

[Elevator Strike]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff Page [?] No Original Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 12

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 530 Parkside Avenue

DATE February 17, 1939

SUBJECT Elevator Strike

1. Date and time of interview February 4-6, 1939

2. Place of interview

Garment area, fur section 27th to 39th Street, Sixth to Eighth Avenue, N.Y.C.

3. Name and address of informant Anonymous

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Too well known for description.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 530 Parkside Avenue

DATE February 17, 1939

SUBJECT Elevator Strike BUILDING STRIKE TIES UP GARMENT, FUR AREAS (Banner headline: February 2)

IN A LOBBY

9:00 A.M.

—Woopee-ee-ee!

—Looka him.

—Dumbbell, wot're yuh celebratin'?

—Dis strike. It ain't lox an bagels. It doan happen all de time.

—Look, dere's yur boss.

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—Wot, he ain't walkin neigher? O boy!

—You gonna walk if he walks?

—De twenny eight floor? Yeah, if he carries me up dere.

—Hey, take my pitcha somebody, will yuh? Harry, take my pitcha.

—— UNDER THESE CONDITIONS EVERYBODY IS LIBERAL (A Fur Boss Speaks His Mind)

Who is the boss anyway? He's elevated from the working class, ain't he? Maybe one boss got another herring to eat, that's all. Under 2 these conditions everybody is liberal. How bad it shouldn't be in our line, their line is worse. All day standin and shovin doors in a draft. It ain't skilled labor maybe but it's plenty hard, don't worry. Today it is better recognized people gotta live, their livelihood gotta be protected. These boys, if they make thirty they spend thirty. Are they grabbin somethin, they're destroyin property, they're committin violence, maybe? Foolishness! They're plain married people - whatever they're askin they're entitled to it. Them real estate crooks suck goddamn good rent outa us. They can afford another dollar to their help. A dirty record already they got in the industry, a fire on them, every time they're jackin up the rent. If I move from here to there, it's the same thing - the leases protect them, not me. Strike, shmike, that don't effect the building. The tenant is holding the building, not the building holding the tenant. I got a say in it, too, after all, and what I say is they should settle right away.

—— WE RUN THE BUILDING (Says a union garment worker)

At the hearing with the Mayor we got two thousand people to mob the twentieth floor. It took us twenty minutes to round them up, we sent people into the market and pulled them out. That hall was packed, I'm telling you and it had a very salutary effect on the conference. That's the kind of cooperation the elevator men get from us. Last strike we

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pulled the scabs right out of the cars. I remember they hired fifteen Mexican boys, poor kids. Five o' clock the day of the strike we figured on walking down from work. Instead we went out in the ahll and rang for the elevators all at the same time. When they dame up, we rushed in, locked the 3 doors, took them down and marched the kids out through the cellar into the street. You should have seen the scabs marching in front of us. This strike they're scared of us. They don't dare hire scabs. After all, we just run the building. In fact, we won the strike last time and we're going to win this one also for 32B.

— TWO PICKETS IN THE RAIN

—Looks like a good hand, dis here strike. A double marriage. Kings an queens.

—Quit crappin an hike.

—De garment guys backin us and de fur workers. I'll lay your fanny on it, we win.

—Big words, punk. How much a hunderd?

—Kings an queens. Boy! Wait'll de guys wid weak hearts start gawn up dem stairs. Dey'll drop dead and den dey'll know.

—If it ain't ovuh by next week I gotta join de breadline.

—Wait'll dey start droppin. Yuh gotta have sacrifice inna strike.

—

IN A LOBBY

12:30 P.M.

—Didja walk up?

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—Hones', I did.

—How is it?

—Yuh walk up and yuh go down, yuh walk up and yuh go down. It's sumthin terrible.

—Gwan down is easier, ain't it?

—Yeah, yuh body is wid yuh. I'm sweatin too much. I'm liable tuh catcha cold.

—If it's gonna be prolonged, I'm gawn tuh duh movies.

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—Is it still rainin'?

—Yeah.

—SOIVICE ELEVATORS RUNNIN IN DE REAR, GENTS.

—Huh? Wot's dat? Wot wuz he sayin'?

—Nuthin. It's a joke.

—Hey, Joey, comon, dere's a good bill at de Paramount.

