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INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BURBANK
INTERVIEWED BY NOEL DARK
SOCIALIST PARTY PROJECT
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My name is Noel Clark. I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The date is November 29, 1972. I am going to talk this evening to Mr. David Burbank about the Socialist Party in the State of Missouri.

CLARK: Mr. Burbank, would you mind, first of all, saying your name?

BURBANK: Yes, I am David Burbank.

CLARK: ...and your address.

BURBANK: My address is 300 Mansion Center, St. Louis.

CLARK: Okay. Mr. Burbank, would you mind giving us a short history on the Socialist Party as you first became acquainted with it?

BURBANK: Well, I think I might start out by giving a little bit of background. As you probably know, the Socialist Party was greatly reduced after World War I. The Red scares and the Communist split reduced it nationally to very little. There were several cities where they had originally been very strong before World War I and even during World War I. St. Louis was one of them. There was a very large German population and this party here was, to a very large extent, a German organization. It had been so for a long time. The German Socialists were active in various German Unions, like the brewery works, the carpenters, machinists and so on, and exercised considerable influence in these unions. There were the so-called language groups in the Socialist Party but, in St. Louis, it was the Germans who were the most important. Just as, for example, it was in Milwaukee. Well, with the Communist split and the Red scare and World War II, which brought to the surface a good deal of feeling against the Germans, the Socialist Party virtually disappeared. In the 1920's, it didn't amount to much. It dragged on up until about the 1930's ...the old Germans still dominating it, the principal being a man named Hoehn, who was editor of the two papers here; one of them was called the "St. Louis Labor", and the other had a German title, I think it was the _____, I'm not sure. It was the German edition of this English paper. This was a union paper, and I'm not too sure there were any other union papers here in St. Louis at that time. And this was a relic, so to speak, of the old days when the German trade unions and Socialists were very active in the unions. Well, these papers, in the early 1930's, probably about 1930, or 1929, somewhere in there, these papers folded. There was no longer any...they just couldn't exist; there was just no support for them, and Hoehn was an old man by that time. (He) survived, but he was, you might say, the only remaining functionary of the

Socialist Party around here. There were a few others... it had membership here, but they were very inactive. Mostly old Germans who retained their membership as a matter of form. With Norman Thomas coming to the fore in the National Party, and the interest in the Norman Thomas campaign in 1928, younger people came into the Socialist Party all over the country, and a certain number of intellectuals and professional people who were attracted by Thomas, and the result was that, in various cities, including St. Louis, there was an upsurge of interest. New people came into the Socialist Party. Now, Hoehn and some of these old guard Socialists, who were not really doing much, were, none the less, not very pleased to see these new people coming into it. Paul Preisler and his wife were among these people who came in at that time. I don't know where they came in...1928, 1929, 1930...about that time. Other people came in, too, in St. Louis. Some of them, for example, were second generation Socialists, so to speak. Their parents had been Socialists. Many of them were of German ancestry. Among the Germans here, there was quite a strong Socialist tradition. And, in some of the German organizations here, there was still a good deal of sympathy for the Socialist Party.

CLARK: How big a growth do you think there was in this period of time?

BURBANK: Well, I don't know exactly, but the Socialist Party under Hoehn and these old men in 1926, '27, and '28...perhaps there was just a dozen members...I don't know how many official members there were...but perhaps a dozen or so that came to the meetings. It was simply a relic. There wasn't any organization. Then, other people came in; you see, the Socialist Party had a place on the ballot at that time and so did the Socialist-Labor Party, which was another relic. But the Socialist Party had a place on the ballot. This gave it a certain attraction. You could put up candidates without any problem...statewide candidates, local candidates...there was no question about this. And this went on for a long time. So these people and, as I say, I don't know whether Paul Preisler was the most active of them at the beginning or not. But he and his wife were certainly very active later on. Another was W. C. Meyer, who was a very active agitator in the Party for some years and had a very curious history in the Socialist Party. Well, there were others; I don't remember their names. Possibly the list in your literature there would remind me of some of them. Let's see...the Oldendorf's are mentioned, and...

CLARK: There was a Gertrude Oldendorf mentioned who was very active in the youth part from what I can determine from the notes.

BURBANK: Well, probably in supervising...these were children's groups, not the youth.

CLARK: Yes, children's groups...the Falcons, for instance.

