

**Interview with William Blom, 7/24/01**

**FV:** For the record, would you tell us your name, the positions you held and the remembrances you're ready to tell us about, and then I'll have some questions.

**WB:** Okay, my name is William Blom, B-L-0-M. It's been pronounced every way you can think of, but it's Blom. The position I held with CSEA for 30 years was Director of Research. It was very interesting back then, back in 1962. The hiring was a lot different than it is now. You had a final interview and it was with people that were pretty high up in the organization and the law firm that was retained. I had an interview back in what used to be Keeler's restaurant down on State Street in Troy-not in Troy; excuse me, in Albany-and I was interviewed by Joe Feeley, who was President of CSEA at the time. And Joe Lockner, the Executive Director; John DeGraf, who was one of the partners in the law firm retained, DeGraf Foy Conboy and Holt Harris; and Henry Galpin, who was the Research Analyst at that time. Salary Research Analyst. It was very interesting and I guess I was a little bit naive. I had just gotten a degree-from the University of Michigan in statistics, a master's degree. When they asked the questions and so forth, I remember saying to them, "Well, is there gonna be a chance for some real research? Can we do some things that would be important, you know, as I view it, to the membership that haven't been done before?" Everybody kind of chuckled, started to laugh, and then somebody said "Sure!" And I thought to myself something's different here, something's wrong. And I found out why. Because all your time is taken up doing the things that had to be done for the membership in terms of solving problems, and there wasn't any time for doing statistical type research, you know, on any topic that might be of interest or need to the members. So, that's the beginning. I liked the job very much. It's been a job that is so complex that you never know what the problem is going to be from one day to the next. And that made it very interesting. You get to be knowledgeable in civil service law and local procedures, talking with groups of people on the management side as well as on the CSEA side, and I enjoyed it very much.

**FV:** You mentioned a lot of people that you worked with when you first met, like Joe Feeley and ... Give us some of your recollections about the people, the personalities, how they interacted with people.

**WB:** Well, Joe Feeley was the President of CSEA at that time. At that time, it wasn't a full time job. It was a part time job, and he worked for the State Tax Department up on the State Campus, and there was a telephone connection that went-his phone rang up there, it also rang on the President's desk here, so he didn't miss, you know, any calls so to speak. He had a secretary here and he'd come down to CSEA usually after work or about three o'clock. So you had-except on special occasions-so you really had to be around to know what his thoughts were what he would like to have done. We used to kid about the day starting at 5:30 in the afternoon. But usually there was a few of us that would congregate in his office and we'd discuss the problems and so forth. Joe was, I would say, a rather easy-going person. He was a nice person to work with and for, and everybody seemed to get along pretty well with Joe. Now, the Executive Director, Joseph Lockner, was kind of a fireball. I mean he had his nose into everything so to speak. He was called 'Mr. CSEA' because of all his years with the organization. He was with CSEA long before I was, when they started with a little office over in the State Capital. That's where it all began, I guess. And when I started, we were at 8 Elk Street down the road down here. So Joe, he could sit and talk for hours and talk about everything that happened all the way back, and it's too bad that he passed on because if he were here today, I'm sure

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you'd three notebooks full, and so forth. But he was okay to work with, but he was, like I said, kind of a fireball. You know, if you didn't do something the way he felt-Blam! But that's needed. So he was very effective, I think, as an Executive Director. The law firm, DeGraf Foy Conboy and Holt Harris, was retained by CSEA. There were no in-house lawyers like there are now. And that made it very interesting too. The first one that I remember working with, assigned to us from the law firm under retainer was an individual by the name of Harry Albright. Now he was-he handled it pretty well. He had an office upstairs in the CSEA building, and he came over about half of each day or mid-afternoon or whatever. The attorneys always represented us over with the politicians. Usually the attorney and the president would go over and sometimes some staff would go. And back then, it was most interesting because there was no Taylor law, no negotiations, nothing that would force the State to sit down and talk to you, even. But CSEA had developed a relationship whereby we had regular conferences with the budget director of the State. At that time, when I started, it was Dr. T. Norman Hurd and his deputy budget director was a man by the name of Al Marshall. And we did most of the business with the two of them. Now they didn't have to listen, but throughout many administrations, political ministrations, they listened because they knew that we had our finger on some of the problems that they might not be aware of-now, what's causing unrest among the employees; how are we doing with respect to salaries? Well, they had research too and they knew, but we'd point out to them how there were inequities in terms of job titles and salary allocations that went with the job titles, and they listened but they didn't have to give us anything so to speak. But it usually worked out where they would tell us what they were going to do as a result of what we said, and what they weren't going to do. And we did a pretty good job I think for the membership that way, pre-Taylor Law times.