—O.K. I'm wid yuh.

—Cumon home, everybody, go on. Gwan home, wot're yuh hangin aroun fur?

—De girl said she'd bring down de checks, didn't she? So where are dey?

—Search me.

—Aah, les go home, dere's no money in it.

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—— LOOKA ME, I'M DABBLIN IN POLITICS (“De girl,” a steno, looks at the situation)

Are you going to quote me direct, handsome? Well, I got nothing against the elevator boys - they always take me up - hee, hee - without lumps or bumps. In my opinion, it's skyscrapers and elevators that are the evils of civilization. Now - if we lived in the stone age, for instance - hm - with them cave men - there wouldn't be no elevators, we'd all live in huts, see?

If the owners were wise they'd build escalators, for these emergencies. Looka me, I'm dabblin in politics. Truthfully, it don't make any difference to me. I wish I was ridda these skunks and wolves and foxes. Pictures, radio, fame, lights - that's my dream. 5
“SACRIFICE INNA STRIKE: (A typist falls down the stairs, an ambulance is called)

——Wot'd de crowd fuh? Wot's de mattuh? Wot happened?

——Somebody, some lady wuz walkin down de steps and she fell down a flight uh stairs.

——A whole flight?

——Yeah, huh leg looks bad. Black an blue.

——Look out. Here comes de cops.

——Hey, wot's she sayin'?

——Sez she went up twenny flights, her boss made her.

——Jeez, she sure is a martyr to de cause, ain't she?

——Wot's de doctor doin, huh?

——He's tellin huh she's gotta go to de hospital, dey're gonna splint it up and X-ray it dere.

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—Tink she'll collect?

—An how!

—Strike keeps up, I tink I'll take a fall myself.

—DOAN WORRY, MADAM, IT'S NOTHIN SERIOUS...HEY, YOUSE, GET BACK DARE, WILLYUH. GIVE DE LADY SUM AIR. C'MON, GET BACK...

—— SETTLE STRIKE IN TWENTY FOUR HOURS, MAYOR DEMANDS (Headline in evening papers)

—— NIGHT PICKET

(An elevator man who should be at night law school keeps on picketing a dark building)

I'm a student at N.Y.U. I'm working my way through night law school and I'm married, besides. But I'd stay out and starve and lose my education rather than not strike for what I think 6 is right. Mayor or no Mayor. Why, we used to be fired on the spot if we answered back. You can imagine a man answering back, especially if he was married, he must have been goaded beyond endurance. The mayor, perhaps, thinks of us the way the others do. That is, we're unskilled labor and, rather than strike for a decent life, we should keep the peace. But how account for all the accidents in the last strike when the desperate owners were hiring inexperienced scabs and thugs? I myself recall how one of those scabs was crushed between the elevator and the shaft. Anybody can step into our jobs, that's what they say. It's not ture. These are our jobs and we won't let any ody else step into them. We'll strike, and we'll go on striking until we get some decent treatment. If it takes twenty four hours, all the better, but if it takes longer, that's their hard luck, the Mayor to the contrary notwithstanding.

—— NEXT MORNING

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IN A LOBBY

9:30 A.M.

—Wuz anybody up yestidday?

—Yeah, Danny, de screwball.

—I walked up, yeah. My knees wuz saggin. Never again. Not me.

—Yuh sure?

—It ain't worth it. Yuh struggle tuh get up dere an wen yuh get up yuh freeze tuh deat'. Yuh be surprised how cold it's up dere on de twentieth floor.

—My boss took a soot in de Hotel Pennsylvania. Fur de buyers, you know. He sent everybody else home already until tomorrer.

—My boss tol' us tuh come back 12:30.

—Hey, look. Somebody's ringin fer de elevator.

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—Wot for? Wot's de idea?

—Hey, wot's de ringin faw?

—It's a joke. Just for a little joke.

—Still rainin outside, huh?

—— HERE I AM — STUCK (A buyer complains)

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There's enough trouble making a living and this comes along. It's injurious all around. If you're striking against Ford, all right - rip his guts out, I say, hang him, lynch him, he deserves it. But around here? What's the pickins around here? The building's bankrupt. Thank God the company I'm with don't need laws or strikes or anything in the nature of force to give us a decent wage. I got two raises in one year and I didn't have to ask for it even. If I had to strike like this I'd rather - I don't know what - go out and bum on the open road or something. It's not worth all the trouble.

——— WE AIN'T INVOLVED IN IT (A fur worker revises his opinion)

It's only opp to deir trade union conscience, no more. De union didn't give no order. If you wanna walk up, O.K., an if not, it's also O.K. It's on his own responsibility to freeze - de pleasure is all deirs. We ain't involved in it. Only thing we don't get no pay, dats all. It's not physical vurk as a carpenter - you can warm up maybe. Here you gotta use your head more. De main ting is de heat. I'm an operator, I vurk on Persian furs, I sew dem togedder. As far as vurking conditions, it's nice, clean an lotsa of air - vurking conditions is O.K. To tell de honess' troot, I'm ah union man, yes, bott I don't like ah strike. It's not altogedder

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I don't like ah strike, de principle of it, you understand, but vot I don't like is nodding to disturb de peace, dat's all. Vot am I, afer all, Ah Ben Gold? Dot man, even ah bullet wouldn't take him, like dey say in Youdish. Wotever should happen to him, he comes out widdah smile. How many times dey tried to kill him wid ah chair, wid guns, even wid knives, nodding helps - even his enemies dey wouldn't say nuthin about him, he's an hokes' and a smart man. But, I ask you, how many is dere in existence like Ben Gold? I'm not one ahdem. I like it when I'm not involved. Dey said I should come back twelve thirty, so I'm stayin here in de lobby watin. Vot can vun person do? In dis instance de noness have it.... ON THE PICKET LINE (In the rain)

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Gaw head, try an tell wot de odds are. Suddenly de Mayor wants de strike to be ovah. Like dis favorite. Image uh War. I play im back eight tuh one an he beats me by tree legs. Opens up two, goes up tuh eight, pays a hundere an fifty an comes from nowhere. Gaw head, it figger it out. Dat's why I say who expected de Mayor tuh butt in all of a sudden? I know dis much - dis here is de ace in de hole, dis garment section. We beat it here, an we beat it uptown. I may be wrong but de way it looks tuh me - yet? Mayor or no Mayor, we gonna give em ah shave an a haircut, shampoo-oo !

—

IN A LOBBY

2:00 P.M.

—It's a hold-out.

—De pipes gonna freeze, won' dey?

—Yeah.

—Maybe somebody's gonna catch pneumonia.

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—Hey, Moishe Goldberg, yuh look upset epis. Wot're yuh, worried?

—Wot for, huh?

—An elevator, wise guy.

—Accordin to de papeh, dey're gonna settle.

—Yeah? Vich side?

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—I dunno.

—It's still rainin'?

—Sum wedder far ah strike.

—Listen, wot's de good uh talkin? We're stuck an you know it. Sympathy, shmim athy, if de factories wuz on de first floor ah million an a half elevator boys wouldn't be able to keep us out.

—All right, all right. Calm down. I like to gargle ah word, does it hurt you?

—Hay, boys, I telephoned de boss. He sez we kin go home.

—Another day wasted!

—— COP (Cop guarding the door outside)

I dunno why day all trowin dirty looks at me fur? I ain't done nuthin.

—— I LIKE TO SCHMOOZE

(It is late afternoon an old fur worker sits on a cold radiator in an empty lobby confesses)

Sum vimin or men dey go in far dis, dey go in far dat - it's his vice. Me - I like to schmooze. I'm ah schmoozer, I dan't help it, it's in me. May e it's frahm de industry, it's so evaporated, may e it's on account I'm gettin uld. I dunt know. Bot dis strike I like. Vot's going on, I'll tell you de troot. I dunt know but it's no yellin or crazy bizniss like last time. Dey shot off de 10 electric, dey cot dee vires vile peepil vuz in de elevators, vot didn't dey carry on, all kinds craziness, it vuz terrible. Dis time it's just like my indistry - nice an qviet... I remember how long ahgo you used to cluz de doors at night, dere vus monee in de safe. A vurker used to sit don by his bench Febverry he voodint get opp ontill Crissmis. Today it's handled by

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peepil dot ain't got much conception of bizniss. Dey're showin ah skin fah fifty shillings tuhday, next day by sumbody else it's forty five awreddy. Dere dun exist ah standid price like by clucks. In fact, de vay it used to be und de vay it iss, it's no industry at all, hardly, it's only hard plugging, fah an uld man especially.

