WARREN K. BILLINGS

The Story of a Rebel

A Biographical Interview Conducted by

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for the Institute of Industrial Relations
Oral History Project

University of California

on January 9, 16, 29, 31; February 1, 19; and March 12, 29, 1957
in San Francisco, California
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INTRODUCTION

On July 22, 1916 a parade was scheduled to march down Market Street in San Francisco. The street was cleared, spectators were massed along the sidewalks and crowded in the windows of buildings, the first divisions of the parade had already begun to march and others were assembling, when a bomb exploded at Stewart and Market, killing six people, fatally wounding four, and injuring forty others.

Who committed this atrocity and why?* It might have been the work of a small band of Mexicans angry over General Pershing's invasion of Mexico in pursuit of Pancho Villa. Or possibly it was planned by German agents, for Europe was at war and this parade was a demonstration for "preparedness." It might, on the other hand, have been an anti-war gesture. Four thousand people had met the night before in the Dreamland Rink to protest the idea of a preparedness parade.

Many of California's prominent citizens and most of its newspapers opposed America's entry into war. Throughout the country, anti-war sentiment was strong enough to make neutrality a major issue in President Wilson's campaign for reelection. Then again, it might have been the work of labor radicals. This was a businessman's parade. Of the 115 divisions scheduled to march, nearly every major industry in the city was represented and not one labor organization. Just two or three weeks before, on the heels of an anti-labor resolution passed by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1,000 businessmen had met and pledged $200,000 for a showdown fight with labor on the open shop issue. By many of the city's labor leaders, the parade was regarded as a demonstration against unionism.

Sometimes the phrase "class war" is metaphorical, but in California labor-capitalist strife did on occasion resemble guerrilla warfare. In 1910 a bomb planted by labor radicals in the Los Angeles Times building had killed twenty-one people. Attempts were made to bomb
the homes of Harrison Gray Otis, the owner of the
Times, and of Felix J. Zeehandelaar, representative
of the anti-labor Merchants' and Manufacturers' Asso-
ciation. In northern California, dynamite had been
used in strikes against the Pacific Gas and Electric
Company. Alexander Berkman's anarchist newspaper,
The Blast, was published in San Francisco. In the
agricultural regions, with the help of the I.W.W.
migrant worker discontent flared into riot. Resort
to violence was by no means only on the labor side.
San Francisco's police had used clubs against water-
front strikers in 1901. "Black Jack" Jerome brought
his thugs and strikebreakers to battle the longshoremen
in their strike in 1916. According to labor radicals,
employers used Pinkerton's detectives not only to pro-
tect property but also for counter-espionage.

San Francisco's police and district attorney
were convinced that the July 22 bombing was the crime
of labor radicals. They made their arrests in what
later seemed to many to be unseemly haste. Within five
days they had taken into custody Warren R. Billings, Tom and Rene Mooney, Edward D. Nolan, and Israel Weinberg. Billings had a prior prison record for transporting dynamite. Mooney was a friend of the men who had bombed the Times and had been a thorn in the side of employers and the so-called respectable labor leaders for years. The others were also labor radicals. On August 1 a Grand Jury indicted them all. Alexander Berkman was indicted for first degree murder as an accomplice, but he was in New York by that time and the New York Governor refused to extradite him. Billings was tried on September 11 and "convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on the testimony of a drug-addict, an ex-convict, a garrulous ex-prostitute with a police record, and an apparently irresponsible mother and daughter, later discredited."* He went to Folsom State Prison. Mooney's trial began January 3, 1917, and on February 24 he was sentenced to death, largely

on testimony which was later proven to be perjured. He awaited his execution at San Quentin. Nolan was released after a few months for lack of evidence, and the others were acquitted. The story of Tom Mooney's fight for justice was to occupy headlines around the world for the next two decades. Neither the California Supreme Court nor the United States Supreme Court would interfere with the trial courts' holdings. It was only after intervention from President Wilson that Governor Stephens commuted Mooney's sentence to life imprisonment, in 1918. But, throughout the country and throughout the world, fund gatherers for Mooney's defence went into action. The California State Federation of Labor and the American Federation of Labor took up the battle. So did the American Civil Liberties Union. For more than twenty years, the Mooney case was a hot potato in California politics and an international cause célèbre.

In the meantime, Warren K. Billings was almost a forgotten man. He was only 23 years old, eleven years younger than Mooney, at the time of the bombing and had
been a far less conspicuous figure in San Francisco. Also, he had a prior prison record, and at Folsom he was kept incommunicado for several years. He agreed that the Mooney case should take precedence over his, and so Tom Mooney -- big, tough-fisted, articulate, quick-tempered, a master showman -- dominated the scene.

Naturally the Mooney-Billings case left in its wake a torrent of typescript and newsprint -- lawyers' briefs, trial records, newspaper stories, correspondence, investigating committee reports. Much of this documentation is on deposit in the Manuscript Division of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. But most of it concentrates upon the central figure of Tom Mooney. To tell the story of the forgotten man of the Mooney-Billings case, the following interview of Warren K. Billings was tape-recorded at his tiny second-floor watchmaker's shop on Market Street near San Francisco's Civic Center on January 9, January 16, January 29, January 31, February 1, February 19, March 12, and March 29, 1957. The interview was not
intended to duplicate -- except unavoidably -- what was already of record. It was not designed to stand alone as a definitive account of the Mooney-Billings case, but to document Billings' side of the story as he remembered it; to shed some light on his personality, character, and values; and to accumulate new data for scholars of labor history. Francis Gates of the Social Science Reference Service of the University of California Library at Berkeley and Robert Knight of the University's Institute of Industrial Relations supplied useful background information. This was one of the first of a series of lengthy tape-recorded interviews, with leaders or especially representative people in labor-management relations in the West, planned, conducted, and edited by Dr. Corinne Gilb for the Institute of Industrial Relations Oral History Project under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Gordon of the Institute's staff and Dr. Irving Bernstein of the Los Angeles staff.

At the time of the interview, Billings was 64 years old, small, wiry, his grey hair showing only slight
rusty traces of its former red. Upon the interviewer's arrival late in the afternoon, Billings would take off his green eye-shade, sit down at his desk piled high with old papers and broken clocks in his cubbyhole of an office, and cock one leg over the arm of his chair. With blue eyes twinkling, he would start to talk with great vivacity and no interruptions, except for an occasional question from the interviewer, the noise of sirens and gearshifting on Market Street below, and an occasional visit from customers (usually laboring men or members of the I.W.W. or former prisoners, with whom he exchanged reminiscences about life at Folsom with all the gusto of an old college grad recalling his undergraduate days). Of his early life, he appeared to have almost total recall — down to street addresses, menus, and conversations in almost burdensome detail. And he was astonishingly, albeit not completely, frank about his early misdemeanors. It was only for the period after 1916 that his memory faltered. The later in his life the events described,
the less vivid his recollection. It seemed to the interviewer that this was neither an attempt at evasion nor evidence of weariness, but a genuine and curious phenomenon of memory.

Warren Billings was not, except in very ephemeral ways, a labor leader. He was not, until his martyrdom, a leading figure among labor radicals. He was -- to use his own words -- just a working stiff. He appears to have enlisted in the ranks of labor radicalism not through preconceived ideological convictions but rather through personal psychological needs. His father died when he was a baby; the children were many and the family was poor. So an uncle, who was also a police- man, took them over, disciplined them, and exploited their labor. Billings tried to run away, but each time a policeman brought him back "to be exploited some more." What Billings wanted most was to be "one of the boys." He was a sporting man at the racetrack or among gentlemen of the ring, the fall guy among juvenile delinquents, a Sunday School leader when fate threw him into a church
environment, a tramp among tramps on the open road, and a trade unionist among trade union men. He was not insincere. He wanted most of all to belong, to be identified with a group. He was on the way to Mexico with the vague idea of "joining" the Revolution when he landed in San Francisco in 1913. By chance he met a recruiter from the I.W.W. and so his "belonging" for the next few years was to labor radicalism.

Quite naturally, because of his personal history, he rebelled against any kind of authority as exploitation. His uncle as employer had epitomized all employers, "who exploit labor for their own gain;" his uncle as policeman had epitomized all government, "which protects the employers' interests and not the workers'." He was also at an age when boys often rebel against authority as a stage on the path to maturity.

His spontaneous narrative reveals another interesting psychological detail. He needed and wanted a father's attention, even if it took the form of discipline. He got that kind of attention occasionally
from the marshals of the little towns he passed through when he was riding the rails or from the policemen with whom he came into conflict. And one senses that some of his behavior was a courting of police attention. One also senses that life in Folsom gave him a kind of security he did not have on the outside.

If all this sheds some light on the character and motivations of Warren Billings, who was "just another working stiff" until fate catapulted him into the limelight, it might also suggest some hypotheses about other labor radicals whose activities followed a similar pattern. This is not to deny that there was exploitation and that their grievances were genuine. It is to suggest that the matrix of their ideology was psychological and social as well as economic and that some of the psychological attitudes of son toward father inevitably enter into the employer-employee, capital-labor relationship.

Corinne L. Gilb

Institute of Industrial Relations
University of California
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FAMILY BACKGROUND

Billings: I was born July 4, 1893, in Middletown, New York, a small town, then about 12,000 population, in the southeastern portion of New York State. At the time that I was born, my father, who was then alive, was a carpenter. My grandfather, father's father, also had been a carpenter. My grandfather was a native of Massachusetts. My father, of course, was also, until after he married my mother.

I was named directly after my grandfather. His name was Warren Knox Billings, in honor of his uncle, Warren Knox who was a direct descendent of Joseph C. Knox, the hero of the Battle of Boston, the Revolutionary War. Warren Knox was named Warren in honor of General Warren, who was the hero of Bunker Hill. So indirectly I'm named after two generals in the Revolutionary War, but I was directly named for my grandfather.

You see, although my mother was born in New York City, she was of German parentage. Her
mother and father had left Germany after the Revolution of 1848. Just why, I don't know, but one time my mother mentioned that one of her uncles, one of her father's brothers, had been connected with the Revolution of 1848 in Germany, and had been forced to flee the country after the Revolution failed.

Since her parents were from Frankfort-am-Main, my mother was naturally Catholic. That's a preponderantly Catholic part of Germany. And she remained a Catholic until she was thirteen years of age, when she married my father and went to Massachusetts to live with my father's family. They were all New England Puritans. And my mother was ostracized by the New England people because she was an outlander. The Billings family, in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont -- there were a great many of them years ago in that district -- refused to have anything to do with my mother and father because of the fact that my father had married an outlander.

After that they lived in New Jersey a portion
of the time and later in Middletown, New York. However, my father died when I was two years old. My mother was left a widow with nine living children at the time. There had originally been eleven children. Two had died previous to that. And naturally, because of circumstances, we were very poor, and my mother had to go out and work. General housework, washing and ironing and scrubbing and so forth.

We lived in the poorest section of Middletown, on Water Street, in the cheapest place we could find, I presume, which was upstairs over the "Last Chance" Saloon. In the same house with us was a Negro family, one Sam Johnson and his wife and children. I then had a brother who was two years younger than I. He was just a newly born baby at the time my father died. And two little Negro girls, the Johnson sisters, took care of my brother and me while my mother went out to work. That, of course, probably resulted in me not having any racial prejudice. I thought a great deal of the Johnson girls and
Billings: their father. I don't seem to recall their mother, but I do remember their father very well, probably because many years later, when I was sixteen and went back to Middletown, I was working in the hotel as a bellboy, and after I had worked there two or three days, a fellow came to me and said, "The baker wants to see you, down in the kitchen." So I went down in the kitchen and the baker was Sam Johnson. He reminded me of the time when I had lived in his house and one thing and another, and we became quite good friends.

A short time after we lived in the house with the Johnsons, we moved to a house at 55 Mulberry Street in Middletown. The Howell, Ranchman and Hays Tanning Company had a large tannery there, and our back yard was against the tannery fence. When the wind blew from the hide house to our house, we got quite an odor. But it was a cheap place to live, and we lived there up to the time that I was about four years old, when my younger brother died of "membranous croup".
Billings: Subsequently, my grandfather, who at that time was living in Massachusetts in the little town of North Grafton, where he had lived most of his life, came to Middletown and lived with us. But my grandfather was a heavy drinker. He was not a drunk. In fact, he never was intoxicated, but he consumed two quarts of whiskey every day. In the evening after supper, he would go to the saloon and come back about 11 o'clock with a two-quart jugful, and he'd take a drink and go to bed, and the next morning he'd wake up and take a drink, and then he'd get up and wash, and then he'd take another drink. After he had his breakfast in the morning, he'd take his jug and go across the fields to help a friend of his named John Mapes, who owned a farm, as they called it there, a little ways over in back of the cemetery. My grandfather would go there and mow hay all day long. He was 77 years old at the time. And he'd take his jug along and set it down at the end of the row, and every time he'd finish a row of mowing, he'd take
another drink. My mother was a Prohibitionist and objected to his drinking, and they were bickering about it a good deal. So finally in 1899 my grandfather went back to North Grafton, Massachusetts, and bought a general store he had owned there some years prior to that before he came to Middletown to live with us. It was there that he died. Apparently he ran out of whiskey and that killed him, I guess. (laughter).

After my grandfather's death, when I was about six, I claimed all the mail that came to the house with the name Warren K. Billings on it, and naturally I got all my grandfather's mail. Some stock brokers in New York were continually sending him letters asking him for more investments and one thing and another. I was just learning to read, and that was how I learned that my grandfather had at one time had considerable money but had lost nearly all of it in the Bucket Shop swindle of 1893.
Gilb: Did you get regular schooling during your childhood?

Billings: Oh yes, I started to go to kindergarten -- I guess maybe it was a little before I was six -- but immediately after I started school, I contracted the usual childhood diseases and wound up with the scarlet fever and was out of school for practically a year. I very nearly died with scarlet fever, and finally, when I recovered from that, I began to go to school again, and I had only gone to school a part of one term when my family moved to Brooklyn, New York, in the year 1900. I was seven when we moved to Brooklyn. We moved to a section of Brooklyn which was known as New Lots, a section of East New York.

My oldest sister, Lily, had married a man in New York City named Henry E. Sloat. At the time she married him, he was a brakeman on the New Jersey Central Railroad. Subsequently, Theodore Roosevelt, when he was Police Commissioner in New York City, appointed Henry Sloat
Billings on the Police Department. That was some years before I was seven. When I was seven, in 1900, Henry Sloat had been apprehended playing poker in the cellar of Horton's Ice Cream Factory of New York City when he was supposed to be on duty, and for that he was transferred to being a mounted policeman in an outlying district of Brooklyn which was known as the Old Mill. It was sort of a fishing village on the edge of Jamaica Bay where there was an old Dutch mill that had been there since the early 1600's. There he got an idea that he would like to go into the dairy business, but in New York City, it was against the law for a policeman to have any other business. So he conceived a very bright idea of getting my mother and my two brothers and me (my sisters and older brother had been married off by then and gone to live by themselves and my mother and two brothers and I were alone). So my brother-in-law came to Middletown and induced us to move to Brooklyn, and he rented a house, got a couple of cows,
Billings: had us kids help him build a barn, and he started a dairy business which he called "Billings Brothers' Dairy." The Billings brothers did the work and Henry Sloat got the money.

Gilb: This is what started you off on the road to rebellion!

Billings: That was probably the thing that started me off as a revolutionist, because I could feel the exploitation so plainly even at that time. In the dairy business you have to get up early in the morning and the stables have to be cleaned, the cows have to be milked, and the milk has to be strained and delivered. There were quite a large number of German people in that area, and we sold milk to these German families for seven cents a quart, and I used to have to deliver the milk in tin pails. My brothers and I would have to get up at four o'clock in the morning and clean out the stable, feed the chickens and do the other chores around there. I would have to deliver the milk while
Billings: the others worked around the place, and then when I came back from the milk route, we had breakfast. After breakfast, we had to finish the chores and then go to school.

My brother-in-law made arrangements with the principal of the school for my brother and me to be released from classes ten minutes early at noon so that we could go out in the pasture to get the cows and bring them back in and give them a drink at noon and then take them out to pasture again. Being a policeman, he was more or less of a politician. In fact, he was very good at using political influence to get anything he wanted. He was a Democrat and was quite well acquainted with a number of politicians in Tammany Hall.

Ilb: How long did this last?

Illings: From the time that I was seven until I was almost thirteen, 1900-1906. It was in 1906 that I pulled my personal revolution, the first strike that I was ever engaged in, when I refused to work any more. In the meantime my two brothers had graduated from school and my brother-in-law
Billings: had secured jobs for them in New York City.
The oldest one of us three, my brother Anton, had gone to work for some manufacturing company, and I believe he was earning about $5 a week, but anyway, he'd have to bring home his pay envelope, and my brother-in-law would give him back 25¢ for spending money. Then when my brother Bert graduated from public school, which I guess was in January or February, 1906, Henry got him a job as a copy boy for the New York Sun and he had to bring his pay envelope home and give it to Henry. And I had to do all the work then. There was nobody left to take care of the cows and do the work but me.

During 1903, 1904, 1905, some of the time we had four or six cows, and at one time we also had five horses. My brother-in-law had bought two heavy teams and two dump trucks and he was leasing these trucks out on excavating jobs to haul dirt. At one period he hired my two brothers-in-law as truck drivers. My second-older sister's husband and my younger sister's husband. They
Billings: had gotten out of work. My second-oldest sister, Julia, her husband Charlie, was a barber. My oldest brother, Bill, was a barber. Bill, back in 1895 or thereabouts, won a prize of $100 in a footrace in a county fair, and with the $100 he opened a barber shop in Middletown, New York, which he subsequently sold, in about 1909 or 1910, for $10,000. In the meantime he had built it up to where he had a seven-chair barbershop that was all marble and glass and very well fixed up.

Gilb: I want to hear about your personal revolution.

Billings: My revolution, like all revolutions, was not successful the first two or three times. There were two or three failures. At one stage of the proceedings -- I don't remember now what year it was -- I decided to run away from home. It was in the summertime during vacation. During the summertime my brother-in-law used to take our clothes away from us, just give us a pair of overalls and a blue shirt and a straw hat. That was all the clothes we had, except on Sunday, when we'd get our suits to go to Sunday School, in the Dutch Reform Church, because it was closest
Billings: to us. My mother had become a Protestant after marrying my father, although she was raised a Catholic, and she had become very bitter against Catholicism, for some reason or other. I never did question her about that and she never did explain.

At any rate, the first time I ran away from home, I ran away in the summertime. I had a 22-caliber rifle and I went into the swamps south of Brooklyn, along the shore of Jamaica Bay, and made a place for myself underneath a deserted boat house. And I slept there and hunted throughout the meadows, and was living on birds and vegetables that I filched from the farmers' vegetable patches along the edge of the meadows. I was out there for about three weeks. I eventually ran out of bullets, and I had a few muskrat skins, and I decided that if I went into the business district in Brooklyn I could probably sell the muskrat hides and get some money to buy bullets with. I sold the muskrat skins, and I think I was on my way to another store to buy
Billings: some bullets, when a mounted policeman spotted me and just reached over and scooped me off of the sidewalk onto the horse with him and took me with him to the police station. So that ended that escapade. My brother-in-law took me home and put me back to work on the farm again.

A short time after that, I ran away again and went out to Aqueduct Race Tract, which was eight or ten miles from where we lived. I tried to get a job as a stable boy and finally wound up as an exercise boy for Johnny Daily. His father, Pop Daily, was a well-known old-time racehorse trainer. Johnny was beginning to train racehorses at that time, and was training racehorses for the Vanderbilt Stable. Of course I knew considerable about horses, having been around them a good deal. I was pretty young -- I think ten or eleven, I don't remember which -- at any rate, I did work as an exercise boy for five or six days, and then one of the mounted policemen that was on duty around the racetrack spotted me and recognized me, and then my
Billings: brother-in-law and this other policeman came after me and took me home again. (laughter) So that revolution didn't pan out either.

But the next one, when I was twelve years old, that one really panned out. I just deliberately made up my mind that I was not going to work any more. So at four o'clock in the morning, when my mother told me to get up, I told her I wasn't going to get up. When I didn't get up, finally, she had to tell my brother-in-law. He tried to get me up and I refused to get up. He went downstairs and got a horsewhip. Being New England country people, we used to use a cornhusk mattress with a featherbed on top. So when my brother-in-law was gone after the horsewhip, I got under the featherbed; and when he started beating the bed with a horsewhip, he was just beating the featherbed and I was laughing at him. Finally he broke the horsewhip, so he went downstairs again and he came back with a hoe handle. He started to beat the bed with a hoe handle, but my mother and sister interfered
Billings: then and finally induced him to stop.

Then he locked me in the room and wasn't going to give me anything to eat. I think that my mother smuggled something to me the next day. I still refused to get up. I stayed in bed for three or four days. Got very little to eat during that time. But after four days of that, my brother-in-law decided that he'd better sell the cows and that we'd better go somewhere else to live, my mother and my two brothers and I. Of course my two brothers were both working in New York City at the time, although they were only earning small amounts.

During the six years that we had worked on this farm, my brother-in-law had bought the house that we lived in. I don't know whether he had it completely paid for or not, but he had at least bought and paid for several cows and several horses and a lot of equipment. At one time he bought a buggy that was worth $110. That was a lot of money in those days. He had an ex-racehorse, a blind mare.
Gilb: And wasn't he putting anything aside for you at all?

Billings: No. All we got was the food we ate and the clothes we wore and a place to live, that was all any of us got out of it. It was partly because of that -- you see, when I got to be 12 years old, I wanted a few cents to buy something with, something that maybe other boys had and I thought I ought to have. One time, I recall, I was going to the Sunday School picnic, and I wanted to spend a little money on my girl friend, Viola, whose father owned a farm right close to us. So I filched about 35¢ out of the china closet where my sister used to put money away for the butcher.

My brother-in-law and I were very much at odds.

Gilb: What happened when you finally staged this successful rebellion and your family decided to move? Where did you go?

Billings: My brother-in-law sold the horses and cows and put the house up for sale, and we moved into Brooklyn. The district at that time was known
as the Crow Hill district. On the corner near our house was a Jewish orphan asylum. It was a home for half-orphans. There were about 400 children, and they all went to the same school I did, which was Public School 144. We lived there at 1963 Dean Street during 1906 and '07, and then in 1908 we moved about a block and a half away. I graduated from Public School 144 in February, 1908. Then I began to go to work.
WORK IN NEW YORK

Billings: I went to work shortly after that. I held several jobs, but only for a short time. I couldn't hold a job for any length of time because every time I went to work somewhere, I would feel that I was being exploited.

Gilb: Were you being exploited?

Billings: Well, I never knew a worker that wasn't. So far as I know, every worker that ever worked was overworked and underpaid. That at least is my opinion. So I always felt that I was being overworked and underpaid, and consequently, I never got along well on any job that I was on. For that reason I never stayed very long.

Gilb: Did you run into any unions during this period?

Billings: Not immediately. The first job I had I was an errand boy for a printing house, I worked about three months, when another boy and I got into a battle and as a result of the battle we both got fired. That job had been secured for me by my brother-in-law, Henry Sloot. His cousin was the foreman in the plant.
Errand Boy in Tammany Hall

Billings: Subsequently I got a job in Tammany Hall in the Wigwam as a page boy. My brother-in-law got me that job too. That lasted quick also because I got into another fight with another page boy there, and we both got thrown out into 14th Street. That lasted quick, but during that period I got acquainted with several of the old-time Democratic politicians who were around at that time. Ex-Senator Dan Reardon, Diamond Dan O'Roarke, Big Charlie Murphy, and a couple more. The way I got acquainted with them, of course, was through them sending me on errands back and forth to each other.

Silverplater's Helper

Billings: Then I went to work in the silverplating plant with E.G. Webster and Son, Silversmiths, of Fifth and Atlantic, in Brooklyn, as a silverplater's helper. I worked there a couple of months and then I went to work in another plating plant, C.J. Tagliabue and Company, who
Billings: were manufacturers of thermometers. They also did the plating on Gem Safety Razors, and they also made hypodermic needles, which were nickel-plated at that time. And I worked there for a short time, and it was after that that I left Brooklyn and went back to Middletown, New York, in June, 1909, just for a visit.

That was my original intention, but after I got there, I met some of the boys that I had known before I had left Middletown when I was six years old, and after I got acquainted, I decided to stay. It developed subsequently that two of the boys were heavy drinkers. In fact one of them was then known as the town drunk. Of course, I was from Brooklyn, sixteen years old, and naturally wanted to be a big man and tough, you know. So when one of them said, "Do you ever drink anything?" and I said, "Sure. Sure. Anytime," and went with them down to Water Street to a little bar that had been there for many years. And I sat in the barroom with them and drank Old Crow and tried to be a big tough
Billings: guy. So I decided to stay in Middletown and I worked a short time in the tannery, and then I worked a short time in Borden’s candy factory. Then subsequently, after working there a short time, I went to work in the hotel as a bellboy.

Gilb: How long did you stay in Middletown?

Billings: I stayed there just a little over six months. I got there in the early part of June and I left the day before Christmas. That was 1909.

**Strike in a Shoe Factory**

**Birth of an Industrial Unionist**

Billings: I went back to Brooklyn. It was after that that I went to work in a shoe factory known as Wishert and Gardner’s in Brooklyn.

That was actually where I first became involved in any organized labor strike, in the shoe factory. Sometime during 1910, I believe, or the early part of 1911. There were a number of employees in the plant that were known as turnlasters. They make women’s shoes and they make them inside out and they turn them right
Billings: side out after they are made. Made with just a single sole. And these fellows were all Italians. They were members of the Italian Chamber of Labor. They were not members of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union. At that time, in the shoe factory, all over, each little craft in the factory had a union of its own and there are a great many different crafts in the shoe factory. In the cutting room alone, where I was employed as a trimming cutter, we had the Trimming Cutters Union, the Lining Cutters Union, and the Shoe Cutters Union. Each factory, even a factory like that which employed about 3,000 people, only had one pattern maker in it, and he belonged to a separate union of his own, the Pattern Makers Union. There was only one patent leather repairer in each factory, too. The factory made patent leather shoes, and if any of them got cracked or scraped in the process of running them through the plant, why, they would have to be repaired. That was a very specialized trade, but they only needed one patent leather repairer in each
Billings: Factory. And he belonged to a union of his own.
Gilb: That was carrying craft unionism to the extreme!
Billings: Right. And at the time of this strike, the
Italian turnlasters went on strike and everybody
else continued to work for about two days. And
another young fellow and I managed to talk the
trimming cutters into the idea of going out in
sympathy with the turnlasters. We also succeeded
into talking the rest of the cutting room employees
— lining cutters and shoe cutters — into joining
us. So then the cutting room went out in sympathy
with the turnlasters. After that, we succeeded
in talking the girls in the fitting room, who
were mostly sewing machine operators, into joining
us, and in about nine or ten days we had the entire
factory out on strike. It was just following that
that the Boot and Shoemakers Union consolidated
all these different crafts into the Boot and Shoe
Workers Union. All became one organization after
that, although they had previously been all separate
unions.

The Boot and Shoe Workers Union, I guess, was
Billings: probably one of the first large industrial unions in the AF of L. Naturally, I was convinced by that strike that industrial organization was much more effective than craft organization. Needless to say, the strike was won by the workers very shortly after they all got together and all walked out. I think the strike only lasted three weeks altogether, and I don't think it lasted more than three or four days after they finally got them all on the street. That is one of the things, of course, that convinced me that industrial organization was the type of organization that the working man needed most.

Gilb: During this time were you reading anything? Did you have any contact with the growth of the I.W.W. or the Socialist Party?

Billings: No, I didn't. I had heard of the I.W.W. and the Socialist Party, both, but not very much, and hadn't been in contact with anybody that really knew the details of the organization of the I.W.W. or the Socialist Party, either one. Of course,
being too young to vote, I was not too much interested in politics, and having been acquainted with numerous people in the Democratic Party in Tammany Hall, naturally, I considered myself a Tammany Hall Democrat, and didn't think too much of Socialism. In fact, I knew little or nothing about it. It was not until 1911, when I finally went to work as a carpenter's helper, where I worked with a young fellow named Garry Pearsall, who was at that time a member of the Socialist Party. I actually became conscious for the first time of the existence of the Socialist Party. Although I had seen mention of it in the papers and one thing or another, I just hadn't paid any attention to it.

I worked as a carpenter's helper for six months at that time, and Garry Pearsall and I worked together most of the time. At that period I was a member of the Methodist Church, and so was Garry Pearsall, and I was living out in Ozone Park, Long Island. Of course, how I got there is another part of the story that concerns my
brother-in-law, Henry Sloat.

A Burglary Charge

Billings: In the early part of 1911, I was associating with a couple of fellows, and we got arrested. I was living by myself at the time, in a furnished room. Two or three or four young fellows had been up to my room one evening, playing penny ante poker, and one of these fellows had left a handbag there. The next morning I was arrested with the handbag, and it turned out to contain burglar's tools. Two of these other fellows were arrested with me, and we were charged with 47 charges of burglary, and I was charged with one charge of carrying burglar’s tools. Nobody was able to identify us as burglars, and there was no physical evidence of any stolen property, and so the 47 charges of burglary were dismissed in Gates Avenue Court the following morning, but the one charge of carrying burglar’s tools was pressed against me, and I was held over to the Court of Special Sessions on the charge of
Billings: carrying burglar's tools.

My brother-in-law, Henry Sloat, was still a policeman, and when he found it out, he came down to the jail to see me, and then he secured the services of a minister of the Methodist Church as a lawyer. This minister, Dudley Oliver Osterheld, had formerly been a lawyer. When he found that he was about to be disbarred, he resigned from the bar and joined the ministry. He became the minister of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Ozone Park, Long Island. (laughter). He and my brother-in-law made arrangements with the courts to dismiss the charges against me, and they arranged it with the probation officer to make me believe that I was on probation. I found out many years later that there was actually no record of the case, that I was not on probation at all.

My brother-in-law wanted me to think I was on probation in his care so he could exploit me once more, and that's what he did. He took me out to Ozone Park, Long Island, where he was living at that time, and where he was assigned
duty as a mounted policeman, and he got me a job in a large manufacturing plant there known as the LaLance and Grosjean Manufacturing Company. They made agate nickel steelware, agate pots and pans. They made coal shovels and dustpans and a great many articles of that type. Those articles were usually coated with black japan, and I worked in the paint shop. I lived with my brother-in-law and sister, and every Saturday I had to bring my pay envelope home and give it to him, and he would give me back 25% for spending money.

He would also give me 25% to put in the collection plate in the Methodist Episcopal Sunday School and the church. I had to divide that 25% up between the morning service, the afternoon Sunday School, and the evening service at the church. During that period I had to go to church four times -- three times on Sunday and a prayer meeting during the week. Then, at one period, when I became interested in a young lady who was a member of the choir, I
Billings: joined the choir, and I used to go to church five times a week. (Laughter)

Carpenter's Helper; Church and Athletics

Billings: Then I went to work as a carpenter's helper, and I was boarding with a family which had a young fellow in it who was about four years older than I and was an installation man with the telephone company. He and I and other boys in the Sunday School organized a company of the United Boys Brigade of America. At that time the Boy Scouts had not become very popular, and this other organization, the United Boys Brigade of America, had little group organizations in a great many of the Protestant churches. We organized this local section. Langford Bowns and I and some more boys, we got together and we formed Company L of the 47th Regiment of the United Boys Brigade of America. Langford Bowns became captain of the company and I was Captain's Aide and Athletic Instrucor. Prior to that, I had a little experience boxing and had engaged in a few fights in preliminary bouts, as they used to call it,
in the Uncle Sam Athletic Club of Brooklyn. I started boxing when I was fifteen, and prior to that, when I went to school, I used to engage in long-distance footraces. I used to run five, ten, fifteen-mile cross-country runs, and a couple of times I ran in the Marathon Race in Brooklyn. The Marathon Race they used to hold there at that time was a free-for-all; anybody could enter it, and I entered in two different years; I believe it was 1909 and 1910. At any rate I was rather athletic; in the Boys Brigade, I became the Athletic Instructor. I used to serve as referee in boxing bouts and serve as the umpire in baseball games, and so on and so forth— between the smaller children, of course. I was at that time about 17.

And I worked as a carpenter's helper. It was rather natural that I should take to the carpentry business, since my grandfather and father were both carpenters. In fact, at the time my father married my mother, my grandfather
Billings had a small farm in North Grafton, Massachusetts and gave my father a part of the farm, and my father and grandfather built the house and all of the barns and outhouses and dug the well and built all the furniture for the house. When I was a small boy, every stick of furniture in the house was hand made out of solid hard wood. Either oak, maple, or walnut.

While I was working as a carpenter's helper, I saved all my money. I only earned a dollar and a half a day, which was $9 a week if I worked a full week, and I paid $6 a week board and room. The other $3, besides what little I gave to the church, I spent for carpenter's tools. I had a very nice set of carpenter's tools. I bought some lumber and built myself a very nice tool box. Bought some metal trimmings to put on it and so on. I made it carefully and got it all finished, nicely varnished and everything, and I took it out to the job on a Saturday, and Monday morning when I went out to the job, I found out that someone had broken into the tool
Billings: shed and opened my nice new toolbox with a hatchet. And all they left me was a hammer and hatchet, the oldest tools I had. I got discouraged with the carpentry business as a result of that and quit trying to be a carpenter.

Streetcar Conductor

Gilb: What eventually made you leave the East and come West?

Billings: That, of course, is another story. After I worked as a carpenter's helper and got discouraged about that, I went back into the city of Brooklyn and I began to look for a job, and I began to see some of my old acquaintances in the Tammany organization and had a letter from a ward heeler to the employment officer of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, and got myself a job as a streetcar conductor. I was only 18 years old and had to swear I was 21, but I did get on the streetcars as a conductor, and worked three months and then I got fired for being careless about registering fares.

There was a big, fat Negro woman who used to
Billings: ride on the streetcars with a big clothes basket, and she always had a little piece of paper and a little stub of a pencil, and every conductor assumed that she was making up a laundry list, figuring out how much somebody owed her for the laundry. Instead of that, she was checking the transfer clock and the cash register in the car and checking the number of passengers that got on and got off and so on and so forth. Her name was Mandy Johnson. She turned in a report which the general manager showed me in which she said that I had taken 47 fares in a distance of a mile and a half on the Fulton Street line between Franklin Avenue and Flatbush Avenue. Major Krebbs, the general manager, fired me, and after he did, I went out to my brother's house.

My brother was away at the time I got there: he had gone down to see about a job on the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company. Pretty soon my brother came home, and he said "I got a job as a conductor." So I took off my uniform overcoat and the cap and put it on him and said, "All right. There's
Billings: "your uniform." Then I gave him some good advice, seeing how he was married and had a wife and one child at the time, I said, "If you confine yourself to not taking more than $3 a day while you're working as a conductor, you'll be considered the best conductor in the city of Brooklyn. You've got a family to support; you're not like me; it didn't make any difference to me whether I got fired yesterday or tomorrow, but with you it does; you have responsibilities that you have to take care of, and so you'd better be careful and take it easy." So he did. He followed my advice. I don't know that he even took $3 a day. Bert always was inclined to be very honest, and I think probably he took as little as possible. At any rate, he finally became, after five years' service, an inspector on the streetcars.