**FV:** How did you get the research, how did you go about getting the research from the membership about the inequities ... ?

**WB:** Well, a lot of it came from the annual convention, delegate meeting, if you will. Research usually had a booth, as did other places like the communications department, and we were available throughout the entire meeting. We would tell them what Research is responsible for and if they had any problems with any of the delegates, they could come to us and we'd sit down and talk to them about it. And if it was something we had to take-back and find out more about, we'd do that and then give them a report. And if they had any members.that they wanted to meet with us, they'd just tell the membership that we were available, here's the telephone number; make your arrangements if you want meet and discuss a problem that you think the Research department can help you with, feel free. And we were very happy to do that. We go a lot of our information that way.

**FV:** So the face-to-face...

**WB:** Yeah, the face-to-face-a lot of it. And a lot of it was in writing, you know. You'd get complaints...

**FV:** Did you do surveys?

**WB:** Yeah, we did a few surveys. We weren't staffed highly. When I started, there was myself, the Assistant Director. I think they changed the name to that. Got a Director and an Assistant Director with nobody under you, you know. We had an Assistant Director named Tom Coyle and we had a secretary. That and all the research files were in a little room down at 8 Elk Street, and there

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wasn't much room. There wasn't much space at all. As time went on, we were able to hire a research assistant, so he got stuck in that little room too. We had less room to breathe. But that's how it started and it worked up from there to a maximum when I left, I think I had, including a budget analyst analyzing State and local budgets, a maximum of probably eight or nine people. So we managed fairly well on what we had. Of course, back then, CSEA was pretty much an organization for State employees. There weren't any locals, you know, counties, political subdivisions of any kind, cities, towns, villages, school districts, and that all built up in that 30-year period. We developed a county division to go along with state division, and it became very active. After a while, toward the end of my time with the organization, county division numbered as many if not more than the state division—they did number more. Then that got a little more difficult because then you got involved—now I'm talking post-Taylor Law—you got involved in representing them and they'd send their demands to you and you would have to develop the supporting information for their demands so it could be used in local negotiations. Sometimes we'd be required to go and sit down at the table and make a presentation on salaries or fringe benefits or civil service law, rules and regulations, which we had to know fairly well. So, that became, as I said, a very interesting part of the job because you learned a lot. Now, let's see, we had the State negotiating units that were set up with the Taylor law and we had the administrative unit, the institutional unit, technical services unit—I think that was called operational services unit—and the administrative services unit, which were the clerical people. And we had to negotiate with the State on behalf of each unit. There was a part of the contract that was applicable to all, so you negotiated that for all of them, and then you had individual problems within each unit that you had to negotiate, and that took a lot of time and, again, was very interesting. And you'd have side meetings with the State to see what kind of data they would look for and what we could develop. We developed a good working relationship with the State of New York, after the Taylor Law. And the State would also designate certain jobs. In the beginning, it was from existing jobs. After that, it got to be new jobs they set up, designate them as in the management/confidential category, which means they couldn't be represented by any union. So what we had to do then was we'd get the list from the State, look at the job titles, look at the duty descriptions and try to determine, based on criteria established by the Governor's Office of Employee Relations in conjunction with Public Employee Relations Board, PERB, whether or not we really felt that these jobs should be excluded from collective bargaining and be in the management/confidential group. And that got very interesting too because you'd talk to GO-Governor's Office of Employee Relations, GOER, about it. If we couldn't settle it with them, then you went to a hearing at the Public Employment Relations Board. That was like a judicial setting; you made your arguments and so forth and so on. And we were, I would say, fairly successful in doing that.

**FV:** Now who was governor when this started?

**WB:** I think it was Rockefeller. Yeah, I was here for Rockefeller, Harriman, Carey, Malcolm Wilson. I may not have them in the right order. And of course, Cuomo.

**FV:** Did you meet with any of them?

**WB:** Oh, yeah. I have some pictures of the whole CSEA group with Rockefeller in the middle and so forth. But generally speaking, someone like me with my place

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in the organization, wasn't permitted or didn't have too much to say. But Rockefeller was generally, I would say, a friend of State employees, probably on a comparative basis, my guess would be, we go more for State employees during the Rockefeller years than at any other time. We met with him quite a bit and discussed things, I mean our entire group. And the same thing happened with the other governors. It got interesting. You go to see how they acted and handled themselves, and whether they wanted to be involved or didn't want to be involved, you know. A couple of them-I'm not going to mention names-you know, would just as soon stay out of it. I've got my people here; you can talk to them. And then the people who represented the governor would say, well he had the final decision, you know, so you're getting the runaround, but it worked out all right in the end.

**FV:** So the biggest change was probably under Rockefeller, when the Taylor law came in, right? I mean, for you.

**WB:** Yeah, the Taylor Law made a big change because...

**FV:** Tell us about before and after.

**WB:** Well, I kind of hinted at it. Before, there was no requirement to sit down with any representatives of state and local government employees. If they did so, they considered it out of the goodness of their hearts-you know, the local people and the state people. And we had conferences with the State, as I had indicated, in the Budget Director's office, so-called "negotiations," which were not true negotiations because we didn't have the Taylor Law, which required them to sit down and talk to you, and to do certain things. And the political subdivisions, when they became part of the organizations, you had, again-oh, I didn't mention this but back when I started the field staff, they were called field representatives, not collective bargaining specialists, and I think there were six or eight for the whole state, and that's all we had. So you had to help a lot more. You know, a lot of them now would do it on their own. They do their own collection data and find out things from here and there and use that information. That is when I left. We were still involved in helping them with fact finding-fact-finding before whatever government agency you had to appear for the fact-finding. We'd present data on salaries, fringe benefits, like I said, civil service law and local management/confidential designations also. And it changed when the Taylor Law came in because that's what they had to do. I mean it was an unfair labor practice not to talk. That made a big difference because at least you felt as though what you're doing, somebody's going to listen to it and really listen to it. And they did. Of course, most of the time, they didn't agree but that's what made the world go around, as far as labor negotiations are concerned.

**FV:** So you were there for pretty much all the major issues in CSEA.

**WB:** Yeah, I think I was.

**FV:** Can you enumerate on them, tell us what they were, the people involved, how things were handled?

**WB:** Let me get a drink.

**FV:** Yeah, go ahead. Take a break. I'm going to stop the tape. Are you from Troy or are you just living there now?

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**WB:** No, I'm from Troy.

**FV:** I was born there too.

**WB:** Were you really?

**FV:** On Liberty Street, way back.

**WB:** Oh, yeah?

**FV:** Then we moved up to 104st Street. You know the grocery store? It was owned by my grandmother and grandfather; it's still going.

**WB:** Oh, really? Yeah, Troy used to be a great place, I thought.

**FV-** It's coming back.

**WB:** When I was a kid, you could play on the streets without any worry and so forth. I grew up on that horrible street now, 9th Street. Oh gosh, that's terrible, but back then it was wonderful.

**FV:** Well, 8th is just one street down, where Mullaney was (unintelligible).

**WB.-** Yeah, right. Just the second house in was it from Hoosick and 8th.

**FV:**...lived up on 15th Street, off of Hoosick.

**WB:** Oh, uh huh. I see.

**FV:** (unintelligible) It's a great town. I still love it. The history there is amazing.

**WB:** Oh, it'll come back, I think.

**FV:** Anyway, we were talking about the major issues. I guess you touched on a lot of them. If there's any that you haven't, this is the time to...

**WB:** I think our major problems that we tried to solve in Research involved the salaries and fringe benefits of State employees. You know, talking about supporting information for health insurance, for work week, paid time off-I said salaries, I guess-all the different kinds of leave, sick leave, annual leave, which is vacation, and some working conditions in some of the facilities were not the best. Now, I don't want to leave the impression that we solved those. What we did was try gathering information to give either to the field rep or a local president or what have you, to use. And in some instances, we did have to go and participate. But it was a general broad area and, as I keep saying, I guess, that's what makes the job so interesting. You're involved in so many different things, sometimes new things you never were involved in before or even heard of come to light, and it makes it even more interesting. You find out about that and you look into it and get information. We got information from other states, California, Michigan, Florida, Ohio, Texas, Illinois and so forth, to use in comparing with New York State to argue some of the benefits. Of course, the employer's only going to say you picked the favorable ones for you, you know. And they'd come up with a list and show us ones that were in favor of them. And we used to say "hey, we're not running an election here.

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Let's just talk about what the situation is as best we can, you know, throughout the country." So those things were all interesting and that's primarily what the involvement was. Mine was, you know, somewhat narrow in a way because it didn't involve all the political stuff and it didn't involve a lot of the other representations that the employees needed, meetings with their employer because they thought they were treated wrongly or charges were brought up against them for some action or whatever, were taken care of either by the field staff, or now, field staff with attorneys. That was the limitation pretty much on the type of thing we did.

**FV:** Did you find out about working conditions in other places and compare that to here, safety issues ... ?

**WB:** Oh, yeah. Right. Sure. We'd send out questionnaires with a long explanation and offer the other jurisdictions with a copy of the results. That usually was the key to getting an answer. You know, they didn't have to do anything if they didn't want to. We'd send them a copy of the results. But, yeah, we did all kinds of analyses of different situations and different jurisdictions, and the important thing is you have to make sure you're talking about apples and apples.

**FV:** Now Steve told me that in the 50's and 60's-he told me to ask this question-CSEA started these advertising and PR to get its message across. Now your input helped that effort and you gave ammunition for the PR people and the advertising people to help change public opinion. What kind of stuff did you...?

**WB:** Probably, if I recall, what we did was similar to what I just told you. You know, there's a lot of public employees who have relatives. If you count them all, you're probably, in New York State, talking a million plus or more, maybe more than that. And the idea was to not only convince the State employees and perhaps an employer here or there, but to get the public on your side as much as possible, and this is a little out of my area because it's more Steve's and the people we had back then, but we used to develop information to try to make everything look good. You know, the State employees were doing this for you, doing that for you and so forth, and here's the measly little amount they're getting paid for doing it. Everybody thinks well, they don't work at all, all they do is sit around at a desk and they got all kinds of time off. Well, you'd try to disprove those things, you know. We provided information that could be used by what used to be called public relations department, communications, to do so.

**FV:** It hasn't changed much then. We still try to tell the same story.

**WB:** Yeah, I think so. (laughs)

**FV:** So you were there when you were at 8 Elk Street, so you saw the transition to 33 Elk, and then to here? Tell us about the workings of that. I mean, that must have been like a zoo.

**WB:** (Laughs) What wasn't? You know, really. Eight Elk was very, very small. I mean, there was hardly anything you could do to hold a meeting or whatever. You know, there was a room off the one bedroom we had for research. That was called a library. It was a little bigger we had a meeting table, and there were different offices on the two stories below it. But again, very small, not very many offices. So, it just started to grow and grow and grow, and we had to get

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out of there. So we built a building at 33 Elk. That, at the time, was sufficient to handle everything. As a matter of fact, they thought they were going to be able to rent the third floor out. Ha Ha.

**FV:** What year was that, 33 Elk? When did you move there?

**WB:** Oh, golly...

**FV:** Right around the Taylor Law, time, wasn't it?

**WB:** Yeah, I think so. I'd have to go look at the cornerstone to be honest.

**FV:** 1967?

**WB:** Yeah, then we were there for a few years. .

**FV:** You didn't rent the third floor out?

**WB:** No, we didn't rent the third floor out. It got filled very quickly with different committees and people and offices and staff. And then this building, of course, is the old Teachers Retirement building, this one right here. And that was for sale. They built a new one out at Corporate Woods. They looked into it and figured that this would be sufficient for a few years anyway, so they bought this building. And this was much more pleasant. I mean, you could-of course, there was no air conditioning at 8 Elk and in the summertime, you just melted in the pot. At 33 Elk, there was air; it was better working conditions. Here, of course, there's air, so in the summertime, it's not bad. Parking was a problem. Here, they had to buy the lot next door for parking because it didn't take long to fill the small parking lot. So I would say, right now, and I can't speak for the last nine years that I've been retired, but it seems a lot more sufficient for the operation than the other two did. It's all a matter of the growing process.

**FV:** Any other people or issues that you remember that you want to talk about? I know we've pretty much picked your brain about the...

**WB:** I got an interesting little story that will inject a little bit of humor that I got a kick out of. When I said we used to talk to the State over in the governor's conference room, representing State employees. I made a presentation once on salaries. I figured, heck, I didn't get my education for any reason. I better use a little statistical analysis here. It actually wasn't anything more than kids get today in high school. I was talking about salaries, mean, medium, mode, standard deviations and all that kind of stuff, and I made the presentation. On their side, they had-one of the characters was an attorney named Howard Rubenstein. He made lots of presentations for them, but nothing statistical and so forth. So, when I got done with the presentation, since he was their spokesman, one of the States-I think it may have been Dr. Hurd, said, "Howard, did you get that?" And Howard said, "I don't know what the hell he's talking about." That was one of my personal laughs in the job. I enjoyed that immensely, when you can get something over on an attorney who doesn't know what you're talking about.

**FV:** And get him to admit it.

**WB:** Yeah, and get him to admit it; you're right. That's almost impossible.

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**FV:** All right, I've got a couple of more questions and then we'll let you go, but these are—we could spend another hour with these questions I think. What are you most proud of in your CSEA career?

**WB:** Well, there probably could be several things. A lot of it involved the types of information we provided for negotiation, the analyses so to speak, whether it be salary or fringe benefit or what have you. I think we represented ourselves well, and one thing I didn't mention is the reclassification/reallocation process. Now this means-reclassification means changing a job title and putting it in a different job class so that it more represented the duties being performed by incumbents. In other words, you don't have a cook working as clerk and if they're working as a cook, then you request to cook. You know, you've got to get the information, the arguments and so forth. And the same thing with salaries. I mean, again, outside of the salary negotiations, you go back and let's say you've got a group of people with a given title and they seem very low compared to other public jurisdictions. They just take that title. Write to the other public jurisdictions or, if you could, visit them and find out what they have. It might not be a comparable title, but a similar job. By comparing the duties of the job and the responsibilities, and then what salary did they pay. So that was the reallocation, change in salary grade. Reclassification was change in title to more adequately describe what the job is. So we got involved in those at the State level and we had presentations to the Division of Classification and Compensation and the State Civil Service Department, who had the responsibilities for granting or disapproving those. That involved writing briefs and getting them to them, and if the director felt that there had to be a hearing, they had a hearing. We usually would pick a couple of employees from the group we're talking about, the title, and go with them, make the presentation for them. The Civil Service appreciated that you had an employee there because if they think we were telling them something that wasn't true, then they would ask them, but that usually didn't happen. Then if the Director of Classification and Compensation denied the application or the appeal, you appealed it to the State Civil Service Commission. And you did the same kind of representation there. You wrote a brief indicating why the Director of Class and Comp was wrong. It's like a legal process, practically. So that was very interesting. I participated in a lot of that. One of the biggest satisfactions, back then, we had about 30,000 what were called mental hygiene attendants, where since then a lot of facilities are closed down. But they fought for years to get reallocated, higher salary grade. I think by the time we left, we got them reclassified, not all at once, but to a psychiatric attendant and grade 7. They were at grade 4. And for 30,000 people, a three-grade jump was, you know, pretty good and costly to the State. So that was a big satisfaction.

**FV:** Anything else?

**WB:** Well, let's see. I probably can think of ten of them after I leave.

**FV:** Well, I'll ask another question and if you remember something, go ahead, just jump back to it. The next question on my list here is just the opposite. What are you most disappointed by in your career?

**WB:** Well, I suppose—well, if you're talking about from the point of view of CSEA, working for CSEA, not too much. I was generally pretty satisfied. The only thing that would get to you once in a while was when you get backed into a corner by a group at a delegate meeting. Now, they have departmental delegate



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meetings: mental hygiene here, motor vehicles here and so forth, and each staff person was assigned to one of those meetings. I can remember I got stuck with mental hygiene more often than not, and that was the biggest meeting. We used to have somebody on the board of directors who was the mental hygiene representative on the board and who presided usually at those meetings. Well, a couple of times, she says to me, "Bill, I can't do it. I don't feel well." or "'You do it." We're ready to walk in door. I mean, to me, it's about to start. I didn't have any choice. I had to do it. So it went fine for a couple of meetings and then third time it got and I was presiding. Some guy gets up and he says, "Who the hell are you? You're only staff. You have no right to be up there, running this meeting." and so forth. I said, "That's fine with me, Sir, if you'd like to come up and take my place, feel free." Well, that quieted him down, but I mean, that was one-you know, you get a little scary. You're talking mental hygiene delegates, probably two to three hundred people, and you just wonder if it's going to be the start of something, you know that going to cause a big problem. But luckily it didn't. That was, you know, a kind of disappointing thing. Of course, you've got-I'm not talking now about CSEA, but some of those presentations to Civil Service and the State Commission and so forth on job titles or reclassification or reallocation, you could really believe in. You knew that what you were saying was absolutely right, and you'd get turned down and you'd find out later, you know, a few years later, they turned it down because they didn't have the money at the time to pay for it. That just-you felt, what the hell the use is. But you could never give up. And, generally speaking, over all, it worked out.

**FV:** All right. Now we may have touched on this, but the question is here so I might as well ask it. (unintelligible conversation in background). You want me to ask the rest I've got and then...? Okay, we're rolling again. All right, we may have covered this in another way, but let me ask the question this way. What do you see as the most important event during your time of involvement with CSEA?

**WB:** Well, I think THE most important event was the Taylor Law. I say that because it, as I mentioned before, formalized and granted certain rights to public employees in New York State that they didn't have before. And it made the unions-it gave them a place, a recognized place, so that they were more like the private sector unions. The disappointing part of it is there's no binding arbitration. That's a problem. The parties can agree to go to arbitration, can even get a member of PERB or one of their staff to arbitrate a matter or situation, but it's not binding. I mean, if both sides agree to accept it, fine. If they don't, too bad. There's no further step; that's it. So that's quite disappointing. I would hope some time that that would get amended to provide for binding arbitration.

**FV:** Do you see it happening?

**WB:** Well, it's been a number of years now and it hasn't happened. Yeah, I think I do. I think that they're going to realize some time that, looking at the record, that the unions haven't been outlandish in their demands or way out in left field, and that generally they could work with the unions, that they're agreeable to compromise and so forth; that "Hey, why not let an arbitrator in such cases make a recommendation that both will abide by. I don't know how long it will be but I think it's down the road someplace.

**FV:** Probably need another Rockefeller or...

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**WB:** (laughs) Maybe.

**FV:** All right. Let's look to the--history is--what'd Shakespeare says, "What's past is prologue." What lessons does CSEA's history bode for its future?

**WB:** Well, I think that if it looks back and looks at the progress that was made all the way through those years, and you take it step by step and expand on a lot of the things that happened, we can probably get to represent most employees in the state. And I would--all due respect to AFSCME--there might be a place where we could move out of state too. Who knows? You know, we might even go up to Alaska, right? I don't know if AFSCME is already there. They may be. So they're there. So we'll get the Eskimos; they get the rest of the population. (laughs) Or Hawaii, yeah.

**FV:** What do you think of--speaking of the future and representing more people--what do you think of this move of the recent past to represent non-government employees?

**WB:** Well, I think there's room for that. I think that there's a lot of non-government employees that are in jobs that are so related to government that public employee unions can better represent them than the private sector. I think that's the way it's developing and the way it will continue to develop.

**FV:** I just heard on the PBS this morning on the way in here that the research has proven that there are at least 30 percent of American people, families, are making twice what the government says is poverty level, but can't afford the basics. \$28, 000 a year is what it now takes to cover the basics, and 30 percent of Americans don't make it. So, what's the answer.

**WB:** Well, it depends on what the composition of the 30 percent is. I mean, where do they work? What kind of skills do they have? Probably none of them, or not too many of them, have any kind of formal representation with their employers, which they need. But there's always going to be some. I don't see how it could be eliminated, but I think it can be a lot better than 28 or 30 percent, a lot lower. I think that will happen with a little more push by the unions. Of course, you got a problem. Sorry about the squeal. You got a problem that today there seems to be a trend that supports the employer, not necessarily in the public sector, but more so in the private sector now, where the employer has more control, can tell the union, no we're not going to do this; we'll backfill; we'll hire employees if they go on strike; we, may not hire them back afterwards, and so forth. Well, we've gone through periods of time where they--if I can use the expression--wouldn't dare to that because of the outcome. Well, today, something is changing with respect to the employees because if I can say it this way, they're letting them get away with it, and I think that's a weakness somewhere in that they shouldn't be able to get away with it. Why should they--what's the value in having a legal provision for a strike? I mean if I'm an employer and I can backfill your job if you go on strike, what do you gain? I mean where's the power of the gathered group of the employees? and the union to get anything from the employer because of the right to strike? To me, it's gone in that respect. That's gotta change. I think it can change back.

**FV:** Do you still keep up with the CSEA news?

**WB:** Well, I still get the CSEA newspaper and read it every time I get it. Of course, Don Kelly, he's my son-in-law, so we talk about a lot of things.

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Most of the-you know, some problems about what do we do in this county, what do we do-not too much though; just a little bit.

**FV:** So, from where you started to where the union is now, what's your overall impression of CSEA?

**WB:** Well, I'm not saying that because I worked for them, but I think CSEA has done a hell of a job, a good job in not only getting membership but in representing them. And you gotta take into consideration the staff/member ratio. I mean for the number of members there are per staff member in any given area, like the field staff, in representing them at the workplace and so forth, for the number that we have, I think that they've progressed a lot, an awful lot. And I think they probably will continue to progress a lot. I would say that CSEA, in my mind, has done a very good job and that they hopefully will continue to do it in the future. Of course, it depends on the foresight of the leadership and so forth. One of the hardest things probably was CSEA to work with such a large board of directors. When you've got over a hundred people running an organization- heck, what is it; IBM has 12 or something like that? It's hard to get a meeting of the minds, and that takes a lot of effort too. And of course, a lot of that governs what CSEA does.

**FV:** Well, personally, I think a lot of the success of now has a lot to do with the beginnings and your participation and the people from back then, and people dedicated to their work, and you certainly were, and we appreciate it. Is there anything else you want to...

**WB:** Well, thank you. No. You gotta remember, I've been out of it for nine years, so there's probably a lot of things I could talk about if I was still working here that I don't know about. I try to keep up on some things, but you can't. It's that important to...

**FV:** Mostly history project. I just wanted to know a little bit about what you think is going on. Is there any stuff from that past that you haven't-that's gone through your mind that you want to tell us about? Now's the time. People, places, things.

**Voice:** How about changes in technology, in terms of the work that you do computers, the advent of computers your ability to represent...

**FV:**...then and now, yeah.

**WB:** Oh, yeah. That's a good point. We just started having computers up in the Research department when I left. We'd had them for about a year or two, and it made the comparisons a lot easier. It made getting information from different places a lot easier; saved a lot of time. You could manipulate figures and do things that you couldn't do before. Yes, that's a big step in progress and it's continuing, right Ed?

**Ed:** Yup. I remember the spreadsheets, the green spreadsheets, with the pencil, but he was a very neat printer. We could read his numbers better than anybody else's in the department.

**WB:** Yes. I think back on the time it took to do that compared to now, the printout you can get with a computer.  
(background conversation)

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**WB:** With a little calculator, a little desk calculator, that's all. But, those were the times. You made do with what you had. As a matter of fact, we didn't even know there was going to be such things as these desktop computers, back then.

(background conversation)

**WB:** No, I didn't mention that. You trying to hang me? (laughs) Which...? That was another thing that I didn't mention. The State adopted a program of comparable worth, and probably the only information that we gathered on comp worth-we knew where it was and why. But probably the important thing that we tried to do was to determine why it should be a program in cases where it is. In other words, if you had-let me give you an example. State Civil Service law required that the employing authority could make an appointment from one of the top three people, successful candidates on a civil service eligible list. They could take any one; they could take the third if they wanted to. Well, comp worth comes into the picture and they start saying, "Well, you gotta give some preference to a minority." Now I'm not saying that that was illegal, but I mean if there was a minority, let's say, in the top three, you give preference to the minority. We just got requests many times to find out if that person or persons were as well qualified. That was about the extent we had with comp worth because our position, at least I think CSEA's position was, if you got equal qualified candidates, it shouldn't make any difference, you know. And Civil Service did a lot of things to get around a lot of things, to get around the rule of three. They were using group scores and so forth, and this is group one, this is group two, this is group three; now we can make an appointment from anyone in the three groups, and the total in the three groups might be 100, 120. And you had to fight that kind of stuff and say it wasn't legal, it wasn't what was intended by the Civil Service law. That's about it. I think there's been...

**FV:** I just remembered, I think it's Mark Twain. He said, "There's lies; there's damn lies and statistics." (laughs) What do you think?

**WB:** Well, I think statistics are part of the lies and damn lies. But not worse. (laughs) No, I think that statistics-it depends on the person's definition. I mean if people call statistics just a compilation of numbers, you know, counting this number of people here in this category and so forth, that's not it. It's more like I said, getting more technical, you know, like in the polls, where they say there's a chance for plus or minus three percent error and probability of this happening and that happening. I think there's a lot to statistics that, well of course, that Mark Twain never knew about, but secondly that you can't categorize it in the same breath with lies and so forth because you can do a lot with statistics to show what you want. It depends on how you analyze the data, but it's not really lying because the information is there in numbers. You just manipulate by using various statistical formulae or whatever, a procedure, hoping that it comes out the way you want it. If it doesn't, you have to admit it. So, I think statistics is very valuable but people gotta remember it's not counting the number of people that have licenses in New York State.

**Voice:** I was wondering, I mean, over your tenure, you have seen a number of presidents of CSEA come and go, and each of those individuals bring their own brand of leadership, their own agendas. Any anecdotes, any thoughts of some of those individuals and how they helped CSEA become what it is now?

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**WB:** Well, there were some of them that had everybody doing the representation and the work and talking to people and reserve- well, you gotta remember too, I said, like Joe Feeley was part time. There were things that came up that couldn't wait for him to get here, and if he could break away, that was fine. So you had to delegate a lot of authority and a lot of things to people that were available. Back a ways, my era so to speak, there was a lot of talk about, well, CSEA is run by the law firm, because the law firm, like I mentioned, DeGraf, Conboy and Holt Harris is the one I'm talking about, did participate in almost everything. Of course, they still were ruled by the board of directors, but some of the presidents would let the representative attorney and the law firm, you know, pretty much guide what happened. I'm not sure that was good but you gotta remember too the background of some of the presidents. I mean, some of them, like Joe Feeley was, I think a senior clerk or something like that, or a principle clerk in the Tax Department. Bill McGowan worked on the wards, I guess, in one of the mental institutions. I'm trying to think of how you could categorize them as ... But some of them took more of a leadership role. They had the time to do it, they were interested in doing it, and they had a little better background to pick these things up. I'm not going to mention every one I had while I was here and put them in categories. I don't think that would be fair. Some of them aren't around anymore. it depended on the time they had available for the job and what kind of a background they had. I think every one of them was willing. The determination was there no matter whether they participated or didn't. They wanted to make sure that they knew what was going on and even the attorneys would report to them and tell them and make a suggestion, and get the president's approval a lot of times. I guess Ted Wenzel, when he was president, thought there was too much of that because one of the crackerjack attorneys that we had assigned by DeGraf Foy Conboy and Holt Harris after Harry Albright was a guy by the name of Jack Rice, John Carter Rice. Has he still got the firm over there with a partner? When it got all over with, he broke out and DeGraf Foy Conboy and Holt Harris kind of broke up into separate firms, and he took one of them with him and had his own law firm over on Eagle Street. But he was, without qualification, I think the best individual on his feet in a situation that I've ever met. I mean he could pull things out of the air and make you believe that all snow was blue and so forth. You know, fast talking. So, that got to the point where Ted felt he was in control too much, and we had a delegate meeting. I think it was at the Palace Theater in Albany, and Rice was up there and Ted Wenzel fired him right on the spot, right on the spot. And a lot of people tried to rush up on the stage. You know, they thought that this wasn't appropriate, and a lot of people were behind Ted. And his whole point was, you know, Rice, you got too much to say. Of course, Ted Wenzel was a highly educated person, with a PhD and so forth, but he had his ways, kind of funny ways too. I think as far as leadership is concerned, we've had good leadership no matter where it came from. I hope we'll continue to have good leadership. I say "we" because CSEA is still part of my life. I can't get rid of it. I don't want to get rid of it. I think we've got a bright future. Don't record that.

**Voice:** The affiliation of AFSCME was a big step for CSEA, I'm sure, and that was just as I was coming in to AFSCME, and I remember hearing at least from Washington that there was a lot of discussion. You want to talk a little bit about that?

**WB:** Oh, there was a lot of discussion. The affiliation with AFSCME that really split the membership. Those in favor of it said, well, it's going to be a protection for CSEA, we can get services from AFSCME and it's going to do us

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good; it'll make us better, a better union. And we'll have a lot more support. We can even get lobbying done for things in Washington and so forth. And those who were opposed to it were saying, "why are we going to pay them all this money?" You know we could spend this money and get our own-get more people on our own and do this type of thing. We're paying them just so they won't raid us? You know, and challenge us in an election and so forth. So those were the two sides as far as I recall. Of course, I don't have to tell you which one won.

**WB:** Well, we didn't get too involved in that. That was pretty much political, but I think it worked out. I think it worked out well. We've lost staff to AFSCME (laughs).

**Voice:** Would you like to end on that note. (laughs) This is wonderful. That's great, really. A lot of good stuff there. I appreciate it.

**WB:** Good. Good.

**FV:** And if it leads to other questions, maybe we'll come back and get you again.

**WB:** Let me just-you're done, right?

**FV:** Well, you know, if you get to know me, I never... END OF TAPE