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### Oral History Interview: Charles Payne

Charles Payne

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#1172

ORAL HISTORY

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Date December 16, 1978

Charles C. Payne  
(Signature - Interviewee)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Date December 16, 1978

Thomas R. Tull  
(Signature - Witness)



T.T.: My name is Thomas Tull and I'm about to interview Charles Payne on the West Virginia elections in 1940 and the role of Van A. Bitner in the United Mine Workers. The interview will take place in Mr. Paynes' home in Scott Depot, W.Va. and today's date is Dec. 16, 1978.

C.P.: . . .my wife died five years ago and I ain't got nobody staying with me. (T.T. Oh, uh, huh.) I'm by myself.

T.T.: Yeah. Uh, how did you first meet Mr. Bitner?

C.P.: I didn't meet him, I seen him, but I didn't actually meet him till he, till he come to Charleston, district President.

T.T.: Uh, huh. And that was 1933?

C.P.: Uh, somewhere along that line. I don't remember just when it was. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Early '30's.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Uh, in 1932 uh, in the political election, election for governor, the Democrat Guy Kump was elected. (C.P. Yeah.) Uh, did, was Bitner here for that election? Did he support Kump or oppose him, or (Mr. Payne interrupts.)

T.T.: He was for Tom Townsend. (C.P. Yeah.) I see.

C.P.: All of us voted. Tom was, Tom was for the mine work, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Kump was for the, Kump was part of the B & O Railroad.

T.T.: I see. Uh, huh. Uh, well how, how did the organization work to support Townsend?

C.P.: Oh, we just line up all the people we could at the polls. That's the only way we could. We had no bundle of money. We, we didn't have much of a union till the, at that time. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Union been destroyed. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Bitner come in and rebuilt it. (T.T. I see.) When Bitner come in here we had one local union, that was my local union.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Um. Well, then uh, you just had to just line up votes then. (C.P. Uh?) And get 'em to the polls during '32.

C.P.: Yeah. Yeah. Don't remember see. We go and talk to 'em, now here's our chance to get the union back. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Bitner, President of District 17. (T.T. Uh, huh.) (Mr. Payne clears throat.) But, there wasn't no union here. I belonged to a union on Cabin Creek, kept it ever since, I never would let 'em destroy it. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I was part hell and high water. (T.T. Uh.) I went, opened up (Mr. Payne clears throat.) , I lived second house above the company store in Raliegh. One night 'bout 15 minutes to 7, somebody knocked on my door and, martial law was on, see. I went to the door, five state police. You Charley Payne? I said, yeah. Come on in. They come in. Said, you president of the local, ain't you? Said, yeah. (Mr. Payne clears throat.) Said, tonight's local night ain't you, aint' it? I said, yeah. Said, where you meet at, over to the hollow church? Two hollows over that come together at the mouth, called one little hollow, one big hollow. Said, we just come over to tell you that (Mr. Payne coughs.), that we wasn't goin' to let you hold that meeting tonight. I said uh, we, who do you mean we? I said we, the law. I said, let me tell you something, and this is Charley Payne talkin'. Goddamn you and goddamn the law. I know what my rights are. I'm goin' to hold it. Said, we'll be there, in, in the building. I said, I'll, I'll put you out to. If you want to arrest us, you can arrest us. We won't resist. We won't start no fight. But if you come into that building, whenever I tell you to leave, I mean for you to leave or we'll put you out. Start a fight and we'll beat the hell out's you, if we can. Well, kinda tough ain't ya. I said no, but you won't brow beat people, you can't brow beat me. I've held this local union together all this time, the rest of 'em is gone. I said, you can't break it. Baldwin Felts couldn't break it. That's all you fellows are, ex- Balwin Felts men. I said, Hell, you can't, hell, you can't do that to me. I said, if that's all the business you got with me, hey get the hell out. They got out. I went over to the meeting. (Mr. Payne clears throat.) I fixed a couple of good door men on, for the inside, a couple of good, strong ones on the outside. I told 'em, I expect those state police to come. I said, if they come, let 'em in. Then I opened up the meeting and things go on about 5 min., somebody knocks on the door. And uh, on the outside door, somebody said the state police was out there. I said, let 'em in. They come in. I said uh, who you want to see Jim?

He said, Ah, we just lookin' around. I said, you have a warrant for anybody here? No. Got a search warrant to search this place for guns, pistals, whiskey, dynamite or anything else? I said, oh, we may have all of it, I don't know. I never had none of it, see. (T.T. Um.) No. I said, what is your business here? They said, well, it ain't your business. We don't want no goddamn visitors so get out. They says, alright. They got out. They never bothered me no more. (T.T. Uh.) That's the only local there ever was, District 17.

T.T.: Huh. And then when, Mr. Bitner came down, and uh, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected, then you organized the . . .

C.P.: Oh, I never organized. Bit-, I helped do it. Uh, head-, well, company headquarters on Summers Street. (T.T. Uh, huh.) It's not there, cause, we was, we saw to move up on the boulevard, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And uh, some, some other people owned it and they closed our work down and tore the building down. (Mr. Payne clears throat.) Uh, but uh, Bill, Bill Blizzard brought him in to see me.

