at all.

BB: Stan was from Havre when he was a state senator, which was a railroad town. I know that I was involved with legislation over the years involving rail labor. Generally he and I voted the same way.

JM: That's right. There were times that he came with us. I could always talk to Stan. Stan was pretty conservative. He didn't have great feelings about the role of the labor movement. I think his attitude was more that we were a group that had to be dealt with. So we did. We had a friendship. I was never very close. Of course, Marc Racicot—I was gone for most of the time he was around.

BB: Did you ever know Hugo Aronson?

JM: I didn't. I met him. I was a youngster then. I met him, was all. Tim Babcock was governor when I came on board with the AFL-CIO.

BB: Jim, as you look back at the labor movement both in Montana and the United States and think about where it's been and where it is now, what are your thoughts on the labor movement looking into the future?

JM: I think the labor movement without question is going through some very, very difficult times. In 1953, that was the year that we had the highest percentage of workers in unions ever before. It was a 33 percent.

BB: What is it down to now?

JM: No, it's down to about seven or eight percent. That's in the private sector. About 12 percent of public employees are in public employee unions. Excuse me, it's 12 percent of the workers in the work force are in unions, if you consider public employees. Public employees are up to about 35 percent nationally. That's been static for 30 years. So that tells us that we have some major problems. I think you have to consider why those problems came about. We've had a major changing of the rules starting with the Reagan years. In 1935, we saw the passage of the National Labor Relations Act. With that was the formation of the National Labor Relations Board, which was an instrument for workers to go to, to help them join a free trade union of their choice. It was an instrument for workers.

That changed during the Reagan years. Those rules changed. All of a sudden, there were people being appointed to the National Labor Relations Board that couldn't care less about workers. They were there representing the interests of corporations. Right now, it's three to two. The Bush appointees just made a very bad decision for nurses, for example. It will limit the number of nurses and also teachers. It will have a tremendous impact on teachers that can go into unions. I think that decision is aimed at teachers more than anybody else. So we have that kind of a situation. We also have court decisions. We're the only industrialized country that allows for the permanent replacement of strikers. Other countries don't do that. So, essentially workers in America can't go on strike. We can't register our protest like we once could because employers can replace those workers. They're just simply out of work.

BB: The aircraft controllers, for example.

JM: Exactly. With the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] the way it is, if an organizer is out organizing workers and there's a blatant unfair labor charge against an employer, they can't bring that to the NLRB now and have it resolved fairly because what happens is it goes to the NLRB and then usually a decision is just postponed for so long that all of the people that are supportive of the union end up losing their jobs. So we don't have that kind of a situation in other countries. At the same time, we see a decrease in union membership for another reason worldwide. That comes because of the issue of trade as corporations are moving around the

world and going to the lowest bidder in terms of wages and environmental controls, taxes, and all of that. It puts unions in a very difficult position. Unions are considering all of that now. The problems of the AFL-CIO are having international unions getting out, leaving. That's part of the struggle to try and figure out a direction and how to deal with all of this.

BB: Technology has got to have a huge impact.

JM: It has a tremendous impact. So I think we're going to see—I guess the question is whether the labor movement is going to survive. I don't think it's going to be the kind of a labor movement that I remember, that I remember as a kid and as I remember when I was active as a leader. I think there's going to be a major paradigm shift in how unions approach problems. One of the best examples is how we struggled for years to get healthcare for workers in our contracts. We had strikes. Some people were jailed. Some people died over that struggle. We got healthcare and it went to just about everybody whether there was a union involved or not. It became the acceptable way to proceed.

Now we're finding where it's just the opposite. It's almost impossible to negotiate healthcare in a contract. Those that have healthcare, the cost of that is just skyrocketing so fast. The other thing is pensions. We were the reason behind workers across this country having defined benefit retirement plans. You worked so many years, you have a defined benefit. That's all switched to 401Ks now. There's no stability in that at all. Those are major problems. In the steel industry, where I was active with the steelworkers before Arlene and I came back to Montana, my God, people with 40 years in those steel mills have lost their retirement plans. They've lost everything. They've bankrupted their retirement plan.

BB: You wouldn't think that would be legal.

JM: It's not supposed to be. There have been a lot of changes in the law. The saying is that's the reason I came to town, to make sure that didn't happen.

BB: You'd think that the guy would have some kind of a vested right in what he's paid into.

JM: That's exactly right.

BB: It seems to me like that would be a crime of some kind.

JM: It's just unreal. What's happened over the years is they've got to where some corporations—LTV Steel was an example—they weren't putting the money into the retirement plans that they were supposed to. So finally it got to be they had to go to the pension benefit guarantee board with the federal government I don't know how many times to bail them out. Taxpayers were bailing them out. Corporation after corporation did that. That's wrong. Then what happens is they bankrupt them because they don't put enough money in. Maybe they're taking some money out, investing in the business, and things like that. It was much tighter

when that legislation was passed. There was much greater protection for workers then. It's kind of like deregulation all over. Workers have paid a horrible, horrible price. So unions are having to deal with all of that. They're really struggling with it. Membership is down. When you say seven or eight percent of the workers in the private sector [are] in unions, essentially there's not much of a labor movement left in America.

BB: I think that reflects also, back in the '30s and '40s and '50s and so on when there were plants, and they were organizable; the steel industry, the rubber industry—

JM: They were labor-intensive.

BB: They were. Now because of technology, we see people working at their computer at home. We have jobs that are changing constantly because of technology. One guy might be doing one thing this year and something totally different next year, and a different workplace, and that sort of thing. So it seems like it would be a nightmare to try and organize it.

JM: You see, we still have major corporations. I was just reading *The New York Times* about the steel mill in Middletown, Ohio, on strike. They're going through a real difficult time. It's an independent union. Steel workers have never been able to bring that into the Steelworkers Union. One of the reasons is that they're very fearful to make that shift. A lot of workers are afraid to join the unions. They have every right to be. If they make the case for organizing the union at a place, there's a good possibility they're going to lose their job. They're going to get rid of them. There's not any kind of a cooperative attitude about that in the American place today. They're just out.

BB: So things haven't changed much since your dad and those other guys had to sign in a circle?

JM: That's right. We're coming back as we have lost so many of our rights that I think most people assume that we had in stone. As we've lost those rights, that's exactly right. We're going right back to that.

BB: As a great believer in the union movement, you don't seem optimistic as you look into the future.

JM: I don't think there's anything to be overly optimistic about. I do think—I always believe that the labor movement as much as anything was a social movement. It was a struggle for social justice, not just for union members, but for all workers. In other words, I think when the labor movement is that kind of a movement, there are more people that want to be part of that. I think we have to get back to that. What happens with the labor movement so much of the time is we become just another special interest. That's one of the problems when we're doing the bidding of corporations and we appear at the legislature. We're just another special interest. In the old days, if you were on a committee and we were there testifying on welfare laws or something like that, we weren't testifying for our membership directly. We were just saying

that we ought to do something about hungry kids and giving them a chance to go to school and doing things like that. We really believed that with all our hearts.

We played a tremendous role with that. When we talked about industrial safety, occupational safety and health, and we were making those fights, we didn't say that we just wanted safe working conditions for union workers. We wanted safe working conditions for everybody. When I testified before those committees that you were on about worker's comp and unemployment comp, we didn't go there saying, "Give this to union members." We wanted those benefits for every worker. I think the social aspect of that movement really needs to be emphasized, especially the industrial unions that did that. I came into the movement with that feeling. It was like your religion. Your union was who you turned to when there was nobody else to go to. They would be there for you. At the same time, unions and union leaders make mistakes and they misbehave. They do things that are wrong just like everybody else. Overall, the record was pretty good.

They had a wonderful record. I look now and when I was active, some of the things I got to do that were really exciting was I got to be active in international affairs. I was in Israel a couple of times back when Yitzhak Rabin was a prime minister. What a great experience. I worked with the labor movement in Israel, I remember. I joined. I paid my dues. I got to talk to Golda Meir. She was active in the teachers union in Milwaukee before she went to Israel and became the prime minister. Isn't that great? I got goose bumps thinking about it. I got to spend time in Central America working with the labor movements there. It was just a great experience. I spent time in Brussels working with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. That was a great experience. I got to spend a couple of years at the ILO as a worker representative for the United States.

BB: What's ILO?

JM: International Labor Organization, which is part of the United Nations structure. It was a great thing. A story about the ILO that I'll just have to tell you—I had a friend by the name of Jim Baker, who at one time was the director on the west coast for the AFL-CIO and he was a real young guy. He was extremely bright. He became a director. Later he became the European representative for the AFL-CIO in Paris. Then he was an administrative assistant to Lane Kirkland. One time we had a farm labor institute that involved eight states over at Missoula at the University. Gosh, we had a banquet. It was really great. We didn't have a speaker. There were about 200 or 300 people there. We were just going to have people mill around and visit with each other, get to know each other.

Jim Baker came in and he had been flying all over trying to get to Missoula. He came in and he looked beat. I insisted that he come up to the head table where all of the state fed leaders were. As a joke, I got up and introduced him as the banquet speaker. He got up and he whispered, "Murry, you dirty son of a bitch." It boomed out over the room. Everybody

applauded. They thought it was a put-on deal, see? He gave a hell of a speech. He just did a marvelous job. He said, "I'm going to get even with you someday for that."

Years later, he ended up going to Europe. Largely because of him, I ended up doing work in the area of international affairs. When I was at the ILO, we worked in committees. Then our paper would go to the plenary. The plenary looks just like the United Nations; 114 nations represented there in this huge hall. It's just like the United Nations Assembly in New York. There are people from your committee that make presentations there asking for the adoption of the paper.

These people worked for a couple of days on their presentations. They had their presentations in these leather folders like this. They really looked pretty good. This Jim Baker said, "Oh by the way, I forgot to tell you I put your name in. they're going to be calling on you today."

I almost fainted. I said, "You didn't." He took me up. My name was on the list to speak. I said, "I don't even have any paper to write some notes on." He gave me four bar napkins. I said, "I don't know what I'm going to say."

He said, "Get up and tell them stories about growing up in Laurel and all that stuff that you always bring tears to people's eyes. I'm sure none of it's true, but it always sounds good."

They were having trouble with Ireland. Ireland was having trouble with Australia, Finland, and some of the Canadians. He said, "Get up and tell those stories." I sat there and I made some notes on these four bar napkins. I'll never forget. Everybody has their presentation and it looked really official. They call on me. I get my bar napkins in my pocket. The American delegation sat way in the back. That was the longest walk of my life. I was thinking, "If I can just get through this, I'm going to kill him." Anyhow, that's how I addressed the plenary at the ILO. We did okay. They didn't walk. It was a great experience.

BB: A happy ending. We've just got three minutes left. You know, I'd be interested to know, you mentioned this fellow said that you used to tell people stories that would bring tears to your eyes? Tell us one of those stories.

JM: A lot of the stories were stories like I told about my dad organizing that plant. As you and I talked about, I'm not only Irish, I'm an Indian. I'm a Native American. We were always proud of our ethnicity, both the Native American part and the Irish part. So with that was always this struggle to make things better. I went through my life trying to bring logic and reason to both of those ethnicities to the groups I worked with. I finally discovered after I was about 17 years old that it probably wasn't going to work. It just wasn't going to work. Nothing logical was going to work. It's the same way in the Indian community. Don't say that to be offensive, but I really love being this way. I'm really happy with it. Both groups are so tumultuous in terms of how they respond. We respond emotionally and we scrap. We disagree and all of that. It's really hard to bring it all together. What that struggle was always about was making it better for workers. It

was giving Indian workers a chance to be able to survive and make it too. With that, there were strikes and there were times that we were hungry. There were times that we really had to struggle to survive. Those were good times too. It brought our family closer together and brought our friends closer together. There was that feeling of being close and united and doing God's work. That's all there was to it.

So that's why at times, there were people in the legislature and in Congress including yourself that might have, at times, thought I was being a little bit unreasonable about things. Probably all of that came simply because of the way I grew up. I was making that case the best way that I knew how. It wasn't always the most effective way. It was the best way that I knew how. The thing that I always wanted people to understand was, like I said about George Meany, I didn't want there ever to be a question in anybody's mind about where I stood. I was always with workers. I was always with them and their families, come hell or high water. That's where I was going to go back when I got done with my years in the labor movement. I was going to go back and spend my time with workers and their families. That's what Arlene and I got to do. It's been really good, Bob.

BB: Thank you Jim, so much.

[End of Interview]