Martin Lebedoff
Narrator

Carl Ross and Linda Schloff
Interviewers

June 22, 1988
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CR: Okay, this is an interview with Martin Lebedoff of Minneapolis on June 22nd, 1988, this is for the Minnesota Radicalism Project and the Archives of the Minnesota Jewish Historical Society, the interviewers are Carl Ross and Linda Schloff. So why don't we begin, you wanted to tell us something about the...

ML: In response to your question about Jews in the radical movement in Minnesota, I have to think that Jews by virtue of the society they lived in in Europe and Russia, knew that they fared well where man had due process and individual liberties and they always involved themselves in movements that led toward those things and there was an old time establishment in Minnesota that controlled the University, the legislature, most elected offices for a period of 125 years and there had to be a change and Jews gravitated toward the liberal point of view and joined the leaders in attempting to make that change.

CR: Let's take that as a starting point. Why don't we start with some [unclear] things of...

ML: I also often think about, I often think about the results with the legislature for a good number of years and in recent years was dominated and controlled by the Farmer Labor Party. I always think that for 125 years the Republicans dominated it and did little more than protect railroads, lumber interests, landowners, newspapers with terrible laws that we have relative to newspapers in the state of Minnesota and the people ought to have a short chance to attempt to catch up a little bit.

CR: Now your parents were as you said immigrants from Europe, can you tell me precisely where and a little bit more about them?

ML: My father came from the part of Russia known as Belle Russia, White Russia and his family lived in a Jewish suburb of the city of Gomel which was a major city, g-o-m-e-l, sometimes pronounced Homel, and it was a city of about half a million, and during World War II it was a bastion of German military strength and the headquarters for them, it was at the juncture of two major rivers, the Niper and the Soj, my father's father and grandfather and both been in the business of leasing lumber tracks from the government and cutting trees all winter and then on the spring flood tie them into huge rafts and float them down the river toward Kiev, my father and his brothers left Russia at the time of the Russian Japanese war, the time of their induction into the Army where they were treated as second class citizens. My father tells me that when he went to the Army they looked at his sheet and said Jewish, you clean horses. So he crossed the border into Poland and
escaped from Russia one night, made his way across Germany, got to London and then like so many people who travelled and needed somebody, a place to stay, he found Monslight[?] in London. The woman he found later became my grandmother, my mother's mother. He went to her house, spent some time on his way to Canada, he met my mother and after getting to Canada and Winnipeg he left there and came to Minneapolis because he had a brother living in Minneapolis. He got himself settled, got a job pressing at the Morchild-Rothchild Company, sent for my mother and they got married in Minneapolis in 1907.

LS: What, was he involved in any radical activities in Russia?

ML: No, not my father.

LS: What about your...

ML: I'll get to, I'll get to his brothers.

LS: Where did he meet your mother?

ML: In London at her mother's house. And my mother's mother had been born in the same town that my father came from, that's why he sought them. My mother's father was a fur trader, he travelled extensively buying furs, in fact one of my mother's sisters was born in Argentina while he was on a long buying trip.

LS: Really.

ML: Yeah.

LS: He was a, he wasn't just a fur trader in Russia?

ML: I don't know what he did in Russia, my first knowledge of him was as a fur buyer travelling and buying furs and I knew that my mother's youngest sister, an aunt of mine was born in Argentina.

CR: So he travelled out of Minneapolis.

ML: He travelled out of London.

CR: Out of London.

ML: Yes. Travelled out of London.

CR: Yeah, okay.

ML: And he was killed in a railroad accident when my mother who was the second oldest child was 12 years old and her mother, one of those large group of remarkable women that raised families and moved them and cared for them, they were an unbelievable generation of people, she raised her family and after three of her daughters came to the new world and married, she moved her two
younger children and settled in Minneapolis where two of her daughters lived. Third lived in Detroit. The brother who my father came to Minneapolis for, as a young man was a student of Lenin's in Geneva and was involved in the radical movement in Russia and he left before he was inducted in the army to avoid the military service. And he settled in St. Paul, he learned a trade in Russia, he was a barber, but in St. Paul he opened a barber school and his economic success was good, for the years in which he lived he was regarded as a well-to-do man. A good reader, good student, he furthered his ed...he got a high school degree in St. Paul at the age of 70. Took courses at the University after that and he, in his later life he did not participate in the radical movement so much as he participated in groups that tended to protect individual liberties.

LS: Such as. Can you think...

ML: Well Civil Liberties Union...

CR: Or were there Jewish groups?

ML: He didn't participate especially in Jewish groups, he had a great distaste for organized religion, and he told me at my bar mitzvah that that was the first time he'd been in a synagogue in 40 or 50 years. And he and I had a close relationship, he had a fondness for me that I appreciated.

LS: Did he ever tell you about anything that he had done in further radical activities in Russia or what he had learned at Lenin's knee?

ML: No. Well, no, but he was kind of proud that he was a student of Lenin's at that school. My father had a younger brother who stayed in Russia, mainly because he was generally a prisoner in Siberia. When I saw the movie Dr. Zhivago I said Uncle Jack I saw the movie Dr. Zhivago and saw them loading the people onto boxcars to haul them to Siberia, is that the way you went? He says that was kind of the country club crowd, he says I walked all the way to Siberia and my father and his brother who lived here, got him out of Russia and to Minneapolis just in time for him to be drafted into the army in World War I and sent to France where he fought in two or three of the major battles.

LS: Why was he sent to Siberia?

ML: Oh he was a Trotskyite and...

CR: A Menshevik?

ML: I think so, I think so.

CR: In other words of the [unclear] Democratic Party.

ML: He remained loyal to the, he remained loyal to the Trotsky movement all his life, he was a tremendous reader and student, he was like an old world [unclear]...

LS: Was he a barber also?
ML: He was a barber also and he had a barbershop in Minneapolis and he was, not, the European barber was not quite like the American barber, he would put on his good dark clothes at night and go to concerts and lectures and meetings and he had an interest in, both of my parents had an interest in these things and fortunately I was exposed to it. My mother used to take me to the Metropolitan Theater in Minneapolis, I saw the Merchant of Venice when I was nine years old and I think I saw every conductor the Minneapolis Symphony ever had, that's the time when I was that age and I've always had a deep interest in music and the live theater and both parents had it.

CR: Back up one question, your, the relative who came who was a Trotskyist, was this about the time of the Russian Revolution or prior to it?

ML: Russian Revolution was what, '16, '17.

CR: 1917.

LS: '17, uh-huh.

ML: Yeah, he was in it prior to that.

CR: So he came before the revolution.

ML: He came, no, he came here in about 1918 or 1919, see.

CR: Yeah, the Russian Revolution had occurred, the United States was still involved in the war.

ML: Right, yes.

