Interview with **William Lucy**
Date: October 24, 1988
Interviewer: Paul Stekler
Camera Rolls: 4020-4023
Sound Rolls: 407-408
Team: D

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4020]
[sound roll #407]

00:00:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Camera roll 4020. Sound 407.

[slate[

Camera Crew Member #2:

Time code ten—I mean, 1420.

Interviewer:

Ready to roll?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Anytime, yeah.

00:00:26:00

Interviewer:

How did you first get involved with the strike? I mean, how did it first happen?

00:00:30:00

William Lucy:

Well, the strike came about essentially because of the, I guess, frustration of the men. Now, I, at that time, was assigned to the City of Detroit doing some organizational work. I got a call from the President, who had got a call from a newspaper reporter, in effect, telling him or raising the question as to what we knew about…what was about to take place in the City of Memphis. I was from Memphis and therefore, the President thought I might be of some use down there. And he asked if I would go down and just be a part of trying to bring the thing together. I did, met one or two of other staff people down there that to us, seemed like a fairly simple dispute that could've been settled relatively easy. And this was early, oh, about mid-February, 1968. And, in our opinion, it was a simple issue if we had been working with a city or, or an administration that had some understanding of the day-to-day problems of workers in these particular categories and had a willingness to sit down and sort of address those problems.

00:01:35:00

Interviewer:

Were you surprised that the men there, in particular, struck?

00:01:37:00

William Lucy:

Yeah, I was quite surprised. The, the, the strike was, was, was an accumulation of, of grievances that had not been addressed. The men were not the typical militants that you would see in, in, militant union activity. These were fifty-five, sixty-year-old men who had spent the better part of their life, at least their work life, working for the City of Memphis, in what essentially had to be the most unskilled profession that you could imagine. So, they were not eager to strike, they were not eager to make any statement. They simply were looking for a resolution to some of the outstanding grievances that they had for some time.

Interviewer:

Why don't we cut it for a second? Make sure everything’s going well.

[cut]

[slate]

00:02:19:00

Interviewer:

So, how did you first become aware of the strike?

00:02:23:00

William Lucy:

President Wurf, had received a phone call, or at least an inquiry from a newspaper reporter asking him if the union was in fact, planning and organizing a strike in the city of Memphis. It came as quite a surprise to, to President Wurf simply because in February, nobody has a strike in Memphis, Tennessee. He called me at that time, I was assigned to Detroit, and asked if, if I, if I had time to go down and, and meet one of our other staff people to see if we could lend some support to bringing this to a, to a conclusion. To us, it was a fairly simple matter. When we arrived, it seemed like it was a disagreement over grievances, and we thought any administration or city government could settle these kinds of differences relatively quickly.

00:03:11:00

Interviewer:

And you were a union representative at that time?

00:03:13:00

William Lucy:

At that time, I was Assistant Director of the Department of Legislation and Community Affairs, Associate Director. I had been assigned to Detroit on a particular…unique organizing effort.

Interviewer:

So, in one sentence, you were working for who, as what?

William Lucy:

Working for President Wurf.

Interviewer:

[inaudible] he was. Sorry.

William Lucy:

I was working for President Wurf as Associate Director of the Department of Legislation and Community Affairs.

00:03:35:00

Interviewer:

OK. What happened when Loeb first…well, what, what were your first impressions of Mayor Loeb?

00:03:42:00

William Lucy:

I, I was struck, by, by, by the mayor, as a, a rather unique individual. At that time, Memphis had just come through a, a, a new election, a, an election that had involved the restructuring of city government and the election of a new city council, and the election of a strong mayor. Mayor Loeb was, was, was a rather large, man, sort of a John Wayne type, John Wayne mentality. Six foot five or six…very impressed with not only himself but his station in life. And a stubborn man, one who, I think genuinely felt warm towards people but in much more of a paternalistic sense as opposed to a relationship of peers on the basis of just human beings.

00:04:32:00

Interviewer:

What was it like when he first…you were there when he first met with the workers?

