

**TrimmerAustin\_19920206**

RICHARD SHARPLESS: New Jersey. The time is 10:45 a.m. It's February the sixth, 1992. Okay Austin, first of all, what's your age?

AUSTIN TRIMMER: I'll be 65 -- I mean, 66 -- the 11th of this month.

RS: Sixty-six the 11th of this month. You're a lifetime resident of Phillipsburg?

AT: I spent the biggest part of my life here in Phillipsburg, yes.

RS: You have --

AT: I have left for -- well, when the Depression hit in '29 my dad was working on construction and he got laid off and then we went from farm to farm to farm in New Jersey up until 1936. That's when my dad got a job at the old Edison [00:01:00] Cement plant in New Village and it's at that time, I realized the value of a union. Because we -- growing up during the Depression, I know what it's like to go hungry and we started to eat better then.

RS: Once you had the union?

AT: Yes, yes.

RS: Now you have a family? You have how many children?

AT: I have three children.

RS: Three children.

AT: I have a daughter, she is a special education teacher up in Nazareth. And then my middle son works up at Norwescap as an energy consultant. Then my youngest son, he starts Monday down at the reformatory.

RS: Oh, okay, in Clinton, right?

AT: Yes.

RS: When did you originally start to work?

AT: Well I spent four years [00:02:00] in the navy during World War II. I was involved in the Normandy invasion. I spent five days on Omaha Beach without moving. From June the sixth to -- and then five days later we left. I was in the amphibious force. We were stuck there on that beach --

RS: Pinned down.

AT: -- for five days because at Normandy they didn't know which way it was going to go. Whether we'd have to retreat or nothing, so they said "You have to stay there." Then when I was discharged I worked for construction for a while and in the winter months I got laid off. I just felt like "I can't take this," so I then got a job with a trucking company. Schober, Henry Schober Trucking Company from southside Easton, you remember it? [00:03:00] I realized what happened. Because I used to, at 13th Street there, where they had all these textiles and power mills, I used

to make a couple trips a day there to pick up stuff to be shipped by railroads. Now, take a look at them buildings over there. Vacant, abandoned buildings. The trucking company lost their franchise to Hall of [Freight?] so that's when I applied at Ingersoll.

RS: What year was that?

AT: That was about -- in '51, I started at Ingersoll January 15th, 1951. I was there until I was forced onto pension on the 31st of October, 1987.

RS: So you were there thirty --

AT: I was in my 38<sup>th</sup> year.

RS: [00:04:00] 38 years. What did you do when you first started at Ingersoll?

AT: I was a raw stores attendant. I worked in the yard, under, emptying the castings that come up from the foundry and putting them in their proper locations and then when they was ready to go in the shop, I loaded them --

RS: What were some of the other jobs you had?

AT: I went in the babbitt room.

RS: Explain that.

AT: I made the bearings, all the bearings for Ingersoll. I even made some for some of their other plants throughout the country. As a matter of fact they started to use a nickel cadmium babbitt. Their Canadian plant couldn't get

the proper procedure down, so the company from Canada, their plant in Canada, called [00:05:00] down to Phillipsburg and wondered how we used this stuff. They didn't have anyone at Ingersoll that could figure this out, so they flew me up to Canada to show them how to use it --

RS: Show them how to do it. You stayed in the babbitt shop then for how many years?

AT: I was in there for -- I was -- thirty-one years

RS: Thirty-one years, in the same shop?

(phone ringing in background; woman's voice)

AT: And when I was out of work, I mean when I was low on work or something like that, because of my experience working in the yard under a crane, I used to operate a crane throughout the shop or run jitney, that's what they had me doing when I was low on work.

RS: Now you said you contracted the --

AT: Asbestosis.

RS: Asbestosis. Okay, would you explain how that happened?

AT: [00:06:00] Well, in the process of making a bearing we used asbestos wick between the bearing and the fixture itself to keep the babbitt from leaking out. Then after the babbitt is set up, from the liquid stages it was in, to get hard then you use a chisel and chisel the fixture away from it. Then we used to use the air hose to blow the excess

asbestos away from there and at the time I didn't know the danger of that stuff floating in the air.

RS: Right. Did anybody know the dangers of asbestos?

AT: Well they've known that since 1902 but they kept it suppressed.

RS: Who's "they"?

AT: Well, the companies, and --

RS: So Ingersoll Rand, you feel, knew that there was a danger involved --

AT: Yes I do.

