DOUGLAS FRASER

Interviewed by

Tom Downs

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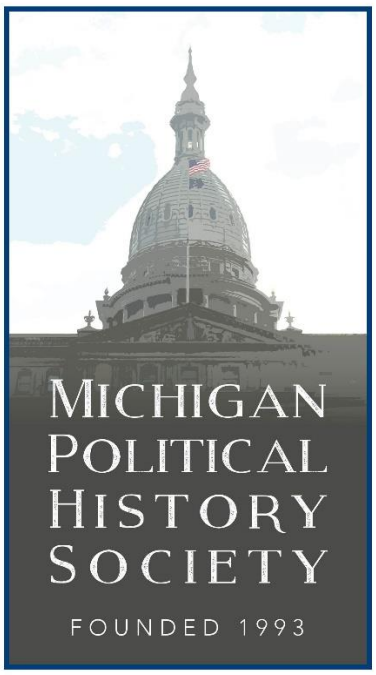

This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

Tom Downs: Doug Fraser is former president of the UAW, worked his way up in the labor movement and is now a special professor at Wayne University along with his good friend Irv Bluestone. I'm Tom Downs. I've known Doug for what is it 20-30-40 years?

Douglas Fraser: Stop at 40.

Tom Downs: Stop at 40. Okay. We'll let them know how old you are. So let's start right in now. Where were you born, Doug?

Douglas Fraser: I was born in Glasgow, Scotland Tom.

Tom Downs: Glasgow, Scotland. When did you come over?

Douglas Fraser: Well, the pattern those days for all Europeans coming to the United States, the father came first, got established, then he sent for his family. So my dad came here, it was about 1923. I was about seven. And about nine months later he sent for my mom and my brother and sister and myself. He located in Detroit, went to work in the Studebaker plant and was an auto worker for the rest of his life.

Tom Downs: So he came direct from Scotland to Detroit.

Douglas Fraser: Well he stopped and passed in New Jersey but only a momentary stop.

Tom Downs: How did he happen to pick Detroit? Just that they were hiring?

Douglas Fraser: The jobs. And basically that's why people left Europe. I mean, it wasn't an oppressed dictatorship or anything like that in Scotland but there just wasn't the economic opportunity to rear a family. So we looked to America and he loved it from the moment he got here, I think.

Tom Downs: Was he a skilled worker in Scotland?

Douglas Fraser: He was an electrician, yeah, and active in the labor movement. He was secretary of his branch.

Tom Downs: Because a lot of the skilled workers were the Scots and a few English.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, the tool and die shops in the auto industry were populated by English, Scots, and Germans. You had a lot of foreign born in a lot of trades.

Tom Downs: Well then how did you start out in the labor movement?

Douglas Fraser: I suppose you could argue that maybe as a member of the union before I went to work because of the environment at home, the conversation, and I decided after about a year that I'd run for second shift steward and then the day shift steward and committee man. I was local union president when I was 27. Then I went to work as a regional director, a regional representative, I should say. Then after the Chrysler strike in 1950, Walter Reuther asked me to become his administrative assistant and then from there I was elected regional director and vice president and president.

Tom Downs: Let's back up a minute. Which local were you in when you started?

Douglas Fraser: 227 is the DeSoto local.

Tom Downs: DeSoto.

Douglas Fraser: Young folks out there wouldn't know what that is. It used to be a car built by the Chrysler corporation.

Tom Downs: Yes, I remember the DeSoto.

Douglas Fraser: I bet you can.

Tom Downs: Yes, all right, I've got as many not gray white hairs as you have, Doug. I don't mind the gray. It's the balding that bothers me. Well now this is a general question and you spent your life really in the labor movement. And you came with good credentials from your parents, good labor genes if you want to call it. What would you say as president your main success was?

Douglas Fraser: Well I think you have to look at it retrospectively. At the time this was happening, I didn't realize it was such a great success. But I think, Tom, the role I played, the union played, in saving the Chrysler corporation, you know there's the revisionist history out there that says Lee Iacocca saved the Chrysler corporation but Lee Iacocca didn't save the Chrysler corporation. The Chrysler workers saved the Chrysler corporation. First of all, they made enormous economic sacrifices and that was the years of the Carter administration. The individual who's running for president at that time, Ronald Reagan, was against the whole proposition of what they call a bailout. So we had a democratic congress. Iacocca was not a folk hero at that time, so he didn't have the clout that he subsequently gained by his reputation. So it was the union really that saved the Chrysler corporation.

Douglas Fraser: Now as I said, I didn't realize at the time because the company was in desperate straits, were on the very brink of bankruptcy. The Wall Street Journal said why don't we just let it die and give it a decent burial? And you take coming from that period until last year the Chrysler workers on average got $8,000 dollars in

profit sharing, which was first negotiated during that terrible period. So that was a terrible period and I, you know obviously, didn't recognize the significance of the accomplishment until later years.

Tom Downs: I remember our mutual friend Billy Ford in congress, he told me when the lobbying was going on in Washington that the Chrysler just didn't know what was going on and it was the UAW that knew its way around. Would you verify that?

Douglas Fraser: Oh yeah. And we brought all local union people there. You know I could remember specifically there were some dispute within the administration, some political risk involved asking for a billion and a half in loan guarantees. And for a while some people in the administration were reluctant. But I can recall the morning that they decided to go forward. It was out of vice president Mondale's house at a breakfast meeting. And it was myself and Mark Stepp who was then director of the Chrysler department, Howard Pastor who was our Washington lobbyist, and vice president Mondale, secretary Miller, secretary treasurer, and Stu Eizenstat who was president Carter's principle administrative assistant on economic affairs. And it was at that meeting we talked through the problems and the administration said at that meeting that they would go forward.

Tom Downs: Now it was both the bailout and the union giving up some economic things. What did you get in turn for that? Besides your jobs, which was important.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah it was important to save the corporation. Well we tried to lay the groundwork for the future and one of those was of course the profit sharing. And right before the loan guarantee bailout, we made our first set of concessions. We got representation on the Chrysler board.

Tom Downs: Now there'd been big argument. Was that the first profit sharing in the big three?

Douglas Fraser: No, American Motors was actually in 1964. And it was the first of the big three, you're right. But in the auto industry it was the second. Profit sharing was the first in the big three though.

Tom Downs: Now there've been arguments that profit sharing would have people give up their loyalty to union and be too much pro management. You'd heard that argument?

Douglas Fraser: Yeah I heard that argument over the years. And first I didn't know if it was right or not, you know, as a theory. But I can tell you now after particularly the Ford workers who have received profit sharing year after year after year. I think from the beginning, we negotiated that. I happened to be there in 1982, again when there was not profits. Easiest time to negotiate profit sharing when there's no

profits or even the hope of profits. But in any event, the Ford profit sharing is paid off more frequently and I think they've got an accumulated total now of about $14,000 dollars. But there's no signs whatsoever that this results in workers saying, "Well, look, I'm really closer to the company than union." They know how they got it.

Tom Downs: They know they got it through the union.

Douglas Fraser: Right.

