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This is an interview with Mr. Victor Bussie, January 15, 1974. Mr. Bussie is from Louisiana. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass *and Walter DeVries* and transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

JACK BASS: Since 1956, what have been the major changes that you have seen in Louisiana politics?

VICTOR BUSSIE: I think the state has gotten more liberal on social matters. The state has always been liberal in some economic matters. We have a good Workman's Compensation Law. We've kept up with the pace on Unemployment Compensation and things of that type even though it is a southern state and is known to be relatively conservative. It has still been better than most other southern states. We have no right to work laws or any laws directed against labor at all. I think, so far as the racial issue is concerned, it is much better than it was, but it is still deep rooted, it hasn't gone away by any stretch of the imagination. You can see it in many of the votes at the Constitutional Convention and particularly you can feel it from time to time.

J.B.: What are some examples how it is seen or felt at the Constitutional Convention - I mean, a vote in which race becomes a matter indirectly?

Bussie: For instance, and it works on both sides, for instance Fine Police Civil Service has been in existence in this

state for 25 years. It is based on what most people call the seniority system rather than a merit system. It is a system where a man has to qualify for the job every 18 months to stay on the list. He can be appointed then, once he is qualified, off the list solely by seniority. But he must get on the list, which means he must make a passing grade and must requalify every 18 months. The blacks were strongly opposed to that because it kept the blacks out of the main stream of the system, and I can understand to some extent. But, it was not designed for that purpose at all. It was simply designed to keep down strife and turmoil within the Fine Police Departments, to give what we consider to be fair representation to the number of years a man may have spent on the job if he was qualified for the position. In addition to that, he must work one year in a working task period after he is promoted. Any time during that time he can be demoted. The blacks wanted it solely on the basis of merit, but they didn't want it on the basis of the Civil Service merit system, which is in the state for state employees. They wanted to change it otherwise. The whites were fighting because they didn't want the blacks to get what they called an unfair advantage by being able to move up into the system without having that many of the qualifications for that system. So, on both sides, it was primarily a racial issue which motivated both sides.

J.B.: Is the black objection based in part on a feeling that they felt a written exam would adversely affect blacks because of the exposure to an inferior educational system in the past?

Bussie: Yes. There was a great deal of merit to that, there is no question about that. Yet, there was also some merit to not lowering the standards too much. It was almost impossible to get the two to understand the other's side of it.

J.B.: Any other examples that come to mind?

Bussie: In the question of, I am trying to remember what they call the article dealing with human rights. There was a great deal of dissension based upon that, primarily because of the racial issue, a great deal, and there is still some undercurrent in the Convention now, people who would like to go back in and change that section even though we adopted a very good section on human rights. The Bill of Rights, I think, is what we call it

J.B.: What shapes your racial attitudes?

Bussie: I guess primarily because I believe that everybody ought to have an equal opportunity, it doesn't make any difference what the color of the skin may be. I am of French descent and consequently not totally white in the eyes of some people myself. So I guess that might have helped motivate it, I am not sure. That has been my feelings

for many many years, even long before it was popular to feel that way. In fact, when we had the issues going on for the purpose of abolishing the public education system. I stood and fought that issue and at that time, my home was dynamited and everything else because of my feelings in regard to that. I just have a very deep rooted feeling that everybody ought to have an equal opportunity, I don't care who he is.

J.B.: You grew up in Shreveport?

Bussie: Yes.

J.B.: Therefore, you felt sort of some discrimination there growing up because of French descent in northern Louisiana.

Bussie: That plus the fact that I grew up as a very poor man. My father was a railroad man, who was laid off during the Depression even though he had 26 years of seniority. For four years he was almost totally unable to find employment. During that time, I attended high school and I worked those four years that I was in high school from four to eleven every night, seven nights a week, at a drive-in sandwich shop to help the family along. I don't think by that that it hurt me in any way. I didn't feel so at the time. But I am just a little closer to understanding what the cook's problem was who was black in the place. We had many discussions along with many of the others. They were not permitted to be car hops, that was a little higher than



them. They would stay in the back. If we fed any blacks at all, they had to go in the back door and that was always repugnant to me. I just didn't believe in that. I felt that they were entitled to be served just like anybody else and I had no objection to serving them. In fact, even at the expense sometimes of getting disfavorable comments from the other employees and from my employer, I deliberately went into the back and served the blacks even though we weren't supposed to do it. I just feel very deeply that people ought to be treated equally.

J.B.: How did you feel when your house got dynamited?

Bussie: I imagine the same way you felt, would have felt, if such a thing would have happened to you. Yet, I understood it because I know how other people felt. I had received the wrath of that before on a number of occasions, but not quite to that extreme. When I became aware of who was behind it, then I understood it even better. It was the activity of some people who believed in the Klan movement and the same night that they dynamited my house, they dynamited a house of a black woman who had been pushing for equal rights. It is understandable when you live in that atmosphere for quite some time.

J.B.: Did you feel more frightened or angry?

Bussie: Well, at first, there was a great deal of concern in my mind about the possibility of future harm to

my family, not any more so to me, because I recognized the fact that they had every opportunity in the world to do something to me at any time that they wanted to. It didn't have to be at night and didn't have to be by dynamite. I went to many meetings where, I guess, I subjected myself to that sort of treatment, and because of that there wasn't that great concern about it. Everybody, I am sure, is concerned about whether or not someone is going to shoot him, but nevertheless I recognize the fact that I couldn't go into a hole and cover myself up. I had to keep on doing what I believed in. There was some concern about how far they would go toward harming my family. My family assured me that they were willing to face that too, and that they understood. After that, we didn't give a great deal of thought to it.

Walter DeVries: What was the attitude of the union members towards you and your position on this during that time?