00:04:36:00

William Lucy:

I was there when he, when we first came to, to just take a look at what the problem was. We had met with him prior to his meeting with the men, to try and, and point out the safety concerns that the men had, the problems of discrimination with regards to the assignment of work on the critical day that it rained and they were sent home. And his reaction was, as far as he was concerned, the union really didn't represent anybody, at least in his estimation. So, we decided that we would go back and inform the men of his position, and ask them, you know, What we should do. And we went back to the Rubber Workers Hall, where there was a meeting in progress. A, an instant decision was made to bring the men downtown to see the mayor. And so, we, we marched from the union hall, across the city of Memphis to City Hall. And we were intent on taking everybody into the mayor's office, this would've been about twelve, thirteen hundred people. The decision was made to meet in the auditorium, which was just adjacent to City Hall. The mayor, still thinking that this was a situation, pretty traditional in the South, where he would go in, express his views to the men and the issue

would be resolved right away. I can, I can recall him saying, at the outset of his presentation, that, You men have known me for a long time, and my door has always been open to you, and you, you know, I would always give you the shirt off my back, and this, this, this kind of traditional paternalism that exists in the South. And, I think somebody from the back of the room sort of raised up and said, We really don't want the shirt off your back. What we'd like to have is a decent wage and we'd buy our own shirt. I mean, the discussion was, was at least framed at that point.

00:06:23:00

Interviewer:

Was it a mistake for the mayor to come and see them?

00:06:25:00

William Lucy:

I think it, it was useful for the mayor and I think it was useful for him. I think he completely misunderstood what was taking place. And I think the men needed to understand his view of them. He thought that, as traditionally happens in the South, you bring the boss in and the boss would state the issue and, and frame the debate and provide the solution. And then everybody'd go back to work and he'll take care of it. The leaders of the union at that time, T.O. Jones and the rest of them, were quite clear that they had reached a point where a discussion would not resolve the issue. And the mayor made the incredible mistake of stepping right into the middle of a very difficult situation that he couldn't resolve. Those of us from the union, if you know anything at all about workers and you can read their minds, you know right away that an employer in the midst of an emerging strike is not going to settle it with, with kind words. After the mayor spoke, there were some of us who had an opportunity to explain the situation in, in much more detail, both in an effort to make sure the workers clearly understood what was taking place and that, you know, they had a right to, to, to confront their employer in the way that they were.

00:07:45:00

Interviewer:

How did the mayor react to the booing and with the reaction to him?

00:07:49:00

William Lucy:

He was quite taken aback. I mean, nothing like this has ever happened to him before. These were men who he felt had a, a, a major level of respect for him. And, you know, what's, what's taking place here? And I think he got quite, quite perturbed and, and sort of left. I

think for the men, the, the fact that they stood up to the, the mayor was a new experience. This was not a strike at the outset that involved money, didn't involve anything other than the recognition of the men and their problem. And the recognition of the union as a spokesman for them.

Interviewer:

Let's cut it for a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

[slate]

00:08:31:00

Interviewer:

So early on in the strike, can you give me some examples of, of how the negotiations went and, and why they weren't working?

00:08:38:00

William Lucy:

Well, the, the mayor, you know, early in the strike, took the position that the strike was an illegal strike. And, you know, that Memphis, Tennessee was not New York, and the union would not impose a settlement on the city. That, in fact, so long as it was illegal, he would have no discussion with the, with the men or representatives of the men. And this position sort of struck…struck everybody as kind of, kind of strange, because whether there was a strike or wasn't a strike wasn't the issue. The issue was that there was a problem that needed addressing. As we tried to explain to the mayor, you know, one of the key functions of a city and its administration is to provide services. And so, if services are interrupted, whatever is necessary to do to restart those services is what his attention ought to be addressed to. Well, the community, sort of at least saw the view that if there are no discussions, there can be no settlement. So, a wonderful religious leader there, Monsignor Leppert, you know negotiated this strange meeting where, we would in effect, meet in the basement of his church. He would provide all the facilities and we would speak to the mayor and hopefully, the mayor would speak to us. [laughs] On the, the first of these attempts, it was a long rectangular table with the city and its administration on one side, the union and the men on the other side, and Monsignor Leppert sitting on the end. Well, we would speak to the city, and they would not move. Monsignor Leppert would have to interpret what we said to the city, and then the city would speak back to Monsignor Leppert and ask him to tell us what he'd said. Well, this is

the strangest and the silliest situation you ever saw. At the same time, a good deal of this was for public consumption. When the mayor would speak, the television lights would go on and he'd be recorded for posterity. And then when Monsignor Leppert would speak, the lights would go out. I mean it was, it was the strangest environment and that was his way, in his own mind, of not violating the law. He could forever say he has not spoke with the union or the men, and certainly has not negotiated with them.

