

ORAL HISTORY T-0232

INTERVIEWEES: THOMAS KUPFERER, TOM MORGAN AND AL SERKIN

INTERVIEWED BY: DR. PAUL TRAVERS

ST. LOUIS TEACHERS STRIKE PROJECT

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DR. TRAVERS: Today is February 12, 1973, and this is Paul Travers, Associate Professor in the School of Education (UMSL). As a part of the Oral History Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, I have with me Mr. Thomas Kupferer, Mr. Thomas Morgan, and Mr. Al Serkin. Would you, Mr. Kupferer, give us some brief biographical information about yourself.

MR. KUPFERER: I am a teacher for the St. Louis Board of Education. This is my second year of teaching, and I am teaching at Soldan High School.

< p>TRAVERS: Mr. Morgan?

MR. MORGAN: I'm a teacher at Roosevelt High School, and this is my fifth year of teaching, and my sixth year in the St. Louis system. I have lived in St. Louis nearly all of my life and I am thirty-five years old. I went to the Catholic schools in St. Louis, but I have taught all my six years in the public schools in St. Louis.

TRAVERS: Mr. Serkin?

MR. SERKIN: I am teaching at Roosevelt High School. I have taught in the St. Louis school system for about fourteen years.

TRAVERS: I am curious. Mr. Kupferer, you are working on your master's degree in history. Did you take your undergraduate degree here?

KUPFERER: I took my undergraduate work at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

TRAVERS: How about you, Mr. Morgan?

MORGAN: I went to school in western Kentucky, Murray State University.

TRAVERS: Mr. Serkin, are you a native of St. Louis?

SERKIN: No. I'm from New York, but I went to school here, graduated from St. Louis University and got my master's at Southern Illinois.

TRAVERS: Well, let's begin breaking the ice concerning the issues between the St. Louis

City Board of Education and the St. Louis Teachers Association and Local 420, the American Federation of Teachers. I understand that all three of you are members of Local 420.

KUPFERER: That's right.

TRAVERS: Mr. Morgan, would you mind outlining the major issues, in your opinion, between the St. Louis City Board and the Association and Local. We can fill in as we go from there.

MORGAN: It seems to me that the major issue is that we cannot communicate well with the Board of Education of St. Louis. Our union leaders report to us that time and time again, they make proposals to the Board of Education and often the proposals are not even acknowledged. There were times when meetings were set up, and the Board of Education was supposed to meet with our union leaders but did not. They have broken appointments and things like this. So, to me, the Board of Education does not want to communicate with the teachers union of the St. Louis Teachers Association. So, that more than anything else, is the important issue in this strike and, naturally, the salary increase is also an important issue, and that was one of the things that we wanted to communicate with them about. Why haven't we had a raise in four years when the cost of living has risen so greatly and people in other jobs have gotten raises to help them offset the cost of living. The main issue with me is why we can't communicate with the Board of Education. Why we just can't get together and sit down and talk about it, school problems and teacher problems. It seems to be very secretive. They have closed the Board of Education meetings which, to me, goes against everything that democracy is supposed to represent...open meetings...people are supposed to know what is going on...the taxpayers pay for the schools in St. Louis. It seems to be that anyone should be able to go to their meetings, particularly the teachers. That's the main issue as far as I'm concerned.

TRAVERS: It gets to be a semantical problem. The Board states the non-bargaining law and its implications. Yet it will participate in discussions. Communication becomes rather difficult when it comes to defining legal terms, doesn't it?

MORGAN: Well, the superintendent of the school system, Mr. Clyde Miller, talked to us the week before we went out on strike, and said that even though it was illegal to have collective bargaining in Missouri, that that wasn't the issue. The issue was that the Board just didn't have the money for the raise. After the strike began, it seemed like he changed his position entirely. The issue is, you are doing something illegal, you cannot have collective bargaining and you cannot strike. So, that leads me to question his sincerity.

TRAVERS: Is collective bargaining the main issue? If you got nothing else... like the raise or medical benefits...but did achieve a great deal in the area of collective bargaining, would that satisfy you? Or the teachers involved?

SERKIN: I don't think so. It's gone beyond that point. That's the principle, but we've been out now for three and a half weeks and the money situation is beginning to tell on an awful lot of people, and I just don't think they can get the teachers back...just on that issue alone. I think the main thing that brought the teachers together was the money; if there were any issue to

rally around, I think the money was it. It was a means to achieving this collective bargaining.

KUPFERER: I do think that collective bargaining...! agree with Al that it was the money which was the chief issue. I do think that the collective bargaining issue is a very vital issue and of interest to all the teachers in that for future negotiations, if you don't have collective bargaining, then all that the strike represents really goes down the drain.

SERKIN: You see, we could take your proposals and reverse it. What if we got money, would we be satisfied without collective bargaining? And I think the answer again would be no; unless we got collective bargaining as well, we would not go back. I think that must be included in there.

TRAVERS: Then, we are looking at this from a three-folded standpoint.

SERKIN: I would think so. Collective bargaining, the increase, and also fringe benefits. The hospitalization. If people understood...I am a married man with a family, and I pay over \$500.00 a year to Blue Cross. It's a lot of money, and when you look at other systems, when you look at other institutions that have group hospitalization, there's no reason why the Board can't, if it wants to.

TRAVERS: After seeing yesterday's paper (February 11) concerning the starting salary schedules for non-teaching personnel in St. Louis City, the problem becomes more apparent.

SERKIN: It is illuminating. And people say, "Well, you only work so many months, and these people work twelve months." Even at a starting salary...just look at this \$7,200 for ten months a year compared to \$10,000 for a twelve months a year. I mean, I'd be willing to work for twelve months, too, for \$10,000, rather than \$7,200 for ten months.