RS: You were provided with no protection, no protective equipment --

AT: [00:07:00] No protection. In 1987 another OSHA inspector came through and he said, "Where's your respirator?" I said, "I was never issued one." Well he said, "With this, even though you don't use asbestos anymore," he said, "That nickel cadmium babbitt is very hard on your lungs." He said, "You could end up with lung problems, using that nickel, breathing in the fumes of it." He says, "The lead you have here and the chemicals, the muriatic acid, hydrochloric acid, zinc chloride," he said, "You should be wearing" --

RS: This was in 1987?

AT: Yes. He said, "Don't do another job till you have one issued." So the boss made me out a request for one, go to the dispensary and pick up one [00:08:00] and this was in May of --

RS: '87?

AT: -- '87. In June of '87 the general foreman Mel Butler come in and he threw all the switches on my pots. I says, "What's going on, Mel?" He says, "Aus," he said, "we either have to improve the ventilating system in here or shut it down," he says, "so we're shutting it down."

RS: Just like that?

AT: Yup. That was my --

RS: That was when you were essentially laid off

AT: Well I worked from on until the end of October that year.

RS: Right. So in other words, they shut down that whole operation because of the safe--

AT: The hazards.

RS: -- hazards. But you'd worked at it for 30 some years.

AT: Yes.

RS: And you think the company knew about the hazards all this time?

AT: Yes, yes. I believe that.

RS: Why do you think they shut down instead of trying to provide some sort of --

AT: Well at that time they was in the [00:09:00] process of closing the division down anyhow because they had that joint venture with Dresser and they was moving the turbo division out anyhow.

RS: How did you feel towards Ingersoll Rand over the years you were working there? Obviously now you feel -- you, by the way, you haven't been compensated at all for this asbestosis --

AT: I have the --

RS: -- have you?

AT: I have the letter right here from the law firm that's handling my case. Right here.

RS: So you're actually --

AT: In the process --

RS: -- in the process of trying to get some sort of compensation for this.

AT: Yes. Because they even set up a portable x-ray lab down at the Union Hall and anybody who thought they had a lung condition could get their x-ray taken down there. Well, I had an x-ray [00:10:00] and the doctor says, "It was such a poor quality that I cannot tell." Then when I was in the hospital in the -- I went in, I had such a breathing problem in November 1990 that I was in the hospital 24 days, they had me on the breathing machine for 10. The

doctor says, "I don't know how you pulled through," he said, "because we gave up all hope on you. You have a terrible breathing problem but we don't know what it is." So after I was discharged, made arrangements to go down to Deborah Hospital. That's a lung and heart hospital down at Browns Mills, New Jersey. They said "Bring your records with you from the hospital." I took them down there and the doctor Dale Murphy said, "I can't see where you ever had a CT scan." [00:11:00] I says, "I never did." He said, "With your breathing problems, you never had a CT scan?" "No." Well he said, "We're gonna give you one." So they give me a CT scan down there --

RS: And that's where they found out what you had.

AT: He's there looking at me and he's shaking his head. He says, "You don't need a doctor," he said, "what you need is a lawyer." He said, "You're loaded with asbestosis and there's nothing we can do. There's no medical help for asbestos patients."

RS: Are there any other men over there that were involved in the same type of work?

AT: No, I was a -- it was a one-man operation.

RS: Oh, it was a one-man operation. I see, I see.

AT: That's what it ended up. When I first went in the babbitt room, it was two of us there. Then they stopped making oil



engines and different types of compressors, so it dwindled down, it ended up --

RS: This babbitt shop, how do you spell that?

AT: [00:12:00] B-A-B-B-I-T-T-E-R.

RS: Okay, I was wondering how that's spelled, alright. What was your attitude toward the Ingersoll Rand all these years? Did you feel positive towards the company, was it a good place to work?

AT: Well I thought it was a good place, although we had problems. I ended up getting suspended seven times while I was there, fighting other people's battles.

RS: Does that involve union work?

AT: Yes, yes, yes.

RS: Suspended, you mean suspended on the job or --

AT: Well, suspended with intent to discharge for some of the things I did. Fighting these cases.

RS: Seven times?

AT: Yes.

RS: (Laughs)

RUSSELL MOSER: Were you regarded as a rebel, an agitator?

AT: Well, as a matter of fact the company themselves [00:13:00] said that I had more clout in Washington than they did (laughter) and they sent me to D.C. twice for different bills that would benefit both of us.

RS: The management, actually, sent you?