Tom Downs: And I think you can answer that very realistically. Now I want to jump to another point. You know I was very active on the employment security commission and one time workers had to wait a week before they filed for unemployment comp. Then we got that eliminated. Then there's the attempt to get it back in and it was about to get in when Chrysler wrote a letter saying they wanted to keep the waiting week. And that pulled the rug out from under those that wanted to eliminate it. Were you involved in that or do you want to tell a little bit about that?

Douglas Fraser: I just have sort of a faint recollection. We had lot going on at that time. But obviously we talked to the corporation about it.

Tom Downs: And you were able to get Chrysler to split from GM and Ford.

Douglas Fraser: Right, right.

Tom Downs: Now in the Lansing setup, I want to talk a few minutes about our good friend Harold Julian.

Douglas Fraser: OH yeah.

Tom Downs: He was, in my opinion, the most effective person in Lansing not only for the labor movement, anyplace. Do you want to tell how he got to his spot in relation to you?

Douglas Fraser: Well I knew Harold for many years before he assumed the Chrysler or the Lansing position. He like myself was a Chrysler worker. When I worked in the Chrysler department for a short time after I got on the staff and Harold was the assistant director. I was one of his colleagues in the department before I went to work for Walter Reuther. But Harold ... and I think we've had a lot of good people up there. The old CIO days and AFL-CIO days and UAW had some very good people up there. But Harold had a special touch. And I think it was his personality. He was very calm, very easy going, and beguiling. And he was a perfect person for that position. I've seen him work on trying to persuade the most recalcitrate legislation and do wonders with them. And even when people

opposed him, he had the opposite point of view, he never got angry with them. He had just the right personality.

Tom Downs: I noticed that from the years I worked with him that I never heard anybody say a bad mouthing him about anything, even as you say there was a disagreement very rigorously. Now was his line of authority direct to you when there were problems?

Douglas Fraser: No, no, no.

Tom Downs: No, I mean when there was a question on what policy to take in Lansing.

Douglas Fraser: Of course the policy was formulated by and large a group during the years that I was the chairman of Michigan CAP. We had an executive committee but people had such confidence in Harold's judgment that if Harold laid out what was possible, what was maybe probable and what was impossible, they listened to his judgment. But if we made a decision that was contrary to Harold's views and it's difficult to remember such a situation. But I can tell you if that were the case, Harold would carry out the policy of the organization and not what he felt about it. I'm sure there were such cases. I just can't recall.

Tom Downs: I can't think of any. I think, for instance, no-fault insurance. He and Jerry Coomes and Governor Milliken were the ones that really got that off the ground.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah I remember that well. That was difficult. And the other one I remember well, Tom, because we had opposition in the labor movement and fought it out within inner councils. And that was the bottle bill.

Tom Downs: Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: Where we put the ten cent returnable bottles. And I can remember that debate well. The glass workers were opposed to it. The beer distributed workers and I used to argue that my wife and I would just particularly if you come off freeways, I used to say to her, "Now count the bottles. There are 10-20-30-40." We were up to $5 dollars. I said, "If nobody picks them up, I'll pick them up." Of course that really solved an enormous problem that we had in terms of the environment.

Tom Downs: I think it was much more successful than anybody thought.

Douglas Fraser: Oh yeah. And there I wanted to make that point because Harold just did a marvelous job. That wasn't easy and Harold did a marvelous piece of work.

Tom Downs: He was an excellent representative. I think he's the most effective person in Lansing. Now let's talk about some of the real rough problems. We talked a little on the amount of racism. Do you want to go into that a little more? I know how much of a problem is it, what can we do about? Well the racial antagonism. In fact, now the last election I saw some figures that a great number of whites voted both for Engler and republican congressman, which is not traditional.

Douglas Fraser: My personal view is that the racism in the United States is probably greater than it has been in a couple decades. I think one of the reasons is that when you have economic distress and economic pressures on people and three people want two jobs or two people want one job, that creates tension between races, between ages, young and old, between men and women. And I think that's contributed to it greatly. And there's other societal problems that contributed to it. There's no doubt in my mind that I think there's a higher measure of racism today than there was 20 years ago. And what the whites do is they equate crime to black. They relate welfare to black and all of your stereotypical notions of black people that are very very unfair. And I think the country's in trouble on that score. I think we've got very very serious problems.

Tom Downs: Now certainly the UAW took the lead in the whole matter of improved feelings on racism, on religion. I remember old Walter Reuther would say the greatest segregation was Sunday at churches where the union meetings were integrated. What do you see as a solution?

Douglas Fraser: Well I think you put your finger on it. We were able to manage it, you know we have every ethnic group imaginable. Blacks, then the women came into the workplace, and I think it makes a point and even I think it proves a principle that when you have integration and people work together and eat together and associate with each other on an integrated basis, you don't have problems. It's when you're segregated and people are suspicious, and perhaps even afraid. That's when you run into difficulties. And I think the workplaces of America and I was there, I was in the shop when we integrated. I come from a lily white plant, we used to call it a lily white plant. Not one single black until Roosevelt's executive order. So I went through that whole integration, I saw that fear when the first black came in. But after about a year, the uneasiness disappeared. And as long as you have integration, I think it greatly diminishes these artificial barriers we have.

Tom Downs: Now there's good integration in the shop. The tool and die was probably slower than some of the others. What about though when it got out into the neighborhoods, is it still the segregation and want to go into that a little bit?

Douglas Fraser: It went back to old habits. I don't know if you recall, Tom, in the old days of the FDR camp when the Port Huron and the CIO ran, Brendon Sexton had a little

surveys. And we would have, for example, sometimes when you had a union wide program, have black members from the south. It was the first time blacks had ever been associated with whites and whites with blacks in that kind of setting. Where you sleep in the same barracks, you eat together, and you work together. And a transformation took place.

Douglas Fraser: And then he had this little questionnaire. Do you believe that African Americans are entitled to absolute equality, promotion, wages, everything else in the workplace? All the answers were yes. Then we say, well do you think they should live in the same neighborhood as you do? Then you saw some reluctance. I think even that has changed. I think the question of, if you look at all the polls, well you see the integration of some suburbs now. So I think that problem is easing somewhat. And it comes back to the point you originally made. If you have integration, you can solve a lot of these problems.

Tom Downs: I remember an Afro American or black minister said if there were seven pork chops and seven people, no problem. If there are seven pork chops and eight people, then you had a problem.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah it goes to this question of economic stress. Yeah well it creates artificial competition.

Tom Downs: Now I think politically there's going to be an issue to make a wedge issue of affirmative and then race. Do you want to comment on that?

Douglas Fraser: Well I think it's going to be a wedge issue in 1996. I think it's very very detrimental in a democratic society. Everybody's free to raise the issue they want. And obviously there are people out there that know that this is a wedge issue and you know what they call a hot button issue in politics. Because you see all the republican candidates for presidents, they can't wait. They are ceasing on these issues, they're seeing who can get out there first and farthest. And so unfortunately it's going to be the kind of issue that proposition number 187 in California was the last election was anti-Hispanic. And I think it's destructive. I'm a little bit afraid of it, frankly. Because then things are going to greatly intensify the differences not only between races because women are involved in the whole question of affirmative action. So it's going to create tensions and animosity that should not take place.

