

Interview with Leo Turner
with comments by Helen Turner

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20th Century Minnesota Radicalism Project

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Sal Salerno - SS
Helen Turner - HT
Leo Turner - LT

SS: When did you start to become active in the Young Communist League and also when did you take part in the Unemployed Council movement?

LT: The Unemployed Councils were strong then because of the large number of unemployed people at that time. It was '32, I think, most of the time that I was working with them. During that period I did get a job with the CWA [Civil Works Administration] which was the first work program that--no, that was in '33 because Roosevelt came into office in '33 and a lot of people were getting these CWA jobs. It was like the WPA [Works Progress Administration] now. You've heard of WPA?

SS: Oh, yes.

LT: Except CWA was actually a little bit better because they didn't have all the restrictions that WPA had.

SS: What types of things did people do in the CWA?

LT: Well, there was all kinds of things but I was actually digging ditches and stuff like that.

SS: You were doing road work?

LT: Yes, but it didn't last long. I think it lasted for about a year or maybe a little bit over a year and then the administration announced that they were going to have to suspend it because of lack of funds which were supposed to be given by Congress. Of course that created a lot of furor among people who were depending on that. At that time the activity became particularly strong to do something, and actually Minneapolis was one of the strongholds as far as doing something about it. It was one of the strongest cities in the country as far as the Unemployed Councils were concerned. One of the things that we did was, for the day that they announced it was going to close down (or somewhere around that time) we organized a big demonstration in front of City Hall. We didn't even expect as big a demonstration as we got, as I remember it. They say that there were about 15,000

and we circled the Minneapolis City Hall with the crowd. The reason we had it on that particular day¹--that's right, I remember now--was because the City Council was in session and we were demanding that they put pressure on Congress to continue the CWA. Of course they had the police out in force and they expected that there was going to be trouble. We started the demonstration, I think, around noon sometime to coincide with the City Council meeting and it continued for about four hours.

SS: Four hours!

LT: Yes. We couldn't stop it because the people kept coming and it kept getting bigger and...

SS: Did people make speeches?

LT: Yes, well, myself and Gus Hall made speeches. Do you know who Gus Hall is?

SS: Oh yes, I know who Gus Hall is.

LT: And a couple of others who were active in the Unemployed Councils made speeches. I don't remember their names off-hand.

SS: Would Morrie Greenberg have been one of those persons?

LT: No, no, there was a guy by the name of Harry Mayville.

SS: Oh yes, Harry Mayville.

LT: And somebody else but I can't think of who it was now. We couldn't speak very long; we didn't have loudspeakers in those days, (they weren't very common you know), so we were up on the stand--we built a stand around the place--and the few of us who were doing the speaking had to alternate. So each of us spoke about four or five times but we couldn't speak very long because our voices would give out.

We had delegations going into the City Hall. The first group got in but by the time we sent the second delegation--we kept sending them--why they locked the doors and they wouldn't let them in. That of course got the people even more riled up and the police tried to break the demonstration up. In fact, they tried to get up to us who were speaking but the people formed a strong squad around the speakers' place and they couldn't get to us. After a while the police started throwing tear gas. It was the first time, by the way, that they'd used tear gas in Minneapolis. After that they used it a lot on demonstrations. They were sort of inexperienced in its use and they were throwing the tear gas bombs and they didn't have all the sophisticated things that there are now. They're supposed to count to ten before they throw it, to give it time to explode by the time it hits the crowd, but the police were excited, you know. They'd take

the thing, pull the plug, and throw it right away so it hadn't exploded by the time it hit among the crowd and somebody in the crowd would pick it up and throw it back. They'd throw it in through the windows of the City Hall, and in some cases there were courts in session. The courts had to adjourn. I think it went into the City Council Chambers and the City Council had to adjourn. It was really a mess in there, but after about three or four hours of that we decided that we couldn't hold it anymore; the crowd was beginning to get a little bit smaller. Those of us who were speaking sneaked off from the center there and because we knew the cops would get us as soon as we got out of there we went to a restaurant to get something to eat. While we were eating in the restaurant the cops came in and arrested us. They arrested us as well as the people who tried to get into the City Hall meeting and so on. There were a total of thirty-seven I think arrested. It was quite a thing. It got publicity all over the country, and then we made a further show of the trial afterwards.

SS: So you were arrested in this.

LT: Yes. We all went on trial but only eleven of us who were the leaders were sentenced. However the sentences were fairly light. Those who were speakers were given thirty-five days in the county workfarm but the trial lasted, oh, at least a couple of weeks. We had a top lawyer from Philadelphia come to defend us.² There was a real thing at the trial where each person who was arrested would insist on speaking, and we'd make our speeches that we'd made outside again. [Laughter] We were sentenced to thirty-five days each, those of us who were in the forefront and...

SS: And the stenographer had to take it all down. You were a speaker, and Gus Hall was a speaker, and who else?

LT: There were several others, but I don't remember too well who they were. About a month later we were sent out to the Minneapolis workfarm. It's funny: when we were going out there it just so happened that [John] Dillinger, who was an outstanding gangster at that time, had been around Minneapolis. Everybody at the workfarm was looking out when we came in, because they had about a dozen police cars escorting us in the front and in the back and coming in with whistles blowing. The guys who were in jail were looking, "Who the hell is this?" "This must be Dillinger being brought in." But anyway we were in there for about thirty-five days. We sort of enjoyed that actually, because you know we were young and didn't mind it at all. In fact, because of the times, I wasn't eating too much in those days, but I gained weight in prison because we were eating there.

After that we never did get that CWA back but we got some form of work and relief. You see, originally at that time there was no relief or anything; and especially if you were single, and many of us were single. If you didn't have a job you just had to shift for yourself.

SS: Thanks to that we have unemployment compensation.

LT: Yes, that's right. That was our part of the beginning of the fight for unemployment. And of course it continued for quite a while after that. We had a lot of demonstrations. For example, we ransacked the relief stations--there were small relief stations for married people and you had a hell of a time getting anything from them, either, for the married people, so...

SS: Now when you said a relief station, what were those?

LT: Well, they were just places where you went to try to get food. They were run by the city I think--either city or state--but..

SS: They would hand out food like beans and rice and so forth?

LT: Yes, that's right. The Unemployed Council would organize a whole bunch of people to go in there. There were a lot of other things that were done at that time, like going into a sort of wealthy restaurant, and everybody sitting down to eat, and when they left they didn't pay.

HT: Can you imagine that?

LT: Yes. But it was really necessary at that time in order to exist and those things brought some results.

SS: Yes, those were very hard times. It's difficult for people in this generation to really imagine how hard-pressed people were.

HT: How old are you?

SS: I'm thirty-eight. I've heard stories from my parents, you know, but it was the kind of thing if you didn't live through it you can't imagine it.

HT: Couldn't believe it.

LT: Yes, anybody who lived through it will never forget it.

SS: One of the things that you mentioned just briefly was the Young Communist League [YCL]. I was interested in knowing how you became part of that.

LT: Through Gus Hall. Actually I got interested in it in Duluth before I came to Minneapolis. In the beginning he was the organizer for them on the Mesaba Range, on the Iron Range up north, and then in the state, mainly in Minneapolis and St. Paul. That was a time when there were a lot of demonstrations going on. There were demonstrations at the legislature, you know marches and so on which you still have today, but that's when they started. At that time Minnesota developed sort of a good legislature--not the whole legislature but a good part of it. The various public officials, knowing what the situation was like in the state, had to give in a lot

of times to the unemployed marches and so on. We'd march down to the legislature, for example, and some public officials who were members of the Farmer-Labor Party would arrange to have tickets given to all the marchers to go to certain restaurants to eat. They'd let us sleep in the state legislature's offices.³ At that time the Farmer-Labor Party was really a good thing and there was Governor [Floyd B.] Olson and then Governor [Elmer] Benson. So they sort of sided with us on the thing. But the legislature wasn't able to do too much. It was really dependent on the national Congress, which of course also was at that time a little bit better than it has been recently.

Of course, following that period of the unemployed marches and so on then there were a lot of cases of struggles by the budding unions at that time. For example, in one of the packing houses in Austin which was a very good union at that time--it wasn't actually affiliated with any international union; it was independent at that time...

SS: Was this the Independent Union of All Workers that you're speaking of?

LT: No, I don't really remember what they belonged to but they were pretty progressive and...

SS: You're talking now about before the CIO?

LT: Yes. They had a strike in Austin, oh somewhere around the '30s, I don't remember what year, but I remember that Benson was governor and the company, of course, was out to bust the strike. They had all kinds of forces out there to prevent the strike from succeeding. One of the interesting things that happened was that Benson--the local sheriff was of course cooperating with the company--and Benson informed the local sheriff that, "You better get your guys out of there or I'll take them out," and sure enough that took the scabs and everybody else out of there and they won the strike.⁴ Similarly they won a strike in Minneapolis at the hosiery company.

SS: Strutwear was it?

LT: Yes. That was a long one. It lasted nine months but finally the governor told them that, "You better shut down that plant or I'll have to shut it down," because they were operating with scabs. They had to shut it down and settle the strike.

SS: Were you on picket lines or anything in those strikes?

LT: Yes.

SS: Both of them?

LT: No, I wasn't in Austin. I was on the picket line in--there was another one in Minneapolis, [Flour] City Ornamental Iron Works. That was a bitter strike. Two young kids, one eighteen and the other was

twenty-one, were killed in that strike, out on the picket line. I happened to be there the night when one of them was killed.

That was really terrible, and that also led to the governor ordering the closing of the plant because scabs were in there; they had to settle that. So that was a progressive area as far as some of the public was concerned at that time.

SS: Now were you in Minneapolis during the truck drivers strike?

LT: Yes, but I didn't really get involved in that. I went out and watched them and so on, but I wasn't really involved in that.

SS: That was quite a strike.

LT: Yes, yes, yes. Those strikes were all the things that riled up the people afterwards you know. I mean the means that caused those strikes.

SS: Well, it also made it possible for there to be unions in the Twin Cities because before that there weren't any really to speak of.

LT: That's right.

SS: It was pretty much an open shop town.

LT: And now I guess it's pretty well organized, but like every place else, some of the unions aren't so good.

SS: What led you to leave Minneapolis? You left in '37-38?

LT: Well, I left New York then.

SS: Oh, you left New York then, so you left Minneapolis sooner; in '36?

LT: I left there actually in '34. I had one little incident that doesn't fit in with the rest of this, but before I left Minneapolis I rode the freights to Butte, Montana, one summer. I spent about three or four months in Butte. Butte at that time was really a tight scab town. It had been a good town organizationally back in around 1918-1919, that era, and then the copper companies (which are the thing there) cracked down on the unions. They hung the leader of that strike.

SS: Frank Little.

HT: You know quite a bit of history.

SS: It's still dark, but there's a lot that needs to be...

LT: Yes, but they came back and that's when I was there. I was there

when Roosevelt first came into office for three or four months. As I say, the thing I remember about it was the period when he made beer legal and everybody in town was happy. The unions really got started then, just when I was getting ready to leave there. Just to show how bad this town was: I had gone there as a part of the delegation with the YCL, [because] they had wanted some people to come in there on Memorial Day (which at that time was celebrated by the youth as a day to fight for peace and against fascism). They were going to have a demonstration in the town square and they wanted to try to get some sort of a gathering because they couldn't get it locally. We got there about five days before Memorial Day and I was in charge of going to the police chief and asking him for a permit for our parade. I didn't have to say very much to him; he says no. I said, "Why not, what's wrong with it?" He said, "You can't have it, we don't have that in this town." I said, "Well, you do if we go ahead and have it anyway." He said, "You know goddamn well what we'll do," and the meeting with him lasted about ten minutes. We went ahead anyway and we rode in a van from one part of town to where the demonstration was going to be held. A short distance from there we got out to start the march to the place. As soon as we got out, one by one they picked us up before we even got to the place.

SS: Just getting out of the van?

LT: Yes, they knew who we were.

HT: Yes, but they really didn't have anything to arrest them for, because they didn't start the parade. Those were the good old days.

LT: And this was Memorial Day, so there was no court in session that day, but they called a blind judge in to have a special session of the court. Thirty-seven [or so] of us were in the jail, all in one big bullpen, and they called us up one at a time to this kangaroo court, and they asked us, "Guilty or not guilty?" "Not guilty." "Ten days." "Guilty or not guilty." "Not guilty." "Ten days." There was no semblance of a trial you know and they threw us in jail for ten days. Then we went on a hunger strike. We didn't like the food anyway, but even besides that, against the kind of mock trial that they gave us, we decided to go on a hunger strike. These kids, by the way, were from all over Montana, from various farming communities and so on. (There were about seventy-five prepared to go into the march, but thirty-something were picked up.) A lot of these kids were farm kids who ate good meals every day. They couldn't stand this hunger strike too well, but they stood pretty well together. There was a guy on the outside who was sympathetic to us, an older guy who wanted to get us out and get us to a place where he'd get us food. Finally on the fourth day of the hunger strike they agreed to let us go. This guy was there, [and] he took us to a restaurant and he got us all oyster stew, in Montana of all places. But that oyster stew tasted so good after that.

HT: You mean you didn't eat at all for four days?

LT: No. Well, I was used to being hungry at that time and so it wasn't too difficult.

HT: How much oyster stew did you eat?

LT: At least two bowls. That was the first time I'd ever had oyster stew.

HT: Could I ask you a question? Did that demonstration go on when you people were picked up and put in jail?

LT: No, no.

HT: That broke the back of the demonstration.

LT: There was no point in going on with it, but at least we showed him, you know, that we were willing to do it.

SS: Yes, Butte has always been a very tough place.

LT: Yes, but myself, a guy from Chicago, and a guy who lives in Butte, Montana, and had a house there--he had inherited from his parents or something--lived in that house for the three months that we were there. When I arrived in Butte, I had five bucks on me. When I left Butte, I had about a buck left. What we lived on was bumming our food. We got these uneven slices of bread from the bakery every day--they were throwing those away at the time, unless somebody got them. We got buttermilk, which was free at that time; some of the butcher shops would give us some scraps of meat, you know...

HT: Bones, mostly.

LT: And we got some stuff for baking pancakes. We managed to get along all right, but that's the time I learned that you can get along if you're really hard up [and] you have to do it.

SS: So were you trying to set up a branch of the...

LT: Yes, but there wasn't enough people in Butte to do it.

SS: You mentioned that Gus Hall was the person that got you involved with the YCL. Were there other people that you also worked with as organizers when you were up on the Range?

LT: No, up on the Range is where I just joined, but I wasn't really active at that time. But I know quite a few people. I've lost track of most of them, and also I lost several of them in the Spanish Civil War in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

SS: Are these some of the people that you knew? One of them was Pat Garafolo.

LT: Yes, I knew him, but I can't place him now. I remember the name.

SS: Well, he lived in St. Paul, he was an Italian man, and he was supposedly the chauffeur for Dave Doran. They were ambushed and that's how he...⁵

LT: Oh yes, is that where he died?

SS: Yes, he died in Spain.

LT: I didn't hear too much about him, but I knew him.

SS: Well this Sunday is the 52nd anniversary [of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade]. Do you know that?

LT: Yes, they've got a thing here too.

SS: It'll happen this Sunday. Reino Tantttila?

LT: Yes, he was a good friend of mine, and I really felt sorry for him, going the way he did.

SS: Was he someone that also was very active in the early years in St. Paul or in Minneapolis?

LT: Up on the Iron Range.

SS: What sort of things was he involved with?

LT: More with farming, organizing farmers and so on.

SS: The United Farm League?

LT: Yes, as I remember.

SS: Was he also involved in the hunger marches?

LT: I think he was involved in some of them but I don't know for certain.

SS: Maybe up in Duluth, or that area?

LT: Yes. I don't remember too much about that.

SS: There was another man named Kenny Brown.

LT: Ken Brown. Yes, I knew him.

SS: That's the person we know least about.

LT: I don't remember too much about him but... The other thing I

remember being involved in--this actually happened while Hoover was still President--was the [Second National] Hunger March. Of course there were people marching from all over, but we had a march from Minneapolis and it went through a number of cities on the way--Chicago and Ohio. It took about four or five days to get to Washington. I think it was held in December, when Hoover was still President, but he was going out in January. We got to Washington eventually and they wouldn't let us in to the city. We had to sleep and stay on the outside of the city on the pavement, you know, and we were there only one of two days. The other thing I remember about it: the guy that handled the troops in Washington was [General Douglas] MacArthur. Finally, on the day that the march was scheduled, we marched into Washington, but of course we were accompanied by hundreds and thousands of troops. As soon as it was over we were escorted out of the city. They let a delegation of ours in to speak to some people who I guess represented the President and Congress, but there wasn't too much accomplished by that. That was actually the first hunger march that I had participated in.

SS: Who was it that organized the delegation in Minneapolis?

LT: Well there were a number of people, including myself. I think Harry Mayville was part of that, and I don't remember exactly who all they were. But it was a pretty big delegation from Minneapolis that went.

SS: They were all of different kinds of political perspectives. What made you decide to become a radical?

LT: Well, actually my parents were pretty progressive, so that I didn't have a bad background, except that I wasn't with my parents very much. My mother died when I was was ten or eleven. She was Finnish and she was very active in Finnish play groups, you know, showing various plays--progressive plays.

SS: Was she an actor?

LT: Yes, well, not officially.

SS: But within the Finnish community?

LT: With a Finnish company, yes. They would travel around to different places. She was pretty good. In fact at one time I was with her and I acted in a couple of Finnish plays. This was when I was very young.

My father left me when I was even younger; that is, he got divorced from my mother and I was only about five or six when he left. I did see him for one month in 1932 or 1933 while I was living in New York. No, that wasn't '32; I was living in Duluth, Minnesota. Yes, that's right, that's where I met with him but he and the woman that he married, my step-mother, were going to the Soviet Union from New York,

so they took me to New York. We spent a few weeks there before they left. They were going to live in the Soviet Union, in the Finnish section of the Soviet Union, Karelia. I never heard from them once they got there. This is over fifty years ago. Of course they're gone now, but I don't know what happened to them. I didn't hear from them once. But of course, I hadn't heard from him before that either.

My grandparents, who I lived with for a while in Minnesota, didn't talk too much. My grandmother was Finnish, strictly Finnish; she couldn't speak English at all, and so I never really had a conversation with her. My grandfather could speak a little bit, but we never really had a conversation about anything. My uncle who lived with my grandparents and me--he's still living. He's eighty-seven years old, [and] he's living in Florida--he was a progressive in Minnesota. But I could never find out what his feeling is now. He speaks very little. As you probably have heard before, the Finns don't speak very much.

SS: I've not heard that.

LT: No? I've been accused of that, but I've gotten to talking more since I've been away from Finns. Among Finns, there are two groups of people: there's--they always refer to them this way--there's White Finns and there's Red Finns. This is from the time of the Civil War within Finland, and everybody who is progressive is a Red Finn. Those who aren't are White Finns. I never was among the White Finns very much, so for that reason I was sort of a progressive to begin with. Then I was recruited by the YCL when I was only eighteen years old, seventeen years old actually, so I didn't have a chance to change my opinion even if I had wanted--which I hadn't wanted to.

SS: That's very interesting. Could you perhaps just talk a little bit about what it was like to be in the YCL? As opposed to trying to remember specific dates and such, just to try to communicate some of what it felt like to be part of that.

LT: Well, I don't know, I enjoyed it when I was there, and I was actually very active as soon as I got in. Then I got advanced to various positions within the organization.

SS: Now when you say you were very active, what did that mean?

LT: Well, I held positions that involved going around and meeting with various clubs. (They weren't called "clubs" at that time, they were called "units.") So I was meeting people. Minnesota was very good, a very strong place at that time, progressively.

SS: These were like smaller organizations of different ethnic clubs, or were they strictly within the Finnish ethnic group?

LT: No, no they weren't Finnish, they were regular YCL clubs.

SS: Like an athletic club or a...

LT: Well, some of them were athletic, like Carl Ross; he was. At that time we had a organization called the Labor Sports Union, and he was in that. He spent a lot of time in that field, but I wasn't particularly active in that field. There were educational clubs, and people participating in the various organizations. A lot of them participated in the Unemployed Councils and so on.

SS: Was that your field, the Unemployed Councils?

LT: Well it was at one time, yes, when I was in Minneapolis.

SS: But not when you were on the Range?.

LT: No, actually up there there wasn't so much of an organization of Unemployed Councils. Duluth and Minneapolis was where I was mainly in [them].

SS: What was your field when you were on the Range?

LT: I wasn't there that much, you know. I joined there, but you see, I was out on the farm about twenty miles from the nearest group.

SS: Oh, I see.

LT: I was actually in name only, but I wasn't in that category very long because shortly after that I left for Duluth.

SS: I see. Carl thought that you spent more time on the Range than you actually did. He had an idea that you and other people had a little house that you all lived in together.

LT: No, that was in Minneapolis.

SS: When you were doing the Unemployed Council organizing then you all more or less lived together, or lived cooperatively?

LT: Well, we weren't all on the Unemployed Council. Like, Gus Hall lived with us but he was in the activity of the YCL. He didn't have much to do with the Unemployed Councils. And there was another guy that lived with us who's turned bad since then, Jim Barlett.⁶ Have you heard of him?

SS: No, I've not heard of him. That may be one of the people that Carl's trying to remember.

LT: Well, it's just as well not to.

SS: What happened to him?

LT: I think he originally got involved with the Dunne brothers in the

Teamsters, and pretty soon he disagreed with whatever we were thinking.

SS: So he became a Trotskyist?

LT: Yes, sort of. Maybe not even true Trotskyist, but...

SS: Opportunist?

LT: In that line, yes. I don't know what finally happened to him, I haven't heard about him for years.

There was also a fourth guy that helped to keep us in doughnuts and biscuits and so on. In the morning he'd get up before the rest of us, and he'd follow a bakery wagon. When it would park--at that time they delivered to the homes of people--near one of the homes, he'd wait until the guy went in the home and then he'd go slip over behind the bakery wagon and take out some doughnuts and other things. When we got up an hour or so later we'd find all these biscuits and such on the table.

HT: Those were things you had to do in order to eat.

LT: Oh, I remember what happened to him. The last I heard of him, he got caught stealing a car and he was put in jail.

SS: You don't remember his name?

LT: No, I don't.

SS: One of the people that Carl mentioned was someone named Morrie Greenberg. That doesn't ring a bell with you?

LT: No. That's Frank Green, you know.

SS: Yes, he has two names. But that wasn't one of the other people that was in the house with you?

LT: No, no.

SS: So there were four people all together?

LT: Yes.

SS: And each person in the house sort of was working on a different...

LT: Yes, we weren't working together.

SS: This person, Jim Barlett, that you mentioned. Was he somebody who was working in union activity?

LT: Well, for a while he worked in union activity; for a while he wasn't working in anything. But he was also doing a little undercover work of his own, and I never really trusted him too much. I guess there's a lot of things that would come to my mind over a period of time but...

SS: Oh you're doing great. This is extremely helpful since we don't have a lot of information on the early '30s and on the Unemployed Council. There's very little of it, so whatever you remember is just great.

[Gap in the conversation while they had the tape recorder off]

LT: Johnny Bernard had a lot of stories to tell, especially about Minnesota, and he would go out there pretty regularly. He just died a couple of years ago, and he was eighty-six, eighty-seven, something like that. You know he was congressman from the Mesaba Range, the district that includes Duluth and the Iron Range.

SS: Yes, he voted against sending arms to the fascists.

LT: Yes, he was the only one. Of course that lost him the next election. But he was very strong for his opinions.

HT: Did he ever run again after that?

LT: No. He would go back to Minnesota I think once a year, even at his age, and go up to the Iron Range and various [places like] Duluth.

SS: I think there was some kind of [event] at Mesaba Park that... [honored Johnny Bernard]

LT: Yes, he told us about it.

SS: I missed that, but I've run into people that went to it, and happened to have a tape recorder, and sat him down and got some of his stories.

HT: Boy, that was great.

LT: Yes, he didn't hesitate to sit down and give you a lengthy story. Of course, he told them so many times that I guess they stuck in his mind more than most people.

SS: If you went back to the Range, or if you went back to Duluth, or even Minneapolis, I bet your mind would just become flooded with memories. If you took a walk downtown, or if you drove over to the capitol and walked around that area. What could be more different than Minnesota?

LT: Yes. It's changed a lot too.

SS: Oh it has, yeah.

HT: It's got a new group of people growing up.

LT: I was trying to think of something that might be applicable now, but I don't know right off hand. [Of] course, he was very good friends with the Paulls, the attorney and his wife.

SS: Irene and...[Henry]

LT: Yes, well Paull has been dead for quite a while, but she lived out here.

SS: Her daughter, Bonnie, lives here.

LT: She died about two years ago I think; something like that.

SS: Yes, my friends are trying to put together her essays in a booklet form. There was a little book that was done before that, in the '30s called We're the People. You remember that? Ever see that?

LT: I think I have.

SS: It's a blue book, has a blue cover. It was illustrated by Syd Fossum.

HT: I've got to tell you something funny. Maybe it doesn't apply to what you're talking about, but I love bologna. I like it in various forms; I even grind it up and mix it with sweet pickles and mayonnaise and onions. He hates bologna, and he told me one day why. When he was in jail the various times, that's what they fed him--bologna, you know--so he got his fill during those days when all that took place. And of course I never got enough bologna.

LT: It was not only in jail, but when I went on these hunger marches and so on. People would feed us, but they usually just had bologna and some other stuff like that. Of course they didn't have money to buy a lot of stuff, and I really got sick of it.

HT: I still make it. In fact I made some the other day, ground up like that because my children used to like it. He had one sandwich and that was it.

SS: My parents have stories about beans, and how they can't really eat beans anymore because...

HT: I had beans too and I love them. The only thing I can't stand is rice.

LT: I didn't get sick of beans, I still eat them, but...

HT: You had rice coming out of your ears too, because it was cheap,

you know. But beans I still like, and like I said, bologna. Of course we lived in Pennsylvania and were on relief. They gave you rice, they gave you flour, they gave you margarine and most of all, (something you'd never think you'd ever get), grapefruit. They gave you sacks of grapefruit. Now that was something unusual--not oranges, grapefruit. I guess they must have had a surplus in the South. They gave you beans and they gave you cheese. We were tickled to get it.

LT: Jesus, what they're giving now to relief people...

HT: Cheese and butter. But you know it's just too bad, the children coming up now--you know, when you talk about the Depression and how difficult it was, they're not interested because it's so far fetched. They can't believe that things were as bad as they were. I hope it never happens again, because I don't think our youngsters could even survive.

LT: There's still a lot of people who are in pretty bad shape.

HT: Yeah, but among those, it's not all over. It's just the ones that are bad, and then there are people that are affluent. They have jobs and go down and travel right through there and pass them by as if they don't see them.

LT: Yes, especially among Blacks, you find a lot of people who don't really know where their next meal is coming from.

HT: That's right, it's true. The sad [part of the] story is our own people, the generations of now, [who] look down on them for being down and out. They just think it's their own fault. We know it's not and you know it's not, because you've been around, and you've seen enough. I used to be president of our local, and they used to look down on Black people because they thought they were the ones that were taking the welfare money. They didn't realize that all over the country that the people on welfare are mostly white. Only in Chicago they're mostly Black, because there are so many there on the south side of Chicago. They didn't realize that one or two paychecks away, they'd be in the same boat. We couldn't tell them that, and they found out later. Of course our plant mostly just went zap. They only have a small amount of plants compared to what [they] used to have. In fact, they have one here in San Francisco like a warehouse, and it went by the roadside. At River Grove was the main plant [where] they make golf clubs, and that went by the roadside. They went to Tennessee now. First they went through Grand Rapids, and then they closed down Grand Rapids and went to Tennessee. [Workers here] finally found out what it was like to be out of work, because a lot of those people worked out there some thirty-seven years and weren't old enough to retire yet and their jobs were gone. It's just too bad I didn't have a chance to meet them and talk to them. I would have liked to have told them, because they used to bad mouth the poor people, the ones on welfare.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

FOOTNOTES

¹April 6, 1934

²His name was David Levinson. Local attorneys were Arthur LeSueur and Mose Winthrop.

³Turner may be referring to the People's Lobby, on April 5, 1937.

⁴The strike was led by the Independent Union of All Workers against the American Gas Machine Company (manufacturers of gas stoves, oil heaters, etc.) in Albert Lea, not Austin. The dates were March and April, 1937.

⁵The 20th Century Minnesota Radicalism Project later secured a list of Abraham Lincoln Brigade members compiled in 1985 by Adolfe Ross. It shows Doran killed in April 1938 at Gandesa, and Garafolo killed in September 1938 at Sierra Calsallo. The list is in the Minnesota Historical Society Archives, in the Division of Archives and Manuscripts.

⁶He was a leader in Warehouse and Inside Workers Local #20316, and later in Warehouse Workers Local #359. He testified against the Trotskyites in the Smith Act Trials of 1941.