

Sierra Club Oral History Project

THE SIERRA CLUB AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT II:
LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA,
1960s-1970s

David Jenkins	Environmental Controversies and the Labor Movement in the Bay Area
Amy Meyer	Preserving Bay Area Parklands
Anthony L. Ramos	A Labor Leader Concerned with the Environment
Dwight C. Steele	Environmentalist and Labor Ally

With an Introduction by
Leslie V. Reid

Interviews Conducted by
Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili
and
Students in History 290a, Winter 1981
Willa Baum, Instructor
University of California, Berkeley

Underwritten by
The National Endowment for the Humanities
and the Sierra Club

Sierra Club History Committee
1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

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PREFACE

The Oral History Program of the Sierra Club

In fall 1969 and spring 1970 a self-appointed committee of Sierra Clubbers met several times to consider two vexing and related problems. The rapid membership growth of the club and its involvement in environmental issues on a national scale left neither time nor resources to document the club's internal and external history. Club records were stored in a number of locations and were inaccessible for research. Further, we were failing to take advantage of the relatively new technique of oral history by which the reminiscences of club leaders and members of long standing could be preserved.

The ad hoc committee's recommendation that a standing History Committee be established was approved by the Sierra Club Board of Directors in May 1970. That September the board designated The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley as the official depository of the club's archives. The large collection of records, photographs and other memorabilia known as the "Sierra Club Papers" is thus permanently protected, and the Bancroft is preparing a catalog of these holdings which will be invaluable to students of the conservation movement.

The History Committee then focused its energies on how to develop a significant oral history program. A six page questionnaire was mailed to members who had joined the club prior to 1931. More than half responded, enabling the committee to identify numerous older members as likely prospects for oral interviews. (Some had hiked with John Muir!) Other interviewees were selected from the ranks of club leadership over the past six decades.

Those committee members who volunteered as interviewers were trained in this discipline by Willa Baum, head of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office and a nationally recognized authority in this field. Further interviews have been completed in cooperation with university oral history classes at California State University, Fullerton; Columbia University, New York; and the University of California, Berkeley. Extensive interviews with major club leaders are most often conducted on a professional basis through the Regional Oral History Office.

Copies of the Sierra Club oral interviews are placed at The Bancroft Library, at UCLA, and at the club's Colby Library, and may be purchased for the actual cost of photocopying, binding, and shipping by club regional offices, chapters, and groups, as well as by other libraries and institutions.

Our heartfelt gratitude for their help in making the Sierra Club Oral History Project a success goes to each interviewee and interviewer; to everyone who has written an introduction to an oral history; to the Sierra Club Board of Directors for its recognition of the long-term importance of this effort; to the Trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation for generously providing

the necessary funding; to club and foundation staff, especially Michael McCloskey, Denny Wilcher, Colburn Wilbur, and Nicholas Clinch; to Willa Baum and Susan Schrepfer of the Regional Oral History Office; and last but far from least, to the members of the History Committee, and particularly to Ann Lage, who has coordinated the oral history effort since September 1974.

You are cordially invited to read and enjoy any or all of the oral histories in the Sierra Club series. By so doing you will learn much of the club's history which is available nowhere else, and of the fascinating careers and accomplishments of many outstanding club leaders and members.

Marshall H. Kuhn
Chairman, History Committee
1970 - 1978

San Francisco
May 1, 1977
(revised May 1979, A.L.)

PREFACE--1980s

Inspired by the vision of its founder and first chairman, Marshall Kuhn, the Sierra Club History Committee continued to expand its oral history program following his death in 1978. With the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, awarded in July 1980, the Sierra Club has contracted with the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library to conduct twelve to sixteen major interviews of Sierra Club activists and other environmental leaders of the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the volunteer interview program has been assisted with funds for training interviewers and transcribing and editing volunteer-conducted interviews, also focusing on the past two decades.

With these efforts, the committee intends to document the programs, strategies, and ideals of the national Sierra Club, as well as the club grassroots, in all its variety--from education to litigation to legislative lobbying, from energy policy to urban issues to wilderness preservation, from California to the Carolinas to New York.

Together with the written archives in The Bancroft Library, the oral history program of the 1980s will provide a valuable record of the Sierra Club during a period of vastly broadening environmental goals, radically changing strategies of environmental action, and major growth in size and influence on American politics and society.

Special thanks for the project's later phase are due to Susan Schrepfer, co-director of the Sierra Club Documentation Project; Ray Lage, cochair of the History Committee; the Sierra Club Board and staff; members of the project advisory board and the History Committee; and most importantly, the interviewees and interviewers for their unfailing cooperation.

Ann Lage
Cochair, History Committee
Codirector, Sierra Club Documentation
Project

Oakland, California
April, 1981

SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

April 1983

Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library

David R. Brower, Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet, 1980

Richard M. Leonard, Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist, 1976

Norman B. Livermore, Jr., Man in the Middle: High Sierra Packer, Timberman, Conservationist, California Resources Secretary, 1983

William E. Siri, Reflections on The Sierra Club, the Environment, and Mountaineering, 1950s-1970s, 1979

SIERRA CLUB LEADERS, 1950s-1970s:

Alexander Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Critic: Perspective on Club Growth, Scope, and Tactics, 1950s-1970s, 1982

Martin Litton, Sierra Club Director and Uncompromising Preservationist, 1950s-1970s, 1982

Raymond J. Sherwin, Conservationist, Judge, and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s, 1982

Theodore A. Snyder, Jr., Southeast Conservation Leader and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s, 1982

Wallace Stegner, The Artist as Environmental Advocate, 1983

In Process: Ansel Adams, Phillip S. Berry, Claire Dedrick, Brock Evans, J. Michael McCloskey, Stewart Udall, Edgar Wayburn

Sierra Club History Committee

Elizabeth Marston Bade, Recollections of William F. Bade and the Early Sierra Club, 1976

Philip S. Bernays, Founding the Southern California Chapter, 1975

Harold C. Bradley, Furthering the Sierra Club Tradition, 1975

Cicely M. Christy, Contributions to the Sierra Club and the San Francisco Bay Chapter, 1938-1970s, 1982

Nathan C. Clark, Sierra Club Leader, Outdoorsman, and Engineer, 1977

Harold E. Crowe, Sierra Club Physician, Baron, and President, 1975

Glen Dawson, Pioneer Rock Climber and Ski Mountaineer, 1975

Nora Evans, Sixty Years with the Sierra Club, 1976

Francis Farquhar, Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor, 1974

Marjory Bridge Farquhar, Pioneer Woman Rock Climber and Sierra Club Director, 1977

Alfred Forsyth, The Sierra Club in New York and New Mexico, 1965-1978, 1981

Wanda B. Goody, A Hiker's View of the Early Sierra Club, 1982

C. Nelson Hackett, Lasting Impressions of the Early Sierra Club, 1975

Joel Hildebrand, Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer, 1974

Ethel Rose Taylor Horsfall, On the Trail with the Sierra Club, 1920s-1960s, 1982

Helen LeConte, Reminiscences of LeConte Family Outings, the Sierra Club, and Ansel Adams, 1977

Grant McConnell, Conservation and Politics in the North Cascades, 1983
John and Ruth Mendenhall, Forty Years of Sierra Club Mountaineering Leadership, 1938-1978, 1979
Stewart M. Ogilvy, Sierra Club Expansion and Evolution: The Atlantic Chapter, 1957-1969, 1982
Harriet T. Parsons, A Half-Century of Sierra Club Involvement, 1981
Ruth E. Prager, Remembering the High Trips, 1976
Bestor Robinson, Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club, 1974
Gordon Robinson, Forestry Consultant to the Sierra Club, 1979
James E. Rother, The Sierra Club in the Early 1900s, 1974
Tom Turner, A Perspective on David Brower and the Sierra Club, 1968-1969, 1982
Anne Van Tyne, Sierra Club Stalwart: Conservationist, Hiker, Chapter and Council Leader, 1981

In Process: George Alderson, Ruth Bradley, Robert Braun, Estelle Brown, Lewis Clark, Frank Duveneck, Jules Eichorn, Fred Eissler, Joseph Fontaine, Kathleen Jones, Stewart Kimball, Keith Lummis, George Marshall, Susan Miller, Sigurd Olson

California State University, Fullerton--Southern Sierrans Project

Thomas Amneus, New Directions for the Angeles Chapter, 1977
Robert Bear, Desert Conservation and Exploration with the Sierra Club, 1946-1978, 1980
Irene Charnock, Portrait of a Sierra Club Volunteer, 1977
J. Gordon Chelew, Reflections of an Angeles Chapter Member, 1921-1975, 1976
Arthur B. Johnson, Climbing and Conservation in the Sierra Club's Southern California Chapter, 1930-1960s, 1980
Olivia R. Johnson, High Trip Reminiscences, 1904-1945, 1977
E. Stanley Jones, Sierra Club Officer and Angeles Chapter Leader, 1931-1975, 1976
Marion Jones, Reminiscences of the Southern California Sierra Club, 1927-1975, 1976
Robert R. Marshall, Angeles Chapter Leader and Wilderness Spokesman, 1960s, 1977
Dorothy Leavitt Pepper, High Trip High Jinks, 1976
Roscoe and Wilma Poland, Desert Conservation: Voices from the Sierra Club's San Diego Chapter, 1980
Richard Searle, Grassroots Sierra Club Leader, 1976

University of California, Berkeley--The Sierra Club and the Urban Environment

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CHAPTER INNER CITY OUTINGS:

- Patrick Colgan, "Just One of the Kids Myself," 1980
Jordan Hall, Trial and Error: the Early Years, 1980
Duff LaBoyteaux, Towards a National Sierra Club Program, 1980
Marlene Sarnat, Laying the Foundations for ICO, 1980
George Zuni, From the Inner City Out, 1980

SIERRA CLUB OUTREACH TO WOMEN:

- Helen Burke, Women's Issues in the Environmental Movement, 1980

LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, 1960s-1970s:

- David Jenkins, Environmental Controversies and the Labor Movement in the Bay Area, 1981
Amy Meyer, Preserving Bay Area Parklands, 1981
Anthony L. Ramos, A Labor Leader Concerned with the Environment, 1981
Dwight C. Steele, Environmentalism and Labor Ally, 1981

VOLUME PREFACE

This volume of oral history interviews is the second group of Sierra Club interviews to be produced by my graduate seminar, "Survey of Oral History." The purpose was, first, to provide a field experience for the class and, second, to contribute primary source material to The Bancroft Library. From several possible projects, the class selected the topic Labor and the Environment. Their choice was based on class interest in the topic and the opportunity to work with Sierra Club History Committee cochairman Ann Lage.

The seminar convened in January 1981 with a brief ten weeks to select, research, interview, and process an oral history project, just one of several field assignments. I was familiar with the work of the Sierra Club History Committee, having served as a consultant to its oral history program since the committee's inception. Ann Lage provided a list of prospective interviewees, representatives of both the Sierra Club and the Bay Area labor movement who had been involved in helping the two groups reach accord on various issues. Class members selected their interviewees from this list.

Ann Lage, representing the Sierra Club, sent a letter of invitation and explanation to each prospective interviewee. From there on, each student prepared the questions for his or her interviewee, set up and conducted one interview, transcribed the tape, lightly edited the transcript and returned it to the interviewee for review, and prepared an index and interview history. Later Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili, who works with the Sierra Club Oral History Project, returned to one of the interviewees for an additional session. Karen and Ann handled the final details needed to bring these four interviews together in the second volume of the series, The Sierra Club and the Urban Environment.

Willa Baum
Instructor, History 290a
Division Head, Regional Oral
History Office

18 April 1983
Department of History
University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION--Labor and the Environment

Until the seventies, the Sierra Club confined its efforts to affect public policy to those which concerned the protection and preservation of areas of great scenic value.

However, the great upwelling of public interest in all matters relating to the physical conditions necessary to sustain a healthy life, best illustrated by the millions who observed EARTH DAY 1970, had an immediate and long lasting effect on the Sierra Club.

Our successful campaign that stopped the dams in the Grand Canyon in 1968 had enshrined our image as the organization that really knew how to mobilize public opinion in defense of a national treasure. Many thousands joined our ranks, expecting the club to lead in the battle for a healthy environment. They were not disappointed.

The agenda and the policy decisions of the board of directors began to reflect these expanded concerns. The Clean Air and Clean Water campaigns became an ever-increasing part of our club activity, as did the Toxic Substances Control Act. It was during this latter effort that we worked directly with representatives of organized labor, developing a mutual respect and understanding that we had much in common.

But the major turning point of our relations with labor came during the 1973 strike of the Oil, Atomic and Chemical Workers Union against the Shell Oil Co. Since the issues involved were health and safety issues, their leaders appealed for our support. It is to the everlasting credit of the Sierra Club Board of Directors that, after a lengthy debate, it was agreed to support the union.

The reverberations of that decision are still felt. A few of our members had negative reactions to the new direction, but subsequent events have more than justified the wisdom of that historic step.

We continued to work somewhat sporadically on a number of issues, until the Reagan administration took over and began its assault on decades of progress. In particular, the Clean Air Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act needed heroic defense. In January 1981, the OSHA/Environmental Network was established. With then President of the Sierra Club, Joe Fontaine, and Howard Samuels, Chairman of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL/CIO acting as co-chair, an agreement was made jointly to support the Clean Air Act and OSHA.

The OSHA/Environmental Network is now being established in every state as a practical instrument to coordinate the efforts of labor and environ-

mentalists on mutually agreed issues.

We have a two-fold interest in the success of this coalition. First, we recognize that toxic substances and hazardous conditions rarely stop at the factory or workplace perimeters. Despite the fact that only a few of our club members may actually work directly in workplaces under OSHA jurisdiction, we all reside in communities subject to all kinds of pollutants generated within. Second, we are also now aware of the importance of joint action.

The unions are the oldest and most effectively organized group in our country. Although not all sectors of that movement have equal commitment to goals with which we can agree, it would be counter-productive to dwell on our differences. The unions represented in the Industrial Union Department of the AFL/CIO represent millions of workers with whom we have an unparalleled opportunity to work together.

The OSHA/Environmental Network is a good vehicle for expanded effectiveness, with plenty of room for all to come aboard.

Leslie V. Reid
National Labor Liaison Advisor
Sierra Club Director (1976-1982)

April 4, 1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

David Jenkins

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROVERSIES AND THE
LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE BAY AREA

An Interview Conducted by
Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili
Jim Preston
Eleanor Walden

Sierra Club History Committee
1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

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Donated Tapes Collection
Sierra Club History Committee

Sierra Club
530 Bush St.
San Francisco, CA 94108

We, DAVID JENKINS and KAREN ESMAILI-JORGENSEN
Narrator Interviewer

do hereby give to the Sierra Club for such scholarly and educational uses, as the Sierra Club shall determine, the following tape-recorded interview(s) recorded on Dec. 17, 1981 as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the Sierra Club legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use which the narrator may want to make of the information in the recordings himself.

x David Jenkins
Signature of Narrator

DAVID JENKINS

456 Belvedere

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94117

Name and address of Narrator

Accepted for the Sierra Club by

Ann Lage

Chairman, History Committee

4-16-83

Dated

6-21-82
Dated

Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili
Signature of Interviewer

KAREN JORGENSEN-ESMAILI

1560 SCENIC

BULLY, CA 94108
Name and address of Interviewer

4-15-83
Dated

LABOR UNIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT, SAN FRANCISCO
Subject of Interview(s)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Dave Jenkins has been a union activist, longshoreman, and seaman in the San Francisco Bay Area for many decades. Since his retirement he has remained active in the labor movement and in the politics of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union through his work as a labor consultant. During the 1960s and 1970s his activism and his concern for the environment led to his involvement in a series of Bay Area controversies involving environmentalists and labor unions. Because of these experiences, he was a prime subject for the labor and environment series.

Conduct of the Interview

In February of 1981, Mr. Jenkins was interviewed by graduate students Eleanor Walden and Jim Preston as part of a class assignment for Willa Baum's oral history seminar at the University of California, Berkeley. The interviewers reported that the taping session proceeded well, but Mr. Jenkins was not willing to release the contents of the interview after he reviewed the lightly edited transcript. He expressed unhappiness with what he felt were his lengthy answers and tangential statements. Because of the potential importance of Mr. Jenkins's contribution to the series, it was decided to carefully edit the interview again and ask Mr. Jenkins to reconsider his decision. It was also decided to see if he would consent to a follow-up interview to explore a number of interesting questions raised by the Walden and Preston interview.

Mr. Jenkins agreed to a second interview and a planning session was held at his comfortable home in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco in December 1981. A week later we taped a two-hour session focusing on Mr. Jenkins's firsthand knowledge of Bay Area controversies involving environmental and labor organizations. Throughout these sessions, Mr. Jenkins remained warm, friendly, and cooperative.

Editing

Mr. Jenkins heavily edited both the initial and the follow-up interviews. After meeting with him, however, he assented to retaining those portions of the deleted text which we agreed added to the substance of the interview. The final transcript, therefore, accurately reflects his speaking style, his attitudes, and his recollections of important environmental issues involving the Bay Area labor movement. The original tapes for the interviews are deposited at The Bancroft Library.

Karen Jorgensen-Esmaili
Interviewer

20 September 1982

I BAY AREA CONTROVERSIES OF THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

[Date of Interview: December 10, 1981]##

Bay Conservation and Development Commission

J-E: I am here with Dave Jenkins at his home in San Francisco. Today is December 10, 1981. We will be talking about the labor movement's involvement in environmental issues in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1969 through the 1970s. You have been directly involved in a number of these controversies. One of the earliest was the establishment of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission which was a controversy around 1969. The first thing I wanted to ask you was how you became involved and what your role was in that controversy.

Jenkins: Well, actually, I got involved through Dwight Steele* who was originally part of Matson Company's management team and became a very active member of the Sierra Club. Steele asked me to help put together the various segments of labor, labor counsels, ILU, teamsters, auto workers in the Bay Area in support of setting up this kind of commission. And we discussed, and I agreed, that there were vital issues involved such as water pollution, the effect on fishing in the bay, contamination of shellfish, and recreational uses of the bay--all of which our people in one form or another participated in. As a result, we planned and executed a couple of press conferences with most of labor there. Generally, from that point on, we supported the BCDC. It was one of the more dramatic aspects, really, of the first effective cooperation with the conservationists that took place in the Bay Area. The time was 1969.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 54.

*See the interview with Dwight Steele in this volume.

J-E: Which environmental groups were directly involved that you worked with at that time?

Jenkins: Sierra Club primarily. There may have been others like the California Tomorrow which was headed by Alfred Heller, but the Sierra Club was the driving force.

J-E: You say this was the first time there was dramatic interaction on an issue between environmentalists and labor. What was the reason for that? Was there anything that was happening about that time or before that that created this interaction?

Jenkins: It was an area that labor was particularly familiar with, at least for Seamen and longshoremen, which is the area of industry I came from. Two, around the waterfront in particular there was never the intervention of conservationists, environmentalists in a way that we considered hostile either to our living or to our economic well-being so that we didn't have the current prejudices then of the building trades or some of the other crafts in the labor movement that might have had some historic reason for distrusting environmentalists. It was our first contact with environmentalists too, who weren't involved with issues that were pretty separate from our lives and the way we made our living and our general social interest. That combined happily with the bay effort, [and] I think all of us were concerned about it at that time.

J-E: You say that there were some labor groups involved in this. Which labor groups were not involved?

Jenkins: Everybody really was, AFL/CIO, teamsters and the ILWU and the auto workers.

J-E: So, there wasn't a real split within labor on this issue?

Jenkins: No. My own union had a history in relationship to this. One division of our union was the fishermen. A number of years before that, the entire sardine catch disappeared from the West Coast. It had at one time hired during its seasonal work up to twenty thousand workers. For some reason which we never were able to identify, the entire sardine pack vanished from the coast. Both our union and the industry set up research facilities to investigate what had happened. We never came to a clear definition, but part of it we felt was pollution and part of it was the fact that we were not, up to that point, paying much attention to the environment.

J-E: This was about the same time?

Jenkins: This proceeded BCDC by about five or six years. The sardine catch never came back. It came back briefly many years later. Since that time, parenthetically, the same thing has happened to crabs in the Bay Area--

J-E: Were environmentalists interested in those issues at that time?

Jenkins: Not originally. There were professional oceanographers, scientists in the area of fish history and preservation and migration, but environmentalists as such were not involved in this.

J-E: Back to the Bay Commission. You worked together, then, with the environmental groups. Who was on the other side of those issues?

Jenkins: Well, frankly, as I remember, there was a big problem with the smaller municipalities who were concerned with whether they would have an opportunity of competing with Oakland or San Francisco in developing their port facilities and developing commercial facilities along their waterfront, so that there was an enormous amount of, not open opposition, but opposition of a kind that chopped away at parts of the commission proposal.

I'm a commissioner of the BCDC; I was appointed a few months ago by [California Assembly Speaker] Willie Brown. BCDC's jurisdiction is still somewhat limited. It does a great deal, but it could be extended and deepened in a variety of ways. Commercial interests who wanted to develop real estate, marinas, housing, and all sorts of things along the bay were also the potential opposition to BCDC. I don't think they articulated it so much, but they were there.

J-E: What kinds of strategies did you use and did these strategies evolve while working with environmental groups?

Jenkins: Well, we did our part, and they did theirs in persuading the legislators in the [California] state senate and the assembly, and the governor to come over, and we were influential and to some extent they were too. We were more influential, I would think, in terms of numbers and in terms of our political history. Figures like George Moscone--I guess it preceded Leo McCarthy--and Milton Marks and people like that who depended heavily on labor's support, they were influenced by our positions.

Preceding this, starting in 1959, for some seven years we had a group of labor people and environmentalists who fought to prevent the panhandle freeway. Finally we won it in 1966. While this was federal money, it had to be approved, parts of it had to be approved by the [San Francisco] board of supervisors, and our influence was then with the board of supervisors. I was chairman of the labor committee and sections of labor--the building trades--were on the other side.

- J-E: Before we get too far into that Dave, let me ask you a few more questions about BCDC. I understood that there was a controversy in Oakland at one time with the NAACP which concerned limitations on the development of heavy industry along the wharf because a lot of their low-income people were employed there, and this would restrict their employment. Do you remember that? What was the background on it?
- Jenkins: If it was a current, it wasn't a major current. Our union is 50 percent black, and we are the major union representing black workers on the Oakland waterfront. We work Ninth Street and the Alameda docks and Fourteenth Street and the army base [Oakland Army Base], and while there is heavy government black employment at the navy base [Oakland Naval Supply Center] and the Alameda aviation base [Alameda Naval Air Station], we were by far the most articulate and organized group along the waterfront. We also had the terminal workers, and they were not a majority black, but they have a substantial number of blacks.
- J-E: Back to the relationship you had with the environmental groups, it sounded like you sort of lobbied separately to your own constituency using your own strategies. How did that work; what was the working relationships between the environment groups and the labor groups?
- Jenkins: Well, at one point as a result of conversations between Dwight Steele and myself, a meeting was called to which Steele, the Sierra Club and a number of other groups came. John Henning [executive secretary of] the AFL/CIO [American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations] was invited. Another primary member was from the teamsters union. We set up an ongoing discussion about the possibility of cooperation.
- J-E: Was this before or in the middle of the controversy?
- Jenkins: Just part of the whole development of becoming attached to this issue.
- J-E: What went on in the meetings?
- Jenkins: Well, we met at the Sierra Club, as I remember, and had a series of meetings trying to define where our interests were the same, whether the question of jobs was defined. We all agreed that the job base of American industry was narrowing and that there was a perennial employment problem, particularly in an area like the San Francisco Bay area--the flight of blue-collar jobs, the growth of tourism, the service job categories, etcetera. So that tended to make labor regard every new development as a potential job center, even though ultimately in many cases the effect of these jobs would be to worsen the condition of life of working people--air pollution, traffic congestion, inadequate attention to housing,

Jenkins: and other priorities that were needed. We felt that unless the environmentalists saw that this question of jobs and work was a crucial part of their agenda, we would never get together. Maybe occasionally about certain issues, but these issues would be separate.

J-E: What was your sense of the Sierra Club representatives, of their perception of that issue of jobs at these meetings?

Jenkins: I think the meetings succeeded in persuading the leadership of the Sierra Club to turn their attention in somewhat other directions. Michael McCloskey [Sierra Club executive director] paid tribute to it. I also think it helped create the post which is now filled by Carl Pope [Sierra Club conservation department staff person] working with labor people as sort of a labor-environment liaison. I think it also led finally to our discussions about Steele inviting John Henning and myself to address the Sierra Club national board on the Shell Oil strike. All that came about, in part, as a result of our beginning cooperation on BCDC and then through talks that Steele and I proposed.

The Shell Oil Strike

J-E: Let's talk about the Shell Oil strike [1973]. That was an important shift in policy for the Sierra Club.* And you're saying that the BCDC working relationship which began earlier in 1969 sort of laid the ground work for that. Again which groups were involved, and were you personally involved through Dwight Steele again?

Jenkins: Steele was our conduit into the Sierra Club. I don't think we knew any but a handful of other leaders. So, as a result, when I raised the question of Shell and that the support of a particular strike of this kind which had as one of its main issues safety for workers, would have a tremendous impact on the labor movement, he readily agreed. It was my proposal that we go before the [Sierra Club] national board and make our proposals. And when they went on record supporting the strike, at least those aspects of the strike that had to do with safety, that was something which we could use effectively on other environmental issues and other labor issues that we were concerned about.

*On May 5, 1973, the Sierra Club board passed a resolution supporting the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union strike against the Shell Oil Company in California. This was the first time in its history that the board took an official position on a labor dispute.--Ed.

J-E: And you were at the board meeting and made the presentation with a number of other union leaders, I believe, is that correct?

Jenkins: One other, John Henning.

J-E: And who else was there besides the regular board, Dwight Steele?

Jenkins: Yes, Dwight Steele.

J-E: I think Will Siri was there, was he not?

Jenkins: Who's Will Siri?

J-E: He is a Sierra Club past president. He has been one of the people also interested in labor and that whole set of social issues that the Sierra Club is trying to deal with now. You made the presentation at the board meeting?

Jenkins: I made one of the presentations.

J-E: Can you give me some sense of how you perceived the reaction to your proposal on the part of the board members?

Jenkins: Well, as far as I remember, everybody was sympathetic. I think the major problem was whether or not the Sierra Club was straying from its position as an environmental organization to get involved in an industrial dispute, which involved big business and, to some extent, big labor--though the oil workers are really not a very strong union, except in certain areas of the country.

J-E: At least some people perceived that there was a lot of indifference on these issues on the part of the board. Would you describe their reaction as indifference, or would you say there was a concern about the effect of supporting that kind of an issue.

Jenkins: I'm sure what manifested at that board meeting is the problem that we have generally with the Sierra Club. Its composition and leadership comes mainly from the professions and, in many cases, from lawyers who are not unwealthy, but at least who are very successful figures in business. Labor is perceived by them as a power center, as fighting hard for the interests of working men and women. This sometimes ran counter to their interests as many of them represented big business, many of them were employed by big business, and they had their own fears about getting identified with the labor movement.

J-E: Did you sense that at that board meeting?

Jenkins: Well, I sensed a little bit of that. As I say, they voted well.

J-E: Why do you think they voted for it?

Jenkins: I think it was an overwhelming issue. I think that they wanted and saw the need of breaking up an alliance between labor and business which was taking place on so many projects. The contractors, the employers, etc. were counting on the labor movement's support. This was all based on the concept of new jobs, new incomes for the community. I guess there was also genuine sympathy with the presentation--that they had been silent in the face of silicosis and quiet in the face of asbestosis and quiet in the face of garbage in the neighborhoods, quiet in the face of other urban issues, and that they really wanted to have the credentials they were rapidly getting. This was a force that they just had to deal with.

Panhandle Controversy

J-E: Let's talk about the [San Francisco] panhandle freeway controversy. That was another Bay Area issue that you were involved in directly. We are talking about 1966. Could you explain what the general controversy was and who the groups were that were involved on both sides?

Jenkins: Well, the panhandle starts in San Francisco at Baker, bound by Oak and Page streets and then runs into Golden Gate Park, which is ten blocks. It's a broad strip of trees and gardens and walkways and paths and green places. It is both an extraordinary recreation and park area, and also, it is crucial to the neighborhood. It is on one side bound by the Haight-Ashbury [district] and the other by a heavily black community, more recently black.

The proposed freeway's ostensible purpose was to cut down traffic delays getting into Marin [County]. It ultimately would have gone under that whole area and then cut over to the edge of the park bound by Stanyon and Fulton to empty out into the freeway going across the Golden Gate Bridge.

The opposition was led by a woman in my area--I live in the Haight-Ashbury--Susan Bierman who is now a [San Francisco] planning commissioner. And it was done against very large odds. One, the labor movement was on record for it because of the amount of \$280 million in jobs. Two, the most progressive supervisor on the board, Jack Morrison, lived in the area and was for it. We had to turn him around. We had to fight for a majority of the board, and the board was primarily business-oriented, though there were a few figures on the board who weren't.

Jenkins: It was easy enough to mobilize the neighborhood of maybe sixty thousand people, but it took a large-scale coalition of community organizations. Then my union went on record against it, the ILWU (the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union), and as their representative, I assumed cochairmanship of the fight.

The fight was launched with much testimony in front of the board of supervisors with changes of plans by the contractor saying that they were going to resurface and rebuild all the things that were torn out, none of which was really possible. The freeway also would have impinged and dislocated thousands of people who lived on the periphery of the freeway itself, and this was housing which was crucially needed. So, almost the entire black community joined us in opposition to it, helped, of course, by the reputation of the building trades being discriminatory and the contractors as well. So, blacks or other minorities could not look for much employment [from the freeways constructed]. It was also an attack on their housing. So the fight raged back and forth for really five years or more, and we finally dumped it in 1966. It was debated by the board of supervisors, who had to give permission to block off streets along the entire route which would have cut access and egress to the panhandle. Once they refused to do that, the project died.

J-E: You mentioned your union, but what other unions were involved in the opposition to this?

Jenkins: It's hard for me to remember. There were individual union locals.

J-E: Was the longshoremen's union basically alone in fighting the freeway in terms of labor?

Jenkins: We were technically, I think, the ones furthest out on it. First of all, we had a large membership living in the Haight-Ashbury. Two, we were the largest black union as well. So this was our constituency. We must have had at that time, maybe three or four thousand members living in the area surrounding [the panhandle]. I'm sure we were supported by other unions, though I don't remember them exactly--the SEIU (the building service workers union) was one of them. The building trades were very much for the project, and the official AFL was for the project.

J-E: What about the environmental groups or neighborhood groups?

Jenkins: They were primarily neighborhood groups. I don't think the environmentalists were a part of it. I don't remember their participation.

J-E: Did you try to get them involved--?

