

**Irwin Herness**  
**Narrator**

**Steve Trimble & Tom O'Connell**  
**Interviewers**

**January 20, 1977**

IH: [Unclear]

TO: Usually the best place to start is just if you could talk a little bit about where you grew up and how you, how you became active in whatever it was you were active, the Farmer Labor Party I guess it was [unclear] and maybe just kind of start us out a little bit about yourself, your family.

IH: I came from, I mentioned before from up in Ottertail County, out on a farm there, near a town called Battle Lake and when I was a boy 11 years old I had an accident in which I had, I was running after a buggy trying to catch a ride and my foot got caught in the wheel and my leg was pretty badly mangled up so I had my left leg amputated at that time. I then, that is mother was old, my father died when I was, a few years before that. So my mother was a widow with four other boys, well five boys and it was pretty tough going on the farm there, quite a struggle to make a living so she kind of farmed us out to some of the other relatives. I went to a relative out in South Dakota where I'd be near a school where I wouldn't have to walk so far and I finished, that is I went to grade school out there and then to high school out there in South Dakota. Later on I got more on my own so I was able to take care of myself, working evenings and worked my way through school so I came out to Minneapolis here...

ST: What year, what was, what time was that about?

IH: Oh, that was about 1919, I was 18 years old then, went down here, no, 17 and finished high school here and then afterwards went to the U, working, I worked my way through...

TO: What part of town were you living in?

IH: I was living, I had a place where I was rooming, but that was right across the street from the Curtis Hotel on 10th Street.

TO: Like a boarding house kind of situation.

IH: Not a boarding house, just a rooming house, an old house. I remember I had a little room there facing the Curtis Hotel where I could sit and watch people come and go from, at the Curtis Hotel. The room cost \$2.50 a week. And then I was working at the drug store right up on Hennepin, I was behind the soda fountain, of course I was all over the store and I went to the Minnesota U one and then afterwards I went to North Dakota for two years, or three years in North Dakota, finished the, my college work up there, at Ellendale, North Dakota. Afterwards I went to Duluth, I was going to

teach but I didn't find just what I wanted so I happened to get to Duluth and I happened to get lined up on selling office equipment, no just accounting machines for the L.E. Fisher Company and I did quite well at that, selling those accounting machines when the Depression came and then couldn't sell anymore of those machines. I also worked at general outdoor advertising company at that time for a while and that was pretty tough going during the Depression. I was active at that time in the Farmer Labor Party and Floyd Olson was elected, that was when Franklin Roosevelt was elected President, so about a year afterwards I was made contacts down here so I got a job at the state Department of Agriculture in the Cooperative Division so that was just what I wanted to work in connection with co-ops and I continued at that until Stassen was elected governor and of course I was one of them that just had to go because I'd been pretty active in the campaign work and the DFL Party, the Farmer Labor Party at that time. So I was wondering do you have something, some questions there that you...

TO: Yeah, there's plenty that we could start asking about.

ST: I've got one, from earlier on like out in, is like out in Dakota, or South Dakota there in you know 1916-17 and '18, did you get introduced at all to the ideas of the Non-Partisan League or any of those?

IH: Yes I did.

ST: Could you talk a little about that?

IH: Where I was staying was with my uncle, but he was a pretty staunch Republican, but he had a brother, my uncle, who lived at Evansville, Minnesota, who was fairly active in the Non-Partisan League and they got together once in a while and finally my uncle [unclear] also could see that that would probably be the, a much better answer to the economic problems so his brother kind of converted him to this Non-Partisan League and it wasn't out there in South Dakota where I was, there was no activity in that Non-Partisan League but we heard enough about it out there [unclear] and supporting [unclear] he was an organizer in that area I guess.

TO: Do you remember when Lindburg ran?

IH: Yes I remember that too and Rick Shipstead, A. C. Townley and later on in my cooperative work I met Joe Gilbert down here who was working for Midland Co-op and I had a lot of contacts with him and he told me about how he'd been active in helping to start the old Farmer Labor Party, that's the Non-Partisan League days.

TO: Can you talk a little bit about, you became active in the Farmer Labor Party about the time of Floyd Olson...