TRAVERS: And that was the lowest...

SERKIN: Yes, and this was the lowest. And that's without education or anything. What about all the time the teachers spend going to school and still go to school. This isn't free. You talk about getting a return on your investment in education. Well, where is the return?

KUPFERER: I think this collective bargaining issue about...goes further into things like our advanced education, and often teachers put in a lot of extra money for materials and things which are difficult to obtain from the Board. These kind of things, it is hoped, by many teachers, I believe, that the teachers will be helped out. Too often, teachers want to get some action on a change in school policy, and it is wound up in a bureaucratic mess and nothing ever comes out of it. And, I know that many teachers hope that the union will be able to give us a little backing on these kind of proposals and make these kind of changes.

TRAVERS: Is there any particular reason why the mid-year raise was requested? Why didn't you become militant last spring in order to gain a September raise?

SERKIN: We proposed that, but they just kept us hanging there, and finally when fail came...there was nothing. And, I think also, the increased money that was going to be taken out of your paycheck at the beginning of the year by the Federal Government...

TRAVERS: There has been precedent for them to offer a mid-year raise.

SERKIN: There has been precedent.

KUPFERER: The Board gave it about ten years ago in 1962.

TRAVERS: That brings up the two audits which I have been somewhat interested in. The audit requested by the teachers, Elmer Fox & Company, and the audit requested by the Board, Ernst & Ernst Company. Both agree on the figures, but their interpretations seem to be different.

SERKIN: This is always the problem in having audits. First of all, you cannot audit an 80 million dollar a year business in two days. This is an impossibility. All they are giving you are figures, and you're just making a supposition that the figures are correct. Then you are making an assumption that the figures they have given you have actually been spent, and then you are making an assumption that they have actually been spent on the things they have put down next to the figures. I mean, no bank could be audited in two days like the Board's 80 million dollar budget. Let me give you an example of statistics. The Board talks about class size, and they will refer to so many children per teacher. All right. Now, the only thing they never tell you in this is: 1) teacher, includes administrators, counselors, consultants, hundreds of people, even the superintendent of schools who is not even in the classroom. He is lumped with others as a teacher...to get this number of students per classroom teacher down; 2) when you take the whole system, fine and dandy, but when you take the south side where you have very few kids going to public schools, compared to the north side, which is jammed, and then you balance it out, yeah, then it's true. But the south side teacher may be sitting with a class of 20, 23, 24 and the north side teacher is sitting with a class of 45. And if you balance it throughout, well, yeah, then it comes out...two teachers, 45 and 23, 68, divide it by 2, yeah, then it's 29 in a class. And, so, on paper it looks beautiful, but in reality that north side teacher is having her hands full.

TRAVERS: Has class size been any part of the negotiations?

SERKIN: We have been talking about it. I think it will become more of an issue which we get in this collective bargaining.

TRAVERS: What kind of a teacher-pupil ratio are you shooting for?

SERKIN: Right around 30, 31. Again, that's a misleading figure.

KUPFERER: Again, we would like a more realistic figure. As Al said, how many people are actually in the classroom teaching a class?

SERKIN: Exclude the superintendent, counselors, and those not teaching.

KUPFERER: In my own situation, I teach in a north side school and people were brought into my classroom, and the number got above 40 to 42 people, and before it hit that, I talked to the counselor and told him how large my class size was, and that if I had full attendance, any one day, I didn't have enough seats. He kept sending people up because he had no place else to put them, because all the other similar classrooms were crowded. I had no recourse. I

had no one I could turn to straighten the situation out. I was just the classroom teacher, and I just had to accept this. If it had been 50, or...you know, there's no limit.

SERKIN: It's not like college where you can just close a class. Here the classes are open and the body must be in the room; even if you don't have a seat, the body still must be in the room. And you're faced with this...just unbelievable...mess: There is absolutely nothing you can do about it. And you have all that...and then, they add study hall people in the back of your room. I know Soldan was a building built for 1900, 1600, and they then added an addition...it's just over jammed. You walk in the hallways, and I don't think you could even walk down the hallways without bumping into a thousand people.

MORGAN: It is impossible for the people in my particular school to change classes in the time allotted, because it is so fantastically crowded. And there is absolutely nowhere you can turn to try and get this situation settled. They ask you to put it in writing, but it gets shuffled from person to person. There's no one to turn to, and that's why...

SERKIN: No, the reason I brought this up was because you brought up the audit, and that's what I was trying to tell you that figures are unemotional and meaningless when they are written on a piece of paper...and, then, if you actually know where the stuff is going? I mean, you can give me any kind of figures, which is what they do, but unless you go down and see the figures in real action and see how they really don't match out, fine and dandy. It's like having a dead body count in Viet Nam. There's so many... We've bombed so many miles...there must be so many bodies...and that's about it. It's meaningless, and so the audit in two days is a totally meaningless audit.

TRIVERS: We are talking about roughly 3 million dollars for mid-year raises. Is that right?

SERKIN: Somewhere around that. It's kind of hard. We estimate that Clyde Miller had admitted on the stand that there is \$1.9 million extra that we got that we didn't think we were going to get, and there's \$1.9 million less than we spent this year. He admitted that on the stand.

TRIVERS: Now, that would mean \$1,000 increase for teachers, right?

SERKIN: Yes, however, that would be on an index scale. That would not be just straight across. This is one of the points which is going to have to be debated which, I'm sure, they are debating now. The Board may offer a settlement across the board, and what the teachers would probably want is a settlement which is based on an index which means your years of experience. And that may be a touchy point which they are trying to debate right now.