Jenkins: Well, there were plenty of individuals who lived here who were members of the Sierra Club and were environmentalists who joined in. I think, in effect, we knew we had the support of almost all these groups. Having them officially before the board of supervisors wasn't necessary. We were really the power center here.

J-E: What was your general strategy?

Jenkins: Well, we had thousands of petitions; we had a mass meeting in the [Golden Gate] park with ten thousand people from the area and the city. We had demonstrations in front of the board of supervisors. We did everything necessary we could do. It was mainly a political fight, as well as mobilizing the neighborhood. There was no neighborhood opposition, to my knowledge, because everybody along the route felt in one way or another adversely affected by it. It was true that my children played there; there were plenty of other children who played there. The reason really was that the panhandle was an enormous buffer to pollution; it was an enormous buffer to traffic, and also we didn't want the tearing up of the neighborhood for years and years.

J-E: What do you think turned the supervisors around on that issue? Was it the mass support?

Jenkins: Mass support unquestionably. We had Roger Boas as a supervisor; he was for us, though he didn't live in the neighborhood. Moscone was on the board then, and he was for us. Bill Blake was for us. We had five, and we needed six. So, we got them by virtue of our strength. It's one of the real strengths of why district elections are not valid. Our ability to affect the election of all became tremendously important.

California Coastal Commission

J-E: I wanted to also talk about the Coastal Commission established by Proposition 20 [1972]. So far we've talked about issues where there hasn't been too great a split within labor. On the Prop. 20 issue there was a split within labor. And as I understand it, the official AFL/CIO was against Prop. 20 and a lot of local unions were for it.

Jenkins: Well, that leaflet [refers to campaign leaflet] with the exception that our name should have been on it, lists the unions who were for it. Let me see that for one minute. The Bay Area Council of

Jenkins: Service Employees Unions were maybe thirty thousand strong. Auto workers were about sixty thousand, the transportation union was about three thousand, Electrical Radio and Machine Workers were about three thousand. California Federation of Teachers was about ten thousand, the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks were maybe four thousand, and my union [ILWU] had forty thousand in the state. There were many other AFL-CIO locals. So, out of maybe one million seven hundred and fifty thousand we claimed in this leaflet that we had two hundred and sixty thousand union members. That was about right.

The construction unions were against it because they were fearful of a thousand and one problems of licensing that they would have to go through in order to build housing along the coast. They felt that construction would literally be at an end, and it would affect many of the marine related industries which were tied in with shipbuilding. The opponents to the coastal commission wanted labor's full support. I was offered a job at \$25,000 and a bonus for the campaign.

J-E: By whom?

Jenkins: By Whitaker and Baxter who were running the campaign. But they had become absurd. They were implying that the Coastal Commission's prohibitions would extend as far away as Sacramento and that every river and tributary would be affected by the prohibitionism. And it was genuine overkill that finally led to Proposition 20's passage.

J-E: Why did you turn them down.

Jenkins: I didn't need the money!

J-E: That's your only reason?

Jenkins: Yes, and I didn't agree with it. I thought it was absurd. I felt we needed coastal protection. I mean the working class in this state love the coast. They're the ones who fill the trailer parks; they're the ones who go camping; they're the one's who do hunting; they're the ones who really are out there doing the fishing, etc., I think the commission was a legitimate and fine idea--

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J-E: Was it the building trades, again, that were against it, were they the major opposition?

Jenkins: The state AFL was. Matter of fact, I think Jack [John] Crowley, the head of the San Francisco Labor Council was state chairman, with whoever the employers were, of the committee against Prop. 20.

Jenkins: I had worked with Whitaker and Baxter at one point. Whitaker and Baxter were rather notorious PR people who helped to defeat the compulsory health insurance proposition, I think in '48. However, they were hired when we wanted to take the port of San Francisco back from the state. And I set up the labor committees, so I knew them and worked with them in a limited way. And they thought I could have made the difference [with Proposition 20]. I didn't think I could.

J-E: So the state labor organization was against Prop. 20. But a lot of the affiliate unions in local areas supported it?

Jenkins: Well, the vote clearly showed that on an initiative of this sort, labor cannot speak for its members.

J-E: Why did they take that position? What was their interest?

Jenkins: I think it's the same reason that the state AFL is about to support the Peripheral Canal. It's \$20 billion of construction. With tens of thousands of people out of work, they find their position. I don't think it's immoral of them to do this. I think it is justified by the narrowed base of work in our society and the fact of perennial unemployment in the building trades. There aren't alternatives. The environmentalists say, well, if we build garbage plants that's so much more jobs, and if you stop building freeways and cut down on cars, and you can build public transport. Because the labor movement is not into accepting the concept of participating in a planned society or planning in a society, they feel those are really pie in the sky proposals, so the freeways continue to go up, and the car building becomes the mainstay of American industry, and instead of fighting for alternative methods of transportation which maybe ultimately could mean more jobs, they can't wait. The average working man and his wife if they're out of work for six months, a year, with no alternative employment and no government planning intervening, with no guarantees, will not opt for these kinds of alternatives.

J-E: I guess what strikes me as curious is why the state organization perceived the interests of labor to be different than a lot of the local groups perceived their own interests.

Jenkins: There's the freedom to disagree on these kinds of issues in the labor unions. Now, the question of foreign policy is another example. The national AFL-CIO for years has supported what the current administration has done on investment in nuclear armaments, and it pursues clear anti-communist policy that becomes reckless really in its verbiage. The truth is that many of its own members don't go along with them. But the ability to fight that or to take that and make the union a forum for alternative policy is

Jenkins: extremely difficult. I think that when the building trades goes on record to build a project, they're talking for their members; they are. But it seems to me that they have the responsibility of pointing out the dangers thereof and fighting for alternatives.

By and large, the labor movement with some exceptions has been for the building of atomic plants, saying there is no real alternative for the running of industry. There are thousands of union electricians working with PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Company]; there are tens of thousands of other workers involved. They don't see an alternative in solar energy. They don't see an alternative in these other things. Their leadership in many cases is more advanced than they, but they are not offering alternative policies, except a few of the unions--the machinists--are doing it more and more.

J-E: So, you're saying that on the Coastal Commission issue, then, the state organization saw the interests of labor in really a different way than a lot of local unions did.

Jenkins: Well, also they had some legitimate grievances--the fact, in many cases, that building along many sections of the coast, close to the coast (I think the law reads ten miles in) would take twenty permits in order to get to it. There are endless delays and complications which increase the cost of housing and scare off builders. All these arguments were legitimate. How do you get through that bureaucracy and simplify it? It still remains a major problem.

J-E: Some of these local unions that supported the Coastal Commission, was their major motivation the one that you first talked about, the accessibility of areas for leisure along the coast? Was this their basic motivation, and the job issue was not as important in this one?

Jenkins: Well, in many cases, their job was not directly related to the Coast Commission--auto workers, teachers, longshoremen, warehousemen. When I would go to a building trades union, or a union directly involved and say, "I think it's to your best interests not to take such a position," they'll say to me with some legitimacy, "Look, nobody's proposing to take your jobs away on the waterfront, the warehouses, and if they did, you would fight it. If you're a teacher, nobody's proposing cutting out your tenure." So, in a society that doesn't have the capacity to plan and support the private enterprise concept, everyone is out for their own survival. I think that was the reason for the popularity in labor movement of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill. It attempted to guarantee a job for everyone.

J-E: Were these unions that supported Prop. 20, were they unions that didn't have jobs at stake?

Jenkins: Well, that's not totally true, but in the main it was true for the transportation workers, the electrical radio and machine workers, the railway and airline clerks, the federation of teachers, auto workers, ILWU.

J-E: Do you think perhaps it was the building trades that put the pressure on the state organization to oppose it?

Jenkins: They are an important part of the state organization and they represent maybe four or five hundred thousand workers out of a million eight hundred thousand, and there are other sections of the workers who were directly related to it. Thousands of teamsters go to work on a project, and this is true for all sorts of auxiliary workers that are building stuff for that, carpentry, and many other crafts.

J-E: You worked with environmental groups, then, directly on this issue, and what groups were involved? Was the Sierra Club involved?

Jenkins: The Sierra Club was a prime mover in this. I once looked at a book of environmental organizations. I think there were twenty-eight hundred in the state. So that for every case, for every area, there seems to be an environmental group. In a sense it's an out for people. They don't strike at the basic problems of society; they don't want to talk about the promise of a planned economy; they don't want to talk about an end to war; they don't want to talk about a more rational distribution of wealth. There is an enormous investment in defense and too little in housing, too little in job creation. So fighting for a forest or fighting for a green space or fighting for the right of recreation is easier. One can lay down and stop a bulldozer at a beautiful lake that they don't want to see wiped out, but it's a more complicated process to guarantee that if a plant closes down, that the plant is responsible for the workers who have been there for twenty-five years and gives severance pay and at least offers them other jobs in terms of relocation.

J-E: Did you have a working relationship with the Sierra Club?

Jenkins: Well, I knew [Mike] McCloskey, and I knew Carl Pope, and I knew Fran Gendlin, the editor of the paper [Sierra Club Bulletin]. I knew Johnson of the Nature Conservancy. But it wasn't that they persuaded me about these issues, I just felt that we had to come to grips with the environmentalists in spite of the fact that many of their priorities seemed alien to us.

J-E: Did you work together? Did you do what you had done in the Save the Bay campaign where you worked sort of independently and communicated with them?

Jenkins: We didn't have our own independent apparatus; we gave to those who were fighting material like leaflets, and our names and saw that they were distributed in union halls and at union work places and used this material in our union papers. We challenged the idea that labor was unanimously for the issue, and we called a press conference and announced our support of the Coastal Commission so that no one could say, "Hey, labor unions are for us on this one."

J-E: Are these strategies that you worked out with environmentalists?

Jenkins: We learned them with our mother's milk and trade union organization.

J-E: I guess what I'm trying to find out is what kind of working relationship, if any, was established between labor and the environmentalists.

Jenkins: It was a loose relationship. They would come to our meetings and occasionally, but not often, we would be invited to theirs. Initiatives on this score came from our side rather than from theirs. We were more concerned with unity with the environmentalists even though the environmentalists gave a lot of lip service to it.

Conservation and Jobs Conference, 1971

Jenkins: The first conference between labor and environmentalists of any size was the one which I was in a position to call. Labor responded really in great form.

J-E: This was 1971, and the conference was called Conservation and Jobs, right?

Jenkins: We had an executive committee; we had California Tomorrow, the Sierra Club, Common Cause, the Oceanic Society. Then from the labor movement we had Al Figone of the District Council of Carpenters, Morris Evanson of the Painters Union Local 4, and Ken Edwards, president of the San Francisco Building Trades Council. Then we have some people allied, and these were the conveners; we had Joe McCray; we had Father Jonson who was the dean of USF [University of San Francisco].

J-E: Where was this?

Jenkins: We held it at USF on July 20, 1971.

J-E: What you're saying then, as this relates to what we've been talking about, is that the conference was part of an ongoing interaction labor had been having with environmental groups--

Jenkins: No, this was uniquely brought into existence, and we had a lot of business people, and we had a lot of community organizations.

J-E: How was it brought into existence. How did it start?

Jenkins: I got offered a \$20,000 grant by the Institute of Public Affairs. We had the director of the San Francisco Foundation who participated, the Glide Foundation, William Coblenz, the League of Women Voters, Channel Five, and the Presidio. We had a cross section of people. Business leaders showed up like Ernest C. Arbuckle, vice president of the Wells Fargo Bank and president of the San Francisco Employers Council; we had Keith Thompson of Bechtel, Walter Newman of I. Magnin, Bank of America's Fred Martin, and John Richey--

J-E: How did you come to get the \$20,000 grant? Was it given to you by the Ford Foundation? And how was the idea for the conference generated?

Jenkins: Well, the foundation had funded this organization, the Institute of Public Affairs headed by a man named Victor Weingarten. He was doing a number of conferences in major cities around crucial urban issues, and he came to us. He was directed to me by Robert Schrank of the Ford Foundation, and when I agreed, the money then started to flow. In addition to the \$20,000 for the conference he paid people that I helped choose--Lawrence Halpin, Dwight Steele, Joe McCray and Bruce Poyer of the Institute of Labor Relations at Cal [University of California at Berkeley], all received stipends for doing major papers for the conference.*

J-E: And what was the purpose of the conference, at least the stated purpose?

Jenkins: To bring labor and environmentalists together. Let me see the program [for the] Conference of Conservation and Jobs. [refers to program]

J-E: Was it to bring them together to find out where the areas of conflict were?

Jenkins: The areas of conflict and also agreement.

*See Joe McCray, "Pollution, Trees, and Wages" and Dwight Steele, "A Conservationist's View of Environmental Pollution Problems of San Francisco," read at the Conference on Conservation and Jobs, 20 July 1971, at San Francisco, California, xeroxed. On deposit at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.--Ed.

J-E: And what actually took place? I know you had a series of speakers.

Jenkins: It was a three day conference. We opened up at the World Trade Club where [Joe] Alioto, mayor of San Francisco, spoke, and then Jonson spoke. He was the president of the University of San Francisco. We had presentation by Lawrence Halprin, a well-known designer and landscape architect. Kenny Edwards was chairman. He was secretary of the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council. That was our opening presentation--by the city, by labor, by professionals in the field, and by educators. Then we had an all day session which was chaired by Ronald Polosi, who was a San Francisco supervisor, and a major presentation was made by Dwight Steele. Labor attorney Joe McCray made a speech. Presiding was Albert R. Jonson.

We finished with a session chaired by Robert Mendleson, who was a city supervisor, and then recommendations came from the conference. One recommendation was to continue the conference work. Other resolutions supported basic respect and concern for all aspects of human existence. We resolutely on such matters as full employment, the conditions of employment, the equality of employment opportunity, housing, education, clean air, water and streets, solid and liquid waste disposal, transportation, and recreation. We resolved that the conference should speed Market Street beautification, seek federal money from [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] for the study of conservation and jobs, work for good low to moderate family housing, support the Alioto suit to free \$350 million, support a less than two-thirds vote necessary for the passage of bonds for these issues, support the ending of the war in Viet Nam and the redirecting of monies, support underground wires at cost to the utility companies, support guaranteed annual wage for displaced workers. These were referred to us.

J-E: This came out of the working committee?

Jenkins: We resolutely on the creation of new jobs on an ecological basis; earthquake proofing of the schools (which we finally passed); the issue of quality education; a change in the basis of property tax; approval of the San Francisco Planning Commission's urban design plan; consideration by Congress of the Golden Gate National Recreational Area; and a discussion on the future of the Presidio-- basically, to keep that intact. And then a number of people involved in the conference donated money. The building trades gave some money, so did the employers council, hotel employers.

J-E: What was the money to be used for?

- Jenkins: Continuation of the work. California Action, Bechtel Corporation made contributions. I made a contribution of \$250.
- J-E: The resolutions were the end product and while people were talking among themselves were there conflicts on the issues?
- Jenkins: There was a lot of cautiousness, I would think. The employer representatives, they represented most of San Francisco business, were cautious. They made commitments, but those commitments were just to have their hand in rather than to make a commitment to some of the things I talked about, or on which we resolved. They stayed with us and played a fairly decent role up to a point, but afterwards they dropped out so that the continuing groups were the Sierra Club, the labor movement, California Tomorrow, and the League of Women Voters, Common Cause--really a lot of fine people-- Telegraph Hill Dwellers Association, Potrero Hill Association.
- J-E: Can you think of any areas of agreement or conflict on issues that came about when these resolutions were being discussed.
- Jenkins: I think that what happened was that there was a lot of joyous things at this conference, and we found when confronting each other that much of the lack of communication in the past had created visions of each other that simply were not true. On the one hand, the [prior opinions of] conservationists, the middle-class white-collar types who saw all of labor as sort of having a position of just jobs, jobs, jobs regardless, just dissipated when there was evidences of support for crucial things like the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, BCDC, Coastal Commission, Saving the Redwoods, building the Exploratorium instead of tennis clubs, and a hundred other things which effected labor in one way or another. It dissipated when we started to enunciate the history of working people, the fight for a decent environment, decent housing, decent neighborhoods, adequate lighting, removal of garbage, decent sewers, and a thousand other things which we were more knowledgeable on than the environmentalists.

I think that this was a courtship that had all the possibility, in some ways, of breaking out into going steady. In many ways it proved that to be true. It was a continuing source, then, for Sierra Club and all sorts of other community organizations to know that they had friends in the labor movement and vice versa, that there really was the ability to talk. Its major problem, I would think, was that it was still almost all white, white labor. We brought some blacks in. We also had no commitment from the major legislative organizations of the trade union movement like the state AFL Executive Order or the local labor council on certain issues. We had individuals who were powerful and in many cases officials, but they were not prepared to make a commitment further than to get together on certain issues.

J-E: Was that true of the environmentalists too?

Jenkins: I think so. I think that in my union, while we would join a coalition, we would not give that coalition the power to speak for us on issues that we have to take back to our own members for affirmation. Therefore, whether we got a group that's for the environment or for peace or against discrimination, we will not turn over our autonomy to that group. We can't actually; it would be wrong for us to say that we could. So that labor has always been preoccupied with this. I think the environmentalists are less involved in this because I think they don't come from an organizational history. In a sense, they spontaneously are outraged at some act they consider an outrage, and they proceed to go to their organization and say, "You gotta help me." In the labor movement you have to go before your executive board; a vote has to be taken by the members, and you need an authorization from your board of trustees for money.

J-E: So, what you're saying, I believe, is that at the 1971 conference, the seeds were lain at least among certain personalities and people who were leaders in certain parts of the labor movement and certain parts of the environmental movement for further actions and cooperations, but at that point the labor movement and environmental movement and the groups themselves were not ready to take stands together on environmental issues?

Jenkins: That's right. I mean those seeds you're talking about did explode with a few babies. We did support Market Street which finally went ahead, and the Golden Gate [National] Recreation Area was helped by that. The fight on Prop. 15 [in 1978] was to some extent helped. In other words, we knew that we represented interests that by their nature could be hostile, but there were large areas if we consulted beforehand, on which there might be alternative methods of proceeding--on construction, building, transportation, water, pollution, and a variety of other things.

J-E: I have one more question about the conference, and then maybe we could talk about the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the other sort of concrete controversies that were related to that conference. Someone assessed the conference as not being successful, and one of their reasons was that the conference defined the issues more from the point of view of the environmentalists than from labor. Does that make sense to you?

Jenkins: Hard for me to know why one would say that. We had two major papers that were produced, copies of which I have, and I have a third paper by Dwight Steele who understood the labor problems and also was an activist environmentalist. Steele's paper went in the same direction. Jonson, the president of USF came from a

Jenkins: university which always had labor support, particularly Catholic labor, and he was sensitive to both sides of the issue. Alioto, who we had elected mayor, was firmly a prolabor figure at this conference, and if anything, I would say there was almost too much emphasis on the urban environment as the only way that labor per se would get involved in the environmental movement. I think that was an overstatement, in a sense. We had other problems at the conference, and that was when environmentalists talked about giving up cars and using public transportation. Labor said you're crazy if you think the average working stiff who has his car as the only means of getting to the country--

J-E: Environmentalists said that at the conference?

Jenkins: Yes. The only way he can get to the country is through his car, the only way the beach becomes accessible, the only way he can go on a holiday or camping is with his car. If you think he's going to give this up, that's something that's going to attract them to the outdoors. All you have to do is go out in the Mission on a Sunday and see the workers polishing their cars.

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Jenkins: I don't think you can argue with the fact that people's material conditions determine their consciousness. If you're living in the Mission or in the Fillmore, if you have a job that's on the edge of poverty, if your preoccupation is with cleaning up your work place and getting decent housing and decent schools and decent medical care, these things take an enormous priority over whether Mono Lake [is drying up], even though it's explained over and over again that Mono Lake is a feeding system which affects your water. Workers feel helpless in the middle of all this.

I grew up in an area like Passone, New Jersey, where the river was polluted ever since I was born. The textile mills polluted the river where our mothers and fathers worked, or friend's mothers and fathers worked and where we ultimately worked. If somebody had said stop working until the river is cleaned up, we wouldn't have had an answer to it, though there were answers.

J-E: Do you think on some of these specific issues that through the communication between labor and environmentalists at the conference the environmentalists, for instance, saw more of the labor viewpoint as an outcome?

Jenkins: Oh, yes, I don't think there's any question that it deeply affected the environmental movement. I don't think the Sierra Club can control every little segment they were involved in, and there still are thrusts that become absurd on the part of the environmental movement like wanting to stop all hunting and fishing and trapping.

Jenkins: This is like denying the working women the right to have babies. Because it's going to overpopulate the world, it still isn't natural to deny it. A lot of that stuff comes from the environment. But I think there's no question that this conference played a national role and was then duplicated in different parts of the country.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

J-E: I wanted to ask you about three urban issues that involved, to some extent, labor and environmental groups. As I understand it, the involvement of labor in these issues was an outgrowth of the conference in 1971. The first issue was the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. What kind of involvement did labor have in that issue?

Jenkins: Well, the main mover of that was Congressman Phillip Burton, who I think came out of the area that we had known him well in. He was a major advocate for the labor movement in Congress and generally a progressive legislator. His role with the Golden Gate National Recreation Park as its main proponent was a surprise to us, frankly--to our conferencees as well as the rest of the labor movement. As a result of the conference, we supported him in his efforts which were crucial. He's generally regarded as the father of the park.

J-E: Did you become aware or did labor become aware of the controversy at the conference in 1971?

Jenkins: The truth was that it seemed at the conference far down the road. The opposition to it was relatively little. One would assume that the logging interests were opposed to it, but that was not presented. Logging had not been a major factor in Marin for a number of years previous to the passage of it. There was some faint opposition from construction people but not in any major way. The chamber of commerce was not fomenting against it. Unions up and down the coast who were affected by it, which were mostly wood products, cannery workers, truck drivers, said little. The vast majority of legislators in Marin County were pro Golden Gate, and our active support of it dated from this time, and I think that the conference was a major contribution.

J-E: In the initial plan there was a large section of Marin that was apparently not included which later was added. The addition of that part of the park apparently took away from the areas that were more accessible to low income people from the San Francisco side. Was that an issue that you were ever aware of?

Jenkins: It very well may be, but my recollection is not that sharp. We did make the point that a lot of poor people would be much more comfortable if there was an integrated park staff, that the rangers and the national park people were almost exclusively white, and that was an issue that we raised.

J-E: What was the reception that you received from environmental groups on that issue?

Jenkins: There was no opposition to it, but it was nothing that they had anticipated. I mean anticipated in the sense that they had raised the issue or foresaw it as a problem.

J-E: Were they just indifferent to that issue?

Jenkins: No, they were supportive once we raised the issue. The truth of the matter is that the exploitation of these great national parks by blacks, minorities, had not taken place except among certain minority groups. Blacks still tend to exclude themselves in many ways although not totally. But I remember, for instance, in Golden Gate Park--which for years was a white enclave even though it was on the edge of the Fillmore, four or five blocks away--people just didn't feel comfortable because of current racial attitudes and overtones and once the fight for integration started, it changed the composition of recreation enormously. So that was an issue I do remember.

J-E: I see. Nothing really came of that except that you were sensitive to that and voiced the issue, and it was received.

Market Street and the Forty-Foot Height Limit

J-E: What about Market Street beautification. That was also a point that came into focus at the conference.

Jenkins: I think we brought the environmentalists aboard on that. The labor movement was always all for it; it represented thousands of hours of work for all of us. Market Street is essentially a shopping place for working people and minorities. It's the main shopping area for Hunters Point, Chinatown and the great stores like the Emporium, the hugh Woolworths there, and a number of other stores that were really the center for working people and minority people who shop in these places. The development of the Stonestown suburban shopping center just was nonexistent for these communities. So the environmentalists did come aboard on that and were helpful.

Jenkins: The conference was really the place where it was raised.

J-E: Was it an issue that they were aware of before?

Jenkins: I think so because it was on the ballot; it was a \$30 million issue.

J-E: In what ways did their perceptions change?

Jenkins: I think just the recitation of facts that they were not aware of, that it was a major shopping area, a place where there was transportation to homes, in areas of housing where blacks and Latinos and Asians live. The shopping area was unique to them, in a sense.

J-E: What groups are we talking about? Were they the Sierra Club or other groups that attended the conference?

Jenkins: I would say San Francisco Tomorrow and California Tomorrow and the other groups. To some extent, Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill dwellers were worried about the views from their mountain enclaves.

J-E: Are you talking about unorganized people, or were they organized into neighborhood groups?

Jenkins: Yes, well, there is a Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Association.

J-E: Were these people part of environmental groups?

Jenkins: To some extent they became active. I think they perceived the town somewhat differently. We were not interested in their views from Telegraph Hill in terms of the freeway. The thirty or forty thousand people that worked on the waterfront were delighted with the freeway. It meant that they got to work twice as fast; they also had views of the Sunset [District] when they went home which they didn't ordinarily have.

J-E: Did you work with San Francisco Tomorrow and California Tomorrow after the conference toward--

Jenkins: Well, we split up on other issues. I worked full time on the Market Street thing and the chairman of the campaign was the head of the Wells Fargo bank and the vice-president or executive vice-president of the Palace Hotel was another. When we won it, they gave a party for me and one other person at the Pacific Union Club. It was the first and last time I have been to the Pacific Union Club. I had hired a black guy, Arthur McMillan, to work with me. He had been very effective in getting the black community involved in it, and when I got to the luncheon, McMillan had not been invited,

Jenkins: and so I stood up, and I said, "Gentlemen, I would like to propose a toast to Arthur McMillan, who was effective and an important person in our campaign, and I'm sorry he's not invited." Well, it was interesting to see the president of the Crocker bank and the Wells Fargo bank and all the rest, rise at the table.

J-E: You say there was a split?

Jenkins: Well, then we split with them on other issues.

J-E: But on the Market Street issue you went together on that, and there weren't environmental groups besides San Francisco Tomorrow involved? Sierra Club wasn't involved in Market Street? Was there any sympathy for any of the issues involved there or was it an issue the Sierra Club felt they didn't have a stake in?

Jenkins: I think their growing consciousness that they had to be involved in the cities, in problems and jobs was crucial. Up to then, or was it after that, we divided somewhat on the U.S. Steel building [1973] on the waterfront. Many of those groups were opposed to it, and we were for it.

J-E: When was this?

Jenkins: Sometime in the early seventies. It was the time of the forty-foot limit in San Francisco. That exploded into a major issue, and the U.S. Steel building was defeated, as you may remember, and also another building proposed for the waterfront was defeated which was a Ford Foundation building. It would have been a big plaza. Some of the figures who were part of the conservation movement were more a part of business than they were conservation--like Bill Coblenz who represented the Ford Foundation. I split with them about that building. The U.S. Steel people had agreed to build an enormous marina which would have given us access from the ferry building down to Pier 18 as part of the deal, and I thought that would give us infinitely more open space than we'd ever had. I also had worked on an agreement with the contractors that 25 percent of all employees would be women and minorities. So I thought that was an important advance.

Now this, of course, would have been on port property. What really happened then was two blocks up; skyscrapers sprouted which they had no control over. Their victory gave impetus to the forty-foot height limit proposal, which we defeated. And we split on that as well.

J-E: So you were against the groups that were trying to keep that from being built, those two buildings. The forty-foot height limit was in 1976, wasn't it?

- Jenkins: There was a very bitter feeling about the forty-foot height limit. It was beaten very solidly. I worked then with the chamber of commerce and the labor movement and the black community. Alvin Duskin, leader of the fight for forty-foot limit, then ran for supervisor, and was defeated. He got a respectable vote.
- J-E: How did the unions line up on that issue? Were they for or against the forty-foot height limit?
- Jenkins: Nobody in the labor movement was for it.
- J-E: That was a real issue where environmentalists and labor really had a head-on clash. What groups again were fighting for the limit?
- Jenkins: It was basically San Francisco Tomorrow and a loose coalition around them of other community groups, city beautiful types.
- J-E: What were the issues here?
- Jenkins: Obscuring the view. Manhattanization of San Francisco.
- J-E: And for labor?
- Jenkins: Basically we wanted to go ahead with construction jobs, white collar and otherwise. The jobs were in construction originally and then maintenance, janitorial, the extension of Muni services, and the other city services, and the white collar jobs in the thousands. Now, threading all through this period was the question of Yerba Buena which really started about sixteen years ago. Struggles came and went, but that issue remained and still, to some extent, remains as the dividing issue in the city.
- J-E: What kinds of campaign strategies did you use to defeat the forty-foot height limit.
- Jenkins: It was essentially that San Francisco had more open space than any comparable city in the world. We had helped keep the Presidio in the army's hands and not turn it over to the city. We made an issue of Fort Mason and allowed it to go into the national recreation area, and we instituted public walks from Fort Point down to the Yacht Club. We had Golden Gate Park and a thousand other areas. Most of the city already was enjoyed from Van Ness out, which was the vast majority of the acreage, and to prescribe a forty-foot limit for the whole city was wrong.
- J-E: So your basic argument was that this just wasn't needed.

Jenkins: That it wasn't needed and in no way could the city live with it, really.

J-E: Did you attempt to meet with people in the environmental groups?

Jenkins: We met with San Francisco Tomorrow, and they regarded it as genocide. For us it wasn't.

J-E: What do you mean?

Jenkins: I mean they thought that the city was going to forever be cementized and Manhattanized, etcetera, etcetera. It was difficult to tell them that I thought Manhattan, the buildings in Manhattan, were fairly exciting. I had grown up in New York outside of Central Park and a few other places. There was much that was green there. I love the quietness of New York streets on weekends. I worked on the docks and loved the river, but to say that to them would be inflammatory, and there was no chance of any duplication of that.

The thing that always surprised me about the environmentalists was that we are the only town of our size, I think, and our location, that has never fought for the use of the bay as a recreational area, outside of individual sailboats. But when you go to London on the Thames or to Germany along the Rhine or major cities of the world, the lakes and the rivers and the bays are enormous areas of recreational enjoyment. That never happened here in San Francisco, outside of this stupidly expensive ferry that they started. I didn't want them to spend the money on it. Also I wanted to press for a suicide barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge which the environmentalists never involved themselves in either.

J-E: So you had meetings with San Francisco Tomorrow.

Jenkins: It was an endless exchange of ideas.

J-E: But you felt that they were so keyed into their own views that you wouldn't have any way of convincing them otherwise?

Jenkins: Yes, we became, frankly, opponents about that.

Yerba Buena Redevelopment

Jenkins: In the main, we became opponents on the Yerba Buena thing. The Yerba Buena project was not an environmental issue so much as a fight of community and legal groups. The Yerba Buena issue has threaded through the city for the past sixteen years. We went to ballot about it; we removed businesses; we removed all sorts of things in order to bring it into existence in the hope that there would be a new downtown center. The rationale for keeping it as a small business and housing area had long passed.

