

CSEA HISTORY PROJECT

DANNY DONOHUE INTERVIEW

12/6/04

INTERVIEWER: We're speaking with
Danny Donohue on December the 6th, 2004.

Danny, let's begin a little bit, if
you would, by having you tell us about -- about
your childhood. Where did you grow up? What
was your family like? What were your
circumstances?

MR. DONOHUE: Well, I grew up in
Brooklyn, New York. I spent about 27 years of
my life there. I came from a family of 11 boys
and 1 girl. We joked early on that, you know,
Dad should have let Mom alone for a while and
the argument was -- he argued back if there
would have been night baseball, some of us
wouldn't have been there.

(Laughter.)

MR. DONOHUE: But truthfully, it was a
typical family in Brooklyn when I grew up.
There were other families in the neighborhood
with 15 children or 10 children. I think all of
these people that had come from Europe, and
especially from Ireland and Italy and Germany,
were all thinkin' they were plowing fields
somewhere in Brooklyn. You had to have a lot of

sons and a lot of daughters.

It was a good time. It was the only time in my life I ever understood that one mother can stick her head out a window and holler a name, which there could be five Dannys in the neighborhood, and suddenly you knew exactly which mother it was that was calling. You know, it's kind of funny when you think about it that way.

Nowadays kids try to be different and they all want to look the same. Back then we all wanted to be the same and we all looked different somehow, but it was a good neighborhood. I don't remember what money was when I was a kid because everything was in the book. My father would go round at the end of the week and pay off everything from barbers to butchers to bakers.

I'll never forget the old joke. Summer would come and you'd wind up -- you knew it was summer because you stopped going to Catholic school in a uniform and you got a new pair of sneakers. Not Michael Jordans, but like Keds, a coupla pair of dungarees and a coupla

T-shirts. You then got a crewcut. By the time the hair grew in, the sneakers wore out and the shirts and pants had holes in 'em, you were back in the uniform going back to school.

And that was -- that was basically the early time. It was -- my mom was a great cook in one respect. Everything went in the pot because you could always add more water and we were always addin' more people.

My father owned a bar in Brooklyn. I could tap beer before I could spell it. I understood there were 32 ounces in a quart. Even with buybacks you could do certain things, so it was a rather interesting life growing up.

INTERVIEWER: And with -- with 12 kids where -- where did you fall in the mix?

MR. DONOHUE: I was the ninth son in that process. I -- I think I was ten before I even sat down for dinner with my father because, truthfully, there wasn't a table big enough for everybody in the family. A lot of my brothers are a lot older than I am. Some of them looked like my father when I was a kid, but it was always interesting.

INTERVIEWER: You were kind of beaten down at the bottom of the pecking order. What did -- what kind of lessons did you learn growing up under that circumstance?

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, basic union lessons. The first one up was the best fed and the best dressed and everybody else negotiated for whatever else they could get. (Laughter.) No, you learn to deal with people. You learn to -- you know, it's nice to say your brothers and sisters always love each other. Not really. You get those -- your old fights, they go on.

I remember a classic and it was funny for us, but everybody has their own quirk in their family. You go in and you kick off your shoes, take off your coat, whatever. In my fam...in our house, you took off your pants. Everybody ran around in their shorts all the time. Well, that worked until my sister came along. Then my mother held a family meeting and the quote was, "Now listen, you guys. You gotta keep your pants on," and one of my brothers said why? My mom says your sister. What's wrong with him? That's the problem with you guys.

You don't understand this.

But we made Castro convertible famous. Everything in our house converted into a bed. Besides the kids, and like I said, some of my brothers, there's a -- there's a gap of about eight, nine years between me and a couple of my brothers, my older brothers, but besides us, you always had relatives coming over. We always had people staying in the house.

I remember being in the basement shoveling coal into the burner, making sure that, you know, you had enough heat and hot water, and seein' a coal bin nowadays is something out of a relic. You know, they think it's the ancient days.