CR: So when were you born then?

ML: I was born in January of 1911.

CR: In Minneapolis.

ML: In Minneapolis.

CR: So tell us more about what it was like to be young and growing up in the Jewish community or in the Minneapolis community, however it may have been.

ML: In the...

LS: You did live on the northside then.

ML: Yes, yes, my parents' first home was on, was part of a duplex on 8th and Dupont. Later they moved to another duplex on a street called Basset Place. My father had gotten into business for himself. He started out as a presser and saw no future in it and he and another man, he discovered that men's suits in that era were tailor made, tailor made to the extent of the suit coat, the trousers were machine made so he and this man started manufacturing trousers to sell to coat manufacturers.
Then there discovered that the garment industry was so small in Minneapolis that in order to succeed they had to be in a larger market. So he left my mother and me here and went to St. Louis and they started a factory there. Then my mother gave birth to my brother who was her second child and he came home and didn't go back and he bought a horse and wagon and peddled fruit for a while, then he got a couple of well-to-do Jews to loan him some money and he opened a moving picture theater and that was the business he spent his life in. And he was modestly prosperous, most people thought we were well off, and...

LS: Was that a fairly Jewishly dominated business back then? As far as owning a theater.

ML: The ownership of theaters was mostly Jews in Minneapolis and St. Paul and we always lived on the northside and after Basset Place they moved to 11th Avenue North between Humboldt and Irving and then my father bought a home in what was known as Homewood which was a substantial and relatively expensive residential area, he bought a home and they lived there until 1941 where he sold it because the three children had become adults and they built a smaller house on the west side of Cedar Lake at Franklin and Drew and they lived there about five years and decided to move to California and we sold that home and my parents moved to California along with my sister who was the youngest child.

CR: Where was the Homewood community?

ML: The Homewood community was in north Minneapolis, it was bounded by the eastern boundary was Penn Avenue and it went west through Washburn which was the last street. The southern boundary was 10th Avenue North and the northern boundary was Plymouth. And it was an era of course that can't possibly ever be repeated because those Jews who lived in Homewood were all modestly prosperous and they lived in a self imposed ghetto and they, some of the sights I remember when it came time for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and it was time to go the synagogue, all of a sudden the doors of all the houses would open at the same time and the families in their best clothes would come out and walk to the various synagogues and it was quite a sight. The era, the whole area was a wonderful place to live, there were a lot of bright, intelligent people, children had playmates who were comparable to themselves, the streets were safe to walk, it was, that area lead Minneapolis in all of the things you look for in what we call the quality of life things, the...

CR: How did the bulk of the Jewish community make its living?

ML: Minneapolis was a, when I was a child, was very anti-Semitic, but silently anti-Semitic. They just...

CR: We're talking 1920's now?

ML: The time of World War I and into, through, into the '20s, yes. There was a rather severe depression in this country right after World War I, in the 1921 or '22 and that affected a lot of people. It was, I graduated the University of Minnesota in 1933 and it wasn't possible for a Jewish graduate to get a job unless he went to work for another Jew, there was no jobs in any of the large law offices, the major business were the contraction company, were the power and light company, major law offices, large companies like Honeywell and Minnesota Mining, Minneapolis Steel and
Machinery, none of those would employ a Jew, so most of them became small business people, they were store keepers, they were small garment manufacturers, and those were the traditional Jewish businesses in Minneapolis.

CR: And the Jewish garment industry employed Jewish workers.

ML: They employed Jewish workers and non-Jewish workers.

CR: Several hundred or smaller numbers.

ML: Most of the factories were smaller but in total they employed several hundred, yes. Maybe even as many as 2,000. There were a lot of garment manufacturers at one time.

CR: Right, yeah. This was generally true of St. Paul's process also.

ML: Yes, I'm not as familiar with St. Paul but I knew that there were manufacturer's there too and some very successful ones.

LS: What about the, well the larger manufacturing like Munsingwear for instance, did many Jews work there?

ML: No, no, but those were very mediocre jobs, there were no management level jobs at all and I don't think Jews sought the jobs as factory workers.

CR: Other than in the Jewish organized needle trades that...

ML: Right, right, and there were really no substantial storekeepers, you know, the major stores were Dayton’s and Donaldson’s, major department stores, there were no Jews in any bank, it was a difficult time, so they went into business. When I graduated the University I started a business.

LS: Well does all of this, caused Jews to become radical in this country?

ML: It didn't make a radical of me, I liked the socialized capitalist system for making money and my liberal thrust went toward individual liberties and promoting the philosophy of due process or as my son David Lebedoff says, he says everybody has due process but some people have more than others.

CR: Good description. Was this community largely secular or largely religious?

ML: He asked, he asked...

CR: Or would you define it in those terms?

ML: He asked if the community was secular or religious, I think you can't divide it that way were they secular or did they belong to an organized house of worship. It's been my belief that Jews living the diaspora needed a centrality of Judaism and they found it in the house of worship and they joined, whether they believed or not, they were members and paid dues and Minneapolis had
one of the highest levels of membership in synagogues of any city in the country. When I say Minneapolis I'm not precluding St. Paul.

LS: I understand. You're talking about the community you know the best.

ML: Right.

CR: So apparently along side of this a secular life grew up so the Jewish culture's expressed in both aspects, secular and religious.

ML: The major change in the feeling about non-Jews to Jews came, it's personal belief that the founding of the state of Israel made the major change. I think the non-Jewish community had great respect for Jews when they found out that they had a homeland. It always makes me think of a wonderful story, my wife and I went to tea at Ben Gurian's house in Rehovat one Saturday afternoon and he told a wonderful story. He talked about a man who came to visit a friend and he came up on the porch and knocked on the door and there was a dog sitting on the porch so he patted the dog's head and he went in and spent the afternoon and when he left he came out and the man whose house it was he petted the dog's head and says you have a nice dog. He says that's not my dog, I thought it was yours, it's not mine either and he gave the dog a kick and chased him off the porch. When each one thought he had a home they patted his head, when they didn't they kicked him off the porch.

CR: In this picture then when does a Jewish labor movement begin to make its appearance, for instance you, you mentioned that you were familiar with the old Labor Lyceum...

ML: Very.

CR: And this was founded [unclear]...

ML: My father had an older brother, name was Harry, he was the secretary of a cemetery association, the United Hebrew Brotherhood and he also was the secretary of the Minneapolis branch of the Arbitering, the Workman's Circle and...

LS: Excuse me one moment. When, Harry is not the brother whom he joined, Harry's not a brother you've mentioned before.

ML: The other two brothers were Jack and Charlie.

LS: Okay.

ML: Did you grow up in St. Paul?

LS: Yes.

ML: Charlie's name was Charles Lee, he had the Lee Barber School.

LS: Ah ha, I know the barber school.
ML: Yeah, the Lee Barber School. When Charlie died I was the executor of his estate and I sold the barber school to a nephew named Arthur Brooks...

LS: Oh.

ML: Arthur Brooks' mother was a sister to my father.

LS: Yeah, and that's still going, that's still a very going concern, isn't it?

ML: I think so, I'm not sure he has it anymore.

LS: A daughter who married Ray Hill...

ML: Are they running it.

LS: Yes, ah huh.

ML: Now I think Arthur and his wife moved to Florida.

LS: So there was Charlie who was in Minne...St. Paul...


LS: Jack and okay, I'm sorry to sidetrack you. So Jack was the secretary of the Arbit...

ML: No, that was Harry the older brother.

LS: Hary, Harry.

ML: And he had, he didn't participate in any of these things, he was completely different than the others, he ran a, he had a small furniture store business. Had a brilliant daughter.

LS: Well why was he active in the Arbitering?

ML: Harry?

LS: Yeah. How did he get involved in that?

ML: I don't know, but he was, my father paid dues to it, Jack and Charlie paid dues to it, it was also a loan society for some people, it was...

CR: It had a working class outlook. You must have developed either in the sense of the original worker experience in the old country or somehow sharing the working class concept as Jewish workers in this country. Do you know when the Workman's Circle was founded here?

ML: No, but when I first became conscious of things around, it was here.

CR: You as a child [unclear]
ML: I'd say by the time I was 10 years old I was conscious of...

CR: In 1921.

ML: Yes, yeah.

CR: That's quite early days.

ML: Yes, yes.

LS: Did it also pay death benefits?

ML: I don't know. It might have, maybe burial expenses or...

CR: Right, it was I think a typical fraternal benefit society such as most of the immigrant groups sounded. So this suggested when you and your family come into the picture there's already quite a well established community here.

ML: Yeah, and now we were never in the garment or needle trades and I just knew about it from men that I knew who had places, men like Supack and Lyman and Bloombergs and other people and they were early involved with unions and I think they accepted unions in their industry. I knew more about the Teamsters and their start. Vince and Miles Dunn organized that, they were both at worst acquaintances of my uncle Jack who was the Trotskyite and...

CR: Were they also on the northside?

ML: I don't know but I don't think so. They were not Jewish.

CR: Before getting on then to this which is I think an interesting experience...

ML: Now one of the centers of activity was the Labor Lyceum.

CR: When did the Labor Lyceum originate approximately, was it in existence already...

ML: It was in existence when I was a child, I remember they built a new building in the ’20s on what's now Olson Highway and about Irving or James.

CR: So that Labor Lyceum building goes back to the early ’20s.

ML: Right, right.

CR: And it would have taken a fairly substantial membership to build that kind of an ambitious center.

ML: And it was domin...yes, yes, it probably cost $8,000 which was a lot of money then. There was a man whose last name was Shier, s-h-i-e-r, and he was the dominant figure in the Labor Lyceum, he was the leader of the labor movement among Jews, he was a very bright guy.
LS: What was his first name?
ML: I think it was David, but I'm not real sure.
CR: Shier.
ML: Shier, yeah.
CR: Yeah.
ML: He had a daughter, Ruth, an attractive girl, who married a man named Bloomberg who was a garment manufacturer. They moved away when they were young marrieds.
CR: Would he have been a trade union leader as well?
ML: Who, Bloomberg? No, he was a...
CR: Shier.
ML: Shier, I think he was actively involved with all those people, I don't know, I think he was also the agent for the newspaper The Forward(?) which had a large circulation in those years, it was a daily newspaper, Yiddish.
CR: That suggests a very socialist orientation on the part of a large number of people.
ML: It was, Shier was definitely a socialist.
CR: The Labor Lyceum was essentially a socialist [unclear]...
ML: Socialist, yeah. But it was used as a meeting place by the Workman's Circle, by some of the burial society, it had a centrality of Jewish life, organized Jewish life other than synagogue. And let me say this, it was very secular.
CR: Do you have any sense or have any feelings about the Socialist Party movement in the Jewish community which...
ML: When I was 18 I had a great respect for the socialist movement. I don't like it...

END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

CR: You're on.
ML: I had some words with Abba Eban one night, he spoke at the, at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis and he used his time to lambast the Lakood[?] and tell all the nice things about his labor party and I said to him later, this wasn't the proper forum for that kind of a talk, you should have saved it for the Knesset, why he says, why, he said I live in a democracy, I says no you don't,
he says what is it, I said it's a socialist bureaucracy. He looked at me and he colored a little bit
and... but Israel has become a socialist bureaucracy, it's unwieldy and has hurt their form of
democracy.

CR: Yeah, going back to the existent earlier Jewish socialist movement here, have you any sense of
whether it was organized in Yiddish speaking branches of the Socialist Party or English speaking...

ML: I think both, I think both.

CR: Can you identify any names, people who were associated with it, outside of Sam Friedman?
Friedman was apparently the state secretary of the Socialist Party about 1919, 1918-1919.

ML: Didn't he live in Duluth?

CR: He didn't move to Duluth until 1930 and in the meantime somewhere between the early '20s
and 1930 he was in New York, but in 1919 Sam Friedman was the shall I say the spokesperson for
the right wing, the group that was not going with the Communist, new born Communist Party.

ML: Well there were many there who, Supack tended toward the other wing...

CR: The left wing.

ML: Yeah, yeah. He and his son and his son-in-law were all deeply involved with that. And,
Lyman, he stayed a socialist, he never tended toward the communist philosophy.

CR: But there appeared to be a socialist group around the [unclear] right into the 1920s.

ML: One of the men who was deeply involved, is still alive, his name is Jack Jaffe, he lives up the
street at the Shalom Home, j-a-f-f-e. He has two sons here in town, one is an advertising agency
executive and the other is an accountant, has an accounting practice, private practice with clients,
and he has nephews and nieces, he has a good size family around.

LS: Do you know what his physical and mental shape is?

ML: He's a little frail physically, I think mentally he's good. I think he would love to talk about
some of those things, I feel a close friendship with him and I'd be happy to go with somebody if
they want to interview him. He would be comfortable if I were there. But I remember as a child
when the men would get together and talk you know, the Jews, in their own neighborhood were
great in summertime standing on street corners. Plymouth Avenue had groups on every, in front of
every business they had a light on at night and they'd always say well we'll have to ask Shier, it
always wound up where they'd have to ask Shier, they had a lot of confidence in him and he was a
very bright man.

CR: Is any of his descendants living?

ML: Well Ruth must be living, she's younger than I am.
CR: His wife?
ML: No, his daughter.
CR: His daughter.
LS: But she doesn't live in town.