IH: Yes.

TO: I'm real interested in the life of the Party, were you involved in like a ward club or a Party club up in Duluth [unclear]

IH: Well my activities in the Farmer Labor Party really started here [unclear], I was more, I just did campaign work during [unclear], Floyd Olson and so on. I didn't have, well I joined the Party but I

hadn't become active yet, but after I got to St. Paul I was [unclear] Farmer Labor ward club out there in east end...

TO: [unclear] district there...

IH: Yes, it is.

ST: East end of...

IH: St. Paul.

ST: St. Paul, around what neighborhood would you say?

IH: Around White Bear Avenue and Minnehaha [unclear] there, I spent, we lived there for about six-seven years, so I did a lot of campaign work around there, delivering literature house to house, we had our [unclear] that we'd go out at least once a week in the fall months before the election distributing literature.

TO: Did you have meetings, educational or cultural events, things like that with the club?

IH: No, we just had our regular monthly meetings.

ST: The monthly meetings...

TO: What were they like?

IH: At the regular monthly meetings they would discuss on what we might do to support certain bills before the legislature [unclear] important, for the unemployed at that time and I can't just think now just what they were...we had some demonstrations at the capitol, we would...

TO: Did you go to those?

IH: Yes, yes I did. I was trying to think of what that was, I think it was the farm movement and for unemployed, they met at the Capitol, to pester the legislature because both the House and the Senate, the majority were the Republicans, [unclear] Republicans, and we demonstrated there too to try to get them to support the Floyd Olson's measures...

TO: Were those pretty big, do you remember, the demonstrations were they pretty big?

IH: Yes, they were, yes. Very good turn-outs for those demonstrations.

TO: Did you ever have outside speakers or speakers come to your meetings on various topics, do you remember?

IH: I don't remember if we had any, we had our local people in St. Paul like Howard Y. Williams, he used to come out there, although he's from St. [unclear] Park out there in St. Paul, he used to be a very good speaker, used to come out to different clubs to speak on the issues and otherwise it was our local senator and representative that [unclear] speaking at requests for club meetings.

TO: Did a lot of people attend?

IH: Very good attendance, yes.

ST: Besides speakers and things, did you get into having oh more cultural sorts of things, like...

TO: Music...

ST: ...music or plays or things like that, that you know of?

IH: I don't remember anything like that.

ST: So at least those weren't real important.

IH: No.

TO: Did you ever throw dances, fundraisers?

IH: No, they didn't have anything like that, we'd have some picnic in the summer, I think one or two [unclear], it probably wasn't so much for raising money as it was for getting our candidates before the people and so on and more to give it good turnout. I think that most of the money was raised through sustaining funds and so on that we had, especially amongst employees [unclear] the state and so on.

TO: There was a lot of controversy...

ST: [Unclear]

TO: ...wasn't there a lot of controversy about...

IH: Yes, there was a lot of controversy, there was, the newspapers made a lot out of saying that the state employees were forced to make those contributions but I know most of them there at the state when I was working there in the Department of Agriculture, I wouldn't say most of them, but quite a number of them were not making those contributions and nobody seemed to make much out of it, it was those at first that were concerned more and were interested that were making their contributions.

TO: One other question about the meeting I want to ask at some point here in your work with the co-ops, it seems like one of the things that I've noticed is today in the Democratic Party or you know any of the political parties pretty much function only during election time, it's not usual for there to be clubs and meetings, did you notice a change, do you think people were more involved in the issues and learning about the issues in the '30s than they were after when the parties merged, was there more participation than there is now?

IH: No, I don't think there was, especially amongst the younger people, they didn't seem to take a different interest except a few that were members of our Farmer Labor Party, but it wasn't much from the young people and that's why I think that, [unclear] that what we've seen in later years now how the young people are taking an active interest politically, especially during the '60s, the

anti-war movement where a lot of young people [unclear] and I really give those young people a lot of credit, I don't know what has happened lately, it doesn't look like the activity, I hope that they haven't forgotten those issues, but I don't think they will, I think that what they learned from the demonstrations they probably still understand the issues but right now there probably isn't...

TO: There isn't much going on.

IH: No, not too much going on to bring them together.

TO: I was in a college classroom yesterday doing a little talk on the Farmer Labor, you know the old labor history of the state and only two people had heard of Floyd B. Olson.

IH: Is that so?

TO: Not one person had ever been in a demonstration, and that was about 40 people in the class.

IH: And only two people had ever heard of Floyd Olson.

TO: So, you know....

IH: Now Floyd Olson was an outstanding speaker, you probably never heard him, I don't know if you ever heard him on tape...

TO: Have we?

ST: I saw a film clip once.

TO: Oh, I haven't even seen that.

IH: He wasn't too good on principles, he had to be prodded and that was his, but after he became a non-...for example the sales tax issue, at first he was on the verge of supporting that until some of the other left-wingers they got behind him and says oh no you can't do that and they had to show explain to him why that was a very important issue that he could not support and when he saw it, and of course then he was opposed to it and when he came out against it he became very forceful and his, he was very very good and when he could bring it out so the people, so that they could understand.

TO: Did you know him, or as an employee did you ever meet him?

IH: No, oh yes [unclear] but just casually, that is I don't think he knew me.

TO: Right.

IH: Although I shook hands with him and so on, but I doubt if he had any personal knowledge about me.

TO: Yeah.

IH: Elmer Benson was the one that came along about the same time, and he was really an

outstanding person, that really stood for principles and I had close contact with him. I think that he is one of the most outstanding, greatest in the political movement that we've had in Minnesota.

ST: Can you talk a little more about him and experiences you had with him?

IH: Yes. Elmer Benson took the, of course he was, they were [unclear] liquor control at that time because liquor control was just being set up and he wanted to have the state to control the liquor while the other liquor interests they wanted it open, under private interest. Benson contended that the only way that you could have effective control of liquor would be to have it under state control, but he was making that, it's his principle issue about in '38 I believe it was, and the surprising thing is that the churches were the ones who were the principle forces fighting against them in this program.

TO: Why was that?

IH: Because, well they used the argument that the state was not supposed to go into the liquor business, that was [unclear] but they were really being used by the liquor interests, the churches were, they were [unclear] working for the liquor interests, I don't know if, it must have, been doing so intentionally because I don't think they were that naive that they didn't see what they were supporting...

TO: So he lost a lot of votes then.

IH: Oh yes, he lost a lot of votes. That was one thing and of course the communist issue was another thing and the Jewish issue because he happened to have Roger Rutcheck working as his secretary and they made, that is during that time there was a lot of anti-Semitic, Semitism, and not only in Germany but here as well and that was really exploited by those reactionary forces that were opposed to Benson, [unclear] he had a Jew as his private secretary and they had pamphlets and stuff...

TO: Also Abe Harris, did you know who he is?

IH: Yes, I knew him, he was another one, editor of the Minnesota Leader, so...

TO: Did you read your Minnesota Leader in those days?

IH: Every word of it.

TO: That's good.

IH: It was our bible.

TO: It was a great paper.

IH: Yes, it was, yeah I couldn't wait until every month when the Minnesota Leader came out, every issue.

ST: Do you remember any meetings you had with Benson, or you know any interesting

experiences with him?

IH: Not some, no not at that time I don't remember that we had any meetings with him.

TO: What about the communist issue?

IH: Well the communist issue was one of the outstanding issues that they were using against Benson, they even used some pictures that they had, the picture of Elmer Benson and the parade in New York City, that parade was for the unemployed and they were trying to prove Elmer Benson was in a communist parade there, so they had him, they had those pictures superimposed on this picture, some communist, I think it said some communist leader of some kind or if it was some kind of a flag, I don't know, but I know there was some superimposing that they did in some pictures. You probably have some information on that.

TO: Yeah, I've heard about that.

IH: That was used quite extensively in circulars distributed throughout the state, but Elmer Benson and, that is, through the campaign organization we tried to, that is come back at that and show that it's been proved that that was superimposed and that was proven that it was what they had, how they had doctored up those pictures, but the damage was done already, you know, that's what one of the reasons that Benson was defeated. It was on account of the communist issue and the Jewish issue and of course they used that liquor interest.