Up to that time the streetcar company had not been organized. When I worked as a conductor, I worked for 21¢ an hour. At that time they paid 21¢ an hour for the first three months, 22¢ an hour for the next twenty-one-months, and
Billings: an increase of 1¢ an hour each year until you reached 25¢ an hour. That was tops. You worked ten hours a day. My brother worked up to 25¢ an hour as a conductor and then he got 28¢ an hour as an inspector. And then after he'd been on the railroad about seven years, the conductors and motormen got organized, and after they got organized they went on strike, and the depot master called my brother in and told him he'd have to take a car out as a conductor during the strike, and he refused to take the car out. So he turned in his badge and that was the end of him working as a railroad man.

Gilb: What happened to you after you got fired?

Billings: I got fired in March, 1912. And I was looking for a job and I couldn't find a job during March and April and May, and I was still going with this girl in Osone Park. I had previously intended to get married when I had $500 saved. That's what I was shooting for when I was on the streetcars (laughter). But I never got up to the $500. And after I got out of work, I tried to get the rest
Billings: of the $500 by gambling. I went around and visited crap games and one thing and another around the city, and I just kept losing, and finally I got down to where I was broke, and I hooked everything I owned, and I finally got so badly in hook and so much up against it that I had no place to sleep. I had packed my suitcase with what junk I had left and taken it over to my brother's house and left it there, and I was sleeping in a moving van parked in a vacant lot, and cruising around town for something to eat, and it was getting pretty tough, and I finally decided that if I was going to be a bum anywhere, it might just as well be somewhere else than Brooklyn. So I decided that I would look for an opportunity to get out of town.

A Hobo Going West

Billings: So I went over to New York -- I watched the employment ads in the papers, of course, the New York World, and I noticed an ad advertising for extra gang men on the Lehigh Valley Railroad,
and the assignments were being made over on Mulberry Street, New York, which is the heart of the Italian district. I went over there to this Italian agency and applied for a job as an extra gang hand, which is pick-and-shovel work, of course, and I was accepted and was assigned to a shipment of men that were to go to Batavia, New York. The principal reason I took this shipment was that I had planned to get off the train and go over to the town of Rochester to try to get a job in Kelly's Shoe Factory -- a big shoe factory there. However, when we got to Rochester Junction, the two Italians who were in charge of this shipment stood in the doorways of this car we were in. They stood one in each doorway, with their arms folded, with their hands under their coat, undoubtedly with a pistol under their arms, and told us that we couldn't get off, that we had to stay in the car. We stayed in the car and went to Batavia.

On the train coming up there with a shipment of some forty-odd, I met a young Italian fellow
Billings: a little older than I was, and we got to talking. When we got to Batavia we found out that the cars that we were supposed to live in were old, dilapidated, filthy bunkhouse cars -- they were absolutely uninhabitable in their present condition, and we were supposed to clean them up and then live in them. After we got there and looked over these cars, we decided we'd rather not go to work there, so we decided to go somewhere else. So this young Italian fellow and I, we decided to catch a train into Buffalo. When we got there it had been raining about three weeks, so we decided we'd go somewhere else. We started to Cleveland. We got on a freight train, but the railroad detectives started shooting at us when we were trying to catch this train, and this fellow fell off the train, or jumped off, I never could tell which. I went a little ways before I got off. Then I got off and went back and I hunted through the freight yards for two hours, and then I went into the town of West Seneca, and I inquired in
Billings: the police station, the hospitals, and I couldn't find any trace of him, and I went back to Buffalo, and tried to trace him there, and I couldn't find any trace of him at all.

The next day I decided to go on to Cleveland anyway, by myself, and I met another young fellow while I was catching a freight train, and we rode into Cleveland.

In Cleveland at that time there were four or five automobile plants, all along the big boulevard. We stopped at all of these automobile plants and applied for work, and we couldn't get a job. And then we went into the town and we went around to any kind of industrial plant or manufacturing company that we could find. We were looking all day and we couldn't find a job. So then we decided to leave there and go to Toledo. He finally lined up a job as a farm hand outside Toledo. So I decided to go on West.

I met up with another fellow who called himself Denver Smith. And he was on his way to Denver, he said, but he was going to St. Louis
Billings: first. He invited me to go along with him, so we went in a boxcar on a freight train. When we got to St. Louis he went to find his friends and left me standing in the street. I stood around there and waited all night for him, and the next morning I met him again, and he was drunk. He had been drinking with these friends all night. Then we went to the yards to take the Wabash to Kansas City and got on the Santa Fe to Chicago by mistake. We got off and spent the rest of the night in Machen, Missouri and the next morning Smith decided he'd get on a passenger train and pay his fare back to St. Louis. That left me in Machen, Missouri.

I didn't know what to do, but I got to talking to a switchman in the railroad tower, and he told me how to ride the trains into Kansas City. I didn't attempt to do any work or anything else until after I left Kansas City and got into Fort Morgan, Colorado, on the Burlington. When I first got there, I met the Marshal. They
called him Marshal Bob. He was quite a character. Little fellow, about my size. Came walking down the street with a big pistol strapped on his belt. I was with a red-headed fellow, Jack Keys, that I had picked up in Kansas City. I felt sure we were headed for jail. The Marshal said, "Where you goin'?" "Oh, we're going down the track looking for a car to sleep in." "Come along with me", he said, "I've got a good place for you to sleep." I knew that was the jail. So he took us to the jail, showed us where the blankets were, showed us the bunks, said, "Now you can sleep here, and if you want to catch the early train in the morning -- train leaves at 6:30 -- I'll wake you up. If you don't want to catch it, you can sleep." So we talked about it and Jack said he heard there was some street work going on in Pueblo and he thought he could go to work there. I was pretty tired; I'd been traveling pretty fast, so I decided I'd rather sleep, inasmuch as the Marshal seemed to be so friendly. I told the
Billings: Marshal, "I think I'll hold this town down for a couple of days." He says "All right." So the next morning he came in and woke Jack Keys up and Jack went on to Pueblo, and I went back to sleep again.

They were so friendly to me there, showed me a place where I could wash dishes for breakfast and another where I could do some gardening for lunch, that I decided to stay. I got a job as a waiter in the hotel for three days, and then the new owner took possession Saturday night. On Sunday morning while I was serving the breakfast, she was criticizing every move I made. Nothing was satisfactory. She was a very sour old lady from Cheyenne, Wyoming. And when I sat down to eat my Sunday dinner, she tried to take my fried chicken and strawberry shortcake away from me. We had quite an argument about it, and I finally pushed her out the dining room door and locked the door and kept her out there while I sat down and ate. (laughter). When I had finished eating
Billings: I took my apron off and hung it over her head and said, "You serve the dinner. I'm through." And I walked out. That was another one of my individual strikes.

So then from Fort Morgan I went to work in Denver as a mule skinner for half a day. Then I went to Pueblo and worked in an ice plant for one day. Then I left there and went to the top of the mountains. I got to be kind of chummy with a young Irishman from Missouri and we got a job on the coal chute. We were supposed to unload one car of coal a day, which is 40 tons. The first day we got one car, and the next day they put two cars on the coal chute, and we had to unload 80 tons. The next day it was one car, and the next day it was two again, and the following day it was two again. So Paddy and I decided that was too much coal, so we cut it with the coal chute.

Then I went over to another place and went to work unloading coal for ten cents a ton. You had to wheel the coal in a wheelbarrow up a
Billings: Runway out of a boxcar up over the top of a coal-yard fence and dump it into a pile. I met a fellow there, and he and I took a contract to unload one of these cars. There were forty tons in a car, and at ten cents a ton that's four dollars. It took us all day to unload one car of coal, so we made two dollars apiece, working all day. I decided that was too much coal for too little money.

So I went into Grand Junction and from there into Salt Lake City, and then I went back up to Strawberry Valley in Utah. Went to work for the United States Reclamation Service on the Strawberry Valley Dam. That was in the fall of 1912. I worked up there for two or three weeks, and then I went back down into Salt Lake City. I went up to Idaho and Oregon. Going up through Idaho, I went to work as an apple picker. I made apple boxes in La Grande, Oregon, for one day. I picked apples in the Boise Valley and the Payette Valley and in the Grande Ronde Valley
Billings: up by La Grande. But only for two or three
days at a time. And then I went on through
from there to The Dalles, and the chief of
police suggested that I go to work at Big
Eddy, Oregon, for the United States Army
Engineers. They were building a canal, and
they were looking for pick-and-shovel men at
the time. So I went back to Big Eddy, which
was four miles from The Dalles, and I worked
four days as a pick-and-shovel man, and then
I got a job as a waiter; in the dining room.
And I worked there until the day before Christ-
mas. Then I quit that job and went into Portland.
And I was in Portland from the day before Christ-
mas until Washington's Birthday. During that
time I tried to work around Portland. Work was
very hard to get. I worked one day in a cafeteria
as a bus boy for a dollar a day and my meals. I
worked twelve hours, for a dollar a day. One day
of that was too much, so I quit that. Then I
tried to solicit photographs, to sell photograph
tickets around town. I walked all over Portland
Billings: for three or four days and didn't sell any
tickets. So I gave that up. So finally I
decided that I'd have to do something, and I
thought it over. I'd been reading a good deal
about the Mexican Revolution and Francisco
Villa, so I finally decided that I'd go to
Mexico and join the Villa Revolution.

Gilb: Did anybody talk to you about this, or did you
just read about it in the papers?

Billings: I had discussed it with various fellows I'd
met in various pool halls and hangouts in
Portland. We'd talk about the Revolution,
what we read about it in the papers, of course.
At any rate, I finally decided I'd go to Mexico
and join the Revolution. It was beginning to
warm up a little bit, and I figured it was warm
enough for me to make it over the Siskiyou
Mountains. I started out on Washington's
Birthday, 1913, on top of the Shasta Limited.
I got on the blind of the Shasta Limited and
rode down to Grants Pass, Oregon, and got pulled
off the blind in Grants Pass, Oregon, just froze
Billings: stiff. They took me into the railroad station, rubbed my hands and feet with snow, and brought me to. I was conscious at the time but was unable to move. I was unable to talk because my face was frozen. So they rubbed my face with snow and got me so that I could talk.

The chief of police put me in the Grant's Pass jail, and kept me there overnight. He left the door open. In the morning he came up and brought me my breakfast. The door was still open. I swept up the jail and folded up the blankets and had the dishes there — he had brought my breakfast from the restaurant across the street. I stuck around for a little while, and he didn't come back so I took the dishes over to the restaurant and asked the fellow whether I was supposed to stay in jail. I didn't know whether I was under arrest or what.

The restaurant man suggested that I go downtown and look for the chief of police. So I went down the main street of the town and looked around, and I couldn't find the chief,
Billings: and it was pretty cold weather, so I got into a pool hall, and after awhile the chief of police came in. So I asked him whether I was supposed to be in jail or not, and he said no. He asked me what I was going to do, and I said, "I'm going to California." He said, "Well, you want to catch a train out of here." So I caught the freight train and went over the hump. Came down into California.

I had quite a lot of fun riding the head end of the Shasta Limited. The train crew would ditch me at some station and I'd stay over there till the next day when the train came through again. I was four or five days coming down from Portland, and they got pretty well acquainted with me before we got very far in California.

I finally got down to Woodland, and then eventually I rode the head end of the Shasta Limited from Woodland right into Berkeley Station. Then I got into Oakland. Of course, it was the first time I'd ever been to California; I didn't
Billings: know anything about it. I inquired around, talked to people, and found that I could get across to San Francisco on the 5¢ ferry, providing I had the 5¢, which I didn't. So I got out on Broadway in Oakland and started to beg 5¢ to get across the ferry with. The first fellow I begged was a rather large-sized gentleman, and as soon as I begged him, he threw his coat back and showed me the star. He was a detective. I told him my story and he gave me the 5¢ and I came across the ferry. I guess he thought it was worth a nickel to get rid of me.
RADICAL LABOR ACTIVITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1913

Union Spy in a Shoe Workers' Strike

Billings: So I got over to San Francisco. I left here on the 6th of March, 1913. It was one of those cold, foggy days that we have here in the early spring. I don't think I was ever colder in my life than I was right here in San Francisco. I'd get out and walk around the streets and pretty near freeze stiff and then I'd have to go hunt for a pool hall or a saloon that I could get in where I could get close to a stove or a radiator. They had quite a few stoves at that time, especially around Third and Howard. And so I was around an employment office there, I met a tall, slender fellow with black hair. I never knew him by any other name except Blackie. We got into a conversation, talking about work and one thing and another; he asked me what I did for a living and I told him I was a shoe cutter. He asked me where I had worked, and I mentioned the factories in Brooklyn I had worked in.
Billings: He said, "I know where you can get a job. They're looking for shoe workers out in the factory at 18th and Bryant." So I said, "I'll go out there if you'll tell me where it is."

He said, "Of course, there's a strike on."

Prior to that, in the conversation, I had gathered that he was a member of the I.W.W. But when he started to tell me that I could go to work in a factory where there was a strike on, why, things began to look a little different, and I asked him, "What are you doing, recruiting strike breakers if you're a member of the I.W.W.?

"Oh," he said, "I'm a member of the I.W.W. all right." He pulled out his red card and showed it to me. He said, "You don't understand about this strike proposition. Actually, the strike leaders are members of the I.W.W. They want a man to go into the factory and find out how many pair of shoes are being made and who they're being made for. If you've got the guts to go to work as a strikebreaker, and want to take on this job for the union and get the information they want, you can go out there and get a job. I'll take you out and introduce you to
Billings: Ted Hooper and Barney Salner. They're the strike leaders."

Gilb: What company was this?

Billings: The Frank and Hyman Shoe Company (formerly the G.M. Kutz Co.). So Blackie took me out to Woodman's Hall on 17th Street between Mission and Valencia, which at that time was the headquarters of the I.W.W., and introduced me to a fellow named Ted Hooper, who was secretary of the I.W.W., and at the same time was strike leader for the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, he being a shoe worker. Then Hooper introduced me to Barney Salner, who was secretary to the Shoe Workers Union. They made the proposition about me going in the factory to find out how many pair of shoes were being made, and who they were being made for. That would be very simple for me to find out, because I was a lining cutter. (I'd cut linings in Hannon's Shoe Factory in Brooklyn.) They only used one lining cutter in the factory, and every order for shoes that went through the factory had to go through that lining cutter. I went into the factory and told the boss
that I was a lining cutter from Brooklyn, asked if he had a job for me; he asked me if I was a member of the union and I said no. So he called the foreman down. Foreman asked me where I'd worked, and I told him Wichert and Gardener's, and Hannon's in Brooklyn. He said I could go to work.

So I went upstairs and went to work. As I recall, the factory paid me $13.50 a week and board. The strikebreakers were sleeping and eating in the factory. That is, the men were sleeping there. The women were sleeping in a hotel over in Polk Street. There were about sixty-some-odd strikebreakers in the plant at the time. So I worked there a matter of seven weeks, during which time I, of course, went out to meet the union men to report to them about the number of shoes being made and who they were being made for, and who the non-union employees were, where they came from, which ones were shoemakers and which ones were just farmers, and so on and so forth. The first time I went out to meet these fellows, they had given me an address at 141 Albion Avenue. I went there, and while we were there, I discovered that the place was the
headquarters of the Socialist Party. (laughter). So I was a little frightened about that, because I thought that some of the Socialists might possibly recognize me as a scab shoemaker, strikebreaker, and I thought maybe I was in danger of getting beaten up around there. So I suggested to these fellows that we ought to find some other place to meet.

Finally one of the fellows said, "I know a place. We'll meet at Tom Mooney's house." So they directed me then how to find Tom Mooney's house. The next time I came out of the factory, three days later -- I used to report twice a week -- I met these fellows at Tom Mooney's, on 15th Street. That was how I got acquainted with Tom Mooney and his family.

What did he look like to you the first time you saw him?

Well, just like an ordinary worker. Tom was a molder by trade. He was about eleven years older than I was. I was not quite 20 yet, I'd be 20 in July -- this was March -- and Tom was about 31. I met Tom and his wife and his mother and his brother and sister and got acquainted with them. In the past I had known
numerous Irish people like Tom Mooney and his mother in the state of Massachusetts and other places. Tom and his mother, by the way, came from Holyoke (Mass.). So I got friendly with the Mooneys. Of course I didn't see too much of them during that particular strike because I was living in the factory and was only out of the factory twice a week.

Wasn't Mooney active in that strike?

Billings: Yes, he was active in the strike. He was helping the strikers. The employer, young Hyman, used to take the women from the factory in his automobile and drive them to their hotel, and Tom was trying to find out for the union which hotel these women were staying at. Tom trailed the car on his motor cycle. On one occasion, Tom ran through McCoppin Street, which was a little, narrow street at the time, and he ran ahead of the automobile, and Mr. Hyman, the employer, speeded up and overtook Tom and pushed him to the curb, broke his leg and ran over the motorcycle. Tried to run Tom down, actually tried to kill him with the car. As a result of that, of course, Tom was laid up in the
hospital with a broken leg for the remainder of the strike. The motorcycle never did get repaired. In fact, in 1916 when we were arrested, the police found the remains of Tom Mooney's motorcycle in Ed Nolan's basement, where Tom had stowed it after it had been broken up. He had never been able to repair it or get it repaired.

Gilb: Did he bring charges against the employer?

Billings: He sued the employer, and I don't recall what the result was. I think he made a settlement for $100 or something like that, eventually.

Gilb: Was there much violence on the outside in that strike?

Billings: No.

Gilb: I'd been told that the strikebreakers carried guns.

Billings: All the strikebreakers carried guns. Not directly as a result of any advice given to them by the employers, but there were strike guards on the job who were employed by the Merchants and Manufacturers and Employers Association, known as the M.M. and E. These strike guards advised the strikers that they should be in a position to defend themselves. In other words hinted that they should carry arms. A
Billings: Few of them did. At one time I borrowed a gun from Tom Mooney and carried it for a short time, and then later I secured a pistol of my own. I think I bought it in Street and Barbour's gun store on Kearny Street, I guess. At any rate, I bought a small caliber pistol, .32 caliber pistol. I had it in my possession at the time that I severed my connections with the strike.

After I had been in the plant seven weeks, someone broke into the plant and cut up four hundred and eighty pair of shoes and took parts of the machinery away and disposed of them.

Gilb: Did you know who the someone was?

Billings: I never knew exactly who it was, but I've always suspected that the principal actor in the deal was a fellow named Clayton who had been one of the strike-breakers. Clayton was working in the plant, and he had been formerly a prisoner for many years in the Jefferson City, Missouri, State Prison, where he had been serving a life sentence for killing his wife. You see, in Jefferson City, Missouri, the prisoners
Billings: worked under contract to the Keys and Keys Manufacturing Company which made shoes in prison and sold them outside. This fellow Clayton had worked for Keys and Keys Shoe Company in the prison for a number of years and became a very competent man. He was able to make shoes all the way from beginning to end on the United Shoe Machinery Company's machines. So the United Shoe Machinery Company got him out on parole and was returned to the prison, and then he was re-paroled in 1912. In the latter part of 1912 he came out here when the strike started as a strike-breaker and was working in this struck plant as a Goodyear welt stitcher, on a Goodyear welt machine, which is a very technical job and takes an expert operator. This fellow was very good at it. He operated the Goodyear welt machine, and he also operated the bottom stitcher and other machines whenever they didn't have anybody in the plant to operate them. He would go from one machine to the other and operate them.

As it happened, the union used to form an endless chain picket line in the evening after the work day in front of the plant. And the girls from the laundry, I believe it was the United States Laundry
Billings: across the street, would join the picket line. So the strikebreakers working in the plant would stand at the windows and look out and watch the picket line and holler at the pickets and one thing and another, just to -- well, as a source of amusement or something. So one day this fellow Clayton was standing at the next window to me, and I had made arrangements with Barney Salner so that when Barney Salner was standing across the street and Clayton was standing next to me, I took a little piece of blank paper and folded it like a note and I reached over alongside of Clayton and pushed it out the window when Clayton was looking the other way. Barney Salner stood across the street and saw the note come fluttering down, and he looked up at the window and nodded, and ran over and picked up the note and looked up at the window and nodded again. Well, the guards for the Merchant Manufacturing Association saw what he was doing, and they looked up at the window themselves and saw that Clayton was the one who was standing in the window. So the employer immediately fired Clayton. They knew there was a spy
Billings: in the shop; they didn't know who it was, but they suspected that Clayton was throwing out notes to the union men. So Clayton got fired. Of course, our plan in getting Clayton fired was to get rid of the best shoe mechanic in the shop, in order to cripple the factory.

Gilb: He was a genuine strikebreaker, then. He wasn't in cahoots.

Billings: Oh yes. He was a genuine strikebreaker. After Clayton got fired, he was sore at the employer and he immediately went across the street and told the union men that he wanted to join the union. The union took him in, and it was shortly after that that the factory was broken into and these 480 pair of shoes were cut up.

Gilb: How did he get past the guards?

Billings: There was only one guard on duty at night. An old fellow named Jacobs. We used to call him Jake. He was a wine bum. We used to do a good deal of gambling in the plant. So one night we held a little crap game down in the office on a big flattop desk, and I had a
pair of 7/8 inch celluloid dice which I could handle pretty well, and I slid the dice out on the desk, the same four trey or five deuce or six ace up there, and I kept winning; every time I threw seven, I'd win, of course. I threw one seven after another until I won all the loose money in the crowd. So then just to be a good fellow, and to have a little fun out of the deal, I gave all the money to Jake and told him to go across the street and buy us some liquor and we'd have a little party.

So Jake went over and he got us a case of bear and a couple of bottles of wine and a couple of bottles of whiskey and a couple of bottles of gin and a few more things, and everybody in the factory got drunk except one fellow, who was a Methodist minister from Atlanta, Georgia, and he wouldn't drink anything. He slept in the next bunk to mine, however, and he slept very soundly all night. I lay there and watched him, and I knew he slept soundly.

During that night somebody broke into the factory and cut up these 480 pair of shoes.

Gilb: That sounds like more than coincidence. Are you sure that you didn't know they were coming?
Billings: I hadn't been definitely told that they were, but it had been suggested to me that it would be a good idea if everybody got well liquored up.

Gilb: So then what happened?

Billings: So anyway, the next morning, I decided that, inasmuch as Clayton was gone and the factory was partly crippled, it would be further crippled if I quit, because I was the only lining cutter they had —— they couldn't get another lining cutter this side of St. Louis. They couldn't get another Goodyear welt stitcher this side of St. Louis. And the union sort of had the idea that crippling the strike to that extent would give them an opportunity to reach an agreement with the employers.

Gilb: Did the employers suspect you of being in cahoots?

Billings: The employers suspected everybody, but they didn't particularly suspect me. Old man Frank was an elderly gentleman, a very nice old guy. He knew the shoe business, but he didn't have any money. Young Hyman had lots of money and was tough and hard boiled, but didn't know anything about the shoe business. Hyman was one of those kind that was suspicious about
everything and everybody, but old man Frank was more easygoing; in fact, the old man and I had gotten quite friendly, and I think that if Hyman suspected me of anything, probably the old man talked him out of it. Because the old man recognized the fact that I was a good shoe cutter, I could cut shoes, I could cut trimmings, I could cut linings, I could make patterns, and the old man realized that I was a competent mechanic, and he was convinced that I was doing a good job there. He didn't know, of course, what a good job I was doing for the union.

So after the factory had been broken into and the machinery had been disrupted so that they weren't able to operate at all, I decided that if I quit, that would further cripple the factory. I told Mr. Frank first that I was going to quit, and he told me that I would have to see Hyman, and that Hyman had charge of all the money, and I couldn't get my pay until Hyman gave it to me. So I went to see Hyman and he was busy with two detectives taking them around the plant showing them the damage that had been done, and he said, "You'll have to wait until I get through
here." So I went back upstairs to talk with one of
the girls in the fitting room that I had been friendly
with; I was trying to get her to quit the job with
me. She was a shoe fitter, that is, a person who
puts the lining and the upper together, and sews
them. She was rather competent, so we were trying
to get her out of the plant too. Her name was
Mattie, and while I was talking to her, this strike
guard from the Merchants Manufacturers Association, on
day shift, came into the fitting room and I thought
that he came in to tell me that the boss had my money
ready. I already had my suitcase packed and was
ready to leave, and so I said, "Well, Mattie, I've
got to go; here comes Summers after me," meaning that
he'd come up to tell me that my money was ready. So
I walked towards him and as I met him in the center of
the floor, he swung at me with his fist. He knew, of
course, that I had a pistol in my pocket. Because I
expected to carry my suitcase with my right hand, I
had put the pistol in my left hand pocket, and the
pistol was in a holster. When Summers swung at me,
he staggered me a little bit, and then he grabbed me
Billings: by both wrists and forced me backwards over the seat of a chair and called another fellow to come over and take the gun away from me. So when the other fellow came over, Summers raised me up off of the chair, and I was able to push my hand over and get ahold of the handle of the gun, but I couldn't get the gun out of my pocket, or out of the holster. All I could do was to hold onto the handle and press down on it to try to keep it in the holster, to try to keep him from taking it away from me. My sole idea was to keep Summers from taking the gun away from me.

Summers tried to pull my hand away from the gun, and a fellow named Chadwick, who was a professional strikebreaker — in fact had been in the streetcar strike in 1907 in San Francisco — reached for the gun and inadvertently got ahold of the trigger. I hadn't been able to get ahold of the trigger, but he did, and he grabbed the trigger, and the gun went off and the bullet tore through my left thumb. It hit me just above the knuckle here and came out through the end of my thumb. The gun and my two hands
at the time were behind my back. The muzzle of the
gun was right against my thumb. Apparently the same
shot that hit me in the thumb hit Chadwick in the
foot, in the instep. At least that was what he testified
to in court. Whether or not that was the same shot
might be a moot question. There was one other shot
fired subsequently, accidentally, of course. When
Summers still held my by the wrist and I was unable to
going loose, he held my hands down so that the gun was
pointed toward the floor, and Chadwick was behind me
moving around trying to get the gun away from me, and
the gun went off again. Whether it was the first shot
or the second shot that hit Chadwick in the foot, I
couldn't say.

After this gun exploded the second time, these
two detectives from downstairs rushed in and one of
them told me to drop the gun, and when I didn't drop
it soon enough, he struck at me with a blackjack which
hit my right shoulder, and paralyzed my arm, and the
gun dropped out of my hand.

Then of course they put handcuffs on me and put
me under arrest. They took me and this fellow Chadwick
Billings: to the hospital to have our wounds dressed, and while we were there, I explained to Chadwick that I hadn't been attempting to shoot him, that I was sorry he got shot in the foot, and he said that he knew that I hadn't intended to shoot him, or something. So anyway, when we went to court the next morning, Judge Brady looked at me and then looked at this fellow Chadwick and he said, "How tall are you, Mr. Chadwick?" "Five foot nine, your honor." "How much do you weigh?" "I weigh a hundred and fifty-some-odd pounds." Judge Brady looked at Summers, "How tall are you, Mr. Summers?" "I'm five foot eleven and a half, your honor." "And how much do you weigh?" "I weigh one hundred and ninety-six." He looked at Mr. Ruddiger, who was one of the arresting officers, and said, "How tall are you, Mr. Ruddiger?" "I'm six foot one, your honor." "How much do you weigh?" "I weigh two hundred and seven." Then he looked at me, over the top of the bench, and he said, "How tall are you, son?" I said, "I'm five foot four, your honor." And he said, "How much do you weigh?" I said, "I weighed one hundred twenty-four pounds at the identification bureau this
morning." And he looked at the other three and said, "What I want to know is why three husky guys like you couldn't take a gun away from this kid without somebody getting shot." (laughter) So he reduced the charge from assault with intent to commit murder to assault with a deadly weapon. There is considerable difference. Assault with a deadly weapon at that time carried a penalty of not more than two years, whereas assault with intent to commit murder carried a penalty of from one to fourteen years.

So I was charged then with assault with a deadly weapon. Bound over to Superior Court. I was in the county jail out in Ingleside for two and a half months and then went to trial. When I went to trial, the arresting officer and the guard for the Merchant Manufacturers Association testified against me. The guard testified that I was trying to shoot him. There was no indication that I had ever tried to shoot him. I didn't get the gun up pointing at him at any time; it was always pointing at the floor. But the intern at the hospital testified that I had told Chadwick that I wasn't trying to shoot him. They tried to infer from
that I was trying to shoot Summers.

But at any rate, after the arresting officer and the strike guard testified, then Chadwick was put on the witness stand, and he testified that the same shot that hit him in the foot was the one that hit me in the thumb. His testimony indicated that the shooting was clearly accidental. Nattie testified to exactly the same thing that I testified to. It all agreed with Chadwick's testimony that the shooting was accidental. So the result was that the judge turned the case over to the jury about twenty minutes to twelve, at noon, and the jury didn't come back with the verdict, and at about ten minutes to twelve, the judge sent for the jury. At that time we had a professional jury system. That is, a number of old men, retired, and disabled, unable to work, hung around the courts and took service as jurors in order to get the juror's pay, which at that time was $2 a day. If they were on a case during their meal hour, they got their meal. So these jurors didn't bring back a verdict by ten minutes to twelve, so Judge Frank E. Dunne, in Superior Court, called the bailiff and said, "Bring the jury
Billings: back here." The bailiff brought the jury back into the courtroom and Judge Dunne said, "Gentlemen of the jury, I want to tell you that you're not going to get any lunch at the expense of this court today. This is a clear case of accidental shooting and there's absolutely no reason why you gentlemen of the jury should be out over two minutes. You've been ten minutes now and you haven't reached a verdict. If you don't reach a verdict within the next five minutes, right here in this courtroom, I will dismiss the jury. You're not going to get any lunch at the expense of this court today."

The jury still held out. They still didn't reach a verdict. So the judge dismissed the jury, released me on my own recognizance for two days, told me to come back two days later to have my case set for retrial.

Two days later, when I came back, my lawyer, who was a heavy drinker, didn't show up in court. I was there along; I didn't know what to do about it; I didn't have much of an idea of court procedure, so I
Billings: didn't know what to say or what to do. The bailiff called the case and I stood up. And the judge asked if I was represented by counsel, and I said, "Well, I had been, but he doesn't seem to be here." He was a wine bum lawyer employed by the Shoe Workers Union just to defend me and my case. Some lawyer that they could get cheap, because the union didn't have any money. Maxwell McNutt was Prosecuting Attorney in Judge Dunne's court at the time. So when I didn't know what to do about the case, Maxwell got up and said, "Well, your honor, I guess it is incumbent upon the District Attorney's office to make a motion that this case be dismissed." So the case was dismissed on his motion.

Gilb: All during the time you were in jail, did the union people come and visit you?

Billings: Anna Mooney -- Tom came and visited me once or twice, and Anna came and visited me, and some of the people from the unions came and visited me occasionally. Some of the people from the Boot and Shoe Workers Union came occasionally. One or two, at any rate. In fact they came to tell me that they had secured a lawyer
Billings: for me, and so on and so forth. But the union was in very poor circumstances, had absolutely no treasury, and there wasn't much that they could do for me. However, the Mooneys did visit me quite regularly, and did more for me than anybody else, and in fact invited me to come to their house when I was released.

Gilb: What happened to the strike?

Billings: Shortly after I was arrested, the strike was settled. I think it was only a matter of two or three days when an organizer from the International Boot and Shoe Workers Union in Boston came out here and he succeeded in settling the strike on an open-shop contract. That is, the union lost recognition of the union. All they had been striking for was to prevent a cut in wages. The employer had decided on a cut in wages, and that had caused the strike. So they went back to work, actually, at the same wages and under the same conditions except that they lost recognition of the union. From then on it was an open shop. The workers were not required to join the union.
Gilb: They certainly didn't get much for their efforts!

Billings: No, that's right. The strike lasted thirteen weeks.

Gilb: I wondered about these strikebreakers. You must have talked to them. How did they feel? Were they against the union?

Billings: Oh yes, they were against the union. All strikebreakers consider themselves as economic royalists. They're individualists. Actually, all strikebreakers are individualist anarchists. They have no regard for law and order and no regard for government. No regard for anything except their own gain. And most of them have very little regard for human life, along with it. They think that the world is a jungle.

Gilb: Where did most of the strikebreakers in this plant come from?

Billings: Mostly came from St. Louis.

Gilb: Recruited?

Billings: Yes. They were mostly tough guys from St. Louis that had worked in shoe factories back there at one time or another, but they were mostly street corner bums and small-time hoodlums, and most of them had minor police records.
Gilb: Had Frank and Hyman gone back there to get them?

Billings: Yes. They were imported out here. I don't know whether Frank and Hyman went back there to get them or whether they were sent here by agents of the United Shoe Machinery Company, which is probably what happened.

Gilb: What was Frank and Hyman's relationship to the United Shoe Machinery Company?

Billings: Well, they rented shoe machinery from the United Shoe Machinery Company. You see, the United Shoe Machinery Company had the sole right to a great many machines, which they did not sell. They rented them to the factories. For instance, every inch of Goodyear welt that was sewed onto a shoe by the Goodyear welt machine was registered on the machine, and the rental of the machine was paid according to the number of inches of welt that were sewed by that particular machine. Those machines belonged solely to the United Shoe Machinery Company. They had a monopoly on them. Nobody could buy them, and you could only rent them on their terms.

Gilb: Oh! So Frank and Hyman were merely agents in a sense.
Billings: Yes. As long as they used United Shoe Machinery machines, they paid the United Shoe Machinery for them. Actually, the strike interfered with the profits of the United Shoe Machinery Company, because if the factory was closed down and these machines were not in use, the United Shoe Machinery Company lost money.

Gilb: Where were their headquarters, do you know?

Billings: St. Louis, I believe. I believe that it was through the agents of the United Shoe Machinery Company that the strikebreakers were recruited and sent out here.

Book and Shoe Workers' Local

Gilb: What month was it that you got out of jail?

Billings: I got out of jail in June, 1913. I went to Tom Mooney's house to live, and then I of course was a member of the union at that time. I had joined the union during the time I was working in the plant. But I was unable to get a job in my own name because of the fact that they had then found out, after my arrest, that I had been working for the union, because the union defended me and supplied me with
a lawyer and so on and so forth. So the employers became convinced that I was an agent of the union, and I couldn't get a job in another shoe factory. I finally got a job in the Buckingham and Hecht Shoe Factory at 26th and Valencia Street under the name of Gregory R. Smith. And at that time I lived at 271 San Jose Avenue in San Francisco, which was directly opposite the home of James Rolph, the mayor. I lived there for a couple of months while I worked in that factory, and during that time the Pacific Gas & Electric Company strike started. The electrical workers, outside linemen, affiliated with Local 151, went on strike against the Pacific Gas & Electric Company, and Tom Mooney got interested in that strike, and got me interested in the strike, and I began to work for the electrical workers in times when I was off from the shoe factory. The shoe factory job was part-time. Some weeks I would work two days and some weeks I would work three, and once in awhile I might work a full week, but I'd work two or three days a week as a general rule.
Gilb: How did you get that job?

Billings: I just went into the factory and asked if they needed a lining cutter or a trimming cutter and they gave me a job as a trimming cutter.

Gilb: Did any of the shoe factories in this city have a union-shop agreement or a closed-shop?

Billings: Only one. There was only one shop, after the Frank and Hyman strike, that had a union agreement. That was the United Workingmen's plant, which was on Bartlett Street between 25th and 26th, and it was a cooperative plant. It belonged to the workers who worked in the plant. At one time, during '14 or '15 they operated a cooperative shoe store on Mission Street. But it was not a success and they were finally forced to close down. And eventually the United Workingmen's shoe factory went out of business too. It was unable to continue.

Gilb: Then the union had no contracts with any of the factories.

Billings: That's right. See, there were only three factories here, and they were all small shops. Buckingham and Recht was the largest. Frank and Hyman was next,
Billings: (putting out about 300 pairs of shoes a day) and the United Workingmen's shoe factory was the smallest. It only employed, I think, 46 at its peak.

Gilb: When you want to work at Buckingham and Necht, did they ask if you belonged to the union?

Billings: No, they didn't. I believe that that was one thing that was in the union contract. It was some kind of an open-shop contract, and I don't recall just what the wording was. I think it was contrary to the contract for the employer to make any inquiries or discriminate against men because of their membership in the union.

Gilb: Did they have a written contract?

Billings: No. It was a contract like the present right-to-work laws that they're trying to adopt; it was a contract which was supposed to give the workers the right to belong to the union or not belong to the union, as they saw fit.

Gilb: Who drafted the contract? Sounds like the employers did.
Billings: The employers undoubtedly drafted it. I don't know how the representative of the International Shoe Workers came to agree to it, but I guess the union was a very conservative one. That is, the International officers were very conservative. In fact, at that time the International had the largest treasury of any of the international unions. In 1912, they had over seven and a half million dollars in the treasury of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union. And I don't think at that time that any of the other unions had that much.

A fellow named Charles Bean was the International Secretary of the union. He was one of our first labor politicians, I guess. Labor fakers, we used to call them.

In other words, your local here wasn't on very good terms with the International.

Billings: No. You see, prior to that time in 1909, I believe, at a convention in Montreal, a group of progressive shoemakers had split away from the International and formed the United Shoeworkers, so that from
then on there were two shoeworkers unions, the Boot and Shoe, and the United Shoeworkers. When I worked in Brooklyn at Bannor's factory, I worked under the United Shoeworkers. So I carried a card in the United Shoeworkers. Prior to that I had worked in a Boot and Shoe shop and carried a card in the Boot and Shoe Workers Union. So actually, when I came to California, although I was delinquent in both unions, I had actually been a member of both the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and the United Shoeworkers, which was independent. The local in San Francisco was originally with the Boot and Shoe. Then when the United Shoe Workers were formed this local jumped to the United Shoe Workers. Subsequently, in 1913, or 1912, I believe, it went back into the Boot and Shoe, so that although the members here were affiliated with the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, they were in sympathy with the United Shoe Workers. And they were recognized as progressive, or radical, shoe workers. Consequently, this local was not in
Billings: good standing with the International, and the International was not in good standing with this local, either. (laughter)

**Electrical Workers' P.G. and E. Strike, 1913**

_Framed by the Pinkerton_

Billings: After that, when I became interested in the Pacific Gas & Electric Company, I was working for one of the officers of Local 151 of the Electrical Workers Union doing investigating work, finding out how many guards were stationed along certain high-tension lines coming into the city, because the strikers were making arrangements to pull down these lines during the night by throwing a rope over the line and then tying it to the back of a car and driving away and pulling a cowcatchen up over the two wires to get a short circuit over the line that way.

So I walked along these high-tension lines and found out where the guards were, how many there were, where they were stationed, and so on and so forth,
Billings: and reported this information to the union.

Gilb: I have a note here that one of your other jobs was, in the line of duty, gathering dynamite.

Billings: The fact of the matter is that I did help secure some dynamite, for the use of the electrical workers who were using it to disrupt power lines by blowing down transformers and power poles out in outlying districts where there was nobody around and nobody could be hurt or anything, but it would destroy the property of the Pacific Gas & Electric Company.

Gilb: Where did you get the dynamite?

Billings: From various quarries and construction jobs where they had dynamite stored. That was the usual method of acquiring dynamite those days, prowl a powder shanty.

Gilb: Dynamite played a very prominent role in labor relations in those days. Have you read Louis Adamic's book, *Dynamite*?

Billings: You should read the letter I wrote Louis Adamic after he wrote that book.
Billings: I bawled him out. Because he went to all of the anti-union sources. He got his information admittedly from the San Francisco Examiner and the Los Angeles Times. Now he didn't ask anybody connected with any of the unions for any information. He didn't ask me for any information about it. He sat down to write a story which he tried to make people believe was favorable to the unions; instead, it was all anti-union.

Gilb: It's interesting to get your viewpoint on this.

Billings: Actually what he did in his writing, he pled guilty for every union man who had ever been charged with any crime of sabotage. And he never said a word about the number of Pinkerton agents and other private detectives who had been employed by capital to commit these crimes and to agitate the commission of crimes in these strikes as agent saboteurs; he never said a word about that. These provocative agents hired by the Pinkerton agency were the principal ones that committed these crimes, even in
Billings: the F.G. & E., and the ones that I actually supplied dynamite to! Some of them were Pinkerton agents.

Gilb: And you didn't know it.

Billings: Of course I didn't know it. None of us knew it. We found out twenty years later.

Gilb: Didn't Martin Swanson, the head of the San Francisco Pinkertons, organize a frame-up during this F.G. & E. strike over in Berkeley?

Billings: He did.

Gilb: Can you tell something about that?

Billings: Yes. He organized a frame-up against three union men, George Silkwood and a fellow named McAlpine and another fellow whose name I don't recall. There was a crew of men working in a manhole over in Berkeley, near the Berkeley power station. He sent one of his operatives over there to work on the gang. Then he sent three other operatives of his over there to beat up the fellows who were working in the hole. The Swanson man working in the hole stuck his head up and somebody made a
Billings: swing at him and he lay down and made believe he was dead, and then after it was all over, he became the chief witness for the prosecution. And Swanson arrested McAlpine, Silkwood, and another fellow. And they accused these three union men of being the three who had beat up the three non-union workers in the hole. The fact of the matter is that none of them had anything to do with it; they were not present, didn't know anything about it. They were all somewhere else doing something else. But they were tried and convicted and sent to San Quentin.

Subsequently, about a year, or nearly a year, or maybe it was more than a year, after their arrest and conviction, this stool pigeon who had done the testifying got friendly with a fellow over in Oakland in a saloon and told him the story of how he helped Swanson frame these three. This fellow that he told the story to happened to be a member of the Teamsters Union. In fact, I believe he was an officer of the Teamsters Union. And so he became interested in this story.
Who was he, do you know?

I don't know his name. I never did know who he was. I'm quite sure he was a member of the Teamsters. At any rate, he began to investigate this thing, and he inquired around the electrical workers and so on and so forth, and they finally arranged to try to get this fellow to tell his story over again someplace where they could take it down in shorthand and make a recording of it and use it in an application for a pardon before the Governor.

So that was done. The Teamster man kept in touch with this ex-Pinkerton and got him to come to his house. In the course of the evening, after giving him a few drinks and one thing and another, he got him to tell his story all over again. There were three or four people in the basement listening to the story. They had a sort of dictaphone that had an earpiece buried in the living room, and the people down in the basement, the stenographer and the others, were listening to the conversation on a headset and the stenographer was putting it down. So that evidence was taken before the Governor and
Billings: the three men in San Quentin were pardoned.
Immediately after that, Swanson was fired by the Pinkerton Detective Agency. Not because he framed these three men, but because he got caught at it.
(laughter)

Gilb: Another question that I want to ask about the '13 strike. I have a note that F.H. McCarthy and the Labor Council were against the strike and issued union cards to the scabs.

Billings: Well, originally, they were, because you see, there were two factions in the Electrical Workers' Union. And this strike was pulled by the outlaw faction. It was an unauthorized strike, what we call nowadays a wildcat strike.

Gilb: What were they striking for?

Billings: Well, they were striking for hours and conditions. But the strike was actually unauthorized by the Electrical Workers' International Union.

Gilb: And I have a note too that the union used its office as an employment office for strike breakers. Is this true?
Billings: I've heard that, but I have no personal knowledge of it.

During that period when I was tracing high-tension lines for the Electrical Workers' Union, I stopped into an office to make a report, right in this building, 1095 Market Street, and after I had made the report I went downstairs to the Waldorf Bar on the ground floor. It was about the 10th or 11th of September, 1913. While I was standing against the bar drinking my beer, a tall, slender fellow came in, stood alongside of me and ordered a glass of beer. Then he looked me over pretty thoroughly and started to talk about the weather, by way of starting a conversation. Finally, after a few minutes, he changed the subject to work and working conditions. Finally he said, "What do you work at?" I said, "I'm a shoecutter." He said, "Say, you wouldn't happen to be Billings, would you?" I looked at him and said, "I don't know what business of yours it would be if I were."
And he said, "I'm So-and-So from over in Oakland. I was just talking to John upstairs. I wanted to see somebody I could send to Sacramento, and John told me to see you, if you were Billings."

I said, "Yes, I'm Billings. But we'll go upstairs and see if you know John." So we went upstairs and went to John's office, and John introduced me to the man. I couldn't remember the man's name afterwards; someway or another, the name slipped me, but eventually, some years later, I found out his name was Edgar H. Hurley.

Is this the man who later became a State Senator?

That's right. Assemblyman and after that, a State Senator. I don't know whether he's still alive or not. I think he's in the insurance business over in Oakland now. At any rate, Hurley said, "Can we go someplace we can talk?" And I said, "Let's go out on the street."

So we walked across the street and stood there for a few minutes, talking, and he told me that he
Billings: wanted somebody to make a trip to Sacramento with a suitcase. During the course of the conversation, I asked, "What's in it?" He said, "You don't need to know what's in it. It don't make any difference." I said, "I'm not talking about the suitcase. I mean what's in it for me?" He said, "We'll give you $25 and carfare to Sacramento. We'll give you $25 in Oakland and $25 when you get up there."

I made the arrangement with him. I believe that was on Thursday afternoon, September 13, 1913, was the day I was to pick up the suitcase. The following Saturday. I was working at that time in Buckingham and Necht Shoe Factory.

I went to Oakland that Saturday, to an address on Vine Street that Hurley had given me, and there I met another fellow that gave me the suitcase, and he also gave me a small package about 2½ inches long and maybe an inch in diameter or so, and he told me to be very careful of that package. It was wrapped in brown paper, and he told me to be
Billings: very careful of it, not to treat it roughly.
Gilb: I have been told that the suitcase contained dynamite to blow down a high-tension wire and black out the State Fair.
Billings: That was what I was told afterwards.
Gilb: How did Hurley happen to get ahold of this suitcase?
Billings: Hurley never had the suitcase, and I don't think he ever saw it. The suitcase was made up by another man who was a member of the union. I didn't know, at the time, just who made the suitcase, but many years later, I found out. The fellow who made the suitcase was one of the electrical workers who had sold out to the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and he was actually working for the Pinkerton Detective Agency when he made up the suitcase, and made the arrangements with Hurley for Hurley to carry the suitcase to Sacramento. Hurley was the strike leader of the Electrical Worker Local 151 at that time on the East Bay side, and the idea was to frame Hurley on this charge of carrying dynamite so that
Billings: the company could point the finger at the union and at Hurley, and say, "These are the men who are destroying P.G. & E. property during the strikes."

Gilb: Did he know what was in the suitcase?

Billings: I don't know whether he knew what was in the suitcase or not. I'm sure that he never saw the suitcase.

Gilb: Why did he pass the job on to you rather than do it himself?

Billings: That, of course, is a matter of conjecture, more or less, although the way it was finally told to me was that Hurley, who had been married only a short time at that period told his wife that he had to go to Sacramento in connection with the work of the union, and she made the suggestion that he hire somebody else instead of going to Sacramento himself. Whether Hurley knew that there was dynamite in the suitcase or not, I don't know. Maybe he did. I have never heard him say so, and have no direct knowledge that he ever was told what was in the suitcase, and I know that he never saw the suitcase.
Gilb: So then you went down to the S.P. depot with the suitcase.

Billings: Yes, I got on the train with the suitcase and went to Sacramento, and the fellow in Oakland who had given me the suitcase (I had never been in Sacramento before) gave me directions to meet a man at the S.P. depot in Sacramento. He told me that the fellow who was to meet me would be standing in back of the baggage room and would step out when he saw me and stick out his hand and say, "Hello kid, how are you?" and would tell me where to go with the suitcase. As it turned out, when I got to Sacramento, I walked out through the passageway behind the baggage room, and a portly sort of fellow, heavy-set, at any rate, stuck out his hand and said, "Hello kid, how are you?" And I said, "I'm all right. Where do you want this thing?" He said, "You see that car there? That's a G Street car, but it's on Second Street now; it runs up Second Street to K Street, then turns and goes up K Street. You get on that car and stay on
Billings: until it turns, and go three blocks further, because that will be 5th and K. You get off at 5th and K and walk up half a block, you'll see a saloon there, the Silver Cup Saloon. Go in the saloon there, and at the left hand side of the door as you go in, you'll see a radiator. Set the suitcase down in front of the radiator, and then go away from it. Go in the man's room or go down to the other end of the bar and get yourself a drink or something, but get away from the suitcase. We'll have a man in there waiting for you, and he'll pick up the suitcase. When you come out, I'll be in front of the Bon Ton Bakery, which is next door to the saloon, and give you the other $15."

Gilb: What were you supposed to do with the package?

Billings: I don't know; I was to give it to him, I guess, when he gave me the $15. I presume that I would have delivered it to him when I met him, if I had ever met him. As it was, I met the police first.

Gilb: I have a note here that you also had a revolver
Gilb: and burglar tools.

Billings: Yes. I had a pistol in my right-hand coat pocket, a number of shells loose in the left-hand coat pocket, and a jimmy and some skeleton keys, I believe, in the other pocket. I told the police that I intended to engage in a little burglary while I was in Sacramento during the State Fair. The State Fair was to begin that day.

Gilb: But that wasn't true, was it?

Billings: No, that wasn't the actual fact. The actual fact was that I had been previously engaged in supplying dynamite for some of the members of the Electrical Workers' Union and I had been securing the dynamite by burglarizing powder shanties. I had previously burglarized one in the Berkeley Hills, and another time one in Dublin canyon, and another time in South San Francisco, or down that way. Visitation Valley, I believe it was.

Gilb: Did you carry out the man's instructions and leave the suitcase, and so forth?

Billings: I set the suitcase down in the -- by the radiator
in the saloon, and turned around, and when I
turned around, there were four men facing me. Two
of them had guns. I asked them what the trouble
was, and they wanted to know who I was and where
I came from. So I told them that I was Warren K.
Billings and came from San Francisco, and they
said, "You're sure you're not so-and-so from San
Diego, the fellow that's been passing cheques down
there?" I said, "I've never been in San Diego and
I've never passed a cheque. I can't cash a good
cheque, and I know nothing about cashing a bad
one." They continued to question me along that
line, and to establish my identity I showed the
detectives some letters addressed to me by my
mother. The two fellows that had the guns were
police officers, Detective Kramer and Ballz of
Sacramento, and they finally became convinced
that they had the wrong man. So they turned around
to the two gentlemen standing behind them, and they
said, "Well, what about that?" And one of the men
standing in back was a rather portly-looking, sort
of Scandinavian appearing person, who afterwards I found out was Martin Swanson, then chief of the Pinkerton Detective Agency. Martin Swanson said, "Dot's the suitcase all right." He spoke with a Scandinavian accent. In fact, he was a Dane. Then the officer said, "Well, what are we going to do about it?" The other gentleman happened to be B.F. Cantrell, property agent of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. And Mr. Cantrell said, "Well, we'd better take him in and look him over and find out what he's doing with that suitcase." Obviously, they had the right suitcase and the wrong man. They were sure it was the right suitcase because it was a dark-brown imitation leather and had two brand-new bright yellow trunk straps around it, about two inches wide, which you could see as far as you can see anything. You could identify the suitcase by those two straps. Afterwards I found out that these four gentlemen had met me at the train. They had seen the man talk to me that had given me
Billings: the directions. They absolutely made no effort
to arrest him. They followed me on the streetcar
and followed me in the saloon, and as soon as I
set the suitcase down and tried to walk away from
it they stopped me, because they were afraid that
if I ever got away from the suitcase, they couldn't
connect me with it again. The fact that they had
never made any effort to arrest the man that met
me at the train afterwards appeared to me and my
friends to be positive proof that he was an operative
for the Pinkerton Detective, or at least was in the
employ of Swanson.

Gilb: Well, do you think the whole thing was a frame-up?

Billings: Undoubtedly it was.

Gilb: Who were they trying to frame?

Billings: Ed Hurley.

Gilb: Did they expect you to be Ed Hurley?

Billings: The suitcase had been made up on the previous
Saturday, and taken to this address on Vine Street,
with the instructions that it was to be turned
over to Hurley. When I came for it, and told the
fellow there that Hurley sent me to pick up the suitcase, I picked the suitcase up Saturday noon, and they had gone to Sacramento on Friday, and Friday evening they were in the police station giving the police a description of a tall man wearing a blue serge suit and a black soft hat who was supposed to arrive in Sacramento with this particular suitcase. When the suitcase got there, the man that had it was a little, short fellow with red hair and wearing a black derby and a bright brown suit, with absolutely no resemblance to the man they had a description of. So when they arrested me in the saloon, the police were positive they had the wrong man, but Swanson was positive they had the right suitcase.

After I was arrested, the entire efforts of the police seemed to be to try to get me to identify the man who had hired me to carry the suitcase. And I couldn't remember what the man's name was; all I could remember about him was that he was a tall,
Billings: slender fellow with a blue serge suit and a black soft hat,

Gilb: Sure you couldn't remember?

Billings: I didn't -- no, I couldn't at the time. In fact, I didn't find out until I was released from Folsom that Burley was the man.

Of course, the police in Sacramento gave me a lot of third degree and a lot of questioning, particularly Max Fisher, who was chief of the State Bureau of Identification. Max Fisher was known as "the man with the camera eye", and "the world's champion kid-gloves third-degree artist." He never used any rough tactics, but he used psychology in questioning people under arrest. So Max used psychology on me, and I entered into the game rather freely, and we had quite a lot of fun. Max would have me brought over to his office every day for about two or three weeks. During that time, he would say, "Well, we know all about you now. Mac told us." And I said, "Yeah? Mac told you? Mac who?" "Oh, you know Mac." I said, "Yeah, macaroni."
Billings: Who's Mac?" He said, "McAlpine." I said, "Well, I don't know anybody by that name." So Max would threaten to wring my neck and one thing or another, but he'd never do anything, just rant and rave a bit, and I'd laugh at him. And when they tried to take my fingerprints in the Identification Bureau, I made a game of that too. When they would put my thumb down on the paper, I would put my thumb down on the paper, I would press hard, or squeeze or push it a little bit, so as to blur the print, and I had them taking fingerprints every day for three weeks, and they never did get a set of prints. The same with the pictures. Max tried to get a photograph of me. I'd set pretty quietly until he got all ready to snap the picture. When he'd squeeze the bulb on the camera, I'd squeeze my face into a knot and make faces at the camera. Max would get mad some more. We had a lot of fun.
Billings:  I was tried on a bill of information. The section of the penal code, which has since been repealed, under which I was tried, said that any person transporting explosives having the power of black blasting powder or greater, upon any public conveyance then and there carrying passengers for hire, is guilty of a felony and punishable by imprisonment in the state prison not more than two years. The law said "in the state prison." Consequently, in spite of the fact that I was only twenty years old, it was impossible for the court, under the law, to send me to Ione Reformatory or any other institution, or incarcerate me in the county jail, or even give me probation, because the law says, "punishable by imprisonment in the state prison."

Hilb: I have a note that the judge in this case happened to be a stockholder in P.G. & E.
Billings: That's right. I was arrested on a P.G. & E. streetcar with a suitcase full of dynamite during a P.G. & E. strike, and I was tried before Judge Hughes, who was a stockholder in the P.G. & E.

Gilb: So you didn't stand a chance.

Billings: No. Judge Hughes expressed his regrets at not being able to give me any more than two years at the time he pronounced sentence.

Gilb: At the time you were being held and brought before the judge, did any of your friends come to help you or talk to you?

Billings: One representative -- one of my friends who was a representative of the unions here in San Francisco and representative of the International Workers Defense League visited me and told me that the Defense League would see to it that my defense was taken care of. That was Edward D. Nolan of the Machinists Union, who was afterwards one of the co-defendants of Tom Mooney and myself.

I might add that prior to that time I was a member of the International Workers Defense League.
Billings:

myself, and attended their meetings here in San Francisco. I was a delegate from the Boot and Shoe Workers Union. Of course, I was a volunteer delegate. When my union received a letter asking for a representative in the defense committee, I volunteered to act in that capacity.

Gilb:

Could you tell me some of the other labor people who were active in the International Workers League?

Billings:

As I recall, the members of the International Workers Defense League at that time were David Nilder, who was the secretary; Tom Mooney, representing the moulders' union; Henry Hagenstein and Al Snyder representing the machinists' union; Jack Lofthouse representing the millmen's union; Selig Schulberg, who I believe was representing the waiters' union. I don't recall whether Backmeir was a delegate to the League or not, but he was a member of a machinists' union and associated with the same group of people; also Pete Isaac, who was president of Lodge 68 of the Machinists' Union at a subsequent
Billings: date, but not at that time.

Billb: Why were there so many machinists represented?

Billings: The Machinists' Lodge was a big organization. They had better than six thousand members at the time. They were -- in fact, they took in all of the automobile mechanics at that time. Edward D. Nolan was one of the members of the Defense League from the Machinists' Union. There were quite a number of other delegates whom I remember vaguely, but I can't recall just now.

Billb: Were any of the unions conspicuous by their absence?

Billings: Well, of course, principally the building trades unions were conspicuous by their absence. The bricklayers, hodcarriers, the building laborers, the plumbers, and the painters -- unions belonging to the Building Trades Council.

Billb: How about the Teamsters?

Billings: The Teamsters were absent also. They were not affiliated with this League.

Billb: So anyway, they did try to help you in this case, but it didn't do any good.
They did secure a lawyer. In fact, they sent Austin Lewis from San Francisco to see me, but in the meantime I had gotten in touch with a lawyer in Sacramento who handled the case. He afterwards was a judge, Martin Welsh. Of course, there was not much possibility of defense, inasmuch as I was caught with the suitcase in my possession, and the detectives had followed me from the S.P. depot on the streetcar.

Of course, my contention was, and still is, that the law says "any person willfully and knowingly carrying explosives." A person cannot knowingly carry anything in a suitcase if he has never seen the contents of the suitcase. And I personally had never seen the explosives in the suitcase. I didn't even see the dynamite caps that were in the package and I put it in my pocket knowing that I had to be careful of it, but I didn't know, of my own knowledge, that it contained fulminate of mercury caps. Even if I had, the trial of Tom
Mooney at Martinez in 1914 proved that fulminate of mercury is not a high explosive under the law, because Mooney was arrested in a boat in which there were some dynamite caps. There was no evidence of any dynamite having been in the boat or any intention of anybody putting any dynamite in the boat, but there were some dynamite caps in the boat. Actually, the truth of that story is that the boat belonged to a native of Martinez who was a poacher and who used dynamite caps to dynamite fish in the Bay. Just what Mooney was doing in the boat, I don't know. I was in Folsom by this time, and Mooney was with two other fellows, Brown and Hanlon. Mooney was tried three times in Martinez on the charge of having high explosives in his possession, but the court disagreed and after three disagreements, Mooney was discharged.

ilb: Did the Workers Defense League also supply counsel for him?

illings: Yes, I believe they did. International Workers
Defense League also supplied counsel and rendered assistance to many other cases in that period. In fact the League was quite active from 1912 to 1922, I believe. It was active in our case, in the early days of the Mooney-Billings case, from 1916 on up, probably to 1922. I think the League disbanded in 1922. Nate Cogland was Mooney's attorney in Sacramento in 1914 when they brought Mooney to Sacramento after his dismissal in Martinez. They charged him with being a co-conspirator of mine in transporting that dynamite. Martin Swanson came to Folsom and asked me to identify Mooney as the man that met me at the train. I told him, "You bring Mooney up here and let me see him, and if he's the man, I'll identify him; I don't know whether he's the man or not." He couldn't bring Mooney to Folsom, so he finally got a court order to take me to Sacramento. I wanted to go to Sacramento because, when I had gone to Folsom in the first place, I had written my mother that I was going up in the mountains on a prospecting
Billings: trip and I would be in the wilderness where it wouldn't be possible for me to communicate with her and I would write her as soon as I got back. I had been gone about six months by the time this Mooney case came up in Sacramento, and so I wanted to get back to Sacramento to send a letter to my mother. I didn't want her to know that I was in the penitentiary.

In Sacramento, Nate Cogland came in to see me, and said, "They're going to put you on the witness stand." I said, "All right, Nate, what do you want me to do about it?" He said, "Just don't answer any questions at all."

So I took him literally. This was a hearing, in the police court, not a Superior Court trial and the prosecuting attorney got up, and he said, "Your name is Warren K. Billings, is it not?" and I said, "I refuse to answer." And he said, "Why do you refuse to answer?" Well, Nate Cogland had told me not to answer any questions, and these were
questions. So when the prosecuting attorney said, "Why do you refuse to answer?" I said, "I refuse to answer." Then Judge Christianson said, "Young man, do you know that you are committing a crime, to wit, contempt of court?" That, of course, was a question. Nate said not to answer any. So I said, "I refuse to answer." The judge said, "Do you know that I can put you in jail for that?" And I said, "I refuse to answer." (laughter) So the prosecuting attorney jumped up and said, "Your Honor, this man is already confined to the state prison in Folsom." And the judge said, "Oh." And everybody in the courtroom roared.

So then the judge declared a recess, and he sat about twenty minutes in his chambers. He came back with an armful of law books and went through them and he finally turned around to me and said, "Young man, I find that I not only can sentence you but I will sentence you. This court hereby adjudges you guilty of contempt and sentences you to pay the sum of $100 fine with the alternative
of serving one hundred days in the county jail of Sacramento County, said sentence to commence at the expiration of your present term of sentence."

Obviously, that was merely an attempt to keep me from making a parole. But the law provides that punishment for contempt must be forthwith. That don't mean go back to the penitentiary and finish a two-year sentence and then come back and do the time for the contempt. It means do the time for the contempt right now. So under the law they had to either confine me in the county jail for a hundred days before they took me back to Folsom, or else the sentence was illegal. They took me back to Folsom the next day, and I never did do the hundred days.
IN FOLSOM PRISON, 1913

Hilb: What did you do while you were in jail there that year?

Billings: The day I got there, Jack Smith, who had been captain of the prison, had just been appointed as acting warden. Joseph J. Johnston had been assigned to San Quentin prison. I got there on December the second, which was on a Saturday. On Monday, which would be December fourth, I was brought out of the receiving cell to the captain's office, and J.J. Johnston was there. He was still officially the warden. I talked to him for probably two minutes. And after that he left, and Jack Smith took over. So then I was called into the captain's office to be assigned to work and one thing and another, and Jack Smith immediately got the idea that he was going to question me and get information out of me as to what I was going to do with the suitcase. The police in Sacramento had spent three months trying
Billings: to find out what I was going to do with the suitcase, and all I could tell them was that I was going to leave it in the saloon and let somebody else pick it up. I didn't know anything more about it; that's all I knew about it. But Jack Smith started to ask me questions and I got a little peeved about it and I said, "Now listen, warden, I didn't come here to answer questions. I came here to do two years and I expect to do it. And I don't want to answer any questions about it." So you're a stonemason, are you? We'll make a stonemason out of you. Go down to the stoneyard and stay there." So he issued orders to the captain that I was to be kept in the stoneyard all of my time. The stoneyard was supposed to be a punishment at that time.

In the stoneyard we were cutting granite building blocks to build a big wall around the prison. The wall is thirty feet high and several miles long and I cut a lot of the rocks for it, at any rate.

There was two or three old-time convicts in the stoneyard that knew about my case; they'd
heard about it and read about it and they felt rather friendly to me for several different reasons. One, probably was because I still maintained that I was innocent, that I didn't know that there was any dynamite in the suitcase, and that I was hired to carry the suitcase in the first place. Another one probably was because I had refused to identify anyone as the one who hired me to carry the suitcase, except to give a general description for them. And then also the fact that I was brought to the prison by the under-sheriff of Sacramento County, Frank Myers, who had formerly been a guard at Folsom Prison and had the reputation of being very tough and very hard on the prisoners and when he brought me to the prison, he kept me handcuffed all the way inside instead of taking the cuffs off when we got inside the main gate. While I had my hands handcuffed together and was standing in front of the lieutenant's office waiting for them to book me in the prison, the main line of the prison was going
Billings: into the dining room, twenty-five hundred men, 
marching in in single file, and they were all marching 
by me and saw me standing there under the guns --
there were rifle towers all around me, guards standing 
there with rifles under their arms, and here I was 
standing in the middle of the yard with handcuffs. 
And these fellows, they all looked at us, and when 
they saw Frank Myers, they all started to boo him. 
They all yelled, "Take the handcuffs off that kid, 
you s.o.b." So that made a lot of the men feel a 
lot more friendly toward me, and when I got assigned 
to the stoneyard and they found out that I got sent 
there because I refused to answer any questions 
from the warden, why then, they were more friendly. 
So some of them, the old-timers, gave me some good 
advice about how to do time, and they told me to 
mind my own business and not mix up with any gangs 
and do my work and learn how to do it the easy 
way. By studying the rock and learn how to cut 
the stone the easy way, not to fight it.

Gilb: Did you meet any men in Folsom at that time who
Gilb: were your friends afterwards?

Billings: Oh yes, I think they were all more or less my friends afterwards. Many of them were, at any rate. When I went back in 1917, a lot of them were still there.

Gilb: But I mean in between, say from '14 to '16.

Billings: During the time that I was out, I met one fellow in San Francisco that I knew in Folsom. I met one fellow in Denver that I knew in Folsom. But I didn't -- I just met them and had a casual conversation with them. Both of those fellows, by the way, were doing all right and staying out of prison; they were not committing any crimes. One of them was a tailor -- the fellow I met in Denver -- he was working in a tailor shop and getting along very nicely.

Gilb: Who came to visit you in Folsom?

Billings: I don't recall that anybody came to visit me in Folsom at that time.

Gilb: Did Tom Mooney come to see you?

Billings: No, I don't believe he did. He was in jail in
Billings: Martinez most of the time. During 1914.

Hilb: Well, not entirely. He was acquitted, wasn't he?

Billings: Yes, but not until, I don't know, it was October, 1914, something like that.

_stockton open shop campaign, 1914_

Billings: Another thing that happened in 1914 that Mooney was involved in was the Stockton strike, the Stockton lookout. And Mooney was connected with the investigation that followed that. A private detective was sent by the Merchants and Manufacturers Association to frame Olaf A. Tveitmoe by planting some dynamite in Tveitmoe's room in the Stockton hotel. He stole the dynamite out of a boxcar that had been loaded by the powder company at Bay Point, and took some of it to Stockton and tried to plant it in Olaf A. Tveitmoe's room. Anton Johannsen happened to walk into Tveitmoe's room while the fellow was in there, and captured the guy, and they finally made the man confess to what he was trying to do. Also he told
Billings: the men who he was hired by.

Gab: Tveitmo was a building trades guy.

Billings: Yes, he was secretary to the Building Trades Council in San Francisco.

The Stockton lockout resulted from a strike against the Sperry flour mill in Stockton, and this fellow that tried to plant the dynamite in Tveitmo's room confessed that he and his confederate had been instructed to plant dynamite under the corner of the Sperry mill also. The idea was to frame Tveitmo for attempting to dynamite the Sperry flour mill.

After Mooney was released from Martinez, he went to Stockton and was working on that investigation. I don't remember too much about it except I know that Rana Mooney sat and took notes in Stockton all during the trial of this fellow that was arrested, and organized labor attempted to make some use of that information afterwards to demonstrate how the provocative agents had been employed by the Pinkerton Detective Agency and the Merchant Manufacturers
Association and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and other employers organizations to show that the unions were doing terrible things and therefore should be outlawed. They were going to try to break up the unions by putting through what was known at that time as the American Plan. I guess at that time it wasn't known as the American Plan. That came later. It was known as the open shop movement at that time. Their idea was to get a state law very similar to the right-to-work laws that are now being enacted throughout the country in various places; in fact, the present right-to-work program is like what was formerly called the American Plan and prior to that was known as the open shop movement.

**Ford and Suhr Case**

Mooney also was interested in the Ford and Suhr case, the I.W.W. organizers who were arrested and charged with murder as a result of what was known
as the Wheatland hop ranch riot. The fact of the matter is that there was no riot and Ford and Suhr were not guilty of the shooting which took place. The agricultural workers were striking because the conditions in the camp were almost unbearable. Ford and Suhr organized the workers, and the workers were holding a meeting and making speeches there. During the meeting, Durst, the rancher, had gone into town and got a posse together composed of the sheriff and several deputy sheriffs, the District Attorney, Ray Manwell, and several assistant District Attorneys and other people from around the courthouse, and they came up there in a posse to break up this meeting by using pick handles to break the heads of all the workers and drive the workers off the ranch so that they could employ non-union workers in their place. When they produced the pick handles and tried to disperse the crowd, one worker, who I believe was a Cuban, produced a pistol and started shooting and he shot District Attorney Ray Manwell
and killed him (that is, he died subsequently). The sheriff, or one of the deputy sheriffs, shot the Cuban and killed him, and afterwards, Ford and Suhr were arrested and brought back. They had been left there; they were not arrested at the time.

This was all in August, just a month before you went to Sacramento, wasn't it?

I believe it was, yes, it was in the latter part of August, or the first part of September, just before I was arrested, anyway.

Did you have any friends who were involved in it?

No, I didn't know anybody who was involved in it at the time; I consequently got acquainted with Ford and Suhr, when they were in Folsom. I was sentenced to two years in Folsom. I went to Folsom on the second of December, 1913, and I was released on the twenty-second of December, 1914. I served twelve months and twenty days.

Parole, December, 1914

I finally went up before the parole board in December, 1914. One of the judges on the parole
Billings: The parole board asked a question about my hundred days of contempt of court sentence and another one of the judges on the parole board, speaking of Judge Christianson, said, "Oh, he's crazy. Punishment for contempt has to be forthwith." So although I was quite sure I didn't make a parole, I was very much surprised the next day to find that my name was the first one on the list. I got an immediate parole.

Gilb: I have a note, being sort of a detective ahead of time here that some of your friends had paid $75 to influence one of the members of the board.

Billings: That is what I was told afterwards.

Gilb: You remember which ones?

Billings: I don't remember who paid the $75.

Gilb: They were union men, labor men?

Billings: Yes. Members of the Electrical Workers Union. As I understand it, yes.

Gilb: Who was the fellow? Is he still alive?

Billings: No, he's not still alive, but it's rather a serious indictment to make a statement against a person —
Billings: the fact of the matter is that he was a high
official of the Republican Party in the state of
California at the time. Of course, I have no direct
knowledge of what happened; I only have hearsay
information that this member of the board accepted
$75 to give me an immediate parole. One thing I
do know is that the parole board at that time always
had a rule that they would not grant a parole to
any person who did not plead guilty at the time they
were charged. So when I went before the board, they
read off the charge and one thing and another,
and they said, "How do you plead? Guilty or not
guilty?" I said, "Not guilty," standing on the
contention that I didn't know, of my own knowledge,
what was in the suitcase, and the law says "any
person willfully and knowingly carrying explosives."
Which one of the members of the parole board said
was merely a technicality. The members of the board
had some discussion about it at the time, and
finally this one member of the board, who I was afterwards informed had accepted the money, turned to me and said, "However, you were convicted by a jury." And I said, "Oh yes, I was convicted by a jury." And he said, "That's all." They accepted the fact that I admitted that I was convicted by a jury as a plea of guilty to the charge.

Did Ed Hurley ever try to get in touch with you while you were in jail?

No. Not that I recall.

Do you think he had anything to do with trying to get you on parole?

Oh yes, I think probably he was responsible for the arrangements with the parole board, but I don't know for sure that he was.
LABOR IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1915

Tailor's Apprentice

Gilb: When you got out of prison in late 1914, I know that you were apprenticed to a tailor through Fremont Older's intervention. How did Older (editor of the San Francisco Bulletin) get acquainted with you?

Billings: Well, I don't know. Of course, that transpired while I was in Folsom. I didn't know Older; I didn't know anything about him. When I was released, I was given instructions to go to a certain office, and I went there, and I met the gentleman who was there, and it turned out to be Fremont Older. Then he introduced me to Dave Milder, the tailor, and Dave actually didn't have a job for me, but he agreed to take me out of the prison. A parolee has to have a job to go to.

Gilb: But you never did work for him.

Billings: Oh yes, I worked for Milder. At first, he didn't
Millings: actually have any job for me, but I made one for myself around the place by sweeping the floor, and then I started doing some bookkeeping for him; I knew a little bit about single-entry bookkeeping. In fact, I studied it a little bit while I was in Folsom in 1914. So I kept books for the International Workers Defense League at first, and then I kept Milder's books, and then I used to run errands for him, and finally got to do some tailoring around the shop. I started pressing my own suit, and Dave taught me how to press, and then I became a presser and ... Ilb: And how long did this last? Illings: From December till April. Ilb: And why did you leave then? Illings: Well, actually, Dave couldn't afford to pay me anything, and I couldn't afford to work for nothing.

Ford Assembly Plant

Illings: I finally got into a position where I had to get some money. I needed clothes and everything. So
through Ed Nolan I was introduced to a fellow named Flaherty who was business agent of Lodge 68 of the Machinists' Union, and Flaherty got me a job in the Ford Assembly Plant at 21st and Harrison Street. I went to work there in the assembling plant and I worked there for about six months. The factory is still there. It's now the John A. O'Connell Trade School.

I have a note that there were about 400 workers.

I believe there was, yes.

When you went to work in the Ford plant, did you become a member of the Machinists' Union?

No, the Ford plant was unorganized at the time. My first employment in the Ford plant was in the upholstery department. I was upholstering seat backs for Model T's, and that, of course, would have come under the Upholsterers' Union, but there was no union organization in the Ford plant at that time. Then later I was working on the assembly floor assembling Model T cars, and those workers should have been members of the Machinists' Union but were not organized.
Gilb: Why weren't they organized? Didn't the machinists themselves try to organize them?

Billings: I never knew of any attempt to organize them. I talked unionism to a number of the employees there and also talked Socialism to some of them. There was one fellow there who seemed to have some knowledge of Socialism, and we used to discuss the matter frequently. He afterwards became a policeman.

Gilb: Were you a Socialist at that time?

Billings: No, I wasn't. My philosophy differed from the philosophy of Socialism, or of the Socialist Party, because, like Tom Mooney, I favored both political action and direct action. The Socialists were opposed to direct action and believed only in political action. Mooney and I and the remainder of the group of us so-called radicals in the labor movement were convinced that the workers needed both economic and political action in order to get a fairer share of what they produced.

Gilb: I have heard that the superintendent of that plant
kept two payrolls, one official and one unofficial, and pocketed the difference, and that you tried to do something about this, and couldn't get the union to do anything. Is that true?

Billings: The superintendent and the general manager working together sent in a payroll to the Ford Company which called for each employee in the plant to get $5 a day. They had a probationary system in this plant under which they employed workers who were over twenty-two years of age at the rate of $2.72½ a day. Any worker under twenty-two got $2.12½ a day, and that was what I was getting. Theoretically, I was to be raised to $2.72½ as soon as I reached the age of twenty-two. So, I had gone to work there in May and I was twenty-two on July 4th. So after July 4th, I called attention to the fact that I had passed my twenty-second birthday and said I thought I was entitled to more money. The superintendent, Mike Stewart, suggested that I write to Middletown and try to get a birth certificate. It took about
two weeks for the letter to go there and return, and I got word back that there was no record of my birth. My mother was not attended by a physician and there was no record made. Consequently, the superintendent indicated that I couldn't get the increase because I couldn't prove I was twenty-two.

Then I wrote a letter to my mother who was living in Philadelphia; two weeks later, the reply came back stating that I was twenty-two, and when I was born, and that there was no record of my birth. I turned that letter over to the superintendent, and he said, "I haven't got time to read it now, I'll read it a little later." He took it and put it in his pocket, and I didn't see him again for a week or ten days, and when I did get ahold of him again, he said, "Well, that isn't sufficient proof to establish the fact that you're twenty-two, and we don't think that you're entitled to an increase in wages anyway, inasmuch as you don't save any of the money you do earn."
Now, I was getting $2.12½ a day and paying all my own expenses. I wasn't making money enough to live on. I found it necessary to work as a shill in a poker game nights and weekends and work around the pool hall to make enough money to get along on. And the superintendent said, "Not only do you not save any money, but you frequent pool halls, you play poker, you drink." and it was evident that their stool pigeon system had been tracing me down and knew everything that I did and some things that I didn't do. That had all been reported to Mike Stewart. So the superintendent said I was not entitled to any increase in pay.

I was quite peeved at that, and I decided to quit the job. I went down to the general manager's office to tell him that I was quitting, because the general manager was the one that had hired me, and of course at the time he had hired me, I had been on parole from Folsom Prison and my parole had concluded on the second of August, 1915. I think I quit the job the day before Labor Day. I had already heard
illings: about the double system of payroll that the general manager kept. In fact, I had seen the regular, real payroll book on the general manager's desk at a previous time and had noticed what it was all about. So I went into his office, and he wasn't there, and I reached into the top drawer and confiscated the book. I took the book afterwards and gave it to one of the representatives of the Machinists Union, the fellow that had gotten me the job in the Ford plant in the first place, to show him just exactly what was going on in the plant and what the general manager and the superintendent were doing. I found out afterwards that he took the book back to the general manager of the Ford plant.

11b: What were his reasons?

illings: I don't know. It was not until some months later that I found out about him taking it back because immediately after I quit the job, I left San Francisco and went to Denver for five months.

11b: When you consider the fact that the plant wasn't
unionized and the Machinists' Union didn't seem to be interested in unionizing, maybe some of the union leaders had a deal with the managers.

Hillings: The whole set-up seemed to indicate that the business agent of the Machinists' Union was working very closely with the management of the Ford Company.

Hillb: It's happened before.

Hillings: It's happened before. There are some grafters and fakers in the unions, of course. Opportunists of that type work their way into official positions every now and then, and it takes the workers quite some time to ferret them out and dispose of them.

_Boot and Shoe Workers Union_

Hillb: During this time you were active in the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, weren't you?

Hillings: At the same time, I was president of Local 216 of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union. I was president because I was not working at the shoe trade. I was blacklisted in all the shops, and anybody who
Billings: was actively engaged in the shoe business couldn't be an officer in the union because all of the factories had open shop contracts, and they would immediately fire anybody who took an official position in the union. The only other officer of the union, the secretary, was employed in the factory of the United Workingman's Cooperative. They had a small factory on Bartlett Street between 25th and 26th. That, of course, was the only factory in San Francisco that had a union shop agreement because that factory belonged to the members of the union. It was a cooperative association.

11b: How many members were there in the Boot and Shoe Workers Union at that time?

Billings: I think at one time they had 116 and another time they had 104, or something like that. It ranged just about 100. We were entitled to two delegates in the Labor Council because we had more than 100 members. During the time that I was president of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, I was their
delegate to the San Francisco Labor Council. I was also delegate to the International Workers Defense League.

The International got 66 2/3% of all dues collected, and the dues were 10¢ a week for members. The other 33 1/3% was used to pay hall rent and other expenses of the union. Prior to that, too, one secretary of the union had absconded with the treasury, and so the union was usually in debt. In fact, this fellow that had absconded with the treasury -- very nice fellow, unfortunately a heavy drinker, and he had a wife who was -- well, she always wanted more money than he could give her. She would get him drunk and get him to sign checks on the union treasury, and she'd cash them and spend the money. So eventually it was discovered that he was in the neighborhood of $200 in debt to the union, and by then the union didn't have any treasury.

We tried to get him to pay back some of the
money. We tried to get him a job; tried to keep
him working in a factory; but he couldn't work
steadily because of the drinking and because of
his health and because the shoe trade was on the
rocks here at the time anyway. The work was
scarce; lay-offs were frequent. So although he
made an agreement to pay the union — well, there
was one time that he paid the union $5 a week and
he found that he couldn't do that. His wife
divorced him and the court ordered him to pay her
$12 a week. Theoretically he was supposed to be
making $24 a week if he worked full time. But if
he got laid off three days a week, he only made
$12 a week and he had to give that to his wife.
Then he didn't have any money to pay his room rent.
So we had to support him most of the time. I
made an agreement with him that instead of paying
$5 a week he should pay $2 a week, and half the
time I used to pay the $2 for him.

This was the year of the Panama-Pacific Exposition.

Didn't that help anything?
Billings: Not in the shoe trade. The shoe industry in San Francisco was dying and there was just no way of reviving it. It did die; it passed out completely. The Buckingham and Hecht Shoe Company, which was the last one to survive, finally became a part of the Petaluma Shoe Company, which is still operating. At least I see shoes occasionally with the Buck-Hecht name on them, made in Petaluma.

Gilb: Did the labor unions hold off strikes or any kind of violence in order not to disrupt the Exposition?

Billings: Yes, so far as I know. There were not any serious strikes during 1915. There were strikes. During 1915 there was a strike on the waterfront. The hotel and restaurant employees were trying to organize the dairy luncheonmen, and that was quite an affair. There were a few other strikes. But there were no public utilities strikes or anything like that. There were no strikes against the United Railroad at that time, nor the Pacific Gas & Electric Company, or the S.P. Railroad or any of those organizations.
Billings: The waterfront strike started with a strike by the Bay and River Boatmen against the tug-boat companies, and they were joined subsequently by the pile drivers and bridge carpenters, who went out in sympathy with the River Boatmen, and then the Riggers and Stevedores, which was the forerunner of the present longshoremen, also went out in sympathy. That more or less tied up the waterfront, and there was some serious disorders -- well, not too serious -- that was the latter part of 1915 or the early part of 1916. The Fair opened on Washington's Birthday, February 22nd, 1915. During the early part of the Fair, there was no particular labor disturbance, I should say, until probably June, which I believe was about the time that the hotel and restaurant employees started. We had a very short strike. While I was President of the Boot and Shoe Workers, I was the only one that was in a position to negotiate contracts for the union. I didn't negotiate
contracts alone, however; in our organization, we always elected a negotiations committee. So when the manager of the Buckingham and Recht Shoe Company posted a notice on the bulletin board that he was intending to cut prices on one certain pattern, the work being piecework in that particular department, the cutting room, the cutters immediately demanded that we hold a meeting and so we called a special meeting of the union and the workers decided to strike unless the cut notice was rescinded. So I went to the superintendent of the factory, Alfred Weil, and told him that I represented the union and that unless he pulled down the cut notice, the workers would strike. He refused to even talk to me or say anything about it, except that he was insistent that he was going to cut prices and that was all there was to it. I reported to the -- I went through the factory and reported to the men individually and in small groups that he refused to rescind the cut and told them that when they came out to lunch they should bring their tools with
them and stay out on strike. That was what had been decided at the workers' meeting the night before. So the workers walked out on the street and at one o'clock they refused to go back in. Outside of a few girls that worked in the office and maybe half a dozen other employees, the entire personnel of the shop struck, not only those who were members of the union but some who were not members of the union.

I was standing on a rubbish box in front of the plant talking to the assembled workers on the sidewalk, and the manager of the plant called the police, and the police came there and pulled me off the rubbish box. They were going to arrest me on several different charges, but finally they decided that the only thing they could put against me was damaging city property by standing on the city rubbish box. (laughter) And the policeman said, "Well, after all, we have to satisfy Alfred Weil in there too. So you'll have to stay off the rubbish box anyway." So I stayed off the rubbish
Billings: box anyway. I got on the factory steps and finished my speech from up there. That was after the policeman had gone away, and Alfred Weil called the police again.

When the police got there the second time, I was already through with my speech and I wasn't standing on his steps any more, so they didn't have any charges of trespassing to put against me then. So we went into the back room of the saloon across the street and held a strike meeting, and we talked to the two policemen in there. As a result of that, they decided that we were operating legally and there was no charge they could put against us and there was nothing they could do for Mr. Weil, so they went on back downtown.

Gilb: Did you win the strike?

Billings: The strike lasted till 2:15. At 2:15 Mr. Weil stuck his head out the door and said he wanted to talk to me. I went down there and took the rest of the strike committee with me. When I walked into Mr. Weil's office with the strike committee,
Billings: he didn’t want to talk to the strike committee, he wanted to talk to me personally. I refused to talk to him and told him he’d have to talk to the entire committee, that I didn’t have anything to do with it except to officiate as chairman of the committee. He wound up by very grudgingly pulling down the strike notice and we declared the strike off and the workers went back under the same conditions that they had previously worked under.

Up until the time that I was president, the International officers didn’t know anything about my radical ideas. It was only after the strike was over, on another occasion, when an organizer named Clarence Lovely came out from Boston, ostensibly to boost the union label. That has always been one of the policies of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, to try to induce the workers to buy only union-made shoes, bearing the Boot and Shoe Workers label. (They are engaged in a campaign right at the present time, I see by the
papers, on the same point. They were depending upon the Shoe Industry Board to carry on an advertising campaign on that point, and the Shoe Industry Board fell down on the job, and now the International has taken it over themselves and are about to engage in a big campaign of advertising union-made shoes.)

In 1915, Clarence Lovely came to the meeting of my union and he began to talk against the United Shoeworkers, a dual organization that had been formed a few years prior to that by radicals and progressives who split from the International Boot and Shoe Workers Union. In Brooklyn I had carried cards in both organizations. This local in San Francisco, at the time of the split, joined the United Shoeworkers. Subsequently, it went back into the Boot and Shoe. Consequently, half of the members at least in this local were progressives; philosophically, at least, they were United Shoeworkers. So when Clarence Lovely got on the platform and began to cuss out the United
Billings: Shoeworkers, quite a few of the members began to resent it. I noticed their resentment and I stepped over to Mr. Lovely and tapped him on the shoulder and advised him that he should leave the United Shoeworkers alone and stick to boosting the union label. He looked at me and didn't follow my suggestion and went on with what he was saying about the United Shoeworkers. I called his attention again and told him that more than half of my members were former members of United Shoeworkers and suggested to him that he'd better leave the United Shoeworkers alone; if he didn't we'd have to throw him out of the hall. I told him that I had plenty of fellows out there that would help me. So after that Mr. Lovely went back to Boston and made a report. Subsequently, the International president sent a letter to this local in which he said unless this local got rid of its anarchist I.W.W. president, the International would pull the charter. I wrote a letter back and offered him my resignation and told him that he didn't have to pull the charter
Billings: for me, that I was tickled to death to get out of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union. So I resigned from the office of president and also retired from the Shoe Workers Union.

Gilb: What month was that?

Billings: That must have been about August or September, 1915.

Gilb: Just about the time you left the Ford plant.

Billings: Yes, just a few days before I left the Ford plant.

*Central Labor Council*

Gilb: Was Arthur W. Brouillet a member of your union?

Billings: No. I think he was a member of the Shoe Clerks Union. He was a shoe salesman, I believe. The stores downtown on Market Street during the rush hours on Saturday night wanted extra clerks, and the Shoe Clerks Union couldn't supply them, so they allowed shoe cutters to work as shoe clerks. I think I worked one or two Saturday nights in the Philadelphia Shoe Company. Bert Kashinsky was the
owner of the Philadelphia Shoe Company at that
time, and he would employ four or five extra
clerks every Saturday night. As a result of that,
we got into a jurisdictional dispute with the Shoe
Clerks Union because one of their representatives
insisted that the shoe cutters who had worked as
extra clerks should also be members of the Shoe
Clerks Union. We didn't think it was fair to
force a part-time worker, who worked maybe four
hours on Saturday night at a trade, to pay full
union dues. So we had a discussion about it, and
it developed into a jurisdictional dispute, and we
wished to put it before the executive council of
the San Francisco Labor Council.

The Council was busily engaged in discussing
political matters, which they did quite frequently
in those days. At the time I think they were
discussing whether they would endorse F.H. McCarthy
for supervisor or something like that. They were
also discussing the Spring Valley Water Company.
The Spring Valley Water Company at that period was
Billings: attempting to sell its installations to the city. Some of its pipes were old-fashioned wooden pipes which had been in the ground for thirty years, and the company's installations had only cost seven million dollars in the first place, but the Spring Valley Water Company was trying to sell the outfit to the city for thirty million. It didn't seem quite right to some of us, and we were arguing against it.

But at any rate, at the time that I wanted to bring up the jurisdictional dispute between the shoe workers and the shoe clerks, these political arguments were going on in the Labor Council. I finally attempted to get the floor on the matter of the jurisdictional dispute, and the chairman called me out of order and told me to sit down. I refused to sit down. I insisted that I had a right to speak. And Hugo Ernst, who at that time was delegate from Local 30 of the Waiters and subsequently was International secretary of the Hotel and
Billings: Restaurant Employees International Alliance; Hugo Ernst defended my right to speak, and as a result of that argument, the chairman ordered the sergeant at arms to escort both Hugo Ernst and myself out of the hall. So we were cast out of the Labor Council. We came back about 20 minutes later, and nobody said anything.

Gilb: What labor group tended to dominate the Labor Council?

Billings: The Teamsters Union, under Mike Casey and John A. O'Connell, were the dominant organization. Of course John A. O'Connell was the only one of the teamsters group that was actually an official of the Labor Council; he was secretary-treasurer. The president of the Council previously, during 1913 and '14, had been Andy Gallagher, during part of 1915, too. But in 1915 Andy Gallagher was defeated as president of the Council and Dan Murphy was elected.

Gilb: Didn't you have something to do with that?
Billings: I was engaged in part of that too. A group of us, particularly younger members of the Council, felt that Andy Gallagher was too reactionary and was lined up too well with the reactionary forces in the Council. I don't recall what union Andy Gallagher represented. Murphy was a pressman. Pressmen's Union. At any rate, a group of us that knew Dan Murphy very well -- he was a young fellow; he was on the square, a good, honest union man. We all had confidence that he would make a much better president for the Council than Andy Gallagher, who had already been president of the Council for a number of years. He was president at the time I came to San Francisco in 1913, and he had been president for at least ten years.

Gilb: What other unions did the men who were in your group represent?

Billings: Well, mostly the Machinists and the Millmen and -- only Tom Mooney from the Moulders. The rest of the delegates from the Moulders were reactionary. Tom and his brother John -- I believe John was a
delegate at one time -- were about the only ones that were aligned with us progressives. We were recognized as radicals in the Labor Council. There were some from the Waiters and other different unions. There were quite a number of us recognized radicals. There was one fellow particularly from the General Laborers Union. I can't recall his name now, but he was quite a character. All of us progressives were pretty much in favor of industrial organization within the A.P. of L. This one fellow from the Laborers was also a member of the I.W.W. and was very much in favor of industrial organization. So no matter what question would come up on the floor of the Labor Council, this fellow, if he got an opportunity at all, would get on his feet and say, "Well, the answer to that, gentlemen, is industrial unionism." And then he would proceed to tell the Council why industrial unionism was the answer. And he always could explain it.
Gilb: What were the main functions of the Council at that time?

Billings: The main functions of the Council, of course, at any time, are to take care of the business of the unions, to keep the unions operating together and unified, and of course, in doing that, it has generally participated in local politics to some extent. Of course, any labor council, being a delegated body, has actually no power except through its affiliated members.

Gilb: Didn't it give strike sanctions?

Billings: Yes, it did. Well, at that time, strike sanction was granted very loosely. In order to pull an authorized strike in the shoe trade, it was necessary to get authorization from the International. If the International granted authorization, the Labor Council was powerless to do anything but agree to it, and the Council, of course, wouldn't grant authorization to a wildcat strike. The strike I pulled in the shoe factory was a wildcat strike. We had no authorization. If
Billings: it had gone to any length, the International probably would have refused to pay strike benefits, and that happened also in the Electrical Workers strike in 1913. Of course, in that strike, there were two factions, the McNulty faction and the Reed-Murphy faction, I believe it was. At any rate, one faction favored the strike and the other faction favored waiting till they got the authorization from the International. They never did get the International's authorization; they went on strike anyway, and eventually won the strike. It was a long, hard strike.

Gilb: If as the Boot and Shoe president, you waited for the International to authorize a strike you might have to wait a long time?

Billings: That's right. They were very conservative.

I.W.W., Anarchists - 1915

Gilb: Was Mooney an I.W.W. member at this time?

Billings: Not at that time. Mooney had previously been a member of the I.W.W., and at one time he had also
Billings: been a member of the Socialist Party; in fact, at one time he ran for sheriff on the Socialist ticket here in San Francisco. But he was expelled from the Socialist Party because he advocated direct action. The Socialists, of course, favored political action, and the I.W.W. favored economic action and direct action and not political action. Tom Mooney couldn't get along with either the I.W.W. or the Socialists because he believed both political and economic action were necessary to benefit the employed class.

Gilb: When he was on the Labor Council, was he involved in conflict there, too?

Billings: Oh yes, he was always involved in conflict with the Labor Council. Of course he was a recognized radical in the Labor Council.

Gilb: I know he was particularly hostile to Mike Casey. Do you know what the matter was?

Billings: He was not only particularly hostile to Mike Casey, he was also particularly hostile to Andy Gallagher, and John A. O'Connell, and several others. Theodore
Billings: Roche, for instance, of the Molders Union. In fact, after Mooney was arrested in 1917, Theodore Roche did a good deal to prevent the Molders Union from coming to Mooney's defense.

Gilb: I'm going to ask you more about that later. Were you an I.W.W. at this time?

Billings: No, I was never a member of the I.W.W. but I associated with a lot of members and knew a lot of members of the I.W.W.

Gilb: Did you know George Speed?

Billings: Oh yes, I knew George Speed quite well. The International Workers Defense League held its meetings in the I.W.W. hall, the old Woodman's Hall, on 17th between Mission and Valencia. It had originally been used by the Woodman's Lodge, and then it had been rented to the I.W.W. That was where they had their headquarters. At the time of the shoe strike in 1913, the secretary of the I.W.W. was one of the shoe workers who was one of the strike leaders. In fact, he was the one who engaged me to go to work in the shoe factory for
Billings: the union. Besides the International Workers Defense League holding its regular Sunday morning meetings -- we met every Sunday morning -- we also held festive occasions, parties, and one thing and another in the I.W.W. hall, and we invariably extended invitations to all members of the I.W.W. as well as members of other organizations, other unions, and so forth, to any of our affairs. So that we worked quite freely with the I.W.W.

Gilb: How many members of the I.W.W. local were there at that time?

Billings: I have a faint idea that it was somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 members. That particular local. There were two or three other branches of the I.W.W. here in San Francisco. For instance, there was a Russian-Finnish branch. I don't remember where they met. They met in some other hall, and they had quite a large organization, and then I believe there was also a Hungarian branch. It seems to me that there were altogether five different branches of the I.W.W. here in San Francisco.
Gilb: Was Speed the president of the one which you...

Billings: He was president of Local 173. That was what that organization was known as at the time.

Gilb: What was his background?

Billings: Well, I don't know anything about Speed's background except that he was a long-time member of the I.W.W. I think originally he was an agricultural worker, but I'm not sure. Of course, the I.W.W. is organized by industries and some of the men are members of the Railroad Union, Transportation Workers, and some are members of the Agricultural Workers and so on and so forth; it's split up into a number of different industrial unions.

Gilb: At that time were many of the members of the I.W.W. local also A.F. of L. members?

Billings: There were quite a lot of members of the I.W.W. who were in the A.F. of L., or it might be more accurate to say that members of the A.F. of L. joined the I.W.W. The I.W.W. had formulated a theory at that time that any member who was a
Billings: member of the A. F. of L. should stay in the A.F. of L. and work for industrial unionism. It was a program which we called at the time "boring from within." And so I was one of the borers.

Gilb: You were a borer. But you weren't an I. W. W. member.

Billings: No, I never was a member of the I.W.W., although I've always been well acquainted with them, worked with them and still do.

Gilb: Did you know Alexander Berkman?

Billings: Yes, quite well. I got acquainted with Berkman through an anarchist group that I was associated with, and through Mooney and Nolan, Selig Schulberg, those people. Alexander was well acquainted with that same group, and we all worked together and met together on various occasions. Whenever the anarchists held any sort of meeting, whether it was Berkman or Emma Goldman or anybody else, we usually attended it just the same.

Gilb: Did Bill Haywood and Emma Goldman come out here frequently?

Billings: I don't recall Bill Haywood coming out here, but
Billings: Emma Goldman came out a couple of times, once in 1915 that I recall.

Gilb: How was Berkman earning his living at that time?

Billings: He had published a book prior to that, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, after his release from prison, and I believe he was receiving royalties from the book, he was also writing for various radical publications, and then he began publishing *The Blast* here in San Francisco. Actually he was quite successful with *The Blast*. I'm quite sure it at least paid for itself.

Gilb: I have a note that you helped raise funds to finance *The Blast*.

Billings: No, not exactly. I may have sold tickets for a picnic or a ball or something else; I may have solicited some funds. Of course, the Boot and Shoe Workers Union had no capital whatever. In fact, when the secretary found it necessary to write a letter to Boston, sometimes I had to pay for the stamp.
DENVER, 1915-16

Gilb: After you left the Ford plant, then what did you do for a living?

Billings: I went to Denver right after that. You see, at the time I left the Ford plant, I was living in the house of Mrs. Belle Levin, who had previously been arrested with the McNamara brothers as a witness. She had been held as a witness in the jail in Los Angeles for some months. That was, of course, in 1910, before I came to California. Subsequently, I met Mrs. Levin, during 1915, I believe, and finally moved into her rooming house on Mission Street and was living there. At that time Matt Schmidt had been arrested in Los Angeles and was on trial with Dave Kaplan, in the Schmidt-Kaplan case. That was a part of the McNamara case also. Belle Levin was being sought as a witness again, and she escaped and went to Denver. Subsequently, she wrote me and told me how good things were in Denver, and after I quit the job in the Ford factory, I went to Denver, and I stayed in Denver.
Billings: from September until the 18th of February, 1916.
Then I beat my way back to San Francisco.

Gilb: What kind of work did you do in Denver?

Billings: After I got there, things were not as rosy as I thought they were. Work was very difficult to get. I succeeded once in getting a job as Ford mechanic in a garage. I overhauled one Model T that belonged to a doctor. The car was in such bad shape that I found it necessary to replace a good many parts in order to put it in proper condition. In that particular instance, the employer was very much dissatisfied because I spent too much money for parts for that car. So I got out of that business. I went to work shovelling gravel. And that lasted two or three days, digging gravel out of the bottom of Cherry Creek. That was a little too tough. I think we got $2 a day for ten hours, about 20¢ an hour.

Then I went to work in a restaurant as a waiter on a luncheon job, and then I got a job in a printing house, four hours a day, at 25¢ an hour as a shipping
Billings: clerk. The Griffin Press was the name of it. They used to do all the printing for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. I worked for them a half a day every day wrapping packages for shipping and so forth. Then I worked for a restaurant from 1:30 as a waiter, and then in the evening I would go to another restaurant and work two hours as a dinner waiter. I got 25¢ an hour and my dinner. In the other place I got 25¢ an hour and my lunch. So working on three jobs, I made $2 a day and two meals.

The waiters were unorganized in Denver at the time. I had worked as a waiter before, in camps and one thing and another, and one of the reasons that I went to work in restaurants there was because I was trying to organize the waiters. The waiters in Denver had what was known as the waiters club, but only the high-class hotel waiters belonged to that. It was not a union; it was sort of an employment association, through which the hotels and the high-class restaurants secured waiters when they wanted
Billings: them. That didn't satisfy me as an organization for working men. They had a hall, a meeting room, and all they did there was play cards, gamble, and one thing and another. So I thought they should have a bona fide union, be affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. I tried to get into the trade and talk up union organization. I don't know if it did any good; maybe it did. Eventually it got organized, so I guess maybe it helped.

After I lost my job in the printing house, I started looking for something to do in the morning, and I ran into a proposition where I could go into secondhand shops and pawnshops and press suits of clothes. All secondhand clothing had to be steam cleaned before it could be resold, according to the law of the state of Colorado. So I took contracts to press these garments at 15¢ a suit. I would be at each secondhand store at a certain time and I'd have the proprietor have everything ready so that as soon as I got there, I could go right to work.
Billings: I used to run from one shop to another without even putting my shirt on. It was in wintertime, or fall. I'd just put my coat on and dash from one shop to the other. When I got there I'd throw my coat off and just start in pressing. By working at the utmost top speed, as hard as I could possibly work, I could sometimes make 60¢ an hour. That, of course, was very good wages in 1915. But of course, I'd work maybe only two hours and sometimes three. I'd make from 45 to 60 cents an hour.

After I had worked on pressing clothes in secondhand stores, I went to work for the Joslin Dry Goods Company as a presser and bushelman for a couple of weeks. During that time, while I was away from the pressing table, I had a green velvet skirt laying on the ironing board, and somebody pushed it against the iron and burned a big streak in the skirt. So the boss of the alteration department decided that I should be charged for this suit. Well, I was getting $15 a week and I think the suit
Billings: was worth $18, and he was trying to take my week's wages and force me to pay him $3 besides for the suit. I refused to pay for it. First I argued with the head of the department, and subsequently with the superintendent of the store, and finally with the store manager. In the argument with the store manager, I threatened to take the matter before the Labor Commissioner. I don't know whether he thought I was bluffing or what, but anyway, he refused to pay me. So I went to the Labor Commissioner.

Well, when I explained matters, the Labor Commissioner immediately called up the general manager of the store and told him that he couldn't hold my wages for any industrial accident. So I went back to collect my money, and in the course of conversation that followed with the general manager, I explained to him who I was and what I had been doing, and about my being an ex-convict and having been in prison in California and so on, and in fact we became quite friendly. I was out
of work after that for a few days or a week or two.

Later I was arrested by the police in Denver, on a trumped-up charge of burglary, which I had no knowledge of and knew nothing about -- two officers had merely taken a dislike to me because they had seen me around in poolhalls and one thing and another. I had been in a pool hall on the night before Thanksgiving, talking to the pool hall owner and two other customers, habitues of the place, young fellows whom the pool hall owner knew quite well. While we were talking, someone came into the cigar store, which was the front end of the pool hall, and the owner of the pool hall went into the cigar store to wait on the customer. It developed afterward, of course I didn't know it at the time that the customer bought a couple of cigars and had to have change for ten dollars. The cigar store owner had to dig up the money he had hidden underneath the counter in order to change the ten-dollar bill. In the back of the pool hall where I was
standing, there were three chairs in a row which were fastened to the floor. If you sat in the center one you could look through the doorway into the front part of the store and you could see in a mirror anything that took place in the store. The owner had done that purposely so that he could sit in that chair and watch what happened in the store. So without knowing anything about this, of course, after he went into the store, I sat down in that particular chair. But I was talking to one of the fellows who were sitting next to me, one on either side. And afterwards the cigar store owner came back and I got out of the chair and we continued to talk until -- that had happened sometime between eleven and twelve, and we continued to talk until about twelve o'clock and then we closed up the place and we all went home.

Someone broke into the place that night. The owner told the police about the three of us that were there, two fellows that he knew very well, and
Billings: one fellow that was a stranger to him. That was me. He described me, and he told these fellows where I lived, a block or two away. This pool hall was on Champa and 20th and I lived on Champa and 18th. The robbery had been on Wednesday night, the night before Thanksgiving. The police came to my room on Sunday morning. I was in bed, and they searched the room, searched my clothing. They found ten dollars in my overcoat pocket. I don't remember now what sort of money it was, whether it was in bills or some silver. At any rate, they arrested me on the charge of burglary and held me until Monday morning, when I went before Judge Bray in the police court. I demanded immediate hearing, but the judge continued the case from day to day until Wednesday morning, against my protest each time.

On Wednesday morning we went into court. The two arresting officers testified first. One of them testified that the officer on that beat had seen a man pass him on the corner of 20th and Champa Street
Billings: between 1 and 1:30 in the morning, and he identified me as the man that passed him. And he said that the man he saw had either a cigar in his mouth or a cigarette in a cigarette holder. It happened that I was using a cigarette holder at the time and had the cigarette holder in my pocket. The police had found it, of course.

I had studied a little about legal procedure and had learned a little about it from my incarceration in Folsom the first time, and so I began to cross-examine the arresting officer. I questioned him about the officer who claimed to have seen me, where he stood on the street, the width of the sidewalk and so on and so forth, and I brought out certain facts, that the officer stood on 20th Street directly under an arc light, that the sidewalk was approximately five foot wide, that the man who passed the officer passed on the same sidewalk, obviously, within two or three feet of him, and yet this officer who claimed to identify me still couldn't tell the difference at that distance between a cigar and a cigarette in a
Billings: cigarette holder. That of course confused the arresting officer, and then I pointed out to the judge that it was hearsay testimony, that this was not the officer that stood on the corner of 20th Street, but somebody else testifying for the officer that was there.

The judge then agreed to rule out that testimony as hearsay, and then they put the complaining witness on the stand, the owner of the pool hall. And in cross-examination, I asked him why he had told the police that he suspected me. He said, "I suspected you because you were a stranger. I didn't know who you were or where you came from." Fact of the matter is that he did know I had come from San Francisco, because I had told him so. He admitted that he knew that one of the other fellows had served a sentence in Buena Vista Reform School on a charge of burglary, and that the other one had served time in the Canyon City Penitentiary for holding up this same store owner. And I asked him to explain to the
Billings: court why he preferred to suspect me, a total stranger, rather than either one of these men, both of whom he knew had served time for crimes of larceny. That, of course, confused him.

On direct examination, he had attempted to identify the ten dollars in money that was found in my possession as money that came from his place. I said, "Do you have any marks of identification on this money, or do you know the dates of any of the coins, or the numbers of the bills?" He admitted he didn't. I said, "Then how do you identify it as money that came from your place?" And he said that it was the same kind of money. So I said, "Yes, it's United States currency, and all the money in the United States is United States currency." He was very much confused by this, and the judge by that time was beginning to get a rather favorable attitude toward me, because it became apparent that all of this so-called evidence being presented against me was no evidence whatever.
Billings: One of the officers claimed that I had told one of the boys who had been with me in the pool hall that I robbed the place, and I had given him $10 to keep his mouth shut. That, of course, seemed rather unreasonable, to say the least. While I was in the jail on Monday and Tuesday, waiting to be heard, I had gotten in touch with another prisoner who knew these boys. He got out on Tuesday and he sent word back to me that the police had told this young fellow that he would have to come into court and testify against me; if he didn't, they would send him back to the reformatory. He was out on parole from the reformatory at the time. So I cross-examined the arresting officer about it and pointed out to the court that the boy was present in the courtroom, and the boy stood up and said, "Your Honor, I don't know anything about it. Officer Lane told me I had to come down here and testify; if I didn't, he'd send me back to Buena Vista." So that exposed the entire plot of the arresting officers, and the judge, of
Billings: course, immediately agreed to dismiss the case.

After the case was dismissed, I tried to get back my money which had been held in evidence, $10. I was released from court at 11:30 that morning and it took me till about 3:30 that afternoon to get my $10 back. The police were trying very hard to get away with it.

Gilb: What did they have against you?

Billings: Just this imaginary charge of burglary.

Gilb: They didn't have any reason to try to get you?

Billings: Not at that time, no. They didn't know anything about me. They didn't know that I had formerly served time in Folsom Prison at that time. They didn't find that out until later. After that, I had considerable trouble with Lane and Watson, the arresting officers.

Gilb: Oh, you did!

Billings: Yeah. Subsequently, I was sitting in a pool hall on 18th Street next to the Denham Theater, talking to a young fellow whose father was a doctor there in
Billings: Denver; we had both been looking for work that day, and we met in the pool hall. In fact, we had met there several times. We were sitting there talking and I was reading a newspaper. There was headlines in the newspapers about the German spies blowing up powder plants. This was prior to World War I, of course. And there was some article, I think it was about the Black Tom explosion in New Jersey or some other powder plant that had been blown up, presumably by the German spies. This young fellow was saying how hard it was to find work and wondering what we'd have to do in order to get a job, and I said, "I guess we'll have to go to work for the German spies blowing up powder plants." And just as I said it, Lane and Watson stepped in the door of the pool hall. They heard my remark.

So they came over and arrested me and this other young fellow. They took us out, and they tried to drag both of us into the alley between the pool hall and the theater. But I wrapped my arms around a telegraph
Billings: pole and started to holler, and a crowd began to collect, so the police decided they couldn't drag us into the alley. What they wanted to do was to beat up on us and try to make us make some kind of a confession so they could put some kind of a charge against us. They did take us to jail anyway and charged us with having the intention of blowing up a powder plant in the town of Littleton. Neither of us even knew that there was a powder plant in the town of Littleton.

The police, of course, made one oversight in making that charge against us, because that would be a federal charge and they had to call in the Department of Justice. It wasn't called the Federal Bureau of Investigation at that time; it was called the Department of Justice. So an operative for the Department came down and asked me where I was born and who I was and one thing and another, and of course in the meantime the police had found out about my record from California before that. The man from
Billings: the Department of Justice talked to me for some length about that, and I explained it to him, and when I got through, he turned around to Chief Leighton and he said, "Turn this fellow loose. You haven't got anything on him." Then he berated Chief Leighton very sternly for wasting the time of the Department of Justice by putting such charges against people like me, where there was absolutely no evidence, no indication of any kind that there was any crime committed or any intention to commit any crime.

So afterwards, when I walked out of there, he walked along with me. He said, "Young fellow, if I were you, I'd take a streetcar out of town. These fellows, Lane and Watson, are going to give you a lot of trouble, if you don't get out of here." I said, "I don't see any reason why I should let Lane and Watson run me out of Denver." He said, "Watson has got a reputation of running seven men into alleys and shooting them. Every time, he's always found a gun there that he's claimed the other fellow had, and
Billings: he's always gotten out of it. The first thing you know, Watson will be running you into an alley, and they'll pick you up in a basket. You'd better get out of town before something like that does happen."

I remembered how Watson had tried to drive me into the alley next to the Denham theater, but I wasn't too frightened by it until a little later, I was working in the Denham theater as an assistant property man, moving mountains around, as we used to call it. They were playing a wild-west show called "The Roundup" and I managed to get a job as the assistant property man because I could operate the old-fashioned Gatling gun during the battle scenes. It was an old brass cannon like they used to use during the Spanish-American War. When I was a boy in Middletown, New York, I used to go to the National Guard Armory with friends in the National Guard and in the National Guard Armory they had several of these Gatling guns, and I had learned
Billings: to operate one.

So I was working there. The show would get over about 11:15 or 11:20 at night. So I was on my way to my room one night and I ran into Lane and Watson. I don't know whether they were waiting for me; probably they were, because they were only a few feet from the corner of an alley between Curtis and Champa on 16th, and I lived at 1825 Curtis Street in a rooming house at that time. They grabbed me and they tried to push me into this alley between Curtis and Champa, and I grabbed a telegraph pole against and started hollering. When they saw they couldn't get me into the alley, they took me around to my room. They couldn't find anything in my room that would give them any opportunity to put any charge against me, but they took me down to the police station anyway, and they charged me with vagrancy, in spite of the fact that I had a room to live in, I had my rent paid, I had a meal ticket in my pocket for meals in a restaurant, and I was working.

The law in Colorado provided that if a person had
Billings: his room paid for for three weeks in advance, he was not considered a vagrant under the law. So I had previously arranged with my landlord that if I did get arrested for vagrancy, that he would come down and testify in the courts that I had my room rent paid for three weeks in advance. I only had it paid for one week, but he was willing to testify that I had it paid for three weeks.

He was notified, of course, and the next morning he appeared in court when I was charged with vagrancy. And he testified that I had my room rent paid for, I think he said, six weeks in advance. Anyway, he made it good enough so that the court dismissed the charge against me and I was released.

After that, I went to work for two weeks for the Joslin Dry Goods Company, just before Christmas, as a package wrapper on what was known as the accommodation desk, wrapping packages for mail. Walton N. Moore, the manager of the Joslin Dry Goods Company, had given me that job. While I was in charge of that
Billings: department, I had one other fellow working with me, and things began to turn up missing. Packages that were wrapped for customers were arriving at their destination without anything in them, or something else in them that didn't belong in them. So it became apparent that somebody was stealing things from the store. Of course, knowing that I was an ex-convict, they naturally suspected me. So they called me in, and the house detective and the superintendent and the general manager and I, we all had a long conversation about it. Eventually it was discovered that the fellow working with me was taking the stuff, and he was the son of a stalwart citizen of Denver and wasn't supposed to be a thief of any kind. The general manager sent for me and apologized. Of course I had quit in the meantime, after being accused of taking the stuff. Anyway the general manager, Walton N. Moore (he was afterwards in the clothing business here in San Francisco) was quite friendly with me. When I had another
Billings: set-to with these two officers, Lane and Watson, I reported it immediately to Mr. Moore, and he called the police commission and the chief of police and the police detectives, and he got all of them into his office, and explained the whole situation to them, everything I had told him, and had me explain it to them. They called in the two detectives, Lane and Watson, and then the chief of police gave the two officers orders that if they ever brought me in again to be sure they had positive evidence against me. He advised them to leave me alone until they did have evidence against me.

However, I continued to think about what the Department of Justice fellow had told me, and I happened to run into him sometime during January. He said, "I'm surprised that Lane and Watson haven't caught up with you." And I said, "They did catch up with me a couple of times, but they didn't succeed in getting me into an alley." He said, "They will. Just stick around." So I think it was that final remark
Billings: that finally convinced me that I'd better leave Denver.

RIDING THE RAILS TO SAN FRANCISCO, 1916

Billings: It was a little early in the year to start going anywhere on freight trains, you know. Pretty cold, especially coming west, when you had to come over the Rocky Mountains. But finally, on February 18th, I left Denver. I went to Cheyenne, Wyoming, on the first section of the Overland Limited. Caught the second section out of Cheyenne the same night and rode to Rawlins, Wyoming. I slept all day and left Rawlins the next night on the head end of the Overland Limited again. I froze off the head end, and then I got down under the rods of the passenger coach. It was snowing. The hard blizzard snow on the track was blowing up under the car, and it was cutting my face and hands and I couldn't stay there any longer.

So when we got to Green River and the train slowed down, I rolled down the embankment alongside
Billings: the track. I had on an overcoat and a earlap cap and a pair of sheepskin mittens, but I just had an ordinary pair of city shoes, and my feet were beginning to freeze, and I couldn't stand on them. So I climbed back up the embankment on my hands and knees. There was a freight train in the siding, and the flagman of the freight train in the siding, and the flagman of the freight train was behind the train, back by the switch, standing there in the snow with a lantern under his arm. He saw me coming along on my hands and knees, and I had this earlap cap with a long peak on it, and when he first saw me he thought I was a bear. The first thing I knew he came out from under his coat with a pistol. Then he held the lantern up over his head so he could see to get a shot at me, thinking I was a bear, and I hollered at him, and he realized that I wasn't a bear. He took me in the caboose of the train, and warmed me up a little bit. They carried me into Granger and left me off there.

I stayed in Granger until morning, and then in the morning I caught another passenger train, and I
Billings: rode as far as Carter, Wyoming, which is only forty miles from Granger. The blizzard was still on. So I froze off again in Carter, and I stayed in Carter a couple of days. They had carloads of feed for sheep come in there, and the ranchers would come into town and get somebody to help them unload it. So I worked a few hours each day on that. After being there in Carter a couple of days, I went to Evanston. I went through on the Overland Limited, and it's only about forty miles, but it took us over two hours to make that forty miles. It was still snowing.

I worked all day in Evanston, shovelling snow, and made three or four dollars. The next day I was around town trying to find some kind of work. Couldn't find anything. By that time most of the snow had been cleared where people wanted it cleared. So I decided to stay over one more night and then leave the next day on a freight train and go into Ogden. That night a group of us tramps were sleeping in the powerhouse. The engineer would allow the tramps to
sleep there where it was warm. We went to sleep, and we were there until about two o'clock in the morning and then the police came and gathered us all up. There was two fellows among us, two of the tramps that had brand new shoes on. So the police were after those two. A freight car had been broken into, and someone had broken into a case of shoes and stole some. They held us until morning, and then in the morning they ordered us all out of town, except the two that stole the shoes. Of course, they charged them with burglary and held them for a trial.

So the rest of us -- in fact, the police hiked us out of town. They ordered us out of town and showed us the railroad track and told us to keep going. So we hiked about four miles, and then we stopped along a little grade and waited for a freight train to come along, and we caught the freight train and rode into Ogden.

I met another young fellow there, and we got out of Ogden on the head end of a passenger train,
Billings: We just barely got across Salt Lake. On the other side of the lake, where it's a very arid spot, a big salt marsh there, absolutely nothing on it, we got ditched, and there was nothing there. There was a water tank, and a little shack underneath it. The shack was built out of single boards, and the spaces between the boards were about an inch or an inch and a half wide. And there was a little stove in the shack made out of a little powder can. We got in the shack and found some wood and built a fire. We had gotten there just about daylight. We tried to get something to eat; we were both hungry.

There was a railroad section gang there, all Mexicans, about eight of them, and one foreman who was Japanese. The foreman couldn't talk English and neither could any of the Mexicans. I eventually talked the Japanese into giving me a handful of rice and a little tea, and we cleaned some cans out and put the rice and tea in them on top of the stove. We got the rice half cooked and the freight train
Billings: came along. So we caught the freight and climbed into an open gondola. We were eating half-cooked rice and drinking tea when the brakeman came along and invited us to come up to the front end, where there was an open boxcar. This was a local freight, and on a local freight they have one open car for local deliveries, and at every station the brakeman has to put off whatever packages go off and pick up whatever there is to be taken aboard. So then he had us do his work for him. Loading and unloading freight from there on into Wells. We got into Wells, and he gave us each a meal ticket. The railroad men at that time in that country used to have what they called pie books, a book of tickets so they could eat in any eating house along the railroad. So we got a meal in Wells, and then we went through to Elko. Then the other fellow I was with, he got a job feeding sheep out of Elko, so he went to work and I went on by myself.

I got ditched off the passenger train in Carlin,
and the railroad detective there saw me and kept me off the train. I had to stay in Carlin for several hours, until late afternoon, before I figured out a way of beating that railroad man. Finally I figured out a way of doing it. He would get on the train at the depot and get on the line behind the engine and stay on it as long as he dared. When the train got to going eighteen or twenty miles an hour, he'd jump off, because he figured if he stayed on any longer, he wouldn't be able to get off. So I found out how far he rode, and I went up the tracks further and waited for the train. After he got off, I got on. Of course I had to get the train when it was going about twenty-five or thirty miles an hour, and it was a little dangerous, but I was young and active and pretty strong at the time, so I didn't have too much trouble.

Then I went on through Battle Mountain and came into Reno. I got into Reno and I didn't have any money, so I got out on the street and succeeded in
Billings: begging 75¢. So I got a meal for two bits. You could get a pretty good meal for two bits in those days. Then I was looking around, and I saw one of the saloons alongside of the railroad track where they had a 50¢ stack poker game. So I got into the 50¢ stack poker game, and I ran my 50¢ up to a dollar and a half, and then I cashed in, got out of the poker game. I had played poker practically all night to get that much. So then I went over across the tracks to the rooming house where the railroad men used to stay and got a room until the next night and slept all day, and got up that evening and went back over to the gambling house and got in another game. I had a dollar that time. I got in the dollar stack game and I ran that up to about $5. I stayed over another day, got into another game, and ran that $5 up to about $70, and I was doing pretty good. I thought if I ever got enough money to pay my fare to Frisco and had $100 over, I'd quit and come on West.
The next night I got into the Washoe; there's a place there called the Washoe, very prominent gambling house. It's still there, I think. That was where I had won the $70. And I met some of the same fellows that had been in the game with me the night before, and we got into a conversation. Poker game hadn't started yet. So a couple of them were up against the bar having a drink, and they invited me, and we got up against the bar, drinking. I had several drinks and then we started the poker game, but I got to playing poker like a drunken sailor by then, and so I wound up at midnight broke. I got disgusted with myself for losing all my money, so I decided to go to San Francisco anyway.

The Overland Limited came through there just after midnight. So I caught the train, and I found a place on top of the oil tank of the engine where I could sleep up there, right next to what they call the oil head, where they pour the oil into the oil tank, you know; and in front of this, between it and the engine cab, it's nice and warm. The only
Billings: breeze that comes up there comes up from the fire
box of the engine, and they shoot steam into the
oil tank to keep the oil warm so it flows freely,
It was nice and warm up there. So I went to sleep
coming out of Reno. I didn't see Truckee or anything
else. I woke up once in Colfax, and decided if I lay
still, nobody would bother me. It was still dark,
I just lay still and got out of Colfax, and the next
time I woke up, it was just a little while before we
got to Auburn, California. The grass was green, the
birds were singing, the sky was blue — California
sure looked good that morning, after coming through
all that snow in Wyoming and Nevada. There had been
anywhere from one to three feet of snow all the way
from Denver,

On the way to Roseville the train conductor
spotted me and waved a pistol at me, and I had to
dodge the railroad policeman and the chief of police
in Roseville. So that afternoon I got out of Roseville
and went to Sacramento. When I got into Sacramento —
Billings: I hadn't been in Sacramento, of course, since 1913 -- I looked around for a fellow that I knew there. He was a reporter, correspondent for the San Francisco Examiner, a fellow named Tom Brown. I went up to Tom Brown's office, talked to him for awhile.

That night, I decided to leave Sacramento and was going to come into San Francisco over the Western Pacific. I started for the Western Pacific depot and on the way I walked through an alley in the produce district. In the alley, I inadvertently kicked against something, looked down, and it was one of these box openers that fruit and vegetable dealers use to open crates. So I picked it up and I thought, "If any of the second-hand stores are open, I might get ten or fifteen cents for this box opener."

So I walked out of the alley with this thing in my hand, wondering whether I'd find any secondhand store open. It was pretty late in the evening. I hated to throw it away, if I could get ten or fifteen cents for it. When I walked out of the alley on
Billings: Fourth Street, a policeman was standing there, and he saw me with this box opener in my hand and he came over and put me under arrest and took me to the police station and charged me with burglary. It appeared then that a burglary had been committed in the next block in the alley, not the block that I came through between Third and Fourth, but the block between Fourth and Fifth, which I had never gotten into. The report of the burglary was that a silver watch had been stolen. Well, they didn't find any silver watch in my possession and there was no evidence that I had been in the alley where the burglary had been committed, and so the police dismissed the charge of burglary and held me on the charge of carrying burglar's tools, considering this box opener as a jimmy.

So they held me until the next morning, and the next morning they took me to court and the judge gave me a six months' floater out of Sacramento. That is, he ordered me out of town and gave me a six months' suspended sentence on the consideration
that if I came back into Sacramento within six months, he would send me to jail.

So I hiked across the M Street bridge over the Yolo and started for Davis. But before I left, while I was in the jail, that night, I had met a young fellow there who had been arrested on a charge of assault, fighting with a policeman. He asked me to pick up a loose-leaf binder book, wrapped up in a piece of brown paper he had left in a Japanese restaurant, and send it to a friend of his in Wichita, Kansas. Well, I got the book and I found out it contained copies of affidavits stating that the person carrying the book was deaf and dumb as a result of typhoid fever and was on his way to Berkeley, California, where he hoped to go to a school for mutes, and that he was trying to work his way to and through this school, and that he would be very grateful for any contribution that anybody would care to make. In other words, it was what the beggars call a begging license. It was merely an affidavit sworn to before a notary public. This
Billings: fellow had been begging on it.

So when I hitch-hiked into Davis I made believe that I was deaf and dumb. More for the fun of it than anything else. In Davis I walked into a restaurant and handed the book to a fellow behind the counter, and he gave me some ham and eggs. Then I had to sign the book as a contribution, and I thanked him for it. It seemed to be a pretty good racket!

So I got out of there and I was standing around on the street in Davis -- it was a little chilly, and I walked into a pool hall. I had a little money, not much, maybe a dollar or so. I still pretended to be a dummy, and played a game of pool. Just for the fun of it, I called some pretty difficult shots, and generally made them. When I called one of these three-cushion banks or something, the fellow there held a big conversation about the dummy, thinking that I wasn't listening to them. So I got quite a kick out of it, and had a hard time keeping my face straight. I played one game of pool and went out.
Billings: Finally I caught a train into Berkeley and came across the ferry into San Francisco. Fooling around after I got into San Francisco, I walked in and presented the book to the barber college, and they fixed me up with a free haircut. Then the next day I mailed the book back to Wichita, Kansas.

SAN FRANCISCO LABOR ACTIVITIES, MARCH-JULY, 1916

Billings: After I returned to San Francisco in March, 1916, I went to work in the Union Iron Works (it's now the Bethlehem Steel Company Shipyard) as a machinists helper. I worked there a few months. During that time I had an opportunity to go to sea. In fact, the chief engineer on one of the ships tried to shanghai me as an engineroom storekeeper. I managed to break out of the storeroom after he locked me in. He forgot, I guess, that the storeroom was full of tools. I broke out and got ashore just as the sailors were casting off the lines of the ship.

Gilb: How did he get you there in the first place?
Billings: I was on the crew from the Iron Works. The Iron Works machinists had to use certain tools that belonged to the ship in order to overhaul the ship's engine. The engineroom storekeeper had jumped ship, and the chief engineer wanted somebody to act as storekeeper temporarily until he could get a man, and so our foreman assigned me to the job. I worked on the job for about a week, during which time I made a complete inventory of everything in the storeroom, and the chief engineer liked my method of doing it, so he wanted me to ship with his as engineroom storekeeper. Of course at that time they paid an engineroom storekeeper $35 a month. The chief engineer did offer me $45, trying to get me to ship with him, but I told him I couldn't make up my mind to go to sea, so I escaped from the storeroom after he locked me in.

Gilb: Did you belong to the Machinists Union?

Billings: No. At that time helpers were not taken in as members of the union. Only machinists and apprentices were members of the union. But I was not rated as an
Billings: apprentice. I was rated as a helper. My job ran out in a short time.

**Auto Mechanics Strike**

After that I was out of work for a period, and then, I believe it was in May, the automobile mechanics went on strike against some of the automobile agents. Most of the agencies signed up, but there were four that continued to strike for some time. They were the Chalmers agency, the Haynes agency, the Cadillac agency, and one other, I don't recall now just which one that was. The automobile mechanics were at that time members of Lodge 68 of the Machinists' Union, and in Lodge 68 were Ed Nolan and other progressives who had been in the union for many years. I had worked with them many times before, and they wanted somebody to go into one of the struck shops to find out who the nonunion machinists were that were working in there, which ones were machinists and which were just farmers, and who the people were that were
Billings: bringing their cars in for repair. Of course we had
to use a secondary boycott as a general method at
that time. So consequently, the union wanted to send
letters to people sending their cars there advising
them not to take their cars into a nonunion shop.

The Machinists Union used me at first as sort
of an investigator to follow some of the people who
worked in some of these shops to find out where they
lived. Then finally I went to work in Don Lee's
Cadillac garage, California and Van Ness, as a
mechanic's helper. I wasn't rated as a mechanic.
That's what they used to call a grease monkey at the
time. And I worked in there for a period of seven
weeks during May and June.

**Mooney Attempts to Organize Street Car Workers**

During that time Tom Mooney was very active in
organizing the streetcar employees on the United
Railroad. On June 10th, Tom Mooney attempted to
organize a streetcar strike and held a meeting that
Billings: night in Woodman Hall on 17th Street. That same
night some power towers belonging to the San Francisco
Sierra Power company or the Great Western Power Com-
pany, I forget which, on top of San Bruno Mountain,
near South San Francisco, were dynamited.

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company tried to
saddle the blame for the dynamiting of these towers
on the strikers and on Tom Mooney. In fact, subse-
quently, they posted notices in all the car barns
warning the employees not to have anything to do
with Tom Mooney because he was a dynamiter. Jess W.
Lilienthal posted notices offering a $5,000 reward
for the arrest and conviction of any person who was
guilty of dynamiting the power towers. Of course, we
always did believe that the power towers were dynamited
by employees of Martin Swanson, who at that time was
operating what was known as the Public Utilities Pro-
tective Association, a private detectives' protection
racket, supposed to protect the properties of the
Pacific Gas & Electric Company and the United Railroads
Billings: and other corporations during labor disturbances. We knew, of course, that the effort to saddle this upon Tom Mooney and the unions was entirely false because on that night Tom Mooney was holding a strike meeting and had 150 or 200 employees of the United Railroads gathered in this meeting, and they were there until the early hours of the morning. In fact, they were there until after the power tower had been dynamited.

Gilb: Were you there too?

Billings: No. It was on a Saturday, that the meeting was held. The preceding Thursday, I had had a little industrial accident and had gotten some pieces of steel and pieces of carborundum in my eye while working on the grinder; and on Thursday I was taken to the doctor; and Friday I had to go to the doctor again, and they had a patch over my eye and put medications in my eye and told me to stay in a dark room. So all day Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, I was at home in my room with the shades down in order to give my eye a
Billings: chance to heal. I did go back to work on Monday or Tuesday, but in the meantime I was incapacitated. But it was for that reason that I hadn't attended the meeting. I probably would have been at the meeting if it hadn't been for the injury to my eye. However, I continued to work in Don Lee's shop until the 30th of June.

I might add that Tom Mooney's attempt to pull a strike at that time was abortive. No strike occurred; it was postponed. And then after the 30th of June, I went on a vacation on the Russian River with a couple of friends. In fact, we rented a rowboat and rowed down the river from Guerneville to the mouth of the river down at the ocean, near Jenner. And we spent two weeks there. Then I received a message from Tom Mooney -- we had gotten back to Monte Rio at that time -- I received a message from Tom Mooney asking me to come back to San Francisco to help him with his proposed streetcar strike. I believe it was on the 13th of July that I received a message that he was
Billings: going to attempt a strike on the 14th.

So I came back to San Francisco. I was about ready to come back anyway. And on the 14th Tom attempted to pull a streetcar strike at the corner of Third and Market Street. According to the plan that we had concocted, I rode down on the Geary Street car and pulled the emergency brake when the car got in the proper position across the Kearney Street tracks, which effectively stopped all the cars on Kearney Street, and they in turn obstructed the traffic on Market Street, so that they caused a jam there. These Geary Street cars, which belonged to the Municipal Railroad, had a particular type of emergency brake. Once it was set, it became necessary for the conductor to get underneath the car to release the emergency brake again. Tom attempted to pull this streetcar strike right at the beginning of the rush hour in the afternoon, and the result was that there was a big pileup of streetcars both on Kearney Street and Market Street.
Billings: The plan was for the motormen and conductors to leave their cars there and commence the strike. However, the company, through their spies in Tom Mooney's organization, knew all about it and had a large number of trusted employees stationed at Kearney Street and Market Street to move these cars in case any of the motormen and conductors walked off. A few of them did, but immediately if one walked off, some other employee of the United Railroad would take his place and they would attempt to move the cars. Eventually, of course, in three-quarters of an hour, it was possible for them to clear the jam and get traffic moving again. Not enough of the employees joined the strike at that time to make it effective. In fact, that strike fell through right then.

Of course, while the cars were stopped there, a number of us, mostly young fellows like myself, were attempting to continue the obstruction by pulling the trolleys off the wires and cutting the rope and then letting the pole fly back up, so that in order to
Billings: move the car, the conductor would have to climb on top of the car and pull the trolley pole down and put it on the wire and he would also have to get the rope out of the reel box on the back of the car and tie it to his belt while he climbed up on top of the car and then tie the rope together again, all of which would take considerable time. We figured that it would continue the traffic jam long enough to get a few men together to definitely create a strike. It didn't work, as I said, because of the preparations made by the company. So the streetcar strike fell through.

After that, I was not particularly employed for awhile.

Gilb: Tom Mooney was a moulder. How did the moulders feel about his organizing these other people?

Billings: Tom had been a moulder for many years. In all trade unions at that time, and it's more or less true in a great many unions at the present time, any person who had worked at the trade for a number of years and been
Billings: a member of the union for a great many years, could continue to carry his membership. In fact, there are many people in San Francisco today who have long since quit the moulders' trade that are still carrying cards in the Moulders Union. One of them is Mike Roche, federal judge here in the post office next door. He's still carrying a card of the Moulders Union. He hasn't seen the inside of a moulders' shop inside of fifty years, I think. But he still carries a card.

Gilb: Mooney wasn't working at the Moulders' trade at this time?

Billings: No. He hadn't been working as a moulder. He had gotten out of work sometime before that; and during the period that he was out of work, he had gotten interested in organizing streetcar men, and he had applied to the streetcar operators' union, I forget the name of it now, for credentials as an organizer, and he was given credentials as an organizer by the international president of the streetcar union. He
Billings: had authorization for his organization work.

Gilb: How about for the strike that he was trying to organize?

Billings: Well, the strike, of course, the question of a strike at any time more or less depends on the men involved. If they vote to strike, it's a strike. In the case of the streetcar men, at the meeting on June 10th, the men had voted the strike. They had failed the strike at that time principally because Tom's organization was not solid enough. He didn't have enough men organized to really create a strike. In fact, you have to have a majority of the employees lined up in order to actually start an effective strike.

Gilb: What percent did he get?

Billings: I never knew enough about the details of his organization to know. I was not entirely occupied with assisting Tom Mooney. I was also working on two or three other projects at the same time.

Gilb: What were they?
Waterfront Strike

Billings: Well, one of them was the waterfront strike, which was going on at that time. Some months prior to that, the Bay and River Boatmen had gone on strike here in San Francisco Bay; and then the pile drivers and bridge carpenters had joined in the strike as sympathizers; and then the Riggers and Stevedores Union, the old Longshoremen's Union, AF of L, they went out in sympathy with the others. So that effectively tied up the waterfront. The shipowners were trying to run scabs in on the dock. In fact, at one period they had a barge anchored off the foot of Howard Street, or Folsom Street, or somewhere, on which they had about 400 strikebreakers, until somebody drilled a hole in the bottom of the barge and it sunk. After that, they had to park the strikebreakers somewhere else.

Gilb: Was Black Jack Jerome operating at that time?

Billings: Yes, Black Jack Jerome was operating at that time, and he was quite active, in charge, I think, of at
least one section of that waterfront strike. Of course Black Jack Jerome was always one of the principal ones of the strikebreakers who, like the Pinkerton Agency, always had their spies in the unions and knew what the unions were doing. Their spies were generally the provocative agents that caused most of the sabotage that was done. When it wasn't done by these private detectives themselves, it was at least suggested by them. And that was of course no new thing, and it's still not entirely an old thing, because I have a piece here in the *Industrial Worker*, the I.W.W. paper, which is the issue of February 18th, 1957, and the heading says, "Violence in Ohio Phone Strike." And it says, "There has been much publicity about violence against the company in the telephone strike around Portsmouth, Ohio. In hearings on charges brought by the company, two private detectives swear the company instructed them to get rid of the strike leaders, preferably so as to make it seem like an accident, running over them or forcing their car off
Billings: the road." A matter of murder, of course. "Detectives further assert that they were fired for refusing to handle those jobs, and that the company had promised that if they got in trouble, their lawyers would look after them." That same sort of thing was happening all the time in 1915, '16, here in San Francisco. Those of us who were active in the labor disputes of that period sometimes didn't realize all the things that were being done or suggested by agents of the Pinkerton Detective Agency; and Swanson's organization, the Public Utilities Protection Association; and the organizations of the Merchants, Manufacturers and Employers Association, M M and E, as we used to call it; and organizations like that of Black Jack Jerome. The agents who were in unions as members were invariably the most radical and most vociferous of the union men. They were always on their feet in the meeting, always talking, always making suggestions, that this ought to be done and that ought to be done, and we ought to run these scabs into the Bay.
Gilb: What did you try to do to the scabs in the waterfront strike?

Billings: Well, some of us kids from out on Mission used to think it was fun to get into a fight, so we would go down to the waterfront occasionally, and when we found out that the police and Waterfront Employers Association were trying to run scabs in on some dock, why, we would join in without any recognition or permission from the union, and just start a general melee in which we would chase the scabs from here to there. Quite frequently, these fights didn't amount to very much. Usually they didn't even succeed in stopping the nonunion workers from getting into the docks, but sometimes it did prevent the scabs from getting into the docks, and sometimes it did cause quite a little bit of trouble.

Gilb: Did the union approve of your doing it?

Billings: The union itself had absolutely no knowledge of who we were or what we were doing or when we were going to appear or anything else. Sometimes some of the
The Culinary Strike

The same thing applied to the activities of some of us in the culinary crafts. The culinary crafts at that time were trying to organize the dairy lunch houses; they were organizing waiters and waitresses and counter men. During that period, there were quite a few incidents, according to a booklet subse-
sequently published by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Law and Order Committee, the book which was known as Law and Order in San Francisco. They put forth a list of eating houses in which stick bombs had been thrown, had been rolled around on the
Billings: floor and the patrons had stepped on them and as a result the patrons were forced to leave the restaurant because of the odor. Besides that, of course, there were quite a few nonunion workers who were beaten up mildly, not seriously. A few were slapped in the face or given a black eye or something like that, once in awhile, both in the waterfront strike and in the culinary strike.

Gilb: What did you do in the culinary strike?

Billings: On one or two occasions, I went visiting restaurants where they were rolling stink bombs around on the floor, and on two or three occasions I intercepted some of the nonunion workers that were attempting to go to work in one of those places, and directed them to other places. (laughter) I was more or less active in those affairs, but not in any official capacity, that is, not with the cognizance of the union officials.
Radicals

Gilb: Were you also active in the Workers Defense League during this period?

Billings: Yes, I was active in the Workers Defense League during this period, too. Of course, I had been away for six months during the time that I was in Denver. Usually I merely attended meetings and perhaps sometimes sold tickets to a picnic or a dance, or sometimes went with some other delegates to speak at meetings or solicit funds. I never did appear as a public speaker at that time. I merely went with the fellows that were engaged to do the speaking. It wasn't until years later, in fact, when I got out of Folsom, that I began to speak publicly before union meetings, although I had frequently spoken in the San Francisco Labor Council and before my own union.

Gilb: How did you and your friends feel about the war in Europe?

Billings: Well, we were all progressive-minded people, opposed
Billings: to the entrance of the United States into the war. At that period, the United States was neutral, theoretically. Actually, they were supplying arms and ammunitions to the Allies. The radicals were opposed to the United States taking sides one way or the other. Of course, there were quite a number of Germans among the radicals; there were quite a few German anarchists in the United States; there was a number here in San Francisco. In fact, I don't doubt but what some of those German progressives felt very keenly about the war in Europe and thought that Germany was being badly mistreated by the United States' sending arms and ammunition to the Allies. But we didn't seem to feel that way particularly about it; our idea was that it was merely unfair for the United States to misrepresent itself as being neutral while at the same time it was actively participating in the war by supplying arms and ammunition to the Allies.
A Bribe Offer from Martin Swanson

Billings: It was only a very short time after the streetcar strike of July 14 when the bomb exploded. The bomb exploded on July 22d, which was designated as "Preparedness Day." At that time I was unemployed. I had been interviewed by Martin Swanson on July 19th, at which time he showed me these posters issued by Jess W. Lilienthal offering $5,000 reward for the arrest of the person who dynamited the towers on San Bruno Mountain, and Swanson had explained to me how easy it would be for me to acquire that $5,000 if I would go into court and testify that Mooney told me that he was the man who dynamited the towers. Swanson explained to me that I didn't have to know anything about it. All I had to do was go into court and say that Mooney told me that. Then I would get the $5,000. Swanson explained to me how I could go to Mexico with $5,000 and how I could go into business there and be a good citizen of Mexico and have lots of money and have a good time,
providing that I would be his stool pigeon and
testify against Tom Mooney in order to get the $5,000.

However, I had a little experience with police
and with people of Martin Swanson’s type, and I knew
that their promises didn’t amount to much. They
promise you $5,000 and see to it that you don’t get
it. If there was $5,000 to be had anywhere, Swanson
would have his mitts on it; he wasn’t giving it to
anyone else if he could help it. I wasn’t at all
interested in Swanson’s promises or his offer, and
told him so quite frankly, and told him that I knew
that he was trying to frame Tom Mooney and told
him that I wouldn’t have anything to do with it, and
that I wouldn’t help him in any way.

Then I sent a message to Tom Mooney by a fellow
named George Speed, who was secretary of Local 173 of
the I.W.W. here in San Francisco at the time, and told
Mooney that I wanted to see him, and he sent back
word that he would meet me at Alexander Berkman’s
house on Dolores Street, which was the office of
Berkman's newspaper known as *The Blast*. So I went to Berkman's, and in a little while Tom showed up, and I explained to him about my interview with Swanson and what had happened and told him what Swanson told me and also what I told Swanson. Then we discussed the matter at some length, and I made the suggestion that I should go along with Swanson and make believe that I was going to accept his proposition and that I could carry it along until I got into court, and then in court I could get up and tell the truth about it, and tell how Swanson had employed me to help him frame Tom Mooney.

Tom didn't think that that was a very sound plan, thought it was kind of dangerous, particularly for me; and he tried to talk me out of the idea, and we discussed it to some length and finally decided to take the matter up with Ed Nolan. We both considered that Ed probably had better judgment than either of us, although I wasn't particularly considered to have poor judgment at the time, although Tom was
always more or less considered to have poor judgment. But my judgment was considered to be pretty good. But we thought that Ed Nolan had a more levelheaded way of looking at things and had more experience and information about things generally than we did, and that he could probably give us a better idea, or at least Tom was in hopes that Ed would be able to talk me out of the idea of trying to frame Swanson while Swanson was framing Tom Mooney.

So anyway, we got ahold of Ed Nolan that evening, and took the matter up with him, with the result that Ed did succeed in talking me out of the plan, and we decided to give it up.

I had an appointment to meet Swanson again the next day, and I did meet him, and when I met him the next day, that was when I told him off and told him that I would have nothing to do with his plan.
Billings: Yeah. The first time I just talked to him and let him tell me what he wanted, and I told him that I'd have to think it over or something like that, that I'd let him know, and he told me to meet him the next day. So in the meantime I contacted Tom Mooney and Ed Nolan. The next day I met Swanson and told him what I thought of him. And that was the time that Swanson shook his fist under my nose and told me that he would get Tom Mooney and would get me too. That was on the 19th of July, 1916, three days before the bomb exploded.

THE PREPAREDNESS DAY PARADE BOMBING

Three days later, when the bomb exploded, none of us in the movement, none of us who had been active in the trade union, had any idea what the explosion was all about.

Gilb: Had you attended the meeting that protested the Preparedness Day Parade?

Billings: Yes. I had attended the meeting on Thursday night.
Billings: That was the evening of the same day I saw Swanson, I believe. And at that meeting I heard William McDevitt, the Socialist supervisor in San Francisco here, make a speech in which he said that people were being forced to march in the parade by the big corporations, that the men who worked in banks and other large institutions had to march whether they wanted to or not, and if they didn't they'd lose their jobs.

Of course, the San Francisco Labor Council had previously adopted the resolution opposing the parade, opposing the idea of preparedness for war, opposing the United States' entry into the war, and had recommended to all of the delegates that they return to their local unions and advise them to have nothing whatever to do with the parade.

Gilb: Did they also think of it as an open-shop or employers' type of parade?

Billings: Well, the parade was backed and conducted by the same people who were always the leaders in the open-shop
Billings: movement. Jess W. Lilienthal was an important personage in the parade, and Thornwall Mulally was a leader of the parade, and those people were all at the head of the open-shop movement in San Francisco. There was no doubt about it that it was an open-shop parade, that it was backed by all the open-shop employers. That was one of the reasons why organized labor would have nothing to do with it. Of course, organized labor had for some time previous to that opposed the entry of the United States into the war. And as to the parade, they didn't participate in the parade and didn't have anything to do with it; in fact, they even advised members of unions not to even go and see the parade. And they figured, I guess, that by doing that, that they would discourage the opposing forces from holding these kind of parades and whipping up the war spirit.

Of course, it didn't work. The war spirit continued to get whipped up from early in June on until the United States finally got into the war
Billings: a little later, I believe it was April, 1917.

**Billings' Activities at Time of Bombing**

Gilb: What were you doing at the time that the bombing took place?

Billings: At the time that the bombing took place, I was still more or less working with the strikers in the automobile industry. Any automobile that was sold within the year was guaranteed for a year by the agency that sold it, and anything that happened to the car within the year was supposed to be repaired by the agency free of charge. The automobile painters were still working in these shops. For instance, in Don Lee's shop there were union automobile painters still employed. So someone in connection with the strikes (not a union official) had a plan to destroy the paint on certain automobiles which were under contract and were sold within the year, still under the agreement, so that when the paint was destroyed, the owner of the car would take it back to the agency, and the
Billings: agency would have to repaint it at its own expense. The union automobile painters would get the benefit of the work and the employer would have the expense and he would know that it was because of the automobile mechanics' strike that he was having this additional expense. And in conjunction to that plan, I had volunteered to apply paint remover to the sides of certain automobiles still under contract that I found on the street in various places.

So I secured a can of paint remover and a rubber syringe bulb, and I would go into the men's room in various saloons and fill the syringe bulb and go into the street and carry the bulb in my coat pocket with my thumb over the end of it and look for a car of any one of the four makes that were on strike, that I knew had been sold within the year.

On the day of the parade, July the 22d, I was surveying the streets on the north side of Market Street from about Leavenworth Street down to Grant Avenue. I had come down from the Mission in a jitney
Billings: bus on Valencia Street, and I got off the jitney bus at 11th and Market because the street was being cleared at that time by the police for the parade. It was about 1:25 or 1:30 in the afternoon. The jitney buses were being directed down 11th Street to Mission and were running down Mission Street. I had been on the south side of Market, I think, the day previous, and I wanted to go on the north side of Market that afternoon because I figured there was more opportunity of finding the cars I was looking for on the north side of Market Street than there would be on the south side. So I crossed over near 11th Street to the north side of Market and walked down Market Street to about Taylor Street. Then, if I recall right, on the corner of Taylor and Golden Gate, where the Golden Gate Theatre now is, I believe there was a saloon there. I went in there and got a glass of beer and filled my syringe bulb and then went out and looked at automobiles. I did find two or three automobiles in that area during that time between
Billings: 1:30 and 3:00, which is about the time I left to come back over to the south side of Market Street.

One of these cars that I found was a battleship-gray Hudson. It belonged to Dr. Robert Paddock. I didn't know who it belonged to at the time; I didn't know who Dr. Robert Paddock was, but I found out during my trial that he was the personal physician of Judge Frank H. Dunne, before whom I was being tried. Dunne was in very poor health and was under constant medication. I had heard at one time or another that the medication was principally morphine. But at any rate, he used to have to go to his doctor's office for these shots that he was taking. At the time that I discovered Dr. Paddock's automobile, it was parked in Union Square Alley in back of the Liebes Building, which faces on Post Street. Judge Dunne had come downtown in the car with Dr. Paddock, we found out during the trial, and Dr. Paddock and Judge Dunne were up in Dr. Paddock's office at the time I discovered the car. I checked the registration of
Billings: the car and found out that it had been sold within
the year and was still under contract, and I squirted
paint remover on the side of it.

Before I squirted paint remover on the side of
this particular car, I had been across the street
in a saloon known as the Reception Bar. At the time
I was in there, there was a tall gentleman with rosy
cheeks and a mustache with waxed ends. A very nice-
looking gentleman, looked rather Germanic in type.
He was standing against the bar having a drink and
talking to the bartender, and he said to the bartender,
"Well, George, I've got to go." And the bartender
said, "So long, Baron, I'll be seeing you."

Well, just before that, the German spies had
been arrested in San Francisco. The German consular
officials, Von Bopp, Von Brinken, and Von Schacht,
and a private detective named Crowley, for committing
actual sabotage against the United States Government.
One witness, one Lew Smith, private detective, and
turned state's evidence against these consular
Billings: officials, and they were subsequently convicted and interned, and the private detective Crowley, who had employed Lew Smith, was sent to the federal penitentiary. Their trial had been during May and June here in the Post Office, and we had been reading it here in the papers, and Von Brincken, the naval attache of the German consul, was a baron. He had married a girl from Burlingame and he had separated from her and they were getting a divorce, and there had been a great deal in the papers about it, and he was living in the St. Francis Hotel, which was only a block from Union Square Alley and Grant Avenue.

When I saw this Germanic-looking gentleman in the bar, and I heard the bartender say, "Well, so long, Baron," I merely assumed that this was Baron Von Brincken. So I turned to the bartender after the Baron went out, and I said, "Pardon me, is that this German baron that we've been reading about in the newspapers that lives up here in the St. Francis Hotel?" And he said, "Oh, hell, no, that George
Billings: Baron, the ladies! tailor, around here on Geary Street." (laughter) That, of course, stuck in my memory, so when I was questioned by the police as to my whereabouts on the day of the parade, I could explain to them what I had seen and heard in this saloon.

But we never could find the bartender. We subsequently got information, indirectly, that the bartender had been given $150 by two representatives of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and had been told to leave San Francisco and stay out, and that he had subsequently gone to Seattle. But this was two or three years after my conviction before we found that out.

**Who Did Drop the Bomb?**

Gilb: Well now, you had an airtight alibi during the bombing. Who do you think did the bombing?

Billings: Well, there is no doubt in my mind that the bombing was done by persons in the employ of Martin Swanson,
Billings: who in turn was in the employ at the time of the Law and Order Committee of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. Of course, all of this is information which cannot be substantiated. There is no proof of it. It grows out of my own particular deductions.

We know that the bomb exploded at Stewart and Market Street alongside of a one-story saloon building. We also know from the testimony of a Civil War veteran named William Taylor, who testified during my trial, that he sat on the open steel doors of the saloon cellar, and that while he was sitting on this door, a man came along -- a tall, Swedish or Norwegian looking man, slender in build and poorly dressed -- and he came along with a dilapidated-looking suitcase and he laid it down flat on its side on the sidewalk against the building. And Taylor says that he spoke to the man and said, "That's no way to leave a suitcase. If you want to leave it there, why don't you set it up against the building, where it will be out of the way?" And he
Billings: says that the man with the suitcase replied, "You get away from here, you old s.o.b., I know what I'm doing." So the old man said, "Well, that's your suitcase. I don't care anything about it," and he walked away. He was sitting there waiting for the section of the Grand Army of the Republic to form in Stewart Street preparatory to marching up Market Street in the parade. The sections of the parade that were to form in Stewart Street were the Grand Army, the Civil War Veterans, and the Spanish-American War veterans, and the Boy Scouts. And consequently, members of these three contingents were gathered around there on the sidewalk waiting for their sections of the parade to form in Stewart Street.

A fourteen-year-old boy named James McDougall, who was one of the members of the Boy scout troops, was also standing around there on the sidewalk. He had gotten there early and had been standing there for some time and was tired and was looking for a place to sit down, and he saw this empty suitcase
the street in the Tenderloin Hotel, Mrs. Jane Compton.

Then shortly after that, as a woman who was across

empty.

knew it was there, and knew the suitcase was light, was

empty. There were three people who saw the suitcase,

recollect the building. So he knew the suitcase was

were under the handle of the suitcase and turned it up

way where nobody will step over it." So he part the

said, "Well, then, I'll see the suitcase up out of the

when, "and the boy ran down the street. "When then

suitcase, son?" and the boy said, "Go out, it can't

boy see on the suitcase and asked him, "Is that your

section of the parade, a yellow-named Mexican, saw the

was a member of the Spanish-American War veterans

standing close to the building. Then the next him, who

jumped off of the suitcase, when he did, another man

in it. I've couldn't have sunk in it, I'll be glad. So he

he knew the suitcase was empty. It's glad anything

sank him all the way to the sidewalk. Consequently,
Billings: later testified, she saw a man come across the roof of the one-story saloon building. He had a package under his arm and it appeared to be about sixteen or eighteen inches in length and about six or eight inches in diameter, and it seemed to be wrapped in brown butcher paper, she said. He came diagonally across the one-story saloon building from the rear end, where the adjoining building was being torn down, and he came over to the Stewart Street side of the one-story saloon roof and leaned over the fire wall and when he did, he straightened up with his hands out before him as though he had just dropped something, and that particular moment, the explosion occurred, and he then ran back across the roof with both arms swinging free at his side.

Now many years later, we secured testimony from one Mrs. Dora Monroe and her husband. Dora Monroe was the sister of Lew Smith, the man who had turned state's evidence against the German spies and had subsequently been placed on probation in charge of John W. Preston, at that time Federal Prosecuting Attorney, and sub-
Billings: subsequently a justice of the California State Supreme Court. We gathered information that Preston had gotten Law Smith a job with Martin Swanson. And we had testimony from Dora Monroe and her husband that at one time in their house in Michigan, while they were discussing the case of Tom Mooney, Law Smith had made the statement that "There is one man that shouldn't be in jail at all. I'm the s.o.b. that threw the bomb from the roof."

Now after that statement of Dora Monroe and her husband were published, in the newspapers, the police and members of the District Attorney's staff in San Francisco immediately went to their home in Michigan and forced them to sign contradictory affidavits denying their original affidavits in which they said Law Smith made this statement. There was another fellow with Law Smith at the time, a fellow named Stevens and he was a crony of Law Smith, a private detective who had been a gunman with Law Smith in the state of West Virginia during the mine strike when they had both
Billings: been employees of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency; and he was the one who eventually exposed Lew Smith's statement, but he didn't do it intentionally. He merely told somebody else that he heard Lew Smith make this statement, and it was through the third or fourth party that we finally got it and traced it down, and finally got to Dora Monroe and her husband, and got their statement and their affidavit they had also heard Lew Smith make this statement, that he was the one who threw the bomb from the roof.

Gilb: You think he was?

Billings: No doubt. I feel quite sure.

We had other information that couldn't be substantiated either, to the effect that the Chamber of Commerce Law and Order Committee had called in Martin Swanson and had instructed Swanson that they wanted him to get rid of the radical labor leaders in San Francisco, and that Swanson had named Tom Mooney, Edward D. Nolan, myself, Alexander Berkman,
Billings: and a number of other people connected with the San Francisco Labor Council as the principal radical labor leaders in San Francisco who had to be disposed of, so that the Chamber of Commerce open shop plan could be put into effect, so they could break up the unions and institute their open shop movement. And I, at least, have concluded that after receiving such instructions, Swanson had gotten his operative, Lew Smith, to construct the bomb and to drop it from the roof of the one-story saloon building ostensibly onto this empty suitcase which was to prevent it from exploding, and that then they were planning to frame Tom Mooney and the rest of us for the attempt to dynamite the parade. I don't think that any member of the Chamber of Commerce, anybody else, even Swanson, had any intention of hurting anyone. They didn't intend to do what the bomb actually did, kill ten people and injure forty more. That was not their intention. The explosion, in my opinion, was entirely accidental. The explosion was due to the fact
Billings: that the bomb was made of a piece of wrought iron pipe four inches in diameter capped on each end with a screwed-on pipe cap and loaded with dynamite and pistol cartridges, the cartridges being .32 calibre of a steel-nosed type that was used in an automatic, which, by the way, were cartridges that fitted the gun that I carried. I had a .32 calibre Belgian automatic that I carried at that time, which I had purchased in Shreve and Barbor's gun store on Third Street.

One of our lawyers, after the trial, succeeded in getting a statement from one of the clerks in Shreve and Barbor's gun store that he had sold four boxes of these bullets to a gentleman who fit the description of Martin Swanson. He would not identify pictures of Martin Swanson as the man. He wouldn't identify Swanson as the man. But he said that the pictures looked like the man he sold the cartridges to, and he admitted that he sold four boxes of these cartridges, approximately four hundred bullets, to a
Billings: man of this particular description. Immediately after the explosion, the newspapers were shouting to look for the man who put the suitcase at Stewart and Market Street. And as I said before, the description given by Taylor was of a Swedish or Norwegian-looking individual who was tall and sort of blond and poorly dressed.

The same night of the bomb explosion there was a man in the back room of a saloon over in Oakland and a couple of fellows got into a conversation with him, and he was a sort of wild-eyed looking individual, and rather unkempt looking, and he said some things about he had to get out of there, he had to get away, because he was the man that put the bomb at Stewart and Market Street. So these two fellows that he told this to, went out to look for a policeman, but one went one way and the other went the other way to look for a policeman, and while they were gone, the tall, seedy-looking individual disappeared.

A few days later, I don't remember how many, the fellow appeared in the back room of a saloon in
Billings: Portland. He was sitting at a table crying into his beer, and a couple of fellows came along and got into a conversation with him. He was a tall, seedy-looking, Norwegian-looking individual, and when they got to talking with him, he said that he was the man that put the suitcase at Stewart and Market. So these two fellows thought, well, we'll have to get ahold of the police and find out if they're looking for this man. So one fellow went and got a cop.

When the cop came, they arrested this man and took him to the police station, and he said, "Yeah, I put the suitcase at Stewart and Market Street."

When they asked him why he did it, and he said, "Well, he'd given me five dollars for doing it." And they said, "Who gave you five dollars? Who hired you to put the suitcase down?" He said, "The Kaiser." So the police looked at this fellow and said, "Well, the poor guy is nuts, he's crazy. Says the Kaiser hired him to put the suitcase there."

But they held him in jail on the theory that
Billings: they'd have to take him before the court for a sanity hearing, I guess. The same night, the Danish Consul appeared at the police station and asked if they had this fellow, Ole Larsen. Nobody has ever found out yet how the Danish consul knew that that man was under arrest in Portland. But the Danish consul came in there and said, "This man is a Dane; he's not a citizen of the United States, he's a citizen of Denmark, and I'm responsible for him." He tried to get the man released. But the police wouldn't release him. They wanted to hear from San Francisco. Finally, the result of the whole thing was, that this Ole Larsen was finally taken before a court and committed to the insane asylum.

Now, nobody at that time, made any direct conclusion as to what he was talking about when he said the Kaiser hired him to put the suitcase there. But afterward, mulling it over in my mind for many years, I came to a conclusion. None of the private detectives, who worked as strike guards and so on, none of them
Billings: ever used their right name. They were always known, among their own group, at least, by some moniker, as we called it, some nickname, and Lew Smith, because he had worked for the German spies, Von Bopp and Von Brinken, and because he had been convicted with the German spies, was afterwards known as "Der Kaiser," among the strike breakers and gun guards. His moniker was "Der Kaiser." So when Larsen said that he was hired by "Der Kaiser" to put the suitcase at Stewart and Market Street, he wasn't talking about Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, he was talking about "Der Kaiser" Lew Smith. That's who hired him to put the suitcase there.

Labor Reactions; Legal Counsel

Gilb: When you were arrested and the trial took place, I'm particularly interested, what members of the labor movement came to your assistance and which ones did not?
Billings: When we were first arrested, of course, there was such an uproar in the papers, so many people were so badly frightened, that nobody came to see us for several days. I was six days held incommunicado and didn't get to see anybody. The Shoe Workers Union did send a lawyer, Edmund H. Lomasney, to interview me. The lawyer, of course, threatened to apply for habeas corpus, and that forced the prosecution to file a charge against me. They then charged me with murder under an information, and the next day we were all taken before the grand jury and were indicted on eight counts of murder.

Subsequently, then, Maxwell McNutt handled the case as chief counsel, and Lomasney's partner, John G. Lawler, was also working on the case. During my trial, those were the three attorneys that handled the defense. Maxwell McNutt acting as chief counsel, assisted by Edmund H. Lomasney and John G. Lawler.

Gilb: How did you happen to get McNutt as an attorney?

Billings: Well, McNutt entered the case upon the appeal of
illings: Tom Mooney because, prior to the bomb explosion, Martin Swanson had told McNutt that he would get Tom Mooney yet, that he had succeeded in putting a red shirt on him, and that he would soon put Mooney away where they wouldn't have to worry about him for many years. And that was during the period just prior to the bomb explosion, when I think that Swanson was planning to attempt dynamiting the parade, for which he expected to send Tom Mooney to the penitentiary.

BILLINGS' TRIAL

I know that the details of the trial are all of record. But you have mentioned to me that there were some aspects of the trial that weren't of record.

illings: Yes. One of the principal aspects of the trial -- of my trial -- I was tried first. My trial began on the 11th of September, I believe, 1916. I was charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder. Not having any evidence against me on the direct charge of murder and feeling that they were not going to be able to
Billings: secure a conviction on a murder charge, the prosecution's theory was that they could put in on a conspiracy charge, anything as evidence. As the lawyers usually say, on a conspiracy charge, you can throw in everything but the kitchen sink. In fact, I think you can work the kitchen sink in pretty nicely in most conspiracy cases if you spend a little time and effort doing it.

At any rate, I was charged with conspiracy to commit murder, and it was the plan of the prosecution to introduce all of the evidence obtainable about all of the sabotage that had been done during the Pacific Gas & Electric Company strike in 1913, during the waterfront strike in 1916, during the automobile mechanics' strike in 1916, and during the culinary workers' strike in 1916. In other words, they were going to attempt to prove to the court that I was the guy that did all this, and that because I was the one that did all this, that that made me guilty of murder. In fact, District Attorney Fickert, when
Millings: he made his opening address in my trial, promised
the court that he would prove that in the year 1913,
Tom Mooney and I entered into a conspiracy to kill
all the people in the state of California that didn't
agree with our political opinion. That was the state-
ment that he made in the court, and in order to sub-
stantiate that statement, he intended to attempt to
produce all of the evidence of sabotage in any labor
disturbance that had occurred in San Francisco and
vicinity from the early part of the year 1913 up to
the latter part of the year 1916.

Of course, after a great portion of this
evidence had been offered and had been laid before
the jury in my case, then the lawyer representing
me, Maxwell McNutt, objected to this evidence and
finally after considerable argument, the court ruled
that the so-called conspiracy evidence was inadmissible.
And the charge of conspiracy to commit murder was
dismissed. And I was held and tried then merely
on the charge of murder. All of the evidence that
Billings: had already been presented to the court regarding 1913 was ordered stricken from the record, and the jury was told to strike it from their minds. But jurors never do. The mere fact that the court says you must strike this from your mind doesn't mean anything. So actually, that conspiracy evidence had a great bearing, I feel, on the final verdict against me.

Gilb: Do you think that Judge Dunne was prejudiced in any way because you'd come up before him previously?

Billings: Not because I had come up before him previously. He was prejudiced because the automobile on which I shot paint remover was the automobile of his doctor, who was a very close friend of his. In fact, we had the doctor on the witness stand, and I of course did not admit at that time that I was the one who had put the paint remover on the car. I merely testified that I had come through Union Square Alley and had seen the car there with this irregular white streak on the side of it. I testi-
Billings:  Vied to that in order to identify that particular car as being there at the particular time that I was there, which was approximately at the time the bomb exploded.

Gilb: One of Mooney's letters claims that you were prejudiced against McNutt. What was the basis for that remark?

Billings: That developed subsequently. Not prior to my trial, but at the end of my trial. You see, during my trial, when we were selecting the jury, McNutt wanted on the jury an old Scotchman, McNutt being a Scotchman himself. And I objected to this particular juror. McNutt and I had some words about it. Finally I allowed it to go that way, but afterwards I was very sorry I did. This Scotchman, who became foreman of the jury and was actually in control of the verdict they rendered, we found out many years later had previously written letters to the Mayor about the case, expressing a very strong opinion against any defendant who would be arrested for this particular type of crime, not mentioning any defendants, of course, but
Billings: just any defendants in general who were arrested for it. He would be very much prejudiced and could be depended upon, he said, to convict them. In fact, he made that statement in a letter which he sent to the Mayor, which we finally uncovered in the year 1936, twenty years after the trial, and some years after the death of the juror, too, by the way.

Gilb: But during the trial you had confidence in McNutt.

Billings: More or less. Not too much. Afterwards, I had no great animosity against McNutt. Of course, I did think that he made two or three mistakes. One mistake was the acceptance of that juror, and another mistake was in his closing address to the jury at the end of the trial, when he was confident that we were going to get an acquittal. He took opportunity to try to butter up the jury a little bit, as he thought, and he said, "We have had our trial, and I must say, a fair and noble one." He thought he was buttering up the court, buttering up the jury, perhaps, but actually, he was laying the groundwork for a serious
Billings: obstruction that got in our way a good deal afterwards on appeal. Because when he went to the appeals court, claiming that we hadn't gotten a fair trial, why, they pointed out to him that he had said that we had had a fair trial.

TO FOLSOM AGAIN

Gilb: What ambitions, what plans for the future had you had at the time you went to prison?

Billings: Up to that time I don't think I had had any particular plans for the future. Working kids at that time usually didn't have too extensive plans, especially in view of the fact that I had very little education, although I had graduated from public school, of course, but that was all the education I had. I didn't have any technical education. My only trade was that of a shoe cutter, a very seasonal and very poor occupation.

Gilb: Were you worried about your future?
Billings: No, not particularly.

Gilb: Just lived from day to day.

Billings: Yes. Young people at that time more or less always had confidence in their ability to eke out an existence tomorrow the same as they did yesterday.

Gilb: How did you feel about being back in Folsom again? Was it a terribly bitter experience, or did you expect to be out at any time?

Billings: When I first went back to Folsom, I felt reasonably sure that I would have a good opportunity of securing justice in the next few years. I didn't have any conception of how long it would take, but I couldn't see why an innocent man should expect to be kept in jail for any length of time. Of course, I expected that it would be a few years, but then a few years is a comparative length of time. It might be two years or two hundred, I guess. All depends on what you consider a few. But at any rate, I was always more or less hopeful that I would secure my release eventually, and I was always confident that I would
Billings: be able to carry on until that time.

Gilb: In general, while you were in prison, did you feel any resentment over the fact that Tom Mooney dominated the situation?

Billings: No, no, not that way. That isn't what happened. The fact of the matter is that we were separated, and I was held incommunicado in Folsom. For six years, I wasn't allowed to see anybody except one attorney, John G. Lawler, and he had to get a special permit from the Board of Prison Directors every time he came to see me, and he was only allowed to visit me every three months. During that time, if I tried to do anything in connection with the case, I would be quite liable to be working at cross purposes with Tom. And when I first went to Folsom, Tom was still in San Francisco in the county jail, so that he was still in contact with people on the outside, and I was separated from him. Consequently, I allowed Tom to go ahead and handle the matter.
LABOR'S SUPPORT

Gilb: What labor people came to your aid?

Billings: As near as I can remember, the first one that came to our assistance, actually, was Alexander Berkman. He came to our assistance, not here, but in New York City. He was in New York at the time of the explosion, I believe. Subsequently, he solicited funds from all of the New York needle trades workers and the Jewish labor unions in New York and a great many other organizations back there, and I believe he was the first one that actually solicited funds for our defense. Here in San Francisco, there were quite a large number of radicals and progressives, but they were very much frightened by our arrest, and it was some time before even they came to our defense. They did eventually, however. The labor unions, of course, were against us, preponderantly, until long after my trial.

Gilb: Didn't Arthur Brouillet -- I recall talking to him five years ago, and he said he had some connection with your trial.
Billings: A. W. Brouillet was the president of the San Francisco Labor Council at that time. He was one of the ones who was most positive that we were guilty, and one of the ones that stood in the way of organized labor doing anything for us. Actually, one of the important people in organized labor who came forward a little later and began to try to do something for us and who did succeed in convincing organized labor that the Mooney case really was a labor case was Paul Scharrenberg, who was Secretary of the California State Federation of Labor at the time.

Gilb: At about what time did he start really taking an interest?

Billings: Late in 1916, I should say. I don't recall definitely the date and I don't know. Paul did his work very quietly among the union officials to whom he frequently wrote letters and to whom he talked a good deal about the case. He did his work unobtrusively, so that none of us knew actually that he was doing anything in our favor until some years later.
Gilb: As time went on, which unions were most helpful?

Billings: Well, I couldn't say that any one particular union was more helpful than others. The United Mine Workers made large contributions at various times, and a great many other organizations did too. In fact, all of the big unions contributed liberally to our defense at various times.

Gilb: In San Francisco, which individuals and union representatives were conspicuous by their absence of support?

Billings: P. H. McCarthy and Andy Gallagher.

Gilb: For obvious reasons.

Billings: They were conspicuous for their absence all right. Of course, personally, I never did hold any grudge against any of these people because of their opinions about the case. In the early days, they were convinced that we were guilty and they didn't want to be identified with people who were guilty of throwing a bomb. I didn't blame them a bit for that. If they thought that way, why, it was too bad, but it was
Billings: their belief. I thought that they should have been educated, they should have been convinced, as to what the truth of the matter was, but at the same time I didn't feel angry at them, particularly, because they didn't take up our defense.

Gilb: I know that the Moulders didn't become active in the case until around April, 1917, and that even after that time they were only active off and on, and the Machinists were active up to 1920 and then their support fell off. How do you account for this lack of complete support from the very groups that you and Tom Mooney had been assisting?

Billings: Because Ed Nolan was a member of the Machinists Union, the Machinists probably became active more easily than any of the other unions, except, of course, the New York Needle Trades Unions, which were in the forefront of the fight earlier than 1917. The Moulders Union, because of certain people in it who were enemies of Tom Mooney, held aloof from it, and actually, when Tom Mooney formed the Tom Mooney
Billings: Defense Committee, in 1917, before I went to Folsom, there were only three members of the Molders Union associated with the case. One of them was Tom Mooney's brother John. Actually, they were just three individual members of the union that happened to know Tom. These other two besides his brother were just fellows that knew him and had no particular enmity towards him. The officials of the union were antagonistic to Tom and had been all during the time that he was active in the Molders Union, because he was a known radical and was considered a disturbing influence in the union. That is, he asked questions frequently at meetings that they didn't like to answer.

Silb: Do you think that labor had a slightly different attitude towards you and towards your case than it did toward Mooney's?

Billings: They always had an entirely different attitude towards me personally than they did towards Tom, because of the fact that although I had been in the Labor Council during 1915, I was not too well known by the officials
Billings: of the labor movement, and those officials that did know me knew that I had been an active participant in numerous strikes and they didn't consider me the same type of person that they considered Tom Mooney. In fact, the general opinion of Tom in the Labor Council was that Tom was a wild-eyed radical. They didn't have that particular opinion of me because I hadn't been openly engaged in so many radical activities. I hadn't been openly identified with so many radical activities as Tom had.

Gilb: You were younger and less influential at that time.

Billings: Yes, that's true. I was only in the Labor Council for a short period.

Gilb: Do you think they thought of you as a labor person at all?

Billings: I think not. The general officials of the San Francisco Labor Council didn't recognize me as a labor person at all, because I really hadn't come in contact with them.

Gilb: What did they think of Ed Nolan?
Billings: Well, they all knew Ed Nolan and although he was known as a radical, he was generally pretty well liked, except by the most reactionary union officials. The most reactionary union officials were slightly opposed to Ed Nolan too, because of his radical activities, but not nearly as much as they were opposed to Tom Mooney.

The Mooney Case, 1917-1922

Gilb: Let's outline briefly the steps in the Billings case during the period you were held incommunicado.

In April, 1917, a League was formed to work for the recall of District Attorney Fickert. Paul Scharrenberg and Dan Murphy played a part in that, and the officers of the Fickert Recall League were: C. A. Linn, attorney, chairman; Sara Bard Field; Timothy Driscoll of the Gas and Water Workers Union; Dr. Winifred S. Foster; Michael F. Coll of the United Glass Workers Union; Selina Solomons; John Lyons, J. H. Young, and Jas. J. Corbett of the
Gilb: Plasterers Union; and Henry Lay of the House-Smiths Union.

Also during 1917, the Supreme Court denied a new trial on the grounds that there was no error revealed in the record itself.

Then on January, 1918, the Federal Mediation Commission released its report on the case. Mooney's execution was set for August 23, 1918. The Supreme Court's final, negative, decision on appeal came on July 22, 1918. Governor Stephens was silent for a long time despite mass protest meetings and President Wilson's urging that Mooney be given a new trial. Finally he granted a stay of execution and after re-election commuted Mooney's sentence to life imprisonment.

Billings: Bob Minor, of course, was the first one that became secretary of our defense committee, and he quit a job on the New York World, where he was working as a cartoonist, to come out here to San Francisco to be secretary of our defense committee. That was,
Billings: I think, before my trial, but I can't remember what date.

Gilb: And did he do a good job for you?

Billings: Oh yes. Bob did a very good job. Of course, he and Tom Mooney had some differences of opinion about propaganda and the construction of the pamphlets and so on, but still, Bob did a very good job.

Gilb: How about Ed Nolan, when he took over in 1917?

Billings: Well, Ed Nolan also did a very good job while he was secretary of the committee, after Bob left. Of course, being in jail, I didn't have too much opportunity to be in on all of the happenings of the defense committee.

Gilb: Did you have much contact with Rena Mooney after she took over the defense from Ed in 1920?

Billings: No, not too much, because in that period I was in Folsom. Because Tom and I were in separate institutions and not allowed to correspond, I didn't get into very much contact with any person connected with the Tom Mooney Moulders Committee.
Billings: I believe in 1921 or '22, when John Mooney went to the American Federation of Labor convention and protested to the convention that he had stopped to see me on his way to the convention, which was held in Denver that year, and that he had been refused permission to see me. After this protest to the American Federation of Labor, the officials of the American Federation wrote a letter of the Governor and complained about the matter; and it was not until after that, probably some months after, that I was first allowed to receive visitors, other than my one lawyer. I think that probably it was late in 1922 that John Mooney came back from the convention, probably October, and I think it was early '23 when Rena Mooney visited me for the first time.
LIFE IN PRISON

The Stonemason

Gilb: During your early years in Folsom, what were you doing with your time?

Billings: For the first six years that I was in Folsom, I worked cutting granite building blocks to build the prison with.

Gilb: How come you did that so long?

Billings: That, of course, went back to 1913 when I first went there. I got into an argument with J. J. Smith, and he had asked me what I did for a living and I said I was a shoecutter, and he said, "I'll make a stonemason out of you. You go down to the stoneyard and stay there." He issued orders to the captain to keep me in the stoneyard all of my time. So I did most of my time in the stoneyard. I did get out at one period and sneak over to the sand gang and worked there for awhile and then got shifted back to the stoneyard. That was when Dan Curran was
Billings: captain. When I came back in 1917, J. J. Smith ordered me put back in the stoneyard and issued orders for me to be kept there. So I was kept there until 1924. I was there seven years and four months in the stoneyard.

Although the stoneyard was supposed to be a punishment gang, actually it was one of the easiest jobs in the prison. The men who worked there were generally old-timers, mostly hard-boiled old cons, but they had sense enough to keep out of trouble and to get along the easiest way possible. And not only that, but they had some sense of organization.

Watchmaking

Gilb: When did you start to learn how to fix watches?

Billings: It was in 1919 that I first started to work on watches. While I was in jail, I had sent my good watch out and got ahold of a Westclock model dollar watch, and I had used it about a year in the jail and then took it to Folsom with me. When I got to
Billings: Folsom, they took my dollar watch away from me and put it in the office. But late in 1919 they changed the rules and allowed a prisoner to have a cheap watch. So I got my watch back, and it didn't run. It had dried out and gummed up laying in the office.

So I took the watch down in the stoneyard and I got ahold of a large tenpenny nail, flattened it out with a stonecutter's hammer and borrowed a file and filed it square on the end and made a screwdriver out of it. I took the watch apart with the screwdriver and soaked all the parts in the coal oil and wiped them off with a white handkerchief and brushed them with an old toothbrush and put the watch back together again and it ran.

So a fellow that was working next to me on the next rock, Blackie Wilson, saw me fix my watch and asked me to fix his. I took it apart, as I had mine, and cleaned it thoroughly and put it back together, and it would run a few ticks and then stop. I had studied the principles of mechanics some years
Billings: before that, and I knew that there are only two things that stop a piece of machinery from running: dirt and friction. I knew there was no dirt in the watch, because I had just cleaned it thoroughly, so I began to examine it for points of excessive friction, and I discovered that the pivots on the end of the balance staff was worn rounded, on the end, and they had worn a rounded dent into the screws that they worked in so that the dent was the same size and shape as the end of the pivot, and that created too much friction. So I borrowed a Chinese pump drill, from another prisoner who made abalone shell work and one thing and another, and I placed the balance staff of the watch in the drill, figured out a method of grinding it down and finally ground it down to where it had fine conical points again, put it back in the watch and put a little light motor oil on it, which I had borrowed from an electrician, and in that way I was able to make the watch work properly.

Blackie Wilson, the fellow who owned the watch
Billings: (actually his name was Eugene Quiada; he was half-Mexican and half-Irish; his father was a Mexican saddlemaker here in San Francisco and his mother was an Irishwoman), made himself up a big double-breasted watch chain out of horsehair. He had shirts with two pockets, and on Sunday, Blackie came out with this big double-breasted watch chain across the front of his shirt. Some of the fellows thought he didn't really have a watch so Blackie pulled it out and said, "Billings just fixed it." After that one after another came around to me with watches.

So to be accommodating, I started fixing watches for these fellows. I didn't know anything about it, but each watch posed a particular problem, and I would sit down and study it out and then think about ways and means of correcting the trouble. I had been doing a great deal of studying at that time (English, mathematics, philosophy, psychology and a few other things), and I came to the realization that working on watches and solving the mechanical
Billings: problems that they posed was recreation from the studying that I had been doing. My mind was beginning to get congested from trying to absorb too much, which I undoubtedly was unprepared for, inasmuch as I had had only a grade-school education.

Gilb: How did you happen to be studying? Just for your own interest?

Billings: Yes. In order to have something to do. For the first couple of years that I was there, I read nearly every evening, from four o'clock to nine.

Shoemaking and Contraband

Billings: Beginning around 1924, I was three years in the prison shoe shop, during which time I was the shoe cutter. I was actually assistant foreman, unofficially. I hadn't been officially appointed as assistant foreman, but I was very friendly with the young fellow that was foreman, and because I had a better education than he did, I kept a record of all the supplies and made out the requisitions for supplies that he
Hillings: needed, just to assist him.

That ended in 1927, at the time of the so-called Thanksgiving riot in Folsom. It wasn't a riot, actually; it was an attempt to escape on the part of six individuals. But one of these individuals had been armed with a straight razor, and naturally, after an affair of that kind, the guards and prison officials would make a complete search of the institution. In searching the shoe shop, they found considerable material which they considered contraband, among which was a straight razor, which belonged to me. That is, I had it in my possession, although it had been stolen from the supply room. The guard of the shoe shop used to come into the cutting room and borrow my straight razor about twice a week and shave himself with it. But he didn't know that it was stolen. When I was questioned about it, I was forced to admit to the captain of the guard that the razor had been stolen. Fortunately, the fellow that had stolen the razor had long since been released
Billings: from prison, so they couldn't punish him, but they also found considerable other contraband in the shoe shop, particularly in my department. They found some food and some shoes and some cash money, not very much, maybe four or five dollars. All of this stuff was contraband. The foreman of the cutting room of the shoe shop who had been my friend had been sick for three or four weeks just prior to this and had not been working in the shoe shop. The job of foreman had been given to a little Italian fellow who worked in the shoe shop. When the search was made, the guards questioned the little Italian fellow about everything that was found and he said, "I don't know. It must belong to Billings." So everything that was contraband was credited to me.

Gilb: How did it all get there?

Billings: Various ways. For instance, some of the members of the I.W.W. who were serving sentences on the Criminal Syndicalist charge had been in the prison for some years and were being released about that time.
Billings: While I was working in the shoe shop, when they were about to be released, I would make a special pair of outgoing shoes for them, cut out of the best parts of the leather obtainable, and then I would make the shoes entirely by hand, sewing the soles on by hand. Those shoes, of course, were considered contraband. They were not regulation discharge shoes. I think they found two or three pair of these shoes.

Then the money that was found in the shoe shop was found in my cutting bench, in the table, and contraband coffee was also found in the shop. That didn't belong to me, but I got credit for owning it. And so anyway, when the captain called me into his office and questioned me about all the contraband that was found in the shoe shop and about the straight razor, I merely told him that inasmuch as he was going to put me in the dungeon for having the straight razor, he might just as well put me in for the contraband shoes and the money and the coffee
Billings: and anything else he could dig up, because I couldn't see any reason why four or five of us should go to the dungeon over the same beef.

Instead of putting me in the dungeon, the captain put me out on a pick-and-shovel job, which he was using for punishment gang at that time. They were digging away a large hill on one part of the prison grounds, to build a new administration building and a new hospital. I worked out there a year. Four or five or seven or eight young fellows gathered around me, and we worked together and became recognized as a group. The guard in charge used to call it, "Billings's gang." One of my gang overheard the guard tell the captain, "There's Billings and his gang over there. I never do catch them sitting down. They're always working. They're one of the best gangs I have on the job." The fact of the matter is we were using a system. We always assigned one man to watch the guard, so every time the guard looked our way, we were always moving.
Billings: When he looked the other way, we all stopped moving. So we got the reputation of being a gang of good workers.

Gilb: Did you organize this?

Billings: It more or less grew up. It didn't have to be organized.

I.W.W. Men in Prison

Gilb: Were the I.W.W. people your best friends in prison?

Billings: I was good friends with all the I.W.W. there. Of course, I was also good friends with a great many other people there, with some of the prisoners that had been there a long time, serving life sentences. Some of the real old-timers. When I was in Folsom in 1914, I made friends with old Indian Dick, an old Indian who had been sent to Folsom in 1878, when the prison was first built. In fact, Dick had been transferred from San Quentin to Folsom. The guards and officials of the prison said that Dick had shot seven Chinese and had scalped them and took
Billings: their queues into Sacramento and tried to collect
a bounty on them. Whether or not that was true, I
don't know. Dick denied it.

Billings: This was what he was in prison for?

Billings: Yes, he was in prison for killing these seven
Chinese.

Billings: Who were some of the I.W.W. people you knew there?

Billings: Jimmy Price was there at the time I was there.

Billings: He probably was the best-known of the group that
was there aside from Ford and Suhr, of course. They
were convicted, not of criminal syndicalism. They
were convicted in the Wheatland riot in 1913. Blackie
Ford and I found a space over in the quarry that was
not being used, and we leveled it off and built a
wall around it and got some topsoil from up on top
of the hill and made a garden. Planted some canta-
loupe one summer. And Dick Suhr also worked in the
stoneyard with me. That is, he didn't work right
with me in the same block, but he worked in the stone-
yard the same time I did. And I was very friendly
Billings: with him, of course. In fact, when the I.W.W. prisoners were brought into Folsom on criminal syndicalism charges, at first they were all assigned to the stoneyard for six months. And that was during the period that I was working there, probably around 1922, about the time of the Palmer raid. The general idea of the prison at that time was to assign new men to the stoneyard for a period of six months. And then after six months, if their conduct was satisfactory, they would be moved to other jobs.

Visitors

Gilb: Did you ever write to your mother or be in communication with her after you went to Folsom?

Billings: I was in communication with my sister in Philadelphia, and my sister was always in touch with my mother. My mother lived with my sister in Philadelphia considerable of the time, and in fact during the time I was in Folsom, the General Defense Committee of the Industrial Workers of the World every Christmas took up a
Billings: collection for Christmas Fund for prisoners all over the country, and I was always included as one of the prisoners who were selected as beneficiaries of that fund. They used to send money to me, and I would generally write them in advance and suggest that they send the money to my mother instead of to me. In fact one year in particular I recall, my mother was living in Philadelphia with my sister, and my sister's husband had died in an insane asylum just prior to that. My sister had three small children, and they were having a very hard time. It was a cold, hard winter in Philadelphia, and they were having a very hard time. I wrote to the General Defense Committee and asked them to send the money to my mother and sister instead of sending it to me, and the result was that I received a letter from the General Defense Committee in which they told me that they had just sent $50 to my mother and $50 to my sister and were also sending $50 to me.

Gilb: Did any of your friends come visit you during all
Gilb: this period? Did Ed Hurley ever come see you?

Billings: Ed Hurley only came to see me once. That was the time that I sent for him. Ed was in the Assembly at the time, and he came to see me with another Assemblyman. I don't remember whether it was Walter McGovern or not. I think maybe it was. I don't recall the details just now, but whatever it was that I wanted done, Hurley refused to do it.

Gilb: That's gratitude! Who else came to see you pretty regularly?

Billings: There were quite a few people that came to see me. None of them really regularly, except after my present wife, Josephine Rudolf, came to see me the first time, she visited me more regularly than anyone else.

Gilb: She hadn't known you before you were in prison, had she?

Billings: No. She got acquainted with me while I was in prison through correspondence as a result of her mother wanting to write a letter to me. Her mother was an invalid, crippled with arthritis and unable to write,
Billings: so she had Josephine write the letter to me and I got into correspondence with Josephine and we carried on the correspondence. I don't recall what year it was that we started to correspond. I think it was 1926, but I don't recall specifically.

Gilb: Did Ed Nolan or any of your old friends visit you?

Billings: Ed Nolan never did come to see me, I don't believe, because of the fact that when he was first released, he was still under indictment. It wasn't until years later those indictments were dismissed, and I don't think Ed Nolan ever did come to see me.

Gilb: Any of your other friends in the labor movement?

Billings: A few. At various times different ones came. My most frequent, most regular visitors, were Madeline Wieland and Fremont Older, I should say. They had a regulation in Folsom that only relatives were supposed to visit. And so as a general rule they refused to allow people in unless they got a special permit. Madeline Wieland having many years ago at one time been married to a cousin of mine, back in
Billings: New York City, was listed on the books at Folsom as
my cousin, and she was allowed to visit me regularly.

THE MOONEY-BILLINGS CASE, 1920's

Silb: Let's get back to the Mooney-Billings case. I know
it was around '22 or '23 that Mooney had a sharp break
with labor over his support of Richardson. Do you
know anything about that?

Billings: No, I don't. Tom was always having some difficulties
with certain people in the labor movement, and my
only recollection of the Richardson administration
is more closely identified with its closing months,
during which time the lawyer from Grayville, Mr. Ellis,
came to California, and went to see Tom and also went
to see Governor Richardson and then came to visit me.
It was at that time that Ellis advised me to file a
petition for executive clemency without stating
definitely that I wanted a full pardon. It was his
Billings: contention that the Governor had indicated to him that if I would apply for a commutation of sentence or would apply for a general executive clemency without stating definitely what type, that the Governor would probably commute my sentence to about thirty years, which would allow my term to expire shortly after the Governor went out of office.

The petition for clemency was to be based on the statement made in an affidavit by John McDonald, who was the only witness against me in my trial who attempted to place me at the scene of the crime. In his affidavit, which was made, I believe, in 1921, in the office of Frank P. Walsh in New York City, John McDonald had admitted that he had never seen either Tom Mooney or myself in his life until we were pointed out to him in the jail. These statements indicated clearly that McDonald was entirely a false witness, and that his testimony was entirely untrue. He also admitted in that affidavit that he had been offered a large slice of the $17,500 reward and that
Billings: it was in hope of getting that reward that he had testified, and his affidavit alone seemed to me, at least, to be sufficient grounds for reversal of the sentence against me.

Milb: I know, as a matter of fact, that in 1922 you and Mooney reached an agreement whereby you said it would be all right if Mooney presented his case first. What was your motive for agreeing to that?

Billings: That was shortly after the affidavit of John McDonald was made, and the first time that I brought up this matter about applying for executive clemency. Tom had sent me word that he expected to apply for clemency in his case, and so we reached an agreement that he would apply first in his case and I would hold my case in abeyance until some decision had been reached in his case. However, that agreement fell through because Tom Mooney did not file any petition in his case, and this lawyer, Ellis, insisted that I should file before Governor Richardson went out of office, because Richardson had assured him that he would give
Billings: me some consideration, although Richardson had specifically stated to Ellis that he would not take any action in the Mooney case.

Gilb: Did you apply for executive clemency?

Billings: I attempted to apply for executive clemency, but because my case had to be predicated upon the statement of John McDonald, I had to first secure a certified copy of McDonald's affidavit. I attempted to secure this from the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee, and in various ways I was stalled. The thing never was actually refused, but it never was forthcoming. I finally did get an uncertified copy after some years. It was quite a long time before I was able to get a certified copy.

In the meantime, I believe it was in 1926, I broke with Tom Mooney as a result of my efforts to get this document, and the result was that I organized what I called the "Warren K. Billings Committee for Pardon." With Madeline Wieland as secretary. She had previously been office secretary of the Inter-
Billings: national Workers Defense League. Prior to that Paul Scharrenberg had come to see me for the first time, and during the course of our visit, after we had talked for an hour or an hour and a half, Scharrenberg looked at me and he said, "Well, you're not at all the kind of a fellow that I thought you'd be." And I said, "What do you mean?" "Well," he said, "I had an idea that you were like Tom Mooney, a wild-eyed radical of some kind." But he said, "You don't seem to be." And I said, "Well, I've never considered myself as a wild-eyed radical. I've always considered myself as a progressive trade unionist." And from then on, Scharrenberg was more favorable to me than he ever had been toward Mooney, although long before that, in spite of the fact that he disliked Tom Mooney heartily, he had done a great deal of work to convince organized labor generally that the Mooney-Billings case actually was a labor case.

Silb: I'd like to ask a question. What was the motive of this Moulders Defense Committee in not helping you secure clemency?
Billings: Tom objected to me applying for executive clemency at that time. I don't know just exactly what his attitude on the matter was. I never was able to talk to him, of course, and I couldn't find out very well through a third person, but it seemed that Tom had an idea that any action of that kind taken in my case would interfere with plans that he had for taking certain action in his own case. They prevented me from filing my petition for executive clemency for a number of years, and even with the Warren K. Billings Committee for Pardon, I still didn't succeed in getting the pardon trial. It was not until 1927, I believe, or 1928, that I finally secured the certified copy of the McDonald affidavit, and then in the meantime, while I had been preparing my petition and trying to get this certified copy that I needed, the legislature had met, I believe in 1927, and they had adopted a new law providing that any person who applied for executive clemency and had previously been convicted of a felony would have to apply directly
Billings: to the Supreme Court for their recommendation before submitting the petition to the Governor.

The procedure, prior to that, always had been that the appellant filed his petition in the Governor's office. The Governor considered the petition, and if he thought he wanted to grant executive clemency in the case, he would then submit the case to the Supreme Court for their recommendation, which is required by constitutional provision for anyone who had been twice convicted of felony. And the Governor in most cases would merely call up the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and say, "Judge, I'm sending you the papers on the Joe Smith case and I want a recommendation for executive clemency" or for commutation of sentence or for pardon or for whatever he wanted, and the Chief Justice would call the court together and would say, "We have a request from the Governor for a recommendation in the case of so-and-so," And the justices, a required number of them, at least, would sign the recommendation and it would be sent back to the
Billings: Governor's office. Generally, it was done without any consideration of the case at all other than the fact that the Governor wanted the recommendation. In cases where the Governor did not want a recommendation and did not want to issue any executive clemency, why, the case just never was submitted to the Supreme Court at all by the Governor. Usually it was referred to the Governor's Advisory Pardon Board, and the Advisory Pardon Board continued the matter from one year to another and just stalled it off so that nothing ever happened.

In my case, after the legislature had adopted this new provision which made it necessary for me to apply directly to the Supreme Court instead of sending my petition to the Governor, I asked several lawyers by mail what form such a petition should be drawn in. None of them seemed to know. There was absolutely no precedent for such a law and no precedent for any form. So I studied through the law books that I had in my possession and came to the conclusion that it
Billings: should be in the form of an affidavit the same as a petition before a court. And so I drew a petition and submitted it to the State Supreme Court, entitled, "A Petition for Recommendation for Executive Clemency for Warren X. Billings."

I believe that was in 1929 that I finally submitted that, and the Supreme Court held it without taking any action on it until the early part of 1930, and then Fremont Older came to visit me, and in a discussion of the matter, Fremont Older called my attention to the fact that it was possible for a committee of citizens to stop the wages of the Supreme Court Justices if the committee could charge, upon substantiated grounds, that the Supreme Court had been dilatory in its duty in considering any case that was on its docket. That is, if the Court had not made any decision or had not taken any action, on any case that had been submitted to it, a committee of any three citizens could file a complaint with the state treasurer, and thus stop the state treasurer
Billings: from paying the salaries of the Supreme Court judges until some action had been taken on the matter.

Older promised to do this. I believe he did. I never saw the document; I don't remember too much about it, but I think that Older did file a statement with the state treasurer which caused the Supreme Court to immediately take some action on my petition. At one period, the Chief Justice had issued a statement to the newspapers in which he had said that the court did not know what its jurisdiction was in the matter.

I took the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of the State of California, a couple of more law books and looked through them and I came to the conclusion that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court was the same in this particular matter as it would be in any petition for any type of writ—habeas corpus or any of the other writs which can be filed before the Supreme Court.

So I wrote a letter to the Supreme Court stating
Billings: that that was my opinion and setting forth the
sections of the Constitution and so on and so forth
on which my opinion was based.

The Supreme Court, of course, got very angry,
immediately that they received my letter, because
they considered it considerable of an insult for a
prisoner in the penitentiary to be telling the Supreme
Court what their jurisdiction was. They immediately
called the hearing on my petition and denied it
without any consideration. That later brought about
the hearing that was granted before the Supreme Court
in 1930, which was one of the most unusual proceedings
ever held under American jurisprudence.

ilb: Before you get into that, I want to know what attorneys
you consulted, or did you consult attorneys in drawing
up your original petition? Was this all your own work?

Billings: It was all my own work. I built up the entire
petition myself and typed it myself and bound it
myself and everything else.

ilb: Did you look up your own law?
Billings: Yes. I had several law books in my possession, and copies of the United States Supreme Court reports, all of the penal code and code of civil procedure in the State of California, and the Constitution of the United States and of the State of California, and several other books, including Cowdery's *Legal Forms*, Dunlop's *Elementary Law*, and several other books. I had quite a few law books at the time. I had been studying law, in fact, for about six years.

Gilb: Did Frank Walsh give you any advice? Did you consult with him at all?

Billings: Not at that period. I tried to get in touch with Frank Walsh at that period, and I don't recall just -- I think that my only inquiry of Frank Walsh at that time was that he could supply me with a certified copy of the McDonald affidavit. And I think he assured me that he could not, because he didn't have a certified copy of it in his possession, because he had turned the copy over to the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee.
Gilb: Did you have any contact with Clarence Darrow in the twenties?

Billings: No, I don't believe it was in the twenties unless it might have been late in '29, but I don't think so. I think it was in the early thirties, that I had correspondence with Clarence Darrow on the habeas corpus proceedings.

Gilb: Were you aware of the Sacco-Vanzetti case?

Billings: Oh yes. I read about it in the Eastern papers. You see, we were not allowed to have any local state papers. We did get out-of-state papers. I read the Chicago Tribune at times, and at times I read the New York Times and at one time I believe I read the Philadelphia Public Ledger. I think I was reading the Ledger at the time of the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

Gilb: Did you think it had parallels to your own case?

Billings: Yes, in a way. Inasmuch as Sacco and Vanzetti were absolutely innocent of the crime with which they were charged. The fact of the matter is that the United States Department of Justice practically assassinated
Billings: a partner of Vanzetti's in New York which caused Sacco and Vanzetti to start a propaganda campaign against the Department of Justice. Which actually is what resulted in their being arrested and being charged with this crime.

I think everyone who followed the Sacco-Vanzetti case knows that Sacco and Vanzetti were not the ones who robbed the bank in Braintree.

Gilb: Do you think that the widespread interest in that case sort of cut into funds that might otherwise have gone into the Mooney-Billings case?

Billings: Well, I don't know. It might possibly have done so, but I don't think it had any serious effect on the Mooney-Billings case.

Gilb: Another thing I wondered is in 1927, Anita Whitney was granted full pardon. You must have heard about this.

Billings: Oh yes. I was conscious of the Anita Whitney case. The fact of the matter is that J. E. Snyder and John Taylor, the two co-defendants of Anita Whitney
Billings: were both formerly active in the Mooney defense. Particularly J. E. Snyder. In fact I knew J. E. Snyder very well, and his wife and daughter. They used to visit me in the jail in San Francisco before I went to Folsom in 1917.

Gilb: Did you feel when she was pardoned and you and Mooney were not, that this was a kind of injustice?

Billings: Oh no. We merely felt... All of us I think felt the same way about that. Anita after all was a member of a very wealthy family. She had relatives who had a great deal of money and a great deal of political prestige. Under the system that we have in the United States, it was quite to be expected that Anita would be pardoned.

Gilb: Even by Governor Young?

Billings: Oh yes. Sure. Governor Young was just as big a faker as any of the rest of them.

Gilb: I noted in going over the Mooney letters, there were many to other people but relatively few to you, during the late twenties. Were you on good terms?
Billings: I never did have any direct correspondence with Mooney, you know. Never allowed to. Any letters that I ever received from Mooney -- I think there were only two or three, which I received during the period when he and I were having some disagreement as to procedure, and those letters were actually written to Rena or Mary Gallagher or somebody in the office and then they were readdressed to me afterwards, although they were specifically intended to go to me.

Gilb: During the time that Mary Gallagher was in charge of the Mooney defense, did she confer frequently with you?

Billings: She did for awhile. At one period in the early stages of her work in the committee, she didn't have any contact with me. She came to see me once, I believe, and then it was a long time before I saw her again. Then near the end, when she was having difficulties with Tom, she came to see me quite frequently. And then when Mary went out of the office, her sister,
Billings: Ann Vance, took over the job as secretary of the committee for a short time, and Ann visited me a few times. During that period another woman named Dorothy Murphy had been working in the committee office and was trying to work her way in as secretary. She came to visit me a few times. Trying to get me to assist her in getting the job as secretary of the committee. Of course I had nothing to do with it and couldn't do anything to help her if I wanted to, but I didn't have any particular desire to.

Gilb: Did Mary Gallagher consult with you on policy or just come to see you as a friend?

Billings: Well, she came to see me ostensibly to tell me what was going on in the committee and what the committee was doing, but I didn't always find out just what was going on. The visits were generally more just friendly visits, and naturally she'd only tell me what things she wanted me to know. What things they didn't want me to know, I didn't find out about.

Gilb: What sort of things didn't they want you to know?
Billings: Well, I don't know, of course.

Gilb: Yes, I know, but what do you imagine now that they were?

Billings: Well, when she was having difficulties with Tom, at the beginning of the affair, I didn't find out anything about it for several months. In fact, it was not until I found out about it through other people that I was able to get any information out of Mary Gallagher. She had never said anything to me about it. As I recall it now, it seems that for a period of months there she tried to make me believe that everything was going along smoothly when at the same time she was having considerable difficulty with Tom.

Gilb: It's obvious from his letters to her that he was in love with her at one time.

Billings: He thought he was.

Gilb: Of course, it's obvious that she worked very hard and very loyally for him, and that she eventually ran into the same kind of difficulties that everybody else...
Gilb: did -- he was dictatorial and hard to work with.
There is a rumor that they broke over her having an
affair with Kidwell of the Bakery Drivers. I wonder
if you could substantiate that.

Billings: All I know is the gossip about that. I don't know
anything definite about it, except what I was told
by some other people.

Gilb: Which was what, more or less?

Billings: Well, the only thing that I can recall specifically
that I was told about was that Tom had found out
that Kidwell was paying for the apartment that Mary
Gallagher occupied. That's the only thing that I
can remember. I never did know whether it was true
or not.

Gilb: At the time Mary Gallagher left active charge of the
Mooney defense in about 1930, was it true that she
divided half of the money that she had with your group,
or with you?

Billings: No; I don't think so. I don't recall that. She
didn't have any money. The Mooney committee had the
Billings: money. She made an accounting of the fund. Had a certified public accountant check the books and the fund was all accounted for. So Mary didn't have any money to divide with anybody.

Gilb: I have been told that both she and you wanted to give a statement of all expenses -- the way the money had gone -- to the labor people and that Mooney objected to this.

Billings: No, I don't think Tom particularly objected to it. In fact, at the time that Mary Gallagher resigned from the committee, such a financial report was drawn. After the public accountant went over the books, the report was published, and I know I received a copy of it. A copy of it was sent to me in Folsom and I am quite sure that copies of it were sent to all of the major contributors, the big unions that contributed and so on and so forth.

Of course, people had to understand, it would be absolutely impossible to send a financial statement to everybody who ever contributed to the Mooney case.
Billings: There were millions of them. The best that anybody could do would be to send a financial statement to the organizations which had consistently contributed.

Gilb: And then also, I have heard the rumor, statement, that Mooney tried to have things stolen from her home and had her assaulted in the street after she left him.

Billings: I don't know anything about that. I don't recall ever hearing that before.

Gilb: Really? Well, some of these things are based on not necessarily reliable hearsay.

You said that you formed a committee of your own and that Madeline Wieland was in charge. What did she do for you?

Billings: We sent out letters of appeal, and I personally wrote a letter to Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union and secured, I believe it was, $500 from the American Civil Liberties Union for the use of my committee.
SUPREME COURT HEARINGS, 1929-30

Billings: The Supreme Court met and denied my case in 1929, and handed down a decision, which is, to say the least, unique in American jurisprudence. The majority opinion said that inasmuch as I had been a delegate to the San Francisco Labor Council, that if I personally did not throw the bomb, it was "fairly inferential" that I must know who did. In other words, they were attempting to place the blame for the bombing on the San Francisco Labor Council.

And as a result of that decision, legal experts all over the country wrote criticisms of the Supreme Court. One of them, I remember, was written by Judge Murphy in Minneapolis. I believe he was Dean of Law in Minnesota University. And another was written by Felix Frankfurter, who was Dean of Law in Columbia University at the time. And Frankfurter, as I recall it, said that the reasoning of the Court was worse than would be used by any ten-year-old boy. I don't
Billings: recall just what his words were, but it was a serious indictment of the attitude of the California State Supreme Court.

Gilb: Was Ed McKenzie your lawyer at that time?

Billings: No, Edmund D. McKenzie was not my lawyer, but he represented himself as such. Actually, what happened was that after the Court denied my case and these legal experts all over the country began to criticize the Court because of the fallacy of their reasoning, the Court came to a conclusion that they would have to grant a rehearing so they could straighten out their decision and rewrite it. That was the only way they could rewrite their decision, by granting a rehearing. So they induced McKenzie to come and visit me, to try to get me to sign a petition for a rehearing. McKenzie came to see me and broached the proposition. I said, "The Supreme Court has gotten themselves into this position of their own accord, and I don't see any reason why I should help them get out of it." I said, "If they granted me a rehearing, there's no hope
that I would get any redress from the Court. So I don't see any reason why I should file a petition."
So I refused to sign a petition for a rehearing.

However, the petition was signed and submitted to the Court. Actually, it was forged by Edmund D. McKenzie. It was signed with my signature, but I didn't sign it. And the Court, on that petition, granted a rehearing, which was held in 1930, and at that hearing the Court did something that so far as I know has never been done before in the history of jurisprudence and I don't think it has been done since and I doubt very much that it ever will be done again. The Court, in effect, resigned as Supreme Court Justices, took off their robes of office, dismounted from the bench, appointed themselves as an unofficial fact-finding commission, sat at a table in the body of the courtroom as unofficial fact-finding commissioners, and held a hearing. Inasmuch as the judges were acting as unofficial fact-finding commissioners, they had no power to subpoena witnesses.
Billings: So in order to get witnesses to testify before them, they sent two policemen armed with clubs and guns, of course, to invite the witnesses to the hearing. Actually, two policemen walked into Fremont Older's office and said, "The Supreme Court wants you to appear before their unofficial fact-finding commission to give testimony in the Billings case," and Older protested, and the two policemen insisted, so Older was led by the arm by two armed policemen into the hearing.

The court listened to various witnesses that they had invited in, principally the witnesses for the prosecution, including John McDonald, whom they brought here from Baltimore, Maryland, and I believe Estelle Smith, and possibly Mrs. Edeau and her daughter... At any rate, after they had heard the testimony of several witnesses, they came to the conclusion that they would like to have the testimony of myself. But I was confined in prison and they had no power to issue subpoenas. So they moved the
Billings: hearing to Folsom prison, and built a special platform in the rotunda of the administration building and placed a chair thereon and sat me in the chair as the witness. I was of course escorted from my cell by prison guards; whether I wanted to go or not didn't make any difference.

I was placed on this chair on this special platform, and I was kept there for a period of five hours, under cross-examination by John W. Preston, Associate Justice for the California State Supreme Court, who was acting as interrogator. Preston, by the way, was formerly United States Prosecuting Attorney in the San Francisco area. And he was a very sharp cross-examiner. He was very tricky, and any time I attempted to qualify an answer, Preston succeeded in preventing me from doing so by cutting me off. Whenever I would begin to answer a question, Preston would insist that I answer yes or no, and when I said, "No, but--" the court reporter would drop the "but" and place a period after the "no." So
Billings: that the transcript carries the flat answer "no."

And Preston, of course, would prevent me from going on with my qualification by starting another question, by making facetious remarks and one thing and another. At one particular instance, during the cross-examination, I don't recall now what the subject matter of the question was or what point Preston was pressing me for at the time, but at any rate he said, "I want you to answer this question 'yes' or 'no.' You did, did you not, did you or did you not; answer 'yes' or 'no.'" (laughter). I don't remember what I answered. At any rate, that shows the general type of questioning that Preston used in order to try to confuse me, to try to get answers which were suitable to the purposes of the State Supreme Court.

As a result of that hearing, the Court, of course, rendered another decision against me, in which they used more adroit reasoning than they had in the previous decision, and of course they made it sound better and made it stand up better than the
At that time, McKenzie was before the Supreme Court, as attorney for the Lamson case. Lamson was a college professor charged with murdering his wife down in Palo Alto, and he was in death row of San Quentin at the time. As a result of McKenzie's defense of him before the Supreme Court, the original conviction was reversed and the man was released. And I have always considered that McKenzie made a deal with the Supreme Court that if they would give him a decision in the Lamson case, he would induce me to file a petition for a rehearing. And inasmuch as he hadn't been able to induce me to sign the petition for a rehearing, he signed it himself with my name to get the favorable decision in the Lamson case.
THE YEAR 1934

Gilb: Did the 1934 general strike interest you at all when you were in jail?

Billings: Oh yes. Of course, being a local affair, I couldn't get too much information on the strike except what I would get through out-of-state papers. A good deal of information about the strike was published in the Seattle papers, and I believe it was at that time that I was reading the Seattle papers. And then I also used to get the Nevada State Journal at one time. I don't recall whether I got the Nevada State Journal during the 1934 strike or not, but I might have. I know I read about the strike.

Gilb: After 1934, as far as I can tell, labor began to work for you and Mooney more strongly than they had during the early '30s. Perhaps George Kidwell and others became more powerful in the Labor Council. Did he come to see you when you were in jail or do anything much at all?
Billings: No. Kidwell never did come to see me, that I can recall. Yes, I believe he did come to see me once. I was never well acquainted with George Kidwell. He was much better acquainted with Tom Mooney. He knew Tom quite well and I believe he did visit Tom sometimes, but I don't recall that he ever came to visit me. He might possibly have come with somebody else once. Sometimes there were three or four or five or six people together that visited me on occasions, and perhaps I would be talking to one or two that I was well acquainted with and wouldn't be paying much attention to the other three or four.

Gilb: Did Paul Scharrenberg keep up an interest in you?

Billings: Yes. Paul -- of course Paul was in Sacramento every other year for legislative meetings, being the legislative representative for the California State Federation of Labor. So during that period Paul would generally find an opportunity to visit me in Folsom. In fact, I think probably every time he was in Sacramento he got up there at least once.
Gilb: I suppose it was quite a blow to you when Fremont Older died.

Billings: Yes, it was. The fact of the matter is, Older had been to see me, I think, the day he died. I think it was on the way from Folsom to back home that he died. He had been up to Lake Tahoe where he had a cottage, and he used to come down Highway 50 and come past the town of Folsom. So he used to stop off and see me on the way. So I believe that he was there to see me that afternoon. Then on the way home he had a heart attack and passed away.

Gilb: 1934 seems to have been an important year. Upton Sinclair made an election issue out of the Mooney-Billings case. Did you know that?

Billings: Yes, I recall something about it. I didn't get too much information about it. I never was very well acquainted with Upton Sinclair. I knew who he was, of course, but we had no personal connections.

Gilb: What did you think of him?

Billings: I thought that he was all right. I thought he was
Billings: a good liberal. Some of the things that he did I was very highly in favor of. In fact, when he ran for governor on the EPIC program, I thought that was a very good thing. In fact, I still think that Upton Sinclair was actually elected that time but I think he was counted out by the politicians. I think the election was stolen from him.
HABEAS CORPUS PROCEEDINGS

Gilb: Well, then in 1930, after the Supreme Court turned you down the second time, how did your fortunes proceed from that time?

Billings: It was shortly after that that I began to attempt to get some lawyer to take my case before the court on habeas corpus.

I had been studying law for some time in Folsom, principally on the point of habeas corpus, and I had eventually run into the case of Leo M. Frank in Atlanta, Georgia. In his petition before the United States Supreme Court on habeas corpus, That case is known in legal circles as the case of Frank vs. Munsam, Munsam having been the sheriff of the county where Frank was being held. And in that petition, Frank alleged that he had been denied due process of law because the court had been intimidated by the crowd outside of the courtroom, and also that perjured testimony had been adduced against him, and
Billings: several other points. I don't recall all the other points, now. But the decision was no good. The United States Supreme Court was the important point as far as my case was concerned, because prior to that, there had always been -- at least the majority of the lawyers considered that it was impossible to use extrinsic evidence as proof of an unjust imprisonment on an action for habeas corpus. In other words, the proof of the injustice had to be within the record of the case. It had to be intrinsic to the case.

That was the legal concept, but the United States Supreme Court overturned that concept in the case of Leo M. Frank, and they specifically stated in the Frank vs. Mappum case that extrinsic as well as intrinsic evidence was acceptable to the court on habeas corpus for the purpose of establishing that an illegal or unjust imprisonment had been perpetrated. It was absolutely a case in point as far as my particular matter was concerned, because the McDonald affidavit clearly demonstrated that perjury had been
Billings: used in my case and the proof of the perjury -- the McDonald affidavit -- was actually extrinsic evidence. It was outside of the record of the case.

So I made that contention, that my case should be taken before the court on habeas corpus; and at first it seemed impossible to find any attorney who would agree with me. I contacted Clarence Darrow.

I contacted Morris Hillquit in New York and Frank P. Walsh in New York and two or three other lawyers.

Some here in San Francisco. I don't recall which ones. At any rate, I couldn't get any of them to agree that the McDonald affidavit would be acceptable evidence before the court. However, eventually, someone suggested that I get in touch with John P. Finerty in New York, Finerty having been one of the attorneys in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and also having been the attorney who defended Eamon Devalera during the Devalera treason trial in England. So I did contact Finerty, and Finerty immediately wrote back and said, "Yes, it can be done. It has been done before."
Billings: I did it in the Sacco-Vanzetti case and the same procedure has been used many times and the court will accept extrinsic as well as intrinsic evidence."

So then, Finerty induced Frank P. Walsh to accept that view and to become associated with the case. And they came out here and saw Tom Mooney. Tom then insisted that the habeas corpus action should be taken in his case rather than in the Billings case.

The result was that they took the habeas corpus action in the Mooney case. Tom secured the services of George T. Davis, who at that time was the young attorney who just recently resigned as Assistant District Attorney. And Davis took the matter through the lower courts. A habeas corpus matter has to go first before the Superior Court in the county in which the prisoner is held. Then it has to go to the state Appellate Division and then to the State Supreme Court before it can get into the United States Court.

So then Davis was commissioned to take the matter through the court in San Rafael. Davis, Walsh
Billings: and Finerty worked together so very well that after the case had gone through the two lower courts and had gone to the California State Supreme Court, they -- the three lawyers -- worked together on it.

Finerty flew back and forth across the country, from Washington to San Francisco or from New York to San Francisco, a record number of times. I don't know what the record was at the time, but at any rate he made more trips back and forth across the country in connection with this one case than any lawyer had previously made in connection with any other case.

Gilb: Was he being paid for this?

Billings: No. Both Walsh and Finerty donated their services. To Finerty, however, it was necessary for us to pay his expenses. Frank P. Walsh refused to accept any money at all. He paid his own expenses at all times. Davis, of course, was in the employ of the Tom Mooney Defense Committee. I believe we started in 1932.

I think the case first got into court in San Rafael
Billings: in 1934 and finally got to the California State Supreme Court in 1936. I believe it was in September, 1936, or in August, the Supreme Court appointed a referee, Addison E. Shaw, to hear the testimony.

Personally, I disagreed with the attitude of the Supreme Court in that matter. It was my contention that the Constitution of the State of California provides that on matter of habeas corpus and other writs, that the court shall hear the matter en banc, or commission one individual justice of a court to hear the matter. So far as I could find, there was nothing in the Constitution of the State of California -- although there was in the Code of Civil Procedure -- which gives the Supreme Court the power to appoint a referee in a matter of habeas corpus. Of course, the lawyers always disagree with me because the Code of Civil Procedure says the court does have the right to appoint a referee in certain cases. It doesn't specifically mention habeas corpus, however.

However, the court appointed a referee and all of the hearings were held before this referee. On the
Billings: opposing side, there were two or three members of the attorney general's staff. Sometimes two and sometimes three. And of course Captain Charles Goff of the Police Department, and Charles F. Pickert, who was alive at that time. He was called as a witness. The petitioner's side was handled by Davis, Walsh and Finerty; with my assistance. (laughter) I acted as law clerk with Davis in connection with that hearing, and one of the duties that I had during most of the hearing was checking the previous testimony to find out which documents had already been submitted in evidence and which ones had not yet been submitted. That made it necessary for me to check the entire record.

At one period, when there were 99,976 pages in the record, I had quite a time trying to check all of that record to find out if one certain letter had been submitted in evidence or not. And many times I stayed up all night in the county jail going through the record to find out if some document had already
Billings: been added or not.

Gilb: The California Supreme Court denied the writ of habeas corpus and that was taken up to the United States Supreme Court.

Billings: The big hearing, took place here in San Francisco before the referee appointed by the California State Supreme Court. Then of course after the hearing was over, the referee made his personal report to the Supreme Court, and the Court rendered their decision on his report. Their decision, of course, being against the petitioner.

So then the lawyers, of course, appealed to the United States Supreme Court on certiorari, which is a different procedure and doesn't have the force and effect that habeas corpus has. Of course, under the system of jurisprudence that we have, it is necessary to appeal on certiorari from a decision of a lower court, from the state court.
THE COUNTY JAIL AND DAN MURPHY

Gilb: When did you leave Folsom?

Billings: I was brought down from Folsom in September, 1936. After the referee had been appointed and the hearings had been started, the lawyers subpoenaed me as a witness.

Gilb: How long were you in the jail, then?

Billings: About thirteen months.

Gilb: Was Mooney also in jail?

Billings: Yes. He was brought over from San Quentin in August before I came over, and he was here about sixteen months altogether. He was here about two or three months after I was taken back to Folsom.

Gilb: Wasn't Dan Murphy the sheriff?

Billings: Yes.

Gilb: Your old friend Dan Murphy. Did you have much contact with him?

Billings: Dan was just elected sheriff while I was in the jail. Fitzgerald was sheriff when I first got there. And then at the following election Dan Murphy was elected
Billings: sheriff, and shortly after that I got an opportunity to call him on the telephone, and then Dan came down to the jail to see me. We had quite a talk. Dan was always very friendly. Of course, as sheriff, there wasn't much he could do. After all, a sheriff has rules and regulations to follow, certain laws to conform with and so on, so there isn't too much he can do for an individual person. However, he did come to see me. In fact, Dan was always much more friendly than he was to Tom Mooney. He was not precisely friendly to Tom.
GOVERNOR OLSON PARDONS MOONEY

Gilb: The next strategy of those interested in the Mooney-Billings case was trying to get Olson elected with the idea that they'd get a governor who would really act. Can you tell me anything about what was done in that respect?

Billings: I don't know too much about that. That, of course, was engineered and handled entirely by the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee, and I think that Tom did the bulk of the work himself. Of course there were a great many people identified with that effort, and a great many officials of unions did a great deal of work in order to get Olson elected.

Gilb: Which ones did you think did the most that you heard of?

Billings: I don't know. My opinion of the matter is that the longshore unions probably were the most solidified body in the trade union movement on the Olson campaign. I don't think there was a working longshoreman in San Francisco at the time that didn't vote for Olson,
Billings: and not only in San Francisco but all up and down
the coast, in every port in California. That's a
lot of longshoremen. I'm quite sure that there were
very few longshoremen that didn't vote for Olson.

Gilb: By this time they were with the CIO, weren't they?

Billings: Yes.

Gilb: Did you feel strongly sympathetic to the CIO?

Billings: I never had any feeling against either branch of
organized labor, my opinion always having been that
organized labor was still an organized movement of
all the workers, regardless of whether they were
affiliated with the American Federation of Labor
or the CIO, or whether they were affiliated with
some independent union, or affiliated with the Indus-
trial Workers of the World. It didn't mean any-
thing to me because I felt that all workers were
part of the labor movement.

Gilb: Another thing I've been told is that when the time
came for actual pardoning by Olson that Olson got cold
feet and sort of wanted to back out on the deal.
Billings: That, of course, is more or less surmise. I don't know if there's any definite evidence to that effect, but it's quite probable that certain people who were opposed to the pardon went to the governor and said, "Well, now, Governor, you've done what you promised to do. You promised to pardon Tom Mooney; you've done that so now just forget about it."

Gilb: No, I meant he had cold feet even on the pardon of Tom Mooney. Had you heard anything to that effect?

Billings: I don't recall hearing anything about that, but I know that after Olson had been elected and before he had actually taken office, he visited Tom Mooney in San Quentin and also visited me in Folsom. When he visited me in Folsom, frankly, Olson and I had a little disagreement. He seemed to take an attitude which was very similar to the attitude taken by the prosecuting attorney, particularly in connection with the Pacific Gas & Electric Company strike of 1913. And he insisted on asking me a lot of questions about the sabotage that was done in 1913 in connection with
Billings: the PG & E strike, and I insisted on wanting to know what that had to do with the explosion of a bomb at Stewart and Market Street on July 22, 1916. I told him that I couldn't see the connection. So we had a little disagreement on that. I don't know what happened as far as Olson and Mooney were concerned. All I know is that eventually when Olson did take office, his first official act was to pardon Tom Mooney.
FINAL STAGES OF THE BILLINGS CASE; LABOR SUPPORT

Gilb: In the interval after he pardoned Tom Mooney and hadn't pardoned you or commuted your sentence, did you organize any kind of pressure upon him? Mary Gallagher did some things for you when you were still in jail, didn't she?

Billings: Oh yes, after Tom Mooney was pardoned, Tom went around the country making speeches in which he said he was doing everything possible to get me out, but I didn't feel that way about it. So the result was that I decided to organize a committee on my own. I then wrote a letter to Hugo Ernst, who was vice president of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Alliance at that time. He was an old friend of mine, and I asked him to organize a group for me, asked them to send out letters to each of the unions in San Francisco, asking each union to send a delegate armed with credentials to a meeting to organize a committee to be known as the Billings Defense. Hugo Ernst did send out the letters and I
Billings: I believe there were fourteen delegates at the first meeting, and then we organized the Billings Defense, and I sent for Mary Gallagher and asked her to accept the secretaryship of the Billings Defense, because I felt that she was the most competent person to do what I felt had to be done. And so Mary came up from Los Angeles and acted as secretary of the Billings Defense, and we then got more delegates -- I don't remember how many -- but I insisted that all these delegates should have credentials from their unions, that they should be bona fide union representatives.

I know in one particular instance, one person appeared at one of the meetings -- the second or third meeting when the organization was still being formed -- and actually appointed himself on the executive committee, of the organization. And when I was informed of it, I wrote a letter to Hugo Ernst and demanded to know who this particular individual was representing, who he had credentials from, and who elected him on the executive board. And Hugo admitted that this
Billings: fellow had merely barged in, walked in without any credentials and attempted to take over, and had actually appointed himself on the executive board. So I demanded that he be removed. And he was.

Gilb: Did you know who he was or where he was from?

Billings: Yeah! His name was George Kidwell. (laughter) And the first thing he did when he appointed himself on the executive committee was he said, "Take it easy, we don't have to do anything; the Governor's going to take care of this; this is all taken care of. All we have to do is keep quiet."

I didn't agree with that. I didn't want to keep quiet. I wanted to get out of Folsom.

Gilb: Weren't he and Mary Gallagher still very good friends at this time?

Billings: I don't think so. I don't know.

But at any rate, George Kidwell got off the committee, and we then proceeded, Mary Gallagher and I, with the assistance of some other trade union people. We succeeded in getting the endorsement of the San
Billings: Francisco Labor Council, the San Francisco Building Trades Council, the California State Federation of Labor, the Railroad Brotherhood, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which was independent at the time. And we had as members of the executive board John A. O'Connell, secretary of the San Francisco Labor Council; Jimmy Rickert, I believe it was, that was secretary of the Building Trades Council; Gordon Irvine of the Railroad Brotherhood; C. T. McDonough, first vice president of the California State Federation of Labor; and Henry Zacharin, business manager of the International Ladies Garment Workers Joint Board. They were the official executive committee.

Then we had another group which we used as a steering committee. We called it the Action committee. It actually worked out the program, what had to be done, and saw to it that it was carried out. These other officials, of course, like John A. O'Connell, they were busy with their own affairs.
Billings: They didn't have much of an opportunity to spend time working on the Billings case. However, they were willing to lend their name. And they also did secure the endorsement of their organization. So that our organization was then endorsed by all of the principal AF of L organizations in the state of California.

**Relations With Mooney**

Gilb: I have heard that you had a make-believe quarrel with Mooney in order to win the AF of L support.

Billings: Yes. Actually, I had to do that. That was part of what had to be done. You see, Tom had alienated the support of the AF of L labor leaders by issuing a pamphlet entitled, "Labor Leaders Betray Tom Mooney."

That was the pamphlet he published after he broke with Mary Gallagher, in which he made various statements alluding principally to George Kidwell, but also against other labor officials. As a result of that, the American Federation of Labor here in California entirely stopped supporting Tom Mooney's activity.
Billings: They were still willing to be active in my behalf. But they wouldn't participate in anything that was conducted by the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee. So that was why I wrote to Hugo Ernst and got Hugo Ernst to organize the Billings Defense. At the same time, I also wrote a letter to the California State Federation of Labor to Ed Vandeleur, who was secretary at the time, and told Ed I wanted to put a resolution through the convention of the State Federation, which was meeting in Oakland that year. And Ed said, "You write the resolution and I'll put it through." So I wrote the resolution up in Folsom. Sent it to Ed Vandeleur, and it was unanimously adopted by the convention of the California State Federation of Labor, guaranteeing me the support of the California Federation and all its affiliates.

Gilb: Mooney wasn't happy about this?

Billings: In order to do this, I had to break with Tom, because of the animosity against Tom in the AF of L movement. I couldn't have accomplished anything as long as I
Billings: remained on friendly terms with Tom Mooney. Actually, I wasn't sore at him. He came up to Folsom to see me, and I took advantage of that opportunity to create a public split between me and Mooney. I bawled him out and told him that I didn't think he was doing anything for me. I had to make it look real, because the office in which Tom and I were having our reception was "bugged" and all of our conversation was being recorded.

Gilb: So he didn't know that it was make-believe.

Billings: He didn't know it, no. In fact, until his death, Tom never was convinced that actually it was all make-believe. I must have been a better actor than I thought I was.

Gilb: Also I have a note that Mooney was collecting money for your defense but using it for his own debts, and this was a source of disagreement.

Billings: Yes. There was no doubt about it that Tom was trying to pay off the indebtedness of the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee with the money that was coming in during that period, and consequently, the money was
Billings: not being spent in my behalf, although when he spoke before different organizations he said that every penny that was being collected was being used in my behalf. Well, perhaps that was more or less true, because after all, if he was paying off the indebtedness of the committee, even if it was the Tom Mooney Moulders Defense Committee, that of course was more or less in my defense too, in a way. After all, the debts had been contracted in the name of the Mooney-Billings case, although I had very little to do with it.

Gilb: But you didn't think that was a very good thing for him to do, just the same.

Billings: Well, I didn't particularly object to it. I knew that if his committee had incurred debt, that they had done it honestly with the expectation that they would be able to collect the money and pay off those debts, and after all, I felt that anyone that they owed money to certainly should be paid.
The Communists

Gilb: Also I know that in '38-'39 the longshoremen collected a very large amount for you, and they wanted to hire Herbert Resner as your lawyer, and you objected to him. Why was that?

Billings: At one time another AF of L committee had been formed known as the AF of L Committee for Mooney and Billings, I believe, in which Resner, I think, was secretary, or was connected with it, at any rate, and that committee was attempting to solicit funds from the AF of L union at a time when the Mooney Moulders Committee was confining its efforts principally to the CIO union because of the feeling against Mooney in the AF of L, and that committee actually, in my consideration, was more or less of a subterfuge, the AF of L committee for Mooney and Billings, with Resner at the head of it, and I think that possibly Resner might have been connected with the Communist Party at that time too, and some of the other members of that committee might have been Communists.
Gilb: You mean they weren't really so much interested in your case as they were in some other things?

Billings: That was practically my opinion.

Gilb: Then you yourself were not sympathetic toward them?

Billings: No, I was not a Communist and never had been, and I've always opposed certain things that the Communists did and certain of the Communist ideas, although --

Gilb: Which ones?

Billings: Many of the things which the Communist Party did as an official organization, in my estimation, were acts tending to compromise with capitalism. Personally, I was always convinced that Capital and Labor have nothing in common. (laughter)

Gilb: This is a very interesting story. What sort of acts?

Billings: Well, to go back a long ways, probably to the Communist convention of 1922, when I believe they adopted a resolution against opposing organized religion. The Anarchists, of course, and the I.W.W.'s, were opposed to organized religion, and it had always
Billings: been the theory of the revolutionary anarchists and the real radicals that religion was the opiate of the people, that religion was used more to keep the people in submission than for any other purpose, and that organized religion was bad for the workers, not good for them. Consequently, having been convinced of that, I was opposed to organized religion, and when the Communist Party agreed to condone religion and to work with the organized religious groups, I accused them of compromising with capitalism.

Gilb: I meant to ask you whether there were any Communists on the Moulders Defense Committee?

Billings: I don't know if there were any Communists on the Committee. I think there were some Communists in the employ of -- in fact, I was told at one time that Arthur Scott, who had been secretary of the committee in '36 and '37, had been a member of the Communist Party or was a member of the Communist Party. I don't know whether he was or not.  

*All I know about him was that he was an ex-convict. He did time in San Quentin for burglary, and got acquainted with Tom over there. And it was because of that acquaintanceship, I presume, that Tom put him in charge of the
to various trade unions here in the Bay area, speaking
I also spent considerable time going around
the programs.

program and I spent considerable time enquiring
for the Victory Ball, and so we issued a souvenir
I got out, they were in the process of selling tickets
dance, so they made a Victory Ball out of it. When
17th. They had all the arrangements made for the
dance on November 1st. I was released on October
mentioned, we called the federal defense committee
before I was released the federal defense committee
where I was trying to do a lot of things. You see, just

Gilb: What happened?

Gilligan: I was about to do a lot of things.

Gilb: Six or eight weeks?

Gilligan: I was about to do a lot of things.

Gilb: When I finally got out of Poison, actually, I was

Gilligan: Well, how did I feel when you finally got out of

RELEASE FROM POISON
Billings: before them and talking to the officials of the organ-
nizations, expressing my appreciation for the support
of organized labor, and also soliciting some adver-
tising for the programs.

It was quite a successful dance, and we suc-
ceeded in raising enough money to pay off all the in-
debtedness of the Billings Committee. After the
dance, we didn't owe anybody anything, and I believe
there was $70 or $80 left, which eventually the exe-
cutive board of the Committee finally decided to give
to me. That was part of the money I used to go into
business with.

After I was released, I spent about two weeks
soliciting and appearing before unions and one thing
and another, and then I made a trip to Los Angeles
under the auspices of the California State Federation
of Labor and made a speech before the Los Angeles
Central Council. Neil Haggerty, who at that time was
president, I believe, of the Los Angeles Central Council
and is now secretary of the California State Federation.
Billings: of Labor, Neil got up and made a little speech after I concluded mine in which he said, "This is the first time in the history of the Los Angeles Central Labor Council that the visiting speaker has ever come here and spoken for twenty minutes and never asked for anything." (laughter) I expressed my appreciation to the organizations in Los Angeles for the support they had given us during the twenty-three years we had been in prison and explained to the Council the position that I was in as a result of the Governor having given me a commutation of sentence, because California law provides that when a person is sentenced to life imprisonment, he then and there loses all rights, privileges and franchises under the law and becomes as dead in law as though he were dead in fact. That's the language of the code.

Now when you begin to consider that, a man who is dead in fact has no right to own and hold property. He has no right to enter into a contract. Consequently, he cannot legally get married in California.
Marriage

Gilb: Well, you did get married.

Billings: Yes, not in California, however. I got married in Nevada, where it was legal. It wouldn't have been legal in California.

Gilb: I presume you own things through your wife.

Billings: The property that we now own is community property, is held in joint tenancy, with my wife and myself. However, according to that one particular section of the code, that still isn't legal.

Gilb: How did you happen to decide to marry your wife, inasmuch as you were in prison all these years?

Billings: Well, you see, at times things transpired that gave me hope of being released. So in 1936, when I was down here in the county jail and when my wife had an opportunity to visit me -- she was not my wife then -- we concluded that we would get married, assuming that I was going to be released as a result of the habeas corpus action. However, when the habeas corpus action fell through and I didn't get released, that just
Billings: merely postponed the wedding, that's all.

Gilb: She waited all those years for you!

Billings: Yes. That was 1936, actually, when we decided to marry. When I was released in 1939 we decided to get married, so we were married on the 25th of March, 1940.

Mooney

Gilb: How about you and Tom Mooney after you got out? Were you close friends?

Billings: When I first got out, I believe Tom Mooney was in St. Luke's Hospital. Shortly after he entered the hospital, he was operated upon, and he was not allowed to receive any visitors for a considerable period and the doctor advised against me visiting Tom for quite awhile. Eventually I did go to see him a few times. But Tom's condition was not good. He was in very bad shape.
Watchmaking Business

Billings: I didn't have very much when I came out of Folsom, but I eventually got money enough to go into business.

Gilb: What business did you go into?

Billings: Watchmaking.

Gilb: How did you happen to pick that instead of shoes or something?

Billings: Well, you see, I started repairing watches, working on watches, in 1919. And I worked until 1932 in my spare time. Then after 1932 I became the official watchmaker for the institution. So for the last seven years I was in Folsom, I didn't do anything but repair watches and clocks and jewelry for the guards and their friends and their friends' families and their families' friends, and also for the prisoners. The fact of the matter is that I repaired approximately 900 articles a year during the last five or six years, at any rate. That's much more work than I do here.

Gilb: Did you go to work in this office right away?

Billings: In this building, not in this particular office. I was at first in Room 420.
Gilb: Have you been very active in union affairs since you got out of prison?

Billings: Yes. Before I got out, in fact, in 1936, I was taken into the Watchmakers' Union in Los Angeles as an honorary member. So in 1939, when I was released, I went to Los Angeles and took out an active card in the Los Angeles local and then transferred to the San Francisco Local. When I came back here in November, 1939, I became a member of Watchmakers' Union Local 102.

We had two locals here at the time; Local 101 was the local of watchmakers who were employed for wages, and Local 102 was an organization of self-employed watchmakers. I didn't become a member of 101 because I was unable to get a job as a watchmaker here. Before I decided to go into business for myself, I tried to get employment here in San Francisco, but the jewelers all seemed to be afraid of me. They were afraid that the publicity wouldn't be good for their
Billings: business or something. Of course, they didn't know whether I was a good watchmaker or not. They were too conservative to take a chance, and so I couldn't get employment.

Of course there was not much employment to be had in that line at that time. It was just the tail end of the depression, you might say, January, 1940, and people were just beginning to get back to work. After I went into business in January, 1940, I would say that probably more than half of the watches that I repaired came out of the hock shops or out of the dresser drawer where they had been reposing for many years. People were just then beginning to get money enough to get their watches fixed, and those people who came to me to have watches fixed dug them up out of the dresser drawer or out of the pawn shop and brought them in to have them repaired.

Gilb: What have been some of the things that have concerned you and your fellow watchmakers the most?

Billings: Well, we have been concerned principally, of course,
Billings: with improving the conditions for watchmakers, securing better conditions of employment and better wages. Also we have succeeded in establishing an insurance program in our union. In fact, our union was the first one in California to establish an insurance program. Our program has been in effect more than fifteen years now. There were reasons why it developed the way it did. The business manager of my union is a very forward-looking trade unionist who keeps his eye on the fact that in order to continue to be a union official he has to produce something for the men on the job, and every year when the contract is about to expire, he has to work up a program that will be of some benefit to the men working in the trade. And it was in that way, in order to work up a program that would be of benefit to the men on the job, that George Allen got interested in the proposition of health and accident insurance. Of course the health and accident insurance program was already under consideration by John L. Lewis before we proceeded in establishing it here. In fact, I think that Lewis did succeed in establishing his program
Billings: for the miners before we finally got ours into effect here. We were right close behind him.

Gilb: How many members are there in your local?

Billings: We have only a little over 300 members in our particular local and we have jurisdiction in five counties.

Gilb: About what per cent of the total number of self-employed watchmakers does this include?

Billings: It only includes a small percentage of the self-employed watchmakers. I should say about 35 or 40% of the self-employed watchmakers. But of the employed watchmakers, working for wages, we have probably 98 or 99%.

Gilb: Well then, for self-employed watchmakers, you are subject to the competition of the larger employers in establishing prices, which would automatically effect your wages.

Billings: A union cannot fix prices because of the federal law.

Gilb: Yes, I know.

Billings: What we do is, we suggest a minimum scale of prices.

Gilb: But how can you adhere to it if you're undercut by
Gilb: a larger jeweler?

Billings: You see, the larger jewelers all employ watchmakers. We have them under contract. In the watchmakers' contract, we have clauses, one for instance which prohibits the use of the word "free" or advertising any free work or advertising any price. In fact, the large stores are unable, because of these clauses in the contract, to advertise the price they charge for watch repair.

Gilb: You control them by having the employees in the union.

Billings: Yes. You see, that prohibition against cut-rate advertising is what establishes the equitable price in the industry and keeps the industry on an equitable basis. The stores can't get any benefit out of cutting prices, because they can't advertise. The only way that the cut-throat competition can be effected is for the store to come out and say, "Well, I do the work for less than the man up the street." Then the man up the street cuts prices some more and says, "I do the work less than the fellow down the
Billings: street." Of course they both starve to death when they get down low enough. But in order to prevent that, we have established the system of fair --

Gilb: Have you organized any strikes?

Billings: We have had one or two little strikes in the industry. Not anything of any importance. The fact of the matter is that our organization is very much opposed to strikes. In fact, we wouldn't strike unless it's forced upon us by the employers. Of course, two years ago some of our members were forced out of employment in Granat Brothers because of the strike of the jewelers, which is a sister local belonging to the same International but a different organization. Jewelers' Local 36 went on strike against Granat Brothers. Granat's, of course, operate a jewelry manufacturing shop. And in their manufacturing industry, they got into a disagreement with the union with the result that the jewelers got up and walked out on strike. Then, of course, they established a picket line, and our watchmakers were reluctant to
Billings: go through the picket line. So the watchmakers went out -- that is, they didn't go out on strike, they merely failed to go to work. Granat Brothers became identified with the Employers Council and the Employers Council threatened to sue the Watchmakers Union under the Taft-Hartley, which eventually forced the watchmakers to go through the picket line back to work, which caused a big disturbance in the American Federation of Labor, particularly in the San Francisco Labor Council, with the result that the Watchmakers Union was expelled from the San Francisco Labor Council.

However, I'm the delegate in the San Mateo County Central Labor Council, and I continued to be a member of the San Mateo Central Labor Council and to be an officer of the Council all during this time.

Gilb: What position?

Billings: Chairman of the board of trustees and chairman of the law and legislative committee, and I have been for better than ten years. But I continued in those positions because we were not expelled from the San
Billings: Mateo Central Labor Council. We also were not expelled from the Alameda Labor Council nor from the Contra Costa Labor Council, so that our delegates continued to attend meetings in those councils although they were expelled from the San Francisco Labor Council. But we were not expelled from the California State Federation of Labor. Our International was still affiliated with the AF of L; we had not been expelled by the International. So the action taken by the San Francisco Labor Council actually was an erroneous action and they finally rescinded it.

Gilb: Does your local in San Francisco have a union shop contract?

Billings: Oh yes. We also have organization in San Jose, and we have organized Santa Clara County, at least in the town of San Jose, and we now have a master contract which provides for the same wages and conditions in Santa Clara County that we have in San Mateo County and San Francisco. We also have membership in Contra Costa County and Alameda County, and we are hoping
Billings: that we will soon be able to work out a program where our little union will be able to extend its jurisdiction all over the entire northern part of the state of California. The fact of the matter is that there are so few watchmakers in comparison to the number of employees in other trades, that there isn't room for more than one local, really.

They did have a local in Stockton at one time some years ago in which there were twelve members. I don't think there ever had been more than fourteen members in the Stockton local. And of those fourteen, I guess probably eight or nine of them were self-employed watchmakers and the other few were employed for wages.

There is a local, Local 112, in Sacramento, but it's a very small local and has not been very successful and has never been successful in establishing a scale of wages comparable with our wages in San Francisco. Watchmakers in San Francisco today get $2.75 an hour minimum. Premium men get $2.85,
Billings: $3.00, $3.15. I think there's one or two watchmakers getting $3.25. But in Sacramento the scale is below $2.25. I don't know just what the base pay -- I think the minimum up there is $2.12 1/2. That's one of the reasons why we want to include all of Northern California in our organization, because we think that we can eventually put in a master contract which will guarantee a minimum rate, the same minimum rate in all areas of Northern California.

Gilb: Tell me a little bit about the San Mateo Labor Council. Is this a very big or powerful organization?

Billings: It's not a very big organization. I think there are probably 126 unions affiliated altogether. That is, now that we have taken in the CIO unions.

We had a situation in this unification of labor in San Mateo County which is quite different from what it was in San Francisco or Alameda County. In San Francisco and Alameda Counties, where there were established CIO councils, then it was necessary for the AF of L Council and the CIO Council to get
Billings: together and arrange for unification of the two councils. In San Mateo County, there was no existing CIO council at the time. So consequently, in order to unify the CIO movement with the AF of L movement in San Mateo County, all that was necessary for us to do was to invite the CIO unions to join our council, which they did.
SOBEL CASE

Gilb: I know that much of your time has been taken up recently by the Sobel Committee activities. Can you say about what that consists of?

Billings: Yes. The fact of the matter is, I have become the chairman of the Northern California Council of Committees for Morton Sobel, because I am thoroughly convinced that Morton Sobel is absolutely innocent, and I can see from what happened in his case that he was in exactly the same position that I was in the Mooney-Billings case. I was arrested because I was a friend of Mooney's. Then because I refused to testify against Mooney, the prosecuting attorney shook his fist under my nose and said, "We'll hang Mooney and we'll hang you too if you refuse to testify." And that's what they did to Sobel. They arrested Sobel because he was acquainted with the Rosenbergs. And when he refused to testify against the Rosenbergs, they said, "We'll execute the Rosenbergs and we'll execute you, too, if you don't testify." And he
Billings: still refused to testify. So they added his name to the indictment. He was not named in the original indictment, but they added his name to the indictment as an afterthought and he was tried with the Rosenbergs. But there was no testimony against Sobel except the unsupported statement of one witness, and that witness merely stated that on five separate occasions he knew that Sobel had a conversation with Julius Rosenberg.

Gilb: Who are some of the other people active for Sobel in this region?

Billings: There are numerous people all over the state of California that are active in the Sobel Committee. In fact we have a complete council of Sobel committees, which includes committees in Alameda County, Marin County, Sonoma County, Sacramento County....

Gilb: Are there many labor people among them?

Billings: No, not as a general rule. Most of the people are progressive. A great many of them are old-timers like myself who realize that Sobel has been convicted of something he didn't do and they are convinced that
Billings: under the American system we should have honest jus-
tice. We don't have honest justice as long as innocent men can be in prison.

Gilb: By progressive you mean what?

Billings: People of progressive thought, old-time Socialists.

Anarchists, perhaps. Some members of the I.W.W. Some members of organized labor and -- not officials of organized labor, but individual members. Some of the officials of organized labor are wildly interested, but they're busy with their own affairs and they don't want to get too much involved in the Sobel case because after all, it's a fight that requires a lot of time and a lot of effort, and they don't have the time to give to it. I actually don't have the time to give to it either, although I try to do the best I can. I feel so much concerned because of the fact that I was in the same position.
A PARDON FOR BILLINGS?

Gilb: Tell me, are you still trying to get a pardon?

Billings: I haven't tried recently. I haven't tried for the principal reason that when Earl Warren was Governor, Earl Warren had a particular dislike for me because, when I was first released, I made a tour of the country on some other cases and I included the King, Ramsey Connor case and made certain statements about Earl Warren framing King, Ramsey and Connor. Earl Warren took exception to my statements, I presume, and so he refused to issue a pardon. Since Earl Warren has gone to the Supreme Court and since Goodwin Knight has been governor, some people have approached Knight with the suggestion that he should do something for me, give me a pardon or something. One particular person that I know visited the Governor and talked to him on the matter. The Governor merely said, "Well, I wouldn't do anything Earl Warren wouldn't do." So that seems to indicate that inasmuch as Earl Warren wouldn't pardon me, Governor Knight won't either.
Billings: I haven't at any time considered making a public fight on the question. There are a lot of other more important things to make a public contention about, things like the Sobel case, which I think are more important than whether I vote or whether I don't.
Gilb: You're also active in I.W.W., aren't you?

Billings: Not really. I actually am not a member of the I.W.W. Never have been. I've always been a member of the AF of L. But I've always been friendly with people in the I.W.W. I've often worked with them and they've always supported me. And so occasionally, now, I get invited to address a meeting of the I.W.W. over in Oakland, and I usually go over and make a little speech. It doesn't amount to much as a rule. Usually they call on me in November, when they hold sort of a memorial meeting for the I.W.W.'s who lost their lives in the fight for better conditions. Like the Everett case in Everett, Washington, Joe Hill, and a great many others that the I.W.W. commemorates, and I usually speak at those memorial meetings.

Gilb: Are you regarded as a radical among your fellow watchmakers?

Billings: Oh yes. I guess they all consider me a radical. I make no bones about it. I've always been an anarchist;
Hillings: I'm still an anarchist. I have never denied it; I even told the F.B.I. that I was an anarchist when they came over and asked me questions.

Milb: They still come over and ask you questions?

Hillings: Oh yeah. During one of the Bridges' trials, a young fellow came up here. He was from the Department of Immigration, of course, but he was an F.B.I. man just the same. He sat here in my office for three hours and a half. And he asked me questions. I told him at the start that I would answer any question about myself and no question about anybody else, and so I talked quite freely to him. He asked me if I was a Communist and I said, "No." He asked me if I was a Socialist. I said, "No." He said, "What are you?" and I said, "Well, I'm a philosophical anarchist." So he said, "What does a philosophical anarchist believe in?" And I said, "Well, a philosophical anarchist believes in peace on earth, good will toward men. He also believes in 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'" And I said,
Billings: "On top of that, we put the Justinian Pandex: 'Live honestly, hurt nobody, and render to every man his just due.' That being thoroughly understood, do as you please." I said, "We're heavy on the 'do as you please'." (laughter) This young fellow scratched his head and said, "Well, that seems to be a pretty good philosophy at that."

We had considerable discussion about anarchism, and I explained to him that, in the type of philosophical anarchism in which I believe, we believe that people should learn to do right because they want to do right, and not because there's a policeman standing on the corner armed with a club and gun. And I also explained to him that our position was that any other government by any other name smells just as rotten, that every government we ever knew or ever heard of was based on force and violence, and the anarchists are opposed to force and violence. Therefore they are opposed to government.

Sibel: You sound to me like Henry Thoreau.
Billings: I don't deny that I probably have gathered some of my philosophy from Thoreau. In fact, I've gathered it from various places. Some of it from our old-time friend William Shakespeare. And some of it from Byron and Shelley and Keats. Some of it from Alexander Berkman. Maybe a thought or two from Emma Goldman, I don't know.

Gilb: Do you meet with other philosophical anarchists around here?

Billings: Very seldom.

Gilb: There aren't any?

Billings: There are some old people around who at least consider themselves anarchists, and occasionally one comes around and sees me, and we have a little talk, maybe for a few minutes. You see, the anarchists actually don't believe in any organized movement. For that reason there are very few anarchist groups. There is one group here in San Francisco that calls itself the Libertarians. I just received a postcard from them the other day and it said, "A costume ball will
Billings: be given by the Italian Libertarians at Slovenian Hall, Mariposa and Vermont Street, on March the 30th." I probably won't go to it.
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