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INTERVIEW WITH R.B. LOGSDON
INTERVIEWED BY DENNIS BRUNN
BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT
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INTRODUCTION: This is January 22, 1974, and I am talking here with Robert Logsdon, a long-time member and officer of the St. Louis UE, and in the CIO, and an officer in the St. Louis CIO Industrial Union Council. Now, Mr. Logsdon, maybe we could just start out with a little personal background, where and when you were born and what kind of a background you came from into the labor movement.

LOGSDON: I was born in 1906 over in Illinois, in a coal-mining town, but my father was not a coal miner. I went to high school there, and I came to St. Louis in 1923 and went to work in a factory just off the river. As I recall, now, I made 30-40 cents an hour in 1923. It was a 59-hour week and all that sort of stuff; and after that, I worked in various places. For the last seven years prior to when the union business started, I worked at the Western Union Company down there. I was the building clerk down there; I ordered material, kept time, and all that sort of business. When the depression came on, I was building clerk half of the time and elevator operator half of the time. I could do both those jobs. Finally came the serious business late in 1931, as I recall...very late in 1931...when the layoffs came. I had my choice then between going up with the bunch on the roads repairing poles and things like that, and we just heard from a man called Newcombe...[I've forgotten...I suppose he was president of the company]... saying that things were going to be better. So, when I had my choice of being laid-off, I said, "Well, hell, I'll take the lay-off, and things will be all right soon." Well, that was the end of Western Union! It was a poor choice, you know. So, I worked on a farm for a while when my folks were down in Arkansas and southeast Missouri. I worked in some plants. I worked in Emerson Electric Company; oh, I suppose, that was for a couple of years and, again, it was a 40 cents an hour business where they made fans on the assembly line, things like that. They came around and started...trying to see how we got active... particularly in automobile...and they came around there and, of course, I signed up. I helped sign up a whole lot of people. And after we started signing up people. Bill Sentner was acting...at first, but I didn't know him at first...I met him sometime after I had signed up, I suppose...oh, two or three months after a meeting out on Easton somewhere, where they had meetings...I never will forget the first time I was there! Bill was explaining economics to the people out there, and I'll say one thing. I told him he sure did sympathize that night! [laughter] After he finished explaining that...oh, you know about profit and no expense! [both talking, can't understand this] I never heard that particular, you know, that particular phase of economics explained before and, of course, he just grinned. And, of course, we just went along...

BRUNN: So, he was trying to explain where the profits came from?

LOGSDON: ...but, he left out...I'll say one thing, he had an effective, but certainly, dishonest presentation! Those people, hell, they didn't know! He gave them what they wanted to hear!

BRUNN: Just to go back on the organizing of Emerson. You were there when the drive started?

LOGSDON: Oh, yes.

BRUNN: And you worked with Bob Marewitz there?

LOGSDON: He was one of the in-plant guys, yes, and Arthur Maloane was there...very active...and a guy, I've forgotten his name...he was later president of the local union for several terms; the best thing that I can remember about him was that he drank a whole pot of coffee every time he turned around. I have completely forgotten his name. I think, too, one of the most effective guys in there...two guys...were Lou Kimmel and George Kimmel, two brothers, and Lew was a good friend of mine. He got killed about a year and a half ago this summer. I know he had me to speak at his funeral his wife had down here. And George runs a big tavern down here. They were extremely effective as organizers. They were real good people. In fact, I thought that they were more stable than some of the others. So, after that...of course, I suppose you know the history of about how we had this...why we had this...sit-down strike and all that. I know the day before it occurred, I went down...Sentner had me to go with him...I wasn't appointed anything. I was just recording secretary of the local, but somehow he had me to go with him to meet the company they had formed. We told them that we was going to strike them, you know...not a sit-down strike...so they met with an old guy...I've forgotten his name...a big, tall, lean manager of the company...

BRUNN: Was that Neuman?

LOGSDON: No, it was John something-or-other...for the company, I'm talking about now. John Driy

BRUNN: There was Joseph Neuman.

LOGSDON: No, no, this was his henchman. In any event, we told them we were going to strike...I told Bill, "Hell, let's go." And we got up and took off, and the next day, they started the sit-down strike...of course, this sit-down strike was something they hadn't anticipated on. Oh, in the meantime, once the sit-down strike started, the people then...

BRUNN: Had this...sit-down strike...been discussed ahead of time?

LOGSDON: Oh, yes, I knew about it. I think that perhaps a dozen of us knew about it. The president of the local, I've forgotten his name...you know, that sad old guy we met out in front of Sears, one time? In any event, I've forgotten his name, but he knew about it, Maloane knew about it, and I'm sure Marewitz knew about it. There was a young man...he [he worked at Century] was very active...although he didn't work at Emerson...Henry Fierring...he was very helpful here. There was another man who worked for the local and was very active in all the activities at Century...his name was Otto Maschoff...he knew about it...he was very active. Those two people were real soldiers in the movement. Incidentally,

Maschoff has long since retired...lives down in Ft. Lauderdale. We see or hear from him sometimes.

BRUNN: I'll ask you later for some of these addresses.

LOGSDON: Ferring's wife...she recently died...she was an organizer for UE. I haven't been in touch with him for many years.