BURBANK: Yes, that was the children's group...and the Waldon's. I remember the Waldons very well; Gloria Waldon, one of the younger people in the youth group, not the children's group... Well, in any case, there was there revival after 1928, and about in 1930, there was some activity here by a League for Industrial Democracy. This was an old Socialist-affiliated organization throughout the country. And also some activity by the organization founded by John Dewey called the "League for Independent Political Action." It was not Socialist, but kind of a left liberal organization.

CLARK: Is that how you became familiar?

BURBANK: I first got into the League for Industrial Democracy and the League for Independent Political Action, and then I got into the Young People's Socialist League which was in existence way back—many, many years before—so, it was probably national but, at that time, there hadn't been any organization in St. Louis for a long time. Now, one of the active groups here in the Socialist Party was the Jewish section. I've forgotten what it was called.. ."The Jewish Socialist Bund".. .which was a long existing organization of the Jewish language organization. . .the Yiddish language. . .organization of the Socialist Party. And they, of course, had as one of their organs, the "Jewish Daily Forward" which was Jewish daily newspaper published in New York. They published a St. Louis edition. Of course, "The Jewish Daily Forward" was really only nominally Socialist, even at that time. It had a circulation chiefly among non-Socialists in the East, you know, in the big cities. It had a Socialist tradition. It was nominally Socialist. There was a St. Louis edition, and all of this gave the Jewish section here a certain prestige. They were also closely organized and, later on, they were connected with the fraternal organization called the _____, which was a well-known Jewish fraternal organization. These all, you understand, were the Socialist-Democratic groups and had nothing whatsoever to do with the Communist Party of the Jewish Communist groups. The split in the 1929's had left an active Communist Party here. And the Communist Party was far better organized, more solidly organized, than the Socialists. Counting the membership... I don't know what the membership was...but it had a very solid organization, and it had a considerable Jewish membership. At least, a considerable number of Jewish sympathizers to its organization, the International Workers organ...and there was continual conflict between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party at that time. But the Communist Party had been active all along, and the Socialist Party was just being revived in 1928.

CLARK: Through Norman Thomas...mainly...

BURBANK: Yes. At that time, the Communist Party was in its so-called third period, the ultra-left period. It was organizing its own separate independent unions, outside the AFL. It was calling for all sorts of wild demands. It was organizing unemployed very actively after the depression in 1929. So, in the revival of the Socialist Party, this Jewish organization was quite active, and it was kind of a stabilizing group, because they were solidly organized and turned up regularly at the meetings, and contributed funds and, really, the only solidly organized group in the Socialist Party. Now a little while later, I think it was about 1935, there was a split in the Socialist Party, and the old guard...consisting primarily of the Jewish groups...left the Socialist Party, all over the country, and that included St. Louis. They left that the Socialist Party, under Norman Thomas, was becoming too radical.

CLARK: I notice David A. Shannon in his book on the Socialist Party mentioned there were three groups: the old guard, the militants, and the progressives.

BURBANK: In the split of the Socialist Party, the old guard... the group around Norman Thomas...were called the militant group. There were a number of younger people in this throughout the country who were the theoreticians of the group, so to speak, and they felt that the Socialist Party had to turn somewhat to the left. They were anti-Communist, of course, but they felt that the Socialist Party had to turn to the left and, for example, have to

begin active work formulating its own policy in the labor movement... in the trade unions. As the old guard, which consisted not only of the Jewish group but a certain portion of English speaking sections of the country, these people also didn't like that. They felt that they were hesitant about doing anything in the labor movement. Many of them, or some of them, had responsible positions in the unions. They didn't want the Socialist Party telling them what to do. They were members of the Socialist Party, but they didn't want to have anything to do with forming the Socialist policy in the labor unions. And they were fearful that Thomas and the militants would formulate Socialist policy that they would be obliged to carry out. This was one of the reasons for the split. So after 1935, I think, the Socialist Party was deprived of the old guard. Well, this, in a sense, invigorated the Party because then a lot of people...especially younger people and certain intellectuals who sneered at the Socialist Party up that point... began to think, "Well, maybe, it is a Socialist organization really." And they came into it. This was the biggest boon for the Socialist Party which, I think, was during 1935, 1936, 1937, around there. Well, in St. Louis...as I say, I got into the Socialist League at the end of 1930, and we had a small group of people in the Young People's Socialist League and were quite active, and we immediately became involved in helping the International Ladies' Garment Workers here. They were just then beginning to organize their campaign to organize their industry. Several of us got arrested, and we had a fine time. (laughter) There was a man here at that time organizing by the name of Hyman Schneid, who was a Socialist Party member, very vigorous man, an old-time Socialist, and he was helping to get the Young Socialists involved in this organizing of the International Ladies' Garment Workers. Well, among the adult group of the Socialists, the situation was something like this there were, I think, three locals in the city...I may be wrong...but, I think, there was a North Side branch. South Side branch. West End branch, and then there was a county local. You see, there were locals divided into branches, and the St. Louis Local consisted of these branches. And then, there was a county local which had, I suppose, more than one branch out there, too.