AT: Yes, management actually sent me to D.C.

RS: Well, before we get into your, that kind of work, what was -- so you felt more or less positive towards the company?

AT: Yes.

RS: You felt it was a good place to work?

AT: Yes, yes.

RS: Did you feel they paid fairly over the years?

AT: Yes, up until the time that Reagan come in office and then that's when we, well, I -- 1987 --

RS: Nineteen eight-one.

AT: -- no. '86 I think it was. The company says, "Competition is so great and business is hurting. In order for us to compete you're gonna have to take a vote [00:14:00], getting wages cut." That really irritated me because our membership voted for us to take a cut and I took a 59 cent an hour end cut, a cut in pay. Which had an effect on my pension, when I went on pension, and it had an effect on the amount I got from Social Security and at the same time I had to pay towards my healthcare, which up until that time it was --

RS: Covered.

AT: -- covered. And now even though I'm on pension I still pay \$20 a month, it's deducted for my health care.

RS: When did the -- So you say things began to change when the Reagan administration began?

AT: Yes.

RS: Did you feel that the company was not keeping up with its competitors, was not reinvesting, did you get any idea about why the company --

AT: [00:15:00] Yeah, that was one of the reasons, they just wasn't putting any money back into it. At the same time we took a cut, the annual report from the top executives was published in Fortune Magazine. We took a cut but the chairman of the board got a nice fat increase. And this--

RS: Sounds familiar!

AT: Yes, yes. It's a trend throughout the country, once Reagan took over. Its welfare for the wealthy.

RS: So you feel that there was -- it was not just economic, it was possibly political.

AT: Yes, yeah. Oh yes.

RS: You say that the management wasn't reinvesting, wasn't modernizing, wasn't putting anything back in, did other workers see this thing happening too, did they feel the same way?

AT: Oh, yes, yes.

RS: What was --

AT: A lot of the people over there, they wouldn't [00:16:00]  
open their mouth because they, "Oh, I'll get in trouble."  
Where I didn't mind opening my mouth.

RS: Did the company explain any, why it was doing this or what  
was happening or didn't they explain anything?

AT: No, they wouldn't explain anything. Russ can verify that.

RS: Russ has already said that. So about this time your own  
feelings and attitude towards the company began to change,  
is that right?

AT: Yes, yes. Well, once the Reagans fired the air traffic  
controllers, that was opening the door for it --

RS: You knew that --

AT: -- because it's just like I told the reporter from the  
Express, I said "Reagan and Bush stole a page from Hitler's  
book -- "Destroy the unions." And that's the way I felt  
about it.

RS: You felt it was open season on you?

AT: Yes, yes. Open season, yes. It was out and out. I said,  
[00:17:00] I made this statement too, to the newspapers  
that, "People didn't understand what Reagan was saying when  
he said 'Go back to the good old days.' The good old days  
when it didn't matter what color you were, you were a  
slave." I was surprised the paper printed that.

RS: You obviously were very active in the union. When did you begin to get active with the union and why?

AT: Well, I have to go back to when my dad got -- I seen the value of a union. Once I become -- well, I worked very hard to get the Steelworkers into Ingersoll so I was on the original committee.

RS: Why did you want the Steelworkers over against the, who was it, the IUE?

AT: UE.

RS: UE.

AT: I felt that the UE just wasn't doing the job. [00:18:00] I mean, that should be done.

RS: So you were one of the original organizers for Steelworkers?

AT: For Steelworkers, yes and soon as the Steelworkers were certified, Tommy Mandorino was our first president. He said "Since you were so active in getting the Steelworkers in here, how about getting in on one of the committees or something." So I got involved and very shortly after that I become a steward and I was a steward for 36 years. Then in 1960, I ran for the executive board and I was elected every year, every term, I spent -- I was on the executive board longer than any other member of this local.  
[00:19:00] 28 years I was.

RS: Twenty-eight years. That's even longer than Russ.

(laughter)

RM: That's how long I spent at Ingersoll, 28 years.

RS: Then you got very much interested in politics. Can you explain a little bit your work as it relates to the union and political activities?

AT: Once I got involved with the Steelworkers, I had a better understanding, because the Steelworkers run a good political action committee campaign and I'd become more interested in politics at that time, and one of our members that was on the legislative committee become ill and resigned and I was appointed to finish his term. That was in 1969. [00:20:00] This is elected office throughout the Warren/Hunterdon county, all Steelworkers in the --

RS: In the area, the district.