T.T.: He did. (C.P. Yeah.) Uh, huh. Now, Bill Blizzard was the vice-president under uh, Bitner.

C.P.: Later on, years later, yeah. (T.T. Uh, huh.) He, he was, he was workin' for Tom Townsend in the state tax commissioners office. (T.T. Oh, I see.) Tom was state tax commissioner.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Huh. Um. Uh, later on after uh, the union was built up again in the '30's. Uh, (Mr. Payne interrupts.)

C.P.: Uh, putting down on the tape, takin' it down with us.

T.T.: Yeah, that's alright. That's, we, we want the true you and how the union was and everything. That's how it goes. We want true history, we don't want anything sugar-coated. We want a, we want you to tell it like it is, or was.

C.P.: You see, a fellow gets tired. He gets out there, stuff ground into him and, and you just get, you just get to a point till, hell, you, you'd rather get into a fight with him and get killed a fightin' then you would live. (T.T. Um, um.) Well hell, I listened. (Mr. Payne coughs.) We was somewhere

out there in 1904, out at our house, had to be 1904 out there on Cabin Creek. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And uh, no, 1902. (T.T. Uh, huh.) No, it was 1904 I reckon. Well, 1904, 1902, don't make no difference anyway. I had a bunch of thugs from Putnam county here. Howard Smith had a detective agency. The way you got thugs was this, most of 'em. They hired every killer they could find themselves, see. And, (Mr. Payne clears throat.) then they'd go to the sheriff and the, the governor, say, we need some mine guards. And they give 'em paroled, certain mine guards, certain inmates of the penitentiary. And they'd parole 'em and the company give 'em a job as a mine guard, see. And the sheriff'd deputize 'em into deputy sheriff. See what you was up against? (T.T. Yeah.) Well, they owned the judges too. (T.T. Um.) They owned everything. (T.T. Yeah.)

T.T.: Well, in the '30's now, that changed a lot, right? (C.P. Uh?) When the, when the, in the '30's that changed a lot, right? The union got strong and uh, isn't it a fact that in 1936, Van Bitner even had Rush D. Holt elected senator? (CP Yeah.) He was the main backer for Holt, wasn't he?

C.P.: Yeah. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Yeah, the last uh, I believe he was the last one, I'm not sure, but. We had 139 meetings for Rush Holt and 4 conventions. And Bitner made about 30, 40 speeches for him.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Why did Holt turn on Bitner?

C.P.: Crack-pot.

T.T.: Is that what it was?

C.P.: He's a damn socialist. (T.T. Uh.) What it was, Bitner told him. Bit-, Bitner even bought him, bought him some clothes, and all that kind of stuff. Elected him. And he, wouldn't go to seat him. He was too young. He wasn't quite 35, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And Bitner wanted me to hand over there through, uh, some of 'em senators, through the union. And got him seated. I don't know who the senators was. George W., they were famous men, been in it for a long time. Anyway, they maneuvered him and seated him, see. Bitner told me this himself. Automobile company wanted to give him a, give him, Rush, an automobile. And Rush asked Mr. Bitner about it. He says absolutely not. You can't start to takin' presents

from these corporations. Whenever you take one, they've got you hooked. You can't take, accept no. Your salary's all you can accept. None of that kind of stuff. That's the way it started, just kept building on up and had to break, see.

T.T.: Um. Um, um. Did Bitner ever ask uh, uh, Senator Holt for any special favors for the UMW or anything?

C.P.: No. No. Anything in there be what I said, be on that tape? (T.T. Yeap.) I, if I said there, then everybody could sue me for libel.

T.T.: Uh, no. Huh, uh. No.

C.P.: I want, all I'm saying, saying there for instance about what Bitner, what Rush Holt told Bitner and what Bitner told Rush Holt, that's what Bitner told me, see.

T.T.: Right. Yeah, you wouldn't be sued for libel. Huh, uh.

C.P.: I just wondered if they could.

T.T.: No, because Bitner told you. You're just repeating what Bitner told you. If they want to sue anybody, they'd have to sue Bitner and he's already dead.

C.P.: How long since, to, Bitner died?

T.T.: Well, I'll check on it again, but I'm pretty sure that it was in 1949.

C.P.: It, it, wonder if Miss Stokes working yet.

T.T.: No, I think she's retired.

C.P.: I'd like to have her add-, address. I'd like to call her, telephone number.

T.T.: Okay. I have her telephone number. I'll, I'll get it for you and bring it by, okay? Cause I, I'm sure I'm going to have to talk to you again. I've got a lot of questions for you. (Laughs) Uh, okay. After uh, Bitner and Holt had their problems uh, then 1940 starts to come around and it began to look like, Senator Holt, he wasn't going to cooperate with Bitner. Uh, the ex-governor, Kump, and the present governor,

uh, Homer A. Holt, they wouldn't cooperate with Bitner.  
(C.P. No.) So, what, what did Bitner do? How could he,  
how did he handle the situation, the politics?