TO: How about the issue that it was a corrupt administration because you know people were getting, there was a spoils system going on, political pay-offs...

IH: Yes, they were using that and that [unclear] was they were forced to contribute to the Party and so on.

TO: What did you think of Stassen, were you bitter when he got elected?

IH: Yes, I was in a way, but I didn't blame him for laying us off cause I figured that we did have the spoil system and we knew what to expect if he was elected, we knew that we would all get the axe, that is all of us that were active, most of the employees did stay on but most of the employees were not active politically, so it was only the active ones that got the axe.

TO: Did you have a brother?

IH: Yes, he was active too, he lives next door. He was, he was, he didn't, I would say that his activity was as a teacher, he was teaching down at Bloomington, Minnesota and he'd gotten difficulties because he had tried to organize a union of teachers there, so, yes, he was also active and he still is, he's active in the, now all, as a director of the Franklin-Soviet Council, Friendship Council.

TO: In [unclear], Minnesota?

IH: Um hum.

TO: We should talk to him sometime.

IH: Yeah, his first name is Cliff.

TO: Cliff, yeah. I think I tried calling him...

IH: He's a couple of years older than I am.

TO: Well why, do you have anything more to ask at this point?

ST: Yeah, I just wanted, like, when you became involved in the Farmer Labor Party first if you could just talk about kind of when you decided or why you wanted to become involved, or people like you to, like what was it they saw in the Farmer Labor Party that interested them?

TO: Well, during the Depression days I think that our, we had issues [unclear] everybody could understand, there was unemployment and things were really tough so, and there didn't seem to be any solution to the unemployment situation except war or something like that, which I still contend was probably what, finally took us out of the Depression when it came to war production, well, and it's been ever since, our economy has been geared for war production and it's probably right now, it's one of the things that I've been, where Carter's been at, is gonna fall down is that he's going to be afraid to close off the big defense plants because it's going to make the unemployment situation worse and so you see no solution except war production. And of course what we were interested in was to have people employed in something worthwhile, for a productive use, for producing things that the people needed and so on, food and clothing and building of more schools, in those days there were schools that were run down, fire hazards, building hospitals that we needed so badly and improve health care, so it was some of those issues that we felt that...

#### TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

IH: [Unclear] went along, so I first began to see those ideas when I, first when I was going to school, when I was going to school out there in North Dakota and as I went along of course studying things [unclear] it just confirmed it more, [unclear] the economy and what's going on in this world, that public ownership was the answer.

ST: What sorts of things did you read say from tracing your career through you know high school and all of that to Farmer Labor Party days?

IH: I think that the things that I read were like a literary digest and some of the conservative magazines and, but there was always something that I could find in those magazines. Once in a while I'd find some book, I can't think of, oh yes, this one about, that was written by Lindberg, Congressman Lindberg.

ST: Right.

TO: Yeah, [unclear] one was on money...

IH: Yes, the Moneychangers, something like that.

TO: One was on war.

IH: Yes, ah ha.

TO: You read both of those?

IH: Yes I did, that was back in the '20s. Otherwise most of my reading has been just the newspapers and conservative magazines. [Unclear] got enough of it on the other side, all at the same time to see something on the other side.

TO: Do you remember the 1934 platform that came out of the Cooperative Commonwealth?

IH: Yes, yes, that [unclear]

TO: Does that pretty much express your beliefs at the time?

IH: Yes, that's right, I was enthused about it then and I still stay with that [unclear] really would support. And Floyd Olson took a very good stand on that, like when he came out and said, when they called him a radical, he said I am what I want to be, I am a radical he says. And he says, and then he defined what a radical is, a radical is one who wants to get to the roots of things for solutions and he says that's, that's what I believe in he says, so Floyd Olson did a lot there to help to, that is to get the people thinking [unclear]

ST: So you think that was the real Floyd Olson talking when he described himself as a radical?

IH: I don't....no, I don't know, that's a question...

ST: Cause that's one of the questions, we get, you know we get a lot of different opinions about him and...