Tom Downs: What do UAW do as far as women progressive? How successful have you been on the idea of gender?

Douglas Fraser: Well maybe we haven't done as well as we should have done and we started late. And we have many more women on the staff now. I think that's where you start so that the women in the shops and in the offices, where we have organization, could see them as role models. The difficulty was and I'm not

making excuses, but the whole pattern of life in America was that the woman was the homemaker and the wife and so she wound up with two jobs. Jobs in the workplace, then she went home and did what they call the wifely duties and then the husbands in that world didn't share those responsibilities as they sometimes do now. So a woman couldn't become active in the union. She's too busy taking care of her dual duties.

Douglas Fraser: Well now that's changed. There's a whole sea change here. I went to a woman's conference, UAW conference, up at Black Lake. I've gone there for three consecutive years. There's about 350 women up there who are either leaders in their local unions or want to be leaders in their local unions. And so I see this transformation, more and more women. It's coming much slower than I think either you or I would have liked to see it come.

Tom Downs: Now I heard the secretary of labor Reich say, "You used to just have to work hard and by the rules. Now you've got to work smart." I think he was pointing out that the income, I think the last 20 years the real income has not risen for industrial workers. What's happened, the wife or spouse has gone to work to make up the gap. Then he raises the question, "That gap is still there. What's going to happen next? Child labor?" What's your prediction on what's going to happen?

Douglas Fraser: Well I think there's a couple disturbing things that are happening. One is small steps we could take incidentally, is increase the minimum wage. I just completed serving on what they call the Dunlop commission. It was the formally titled the coalition on the future of labor management relations.

Tom Downs: That's the one where you were the minority?

Douglas Fraser: Yeah.

Tom Downs: Yes, well tell me about that.

Douglas Fraser: In any case, one of the set of statistics we come up with which is very very disturbing, is that this is 1993 figures. That 18% of the full time workers in America; now full time is described as 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year were earning less, or at $13,193, below the poverty level. Now, I'm not suggesting that all those people were in poverty, because it might be the second income, but that's absolutely disgraceful that 18% of the full-time workers worked at miserable wage. Now, the other revealing statistic, two other revealing statistics, that has increased by 50%, that cohort, since 1979. It was only 12% of the workforce in 1979, and now it's grown, which it goes to this whole business of the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. In addition to that, we looked at Europe, of all the European countries, and that doesn't happen in

Europe, there isn't this massive gap between the lowest 10% and the median. In Europe, it's only 35%, in the United States it's 68%.

Douglas Fraser: So there's things happening in American economy, and have been happening in the last 15 years that results in working people, now I'm not talking about people that aren't working, I'm talking about working people are getting poorer and poorer and have a lower and lower standard of living.

Tom Downs: So you're showing that, well going back to the New Deal period. We had this kind of gap, but we were raising the whole, narrowing the gap, and now that gap is widened. I that what your studies showed?

Douglas Fraser: That's what's happening.

Tom Downs: So that you say the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah.

Tom Downs: I noticed there you had the Wall Street Journal, do you want to show us that headline?

Douglas Fraser: Well, this will contribute to what we're talking about: 'Tax Bill Could Mean A Windfall For The Well-Off' and it shows that under the tax bill that passed the house of representatives, the rich will get richer, and the poor maybe won't get poorer, they won't get any richer. As I recall the figures, if you earn $200,000 a year, you'll get an effective tax reduction of $11,240. If you earn $30,000 a year, it'll be $134. I believe, and the president has recommended, a $500 tax deduction for each child in the family, and it should be applied to everybody who earns up to $95,000 a year. If republicans incorporate that among other things in their legislation, except the cutoff is $200,000 a year.

Douglas Fraser: So, the tax bill is very regressive, I think compounds the problem that we're talking about. My personal feeling is that the United State senate, although it's controlled by republicans, won't go this far, and if they do, the president going to veto it.

Tom Downs: Now, tell a little bit more about the Dunlop Commission that you were on, what the majority was, how it was appointed, and what your minority report was.

Douglas Fraser: Well, the commission was appointed in May of 1993 by Secretary Reich and the president, and it was chaired by John Dunlop who was secretary of labor in the Ford administration, and we had Ray Marshall, who was secretary of labor in the Carter administration, Bill Usery, who was secretary of labor in the Nixon administration, former secretary of commerce, Juanita Kreps, four academics, Paul Allaire was CEO of Xerox, and myself. And we had three mandates, one

which should be done if anything, to change a law to enhance labor management cooperation, which should be done to reduce delaying conflict in labor management relations, and the third one with the question of regulations. My dissent took place because I am fearful the majority point of view is going to open the door to return of company unionism, which was barred by the old Wagner act in 1935. That was my principal objection, and I wrote my dissent basically on that point.

Douglas Fraser: Now, Tom, the irony of this is that I feel I've wasted 18 months of my life, and I haven't got too many 18 months to waste, because there's no question that the favorable, and there were, there were some positive favorable recommendations that the commission made that will help unions organize and give workers a greater measure of justice, but they won't see the light of day, not with this congress. There's no chance.

Tom Downs: Now, what do you see, we talked about it earlier, the matter that we shifted from agricultural employment to manufacturing, and now we're shifting to something else. What is the future? Say fellows at the Ford plant or Dodge, Dodge Maine we know is no longer in existence.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah. Well, I think what you're going to see, if you want to talk about auto specifically, you're going to see a continuing decline in employment, but at a much slower rate than you saw in the past. From '84 there was radical change, now it's settled down. You're going to see diminishing numbers because of automation and new technology, fewer workers are going to be able to produce more cars. I don't think, Tom, you're going to see massive layoffs any longer. First of all, the union has negotiated wonderful income protection for the workers, and so it is in steel. In steel, nearly every contract has a guarantee against any layoffs. You reduce the workforce, which is anticipated in steel also, by attrition.

Douglas Fraser: So, the reduction is going to be more civil than it has been, it won't have that economic wrenching it had in the past. But then the question comes, in your day and my day kids used to come out of college and go into these wonderful opportunities to earn a good living, and start a family, and buy a home and car, and all the other good things in life, by working in a factory. And those jobs are not going to be there any longer, in any great numbers, there'll be some there by attrition, there'll be hundreds being hired in instead of thousands.

Douglas Fraser: So, the future isn't bright for the young people who are located in the cities where our factories are, because they're not going to be hiring in any great numbers, and then because of the condition of the workforce, the employers are going to be more and more demanding of the type of people they hire in. In fact, I just had a chat with a fellow last week, and they've evidently instituted a

new testing procedure in all three companies, Ford, GM, and Chrysler. These are for new people now, who've never worked there before, can't do this to the seniority people, and just its verbal descriptionist test is fairly demanding, and you wonder whether or not they're going to screen out a lot of people.