AT: -- Warren/Hunterdon county, vote to have a man on there to represent the two counties and I've been on there ever since.

RS: I see. What kind of work did you do?

AT: Well, we -- anything to do with legislation, it's just like workmen's compensation. New Jersey ranked number 45 in the nation as far as payouts for workmen's compensation. They had a new bill in -- if I went through my papers I could probably find out who introduced the bill. I didn't run

across it yet -- [00:21:00] but they wanted me in Tennessee -- in Trenton to testify for this bill. I made three trips to Trenton on this same bill. And it become law. And now New Jersey went from 45th to fifth.

RS: Fifth?

AT: Yes, yes.

RS: That's amazing.

AT: It was a good [feeling?].

RS: So you feel you had a direct hand in the passage of this.

AT: Yes. I might have a letter here someplace thanking me for --

RS: Now you said the company actually sent you to Washington too to testify, what was that all about?

AT: That was on, it was a program that was called DISC, and I forget, that's the initials of the, it's some kind of a tax program for business because the business they did overseas and they was going to eliminate it. [00:22:00] They sent me to D.C. to see if we could keep it on, because it meant work for our plant. I was successful in that. Later on, there was, it was called, it was a state bill on the, it was called Arab Boycott Bill. In order to surpass this state bill, they sent me to D.C. to get a federal bill in to override, supersede the --

RS: State bill.

AT: -- state bill. So we were successful in that. Because that would have hurt, we'd have had a massive layoff, because at that time Ingersoll was doing an awful lot of work for Iran --

RS: The oil companies.

AT: -- the oil companies over there, yes.

RS: [00:23:00] In your work, while you were involved in this union activity and this political activity, were you aware that -- you were obviously aware that things were going badly for the company?

AT: Yes.

RS: How did you feel about that? Did you feel the company was doing enough, or doing anything, to try to correct its slipping position?

AT: I think they should have been doing more.

RS: Do you have any idea what you think they should have been doing?

AT: Well, they should have put more emphasis on --

RS: On reinvestment?

AT: -- yeah, on reinvestment, keeping up with the -- cause they had some equipment over there that dated back to World War I that they were still using.

RS: World War I?



AT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, real old stuff.

MARTIN DESHT: Sounds like the steel company.

AT: Yes.

RS: Do you think they could have done more for the workers when they started to slip [00:24:00]? Or was their attitude they didn't care?

AT: It seemed like they didn't care. Yes, if they would have kept up with times and got some modern equipment, I think it would have made a different story.

RS: What's your opinion as to why they had -- management had this attitude?

AT: I think it's the people that was running it at that time.

RS: You think it was just incompetence?

AT: Yes, yes. You know, I was very instrumental in getting OSHA to become law too. I made more than one trip to D.C. on that bill.

RS: Now ironically they don't even use it --

AT: It was a good, excellent bill. Because when that would become law, right after it would become law, we have a problem in this plant here, the next day we would have somebody from OSHA in there. It was good law up until the time [00:25:00] that Reagan took over. Once Reagan took over, now if I call on the phone, it's got to be in writing.

RS: Do they react at all? Do they come in fast?

AT: Then not only does it have to be writing, OSHA has to get a search warrant, they had to go get a warrant. And then the company says, "We're not going to let you in." So they just walk away. So the problem's still there.

RS: So you feel like there really hasn't been any enforcement since the Reagan Administration --

AT: No, no. The same way I was sent to D.C. when our ERISA Act become law.

RS: What was that?

AT: That was a pension reform act. That was a good law. But they found a loophole in it, under Reagan, and I think it's something like 26 billion dollars has been drained out of different [00:26:00] pension funds throughout the country. We have a new law in trying to plug that loophole and there hasn't been too much action on it.

RS: It hasn't been much success, right?

AT: No.

RS: Since you've left Ingersoll, what've you been doing?

AT: I'm still active on the legislative end of it.

RS: The union asked you to do that?

AT: Yes, yes. I'm also, I helped form our Warren/Hunterdon County labor council here in New Jersey. I've been Vice President of that for the last 21 years.

RS: So you've been still active?

AT: Yeah, they wanted me to move up and take over the presidency but I said, "With my other duties I'll just stay," because I represent the people of Warren County. It keeps me busy because the different [00:27:00] -- and then I'm also on the board for United Way for the Allocations and Emissions and right now we're going to -- I missed a meeting last week, I got one on the 19th of this month, I'm having a lot of meetings on United Way. I have a meeting tonight because I'm Vice Chairman of the Red Cross Chapter in Phillipsburg.