C.P.: He, he done the best he could. We, didn't have any cooperation  
for the governors office. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Now when uh, he,  
he was for, to it. Kump or Holt either one. He was for Tom  
Townsend for governor. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I don't know, I  
don't know, let's see, who was running against Kump. Tom was  
running against Kump. (T.T. Right.) Now who was running  
against Homer Holt.

T.T.: I don't know who was running against Homer Holt. I heard a  
rumor and I wondered if you could tell me maybe, did Bitner  
ever tell you whether he had uh, convinced Sen. Nealy to  
run for governor in 1940? (C.P. Yeah.) See, now I heard  
that Bitner was the one man. (C.P. Uh?) I heard that Bit-  
ner was the man who, who got to Nealy and convinced him to  
run. Is that true?

C.P.: Oh, yeah. There ain't no question about that. Ain't no  
question. Why, he's the man put Nealy in the race.

T.T.: Nealy wouldn't have gone in if Bitner hadn't talked to him?

C.P.: No. See, he was already in the Senate. (T.T. Uh, huh.)  
He didn't want to leave the Senate to come back here and run  
for governor.

T.T.: Well, how did Bitner convince him?

C.P.: Needed him. Complete, wanted, wanted to completely organize  
the whole state, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Everything. Be-  
sides, Bitner, Bitner'd been a. See, before Bitner, years  
before Bitner come to District 17, he was up northern West  
Virninia, 31. And he, he was sole supporter what kept him  
in Senate. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I mean, on the labor side of  
it. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And Bitner was a good campaigner too.  
He, was a good speaker. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Why, I know Bit-  
ner. Bitner wasn't no pussy-footer. He said he was going  
to catch strike, strikers and things. He, he didn't bulldoze  
'em, he just wouldn't try to be nice to 'em, cause he got  
rough. Play rough, roughshod with him, he just stopped the  
Morris boys. You all belong to the union? Yeah. You like



the union? Yeah. How much do you like it? Well, we like it. You want to stay in it? Yeah. (Mr. Payne coughs.) Well, you know your violating the contract, don't you? If there's a strike or some outlaw proposition. Yeah. You get in line or you get out damn quick cause, or, I'll put you out. He didn't pussy-foot with 'em, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) That's the cause of this, all this picket business, pussy-footin' around the officials with 'em. Wouldn't settle their grievances, afraid to. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Catered to 'em, see. (T.T. Um, um.) Bitner didn't do that. (T.T. Um.) I hear him make this speech, a speech up at Lyndon one time, we was trying to organize. Hell, we did have it organized, but we never did have a contract, but we, later on got a contract but not while Bitner was here. Had thugs in there. And (cough), they uh, had a big thug there, I tryin' to think of his name. Went up there. And he was tough. Thought he was. Had it right down in town, talking about coal on the porch. Now, I mean some people lived in it, people belong to other coal company talkin' right there on the front porch. Bitner said, I see 'ole so and so, called him by name. He's the biggest theif in the United States. Say, I know him. I, he said, he stayed in the Fairmont hotel while I was up there. He said, you know, said, it wasn't more 'in, uh, woke up there, he tore up every bathtub in the hotel. (laugh) Carried it off. Boy he cussed. He said cuss, Goddamn you. Oh, he'd tell them. There ain't no question about that.

T.T.: Huh. Well, what was uh, did, when Bitner got Nealy to run, what advantage was there to have Nealy be governor? What would that do for the Union?

C.P.: Well, the state police wouldn't be against us. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And, (cough) we'd get some laws passed. Favorable see, compensation laws and all that, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.)

T.T.: Was Bitner then uh, pretty deeply involved in uh, the other people who'd ran, who ran with Nealy on his ticket?

C.P.: No. No. No. He didn't, he didn't branch out now, like to every Tom, Dick and Harry. (T.T. Uh, huh. Um.) He decided on Nealy. You can't, you can't do much that's way. You might do, you uh, good uh, a good solid speaker. If you gonna be for the man, for the head of the ticket, you gotta be for him. You can't take in everybodys thats running on down to the wire. Cause you takin' on all the burdens that's

with it.

T.T.: How did they uh, who picked uh, Harvey or Harley M. Kilgore to run for Senator?

C.P.: Mine workers.

T.T.: The mine workers. Did Bitner?

C.P.: All of 'em, all of 'em did.

T.T.: How did, how did they uh, how'd they decide on him? Why him and not somebody else? He was a judge in Raliegh county, wasn't he?

C.P.: Yeah. Why, he was a fair judge up there. And a big, had, there's big coal county, see. There's Raliegh and Logan county and all them, see. All coal up there. (T.T. Uh, huh.) They had to have somebody that was onery and he was the only man that was gonna run, that'd been fair to labor. (T.T. Uh, huh. Um.) Did you know Kilgore?

T.T.: I didn't. No. No. Just heard the name and know a little bit (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: I knew him well.