J-E: What were the groups again? Let's maybe establish that. Which groups were involved in Yerba Buena? There were unions and environmental groups?

Jenkins: Unions were almost universally for Yerba Buena.

J-E: From the beginning or did they change?

Jenkins: It changed. At one time the [San Francisco] labor council had been opposed to this, but as the tax base became impossible there and small industries moved to Daly City and South San Francisco and across the bay, those businesses disappeared. Housing had been a factor for single-man hotels, but there were plenty of them in the rest of the south of Market and the Tenderloin area. Cruel, but we helped them move; we helped them find new places, and we did an awful lot of social work in the process.

J-E: So early there was union opposition to Yerba Buena, and what time are we talking about?

Jenkins: I would say the opposition disappeared by the middle of the seventies.

J-E: And was this uniform, basically, throughout the labor movement?

Jenkins: The machinists had machine shops there; the coopers had cooperages; we had a lot of warehouses, and all of the big warehouses and coffee places moved out or moved to other parts of the town. The land costs were so high, and the old three-story warehouses with elevators were not practical. Industry wanted large areas where they could build a one-level brick place available to trucks and transportation which the downtown city streets would not allow.

The fight, in part, began around the removal of a building that preceded that, but it never got much momentum. That was when we moved the old vegetable market down from the waterfront

- Jenkins: to the outskirts of the city and then the apparel market moved. It took environmentalists a long time to mobilize around that. Labor was for moving it out. But the argument that it would only be housing for the wealthy that would take its place had some legitimacy, but the Golden Gateway also created an urban environment that I think is an extraordinary one.
- J-E: So, in other words, the early opposition to the Yerba Buena development was because there were a lot of jobs that would be lost in that area.
- Jenkins: Also, we had plans which were beautiful plans; we had world architects. We attracted investments of hundreds of millions of dollars by the Rockefellers into the area, and part of what we were removing was a city of the past on the waterfront. The produce market and apparel market didn't have much legitimacy there any longer.
- J-E: You mentioned at one point when we were talking last week that this was an extremely divisive issue, and you said it divided groups along unusual lines.
- Jenkins: Unusual lines in the sense that a lot of allies that we had who were pro-labor and on the same side as we were politically, didn't agree with us on Yerba Buena. It was fought by [Representative] John Burton for one, and to some extent by Assemblyman Art Agnos, though he came later on the scene. [Mayor George] Moscone was against it and then was for it. Almost every politician participated in confusing us about it. The redevelopment of those blocks victimized poor people and forced them out of the area. On the other hand, we felt that the overwhelming issue was really to bring new industry and new jobs and a new area to the city. And that ultimately was the reason for our victory. We felt we needed a convention center; we felt we needed a downtown sporting arena. We needed all these things for the city. It was good for us.

There were splits along a lot of lines. The Democratic party club movement split on it; the political leaders split on it. For those who were working on it all the time, as I was, those splits didn't have much significance. I saw the area deteriorating. I knew that the possibilities of alternative housing existed. The environmentalists played an important role because they agitated and shook the tree until a lot of good things fell out of it that I don't think we would have necessarily done ourselves. We came into political power in the city because we were critical of existing plans. Once we got in leadership and we carried out new plans, the criticism still persisted. It was a general agitation against those in power, and we were then in power. We elected [Mayor] Joseph Alioto; we elected [Mayor Jack] Shelley. We went on to elect [Mayor] George Moscone, and we were an important group.

J-E: Dave, how did you perceive the environmental groups? Did you perceive them as insensitive to labor's needs in this particular battle over Yerba Buena?

Jenkins: I don't know. This was a period, of course, when every cocktail party you went to when you got out of your own milieu, your own group, inevitably somebody would say, "Well, don't you think there's no longer a need for the labor movement? Don't you think that Jimmy Hoffa and somebody else who was currently identified as a crook, has totally destroyed the validity of the labor movement?" And it got to be a great pain. That's like accusing an anthropologist because Leakey had turned out to be a phony about a five million-year-old skull, and therefore all anthropology was corrupt. So that all the social causes that helped the labor movement and maintained it and keep it as a progressive factor were negated.

It was a period as well where the lack of participation by the official labor movement in the anti-Vietnamese war movement had profoundly disillusioned a lot of young people who themselves came from either peace, radical labor or left families. Despite the fact that thousands of us from labor marched in Berkeley and fought with them against the war in Vietnam, in the judgment of these critics we were guilty of ripping off the environment, so to speak, of pushing poor people out of their homes in favor of big business.

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J-E: You mentioned that you thought part of the environmentalists' perception of labor and their needs was based on a lot of stereotypes that were a part of those times in the early 1970s.

Jenkins: And there was some legitimacy to it. The truth of the matter was that many people in the labor movement were politically illiterate of issues outside of their own industry. They represented status points of view, establishment points of view on most issues, but they were good on issues of decent wage and job protection and safety on the job. On great social issues--Vietnam, race--they tended to follow the leadership of the establishment. In many cases they brought to these issues their own particular prejudices.

J-E: Dave, what was your direct involvement in Yerba Buena? Did you play a role?

Jenkins: I was a consultant, a labor consultant to the redevelopment agency for about ten years.

J-E: And what did you do in that capacity?

Jenkins: I mostly mobilized people to be for it and explained the issues that made the project acceptable to the city.

Fort Mason

J-E: There was another urban issue that I want to just discuss with you briefly and that was Fort Mason, and again that goes back to the 1971 conference. What was that all about?

Jenkins: Well, Fort Mason was an active fort, but it ceased being that by the end of World War II. It was an important area where wartime shipping had come in, but its use had been literally wiped out. The question was whether the city would fight to take it over as a recreation area or else business would take it over as a prime area of business investment, and housing for the rich, or at least for the well-off. Rather than carry on that fight, we in effect, withheld our opposition and supported [Representative Phillip] Burton's plan to put it into the Golden Gate National Recreational Area.

J-E: And this was an outcome of the 1971 conference, also?

Jenkins: Yes. Our perception of it suddenly changed.

J-E: Was this because of your interaction with environmental groups?

Jenkins: To some extent, but also independent of that, people like Alioto and labor and the black leadership that I was associated with, made that as an independent conclusion. It was not totally in response to environmentalists. Also, we speculated about making a city park out of it--the maintenance facilities, the dining rooms--and use the buildings as an extension of that whole aquatic area which lies just below it, and we concluded it more naturally fitted into the national recreation park area. We were also wondering where we were going to get the funds to do what was necessary for a city park.

J-E: Were there any particular groups or people who were important in the conference dialogue?

Jenkins: Amy Meyer on the Park and Rec. Commission was a major figure in this, at least listening to her she was the only figure.*

Phil Burton never would have been congressman if it hadn't been for us. He was out of our ranks. I worked on his campaign in this area. He won by 1 percent of the vote. He was generally opposed by the middle and upper class, the papers--he was our candidate. When Phil Burton became a major advocate of the environmentalists, he was able to do it because his base with us was so secure. The environmentalists had not been his original supporters in the main. And in a genuine way, it was our contribution politically to this fight.

*See the interview with Amy Meyer in this volume.

II EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Sierra Club Labor Liaison Committee

- J-E: Let me switch gears here. I want to talk about the Sierra Club Labor Liaison Committee which you had a part, as I understand it, in forming. It was formed in 1973. Earlier we talked about how some of the interaction between labor and environmentalists lead up to this, so this was kind of a consequence, was it not of the earlier involvement between the two movements? In 1972, there were a lot of meetings between Mike McCloskey, Will Siri, and yourself, which led up to the actual formation of the committee.
- Jenkins: Yes. As I said, the panhandle was one fight, the bay fight [BCDC] was another, the beginnings of the Coast Commission was another. The endless issues not only here, but around the country were making it apparent that at least leaders of both groups needed to get together. I think that was facilitated by Steele and myself being close and involving other people.

There were always other figures on the edge of the environmental and labor movements who were more sophisticated than either of those groups, like Keith Roberts, who was a young economist and Joe McCray who was a labor attorney. They had, in one way or another, cooperated on urban affairs and the environment and were ready to come forward with papers, statistics, research. They were important in the process. It is equally true that Steele and myself coming together--it was in part an accident--was important. Both of us were drawing from experiences which were not at all as rigid as other people's or else we didn't have specific responsibilities to a given organization which could have said to Steele, "Stay out of it if you want to keep your job," or somebody could have said the same thing to me. That we were, in a sense, free of that kind of constriction was helpful. I think that's the antecedents of it.

J-E: What did you perceive would be the function of this committee?

Jenkins: I saw it somewhat politically, too. Outside of the advantages to the people in terms of a cleaner and better environment, better transportation, and a thousand other problems that we were confronting in the city, my hope was, as well, that it would mean an important social advance and help expose those responsible for things like the Love Canal and the wrecking of Lake Erie. I hoped that a whole new battalion of people who, starting with environmental issues, could more profoundly see the forces that were greedy for the profits that came out of an uncontrolled economy. I hoped politically it would express itself in more progressive movements statewide and nationwide. I also saw it as a base for candidates that progressive labor would be interested in electing.

J-E: So an alliance with environmentalists had some political significance, too.

Jenkins: Yes.

J-E: The committee idea was accepted by the Sierra Club board. How did you perceive their interests in terms of accepting the idea of the committee. Was it indifference? Did they just go along with it?

Jenkins: Like every organization whether it's a union or the Sierra Club, there's only a limited group of its leadership that goes beyond immediate issues. Working people see a 10 percent increase in dental care or medical services as a totality. That's true in the environmental movement too. If you stop another freeway, if you free a marsh area for birds, that's a victory, and you sort of eclectically go on to each thing. At some point you have to draw conclusions and establish who's responsible for this and what are the forces that are on the side of the people. I'd felt that the rise of the environmental movement was an important development. I'd seen evidence of it in Europe--countries like Holland where they've started to represent 20 percent of the vote and other places--and I saw a need to attach ourselves to those people.

J-E: Why do you think the Sierra Club board also saw a need to establish this committee?

Jenkins: I think they also saw they only could go up to a certain point and no further without broadening their base. As a prime example, they won the Alaska bill; they won it under [President Jimmy] Carter who was supported by labor. Then [Ronald] Reagan gets elected and immediately those business forces which are opposed to that kind of land use start to go into action. He appoints [James] Watt as secretary of the Interior and starts to move in to destroy OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration], off shore drilling, etcetera.

J-E: So you saw that environmentalists and labor had a common ground.

Jenkins: Common ground in many areas. They may not be terribly interested in the fact that workers in the sawmills are getting their lungs clogged because they don't have any day to day evidence. They are not hunters but mountain climbers and recreationalists who know about permafrost and the breaking up of the ecology.

J-E: Was it political expediency?

Jenkins: It was good progressive politics.

J-E: And you think environmentalists felt that also?

Jenkins: I think a certain section did, yes. On the other hand, you run into people who live in Marin who wanted all sorts of restrictions because they don't want their estates to be impinged on. Well, the end effect is to keep minorities and unions out of Marin County.

J-E: The Sierra Club board did support the committee, and you're saying partly it was for political reasons; they wanted a common alliance. And this is also the time of the [Sierra Club] Shell oil strike resolution in about 1973, and you mentioned that you felt there was some sympathy on the part of the board with the actual issues that labor was involved with. Was that also a factor in the formation of this committee, or the agreement of the Sierra Club board to form the committee?

Jenkins: Oh, sure.

J-E: So it's both the political possibilities and the issues. Is that the way you felt at that board meeting?

Jenkins: Oh, yes. I felt that, and the other thing which I felt was that some of the figures that emerged out of the environmental movement, out of their own experiences were much ahead of their own membership on the issues.

J-E: For instance, who?

Jenkins: I think Mike McCloskey was. His wife was a member of the teacher's union. Matter of fact, she taught at Merritt [College in Oakland, California] with my wife. The editor of the Sierra Club magazine [Fran Gendlin] and some of the other people were also. I'm hard pressed to think of others. Also, Alfred Heller of the California Tomorrow. They had more of an urban experience and knew the nature of political power in a way that was important. The old environmental movement that was lead by President Teddy Roosevelt and his achievement of Yellowstone and Grand Canyon parks

Jenkins: had a different origin in a way. The environmental movement had to go through its own reforming. They realized how necessary it was to have coalitions.

J-E: What happened after the committee was formed. Did anything happen?

Jenkins: We met a whole number of times and proceeded mostly in informal sessions rather than formal meetings.

Urban Environment Conference, 1977

Jenkins: We had another conference in 1977 which revived these issues, to some extent, and we worked together.

J-E: The conference in 1977 was the Urban Environment Conference. Was the involvement with the Sierra Club Labor Liaison Committee somehow involved with that conference, or was it just the result of ongoing communication?

Jenkins: No, it was a part of the ongoing communication. The committee was helpful in drawing people. I think the original list is not atypical of who was involved. It involved some of the national people like Sydney Howe and George Cooling of the Urban Institute in Washington, and from the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], Paul DeFalco. The sponsors were more trade union than Sierra Club. Carl Pope was involved, and Mike McCloskey, Paul DeFalco. The University of California's Industrial Relations Institute was involved as well as some of the city supervisors like Gordon Lau. David Calcens was from EPA. For the rest, it was trade unionists; twelve of the sponsors were union sponsors. There were also community leaders like Caryl Mezey, Joyce Ream.

J-E: This conference was part of the urban environment conferences, and you received a grant from EPA?

Jenkins: \$5,000.

J-E: It was a regional conference, and you were the coordinator? What was your basic task in that conference, as you perceived it to be? Was it similar to the 1971 conference?

Jenkins: Jobs and the environment. We talked about thoughtful growth that makes money and provides jobs and enhances the environment; healthy, pleasant surroundings, cleaning up the environment.

J-E: Was the function of this conference again to open up areas of communication between environmentalists and labor?

Jenkins: I think it was more centered on the energy issue which at that time had grown, and our major speaker at the first meeting was Emilio Varanini who was the Energy Commissioner [on the Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission] and then Carl Pope did a paper on institutional barriers to cooperation, and the urban environmental people were delighted. They were able to use this conference as a springboard and to organize conferences all over the country.

At one point in the conference I said that the trend of the last decade--the alliance of labor with major business, its traditional adversary on issues of money or human issues--has been caused by unthoughtful approaches by environmentalists to vital jobs for workers in construction, dam building, logging, heavy manufacturing, and more recently in deep-sea fishing. Labor can deal with the position of environmentalists in three ways: by defeating it, by ignoring it, or by putting it to work in labor's cause. I then went on into an evaluation of that.

J-E: I read in another review of that conference that there was a point in that conference when Carl Pope mentioned that he hadn't gotten a response or a positive response from the labor union people, and there was a "hostile" interchange between Pope and a union leader in the audience and that you interceded, apparently, at one point to get the conference back on track.

Jenkins: Yes, that was Stan Smith, secretary of the San Francisco Building Trades Council, who got up and said that the greatest single thing for the environment movement would be to eliminate the Sierra Club.

J-E: Was that a sentiment that union people felt that they didn't want to express?

Jenkins: Oh no, as a matter of fact Smith was not only taken on by me, he was taken on by the president of the Teamsters Local 85 and others who said that Smith was speaking for himself.

J-E: So there wasn't that kind of hostility. Smith's opinions were just a personal viewpoint.

Jenkins: His statement was one of utter frustration on his part.

J-E: Were there conflicts and tensions between the environmental groups and labor on specific issues at the conference?

Jenkins: Well, the issue again comes down to things that the labor movement hadn't resolved yet, and it isn't totally in their hands to do so. They were being accused of being racist and antienvironment in many cases. Well, the accusation was legitimate enough, but the truth of the matter was there had been some progress but only some.

J-E: Who was accusing them, the environmental groups?

Jenkins: It was the general atmosphere of the conference; it was a combination of that and the fact that Yerba Buena was still being delayed. Labor had organized a march of labor people in the city. I had been responsible for the organization of the march on the offices of Bill Honig and others who had been the main carrier of the lawsuits. There was a great frustration about this and then there was the attack on new construction downtown.

J-E: In '76, '77 there was a lot of interchange and hostile interchange between environmental groups and labor. Didn't that come into the conference in any way?

Jenkins: This one characterization that took place was so extreme that it defeated whatever purposes it might have had.

J-E: Did anyone deal with those environmental controversies that were going on?

Jenkins: Well, I did, and I made a long speech about that on a number of occasions. Mike Peevey did as well.

J-E: At that conference?

Jenkins: Yes. And then people like Leo McCarthy, who was then the speaker of the state assembly addressed the issues, because he was being victimized in a sense because he was prolabor, and he was finding unions coming in and muscling him about his support for the Coast Commission, his support for a variety of other things. He was delighted that we had brought these forces together because he was extremely upset by them. He voiced his opposition to the operating engineers and a whole number of others who had been badgering him about issues which he felt they were wrong on. People were delighted at these conferences to have this kind of communication and contact.

J-E: What was the positive after effect of that conference in 1977 that's tangible?

Jenkins: I think we made allies of a lot of people on Yerba Buena, on the question of race and jobs which was important. I think partially flowing out of that was support for agreements by a whole number of building trade unions on apprenticeship and things of that sort which were at least helped along by the conference. Some of them were already in the works.

J-E: How did that relate to the environment?

Jenkins: One of the issues of the environment is that you can't have enormous areas of unemployment and lack of training of people and job unavailability and still persuade them that the environment was important. You can't persuade them if their own living space and their ability to contend with the world is insecure.

Ten Years of Environmental Controversies: Some Reflections

J-E: I had two other questions I wanted to ask you. It seems through this whole period that you've been involved both in coalitions with labor groups and environmental groups and also on the other side, fighting against environmental groups. You've been in all different interrelationships with environmentalists and environmental groups as a labor leader. How has this, if at all, affected your perception of environmentalists? You still are trying to establish links with environmental groups; are there any residues from some of these battles, like the forty-foot height limit, for instance, which was such a bitter battle between labor groups and environmentalists? Has this ten-year period of interaction affected your view of environmentalists?

Jenkins: I would say that the environmental groups that I know now are much more mature, much more understanding, and much more complex than the kind of groups that used to hold the simplistic belief that all the labor movement is interested in is jobs, and they'll do anything in response to this. I also think there is a more mature leadership in the environmental movement, more diverse than they used to be. The sources upon which they drew were from people who came out of an older tradition, and I think that a whole group of younger people are seeing the possibilities of that alliance now and have outward reaches which are important. I still do think, however, that unless there are defined class positions about who benefits from this and conclusions are drawn from this, that it is still a problem.

It's perfectly obvious that coal miners will go out and strike for one hundred and eighteen days against the mine owners and for mine safety as a central issue. Environmentalists can help and have to understand that to take away people's work is to take away their whole lives. People don't feel that they have alternatives. They feel frightened by it.

J-E: Do you think that the contact between labor and environmental groups that we've been discussing these last few hours, has helped to educate and make more sensitive the environmental movement to the issues concerning labor?

Jenkins: I do, I do. I think there is a real struggle to involve us and to think about us. I went recently to a party that the Sierra Club threw when they got their two hundred thousandth member. There were still only four of us from the labor movement invited. There were two blacks; one was Willie Kennedy, a black supervisor, and the other was Leroy King, the black regional director of our union. They still have a long way to go in how to employ this in a way that's effective. On the other hand, I think that the labor movement has a solid group in it, particularly the younger people, that regard the environmentalists as friends on all sorts of levels and would infinitely prefer them as allies than enemies.

I think it's an intermixing that's also personally productive for them; it forces men and women in the labor movement to confront people's love of country, their preoccupations with these things. They just can't discard environmentalists as pansy pickers or wild idealists, and things of that sort. I think it's gotten very much close.

I think the potential of the Reagan administration of pushing labor and business together as an opponent of the environmental movement is failing because of the appointments, not only in the Department of Interior, but the disgraceful appointments in the Department of Labor as well. These are the two areas most vulnerable in a reactionary, right wing administration.

III LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT: AN OVERVIEW

[Date of Interview: February 6, 1981]##

Points of Agreement and Disagreement

Walden: Dave, we've been talking about labor and the environment. Do you think that labor and environmentalists are two groups that are antagonistic to one another? Is it a question of jobs vs. the environment, or do you think that the two groups can work together in many areas?

Jenkins: Well, historically, let me say that, on the broad environmental issues, like the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, or the Point Reyes National Seashore, or Yosemite [National Park], or BCDC (which is the Bay Conservation and Development Commission), labor and the environmentalists have not disagreed. We've generally supported each other.

Actually, that's been supplemented by the fact that a congressman that essentially was elected by labor, Phil [Phillip] Burton, who was our spokesman, has become a major environmental spokesman on the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Also, other congressmen like [Ronald V.] Dellums joined politically with environmentalists on issues of that sort. On the question of parks and recreational space for working people, we're all generally agreed. That's historically been true in the labor movement.

It's true that the failure, in part, of the environmental movement is because it was upper and middle class, and white, and failed to be sensitive on issue like mine safety, silicosis, black lung, urban blight. They've only recently identified those as their concerns, and these issues are still not major concerns.

Secondly, their attack against the automobile, and the pollution and gas, their rather grandiose ideas on "no freeways" and all this, ran counter to worker's needs--to tell a working

Jenkins: stiff, or a working family, whose car was his only way of getting out of the ghetto or out of the slum or out of a poor neighborhood, that he couldn't have his car on Sunday, was and is bullshit. Also, that was his one way to get back and forth from work quickly, via the freeway. A general hostility and lack of communication was the result of this position.

A case in example is the Embarcadero Freeway; it's bad planning, obviously, but it got us back and forth from the waterfront three times as quick as one ordinarily would get. And we didn't have to drive through endless streets. Our accident rates were measurably lower. And from a scenic point of view, you saw more from the freeway of the bay than we ever did on the waterfront itself, unless you were working on the edge of a ship and overlooking the sea. The argument of the people on Telegraph Hill and other people who felt that this was an abomination and should be put into disuse, has never been supported by the working class, or by, I would say, people generally. You can get the working class a hell of a lot more aroused in this town about Candlestick Park. The winds come in there, freeze them to death, and they feel that's a real rip-off; that's an environmental abomination. Or the [San Francisco] Hall of Justice where everytime you walk in the architecture makes you feel that you're in prison, and if you ask a question, somebody's going to hustle you off to the basement. Those are the environmental abominations which average citizens, working class people are concerned with.

Third, where labor broke off with environmentalists was on the question of industrial health and safety in general. Environmentalists lack knowledge about these issues. It's gotten much better as a result of some confrontations between labor and people in the environmental movement. When the Shell Oil workers struck nationally in 1973 on safety issues I appeared before the Sierra Club board with John Henning of the state AFL-CIO and for the first time in their history, they supported a strike. That was a fundamental change in the Sierra Club's understanding of where workers are coming from. The workers working in an oil refinery were affected by pollution, were affected by dangerous work conditions, and they did join us, and it was helpful. It helped settle the strike, or at least brought it to a much quicker conclusion.

In the basic industries there is a high rate of breakdown and fatigue and danger to workers. Tree topping is the most dangerous and hazardous work in America, so is longshoring, or working in steel and rubber mills. In the auto plants with the unbearable speed-up, the average life of a worker on the line is twelve years; he has either a physical breakdown, he quits, or he can't make it anymore unless he's indomitable. The environmentalists were never concerned with the human equation. They kept

Jenkins: talking about Bryce Canyon and Grand Canyon. Lots of people never felt the ability to get there. If the environmentalists were to take their cars away because there's too much gas pollution in addition, the opportunity for some of them to go seemed to them to be absurd.

And also, cleaning up the neighborhoods which the environmentalists were slow to come into. They did get involved finally in the later part of the--well, in the early seventies, when labor raised these questions with them. Well, environmentalists legitimately said that their major preoccupation was as defenders of wildlife, parks, defenders of whales, defenders of dolphins, the Alaska terrain--all legitimate--and God knows, their leadership was crucial. But environmentalists have failed over and over again when they got out of the area of the broad issues.

Labor and the Environmental Movement in the Bay Area: An Assessment

Jenkins: Labor had second thoughts about the Golden Gate National Recreational Area. Blacks who were involved said, "Who are the rangers going to be? Just white rangers?" We had the same problem with [San Francisco's] Golden Gate Park. For years it was a white park. I only lived ten, twelve, blocks away from there. It's only in the last fifteen years that the park is full of black youngsters, Asian youngsters, Latinos. It was at one time a white park. I mean, the minorities being comfortable in it was really something that's only come up in the last fifteen years. When I first lived around here, and I've lived around here for forty years, it was rare to see them. If they came in the park they'd come in in groups, so it was kind of self-protectiveness against the rest of the people in the park.

Now, all of that's changed, very substantially, especially with second generation minority kids and the civil rights struggle. I mean, the old ones [blacks] who came up from Mississippi, Louisiana, and the deep South, they said, "Be careful, don't go in their goddamn parks, and you'll stay away from trouble." And that's only been broken down by his [refers to Jim Preston, one of the interviewers] generation who said, "Screw you, I'll go wherever I want."

When it got to the job level, it didn't affect us particularly in longshore, my own union. We didn't have any conflict with the environmentalists. The teamsters didn't either. The unions that were most profoundly affected, that ran into collisions, were the building trades unions and the white collar city service unions who work on these projects. But fundamentally the conflict was not with all of the trade union movement.

Jenkins: When the environmentalists tried to pass the forty-foot height limit in San Francisco, the unions fought it. We said we had more open space in San Francisco than any city in America. We had the whole Presidio [Military Reservation, San Francisco] which is open space. We fought to get Fort Mason into the hands of the city as a recreational resource. There's a couple of other forts around the bay that are wonderful. If I ever were in the army, I sure would like to get assigned here. Fort Cronkhite [Military Reservation, Marin County] is another lovely place. So, that's our open space, and we've always fought against turning it over to private developers. As long as we had access, because all they'll do out there at the Presidio is make another Sunset [district, San Francisco] out of the place. So the labor movement's always been on the side of preserving those areas as they are.

And then we had the forty-foot limit already in effect from Van Ness Street up, and we never had any major concern about big buildings downtown, as long as they left open the air corridors and views. And then we insisted that each building put a plaza in, and that has been really accomplished.

Then there is the Yerba Buena which is a major project in the heart of the city. That again was divided; the building trades and the rest of the unions were concerned with it going ahead. Jobs were the major issue. The environmentalists opposed it and brought endless legal suits to stop any work until all the social questions were resolved. We agreed that we had to take the people that lived in those areas, mostly in small hotels, and give them relocation money and help them to move someplace else, to another available hotel. And if they're alcoholics or such, to help them and dry them out. As a matter of fact, there was an enormous amount of good social work involved, which is the way government should work. It was at that point that the environmentalists and the labor movement really collided most dramatically in this town.

A different example is when the state wanted to tear down the panhandle. It's a beautiful stretch of green; it's got about eleven hundred trees. It starts down there at Broderick [Street] and then runs into the [Golden Gate] park. They wanted to put a freeway underneath that, cover it, and then pour traffic out into the Golden Gate Bridge. That was a \$280 million project, with jobs involved. The labor movement joined with the environmentalists to halt the freeway, except the building trade.

Preston: Now, what you say is that the areas where labor and environmental groups have been able to cooperate are parks, recreational areas, and the areas where they have not been able to cooperate are in jobs, construction. Do you see a constructive role for environmental groups in working with labor in terms of construction and jobs? Can you discuss the role that they could play?

Jenkins: Well, I think the environmentalists play a constructive role up to a point. I don't want to negate their role. I think they have fought what they call the New Yorkization of San Francisco, you know, endless blocks of tall buildings (Manhattanization). And I think they are the ones partially responsible for the plazas and the lovely sculpture gardens and some of these other places downtown along with the Redevelopment Agency. But that had already become part of urban planning and architecture.

The environmentalists did play a role in stopping some aspects of the relocation of poor people. Third and Howard [the site of the Yerba Buena project] was thought of as--well, it is, primarily--an area for single older men and women. Whatever you think of the area, that is their environment. The Yerba Buena struggle served to produce more oppositionists; they came from all over to fight. We trained without realizing it, many of them to go on to fight other projects around California and the country. We were a school for community training in how to fight.

The environmentalist won and lost here. In many ways, because they kept the project from being built for fourteen years, they doubled the cost, and yet they won the idea that part of the area be a Tivoli Gardens. Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen [Denmark] is a twenty-eight acre area which is full of entertainment parks, restaurants, open spaces. The Tivoli Gardens idea was finally written into the bid agreement. That is a very rough area to be made into a Tivoli Garden. The area runs from Market Street between Third and Fourth Streets right down to the [Southern Pacific] railroad. It's deserted, small warehouses; it's the south of Market [Street] area. At one time it was all white Irish, and then black, then it became Chinese. Now the Chinese are more affluent and they're moving out. Then, it was Vietnamese and Filipinos, and Samoans are moving in.

It gets dark, and it closes up tight at 6:00 p.m. It's just a few blocks from the Tenderloin [district] at Sixth and Mission [Street] and runs south. But the people are not dangerous, they're poor and in despair. There are some people who drink a lot and are on the streets, many hustle you for a bottle of wine. They're not really dangerous; they aren't the strong young muggers. Nothing's going to happen except it is ugly. People are living in poverty, many families and kids. There are people lying on the street down there. That's a few streets away.

Now the business section has this enormous new white collar population which comes in partly from the suburbs, and they hope to make the Yerba Buena a light, evening-use area. Also they hope that the town people will bring their families down there. It

Jenkins: will be hard to do, especially when you have Marin [County] and Contra Costa [County] across the bay and Ghiradelli Square, Fisherman's Wharf, and Golden Gate Park [in San Francisco]. It is extremely complicated.

But around the issues of relocation in the Fillmore and the relocation of Third and Howard, and the forty-foot limit, and open space, is where the environmentalists made their greatest contribution. Although they were not alone in all that, however. Our union [ILWU] and others, for instance, have a big membership out in those areas. They lived out there. They participated in the struggle against aspects of redevelopment in these areas, as we did in the panhandle. I was the labor chairman of the committee [in the panhandle]; Susie Bierman was the woman who led the fight. We also told the redevelopers that we would stop the bulldozers in the neighborhood unless they changed their policy. So we won out. But the environmentalists weren't really very much with us at that point.

The environmental movements in San Francisco were also joined by a lot of young community radicals, young blacks, Catholic Social Services, black churches, and Mission [district] Latino leaders. Then afterwards the environmentalists did come into the neighborhoods to give some help, but they were never in leadership there. The ILWU and other progressive unions helped. Twenty-eight hundred new houses were built in the Western Addition but the sponsorship changed. It became church sponsored.

Labor's Action League, which was a black trade union group, sponsored two projects. My union and our employers built three hundred units down there out of our union pension funds which is the best integrated project in America. After fifteen years, it's one-third black, one-third Asian, and one-third white, and it still has many people on a waiting list. It's still the best moderate-cost housing in the city. We're planning, hopefully, five hundred more units on the waterfront. So we were factors there.

