

[Jim Cole, Negro Packinghouse Worker]

W3631

Jim Cole, Negro

Packinghouse worker

Jul 6 - 1939

[? - ?]

Betty Burke

May 18, 1939

[American Lives?]

I'm working in the Beef Kill section. Butcher on the chain. Been in the place twenty years, I believe. You got to have a certain amount of skill to do the job I'm doing.

Long ago, I wanted to join the AFL union, the Amalgamated Butchers and Meat Cutters, they called it and wouldn't take me. Wouldn't let me in the union. Never said it to my face, but reason of it was plain. Negro. That's it. Just didn't want a Negro man to have what he should. That's wrong. You know that's wrong.

Long about 1937 the CIO come. Well, I tell you, we Negroes was glad to see it come. Well, you know, sometimes the bosses, or either the company stooges try to keep the white boys from joining the union. They say, 'you don't want to belong to a black man's organization. That's all the CIO is.' Don't fool nobody, but they got to lie, spread lyin' words around.

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There's a many different people, talkin' different speech, can't understand English very well, we have to have us union interpreters for lots of our members, but that don't make no mind, they all friends in the union, even if they can't say nothin' except 'Brother', an' shake hands.

Well, my own local, we elected our officers and it's the same all over. We try to get every people represented. President of the local, he's Negro. First V. President, he's Polish. Second V. Presdient, he's Irish. Other officers, Scotchman, Lithuanian, Negro, German.

Well, I mean the people in the yards waited a [long?] while for the CIO. When they began organizing in the Steel towns, you know, and out in South Chicago, everybody wanted to know when the CIO was coming out to the yards. Twelve, fourteen men started it, meeting in back of a saloon on Ashland, [talkin'?] over what to do, first part of 1937. Some of my friends are charter members, well I got in too late for that.

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Union asked for 15 extra men on the killing floor, on the chain. Company had enough work for them, just tried to make us carry the load. After we had a stoppage, our union stewards went up to the offices of the company and talked turkey. We got the extra help.

I don't care if the union don't do another lick of work raisin' our pay, or settling grievances about anything, I'll always believe they done the greatest thing in the world gettin' everybody who works in the yards together, and [breakin'?] up the hate and bad feelings that used to be held against the Negro. We all doing our work now, nothing but good to say about the CIO.

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