Bussie: In every Convention, we adopted resolutions by unanimous vote to uphold the civil rights movement, or job opportunity or job equality. There were many things which the civil rights movement did that we did not believe in, which we disapproved of. I say the civil rights movement, there were some within the movement, that did things that I didn't think should be done. I thought that at first

it was against the wishes of many blacks in this state, and was, what I thought, would be very harmful to their cause in the long run. Basically, our Convention has always been integrated, long before we could meet in hotels, we met in other places because we had an integrated Convention. We never had any problems then. During the time that all of this was going on, we purposely served meals at the convention for the delegates on the basis that they wouldn't have to leave the convention hall to go somewhere else to look for food, because generally our Convention was held in places almost inaccessible to eating places. They simply wouldn't let us meet in those places. We served food there on an integrated basis and never had any problems at all. I think while some of the delegates may not necessarily felt as deeply as some of the rest of us did, nevertheless, they did not voice any objection, and they voted for the resolution each time.

W.D.: Nobody has threatened your leadership based on your position on this recently?

Bussie: No.

W.D.: It seems to us, as we look at you with relationship to the state government, you are almost unique.

Bussie: You mean I am a freak?

W.D.: No, no, I didn't say that. In a sense that the influence and the power of the AFL-CIO has with the state

legislature, we don't see any other southern state where this is true. Perhaps you can generalize beyond that. We don't see it anyplace in the country. Why is that the case?

Bussie: I really can't answer that, because I was not aware that it was that unique. I assume that the state councils in other states made a strong effort to have influence in the councils of government also, like they really should do. We spend a considerable amount of time working with legislators on problems that involve people. We take the position in this state that we are not just interested in what affects labor, we are interested in anything that affects people. We work harder in education matters, for instance, than we do in matters that directly relate to labor. We have been criticized in the past by some politicians because we had done that. We've worked very hard in mental health. I have been the President of the Louisiana Mental Health Association, President of the Baton Rouge Mental Health Association, and first Vice-President of the National Health Association. I've worked very actively in mental retardation. All these programs which are designed to bring benefits to people, we have been extremely active in. We've worked with other groups that have no association with labor. In fact, some at times, I would say, their attitude is adverse towards some of the things we believe in in labor. Yet,

we find some common ground to work with them on problems. Because of that, I think it has mellowed most people toward us, at least led them to understand that we have no interest in interfering with business or management or anybody else except to the extent that we keep them from interfering with us, and that we seek benefits for our members. We recognize the fact that they have to make a good profit if we are going to get good benefits for our members, and consequently, our attitude has not been adverse in that sense.

W.D.: Aren't your interests, in a sense, much larger than most unions at the state level?

Bussie: I don't know, because I don't spend that much time with other state councils. I go all over the country speaking for them and to them whenever they ask me to, but I had not studied their programs to that extent, so I really don't know. We have many programs that we work with other groups. For instance, we have a very elaborate sound system. You may have noticed it up at the convention. That is our system, the lecturn and all the parts that go with it. We built that here in a workshop as a hobby. Woodworking and electronics are hobbies of mine and a number of other members of the staff. We built it primarily to handle our own conventions, make it more outstanding in the eyes of the public and more

acceptable to the people that we invite to speak. One of the first things that I have noticed in speaking over the country is the poor sound system, or poor lectrum, you feel like almost you weren't welcome to come when you face that situation. But we've used it as a public relations gimmick too. We furnish it free of charge, including the technicians to operate it and everything, to any group that has as many as 300 people assembling anywhere in the state. We handle most national conventions that come into Louisiana free of charge. We handle most of the social events. Anywhere where they need a good sound system. We use it to install the mayors in the principal cities in the state, to inaugurate the Governor and many other programs of that type, on the basis that it is good public relations. It is most helpful to them because they can't get it anywhere else.

W.D.: My point was that most unions, from my experience, tend to focus on Workman's Compensation, and things like that that tend to benefit directly to union members, but don't have that kind of a catholic interest that you do in a whole variety of things. My second point, or maybe question is, when we ask people about the AFL-CIO in this state and how many times they lose in the Convention or the legislature or any other place, we find that you don't lose very often.

[Interruption]

Bussie: We have taken the position that it is just as important to a man who has a retarded child to have a facility in this state to help relieve him of that burden, as it is for us to negotiate a substantial wage increase for him. Even more important, we have also taken the position that almost every family has some mental or emotional problems involved somewhere within that family. In the United States, one out of every seven people have emotional and mental problems that are severe enough either for hospitalization or at least for good medical treatment. Because of that, we think that is something we ought to do for our members, and the members of their family as well as the general public. We think it makes the state a much better place in which to live. Certainly, it makes it much better for our members. We have a selfish motive, no doubt about it. The selfish motive is first, that we want to serve our members in that fashion. Secondly, we want the groups that normally would be opposed to labor to understand that we are not totally selfish. We want to do things to help them also. Whatever involves people, we are interested in, whether it is health care services. I serve on what we call the Super Board for health care in this state. We make our contribution there. We never try to dominate any board. We ask the Governor to put one labor man on each committee and each board, and that is all we ever ask for, so that we can have a voice in it, so that we can participate

in it. We make an effort, of course, to prevail upon other people regarding our views, but we do it in a manner of simply talking. We have an iron clad rule, for instance, that we don't "wine and dine" legislators. That is contrary to the way that business operates. We meet in the day time with them, we are there any time that they meet, but when it is over with, we don't take them out at night, and do many of the things that we think might influence, but nevertheless, I think it is short time influence on legislators. We get actively involved in political campaigns, we help them get elected or try to . . .

J.B.: What do you do in political campaigns?

Bussie: Relatively speaking we spend a relatively small amount of money on any particular candidate. If he had to depend upon the money that we contribute to him, he wouldn't get anywhere in the race. But we do give a great deal of manpower.

J.B.: How much do you actually give in money for, say a legislative race or state-wide race?

Bussie: An average of \$200 per race that we get involved in. In many of those, we don't even give that. But it is seldom that we give over \$200.

J.B.: How about state-wide, say for a Governor's campaign?

Bussie: We don't contribute in the Governor's campaign.



We don't make any direct contribution to any candidate for Governor, nor do we for any United States Senator or Congressman.

J.B.: What role does the AFL-CIO play?