00:10:38:00

Interviewer:

What about the, the council meeting around the 22nd, when Davis chaired it? What did you guys do and what, what…?

00:10:44:00

William Lucy:

Well, the council meeting, that, that followed, what we thought was a really a very successful beginning of the resolution of the strike, for the meeting of the, Committee on Public Works, chaired by Mr. Fred Davis. That committee had in effect, adopted a resolution that was, would have ended the strike had it been adopted by the full committee and supported by the mayor. Well, at the conclusion of the subcommittee meeting that night, prior to the full council meeting, we, we thought everything would be over the next— day. We went to the city council meeting, the union—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

William Lucy:

—day. We went to the city council meeting, the union—

00:11:18:00

Interviewer:

And we just rolled out.

William Lucy:

I'm sorry.

Interviewer:

No, it's all right.

Camera Crew Member #2:

That was a rollout on 4020.

[cut]

[camera roll #4021]

00:11:23:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Four thousand twenty-one. Timecode fourteen, twenty-one. Mark it.

[slate]

00:11:30:00

Interviewer:

Let's go back to the subcommittee meeting. What did you all do for it?

00:11:33:00

William Lucy:

The, the, we, we, we came to the conclusion that the subcommittee, the Committee on Public Works, really could play a role in bringing this thing to a head. The committee was chaired by a council-member, Fred Davis. He and his committee granted us a meeting, where we wanted to discuss their possibly passing a resolution which could be adopted by the full city council, that would, would frame the issue and recommend a course of, of, of solution. I don't think the committee really realized how serious we were about finding a settlement. On the day that we met, they were hesitant and weren't clear about their responsibility. They felt they may be intruding on the mayor's jurisdiction. We had brought, that day, about thirteen hundred to fifteen hundred people to the city council chambers and we were prepared to stay forever, until we got some action from them. And they, sort of overreacted to a degree and ordered us out of the place and we refused to leave. As a matter of fact, we sent out and got, bread, and bologna and cold cuts and, we just really decided to camp in for, for a good while. The committee, really under some real pressure, you know, called the police, who didn't quite know what to do at that point either. And finally, somewhere near, you know, the 11th hour, they passed a resolution that could've been passed at the beginning of the meeting. And, it provided a framework for the solution. And I guess the interesting thing is that the, this was a brand-new City Hall chambers. I mean, the, the city was so proud of it, it had, you know, bright red rugs, and drapes, you know, tables. The men, who also saw that as their

City Hall, I mean, completely cleaned the place up. You know, it was spotless when we left. And that led into the following day the full meeting of the, of the, of the Memphis City Council where we had been promised a hearing on the committee's recommendation. And since they…the members of the committee were substantial leaders of the council, a pretty strong, you know, indication that it would be adopted by the council as a whole and that would be sort of a sense of the legislative body. And the mayor would buy this and we would move on forward and resolve this thing. Well, again, we came down both with the…we being the union, came down with the, the workers, and across the city, the word had went out that this strike was going to come to a head. So, we had a number of community leaders, religious leaders who came also to the council that morning for the purpose of lending their support to this final solution. Well, when the council meeting opened, it opened in the traditional, you know, formal way. And, at that point, the, the chairperson of the council turned to some other member, I forget who, and they, they just made this silly statement and, and moved to adjourn. And we, we, I mean, we were all caught in this strange situation, Well, what happened to the recommendation that was going to come from the Committee on Public Works? And they simply adjourned and got up to leave. Well, I mean, there was absolute, you know, chaos at that point because, the, the men felt that they had been double-crossed, the union felt that they had been sort of been given short-shrift. And we were quite concerned as to where the, the whole thing was gonna go from there. When we came out of the city council chambers, there was such confusion that we really thought that we had to provide some sort of a cooling off process to allow the frustrations of the men to sort of, you know, tone themselves down. When we came out, we confronted a substantial portion of the Memphis police force that had obviously been called to the spot after we went into the city council chambers. So, we came out to meet this, this horde of police standing out front, and in effect, lining the, the plaza in front of City Hall. Our president, President Wurf, went to who appeared to be in charge of the police force, and while we were still frustrated about what had happened in the, in the council chambers, we wanted at least, the authority to march to some place where we could address the men. And this was, I guess the second major march of the, of the strike. We finally reached agreement that we could march down Main Street using a portion of the street so that, you know, we wouldn't interrupt and disrupt traffic. They agreed to this, we began the march. Some of us who had some other responsibilities took off to a, to take care of those. But the police allowed the march to get, to get stretched out along the street for two, maybe two and a half blocks, and then began to, to really crowd the march using police vehicles, over towards the curb. And in the course of doing this, obviously making it smaller and smaller in terms of the width. And, it depends on who you talk to as to what actually happened at what point in time, but it, but at a point in time, the police began to mace, began to you know, really beat, began to really brutalize the marchers. And everyone who was with them, every, you know, people who were on the sidewalks not even involved in the march itself.