RS: You're very busy. OK.

AT: Yes.

RS: You mentioned, earlier on, you talked about the effect of inflation and everything has had on your pension. You feel you're really worse off now?

AT: Yes. Definitely. If I can get my wife down here she would -- she's my, she does all the bookkeeping work and she'll tell you.

RS: Do you think this is caused by present economic policies?

AT: [00:28:00] Yes, yes, yes.

RS: What do you think about the decline of American industry, how do you feel about it?

AT: Well, this is the way I look at it. Under Reagan and Bush, their primary concern was, "Take care of my wealthy friends." Like this here investment tax.

RS: Right. Tax credit.

AT: Tax credit

MD: Capital gains?

AT: Capital gains. Get this capital gains tax and they will invest. Yeah, but where are they going to invest? In Korea, Japan, Mexico. We've lost so many jobs. I have a letter here someplace, that our own government --  
[00:29:00] it's on the books by America, but our own government don't abide by that. I wrote two letters to Don Ritter and Jim Courter who was our congressman at the time. In the 12 years that Ritter's been our congressman over there, he has never answered one of my letters or one of my telephone calls.

MD: Don Ritter?

AT: Has never answered, no --

MD: Congressman Don Ritter, 16th --

AT: Although 65, 60% of our members come from his districts he would not honor one letter. And this irritates me because --

MD: Your friends in government.

AT: Yes. And, well, Ingersoll Rand was a little bitter for pumps for the Defense [00:30:00] Department. That contract went to Italy. I was so irritated that I sat down and wrote a letter --

RS: Why do you think it went to Italy if Ingersoll was a little bitter?

AT: Well, Congressman Courter give me a ride on the merry go round and said that, "They're part of NATO and they have the right to bid on each contract and," but I told Courter I said, "Why don't you add into that contract what the government is losing in income tax, what they're losing in social security and what they're paying out in unemployment. Add that to the contract and see what you come up with." I said, well, I also wrote in the letter, I said, "A plant in your own district, Taylor-Wharton, has closed down flat because them oxygen acetylene bottles that was manufactured in Easton [00:31:00], that contract was awarded to Japan and that place is closed down flat. I said, "I have some friends that worked over there." I said, "They put their life on the line fighting, in the Pacific, and now the good government -- a nice pat on the back! They're in their late fifties and no job!"

MD: You said Taylor-Wharton?

AT: Yes. I said, "I took a ride up through Connecticut. I stopped for gas up there. And this guy had all these flags in his yard." I said to the attendant, "What, does that guy work for the United Nations?" He says, "He's out in the yard there, he looks like he's about your age, why don't you go over there and talk to him?" So I went over and talked to him. "What's with all the flags, you work for the United Nations?" He says, "No, each one of them flags represents a country where our American jobs has been exported." [00:32:00] He says, "And mine was one of them. I worked for Coal Industries. Our good government awarded that contract to Italy, Beretta of Italy and --

RS: That's right, yeah, the U.S. Army uses Berettas instead of --

AT: Yes. You know I tried to bring up with Courter I said, "Reagan keeps bragging about the amount of jobs that he's creating in this country." I says, "Yeah, all minimum wage jobs." I said, "Which adds to our deficit, because when you go from a good paying job to a minimum wage job, you're not paying the taxes to the federal government or the state that you normally would on your good paying job." I said, "We have a new shopping center here in Phillipsburg that opened up." I said, "I feel bad to go out there, [00:33:00] because I've seen a top notch machine operator

out there mopping the floor." I said, "You feel great like that, you know." When there's no --

RS: Yeah, skilled experience doing that kind of stuff --

AT: Yeah, skilled experience doing janitor work.

RM: Who was it, Aus, do you remember?

AT: Joe [Brunio's?] working out there for that frying chicken, he's working out there. The one guy, I didn't know too well, he worked at the drill floor, then he come down to turbo, he got laid off. He's working in Hess's out there.

MD: In Hess's?

AT: Yeah, Hess's.

RS: What impact -- now you obviously through your work with the union know a lot of men who were laid off and how it affected them. What impact do you [00:34:00] think had on the community as well as families?