IH: I kind of think he was pushed kind of in that way cause he was kind of on the spot but he, and finally when he was going to take a stand and he found by taking that stand he had people behind him, so then he became enthused. But otherwise I don't think it really was Floyd Olson, I think naturally he was more to the right, was more maybe he was an opportunist and he just happened to fill in, happened to make the right move there. For example on this truck driver's strike, he took a good stand there, it was Citizen's Alliance in those days that were running things in Minneapolis, they were going to see to it that they were going to have, those trucks are going to go with scab drivers, truck drivers in those days were getting pitifully small wages, weren't able to make a living, \$18-20 a week, something like that, and so they finally went on a strike and then the, [unclear] who was mayor of Minneapolis, Mayor..., I don't remember who it was, anyhow he was going to deputize, well it wasn't the mayor who was going to do it, the police chief, deputized officers there to break the strike, but then Floyd Olson called out the state militia and surprised them all when he used the militia to stop the movement of the trucks [unclear].

TO: What kind of work did you do with the co-ops?

IH: To start with I was doing secretarial work there in the Department of Agriculture, for the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Deputy Commissioner I was their secretary.

TO: Were they progressive people?

IH: Yes they were, not very, I would say that although they were supposed to be liberal, I don't think they were too liberal, they were, I had a lot of differences with them but I had to work with them and then my work with the deputy commissioner required [unclear] we had to work [unclear] that's why I got involved in work with the co-ops.

TO: That and [unclear]

IH: Yes, yes, I had to go out and meet with the cooperatives to help to draw up the articles of incorporation, the by-laws, and explain them to the members at the meetings. [unclear], it was during that administration that we started the REA and when the REA set-up finally came through that was Elmer Benson was Senator at that time and at first the [unclear] it was made in Minnesota and we got the REA, we'd organized the state here, the co-ops, that is co-op REAs, we had oh around 50 of them organized in Minnesota...

ST: They're like electrical co-ops?

IH: Yes.

TO: How'd you go...

IH: And then when the first, what?

TO: How'd you go around organizing, just go from farm to farm in a certain area...

IH: No, they had, they'd [unclear] several meetings in different towns, or different counties. We'd [unclear] people that were in different areas [unclear] groups of people [unclear] REA electric lines so they organized meetings, get together and discussed about getting such an organization going. The first announcement was made [unclear] to a private power company up in Aitken County and we [unclear] that was immediately reported to Elmer Benson who was then Senator and he went to [unclear] and said [unclear] Minnesota, we've got, we have [unclear] these REA co-ops already set up and he insisted that this could not go on, that [unclear] was not the [unclear] of the power companies, we had co-operatives and that should be their purpose [unclear] he gave orders to the REA administrators that from now they should recognize the co-ops and so from then on there was no more [unclear] made to private [unclear]. And that became a pattern, afterwards they sent representatives up here to Minnesota to see what we had done in organizing co-ops...

ST: [Unclear]

IH: [Unclear], so that became the pattern for the rest of the United States then, [unclear]starting the co-op.

TO: Did you ever, did most of the farmers in most of the regions then support the Farmer Labor Party?

IH: Yes, they did. Farmers were very good supporters.

ST: Were there any...

IH: [Unclear]

ST: No, you go on, I'll save it.

IH: I suppose you also wanted to get information about how the DFL Party came to be, should I go on to that?

TO: Do you have a question [unclear]

ST: Well yeah, before we do that I want to just ask a question on, if you could describe sort of from your point of view what you think some of the contradictions within the Farmer Labor Party, what they were, or some of the struggles, internal struggles, rather than, so we don't see it just as a, you know, totally unified party.

IH: That is within the Party? Like the factions...

ST: Yeah...

IH: ...like the Hjalmar Peterson faction and so on.

ST: Yeah if you could tell a little, like how you saw those factions developing...

IH: All right, take for instance my boss at that time was, his name was Troback, he was the Commissioner of Agriculture and as I said before he was not my type of a liberal, he was more of this opportunistic type, he had ideas he wanted to become a senator or something, so, so he was, he would be telling me about his plans there, what he was going to do, and [unclear] big person's Hjalmar Peterson who was Lieutenant Governor, he also had ambitions to become, that is the governor or senator so the main one that they were trying to, the main opposition that they had was Elmer Benson who represented the liberal element or the left wing, so their tactics they used was that Elmer Benson had a lot of Mexican generals, that this faction was just a lot a bunch of Mexican generals and they represented the real, it was the rank and file...