ML: I wonder if Sam Bellman might know, gee I think I'll call him when I get away from here today. Sam Bellman's father was a wonderful socialist.
CR: She was one of this group.
ML: His name was Harry Bellman, he was a true socialist and he was active in Arbitering, he was a fine man. Man of great principle, as was Jack Jaffe.
CR: It might be very helpful if you could communicate with him and try to open the door for...
ML: Well I'm sure that I can get Sam Bellman to do this also.
CR: Yeah, Newton Friedman[?] was sure that Bellman would be cooperative.
ML: Yeah, yeah, well I know...
CR: He suggested.
ML: I know Sam very well, he was in the state legislature for a couple of terms.
CR: Back in the '30s.
ML: Back in the '30s. He got out of the University, he graduated the Law School in about '32, he's just about 80 now and ran for the legislature as a lot of young lawyers do. First time he won by 80 votes, the second time by 40 votes, when he got beat in a Republican landslide in the...you know they had to run every two years.
CR: Right.
LS: Now did you attend any meetings at the Labor Lyceum?
ML: No, no.
LS: What was...
CR: They had some youth groups there too didn't they? Get acquainted with the young people...
ML: No, the young groups that I participated with met at the Emanuel Cohen Center.
LS: Yeah, I was going to ask you about the relationship between the Emanuel Cohen Center and
the Labor Lyceum.

ML: There wasn't any, they were distinct and separate.

CR: The Emanuel Cohen Center in fact was probably the principle community center of secular activities...

ML: And it was across the street of the home for children.

CR: Was this true in the '20s as well as the '30s when I remember.

ML: Emanuel Cohen Center was in existence in the '20s. They acquired a large house on the corner of 10th and Elwood and fixed it up so it was a good place for meetings and I belonged to a club that used to meet there and then we played basketball in the Talmud Torah on 8th and Freemont as part of that and later we got the school system to let us Lincoln Junior High School for our basketball.

CR: Now in the mid-'30s the Federation of Jewish Youth Clubs of Minneapolis with oh maybe 16 clubs or something all...

ML: There were a lot of them.

CR: All centered in the Emanuel Cohen. Joe Nudell was I think the youth director of their activities and Jake Mervis who was the director was a dynamic person in the settlement federation as well as in the Emanuel Cohen Center.

ML: Did you know Jack, Jack Mervis?

CR: I knew him very well, yeah.

ML: Well I saw him in Israel after he moved there, I used to see...

CR: Is he by any chance still alive?

ML: Either he or his wife died and I can't remember which one. They moved, they had a daughter who lived on a kibbutz and they were accepted into the kibbutz and they moved there.

CR: I thought Mervis went to Milwaukee from here.

ML: He did, yeah, but after he, well after that he also was the Hillel director at Ohio University at Athens Ohio and then he and his wife who was a fine woman moved to Israel, they lived at the kibbutz Nearim and he'd come into Jerusalem and see us when we got there. I enjoyed Jack very much, his father was quite a man too, and he had a brother Sam who was a good singer and he eventually got into the movies and made a couple of pictures and then he left that and became a cantor like his father.

CR: So we've identified essentially three centers of Jewish community life, the synagogue, was
there primarily one synagogue?

LS: No.

CR: The Emanuel Cohen Center...

ML: Oh there were many synagogues...

LS: Many synagogues.

CR: And the Labor Lyceum.

ML: There were 10 or 11 Orthodox ones when I was a child, let alone they began to, listen the oldest synagogue was the reform one because the Germans got here first and they were the founders of the reform movement and Temple Israel used to be downtown near where the Curtis Hotel is and I remember going there as a child, we were not members, my parents were members of Kenneseth Israel, it was Lyndale Avenue.

LS: Yeah, that's probably the oldest one in north Minneapolis.

ML: The large Lyndale Avenue shule and some of the men, among them my father, were part of a group who broke away from the Orthodox movement and formed Bethel.

LS: Right.

ML: Never could understand why my father did, he hated going, he didn't like organized religion at all and, but he did about those things what my mother wanted.

LS: I see.

CR: So the Jewish community then was not strictly limited to the northside although that seems to be the core of it.

ML: No, well yes, and it shifted, it started almost downtown as far back as 5th Street and Washington...

CR: And moved northward.

ML: ...and then moved west and why I wouldn't say north, it moved west.

CR: Yeah, well northside is west.

ML: Yes, the northside is west.

CR: Yeah.

ML: Yeah it moved west, and for a long time the center of it was on Oak Lake Avenue which is east of where 7th Street is in Minneapolis now, if you get to 7th Street and Olson Highway, in back
of that was the center of the Jewish community for some years. Then it moved to 6th and Lyndale and that was the heart of the Jewish community for quite a few years, Western State Bank was owned by Jews, on the corner of 6th and Lyndale, it was in the Kissler Hall which was the principle place that Jews got married in those years and Solomon Brochin who incidentally came from my father's town in Russia, had his store and he was the principle Jew who sold steamship tickets...

CR: And his name was?

ML: Brochin, b-r-o-c-h-i-n, he has a son in town named Ben Brochin and I had hoped that he would have a lot of things that they saved of his father's cause...

LS: He gave us some things.

ML: Did he give you some things?

LS: Yeah, but some things he'd given to another delicatessen that went out of business.

ML: Really.

CR: Oh yeah, now I remember this.

ML: Yeah.

CR: You're describing a community which is quite well developed at this point, they have a bank, they have people selling steamship tickets to bring more people here.

ML: Right. And loan money through, let them pay them out...

LS: Who owned the bank by the way?

ML: It was a group, one of them was Dr. N.N. Cohen, who was a dentist. Whose brother was Sumner Cohen who was a specialist in what they called consumption in those days. What do you call it now?

LS: TB.

ML: Yeah, tuberculosis. Sumner Cohen has a son in town who's a lawyer and his name is Eddie Cohen and N. N. Cohen's daughter is married to Morris Grossman, the accountant and her name is Edith and they live in St. Louis Park and he's retired and N. N. Cohen has a son, Yafriam Cohen who's a retired physician.

LS: Boy, it really is rather interesting that a group of Jews got together to purchase a bank.

ML: Yeah, well N. N. Cohen was one of the principles and when the bank when broke, everybody cursed N. N. Cohen.

CR: Was that in the depression? Or...
ML: I think it was in the '22 or '23 depression that the bank went under, it didn't go all the way to the '30s.

LS: I see.

CR: Did the success of some of the community in this business world and so on have that much influence on the general community or was the working class [unclear]

ML: There really wasn't any success as we measure success, they were small business people who made decent livings...

CR: It's [unclear] a community group [unclear]

ML: Yeah, the, any money made by the Jews came after World War II and many of them have become immensely wealthy.

CR: So we're talking about a period when [unclear] the internal development of Jewish communities, creating a middle class and creating some people getting up into the business community but not breaking out into the general Anglo community here yet...

ML: I call it...

CR: Is that accurate?

ML: Yes, yes.

CR: Or I should say Gentile.

ML: I called on Jay Phillips recently with Samuel Pinkus who's the director of the Haddassah Hospital looking for perhaps an endowment of a chair and he said when I sold my business I put $34 million into a foundation and I was the richest Jew in Minneapolis. He says I'm so far behind now he says it's not even close.

LS: Well he should be proud of that.

ML: Huh?

LS: He should be proud that he's given away so much.

ML: He's given away a lot of money.

LS: Yes.

ML: Morry Spiegel [unclear] gonna catch him if he lives long enough. And Mike Kunyon's giving away a lot of money. The Kunyons came from my father's town also.

LS: Is there a Gomo?
ML: And the Brochins came from my father's town.

LS: Was, did the Gomoites meet in...

CR: [Unclear]

LS: Lawn [unclear]

ML: No, but they knew each other, my father and Solomon Brochin remained friends until their death and...

CR: The point of origin was not the basis of community structure very much, played a role but it wasn't basic to...

ML: No, it had a small impact, the point of origin is what brought them to the community.

CR: See the Norwegians in America organized on the basis of their origins and they still are organized that way.

ML: What is?

LS: The Norwegians.

CR: The Norwegians, Norwegian Americans.

ML: Depends where they came from in Norway, huh?

LS: Yes.

CR: The little valley they came from there was a sense of identity. The Jewish identity began to create its own cultural American basis obviously.

ML: Right. Now Minneapolis was not confined to the northside for the Jewish community.

CR: Yeah, I was going to ask about the southside community.

ML: There was a large large group who lived along Franklin Avenue which was the east-west street and...

CR: About Chicago?

ML: No, they were farther east, Bloomington, 15th Avenue South, there, and there were several synagogues, there were four or five kosher butcher shops on Franklin Avenue.

LS: Now was this considered the Romanian community?

ML: Romanian community, in the main, in the main.
CR: Around the corner of 38th and Chicago there was a clothing store, a delicatessen.

ML: Jews didn't live there.

CR: They did business there but didn't live there.

ML: They didn't live there. None of them got quite that far south. A lot of Jews got south of Lake Street because the membership to the Adath Eshuran synagogue which was on 34th and Emerson and they lived around it, Leo Gross's father had a house a block from there and then they, as they became more prosperous they moved farther south, around Lake Harriet, where there was a well-to-do Jewish community and St. Paul had two distinct Jewish communities. There was the group across the river, there was the group alongside the state capitol...

LS: Right.

ML: And then there was the group, Holly and Grotto as the center, and then they moved west from there.

LS: Right.

CR: Well, going back a little bit again to the northside and the labor connections, supposedly the affiliation between the developing Farmer Labor movement and the Jewish community began to evolve way back in the 19...in the '20s sometime.

ML: Say that again?

CR: The mythology has it that Floyd Olson living on the northside had strong roots in the Jewish community...

ML: He had many Jewish friends.

CR: Spoke Yiddish and was well known and probably to some extent, represented the political base from which he began to seek the county prosecutor...

ML: He made county attorney, yeah.

CR: County attorney's job. How much truth and so on is there in this and when did alignment with the Farmer Labor movement develop among the Jewish people on the northside or generally?

ML: No, they joined it when it became the dominant thing. I don't think they were, there were some Jews who were involved at the State Capitol, do you know the name Arthur Jacobs?

CR: Yeah.

ML: Yeah, he was a...

CR: So Olson was elected in 1932.
ML: Yes, and Art Jacobs was a powerful man at the state capitol...

CR: An Olson appointee?

ML: He never had a job, but he knew, he could handle legislators. He was the first lobbyist I ever knew, before they had that name.

CR: Olson had a number of Jewish associates like George Leonard for instance.

ML: Well George Leonard, he came from my father's town and was my father's...

LS: Another Gomo-ite.

ML: Yeah, and he was my father's lawyer and, brilliant man...

CR: Well did this seem to develop some political clout for the Jews?

ML: He was a powerful [unclear] force. George Leonard was so powerful politically that he was appointed as a regent of the University in those years which was an unbelievable thing for a Jew.

CR: That's, it's, in a sense political success for the Jews began with these associations and these connections...

ML: Absolutely, but they were not generally part of the movement that started it, they came into it because it looked like it was the thing, it was a place for liberals to land. Really, Humphrey made the largest impact on the merger of the Democratic Party and the...

CR: That's later.

ML: ...and the Farmer Labor.

CR: Some of the late, Jewish labor leadership emerge by the early ’30s, Sanders Jennis and some of the others...

ML: And Reuben Latz, and...Reuben Latz was a fine man, I didn't know Sanders Jennis personally but Reuben Latz I knew, he has a son who's a lawyer...

CR: Bob Latz.

ML: Bob, yeah. I had a lot of respect for Reuben Latz. He had a sense of idealism, he lived by it...

CR: He was a community leader as well as a labor leader.

ML: Community leader means among the establishment, I'd say no.

CR: I mean really, I suppose the Jewish community, did he identify closely with the Jewish community?
ML: He didn't withdraw from it, but he was not a factor in it at all.

LS: No, he wasn't active in Minneapolis Federation.

ML: No, he wasn't active in anything Jewish really.

CR: Did they maintain the connections with the Labor Lyceum?

ML: He did, yes.

CR: He did, Latz did.

ML: Yes.

CR: Jennis?

ML: I don't know, I don't know. There is an interview with Jennis over at the society, I have not listened to [unclear]

ML: I can't tell you anything about Jennis except what I have known from hearsay.

CR: Yeah, well apparently just as...

ML: Now the Jews got into the laundry business pretty heavily, both as workers and owners, a lot of Jews owned laundries. Isfink married a Gross girl and he got, became the dominant figure in G&K which controlled the market in the main and he merged several small Jewish laundries into their own...

CR: And Latz represented the laundry workers union.

ML: Workers, yes.

CR: Was that largely then, it was largely a Jewish union, Jewish membership.

ML: I think the leadership of the union was Jewish more than the membership.

CR: More than the workers in the shops.

ML: Yes, yes, it was a difficult, difficult union to run because traditionally laundry workers were at the bottom of the barrel well when it came to wages. I tell you what they paid in those years, beyond belief. My wife worked for a while as a payroll clerk for a small garment, not such a small garment, it was a ladies, I can't remember the name of it. It was owned by four Jewish men, Adolf Shien, a man named Lazarus, a man named Fine and a man named Bob Schneider. And they manufactured ladies house dresses, to retail for about $1.98. You can imagine how much they could afford to put into these things.

LS: When was this?
ML: This was in the early ’30s. My wife left the job, she got ill working there when she saw women who were working on sewing machines anywhere from 60 to 80 hours a week and a two week paycheck would be $11, $16, got about 25 cents an hour. Unbelievable, what a need there was for unions. The, incidentally the movement is gaining some strength in the last couple of years because they've got smart enough to move out of the dead businesses and get into the, America is tending away from manufacturing and into service and unions are starting to organize service workers. And they're much more realistic and practical. I saw it in the movie industry, we always had, did business with the union relative to projectionists in the main, and when a change came in the movie business away from a single screen theater to a theater with anywhere from 2 to 8 or 12 screens and the new equipment that permitted one man to operate the whole thing. They just accepted the one man without any big fight, something that they wouldn't have done in the early days. But they saw that this man got a real salary and attrition kind of took care of most of that membership.

CR: There were at least two major schisms in the Jewish labor movement, in the socialist movement. The first one in 1919 when the Communist Party was formed. The second in like ’28-29 when the left wing of the Workman's Circle left and formed the International Workers Order and again there was, I, my own sense of it is that in the 1928-29 split the left wing that broke away was very small, not too significant, that the major bulk of the Workman's Circle remained intact, I'm not sure but that's my feeling about it. I don't have any feeling about the proportions of influence that developed out of 1919 but it may well be the same, that the bulk of people remained with the Workman's Circle, the Socialist Party and labor, labor, Jewish labor movement.

ML: But even after the split the Workman's Circle kind of faded away, it was, it filled a need for the immigrant society and the need disappeared.

CR: You're talking about 1919 or the late ’20s.

ML: In the late ’20s.

CR: Up in the ’20s. It was fading all...

ML: I'm not familiar with the split of 1919, I was too young.

CR: We all were to remember that. The answer to that we'll have to find in manuscript sources, newspapers and places like that.

ML: I was 8 years old in 1919.

CR: In ’28 or ’29 the number of the even radical Jewish garment trade owners and so on went off to, with the left.

ML: They did.

CR: But you feel historically the Workman's Circle and the Socialist labor movement among the Jews has largely outlived its base and its usefulness by that time. We sometimes forget that many of the immigrants who came in the World War I period were only in their 40s at that time, the late
'20s, early '30s...

ML: They were younger.

CR: Vigorous, young, effective organizers and so on, they were not the kind of people we visualize as our grandparents, but the question is not so to speak that they had aged etc. but rather that they had left their early immigrant experience behind them. They didn't, they have that same need for that kind of associations and groups.

ML: No, well, they got involved in their businesses and there, a great need to get ahead, educate their children.

CR: Did the immigrant put their efforts mainly into educating their children or, to what degree did they themselves make to success?

ML: They, they educated themselves too in the main, I remember my father taking English lessons when I was a young child.

CR: So there's quite a bit of immigrant generation social mobility upwards and then quite a...

ML: Upward mobility has been available to...

CR: ...quite a leap for their second generation.

ML: ...been available to Jews for 40 years now.

LS: Something, excuse me, something else that's that seem to be connected is Jews who started out as labor Zionists put their...

ML: There was a lot of them here.

LS: Did they meet at the Labor Lyceum?

ML: Yes.

LS: But then it seems as though they put their activities into Zionist...

ML: Well not until '48 really...

END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

CR: Okay, you were asking

LS: We were talking about the labor Zionists who met at the Labor Lyceum and it seemed to me that they were, even before the state of Israel they were putting a lot of their activities not into labor so much but into you know Zionist [unclear]
ML: But both, really both, they were strong in the labor movement and they were strong for the establishment of the Jewish movement.

LS: I see. Well when you say they were strong for a labor movement, I mean how did that manifest itself?

ML: Well most of them were workers, and they joined and they participated.

LS: They joined unions.

ML: Joined unions and participated and some of them were small business people.

CR: Are we still talking about primarily needle trades unions?

ML: No, I'm thinking more laundry workers and laundry owners, yeah. And a lot of them went to Israel after '48, they founded the Moshav Betarut and many of them live at Kefar Blum which is way up in the, that's the finger that sticks up into Syria, near Mt. Ramon.

LS: Are you talking about people like Sadie Igel?

ML: Yeah.

LS: Who else left? Was he active, I mean was he active in labor...

ML: No.

LS: No, he was...

ML: Sadie Igel was a Zionist pure and simple, he was not one of the ones that were both. It was a Rappaport family, do you know Roz Baker?

LS: Uh-huh.

ML: You don't know her. She was married to a man named Eli Amnder who died and she married Mike Baker, but before that her name was Rappaport.

LS: Oh, well, Mike is on the board for...

ML: Yeah, well Mike's wife is...

CR: She is a native Minneapolitan.

ML: Yes, but her family were stong labor Zionists and were in the labor movement also. Mike's a very bright guy you know.

LS: Oh, yes.

ML: And a very knowledgeable Jew even though he doesn't, he lives a secular life.
LS: I know. I know.

ML: Yeah. But there were Jews you know of all levels of thought about the whole thing, do you
know Gida Gordon? Yeah, brilliant woman, and a magnetic speaker, her name was Bareman and
her father, A. N. Bareman was the founder of the Bareman Fruit Company and they were one of the
principle companies engaged in not, in attempting not to permit their workers to organize and join
the Teamsters and eventually he lost his business he was so stubborn about the whole thing, would
never accept organized labor.

LS: Now where does Gida stand on this?

ML: Guida's a liberal. Although I might say she worked for Harold Stassen once when he was
running for governor...

LS: Oh dear...

CR: [Unclear] like this.

ML: She was just out of school.

CR: It seems to me that you are suggesting that when the Teamsters organized in the mid-30s you
had a new labor factor in the Jewish economic life here.

ML: Yeah, some people [unclear]

CR: No longer...

ML: Some people were bosses now.

CR: Right...

ML: Now you know most people how they are about taking on a union, they love the labor
movement, the union, organized unions, except in their own business.

CR: Was this true of the Jewish unionists in the Jewish shop who organized the needle trade
unions?

ML: I don't think it made any difference whether it was Jewish unionists or non-Jewish unionists,
most bosses didn't...

CR: Parted ways here.

ML: They parted ways, the boss didn't want the union and you can understand it, it...

CR: They felt the same about the Teamsters coming in.

ML: Course.
CR: So the Teamsters came in and began to organize Jewish workers all over, was this the first break of Jewish working class membership in other parts of the labor movement besides the needle trades?

ML: I don't know.

CR: It's pure speculation but...

ML: Yeah, I don't know.

CR: You said last, a couple weeks ago I think that you remembered some experiences with the Teamsters.

LS: Or was it the Teamsters strike?

CR: The Teamsters strike.

ML: Well I happened to be on 6th St. and 1st Av. N. while that infamous day when the, when the organized business community tried to put down the [unclear]

CR: Can you describe that event? I've heard it described by several people and it always varies.

ML: Well there were a lot of people on the street. How did I happen to be there, the movie industry which I was had an annual summer outing and I had a friend that owned the theaters in the White Bear Lake and he was coming into town and I used to eat lunch at a place on 6th St. close to 1st Av. N., and I said I'm going to have a bite to eat there, I'll meet you on the corner at noon. And I was standing on the corner of 61st Av. N. and there were, all of a sudden there seemed to be an unusual number of people at the intersection and they came marching up the hill from 2nd Av. N. up toward 1st Av. N., 6th St. ran from the bottom of a hill up to 1st Av. N. and then leveled out came another block toward Hennepin. You know where the old Butler Building is, it's down that hill...

CR: They were coming down.

ML: They came up the hill.

CR: Up the hill.

ML: Toward 1st Av. N. and all of a sudden there were men with clubs that came out of coats and trousers and pretty soon there were clubs being swung and the Teamsters also had clubs but I would say that the Teamsters were attacked first and then responded. Now let's see one of the men of the Citizens Alliance, is that what they called themselves?

CR: Uh-huh.

ML: He was killed and several people were injured and most of it seemed to settle around the warehouse of the Bareman Fruit Company which was on the hill between 2nd Av. N. and 1st Av.
N. And it didn't last long, there were a lot of police there right away, lot of clubbing. And I want you to know in, what year was that, '34?

CR: '34.

ML: Yeah, I was 23 years old.

CR: Midsummer '34.

ML: Yeah, I didn't think it was any place for me to be, it was on a Friday I know that. Cause the outing was always on a Friday. And they made a lot of strides and they did a lot of good by being formed. Some of the excesses of the Teamsters were unfortunate in later years, couldn't have too much respect for Fitzsimmons, for Hoffa.

CR: True.

ML: Yeah. He was guilty of the sin of arrogance, Fitzsimmons was. But there were a lot of idealists that I knew in the Jewish community, men like Harry Bellman and Jack Jaffee who would have done almost anything to see what they considered a better world.

CR: At what point and how did the anti-Semitic barriers seem to come down, or get torn down, taken down?

ML: It can't happen, anti-Semitism can't disappear or diminish by the efforts of Jews alone, there has to be a good core of non-Jews who know that is was wrong and they have to do something about it. Fortunately Minneapolis did have a group like that, headed by families like the Daytons and the Crosbys and the Pillsburys, they knew they were wrong and they went ahead to make changes. But I'm convinced personal belief, that the establishment of the state of Israel was the principle factor.

CR: When did employment in the department stores, the banks, insurance companies and so on, actually begin to open up? That late?

ML: Principally when Humphrey was mayor.

CR: '45.

ML: Yeah. He established a commission...


ML: Right, and things started to go from that point. Now St. Paul never had the depths of anti-Semitism Minneapolis did.

CR: How would you explain that? Or why do you say it?

ML: I think, well, oh it was, first of all, in St. Paul Jews belonged to the automobile club, they were
members of the Athletic Club, they were not discriminated against to the same extent that they were in Minneapolis. I have a sneaking suspicion it was that it was a predominantly Catholic community and that was the reason for it.

LS: It's also been suggested that because Jews had got to St. Paul so much earlier among the early settlers...

ML: They did, they did, they did.

LS: They had, that they were seen in a different light. And also there was a larger German community in St. Paul and they joined the German community on a pretty equal footing.

ML: But a lot of eastern European Jews came to St. Paul.

LS: Well yes, but later, when the German Jews tried to distance themselves from the eastern Europeans.

ML: Well that's all [unclear]

LS: That's all, it's, nobody can say exactly why but two towns have had different histories as well, very different ethnic...

ML: I think the fact that it was the oldest Jewish community made a difference, yeah. But I've always had a sneaking suspicion that the fact that St. Paul was so heavily Catholic made a difference.

CR: Yeah, I think that's a pretty fair assumption. Not that the Catholic Church was outstanding in this respect...One of the interesting things is that a lot of anti-Semitic literature in the '20s, '30s, '40s, came out of the Catholic printing presses...

ML: I know it.

CR: ...in St. Paul.

ML: I know it.

CR: But probably not as much as...

ML: And Protestant out in Robbinsdale.

CR: Probably not as much as came out of the Evangelical temples on Lake Street and a few other places in Minneapolis which were notorious. Do you think this kind of anti-Semitic literature and stuff actually intimidated people and shaped their perceptions about the Jewish community and the, reinforced this older anti-Semitism around here.

ML: Well I think anti-Semitism has a religious base.
CR: [Unclear] is a long time.

ML: Yeah. And Jews rejected the concept of Jesus and they'll never be forgiven.

CR: Well that's one interpretation, there are others. Was the description accurate to your view of Minneapolis being the capital of anti-Semitism in America in the 1920s?

ML: They say it was. Didn't bother me, I felt a kind of contempt for people who had those beliefs, felt sorry for them really.

CR: No, the article by Carrie McWilliams that made that charge is of course notorious and it's always assumed that it's true.

ML: On the other hand his other city that he mentioned was Boston and that's a predominantly Catholic city so, so much for that theory, yeah.

CR: No, I personally think that until very late days the anti-Semitism was very very entrenched in Minneapolis, very deep-rooted, and actively propagated, it was not a passive force, it was an aggressive attempt to put Jews in their place so to speak or keep them there. You feel that the Humphrey program...

ML: Humphrey program opened up the job market.

CR: The Human Rights Commission really did some effective work.

ML: Yes, yes. We were very close to Humphrey in his early days. I got to know him because I was a close friend of Lee Levinger, I don't know if you know the name or not.

CR: Who?

ML: Lee Levinger.

CR: Yes, I know him.

ML: His father was a judge in St. Paul...

CR: Yeah...Lee Levinger was...

ML: Incidentally his mother [unclear] the night it was Jewish...

CR: Lee Levinger was one of the young...

ML: Brilliant man.

CR: ...radical liberals...

ML: He wasn't radical.
CR: ...in the ’30s on the campus.

ML: He wasn't that radical really.

CR: The Jacoban Club [unclear]

ML: Yeah. Very brilliant guy and he was close to Humphrey and he got some jobs because he was close to the political leaders of the DFL, he was appointed to the State Supreme Court which he left rapidly. And then went to Washington and got a job in the Department of Justice. And then he went back into private practice, as an anti-trust lawyer. And I used to go to his house quite often to a New Year's Eve party, it was kind of an annual thing and Humphrey was always there and the first time Humphrey ran for mayor of Minneapolis he got beat. An architect named Klein beat him and he said to us one day, I need a job, he says I have no income, I've got a family, so he gave him a job writing ads, newspaper ads for group of theaters until he ran for office the next time. He was a warm friendly man and a good political opportunist. And I'd like to go off the record now...

CR: Should I turn this off? [tape clicks] Well after Humphrey run successfully for mayor and served as mayor, we come to another phase of events. That is the merger of the Farmer Labor Party and the Democratic Party.

ML: Humphrey couldn't have gone to the Senate without that merger.

CR: Was that widely approved in the Jewish community, the merger?

ML: Yes, they had a, because it was at the time Humphrey was trying to become Senator and the Jews liked Humphrey.

CR: So the, their, say affection for Humphrey and their already fairly...

ML: Very few Jews liked the Republican Party.

CR: Yeah...

ML: First of all they were outsiders.

CR: They had, [unclear] in the voting patterns they had generally begun to vote Farmer Labor and had voted the Democratic presidential ticket for a number of years.

ML: Right, right.

CR: So '44 the big question became could Roosevelt be re-elected again, and kind of energized the movement for merger.

ML: Well Jews sure liked Roosevelt but his luster has diminished with time.

CR: So I suppose the Roosevelt connection and the Humphrey connection cemented the loyalty of the, so to speak of the Jewish community to the DFL Party.
ML: Listen, listen, the, as far as most Jews' thinking went on the national level of voting, it was more important to keep fascism out of government than it was anything else and a fascist leadership was more potentially liable to occur within the Republican Party than it was in the Democratic Party.

CR: Yeah, well this was still war-time. That of course had a decisive effect.

ML: Yeah.

LS: When did Humphrey run for the Senate.


ML: '48. My young daughter, Lisa, and Penny Duremberger managed his headquarters in Chicago during that convention. Penny Duremberger was a Democratic who married a Republican Senator.

CR: Well, we haven't touched on the political experiences of the Benson administration at all.

ML: Well I knew Elmer Benson and he was a Farmer Laborite, no doubt about that, and came from a small town, but he was relatively well off, that's my impression...

CR: Yeah.

ML: I'm sure you knew him quite well, didn't you?

CR: Actually I didn't, no.

ML: Oh?

CR: I knew some of the people who were, quite well, who were around him. I knew Abe Harris somewhat, I knew Roger Rutchek who was a secretary fairly well. And he's probably the first governor around who had such close advisors who were identified and denounced to a certain degree by anti-Semites as... And anti-Semitism became a basic issue in the 1938 campaign. Is there any reaction to all this in the Jewish community, did they have feelings about Benson?

ML: There was a great, a great distaste for Harold Stassen because Ray Chase in Anoka ran his campaign and he distributed anti-Semitic literature, that I have vivid memories of. You know the name Ray Chase?

CR: Yeah.

ML: Yeah.

CR: So in '38 there's no question in the minds of the [unclear]...

ML: Was that the year that Stassen became...

CR: That was the year of Benson's defeat in, [unclear] red-baiting and anti-Semitic type campaign
which very probably was a decisive issue.

ML: I would say the Jews didn't have a close warm feeling about Benson, I think they preferred him to any Republican that was on the scene.

CR: They didn't have even the kind of feeling that presumably Olson had...

ML: No, not Olson or Humphrey or...

CR: Yeah.

ML: Jews always liked Mondale.

CR: Why is that?

ML: I don't know if you know it, one of the few very honorable men in the political scene in America.

CR: Mondale. That'd probably be true.

ML: And really a good Democrat, and he went pretty far for a small town minister's son. I know him well and I'm quite fond of him as a person.

CR: Was the coolness toward Benson due to any degree to the fact that he appeared to be so far to the Left?

ML: I think partly. With some, you know you can't...

CR: It's hard to generalize.

ML: Jews can't be generalized, they run the gamut from left to right and top to bottom and, can't say anybody thinks like a Jew.

CR: Yeah, but we can generalize to some degree about the popularity of Olson and the popularity of...

ML: Because there was such a great majority that liked them, that doesn't mean everybody did.

CR: Yeah, so there was less of that kind of feeling about Benson. Benson of course was not a warm character, he was not charismatic.

ML: Right, he had no charisma.

CR: And this created certain problems for him.

ML: That's right.

CR: On top of that he had become in the public mind probably identified as being substantially left
of center...

ML: I think so and I think that hurt him too.

LS: Well I guess what you're, in a sense what you're getting at is that the Jewish community is becoming more and more middle class and taking on the coloration of...

CR: Not necessarily, the 1938 election was certainly some kind of a watershed in Minneapolis politics, that is it marked the end of a rising radical progressive current which peaked in that administration and probably pushed the Farmer Labor Party out into left field where it began to lose [unclear] in many areas.

ML: You know I have tremendous respect for Jews when it comes to voting habits. In the last 40 years, Jews have a tremendous interest and even love for the state of Israel, but I don't know any Jews who vote for a candidate because he is for Israel if he's not good in other areas. There never was a president of the United States who was warmer to Israel than Ronald Reagan but the Jews of America voted 2 to 1 for Mondale. They, nobody appreciates America as much as Jews do, you can be as critical as you want of it, but try comparing it to any other place.

CR: Well, our subject of discussion basically is Jewish radicalism and Jewish socialism and the labor movement. You've already remarked that that appeared to be largely an immigrant generation phenomena. From a community with a lot of radical currents in it, we seem to have emerging a rather solidly liberal oriented community...

ML: I think that's a good fair estimate.

CR: More middle class liberal values rather than working class radical sensitivities.

ML: It's a question of needs, the need was to form organized labor in the '20s and into the '30s because the working man was not getting a fair shake and you couldn't just organize it without being radical. Laws of the nation have changed to the point where almost every worker has almost all the protection he needs even without a union. I said almost.

CR: Almost.

ML: So you become liberal, you become more middle class.

CR: I think what's interesting about what you're saying is that this is not generally been the orthodox view of Jewish history in America or in Minneapolis. That history's tended to emphasize the economic success, emphasize the emergence of the wealthy Jewish class and the successful Jewish middle class and somehow edit out of that tradition of that [unclear] that we're trying to resurrect here.

ML: Most people that talk about the emergence of a wealthy Jewish class and a more prosperous middle class say it like it's unusual to Jews only. This has happened to everybody in America.

CR: One of the things that truly interesting about the Jewish experience is that, well this is true,
there is also an extraordinarily large participation of Jewish workers in the earlier radical labor movement. There's no dichotomy, contradiction between the two.

ML: Of course.

CR: There's a connection as a matter of fact, that, I'm merely commenting on the perceptions of the Jewish history that I think every individual in the community has a sense of their origin, knowing where they...

END INTERVIEW