AT: Well, it's like what the one guy I was talking to, he said, "You know," he said, "when I was working at Ingersoll, I had a good paying job, my wife was home with the kids, I had health insurance. Now I'm working down here, just a few cents above minimum wage." He said, "My wife had to go to work in order for us to survive. And it's even taking part of this pay because now our kids is in daycare." He says. So he was questioning me what New Jersey is doing

for these people that don't have any healthcare. And I said we're working on a program right now.

RS: So you feel this has really had a negative effect on people?

AT: Oh yes, it's very difficult. [00:35:00] I run across one of the people that -- over in Easton I was over there, and I won't mention his name, but I said to him, "What happened to you?" I said, "You look like you just crawled out the sewer." He said, "I want to tell you something," he said, "Since I left Ingersoll," he said, "when I was at Ingersoll, I was buying a home, I was buying a car, I had a family. I got laid off and the only thing I could find was a job in McDonald's. My car was repossessed. They foreclosed on my home. And the place we rented, I couldn't make the payments. In order for my wife to get on welfare we had to separate and I'm living in the streets now." So that's --

MD: That's the new American dream.

AT: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

RS: [00:36:00] You think Ingersoll had an obligation to do more for its people than it did, people like that?

AT: I figure that up until the time that Reagan come in office, joint ventures and stuff like that wouldn't have been allowed.



RS: So you feel it's --

AT: In other words, at one time there was once such a thing as competition. Now they have a joint venture. Because even the customers at Ingersoll they was very disturbed, these oil companies that bought the turbines from Ingersoll. They said they "Always bought Ingersoll because it was a better product than Dresser made. And now what are we gonna do?" Well as a matter of fact, some of our ex-employees started their own company up by, off Airport Road up there. To overhaul --

RS: Pumps.

AT: Turbo--

RS: Turbos.

AT: Turbines. [00:37:00] Ingersoll turbines. As a matter of fact, I was just talking to one of the guys that work up there, he says now that Dressers -- all this repair work, they're trying to underbid them to run them out of business

RS: Dresser's trying to underbid them?

AT: Yeah, on it's repair work.

RS: You think the government should be going more to correct this situation? The decline of American industry? Help workers --

AT: They should be doing more to keep manufacturing in this country. That's just like General Motors, Chrysler, and

Ford, has already moved 55 plants out of the United States to Mexico. Now I just run across an article where Zenith has one plant left in the United States --

RS: Right, they're gonna move that.

AT: As soon as Bush gets this [00:38:00] new deal approved with Mexico they're leaving this country and that's 1200 jobs. So they're just gonna --

RS: So you think there should be restrictions on the ability of plants to move?

AT: Yeah, I mean you can't replace a good paying job with a minimum wage job. The United State is going to keep going down that drain hole.

RS: Right, and then when you get minimum wage jobs you can't pay for the products you do make.

AT: Yeah. Just like this Christmas they said, they already closed four stores out of this new shopping center. If you're working for minimum wage, you can't go out, let's say I'm going out to buy a new shirt, you patch the one you have on. You just don't have the money to survive. You got to buy food, you got to pay your utility bills.

RS: So obviously you've been busy though, trying to correct this situation, [00:39:00] trying to do what you can.

AT: Yes, yes, yes.

RS: That's good. Okay. Any questions you gentlemen want to ask?

RM: No, I just like to say to you, Austin, I've known Austin for a long time and I know he's always involved. In fact I can remember Courter, he was never one of your favorite guys --

AT: Well as a matter of fact, before he left office, our trip to Washington, our office in Washington which is run by Jack Sheehan, he sends out a letter that the delegates from the Steelworkers will be in Washington, we will be in your office, we would like to set up an appointment. And of about 14 congressmen down there, Courter is the only one to call our office down there saying "Who's going to lead the delegate down to my office?" He wasn't available because he didn't want to face me.

MD: [00:40:00] Did Don Ritter ever answer any of your calls or anything?

AT: Never. He has never.

MD: I guess, what'd he figure if you were out of his district therefore you were out of his --

AT: Yeah, but I even put in the letter, I said, I represent, 65% of our people live in your district. I even spelled it out and underlined it.

RM: That's Don.

RS: Yeah, he's no friend of the working man, that's for sure.

RM: I think if more people would've listened to you, Austin, when I'm going back now 20 years, you stood at that executive board and you'd talk about your legislative thing, a lot of guys kind of turned around and had conversation with themselves, but they --

AT: Yeah, they didn't want to listen.

RM: And I know you're aware of that.

AT: That's why we're in the trouble we're in now.

RM: I remember that very well. They never thought it was important to elect someone that was going to --

AT: I don't know if you remember this, Dick, but --

RM: [00:41:00] Russ.