But once we (the unions) won political leadership, then we said, we'll go ahead and do it. At that point the neighborhood coalitions continued the [Fillmore] fight. What they were fighting against, in some cases, was perfectly legitimate. Too much of an area had been torn down in the Fillmore. The idea that HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] would go on funding endlessly and that they'd keep financing low cost and subsidized apartments was wrong. We thought that a vital business section could be built in the Fillmore. But in the meanwhile, other areas had developed; other places had developed for shopping, and we found that the minorities just went downtown to shop. If you go downtown on a Saturday or Sunday, the stores are full of blacks,

Jenkins: Chinese, Filipinos shopping in the big stores downtown. So, how to bring back the economic life to Fillmore Street? It's been a long fight and some bad planning.

What's difficult about the environmental movement in San Francisco is that the urban changes here have really been brought about by political groups like my union, black organizations, young Japanese organizations--and also the mood changed. For instance, we built Japantown. The older Japanese were very proud of it; the new young Japanese-Americans said you're breaking up our community--all those beautiful apartments, the low-income subsidizing, the theatres. They said all that helps is the Japanese upper class which was nonsense. There was a group of young Japanese that fought us very strenuously on that. But finally the older Japanese prevailed, and what you see out there is now Japantown. Also the economic situation was that, one for one, they had a higher per capita income than their white counterparts and they [the new generation] had a higher degree of training and education than the older generation. Many of the newer generation really wanted to have a kind of community Japanese life.

We also had a lot of longshoremen and warehouse workers living out in the Fillmore and Hunters Point. They were living in old, run-down apartments and slum apartments because of discrimination. When the old Fillmore broke up, a lot of families were scared to move out. Some of them broke out and bought houses out in the Ingleside [district] or up here in the Haight-Asbury [district].

It broke up part of the unity of the ghetto, even though the churches remained there, and the funeral parlors. But the black longshoremen had 1/2 percent of the top black income in the country. There was no reason for them to live in the ghetto. But no movement had taken place to break down racist policies in housing. This forced whites, like myself, who were living in areas close to the ghetto, then to take up the fight. White progressives took up the fight in the Haight-Ashbury to integrate our area with success. The same thing happened in the Ingleside area. Pockets of black living remained--out in Hunters Point and in the Western Addition. These were some of the salutary effects.

In many cases, if you'd go to check out whose going to the Third Baptist Church on Sunday, they're coming in from San Mateo, Diamond Heights, etcetera. The church institutions tended to stay where they were, but the population had moved away. Willie Brown lives two blocks up the street on upper Masonic; Judge Derman lives around the corner on Clipper, and Washington Garner, the president of the San Francisco Police Commission, lives in the upper Haight. The churches play an important part in the life of the black community.

The Labor-Business Alliance

Walden: A lot of times the environmental regulations are considered to be excessive or unproductive regulations that drive industry away. Leonard Woodcock [president of the United Auto Workers] said that when industry threatened workers with loss of jobs and threatened to move out of the area when environmental regulations were imposed, this was "environmental blackmail," meaning that when those regulations are expensive for industry, they threaten to pack up and leave, and it's a threat that they can substantiate. Do you think industry should be subject to environmental protections, and who should bear the cost?

Jenkins: I know what Woodcock means; I'm sure in auto he's faced it, and other industries have faced it.

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Jenkins: I would say that's generally true. It's probably taken place most dramatically out on the West Coast in building the nuclear plants. For the construction and electrical trades it was a loss of work. It happened over in Contra Costa County when Dow Chemical tried to come in; this was on the planning boards for years. Then a whole number of environmentalists came. The anger against Dow Chemical came from a lot of younger people; it came from their role in the Vietnam war and Dow's manufacturing of napalm. The labor movement was furious at the environmentalists there in Contra Costa. Tony Cannata [of the Contra Costa Labor Council] and the rest of those guys went ape. Basically the building trades, the steel workers, etcetera, were furious. They wanted Dow Chemical and the work, and Dow's guarantees that they would not duplicate the Love Canal wastes and all that.

The environmentalists' lack of coordination with the labor movement on the Dow controversy, the lack of access to each other turned out to be disastrous. Because while they stopped Dow from building there, they then helped create an alliance between labor and business which continues. And that has taken place in many other places. So the labor movement, or sections of it, got along with an alliance which excludes the environmentalists.

We also have a state organization [the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance] headed by Mike Peevey, to which the unions give a certain amount of money and labor is on their board along with Bank of America, PT&T [Pacific Telephone and Telegraph], and PG&E. Peevey was formerly educational director for the California Federation of Labor. Then he went over to this job, recommended by the labor movement. This organization is for the AFL-CIO and for big business in this state, for their kind of conservation, their kind of environmentalism. Kathrine Dunlap is

Jenkins: the chairman; Tony Ramos is on the board [California State Council of Carpenters].* Bill Robinson from the Los Angeles Labor Council, and Bob Shelton--most of the big corporations are, one way or the other, affiliated.

Preston: Dave, can you follow up on that comment you made that, apparently, at least in Contra Costa County, the environmental movement could push labor and industry together to form a common front. Do you see a danger if that is done on a widespread basis?

Jenkins: Well, I do because essentially it represents the lowest common denominator of unity. Go down to the laborer's union hall, which is the best example of a mixed union, black, Chicano, Latino and white. They range from three thousand to six thousand members working. And these union halls are packed some days. Their main concern is whether they can get a job that week. So you raise a question of construction, and they say that "The employers are with us on this fellows, and let's go see the politicians together." That's a formidable alliance.

And the black membership get their black ministers involved. You know, half the ministers are working people anyway, these guys who come out of industry themselves. We have had two hundred black preachers on the waterfront. So we always had this connection between church and labor.

The environmentalists could not see that the job issue was overwhelming. Let me give you a current example. The rubber company, U.S. Goodyear, closed their plant down near Seaside [California]. A lot of blacks settled down there, and the biggest single plant was the Goodyear company. It was unionized [United Rubber Workers]. There were one thousand workers. It was not the most pleasant plant in the world to have in your community because of the smell of burnt rubber. It closed down one year ago. It's 80 percent black. Now what do black workers in the Monterey peninsula do outside of tourism and domestic work?

The blacks in Salinas and Seaside face the same conditions as we faced in Hawaii. Where do white, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino workers go when they close down and mechanize the plantations? At least there was tourism there. You take a guy who has worked on a plantation who was a key guy then suddenly he is picking up golf balls somewhere, or he is stuck in a galley. We happen to be able to absorb many of them. But we are a strong union, and we negotiated a severance pay for them. So, if they were there for thirty years, we got twelve to fifteen thousand dollars for them. Many of them wanted to, if they were older workers go back to Guam, Japan, or places like that.

*See the interview with Tony Ramos in this volume.

Jenkins: It happened also when packing houses closed down [beginning in 1960] in Chicago, which by that time were predominately black. The old workers--Polish, Russians--were only about a quarter of the work force; the average age was fifty. They got a small severance pay, so you could go into a business or a woman could open up a beauty parlor, or small business. Well, that worked up to a limited point, but in many cases they had to relocate. So they took their severance pay and worked wherever they could. Some got jobs, many couldn't and went on welfare. But they were really at fifty, fifty-five in the main on the unemployable pile.

Now, we had a joint committee that employers and the union [United Packing House Workers of America] set up, and [President] Clark Kerr of the university [University of California] was the impartial observer. Never did it do anything substantial. It helped some people. It tried but failed.

Take Youngstown and the environmental movement there. There were five thousand people working in the US Steel plant in Youngstown. For years they had allowed their equipment to deteriorate. For years they have polluted the Youngstown River. So the Environmental Protection Agency comes along and says that you are killing your workers; there has been all sorts of history of your workers dying from a variety of poisoning, and you got to clean it up. The company says, "To clean it up would cost \$20 to \$50 million. Screw it, we will transfer to a new plant in the South where we also have a chance of paying less in wages." So they move out of the so-called northern belt.

Youngstown steel workers tried to get together to put together a package where they will run the plant, and they'd tried that for two years now, and it's going down the drain; the government would not help. You read about what [Douglas] Fraser is doing to Chrysler now. He has to do it. First of all, the BS about the auto workers getting involved in the slogan of "Buy American." This is crazy, in a way, because American money is invested in Japan; it's invested in Germany, in Taiwan.

Fraser is caught, unfortunately. But if a union like Fraser's autoworkers, which has a big stake particularly in the Midwest, gets caught in this kind of BS, you know, "Buy American, buy Chrysler," what working stiff is going to buy Chrysler? If he figures it's going to go out of business in a year, where does he get his parts from? That kind of thing is a dead end.

The Amalgamated Clothing Worker's membership has been slashed by this foreign competition. Now, they know that American conglomerates are manufacturing women's and men's clothes. Levi Strauss [Company], you know their unisex clothes. You know that

Jenkins: part of Levi Strauss workers' pay goes up when the minimum wages goes up. This great philanthropic company. Sure they have got blacks and Mexicans, and for years they fought the dollar minimum wage. When the environmentalists want to build a park, Levi Strauss helps out. But a kind of cynicism arises among knowledgeable working people. If Levi Strauss is so generous, why don't they pay their workers decent wages?

Labor Leaders' Attitudes toward the Environmental Movement

Jenkins: There is a cynicism among labor leaders about the faces that appear in the environmental galaxy. The average business agent, union official, approximates his own membership. The idea that he suddenly comes up from being a longshoreman or a steel worker or stationary engineer and suddenly has the knowledge to understand all these issues is not true. What he knows is his own job conditions, his own environment. He usually reflects the philosophy of the workers. In some cases he is narrow. He is socially, on many issues backward--on race in many cases, on sexism. So you are expecting out of a group of typically educated American working people in the trade union movement advanced attitudes about saving the environment.

They are educable and, in many cases, they are fine, but in other cases they aren't. We have a hundred and forty-five thousand elected union officials in this state. They are a big group. If you go interview them on a variety of subjects you will find all sorts of positions. They react to the crime issue; they react to the race issue, and they have to be taught by progressive elements within their own union and society. The one thing they are clear on is the need for decent wages and full employment. Much of this creeps over into attitudes that tend to make them characterize the environmentalist as posy pushers, and tend to make them negate some aspects of the environmentalist philosophy. And the Sierra Club, God bless them, and the Defenders of Wildlife sometimes do things without attempting to create an understanding. And labor does it too.

Preston: That's an excellent point you brought up, Dave, about the attitudes of labor leaders. If that is so, are you saying that the environmentalist must first prove to the labor leader that he is interested in his people and their welfare and jobs?

Jenkins: Yes. That's what our problem is. A guy comes into a job, and he is a sheet metal worker. He doesn't see a building; he sees a hundred and twenty sheet metal workers, and he sees sixteen bucks

Jenkins: an hour. Now, if the same guy comes along, and he sees that he can build a new environmental building, a solar building with sheet metal workers, then he is for solar energy. He is by nature a progressive.

Our union was once all white; now it's 50 to 60 percent black with black leadership at every level. The boss is black, and love him or not love him, no one would think of challenging him. Because we had blacks to come up from Mississippi and Louisiana whose fathers have been longshoremen for two hundred years. They knew about longshore work, and many have been bosses in many cases down South. They were not peons. They rolled cotton on a time-piece basis. I used to hate to roll cotton. They could make that stuff bounce all over the hatch. Jesus, they were beautiful. I was with an all black gang for two years, and we used to get cotton. And these guys loved cotton. They worked it on a piece basis and used to make a hundred dollars a night down in New Orleans. The white workers who objected on a racist basis to them coming in changed once they saw what good workers they were.

Their language was a new language, the m.f.'s, mammy jammer, whole new curse words. In two years the white workers were using the same words. If you sat in the back of a hatch and wondered who was saying that m.f. boss, that m.f. hatch, that m.f. house, you would be hard put to identify who was it, a black or white worker. It was true culturally about the drinking places, the eating places, the social places, the gambling places; they all became integrated.

The environmental movement has got to learn that as a movement by itself, it does not have the political weight. And labor doesn't either. That's the arrogance of the labor movement. That has to be a thing of the past. The [Ronald] Reagan victory [in the 1980 presidential election] makes it especially necessary, although we did well in northern California. We strengthened our position in the California legislature. We got beat on Reagan, except in the northern counties where we have labor and environmental strength. There are terrible constrictions in this thing. The environmentalist and labor people have to master that.

Some of the unions under any circumstances perceive the environmentalist as dangerous. When the Operating Engineers see them fighting the building of a freeway or the Peripheral Canal, they see it as so many units of work. For the Operating Engineers, the canal is a five-year project. It's a lot of dough and jobs for their members, and it's hard to say to Dale Marr, who is a decent guy, "You're crazy. The Peripheral Canal will rob the north of its water. It will exhaust our industries. There is all sorts of work to do in the south." So there will always be trade unions outside, and I don't see any answers.

Jenkins: But there are whole sections of unions, my own, the Service Employees Union, UAW, Transport Workers, a considerable section of Teamsters and Lady Garment Workers, and Hospital Workers who often side with the environmentalists. We've split on these issues before, and we continue to split. The state AFL fought the Coastal Commission and four hundred thousand of us supported the Coastal Commission. Some of us were for BCBC, and some fought BCBC. The ILWU was for that, in spite of the fact that some unions were against it. On the question of nuclear energy it was the same split. But many of the environmentalists are counsels for the big corporations. They are the labor relations guys for the employers. One of my best friends, Dwight Steele, is a magnificent environmentalist, but he is also a management representative for the shipowners.

Possibilities for a Labor-Environmentalist Coalition

Walden: You have said that a coalition of labor and environmentalist is politically necessary for progressive action along certain lines. Can you sum up by saying what issue, locally or in the state or region, might most benefit by that kind of progressive coalition?

Jenkins: Well, one project comes to mind which we did with the environmentalists support, and that was the beautification of Market Street, which was a \$35 million project to repave all of Market Street, clean it out, and beautify the street. They made a couple of plazas where people could sit and generally made the area more attractive. I think there are all kinds of projects like the Golden Gate Park which are crucial to the life of the people. Golden Gate Park is now the property of the whole city and is behind \$20 million due to cutbacks in national funding.

The Yerba Buena project we are now working together on. Yerba Buena is going to be built, and the other twenty-nine construction projects in this town must provide some employment among black and white youths. They are not kids anymore; many are heads of families, young men, who are really permanently unemployed in this system. That looms also as a good fight.

The environmental-labor thing has to include the question of jobs, and it has to be sensitive to the inclusion of blacks and other minorities in the work force. Unemployment adds to the problem of crime and the drug thing and everything else that goes along with it. I think that major sections of the labor movement is up to this. I think that the environmental movement politically has to expand its horizons. Winning Alaska was a great victory.

Jenkins: The average American does not care about the tundra in Alaska or the great Kodiak bear. I shipped to Alaska. I have also seen hungry Eskimos in the port cities, Juneau, Ketchikan, Seward, and I have seen the destruction of their culture—that has to be our mutual concern.

The labor movement has to understand that the environmental movement has a diverse leadership just like labor. Labor is willing to fight with them. That is equally true on the nuclear issue. But what has not been clear to us is whether alternative energy positions can work in industry.

I ran the 1971 and 1977 conferences where we discussed all of this, and you start to get a sense of the thing. And you get labor people wondering what are the differences, once you talk to the enemy, so to speak. If you look at the Sierra Club leadership, you see a club of one hundred and eighty thousand people, and the leadership has to be broadened.

Preston: That is a question I wanted to ask you. Can the priorities of the environmental movement become closer to those of the labor movement without a change in membership of the environmental movement?

Jenkins: We have got to find ways of making that happen. We had dinner the other night with the editor of the Sierra Club magazine and these were the issues that we were talking about. And they agree. Environmentalists are troubled about their isolation. They have brought in one hundred thousand new people.

I was just in a campaign in Oregon. The Sierra Club, Friends of Animals, and Greenpeace had put an issue on the [Oregon] ballot to prohibit trapping in Oregon, asserting that the use of the trap was cruel. It so happens that 57 percent of the fur coats in America are made with wild skins. It's one of the biggest industries in Louisiana. In Ohio, there are fifty thousand trappers, crazy as it sounds. There are thousands of trappers for an industry of forty thousand workers working on skins. I was sent up to Oregon by the Fur and Leather Workers Union and the American fur industry, and we fought it. What was our coalition? Our coalition was cattlemen, ranchers, and the lumber industry and lumber workers, retail clerks, teamsters, merchants.

Beavers destroy 12 percent of the new sapplings. The trappers were concerned about it because this was their livelihood. The sheepmen lose fifty thousand sheep to coyotes every year. And the environmentalists say, "Well, you can electrify your places." They said the ranchers could put up electric fences or do other things, none of them practical.

Jenkins: Well, we beat them 63 percent to 37 percent in the state vote. We spent \$325,000 on that ballot issue. That was irrelevant and wasteful. And the environmentalists spent a lot of money. They spent an equal amount. They got big full page ads with a big collie dog caught in a trap. So everybody loves collie dogs. Then they ran stuff on the Canadian seals. Well, the fur industry has not touched Canadian seals in ten years, and we don't work on endangered species.

It so happens that the industry back east, the fur and leather industry, is fully integrated. All of the machine shops also have women working in it at good pay. And we just put many new apprentices, black and Puerto Rican, on the job. We said, "Why are we wasting our time on an issue like this? This is a legislative issue. If there are endangered species, if there are alternative trapping processes that make sense, fine. But we've experimented with five hundred traps." The trap used in Oregon and around the world snares and keeps them there, and sometimes the animal in desperation tries to pull it away. Well, the black community in Oregon doesn't know what you are talking about. Most of them come from the South where they trapped as a necessity and as a recreation. Fishing and trapping is natural to blacks' economy and culture. So in the black community in Portland, we had 97 percent of the vote.

It's crazy; they have a lobby here to try to prevent the trapping of bobcoats or coyote. Our union happens to have a fishing membership in San Diego. When union members go out, they do net catching, and they catch dolphins. They have done it for years. Americans don't eat dolphins, the Japanese do. The union guys cast them out. Well, they kill them. The dolphins swim higher than fish, so when the fish first pass our guys struck twenty-eight hundred fish. Then they said they couldn't keep from catching dolphin; there was no way they could do it. Well, we've got to compromise. The environmentalist were right to raise the issue, but the move to prohibit without consultation with us to find out what kind of solution we could arrive on, was crazy.

I went up to the legislature yesterday—I go up about once every two weeks to see what's on the books. They have passed an animal bill of rights that animals have the same rights as human beings. The new resolution raises the question of immortality. Maybe you might come back as a bobcat, I don't know. Farmers and a lot of other people think these people are out of their minds. A woman who is their main lobbyist half owns the Oakland Raiders [professional football team]. She is a tough woman, and they have a lot of money. They raise an enormous amount of money from ladies from the suburbs. They make you feel like murders when you kill an animal. Why don't you use plastic furs? Well, we say plastic furs cause pollution, and people don't want to buy them anyway.

Jenkins: The fur industry has gone up from \$200 million to \$800 million in sales in the last seven years. If you were to go out and buy a wool coat, it would cost you anywhere from \$500 to \$800. So you buy a \$3000 fur coat or a beaver which will last you twenty-two years and never goes out of style. Well, in cold climates, the Norwegians have a magnificent industry; the West Germans have [also], and the Russians' market is the largest fur market in skins in the world. They raise \$5 million a year on full page ads.

Now, we're not responsible if you're a hunter, and you go out off season, and you want to shoot one of the endangered species like the mountain cats or leopards. We don't have control over it. This is a generation that has zoomed in on the environmental movement. You can stop a whale from getting killed; you can try and stop a seal from being slaughtered; you can stop the manifest brutality of man in his pursuit of hunting and fishing, much of it is no longer needed. But the environmentalists do not object to us raising animals or furs on farms. I would think that if you are against killing animals, why not be against the killing of those that you raised? The fact that we kill ninety-five million turkeys a year does not get to me as an animal. And then there are a whole group of people who are against killing an animal for their skin, and the environmental movement will not disassociate itself from these people. They will either support it, or mildly say that there is nothing we can do; they are part of our coalition. It is most contradictory because tanneries make articles of dress. They deal with the nature of what we wear and what we eat.

So I think that there are gigantic areas that labor and environmentalists can unite about. Protected coasts, pollution, keeping open spaces, recreation and parks, the question of energy-- all of those are in the cards. There has to be a thoughtful approach by the environmentalist on these issues. They are no longer in a position to say regardless of jobs, regardless of anything else, we are going to do this; we are going to save the continent. That is no longer the issue. The issue really is whether we can put together a coalition that can stop those who want to strip all of the West, regardless of consequences, want to put the Indians out, destroy their homes. And I think those are the issues. In order to do that you have got to attack big business. You got to deal with these same oil companies that want to rip off all of Nevada, and all of the Southwest. These are the same companies that have ripped off the whole Middle East.

At some point the environmentalists have got to say to the labor movement, "We understand your concerns." You must have some backup and understanding and historical regard for the labor movement in order to fight what big business is doing. If this is not done, then you are just lost. You can't forget the history of labor of women and of blacks. You can't just start from scratch; you can't do that.

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Sierra Club Oral History Project

Amy Meyer

PRESERVING BAY AREA PARKLANDS

An Interview Conducted by
Galen R. Fisher

Sierra Club History Committee
1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

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Galen R Fisher
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Galen R. Fisher
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Berkeley CA 94705
Name and address of Interviewer

Overall concern = relationship between
environmental movement and organized
labor. Main topics: Her role from 1970 on
in the creation and shaping of the Golden Gate
National Recreation Area (GG-NRA). Her trip to Soviet Union in 1978 sponsored by Trade unions
and with a group of labor leaders.

6 Feb 1981
Dated

Subject of Interview(s)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Amy Meyer was born October 2, 1933, in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up there. She attended the Brooklyn Ethical Culture School and Midwood High School. Her parents were both in the legal profession, her father as a lawyer, and her mother as a legal secretary.

Her higher education brought a B.A. from Oberlin College, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from the California School of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. In various ways she has performed as teacher and lecturer in the fields of art and conservation.

Among her public roles are the following: vice-president, San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission; vice-chairman, Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) Advisory Commission; cochairman, People For a Golden Gate National Recreation Area ("Piffgunnura"); board member, SPUR (San Francisco Planning and Research Association); and member of Marin Conservation League, People for Open Space, and Point Reyes Bird Observatory.

Amy Meyer was interviewed on February 6, 1981, at her home in San Francisco as part of the Sierra Club's oral history project. Hers was one of a series of interviews, sponsored by the Sierra Club History Committee and conducted by University of California graduate students, which explored the relationship between the labor movement and the environmental movement in the Bay Area. Mrs. Meyer, an active Sierra Club leader, was selected as an interviewee because of her work with labor leaders and her concern with urban environmental issues.

Galen R. Fisher
Interviewer

July 1981
Berkeley, California

I ESTABLISHING THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

[Date of Interview: February 6, 1981]##

Piffgunnura

Fisher: The History Committee of the Sierra Club is interested in the relationship between organized labor and the environmentalist movement. Would it make sense if you told, to the extent that you think it's relevant, what your background is?

Meyer: Sure. I come from New York City. I moved to California some twenty-six years ago, and have lived in San Francisco for perhaps twenty-four years. I became active in the Sierra Club in about 1970. I'd been a member starting in 1966, and originally came in through the white water section, which is the kayakers, and became more interested in hiking, went on some Sierra Club hikes as a result of working on the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. What happened was that in 1970 a group of people who were almost entirely Sierra Club-based began the formation of an organization called People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area, or "Piffgunnura." This was in response to knowing that there were studies underway under the BOR, which is now called the HCRS, the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

Fisher: What is BOR?

Meyer: BOR used to be the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, except that it has a new name now. They had been studying fourteen areas in the United States for a proposal that was called "Parks to the People Where the People Are." It was a Nixon proposal. The Gateway National Recreation Area in New York was the first area to be

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 33.

Meyer: studied, and this one appears to have been the second. And since then others have been studied and become parks such as Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area in Ohio, Santa Monica Mountains NRA in Southern California, Jean Lafitte near New Orleans, Chattahoochee in Georgia, and there have been a number of others. So we were part of a movement at a time when if you colored almost anything on a map in this part of California green, and said to the people, "You ought to float a bond issue or support legislation for its establishment as parkland," from about 1968 to 1974, it's my opinion you could have gotten almost anything turned into a park.

The organization was under the leadership of Dr. Edgar Wayburn, longtime president of the Sierra Club, member of the Sierra Club board, and I'm the co-chairman. Ed was and is the theoretician, and I'm the nuts-and-bolts and the spider web of the organization. In other words, I do all the day-to-day work, and he keeps me out of trouble. With us we've had perhaps over the years some twenty or twenty-five people, largely middle-class, upper middle-class professional people--lawyers, doctors, teachers, and the like--whose interests come from their work or their avocations. We have a lawyer who worked with us for years whose avocation was transit, transportation. These people would pursue various aspects of work having to do with the park.

The organization was actually formed in January 1971. The park was established on October 27, 1972, which makes it, for a park of 35,000 acres, easily the shortest run legislative process that anyone has ever run into. And we were tremendously lucky. It was one of these things that just moved. It was like having a tiger by the tail, and we simply held onto the tail and kept going.

Now in the course of this, the idea was to have as many people, individuals, organizations as possible form a coalition. In fact, Piffgunnurra was referred to as a coalition of conservation and civic-minded organizations and individuals working together to establish the GGNRA [Golden Gate National Recreation Area]. Since then we still use that term, and in the course of events some sixty-five or seventy organizations signed on with us. Now many of these organizations are of the kind you would expect to have in any event of the conservation battle--the Contra Costa Hills Club, the Marin Conservation League--organizations with names like those. On the other hand, there were a few other organizations and individuals--we tried to hit as broad a range as possible. These were the Apartment House Owners' Association, the Committee for Better Parks and Recreation for Chinatown, which is the only organization of its kind I know about, and we attempted to reach some labor people.

Role of Labor: Passive Acceptance

Meyer: The role of labor in this was always one of passive acceptance, acquiescence. The only labor man I have ever met who was actively involved in the conservation movement--and I've only met him to say hello to him--is Walter Johnson, who's been on the board of the Nature Conservancy, was active in the Retail Clerks, is a leading man in the Retail Clerks Union in San Francisco. But other than that, the people who signed on with us simply did so because we had the right collection of names in our stationery, and if that becomes important I will go and get a piece of stationery--the early stationery--and read it off. I meant to get it for you and didn't pull it out this morning. A few names that you will find there were labor names.* The organization of the park was not perceived as threatening to labor interests. Because the primary view--and this precedes the thrust of the gasoline shortage, precedes Prop Thirteen, this is all before the big strains that we've been feeling in the past five years--is that this park would provide opportunities for people close to home, people who don't have the money or time to travel long distances. What we could say to anyone who asked us, "Who is this park for? Isn't this just a bunch of upper middle-class people running around enjoying themselves?"

First of all, the congressman who carried the legislation that was prepared, was Phillip Burton. Though at the moment he's best known for his conservation work and the fact that he has done more to turn land into parks than any congressman ever in the history of the United States, Phil's other major interests are labor and education. And in fact he has just stopped being the chairman of the Subcommittee on Parks of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

[interruption]

Meyer: And now instead Congressman Phillip Burton has become the chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations, probably the most influential labor panel in the House. The work he has done has always had labor-aware overtones. For example, (other Sierra Club people can tell you more about this) the whole enlargement of Redwood National Park included job retraining and payments for people whose jobs would be lost, and this was Phil's doing in order to get the enlargement of Redwood National Park through.

So we have never been, none of the work I have ever done, has been alienated from the labor movement. But it has not been in very close quarters with people from the labor movement. And the reason

*See Appendix, p.34.

Meyer: appears to have been, phrased by reporters and those who knew our organization, "Well, it's just that most of you have a little more time and money than other people and labor and minority people (whom we tended to lump together). Really their first interests tend to be elsewhere, like getting the proper wages and hours for their workers, or, in the case of minority people, first of all food, clothing and shelter."

To some--the proposal to take a third of Marin County and turn it into parkland (only it was about a sixth of it--we were adding onto Point Reyes), and to take city parkland away from the city and put it under federal management is really only understood by people who have enough leisure time to know that the city was having trouble managing its parklands, and even that early the symptoms were showing, and that the Marin County lands were in danger of being lost to development, golf courses, marinas, that natural habitat was being destroyed, and that ultimately ranching would be driven out. This is not the kind of thing that the average laboring person or minority or inner city person deals with and works with. It is usually the concern of the upper middle class.

But the joke used to be that the people from John Burton's district, which is the district that represents much of the northwestern part of San Francisco and all of Marin County--that's Congressman John Burton, who is Phil's brother--the joke was that "the people from John Burton's district got the park, and the people from Phil Burton's district will use it."* Because Phil represents the eastern part of San Francisco and the more laboring class portions of the city that are generally in the southern and western parts of the city. Eastern, southeastern, and to some extent the western part of San Francisco, which simply is a poor district. This hasn't always proved to be true since we, of course, now have a gas shortage and grave dislocations of inflation, but the use of this parkland, no one could have predicted in 1972 or '74 that usage which was fragmentary and not really recorded but the most you could have said would be a million or two people in all the GGNRA, Point Reyes in those years, and maybe you throw in another million for Muir Woods since it's a national and international tourist attraction that--I heard these figures the other day: It is the understanding of the Public Information Office of the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service that the visitation in these parks in this last year was twenty million people, the highest visitation in the United States and probably some incredible percentage of the total visitation to all national parks. It was 10 percent of the total visitation to all national parks in this

*This was said by an aide of Phil Burton's.--A.M.

Meyer: country. And the people who are visiting are by no means confined to the upper middle class or the upper class, but here we have this incredibly accessible parkland that the average laboring person--anybody--can get to, on a bus, in many cases.

Fisher: When you speak of use of the park--do these statistics reveal what part of the park that most people visit or use?

Meyer: Yes. You would find out that much of it is superficial visitation, that is, Alcatraz, Muir Woods, Fort Mason, and the Conzelman Road Overlook in the Marin Headlands. There's an awful lot of it that goes there, and the Cliff House and its area. You do have to say that a good percentage of it goes there--that's the only contact that these people will have with the park. It will be limited, but it's there. A lot of it, though, is hiking, and groups hiking, and the nature education, and all kinds of other things. And that's much more distributed over the entire park area.