My kids think, you know, compact disc players and IPODs and cell phones. Didn't you have those when you were a kid?

You know, what do you mean, black and white movies or suddenly having to -- you know, turn around and you didn't have a McDonalds on every corner? And they delivered things like ice and vegetables and sharpened knives on the street corners. Brooklyn was a different place.

INTERVIEWER: When -- when do you remember first becoming aware of unions? How did your opinion of unions develop?

MR. DONOHUE: My dad had always been a union guy but I never knew what he had really done in the unions. The unions were always a part of our lives. We were always in a union. You always had to be part of a union, especially in Brooklyn back then. Back then Brooklyn had seven newspapers, all in one borough.

And it was funny because people would say, well, you live in New York. Well, we lived in Brooklyn; we didn't live in New York. New York was Manhattan across the island. And basically unions were a way of life in my family, in my neighborhood.

Later on I found out, after my father passed way, that he had actually helped found the bartenders' union in Brooklyn back some 25 years before he died, 30 years before he died actually.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. When did you first become aware of an organization called CSEA?

MR. DONOHUE: I was doing what every young man should do in his life. I was bumming around on Long Island after getting out of high school and figuring out whether I wanted to go to college, and what happened was, my aunt had said, well, you gotta do something. It's getting cold and you can't run around in a bathing suit.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MR. DONOHUE: So she said why don't you go to work for the State? So -- no, actually, truthfully? I said I don't want to work. She says, then go to work for the State, so I -- I went -- I then went to work and I worked there about -- I guess about a month, month and a half and I got drafted. When I came back --

INTERVIEWER: You had -- you had gone to Central Islip?

MR. DONOHUE: Central Islip Psychiatric Center. I was in their orientation program when I got drafted in the Army, and two years later I got out of the Army and my aunt says -- same aunt says, well, they have to keep

your job. You should go find out about it. Pat Loff would be very proud of me. I show up on a Wednesday and some gentleman cutting the strings out of the inside of a white coat says, will you start tomorrow? And I went to work. I never even enjoyed being unemployed for a while after coming out of the jungle a long time ago.

Suddenly it was like, you know, now I'm in this job and truthfully I didn't know much about it, working with psychiatric patients. I had never really had orientation, but you start to learn. There was so many good people there.

But one day someone came in and said, listen, you wanna buy insurance? And I said, wait a minute. Let me get it straight. If I break my arm in a barroom fight in New Jersey I get paid? Yeah. So, truthfully, he says okay, fine, I'll take the insurance. He said, well, you gotta be a member of the Union and I said, sure. That was never a problem. I was a member of a Union. Back then the dues were 50 cents a month, so it's a totally different world at that point in time.

INTERVIEWER: Had they come to you from the Union when you were hired and signed you up?

MR. DONOHUE: Not really. From what I understand, was in the late sixties CSEA got collective bargaining. What I mean by that is they got the right to negotiate contracts. Prior to that it was collective begging. They -- they had no right to negotiate contracts with anyone, so think CSEA -- and this is -- this is like 1968, '69, so it was about that time, so I don't think they had done it then. They were still basically working with the insurance operation.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Can you hold on a second? And we'll be back.

(Pause.)

INTERVIEWER: So tell me about what -- what your early experiences with the Union in Central Islip were like?

MR. DONOHUE: Truthfully, it was a different kind of union. I had known unions in the context of working on different jobs where I had to be a member of a union, very rigid

meetings and there were all kinds of problems that were discussed at different times.

Back then CSEA was really -- I think just finding out what it could do, and what it could do was kind of interesting. We -- the first Union meeting I ever went to was held in the bottom of a bowling alley on the grounds of CI. They used to have it for the mental patients, and they gave me a can of Ballantyne beer and an envelope.

In the real old days water coolers had little like envelopes you pulled out. They were waxed in the inside and you -- it was full of Fleischmann's booze and a can of beer and there was this Irish guy standing up in front of everybody, Tom Fratell, saying you want to know what we did at the convention? Well, we got drunk and we tried to get laid, and that was the issue. That was -- that was what the Union did at that time.

Now I'm not gonna lie. I was the ripe old age of about -- at that point about twenty-three, having a great time, meeting young ladies everywhere I could, enjoying life, so Union

meetings weren't necessarily on the agenda. Ironically, I really got involved in the Union in CI after I got married.

I remember my wife asking did I want a night out with the boys and I said, no, but I'll take one with the girls, and she said no to that. But a friend of mine came to me and said would I help him become an officer in the Union, actually president, and I said sure. He was a nice guy. I -- I didn't understand what the Union meant even at that time.

So I went on vacation, came back and I said, well, I'll help you. He says have you ever thought about runnin' for president. No, and I never had. I was never part of what I was looking at. What he said after that was interesting. He said, well let's, you know, very honestly we need to get somebody who can get elected. He had checked the waters and he couldn't quite do that.

CI at the time had 2700 members and out of the 2700 members -- they had a rule about attending 12 meetings a year. Out of the 2700 members about 20 people were qualified to run

for office given that rule.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, if you wanted to run for office you had to have attended 12 meetings?

MR. DONOHUE: Yes, within a year, or you could not run. Other than the incumbent officers and their immediate families, there were very few people who qualified. In the election before I ran there were actually two candidates. They were two-year terms then, by the way. There were two candidates and there were a total of 85 votes cast. Total out of 2700 people.

When my friend Mike talked to me about running, we were past the period of time when you could be nominated, so we got petitions signed. We got about 500 names on a petition, and not that people were -- were saying they were in love with me. They were unhappy with the current occupant of the local, the president, and they wanted a change. At least I believe.

We then had an election. No, I'm sorry, that's wrong. What happened was after we

presented our petitions to the president and he said, well, it's too late to put your name on the ballot, little did I know that all you gotta do is put your name on a little piece of paper in the machine. But he said no.

We were then informed by a gentleman named Flamingbaum, who was then the regional president, that no one could stop me from running as a write-in, and to a certain degree we made history. We got over 500 people to vote in that election for me. As I said before, not because they were in love with me, because they really didn't like the current president. But realistically they got involved in the Union. They took the time to get involved. They literally were standing in a line for hours writing my name on a machine and it had to be spelled correctly. If it wasn't D-o-n-o-h-u-e, it didn't count.

So people took the time to get involved and made a difference. CSEA then, after the election was over, said that they didn't believe it was the right way to do it; that other members should have had a right to

run and hold office. We had another election. My opponent in the first election got 250 votes to my 500. The second election I got 700, he got 250 votes.

And I like to joke that since then it's been going downhill ever since, but every election the members came out and more and more members voted in each election.

INTERVIEWER: Now, when you were doing the write-in election, I mean were you actively campaigning or was it one -- something to do, and kind of done as a lark, more than anything else?

MR. DONOHUE: Well, actually I was -- I got a little mad when the incumbent president said that I couldn't run, knowing what I did know about the fact that any members have a right to be involved in the election process. And when I got mad, I decided let me try it. My wife said to me, go do what you're gonna do because she knew she was -- no point talking to a dumb donkey when it came to that. And, yeah, we put our -- I had to write my name -- well, actually we did my name on a piece of paper and

made about 5000 copies of the stupid thing and handed it out to everybody so they could write it in the right way.

We went to places like our laundry at the grounds of CI, which was very heavily minority workers. People who had never voted in an election on-site or an election at all in some cases. We made a deal with the manager of the laundry that they would be picked up and taken up to vote and brought back to work and he actually gave 'em a half hour more to get involved because he was kind of surprised that people were willing to reach out to the members, to really say to them come in.

Sometimes CSEA become like a very close-knit family. Doesn't want other people involved. That was the CI that I found then. I also found a lot of people who wanted to be involved. All you had to do was ask 'em to get -- to understand that it's their Union, not mine. They can make it.

I love when people talk to me about that, well, is a write-in that unique? Well, if I would have known then what I know now, I would

have never tried it. No one wins a write-in. You win a write-in because people are mad. They're mad enough to get involved.

My job then as president was to keep them involved, to make them understand they can make a difference.

INTERVIEWER: So what happened when you became local president?

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, all hell broke loose. Some of the deals that had been there for years disappeared quickly. We went out and got 52 shop stewards and we didn't fire any of the old shop stewards. What we said was, we need you. We need you to give us your experience, your knowledge, but things are different. Things are gonna change. Some people could cope with that; some people couldn't.

Some people -- at that time, like I said, I think I was at that point in my life about twenty-eight years old, twenty-nine, and some people considered me too young to be an officer of a local, let alone the president, so it was -- it was a period of adjustment for a

lot of the old-timers because things were changing and it was a period for the younger people to stand up, to get involved in the Union.

You can only say I want your help but if no one comes forward, you lose, so we actively were soliciting people all over the place. Night shifts, day shifts.

INTERVIEWER: What -- what year was this, mid-seventies?

MR. DONOHUE: I got elected in 1975. I believe it was '75.

INTERVIEWER: So at the same time you're taking on this role, there's also a lot of change happening in CSEA at that time, too.

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, there was. It was the beginning, I think, of major changes in the Union. I didn't know totally about them at the time. Ted Wenzel who had been the president for a number of years was -- was on the verge of losing the next election to Bill McGowan, who was from West Seneca in Region 6. He was an electrician. Bill was trying to change the Union from an association that Ted Wenzel had

every right to be proud of, but since collective bargaining come into place, it had to become a union. We had a responsibility to our members. We had a responsibility to the people that we represented to make it a union.

INTERVIEWER: How -- how did you become an officer of the Long Island Region of CSEA?

MR. DONOHUE: All of -- you know, I'd love to say to you that I planned everything that ever happened. I became an officer by running for first vice president of the region against a gentleman named Jim Corbin who was --

INTERVIEWER: What year was this?

MR. DONOHUE: That would have been in 1978, and Jim was the president of Suffolk County local which was a county local of about 5000 people. As I said, I was the president of CI which was about 2700 members, and we both ran for the position. He was the incumbent and I beat him and it was, again, it was one of those situations where here I was coming from a smaller local than the incumbent officer I was running against, but people again wanted

something different.

I believe the good people have given me a chance to change the Union where I can and I -- I firmly believe no one gets elected alone. It's good people that get you elected. They have to believe in something. They have to see something in you and you gotta prove you can work for them.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you decide to run?

MR. DONOHUE: I decided to run because realistically I felt that Jim wasn't doing the job. That was my opinion, but it was also the opinion of a number of other officers; that a lot of things that we had hoped to have happen, Jim was young and we would hope that he was standing up and doing the things he needed to, weren't being brought forward.

That doesn't mean you fight with the incumbents. That means you give them different ideas. If all you're going to do is say, yes, everything we've been doing over the years is good, then you're not doing your job. You should question what goes on. You don't have to

fight and burn down the buildings but you question it. You look at it. How do we make it better? Because everything can be made better.

INTERVIEWER: So at the time then in 1978 when you're elected as the first vice president of the Long Island Region, the president is a guy named Irving Flamingbaum.

MR. DONOHUE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about Irving.

MR. DONOHUE: Irving -- Irving was a friend, first off. I have to qualify it that way. Irving was the man who called me and said they -- no one can stop you from running as a write-in. Now Irving did not know who I was. I would love to think Irving knew who I was and thought I was a great guy for the job, but he didn't like the incumbent officer in CI either. But Irving was one of those people that once we got to work together, I respected intently.