T.T.: Did he come and speak in Charleston quite often or did you go see him in Washington or, how'd you know him?

C.P.: Who? Who? (T.T. Kilgore.) Oh, he'd come around over here in the state and make some speeches once in a while. Not for us but for political speeches, see.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Um. Did you work in the main headquarters of the UMW during the '40's? (C.P. Uh?) Did you work in the main headquarters of the UMW during the '40's, in Charleston? (C.P. Yeah.) What was your job?

C.P.: Well, when I first went to work, I was a field worker. (T.T. Uh, huh.) In charge of the Kanawha fields. And then I (Mr. Tull interrupts.)

T.T.: Is that like an organizer?

C.P.: Yeah. All, looking after all kinds of field work. The local unions, visiting local unions and keepin' them out of trouble and whatever could be done to help the organization, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Uh, settle little grievances, contract questions and all that see. And then I was promoted to uh, in charge of all the grievances, the whole district. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Going from uh, I got, I had, I had to go to Logan, Williamson, Welch, Greenbriar, Beckley, all had suboffices see, of Charleston. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And then I was put in charge uh, uh, made vice-President of the office in Charleston.

T.T.: Um. Well, did you, did you have meetings, did you have to meet with Bitner a lot or did you not see him very much or both of you (Mr. Payne interrupts.)

C.P.: Oh, I seen him every time he come to Charleston.

T.T.: How often was that?

C.P.: Well, that depends on how, how much business he had over there and how much trouble he had, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) He come every time he got a chance. He liked, he liked to be over here.

T.T.: Huh. Well, who ran things while he was away? (C.P. Uh?) Who ran the district while he was away? Blizzard?

C.P.: Well, when Blizzard was made assistant, (T.T. Uh, huh.) but most the time when he was away, Bit-, Bitner was with him, see. And I was, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I was next in charge. But Bill was main assistant. He wasn't vice-president, he just second that's all, to Bitner. (T.T. I see. Uh.) And then he become vice-president. When Bitner left, why he become president, they made me vice-president. (T.T. Uh, huh.) But they made, but, made me in charge of all the grievances in the state. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I mean in 17.

T.T.: When Bitner uh, left the mine workers uh, did the power that he had in the state, I mean, he was a pretty powerful man, right? (C.P. Yeah.) As far as politics goes. (C.P. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.) When he was kicked out or when he left the mine workers, did he uh, lose that power? (C.P. Well, uh.) Was he still powerful after he left the mine workers?

C.P.: Oh, he was influential, but he wasn't powerful. He wouldn't have the power of the union behind him, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I mean, the rank and file would, a lot of them be behind him. But the officials in Washington wouldn't be, be behind him.

T.T.: Yeah. Would most of the uh, rank and file and local officers, would they uh, uh. Like, if Bitner said, well, you, you know, we oughta support, labor oughta support uh, uh, such and such a man, would, would the rank and file follow his suggestions, even though he wasn't with the workers at, with the mine workers anymore?

C.P.: Who, Bitner? (T.T. Yeah.) I don't know. He never did try it.

T.T.: He didn't try it? (C.P. No.) He didn't work that way, huh?

C.P.: Ah, no. Bitner never, Bitner never did play, play, play, play that'a way. If he didn't have, if he had no interests, no official connection, he didn't dabble into it, see.

T.T.: Um. Huh. So, after he left the mine workers, he was pretty well out of this, out of this state then as far as the politics of the state, huh? (C.P. Yeah.) I see. Did he come in, back into the state to uh, uh, help Clarence uh, Meadows run for governor? Did he come in and give speeches and things for him? In '44?

C.P.: (cough) I don't know whether he ever made any (cough), I don't know whether he ever made any speeches for Clarence Meadows or not.

T.T.: Um,um. Now he was, he was with the CIO then. Did he come into the state and try and work through the CIO? (C.P. Who?) Bitner. (C.P. No.) What about his friend, John B. Eastman, or Easten?

C.P.: John Easten was president of the state CIO.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Now they were pretty friendly, weren't they? Weren't they good friends?

C.P.: Oh yeah. Yeah.

T.T.: And uh, would Easten try and influence, (C.P. Uh?) would

Easten try and influence state politics?

C.P.: Who, Easten? (T.T. Yes, Yeah.) Oh, personally, with his personal friends is all. Easten uh, he didn't have too much influence. Pretty good talker, Easten was.

T.T.: When uh, Matthew Nealy was elected governor, were there ever any meetings between Nealy and Bitner where they sorta decided on who should be in charge of the department of natural resources or things like that? Was Bitner ever (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: I don't know about that now.

T.T.: Well, I just wondered if he was, you know, a sorta a behind the scenes wheeler-dealer.

C.P.: I, I really don't know (inaudible). Things was, things that uh, always that affected to labor he took into consideration, but whether he did any of these other things or not, I don't know, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I imagine he talked to, Bitner talked to 'em about any of 'em and he listened to 'em and maybe, they could influence him a lot. (T.T. Uh, huh.) But, to think, things like uh, state police, (T.T. Um, um.) Secretary of Labor, uh, Speaker of the House, representatives, president of the State Senate, governor, things like that.