The labor movement never said, no one in the labor movement ever said to us during the whole campaign, "You're taking away jobs; you're going to prevent construction; you're going to prevent the development of freeways or marinas or anything." No one seemed to get that feeling. This can be attributed to a number of different things. One is the publicity for this park. By the decision of the people who are the steering committee of Piffgunnura, the publicity was kept at an absolute minimum. We did very little with the newspapers. We did do a lot of speech making and slide showing, and we did get sixty-five to seventy endorsing organizations. But we did it on a one-to-one basis, or a one-to-thirty basis, or a one-to-five hundred basis, and not on the basis of mass publicity, because that can be pretty difficult. It can backfire. That was one aspect of it.

The other was, I don't think most people know that much about west Marin, or didn't at that time. And I guess I'll use myself as the example because everybody finds it very funny. When told by a couple of young men from Marin County that our proposal for the GGNRA ought to include the Olema Valley, I am the one who said, "Where is the Olema Valley?" I'd never heard of it. Today of course, I know the Olema Valley quite well. But there's a piece of land that was lying between, that lies between, the Marin Municipal Water District and Point Reyes National Seashore. And it includes a section of the Bolinas Ridge, and the Olema Valley below runs from Bolinas Lagoon to Olema. It's about ten, ten and a half miles long. It's just not that well known. It's quite remote from transportation.

There are several other reasons why this park didn't have that much trouble. It was located largely in the fog zone, and also where transportation access by automobile was tortuous. Getting around on Highway 1 is very difficult and Marin County had its feet down absolutely against the widening of Highway 1.

Meyer: But in all of this, a lot of it is focused in Marin County which is a relatively wealthy, more privileged county. You did not hear people screaming to have Highway 1 widened. In fact you had just the opposite, in the unanimous vote of the board of supervisors sometime in the, probably 1974, to absolutely forbid the widening ever of Highway 1, in that county--a very conservative point of view toward opening this area for development in any way.

There was also none of the fighting that occurred over Point Reyes, where speculators moved in on the land while it was waiting to be purchased, and raised the prices. None of that happened in this area. This land is now 99 percent purchased and what isn't purchased is tiny little problems. But the land was purchased effectively, economically, and without the speculators getting in. It was a very, very lucky job.

During none of this did anyone hear anything from labor movement people except "It sounds OK to me," or "It's all right." The feeling was--always the message taken to any group that would have a group of laboring people in it--people you would call working stiff--would be "You're going to benefit more than anybody from this park, because it's going to be accessible to you; it's going to be free; it's going to be easy to get to." It is a maxim that was developed by a man in the Sierra Club named Peter Borelli, who used to be in the New York office (I don't know Peter Porelli--I've never seen him), but he said, "If you're going to bring parks to the people, you've got to bring people to the parks." This was the reason why the park legislation contains the language for a transportation study, which was one of the first things that was done with the effort to try out and to make use of public transit which is infinitely cheaper than everyone taking their own auto, and to see what parts of the park effective public transit could be brought to.

Notable success has been in the Marin Headlands, and also there were some experiments done with transportation for seniors using Golden Gate Transit buses that were idle in the middle of the day. Whether that could be continued under Prop Thirteen is very questionable. I have heard nothing about that in recent times. But the transportation in the summer by Muni--San Francisco Muni--to the Headlands for a dollar round trip--where do you get a better bargain? And the ability to take a San Francisco bus to many parts of the park, and the ability to take a Golden Gate Transit bus to many of the other parts of the park--well, not always time-efficient--buses are not the most time-efficient form of transportation, and the park, with very few exceptions, most of the body of the park is not accessible by water. We did try the idea of ocean-going ferries, but it's just an impractical idea, ranging from seasickness to cost.

Meyer: The idea was to try to get people on public transit, and that again should appeal in the long run to people whose means are for some reason or another limited. There's a tremendous chunk of the city of San Francisco, a tremendous number of people, who do not own automobiles. It's not something that most of the more suburban types realize. And of course it's true when you get to cities like New York.

So that's my background, in terms of how I got to this.

A Unique Situation in Marin County

Meyer: I will add this. One of the major reasons we never got into difficulty with the labor union movement over the GGNRA was that half of the land involved was already in public hands. Nobody argues about old Army land or parklands which are changing administrations. But half the land was not, and much of it was ripe for development. However, we did not go into subdivided areas. We did not go into areas where people were just about ready to build homes. There has been the absolute minimum of going into areas which would stir up people who really counted on doing something, had made their pitch for a piece of the American Dream, and were about to be done out of it. There have been a couple of times when we had to do it in order to tie pieces of land together where some little funny inroad had been made, or we had to come in close to a community. But we successfully avoided, I'd say, all kinds of difficulties that way.

But we did get too close to the town of Stinson Beach. We essentially put a very tight noose around the town of Stinson Beach. We managed to miss a ten-acre parcel that no one had any thoughts of developing. And we picked up forty acres where we knew people were subdividing, and we knew it was going to be strung out along Panoramic Highway, and we knew it wasn't smart. We had to give those up in 1974--the forty acres and some bits of other land. Essentially, though, a very large amount of other land--like seven hundred acres--was traded for those forty, because we couldn't hold that, and we did not want to. We didn't feel it wise past a certain point to fight the local people, because if you do it you get the whole movement into trouble.

But of course we had a unique situation: we were not dealing with an area that had been previously subdivided. We were dealing with still the original ranches, and in many cases the ranches were in the hands of the original owners. Not all of them--some of them had to be persuaded--but most of the time we were hitting active ranches, working ranches, or people who sensed that the turn around

Meyer: the corner was not the one they wanted to take. That is, if things were going for development that wasn't the way grandpa or grandma would have liked it, and the present owners thought the land should stay as it is. You still have that ethic.

San Mateo County Contrasts with Marin

Meyer: Now, by contrast, in 1975, having been tremendously successful in Marin County, and having made a decision in 1971 that we would not go into San Mateo County, because the thought was that Marin County was easier. It was ready for this, it was begging for it, whereas San Mateo County really wasn't; we didn't get that feeling. There was not a sufficiently coherent, well-developed movement in San Mateo County. There were some individuals who saw that San Mateo County was in trouble. San Mateo County is much bigger, much wider, much longer, larger, has a much bigger population, is much more difficult to work with. Also, it doesn't divide up quite so cleanly and neatly. That is, the whole population of west Marin, from Muir Beach to Point Reyes Station is probably not in excess of four thousand people, even today. And at that time it was probably two thousand. And I suspect both of those figures are high, whereas in any given town on the San Mateo County coast like Montara you would get into a population of perhaps four thousand, seven thousand. I really don't know the figure, but I do happen to know the population of Pacifica is thirty-nine thousand.

So you're dealing with much bigger quantities of people who are much more divisive right in the park area, and it was harder to deal with. And there was also not the same congressional support. The late Congressman Leo Ryan just didn't give the same kind of support, and he also happened not to be a cohort of Phillip Burton, and that didn't help either. So we had a different situation in Marin. We went for the Marin situation.

In 1975 people down over the county line--the south county line--decided they wanted some attention, and that there were things to do. I happened to luck out in having under my supervision a graduate student from Goddard College, one of these "colleges without walls" situations. A graduate student. Goddard is in Vermont, but he was doing this on his own out here using their office here.

Fisher: What office is that?

Meyer: They have a field office here. I do not know if it still exists, but they were giving out graduate degrees on a kind of independent studies program basis, and I inherited him. As it happens I inherited

Meyer: him from Claire Dedrick when Dedrick went off to become a secretary of Resources under Governor Brown. She essentially gave me this graduate student [asking that] I please take over supervision since I obviously knew something about what he wanted to do. And what he wanted to do, as it turned out, was to start to map the whole San Mateo County, its open space. It was just a perfect thing. We just got going.

We formed an organization down there which was essentially the San Mateo County regional group of People For a GGNRA. But the realtors down there--we made several mistakes. First of all, the thing was not being operated from inside the county, which in that county was not going to work. And the crucial issue was that we printed up, unlike what we had (we learned it in the North; we should have stuck to it, and didn't), we printed up a fairly easily-read fancy piece of literature--it was bright green paper instead of a kind of a piece of old mimeograph paper, and it was printed instead of mimeographed, so that the people looked at it and said, "This may be something real." We also had the former success in Marin, so they knew we were for real, and it scared the wits out of all the realtors in San Mateo County. And they proceeded to form the People Against a GGNRA, and it took until 1980 for Phil Burton to get Sweeney Ridge in Pacifica into the park. We have a start down there; we have a toehold down there now, but it's only within the last two months. And it almost has no right to exist. How it ever got through is really a small miracle, because the Congress was not nearly so generous about starting parks in California in 1980, or even extending them, as they had been in 1975.

Fisher: Did the realtors try to get labor on their side?

Meyer: This is what I don't know, and the person to ask is a woman named Marlene Sarnat down the Peninsula. I was hoping to get to her and have not. But she would know. I do not recall anything specific about labor. What I do remember was that we hit people who had saved all of their lives to buy ten acres, or forty acres. The ranches were already in some cases subdivided. If they had been four thousand acres they were now in four hundred acre parcels, and if it was a thousand acres they were in hundred acres, or they were in ten acre parcels. It was forty, ten acres--these were the quantities.

And I got a couple of very bitter, nasty phone calls from people. One was a retired military person; one of them I have no idea what he did. But these people had saved all of their lives, and we were going to come along and drive them out. This was not going to go down. This was particularly in the La Honda area, where the feelings ran very high. So the work that has to be done

Meyer: down there once again: It's become more indigenous. The people down there who are in San Mateo County have led the fight. I work with them but I work with them on the basis of they call me--I don't call them. That works out pretty well. Almost all the parkland is in Marin County but this organization operated from this house in San Francisco. Most of the board members were San Francisco people. Marin County didn't mind that at all.

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Meyer: Part of it has to do with the composition of Marin County. Marin County is a relatively more privileged county in terms of its population. People there did understand what was going on, and the roots of much of the move for keeping open space. Many of the people who use Marin County's lands come from San Francisco. In other words, it's much more traditional for people from Berkeley and San Francisco to take vacations in Inverness and Stinson Beach and hike in Mount Tam. They don't go down the Peninsula to San Mateo County; they go north.

The connections between this county and south of us are really different; they are not the same. We aren't even in the same coastal zone. The California Coastal Commission zone line cuts at the San Francisco border. They're in the South Central Zone, and we're in the North Central Zone, with Marin. So that's part of the problem. Also there is not the tradition in San Mateo County of preserving open space. The fight to save San Bruno Mountain, unlike Mount Tam, has been a late fight, very difficult, very expensive, and still being fought. With Mount Tam they started to preserve it at the turn of the century. The redwoods helped.

There is the Save-the-Redwoods League down the Peninsula. One of the oldest parks in the state, if not the oldest, is Big Basin Redwoods. But that's quite far south. The environmentalist ethic hasn't penetrated quite the same way there. I think this is changing radically in San Mateo County today because there's the recognition of parklands close to home. The Sweeney Ridge Bill did get through. And the feeling of discomfort, I would say, is lessening. In other words, what I think went wrong in 1975 was as much mishandling as anything else. You have to handle the situation with some sensitivity, and we didn't have quite the right people to do it. I wasn't the right one, and there were several other people who just weren't quite correctly attuned to what was going on down there. And the situation was too far gone in some places. That had to be reckoned with. But I did not hear at that time--I personally did not hear squawks from the labor movement as such. The realtors wanted to divide the land; the implication was they wanted building on the land. But I don't recall any union organization getting up and screaming, "We don't want parkland." Maybe it was too remote; I don't know.

Park Service Hearings on the Park Plan

Fisher: I guess I did ask you over the telephone briefly whether there was anything terribly relevant that came out of these workshops of about 1976, and hearings, I guess of 1977, but apparently not.

Meyer: Well, not as to relates to the labor movement. This is the same kind of problem that we encountered with the legislation. The Park Service made a strenuous effort to go out to about 135 groups and organizations that they felt would not naturally come to them. They scheduled meetings from Hunters Point to Novato to find out what people wanted in this new national park. They didn't go particularly to the conservation organizations, because they knew those groups would show up on schedule.

They would go to the community groups with that interviewing technique for groups that has become fairly standardized: you put great big sheets of white paper on the wall; you take big Magic Markers, and you ask people what they want in the park. You describe your park--you show a slide show, and then you have responses--you write these all down on the wall on the white paper. Then you type these out and send them back to the group and say, "This is what we think you said. Please correct." They would send it back, and so they would have an idea of what people said they wanted.

These are the groups who never appeared at the hearings. These are the people whom you had to go out to and bring them the information. You got the raw material from the workshops, and you feed that in. Some of the ideas were a little too development-oriented for a national park, or for the monies that would be available for development. Some of them seemed to be--I heard one meeting in Novato; I heard one meeting on Potrero Hill. The people who came tended to be people who were interested in the out-of-doors. It had a way of forming a bias. I did not go to some meeting in, say, a neighborhood meeting in Hunters Point which might have given me a slightly different view.

But when we got all through with this, and the eventual plan came out, the plan was still based, the way any good park plan should be, which was on what does the land have, what is the land resource? That included the climate, the erosion qualities, the transportation system, all the resource base. The park's development proposal, or use plan, basically grows out of the resource base. These communities did contribute ideas. They did not show up at the final hearings. They're just not the kind of groups that do, and labor was absolutely absent.

Fisher: Do you foresee any reasons for greater clash in the future as retrenchment sets in, as money gets tighter?

Mayer: Do you mean as per Reagan's speech, say, of last night? He says we're going to pull government back.

Fisher: Well, I suppose it could affect public transportation, for example.

Meyer: Sure,

Fisher: Is there going to be a problem there, because as you were saying the inner city people would need to depend on public transportation? Is that going to be there to realize this ideal of bringing the people to the park?

Meyer: I think that we're headed for less money altogether in the public sphere. So you're going to have competition for that money. When you come to something like public transit you're going to find a tremendous opportunity for alliance among the inner city labor and conservation.

II WITH AMERICAN TRADE UNIONISTS IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1977

Environmentalists and Labor Leaders: A Convergence of Concerns##

Meyer: I was specifically sent to Russia as part of what was billed as a trade union exchange, though in fact it was a one-way street. That is, Dave Jenkins--long active in the Redevelopment Agency, and a union man from way back, and whose background I'm not that familiar with--put together over a six-year period three trips to Russia, I guess over a five-year period, did it every other year, and eventually this gave out because of some recent aspects of the Cold War. It was supposed to be an exchange. The Russians only sent back one delegation with three trade unionists and a translator. Part of the problem was that George Meany of the AFL-CIO said that as long as they made life difficult for Jews in Russia and would not allow emigration of Jews, as long as they continued their hardline practices, he didn't want them here, in addition to which, from the labor point of view, it was importation of Communism, and so they didn't want these people here. We were harder on this end than the Russians were about taking us over there.

So I spent two weeks with a group of labor union people in the Soviet Union where I had a chance to sort of see them on their own, on their terms, visiting things that were of more interest to them. There were four of us who were nonunion people. One was from the San Francisco Board of Education, one was the sheriff of San Francisco, Richard Hongisto, Peter Mezey from the Board of Education, and Bernice Garner, who is a black lady who is active in many black social welfare institutions. I was to represent conservation.

Fisher: Remind me of when this was.

Meyer: 1977. So I went and worked and talked with these people, and visited institutions. There were certain things that I saw that I had not known how much they were, and have been, explored in common by the union people and by Sierra Club types. I was struck by the similarities of interests. It was not I who raised the questions

Meyer: about air pollution, auto emission standards, and the problems involving cars--increasing use of the automobile in Moscow, Leningrad, and the big cities. It was my trade union friends who asked those questions and asked the Russians what they were doing about it and expressed shock and dismay that the Russians were not dealing with the problem before it hit them over the head. In other words, here was your chance--we've got some technology, why don't you use it? Essentially the Russians said they weren't bothered; all they cared about was getting cars on the street.

When we went to--as it says in this article in the magazine*-- we went to the Moskvitch auto factory outside of Moscow, it was the labor union people who could point out to me where the safety standards were not being observed; that is, people were not wearing goggles; there were holes in the floor of the factory, and the like. But any Sierra Club person perhaps would have taken a slightly different point of view: they would have been worried more about toxic fumes, maybe, and residues, and debris that might have a long-lasting effect on the environment, but would also have a health effect.

In the area of environmental health, it seems to me, the labor movement and the environment movement have a tremendous goal to pursue in common; anything that could be done about it ought to be. And how far that's been pursued I don't know. Certainly there's a lot of work being done in environmental medicine these days. (I'm married to a doctor--that's not his field.) But there is work being done in that field--more than was being done in 1977. But the kinds of questions the union people were asking were my kinds of questions.

Fisher: That's really interesting. The thing that strikes me is that you were learning about the American labor movement by going to the Soviet Union.

Meyer: [laughter] That's very--rather weird.

Well, my background is--my father was a lawyer. I went to private school--I went to a public high school, but I went to a private grade school and private college.

Fisher: Where was that again?

Meyer: In New York City, and Ohio--I went to Oberlin in Ohio. Oberlin is a very egalitarian-minded institution which has a large number of students on scholarship and includes tremendous numbers of students

*Amy Meyer, "Russian Diary," Sierra, October-November-December 1978, pp. 40-44.

Meyer: who come from the families of teachers on the East Coast--people who come from the prep schools--children of people who teach in the prep schools, kids from the prep schools, but not necessarily the upper class families who use the prep schools. It is a great leveller as a college, and it's got a missionary base, and that's part of the picture.

My education was a privileged education, and my economic circumstances have been the kind so that I could afford to sit back and look, and I was not rushing out to get a job every morning. But I have also done that: I have worked as a secretary for the American Society of Mechanical Engineers; I worked in the publications department for a brief time, and I worked as the lowest variety of group social worker in the kinds of systems they have in the towns in New Jersey. You go in and work with and play with and have groups for youngsters after school, summer camp programs, and the like. So it's not as if I'm oblivious to it, but I haven't been under economic pressure most of my life.

But when I'd stand, for example, with a man--I'm thinking of the head of the Firefighters' Union here, Leon Bruschera--we're standing looking down into the Kura River at Tbilisi, and he said, "Isn't that an oil scum on the surface of the river?" I said yes. He said, "What's the good of a river if you can't fish or swim in it?" That kind of approach only indicates that the better people, the more closely people work with each other, the more quickly some of the stereotypes disappear.

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Meyer: One other thing I would point out from this Russian trip is, first of all, the feeling of our people for the public transit that the Russians provided. This could be Californians as much as anything about their being labor people. In other words, Californians have not had that much experience with really good public transit systems. And the Bay Area's are the best of California, but they are still not-- It's not the New York subway going for miles and miles, and the Moscow subway is immaculately clean, fast, and beautiful. And so there was much enjoyment of this inexpensive, beautiful subway system.

Another one was the joking that went on, because next to this there were two people-- One story I told in this article in the Sierra magazine--the one about the nurse who was on the trip. We were talking about bumper stickers, and the one we were talking about was "Save a Whale and Shoot a Russian." This was of course something that had come when the Russian trollers had come within our twelve-mile limit. It was some kind of bumper sticker that developed up north having to do with the Russians croaching on our fishing rights. This was, of course, a way of teasing a

Meyer: conservationist in front of a Russian. It was lots of fun to do, and of course the "save the whales" material was a very touchy material for the Russians since it was they and the Japanese who chased the whales. One could find the threads of the—who are these funny conservationists anyway?

Portraits of Unionists, Russian and American

Meyer: But the kinds of labor union people who went to Russia fell into two categories. One were the people who were the presidents of unions, the labor consultant. Many of the people who went were from as-- I won't say maybe the same kind of privileged background I come from, but a background in which their own capacities and abilities had brought them a comfortable job, a handsome income, and an identification as much with the managerial class as I have--my superficial identity. The few others--a man in his sixties who had never traveled and whose first trip to a foreign country was this trip to Russia. This man was miserable the entire trip. He was very uncomfortable. He could not wait to get home to his newspaper, his pipe, and his slippers. He was really out of his element, and he hoped fervently that I would be more understanding in the future about some of the things that labor union people wanted and would not object so much if someone wanted to build a freeway or the like. Stereotypes came through.

There was one man on the trip who is the head of a union up north who I think took me--took it as a class battle between the two of us which had to be settled. It had to be settled on a sexual level. Without getting into trouble on your tape [laughter]--this had to be settled. He would try to kiss me in front of all the rest of the group, and what was I going to do about this? I was able to handle this as a good joke. We got things sorted out. It took about twenty-four or forty-eight hours. But I think as I recall, and I can see I'm having trouble remembering it, it was precipitated by my saying that something he did was crude, and he just went through the roof. In other words, I didn't hold back; I would say what's on my mind, and I said he'd said or done something very early on in the trip, and I said, "That's terribly crude!" Pow! [laughter] Because here I was, this person telling him--he's a rough, tough sort of guy--what was crude, and he was going to show me. Well, we got it sorted out, and we did fine for the rest of the trip. [laughter] It was very funny!

Fisher: Did age have something to do with these last two--they were both a little older.

Meyer: Yes. Well, the first one was in his mid sixties, early sixties. The second one was probably in his early fifties or late forties, but the beer drinking, heavy-set, bluff type that is associated with some of the working unions. Not so much the managerial class identification.

One of the striking things in Russia, commented on by all the union people, was the way the Russian unionists dressed. Everyone of them was dressed in a suit and tie and hat. Not only did they look like New Yorkers of the 1930s, which is eerie--it was just terribly eerie--but it was the definitely managerial identification. And when this particular man would wear a ski cap and sweater, and would go around looking like he might look in a California town, this was not what was expected. What the Russians really enjoyed were those people who had brought some very nice clothes with them, and who would dress for dinner. We had a couple of labor union people--not us, not myself, not the guy from the board of education, because his wife had been previously and had told us not to get dressed up, and so we had brought very modest clothes with us. But a couple of them didn't get this warning, and they came with elegant clothes, and the Russians loved it, and absolutely ate it up. See, the identification of their union people was with the managerial class, and our people picked it up very quickly. Some subsequent reading that I did, which I was directed to by the labor consultant on our trip, indicated that the identification was with--as happens here: you get into a high enough union position and the identification moves more and more away from the guy on the street.

Two Labor-Environmentalists: Keith Eickman and Walter Johnson

Meyer: The only other thing I would tell you about--I've had a long time contact with this personal friend. He's Keith Eickman, who has been for eighteen or twenty years the president of Local Six of the ILWU Warehouseman's Union here, based in the Mission District. Keith has been its president, which is an elected office. It's a union that covers from Salinas to Vallejo, I believe, a huge area. He is their elected head, and he is on the San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission with me. I've been there almost five years. He came on four years ago, also appointed by George Moscone. A more respected person in the labor movement, or any movement, I have hardly met. Everybody loves Keith. Keith has that fine sense of when to say something and when not to, what's right, and what will mean something.

I watched him one day use it to particularly good advantage. Here's one of those stories. A group of people had been sent by the board of supervisors to investigate the San Francisco Zoo,

Meyer: and this is the San Francisco Animal Control Commission, which we refer to--I am the commissioner whose primary responsibility is the zoo. There was this committee of us, but I'm the chairman of that committee, and I'm very close to what happens at the zoo. Running zoos in the modern times under a municipality is a very difficult thing. But running a zoo of exotic animals is considered vastly different from running an animal control commission, which is what we call the "dog and cat commission." They were quite competent to decide anything they want about dogs and cats--that's their area; they're responsible for things like dogs barking and dog litter and the like.

They were given the job by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, in an unfortunate political move, to investigate the zoo, which they proceeded to do in a manner that was--I think the word "abusive" will cover it. People called in, grilled for hours, statements made on--and this was without any benefit of courts, lawyers or anything else. This was the most kangaroo court situation anyone had ever seen, with no controls on it, and there was no way of putting controls on it, because this was a commission appointed by the board of supervisors, and the relation to the city attorney's office wasn't safe. It finally boiled down to the fact that our zoo director refused to testify before them again on the advice of his attorney because they wouldn't give him the protection of the city attorney's office. He said, "I'm not going back," which is probably one of the smarter things that happened. I was not personally hit by it much, because the staff said they would take care of it. But it became a long, drawn out affair, and it became evident that the Animal Control Commission wanted to have more power.

Fisher: That was the main motive?

Meyer: Yes. It appeared very much to be the main-- Well, the motive was-- of course, the stated motive was that we were abusing the animals at the zoo. It's enough to say that a sixty-page report was presented by them to the board of supervisors and that it was tabled by a board of supervisors committee, and that was the end of it. There's been nothing since.

Fisher: That's how ridiculous it was.

Meyer: Yes, it was absolutely preposterous. The factual material was way off. They're not competent to investigate the care of leopards or "rhinoceri." They're just absolutely incompetent. They took information from whatever source they could get and then they blew it up and distorted it. They didn't have the intellectual filter to deal with it. They had a hearing before the board of supervisors.

Meyer: They also had a hearing--we had to have a hearing on this before our San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission. For two hours this hearing went on. I was left to handle certain fundamental questions that had been brought up. It was hard, because our staff was being abused constantly by people who got up and testified about their incompetence, their not caring.

Finally, Keith Eickman got up and said, "I am absolutely disgusted with this whole thing. I just want you to know this is an attack upon the workingman. You have attacked the keepers of the zoo; you have attacked the staff; you are attacking the workingman, and I'm through with you. This has to stop." He stopped the whole thing in its tracks. I've never seen [laughter] the labor point of view used so effectively. It was true; it was part of it, and when I kidded Keith about it since he said, "Well, it was an element." [laughter] That was it. They were on the carpet, and they were through. [laughter]

Keith is a member of the Sierra Club, and Keith is a hiker, a person who travels to faraway places and appreciates and enjoys and tells about the scenery and the environmental things he's seen, who has that profound, somewhat necessarily doomsday feeling about the future of this world. It's all wonderful to set aside parks and everything, but do you have any idea what we're doing to the ozone layer, or do you really think, looking at the Russians and the United States, and the energy crisis, are we ever really going to solve the problem of offshore drilling, or are we going to be swallowed by our own inventions?

There are people like him waiting to be found. I met him on the commission. People like that have a tremendous influence, and could have, for good, on both the labor movement and the conservation movement. It's he, and by reputation, Walter Johnson, who are the two I know who are really special.

Fisher: Walter Johnson.

Meyer: From the Retail Clerks, who's on the board of The Nature Conservancy-- is or was the board of The Nature Conservancy. And that's about all I could tell you without being asked more questions. [laughter] You've had it as one track.

Fisher: Well, you're the perfect interviewee. You have it all so well organized. You ask the questions of yourself, which is really the ideal, as a matter of fact, in this kind of material.

Phil Burton: Bridging the Gap

Fisher: I just thought I'd ask you one more thing. Phil Burton: I was wondering how important you think his role is in bridging this, or preventing a clash. Would you say he is a very important factor in reconciling potentially antagonistic positions in the area?

Meyer: I think the most vivid demonstration would be in the Redwood National Park issue, because there the labor unions were on the side of management, and it was the lumber companies uniting with the labor unions against the conservationists to try to prevent the park expansion. So that gap had to be bridged, and the labor unions were, I would say, neutralized by--that is, their opposition was neutralized by--the provisions for retraining and payments to people that would enable them to make the transition out of the park area.

There was a recognition at the same time by everyone in the public press--it was known everywhere--that if they were allowed to continue--the timber companies and the unions--in logging as they had been logging, at the rate they had been logging up north--and this park, which only takes up a small amount of that area (expansion had not yet gone through)--it might have prolonged the natural life of the jobs up there only a very short time more. And then those jobs would have been wiped out too, because redwood trees just don't grow that fast. That was a dramatic example up north. Here, I do not know--I have no way of knowing--how much Phil's labor contacts and Phil's labor point of view helped to neutralize labor opposition to change, because the opposition has been so muted to anything that's been done about GGNRA.

The worst opposition we got was from the army, which felt threatened because some lands were being declared excess. They didn't want to give them up, and they questioned whether we ought to take as much land into the park as was there. It was that kind of thing. And so legislation was written carefully to cover this. But that was not a gap Phil could bridge, and I--I just don't know. There probably is a layer in there that I'm not familiar with.

I know somebody you can ask about it: Bill Thomas, who was the Public Information Officer, second in command of the Public Information Office here in the Western Region of the Park Service: 556-5560. He's a very good friend of mine. He was Phil Burton's assistant, legislative aide, during all the original legislation. He could probably answer. Bill would have a perspective on how much--to my mind the most important single person in the conservation movement, from the point of view of getting things done, and making it possible to get things done, has been Phil Burton. All of us

Meyer: worship him. He's just this man who claims that when he was growing up, for him a tree in a pot was a wilderness. He loves to make outrageous statements. [laughter] He's come here and gone out on the deck and breathed the air. I said, "Phil, would you like to take a walk tomorrow?" He'll say, "This is enough air for me. I'm going back in the house again." [laughter] [This] man who claims that a smoke-filled room is his natural atmosphere I once got out on Wolfback Ridge to see what he'd done.

He has finally seen what he put together. He's seen it from the air. I did ride in the helicopter when he saw it from the air, and he has gone and seen much of it on the ground. But much of his work was done without his knowing what was there. Like Keith Eickman in his own way--on a different level, different means--he has this profound understanding of what it meant to set aside these chunks of land now--and if you didn't do it when the time was ripe, you couldn't grow more lands--we'd better do it, and do it correctly. But if he was also pacifying some of his labor people as this was going on--Bill Thomas would probably be able to give you an insight into it.

Fisher: Sophisticated thinking that many thought was impossible just a decade or so ago. That's wonderful.

III WORKING FOR A BETTER URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Broadening the Sierra Club's Area of Concern

Fisher: You were on the San Francisco Bay Chapter Executive Committee. Is there anything here that comes to mind?

Meyer: Yes, and that probably helped to prepare me for the Russian trip. We had an appeal from a workers' union having to do with either Chevron Chemical or Standard Oil--one of the big East Bay refineries, having to do with health and environmental medicine and environmental health issues--an appeal for Sierra Club support for safety standards.*

Dwight Steele was the Sierra Club person. He's a lawyer who lives up near Lake Tahoe, or else lives in Ro smoor--he's been in both places. Dwight was the person who helped to make the connection. I was on the Ex Comm from 1974 to 1978, and it probably happened about 1976. The chapter records are not the most notoriously neat records in the world. But that appeal was made and our chapter did very much give support--was pleased to be asked, and glad to give the support.

It's really been a process of the broadening of the concerns of the club. We now have had for maybe five years an urban environment task force, and I'm on that task force. I'm not terribly active at the moment--this is not something I can make a first priority, but if I'm asked to do something I'll do it. I'm concerned with urban parks, and again something that would hit the city dweller is a proposal that we have made to Phil Burton that legislation be developed in particular to renovate and rehabilitate the old, ornamental inner city parks. That is, Golden Gate Park, Central Park, Belle Isle, and the ones that are now about a hundred years old--the Olmsted era parks, that have just reached the point of having to be rehabilitated. And if they aren't--their plantings are simply dying out, blowing down, falling apart, and they need a massive reworking. That would affect the city dweller.