00:16:51:00

Interviewer:

Now, you were, you were laughing telling me, when I said "Was this a turning point?" because of the, the ministers there and the way they were dressed and the reaction. Can you tell me, I mean, was this a turning point, and why were the ministers…?

00:17:01:00

William Lucy:

This was a clear turning point in the strike. The ministers who had came to city council to, to lend their, their moral and personal support to the solution, thought that the men had got, you know, bad treatment before the city council. But they, they did not, I'm sure, think that, that it could not be repaired. When the violence broke out from the police force, the ministers were part of the march. And they certainly didn't believe that, in any stretch of the imagination, that they would be treated the same as ordinary blue-collar workers in the City of Memphis, Tennessee. And the, the, the dividing line or the polarizing line at that day, if you were Black and on the street in Memphis, Tennessee in that area, you were treated the same no matter what your station in life was. And I think this was a turning point in the strike for at least one of the prominent, you know, religious leaders, Ralph Jackson. Jackson, who was a conservative leader in the religious community, but was maced right along with everyone else, just completely had a revelation as to who he was and what he was in the City of Memphis. And I'm sure there were others who experienced the same instant realization that they may be economically better off, they may have a greater stature in life, but before the eyes of the political leadership in the city administration, they were still Black.

00:18:23:00

Interviewer:

You were telling me specifically you that got all these ministers in their, in their Sunday best suits?

00:18:29:00

William Lucy:

The…they were dressed, to appear before the City Council of Memphis, Tennessee, and this is a rather important event for them. And, they, they came down in their, in their finest. The, the, the, I guess the intellectual leadership and the religious leadership of most Southern cities is a very formal group of people and they react very formally. And, and as I say, they had their, their, their Sunday best and the macing was the ultimate outrage and insult to them.

Interviewer:

Cut for a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sure.

[cut]

[slate]

00:19:09:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about inviting King in March, why…what it had to do with morale?

00:19:15:00

William Lucy:

In March, when the decision began to, at least the, issue began to be discussed about inviting Dr. King to come to Memphis, it, it grew out of the frustrations of, of the city and I guess, maybe the, the, the media really putting a lid on what was taking place in Memphis. We were forty-seven days into the strike and, nobody knew it except us and the City of Memphis. Roy Wilkins had come to town, Bayard Rustin had come to town to speak in support of the strike, but it still…there was no understanding beyond the city as to what was taking place. The invitation to Dr. King to come was that we believed that he would, not only, you know, lend his moral support to the strike, but he was in the midst of organizing the Poor People's Campaign and we just really thought that that would be a good movement for him to identify with and that there would be national media with him that would, in effect, take an interest in what was taking place.

00:20:10:00

Interviewer:

Was there a toll being taken on the older workers as well?

William Lucy:

We think so. We think that the—

Interviewer:

Start by saying, by repeating it. Was there a toll being taken on the older workers?

00:20:18:00

William Lucy:

We think there was a toll being taken on the older workers.

Interviewer:

So, you put it in the present tense, "We thought." So, did you think there was a toll on, on the workers at that time?

William Lucy:

Yes, there was. Wait. Let me say. Give me a whole second. [laughs] I'm sorry. There was a toll being taken on the workers because in their opinion, the issues were so simple, yet the city was making them so difficult. And we, we and they believed that a, a moral shot in the arm was, was…would be useful and that Dr. King was the one who had the kind of stature that could bring that, that, that, that moral support as well as inspiration to continue.

00:20:59:00

Interviewer:

What was Reverend Lawson's role?

00:21:01:00

William Lucy:

Reverend Lawson was co-chair, along with H. Ralph Jackson of the committee that was basically, the community support committee. It was called the Committee on the Move for Equality. And it was a, a, a, a structure for the religious community, the political leadership in the Black community, all those who wanted to lend their support to the strike at that time.

Interviewer:

What about when King first, first came? What was that first—are we running out?

Camera Crew Member #1:

We have forty feet.

00:21:30:00

Interviewer:

Describe Lawson for me.

00:21:33:00

William Lucy:

Jim Lawson, was really one of the strong, bright, intelligent leaders of our time, not just that time. He was a, he was a, a very deep thinker, one who had a long-standing relationship with the civil rights movement, and a personal relationship with Dr. King. And had, was pastoring Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis at that time, but well respected across the community.

00:22:02:00

Interviewer:

Was he a powerful leader?

00:22:04:00

William Lucy:

He was a powerful leader in the Black community. He was a hated leader in the, in the broad White community simply because he was a different kind of religious leader than the White power structure was accustomed to dealing with…in Memphis.

00:22:17:00

Interviewer:

And why? What, what was different about him?

00:22:19:00

William Lucy:

His vision of what was necessary to adjust the grievances of, of people now, while they were strong with regard to his religious and theologic responsibilities, he was also—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

William Lucy:

—very militant in terms of what the community ought to be doing for people right now.

[cut]

00:22:37:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #4022]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Speed.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Camera roll 4022.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Time code fourteen, twenty-two.

00:22:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Like he said.

[slate]

00:22:48:00

Interviewer:

King's first speech at the Mason Temple, March 18th. What stands out to you, what was most vivid about what you remember that night?

00:22:57:00

William Lucy:

I think what I remember from that night of that first speech was the incredible ability that King had to understand and interpret the, the issues and what was taking place. He had not been there before, and he had had the most minimal of briefings. But he clearly understood that the, the struggle was really about a new kind of people, people who worked forty hours a week and still lived in poverty, and he was able to, to, arrange his presentation to

demonstrate to the crowd that he understood this, and to give them a sense that, that their struggle was a legitimate struggle that they had every right to carry out.

00:23:36:00

Interviewer:

How did he speak that night? What do you remember and how was the crowd reacting?

00:23:39:00

William Lucy:

Well, the crowd completely reacted as, as, as, as only a crowd could react to Dr. King. I mean, his, his oratory skills were, were incredible, but again, his ability to interpret this and to put it into words that were so basic and so simple that everybody could understand, and he brought the, the audience to just a, a fever pitch. I mean, and I think in the course of that speech, recognized that, that this was a, a new movement in America and a new movement among working people and a new movement among poor people and one that had to be supported.

00:24:15:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember him specifically talking about how he felt that Memphis was…what, what Memphis was like as a community?

00:24:20:00

William Lucy:

Well, he thought that Mem-Memphis was in effect symbolic of, of, of the country as a whole, where the powers to be really had not come to deal with the, the issues that affected the ordinary people. And that the struggle of working people to earn a decent living, was what the, the whole problem in America was about.

00:24:39:00

Interviewer:

OK. I want you to think back for a second, and sort of go into the recesses of your memory, the march that he leads. What do you remember about that march, you specifically?

00:24:49:00

William Lucy:

I, I from the…I, I remember from the march the, the, the organization of the beginning of it, first of all. And how the, almost the entire city thought that this would be the, the catalyst that would, would bring a solution together because you had all of the forces that was necessary. King's prestige, his willingness to, to put himself, you know, in, in the middle of this activity and a growing sense across the community that this thing had gone on just too long. As the march progressed, we began to understand that there were some other, other things at play also. As we learned later on, the police department as well as bureaus of the federal government had really became involved in a rather destructive way. The violence that emerged from the march was not of the strikers' doing but rather, in our opinion, the, the activities of, of provocateurs and…that were, that were really active among certain groups in the community.

00:25:51:00

Interviewer:

As you were marching, when did you first sense that something was wrong? What did you see? What did you feel?

00:25:56:00

William Lucy:

While we were marching, I was about in the first one-third of the march as I could tell at that point. And we began to hear windows breaking, we began to hear, you know, you know, loud rustling and uneasiness among the marchers. And there hadn't, been no violence in whatsoever in the march and certainly none encouraged by the union and we couldn't quite figure out what was taking place. ***And then we began to see individuals who were stepping out of the march, and, and, and, throwing things at windows*** and we began to really be very concerned about what all of this meant. And some of us were staff people and some of the leadership among the strikers, those that we could lay hands on where we were, began to grab a hold of these people and pull them back into the march to, to, to sort of bring this to a halt. After a while, the police themselves, this apparently, not necessarily on the cue, but certainly at…on command, began to wade into the crowd and began to, you know, to beat people, they began to, you know, really truss people up a bit. And we were quite concerned because the march was filled with all kinds of people who had come to participate.