CLARK: Did they all report to one central location?

BURBANK: Well, I don't recall now whether the county was a separate local. We had a Central Committee. I was a delegate to the Central Committee for the Young People's Socialist League, and we had delegates from all the St. Louis branches, three or four of them, and, I'm pretty sure...whether there were delegates from the county local...that may have been a separate, independent group, see. We called this the City Central Committee. So, probably, this didn't include the county. But, when it was a question of planning a large meeting, or anything of that sort, then there would be representatives there from the county. Now, I don't remember much about the split with the old guard because I was into something else (which I will explain in a moment) about that time it was going on. But my impression was that the Socialist Party people here were not terribly interested in breaking with the old guard, mainly, because they just were not terribly concerned about such political issues. I think that it mostly was a national thing...it took place on a national basis...and when the split took place at some convention and then in every locality the old guard split off, and the only group that split off here were the Jewish groups. There were no supporters here of the old guard except the Jewish group and from that point on, in 1935, separated from the Socialist Party. Well, most of the people here in the Socialist Party supported Thomas. They went along with Norman Thomas, and some people, probably like Preisler and some of the others, were actively in touch with Thomas and his militant group. But they really didn't...there

wasn't any necessity here for any kind of activity for a militant faction; there were no factual components. Most of the people here supported Thomas, supported the break with the old guard, and went along with it. And, generally, from then on, they went along with Thomas in everything. Of course, the opposition in the Socialist Party against the Thomas militant group never amounted to a great deal until some years later. Now I was...I didn't get a very good impression of the Socialist Party at that time. Of course, I was young and I didn't know too much about these things.

CLARK: Why did you get interested in the Socialist Party?

BURBANK: Well, it certainly didn't have to do with anything from my family or anything like that. It didn't have anything to do with the economic situation. I didn't feel that at all. I did a great deal of reading, and you couldn't help but see some of the effects of the depression after 1929, and I was just generally a kind of a rebel. Actually, I was a kind of...I scandalized my family...not my family...but my mother, my only family at that time. She was not very tolerant about this sort of thing, but I certainly scandalized most of her friends, and I was really kind of a "black sheep" of my particular generation and my particular class. I don't remember anyone else who got into the Socialist Party or those things. There were a few representatives of some well-known families around town who got involved with the Communist Party, but there were not many of those, only two or three that I could mention. But, not many got into such things at that time. It wasn't at that time as popular as it is now for middle class youth to get into these things. So, it was kind of a fluke that I got into it. It was a very good thing, because I learned a great deal from it, and it brought me into contact with people and situations that I never would have otherwise. Although in a sense it prevented or stopped me from getting into any kind of profession or doing anything really worthwhile in that respect. Nevertheless, it prevented me from, I think, turning into something which...well, we're getting into philosophical questions...well, I could have seen myself turning into an awful stuffed shirt in the normal course of events, and that didn't happen because I was brought in...perhaps I was sidetracked and wasted a good many years...but I was prevented from turning into a terrible stuffed shirt and, for that reason maybe, it was all for the good. But, I became interested and, again, I can't say why, specifically, in the labor unions. Now, I had no connections with the unions whatsoever, and the AFL was the only labor organization at that time in 1931, and they were practically a dead organization, rapidly losing membership, consisting in nothing except just unions of highly skilled construction workers in cities. The organization made no attempt to organize the unemployed...they were unorganized...no attempt was made to organize them. It was in a pitiful state. There were some people who were trying to do something about it. They were forerunners of the CIO, and they had gathered around a man by the name of A. J. Muste, an organization called, "The Conference for Progressive Labor Action", which in turn was centered in Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York. They tried to...Muste had gathered about him a group of some very effective organizers, and they attempted, in a small way, to develop progressive groups in various unions. They published a magazine called "Labor Age" which had some very excellent articles on the labor movement. I read the "Labor Age" and joined the Conference for Progressive Labor Action...and was the only member in St. Louis, as far as I know. Oh, there were a couple of others...one was Walter Hoops...his name you probably have down there. I think he gave some information to your Oral History thing. Anyway the Conference for Progressive Labor Action never amounted to very much at anything as an organization. We did have an organizer here...from the CPLA by