T.T.: Uh, huh. See, I read uh, part of that book by Judge Ben Moore? (C.P. Yeah.) And he said that B-, that Bitner and Homer Hanna were the two men that picked him to be the district judge. Do you know anything about that?

C.P.: Yeah. I don't think that's right. Do you know him?

T.T.: No. I (C.P. Judge Moore.) No. I think he's dead.

C.P.: Oh, he died a long time ago. (T.T. Yeah.) He'd never been judge (cough) if Bitner listened to me.

T.T.: You didn't like him.

C.P.: Hell no. That son of a bitch. I was glad when he died.

T.T.: How come?

- C.P.: Well, he was partners with Townsend, worked when Mr. Townsend was in office, see. Tall, boney fellow. I know'd his brother Fred Moore. (T.T. Uh, huh.) I liked him. But I heared him say, Bitner say, I'll never recommend a man to be judge, if he ever represented the coal company as attorney. Because they always been influenced by that money, see. (T.T. Um, um.) Always their victory.
- T.T.: Okay. There's another man who wanted to be judge?
- C.P.: Yeah. But I don't want to name him. He's dead.
- T.T.: Was that Joe N. Kenna? (C.P. Uh?) Was that Mr. Kenna?
- C.P.: I say, I don't want to name him. I'm, (T.T. Oh. Okay.) he oughta be, he wanted, he wanted to be judge. District judge. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Uh, Mr. Bitner was sold on him. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Well, (cough) I has a record, of the Armed March trials. (T.T. Uh, huh.) That was in Logan and different places, put all that Armed March indictments. (T.T. Yeah.) And this lawyer wanted to be judge. He was turning the operator down in offices, in the, in the Kanawha Hotel. (T.T. Uh, huh.) It was up, it was the best hotel in Charleston then, see. He had offices in Kanawha Hotel, he was bringin' them witnesses in there, instructin' 'em, buying 'em off, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Instructin' them all to swear, to swear to lies, see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And I had a record of all that, it's testified in the courtroom there, see. And I had a record of that. (T.T. Um.) I (inaudible), this fellow would have Mr. Bitner up to his house to dinner, all that kind of stuff, see. (T.T. Yeah.) And he invited me up to dinner with him one time. I wouldn't go cause I know'd him. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Hell, I didn't like him at t'll.
- T.T.: Um. So you convinced Mr. Bitner not to recommend that man for the judgeship, huh?
- C.P.: Well, wait a minute. I, I ain't through yet.
- T.T.: Oh. Okay.
- C.P.: One day Mr., I went in there and I said, Mr. Bitner, I want to talk to you. About this man that you gonna appoint for judge. The fourth. Took sound advice, level with his food

and all like that. Well, he said, he's a hell of a fine fellow. I said, that's what you think. He's putting one over on you. (cough) I said, there is coal operators in Kanawha oper-, operators, he's attorney for the West Virginia Coal Asso-, Association and had an office over here in Kanawha Hotel a long time, lining these damn witnesses up and buyin' 'em off. Get 'em, get 'em in there, they'd swear to anything, see. Takin' their evidence down. They's swear to. I said, hell, what in the hell you think you, you, I don't believe that. I said, I don't give a damn whether you believe it or not. I don't want him appointed. I said (inaudible), if anything I can do to keep him from being appointed irregards you being for him, I, I keep him from being appointed. Well, he's going to be appointed. I said, I don't think so. I had this, I had this book, 900 and some pages of it. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Long, Senate pages see, court records. (T.T. Uh, huh.) And I just, mark right in there see. I told him, I said uh, there it is, read it. Showed him what it was, it was court records see. (T.T. Uh huh.) Armed March trial. He was reading that why, he said, that goddamn son of a bitch. Said, he's through. (T.T. Huh.) He didn't get it. Well, then he picked Harley Kilgore. I never has nothin' agin' Harley Kilgore. (T.T. Uh, huh.) But he, he turned against Roderdam.

T.T.: Kilgore did?

C.P.: Yeah. (T.T. Huh.) Kilgore got a drinking habit, see. (T.T. Uh, huh. Um.) I remember the last time I seen Harley. Was over in Logan. Was dedicating a hospital over there. Well, it wasn't dedicating it, it was opening it up to be built. What is that?

T.T.: Ground breaking.

C.P.: Yeah. Ground breaking. Ground breaking. And uh, he was over there for that. Was down in Smoke House in Logan, eatin'. He was pretty drunk too. I think he got takin' money from everybody too. I don't know that. (T.T. Uh, huh. Um.) But that Rush Holt, he let them big shots, they just blowed him up and his head got bigger than a ballon, see. (T.T. Yeah.) Well, we beat him too. (T.T. Yeah.) Goddamn, I helped 'em do it.

T.T.: Did you have to give speeches and things or (C.P. Uh?),  
How did you help?

C.P.: Makin' speeches and meetings and everything.

T.T.: Uh, huh. I have a question. On uh, you were talking about  
uh, Bitner and him making a decesion on that one man not to  
support him after you showed him those records? (C.P. Yeah.)  
How did you happen to come by those records? Can you tell  
me that or is that kept a secret?

C.P.: Uh, they was there in the office. And there wasn't anybody  
in the office. And I found 'em in the trash, were in the  
trash where he was going to burn 'em up. (T.T. Uh, huh.)  
And I got 'em out. kept 'em.

T.T.: Uh. The lawyer was going to throw them out?

C.P.: Uh? No. No. Hell no. In, was in the union office. (T.T.  
Oh, I see. Uh, huh.) The records was in there. Some of  
our fellows had it. And there was, been, three boxes on  
the inside, had all kind of old stuff. Uh, cigarate stubs  
and trash of all kinds. I piled it up on the floor and  
wanted me to shovel it up and haul it away and dump it,  
see. (T.T. Uh, huh.) It was in that pile and I found it,  
I fished it out and I took it home with me.

T.T.: I see. Um. Uh, huh. How did Bitner make his decisions?  
Did he go around and, did he make them himself or did he  
have a group of people meet with him to make decisions on  
(Mr. Payne interrupts.)

C.P.: No, hell. He, he made 'em himself. (T.T. He did.) He  
had a mind just like a goddamn steel trap.

T.T.: Uh. What was the toughest decision he had to make while  
you were with him?

C.P.: I don't know. I don't know. He had to let some fellows go  
for drinking. A lot of 'em he oughta let go, he did let  
go. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Hell, if a fellow run away from the  
union, whenever just as quick as I found the man was drinkin',  
it's that quick he'd go. Or gamblin'. Or using drugs of  
any kind, just that damn quick he'd go. Or whenever I found



out he didn't have guts enough to make the right kind of decision, right kind of a decision, I mean corresponded with the law or the contracts or whatever supposed to be just decision. When I found out he didn't have guts enough to do it, he'd go. You got to be honest, you got to have nerve, to do these things. If you lack any of them, you just can't make a go of it. (T.T. Uh, huh.) That's what happened, that's what got these strikes and things up.

T.T.: Yeah. Well, was Bitner like that? Did he let them go like that or did he let 'em have (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: Oh, hell no. Hell no. He'd dig into 'em himself. Bitner wasn't afraid of nobody. He wasn't afraid of one man nor 1000 men. I'm tellin' you. He was a little fellow. (T.T. Um, um.) I mean, he would be as fat, I mean he wasn't too fat. But he, he wasn't lean by any means. He probably weighed 160 pounds. (T.T. Um, um.) I got his picture here somewhere, but I don't know where it's at.

T.T.: Uh. I'd like to see it if you ever find it.

C.P.: Let me see. Stay here a minute.

T.T.: Oh, okay. (Mr. Payne leave room. Tape is turned off until he returns.)

T.T.: Huh.

C.P.: That used to belong to the state police, but it don't now.

T.T.: (laughs) Huh. I heard that uh, Bill Blizzard gave you the cannon that they used at that uh, uh miners march.

C.P.: Yeah.

T.T.: Where's that now?

C.P.: My boys' got it.

T.T.: Does he?

C.P.: Yeah. He didn't want that, that damn pistol, he didn't want nothin'. (cough) That's the exact duplicate, now I know it's the exact duplicate because I had the gun in my hand

for 30 minutes and looked and broke it down and examined every way for 30 minutes, that killed President McKinley. (T.T. Oh, yeah?) That's an exact, exact duplicate of it. (T.T. Huh.) Same make, same length of barrel, same caliber, made by the same company, same color and everything. (T.T. Um.) That's called Owl Head. See the owl head up there? (T.T. Yeah. Uh, huh.) Made by Iris Johnson.

T.T.: Uh. Yeah, that's something.

C.P.: That's a son of a bitch. (T.T. Yeah.) That's a Ray Smith Special. I got the rubber clips here on, and there's golden handles.

T.T.: Uh. Do you have a lot of papers that you'd collected over the years on (Mr. Payne interrupts).

C.P.: I have my wife's grandfather's discharge. Civil War veteran. (T.T. Uh. Yeah.) Discharged in 1917, I think. I mean this was wrote he, he got his, he got his real discharge burned up in the house and this is a duplicate of it, see. (T.T. I see.) Re-issued by the war department.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Uh, in my reading on Bitner, I found out that he didn't like uh, (C.P. Uh?). In my study on Bitner, I've been reading different books on him and things. (C.P. Yeah.) Or books that have a little bit in there about him. I found one that said that uh, that he didn't like uh, Judge Joe Kenna. And I wanted (Mr. Payne interrupts).

C.P.: Who didn't? (T.T. Uh?) That Bitner didn't? (T.T. Right.) He didn't like him after I, I called him up. Why he. (T.T. Oh, uh, huh.) Put, been, put him next to what he was, see. (T.T. Yeah. Huh.) Hell, I had some pictures here I wanted to show you. I can't find 'em, by God now. What'd you read that in?

T.T.: I think it was in Ben Moore's book, Judge Moores' book. I've got a copy of the book here.

C.P.: Yeah. I didn't think much of him, (T.T. Yeah.) I liked his brother though. His brother used to be superintendent of the mine where I worked.

T.T.: Oh, he did.

C.P.: Yeah. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Fred, he was a nice fellow.

T.T.: Did you ever, did you ever meet Homer Hanna?

C.P.: Hell, yes.

T.T.: What'd you think of him?

C.P.: Homer, he was just a slick politician. About all you can make out, he was smart. (T.T. Uh, huh.) He was smart. Homer was smart, he was a slick politician. (T.T. He, uh . . .) And a good mixer on top of it.

T.T.: Oh, yeah?

C.P.: This talk will not be, be over ra-, radio broadcast, over, will it?

T.T.: Oh, no. (laugh) No, this won't be over, this is just uh, I'm going to use, you know, some of the things you tell me in my paper that I'm writting for a grade and then this will just go in the library there and they'll keep it in case somebody else is interested in the mine workers of that period of time and they'll listen to it. You know, and just use it for, mostly it's for research papers and things like that, it's (Mr. Payne interrupts).

C.P.: I got interested in the mine workers since it was first organized. (T.T. Oh, yeah?) District 17 uh, in April 21, 1893 in Wheeling.

T.T.: Um. Um. Well see, something like that you know, really you oughta try and get it in the, you know, a library or museum to keep it. Here's where, here's where Judge Moore talks about this Kenna guy who was supposed to, he thought that he had it, the nomination. (long blank in tape) I got that, I borrowed that book from Homer Hanna's son, lawyer up in Charleston.

C.P.: Yeah. Young Homer, uh? (T.T. Yeap.) What, he's a lawyer to, ain't he? (T.T. Yeah.) Is he the oldest one, oldest lawyer up there?

T.T.: Uh, here's his card right here. Hanna and Elliott.

C.P.: Wonder if he got a pretty good practice?

T.T.: Uh, I think so. I understand he's uh, well respected by the other lawyers in the town. Did uh, Bitner have to pull any dirty tricks (laugh) during the campaign in 1940? (C.P. No.) You see, Neal-, Sen. Nealy there he had a pretty tough fight against (C.P. Who?), Sen. Nealy. He had a pretty tough fight against uh, Governor Cump and Governor Holt, they were really against him.

C.P.: Yeah. Oh, there ain't no question 'bout, there ain't no question 'bout Bitner being for Nealy. Always was.

T.T.: Do you remember Fred Mooney? (C.P. Uh?) Do you remember Fred Mooney? (C.P. Yeah.) He didn't like Bitner too well, did he? (C.P. Huh, uh.) How come?

C.P.: Oh, do you know Fred Mooney?

T.T.: No, I just read his book. His autobiography.

C.P.: Fred Mooney's a dangerous son of a bitch. (T.T. He is?) He, he shot three of his wives.

T.T.: Huh. I didn't know that.

C.P.: Killed two of 'em. Last wife, he was bossing up in Fairmont, boss of the coal mine. That was after he left the union, see. He was boss up there. And she was sick. I knowed her, she worked in his office when he was Sec. of the Treasury. And uh, he married Clendenin woman, old Clendenin sister. And she was sick, and she was, layin' on a cot when he went to work, Fred was. He put dynamite, time-bomb under that cot, (T.T. Huh.) and blew it up after he went to work, but it didn't kill her. (T.T. Huh.) Then he called 'em out, she told what he'd done. And he killed hisself.

T.T.: Huh. How did uh, John Easten die?

C.P.: Well, I don't know how. He got into some kind of a damn mess, the law. I don't, I don't know how he died. Oh, here's them pictures I want, some of these pictures I want to show you.

T.T.: Oh, yeah. Uh, huh. What did Mr. Lewis think of Bitner after, after Bitner left the mine workers.

C.P.: I think he got along pretty well with him.

T.T.: Even after that, uh?

C.P.: Yeah. He owned a mining store down in Illinois. And then that happened to his mother. I knew his mother too.

T.T.: Huh. Do you uh, (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: I remember his wife.

T.T.: Oh, yeah. Do you uh, remember uh, Ned Smith?

C.P.: Yes, sir. Very well. Uncle Ned's from Wheeling.

T.T.: Huh, well, from uh, he was up from Fairmont, wasn't he?

C.P.: Fairmont, yeah.

T.T.: Now, he was pretty friendly with Nealy and Bitner too, wasn't he?

C.P.: Yeah. Uncle, Uncle Ned, there wasn't, well, we all thought the world of Uncle Ned. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Yeah.

T.T.: Was he for organized labor?

C.P.: Oh, yeah. He had boots up on his breeches. He went to all the conventions, and state conventions, everything. I believe I could find him here, but I don't see him. Did you know him? (T.T. Who?) Ned Smith. (T.T. No.) I knowed him well.

T.T.: Yeap. Yeah. Didn't you tell me once that you poked John L. Lewis's brother once? (C.P. Who?) You.

C.P.: Who punched John L. Lewis's broth-, brother?

T.T.: You did. Didn't (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: Yeah. Hell, I punched Raymond. (T.T. Raymond?) Yeah.

T.T.: What was that about?

C.P.: Called me a liar. (T.T. Oh. laughs.) Knocked the shit out of him. He's the one that was lying. I got his picture in there. Raymond, Bill Blizzard.

T.T.: Was Raymond uh, would the head-, headquarters in uh, Washington or (Mr. Payne interrupts.).

C.P.: Well, he used to be the Secretary of the Tresuary up here, was, was then, see.

T.T.: Oh, was he. I didn't know that. What'd you think of Percy Tetlowe?

C.P.: Fine man. Percy was a gentleman from the word go.

T.T.: Now, he took over after Bitner left, right?

C.P.: Yeah. Percy Tetlowe was a gentleman from the word go.

T.T.: Was he pretty tough though when he needed to be?

C.P.: Yeah. He was when he, Per-, Percy had a china voice, but he had plenty of guts and he was a good speaker. Always had a smile.

T.T.: Did many of the UMW people leave the UMW to go into the uh, you know, after Bitner left the UMW, did many of them follow him into the United Steel Workers?

C.P.: No. Not too many.

T.T.: See, I'm, I'm just sorta wondering what kind of a leader he was, I mean if uh, people liked him so well, they liked the union more, they'd stay with the UMW rather than go with him?

C.P.: They, they, they never, warn't never goin' left to the steel workers. I mean the uh, mine workers go to the steel workers just, be changing the unions. They had to belong to the mine workers, they'd work for the mines, see.

T.T.: Uh, huh. Now, didn't you work with Bitner organizing the steel works up in Buffalo?

C.P.: Yeah. I was director up there.

T.T.: That's what I thought. (C.P. Yeah.) Well, who, who ran things down here while you were up in Buffalo? (C.P. Uh?) Who ran things here in Charleston while you were in Buffalo?

C.P.: Oh, Blizzard. It kinda run itself. I, I had Blizzard, Charley Kiser, and Red Cassidy, and (Mr. Tull interrupts.).

T.T.: I heard Charley Kiser's still alive?

C.P.: Yeah, he is.

T.T.: Down in Florida? (C.P. Yeah.) Do you have his address?

C.P.: No, I don't. He nothin' but a wind bag.

T.T.: Oh, really? Um. He wouldn't be much help to me, uh?

C.P.: Oh, he'd tell you every goddamn thing in the world, but what it would be, none of it true.

T.T.: Oh. (laugh) You ever see Bitner get into a fight or anything?

C.P.: No, I've seen him where there was fightin' though, but, Goddamn, I'd like to know what in the hell I. I had some pictures I wanted to show you. Wait a minute while I go back in there. (T.T. Okay.) I'll be back in. I just brought them pistols in to you. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Now that's, that's exactly, that's exactly the kind of gun killed President McKinley. (T.T. Uh, huh.) Same length of barrel, same caliber, same blue steel, same pearl shell handle, same company made it, uh, same everything. (T.T. Huh.) (Inaudible) owl head.

T.T.: Um. I have a question. This is, do you know anything about Bitner's personal life? He spent an awful lot of time away from his family, didn't he?

C.P.: Yeah. Course, he just had the, he just had his wife and one girl, see. (T.T. Uh, huh. Yeah.) Where'd you say she lived at, the girl?

T.T.: Grafton, Penn. Right outside Pittsburgh.

C.P.: I thought, I, but that where he lived when he died?

T.T.: Uh, yeah. Uh, huh.

C.P.: I thought he lived in Lincoln, Penn.

T.T.: Well, from the, from the uh, obituary I saw in the New York Times, they had him listed as Grafton, Penn.

C.P.: Wait till I take these back in there. (T.T. Okay.) I want you to see them pictures. (Mr. Payne speaks in the background, but it is more mumbling to himself and is inaudible.)

T.T.: Who was the lawyer for the UMW when Bitner was District President?

C.P.: Tom Townsend.

T.T.: He was? (C.P. Yeah.) Do you know how uh, Bitner got nomi-, uh, how Bitner got on that war labor board? President Roosevelt had to appoint him, but who, who uh, suggested Bitner to Roosevelt, do you know?

C.P.: No, I wouldn't know that. (T.T. Okay.) John L. Lewis I imagine.

T.T.: Well, I don't think so cause that was in 1943, that was after Bitner left the UMW.

C.P.: Bitner wasn't on no -o -o, labor board after, after he left the UMW, was he?

T.T.: Yeah. I think. (C.P. Huh, uh.) No? (C.P. Huh, uh.) He got on it before?

C.P.: Yeah. He never was on no labor. . .

The interview is cut off at this point due to the tape running out.