AT: I mean Russ, but when Nixon was in office, he put in this wage and price control and I wrote an article in our Trailblazer. Well anyhow, somehow or other, that Trailblazer ended up in D.C. One day I'm going, leaving for work, and there's a guy in the parking lot over here, the AA parking lot. Gee, it's not even, only 20 minutes to seven and the place don't open up till 8 o'clock. I go to work, the guy pulls out, he follows me all the way to work. I come out of work, he follows me home and he's parked across the street there. My wife gets all upset. She calls the cop. The cop come, goes over and talks to him,

he pulls away. [00:42:00] Next morning I got to work, he follows me to work. I come home from work, he pulls in. I call the cop, my wife told me who the cop was, he used to work at Ingersoll. I call him, "What's going on?" He says, "That article you wrote about wage and price controls in the Trailblazer," he says, "You made Nixon's blacklist." (Laughter) The guy's from the --

MD: Anti-communist league or something?

AT: -- He says, "The guy's from the CIA." He said, "For some reason, they're watching you." (Laughter)

RM: Doesn't surprise me, not at all.

AT: So I go over and talk to him and I said, "What the hell is going on?" He says -- this is what he said, "That screwball [00:43:00] that we have in the White House doesn't like what you wrote about the wage and price control. It was just a wage control."

RM: In the Trailblazer?

AT: Yes, because when he put that on, [Shelly Marcy Ann?], Annie, the president of the AFL-CIO for the state of New Jersey, he calls people from each county down to Rutgers and we had a meeting down there. Myself and [Bill Mynan?], you remember Bill [Mynan?]?

RM: Sure.

MD: Mm-hmm.

AT: We were put on the wage price control board to watch the stores around here. I watched the stores around here, and one night I was in -- it was Food Fair then, here on the parkway. I went in there and I seen paper plates on the end of the aisle was one price and I went down and the same plates [00:44:00] on the shelf was a different price. So I told the manager, I said, "Hey, that violates the wage and price control." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "You got two different prices there." He said, "We'll change them tonight." I said, "You'll change them while I'm here." And I pulled out my little card that I had from the -- it was from the IRS -- I said, "You're going to change them because I'm going to stay here and watch you. I don't care what time." So I stayed till 11 o'clock that night, made him change all them prices.

RM: But this guy was watching you, huh?

AT: I don't know whether it was through that, but I caught -- I went over there to -- it was the A&P at that time, and I went over and I said let me see your master list and they had no problem. They gave it to me. [00:45:00] I went to Acme -- no problem, they got out their master list, "Here you can look at it." But the manager in Food Lane would not see me, show me that master list. That's why I watched

him the closest. I caught him on three different items at three different times, where they were cheating.

RS: Austin, did you feel that the union, unions, could've been stronger, or could've done more?

AT: Right now, I am very irritated at the unions. Because, you know, over the years and years that we've struggled to get where we are today. It seems that a man goes in the shop now and the company says "We give you this, we give you this, we give you this, we give you this." The young guy says, "What do we need these companies -- what do we need the union for? The company loves us, [00:46:00] they give us all this." They don't know what we had to go through to get what we have today. And if the union man doesn't wake up, we are going to go backwards. It proves it right here --

RS: What's happening

AT: -- what's happening, because it's just like I go to these council meetings and stuff like that, just like the last time I went to D.C. If I didn't have my wife along with me I would have walked into Dick Zimmer's office by myself. Because for some reason, we had a meeting last September down in Atlantic City, strictly Steelworkers. Sam Dawson from the Steelworkers PAC committee said [00:47:00] that, "If you live in one state but your plant is in another

state, you better affiliate where the plant is, not the state you live in." Because, he said, "You can send your whole membership to the state where you live and it won't do you good because you're working under the state where their laws, rules and regulations, and that's where you must affiliate."

RS: Well do you think the union itself might have done a better job of educating its workers?

AT: Well, you got some people right now that --

[INTERRUPTION]

RM: -- out of a rank and file of 22,000 guys we have maybe 50 guys at the meeting. You remember those days? And there was so much apathy then, and I'm going back now to the '70s when really, especially the late '70s [00:48:00] when the struggle really started to begin when we had Reagan -- well we had Carter, then we had Reagan -- and then there was so much apathy then. I remember once, Austin, we had to make a change in our bylaws. I think it was a Sunday meeting, you know we didn't have a quorum, we didn't have enough guys for a quorum to pass these (laughs) -- so the apathy was there, with our own rank and file. I remember that well.