the name of Carl Lore. Carl was the son of a well-known German Socialist, Ludwig Lore, in the East. We tried to develop some interest in some kind of progressive group among the packing house workers in East. St. Louis. But we didn't get anywhere. But we did succeed in building up kind of an unemployed organization here in St. Louis. At that time, there were organizations of the unemployed, organized on a self-help basis. They were not militant organizations; they simply would get together some kind of an old house...move several families in, fix it up by themselves, scrounge food from markets and try to help themselves. It was a national movement. Well, it went on for a year or two but, of course, it didn't get anywhere; and, in the meantime, the Communists with their unemployed councils were staging demonstrations at relief stations and getting a great deal more publicity for it and, possibly, doing more for the unemployed...! don't know. Their tactics were somewhat irresponsible because they were all aimed at furthering the Communist Party rather than in helping the unemployed. The CPLA tried to develop unemployment organizations which were unions of the unemployed and bargain with the relief agencies for the unemployed and tried to build up organizations which were really controlled by the unemployed themselves and which did not have or were not intended to further the aims of any specific political organization. The unemployed organized eventually what was called the Unemployed League and, in some parts of the country, like in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, the Unemployed Leagues had thousands of members and were a very powerful organization for a while. The only most important competitors to the Unemployed League was the Communist Party. The Socialist Party, I might say, controlled some of the unemployed organization in Chicago, and some places like that. They called them "Workmen's Alliances." Well, in St. Louis, we never did have any effective unemployed organization, but we did have something going. It was the only competition here that the Communists had for the unemployed. And this, of course, developed out of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action. The Socialist Party had nothing to do with it. About 1935, the people in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action formed, or decided to form, a party, called the American Workers Party. Their program was essentially the same as the CPLA. The AWP was quite active in the national Unemployed League and did a pretty good job in some strike situations. For example, in one of the famous strikes that occurred in the auto-light strike in Toledo. Belonging to the CPLA, I went along into the AWP and, because this now called itself a "party", this was incompatible with my membership in the Socialist Party, so I quit the Socialist Party sometime in 1935 but, of course, I continued to see all these people and ... The Unemployed League we had in St. Louis eventually called itself the "Workers Alliance", and Continued up into '36, '37...1936, I guess...and operated on a very small scale, but we did represent the unemployed to the relief authorities, and we saw a good deal of the St. Louis slums.

CLARK: You, evidently, felt at this time that the Socialist Party was...

BURBANK: No, I was not satisfied with the Socialist Party. And I felt that the American Workers Party was more what I wanted. The American Workers Party was oriented to the labor movement toward trade unions and towards the unemployed group. It was trying to make some kind of Socialist program that would appeal to the American workers specifically.

CLARK: Were they a large organization?

BURBANK: No, it was a very small organization and, here in St. Louis, there were only, well, the American Workers Party, perhaps I was the only member here. There would be