Bussie: Primarily communication with our members. We have a news letter which goes directly to every member in the state and we have constant meetings, and we form committees over the state in the areas where we have candidates that we are interested in. We work with other groups, the blacks, the Mexican-Americans, the Italians, you know, the groups that generally have about the same sympathies that we do. We help in many other ways. We will help a candidate who has a particular man he is interested in, for instance, in finding a job that might help him in his political campaign. These are the manners in which we help.

J.B.: Do you work in such things as canvassing, getting out the vote, voter registration?

Bussie: Yes, we have voter registration drives regularly. We have . . .

J.B.: Is that for non-members, as well as members?

Bussie: Yes.

J.B.: Do you work actively in blue collar precincts that have low union membership?

Bussie: It depends upon what the situation is in each

of those. It would be physically impossible for us to work in all of them. But we join with other groups who are interested in it. For instance, in this state we worked for many years before any federal laws on registering the blacks. At that time Louisiana had a law which said you had to answer certain questions about the Constitution if you were going to register. We were able to receive the questions and answers on that. Now, I am not at liberty to say, but nevertheless we reproduced two million copies of all the questions and answers and we flooded the state with them. We were threatened with law suits, jail sentences and everything else for violating state law. But we felt that the law was unconstitutional to start with, and secondly that people were entitled to be registered to vote. We went primarily into the poor working sections and into the predominately black sections to distribute that kind of literature. Consequently, we built up a rapport with those people that we could over the years they have generally felt that at least we were sympathetic to their problems even though they were not members of labor. It depends on what the circumstances are in each area.

J.B.: How much volunteer help can you and do you mobilize in, say a Governor's race?

Bussie: A tremendous amount. One of the big assets that we have had in this state is when we merged the AFL and

the CIO. We've never had another fight about whether or not we had emerged an organization. The former President of the CIO was the Executive Vice-President of the state council. His office is right over here. He is the delegate in the Constitutional Convention. We had known each other for many years before we merged and worked together in Shreveport. We are both from Shreveport. We never have had any problems and because of that, we don't waste our time in Convention fighting each other. The AFL and the CIO just forgot about the old designation once we merged in this state. Our conventions are designed to not only inform our own members, but also as a public relations thing. We have about 8,000 people a year who attend our convention. We send invitations to every group in the state, depending upon who is speaking. If we have a speaker on mental health, we send it to all of the mental health members in the state asking them to attend the convention to hear that speaker. We do the same thing on mental retardation, Red Cross, Salvation Army and all of those groups. We try to have speakers representing various groups from time to time that might be of public interest. When we had Kennedy and Humphrey and other national speakers, we invite the public to come and hear them. Because of that, the public gets some feeling of what we are doing. In our conventions each year, we

reserve 300 seats for children. We invite the school system to select the 300 students that they would like to send to that convention, to sit there each day and hear the speakers, particularly the national speakers. We have Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who help handle the crowd in a convention, to kind of give them a feeling of what is going on and give them an opportunity to participate. These are the kind of things, I think, that have caused the public to be aware of the fact that we do have concern for all of those things. It has helped to motivate a lot of people in a desire to get to know us better and to understand us better and to give us a chance to work with them.

W.D.: What percent of the work force is now unionized here?

Bussie: We have 186,000 members. I would say we may have 15% of the over-all work force.

W.D.: Is that increasing or decreasing?

Bussie: It is increasing.

W.D.: Is it increasing in numbers or percentages?

Bussie: In numbers. We have a substantial number of public employees in the union.

W.D.: Is that where the increase is taking place?

Bussie: No, we have been successful in many other fields too. That is where the bulk of the increase has taken place, yes.

J.B.: We've heard a couple of conflicting stories, I think, about your position on teacher unions. What is your attitude as far as teachers and organizing and how much . . .

Bussie: My attitude toward that is the same as it is toward any other group. If they have a good organization, whether it is a union or not, I don't believe we ought to interfere with them. If they are satisfied with their organization, then fine. We will work with them and help them in any way we can. If they are dissatisfied, and they want a union, then we are in that business and we will provide a union for them and again help them in any way that we can. We have tried not to create problems for any particular group, unless that group took out after us. I think again, that is part of the reason for our growth.

Begin Side Two

W.D.: Do other groups have the kind of clout that your organization has?

Bussie: It depends on the issue, it depends on how hard they are willing to work for it, it depends on whether or not they work for just their own cause and not trying to help other groups. It is natural if we go in and help you with a problem that you have, even though you are not a member

of labor. If we have a problem and you can help us without hurting yourself, naturally, in most cases you are going to do that. We recognize that fact of life. Because of that, and our sincere desire to help people with whatever problems they have, we . . . if we get calls from people who are not members of labor about problems that they have, we still try to help them solve it. If we get a call here, I don't ask the person who is calling if he is a member of the union. If he voluntarily tells me whether or not he is, fine, but if he has a problem with a mental institution or anything else, we attempt to help him. People aren't prone to forget that.

W.D.: Do you think it is basically because your interests are much broader . . .

Bussie: I think that has a great deal to do with it, I really do.

J.B.: How do you assess the role of <sup>PARR</sup> Parr?

Bussie: I recognize Parr for what it is and I do not criticize it for what it is. It is a representative of big business in this state. That is exactly what their interest is. Stymwell, of course, is very dogmatic about the fact that it is not, but it has to be. They are convinced that when they make studies on problems that they come up with the only solution that there is to that problem. If you don't agree with that problem,

then you are against good government. As far as I am concerned, good government depends upon who is making the statement. I think we stand for good government as much as anybody else does. Good government doesn't just come from big business, nor does it come from big labor. The two can work together. For instance, we have led the fight in this state to correct the property tax situation. We've been severely criticized and hammered at and everything else for it, but we are convinced that our position is correct, even though some union members don't agree with that position. We think that whatever the law is on property tax, it ought to be carried out regardless of who it might affect. If we don't like the law, then we should fight to change it. But as long as that is the law, then no assessor or anybody else ought to have the free right to violate that law and do what he wants to do. Big business yelled about it for years, but nothing but yell. We took the thing into court and have been in there for six years, severely criticized by the assessors and many other people for doing it, including my friend the Governor. The Governor severely criticizes us from time to time. We understand that. That is not anything that makes us mad or leaves us . . .