Tom Downs: I know some highway construction, when you and I were young you'd see a wheelbarrow and a shovel. Now all you see is this tremendous equipment, probably the fellows running it are getting good union wages, but I guess where are the jobs going to be?

Douglas Fraser: Well, what you've got to count on is an expanding economy. It's sort of overstated, all new jobs are McDonald's, there's a lot of good service jobs, and that's where it's going to be. And then comes another complication, because the wages relative to steel and auto are relatively low. It means overall that the standard of living of the current generation, rather than what it's been in all of the previous generations, I think at least this century, where the new generation all set a higher standard of living of their predecessor generation, that's not going to happen anymore.

Tom Downs: Well, that seems very pessimistic. It seems to me if we're increasing productivity, this is economics 101, it should be able to be shared so everybody's a little bit better off.

Douglas Fraser: Exactly, exactly.

Tom Downs: But you think that's not going to happen in the immediate future?

Douglas Fraser: I think there's other things entered into it, Tom. It's not only automation, because after all, theoretically, in economic theory, automation allows you to produce more with fewer people, which means you drive down the price of your product, which means that you need more people. In auto, for example, just a couple of quick figures, in a 20-year span '55 to '75, we increased production 74% with 13% more people. Now, while we had this enormous increase in productivity, we still were hiring people because you had an expanding market, because in '55 we had roughly 7 million cars and trucks, and I should say in '55 to '75 we had 12 million, but if the market weren't expanding we'd have had massive unemployment.

Douglas Fraser: So I think, I'm not optimistic about the standard of living. I think probably jobs will be there, after all we've created, since Clinton took office, 6 million new jobs, but the type of jobs are not going to be as good as they have, particularly for those people who just have a high school education.

Tom Downs: One thing, we're jumping quite a bit, I'm talking about the matter of union leadership. You came from a union family, certainly worked up in the labor

movement, I'm thinking of some people I know, like our good friend Irv Bluestone is one of the leading economists, I guess at MIT, and I saw in some place he's advising Gephardt on economics, a very important job. Ken Robinson, a very good friend of both of us, his son's the dean of law school at Wayne University, doing a very good job. Gus Scholle dropped out of high school in the depression, his daughter graduated from Harvard Law School, which is not bad. I think Vic Reuther's, one of his nephews is working for the UAW, and I think you have a son working for the UAW, but where's leadership going to come from in the UAW in the years to come?

Douglas Fraser: Well, where it has to come from are these people who are now hiring in. I don't have the numbers offhand, but you see, as time goes on auto workers will be leaving by the thousands. They're leaving, they're retiring at an earlier age all the time, and so that's where leadership has to come from, from those new people that are now hiring in. It's the first time in years and years that we've hired in new people. I think it'd be almost an impossible question to answer, except for what's now happening, where new people are coming in. The laid off people, they've all been back, they're absorbed, so what you're going to have from this point forward is new hires.

Tom Downs: I'm thinking of the period of the thirties, that we had this tremendous unemployment, where we had very competent people, and now a lot of them are getting in the more skilled professional jobs.

Douglas Fraser: The people coming into the factories now have much higher level of education than we had. I just read a piece at the Windsor plant in Canada, I'm sure there's probably some parallel situation in the United States where fully one third of the new hires, who are hiring over there also, are college graduates. And I hear stories now about people who are college graduates, or a couple of years in college, hiring in, and the other interesting thing is our own international executive board, where we now have three college graduates sitting on the board. Outside of Irv, I can't remember a member of our board being a college graduate.

Tom Downs: And was Irv on the board? He was head of the GM.

Douglas Fraser: Well yeah, but then he was elected to the board.

Tom Downs: And then he was elected to the board, that's correct.

Douglas Fraser: And I think probably, because certainly Walter Reuther wasn't, Leonard Woodcock wasn't, I wasn't. So what's happening is now in the leadership of the UAW we have college graduates for the first time.

Tom Downs: Yeah. I want to give a little example of the pragmatism of the labor movement, that when I was in college we'd hitch hike up to the Flint sit-down and run coffee and mimeograph and I remember that was the time when the great fear was communism taking over the plant. I remember asking this fellow in the sit-down, I said, "Well, are the workers taking over the means of production?" And he looked at me, kind of dumb college, he parted his hair and showed a great big scar. I said what was it? Well, he'd been on the picket line I think in Hamtramck and the horses, mounted police just cut his skull open. So he said, "I'm inside this plant and there ain't no blankety blank horse going to get at me." Well, I think I learned more there than in any class, that very pragmatism. Now, I've heard many times, the labor movement years back, workers would say, "Keep the union out of politics, keep the politics out of unions." And I know you and Walter would talk about the interests of the bread box and the ballot box. You want to tell me a little bit about how the union members were transformed into being more and more interested in political life?

Douglas Fraser: Well, I think probably we hammered away at the proposition that you have less control over your destiny at the bargaining table as time goes on. It's truer today than it was in our time, because so many things are affected by politics. For example, just to name a couple. Healthcare is a horrendous burden at the bargaining table. They don't even have to talk about it in other companies in the world because they have national health insurance. Trade policy, tax policy, all these political policies affect your life, and so you have to be involved in the political life. But I can remember bringing it down to state level, we negotiate SUB benefits, that we eliminated the one week waiting period, had a hell of an impact on that SUB fund. In Indiana, they wouldn't let us integrate it originally, and a couple of other states. So, no matter what you do at the bargaining table, you can make gains with one hand and the state legislature, or the United States congress can take it away from in the other.

Douglas Fraser: So, I think the workers, and maybe that's a lesson that has to be relearned, however, because I still hear that view. "Well, the union's role in society is to take care of our wages and fringe benefits and working conditions, and politics is a personal thing." Well, of course it's a personal thing, but the person has to understand the impact that politics has on their life.

Tom Downs: Another example, I've heard the head of your social security department tell how we had certain pensions, and you had the pensions be in addition to social security, which meant the employers wanted to improve social security. Do you want to elaborate how that strategy developed and how it worked out? I think it was a tremendous strategy.

Douglas Fraser: Well, it was 1950, I was involved in the Chrysler strike, 104 days, and the only issue was funded pensions. We were asking for $100 a month including social

security. The corporation was offering $100 a month including social security, but the issue that divided us, reminds me of the baseball strike, was issue of principle. They're the most difficult issues to solve. Chrysler argued for almost the whole, about 95 of those 104 days, they'd never missed a payroll, they would pay pensions out of the general revenues out of the company. We of course, and thank goodness we did it, we said, "No, we want it guaranteed. We want a funded pension." And based upon subsequent events I'm glad we made that fight. That's a very difficult one, because it's a difficult one to understand. I was there at all those negotiations, it was 104 days, and we were talking about an actuarily sound pension plan. I didn't even know what it meant when we started negotiating.