KUPFERER: I think one of the important things about the audit is that the teachers do not have any confidence in anything that the Board says about the audit findings, and one reason is because the Board meetings are closed and secretive, and we can't find out what they are doing with the money. They claim the budget is somewhere around \$84 million, whereas one of the men we elected to the committee ...the retirement committee, claims that the budget is probably closer to somewhere around \$130 million. But the Board has so many different channels for this money, that they only claim that \$84 million is being spent for education. Then they can fulfill their obligation and spend 80% of that for teachers' salaries, which is,

supposedly, the state law in Missouri. Whereas, if they claimed the \$134 million, then they can't claim they are spending 80% of that on teachers' salaries. This is what the man we elected to the retirement committee reported to us a couple of weeks ago. So, I think, it boils down to the fact that teachers do not have confidence in anything that the Board says about finances. And when they say, we can't afford to pay you, it's maybe like a man telling his wife, "I can't afford to buy you a new dress, because the way I see things in the future, I'm not going to have the money." When you have confidence in the man, you say, "Well, I think you are right." But...we don't have confidence in the Board. We think that what they see for future expenses just is not there.

TRIVERS: This trouble with the index plan has been brewing for some time, hasn't it?

SERKIN: Right. The last raise that we got was four years ago, and it was a straight \$1,000 across and they were trying to say that it was an equitable thing. We disagreed in saying that it was not a fair thing because we were handicapping those people who had been in the system longer. No use talking about loyalty to a place that maintains that attitude. * We didn't desert it and to go the county like everybody else who raced out. So what happened? They took the index away. Well, the Board saves money on that. I think it is the feeling of the teachers that the Board would just as soon that they should all quit, and the Board could start over paying \$7,200 and they would save a lot of money. As far as the Board feeling loyal to the teachers that problem started fifteen or twenty years ago. I don't think there is any loyalty. They would be just as happy to see them so and save money. We have no confidence in them. Here we are. We are four thousand teachers, and we find out that the Board sends out 12,000 W-2 forms. That means there are 4,000 teachers and 8,000 other people on the Board's payroll.

KUPFERER: And if they are paying those salaries that are listed in the paper... \$13,000 - \$12,000...it doesn't seem that they could be paying 80% of their payroll for teachers' salaries.

SERKIN: And the nepotism that goes on down there...what we know of that goes on down there with that Board...is just fantastic. We feel...they keep telling us we are professionals...they keep telling us that the job of everybody is the student in the classroom. We say, "Fine, we are the ones in the classroom with the students." And where is our support? It's like being on the front line and your generals are telling you, "Put up a good fight, and we'll see you around. We hope you win." And that's it. And we feel that they've got it. In fact, I will say right now, and I think these other men will agree with me, even if they could prove that they didn't have the money, we still wouldn't believe them. It's gone that far.

KUPFERER: And we still would want the raise, because even though it is not the best policy to operate in the deficit, the federal government operates in the deficit. The Chicago school system operates at \$72 million a year deficit. Families operate in the deficit, so we wouldn't feel bad if the School Board operated in the deficit by a few million...if they had to do that. If it came to operating in a deficit...this is what they are going to have to face.

TRIVERS: We are going into the fourth week of the strike. Is the enthusiasm for the strike still as strong as you found during the second week? Are the teachers hurting to the point where they are now ready to concede?

SERKIN: No, I don't think they are hurting. I think that the teachers as a group are more mental than physical, and the physical part of the strike appealed to them the first week, and I think the physical part of the strike is letting off. Once the schools close, it's awfully hard to get a teacher's mental ability to stand up against the schools and picket an empty building. I think that it has been pretty difficult for them. And, again, in the teaching profession, we have an awful lot of women, and they have done a fantastic job, but, again, it's hard for them. They have families, some of them, and many of our teachers are, let's face it, rather old, and the weather hasn't been too conducive. But, I think, I can say safely that if the Board tried to open up the schools tomorrow, they would all be out and would say, "Okay, we're back in action. Let's go down there and close the schools." I think it's there, but you've got to see it. If you just walked in there now, you wouldn't see because it drags on. But they are not ready to go back.

TRAVERS: Are they able to get loans?

SERKIN: Yes, free loans. Both the union and the teachers' association...if they need it. Interest free loans.

KUPFERER: You can get \$200.00 per pay period.

SERKIN: For three pay periods at least. That's six weeks.

TRAVERS: The national organizations...is either helping?

SERKIN: Yes, they are paying the interest. The Board is in a bind. By state law, the Board must get in so many days per year in order to get state aid. And if they don't, then they are going to lose. So, the longer we stay out, somehow they have to make up all these days so that they can get state aid. And this is it.

TRAVERS: You know, I used to have the impression that there was a great deal of teacher apathy in the City. I know Mr. DuBose used to say a third of the teachers belonged to the Association, a third to the Union, and a third didn't care one way or another. But now the two organizations have really joined forces, and it seems to be an enthusiastically supported strike.

SERKIN: Things have changed.

KUPFERER: Supposedly, the union lost a lot of enthusiasm four years ago when some people wanted a strike and other people didn't. That's when Mr. DuBose became president, isn't it? There was a big shuffle, and the union lost a lot of members then, from what I understand. But it's been growing and in the month of December, we picked up a lot of members. In January, when the strike started, we picked up more members, so I believe that the membership is now over 2,300 which is more than one-half of the teachers; so, added to that, the slate people, about 1,000...so, I'd say about three-fourths of the teachers are committed now to one or the other organization.