J.B.: Am I pertinent that on that issue, <sup>PAR</sup>~~Parr~~ did a lot of research for your suit?

Bussie: <sup>PARR</sup> Parr did a tremendous amount of research, but we did as much research on our own to find out. We don't accept Parr's analysis of any situation, just like we don't accept any other group's analysis of the situation. Quite often, we don't even accept the national AFL-CIO's analysis, because it may be a different situation in this state. When the AFL-CIO nationally was opposed to the ERA amendment, we supported it, because we felt that it was right. Why should a man control all of the property in this state, when half of it belongs to the woman? Why should they discriminate in salaries? If the work performed is of equal importance to the company or to the union or to anybody else, why shouldn't they be paid the same? That has been our position on it. I am very happy and pleased that the national AFL-CIO has changed its position.

J.B.: Has ERA passed in Louisiana?

Bussie: No, but it is going to this next time in my opinion.

W.D.: That will be atypical of the South too, won't it?

Bussie: I don't know what the other southern states are doing. But we spoke for it in the last session and fought for it. You seldom pass anything of that major stroke in the first session that you propose it. It usually takes two or three sessions in order to pass



anything of that type, but I feel sure that we will pass it this next time. I was just successful in that last meeting of the Super Health Board to get that group to go on record endorsing the ERA and the reason for that is that the status of women's council comes under the jurisdiction of the Super Health Board, and I wanted the status of women's council to be free and also to be mandated to go to work for the ERA, which they are now doing.

J.B.: How many state boards and commissions do you, yourself, serve on?

Bussie: I don't know. I would say somewhere around 20 or more.

J.B.: Do you make most of the meetings?

Bussie: Yeah. If I don't go, my wife, who is the Community Services Officer for the state AFL-CIO makes the meetings in my place. Seldom do we miss them. Mr. Floyd serves on a number, Mr. Morgan serves on a number, Mr. Berg serves on quite a few, Mr. Stoddard serves on a number of them.

W.D.: What would be the total for all the organized labor members serving on boards. If you serve on 20 what would be the total for you and your representatives?

Bussie: I'd say, just a wild guess, it must be somewhere in the neighborhood of 75 or 80. It's hard to say, because the Governor appoints special committees to

look into various problems almost daily. Inevitably, somebody from our group is appointed to the committee. We have a policy that if anyone is appointed under the jurisdiction of the Louisiana AFL-CIO, he can not accept per diem payment or expenses. We pay whatever the cost is from this council. If he has a lost time situation from his job, we reimburse him for that. If he travels in the duty which is imposed upon him by the function of the committee, we pay his travel expenses. He can not accept anything for those services. We think those are part of the services he ought to provide as a citizen, but we don't think he ought to be penalized to the extent that he is paying for it out of his own pocket or losing money, but he ought not to make money off it either.

J.B.: Until a few years ago AFL-CIO held membership in Parr, am I correct in that?

Bussie: Yes.

J.B.: Why did they withdraw their support?

Bussie: Well, we also held membership in Cable, Council for a Better Louisiana. We got out of that because they refused to take an active part in the property tax fight after many years of saying that they strongly supported it, demanded that the Governor do something about it, the legislature, and everybody else, yet, they themselves were not willing to join in the law suit. Even though, some

eight or ten times we passed the motion in Cable meetings to instruct the board to do it, they still refused to do it. So, we just dropped membership. We became very dissatisfied with Parr primarily on the single member district issue in the state. We declined to get involved with Parr any further after that. They didn't particularly need our membership anyway. If it had been a question of them folding because of lack of our membership, we would have stayed in it. We don't want to see them fold, we just don't agree with some of their views.

J.B.: What was the objection of single member districts?

Bussie: Well, we think in the city of Baton Rouge, for instance, that there is better representation given to the people and to the local government if everybody in Baton Rouge has an interest in what that delegation does. It is proving to be true. Even business now agrees to a large extent that we were correct. A legislator in east Baton Rouge parish is interested only in what happens within his little part of east Baton Rouge parish, not what happens to the overall function of the parish. This was our primary objection. We were opposed by the blacks, by Parr and I guess by everybody else that I can think of, who felt that we were wrong and that single member districts was the answer. Many people are now reassessing their position on it. We just think that if you have a delegation representing

a given area, that delegation ought to be interested in what affects that given area, not a little small segment of that area. That was our position and still is our position.

J.B.: Your opponents, I think, at least contend your opposition, the AFL-CIO opposition to single member districts was that you should have less influence in elections and "silk stocking" wards.

Bussie: That perhaps is true to some extent, but our opponents still say that we are exceedingly strong and that we get everything we want, and everything else. They have had single member districts in the legislature now for quite some time, and it hasn't had the effect that they thought we were concerned about. But we have been able to prove the point that the legislators from east Baton Rouge go in eight different directions on most issues, and consequently it is not giving the best service to this area or to Shreveport in Catto parish and in those areas. We still believe that if the people in the whole parish had the right to speak, then the situation would be entirely different. We may be proven wrong someday, but up to this point, I think we have been justified in our views. We think the blacks will have much more influence in east Baton Rouge parish if they have an opportunity to vote on every person who is a representative from east Baton Rouge

parish. They thought otherwise. They thought having one or two legislators from this district was more important to them. We didn't think so.

J.B.: Have they changed on that?

Bussie: Quite a number of them have, yes. I don't know what their official position is, I haven't asked.

J.B.: What do you attribute the relative lack of success of the Republican party in Louisiana, even compared to other southern states, and even with single member districts?

Bussie: Well, single member districts is not doing what Stymwell and a lot of those folks said. Here is another thing. Stymwell was selected as the person to pick out the boundaries for single member districts. If the AFL-CIO had been given that, and we have a research department and we have people who are qualified to do it too, he would have gone through the ceiling. It would have been a very undemocratic process and everything else, yet, he assumed that that was rightfully his prerogative. We don't think so. Why should he have the right to pick out the boundary lines for any political sub-division in this state, but that is what he did, which is another thing that we violently disagreed with. I am sorry, I lost the point of your question.

J.B.: I forgot what the question was.

W.D.: Republican party.

Bussie: Oh, the Republican party. Basically, Louisiana has been a Democratic party for many years. Now we have, what I call, a Republican philosophy within the Democratic party. I don't know whether they have it in other states or not. But we have an ultra-conservative group within the party. We have an ultra-liberal group, and then we have people who travel fairly down the middle of the road. So, while we have one party, we have the whole philosophy involved in that party. It has been hard to get people to separate themselves from that. They still call themselves Democrats, but they will vote for people that would normally represent the Republican philosophy, or they would vote for candidates that normally would represent the Democratic philosophy. The name Republican in the state has not caught on like it has in many other states, because many people simply do not want to be called Republican.

J.B.: In terms of government attitude, what is the legacy of the Longs in Louisiana?

Bussie: Well, many people say that they violently disagreed with the Longs, yet, they accept very readily the benefits, which the Longs fought for. When Huey Long became Governor of the state, we had very few paved roads. Huey immediately launched into paving those roads. Public schools had gotten to the point where they were almost

non-existent so far as the availability of children of real poor families. Huey made it available to them by providing free text books and things of that type. I recognize, of course, the argument about anything free, somebody has to pay for it. Yet, by the same token, I recognize those of us who can afford to pay for it doggone sure ought to make sure that everychild has an opportunity for an education, and as good of an education as that child can absorb. I disagree very violently with the philosophy that you ought to charge a young person to attend colleges and universities which are state financed. I believe they ought to be able to attend on the same basis that they can the public education system. And in the main, the Longs felt the same way. I believe that most people readily accept the philosophy to a great extent of the Longs even though the name Long may be repugnant to many of them. The Longs did a great deal of good in this state.

J.B.: Getting back to <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~. How do you assess the, how do you define <sup>Steinwell</sup>~~Stymwell~~'s role?

Bussie: I think <sup>Steinwell</sup>~~Stymwell~~ basically is a very fine and honorable man, and I mean that sincerely. He represents big business and you have to take that into consideration when you look at their analyses of problems. I think one of the worst things that is coming into this state now, for instance, is the situation in education. I don't believe

that it helps to try to interest a child into going into vocational education when he is still relatively young on the basis of "Well, he probably couldn't absorb enough in a University to get a degree anyway." I believe that every child ought to be encouraged to go to school as long as he possibly can succeed in school. After that let him worry about getting a job and filling his place in life. I find that a lack of sufficient education has hampered me and many other people in life. Because of that, I want all of them to have every opportunity that they can before they make a decision to go into the trades, to encourage them to go into the trades on the basis that you start making money now. What is going to happen to them in the future because of that lack of educational opportunity is just something that nobody yet can say. But I am persuaded that our role ought to be to encourage them to go to school as long as they can possibly profit from it.

W.D.:

Bussie: I think vocational education is fine. But career education is a lot of hogwash, I really do. And most educators feel the same way.

J.B.: How do you make the distinction between vocational education or technical education and career education?



Bussie: Vocational/technical education can be given to a child at any time. Career education is to encourage him to go into it, and to go into it much sooner than they should be encouraging it. As I understand, what the Superintendent of Education wants to do, he wants to start teaching it from the first grade on, that you ought to follow that pattern. I think that is entirely wrong. It encourages many young people who are not mature enough to make a sound judgement about their future to go out to start seeking employment much sooner than they should and never going back into the educational system. I think it is detrimental not only to the child but to the state and the nation as a whole. One of the things that I firmly believe has helped America as much as it has is the availability of education, the encouragement which we give to people to try to complete their educational opportunities, and I think this is step backward, designed by many people who feel that well, most children can't absorb a college education anyway, so why put him in the position of even trying. I found that many young people who go to college, if you sat down and tried to figure out whether they could ever make anything of themselves, educationally speaking, you'd probably shove them off in a different direction, but who come out fine in the final analysis. I don't believe in the European system where they decide much younger in life

which course their child ought to follow. I think he ought to have something to do with making that decision, after he has absorbed all that he possibly can.

W.D.: Then you think the reason that <sup>PAR</sup>~~Parr~~ came out with that recommendation is essentially because it was a big business orientation?

Bussie: Yes, the feeling that too much money is going into education and we need to do something about it, and we are building too many Universities and we ought to stop that because most children that go to universities drop out in the first two years anyway, so why encourage them to go. I think whatever he can get out of that university is going to be helpful to him. If he can't go any further than two years, at least we ought to encourage him to go there.

J.B.: Do you think their concern has been more with that aspect of it, or with the aspect of industry saying it needs people with more skills?

Bussie: I think in this state, industry gets all the people with the skills that it needs. I have not found any shortage of it except when we have a big boom in construction, and that goes on everywhere. There is no way that we can prepare enough people, for instance, to carry on the construction boom that we had here a few years ago, unless you could train them, stack them in a corner and tell them to

wait until industry decides that it is going to build a number of plants in this state. Those people have to live in the meantime and have to have employment. One of the big criticisms we've had in unions, is that you take people into the union and then you can't get them employment. I think that is a justifiable criticism. Yet, you rock along for three or four years with more people than you need, suddenly you have a big boom, you have fewer than what you need, and everybody says, "Well, labor should have trained those people. They should have had them ready." Well, what do they live on in the meantime. What do you do with those people in that course of time. We are not being selfish about it, we are just being realistic about it. Sending them to trade school is not going to train them to carry out the duties which industry wants. Trade schools simply don't give you that kind of training.

W.D.:        <sup>PARR</sup> The ~~Parr~~ report on economic development says that the basic reasons or the problems of economic development are first of all the right to work law, lack of industrial skills of the work force, workman's compensation, those are the three major reasons why they can't get industry to move into Louisiana. How do you see that?