BRUNN: Were black workers any part of this early sit-down at Emerson? Did they have any foothold at all in this plant? They had much more of a foothold, as I recall, in Century and in Wagner than they did at Emerson. There were a few black workers...I don't recall any. Now, in Century, there were a much larger percentage. I don't mean a large percentage, but a much larger percentage of black workers at that time and more active. I don't recall names, but out at Wagner, which was the last of the three to be organized, they were all organized in the same year...

BRUNN: That's right. In '37.

LOGSDON: And at Wagner, it was really an outside job, in that we got big parades on the outside all around the plant and all that and signed 'em en masse, because we had already won the other two, you see.

BRUNN: You already had a base.

LOGSDON: That's right. But out there, there was Lee Henry, who was active in the very beginning, who lives out in north St. Louis yet...or at least he did a few months ago...and there were several black leaders, I've forgotten their names...one who died a few years ago...a great, big, strong, fat man...and he died from cancer, and he was tremendously active. I would say, on the whole, that the Wagner local had the best and most participatory leadership of the blacks of any of the three locals. I believe that they also had the type of leadership from the local scene that would welcome it more than at Emerson, see...not more than at Century, but then, on the other hand, Ferring, I don't think ever had wide acceptance of people. He was from the East, he was educated, and people kind of separated him from Maschoff and Sentner, myself, and people like that...

BRUNN: Who were from Missouri, Illinois area...

LOGSDON: ...Sentner went to Washington University and this, that, and the other thing...he was at St. Louis University, but he talked like them, so he had pretty wide acceptance.

BRUNN: I would like to come back to Sentner in a little while, and ask you more about him, because of the important role he played there. Do you remember the kinds of jobs that black workers had within these three plants?

LOGSDON: Say, I'll tell you...let's start with Century first, huh? In Century, of course, they had all the janitor jobs, practically all of them. But there were two plants... Century and Century Foundry...perhaps two miles apart. At Century Foundry, they had a large share of the high-paying jobs...the moulders, the people that make the castings, all those jobs. In the Foundry, I would say, the majority of the people there, incidentally...a man out there by the

name of George Atkins, as I remember, and he was a real leader among the black people and the white people...finally, the company found something on him years later and fired him. I'm not sure whether they fired him when it was UE or IU, but I met him several times later out at the airport, because he was working out at the airport then.

BRUNN: But he worked at Century Foundry?

LOGSDON: Lee Henry can probably tell you somemore about him. Lee probably kept all his notes. Lee retired some seven or eight years ago from Wagner. Lee was a stabilizing force on the black people in the deal out there. In Wagner, I said from the very first. Lee was on the executive council most of the time...most of the years...I can't say for all of the years, you know...of the UE, and there were negro stewards there, I believe, each year from '37 on. What happened after they went to the IUE and what degree of participation they had, I don't know, because the leadership would certainly be different. But up to that time, they had a large degree of participation out there.

BRUNN: What jobs were open to blacks?

LOGSDON: Well, I'll tell you, they had...there wasn't any question of just negroes at Wagner... even from the beginning, as I recall. Remember, this is thirty-five years ago. But in the beginning, I don't believe they had at all a black janitor force. They had some machine operators and had a few of the better jobs even then. I believe that expanded slowly by degrees, as long as UE was in there. Now what it is today, I haven't the slightest knowledge or anything. Along with that they had a leader out there...one was called, Joe Pogue...he died up in Washington a few months ago, in the State of Washington. He was very sympathetic towards black people, and all progressive things. Had an old man called Waldron...he didn't have too great a degree of courage...I say this, but at least he was on the right path. They had quite a few in leadership. They had a different core of leadership out there than they had at Emerson, and they had later in...

BRUNN: Sam Silverman?

LOGSDON: Sam Silverman, yes, he was there. Sam was no fighting leader, but Sam was always on the right side. He was always on the right side!

BRUNN: In 1938, I ran across a note from Bil Sentner to the Urban League discussing the situation of blacks, and he mentioned that 100 out of the 400 eligible blacks in the UE area...jurisdiction...St. Louis area...were members of the union. Was there no check-off or automatic membership by this time?

LOGSDON: Oh, no.

BRUNN: This was a question constantly.

LOGSDON: When you say 1938, that's good, because in 1939, we got our first voluntary check-off. But when you say "voluntary" that means, in effect, it was once a year...once you had a man signed up, you had him. So in that period and so, that spread all over, and the percentage of black and white...I believe that if you go back to '38, '37, we had a bigger percentage of white people paying then than the black people. That was obvious. They...white

people...were getting more out of it. It was as simple as all that.

BRUNN: They had better jobs to start with.

LOGSDON: Better jobs, and you get better protection. You've got to remember, too, that the heads of the industrial relations in all plants, they weren't pro-negro. They reflected just as much as the workers the anti-negro sentiment. For instance, the man, he's dead now...I forget his name...the head man at Century was viciously anti-negro, although he employed quite a few of them. You could smell that in his attitudes and in his pronunciation, and all that when you were in negotiations. He's long since gone...I wish I could think of his name, but I can't. Perhaps one of the most sympathetic toward black people's rights of having jobs was a man called Evans who was the general manager out at Wagner in those early difficult years. Again, he's long since dead, but he was...let's put it this way, he didn't put too many obstacles in our way...that's the best way to say that. That's about all he could do in his position there.