Tom Downs: I'd like to go in there a little more. I was about as close to Gus Schollele as you were to Walter Reuther, and when that came about Gus and I said, "How are you going to get people out on strike for the term funded?" Nobody knew what it meant. How did you do that educational job to get people to understand it? And as you said, with the way Chrysler went, you're very glad you had it funded.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah. Well, let me tell you a little story in connection with that. The strike had to be, oh 60, 70 days old, and it was winter, and we had a rally of the old Plymouth local 51, and the strike would be at least 70 days, and we're all bundled up outside, Walter Reuther was giving a speech, and he says, "The company made the first significant move. They've agreed to set aside $90 million in a reserve fund." It wasn't a funded fund. He says, "It's a step in the right direction." And some worker in the back says, "Yes, Walter, but is it actuarily sound?" So eventually the workers understood it, but still I don't want to diminish the difficulty.

Douglas Fraser: But then what happened later on, at the point we integrated $100 a month including social security, then for the very first time the companies went to congress and tried to increase the social security benefits because they'd have to pay less, and after they did that we separated them again in subsequent negotiations.

Tom Downs: Yeah. So that, I think that was a tremendous accomplishment.

Douglas Fraser: The other recollection I had, we didn't negotiate on company property, we refused to because it was bitter. We thought that we were involved in an unnecessary strike, that the corporation shouldn't have taken the strike on this issue, and we're negotiating in old Wardell Sheraton hotel on Woodward and Kirby, and so then the inevitable day comes, we make a settlement, and you're supposed to go down and shake hands with the company for a photo opportunity. And just before we go, there was a room they set aside for that,

and all the photographers were there, there was no TV as I recall, or maybe there was, but in the early days, but a lot of cameras.

Douglas Fraser: Walter Reuther said, "Look," he said, "I don't think we should engage in this, in these normal traditional handshakes." He says, "They had no right putting us through this, and why don't we just show our disdain and our anger by refusing to shake hands?" So, that's what we did. Now, some people might think, "Well, that's petty." But it made us feel good, I can tell you.

Tom Downs: Yeah, and I think it is that when you look back at those things that are accepted now that you and I remember, unemployment comp was rocking chair money, anyone who wanted a nickel an hour raise was a communist and that certainly there has been some progress.

Douglas Fraser: And I must say that the industry leaders are more civil now. I can recall days, and you can too because it's a few decades old perhaps, that people in corporations thought their one task was to maximize profits. It was their only mission, their only responsibility. Well now, as you know, they're involved in civic activities. We still have arguments with them obviously, but they're much better citizens than they once were.

Tom Downs: Now, what about the whole ecology movement? I remember Jon Lovett I got to know quite well in Michigan manufacturers, "What do you want to do, fish or work?" Then the problem in the labor movement, I was out on a recount out in the state of Washington and the fellows that wanted good ecology, the Union of Lumbermen or Woodwork, whatever they're called, raised some questions. How do you solve this problem of what you and I agree is sound ecology? If Michigan still had forests, what shape we'd be in with the matter of jobs?

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, and that's just about an irreconcilable conflict, unless you can assure the workers of some guarantee of security. I'll give you another one. Iron mines up in Minnesota. No question, they were polluting its wonderful Lake Superior. It was obvious you had to do something about it, but it would mean closing down the mines. Now you're talking about losing thousands of jobs, impacting on thousands of families. So you have this absolute irreconcilable conflict, unless you can figure out a way to guarantee income security for those families that are affected. Now they did it up in the Redwoods, incidentally. It was very expensive but they were able to do it. Today there's this conflict in Oregon. And sometimes you run into situations where you have this conflict and it's difficult to find a middle ground.

Tom Downs: I think trees can be harvested so that you can with effort do that. But I don't know about iron ore mining. Can you keep that from polluting?

Douglas Fraser: No, I don't think so. I think you have to do one or the other. You have to shut it down or maybe with technology, down the road, you'll be able to do it as we've done with smokestacks. We've greatly reduced the harm that they're doing. They're still polluting our environment but we're making progress there. But it's very expensive. But if the choice is between the environment and losing jobs, you're in for a very, very difficult struggle.

Tom Downs: It's the old story if you're the woodcutter there's one Sequoia left and your family's starving or freezing, what are you going do?

Douglas Fraser: Right.

Tom Downs: So those are some problems.

Douglas Fraser: Or trying to preserve the snail darts, or the bird out in Oregon.

Tom Downs: The spotted owl.

Douglas Fraser: Spotted owl, yeah.

Tom Downs: Do you want a spotted owl or do you want to eat? You can't eat the spotted owl.

Douglas Fraser: The worker might say, "Well I'll give you a plate of spotted owl."

Tom Downs: I go back to that fellow, the Flint sit-down I saw, that had his head cut open. It was very pragmatic. Would you agree generally the American worker is more pragmatic than ideological?

Douglas Fraser: Oh yes. Yeah, I think we're less political, unfortunately I think. But I can see the difference. Forget about the European and their tradition and their history and their involvement in political parties. But I can see a difference between the United States and Canada.

Tom Downs: Tell us more about that.

Douglas Fraser: Well, probably because of their European heritage. We have a European heritage too, but maybe theirs is newer. I don't like to say this, but Canada is a more caring, compassionate, sharing society than we are in the United States. I don't get any pleasure saying that. But I think that happens to be the case.

Douglas Fraser: I believe that on that score we've deteriorated in the last 12 years when the gospel of greed and the mark of a successful person was how much economic wealth you could accumulate. I think our standards were corrupted. But I think

we have to be concerned about that, because I don't think we're really as caring and neighborly and understanding as we were a couple of decades ago.

Tom Downs: Well you and I went through the depression period where there was I think a much closer common bond of people. We were all in the same boat. But what do you do about it, Doug? We agree on the problem.

Douglas Fraser: Well I, again reluctant to say this, but hopefully you could correct it by education. That would be the way to do it. You'd have to start in the schools and have to worry about the curriculum. There's a big argument in Michigan about curriculum. But we'd have to I think teach kids a sense of fairness, a sense of caring for each other and compassion. Absent that, maybe the turn won't come until we have another economic decline. I mean a serious economic decline. Now that's a hell of a way to get educated. But you and I went through the worst in the history of this country.

Douglas Fraser: I share your view. I remember those days well, Tom. I was 13, 14, 15 during those years, lived in a neighborhood where everybody was laid off, all auto workers including my father. And yet there was this neighborliness and togetherness. Maybe it's because everybody was in the same boat.

Tom Downs: I hope we don't have to pay that price to get it.

Douglas Fraser: As you know, I think that was a very important part of our education.

Tom Downs: It was. I think we still have depression scars. Maybe they're good and maybe they're bad. Now a couple other things to jump on, Lani Guinier's written about how there should be shared power. Her example is that kids are playing, four want to play tag and five want to play hide and seek. So they take turns, which sounds reasonable, but you went through the factional days of the UAW. Would it have been possible to sense there was shared power that each group within the UAW had a certain number of seats on the board, but did they fight like cats and dogs or am I being too cynical?

Douglas Fraser: No, I think that kind of factionalism, I think the membership suffered during that period because everybody concentrated on the politics and not on the people, not on the programs and principles. I think those kind of politics are destructive. I think the best you can get, if it isn't a bitter fight, the best you can get is absolute gridlock. And I don't think that's the way democracy should work. I think the majority has to rule.

Douglas Fraser: One of my big arguments is rule 22 in United States Senate, the filibuster rule, where a majority can't work their will. We lost the strike replacement issue and campaign reform issue just to the last Congress. Now, we of course are using it against the Republicans. But despite that, it's unfair. It's undemocratic.

Tom Downs: I think the Senate has had an apportionment problem. Nevada has two senators, Michigan and New York do. Certainly the Supreme Court's done a lot on legislating for the state legislature's apportionment.

Douglas Fraser: But I think, if I might inject Tom, I think Gus Scholle and perhaps Ted Sachs deserve a great deal of credit in the old reapportionment fight. They more than any other individuals took that fight to the Supreme Court and got some sense out of it.

Tom Downs: Right.

Douglas Fraser: I can remember well reading the decision. I remember Justice Frankfurter say, "Well we shouldn't get involved in that. It's a thicket." And thank god the Supreme Court did get involved. At least we've got some equity on the House of Representative side. We don't have it on the Senate side because that's built into our Constitution. But I think that was one of the most important political fights that the labor movement ever advanced.

Tom Downs: And I think Ted Sachs gets a lot of the legal credit. I think the one that really deserves the credit is Gus Scholle who was a high school dropout. In fact, there's a little history on that, that Mennen Williams had won big and the Senate ended up killing everything. It was I think two to one Republican, and the committees were about four to one Republican. They'd pick the dumbest Democrat to be on the key committee, which was kind of hard to find at times. But Gus had me count up the number of people that voted Democrat and Republican. And even though the Republicans had the Senate two to one, more people had voted for our Democrat senator than the Republican.

Douglas Fraser: Well Gus used to have, I remember well, a tree stump speech. He used to vote tree stumps rather than people.

Tom Downs: He had that sense that many legal scholars didn't. That somehow or other if it got to the US Supreme Court it would not say that a tree stump equaled a person.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, that's right. That was a great fight. It's very important.

Tom Downs: And Ted Sachs gets a lot for the legal end, a lot of the credit. But I think Gus was the real guy.

Douglas Fraser: Gus was the mover. Ted wouldn't have been to argue it unless Gus had formulated the position.

Tom Downs: Now I think Walter was more, if I differentiate Walter and Gus, and I'm going to talk to Irv Bluestone about this, I'd say Walter was global and Gus was worker Michigan union.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah.

Tom Downs: Would you want to comment on that, the relation of the two?

Douglas Fraser: Well, I don't know if you can compare Gus or anyone else. Walter Reuther was a very unusual man, Tom. He was, and I never use this word recklessly, I rarely use it, but I think he's close to being genius. He was interested in the whole world. He used to talk about, "You can't make progress at the expense of the community. You can only make progress with the community." The community to him was not the community in which we lived only, but the community of the country, the community of the world. He had this global view. It's interesting to think what his position would be now, but he was an absolute free trader.

Tom Downs: Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: He thought it was our responsibility to help the under-privileged and poor nations of the world lift themselves up. But, each in their own way, served the union well. Both were great leaders in their own way.

Tom Downs: They came out of the same place. But I think you're right that Walter had more of a global. I remember this, that he wanted to use the interest on the strike fund to organize internationally. Do you remember that?

Douglas Fraser: Yeah.

Tom Downs: That was one of the few things he wasn't able to get through the convention. Am I right on that? He tried to.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, well we eventually did. I'm glad to say it was during my watch in 1980, we took half of the interest from the strike fund to spend on three functions, organizing, communication, and education.

Tom Downs: Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: Of course interest, because our strike fund is so huge. It generates a hell of a lot of revenue. So it's a very meaningful change we made in 1980. But, you know, people sort of get, you know, revision is history.

Douglas Fraser: Walter didn't always get his own way with the board. That was particularly true when it came to some incumbents who Walter thought shouldn't be incumbents. But, the board sort of rallies around each other, you know.

Douglas Fraser: He's a man of tremendous principle. Of course, he had this great gift of articulation, and he could bring people along.

Tom Downs: Well, and I think He got good contracts. He got good grievance procedure. And, he acted internationally, in that combination.

Douglas Fraser: You make a very, very important point. We had a regional director who was involved in anti-Vietnam movement. Nobody quarreled with that. But he spent nearly all of his time demonstrating with the Hollywood stars. And Walter says, "You know I agree with your position. But the first thing you have to do is take care of the members needs, and then they'll allow you to do these things." For example, when we marched with Martin Luther King in the south, and I'm sure our white membership could have strung us up, except for they thought well it negotiates good contracts. We'll allow for this deviant conduct. So they allow you to do things and take unpopular positions, exactly because... you said it, because you deliver on a collective bargaining realm.

Tom Downs: There's a regional director, I think, from California that just let grievances pile up. The membership, the first job is to take care of the grievances and the good contracts.

Douglas Fraser: Right.

Tom Downs: Now what about NAFTA? What's happening on it?

Douglas Fraser: I think the NAFTA thing has changed dramatically since it was enacted. First of all, I think the argument is as one sided as people thought. But obviously with the collapse of the peso, NAFTA at least in the short run, is going to prove to be detrimental to the American workers.

Tom Downs: Yeah. Now, the argument was jobs, I think somebody said Chrysler was making engine blocks in Mexico? That there's already that using. What's the answer to that? It isn't simply a smooth Hawley tariff. And yet, if you open the boarders completely, you aren't going to have a $10 or $20 hour man or woman compete with a dollar and hour person.

Douglas Fraser: Well the hope is, and the theory is, in the long run it'll work out. I told the story during the NAFTA debate, Lord Kings the great English economist, he was talking about the short term and the long term. He says, "In the long term we're all dead."

Tom Downs: Yeah, yeah.

Douglas Fraser: And again I think about Walter during these times, because he was a great internationalist as you point out. The way it should work out and the way it's

worked out over the ages is, that these newly developing countries will develop. The workers will get higher, and higher, and higher wages, and they'll be customers of your products.

Douglas Fraser: I suppose in recent history the nations you look at is the Asian nations. I remember when we used to complain bitterly about the Japanese wages. Now they're higher than ours. That would hopefully be the case in Mexico. But in the meantime I don't think you can just let them ravage our industries. Certainly they're entitled. If they build auto plants to supply their own market, you know, that would be one thing.

Douglas Fraser: Now, during the whole NAFTA debate, you see, the auto companies argued that they would sell more products to Mexico than vice versa, and that was happening until the collapse of the peso. Now the reason it happens in auto, and auto, it could be very different. I think in textile there's no question about it. The detriment to textile workers union. But auto, because of the nature of the business, if you build a plant that produces less than 300 thousand cars a year you'll lose money.

Douglas Fraser: So, because that market is so much smaller, they can't build a van plant and these specialty plants that supply that market. So the theory was, well we'll sell those types of products to Mexico, and it was working that way the first few months of NAFTA but now it's collapsed.

Douglas Fraser: So, the labor movements complaint is not that we should put up barriers at our boarders, but our government should have something to say about the environmental conditions and the labor conditions.

Tom Downs: Both labor and environment?

Douglas Fraser: Labor and environment.

Douglas Fraser: But then, there's always these shifts. After all this country was once an agricultural nation, as you know. Then we had an opportunity to export and develop.

Tom Downs: And somebody could argue it's high tariff's that helped industrialize America.

Douglas Fraser: Well sure. Absolutely.

Tom Downs: Now let's get back on this other political. We talked about that the Republican in Detroit has as much representation as a Democrat in Traverse City. Do you want to go into a little more into that? How would you solve that problem? Or, just the winner take all and let it work out the way it works?

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, I don't see any solution. Internally in Detroit what you could do is let counsel by districts random at large. But in terms of a state office, I see no solution unless you're willing to alter, what I believe, is sort of fundamental in a democracy and that's the majority rule.

Douglas Fraser: This last election, last November the 8th, I think was a disastrous defeat in the political life a democratic society when you lose as we do there's a price to pay.

Tom Downs: When you lose, you lose.

Douglas Fraser: And we're going to pay that price.

Tom Downs: Now some states try this proportional representation. I've mentioned constitutional convention. The one fellow Mel Nord, who was an engineer, lawyer, wanted to... So you have two people elected from a district, and each vote, the number of votes he got. So you kind of like have to have a racetrack tote board that totaled it up. I kind of like the idea to try it in one House, but that never got off the ground. I think we are pretty wedded to the winner takes all.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah to the system.

Tom Downs: I think there's more on single districts, and the U.S. Supreme Court's been moving in that direction.

Douglas Fraser: So then you say, then you win an election and you're frustrated because of the system. And the majority again couldn't work their will.

Douglas Fraser: So, that's a very, very radical change, and I'd want to think about that a long, long time.

Douglas Fraser: You know, the federal system is sort of skewed anyway Tom, because the founding fathers, in order to put the nation together, in order to form a union, had to make this tremendous concession. I think it's called The Connecticut Compromise, where each state gets two senators.

Tom Downs: Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: I live in a county. I live in Oakland County. It's larger in population than a lot of states that have two senators.

Tom Downs: Right.

Douglas Fraser: Two United States Senators.

Tom Downs: Right.

Douglas Fraser: So, that was a great concession. And somebody who's building a democratic model would think that's ridiculous.

Tom Downs: Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: But here we are, it's so ingrained in the system that I don't think you can change it. So I think if you're going to tilt you should tilt the other way of pure democracy.

Tom Downs: The funny thing is, all us knee-jerk liberals... You know one person, one vote. Congress is that now. Hopefully the Senate will hold back some of the things the Congress did. So, part of this is who's ox is gored I think.

Douglas Fraser: Well, except Tom, and I mean this. I get so repulsed, particularly in the last few years. The filibuster rule, rule 22 came into being in 1917. When it came into being maybe one filibuster a year, two filibusters. We're victimized by the Republicans who are in the minority in the Senate. I forget how many, over 100 in a short span, and they absolutely crippled the majority.

Tom Downs: We made it so much easier.

Douglas Fraser: Oh yeah.

Tom Downs: It used to be there had to be a real filibuster, where people would go around the clock and they would see it.

Douglas Fraser: Right.

Tom Downs: Now you just say I'm going to filibuster and it stops everything.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, you've got to get 60 votes. Then you run on parallel tracks. You legislate on one set of bills, and filibuster on the same day.

Tom Downs: Right.

Douglas Fraser: You filibuster in the morning and legislate in the afternoon. I said because it was so frustrating, particularly when you're in the majority, that what we should do or what the leadership of the house, because the American people are just not educated to this anymore. A real filibuster's not taking place. I said, "If they'd have round the clock, seven days a week filibuster, then the American people would see it now on C-SPAN. We didn't have C-SPAN before. They'd say, "This is ridiculous. We've got to change the rules." Now, Mitchell, who was then the Majority Leader said, threatened to do it at one time, it is a pity. It was an

opportunity lost. We should have done that and educated the American people. Now the shoe's on the other foot, and we're going to use it for next two years, no question about it. That doesn't make it right, in principle.

Tom Downs: I agree with you. Even if you have a filibuster, make it a complete one, and people can see what it is.

Douglas Fraser: Or else I'm not against extended debate. The theory was, when you didn't have the modern means of communication, the theory was a senator got up or a group of senators got up, and spoke to the country. The word would filter out what was before the Senate and then the citizens would be able to express their point of view. Now we have instantaneous communication, that's no longer necessary, but even then, I would say, "look it, if they think that they can rouse the American people against the proposition that they're opposing, give them a chance. If they want two weeks, give them a chance but sooner or later, the majority ought to be able to work their will."

Tom Downs: Now what about this other big change? That, when I was a kid I kind of thought the government was a friend. The policemen, we didn't have policewomen to tell us come to school and say, "Look when you cross the street," the firefighter's say, "Don't play with matches." NY helped me get through school. I looked at the government. Basically, in my right that more and more people are looking at the government as an enemy rather than as a friend, is that?

Douglas Fraser: Absolutely.

Tom Downs: You want to expand on that? What to do about it?

Douglas Fraser: Well, let me first say, that I think the greatest danger to our democracy is cynicism because cynicism is the enemy of democracy. Because if people lose faith and trust in the system, we're in trouble and, Tom, we're bordering on that right now.

Douglas Fraser: It's sort of self-inflicted because the campaigns, I think, are devastating, in terms of people's feeling about the process, and about the system, and the institutions because everybody's preaching, "Government's no good. The government's no good." Then you just think about what we've done about the environment. God knows what our country would be today if we didn't have these environmental laws. Now are you arguing that some of them go overboard? Maybe they do, but basically they save the environment.

Douglas Fraser: Government intervention, in our generation, GI Bill of Rights. That sure as heck was government intervention. The government intervention saved tens of thousands of Chrysler jobs. There's so many good things that our government did.

Douglas Fraser: Go back to our days again, people don't realize, that I remember well with my ma, asked me to go down to the bank with her. Our money was in, whatever money it was, a private bank. My dad had so much faith in the system that he didn't want to take it out. He went off to work, ma said, "Come to the bank, we got to take it out." We went to the bank on Michigan and Martin. The bank was closed forever.

Tom Downs: Your mother was right.

Douglas Fraser: Mother was right.

Douglas Fraser: All of these governmental rules and regulations. If you were to make an argument to me that, "Well, maybe in some ways we overregulate," I wouldn't argue with that. Let's focus in on them and reduce the regulations or eliminate the regulations but my God, don't emasculate the government, that's what they're trying to do. As sure as we're sitting here, if they had their way, if they had the President of the United States and the Senate was of a like mind with the House, we would have a revolution. What would happen after two or three years as a certainty, it'd come all the way back again because it would be so destructive to the country.

Tom Downs: All right, Doug, there's a little more I'd like to go into this real factionalism that you went through. Remember there is a real fight between the right and the left wing. It's hard for people to realize that Walter Reuther, Gus Scholle the right way because they think that was the radicals of their time but do you want to go into a little more, what was the background of that tremendous right, left fight?

Douglas Fraser: Well, originally, I was in Walter Reuther's caucus in the '40s. I don't think it overstates it to say that there's a very, very strong communist element in the UAW. As there was in some of the other CIO unions that Gus had to deal with down in Wayne County. As a delegate at the old Wayne County council knows fierce debates on foreign policy, believe it or not, that consumed nearly all the meetings. On intervening in the war in Europe but, in any case, I came to the conclusion that the leadership, and the communist party, and those who follow the party line really weren't interested in the workers or the union, as such, as an institution. They're interested in advancing the policy of the communist party, of the Soviet Union now.

Douglas Fraser: You could argue endlessly, people out here marketing it that really wasn't true. Well, now it was theoretical but you can prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that in the '40s, particularly during the Hitler-Stalin Pact, that the trade unionists who followed the party line, United States, were not interested in advancing the cause of the workers.

Douglas Fraser: I can remember, and you probably can too, the Labor Day parades. When they used to have placards during the Hitler-Stalin Pact, "The Yanks are not coming. Don't get involved in an imperialistic blood bath." I tell the story. I'm a delegate to Wayne County Council and Local 51. Chrysler Local 51 was dominated by the party. A fella by the name of Pop Edily was President. He submitted a resolution, we used to meet every other Tuesday, and we used to debate these resolutions. They submit a resolution, "Let's not get involved in imperialistic blood bath. The Yanks are not coming." This had been their line for all during that unholy alliance between Hitler and Stalin.

Douglas Fraser: Then comes the invasion of Germany, by Germany, of Russia. Then Plymouth Local said, "Well, we got to get involved in the sacred war against fascism." We come to this Tuesday, it happened in between the two weeks in which we met. I remember Tracy Dahl was President of the Wayne County CIO Council. A fella, I think his name was Scrogins, from the Dairy Worker's. He said, very straight faced, Tracy said, "Read that resolution from the Local 51." He read the resolution, "Let's not get involved in this imperialistic blood bath," and so forth and so on. He said, "Read this other resolution from Local 51. It's now become a sacred war against fascism." Then he turns to the President of the local union who is sitting in the office, Pop Edily, he says, "Now Pop, which resolution do you want." That was a perfect way to make the part.

Douglas Fraser: But then, in the '43 convention where as a delegate, Dick Leonard ran against George Addis. If he had won that, and he came within seven delegates, it'd change his whole history. Maybe even the history of the UAW but we failed. In that convention, the Pact was still in place, they had talked about it. It was after. We're all allies. They induce a resolution, the party people did, tried to reintroduce peace work, incentive pay, to help the war effort. Well, with our history and the way the incentive pay was abused before the union ... I mean, the point was that they didn't care about how the unions felt about working conditions and all these other things. They were just, "Advance the program of the party."

Douglas Fraser: As time went on, and after the war, I don't think there's any question that that was the heart of the factional fight. Now, sure I think there's red-baiting that went on. It was to the political advantage of people. Much too much but never the less, they're more than a kernel of truth in that proposition.

Tom Downs: Now one tough question. When you ran against Gus Scholle, that I worked for. I said, if you had won I'd have been out of work.

Douglas Fraser: Nah, I'd have kept you.

Tom Downs: Oh, I'm glad to hear that.

Douglas Fraser: How did that come about?

Douglas Fraser: Well, it came about, I was in the Army and I come out of the Army. A very good friend of mine, he was a former president of Local 227, Dick Leonard, and the Vice President of the union. He and Walter Reuther were very close allies. They had a falling out in 1944. I shouldn't have done it. It wasn't one of my wisest decisions but they said, "Let's run for president of the CIO." We'd have had a fighting chance except we were carrying too much baggage. I mean, you remember party liners. That Yale Stewart got on the floor, and made a fool of himself, and a couple of other people. If we had any chance, we don't know if we would have had, that destroyed it.

Douglas Fraser: I said to people after, I said, "You know, you're never gonna be successful in politics as long as you have to carry this baggage."

Tom Downs: Yeah. One other quick question. Aimwell and Gus Scholle were very good friends. Aimwell was a third party person all the way. Did the third party ever get off the ground much?

Douglas Fraser: No.

Tom Downs: Just a quick story. That I worked on the resolutions committee, the state council. We were going into the Democratic party, Gus Scholle was in '48. Everybody else thought he was kind of nuts. Aimwell came down and go to speak against him. Gus said, "Tom, well sit down with Aimwell. See what you can work out." We worked out the resolution. It was all right to go in the Democratic party but we got Aimwell's language for this election only. If you check the convention proceedings but I think there was an example where two people were very good friends, and even though they might differ theoretically on something, they managed to work out their differences.

Douglas Fraser: Was Gus involved in a Michigan Commonwealth Federation?

Tom Downs: No. No, what he did, he had a poll made. He had a sociologist make one. What was the fella who ran on that third party ticket. He said, if he got one percent of the vote he'd support him. Well, Gus was a very pragmatic.

Douglas Fraser: For awhile I thought Michigan Commonwealth?

Tom Downs: I think it's the Canadian term, commonwealth or something.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah, yeah. Michigan Commonwealth, Yeah.

Douglas Fraser: Even now it's resurrecting itself. Everybody's so frustrated with today's politics because today's politics, it's so poisonous. The Democrats feel, they feel the

Democratic party's inadequate. Now there's some people in the Labor movement that were meeting in New York last week, were director to the communication workers. You know, a big powerful union.

Tom Downs: Yeah. It's a good union.

Douglas Fraser: And a good union. He's a third party person.

Tom Downs: Well I teach lectures a lot, part-time at Cooley. I had the students read the Lincoln-Douglas debate so then the 30 second sound bites and saying, "We've made progress."

Tom Downs: We're about to windup. Doug, I just want to know if you can be, in a little more positive tone, on what you think is going to happen

Douglas Fraser: The immediate future, it looks dismal because you lost an election on November the eighth. My view, I have an un-abiding faith in the Democratic process. I think our founding fathers, were sort of radical in those days, but the basic concept was that Kings are not sovereign only the people are sovereign. In their wisdom, they gave the power to the people. I don't accept this notion that corporations are all powerful. That the media's all powerful. They're very, very influential but the ultimate power is in the hands of the people. If the people would just exercise that power, we'd begin to solve all of our problems.

Tom Downs: What about the religious rights, say they're going to take back precinct by precinct. That's certainly their Democratic right to do that.

Douglas Fraser: Yeah. Yeah. I think they're much more potent than they've been in our life time, today. I think, I don't know if they've reached their peak, I hope they have but I think they represent a destructive force in the American political scene. They have a right to do it but I always worry about extremes. Whether it's extremes of the right and the left. If the American people follow the pattern that they've followed for decades, then we check both the extreme right and the extreme left.

Tom Downs: Well Doug, we want to end on this optimistic tone. I want to thank you very much. I know I'll see you from time to time. Keep as young as you are.

Douglas Fraser: I'll try.

Tom Downs: Thanks.