AT: Yeah, I was a steward, I was on the executive board of the local, I was Vice President of the labor council. I was



the legislative man for the local and also on the legislative committee for New Jersey, for the Steelworkers.

RM: How long did you write for that Trailblazer? Would you explain that Trailblazer, because I don't know, maybe Rich and Martin aren't familiar with the Trailblazer --

AT: I got a copy [00:49:00] in here --

RM: Oh, do you?

AT: An old copy, I'll show them.

RM: Oh, good.

AT: Because I was going through some of my files last night just to dig this stuff out for --

RM: That was a monthly issue, wasn't it?

AT: It started out as a monthly issue and then when the membership started dropping, they dropped it down to quarterly.

RM: Is that right?

AT: Yeah. And then in 1986, I think, let me see, this was my last article. After that the paper ceased to --

RM: There's no longer a Trailblazer?

AT: No, no, no, no, in '86 our membership dropped so low that --

RM: Oh my God.

AT: -- that they no longer --

RS: What was the, how many members did the union have at one time -- its height over here, at your local?

AT: We had over 3000 members.

RS: How many are there today?

AT: In the union?

RS: Yeah.

AT: 450.

RS: From 3000 to 450?

AT: [00:50:00] Yeah. That's another thing that should be corrected. Because, the part of the plant, the drill floor, run away and went down to Virginia. These plants that's moving South, the only reason they can afford to move South is because of the federal structure of taxation. Because ever since the Depression the Northeast has been subsidizing the South. Like New Jersey ranks number 47th for tax dollars that go to the federal government return.

RS: 47.

AT: And Pennsylvania ranks 36. I mean until that's corrected, we're here.

RS: Right, okay.

AT: But I, on top of that I was chairman of the Bylaws and Resolutions Committee for the local, and I was co-chairman [00:51:00] of the United Way Fund in the plant, and chairman of Bloodbank Committee and-

RM: Nobody was more involved than Austin, always getting into this and that.

RS: You feel good about all you did?

AT: Yes I do. Because I know while I was a steward there -- Walt Taylor, you know Taylor, he was, he said "Listen, I'm tired of getting on machine, I'm going to bid on the assembly job." The company turned him down, they said, "No known ability to do repair work -- to assemble." So they rejected it and I wouldn't buy it. [00:52:00] Even our president at that time said, "We'll have to drop it." I said, "I don't want to drop it." So I went back and I talked to Taylor and I said, "Taylor, what kind of jobs did you have before you started Ingersoll?" He was a boring mill operator at Ingersoll, he wanted to get off his machine. He said, "During World War II, I was in the Merchant Marines." "What kind of job did you do?" He said, "I was a bosun mate." He said, "We did a lot of repair work." "Okay, that's all I want to know." So since I'm involved in this, I have contacts with the Seafarers Union and the Maritime Service. So I got on the phone and I said "Send me the classification on the bosun mate and the different duties that they have." So they sent them, it was spelled out in there. This manual repair, wenches, hoist, and stuff like that.

RM: [00:53:00] I'll be damned (laughs).

AT: So we went to move to the next step on the grievance. The company says, "Where did you get ahold of this stuff?" I said, "I have the contacts," so they had to give him the job.

RM: So you're the guy that, I remember vaguely that when we start talking about abilities to do jobs and when a guy was turned down for a job that he could go outside the plant and come in with his experience to help him get another job. So you're the guy that was instrumental in that (laughs). I remember that, Austin, yes I do.

RS: That's good.

AT: One time we had this guy, Holt, whenever I went down the aisle they used to bark because Holt used to follow me around like a puppy dog. They would "bark bark bark." I hated that guy with a passion because he suspended a guy for leaving [00:54:00] the shop at five minutes to twelve. And I said Holt, "What clock were you going by?" "That one right up there." Well I says, "Come here. I want to show you something. Look at that clock, what does that say?" "It's ten minutes different than the other one." I said "Let's go look at this other one." "That one's faster than that one." So I took him to four different clocks, none of them had the same time on it. (Laughter) So I won that one

because the day they get suspended for leaving the shop early, they had to pay. (Laughter)

RM: Is that right? (Laughter)

AT: So I have a -- down in my garage -- it's too cold down there -- but I have an old pack of fact sheets that I filled out, cases that I won.

RM: Is that right?

AT: Yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE