

**This is an interview with John S. Wadolny for *In the Age of Steel: Oral Histories from Bethlehem Pennsylvania*. The interview was conducted by Kathleen Purcell Munley on March 11, 1975 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.**

00:00:00 Wadolney: My name is John Wadolney. I'm a staff representative for the United Steelworkers of America<sup>1</sup> out of the Bethlehem District Office, District Number 9. (recording paused)

Wadolney: — what I read in books and/or what was told to me by my dad, who had been a Bethlehem steelworker, had been a machinist and started working for Bethlehem in 1909, so that he told me of the efforts made at that time in 1910 to get an organization, a union, into the Bethlehem plant. That was the AF of L<sup>2</sup> attempt at that time, and it seems the reason it failed was because the AF of L believed in craft unions, and instead of trying to organize all of the Bethlehem plant workers into one large or one local union, they attempted to separate the machinists and put them into their own union, separate the construction workers, put them into their own union, and to separate the melters and open-hearth workers, keep them in their own union, and then pick up the construction laborers and put them into a separate lodge or separate union. This, of course, failed.

However, there was a strike in 1910. The men were forced back. Quite a few men were blacklisted. As a matter of fact, my uncle, a half-brother to my dad, was one of the leaders of the 1910 strike, a fellow by name of John Upsos (sp?), and he was blacklisted, could not get a job with Bethlehem Steel again, attempted to get a job in the eastern part of the country, found that every time he applied, his name was on the list and he couldn't get a job. So he finally moved out to Chicago, and his family now is located in Chicago, Illinois. He was successful in getting a job in Chicago, not in the steel mill, however. He went into the meatpacking industry.

Now, another attempt was made, again by the AF of L, back in 1919. They concentrated that time on the machinists at the Bethlehem plant, and a strike was started. The men were out, according to the story I was told, for about 28 days, and then returned to the shop. The strike failed. Again, many, many leaders of the organized workers were barred from entering into the Bethlehem plant.

00:03:10 Now, I started working for Bethlehem Steel after graduating from high school in 1933, and started working for Bethlehem in April of 1934. Now, at that time, there was no talk of unionism in the Bethlehem plant. In 1936, however, a number of steelworkers, and mostly men who worked in the foundries made contacts with machine shop

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<sup>1</sup> A union founded in 1942 by a convention of representatives from the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1866 by a group of unions formerly associated with the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor ultimately merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations to form the AFL-CIO in 1956.

workers and the structural shipping yard workers and the open-hearth workers and the rolling-mill workers, and were attempting to organize a lodge into the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Tin Workers<sup>3</sup>. It was a handful of men who made that attempt. They were able to get about 220 people to sign cards into the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Tin Workers. However, they never were able to muster enough strength and enough support from the employees at Bethlehem Steel to even approach the company insofar as unionism was concerned.

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It was at that time that the company established—I shouldn't say that. I'm starting to forget a little bit. But during that time, the company, of course, had what we call the ERP, the Employees Representative Plan<sup>4</sup>. This, of course, was a company-dominated union. It's almost a disgrace to call it a union. It wasn't a union; it was a group of people that were in the main selected by the company to represent the bargaining-unit people.

Some of the workers who were concerned with a true labor union getting into the Bethlehem plant decided to run for office in the Employees Representative Union to get in on the inside, and they were successful in most departments of the Bethlehem plant, so that when meetings then were held with the general manager of the Bethlehem plant with the representatives of the employees under the Employees Representative Plan, some of these trade unionists who had infiltrated the ranks of the ERP began to ask questions that were quite embarrassing to the general manager, and these people then were discriminated against back in their own particular departments. Word, of course, came down from the general manager, the superintendent department, to 'Put so-and-so in his place. He's getting too big for his britches. He's starting to talk like an AF of L man. He's a representative of ERP, and he should not be.' But anyway, this is the way we infiltrated the Employees Representative Plan.

Now, just about at that time, at the time of the little steel strike in 1937, the federal government ruled that the employees representative plans were not true trade unions and should be disbanded. Now, it seems, from what I was led to believe, that quite a few of the little steel companies did disband the Employees Representative Plan. Bethlehem Steel, however, ignored the order of the government and continued to hold meetings with the Employees Representative Plan, and it was a result of that, that we engaged in the strike of 1941.

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<sup>3</sup> Formed in 1876, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers ultimately affiliated with the CIO as an administrative unit of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee were disbanded in 1942 upon the formation of the United Steelworkers of America.

<sup>4</sup> The Employee Representation Plan was a company union that could not negotiate on wages or strike. Workers subsequently elected the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, predecessor of the United Steelworkers, as their bargaining agent in 1941.

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Now, the union, of course, had been organizing from the period of 1937 up until '41 [1941] into the SWOC, Steel Workers Organizing Committee<sup>5</sup>, CIO. Now, I, of course, at that time was single and wasn't too interested in the labor movement. I had other things to do that I thought were more important. However, an old Englishman friend of mine, Fred Pepper<sup>6</sup> by name, who was one of the leaders of the Steelworkers Union at that time and one of the men, incidentally, who infiltrated the ERP and who embarrassed the general manager by the questions he had asked, and who had a background of trade unionism in that he was a trade unionist in England, from where he came, he talked to me and converted me, got me to become a volunteer organizer for SWOC, Steel Workers Organizing Committee.

I then got into this almost as a religion. I talked to these men who were experienced in trade unionism. Since I grew up in the Depression years, I graduated from high school, as a matter of fact, during the Depression, I know what hard times steel families had in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. You worked for a while, you were laid off. Every time a curtailment in employment came, at the same time a general decrease in wages was put into effect so that the steelworker families at that time didn't even have the rug on the floor, the table and the chair and the picture on the wall that President Phil Murray<sup>7</sup> referred to later on in one of the meetings and/or conventions that I attended.

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But we began to approach our fellow workers to get them to sign a membership card. Now, the dues at that time were a dollar a month. We didn't have a dues checkoff, of course, because we weren't recognized by the company at the time, so that we collected the dues on paydays. We—and when I say 'we,' possibly ten workers to any group of about four hundred working in the department would stand at the banks and/or the grocery stores where our fellow workers would cash their checks, and we stood there to get the dollar dues, because if we didn't get it on payday, we just didn't get it until the next payday. Then when we asked them for two dollars instead of one, we had a difficult task in getting people to make their contribution. But this is the way we signed people up in the organization.

Now, during that time, we, of course, did not wear badges to identify ourselves as volunteer organizers for the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and we kept this as secret as possible. The contacts we made were generally made during lunch period and/or before the start of the shift in the washrooms, the welfare rooms, and at the end of the term, because, let's face it, at that time if you were caught soliciting for membership on company time in the plant, you were discharged. And quite a few of our boys were discharged. As a matter of fact, when the union finally did get a

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<sup>5</sup> Formed in 1936 the Steel Workers Organizing Committee was formed by the CIO and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers affiliated with the CIO as an administrative unit of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, and Steel Workers and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee were disbanded in 1942 upon the formation of the United Steelworkers of America.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Pepper was an English soccer player who joined Bethlehem Steel's professional soccer team in 1914 and participated in a number of championship seasons through 1919.

<sup>7</sup> Served as the first president of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and the first president of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA).

foothold at the Bethlehem plant, some of the employees who had been discharged were reinstated as a result of a ruling by the [National] War Labor Board in 1944, '45 [1945]. I don't recall exactly the exact date any longer.

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But the 1941 strike at Bethlehem was a very tough and bitter strike. Approximately 30 percent of the employees stayed in the shops, and we, of course, called them scabs. Now, picket lines were set up, and it was decided by the leaders of the union at the time, and they were a number of staff representatives who came in from Pittsburgh or Washington, Pennsylvania, and some of them finally stayed in the area. As a matter of fact, William Theis<sup>8</sup> (sp?), one of the men who you referred to previously, and Irwin Leopard<sup>9</sup> (sp?) and Jake Schaeffer<sup>10</sup> (sp?) and John Posback<sup>11</sup> (sp?), all remained in this particular district and serviced the Bethlehem Steel workers.

Now, they decided that we've got to do something about those people who remained in the plant. They didn't come out. They would sleep in the plant and eat in the plant and allegedly were getting double-time pay for everything over eight hours. This is what they bragged about during that period. However, most of them found out that they got double-time pay if they worked for 16 hours, but during the period that they were sleeping in the plant, they weren't being paid.

But we decided upon a scheme to get these people out. So some of the good trade union leadership, workers, however, who worked in the plant, were permitted to enter the plant, jump the fence and enter the plant, and go into the department and act then as one of the non-strikers, one of the scabs, by so doing, however, making every effort to get everybody to walk out. In quite a few of our machine shops, this was successful. It was successful in a number of the foundries in the Bethlehem plant. It wasn't too successful, however in the Open Hearth Division<sup>12</sup> at that time. But by so doing and through that scheme, we were able to get most of the people who had been scabbing to leave the plant and come out to join the pickets.

You made mention of the state police coming in, and they did come in. We called them—Coal and Iron Police<sup>13</sup>, we called them Cossacks<sup>14</sup>. They came in, and we, of course, weren't aware that the sheriff of Northampton County [Pennsylvania] had made a request for the state police. They pulled up in boxcars at different locations within the

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<sup>8</sup> Project staff were unable to locate this person.

<sup>9</sup> Project staff were unable to locate this person.

<sup>10</sup> Project staff were unable to locate this person.

<sup>11</sup> Project staff were unable to locate this person.

<sup>12</sup> Division that would refine pig iron and scrap into steel.

<sup>13</sup> In 1866 the Pennsylvania General Assembly authorized firms involved in coal and iron production to organize private police forces that received their commissions from the state and their pay from the individual firms.

<sup>14</sup> Derogatory name used by coal miners to describe the Coal and Iron Police.

plant, and the doors of the boxcars were opened at the same time the gates of the plant, the plant gates, were open. These state police, Cosacks, came out charging and charged into the crowd of pickets, swinging their clubs, and it seems their horses were so trained for strike duty that their hooves, their back legs and their front legs would swing out to club people, quite frankly, to hit people. They came in and they broke up the picket lines because we were caught off guard. However, after about an hour, hour and a half, the strikers and the pickets began to come back to the picket lines. They were told at that time they'd be permitted— (recording paused)

Wadolney: —permitted to picket. However, under no circumstances would they be allowed to stop anyone who wanted to enter the plant gates. The number of pickets were limited to no more than ten at any of the gates. This, of course, didn't pan out, because 10 built up to 15, 15 built up to 20, and then before we knew it, we had 50 and 100 at the gate.

So the police then charged out again, but this time the pickets were ready for them. So some of the horses were knocked to the ground, some of the state police were knocked to the ground, some heads were bloodied, and they weren't only the heads of the strikers and the pickets at that time. One state policeman, incidentally, at the Emery Street [Bethlehem, Pennsylvania] gate, and that's the gate that I was at at this time, this is the gate up at the Northampton Heights section of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and it's the gate that the big structural shipping yard employees enter, a number of machine shops, bridge shops, foundries, and the open hearth and large rolling mill employees entered. It's a concentration of workers, really, in that one section of Bethlehem, or one section of Northampton Heights.

This one state cop came out with his horse charging, and some of the pickets, of course, ran away from his charge and they ran into Hoppidge's (sp?) Saloon at the corner of Emery Street and Diamond, Diamond and Emery Street [Bethlehem, Pennsylvania]. No, the corner of Emery and—boy, I'm forgetting—Emery and 3rd Street, in the Northampton Heights section of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This horse and this rider, the state cop, charged right through the door into the tavern itself, you see. And then the tavern keeper, who, of course, was very friendly with the strikers and who, incidentally, was a steelworker himself, ordered the state policeman to leave these premises and with his horse. But this is the way they charged. It was rough. It was tough.

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However, after a few days on strike, the strike ended. When the strike ended, we organized a parade of victorious steelworkers, and I was amazed, because I knew that when the strike was called, we only had in the neighborhood of 165 steelworkers who would sign steelworker cards and who had been paying their dues. I shouldn't say sign cards, but who had been paid-up members, who had consistently paid their monthly dues assessment. So that we weren't too confident of our strength. However, when the parade was held, it was estimated that 10,000 steelworkers and their wives and children paraded down the streets of Bethlehem and down to the Hungarian Hall on the South Side of

Bethlehem, where a mass rally was held. So that was the way I remember the steel strike in Bethlehem, the early organizing days of Bethlehem.

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The reason most of the Bethlehem plant steelworkers decided that they wanted to join the union was because the discrimination was shown by the management at the Bethlehem plant insofar as hiring practices were concerned. There was no such thing as seniority. If the foreman didn't like the way you smiled, you didn't hold on to your job; a junior employee did. If, as I had, questioned a foreman one time when I was being removed from a higher-paid job to a lower-paying job, and a relatively new hire was being put into my job. When I questioned this, I was told that if I didn't like what they were doing, that the doors were open, I could walk out. This occurred in 1936 or '37 [1937]. So I, of course, recognized if the union did no other thing, at least it provided some sense of security for the senior worker.

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One other thing it did, as far as I was concerned, and that was that we could now stand up to a foreman and talk to him and express our views, and he had to listen to us and not turn us off by ordering us to leave the plant. It lifted the dignity of the steelworker. It put them on a level scale, in my opinion, with the supervisor that he was working with.

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Since we've had the union, of course, the benefits that have been derived from unionism are tremendous. The basic steelworker, the Bethlehem Steel worker, is today one of the highest paid workers in the land. Insofar as his fringe benefits are concerned, the extended vacations, sabbatical leave, the EPP, the Earnings Protection Plan<sup>15</sup>, which means that if you're being demoted from your job as a result of a curtailment, you can only be cut by 15 percent per year and no more. The SUB Plan, which is Supplemental Unemployment Benefit Plan<sup>16</sup>, which supplements the unemployment compensation that you receive during the layoff so that you know that at least for one year after you're laid off and not successful getting other employment or being recalled into the plant, you know that you're going to be receiving approximately 85 percent of what your take-home pay had been while you were working.

This is a far cry from what I remembered during the periods when I was going to high school when my dad was laid off. He earned \$5.62 in 1932, and we lived by going to the welfare department and getting a check for \$4.50 per week that you would go to purchase groceries with. And there were five of us in the family.

Other benefits, of course, the tremendous vacation plans that we have. I mentioned SUB. I mentioned the Earnings Protection Plan. The pension program today that will provide an employee with 30 or more years of service approximately 85 percent of what his take-home pay had been, which is a considerable improvement over the old

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<sup>15</sup> Bethlehem Steel plan in which employees were given temporary pay supplements if they were moved through no fault of their own into a lower paying position.

<sup>16</sup> Payments provided to workers who were laid off to supplement unemployment received from the state.

Bethlehem Steel pension plan that in 1941 paid an employee by the name of John Shipard<sup>17</sup> (sp?) \$12.50 per month, and he, incidentally, had been an employee with 42 years of service prior to retirement. After deductions for what we refer to as the relief plan at that time, it was the benefit that you received in case you were sick, \$6 or \$8 or \$10 a week, after that deduction, his pension check amounted to \$4.82 per month. Today a man with 42 years of service can expect from the company a pension in the neighborhood of 450 to 500 dollars.

We've made tremendous strides. Not only the workman and his family, but the community in general, in my view, has benefited as a result of the effort made by a small group of men who organized the Bethlehem plant, the rest of the steel industry in the United States of America.

00:25:02 Munley: Mr. Wadolney, when you were talking about the conditions of work in the plant and the attitude of the superintendents, that is before the union, and the foremen and the problems that you had with these people because of their lack of concern, occasionally when we're talking to people about this, there are claims made that the foremen even took bribes. Do you support those views?

Wadolney: Oh, yes. I can give you some examples of it. I worked in the forge specialty<sup>18</sup> machine shop. This was in the Heights area of the Bethlehem plant. We had quite a few Pennsylvania Dutch<sup>19</sup> workers who had little farms in the outlying areas of Bethlehem, for instance, down in Quakertown [Pennsylvania], in Springtown, in Richlandtown [Pennsylvania], places like that, and these men were required, mind you, to bring in eggs and/or times chickens. One day I noticed the worker come in, lift up his trunk, and half a pig was taken out of his trunk and put into the trunk of the foreman.

Now, the one foreman who was general foreman of the machine shop in which I worked at that time loved to smoke cigars, and he made it a habit to go to the machine that the employee was working on, and the first thing he did was went over to a shelf that was at the machine, and if that employee didn't have one or two cigars there, he got a hard time from the foreman. So the quality employees, in order to stay on the good side of the foreman, would provide him with the cigars.

Now, some of the conditions, as far as discrimination was concerned, were horrible, if that's the proper word to use. I remember in the shop in which I worked, during the period 1937, when there was a curtailment in this department, we

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<sup>17</sup> Project staff were unable to locate this person.

<sup>18</sup> Department where metal was worked to predetermined shape by one or more processes such as hammering, pressing, or rolling. Part of the Manufacturing Division.

<sup>19</sup> Also known as Pennsylvania German, this term refers to emigrants and descendants of emigrants from southwestern Germany and Switzerland who settled in Pennsylvania in the 17th and 18th centuries.

were sent out on loan slips and sent into the ingot mold foundry at that time, a dirty crummy job. Today that foundry is considerably improved over what had been. But it was a very difficult job. It was a dirty job. The environment was very, very poor. And we were sent there while junior people were permitted to stay in the department. We didn't have a union. We had the Employees Representative Plan<sup>20</sup>, but if you talked to them, they said, 'Let's not start any trouble, because if you complain about this, you'll lose your job entirely. So you'll have be satisfied that at least you're being sent out on loan slip.'

But one old Pennsylvania Dutchman who became a very good friend of mine, Frank Troutman (sp?), lived down in Springtown [Pennsylvania]. Now, Springtown is about ten miles, possibly eight miles away from the shop that I worked in, the shop that Mr. Troutman (sp?) worked in. He was a machine operator. He told me that he had a break in his service because he'd quit one time. I asked him why he had quit, because I was going over the seniority roster, and I noticed that even though he was an older person, his seniority date didn't go back too far, and I asked him if he hadn't worked previous to this, and he said, yeah, he had worked. He says, 'But during the period 1929, 1930, '31 [1931], when we were in the midst of the Great Depression,' he and all of the other employees would come to the shop and congregate at the main entrance. The foreman then would come out, pick out possibly eight, ten, or twelve people, those that he needed from a group of thirty to thirty-five that showed up for work, who were told to be there for the eight o'clock shift, so they'd be there at seven-thirty in the morning.

The foreman would pick these people out and tell the others, 'Well, come back at three-thirty,' for the start of the four p.m. to twelve midnight time. And the same thing was repeated. These men would come back. He picked out those that he had work for, and usually it was not even half of the ones that showed up for work, and then would tell those that had no job to go back and they could come out at midnight.

And this old Pennsylvania Dutchman, fine gentleman, told me that after four days of this, he quit, he said, because he couldn't take it anymore. He would leave Springtown at five-thirty in the morning to walk for two hours to get to the shop for seven-thirty, wouldn't get a job, would walk back home to Springtown, eight miles, and then leave about one o'clock in the afternoon to walk to the shop to see if he could get some work for the four o'clock shift. Failing to get that, he'd come out for the midnight shift. He did this three complete days in a row, so he walked nine—well, on nine different occasions, he walked back and forth trying to get a job on any one of the three turns, and failing to do this, he decided that it was a lost cause, he'd be better off trying to find some little work down in Springtown and/or taking care of his truck garden that he had. But these were the type of conditions.

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<sup>20</sup> The Employee Representation Plan was a company union that could not negotiate on wages or strike. Workers subsequently elected the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, predecessor of the United Steelworkers, as their bargaining agent in 1941.

Now, who did the foreman select at that time? Of course he selected those who might have been bringing in chickens, eggs, and half a pig, and those who made sure he was always supplied with cigars. These were the conditions that existed at that time. I'm aware of this because I was there.

00:31:29 In checking the seniority list after I became what was known as the chief steward<sup>21</sup> of the forge specialty machine shop, in 1945 or '46 [1946] I decided to make a complete review of the seniority roster of all the people that worked in that department, and I found that there were a number of men that had seniority service dates going back to 1926, 1925, 1924. I wondered about this, because my dad started working for Number 3 forge machine shop<sup>22</sup> in 1919. Previous to this, he had worked from 1909 to 1919 at Number 2 machine shop<sup>23</sup> in the Lehigh Division of the Bethlehem plant.

Now, my dad came from Poland, however, was trained and was the apprentice machinist graduate in Berlin, Germany, so he was a highly skilled machinist, and he had been laid off during the Depression years. Then when he come back, he started, of course, as a new man insofar as his service was concerned, and yet at the same time, many men who were considerably younger than he was and who I assumed at the time did not have families and certainly didn't have any more ability, if they had as much ability, were on the seniority list as people who had continuous service going back to '25 [1925] and '26 [1926] and 1927. So all of these things I found in making a review, making a check of what had happened in the early days. It's just awful. I don't think the generation today could stomach it, could live with it.

00:33:25 Munley: It was very hard then, in other words, to work there. Other than the situations you've described, what was the work like? Was that very hard also?

Wadolney: It depended on the area of the plant that you worked in. Most of the work in the machine shop, of course, was not true physical. It wasn't strenuous, for the reason that the work was done on the machine. The machine did it, a machine tool. Some of the jobs, of course, manual labor was involved, even in the machine shop, were very hard jobs, difficult jobs.

The tough jobs, the jobs that required a man to be almost an ox in the Bethlehem plant were those in the foundries and those, of course, in the labor and construction department in the Bethlehem plant. The coke ovens<sup>24</sup>, of course, that work was always difficult, if for no other reason than the environment involved, the smoke and the fumes and the acids that these men had to contend with all the way through.

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<sup>21</sup> A position held voluntarily in which an employee monitors and enforces agreements made by the union with management.

<sup>22</sup> Part of the Manufacturing Divisions Forge #3. The machine shop was on two floors and it had a rough and finish turning operation for rolls and roll journals.

<sup>23</sup> Built in 1890 Bethlehem Steel's largest machine shop covered 363,290 square feet with 159 production machines.

<sup>24</sup> A collection of ovens used for the conversion of coal into coke by heating the coal in the absence of air so as to distill the volatile ingredients.

The so-called structural shipping yard was always a difficult job and remains a difficult job because they're exposed to all weather conditions. They work on the outside, and they handled structural beams and shapes that are used in constructing and building homes and large office buildings. To this day, it's a very difficult job down there.

In the main, it depended really on where you worked. For instance, glass furnace and open-hearth<sup>25</sup> jobs were more difficult at that time than they are today, but it's not a snap today. It's difficult today.

00:35:19 Munley: What about the relations of the men with each other? For example, were there any problems over ethnic differences with some of the new immigrants that came and worked there?

Wadolney: In the early days when my dad first started working there, I would say that was true. When I started working for the company in April of 1934, this wasn't completely accurate. There was some of this. For instance, in the machine shops, generally you found that in the machine shop most of the people working in the machine shop were Pennsylvania Dutch extraction, Pennsylvania Dutch. And you would find that in the open hearths mostly people were either Irish and/or Welshmen. And you found that in the rolling mills at that time, most of the workers working were of the so-called Slavic extraction, the Slovak, Czechoslovak, and/or the man from Poland.

I found after coming out of high school and I got this job in 1934, I was amazed that boys as young as I or a little older, when we would wash up at the basins we had at that time, they, despite the fact that they could speak fluent English, didn't talk English to themselves. They would talk Pennsylvania Dutch, and I was lost and up in the air. So I had a young fellow who was of Polish extraction, and I said, 'Well, let's play a game with these boys too. So next time we wash up, instead of talking English, let's talk Polish.' And we did this, and, believe it or not, that put a stop to the Pennsylvania Dutch amongst the younger group in that particular department. But to this day, the older Pennsylvania Dutchmen continue to talk Pennsylvania Dutch in the departments, and most of the machine shop foremen, as a matter of fact, are Pennsylvania Dutch.

00:37:26 Munley: When the union was making an effort to organize, did you notice any factors relating to difficulty, for example, to get the union across with the immigrant groups, or did they support the union, or was there anything there?

Wadolney: From my experience, I would say that the people who were most likely to join the union without too much of a salesman talk by the organizer were those who we refer to as the 'hunky'<sup>26</sup>, the hunky element. Now, the hunky

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<sup>25</sup> Division that would refine pig iron and scrap into steel.

<sup>26</sup> Used as a disparaging term for a person, especially a laborer, from east-central Europe.

element are the people, the Polish, the Slovak, the Hungarian, the Windish, the Croatian, the Italian. These people we had no problem with. The Irish we didn't have a problem with. For some reason, the Irish always seemed to be a very strong union-minded person. The same was true of the few English people that we had.

You remember I had mentioned Freddy Pepper, who, incidentally, was brought over to Bethlehem Steel from England because of his ability to play soccer. He was one of the star soccer players in England, and Bethlehem in those early days formed a soccer team and played in a league with Falls River and Chicago, Inland, and St. Louis, and he was brought over to play soccer. During the period that he was playing soccer, he didn't work. He just punched into the shop that he was assigned to, and as soon as he punched in, he left, went over to practice either in the gymnasium or, during nicer weather, on the outside. So those people we didn't have a problem with.

We had a considerable problem with some of the Pennsylvania Dutch at that time, and I, of course, have nothing against Pennsylvania Dutch. My daddy-in-law is Pennsylvania Dutch. My wife is his daughter. They're wonderful people. But in those days, they were toughest to get to join the union. May be a good thing. They had to be sold. You had to convince them that it was good.

00:39:39 Munley: What about the company housing? Did the company follow a practice of having company housing in the early days?

Wadolney: In the early days there were company houses. Now, back in the 20's [1920], the company built shacks, quite frankly, in the coke works<sup>27</sup> area of the plant, and this is on a road between Bethlehem and Hellertown [Pennsylvania], and these shacks, in the main, were built for the Mexicans that were imported from Mexico to work in the coke ovens at that time.

Now, in that general area east of Bethlehem towards Hellertown, the so-called Crest Avenue area, the company put up a considerable number of homes that the whites, so to speak, and not the minority groups moved into. Those homes were eventually sold to the steelworker who lived in the home sometime in the late 30's [1930] and/or early 40's [1940]. So up until that time, the company still had control over certain homes that they put up. Now, the homes on Crest Avenue were sturdy homes, nice homes, well built. They compared favorably with others that were built by private interests. But in the coke ovens, they put up shacks for the Mexicans at that time.

00:41:11 Munley: In the period when you were attempting to organize the union, were you aware of any type of hostility on the part of the community toward your efforts or on the part of any groups in the community toward your efforts?

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<sup>27</sup> Produced metallurgical coke for use in the blast furnaces and recovered useable and saleable by-products.

Wadolney: No, I was amazed that we didn't have more people who were antagonistic to the organization. The community as a whole, the businesspeople in general were sort of neutral in the fight. The religious leaders, however, sided with the organization, and thank God for that, you see. The politicians, however, were not too friendly. As a matter of fact, in 1938, '39 [1939], '40 [1940], we could not rent a school building for a mass rally because the school board at that time was anti-union, and most of the members of the school board at that time were Bethlehem Steel workers, so they were told how to vote, and that's the way they voted. But in general, no, I'd have to say that we didn't have too many people who were strongly opposed to the organization.

00:42:38 Munley: With reference to the politicians, were you aware that one party more so than another party felt this way, or did both Democratic and Republican Parties prefer not to get involved?

Wadolney: Mainly the Republicans. Mainly the Republican was anti-union. Most times the Democrat, if he wasn't for the union, at least he'd try to stay neutral, but most Democrats were for the union. A few who were steelworkers, one who worked in my shop, as a matter of fact, the shop that I came from, who later on turned out to be a darn good union man, became the shop steward, but in those early days when we were organizing, he was on the school board in the city of Bethlehem. He voted against renting the Quinn School building to the CIO at that time. (recording paused)

00:43:36 Munley: Mr. Wadolney, would you tell me of the incident of the man who was on strike?

Wadolney: You want the name or not?

Munley: If you wish to use it, you may. If you prefer not to, it's all right.

Wadolney: Well, Pop Rau<sup>28</sup> (sp?), who was a machinist down in the central tool department of Bethlehem Steel and who was very active and a real trade unionist, was one of the pickets during the 1919 strike, and because he was pointed out as a leader of the strikers, the state police grabbed him, tied him with a rope, and dragged him through the streets of Bethlehem to the main office of the Bethlehem plant, where he was questioned and beat up.

(end of recording)

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<sup>28</sup> Project staff were unable to identify this person.