*Meyer is referring to the club's support of Shell Oil's striking workers in 1973.--Ed.

Meyer: But this urban environment task force, and the whole thrust of the club, has become much more sensitive to the liaisons, alliances, and networks that can be made outside of the club. In January and April of 1979 I worked with something called the City Care Conference in Detroit, which was put on by Sierra Club, the Urban League, and an environmental group which is a conference development group from Washington, D.C., run by Sidney Howe. Representatives of labor, environmental, minority community groups were there--about seven hundred participants. There's an article on it in the Sierra magazine--the July-August 1979 issue.* In other words, there were more and more efforts. I've been at the edge of those efforts; I've seen them happen, but I haven't had any intimate contact with them. It's just that I think the alienation, the old style alienation, is recognized as being quite ridiculous.

Jobs vs. the Environment?

Fisher: We hear so much about the interest of labor in jobs. I pick up from what you say that there's been quite a lot of appreciation among labor leaders of the importance of recreation facilities--that jobs are important but recreation facilities really loom pretty large in the minds of people in the labor community. Is that correct?

Meyer: Let's say that the conflict has never been joined over these parklands--of jobs versus setting land aside. The place where it would be joined would be if you had a development proposed, as for example on San Bruno Mountain. In fact you can see that problem right there. There are going to be fewer jobs for construction because the houses are not going to be built. So the real head-on collision comes with the construction unions.

To the other side, and we have made this point to people, that the parks employ people. They have employees: they have maintenance workers, rangers, policemen, clerical workers. They are job producers too, and these are sustained jobs. A construction job is over and done with. There may be a repair job later on, but basically a construction job is done when the building is finished. The infrastructure, the electrical, water, and sewer lines, and roads are in place, but a job in a park goes on forever. Now, it's not the same intensity.

*Amy Meyer, "City Care: Environmentalists Met With Urban Activists in Detroit," Sierra, July-August 1979, pp. 25-32.

Fisher: Nor the same people.

Meyer: It won't be the construction people, but the crucial issue has been not to fight when you don't have to, and to show the common purpose. One of the things the state had done--Claire Dedrick was active in doing this--was to point out that in rehabilitation of improperly logged or mined areas, and in the development of rapid transit versus freeways, in cleaning up waterways, and cleaning up the air, you could develop a whole category of jobs that would be in everybody's interest, and that would be just as profitable to the laboring section as the construction jobs. It doesn't mean you don't have to have houses to live in or that there aren't other industries, but we've avoided the collision, and I think the reason we have is because of the land that's involved.

Fisher: I realize it goes back in time: Marincello.

Meyer: That predates me a little bit.

Fisher: You don't happen to recall whether the potential for jobs there--in construction, that is--became an issue.

Meyer: I only attended the very last hearing on Marincello, at the Marin County Civic Center in late 1970, and that issue did not surface to my recollection during that meeting, but the real bulk of the battle was fought during the 1960s. Whether people promoting Marincello said it'll bring jobs to Marin County or not I have no idea.

The San Francisco Sewer: A Classic Confrontation with an Unsatisfactory Outcome##

Fisher: You were going to say something about the problem of the sewer.

Meyer: West Side Transport. This was, and has been, a classical confrontation between construction, and political, and labor concerns, and conservation concerns. And the conservationists lost. I've been involved in an anti-position for several years. And what is involved was a decision made, by Leo McCarthy's office primarily, that an extension of the sewer line could not go to Sunset Boulevard--roughly it's Thirty-seventh Avenue in the Sunset District--even though it's a very wide street because such a construction project would be very difficult for the assemblyman from that district. The point of least resistance to the extension of the sewer line after Forty-sixth and Forty-seventh Avenues, which are small, narrow, residential streets--it was evident that the least resistance would be developed over using the Great Highway, that is, going under the Great Highway with this sewer line.

Meyer: The conservationists--not all of them--it's been a very difficult thing. The Sierra Club got caught for a while between the idea of having clean water--you've got to have clean water--and the idea that this was going to cause a beach problem. There's a fundamental law that you don't build major structures on moving beaches. This is a beach which has receded. The dunes of the Sunset were bulldozed several hundred yards out toward the ocean fifteen or more years ago, and the houses were built. This beach has gradually receded. The line of stabilization is considered to be somewhere in the middle of the upper Great Highway. Well, you don't go and add a sewer box to this problem. Numbers of us, from the Sunset and Richmond Districts--and the club did turn around on it finally--and People for GGNRA tried to fight this, but it has been an impossible job because the city has been told that it would have a construction ban if the sewage line was not built as promptly as possible. The wrong decisions were made at least eight years ago. I got to this four years ago, and it was already too late. The decisions had been made. We did go before the Regional Coastal Conservation Commission and won unanimously. The final decision was a stupid decision.

Fisher: Could you say exactly what that decision was?

Meyer: To take a sixty-foot wide--at that time sixty-foot wide--it's now been reduced to about twenty-five-foot wide--tube of concrete and put it in underneath the upper Great Highway, and transport sewage from there to a plant opposite the San Francisco Zoo, and from there pipe it through an outfall, which would go out across the San Andreas Fault, and out into the ocean, in an area where there is real question as to how effectively it will be moved by the tides. That's been the least of the issues. Crossing of the fault line has been an issue. Whether it will move in that area or not has not been so much. The idea of being involved instead with using the existing sewage treatment plant at the end of Golden Gate Park, dumping the primary effluent--primary effluent is the wrong term because that usually means primarily treated effluent, and that isn't what I mean--the treated effluent to whatever level it had been treated--in the greatest rush of water which goes through the Golden Gate--that is, in the channel around Alcatraz.

Those decisions were wrongly made a long, long time ago. What we have developed is an over-engineered system. Questions have been raised about every piece of the system. But the crucial one from a conservation point of view has been the idea of running this thing down the Great Highway, because of the damage it would do to the beach and the necessity to defend the seawall to defend the tube, since a seawall is only effective when it's in a natural line of stabilization. For example, the O'Shaughnessy Seawall that runs from below the Cliff House across the bottom of Golden Gate Park--

Meyer: that whole distance is covered by a seawall--that's in a relatively stable zone, with a relatively wide beach. But when you get south of there is where the erosion problems occur.

The threat of a building ban, plus the political threat, has made it impossible for people to turn around on this, to say, "Let's stop; let's reconsider; let's redesign," because the pressure has been from the State Water Quality Control Board. I'm one of the few people who will get up and say the reason they are doing this, and the reason they are putting this pressure on San Francisco in this way and insisting upon our developing the project that will simply be expensive and not give us nearly what we ought to have. It's not that perfect or that good a system. It's simply that money has been coming down from the federal government, and if they don't spend it they're not going to be in business. That's what it boils down to. It's a self-perpetuating bureaucracy at this point.

It doesn't mean that our water shouldn't be cleaner or that we should dump untreated toxic wastes in the bay. That kind of thing is best treated right on the spot next to a business that is producing the toxic waste. You treat it on site. There's a name for this, for treating it on site.

But we're talking about the western half of the city. The western half of the city is residential. The city is divided by a ridge, and the whole western half is residential; there's no manufacturing in this part of town. We're not dealing with toxic wastes; we're dealing simply with sewage. When you have that you do not need to go to this kind of extreme, or this kind of huge system, and that's where the term "over-engineered" comes from. It also got caught on the straddling of a classic white-black confrontation, which is, "The best place to do all of the work on this and to design everything is in Hunters Point." Hunters Point took a certain amount of construction, and then the people there picked up their heads and said, "We're not taking any more of Whitey's sewage. We want some of it going in Whitey's part of town," and that finished the job. There was just no fighting this thing.

The edge of it--this is the one place where Keith Eickman and I have ever had a disagreement, because I think he saw very clearly that--I think he's quite capable of understanding the beach erosion issue--what he also saw was the ban on construction. A construction ban that would hit the whole town is something terribly disruptive. We had one once briefly, as I understand it, but it's something everybody's afraid of, where you can build no buildings at all because you haven't taken care of your sewage. This is the weapon that the State Water Quality Control Board has been able to hold over the city.

Meyer: In Marin the towns of Bolinas and Stinson Beach, which are just small, compact towns, successfully fought such a project. Stinson is still on septic tanks, and Bolinas is using a spray field system, when the original proposal was for a sewage system that would have cost more than all the assessed valuation of both towns at that time--this is about ten or twelve years ago.

This is typical grandiose stuff, and we here are stuck with it because this city doesn't work that coherently and because the state was able to scare the powers that be. We kept getting votes of the board of supervisors, six-five, six-five, six-five, over and over again, and never could get that sixth vote to help to stop it. I think part of it is that it stayed six-five, because there's still that feeling that if it went five-six in the long run this would hit everybody's ability to construct. This is one of the places where you do find the collision between the labor unions and the conservationists.

Fisher: May I trouble you to clarify? The Water Quality Control Board--

Meyer: Yes, we have a State Water Quality Control Board and then there's a regional one.

Fisher: And it's the State Water Quality Control Board that can say that San Francisco can allow no more houses to be built until it solves its sewage problem.

Meyer: That's right.

Fisher: And the six to five vote was on what?

Meyer: Several times votes were taken at the board of supervisors as to whether this project should proceed.

Fisher: The project to put the sewer under the Great Highway.

Meyer: Under the Great Highway. Those would be the only votes I would pay attention to. There were other votes, that always would pass by this narrow margin--the typical margin was a six-five vote.

Fisher: In favor of--

Meyer: In favor always of going ahead, keeping going, and the reason I think the sixth vote never came--and it almost didn't matter where it would or would not come from, which supervisor (we had district supervisors for a while during this time, so the votes were very accountable for)--was the recognition that any vote of that kind would trigger the construction ban. In other words, they would

Meyer: say, "You are not proceeding with all deliberate speed. Your city government is balking, and we're going to come down on you as hard as we can."

My view of it is that they are in business to stay in business, that the project as designed for the city is astronomical, huge, expensive--terribly expensive for every taxpayer in the city. For the amount of purity that we're getting out of this--relatively too little for the amount of money being spent. They talked of eighty--eighty-eight--overflows a year, sewage overflows. This is an old, improperly designed system which combines our rainwater with our sewage, so that any time you have a rainy season that's heavy you have overflows of sewage near the beach, and you don't want water-contact sports on your beach.

Fisher: Does that go on at various places?

Meyer: Various places. There are certain outfalls. Obviously it's bad. They wanted us to design a system that would allow one overflow a year, theoretically. We managed to get that figure increased to eight overflows a year because that was so preposterous. That's what reduced the size of the tube, from sixty-feet wide, which would have been absolutely monstrous, to twenty-five-feet wide. It reduced the cost; it reduced the potential damage. I thought it was a fair trade-off. But we could not get the thing moved inland, because of political pressure, and we could not get the thing to be reconsidered, and stopped, because of this: if you don't keep moving--you've got to move, you must keep moving or we will come down on you with a ban. This is very much the case of a bureaucracy feeding on itself.

Fisher: Which bureaucracy?

Meyer: The Water Quality Control Board bureaucracy. They spend money that they receive from the federal government. They look up and down the state and say, "San Francisco is the dirty city. You're the ones who are causing the trouble." But if you look carefully you'll understand that other cities pour wastes into the bay. We weren't causing that much trouble. Yes, we did have our problems, and there are certainly things that should be done, but "You're going to clean up, and we're going to start the threat process." And the biggest threat is the construction ban.

Fisher: Well then, what do you hope happens?

Meyer: At this point, nothing. There isn't anything anyone can do about it. It's a lost battle, because the city--it would have taken an extraordinary mayor and board of supervisors--not the kind that you

Meyer: find in a normal city, under the city pressures. You might find it in Bolinas or Stinson Beach, because they are unincorporated communities, much much more outspoken, radical, and everybody knows each other. They were able to down this, and say, "Essentially, we're going to rework our old system and make it work. Septic tanks are sound at Stinson; we're going to make it work."

Right now we're facing this over in the Marin Headlands. Marin Headlands has an antiquated sewer system. Just a week ago there was a discussion of, "What shall we do to upgrade that system? Shall we completely rebuild the thing and pipe it all out to Sausalito? No, we're not going to. We're going to make the old system work." Much much cheaper; much more sensible.

We have an old system; it works, but not that well. But no one ever really dealt with the idea of revamping the old system until it was too late to backtrack. And then the classical confrontation occurs over the--"You're going to have a building ban." But, as I said, this one has been interlaced with some things that Bolinas and Stinson never had to face, like this black-white thing. It's hopeless. It's just been a hopeless mess.

Fisher: The city is going ahead with the very expensive, unwise plan of running the thing under the Great Highway, despite the environmental problems, the problem that nature will attack the thing--

Meyer: That's right. It got through the coast commission--it got through the state coast commission. Leo McCarthy did a lot of manipulating in the state coast commission, and a lot of the appointments depend upon the assembly. And the basic lack of understanding that you're buying a huge pig-in-a-poke--this could not be gotten across because of the political factors. In other words, no assemblyman, no mayor, no board of supervisors really wants to face a real building ban of "You've been bad boys and girls, and your city is dirty," and they never had the ability to stand up to it. It's very sad.

Even the coastal commission couldn't protect us. There is the coastal commission law as written that no structures of this kind, except coastally dependent facilities, belong on a beach. This is not coastally dependent. This was treated as--it was literally subsumed as a coastally dependent industrial facility. That was the excuse given. Well, this isn't a coastally dependent facility at all. There's no reason for it to be in the coastal zone. The coastal zone's supposed to be a special zone; it's supposed to be specially cared for. The regional board saw it, and the political pressure was put on with all stops out on the state board, and I have enough entree to know who got pressured.

Meyer: In the end, when the final votes were taken, two commissioners stood up against it. Harriet Allen, who I think comes from San Diego, and Leonard Grote who comes from inland, whom I know slightly, not that well. Leonard Grote comes from Antioch or Concord--some place in that area--and is a teacher by the way. They stood up and said, "This is a stupid project." They [fought] it down to the wire, but everyone else said it's a lost cause.

Fisher: The ban on building, as it affected the construction industry--

Meyer: It would if it were to occur, sure. It would throw people out of work abruptly, stop all builders, all realtors, and of course it's the kind of collision which the environmentalists dread, because then it's their fault. So it's the kind you try to avoid. And in this case the way to avoid it was--not now, but about two or three years ago--to get the thing redesigned to Sunset. And there was stubborn resistance of McCarthy to going down Sunset Boulevard. He would not budge. This was not going to go down in the middle of his district. When that took place there was no way of getting around it. The cause, as you look back--that was when it was lost. He was not going to budge politically. He's normally a very supportive guy as far as environmental issues go--one of the first people to support the GGNRA. I feel very bad about it because it was something I could not work with him on; I couldn't work with his office, and this is an office I'd worked with for eight years--a very constructive relationship.

But part of the problem is his protégé, Art Agnow, who had been his aide in his office when I started working with him, is the assemblyman from the black district on the other side of town, which was complaining about getting all of Whitey's sewage. Absolutely incredible.

The only other thing I could possibly add about the labor movement up there is in relation to a controversy up at Fort Miley [the veterans hospital in San Francisco]. This is basically a conflict between a very cagey director of a veterans' hospital, who wants to keep parking privileges on more than an acre of national park and who has no more feel for that park, or interest in that park as a resource for his staff or patients, and he could care less. He lives right next to it; he could care less. He lives in a building right on the grounds; he could care less. What he's done is pulled out all the stops in the direction of veterans. In other words, "Veterans, it's your parking that's being taken away if this lot is closed." But there should never be any veterans' parking up there, because that lot is a remote lot, and that lot should only be used by staff. The veterans should all have the very best parking right next to the hospital.

Meyer: The other argument he's used is, the labor unions who serve the hospital are all going to protest if you close this lot. We said, "Fine, we'll build another lot." There was never a lot in fact built for their use; it was just taking an old road and striping it-- a set of stairs were built--to serve the hospital. He said the labor union people would protest. So it's possible to use the labor unions. You can use any group of people who have an interest. Sure, if you have a job, and you would rather have convenient parking as against inconvenient parking, of course you'll go for the convenient parking. It takes only a wise or particularly benevolent administrator who'll say, "Look folks, it's for your own good. You're going to get the advantage of a park which you can use. Look around. You've got to recognize this. We'll provide the protection if you think the lot's too remote from the hospital." But we don't have them. What he also did was to use some of the neighbors up the street. He essentially egged on petitions and things so that the neighbors up the street would block any alternatives. He's constructed that way; he's been an extremely stubborn, difficult person, and so the issue isn't solved yet.

Fisher: This is the issue that triggered your involvement at the beginning?

Meyer: Well, this is the latest perversion of it. The original was not the parking lot. The original in 1970 was that we were going to build-- the federal government was going to build an archives at Fort Miley. On the site where the archives building was supposed to go, a part of that is occupied by an acre or more of parking for the VA hospital. What it has now become is that whole area has been cleaned up, spruced up. There's a stable in it for the park police horses; there's a maintenance yard, a ranger station, a meeting room, all kinds of nice things. And right behind it is this parking lot to which you have to drive through the whole parkland to get to the parking lot, which is terrible because it means that you can't really use the area. But this is the kind of situation in which you could use anybody who wanted to be used.

Fisher: Was that archives construction a large enough job to raise the issue of jobs?

Meyer: No, because the building itself had to be built, and it was built in San Bruno instead of being built here. The building was located potentially on the wrong piece of excess government land. It was never, "Don't build it."

But there are confrontations. I suppose what I am saying about the sewage treatment thing in particular is, there are kinds of confrontations which are no-win situations. The archives one was a situation where, if you're going to say move the building, then put it in a more suitable location: put it near transportation lines,

Meyer: or at least put it with as good auto access. It went into an industrial park in San Bruno, which is ideally suited for a huge concrete building filled with records. That made sense rather than putting it with fifty-two offices facing the Golden Gate on a very scenic piece of land. You could understand that.

But it wasn't "Don't build the building." That one is more likely to be the no-win situation. Move the building is a situation everybody can win. We'll build it, but we'll build it in the right place. The sewage line is a no-win situation for many many reasons. If it had been just the labor thing maybe it could have been handled, but with the white-black confrontation, the building ban, and the question of politicians staying in office, all the cards were stacked wrong. Whatever would be done would--in other words, a lawsuit could have been started à la the Yerba Buena lawsuit, which kept Yerba Buena a desert for ten years. And now finally a Yerba Buena convention center is being built. It took ten years to straighten out the lawsuits, the environmental impact statements, the relocation problems. That one is not so much blamed on the conservationists, but the conservationists helped to file the lawsuits.

File a lawsuit over here on the sewage treatment project and who's going to take it? In these times, with this kind of shortage of public funds, and the cost it would take to redesign it, and the cost it would take to wait, and the building ban, do you think the conservationists need it? The conservationists don't need that kind of--there's a Yiddish word for it--tsuns. That's the kind of thing that throws the movement into disrepute. When you are really taking on other groups head-on, including other people's livelihoods head-on, you can't win it.

Fisher: You have been so helpful.

Transcriber: Galen Fisher
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

TAPE GUIDE - Amy Meyer

Date of Interview: February 6, 1981

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APPENDICES

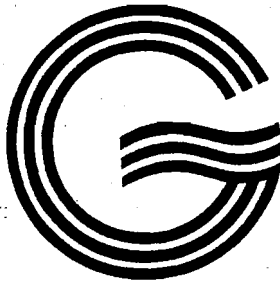

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Sierra Club Oral History Project

Anthony L. Ramos

A LABOR LEADER CONCERNED WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

An Interview Conducted by
Timothy A. Beard

Sierra Club History Committee
1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

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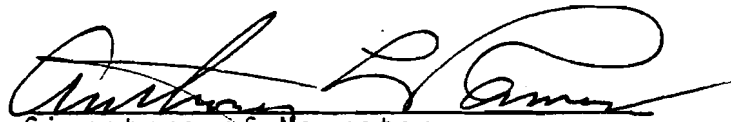
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February 20, 1981
Dated

LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT
Subject of Interview(s)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Tony Ramos is executive secretary-treasurer of the Carpenters' California State Council. He was born on November 29, 1918, in Alameda, California, and grew up in Oakland, attending school there through high school. His father was a machinist and woodworker. His mother, who still lives in Oakland, was a housewife.

Tony began working as a carpenter's apprentice and later worked in Richmond as a joiner in the massive ship building effort there during World War II. He has served as an officer of the carpenter's union since 1939, and has been an executive officer since 1963. Although Tony's affiliations are with building trades groups, he has served as a member of the California State Coastal Commission since July 1980. He is in the unique position of being the only labor representative of this commission, which is charged with protecting the coastal environment along the California Coast.

A single interview was held on February 20, 1981, in Tony Ramos's fourteenth floor office suite in downtown San Francisco. Except for a couple of telephone interruptions and a police siren which blared in the background continuously for a few minutes, the interview went smoothly. Tony's style was informal and straightforward, and he approached questions from the personal point of view of his experiences in the building trades and the coastal commission.

The typed transcript was edited rearranging the order of one section of the interview for clarity and deleting a two-page section as being irrelevant to the overall interview. The edited transcript was returned to Tony with a number of questions clarifying minor points from the interview. Tony returned the transcript and completed question sheet within a few days. His answers to the questions have been incorporated into the final notes.

Timothy Beard
Interviewer

17 March 1981
Berkeley California

I LABOR AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN RETROSPECT

[Date of Interview: February 20, 1981]##

Polarization in the Sixties

Ramos: My personal reaction to the conflict, if you want to call it that... [telephone interruption] I started to say, this conflict distresses me. It's very unfortunate. Environmentalists--we're using these terms broadly and loosely to try to describe the group in general; organized environmentalists, if you want to put it that way--are usually of a liberal persuasion, concerned about the quality of life and so forth. They should be natural allies to the labor movement, and, I think, really basically are. But there have been areas of conflict, misunderstanding, short-sightedness unquestionably on both sides.

There was a tendency early on for many of the environmentalists to be--to use another term that's been kicked around--elitist, to be concerned about the physical natural environment around them without too much concern for the environment as it related to working people.

Beard: Did you have contact with specific issues in the time that you are talking about now [the sixties]?

Ramos: Yes. When this conflict first became apparent, there were efforts made to create better understanding. I remember one meeting at, I think it was the Fairmont Hotel--it doesn't make any difference, it was one of the hotels here in San Francisco--under the auspices

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 22.

Ramos: of the University of California. Don Vial, who is now the head of the Industrial Relations Department for the state, was at that time with the university in industrial relations. And Barry Commoner spoke at that meeting. There were labor panels on why the conflict, what are the issues; what can be done for better understanding. I was on one. This came out at that time that you just simply can't tell a group of working people that we're going to make a drastic change in your life by eliminating the factory you're working in because it's polluting. And that's too bad because we have to do something about the environment without any real consideration as to what happens to these people--where do they go; what do they do about this.

Beard: Were there some kind of specific things that happened to cause this kind of concern?

Ramos: Well, let me see. Yes, there were. I can't pinpoint one right at the moment, but there were instances. At least they were interpreted in this fashion. It was polarization. That was the feeling, at least, that we in labor had. It didn't make any difference how many jobs get lost. If this thing was going to be to the advantage of the physical environment, well then by God we're going to do it, and the rest of it's just too bad. That has to be taken care of in some other fashion, and it's really not our business.

There was this attitude. On the other hand, there were some extremists in our camp, too, that were willing to build anything, any place, any time, as long as it was going to provide a job, and to hell with what it meant to the environment down the road a year or two or ten or fifteen later.

Both camps were wrong. But it started that way.

Beard: There was this tension. What years are we talking about?

Ramos: The sixties.

Beard: So in the sixties there was this real tension...

Ramos: It began to really build.

Beard: ...between labor and environmentalists.

Ramos: Right. Particularly, building trades. Labor is not monolithic. The opinions and attitudes of labor unions vary. Labor unions are not much different than the human beings that make them up, and everybody is interested in his own self-interest to one extent or another, regardless of how noble the pronouncements may be. Example: The machinists' union, which is a good progressive union (it does a

Ramos: real job for its people and takes some good, liberal social positions) was all hot for the SST, the Supersonic Transport, because it was going to be built in factories where their workers were going to be working by the thousands. At least, that's my interpretation of why they were for it. I, on the other hand, was able to take a noble position. I didn't think that the SST was really such a good idea because we didn't need all of the sonic booms and the noise pollution. So that makes it nice as long as it's somebody else's ox that's being gored. You know you become very statesmanlike.

Beard: What were your oxen?

Ramos: Well, in construction mine are this. If you say for a number of environmental reasons we are not going to build a new town down near Livermore--which was on the drawing boards here a while back (an expansion of the housing down there)*--go on down and tell the carpenter's union in Hayward. Or maybe I should go down as their leader and tell them that I think they're absolutely right. We shouldn't build this so that we don't have any place for the workers to go down there when there's not enough housing, I mean, how far do you get with that kind of an attitude? It would be fine if everybody could be that noble.

In reverse, the environmentalists have to get used to the idea that if we're going to have clean air, that you can't clean it up overnight. You've got to put in place those elements that are necessary to make progress in this direction, so that if each succeeding year, it's a little better than the year before, it may be ten years down the road before the millenium is reached--maybe twenty years down the road. We'll work in that direction. But if you're a zealot, and you want clean air, and you're perfectly willing to shut the whole Los Angeles basin down, for an example, and get clean air within eighteen months, you'll have clean air. But that's all you'll have. You'll also have, probably, revolution and a riot. That's an exaggerated example, but that's the point I'm trying to make. And in between there is where the conflict is.

*This was the municipal initiative ordinance establishing a moratorium on residential building permits which was passed in Livermore in 1972.--ed.

The No-Growth Movement and Job Displacement

Beard: I'm interested in the Bay Area. You're talking about this no-growth sentiment here, and you gave the example of Livermore which tried to stop house building--

Ramos: Right. Well, it did!

Beard: It did as a matter of fact. Is that something particularly apparent here in the Bay Area, particularly strong, that sentiment of no-growth policy?

Ramos: No. Not just here. It's a sentiment that has grown. Petaluma had an ordinance that came out very strongly.* There's a number of environmental reasons that had some sense to them. For one, if there's no center of industry there, and the people that are living there are going to have to work in Oakland or San Francisco, it means they're going to have to travel. And that means that there's going to be additional pollution emissions from their automobiles as they're going back and forth.

The Livermore area, for an example, does get some air pollution problems now. It used to be a place where they used to send people who had tuberculosis because of the warm climate and the fresh air. I don't know whether it still qualifies in that regard or not, but that's the image. And you've seen pictures of Denver, Colorado-- unquestionably as to what it looks like now at times as compared to what it looked like some years ago. Phoenix, Arizona, with pollution problems. Nobody pooh-poohs this, that something has to be done. And this is where the environmental group has to add to their concern for the physical environment, their concern for assisting and developing the social activities and programs that are needed to take care of the displacement of workers.

An example, I think, was the redwood park situation up north where, because of Congressman Phil Burton's efforts, we set aside a large area of virgin redwood up there for all time to come as a national park.** There were a lot of workers who were going to be

*In 1972, the Petaluma City Council established a home building regulation system in which construction permits were granted by means of a quota system, severely curtailing residential development in the area.--ed.

**The Redwood National Park was established on October 2, 1968, and enlarged March 28, 1978. A special fund for unemployed lumber workers accompanied the 1978 bill.--ed.

Ramos: able to earn a livelihood over the harvesting of that redwood. As a society through the efforts of Congress, we devised a program for putting a certain amount of money into the area to help retrain, to reduce the shock on the workers, to give them some time to relocate, and to get into something else if possible. It just wasn't shut off with "Okay. We saved the redwoods. What you do with your life is your problem, not ours." We didn't do that.

There has also been a hue and cry on the part of many--I was going to call them reactionaries--conservatives that never again will Congress get jockeyed into a position where they're going to spend that kind of money for that kind of an effort. And I disagree with that.

Beard: Why?

Ramos: Well, because I think that's exactly what has to be done. If you've got a mill that employs a lot of people, and is, in fact, badly polluting the environment and creating problems that should be corrected for the benefit of everyone, and the people that work there whose lives are all wrapped up in that job, then if you're going to have to do something about either putting this mill out of business or moving it some place else or drastically changing it, then I think it becomes incumbent upon society to work together to provide some way to reduce the shock on those workers so that they can survive also. After all, they have an environment.

Conflicts with Environmentalists in the Bay Area

Beard: What are the major conflicts that the carpenters union has had with environmentalists in the Bay Area since the sixties?

Ramos: We haven't had too many here. There's been a no-growth situation in some of the areas. We haven't done all that badly. ABAG [Association of Bay Area Governments] had some original plans a couple of years ago on air pollution. If the criteria and the standards that they were going to use had been adopted as they were originally written--they were subsequently modified after the hearings--it would have really almost put a stop to homebuilding and to the development of stationary sources of pollution, which would mean the factory or whatever. It would have preserved the purity of the air, all right, but it would have been at too big a cost in development.

Beard: What influenced ABAG in modifying their standards?

Ramos: Well, because we formed groups, and we got together, and we testified. Not just the carpenters but the unions, the building trades unions in particular. And in some instances we have made alliances with business--the same people that we argue with sometimes over wages and have to strike in order to make them see the wisdom of our purpose in getting decent wages. But sometimes on these issues, why, we found ourselves to be in alliance with them over stop-growth.

The Environmental Movement and Government Regulation

Beard: And who were you in alliance against at that time?

Ramos: Not necessarily in alliance against anybody except that usually you found strong environmental efforts--that's who's usually-- Sometimes the federal bureaucracy controlled people with their criteria. You see their idea was to get something done. They have a mandate from Washington. It's involved if you haven't delved into it. But the people regionally have to meet certain federal standards, and sometimes these are just not practical because they try to do too much all at once. So that could also be part of the people whom we were against at the time, trying to get a modification or a reinterpretation of these standards.

Beard: Are you saying that the environmentalists, then, had such an influence in government that...

Ramos: They had. There's no question there was a tremendous influence in the sixties. It's waning now. Witness [Secretary of the Interior James] Watt, if you've seen this morning's paper. The guy is talking about opening the offshore leases for oil exploration, even here in northern California, which even the communities on the coast here don't want to have happen for fear of oil spills and that kind of thing. Whether he's just sending up a trial balloon to find out how much opposition he's going to get, I don't know. His predecessor just got through setting aside these leases--or not including them in the government's program for offshore leasing. And this guy is talking about turning right around and doing it.

My point was that there is a reaction that will set in under the Reagan administration because it's business-oriented. And business has some enlightened people in it. But again, you've got this business of "self-interest." You hear the rhetoric about how we prospered and how we became the strongest nation on earth because we had business running the show. We also had a whole rich continent to conquer and exploit. If we were to continue to do it in the same fashion as we have in the last two hundred years, there

Ramos: ain't going to be anything left in the next fifty years. Something has to be done. The environmentalists have got a point. It's time that there was some planning done.

Well, I think, temporarily, it's going to be harder to get that kind of understanding because there's going to be more of this going back to doing it this way: Get it developed. It doesn't make any difference how much pollution it causes.

Changes in Attitude toward the Environment

Beard: What would your personal reaction have been to this twenty years ago, in the early sixties when there was this tension between environmentalists and government on the one hand, and the building trades on the other? Would it have been different than it is today--your personal reaction?

Ramos: No. It was about the same. I haven't changed. I've always recognized, personally recognized, the need for conservation and for environmental concerns.

Beard: How about the rank and file?

Ramos: Well, the rank and file is hard to measure. There are a lot of the younger fellows that are sympathetic to the environmental [concerns]. I debated Dwight Steele in a debate. We both were on a radio deal about a year or two ago.* On this very issue, I said my thing, and he said his. And I had a couple of young fellows from the carpenters' union in the audience. They came up to me afterwards, and they said, "Well, Steele's position is a helluva lot better than yours."--which is fine. [chuckles] They were in sympathy with his more pro-environment position, although Dwight is not narrow-minded or a zealot in the environmental movement. He's a very strong environmentalist. He makes good sense. And he can understand the other aspects.

Well, to answer your question, some of our younger members are inclined to be more sympathetic. The older ones who are job-oriented, work ethic-oriented, are inclined to be not so sympathetic. That job is important to them. And there you are. Again we don't have a monolithic position. It varies.

*"The Price of Peace," 18 January 1978, Labor Management School Series, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.

Beard: Are you and your willingness to compromise representative of union leadership? Or do you feel that union leadership is more like the older rank and file?

Ramos: Union leadership is willing to compromise, as I said in the beginning, if they are not directly concerned. Union leadership in the teachers' union, for an example, is strongly pro-environmental. Leadership, probably, in many of the service industries can be more inclined. Union leadership in the building trades, though, is going to be less inclined. Again, you get down to this basic issue that if you're going to cut off construction, you're going to have a helluva time answering your membership.

No, I would be reasonably typical. Probably I'm more environmentally-oriented than most--well, that probably is an understatement--I am more than most building trades representatives.

I know my membership pretty well. Now, I don't meet the membership directly, but I meet their representatives, and they pretty well know that. You know, they didn't have to choose me to go on the coastal commission,* but they did. So that's an indication that if they just wanted somebody that absolutely had no use for planning and environmental concerns, then I should not have been their choice. So you see, I can't really understand... But they knew ahead of time. I made it very clear that I would try to work toward balance and that extreme environmental positions were not going to be popular, but, by the same token, that there were certain places on the coast that should be left natural and that if somebody wanted to build a fancy hotel there and put a lot of people to work building it, I'd vote against the project because I don't think it belongs there. And I wanted them to know that that's what my attitude was going to be before I ever took this thing. It didn't seem to bother anybody.

Beard: Who was it that you wanted to know this?

Ramos: My people. And they know it.

Beard: And they haven't given you any opposition.

Ramos: No. Oh, they tease me sometimes about being a closet environmentalist for the building trades. But there's been nobody trying to dictate how I ought to vote. Oh, sometimes somebody will tell me, "There's

*The California State Coastal Commission was established in 1972 by the passage of Proposition 20, the California Coastal Zone Conservation Act. The coastal law that Tony refers to later on is the legislative outgrowth of Proposition 20.--ed.

Ramos: a helluva good project down someplace," but very, very seldom. And I always just answer in the same way, no matter who it is, that if it's worth looking at, I'll take a look. And we'll judge it on the facts. But I never make promises to vote any way. I really don't know how I'm going to vote until I know what the circumstances are.

Compromises with Environmentalists

Beard: Has the carpenters' union ever taken a public stand against their own membership or their own particular interests in favor of the environment? In the example that you give--

Ramos: Yes, well in that case we were opposed to the redwood park and then turned around and went along with it when this provision was made and supported the effort, then. After the bill contained the provisions that would take care of the workers up there, our position did change at that point.

Beard: That's interesting. It strikes me as a real significant change-- a change toward more accommodation. You've described this conference in the early sixties in which people were concerned with a no-growth policy and the threat to the building industry. Right now you're talking about some kind of accommodation. How does the accommodation--

Ramos: Well, I don't want to mislead you into feeling that it's better than it was. It's not really working on any large scale yet. And I think that the missing ingredient is the, if you will, government, society, doing something about alleviating the problem in between. That really hasn't happened in any great scale. There has been some progress, however. There have been cases where a proposed project has received testimony from the environmental people, from labor, government and whatever and made compromises on the design of the project so that it could come reasonably close to satisfying efforts of compromise. It doesn't satisfy the extremists.

I think a good example of that was--again, this is Los Angeles-- there was a freeway--Century Freeway, I can't remember--and when they first proposed it about six years ago, there was real opposition by the environmentalists: It's another freeway; it's adding to the total confusion, the total source of pollution. Of course, they were thinking in terms--and rightfully, I think--that some of the space ought to be saved for the development of rapid transit, instead of just blindly continuing to depend on the automobile and the freeway system. There were a lot of minority and disadvantaged, lower income people that were unhappy because the proposed route of this freeway

Ramos: was going to take out a lot of housing. And there's no substitute. When the government hasn't been producing any housing, there just isn't any low income housing available. So they were very much in arms about allowing this development to go through, bulldozing down a certain amount of housing in the meantime.

On the other hand, there were business interests that were anxious to have the freeway go through because it increased the circulation and generally increased business. Labor's position would also be for building it because, after all, you're going to have all this work in physically building the freeway, and you're going to have the overpasses and all the things that go with it. And the carpenters' union would be for it.

Well, the thing was held up by a judge [Harry Pergesen] who made everybody, in effect, go slow. He made them get together and see if they could devise a plan that would satisfy each one of them, understanding that nobody was going to be totally happy, but that at least did something about the concerns of each of these groups. And they came up with it. The design included building the freeway, but it also, then, included building it in such a fashion, that there would be places designated and located for stations if and when rapid transit came in. Then the mode of construction would accommodate this kind of a configuration where it could be worked with rapid transit.

Beard: What year was this?

Ramos: This is still underway. This has been in the process, I think, for four or five years now. I happened to be at the court when the final release of this thing was--I don't know what's happened to it since. I don't know whether there's money to go ahead with it because the state has been holding up on freeway money. I'm not sure that that's what's holding it up. I don't know what the status of it is right now. But it's an example. In the meantime [as for] the people that needed housing--part of the new plan was to take the existing housing and move it into lots that were empty, adjacent to this area so that the housing would, in effect, remain. Plus there would be some commitment to build some additional housing for that which had to be bulldozed down. All right, so the idea being that the amount of housing that was going to be destroyed would be replaced. I don't know how accurate it is, but that's the concept that I'm talking about.

Beard: So you're talking about compromise as a fairly recent concept.

Ramos: Right. Before that we had the ones that were just against the program--which is exactly what happened in this case, except the judge says, in effect, "Wait a minute. You can keep filing lawsuits and injunctions against each other forever. You'll never get the damn thing built. Why don't you get together and come up with a plan that you can all agree to." And that's what happened.

II THE COASTAL COMMISSION

A Union Leader on the Coastal Commission

- Beard: I'm really interested in the coastal commission. This is an interesting situation because, first of all, the building trades council and carpenters' union were all against Proposition 20. Isn't that right?
- Ramos: Right.
- Beard: And Proposition 20 was what one fellow has called "a victory for the environmentalists," essentially. Right?
- Ramos: Yes. Basically, that's the way it's looked at.
- Beard: And here you are, a representative of the opposing forces on the coastal commission--
- Ramos: And there's a bill before the legislature right now to do away with the coastal commission, totally and completely. And I'll bet you that there's any number of the building trades unions that will be out working for that bill. If I wasn't of such sound mind, I might become schizophrenic over it, become schizoid over this damn thing.*
- Beard: How did you first become appointed? I'd like to just kind of document real quickly here your involvement on the coastal commission.
- Ramos: Well, I don't know. The unions had been talking to the governor, saying that this state commission was supposed to generally represent a cross section of Californians. And there wasn't anybody from labor on it at all. And he recognized that that was so.

*According to a written communication from Tony, this bill was subsequently defeated.--ed.

Ramos: As you know--maybe you don't know--the coastal commission's got a rough, rough road to hoe, because they're trying to do something now that should have been done fifty or a hundred years ago in planning what to do with our California coast. And the things that have to be done and are mandated under the coastal law are bound to make people that have property on the coast unhappy, almost invariably. It's just by the nature of things. If you had your own way and you don't have to bother with giving anybody access, then all of a sudden some bureaucrats come in and tell you that you're going to have to allow people to go down there and play on your beach, you wouldn't like it. That's just an oversimplification, but it's a rough program that the coastal commission has to put up with.

So the argument came up that it's all environmentalists, and there ought to be a broader input, more balance. So I guess the governor agreed, and he asked who might be available. There was no election or anything like that. Some names were suggested. And I was chosen, that's all.

Beard: How were you accepted on the commission?

Ramos: I've gotten along very well with them. I don't agree with them all the time. The state commission has some pretty high caliber people. Oh, we can disagree--sit along side of each other and vote against each other on a permit or on some policy--and there's never a bit of recrimination or any of that afterwards. Everybody does as he or she feels it ought to be done. And we do it.

To answer your question directly, I have been well received. They have been friendly. I have been included in lunches and that kind of thing where we can talk off the record. Of course, our meetings are all public. There's no caucuses of any kind. About the only time you really get somebody else's opinion is when he's giving it officially at a meeting; or if you know somebody personally, and you're having a cup of coffee or a drink or something, then you can talk. But no, there was no hostility.

Beard: As a member of labor on the coastal commission, have there been situations in which you felt compromised, felt a conflict with your interests as a union leader?

Ramos: Yes. There have been a couple of projects that--not a couple, a number of times-- You see, we've had to handle permits until the local coastal programs are all adopted; the local commissions go out of business, and the permit process is, then, turned back over to the regional people--to the county or the community. In the meantime, then the state commission has had to do the permits, particularly when they have been appealed. A permit is requested of

Ramos: the regional commission. (You're aware of the set-up. It's five regions.) There's a regional commission that grants you a permit for a project; (You're going to build four condominiums.) And if there's no appeal, then that's all there is to it. If there is an appeal--and there can be from some environmental group or a neighbor or whoever it might be has a right to appeal--then that appeal would come to us.

So to get to your question, there have been times when I have taken a position and voted for a staff recommendation that, for an example, has pared down the number of units that were going to be allowed from two thousand to twelve hundred or something. Because of environmental or other concerns, we decided that that density was too much for that particular area. (This is hypothetical, now, but there have been that kind of cases.) So the staff would recommend that the permit be granted, but that the total number of units be reduced from two thousand to twelve hundred or even nine hundred. And I have agreed in some instances, realizing that this contractor may hire our people, or he may not. I made it a point never to bother with whether he was a union contractor or not, just completely staying out of that, and just looking at it on its merits. Yes, there's been some agonizing; there's bound to be.

Beard: Have you received any official flak?

Ramos: Nope. I haven't. Once in a while an individual, a member of the union representatives will say "Geez, I don't know why the coastal commission didn't approve that project. Goddamit, that was a good one. That would have--" Like that kind of thing, but not direct. I've been left to try to do the job as best I could. And I've let it be known that if you want somebody just to carry out orders that somebody else is going to be formulating, then get somebody like that, not me. So I haven't had any trouble, I really haven't.

Beard: I can understand the disadvantages of being a labor member and that because of this conflict that you feel, agonizing, as you say, sometimes. But what are the advantages of having a familiarity with labor on the coastal commission?

Ramos: I think there is because it does bring into focus, it does add an ingredient towards a more balanced approach. Otherwise you get, if you will, environmental extremism where there's nobody voicing these other considerations.

I'm not the only one--I don't want to leave that [impression]. There's some other people on the commission, particularly of late, that have somewhat the same concerns as I do. And they're not labor members. But the original commission was very strongly environmentally-oriented.

Beard: And has that changed significantly?

Ramos: A little, somewhat now, because there's different people on the commission. Secondly there's been a lot of pressure. I pointed out to you earlier that the processes that are necessary in order to carry out the mandate, the 1976 law, create antagonisms with people because they feel that their private property rights have been interfered with. And they're very vocal about it. They write to their assemblyman, their state senator. It's very fashionable right now to be critical of government and bureaucracy. In any event, isn't that the whole reason why we have this new administration in now, because of too much government? Well, we represent government. We represent government imposing its will on private owners of property on the coast.

##

Regulation of Development

Beard: Is there a difference between the fellow who has one piece of property, a lot, on the coast and wants to develop that and wants to try to get a permit, and the large developer who has a large area that he would like to develop. Are they both at an equal advantage vis à vis the commission? Or does one have a more difficult time getting a permit than the other? Small developer versus large developer.

Ramos: No. There's a very honest effort made, I think, to apply the coastal act equally. And that's one of the reasons that we've antagonized some mighty big developers upon occasion. It sometimes works to the disadvantage of the little guy because, if he's only got one little piece of land and there's some reason why it just should not be developed--if it's on a wetland or it's an environmentally sensitive area or an endangered species or something else--you can't allow him to build a house on it. And [if] that's the only piece of land that he's got to build a house, why that's a very sad situation. And it happens occasionally. I always lean over backwards if it's possible at all to compromise it and let that be built. Sometimes it can't be.

On the other hand, if it's a developer, and he was going to put in twenty houses, and we only allow him twelve, he's also suffered a disadvantage--and it's no question he's suffered some financial loss. But the way things have been, particularly, he can probably raise the price enough on the others to maybe not make it up completely, but he's not totally stymied. So there's no equality between a poor man and a rich man. And the coastal commission can't

Ramos: change that. But basically, I consider, watching it, staff recommendations--actions of the commission--an honest effort to apply the law clearly with everybody.

Beard: How about on the side of the developer? Has there been a change in the quality and style of proposals that have been made to you? I'm thinking of the history of the coastal commission, now, and the history of environmental impact reports. Has that generated some kind of evolution in terms of their proposals to you?

Ramos: There's a number of experts--attorneys, whatever--that are in the field now. They help make presentations on behalf of applicants for a permit. They've studied the law. They know the restrictions and the parameters within which the commission is going to operate and is going to have to make findings. So they will, very often, in order not to drag the process out, meet with the regional staff before it ever gets to the state staff. [They] try to work out a project that has some chance of being accepted because it's already taking into consideration some of these factors.

Yes, there's been a change. I've only been on the commission--well, it was two years last July [1980]. I think I've sensed a change in that time. And I imagine that prior to that there would be even more, where everybody was going to bulldoze his particular project straight ahead the way he wants it; and they said, "I'm not going to let anybody, any group of bureaucrats, tell me what to do." But they don't do that now. There is a real effort to compromise. Sometimes a few more conversations about moving this over here or doing that and the project goes through without any problem.

It's not true that there's been no development on the coast since the coastal commission came in. And it's not true that all the permits are turned down. It is true that about ninety percent of them (I've forgotten what the figures are) are approved. But they are approved with conditions. And it's the conditions sometimes that gall.

Beard: This change that has happened among developers, is it a change in their sensitivity to the environment, would you say, or is it merely an accommodation to reality?

Ramos: It's an accommodation. I'd like to say that I think it's because there's a change in the sensitivity to the environment. I just don't flat believe it. I think my reaction is that if you did away with the coastal act entirely, and they could start putting the pressure on the local county politicians and city politicians to get exceptions and variances, that they'd be right back where they were before the act ever passed. That's the nature of things.

Beard: Are the regional commissions more open to development than the state commission?

Ramos: Yes, in some instances. Not always.

Beard: Why is that?

Ramos: Well, the regional commissions are influenced by the local political establishment much more than the state commission. Part of the makeup of the state commission is appointees from the regional commissions. Nonetheless, the number of original permits that are approved by the regional commissions would be substantially higher than probably would be approved without conditions at the state level.

Labor and the Contemporary Environmental Movement: Friends or Adversaries?

Beard: I wanted to ask just a couple more questions. One, you said there's been a change in the presentations by the developers because of the reality of the situation. How about the environmentalists? Both on the commission and among the people who act as advocates for environmental groups, has there been a change in their attitude toward more of a willingness to compromise?

Ramos: Yes. And I think that's just about the way to say it, "more of a willingness," but you couldn't measure it. It's just a sense-- [telephone interruption]. They're a dedicated group. They're intelligent, and they don't do a slipshod job. They're aware of the act, the requirements and the thrust of the different parts of it, and they make a very sincere effort to stick to that.

There's always a certain amount of flexibility in anything like this where people can be looking at the same requirement and get a slightly different perspective as to how strictly is this to be enforced. You have words like "whenever feasible" that come in. Now what does that mean? It can mean all the way from damn well jamming it through to, on the other extreme, if it's going to interfere at all, forget it. Somewhere in between is what "feasible" means. So there can be an interpretation. I don't know if that's a good example, but there's a serious effort to carry out the act. But I think that the decisions and the positions of the coastal commission at the state level come closer to a balance between the need for development and the need for preservation and protection of the fragile environment than existed under the original Prop 20 or even under the act right after 1976.

Beard: Is there more of a balance in the Sierra Club now?

Ramos: I don't know them in the Sierra Club that well, but I would say yes. From those couple of individuals that I do know, I would think that there's more of an understanding in the Sierra Club, in general, and the environmental movement, in general, if you want to call it that. [It goes back to] this thing that we started out on that you just can't interfere with somebody's livelihood regardless of how important it might be environmentally, without giving considerations to finding alternatives or compromises or something. You can't just be interested in the one aspect only. And I think that there's been a realization of that. The result is that I think there will probably be a closing of the gap that we talked about in the past.

III BRIDGING THE GAP

California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance

Ramos: [I have] an article written by Mike Peevey. Mike Peevey is now head of the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance.* This has been put together with labor and big business and some environmental people as well, to try to do something about avoiding just extreme positions and finding a way to make it work. They would be accused in some quarters of being development-oriented. And there's no question that there's a strong development influence because they are the ones really that are putting up the money to make the organization go.

You asked earlier about enlightened management, enlightened business. And there you'll find some instances of it where they realize that you're not going to be able to continue to do business like we did over the last century, that you're going to have to take environmental considerations [into account] in order to keep business going.

So Mike wrote this article on "Bridging the Gap."** He used to be research director for the State Labor Federation, incidentally. It's an interesting article. You ought to read it because it points out many of the problems that were involved. This was written some months

*According to a written communication from Tony, the California Council for Economic Balance describes its organization as "a non-profit organization supporting programs and efforts to improve the environment while maintaining economic growth. The council's board of directors represents a wide spectrum of interests: one-third of the members are labor leaders; one-third represent business and industry; one-third are community leaders, educators, minority spokespersons, and environmentalists."--ed.

**See Appendix.

Ramos: ago. And I think you ought to take it, and I think maybe that you ought to do something with it if you want to get it in the record, or [at least] some parts of it, because it's a well thought-out article, and much of what he says in there pretty well explains my position.

This is strictly my own observation, biased as it is against the present political situation--and I make no bones about that so that anybody listening just wouldn't get confused--I think that the next four years may well develop in such a fashion that it may provide an opportunity for labor and the environmental movement to come closer together. I get the feeling that we're both going to get the hell kicked out of us in the next four years. Many of the policies of this administration will be as anti-labor as they're going to be anti-environmental. I don't know. Let's just wait and see.

There's already some indications they're ready to cut down on Davis-Bacon prevailing rates. And by the same token, we're already getting stories that we're going to do away with all of these environmental restrictions on business so that it can flourish. It may provide an environment where labor and the environmentalists can find a common ground to do each other some good. We will not always be in accord on every project and every piece of legislation, but I think we may have more in common than we ever had.

Decent Work and Living Conditions: The Basic Issue

Beard: What are your list of priorities for environmental concerns?

Ramos: The first one would be full employment. If we had full employment, there wouldn't be any problem at all as far as the environment is concerned. Everybody would be able to be on the same team, and we'd be able to go. As long as there is a substantial number of unemployed people which pose a threat to those who are employed, and because there is no commitment to full employment, there is going to be a squabble over keeping jobs. This article that I gave you will point that out.

That's why workers work in coal mines where it's dangerous. And it's a lousy environment in a coal mine; I've never been in one, but I've been in a gold mine a couple of times. You ever been down in a mine? It's fun--a great place to work, great environment! Or in a cotton mill. Why do workers do that?

Beard: Because they have to?

Ramos: You're damn right, they have to! It's because they have to work! I just got through reading here about seven construction guys on a power plant out of Fresno. The scaffolding gave away, and it dropped them. Just two years ago there were fifty-one of them killed on an atomic power house back East when the scaffolding gave away. What the hell do construction workers do that [for]? It's glamorous to see this guy up on the steel. Well, it isn't glamorous for me. Certainly it isn't any more at my age. When I get up there, I leave fingerprints in the steel from hanging on.

That's what's hard to understand--or has been, I think now that a lot of the environmentalists are beginning to realize how basic that is.

Beard: I imagine, because of what you said in the beginning that environmentalists, by and large, find themselves allied with a liberal policy which would tend to support full employment.

Ramos: They haven't been. In the past, there's been too many of them that have been, in effect, elitist. They have been professional people whose concern for the environment is almost like a hobby with them. There's no realization or concern about the thousands of people that are living in the slums who have got a lousy environment. What the hell difference does it make to them what happens up at Lake Tahoe? They don't get to go to Lake Tahoe, anyway.

If you're going to be an environmentalist, and you're really worried about environment, let's be worried about all the peoples' environment. If they don't have a job and a decent place to live, they've got a lousy environment. It's all tied together. Don't just talk to me about pristine air, fresh water and mountain trails at the top of the Sierras. It's all got to be put together.

I think there's a greater realization. I think that's a question you asked a long time ago, and it comes back to your question. It took a while for that to be [accomplished], because the first identification was, these people are just playing around with environment as it relates to something that doesn't bother them. They work in downtown San Francisco in a law office or something else, and they go back over to Marin County, and they prattle about the environment. They leave it here. This city grows from some six hundred thousand or seven hundred thousand to over a million people every day. And it drops at six o'clock at night back down. What about the ones that stay here? What about their environment?

Transcriber: Tim Beard
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

TAPE GUIDE -- Tony Ramos

Date of Interview: February 20, 1981
tape 1, side A
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APPENDICES

On Bridging Gap Between Labor and Environmentalists

Mike Peevey, Research Director of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, is an economist who has been involved in civic affairs for many years. As the environmental movement has grown in size and influence he has been repeatedly struck by the insensitivity and misunderstanding of many would-be environmental reformers to the workers' vital stake in environmental reformation and organized labor's role in it. In an effort to spur a more meaningful dialogue between environmentalists and labor, Peevey wrote the following article.

By MICHAEL PEEVEY

In some of the election races last year a number of questions repeatedly arose:

Is there an irreconcilable conflict between environmentalists and organized labor?

Are many environmentalists not liberals, but conservatives or, worse yet, reactionary activists bent on preserving a piece of turf for themselves, regardless of the social consequences?

And, is "no growth" a meaningful goal, or only an elitist sham and shuck?

Most people now are deeply concerned about the lack of clean air; the pollution of bays and streams; and the fact that we consume so much each day waste disposal is a major problem.

As a society we still measure "progress" in too narrow a way. Business decisions are often made with little regard for their social and environmental consequences. Many of the true costs of doing business are not borne by industry, but rather by workers and the community at large. Unfortunately, many environmentalists have not recognized this fact, particularly in relation to working people.

Environmentalists do not speak with one voice. Within the ranks are all shades of opinion. Every movement has its fanatics, those who believe that only the most drastic wrenching of our social structure can stave off imminent physical collapse. The fanatics would stop everything, believing economic growth is bad *per se*. Others, more sophisticated, are beginning to recognize the close connection between environmental and other issues.

The labor movement has a continuing interest in preserving the environment.

A few years ago "black lung" was a major political and social issue because of the efforts of coal miners. "Black lung," or pneumoconiosis, is a disease that kills. It is a disease underground coal miners have lived with, suffered with, and died from for years. Employers, state workmen's compensation agencies, and, in most cases, doctors, refused to recognize that it was caused by an unsafe work environment.

"Brown lung," the disease that afflicts textile workers, is a similar example. Another is asbestosis, which is the scarring of the lungs caused by inhalation of asbestos fibers, a disease workers installing and handling asbestos get with frightening regularity. The labor movement has fought on the job and in legislative halls, practically alone, to develop programs to end these environmental blights.

The labor movement knows that positive action to clean up the environment is necessary. And it knows that industry, left to its own devices, would despoil practically everything.

Today, elements of industry seek to recruit labor as an ally in the battle against environmentalists. Sometimes workers are "blackmailed" into supporting such efforts because employers

are able to exploit their job insecurity by threatening to close down a plant or move to some other locality.

The view that workers must choose between a job in a polluted environment and no job at all is a Hobson's Choice having no place in a democratic society.

If organized labor feels this way, then why are there clashes between unionists and conservationists, clashes that appear to be growing in intensity? There are a number of reasons.

Many conservationists have shown little regard for the needs and aspirations of working people, even though working people and the poor are admittedly the greatest victims of pollution. Environmental leaders, in the main, are relatively affluent and this is often implicitly reflected in their public statements. For example, in pushing for more open space and parks—a worthy goal in itself—many conservationists suggest access to parks should be limited to a few people or that mountains, lakes and streams should be accessible only after a rigorous hike through a pristine wilderness. They seem to forget that parks are paid for by all the people and that everyone should have access to them.

Some conservationists, by championing an economic policy of "no growth," are saying, wittingly or not, to minorities and working people that the prime beneficiaries of a cleaner environment are to be the already affluent.

This is a prescription for even more social strife. No poor White, Black or Chicano with little can willingly accept the notion that "cleaning up the environment" means he must stay

... The view that workers must choose between a job in a polluted environment and no job at all is a Hobson's Choice having no place in a democratic society.

at the bottom of the ladder when within his view are those who not only enjoy economic security but the pleasures of a clean environment as well.

Years ago some suburban liberals looked down their noses at other suburbanites who used one subterfuge after another to keep Blacks or others from their neighborhoods. Today the same suburbanites, fighting the same fight under the "preserve the environment" banner, become community heroes and win kudos from various liberal-left journalistic opinion-molders.

The environmental movement today is non-ideological. Parading behind its banner are hippies, liberals, and middle-of-the-roads, with major units of elitists, conservatives, bigots and downright fanatics. After all, acquiring open space is great for those who enjoy hiking and viewing and it is an alternative to massive congestion and the like. It's also great for those who do not want to see any more poor people in the suburbs and for those realtors who sell used homes and longingly view the market appreciation stemming from open space acquisition. Glory be the ambitious political office seekers who, devoid often of ideology, have the insight to recognize the as yet non-ideological nature of the environment as a political issue. After all, at present it is hardly an act of political courage to support

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On Bridging the Gap Between Labor and Environmentalists

(Continued from Page 3)

"open space" and oppose "developers."

The lasting fact is that the critical job of politicians is not solely to find and then reflect what may be the passing majority view, but to lead, even at the risk of unpopularity.

Looking at the Deep South, it's not the Thurmonds and the Wallaces most of us respect, but the Fullbrights, Yarboroughs and others who vote their consciences even when doing so courts political defeat.

In the end, what appears most important to many voters of supposedly liberal persuasion is not the gut issues of poverty amidst affluence and the need for truly radical social and economic reform, but rather style. What this indicates is that there is in politics, as in society, a class consciousness after all and many apparent liberals, when forced to choose, will do all in their power to maintain their economic and social standards at the expense of all comers if necessary.

Wealthy suburbanites who regularly vote down programs to expand low-income housing are also examples of this attitude. Many, of course, are avid conservationists who, bemoaning freeway congestion, urge workers to use an inadequate public transit system while they continue to drive their own cars.

Other conservationists seem only to oppose programs, without offering alternatives. Examples of this are legion. In San Francisco in 1971, a six-story building height limitation was placed on the municipal ballot. If successful, there would have been no more high-rise office and commercial construction in the city. Such a limitation would have wiped out thousands of jobs in the construction trades and in the clerical, service and maintenance fields.

The proponents of the height limitation measure offered no alternatives, other than to imply that any future high-rise construction should be somewhere else. They showed no concern for the tremendous tax burden the average homeowner and wage earner would have borne as a consequence of limiting San Francisco's tax base when social costs were rising steeply. In short, their campaign was entirely negative. Organized labor and the minority community opposed the height limitation and it was defeated nearly two to one. But the scars and bitterness remain.

Another example of the negative efforts of many conservationists is in the zoning field. In many communities there is a trend towards "large lot" zoning. In some communities no lot can be smaller than one acre. Now such lots are undoubtedly attractive to the small number of persons who can afford them and the home such a status in life requires, but how about the unmet housing needs of moderate and low-income groups?

No one wants to see any more wall-to-wall housing built. However, there is a responsible middle ground. Land can be zoned to stimulate cluster developments that preserve open space.

On the other side, the charge is sometimes leveled by conservationists that unionists are short-sighted, unaware of environmental implications, and would pave over the entire state, if given the chance. While this is an over-simplification, it is true that working people are "job conscious." It is also true that unions sometimes take shortsighted or negative views on vital conservation matters.

In a society with an unemployment rate of six percent—a society where the national administration is attempting to re-define "full employment" as meaning five percent unemployment—workers inevitably will be insecure. Resistance to particular environmental proposals by some workers would decline

if, in reality, we had a full employment economy.

Faced with unemployment, workers are not likely to take a bold stand against industrial pollution. Simply put, when given no other choice and driven by economic insecurity and family needs, workers will not choose a pure environment over a regular paycheck.

It is time for conservationists and secure professionals to recognize that this is the uncomplicated choice many workers face. A worker is not consulted as to whether he "clear cuts" or does selective cutting of timber. A worker does not have a choice between building pollution control devices and a 400-horsepower, gas-guzzling behemoth. A worker does not choose between building 1,000 low-income housing units and a 40-story high-income, high-rise. Nor do environmentalists work to develop such choices.

Environmentalists must recognize that without a total commitment to a full employment economy, many of the conflicts now brewing will intensify. A total commitment means working together to elect political leaders capable of developing full employment programs. This would make the cost of achieving our environmental goals more manageable and would hold out hope to minority groups and others that they would be full participants in a more abundant economy.

We must recognize that while the term "no-growth" may sound attractive it is a reactionary viewpoint even if income was to be more equitably distributed. Incidentally, how many

"Wealthy suburbanites who regularly vote down programs to expand low-income housing . . . are (often) avid conservationists who, bemoaning freeway congestion, urge workers to use an inadequate transit system while they continue to drive their own cars."

affluent people are there who would be willing to take a 25 percent cut in pay in order to help meet the needs of the poor in a society of "no-growth" or a 75 percent cut in pay in a world of "no-growth"?

