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## [Italian Shoe Machinery Worker, Beverly #3]

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. . . Interview with Roland Damiani

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by

Merton R. Lovett

. . .

“As well as remembered.”

Interview with Roland Damiani

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by Merton R. Lovett

. . .

(from memory)

"I'd rather not talk about it, Mr. Lovett. Why? Well, I don't exactly know. A man can't find fault with his bread and butter.

"How do I know I won't be quoted? I would worry about my job; it isn't worth it.

"Yes, that's right. I have no occasion to criticize the United Shoe. They have treated me more than well. But I don't like to talk about it. They might not like it.

"Who might not like it? Well, I — they — I don't know.

"I suppose I think of the bosses — the supers.

"No, no one ever told me not to talk. My boss is a fine man; easy to talk to. He's fair and square.

"Mr. Cole? Mr. Vose? They are real guys. They have helped hundreds of men who were in trouble.

"So far as I know they are all square shooters. A fellow isn't afraid to go to them if he has a just complaint. A man that does his work and tends to business hasn't much to worry about.

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"Yes, perhaps it's the big shots in Boston that worry us. They don't know us. We don't know them. We are kind of superstitious about them. They wouldn't like loose talkers. They insist on loyalty.

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"No, there are no rules about it. But everyone knows that in a big factory there are many secrets. Suppose some competitors found out about some plans or new inventions?"

"Not that I know of. I never knew anybody who was fired for criticizing the company, but they say men have been. And jobs are scarce these days. Who knows? Where would a fellow get another job if he lost the one he's got?"

"I've heard that the company was afraid of spies."

"No. perhaps there aren't any. But the Government is looking for a chance to get something on the big corporations."

"Well, anything the Government did to the United Shoe would hurt us. If they lose any business, some of us are bound to lose our jobs. The men have got to stand by the company. It's for their own benefit."

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"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps there is a hush, hush atmosphere in all companies."

"No, I could not say that the bosses are to blame. Perhaps the men imagine things. Perhaps it is the same in any big shop."

"Maybe so, but I will not be quoted. You'd better question somebody else."

"Well, I don't hear many complaints about the United Shoe. I think the good steady workers are pretty well satisfied."

"Perhaps you have. Some men would never be contented. Some are no good."

"Sure, who wouldn't like to get more money?"

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"I got promotions. I worked for them. I deserved them. If a man is lazy or careless or a poor mechanic, he can't expect advancement.

"Sure, some men deserve higher pay. Some probably don't deserve so much. Men are not alike. On piecework some men make forty dollars — some twenty-five. Not everybody is intelligent and skillful.

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"Well, you know which ones would do the kicking.

"No, you'd better ask somebody else. I won't talk about unions. I need no union to help me.

"How do I know it? Do the union members in other shops get more pay? Do they get steadier work? I don't think so.

Perhaps the company is opposed to a union? How should I know?

"What happened in 1919? Supposing the men who belonged to the new union, lost their jobs? I was wise. I didn't lose mine.

"Well, if a union man approached me, I'd tell him where he got off.

"I believe the bird in the hand is best. A good job is good. I wouldn't take a chance.

"I said before that you can't suit everybody. Why should they want to strike? Have the workmen at the general General Electric got higher pay? Have they worked as much? They have not.

"Well, what would Beverly do without the United Shoe. During the depression what city has been so lucky? Less than a 5 thousand men lost their jobs during the worst times. Most of them were unmarried.

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"Why is there no union? Perhaps most of the men don't want a union. The company treats them too well.

"Perhaps some are afraid. I wouldn't say.

"Do I think the management has bribed the men? I haven't thought of it.

"That's your idea, not mine. Perhaps the company spends a hundred thousand in benefits to save a million in wages? But you'll have to admit that we do get the benefits.

"Yes, the company did give all the men that did not strike contracts for a year at good pay.

"Probably that was one reason that the strike failed. What do you think?

"No, the company kept the contracts. They have not, except in a few cases, cut the pay during the depression. They have only cut the number of hours.

"What do I think would happen to a workman who tried to unionize his job? I have nothing to say.

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"The Italians are not agitators. They are good workers and do not take chances on losing their jobs.

"There may be a few. I don't know. Perhaps there are even Italian communists. But if there are, they are damn few.

"Really, Mr. Lovett, I'd rather not.

"No, I'm not afraid. I think it would be disloyal.

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“Well, if the shop is unionized, there will be hell to pay. What would Beverly do without the United Shoe?”

“Who says what?”

“Why, many people think that the company would leave Beverly, if the shop was unionized, and they couldn't make any profits.”

“No, I never heard a boss say it. I don't know who said it. Everybody is afraid it would happen. You're sure that you won't quote me?”

“Well, you can't blame employees for not talking. The big shots wouldn't like to be criticized.”

“Despots? Benevolent dictators? I don't know. But there is some saying about finding fault with your boss. What is it, Mr. Lovett.”

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“That's right. It wouldn't be nice or safe to bite the hand that feeds you.”

“No, I think I have talked too much. Excuse me. I must make some calls for the evening school. Several were absent last night. I must visit them.”

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