BRUNN: So before we get on to some of the other aspects of the UE in terms of this...this is a general question...how did the different officers and and leaders of the UE approach the white workers on these questions? How did they deal with the general tendency to have...to live in segregated ways both in the community but also on the job?

LOGSDON: Well, I'll tell you. They had a far less problem on the job than they did in the community. On the job, outside of Sentner who made some sort of approach in relationship to the ethics of the thing, most of them took the leadership on the local level and let the company hire these people, you know. They got to make a living and they sure aren't going to hurt us working any here by our side, but if we don't take them in, we're going to be weak. But, I'll tell you, I believe that nearly all of us swallowed that and believed that. The only people who didn't like that too well, I'm certain, would be the tool and die-makers, or highly skilled people. Of all the production workers, I would say that there was very little resistance towards upgrading those people. But what had happened on that and, again, I'm going to exempt the skilled classification which was 5-10-15% of the people in plants; if we leave those out, they just accepted that because that's the way they come in and hired all those years. Now, on the question of community, that's a horse of a different color! I know that when Sentner would bring that up, he'd get real resistance. I remember way back once...I'd been on the road...that was back in the early 40's sometime...that was Sentner...he was on the national executive board then...and a few more of them talking about Local 1102...that's Emerson...had had a dance...at that time they came under the leadership of a guy named Click...who was bitterly opposed to Sentner...though he was really with him at the start, you know...but, in any event, they had had a big dance, and then I just happened to read it in the paper...here they had had a dance in the same hall on a different night for all their black members...you know, a different orchestra and all that. Well, I'll tell you that, at that time, reflected the desires of the big majority of the membership of Emerson local.

BRUNN: Was this before or during the war?

LOGSDON: That's when the war was a year or two old. But I remember that there were some very sharp conflicts during the war when we had this Otto Maschoff assigned to organizing small arms. I worked with him a great deal, and there they had a company and the UE

leadership together...not the local leadership...Sentner and some others...they decided...they had one plant...one segregated plant...I forget...four or five thousand out of thirty thousand...in any event, I recall that the company picked up somebody from the Roosevelt administration...they might have put pressure on the company... you know, not to have a segregated plant...this is rather vague now, but, anyway, the company called Sentner and Maschoff in; they were very sympathetic about moving the people around...and not all the black people were for that, believe it or not...because over there, they had their own head man, "black bosses," you know...just the head man or one or two was white. So they moved them all around, and the white people just raised all sorts of hell. They just shut the plant down, as I recall, for several days. Now, whether they ever put that into effect, I don't recall, because during all these things...I was the road man; I was over in Maytag...I was over in...I got snatches, back and forth.

BRUNN: In the early period '37-'38-'39, there were efforts to try out any kind of integrated social events based on the union with the UE? And in addition to that, were there daily eating arrangements in the plant? Were they segregated or were they integrated?

LOGSDON: I'm trying to think. You see, Emerson had no cafeteria. You went down the street. And Century had none, and I'm not that familiar with Wagner. If there had been any place, it would have been at Wagner. Maybe Henry can tell you. Because I can assure you that...it seems to me...I was rather surprised...we had a place at Emerson. We used to go down on Lucas Avenue, and I'd go to meet some of the guys after I came back from Iowa. You see, I was up in Iowa organizing. I left when the sit-down strike was on. I left to organize Maytag and some other places in Iowa. By the time I came back, the contract was signed and the dead cats were beginning to be thrown. But anyway, on Lucas Avenue, I'd go over there on Fridays, paydays, to a little tavern over there. The man who ran the tavern supported the union during the strike by giving them vocal support, which was pretty rare then. In any event, they'd gather there, quite a few of them, and have a drink. And I was surprised. I'd gone there before the strike, and all I'd seen were white. I see a sprinkling of black people there, and no one would ever say anything. They'd shake hands and sit in the corner. A funny thing...I only saw black men there...I never saw any black women, but I saw, oh, five-six-eight black men in there drinking, and no one said anything. No one took exception to it. And up in the hall when we'd have meetings, there was no segregation unless the black people deliberately went by themselves in preferment. They damn well sat where they pleased. That wasn't true of some of the campaigns. I had the campaign over in...as late as '46...over in Winston Salem, North Carolina, where I tried to persuade the black people to sit with the white people, and they just told me, "No soap! Those guys would kill us!"

BRUNN: Were there social events that involved blacks and whites organized by some of the other locals? You mentioned the Emerson local organizing a dance.

LOGSDON: That's the only one I know of where they had that segregation.

BRUNN: Most of the time...

LOGSDON: Most of the time, if they had anything, they would invite them, but I'll tell you one thing, I don't think the attendance was anything to write home about. I believe that there was a little better atmosphere. I'm sure that Lee or some of the boys he would put you in

touch with, could tell you. There was always a better atmosphere there for some reason.

BRUNN: What was the approach...you had mentioned that some of the local leaders would take because, well, you know the company hired...blacks and whites, and you had to live with it. What was the approach that Sentner seemed to take that you said was, perhaps, more ethical?

LOGSDON: Well, Sentner...he just...I'll tell you, Sentner was ahead of his time in more than one thing. His approach was, "By god, they got the full rights! They should be allowed to do anything they please, go anywhere they please!" You know, that's that!