Bussie: In this state we have a good amount of what we call high paying industry moving into the state. The low paying industry goes into other states. Not just because

of the lack of the so-called right to work laws, but I think because of the attitude of the public in this state. They simply won't work as cheaply as they do in other states. If Parr wants a real cheap work force, then they need to send them overseas. They can get them much cheaper over there than they can here. But we believe in building up a work force that not only is capable of doing the job assigned to it, but also is paid a reasonable living wage. The type of industries which Parr is talking about, the clothing manufacturing industry and that sort of thing, simply does not pay that kind of wage in the South. That is the reason they moved to the South, to get away from paying a decent wage.

J.B.: It is your feeling then that the fact that the textile industry doesn't come to Louisiana, that this does not hurt the state?

Bussie: I don't think that it does the state any great harm. When you fail to move an industry into the state that pays far below the standard wages in the state, I don't think it does. I sure don't.

J.B.: What is your response to the argument that a lack of the right to work law, the argument is the fact that Louisiana doesn't have any anti-labor legislation on the books, that it tends to scare industry away as labor being too strong.

Bussie: I don't think that that is any basic argument, and for years <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ didn't think so either. It is only after we dropped membership in <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ that they began to talk in that fashion, that right to work might be an essential thing in this state. It has absolutely no influence on whether or not industry moves into a state. It might have influence on whether real low-paying industry moves into a state, that might be the only industry that would be effected.

J.B.: Why did the AFL-CIO join <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ originally?

Bussie: We hoped to have an input into <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ and to find out basically what its reasoning was behind many of the recommendations which it came out with and to try to work with them. We have tried it with almost every other group in the state and we felt we ought to try it with Parr too. There are many things about <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ that we admire, many things about <sup>PARR</sup>~~Parr~~ that we support. But there are also many things that we don't.

J.B.: How do you assess Governor McKeithan's administration and also Governor Edwards administration?

Bussie: I think Governor McKeithan did a good job, I really do. I think one of the best things that he did for the state was the Dome Stadium. Many people disagree with that, but I think it not only has had a great amount of impact upon the availability of jobs in the Orleans area already, the economic situation in the Orleans area has

improved tremendously because of it. We've had the construction of several major hotels that never would have been built had it not been for that. We've had a financial situation much better than it was. Sure it is going to cost the state a little bit of money, but relatively a little bit out of the state public funds to maintain the project once it gets going. It is going to be a great tourist attraction, it is going to bring into this state hundreds of thousands of people that normally would not have come, and will help to build up the image of the state. Many people oppose that. We think it is good, and we think that Governor McKeithan is largely responsible for it. Governor McKeithan, I think, had a very successful administration, contrary to the feelings of some of the other people. Governor Edwards, up to this point, has had a more successful administration, partly because he is able to analyze problems much better than any Governor I have ever seen, and is willing to tackle those problems and try to do something about them. I think he works constantly in an effort to not only define the problems but to really do something about them and once he does find it, he goes out after it. He doesn't sit back and wait. I think he is going to be a great Governor, I really do.

J.B.: What happened to his recommendation on the property tax compromise, which I think you opposed?

Bussie: I opposed it very strongly, because I firmly believe that a man's home ought not to be taxed at the same rate as any profit making venture. I think the home is simply a place in which to live, and it ought not to be taxed on the same rate. I do not believe that the bulk of the funds which go into a parish for its operation ought to come from property taxes on the home owner. The home owner can not pass it on to anybody else, industry can pass it on in the cost of their product. Because of that, I think the overwhelming majority of the delegates readily accepted it, many of whom are representatives of business and industry. They voted the same way that we did on it.

W.D.: As the draft now stands, do you think that your organization is going to oppose it or work for it?

Bussie: The Constitution?

W.D.: Yeah.

Bussie: I am in no position to say. That is determined by Convention. Personally, I can't find anything in it that is repugnant to the extent that I would recommend opposing it, even though I am strongly opposed to the section dealing with the legislative sessions. The one thing in that Constitution that the people have spoken loud and clearly on, is that it does not want the legislative session to be extended beyond what they are right now. They turned down

a Constitutional amendment last time by an overwhelming vote to change the 30-day session into a 60-day session every other year. The people themselves did that. There was no organized opposition to it, with the exception of ours. We spoke out against it and we sent communications out against it. Everybody else, apparently, was in favor of it. But the people voted against it. At the same time, they adopted some of those recommendations which were submitted to them by Constitutional amendments, yet, the Convention in the light of that still extended the sessions to 85 day sessions. It didn't even stop at the 60 day session mark, which they had proposed to the people before and which the people had turned down as being too lengthy. That is the only section of the Constitution which is very difficult for me to swallow, but I've swallowed other things that in the past were difficult. So, it is not that major an item.

J.B.: How about on the Boards of Education . . .

Bussie: I strongly favor what was written by the delegates in the proposal. I do not favor an alternate.

W.D.: Do you mean five boards?

Bussie: Well, they call it five boards. It is really two boards and three commissions, is what it is. One board in higher education has the complete control of the money and everything else. The other board in secondary and



elementary education has complete control. I think the other boards which are solely management boards under the jurisdiction of those two, or primarily under the jurisdiction of the one, certainly is a situation which does not justify changing in any way. I don't see anything wrong with it, not a thing. Texas has what, 17 Boards of Education, I mean, 17 Boards for colleges and universities. Many other states have large numbers. For some reason or other, somebody has been able to convince people that five boards is just unheard of in education. That is just not true. Most of the professional educators in this state are well satisfied with what is in there. Look at the voting record of those educators that are in the legislature, in the Constitutional Convention. Louie Meashio knows as much about education as I do. He knows a great deal about producing hamburgers, which I know nothing about, so I commend him for that. But when it comes down to basic education in the state, he is not an educator, and he does not know as much about it as professional educators do, most of whom support what is in the Constitution as of this moment.

J.B.: These three commissions, their functions would be what?

Bussie: Primarily to give some degree of prestige to that university, that's all. Other universities and colleges

can get the same kind of board if they want to. All they have to do is to apply to the coordinating council and they can have them under this proposal. It is simply to help carry out what the legislature and what the coordinating board would tell them to do, that's all. I think it is good because it brings more people into the education process. Why is it good to have 15 or 17 people control the whole education system in the state, regardless of who they are or where they come from? Why shouldn't other people be involved in the education process? They are still under the jurisdiction of that board. They can only follow the policy outlined by that board. The Super Health Council, which I sit on, we have 42 boards and commissions under our jurisdiction. It hasn't created one bit of problem. We adopt a policy and they adhere to it, and help manage the department that they have an advisory capacity over. Why shouldn't education have the same sort of thing? The more people you bring into government, the better government that you are going to have in my opinion. It is when you put it all into the hands of just a few that you have real problems.

J.B.: In the future of Louisiana politics, do you see the state moving back into the Democratic column in Presidential elections?

Bussie: Oh yes. I think so.

J.B.: Under what conditions?

Bussie: Part of it is from the complete dissatisfaction with the Republican administration that is in power. Part of it is because the Democrats in this state have had the fling of trying to destroy each other and going off into different directions and saying that this group doesn't need the other group and so forth. I think we have all been taught a lesson that we do need each other, and that somehow we need to find some common ground on which to solve our problems. I think people in the Democratic party and primarily the leaders of the various factions within the Democratic party have come to realize that. I think it is going to be helpful. Sometimes you have to go down a considerable degree before you learn to let the air out and come back up to the surface, and I think that is what happened.

W.D.: At the state level, some people say that the power in the state-wide elections, particularly the Governor, has shifted now from the north to south with the election of Edwards.

Bussie: I don't think so. I think it depends on the individual, as to which section of the state he comes from. I think it is going to be almost totally immaterial in the future. [Interruption] I don't think that Governor Edwards, coming from the section that he did gave him any votes. It may have cost him a few. Some people from the north wouldn't

vote for a person from the southern part of the state under any circumstances. I've never found people in the southern part of the state hesitating to vote for someone from the northern part of the state, witnessed by the fact that most Governors for many years up until that time, came from the northern part of the state. There are some Protestants who hesitate to vote for a Catholic, but I have found very few Catholics who have hesitated to vote for Catholics. I am a Protestant.

J.B.: Do you think that John <sup>BRICK</sup>~~Berek~~ is in a safe district?

Bussie: Well, that is very difficult to say. Up until this time he has been in a safe district. As to what the future holds in that particular case, I am in no position to say. Baton Rouge has always, as far back as I can remember, had a very unique position in politics. On a local level it's, well, let's take the days of Huey Long. The primary objection to Huey Long stemmed from here. Most of the big fights that Huey Long was involved in was with people that came from this section, this district. I think <sup>BRICK'S</sup>~~Berek's~~ strength comes primarily from the black/white issue. I think that is how he got into office, and I think that might be what is holding him there to some extent.

J.B.: Do you think that issue is still strong enough

that it works to his benefit?

Bussie: Yes, I think the issue is very strong still in the minds of many people.

W.D.: Could you continue your assessment of the administrations both from the union's point of view and say, the general over-all point of view from 1948 through Edwards. If you were to look at those administrations, which the union feels were best and . . .

Bussie: Well, each of the administrations came at a time when the people wanted that kind of administration. Earl Long's administration was a wide open situation that people wanted because, and they wanted an activist in there, they wanted changes made and Earl Long made them. He put in many social programs that I don't think would have gotten in if he had not done it at that time. Later on, he paid the price for doing it. People reacted to that and they elected, what I consider, to be a relatively conservative man for Governor. That man was too conservative for the people. Not only from the stand point of an economic situation, but from the stand point of the actions of the head of the State Police group, who went out to raiding Bingo games and things of that type. Whether the people agree with it or not, that it is a form of gambling, nevertheless it is something that the bulk of the people of Louisiana want. They have demonstrated it many many times.

While they would be opposed to organized gambling, they are not opposed to those sort of activities and because of that and some other things. For instance, he *was for* right to work in Louisiana, Kenan did. Labor made that the prime issue in the next campaign, and had a great deal to do with the feeding . . . Kenan plus many of the people that strongly supported him including his floor leaders who had to fight for it. It almost wiped the slate clean here in east Baton Rouge parish, electing people that were against right to work. Jimmy Davis, I thought, was a good Governor. People must have thought that he was during those times. They elected him twice. There were many things that I disagreed with him on. I violently fought the closing of public schools, increasing of taxation for the purpose of promoting private schools, those sort of things. But basically, as far as labor is concerned, he was fair to labor. I have already analyzed McKeithan for you as best I can. I think McKeithan was a good Governor even though we put McKeithan on the unfair list during his administration. As you probably know, the Workman's Compensation thing, and I think Edwards is going to make a great Governor unless he stumps his toe and I don't see any signs of it. He is a very knowledgeable man.

W.D.: What is the unfair list, is it like the enemies list?

Bussie: To some extent except that we make it public. We don't hide it. We publicize it all over the state. Governor

McKeithan was on the unfair list. Governor McKeithan himself publicized it, even after we did. It simply lets people know that we didn't agree with the action of a public official or a corporation or somebody else and we intend to sort of sever relationships with them to some extent.

J.B.: What put him on the unfair list.

Bussie: Veto of the Workman's Compensation law.

J.B.: Did he stay on the unfair list?

Bussie: No.

W.D.: How does that work? Is it a decision made by you? Is it a collective decision?

Bussie: No. We call a special convention. We had 1,200 delegates and they voted unanimously to put him on the unfair list.

W.D.: He stays on that list until the convention removes him?

Bussie: Until the convention removed him. He attended that convention. He explained why he had vetoed the Workman's Compensation law. We had worked for four years to make changes in the Workman's Compensation law and we had done it through means of resolution at the convention, which had instructed us four different times to proceed with it, and when we finally succeeded then he vetoed the law, because management had asked him to. We didn't think he ought to take part. We didn't ask him to help us pass it. Management

did. He helped them in an effort to try to stop passage in the legislature and we still passed it. Because the legislators recognized that it had been four years since there had been any increase in the benefits which were paid to an injured man, and that an injured man was receiving less weekly than an unemployed worker, which didn't make any sense to us at all. It didn't make any sense to the legislators either. When we passed the bill, he vetoed it and labor reacted to that veto very violently.

W.D.: So the purpose of the unfair list is political, right?

Bussie: In that particular case it was political. But we placed many products on the unfair list. Farah Clothing is on the unfair list, for instance. The same thing is true with many other items.

W.D.: You are trying to get a boycott?

Bussie: That's correct. Politically we are putting on a boycott when we place someone on the unfair list. It simply means that we won't support them for public office, that's all.

J.B.: Why did you support the sales tax for aid to parochial schools?

Bussie: I didn't support the sales tax for aid to parochial schools. That was part of where the money was going. We became involved in that particular type situation



primarily because of school teachers, public employees, mental health, mental retardation, many of the other programs that were in vital need of funds. We put it all together and realized the only way to get enough money to take care of all of that, the amount which went to aid to parochial schools was insignificant as compared to the amount of money which we raised for the other benefits. All of it was clearly spelled out. We would not agree to support it to put it into the general fund of the state, unless the legislature agreed at the same time that these are the things for which the money was going to be spent. We support aid to parochial schools. We believe that it is fair. We believe that if the Catholic parent, for instance, pays taxes to the state to support the public education system, then they ought to have at least some part of that going to educate their children. Not the part which goes to the teaching of religion, but the part that teaches the same thing that public education teaches. We couldn't see anything wrong in that at all.

J.B.: Would you extend that to private schools?

Bussie: If private schools do not discriminate, then we have no objection to that. If they do discriminate, we strongly object to it.

J.B.: Does your organization play a role in Congressional elections?

Bussie: Yes, as best we can.

J.B.: Do you give it as much emphasis as say legislative or state-wide races?

Bussie: I doubt very seriously, in all sincerity, I doubt very seriously that we do. Because it is more difficult to get your members interested in it to start with and the closer it is to home the more interest they have. They are familiar with what goes on from day to day in the legislature, they are not quite so familiar in the Congress. They are beginning to realize the importance of it because so much of the activity that states now can get involved in has a direct relationship toward what the federal government does. There is more interest in it now, but in the past, we have had a difficult time getting them interested in it.

J.B.: Do you use handbills a great deal in political campaigns?

Bussie: It depends on the particular political race that is involved. We have handbilled extensively here in east Baton Rouge at industrial plants. We've done it in several other sections of the state. Generally, that is not the manner in which we operate. If we handbill we sign it. We let everybody know who is responsible for it. We do not handle it like some politicians do, that is, either unsigned or signed by somebody who doesn't exist

or something like that. We identify everything that we put out.

J.B.: Is the fact that you don't give as much emphasis on Congressional races, is that<sup>a</sup> factor in the Congressional delegation generally in Louisiana being more conservative say than the legislature or the Governor?

Bussie: We give the emphasis, but the members simply do not accept it. That has a decided factor upon the outcome of those elections, yes. There is no question about it. Our members in the past simply have not recognized the importance, or else they disagreed with it. Many of them agree with a Rerek and other people that fall in that category. The only thing that we can do is to attempt to educate and encourage.

J.B.: Do you see the AFL-CIO in the future putting more manpower in the Congressional elections?

Bussie: Again, it depends on the circumstances. If the candidate who is in office is extremely unfriendly and the man who is running against him we have reason to believe would be friendly and an asset to the state, then whatever the circumstances are, we would react to it. There is no way to tell at this time.

J.B.: In legislative races, do you support a candidate in most races?

Bussie: It depends upon the circumstances. We have

had cases to where we have a firm policy that if the incumbent has a good voting record, we support him regardless of who runs against him. That has never been deviated from nor will it ever in my opinion. Even though the candidate who attempts to run against him has a good voting record in some other political field, we still support the incumbent first who has a good voting record. In many cases we have had several people who have either had other political offices or even that political office and was defeated in the interim, who are seeking it again. In those cases, we generally support everybody who has a favorable record in the first primary. Then, depending on what the outcome is, as to what we do in the run-off election. Each candidate understands what we are doing. We tell each that we are recommending that our members vote for candidate one, two, or three because each has identical records as far as we are concerned.

J.B.: Are there any areas that we didn't discuss that you would like to comment on?

W.D.: Can I ask one about corruption?

Bussie: Sure.

W.D.: When you read about Louisiana's politics about being corrupt moreso than other southern states, how do you view that charge?

Bussie: I think it is utterly ridiculous to say it. This

is one of the things that kind of tightens me up about <sup>Stennel</sup> ~~Stymwell~~. He continues to harp on the subject that we are more corrupt here than they are in other states.

Look at what happened in Maryland and look what happens in New York. When I was in California, they had stories in the newspaper about corruption in those areas, but because <sup>Stennel</sup> ~~Stymwell~~ and some of his group have harped on it so loud, and Life magazine made such a big splash out of it, we are labeled as being more corrupt in this state. I defy anybody to show us where we are more corrupt. I wish we didn't have any, but what I wish and what actually takes place is two different things usually. I just don't think that it is true, I don't see any reason for that sort of accusation at all.

J.B.: Do you think there is a higher level for corruption?

Bussie: I don't think so. Let's analyze Chicago. Let's analyze Philadelphia. Let's analyze New York.

J.B.: I mean within the South?

Bussie: Well, I don't think so either. They have had their scandals in Florida. They've had their scandals in Texas. Some of the scandals in Texas are so much bigger than anything we've had in Louisiana that I am amazed that the press didn't spend as much time on them as they do on us. But the fact that within our state, some people are always yelling about the corruption within Louisiana, I

think that does more harm than anything else could do.

J.B.: Do you think it is a myth basically?

Bussie: I think there is corruption here. Of course, I think there is, but to say that our state is worse than other states, I simply do not agree with, that's all. I think in public life, we have corruption everywhere from the President all the way down. But I simply don't believe that it is more flagrant in Louisiana than it is in other states. I travel all over the country, and I read the newspapers in those other states. They have basically the same problems that we have in this state. I think we got that reputation from the Huey Long days and people have used it to their advantage to show that everybody that is opposed to them has got to be . . .

End interview with Mr. Victor Bussie.