TRAVERS: Is there any in-fighting now between the Union and the Association in competing for teachers?

SERKIN: I don't believe so, do you, Tom?

KUPFERER: No, I believe that they think they are working for the same goals. There's no difference of opinion on what we want. So, in that respect, they do work together.

SERKIN: What happens afterwards, no one knows.

MORGAN: The union leadership seems to be pushing more for an election...feeling that they would win it, since they have the most people. Win an election and become the sole bargaining agent. And the slate doesn't seem to be too interested in that because they feel they would lose an election.

TRAVERS: Can you have a bargaining agent before the state law is changed? I wonder about that.

MORGAN: It seems you can. Because Kansas City claims they have...Hazelwood has... and one other district in Missouri has. It seems to me the state just doesn't really care. Even though the law says so.

TRAVERS: But the Board could still say, "I don't want to negotiate with you, though."

SERKIN: They could say it, and they could have the law to back them. The law is an archaic law but it's on the books, and as long as the law is there, they can back it. That's in theory. In principle, they can't. They'd fight it. They've taken us to court. They've had injunctions and the strike is still on. So, in theory they can do anything they want, but in actual practice, what they can do is to sit down and say they want to open the schools, and they want the schools open in time to receive state aid. If they don't get state aid, they are not only going to have a deficit, but they will blow the St. Louis School System clear out of existence. It's as simple as that, and they know it. I really don't know what the strategy of the School Board was in keeping the strike going, because they could have done what they are doing today, three weeks ago...without going to court...without all this publicity... whether they wanted to do it out of vengeance, whether they wanted to break the strike, to split the teachers' groups apart...or they wish to do it to see if they could promote aid from the city or the state... You know, here's our plight; we'll give the teachers money if it comes from the state or a tax is passed. I don't know what their strategy was, but there's no doubt in my mind what they are doing today, February 12th, they could have done three weeks ago.

KUPFERER: Whatever their strategy was, it really helped to help the union, because their reaction to what we were going to do has always been a very vindictive sort of action which made the people join together. Tom said that a lot of people have joined the union just since the last of December and January, and even on the day of the strike a lot of people joined, and it was simply that the Board, when they did find out that the teachers were going to come together, instead of trying to talk to them and negotiate, they immediately went to the laws and the prosecutors and tried to do everything that is typical of their...

SERKIN: They got a temporary injunction three days before it started;

KUPFERER: This kind of thing helps the union causes, makes people want to join.

TRAVERS: What is this thing with the contract? Supposedly, probationary teachers sign a contract, and nobody does after that.

SERKIN: We have never seen a contract at all.

MORGAN: I have never signed one.

SERKIN: If the contract means what I think it means as far as a labor/management contract...length of service, salary to be received, which I would consider the economic terms of the contract, I have never signed one in my life.

TRAVERS: Not as a probationary teacher?

SERKIN: I never have.

KUPFERER: I have. This is my first year as a probationary teacher, and I received a contract in the fall which read...now, again, it depends on what you call a contract...but I received a form which I did sign which stated that I would...I don't remember the exact words...but it stated what my annual salary would be, and I signed it. And I sent it to them.

MORGAN: It says something to the effect that I accept an appointment as a teacher on probation in the St. Louis Public School System at the annual salary of...

TRAVERS: Yes, I remember when I was teaching in one of the county districts, I signed that as a COMMITMENT TO TEACH, plus I signed a contract, so I can't really see...

SERKIN: We don't have any legal contract that I know of.

MORGAN: No, we don't have anything legal.

SERKIN: The Board has already blown that. For one, they could not produce 4,100 contracts. Second of all, last year or the year before, the Board had two teachers at Beaumont High School removed in mid-year for certain offenses, saying that, "We could do it, because they don't have a contract. We have to get rid of them." And the court upheld the Board's view, and the Board dismissed these two teachers in mid-year. If you have a contract for a full year, you cannot be dismissed unless you receive payment for your full year. Anybody knows that. So, they have just taken it and twisted it around any particular way they wish. They say they have it, and then they say they don't have it...whichever is going to be useful to them. No teacher in this school system has signed what anyone would consider to be a contract to teach year-to-year. It is a fallacy.

TRAVERS: If we now shift to the problem of the fine that Jerry Abnerathy received. Will Demothenes DuBose and Betty Finneran receive similar treatment?

SBRKIN: This is in the hands of the courts, and I think Joseph McGuire is going to listen to motions tomorrow and Tuesday on that. The court is closed today.

MORGAN: That's not settled. I would think they would get the same.

SERKIN: It is hilarious to know that they have put fines on the associations and other people which will revert back to the Board of Education. They get the money. That means if they fine us enough, they can pay us I (laughter) Maybe that's the strategy, I don't know.

TRIVERS: The Association has received close to a \$150,000 fine.

SERKIN: Well, to show you the public is behind us... We attended a St. Louis Teachers Association meeting today, and you may know that various teachers are going out trying to collect money for Mr. Abernathy to pay off this \$350 a day fine. According to a report received of the money they collected, it is over \$1,200 already. This is from the public.

TRIVERS: Interesting. That's his personal fine, right?

SERKIN: Yes, that's his personal fine.

KUPFERER: St. Louis Suburban Teachers Association supposedly is contributing money.

SERKIN: And you find out that teachers' organizations pretty much all around are making donations simply because it is the thing to do. They have been through the whole mess and they would expect us to reciprocate if they needed it. This is what the whole thing is about...joining together.

TRIVERS: This has been the first strike since the union was founded in 1935 that I know of. But, you see, the public is taking it rather well. You referred to that earlier. Do you see any hostility in parents or students because you are striking?