BRUNN: Would Sentner raise this in local meetings and so forth?

LOGSDON: Oh, he would raise that with the local leadership. In local meetings, he didn't go quite that far. Sentner had a tenuous hold on the thing all the time because of it. That was one of the factors. The other was the Communist factor, and all that. His whole theory was based on the fact of having a bunch of people who would work with him, you know, who didn't have the same deal against them, you know. But Sentner had to handle a very strong viewpoint...with his way of putting out, he wouldn't have lasted very long.

BRUNN: I see, I see. That does relate to an interesting question that...behind the whole history....one of the themes in the history of the UE is the influence of the Communist Party...people like Sentner...and one of the things that the Communists developed was a special theory about not only equal rights for blacks but, at an earlier point, they had developed the theory about certain national culture...the black national culture...that was of independent rights, and so forth, and it was actually a very strong position. How that was expressed, too...

LOGSDON: Sentner talked to me at one time and a very few other leaders. He said something about, maybe, black people should have some states of their own. Another time, they should have...at one time, there was a big layoff, and they should have super-seniority, and we told him, "No!" He even went and talked to some of the locals about it, without me knowing about it; I was in St. Louis most of the time...but the leadership...that was a fine way to commit suicide, I told him! Actually, from then on, after he started that...that was after the end of the war...he didn't last very long after that, because his position remained pretty much the same. Sentner's position only changed on anything in relationship to when they, the Communist Party, changed. Other than that, he was as firm as a rod.

BRUNN: During this earlier period then, you were saying, his position would often be very strong...kind of equal rights for black people...but he would tend to influence the union by trying to deal with local leadership and active people...not necessarily associated directly with him politically, so that they would be separate?

LOGSDON: That's right, that's right! That was the only way he could exist!

BRUNN: I will ask you some more about the post-war period, because it is very important, but I did want to get straight some of the atmosphere of the UE itself on this issue, because from my reading of the record, UE was far ahead of most other CIO unions.

LOGSDON: It was.

BRUNN: Now, a few of the things I wanted to ask you about UE before getting on to the CIO directly, could you recall a few of the campaigns the UE got into essentially? Sort of community campaigns in, say, '37-'38...those early years. One of them was...well, for instance, I saw a reference from 1939 to participation in slum clearance campaigns, in Labor's Non-partisan League, and things like that. Could you recall some of those things?

LOGSDON: Well, the slum clearance campaign I knew about that. I was in and out a great deal. I had nothing to do with it. The Labor Non-partisan League, I was active to some extent in that. I believe that was before Chambers came in. It may not have been, but he did have someone in the office, and the man who succeeded Chambers in that particular job when Chambers went back to the University or into the army, was a man by the name of Jack Becker. The last time I heard of him, he was a publicity man for some New York corporation. He was a good guy with them. Although the Labor Non-partisan League, they worked with the CIO, you know. The UE was very active in pushing that thing. I think that contributed a good deal to the left wing elements of the Democratic party...the liberal elements of the Democratic Party. They registered a good many people. In those days, that would be difficult to do. Particularly with the black people. I remember going down and, of course, those places are torn down now, but down in the downtown area on Jefferson there, 20th and 18th streets...

BRUNN: The Mill Creeek Valley area?

LOGSDON: Yes, there used to be places there three, four, five, six stories high. People would live in a room or two, the black people. That was my first experience going in there to get them registered to vote. It seemed incredible. If they think that the place they are tearing down now is something, somebody ought to have taken a trip down there once! It was unbelievable, the living conditions down there. You know, I've been up...you see, what happened...this was not primarily my job, but I was involved in that.

BRUNN: I do recall here in reading that in 1939, again, you were mentioned in a campaign around relief...the relief program.

LOGSDON: Oh, yes!

BRUNN: Maybe you could fill me in on the UE's role in that.

LOGSDON: We had a great deal of people...you remember in '37...I don't know if you would remember...but in '37, things got relatively good for the pres again. In the fall of '38 there were, I suppose...unemployment got to be perhaps 20% of the work force or something. We had some kind of an organization up there. What did we call that thing? A dime a month dues. We used to meet there on 2111 Olive Street. We'd meet there every Thursday night.

BRUNN: You mean, an unemployed organization?

LOGSDON: Yes, but it wasn't the American Workers Union. No, the American Workers Union was a different outfit. That was the one that the Socialists had organized.

BRUNN: The Unemployed Council?

BRUNN: No, we had some other name for it. I've forgotten. For some reason, we wanted to be independent of those. In any event, we had it and, hell, we had a 150, sometimes 50, or 200-300, and we'd go down, you know, and picket the place. We'd go out and get a pot of coffee and give coffee to the people standing in line. Those were the days when people were "katch," you know, on all this sort of stuff. All sorts of things. We'd send delegates down to see the mayor. I forgot the name of the mayor before Kaufman. He was a pretty good guy to talk to. He's long since dead. You wouldn't know him; I believe that he was a Republican, too. In any event, he...

BRUNN: What year are you talking about? Are you talking about the depths of the depression?

LOGSDON: No, I'm talking about the depths of the second depression. Actually, the depression wasn't over from about '30 until about '41 when the war really got going. But there was a tremendous advance in jobs in '36 and '37. In the fall of '38, it went back almost to a crawl. Most of those guys lost...were off the trolley. You had...

BRUNN: You had, I recall reading someplace, that about 25% of your membership was again out of work.

LOGSDON: That's right. That was the fall of '38, and that lasted...well when the war started in '40, we were already well on the way up. I suppose that when the war started, we were down to still 10-12% unemployed, but we were active in that, and we did all the things that unemployed people do; you know the score on that. We'd get films down there and show them; we tried to feed them. We tried this hamburger bit...even a hamburger at 15-20cents was a large amount, which it was in those days; we found out that we were getting too many damn people coming in for the hamburgers and not finding out what in the hell was going on!

BRUNN: Well, there was a difference. It seems that one of the differences between the early unemployed movement in the early thirties and forties, before the unions, before the CIO, was that at least you had a union base from which to mobilize some of this pressure.

LOGSDON: Not only that, we furnished the place in the hall, you know; we gave them coffee, you know, and more important is, we furnished people like...this was long before I was president of the CIO...but if we had people that were officials, you see, of different unions...I remember Joe Applebaum of the gas and chemical workers, and a fellow who I never held in the highest regard; nevertheless, he done a job when he joined the steelworkers. He backed us up. There was another man, called Ralph Shaw; he did a yeoman's job on that. So, actually, they formed a protective shield around these people to get something done. And it worked! We could rely on them pretty well. Even what turned out to be right-wingers were very active on unemployed. I think that it did a great deal of good, a great deal of good.

BRUNN: In terms of the CIO setting up here...the Industrial Union Council, maybe you could kind of give me a feel for the...which were the active unions, and what were some of the

issues that the council dealt with during the first few years? And then, when you were most active?

LOGSDON: I think, perhaps, the unions that were instrumental in setting that up...let's see, believe it or not, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers were very active. An old man there, long since dead. Max Michealson, was very active. He was a very good old man, by the way. He wasn't the most radical man in the world, but he was far from being an eel. Along with them was the steelworkers. They were active in that, because perhaps they had a directive from Lewis to do it. The gas and chemical workers, at that time when it first started out, I believe, they were District 50 of the United Mine Workers at that time. Nevertheless, they were active, always active in the council. The United Auto Workers were always active when they weren't having their intermural fights, you know, which has always plagued them from the beginning up till and they were active.

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I can't say that they...all I can say is that they were active. Sometimes, they were a disruptive force. Nevertheless, he was active. In the long run, he was for the interest of the people, and just didn't see the interest of the people like a lot of other people did. Later, of course, they pulled out and became independent and later affiliated with the Teamsters. He had a checkered career. All in all, I think he had his career up; he was in a hell of a lot better off when he got fired than when he started out. He was right on the beam when Fitzsimmons run him out, you know.

BRUNN: Were there any unions that put forth any black leadership in the CIO Council?

LOGSDON: It seems to me that there was always a black element, if I'm not wrong, from Wagner out there. And I'm quite sure I saw black delegates there from the steelworkers union. You know, I just don't recall. There was just a sprinkling. I don't recall that any of the big leaders in those days were black. I just don't recall that.

BRUNN: How about the...

LOGSDON: Now, remember this, that between the years of when that was originally formed and the next two years up until the time that I became president those three years, I was gone most of the time on the road.

BRUNN: Do you recall during that early time, or when you became president, any representation from the black building service workers?

LOGSDON: I sure do, I sure do!

BRUNN: Bill Massingale.

LOGSDON: I sure do. Bill Massingale was a good man, a good man.

BRUNN: Now during these early years—1939 through 1940—what was the size of the average meeting of the Industrial Union Council?

LOGSDON: I can only tell you that from '41...from '43 through '46, the years I was in because, you see, I wasn't present at most of those meetings. I was out. I'd be over in Madison. Sometimes I'd be gone a month at a time. I'd come home here once or twice in a month.

BRUNN: So you were an international representative...from when to when?

LOGSDON: I was international representative from 1937, I guess, to 1955, all the time. One time, they, for political reasons, sent me elected to vice-president of the district to, you know, give bulwark to him. But, other than that, I still remained, however, as international representative.

BRUNN: In 1943, then, would the meetings of the Industrial Council fill a large room or...

LOGSDON: I'd say that it depended on what the issue was. I'd say that, as I recall, there was a provision that we had to have thirty people for a quorum, and I can't recall adjourning but one time for a lack of a quorum, all those years. A lot of times when there would be a hot issue on, or there'd be a strike on that we wanted to support, there would be as high as 200-250 there. It would all depend on the issue.

BRUNN: Okay, I...

LOGSDON: I would say that there was pretty good attendance.

BRUNN: I won't ask you any more about the very early years of the CIO Council here, because, as you say, you weren't involved directly at that point. But when you get to 1943, this is something I did want to ask you about, because you, I believe, were here at this time. There was, as you 1943 know, the Detroit Riot in 1943. Right after that, here in St. Louis, the UE and the CIO Council as a whole, I gather, went to the mayor with a program to somehow head off a possible race riot by...

LOGSDON: When they talk about "push"...I remember the papers were talking about that.

BRUNN: Was this a UE-initiated idea to start with? Did it come from several areas?

LOGSDON: I believe it was a UE-initiated thing, but I tell you, there was no real resistance to it on the part of the other unions, I would say that.

BRUNN: Okay.

LOGSDON: Now, they were all interested in that thing. I tell you, about 1943 that thing became far more respectable than it was in 1937, far more respectable.

BRUNN: Do you recall anything about that campaign in particular? Did this involve more than sending a delegation to the mayor?

LOGSDON: I'm sure it did. I'm sure it did, but this was a long time ago. I know that they had letters in the papers of the committee to the mayor, and I'm sure of one thing that they did, is they sent delegations to talk to some of the big employers. I think that had some bearing on

that, too, because in wartime, companies don't want disruption. It's a far different picture than it is in ordinary times. So, all in all, that was backed by almost 95% of the elements in this union.

BRUNN: Do you recall during the '43 period, for instance, any disagreements between the UE or the CIO on the March on Washington: movement here...Ted McNeal.

LOGSDON: I remember about the March on Washington, and I remember that Otto Maschoff was president...who was very good as president...

BRUNN: From small arms?

LOGSDON: Yes, small arms local. But he didn't hold the March on Washington in high regard. I think that Sentner did. I'm not sure, but I know that there were differences. Beyond that, I'm afraid that it's been too long ago.

BRUNN: Were there any other, during this three-year period, that you recall...any other issues that the CIO dealt with, as a group, that directly related to the situation of the black production workers or to general issues of black/white relations in St. Louis?

LOGSDON: Black workers in the plant. I don't remember. I was trying to remember...I don't remember any broad issues. I remember, I think, that it was at that time that Sentner wanted to raise the issue of super seniority.

BRUNN: Toward the end of the war?

LOGSDON: Toward the end of the war, and that was vetoed in the UE before he got to the CIO with it, you know. The only other political issue that I know about was, when he raised the question of...what did they call that? Negro Nationalism, I believe. But that, also, didn't get far in the UE, in the leadership. It didn't get to the membership. That was when he was reading something about something in which it was advocated that we should, I think, turn over five Southern states to the negro people for their own. So, we just told him that he'd better forget about it and get on with it.

BRUNN: This came up in 1946 or so with the general position of the Communist Party shifted?

LOGSDON: Yes, that Party shifted! I found that out to my own sorrow and at a very bad time.

BRUNN: Could I ask you, first, about this super-seniority idea? Do you mean that this was a proposal that, in order to reduce black layoffs because they were the last hired...

LOGSDON: Yes, that's right...

BRUNN: ...to somehow up them in this area?

LOGSDON: Yes, that's right...put them up on the seniority list.

BRUNN: What happened?

LOGSDON: What happened would have been that we got lynched! The only time super-seniority looks good is when it isn't going to apply! Once a white worker knows he's going to be laid off, with more seniority than a black one, even today, he wouldn't stand still for it. No way of putting that over. Let me tell you about when they [the Communist Party] changed their position. The war, back in the war effort and all that stuff, you know, no strikes, arbitration...Sentner even got a period of time when he was advocating to the bunch of us that they ought to forget all their differences. This was at the end of the war...this was at the end of the war...and that kinda sounded funny to me. I just didn't see workers going for that kind of stuff at that stage. I don't even see them going for that now. In any event, though, he gave us this strong line, and Earl Browder gave me a book one time...what the hell was it? ...something like, "The Altar"...in any event, his idea that everybody was going to get along in the future, that there was going to be no more Red-baiting, and all that. I kinda looked at him like he was nuts! But that wasn't my prime interest, so I didn't take off on him. He went to New York to a meeting, later, to a meeting of the Communist Party leaders. Meantime, each year in the Council, we had a meeting of all the stewards who wanted to come to the city, down at the Southern Hotel and, I suppose, there were 500 to 1,000, and we had a good all-day program, dinner, and then along with that, they had some way, some people insisted that we get a bunch of employees...Sentner worked with them some years ago...so, here, they brought 15-25 of them. I don't know who in hell they were now. I didn't know half of them then! So, we get the program going real quick, and here he comes in from New York in the afternoon, and I'm sitting up there. I remember Harold Gibbons sitting up on the platform with me and two or three others. And Sentner said, "I want ten minutes." And I said, "Look, we've got enough of a program anyway." "I want ten minutes." I said, "I'll give you five. Make sure it isn't any more than that." You know. He gets up and he blasts bosses and everything. He just raised all kinds of hell and disrupted that whole meeting. We had quite a session that night, but I found out what happened when I read the paper the next day. That somebody over in France said that Briody was a fake, people decided that Briody was a fake, after this time so that was that.

BRUNN: Did you...

LOGSDON: That was it. Boy, do you remember when I came in? That was a mess! Do you remember when I came home that night? I was ready to blow my top and run him right out of town!

BRUNN: Sentner made a very dramatic shift there, then?

LOGSDON: Dramatic?!! He was marching this way, and he was marching that way, and he did it in front of these damn bosses! Here we were already into our program, and he comes in, don't tell us what he is going to say, don't say anything, he just goes up there. I tell you, I think that was the real beginning of the end of his position in the UE. Right then! Because the stewards never did understand it. So much for that. That's water over the dam many years ago.

BRUNN: Well, I think it is an important question, though. I would like to come back to it. I just wanted to ask you a few more things about the CIO and the issue of black workers. For

instance, during this same period, was there a connection or participation between the CIO unions in an effort to get an FEPC ordinance in St. Louis, as well as to support the national drive?

LOGSDON: Yes, yes, there was. Now I'm vague on the details, but there certainly was. I know that Sentner was active. Not only him, but the UE leadership was active in that. I know that Pogue was active in that. Pogue was a real underrated man. Funny thing was, Pogue could talk; he could convince people. He was the head of by far the biggest local, but he couldn't write. One year after Sentner was gone, we talked him. Bill and I and some more, into being president for a year.

BRUNN: Right.

LOGSDON: I wrote every letter that went out of his office! I don't believe that he was intelligent.

BRUNN: I know what you mean.

LOGSDON: When he writes...his wife wrote his letters right. He just couldn't get them right. He could get up and make a good speech; he'd take notes, and he'd have a report. But he couldn't write! He was an odd character, but he was a good leader. A good leader.

BRUNN: During this '43 to '46 period, what were the divisions here? For instance, were there particular issues that they were...

LOGSDON: Well, I'll tell you. The real particular issue was that Sentner followed the same position that he had before. The political climate was changing, and Gibbons would use "Red-baiting" on anybody that would accomplish his own purpose. You've got to remember that Gibbons came from another group of Reds now; they weren't the kosher Reds, like Sentner. My words may not be right, because I just don't know how to express it. They were the guys that used to run the Northwest organizer up in...three brothers...in Minneapolis.

BRUNN: Dunn Brothers?

LOGSDON: Right, he was that kind of a Red. They hated each other, and to him, anyone who agreed with Sentner was fair game. It was as simple as all that. It was a political struggle for Gibbons to gain power.

BRUNN: Did Gibbons tend to promote, during this period, any particular positions on issues? In other words, even though it may be...

LOGSDON: On main issues, on main issues...I can't criticize his position too much. The only time he would get off an issue, in my mind, would be when he could cloak like a firm Red by doing it. I believe that during that time he became president...he became close to some companies, but I have no proof of it. I have no proof of it. I know towards the end, he sure as hell wasn't.

BRUNN: Do you recall some of the relationship between the CIO and black community organizations like the Urban League? The black newspapers? Or church leaders?

LOGSDON: The black newspapers, the CIO had very little relationship with. The Urban League, we had some relationship; you remember that the Urban League was far more circumscribe than the black organizations are now. It seemed to me even then, I thought that they tried to keep up a too-respectable face. I suppose they had to...to exist. But they had a fellow down...he was in his thirties...oh, was he fat!...I'm stout, you know!...weighed about 230-240 pounds. And I've forgotten his name. I thought very much of him. We got along very well.

BRUNN: You don't mean Williams, do you?

LOGSDON: I don't believe that was the name.

BRUNN: Jefferson?

LOGSDON: This man went to Kansas City later.

BRUNN: Jefferson?

LOGSDON: I wouldn't know.

BRUNN: Richard Jefferson was what they called an industrial department leader.

LOGSDON: This man knew what the facts of life...he knew who the phonies were, and he knew what he wanted to accomplish, and how to get the maximum amount with the minimum amount of disruption, that's the best way I can put it.

BRUNN: As far as black church leaders...

LOGSDON: Oh, yes, we had some contact with them. Quite a bit.

BRUNN: Do you think of the church name or men in some of the situations?

LOGSDON: I cannot. I did know that we met with committees, and I know that some of us went out and met with them. But that's been a long time. Generally, they were helpful. More so than the white ones were! Now, some white ones were real good, and then they had one guy...he was out at the Third Baptist Church I suppose for thirty years, on the radio and all that, and he was totally worthless!

BRUNN: I would like to get back to what you raised before which is, the whole situation which led to the destruction of the UE here in St. Louis, and on the internal side to start with. In other words, the division within the union. Part of this, you see, started in 1945-46, but all along, there were divisions.

LOGSDON: All along there were divisions.

BRUNN: How would you describe these? What were they based on?

LOGSDON: Well, I'll tell you, they were based as far back as 1937. The people who were professional Red-baiters or susceptible to them, you know, were opposed to the national and

local leadership. I don't know names. Maybe Earl White in '37 and a few like that. You go down the line, and there was George Abels in the 40s, you know, at the real early 40s, people like that, people that made a career out of it saw way off, way ahead. You take Jim Click. I don't think that he had any ideological things against the Reds at that time, but he saw it as a means which he used to go ahead and get a position of power. And he did it very well. Very well.

BRUNN: On terms of the St. Louis community, once this began to hit the presses, and so forth, this internal division, what were some of the outside of the union groups that got in it or contributed to it in some way?

LOGSDON: Oh, well, the Catholic priests, you know. Father Brown, I think he is still an arbitrator, he was very active in it as he was active with another priest who was active in Evansville. They had a center down there, although it wasn't received to the same extent down there. And some of the leaders of the steelworkers, you know. The ones who were, when they got their orders from Murray, they followed the orders and, to give the devil his due, I suppose, they thought his orders were right. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers, I think, they all of a sudden switched.

BRUNN: I talked with Kojetinsky before he died. That was his story that they had contributed some finances towards it. But in a way my opinion of him was that a more worthless person never existed! So, let's go on from there. Incidentally, the woman he was married to was our office secretary...his wife...his widow.

BRUNN : Now, did black workers, as a group, come involved, take sides in this internal conflict?

LOGSDON: Black workers, by and large, were on Sentner's side in the conflict. But they were a tiny minority, you know. You've got to remember, I suppose, that the entire black population of St. Louis, I'm guessing now, but the black population of St. Louis in 1946 was probably one-fourth of what it is now. But the population of St. Louis in 1940 was 918,000, and now it's about 550,000, I believe.

BRUNN: Yes, Irrealize that this was a minority.

LOGSDON: It was a small minority.

BRUNN: Yes, but I just wondered what the feel was in terms of...

LOGSDON: Most of them were...the reason that the UE almost hung on Wagner, didn't even come close to it in the other two shops, was that we had solid core of black workers there who were solidly for the UE.

BRUNN: Yeah, Wagner was the last.

LOGSDON: That's right.

BRUNN: In '46, Sentner not only promoted the super-seniority but the idea of a national

state?

LOGSDON: Only the top leadership was in on that. And that's all! No soap on that! You see, Sentner couldn't even convince us on that, and we told him that we wouldn't take it up. He'd boil, but he wouldn't take it up.

RUNN: What were some of the developments then right after that period that UE contributed to this breakup of the union?

LOGSDON: That UE contributed to the breakup?

BRUNN: Yeah. What were some of the developments within the union? In other words, you still had organizing drives, etc., and then you had...there were district elections each year?

LOGSDON: Each one became closer. Each year, you had more opposition. Each year, we had to go out and beat the bushes for votes.

BRUNN: In '48, the Progressive Party, was this something that Sentner would initiate? Or was this something that got very broad support to start with?

LOGSDON: No, it didn't get broad support. [Will you pardon me? I've got to go to the bathroom.]

BRUNN: Yes, well, I say that this was just a very interesting problem...how a radical party that has many of the programs that appeal to the people, because of its international program can be, all of a sudden, just lose a tremendous amount of momentum. In other words, what I was going to ask you was, comparing right after the war...Sentner might propose a new emphasis on a Black National State and that might get nowhere, but then when the idea of a Progressive Party came that had at least a broader support...now, what was the nature of the support that this idea got?

LOGSDON: Well, it wasn't as broad as it should have been, then. He wasn't alone in proposing that, by the way. I don't know the exact genesis of it; I know that they talked to me about it, and I thought that Truman's foreign policies weren't worth a damn, because I wasn't sure at all that it was the correct thing to start up a third party...in as sense that you would be like a Republican...but I remember that they wanted me to come down to the convention they had in Jefferson City...

BRUNN: Do you know Fanny Cook?

LOGSDON: Yeah.

BRUNN: She and I read some reports for...

LOGSDON: Well, I got down there and, by god, I had no more got down there and I was nominated for governor! The first thing I knew, this was all set for me. So, I said, "What the hell? What have we got to lose?" So, home we went. Although there was representation from all over the state, I think that the Progressive Party, from the time of that convention in Philadelphia, went backwards, steadily, from then until November 3. I think, perhaps, that if

the votes had been counted right, there might have been two million votes. I think they might have got five million at the peak, you know. But they went steadily back. First, they had the Red-baiting Deal, you know, and then Truman went to the left all the time. He was a noisy little devil! He made good speeches, you know...some!... in his time!

BRUNN: Of course, he had a lot of support here in Missouri.

LOGSDON: That's right. Of course, the unions, by and large, went back of him almost completely as one of their own.

BRUNN: Were there any CIO unions beside the UE that put in any resources?

LOGSDON: I don't know, there might have been. If there was, it was tiny, I know that. It didn't amount to anything. I know that the Amalgamated and the steelworkers and the gas and chemical workers, the main ones were solidly back of Truman. They worked for his campaigns, so all we had were the ragtags.

BRUNN: By this time, was Sentner already no longer an officer of the UE? In '48?

LOGSDON: No, he was not. He was no longer vice-president then. I think a man by the name of Al Eberhardt from Evansville was president then, I believe. If he was president, it was his last year.

BRUNN: I see. I had a note here that Joseph Pogue runs in place of Sentner. November '48.

LOGSDON: No, that was...in November of '47...no, that must be wrong, because I remember that it was Eberhardt and then Pogue...maybe it was the other way, but I believe...anyway, Pogue was in for the year, and he didn't want that, and then Al Eberhardt from Evansville was in. By that time, Sentner was pretty well out now, you know. He was on the national staff as an international representative, but he didn't have a great deal of influence any more.

BRUNN: Your contact with the UE locals in St. Louis, did they continue through or after '48?

LOGSDON: Yeah, I continued here, off and on, because I was here when they had the election. And then I was on the road for I don't know how many months for different plants wherever I was sent...and I was back there when we lost the Wagner election. And after that, I saw, I told 'em I was leaving. I left for sixty-days in 1949-50 and never returned here. When I got done working on the road, I was joined up with the machinists, and that was the end of the road.

BRUNN: Do you have any...in terms of this question of black workers within the UE and the CIO, the relationship between the unions and the black community...do you have any other things that you remember or issues that I haven't asked you about that might be important, that might be a clue, even if you don't know much about it nationally, that I should look for in my own research?

LOGSDON: I'm trying to think. I think that's about it. I barely can tell you the names of some of the leaders...I believe that's about it.

[End of interview]
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