sometimes one or two other members, you know...we never had an organization at all. Nevertheless, I continued my membership in it; in 1935, and then a development took place toward the end of 1935, the American Workers Party merged with the Trotskyism organization in the United States. The Trotskyism organization was called the Communist League in America, and they had been in existence since 1928. And these two organizations, the American Workers Party and the Communist League merged and they called themselves the Workers Party in the United States. And this was an event that created a great deal of interest at that time. It was the first time that two radical organizations had amalgamated. They were generally splitting. That two should get together was quite a remarkable thing. So, there was a good deal of interest in it among the intellectuals and simplified Socialists who had never had much interest in the Socialist Party and who had been, at the same time, opposed to the Communist Party...Independent Socialism. So, at the beginning, it looked quite promising. We were all very pleased that there seemed to be some unification going on, and here was a possibility of a Socialist Party developing that would be more to the left than the Socialist Party, but which would be anti-Stalinist. Well, as I say, there had been no group of the American Workers Party. We had had a small CPLA group. This was just here, but the American Workers Party had no group. I think I was the only member here. However, there was a Trotsky group here for quite a while, consisting perhaps... Well, as I say, the AWP had no actual group here. The Trotskyites had a group of six or eight people...very strange characters...most of them...and I had known very little of them. The amalgamation between the AWP and the Trotskyites was rather strange because the Trotskyites were an intensely theoretical group. They were, as any organization headed by Trotsky would be... they were intensely interested in various questions of Marxist theory, and in problems arising in the International Labor Union. They paid, actually, a great deal more attention to the international developments than to what was going on in the United States, whereas the AWP was exclusively concerned with the United States and had no theoretical questions and was very much devoted to practical questions, the trade union policies and so on. So, it was a strange combination, and the hope was that one would balance the other, so to speak. It would be a combination which would work out well. Theoreticians and practical agitators. But, unfortunately, it worked out just the opposite way. It was an unstable combination; the theoreticians and the practical agitators didn't get along very well. However, it was a promising development in the beginning. And then, the Trotskyites international organization...under Trotsky's leadership...developed the tactic of entering the Social Democratic parties throughout Europe. They felt that the time had come when the Social Democratic Parties could be radicalized, and the Trotskyites should go into them as groups and form factions within the Social Democratic Parties, and try to accomplish something that way. Most of the Trotskyite organizations in the European countries were very small, but in most cases, they went ahead and went into the Social Democratic Parties, following Trotsky's advice. There was a good deal of objection to this among the Trotskyites. Quite a few of them broke with Trotsky on this question.. .broke completely with him. There was a big faction fight here in the United States when people did this again. Eventually, it was proposed that the Workers Party in the United States be dissolved and they would go into the Socialist Party. This was in 1936. And so, some of the former Trotskyites in the Workers Party again split over this. So, the prospect of unification of a year or so before was already beginning to disappear. Some people were beginning to leave the Workers Party for this reason. And other people were disillusioned; among my friends, particularly, who were formerly members of the Muste groups...so called Musteites,..we were disillusioned because we were originally told that this Trotsky tactic of going into the Socialist Parties would not

apply in the United States, because the Socialist Party here was not important, and most of us had felt that this was true. That we would do much better here to try to build an independent Socialist organization, rather than join the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party was not worth capturing. But then the line changed, and the faction which received its direction from Trotsky, insisted that the Workers Party be dissolved and go into the Socialist Party, and negotiations were opened with Norman Thomas and others; Norman Thomas agreed that the membership of the Workers Party should be received.

CLARK: What year was this? Do you know?

BURBANK: 1936. But there was a big argument in the Workers Party about this, and a good many of us didn't like it. I was one of those, a former Musteite, who was very skeptical of it. Since I had been in the Socialist Party, I felt I had special reason to believe that the Socialist Party was not worth much as an organization. It wasn't worth the effort, but it didn't do any good. The majority of the Workers Party voted to dissolve to go into the Socialist Party, and the terms were rather unfavorable. The Workers Party members were not given any seat on the National Committee of the Socialist Party, and they had to abandon their press. They published a weekly paper and also a monthly theoretical organ. All they had was a little magazine called "The Socialist Appeal." It was being published in Chicago by Albert Goldman, a former Trotskyite, who had joined the Socialist Party a little before. He jumped the gun, so to speak. He had a small group in the Socialist Party in Chicago which published this little magazine. So, after the people in the Workers Party went into the Socialist Party, they were quickly organized as a faction. They had this organ, "The Socialist Appeal", and they were, thereafter, called the Appeal group. Well, I reluctantly joined the Socialist Party here again. Of course, the Socialist Party was very glad to have me, but I was not very happy about doing it. My former friends here, former members of the Workers Party, who had all been opposed to joining the Socialist Party, they quit and joined one of the little ultra-leftist groups which were always forming at that time. So, I was the only member to go into the Socialist Party to follow the line. And, again, first I went into the Young People's Socialist League and the Socialist Party, but I was getting a little bit old for YPSL, so after a while, all of my efforts went into the Socialist Party. I might say you're asking about those arrests...

CLARK: Yes, you mentioned you were arrested.

BURBANK: Yes, there were several of us in the YPSL who were arrested in 1933. I guess it was connected with the organizing efforts of the IVWU. We were arrested for just handing out handbills in front of some boss' house out in Richmond Heights... Skinker Boulevard, one of those big apartments out there, and we were thrown in the Richmond Heights jail, west of Skinker; it was in Richmond Heights. We were briefly in the Richmond Heights jail. Later on, after I was out of the Socialist Party in the brief interval that I was in the organization, AWP and Workers Party, I was involved in a demonstration down here on 4th Street at the time Hitler was beginning his campaign to take over Austria and, at that time, the conservatives in Austria, for their own purposes, decided to crack down on the Socialists who were very powerful in Vienna, and they surrounded the famous area in Vienna where the apartment houses were controlled by the Socialist Party, Karl Marx house, it was called, surrounded it with soldiers, and this was all virtually the suppression of the Socialist Party in Austria which, was in its time, a very powerful organization and was the principal obstacle to Hitler. This was done by the Austrian conservatives and, of course, they, shortly after that,

saw Hitler come in and take over the country. Well, we, the Socialists throughout the world, saw that this suppression of the Austrian Socialists was the beginning of Hitler's expansion. We were anti-Hitlerites at a very early date, and the people of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and other groups had picketed the Austrian consulate here against what was taking place in Vienna, which was in February, 1934, I think. And I was handing out leaflets down there (I wasn't actually picketing) which was advertising an anti-Nazi motion picture we were showing to raise funds for anti-Nazi refugees we were bringing over from Germany. But, we were all taken in by the police, and we were arrested, and taken to the Central holdover in the Central Station down there, and as soon as I got out of the police patrol car, why, one of the detectives whacked me in the face, and then I knew something was going to happen. So, when we got up to the holdover, there were about six or seven of us, and the other six or seven were marched down the aisle to some cells on the right hand, and two detectives and a patrolman marched me down the corridor on the left hand, and began beating the hell out of me. We were way down in full sight of the others...they were just putting them in their cells...and they worked on me with blackjacks and feet but, fortunately, I had on a heavy overcoat, so I wasn't seriously damaged. After a while, they threw me into the cell with the others. Well, they let us out after a while...they didn't bring charges against us, of course...and we immediately went to the papers that evening. The Globe-Democrat was the only paper open in the evening, and we had a good reception from the Globe, and I had my picture and story was printed all over the paper and I, of course, later was able to identify the detective who was involved immediately. The other two I was not able to identify, and we tried to get the Civil Liberties Union here to get interested, and we, eventually tried to bring suit against the Police Board, but that's impossible...it's an organ of the state, they can't be sued... I had no recourse, therefore, but to try to get a grand jury indictment against the detective, and that didn't work either. I testified before the grand jury, but although we had a half a dozen witnesses to the actual beating and although the detective was clearly identified, the grand jury did nothing about it.

CLARK: Were you the most vocal in the group? Or, why did they pick on you?

BURBANK: I don't know. I didn't have anything to say when I was going in on the patrol wagon. I'm not that stupid. I might say that one of the reasons I think it might have happened... In any case, I didn't get a grand jury indictment, so the only thing left was for me to sue the detective individually for damages, which I did, but, although I wanted to get a good lawyer here, all the well-known lawyers here wouldn't touch the case. I don't know...they weren't asked to do it for charity either, but they wouldn't touch it... I got two Socialist lawyers who were young men...relatively young men...and it took four years to bring that case to trial. Then, of course, it was a little bit before Hitler was becoming so terribly unpopular, we were not in the war, and the jury again wouldn't do anything at all...it wouldn't rule against the detective, so he got off scot-free, but I think his career was somewhat damaged by that. It certainly made the city authorities very unhappy and, of course, the city defended him, you see. He was supplied with attorneys, but we were also double-crossed a little on the final trial because my lawyer...we had all those witnesses, you know...they were right here, except one girl who happened, at the time the trial came up to be in the East. She wasn't here, and she...well, my lawyers talked to the city lawyers and said, "Well, now, is it necessary to have this girl here? We have a half a dozen other witnesses." And the city attorney said, "No, you've got these. We'll try the case on the basis of the witnesses you have. One more witness isn't going to make any difference." But, when the city came to sum up the

case, the city attorney made the point that this girl was not there. He said, "This girl is not here because she will contradict their case." Of course, she wouldn't have, but this was for the jury and he was in the process of summing it up, and there was nothing we could do about it. So, I am sure that had a bad effect. In any case, I think it was highly important that we did carry on the case and bring it to trial, and this detective whose name was "Bauer", was...I followed his career as well as I could...and I don't think he made any advancement. I think the city was rather unhappy about the fact that he got into trouble. Well, the only reason that I can figure out that Bauer picked me out that way, aside from the fact of size...I was rather slight at that time... and easily beatable...aside from that, possibly Bauer knew me, because in the proceeding year, I had also been involved in a strike. There were very few strikes at that time...this was 1932...there was a strike in the Jackes-Evans Manufacturing Company over there on North Union, a metal manufacturing company. They made stove pipes and stuff like that. A union was formed over there, and then went on strike spontaneously, and there were no miscellaneous unions into which people in various industries could go at that time. They only had unions for skilled workers at that time. These were not skilled workers. So, in a situation like that, the only thing they could form was a so-called Federal Union. These Federal Unions were unaffiliated with any national union so, of course, they were all orphans. They really couldn't get much support from the AFL. This was a Federal Union, they had no financial support; there wasn't anyone who would take an interest in helping them organize in the AFL. They gave them a charter, but that's all they did. So, the people in the Socialist Party heard about it, and they wanted someone to help out and suggested that I go into it. So I went over there to help them out in various ways.. .picketed.. .was arrested, oh, eight, ten times. We would picket in front of the plant and the police would take us in and arrest us; they'd let us out of jail after a while, and we'd go back...it happened day after day. Well, this strike, of course, failed. It had no support, but I got in trouble enough so that it is possible that Bauer may have seen me and didn't like me because I was involved in this strike. The police were strongly anti-labor at that time and had no compunction at all about hauling in picketers just for picketing. Of course, employers could bring a good deal of pressure against the police to do this. So, it was possible that Bauer had seen me or knew of me in connection with this picketing a year or so before. I don't know.

CLARK: Could I change the subject just briefly?

BURBANK: Yes.

CLARK: You gave Mrs. Cortinovis a book, and it contained some clippings on a gas strike, didn't you?

BURBANK: Oh, I can tell you about that. Now that was also in this period... a short time afterwards, in 1935...the Gas House Workers strike. As I say, in 1935, I was a member of the Workers Party. This, of course, was joined into the Socialist Party. They had one year of existence in 1935. I mentioned that we had a few members here, but only a few members. Well, as I say, there was a very few strikes at that time anywhere...big strikes were unheard of. The people working for Laclede Gas Company...I don't know how they started...but they organized, and they decided to strike. That was a sizeable organization, and they had some good leadership. So a friend of mine... in connection with the Jackes-Evans strike I told you about...had worked with him then, and I had talked with him a great deal about this Teamsters Strike in Minneapolis in 1934...a famous strike...it was the first general strike of

its kind. A vary successful strike, and it was led by the Trotskyites. It was one of the few strikes in which the Trotskyites had any influence. It took place in 1934 before the Trotskyites and Musteites joined, but I told this friend of mine all about Minneapolis. I was very much interested. Well, later he got...I don't think he was actually a member of the Gas House Workers Union, but he knew some of the leaders of the strike...of the proposed strike. And he, apparently, told them about Minneapolis. There weren't many better examples of successful strikes. One of the things that had helped the Teamsters in Minneapolis to win was this Bulletin, "The Organizer", on which you have the file. This was a daily strike bulletin, and it was something brand new in the American Labor movement. So, the people in the Gas Workers Union immediately decided that what they needed was a daily strike bulletin...they wanted it from the first day of the strike. Well, they didn't know how to do any of this. So, through my friend, they asked me if we couldn't get in touch with the Minneapolis Teamsters and see if they wouldn't send someone down here to edit a strike bulletin for the gas workers. Of course, we would not get in touch with the Teamsters Union, you understand. The National Teamsters Union looked at the Minneapolis Teamsters with horror...they were radicals. What I was to do was to get in touch with my Workers Party friends, the Teamsters in Minneapolis who were the leaders in this strike...in other words, get in touch with the Workers Party, not the Teamsters Union. So, that's what I did. And they immediately volunteered to send Mike Dunn down here. There were three Dunn brothers in Minneapolis.. they were the famous Dunn brothers. Irishmen, who led the Teamsters strike there from the beginning. And, Mike Dunn, "Mickey", we called him, had been one of the organizers of this strike. So, they sent him down here, and they also sent another member of the Workers Party from Chicago, Norman Satir. Mickey Dunn, Norman Satir, and I were the editors of the bulletin. This was by agreement with the strike committee of the gas workers that we were invited to do this. Dunn and" Satir were given their expenses while they were here. That's all they were given...their expenses, you know, were not very much. And I wasn't given a cent, because I lived here. We did it because we wanted to help the gas workers... the kind of thing that happened once in a while in those days, but I don't suppose would happen these days. In any case, Dunn came down and he was supposed to get out a bulletin immediately. Only a few people on the strike committee knew that they were going to bring someone here to edit the bulletin...only a few people on the strike committee knew...probably not all the members of the strike committee. . .but, no sooner than Dunn arrived in St. Louis at a little hotel over on Lindell than he was arrested so, obviously, someone had stoolpigeoned.. one of the strike committee of the gas workers had told the police. But, Dunn...the funny part of it is, Dunn was an Irishman and an ex-Catholic.. had seen the New Cathedral down there, you know, right across from the hotel where he was staying, and someone said. Well, you've got to see the Cathedral." So, the first thing he did that afternoon was to go to the Cathedral and look around and take a handful of literature from the literature rack, you know, and when he was arrested, he had all of this literature in his pocket. And there was a captain or whoever interviewed him, and he was highly impressed with this. And he thought this man couldn't be so bad if he had a handful of Catholic literature. And he said, "Where were you this afternoon?" And Dunn said, "I was at the Cathedral." And the captain said, "How did , good Catholic like you get Mixed up in something like this. So, Mickey was released, (laughter) It might not have occurred so easily if he had not had this literature in his pocket.