SERKIN: I don't see much. It seems to me we are getting pretty good support from the public. People come by in their cars and give us the victory sign. There are a lot of union people in South St. Louis, and they seem to be behind us. And the Teamsters have talked to us in our meetings and they have encouraged their members to keep their children out of school as long as the strike is on, to support the teachers.

MORGAN: In South St. Louis, there are a lot of union people and they are pretty well behind us. And the people that go by the school, there are only a few that seem to be hostile. One morning a guy came up and...

KUPFERER: Well, he was a little bombed...

MORGAN: Well, perhaps... But in my own limited experience, it seems that their support has been in favor of us.

SERKIN: It amazes me that the parents of these students in school have not, in my opinion, made themselves felt. There was a parents meeting last night, I think, and about four hundred parents showed up at Harris Teachers College...that was Friday night. But, on the whole, not really that much...a scattering here and there.

TRIVERS: They haven't put any pressure on the Board to...

SERKIN: I don't think that much pressure. They have pretty well just stayed out of

it...accepted it.

KUPFERER: I think one of the reasons for that...I agree that it is so...is that it is a complex kind of situation that perhaps a lot of parents don't understand whose side to take because the papers have not been, you know, in our view, have not taken an impartial view. It seems that what they are saying is that the teachers want a raise and the School Board has said that they don't have enough money, and to a lot of people, they accept it at that...at face value. And, for that reason, they won't get behind the teachers and support them. But there is a great deal of apathy on the part of parents towards their children in school any way...whether it is regarding the strike or Parent-Teachers Association, or anything. But, it would seem that they should either oppose it or support it, one or the other.

MORGAN: They support it in principle, but then in the back of their mind, they probably think, "Well, if they get their raise, it's going to mean another tax hike for us."

SERKIN: Yes, I would imagine that this is going through the minds of a lot of people. "In the long run, we're going to have to pay it."

MORGAN: That's where we are at a disadvantage over many other people. Any time we want a raise, we've got to go ask our fellow citizens to give it to us. Whereas if you work for a company, or a union, and they go fight it out with them, and nobody else has anything to say about it.

TRIVERS: Yes, and the Board is fiscally independent and has to...

KUPFERER: (three people talking here...) They get people in the community...just like when they wanted to pass school tax increases, we always had to get things for the school kids, and hand them out at school, and ask them to please tell their parents to vote "yes" for this. And in the elementary schools, they would put signs up in the windows, "Vote Now", "Vote Yes", and all this kind of stuff.

TRIVERS: Mr. Morgan, you mentioned that in South St. Louis there was some sympathy. Does that also mean, for example, that the Teamsters have not been delivering materials?

MORGAN: The truck drivers have been pretty good. The Teamsters said that they encouraged their drivers not to cross our picket lines. I don't think they did then after they were encouraged not to.

KUPFERER: But we supposedly made a deal with the other union people in the schools that they could cross our picket lines...the engineers and the custodians...as long as the schools were closed. But if the Board tried to open the schools again, while the strike was on, they said that they would honor the picket line and not cross. On the very first day, truck drivers turned back from the school. Several truck drivers said, "You on strike?" And, they went away.

TRIVERS: Has there been any violence at all connected with the strike?

SERKIN: It's amazing, but I haven't seen any.

KUPFERER: There was one reported incident, supposedly. Well, the Board claimed there was an incident of violence, but the union said it involved a non-striking teacher who pushed a picket and another picket came up and slapped him on the back. That's the only one that I ever heard that the Board admitted to... That the union accused...

SERKIN: Probably the most non-violent strike in the history of the United States. (laughter) I don't think you can motivate teachers to violence anyway.

TRAVERS: Mr. Kupferer, were you going to say something?

KUPFERER: Well, I was going to say something about the truck drivers. We had a truck driver come down to our school, and he didn't know if he could cross our lines at the beginning of the strike, so he said, "Well, listen, let me go in and call my boss and find out if I can cross your strike." So, he crossed the picket lines and went in the building, called his boss, and his boss said not to cross it, so he came out and said, "No, I can't cross it." And he took his truck and drove away. So, ...another thing surprised me. I'm in North St. Louis, and we have a great many drivers (truck) come by (like Thompson?), and at the first, they didn't know what they were doing, but there were different union people, different beer truck drivers, and things...waving, and nobody said a word to us...(laughter)...oh, excuse me, "soda" truck drivers...oh, I can't mention that?...that's a good one...(laughter)...seriously, just truck drivers, and people, union people, driving down and waving in support of what we were doing.

MORGAN: The Teamsters knew what strikes are all about, and they supported them.

TRAVERS: Have the media been giving you good...fair...attention?

SERKIN: They give us coverage. Whether it is fair or not is debatable. I think one media has already pre-evaluated us in their own mind and condemned us.

TRAVERS: I noticed some rather severe editorials in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

SERKIN: That's the media. Yes, but if you look at the Globe-Democrat...they have not supported any strike since the Civil War; And that's their position. Any strike, now, they wouldn't support. Of course, they make an issue of law being law.

KUPFERER: Unless it is a law they don't like...like the Supreme Court...

SERKIN: That's it; Or, law of integrating public schools: They can stall on that one:

KUPFERER: Or, the President making more...that, too.

SERKIN: There are many, many laws on the books. You know, we, as teachers, that...(noise)...comes between that and conscience and what we knew as right thing to do. We are not going to be lead into the gas chambers just because there's a law saying you have to go to the gas chambers. So, we feel that law is totally unrealistic. Just the same as our black brothers in the South who violated the segregation laws down there. It's sad. You have to demonstrate these things to the apathetic public so that maybe the law will get changed.