00:27:03:00

Interviewer:

You're being diplomatic right now. If I was in the middle of that, I might have been pretty scared, I mean…

00:27:08:00

William Lucy:

Well, I, I wasn't so, I wasn't scared, I wasn't fearful at that point. What I was more concerned about is the implications that this had for the resolution of the strike. The implications that it had, while I didn't think very deeply about it, for Dr. King. And, and the police. We had, we had a police riot. Not brought on by any confrontation between the marchers and the police, but brought on by the police, instant reaction for the protection of property.

00:27:40:00

Interviewer:

What happened as, as you retreated back on to Beale Street, were you doing anything in particular you can remember?

00:27:46:00

William Lucy:

Well, the, the first thing we were concerned about, as we, as we brought the march to a halt, was the, the safety of Dr. King. And at the front of the march, that was taken care of, and then some of the staff people became concerned about some of the elderly people who were in the crowd and how they needed to be looked after. And the police at this point again, was in-indiscriminately beating people. We decided to move back to, to, Clayborn Temple so that we could really just sort of get ourselves together. And the staff people were just simply trying to take care of everybody that we could to make sure that nobody was seriously injured, either by the stampede of the crowd or by the police and their, and their activities.

00:28:30:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop it there for a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

00:28:33:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Speed.

[slate]

00:28:35:00

Interviewer:

Very briefly, who were the Invaders?

William Lucy:

The, the Invaders [coughs] were a bunch, a group of—

Interviewer:

Let me start again with that.

William Lucy:

[coughs] I'm sorry.

Interviewer:

That's all right.

Interviewer:

Who were the Invaders?

00:28:46:00

William Lucy:

The Invaders were a group of, you know, college students from Memphis State who, had a very, very strong feeling about the need for a more militant approach, not just to the problems of the City of Memphis, but certainly to the problems of the strike made up of, of, student leaders, and I think, very intelligent and very bright kids. They were later infiltrated by the Memphis police department and I suspect by the Federal Bureau of Investigation also.

00:29:10:00

Interviewer:

Now you had a very different description of them when you were in Memphis-

00:29:16:00

William Lucy:

You got me on film, I guess. [laughs]

Interviewer:

OK. [unintelligible] [laughs] question.

William Lucy:

[laughs]

00:29:23:00

Interviewer:

OK, we're driving to the airport and you're with King. Tell me about driving with him and what he was saying, your thoughts about if he was going to come back and why?

00:29:32:00

William Lucy:

As we drove Dr. King to the, airport, we, we discussed a number of things, first of all his perception of, of the strike. And his, his, his classic description that this, that this is the confrontation of the, of the '60s and the '70s, the, the working poor in an effort to improve their own situation. I believe he was committed to coming back because, because the question of whether or not he could have a nonviolent demonstration again was, was, was very, you know, critical to him. There was a more militant mood moving across the country and Dr. King's nonviolent leadership, was being called into question and the violence at this demonstration was being charged directly to him. And he felt that he had to set that record straight.

00:30:16:00

Interviewer:

What was his mood as he got out of the car and left you?

00:30:19:00

William Lucy:

His, his mood when he, when he left us, was, was, was, upbeat but, but pensive. He, he could not understand why this had taken place. In all other situations, his moral authority was sufficient to have a peaceful demonstration and have a peaceful confrontation with the authorities.

00:30:40:00

Interviewer:

Early on in the strike, there were lots of marches, what was happening day, day-to-day?

00:30:45:00

William Lucy:

Day-to-day during the course of the strike we, we, we had to do two things. We had to keep the workers informed and we had to have a role for them to play, both ensuring the city that they were determined to carry on the strike and at the same time, demonstrate to the community that they were still alive and well.

00:31:03:00

Interviewer:

So, on a daily basis, what were they doing?

00:31:05:00

William Lucy:

On a daily basis we were marching downtown. We were marching to City Hall, we were disrupting the, the commercial activities in the business section, the business district of downtown Memphis.

Interviewer:

Do you remember people singing, or what sorts of things they sang?

William Lucy:

We sang every day. We, we sang the traditional freedom songs, "We Shall Not Be Moved." We, we, we, we modified those songs to point out the, the villains of the community, Mayor Loeb, other members of the council who had taken a much more reactionary stand than we thought they, they should have.

00:31:39:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember—

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[camera roll #4023]

[sound roll #408]

00:31:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Camera roll 4023. Timecode fourteen, twenty-three.

[slate]

00:31:51:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember what's, what people were chanting back then?

00:31:54:00

William Lucy:

Well, we were chanting and modifying old civil rights songs back then. I remember one distinctly that was aimed at the, at Mayor Loeb and it paraphrased one of the old spirituals. It was, you know, Loeb is our leader, he shall be removed. The young kids, who had just an incredible, you know, ability to, to develop songs, were the spirit of most of the marchers.

Interviewer:

Can we stop for one second?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sure.

[slate]

00:32:21:00

Interviewer:

So, what was happening, you know, day by day in the marches.

00:32:25:00

William Lucy:

Every day in the…every day during the course of the strike, we had a march. A march downtown or a march to city hall, where we sang, we chanted. And some of the old songs that we, we…I remember distinctly was aimed at the mayor and aimed at the city administration. And I, I, I remember, one of the modifications that we used was, Henry Loeb is our leader, he shall be removed. And that, that was pretty prophetic, we thought, in terms of sending a message to the community as a whole.

00:32:55:00

Interviewer:

That's good. Mountaintop speech. What do you remember, most remember during that speech and what was going on that night?

00:33:06:00

William Lucy:

The, the mountaintop speech took place on an evening, I guess that you could say was perfect for the kind of speech that it was. It was an inspiring speech, one that Dr. King, had really given what appeared to be a good deal of thought to. It told about his personal experiences, both the high points and low points. It wove into it, a message that the strikers were entitled to continue their struggle and certainly entitled to a broad base of support that they had built across the city. He then, you know, went on to, to, to talk about the vision that he saw both for them and for himself. And it was one of the most dramatic speeches I've ever heard. And it was not down, it was not negative, it was really very, very high. When it ended, I mean, the, the, the entire church at Mason Temple just went, went wild with excitement. I mean, he had touched a chord that was, that was so deeply rooted in all of the people, that went far beyond the strikers to community people and he had shared with them his, his view of not only himself but his role in, in society.

00:34:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, I want you to, to think back to that moment. He's finished the speech, he turns around and you see his face, and the crowd reacts. What do you see? What's the crowd doing?

William Lucy:

The, the, the crowd is, is, is leaping to their feet, they're yelling, they're, they're, they're excited about his interpretation of, of himself, his future role both in the movement as well as in the Black experience.

Interviewer:

Did the crowd, did the crowd go wild?

00:34:48:00

William Lucy:

The crowd, the crowd went absolutely wild. And it's, it's just really hard to describe the kind of enthusiasm that was there and the kind of emotion that he had pulled out of people. This strike is, is fifty days old, or fifty-five days old, and, and it is, it's taken its toll on everyone and you're looking for that inspiration, and, and he certainly brought it.

00:35:13:00

Interviewer:

Was he sad at all?

00:35:14:00

William Lucy:

Not at all, not at all. Dr. King was, was very upbeat, was very emotional…his, his, his, his comment about having been to the mountaintop and looked over and seen the promised land was not a, a downer, it was not a negative thought. It was one that…says that the struggle is continuing and I, I, I, I am a part of it and we, we will all, we will overcome. It was a high point, not a low point.

00:35:41:00

Interviewer:

And how did you feel at that moment?

00:35:43:00

William Lucy:

I, I, I personally felt very good. I was always confident that we would win the strike. It was never a question of losing and that reinforced it because it gave the, the men, it gave the union, it sent a signal to across the city, that this moral struggle is going to continue until victory.

00:36:00:00

Interviewer:

OK. What I want you try to do in one statement, a few sentences, is just, when I ask you what did you see when he finished, combine just what you saw of the crowd vividly and what you saw with King and how he felt, and how it made you feel about the strike. So, the mountaintop speech ends and you've built up to this fever pitch, he turns around, you see him, and you see the crowd. How did it, how did it, how did it all…?

00:36:26:00

William Lucy:

Well, I mean, his, the look on his face and the emotion that was being displayed by the crowd said to me that victory is very near in this, in this strike. That the people are united. He has made a moral commitment to it and it's simply a matter of persevering.