TO: Mexican generals, is that in terms of like party boss or...

IH: Yes, politicians, party bosses, and so on, but they were trying to, and they used that quite effective in the campaign, and it was used in the newspapers a lot, that Elmer Benson and the party, Floyd Olson was, after he'd passed away, it fell into the control of those Mexican generals.

TO: Who were the Mexicans, Abe Harris, was he one?

IH: Well yes, that was one they referred to as Mexican general, and Roger Rutchik and George Griffith, he was [unclear] commissioner

TO: Commissioner of what?

IH: Oil, Hoylan's Oil Department there, that came under the Department of Agriculture, it was a

division of the Department of Agriculture.

TO: Were these mostly people with administrative jobs or party....

IH: Yes.

TO: ...party officials...

IH: Ah ha, except Abe Harris who was the Leader, the Minnesota Leader. And they were referred to as Mexican generals and also they got the label afterwards, the Jewish, and also the Communists, so they were trying to get all those [unclear]. But, that Mexican general, that party came from, I mean that label came from within the DFL Party, I mean the Farmer Labor Party and this other faction who was trying to capture control.

TO: Was there differences in ideology, in other words political beliefs between the Peterson faction and the Benson faction, or was it just...

IH: Yes, because they didn't, they did not support this here Cooperative Commonwealth idea, they thought that platform was far too liberal and I, in talking to my boss there and he's, his ambition was more to be elected rather than to have a program, anything to be elected. And I think that's where the problems, I mean differences were, while the Elmer Benson group they were on principles.

TO: How about, was there, [unclear] write or talk to people if there's some split that developed in the labor movement between the AFL and CIO and Benson's support so strongly he lost some of the AFL support, is that true?

IH: Yes, that is true too.

TO: Why, how did that happen, why did the AFL...

IH: Well, the AF of L was, I suppose they wanted to limit to their type of labor organization, while the CIO was more a mass movement of labor [unclear], rather than to have it organized by the crafts, so that's the reason that the I suppose the AF of L they were satisfied with just having those crafts they were getting lucrative salaries out of it and that was all they wanted. The CIO stood for the more organizing the masses, they were, that became the Automobiles Workers Union, so...

ST: Now maybe we're ready for the merger.

TO: Right.

IH: Yeah, I forget what year that was, if it was in 19, it was right after the war...

ST: It was '47 or '48, right in there.

IH: Freeman had just gotten out, there was talk about he was promising politician and of course Humphrey was mayor of Minneapolis, I'm not sure if he was mayor yet when he was, when the merger was made, but we had a meetings at St. Paul Hotel, that was the convention where it was

going to be discussed, the Farmer Labor Party, it was proposed that the Farmer Labor Party should merge with the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party had never amounted to much in the state of Minnesota, at re-election they'd come up with about 50,000 votes and they were pretty consistent about that, only 50,000, and so Humphrey and Freeman they were in that Democratic Party group who were trying to encourage this merger with the Farmer Labor Party. Well at this meeting that we had in the St. Paul Hotel, Roger Rutchik was [unclear] too the chairman was at the meeting, but the Farmer Labor group, they wanted to keep their own identity and not get [unclear] unless we could use the DFL, that is call it DFL but have, be sure that we had our control. We elected all members from the Farmer Labor group to, that is as officers, the chairman, treasurer and it came to secretary they, Humphrey was insisting on getting Freeman in there as secretary and finally as a compromise we accepted Freeman with his pledge that he would work with the other officers in the Party for unity. So we took him in and he just barely got in by just a narrow margin, it was a very close vote and I remember immediately afterwards, that is the meeting adjourned that we consider that, that is everybody consider then that now we have this thing settled, it's one party and of course together and the Farmer Labor caucuses would be in control with the exception of Freeman who had plans to support us and I remember I as one went over to Freeman afterwards, shook hands with him, congratulated him that he was elected and I told him that I thought it was very important now that he should work for, with the Farmer Labor members on that executive committee and he promised he would, but that didn't [unclear], know immediately afterwards, it was through the newspapers [unclear] that they were using as their medium that they were, you could see that they were taking over the Party [unclear] and there were lots red-baiting and so on that they were using afterwards to get that control but that's, that's how it finally developed.

TO: What did you do after they finally did get control, did you sort of drop out?

IH: I dropped out of the Party, [unclear] they took over, so I became inactive until McCarthy came along and I [unclear] the Party again and became active. I was elected secretary then for Ramsey County and served as secretary for a couple years, now I became inactive...

ST: What mistake do you think was made in strategy of the, for the Farmer Laborites that allowed them, allowed the Democrats to take over, the Humphrey forces.

IH: I don't think we should have considered it at all, I think looking back I think what should have been done is that we should have just [unclear], took the Farmer Labor Party, let the Democrats struggle like they did, they never amounted to anything, what they took away from us didn't amount to anything, and we would have been much better off, after that why we lost, they just took over.

TO: What, I want to get out of the '50s in a minute, but the period after '38 when Benson was defeated and the Party continues [unclear] but it wasn't a very successful period between 1938 and the merger, what was that like, do you remember that period, did people get pretty demoralized, did activity fall off? Were you still active?

IH: Yes, I was still active, but...

TO: During the war...

IH: Yeah, it was during the war that time, our activity at that time, during that period was to

support Henry Wallace for president, we were fighting against Truman and all those others and I don't know, I don't remember who we had for candidates in the state for governor and so on, there was Charlie Egway about that time, maybe this as after...

TO: Benson ran for senator. Well it's not important, I just wondered what, during the war when the Farmer Labor Party was no longer doing very well, what it was like being...

IH: During that time I wasn't in, attending any meetings myself because I was working 7 days a week at that time, I was working at Northern Pump, I was on the night shift, from 6 o'clock until 6 in the morning, from 6 in the evening 'til 6 in the morning, 12 hours, so I wasn't able to be active and I was like that for about three years [unclear] activity...

ST: Was that a war plant then?

IH: Yeah.

ST: Did you get in any trouble during that period, like were you red-baited at all personally?

IH: No, no, I never had the FBI after me, I guess they must have known about me, I had no trouble to get in to Northern Pump [unclear], supposed to be screened, [unclear]. The only, there was some red-baiting when I tried to organize a union up at Midland Co-op, I worked there for a while [unclear] after I left the state 1940 to about 1942 I believe it was and on account of [unclear] I was trying to organize a union of the office employees there and I [unclear] and I know there was some red-baiting in connection with that, when I came to, you know when I came to the union meetings, AF of L during that time they, they announced that they wanted to share this little communist around here and so on, I don't know if that was referring to me or what, and they had the American flag standing up there...

TO: What was it like, how did you, or maybe you know some of the people that you were active within the Party, I'm always curious about having been in a party that was the majority party for a time and really successful and then having to go through the '50s where all you know your ideals were not being realized, where people weren't mobilized, how did you [unclear], how did other people react to the, really to the loss of power and the loss of ideals?

IH: I think when we, I, way I ran to it, I figure if it's about time that I kind of try to not expose myself to it, I tried to withdraw from activity of any kind, or even to discuss it, cause that was during the Joe McCarthy days and so on. It was just periods of, period of withdrawal of activity as far as I was concerned, cause I had family to think of and so on and I figured there wasn't much I could do at that point, I just kind of withdrew, I just didn't know what we could do because we had, we didn't have, well from the President on down there was really nothing, [unclear] Truman was president and he wasn't much better than any Republican, in fact he was the one that started all this red-baiting, he was the one that got the BIA organized and got the military to abduct and so on, started the war in Korea, he started containment over there in [unclear] Europe and in Vietnam and all over.

ST: Were you part of the Wallace effort?

TO: He said he was.

IH: Yeah.

TO: That was maybe your last...

IH: That was my last [unclear]

TO: [unclear]

IH: I was pretty active for Henry Wallace, oh we did have some candidates for president, there was that one from Tennessee we were supporting...

TO: [unclear]

IH: [unclear] and...

END INTERVIEW

Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota  
Oral History Project  
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