TRAVERS: I can think of one salutary thing that has come out of this. Governor Bond has suggested that the legislature should seriously consider changing the negotiations attitude.

SERKIN: Yes, they should consider that seriously, because we have set the tone, I think, for Missouri, and what we do here in St. Louis is going to echo from one end of this state to the other, and unless they do change the laws, they are going to see more and more teachers' groups going out. They are all watching us. It's as simple as this. We have kind of set the tone for them.

TRAVERS: I read recently that there are something like twenty-odd states that have public negotiations laws,' but not Missouri...

SERKIN: To allow strikes to be legal? Hawaii and Pennsylvania.

KUPFERER: It seems to me that the Boards of Education would have everything to gain. We have one man from Kansas City who has come here to work with us on this strike, and he said that they had collective bargaining there. And he said that there, they sit down with the Board of Education, go over the books together, and decide how much money there is available for different things. He said that they haven't had a raise for a few years, but there they know that they can't get it because the money is just not there. They sit down with the Board and they go over the books. So, I just don't see what the Board is afraid of. If they could do the same thing with us and we could see that there was absolutely no money there, then we would be reasonable and say that we can't get a raise.

SERKIN: I think that they are afraid because they feel it's an infringement on their power. We spoke about the Board being independent, where else in the entire United States is there a group of people in charge of more than 80 million dollars with no authority over them at all. You say the public is over them? Forget that! No authority over them...no one has to check to see what they have done. No one has to check and see what they do with the money. The union has even taken them to court to open up their books, and we got the court to agree to allow the books to be opened up and one week later the Board got a lawyer to get the judge to dismiss that, and they threw it out.

TRAVERS: Does the union have the right to periodically audit the Board's books?

SERKIN: No one has any right at all to audit the books. Period. Their books are closed. When I say this, I think every teacher will back me up; there are twelve members on the Board, and ten of them have no idea what is on the books whatsoever. Period. They have not even looked in the books. I would say that at the Board meetings held all year long, if there are more than two or three meetings where all twelve of the Board members are present, let me know. Of the twelve members on the Board if any of them have visited five schools during the school year, let me know. If you look at these Board members, really, they say that they do it for no salary, but they have more outside business concerns, and you can imagine. They have no time for the Board, really. They were elected, supposedly, on a blue ribbon slate, and...

TRAVERS: What if it becomes concretely determined that there is no money? Will the union still persist in asking for this raise? You'll have to pass a tax levy to get it.

SERKIN: Well...that's a question. Because they cannot do it in the matter of time that is allotted to them. There is no way you can audit the books. How do you audit \$80 million books? How do you audit where every check has gone? ...that the Board has made out? I mean, it just can't be done. I don't care how many accountants you have, it's just not going to be done in two days. And the Board's books have been closed and secret for so long that you can manipulate figures and you can manipulate money taking from one, paying another, taking from this one and paying the other...and this takes a lot of investigation. Even the United States doesn't take you to court unless the Internal Revenue guys have looked at the books for more than two days. There's no way...and they have already admitted...Clyde Miller, the Superintendent...has admitted they have the money. So, your question just is irrelevant. It's something that can never happen. They cannot tell us they don't have the money cause they have already admitted in court, under sworn testimony, that the money is there. They just aren't willing to spend it

TRAVERS: It seems that what I infer from what all three of you are saying is that the area of communications is really going to be the area of needed improvement. Isn't it?

SERKIN: Definitely. It was in the papers yesterday. The parents met at Harris Friday, and that was the one thing that they demanded. The Board talked to them. The Board doesn't talk to no one...it doesn't talk to parents, it doesn't talk to teachers, it just makes out 12,000 W-2 forms during the year and who knows where the money is going?

TRAVERS: Do you think then if either the union or the teachers association is elected as the bargaining agent, and you do get a written agreement, will that be a big step forward in developing better communications with the Board?

SERKIN: I think it is a big step now. They are starting to talk. That is something they didn't do a month ago. Just to have the Board sit on one side of the table and we sit on the other side...that's an accomplishment...we have never had that before. Period.

TRAVERS: You can call that collective negotiations...or talking...or whatever you want to call it.

SERKIN: I used to, in the early days of the movement, go down to the Board of Education meetings that were held once every Tuesday, and you couldn't even get in the building. They wouldn't let you in the building. It was closed. And then, if you ever got into a meeting, you know, forget about asking a question or proposing something, they read this thing off...zap, zap, zap...the motion carried...zap, we discussed this...and it was finished.

KUPFERER: Their last budget was proposed and voted on in the same meeting with only three members there. They said, "This is the budget, and let's vote for it." And only three guys were there...and that's it. Not debated or discussed.

SERKIN: Why, when you have twelve people on the Board, and they have been elected, what are their qualifications really to sit down with an \$80 million budget? Are they accountants? Do they know every single phase of the Board of Education's thing...to go over and discuss various phases and aspects of a budget? I don't think so.

TRAVERS: Is the Board unanimously obstinate? Or, is it one or two people controlling the

policy-making?

SERKIN: Well, we feel that there is one person in control of policy. Daniel Schlafly. The other members of the Board you do not hear from. We feel that he controls it...he's been on there the longest. We feel that everything comes up from him and down from him.

TRIVERS: He's made few public statements...

SERKIN: Very few. And that's why he's (I can't understand this)_____ . Mrs. (Adella) Smiley (there are two people speaking here_____ ...and she just broke down in the courtroom and the President of the Board...I just couldn't believe...I just can't, in good conscience believe Judge McGuire...he must have felt like he was watching something he didn't believe in that courtroom. The new man, that is, the Board's spokesman, now, I guess that's Mr. Doyle from St. Louis University...

TRIVERS: Andrew Doyle?

SERKIN: Yes, he is a professor of education there. And Mr. Schlafly has a dispute with the Board of Trustees of the University there. I find Mr. Schlafly's name everywhere... (I can't understand this.)

TRIVERS: What went wrong with the Mayor mediating for you both?

KUPFERER: The way I understand it, the Board rejected...

TRIVERS: Was he pro-teacher?

SERKIN: Well, this is what the Board contended. He contended that he was just pro-opening up the schools.

MORGAN: He was just using the Board as a whipping boy.

SERKIN: I also feel that there is, personally, a lot there that doesn't meet the eye, as far as politics are concerned. The Mayor is up for re-election, and there are some people on the Board like Mr. Schlafly, who, I will venture, is not supporting him.

TRIVERS: There has been a history of conflict between the Mayor's office and the Board of Education anyway. I think even pre-dating Mayor Cervantes.

SERKIN: Well, it's kind of hard when the Superintendent of Education gets paid forty grand a year and the Mayor gets paid twenty-five: That is something, isn't it?

TRIVERS: That would create a problem:

SERKIN: It does create a problem.

MORGAN: I guess there was a lot of corruption, years ago, on that Board of Education.

SERKIN: Yes, years ago, before the reformed slate (two people talking here)...

MORGAN: That's why they called themselves the blue ribbon slate.

SERKIN: I just do not think that you can have a group of people who are not getting paid, for the job, as you say, are going to take that much interest in learning where your dollars go nor having any control over them. That's why we feel that the teachers have to be part of that control over them. The parents aren't. Even now, they want some control over them. But here they can do anything they want with \$80 million. It's just...

TRIVERS: Is there any other school district that you know of that undergoes a public audit in order to maintain confidence between teachers and the Board and between the public and the Board?

KUPFERER: We were told by a man from the East St. Louis Teachers Association... he spoke at one of our Union meetings...and he said because of our strike, that just this month, they were sitting down...representatives from the Union and the Board...with the books open, and discussing the situation. And they were together...jointly discussing the fact that if there was not enough money available for a raise, that they could see fit to make some other arrangements, like increased hospitalization insurance, or some other benefits, and the whole point there is that they were communicating together and equally. I don't know whether they have any authority or not to, you know, as to who would make the final judgment, I'm sure the Board does...but, at least, they saw what the situation was...the members of the Union. The officials of the Union. So, it was open.

MORGAN: And this man also made the point that the news media has not reported this at all. When they had their strike two years ago and they were out for three months, they finally got this settled. And now when they have a meeting, a collective bargaining meeting, and they sit down and talk it over, nobody reports.

SERKIN: It's not news.

TRIVERS: You know, this came up earlier about outside support. How much support from the NEA and the AFT can you rely on?

MORGAN: Tremendous support. We have had telegrams from other teachers' unions across the country. 200,000 members of the Teachers Union in New York State gave us support. Arizona, all over the country...

SERKIN : The support can only be two kinds, moral and financial. After that, they are not going to come down and man the picket lines for us.

MORGAN: Well, the Teamsters said that they had 50,000 members and, if necessary, they would come down and man the picket lines for us.

TRIVERS: Are there many field people here?

SERKIN: Yeah, I would think. But judging the amount of field people both organizations have, they consider this to be an important place. Very, very important place.

MORGAN: In many aspects, they have already considered it a successful strike... the fact

that we had all the schools closed in two days...whereas in Philadelphia, their strike is in its fifth week, and they never did get all the schools closed. They still have 40% of their schools operating, I think.

TRAVERS: I suppose legal advice is always valuable, especially when you can get lawyers who have been involved in collective negotiating...

MORGAN: And the contention that the Globe-Democrat and others that outside agitators caused all the trouble and without them, there would be no strike, is foolish nonsense, and Clarence Darrow's famous quote about you've got to have these outside agitators come in at times because they don't have any stake in the community, they don't have to feel reprisals, they don't have to feel the scorn of the citizens or anything else, they can act much more freely than those people who live in the community, but the Globe-Democrat keeps trying to play upon this thing. Without these agitators, there would have been no strike: That's bunk:

TRAVERS: Are there any other major issues that haven't been brought out, incidentally or directly...that you would like to mention at this time? I feel we have covered the idea of the need for collective negotiations. That must change at the state level, and there seems to be some indication to that effect. The area of communications, I think, is certainly a part of that. If you don't have collective negotiations, you'd still like to have greater communication. That seems to be very evident. Some kind of accountability, on the part of the Board in terms of its financial status is needed. We've talked about the need for a mid-year raise. We feel also that there needs to be stronger consideration for teacher medical benefits. You mentioned earlier that you pay something like \$500 a year for Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Isn't that right?

MORGAN: Teachers pay every bit of that themselves. I don't have it, but the Board doesn't pay one penny of it. I don't know of any major business...

SERKIN: Any business worth over \$80 million that doesn't do that for its employees... The thing that I was always interested in...does the Board pay that for some of its other employees? We can never find any of these things out. You talk about secret organizations:

TRAVERS: There is one issue that perhaps is worthy of mention here. Is there any danger of tenure being lost for you people on strike?