00:36:43:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's shut it down for a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

00:36:47:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

And speed.

[slate]

00:36:48:00

Interviewer:

OK, you're at the temple and the crowd is expectant. And in walks Dr. Abernathy. What happens?

00:36:55:00

William Lucy:

Well, we had, the, the, the…we in the union and the, those who had gathered expected Dr. King that night. But bear in mind that that was a, a dreadful night. I mean, it was just a terrible night in terms of the weather. And the expectation was that the crowd would not be very large. Dr. Abernathy came over to deliver the, the main address. And that, there was such enthusiasm that, in effect, it almost demanded that Dr. King come over and speak. And, Ralph then sent word back that the Doc had to come over.

00:37:27:00

Interviewer:

What about that last day? You didn't see King, what were you doing during the day?

00:37:30:00

William Lucy:

The, the city…during, during that, that, that last day, the city had gone to court to get an injunction to prevent the march from taking place. And so, we were dealing with all of the logistics that surrounded the march, attempting to present our case to, to the courts, trying to get people prepared to play different roles in the march…Marshalls, trying to make sure that the strikers and the signs and the staging and everything that we thought had to be done logistically to support the march. Both we and the…Committee on the move, on the Move for Equality was deep, deeply involved in.

00:38:09:00

Interviewer:

So, what were you specifically doing during that day? Do you remember?

00:38:12:00

William Lucy:

My job was, was staff, mobilization and staff support and the continued preparation of the leadership of the union, the rank-and-file leadership, so that they understood their role.

Interviewer:

So, you were getting in contact with people?

William Lucy:

Yes, we were touching base with people all over the city because, you know, we would mobilize at lunch time, but the march was going to begin earlier than that, so we wanted to make sure that everybody was in place. It, it was a, it was a busy period for the staff of the union.

Interviewer:

Can we shut down for a second?

[cut]

[slate]

00:38:48:00

Interviewer:

Tell me what you were doing the next day?

00:38:51:00

William Lucy:

The next day we were busily preparing for the march that was gonna take place. There were, there were a number of, I guess, some mechanical and logistical things that we had to get in place. And we were busy going about the business of dealing with the injunction and organizing for the march itself.

Interviewer:

OK. Cut it.

[cut]

[slate]

00:39:12:00

Interviewer:

The speech is over, he turns around. How did the crowd react, how did King look and how did it make you feel?

00:39:22:00

William Lucy:

When, when Dr. King concluded the speech and simply turned, on, on…at the pulpit, I mean, the, the crowd actually went wild. I mean, there was just such emotion being displayed. He, he was, was satisfied himself that he had delivered what was the speech necessary for that, that moment. Myself and I'm sure the rest of us who had responsibility for the strike really genuinely felt that this was a, a critical point in the struggle. That, that he had brought the kind of message that was necessary to, to re-energize the whole movement. I had never had any doubts both before, but certainly at that point that we would be victorious in the strike.

Interviewer:

How are we doing with time? We have like a half a minute or something?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yes, that's like a minute.

00:40:11:00

Interviewer:

Let's go back to Lawson. When you first met Lawson…I mean, how did Lawson strike you? What was he like? What was Reverend Lawson like?

00:40:21:00

William Lucy:

Reverend Jim Lawson was a, was a very, you know, interesting individual. He was not quick to join the side of the union, although he was very quick to join the side of the men. He was a very deep, intellectual, you know, person, one who had a great history in the civil rights movement. As a matter of fact, he had been an advisor to Dr. King many years before. But also, had studied directly in Egypt, or rather in India, with, with Mr. Ghandi. I mean, he was a, he was a disciple of the non-violent movement but extremely militant, extremely intelligent and extremely committed.

00:41:00:00

Interviewer:

Was it his personal invitation that brought King to Memphis?

00:41:04:00

William Lucy:

Yes. Jim personally invited Dr. King to join the struggle because he understood the relationship of the struggle of these workers with the overall mobilization of the Poor People's Campaign that Dr. King was involved in. And the, the, the merging of our need to have Dr. King's moral presence and what he thought would be Dr. King's understanding of the struggle was what motivated him to, to reach out.

00:41:31:00

Interviewer:

So, we're rolling out?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Let's just roll it out. Thank you very much.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:41:38:00