Besides being a bright man he was a committed man. He was one of those people who took Nassau Local, which then represented over 20,000 members, and hand-carried dues or collected dues, I should say, from those

members. Built that local into a local of over 20,000 members, not because he was a sweet, gentle man, because he was a tough hard-nosed son-of-a-pup, but he cared about the people he represented.

INTERVIEWER: Now did -- did he -- I mean did he hold the position of region president and Local 830 president concurrently?

MR. DONOHUE: Yes, he did until about 1979 when that changed. That changed in about '79 where you could only be regional president. You couldn't hold two titles. You could only hold one. And in Irving's case he was good for the region because Irving basically did care about everybody. It wasn't just his local, and that was helpful to me. It taught me to look at things in a broader perspective.

Although I was a State worker, we had a lot -- we had predominant local government people and school district people, so you just don't worry about one group. You have to worry about all of 'em and learn to deal for all of them.

INTERVIEWER: Now tell me about Irving

himself, because I take it he had kind of a rich and lengthy history in CSEA at that time.

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, Irving had been the original -- besides being regional president he was the council president back when we had councils. That goes back to the fifties. When CSEA first started it was basically all State workers. What happened then was the idea in 1940s, '49 I believe, it allowed local government people to come in. He joined the local governments and CSEA became a lot bigger. At one point we were 350,000 people. Just about every public employee in the state of New York was a CSEA member.

Irving started as a local -- started as a local -- not local president, a local -- I guess you'd call him organizer. Back then we didn't even have a local president. We had chapter presidents. Irving was one of those and he worked his way up. He was a pharmacist for Nassau County. He helped -- as I said, he collected dues by hand. He helped build a stronger operation, bringing people into Nassau County, the towns and villages besides just the

county workers, making it the largest and strongest operation on the Island and the largest in the entire state.

And he was -- as I said, he was -- he was at times everybody had an uncle like Irving, and other times you wouldn't want to meet him in a fistfight 'cause he'd beat your brains out.

INTERVIEWER: Now, he was -- at the time you became first vice president, he was fairly advanced in years.

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, yeah. Irving -- well, Irving had been around -- Irving, when I became executive vice president, was about seventy-one years old. Irving at that point was one of our senior senior people. He had actually run for president against Ted Wenzel at one point and lost, but Irving was probably the dean of the board when it came to that. He was the -- one of -- he was the oldest and probably the most respected person on the board.

He had a unique way of doing business at times. You didn't have to ask Irving twice what his opinion was. He'd tell ya. Even if he didn't like it, he'd tell ya. We had a simple

case in the Concord one time when someone questioned whether Irving, as the local president and -- or the regional president had all of the people from Nassau County that should have been there. There should have been about 250 delegates there from Nassau County. And as you're well aware, we pay for one delegate per thousand from -- for locals, and when that happened there were only about maybe 50 or 60 of them there, and the question was whether he had proxies for everybody.

Irving pointed out that if you give him a roll of toilet paper he'd give you all the proxies you need. It was his way of doing business. It was a different union back then.

The Taylor Law was just getting going. Collective bargaining was just happening. We weren't even part of the AFL-CIO at that point, although Irving was one of the first international vice presidents we had, along with Bill McGowan, our president at the time. Bill beat Ted Wenzel back in I think it was like '77 and we had a trial affiliation starting in '78 and Irving and Bill were the first two

international vice presidents for CSEA serving on AFSCME's board.

INTERVIEWER: The contrast must have been quite striking though 'cause he was kind of the -- the elder statesman of CSEA and you were a fairly young man at that time, and I would imagine that you were by no means the heir apparent.

MR. DONOHUE: Oh, no.

INTERVIEWER: Even though you were first vice president.

MR. DONOHUE: The term first vice president is a euphemism for the guy who, when the president can't be around, they need a body to stand in for him. That's it. Irving ran Region One. He was in charge. He was the president. Clearly as the first vice president I got to work with him a lot, and to be fair, he cared enough to help me become better at what I did; to help me understand local governments better -- to help me understand the laws better.

Also, to make me understand that as a union official there are very few times when you can say "no comment" and there should never be a

time when you would mean no comment. You have a position. The position is what your members do. We answer to a higher authority, we answer to our members, than most other people do. Politicians come and go. We're still here.

Back then I remember our -- our 50th anniversary or 75th anniversary in New York City and thinking of Irving if he was still there and Jimmy Lennon and Jack Gallagher and all -- Tom McDonough, all of the people that made the Union what it is, all of those retirees that helped build the strength in the Union. Irving was probably the best ambassador you can imagine. Here was a seventy-one year old man, going on seventy-two.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m. So what -- what then happened to Irving that -- in the end elevated you to president of the Long Island Region?

MR. DONOHUE: In September, I believe it was September of 1980, Irving passed away and he passed away about nine months before our elections in the region.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us the

circumstances of his passing?

MR. DONOHUE: Yeah. Irving -- we had just come off an AFSCME convention and Irving was at a local meeting in Nassau County where they were debating issues that had come up at the convention or about the convention. Irving clearly had his own opinions about what the locals should or shouldn't do and the bad part about it, Irving being a pharmacist, I believe that Irving also was treating himself, and he collapsed at the meeting. Jerry Donohue, Nick Abitello, and the other people brought him back, but by the time the ambulances got him to the hospital, he had passed again. And he -- it was difficult.

I remember that night in my own life, my wife was on me about, you know, how long you gonna keep playing at this game, because reg...vice presidents of the region were not paid. This was not a career move. This was not, well, how long you gonna go out and enjoy yourself and do this but your kids need to go to college and you need to move up. I was a truck driver for the State of New York, so we had --

we actually had come back from somewhere and after we put the kids to bed I had said, well, you know, tomorrow I will talk to my vice president about him taking more responsibility and he's trying to do something, 'cause the last thing I'm gonna do is take from my family, take from my children's future and my wife. And, as I said, this wasn't a paying job at that point.

That night I got a phone call first from Bill Griffin, the regional director, who said maybe I should come in tomorrow because Irving wasn't feeling well. I no sooner hung up the phone then Mike Curtin and Nick Abitello were on the phone saying that Irving had passed away.

The next morning I walked into an office that was blank. Irving had been around for, God, 25, 30 years. He knew everybody on Long Island, had a picture of everybody staring around at him. That day that room was absolutely empty, including the nails that held the pictures up, and I suddenly looked around and said now I'm the president.

I had nine months to an election and

the question was whether or not the members -- what they were gonna do. He was a long-time leader who was gone. There were a number of long-time leaders with a lot more experience and a lot more knowledge than mine. Nine months later, although 60,000 members could run and 60,000 members could hold office, they elected me. Actually they elected me unopposed.

I'll never forget McGowan asking me how we did that and I said we had 60,000 people with 60,000 guns at people's heads and we told them that they can't run, which is, you know, is a joke. No one -- and that -- what frightened me more than anything was no one literally wanted to be regional president after Irving. No one put their name in, except for me.

INTERVIEWER: Certainly there were people who wanted to be regional president.

MR. DONOHUE: I -- egos being what they are, absolutely. I cannot imagine Long Island, which was the biggest region, not having people that wanted to be their -- but the only other thing that I -- I really base it on, my personal feeling is that people were willing to

give me a chance. They were willing to give me a chance to see what I could do. They understood that my belief is that you can't just leave things the way they are. You gotta change 'em. You gotta make 'em better. Not change for change sake, but you gotta look at everything to see what you can do better, and there's nothing you can't do better.

INTERVIEWER: So when you became region president, that was a full-time job; that you were on full-time release doing that job for the Union?

MR. DONOHUE: Absolutely. In 1969 there was a -- not 1969. 1979 we changed the job to a full-time job with a salary of \$30,000 and that was the salary that I was walking into at that point.

INTERVIEWER: Which was probably more than you were making for the State at that time?

MR. DONOHUE: It actually doubled what my paycheck was for the State and that -- that was the more interesting part. For the first time in my life I was now working for the Union and getting paid for it. I thought that would

make my wife happier. No, it didn't.

(Laughter.)

MR. DONOHUE: You know, when you -- when you look at life, you have a tendency, and that was what my wife was saying, you tend -- you have a tendency to take from people and when you're working for the Union you don't take from the members, but you steal from your family.

You steal in the sense of time and what they would like you to do and how they would like you to handle it because people's problems become your family. When someone has a problem you just can't walk away from 'em. I'm sorry. I can't talk to you know. Set up an appointment. Painfully that's never been my way. Or good or bad, that's never been my way.

The crazy part is my wife would argue that one night she left me a grievance form on the kitchen table and inside of it I said I knew you'd open this up so, yeah, it's one of those fun times. It was a real transition.

INTERVIEWER: What was the biggest surprise for you when you became region president?

MR. DONOHUE: My biggest surprise was that people that had been more or less -- as I said, being the executive vice president of the region, had ignored -- I could be at a meeting and walk out of the room 19 times, disappear for two hours, nobody cared. They had the president; the president knew what was going on.

Suddenly, now I was the expert. The day after Irving died I had --

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MR. DONOHUE: (Continuing) -- executive vice president.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. DONOHUE: You know, basically that people didn't care what I did. They really, you know, I was the executive vice president but they had the president. Suddenly now you're the president. Two days after Irving died I'm doing an issue on real property taxes and I have to explain why -- I have to defend our position to the County Legislature and I'm using Irving's comments. You point at so-and-so, you look at so-and-so, and what I do is I close it up and I said I can't -- you have the written commentary

in front of you, but let me tell you what it's like being young, being in Nassau County, tryin' to get a house, tryin' to live here when everything is so high and so expensive, and not making the kind of money that you'd want to make.

And when I got done I had a real sense I knew what I was talking about, but what frightened me more than anything were the people in front of me absolutely believing I knew what I was talking about. Everyone -- you were now the expert. The president was dead. You're the new president. You know everything and everything about it. To the members, even to this day, they come and they say -- they expect you to solve their problems.

I go out to visit them to give them a chance to talk to me about their Union. I don't think they understand. I get from them something that I'm -- I don't know that they get from me. I get a sense of why we're here and what we do. I get a sense from them why we're in the Union and why the Union's important. To a lot of them it's like, well, the president's

here, or he's a very busy man and he has all the answers to all my problems. No, I don't, but together we can find the answers to their problems.

INTERVIEWER: Let me just very briefly, to kind of wrap up this session, give me some very brief descriptions about some of the leaders that you've known in CSEA. Did you have much contact with Ted Wenzel?

MR. DONOHUE: Not -- not a lot. I was just coming on board as a local president when Wenzel was wrapping up his last two years of being president of CSEA, although I did get to talk to him a number of times. Ted was very involved in what was going on in Long Island, was actually instrumental in helping set up school district locals, breaking away from the counties and making them self-sufficient.

I guess if you're running down the list you have Bill McGowan, probably one of the nicest men you ever wanted to meet, but one of the most committed men you'd ever see to change this Union. He understood that -- I love the story of him locking everybody in Chancellor's

Hall over there to make sure that no one left until we became part of the American labor movement.

And I love all the self-righteous people who have the revisionist history in this organization. The thing I remember was Bill McGowan with that cigar in his face saying "nobody leaves." It wasn't a consensus of everybody being in favor. It was his will to make us face the reality we had to face and that was important.

The Irene Carrs.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that.

MR. DONOHUE: Irene -- Irene Carr was -- was the First Lady of CSEA. She was a woman who pushed the issues that we men sometimes forget about. I'm not talking about women's issues. I'm talking about having programs for children for day care, for having programs for children for home care. Irene was one of those people who thought of leave, family leave. It wasn't just a word; it meant men being home taking care of their children as much as women.

As a woman's leader, bar none. She

believed that women not only have a right but a responsibility, and I think that's the difference. A lot of women leaders will say, well, women should be here and women should be there. Irene said women should earn the right to be here and be there. Women should find the best candidates, regardless of whether they're men or women, and support them and nurture them and mentor them and bring them along.

Irene was the first one to say women deserve a chance, but to also point out women have responsibility to stand up and fight for what they want. No one gave Irene Carr anything. I remember Jack Gallagher, the treasurer, and Irene both fighting at one point. They were both part-time officers and they wanted to make one of them full time and it was like a holy war. Irene demanded to be full time and so did Jack. As it worked out Irene was able to put together enough of a fight so that both of them became full-time officers and CSEA became a better organization for it. I --

INTERVIEWER: Obviously we're gonna spend a lot of time on your relationship with

Joe McDermott but just give us a very brief description about Joe.

MR. DONOHUE: Joe McDermott was one of those kind of guys who sometimes people forget. He wasn't flamboyant in that sense of it. He was the kind of guy who -- and using his words for a minute, did the bricks and mortar. He found an organization that after Bill McGowan left -- and CSEA to a degree is a cult of personalities. It's like any big organization.

When Bill left there was a vacuum. What are we doing? How are we doing things? Joe knew we had to change, but he did the nonsexy things. He brought on young, bright staff. He brought on people that had a vision. He brought on people that were gonna be accountable, people that were gonna be around for a while, so most people are still here 20 years later.

Joe -- Joe was the kinda guy who, if you needed somebody to stand up for ya, he was a rock, a wall. If you needed somebody to be verbose and cordial and kissing necks and running around places, that was not Joe. Joe

loved numbers. Joe was the kinda guy who would remind you he was an engineer, not by what his job was, but just by the fact of the way he approached things. He was very analytical. He was very concise and sometimes that was (inaudible) to a lot of people.

We were in the business of sound bites and personalities that sometimes go beyond the norm. The more radical, the more crazy, the more independent we seem to think are the brighter, better people. Joe McDermott was a very bright man. Flamboyant and the rest of it, no, but he was at a time when we needed to build those bricks and mortars. You can't build a house without a foundation and Joe believed that.

You want to do the final (inaudible) piece?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, sure.

MR. DONOHUE: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: I'm happy --

MR. DONOHUE: This -- this is a piece you'll add on somewhere, probably with the Irving stuff. Irving was at -- at a meeting and

the meeting was the argument. They were arguing over whether or not expenses should be paid, whether Irving had gotten expenses from AFSCME or had gotten expenses from CSEA, and whether the locals should pay him expenses. It was one of those situations where everybody's ego was out of bent and, very honestly, it was also a time when it was the first convention we'd ever gone to, so people weren't quite sure, but clearly there was a question of how many times can you be paid for the same hotel room.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MR. DONOHUE: And that -- that, I think, brought about a lot of the pressure on Irving that night, the pressure for him to -- in Irving's passing, it's sad to say that was the reason that killed him. But by the same token, he was 72 years old, he was medicating himself, and he'd also known at the time that the Civil Service Commission under a gentleman named Bayou had refused to extend his Civil Service coverage, which meant he would have to retire, and that was something Irving really never thought he would ever have to do, and to this

day, I can't think of a better friend than
Irving Flamingbaum.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

MR. DONOHUE: Without a guess.

INTERVIEWER: As I say, we have hours
and hours to --

(Whereupon, the interview of Danny
Donohue was concluded.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, JEANNE M. CARPENTIER, do hereby
certify that the preceding is a true and accurate
transcription of the taped proceedings held in
the above-entitled matter to the best of my
knowledge and belief.

Sworn to before me this

_____day of_____

My commission expires