SERKIN: I don't think so, because in the negotiations that will be there, there will be a no-reprisal clause which will include, I'm sure, that. There were certain politicians out in the county, as usual, who are not directly connected with this, who made some blustery statements about how they were going to go to the state legislature and try 'to push these laws through. And we were informed by our union leaders, through our representatives in Jefferson City, that these statements will never get through the committees even...much less on the floor of the legislature. Reprisals have never gotten anywhere. Not in these days. Those days of browbeating people around and pushing them around...those are days that have gone by. You are going to have to do it the way you keep preaching... the democratic way. And the democratic way, hopefully, is not by threats and reprisals. It's by sitting down and talking, using reason...two opposing sides sitting down and talking and using reason and trying to reach a workable agreement...that both parties can live with. If you don't want to do that, then the schools will remain closed. It's the first time the teachers who have preached

these things in school, are finally going out and doing the things they have preached. This is what it really boils down to. I mean, this is really the hard part. It's true that the money got us together, that perhaps that was the catalyst, but I think deep down the knowing that this was going on year after year...was...that we, as teachers, felt we were getting smaller and smaller as individuals and that the Board was just as we pictured it, the enemy, not only of us, but the schools, and the students... You can only be turned away so many times before you're going to explode, and 1973 was the explosion year. Whatever happens, the city, the schools, the Board will never be the same again.

TRAVERS: Is there any other point that you would like to make, Mr. Kupferer or Mr. Morgan?

KUPFERER: No, on Al's comments, I'd say, that I don't think the reprisals work at all...but, they were used, I think, by the Board. There were threats made. They did work fear among some teachers about losing their jobs, and especially non-tenure teachers of being replaced.

SERKIN: The inferences were always being made...that you would lose...that probationary teachers would be removed...the inference was that south side teachers would be moved to the north in St. Louis ...if they went out...the inferences were always there, but never in concrete terms. Obviously, the Board did not want to have anything that could be used against them. But the inferences were always there. Coaches were told, "If you go out, don't expect to get your coaching contracts next year."

KUPFERER: They were sent letters, weren't they?

SERKIN: They were sent letters on this.

TRAVERS: Might this destroy your chance of becoming an administrator...that is, if you have been active in the strike?

MORGAN: Those who have thought that would happen are the ones who did not go out.

SERKIN: Right. Those in our school who thought that there was some chance sometime in the future that they might join this illustrious group of administrators (I don't understand that last part of this sentence.) _____ You know, the reprisals are there. They haven't worked as a group, but I would imagine that in the future, this is one of things that we could negotiate. They may use reprisals against us as far as summer school appointments. They may use reprisals against us as far as classes that are assigned. "You went out on strike, as I remember. Well, fine, we'll give you these classes, and we'll make sure that you have five different classrooms during the day where you have to walk around." This is another reason for this grievance procedure which we haven't mentioned at all today. We want a grievance procedure... we've got a grievance, and we want to be able to take it through a source which is friendly to us and get this grievance worked out. As of now, we have absolutely no grievance procedure at all. You take whatever is given. So, in the matter of reprisals, I'm pretty sure that this is something that they are also talking about. I think that they have come to some kind of agreement on a grievance procedure.

TRAVERS: Due process has yet 'to be worked out.

SERKIN: I think so.

MORGAN: We had absolutely nothing to lose on that issue, because we didn't know how these things are determined now. We don't know how summer school appointments are made now. You don't know who gets promoted, or why. Or... who gets changed to another school. They can take you and put you in any school they want, and nobody knows why that's done, or how. So, to say that now is nothing new. They have always done that to us.

SERKIN: The type of classes...well, I say that this is grievance procedure now.

KUPFERER: Yes. Well, now, we want to know who does get summer school. What is the criteria? How do you get it?

SERKIN: Why do you get certain classes...why do you get certain rooms?

MORGAN: Why are some after-school activities paid, and others not paid.

SERKIN: This is true.

MORGAN: Why does one man get a \$1,000 for this activity and another guy gets nothing...for his activity...which takes the same amount of time.

SERKIN: Yes...for the same amount of time...the same amount of responsibility.

MORGAN: So, we have nothing to lose in that respect.

SERKIN: That's what I say...to us, it's like coming out of the night...the dark.

TRAVERS: I think when school systems get as large as St. Louis City, there is a definite need for good collective negotiations.

SERKIN: I think so. In a small town, where teachers live in the town and the Board members live in the town and you see each other day after day on the street in the town, then, perhaps, that is already worked there. But in the city system as large as this, there has to be something.

MORGAN: You know, the people most removed from the students in the classroom are the ones making the important decisions. The Board of Education keeps telling us that they are interested in the students. How can we go out on strike? How can we do that to children? They don't know anything about these kids. They are never in the classroom. We are in there every day. We know what the big problems are. They don't know. (ALL TALKING.)

SERKIN: I will say this. I have been teaching in St. Louis for fourteen years, nearly fifteen, and I have never seen a Board of Education member in any school that I have ever taught in. As far as administrators...the only time I ever see them is at lunch.

TRAVERS: This is one of the disadvantages of urban living.

SERKIN: Well, this is it. I think we went through this process in our early history in the factories when you had a small shop and a guy worked for you, you knew him and you

mushroom into an enormous factory. The guy at the top doesn't know the guy at the bottom of 25,000 people. There has to be some liaison between the two groups. We are in the front line...they are the generals. There has got to be something between us. We're fighting a war. And the war will be won or lost in the classroom. It will not be won or lost up in the Board of Education now on Locust Street. It won't. If they don't understand that...

TRAVERS: Well, Mr. Serkin, Mr. Morgan, Mr. Kupferer, is there anything that any one of you would like to say before we conclude? I have enjoyed this very much and have learned a lot from talking with you about the issues in St. Louis City.

KUPFERER: We have enjoyed it, too.