Barbara Ward put it well in speaking of environmental priorities at the United Nations' Stockholm Conference last summer.

"Suppose there are indeed strict physical 'limits to growth'? Suppose that these delicate mechanisms and balances in the biosphere, that make life possible, cannot sustain 10 billion people all aiming to produce and consume and discard and pollute according to present-developed standards? . . .

"Given finite resources, we cannot evade this basic social issue. Where are the restraints to be put? What is to be reduced, the luxuries of the rich or the necessities of the poor? What are the priorities — a decent human environment for the whole human species or riches for some and squalor for the majority?"

Improving our environment, in the final analysis, is too important an issue to be left largely to the professional conservationists. Put simply, environmental reform will succeed, in the long run, only if it is part of an overall program of social and economic reform.

Hopefully, now that the super-charged and simplistic rhetoric of 1972's political campaigns has passed, reasonable people will turn their attention and intelligence towards wrestling with this simple fact.

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Sierra Club Oral History Project

Dwight C. Steele

ENVIRONMENTALIST AND LABOR ALLY

An Interview Conducted by
Esther C. Herrera

Sierra Club History Committee
1983

Sierra Club Oral History Project

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Labor and The Environment
Subject of Interview(s)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

When Willa Baum informed our oral history graduate seminar that we would be participating in a Sierra Club project recording a series of interviews focusing on labor unions and the environmental movement, it sounded like a challenging and valuable learning experience. Ann Lage, project codirector of the Sierra Club Oral History Project, spoke to the class, and she presented us with a list of candidates for the project. I chose to interview Mr. Dwight C. Steele, an attorney active in the Sierra Club's Bay Chapter who had worked closely with labor on Bay Area environmental issues.

Our interview took place on February 19, 1981, at Mr. Steele's office in Walnut Creek. Mr. Steele met me at the Walnut Creek BART station; he was as I had imagined him to be--a semi-retired, distinguished looking gentleman, well educated and articulate. Even though he was very professional in his whole attitude and conduct, he was warm, approachable and open with his feelings. We drove to his office--an unpretentious working place that matched the casual clothes he was wearing. A look about the room gave one the immediate impression that the hundreds of files around represented years of work and involvement in many activities. I trampled over electric cords of various machines and tried to find space amidst cluttered desks to set my equipment and find a place to sit. He got us a cup of coffee, and we began to discuss how we would proceed with our interview. Like myself, he had already put many hours of preparation. I had sent him an outline of what the Sierra Club wanted us to cover, and he spent a lot of time and energy going through his files to gather the information he needed. He was well prepared and organized.

The interview took on a narrative approach instead of a question and answer format as he already knew what I wanted to know. I let him speak uninterrupted, as it was obvious that the narrative was flowing naturally and candidly. It was soon apparent to me that Mr. Steele has very high values and a genuine concern for his fellow man and his environment. But unlike many, he is the type of person who takes action and works hard to carry out his beliefs. This is the type of man who makes things happen and works so that others may enjoy a better world. Of particular interest was his philosophy about labor unions and union leaders and his work with them on the Save San Francisco Bay Campaign, the fight against the Southern Crossing, the Coastal Initiative, and numerous other environmental campaigns.

It has been a pleasure and privilege for me to have been associated with Dwight Steele in this oral history project.

Esther C. Herrera
Interviewer

12 March 1981
San Rafael, California

I PERSONAL BACKGROUND

[Date of Interview: February 19, 1981]##

Education and Career

Herrera: Mr. Steele, what can you tell me about your personal background?

Steele: I was born in Alameda, California, January 23, 1914. I attended grade school and high school in Alameda, graduating from Alameda High School in 1930. After working with a surveying crew in the Feather River Canyon for eight months, I went to the University of California and got an AB in 1935, then went to law school at Boalt Hall in Berkeley and got an L.L.B., which later became a J.S.D., in 1939.

I had taken a year out of school after my first year in law school to hitchhike around the world, visiting most of Western Europe, the Near East, up the Nile to Lake Victoria, climbing Kilimanjaro, then to India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan. I was admitted to practice law in California in 1939 and married Alberta Hill of Richmond, California, October 19, 1940. We had four children. Two of them are deceased, and we now have six grandchildren from our surviving two daughters. Our legal residence is at Alpine Meadows near Tahoe City, but we spend about half of our time in Rossmoor in Walnut Creek. I have an office within bicycling distance from that residence.

My working career has been as a lawyer, originally practicing in Nevada City. When I got out of law school it was the post-depression period and starting lawyers were being paid from \$25 to

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 18.

Steele: \$100 a month, so I went to Nevada City to get some general practice experience. I stayed there for about two years and then went to work for an insurance company in Oakland for a couple of years defending automobile accident liability lawsuits. I then got into labor relations with an employers' association in San Francisco called the Distributors Association of Northern California, handling problems of dealing with labor unions. I was with the Distributors Association from 1942 to 1946 and then went to Hawaii where I became president of Hawaii Employers' Council which represented employers in various industries throughout the islands, primarily sugar, pineapple, tourism, hotels, restaurants, shipping and stevedoring, and building contractors and the like. I was in that job until 1959 when we moved back to California. I then helped to set up an employers' association in the Bay Area called the Lumber and Mill Employers Association. Among other things, I was at times president and general counsel. I worked with that association from 1961 to 1976.

During my career representing employers dealing with labor unions, I became well acquainted, initially in an adversary way, with many labor leaders. I found that most labor leaders, as you get to know them, are very good people to work with on problems because their job is to solve problems--how to get more money, job security, and better conditions for their workers from usually resisting employers. So they're often very effective in the political field and in finding ways to get things done. I've kept up some of those relationships and from time to time have worked with them on environmental issues.

Early Conservation Activities

Steele: About 1966 I decided that I didn't want to spend all of my time working as a lawyer for pay, so I began to decide how I'd like to spend my future. I thought about devoting it to reducing violence and stopping wars, but I decided it was very difficult to get a handle on doing that as an individual, although I have supported some organizations in those field. I'm still trying to do something about violence at the local level, particularly in the cities. The other thing I thought about was trying to help out on the world population expansion problem, but decided I didn't have any particular qualifications for that. So I decided about 1966 or 1967 to become more active in conservation activities. As early as the 1940s I had been interested in this when we were living in Nevada City and had been, among other things, on an advisory committee to the Forest Service with respect to the management of the Tahoe National Forest.

Steele: I've been interested in the Sierra Nevada, hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing from before 1930 and joined the Sierra Club in the mid thirties. I guess I joined the club primarily because of the skiing activities, and I frequently visited Clair Tappaan Lodge during the winter when the Signal Hill rope tow, up Boreal Ridge, was one of the few ski lifts in northern California. I became a life member of the Sierra Club in 1966.

My father was a civil engineer and worked for his entire career (from about 1909 until his retirement) for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, where he became vice-president in charge of engineering. I grew up in a household where we talked about building dams, and I frequently went with my father into the Sierra to visit sites for hydroelectric projects, for damming streams and running transmission lines. I was exposed to the kind of "progress" philosophy of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. At the same time I was getting, at a young age, a feel for the great natural values of the Sierra. I recall having some arguments with my father about why they had to dam up some of these beautiful streams like the north fork of the Feather River. At an early age I began to think whether it was worthwhile to produce more energy at the cost of losing some of these natural areas.

Semi-Retirement

Steele: In the late sixties I decided to spend more of my time doing something about conservation, which we now call environmental problems. I've gradually gotten rid of most of my clients. I still have a law office, but I really only have two clients that I work for regularly. They happen to be labor-management trusts where I'm attorney to both the union and management trustees and not in an adversary capacity. It's the kind of relationships where I don't have to be available on call, and I can spend as much of my time as I want to on environmental and public interest matters.

II ACTIVITY IN NUMEROUS ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Sierra Club Activities

Herrera: What have been some of your Sierra Club activities?

Steele: During the thirties when I was in school and before I went to Hawaii, I was not particularly active although I did use Clair Tappaan Lodge frequently and helped in building one or two other huts in the Sierra. I never did go out on a Sierra Club outing, and haven't to this day, because I prefer to hike with a few friends or by myself. I have not particularly desired to go out with an organized group.

When I came back from the Islands, I began occasionally attending some Sierra Club meetings and about 1966-67 began to regularly attend the meetings of the San Francisco Bay Chapter Conservation Committee. I was active in that committee until about 1975, sometimes as chairman. I served on the Bay Chapter's Executive Committee from 1967-71. In 1973 I was nominated for the board of directors but I was not elected. In 1969 I was named by the board of directors as project coordinator for the San Francisco Bay and Delta. Commencing in 1970 for a couple of years I was vice-chairman of the chapter's transportation committee, and I had begun to get increasingly active in public transportation planning. On trips to Europe, and to Montreal, Toronto, Mexico City, and cities in the United States, I tried to see what they'd done about modern transit systems and also began to get involved in regional planning. For a period of time I was a Sierra Club representative with respect to plans and functions of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the Bay Area and on various land-use matters.

Save the Bay, the Southern Crossing, and Lake Tahoe

Steele: In 1968-69 I was chairman of the Sierra Club's "Save San Francisco Bay" campaign and worked with Janet Adams, Kay Kerr and Peter Behr to organize a coalition to conduct the campaign in the California legislature in 1969 for adoption of the law to make the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission [BCDC] a permanent body, adopt their plan to control bay fill and shoreline development, and provide for its administration.

In 1970-72 I was cochairman with Claire Dedrick of what was known as the "Southern Crossing Action Team." This was not just a Sierra Club activity, but also involved other organizations to try to halt the construction of another automobile bridge across San Francisco Bay. A plan had been in the works for some fifteen years calling for another automobile bridge south of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. It was called the "Southern Crossing." This campaign resulted in getting legislation to hold up the construction, but unfortunately the governor, then Ronald Reagan, vetoed the bill. The good part of that was that when he vetoed it, he said he thought this was the kind of issue that the people ought to decide. This was a very unpopular idea with the highway people, but it did get on the ballot in 1972 in five counties around the bay.

I chaired a special campaign committee; Cyril Magnin was the finance chairman, and we raised enough money for a modest election campaign. Fortunately, there was not much organized opposition to our position. The highway people, some of the business establishments, and the chamber of commerce got into the fight, but they did not spend a great deal of money. We were successful in getting that measure to stop the Southern Crossing by a vote of about 80 percent. I'll comment later about the union support in that campaign, as well as the Bay campaign.

I have been a spokesman for the Sierra Club on Lake Tahoe matters in the period 1969-73 when the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was set up and was adopting their plan, and in more recent years I've been active in the Lake Tahoe Task Force. Although not as a representative of the Sierra Club, I'm now a member of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's governing body, representing the public-at-large of California. I was a member of a labor committee set up in the Bay Chapter in the early seventies and also a member of the Sierra Club's National Labor Committee from 1973 to 1976. I received a special achievement award at the club's annual meeting in 1970.

Steele: I've never been a staff member, but I've worked very closely with many staff members over the years beginning with Dave Brower and then with Mike McCloskey on many matters. The most conscientious and effective Sierra Club staffer I worked with was Dan Rosenberg, who was largely responsible for the success of the 1969 Save the Bay campaign and the 1972 Southern Crossing election. Unfortunately, among the many young people temporarily sheltered in his home were some suspected radicals, and publicity about this made people in the club nervous, so he left and now is in Alaska. I have also had the luck to work with, and learn from, John Zierold on legislation and lobbying, Carl Pope on politics, politicians and organizing, and with many other club staff people, each of them very competent and dedicated.

I also served as a trustee of the Sierra Club's Legal Defense Fund from 1973 to 1978 and for a period of time was treasurer of the Legal Defense Fund. I had to resign from that when the governor appointed me to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I've also been on the legislative committee of the Sierra Club beginning about 1970. I'm not sure what the date was, but sometime in the seventies it began to be called the California Legislative Committee, and I served on that until 1977.

Involvement in a Variety of Organizations

Herrera: In what other organizations have you been active?

Steele: With respect to other organizations that I am active in, on boards of directors and other capacities, I've been on the board of directors of the California League of Conservation Voters since 1971, on the board of the Planning and Conservation League since 1975, and on the board of Save San Francisco Bay Association since 1974. I have been a director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe for many years and was president of that organization for two years. I'm a member of the Legal Advisory Committee to the Tahoe Legal Defense Fund. I was on the executive committee of the San Francisco Citizen's Waterfront Committee during the years when we were attempting to stop high rise developments in San Francisco, particularly on the waterfront. I've been a member of the Audubon Society for a long time, Save-the-Redwoods League and various other organizations. I'm also on the advisory board of California Tomorrow. I'm also a director of the Eugene O'Neill Foundation and of two business corporations, one operating ski resorts in California and Utah and the other a resort in Carmel Valley.

Steele: With respect to international things, I've been, since 1975, a member of the board of directors of the Spirit of Stockholm Foundation whose purpose really was pretty much limited to raising money to provide a bridge between the United Nation's environmental program and the third world countries and specifically to support the Environmental Liaison Centre in Nairobi. I've worked with other directors of that organization, which include Huey Johnson, now secretary of Resources in California; Margaret Mead was on the board until her death, and there were other people from both the East and West Coast, including Marty Rosen, now head of the Trust For Public Land. I'm also a charter member of the Oceanic Society and life member of the East Africa Wildlife Society

Wilderness Preservation and Other Environmental Issues

Herrera: What have been your concerns with reference to wilderness preservation and other conservation and environmental issues?

Steele: My concerns about the environment, as I've indicated, initially had to do with the Sierra, a lot of which I've been much concerned about and more recently, of course, Lake Tahoe which is far from being a wilderness area and is really now being rapidly urbanized. But I never really got into the battles to preserve the wilderness, as such, and as I got into conservation work with the club and with other organizations, I became more and more concerned about urban environmental matters—the quality of life where people spend most of their time. I think I may have had some influence on the club's beginning to move into some activities with respect to the urban environment in the early 1970s. I became concerned about transportation, particularly the damage which was being done to the environment by the overuse of automobiles and the desirability of moving back to public transportation, particularly for commuting, but also for general transportation purposes. I was active in the club and elsewhere on that.

I also began to recognize that trying to solve problems like transportation and land-use planning through actions at the local level, either cities or counties, was really not a broad enough attack on the problem. Therefore, I became active in supporting regional government, and for several years I was a Sierra Club representative on a coalition effort to give more authority and power to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), specifically to give them a legal base and a mandate to develop a regional land-use plan.

Steele: For several years, beginning in the middle seventies we helped draft legislation in California for regional government and in one or two years got fairly close to having such a bill passed but were never successful. The impetus for that has died down although many of us in the Sierra Club have continued to work with ABAG, which is a voluntary association of local governments on various environmental, land-use, and transportation problems. Helen Burke of the Bay Chapter has been very active in that, and I served on a special task force set up by ABAG on industrial siting two or three years ago.

I also got into land-use planning on a statewide basis and was a member of legislative land-use task forces over a period of about four years. Again, with the help of many people, we developed some legislation that would provide for comprehensive land-use and resource management planning for California. Under the leadership of Assemblyman Ed Z'Berg, in one session we got very close to having such legislation passed. After his death, legislation for state land-use planning was taken over by Larry Kapoloff, another assemblyman, and up to about 1979 it looked like we might get such legislation. But because of changes in the makeup of the legislature and a well-financed counterattack on the environmental movement throughout the state, all that effort has been really on the back burner for some time now.

A related thing that I worked for in the mid seventies was a study and report that was under the auspices of the Planning and Conservation Foundation under the direction of Bill Press, then executive director of the Planning and Conservation League. This was an effort to get ten top industry or business leaders together with ten environmental and public interest leaders in the state of California to see if we could agree on some basic concepts about land-use planning and resource management in California. This went on for almost two years with monthly meetings and a lot of work in between meetings. It finally resulted in a document on which there was almost entire agreement by all the twenty people representing business and environmental interests on various aspects of land-use planning. It was published in a document called "The California Land; Planning for People." It had been hoped at that time this would be the guide for legislation, but we haven't been successful in getting a comprehensive land-use bill passed, and we haven't even been able to get legislation passed in California to keep prime agricultural land in agricultural use.

I've wandered a little bit afield about conservation issues--I have, of course, been concerned about air pollution and about water matters. I served on the Northern California

Steele: Water Committee of the club for a period of time, and I followed the whole California Water plan controversy and particularly joined in the efforts to stop the Peripheral Canal, and I'm still working on that.

I've gotten deeply involved with both water and air problems at Lake Tahoe as well as the San Francisco Bay. On environmental health, I haven't been active in that except with respect to health and safety in the work place where I've worked with some labor union people and environmentalists on first trying to get more public attention to on-the-job dangers, particularly noise and air pollution and exposure to often unidentified toxic substances, chemicals and gases, and then on federal legislation, which became the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA).

Aside from some help on getting federal legislation, in my capacity as trustee of the Sierra Club's Legal Defense Fund, I've helped support giving assistance to the administration of OSHA. As I recall, the club intervened in a couple of cases. One involved the inspection of work places without a warrant. The Sierra Club joined with some labor unions in 1976 in filing an amicus brief in a case that went to the Supreme Court: Ray Marshall, as Secretary of Labor, vs. Barlows.

III REACHING ACCORD WITH LABOR

Labor Unions and Environmentalists: Natural Allies

Herrera: What have been your concerns in reaching accord with labor?

Steele: Because of my relationship with labor union people over thirty-five years or more, as I became active in the environmental movement I realized that, on most issues that we were talking about, labor unions were a natural ally to the environmentalists. Aside from their so-called "pork chop" issues of bettering working conditions, getting more money, shorter hours, and fringe benefits for their people, the history of American unions, as well as western European unions, has been that they've had a high degree of concern for better quality of life, not just for the working member of the union but for his family.

Much of the social legislation over the past hundred years in Western society came about because of activities of labor unions. Also, they were really the first active environmental groups with respect to air pollution, toxic chemicals, and water quality problems because of the exposure of workers to hazardous working conditions, outstandingly in coal mines where they had long ago become aware of the "black lung" problems and tried to do something about it. But also in more recent years, the awareness of labor union leaders that their members were being exposed in the work place to new chemicals and to new hazards.

It seemed to me and to a lot of other people that unions and environmentalists were natural allies in fighting pollution of various sorts and trying to have a better environment, not just where we work but where we live and recreate. We also shared a "common enemy" since the business establishment with which unions are constantly contesting is also the cause of most of the pollution and resource depletion which concerns environmentalists.

Steele: I'd had some discussions about this on the philosophic level with some union leader friends before 1969, but it wasn't until 1969 that I had any part in a direct effort for a working relationship or coalition with union leaders on an issue, and that had to deal with the legislation to "Save San Francisco Bay." It was really legislation to put a stop, or almost a stop, to further filling in San Francisco Bay and setting up BCDC to administer a plan. The initial legislation that set up BCDC had been passed in 1965. I'm not sure whether there was any labor union support in 1965, although I think there was. Senator McAteer was one of the authors of the original legislation, and he had union contacts.

In any case, when we were building up a campaign team or coalition which involved twenty-five or so environmental organizations, we also attempted to get some labor union support for the bay legislation, and this resulted in a group of about a dozen labor union leaders from around the Bay Area who undertook to get their unions to support and work with the Sierra Club and others, first in getting an endorsement and then having a couple of press conferences, one in San Francisco and another in Sacramento, and appearances before legislative committees. Some of the labor people who were active in that were George Johns, who was then head of San Francisco Labor Council, Art Carter, who was then head of the Central Labor Council in Contra Costa county, who currently is chief of California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health, and Emerson Street of Santa Clara County Central Labor Council, and others. I'm sure this had some impact on the legislators, particularly the direct contacts by some of these labor leaders helped to get some of the votes that were needed. We needed every vote we could get because in the final vote on the bill, we didn't have a vote to spare.

Following that effort in 1969, some of us attempted to develop some conversation and continuing dialogue and were thinking about a continuing coalition between environmentalists and labor unions, but this was very difficult to do. In my experience with trying to do this over the past ten years or so, I'm still optimistic the day will come when we'll have some kind of continuing close relationship, but so far we've been able to, at least in northern California, get active cooperation only when there is an issue that the leadership in the unions feel is important to the interests of their membership that also coincides with the issue that's important to the environmentalists. San Francisco Bay was one of those issues, the legislation to protect the California coast was another. Various transportation issues frequently coincide because not only are members of the labor unions concerned about getting to and from their jobs, but they're also concerned with air pollution and having more efficient public transportation.

The Environmental Concerns of Labor Leaders

Steele: Most labor leaders that I know have been very much concerned about the general environmental problems of water, toxins, and air, and even land-use planning. We now have some labor union leaders that are active in land-use planning. One of the top officials of the carpenter's union in California, Tony Ramos, with whom I've worked with many years, is now on the coastal commission. He's also been active on other land-use and environmental issues. Don Vial is director of the state Department of Industrial Relations and a member of the governor's cabinet. As I mentioned, Art Carter is now head of California's occupational safety programs. I can't recall others that are in similar situations on commissions or in administrative jobs with the state, but I'm sure there are several of them.

As part of this effort to have a continuing coalition, in 1971, I worked with David Jenkins, whom I've known since the early 1940s, on a broad participations conference on "Conservation and Jobs." Dave is a left-wing labor organizer and activist out of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), who, during World War II when Russia and the United States were fighting allies, organized what was called the "California Labor School" and was its director for several years. He had been very active politically and was a lobbyist both for the union and for San Francisco community groups and was well acquainted with politicians as well as labor leaders. I do not know anyone who has more friends in San Francisco, from all segments of the community, than Dave has, and he has rare talents as an organizer.

Dave Jenkins has always had a great concern for the quality of life, particularly for the underprivileged and minority groups but also on a much broader basis. So he and I and a few others working with Father Jonsen, who was the president of the University of San Francisco, with some help and support from the Ford Foundation, set up in 1971 a broad-based conference in San Francisco of leaders, not just from labor and environmental organizations, but also from business and from the political scene. Mayor Alioto gave the keynote address. We had presidents or vice-presidents from the leading big business interests.

A total of over two hundred attended the larger sessions. The conference went on over a period of two days or two and a half days. It was intended to be a launching pad for a continuing coalition group. Meetings were held after that by some of the leaders, but it gradually died out, partly because the Ford Foundation declined to further fund the activity, but I think primarily because union leaders have to be concerned from day to

Steele: day and week to week with the primary interest of their members, and they have trouble getting reelected if they spend too much of their time or are too much in front on issues that the membership of their unions does not see as primary. This is a little bit of philosophy, but I think it's worth saying. There are some outstanding exceptions to this. There are some labor leaders who have been out in front on environmental matters and have not only survived, but I think it's helped their careers both within their unions and beyond that. One example is Leonard Woodcock of the UAW, another is Tony Mazzocchi of Chemical Workers. Tony Ramos would be an example in California.

Dave Jenkins certainly has stuck his neck out many times on environmental issues and took a lot of leadership when it would have been easier for him to be on the other side. One good example of that is the coastal initiative campaign in 1972. Dave Jenkins was offered a very substantial amount of money--many thousands of dollars to help Whitaker and Baxter, which was the public relations organization hired by the business interests to defeat the coastal initiative--Jenkins was offered a lot of money to help on that, but he turned it down and actually contributed some of his own money to our efforts to try to get the initiative passed. So there are people in the labor movement who do that, but they're a rarity. Most of the leaders that I know have to be concerned with the more immediate economic and survival needs of the union members rather than the long run environmental interests.

Controversies Involving Labor and Environmentalists

Steele: In spring of 1972, we had on the ballot in counties around the bay the issue of whether or not the Southern Crossing bridge for automobile use between the East Bay and San Francisco would proceed. I worked with a number of people in getting support for our position of opposition to the bridge from labor unions. We did have a group of about nineteen union leaders that constituted a "Labor Committee for No on Proposition A." These included Art Carter, Emerson Street, Sam Jensen of Machinists Lodge 68, Al Brown of the Teamsters, Walter Johnson of the Department Store Employees Union, Bill Chester, Jim Herman and LeRoy King of the ILWU, Leon Olson of the Typographers, Joe Balardi of the Culinary Workers, Tim Twomey, head of the Hospital and Institutional Workers Union, and Mattie Jackson of the Ladies Garment Workers. They helped to get the vote out to defeat the building of the Southern Crossing.

Later that year, and as I indicated earlier, working primarily with Dave Jenkins but also with some other labor people, we got substantial support for the coastal initiative, which was known

Steele: as Proposition 20 in the election of November, 1972. We had a "California Labor Committee for Yes on 20" with unions representing about three hundred thousand workers. Tim Twomey of the State Council of Service Employees Union and Versia Metcalf of the Auto Workers were particularly active and the California Federation of Teachers was among the unions which endorsed Prop 20. We were unable to get endorsement from the state AFL-CIO, in spite of some conversations with Jack Henning, who was and is the head of that organization statewide. They opposed it, and the building trade unions opposed the coastal initiative, and some of them joined very actively in the opposition. However, I think that the labor union support for the coastal initiative was a key factor in that measure getting passed by a vote of about 55 percent.

Another local issue where I was involved with some labor union people was the Shell Oil chemical workers' strike against the Shell Oil refinery in Martinez in 1973. One of the issues had to do with safety in the work place, particularly exposure to toxic chemicals. The union was asking to get access to information, etc. and this was the first time I know that the board of directors of the Sierra Club got involved in a strike issue. At first the Bay Chapter decided to support the objective of the strike in providing a safer, more healthy work place. Then the executive committee of the club nationally adopted a resolution of support. There was quite a bit of opposition from within the club to this action, particularly by Sierra Club members in the geographical area of the refinery, some of whose friends and families worked there or were in management capacities there. It finally resulted in a discussion at the board of directors' level on May 5-6, 1973.

At the Sierra Club's meeting, John Henning, head of the California AFL-CIO, who also represented George Meaney, then head of the AFL-CIO nationally, Tony Mazzocchi and Ed Duffy of the Chemical Workers, Dave Jenkins of the ILWU, Tom Isaak of the Operating Engineers discussed with the board, not just the Shell Oil refinery problems, but a basis for continuing cooperation between labor unions and the Sierra Club. One result of that was the setting up of a Labor Liaison Committee nationally in the club. I was a member of that--not a very active one. I don't know what happened to that committee recently.

Sierra Club Leaders: Attitudes Toward Labor

Steele: One of the things I'd like to comment on is that I think there's been a problem in the Sierra Club of having a membership that is basically antiunion. That may not be true in other areas of the country, but I think it is certainly true in the Bay Area. To some

Steele: extent I've observed it in meetings of the board of directors. Instead of the immediate reaction of Sierra Club members seeing that the union leaders are their allies, on many occasions it's been one of antithesis and of even proposing resolutions attacking a union for striking. In some cases it may have been justified where they struck a public utility or struck a transit system, but because the membership of the Sierra Club is white, upper-middle class, there is no natural affinity within our membership for the views, desires, and even needs of the working class--particularly the lower scales of the working class--the laboring blacks, Chicanos, and people who work with their hands.

I recall back in 1972 I spent a good deal of time with some other people lining up a meeting of the Bay Chapter leadership of the Sierra Club--not just the executive committee but a number of other people, including Mike McCloskey, and got some of the California labor leaders to come there and have a sort of relaxed session. Labor leaders who attended included Jack Crowley, secretary of the San Francisco Labor Council, Tony Ramos of the carpenters union, Dave Jenkins, Ken Erwin and Tom Isaak of the operating engineers union. I think we had a list of about sixty or seventy Sierra Club leaders who were invited to that meeting and only about twenty showed up. It was very difficult to arouse any feeling among the Sierra Club leadership that labor leaders are the kind of people they ought to be talking to and that their interests were the same.

Mike McCloskey, of course, is the kind of person who thoroughly understands not just the need to work with labor unions, but he's had, in the early days of his career, some direct experience. I think he was a member of a union. He has been helpful in working with labor, both on the national level and in California, particularly at the national level. He's now a member of some organizations that are working on this kind of coalition. But there is a problem with the membership as a whole in joining with labor unions. I think that's dissipating, but I just wanted to comment on it.

The League of Women Voters

Herrera: What was your involvement with the League of Women Voters?

Steele: Well, for several years when I was working on attempts to get a regional government, one of the representatives of the California League of Women Voters was Holly O'Konski, a very capable and dedicated, hard-working gal. She and I worked on a coalition

Steele: group of about half a dozen people including Bill Evers, a founder of the PCL [Planning and Conservation League], Bob Kirkwood, president of SPUR [San Francisco Planning and Research Association], and Angelo Siracusa, executive director of the Bay Area Council which is the business organization on this kind of thing. We used to meet frequently and talk about a lot of other things than just regional government. Through her I got some understanding about the League of Women Voters and very much admired the way they went about doing things. I attended some of their meetings, including a conference that they had where I was one of the speakers on the subject "Jobs and the Environment" in late 1972.

I've also worked with the League of Women Voters with respect to Lake Tahoe problems. They've been active there, and they have some very good people working on Tahoe problems for many years, including particularly Lois Shellhammer of Sacramento. I have also worked with Caryl Mazey of the league on various northern California issues. I've also attended other conferences as a speaker or panel member on the subject either called "Jobs and the Environment" in late 1972.

I've also worked with the League of Women Voters with respect to Lake Tahoe problems. They've been active there, and they have some very good people working on Tahoe problems for many years, including particularly Lois Shellhammer of Sacramento. I have also worked with Caryl Mazey of the league on various northern California issues. I've also attended other conferences as a speaker or panel member on the subject either called "Jobs and the Environment," which is also the name of a conference held in San Francisco in 1977.

The most recent thing I did was a University of San Francisco series that went on in late 1977 and early 1978, which was for a group of graduate students and the public where there was a sort of a debate format between a labor leader and some other representative on various topics. The general theme was "The Price of Peace" and "Peace Between Labor Unions and Other Elements of Society." Tony Ramos was the labor representative on that program that we put on and which was recorded and used on KQED called "The Environment and Labor."

Concluding Comments

Steele: I continue to keep some of the contacts with labor unions that I've known although, as the years go on, some of them are dying off. I do occasionally contact some of them about specific issues.

I still believe that the day will come relative soon, but maybe not during my lifetime, when there will be a pretty solid relationship between the labor union movement as a whole and the environmental movement as a whole and more specifically, between the Sierra Club and labor leaders, particularly in northern California, a continuing working relationship on all matters that have to do with the quality of life, which we call environment but to the working man it means having enough to survive, being safe on the job, being sure that his wife can walk down the street safely, that his kids have a healthy, safe life, and sometimes an opportunity to take a vacation in some of the areas that they hear we Sierra Club people talking about as paradise.

Herrera: I want to thank you very, very much, Mr. Steele. You have really given me a new perspective on labor unions and labor union leaders. It's a new way of thinking which I never had before. Thank you!

Transcriber: Esther C. Herrera
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