CLARK: On what charge did they arrest him, do you know?

BURBANK: They didn't have any charge.

CLARK: They just brought him in? I see.

BURBANK: So, Mickey immediately went over to East St. Louis and stayed in East St. Louis for awhile...he lodged over there...but he would come back here during the day, and the three of us would edit the strike bulletin. We would do it in someone's house; we would move around from house to house. We didn't stay in one place all the time.

CLARK: Was it a convenience thing or did you move for another reason?

BURBANK: Oh, in the first place, we didn't want to. It was rather a nuisance for the people we stayed with, so we didn't want to bother them too much. In the second place, we didn't want to stay in one place too much because we were afraid we would be raided by the police and/or thugs hired by the gas company. You see, the gas company had a strike-breaking organization that were pretty rough. And, so we moved around for reasons of safety also. We edited the paper; all we needed was a typewriter, and then we would make it up and take it to a printer in the evening, and the next day, we would pick it up and distribute...some thousands of copies all over the city. And it was very effective. We stopped at nothing to denounce the gas company, you can see that. In any case, that went on and was published for several weeks...you can see from the file you have...and, thereafter, was printed about three times a week until the end of the strike. And, before the end of the strike, Satir went back to Chicago, and Mickey Dunn and I continued it, only three times a week; but we were the only editors right up to the end. And that was the first time that I know of that such a strike bulletin was published during a strike. It was a very successful strike. It became a strong organization and has been a strong organization ever since.

CLARK; Was it a Socialist printer who printed this for you?

BURBANK: No, any printer would do that.

CLARK: No problem with that?

BURBANK: No problem with printing at all. You see, it was the middle of the depression, and a printer who would get a daily order of some thousands of papers every day had a gold mine. These printers were so grateful that they would have a big ham and a bottle of bourbon waiting for us when we'd get there, you. know. We'd give them the copy and then we'd have a feast, (laughter)

CLARK: I guess you did;

BURBANK: So that was, of course...you see, that that was something we did simply because we thought it was...out of a sense of solidarity...and the Gas Workers Union really didn't pay much attention to us. We didn't get our names in the paper...we did not ever want our names in the paper. But there were a few other people in the Gas Workers Union who knew what we were doing and were grateful. Of course, most of them didn't know who did it.

CLARK: How was the circulation handled? Was it taken to the homes?

BURBANK: No, it was handed out, all over the city, by the strikers. We didn't have anything

to do with that end of it.

CLARK: I can see that we are coming to the end of the tape and I just wondered ..as kind of a summation, do you think that the Socialist Party played an important part in America at all in this time?

BURBANK: I really haven't told you much about the Socialist Party here. I could...the Socialist Party had a curious history, especially in connection with W. C. Meyer...the connection between Preisler and Meyer. The work that Meyer carried on was extremely interesting and really deserves a good deal of attention. I can't go into that. The Socialist Party here in St. Louis was really one of the less interesting Socialist organization in the large cities. It had a high percentage of people in it who were not interested in the Socialist movement as such. They were interested in running candidates. They believed that they were kind of a simple socialist program. All these things happening all over the world, the Spanish Civil War, Moscow Trials in Russia...they were really not of a spark of interest to them. Most of the people here were completely uninterested in what, I thought were, the big issues in the world, Paul Preisler was always a little bit annoyed when these issues were brought up. Paul liked the idea of having ward organizations that functioned as ward political organizations and to get embroiled in political arguments over what was going on in Russia and Spain seemed to be a waste of time. But, in the last analysis, these were the things that were, or formed, history. I, of course, was mixed up in the factional situation which I haven't gone into.