—— NIGHT PICKET

Jeez, wot're we askin for aroun here? A jackpot or sumthin? A lousy buck a week an tree, four hours. Wot's all de fuss about? De world's goin unduh? Dem bastards, dey'll hold out until de public loses faith in us. Jus' fuh de hell of it, dey'll hold out as long as dey can, de dirty bastards.

—— THIRD DAY STRIKERS VOTING PLACE (Banner headline) AT STRIKE HEADQUARTERS YOUSE IN DE PLURAL

(The union elevator man wait for polling returns)

——We ain't licked yet, for Chrissake, yuh dunno de vote.

——I don't?

——Listen here, you wuz licked de minute yuh started in tuh vote.

——Our hands wuz tied because-dat! (POINTS TO BALLOT BOX ON PLATFORM) Aah.

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——Aw, nuts!

——Hey, fellers, ain't de box suppose tuh have a lock on it?

——Yeah, sure.

——Well, dis one didn't.

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—Which one?

—De one I voted.

—Gwan.

—I'm tellin yuh.

—No joke?

—Dere yuh are, wot did I say? Yuh can' tell wot dey're tryin tuh put evuh on us.

—Wot I say we shoul da went to LaGuardia tree monts ago. Den, if he sez arbitrate, we kin strike if we wanna. Dis way, aftuh de strike, he sez arbitrate, well, it doan make sense, dat's all.

—Well, whose fault is it?

—Whose, wise guy?

—Youse.

—Who? Me? Yuh crazy bastard, yuh, take dat back.

—I mean youse in de plural.

—

THE AFTERNOON DRAGS ON. A UNION MAN TELLS HIS TROUBLES WHILE WAITING. LOOK THE BACK OF MY NECK'S CAVED IN.

I look like a husky guy, don't I, but I can't even lift fifty pounds. I'm weak in the knees. Them high speed cars they affect your kidneys and your heart. After five years you're

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licked. Stands to reason. You ain't got your natural health no more. Outside of that, they're useless to humanity. There's Rudy over on twelfty street, complaining about pains in the stomach and piles. He got it from the high speed. Feller on Broad Street, you know him, Pete, he quit a year ago, he 12 says to me once, "Boy, I'm glad I'm out of that poison gas." That's just what it is. Poison gas. Here, look at the back of my neck, you see that? All caved in there? Look at the way I'm standing. That's what you call a occupational disease. Maybe I look like an athlete but don't trust looks. Honestly, I couldn't lift up a baby.

—— QUIET, EVERYBODY

(The vote is announced from the platform - 8:00 PM.

[md]

Quiet, fellers, de results are in.

WE KNOW WOT'S COMIN.

Quiet, please...Accordin to de ba lots here, you boys voted for propositions one an two an against propostion three. That means -

WE KNOW.

Back to work, boys.

WE AIN'T GOIN BACK. WHO VOTED DAT WAY?

(The boys of the rank and file have their say.)

[md]

——Dis union is finished.

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—One dollar doos, from today on.

—No. No doos at all.

—We gonna find a new union.

—Boy, o boy, dis is de den uh de fawty thieves, no foolin.

—Shoulda carried little ropes in our pockets an strung em up.

—WE BEEN SOLD OUT.

—We been sold down de river.

—Looka dem. Dey're sittin dere laffin.

—Yuh oughta be ashamed uh yuhself.

—Hah much yuh get fuh it, yuh lousy bum?

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—Sumbody oughta give yuh a check fuh dis.

—Don' worry, Hitler's gonna sen im an iron cross.

— We got a gran' screwin all right.

—An wid our pants on.

—

DE VOTE TOINS OUT UNANIMOUS.

(An elevator operator sums it up.)

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Dey woodin except uh hunderd pissent vote frum de floor. Dey gotta depen on dese stuffed boxes. Bambrick's Demicratic prossedjah. "Frum de bottom uh my heart." Bull. Tree tousan' votes an' dey get ten tousan ballots. Two tirty dey begin and tree tirty de vote's all ovuh. De whole day dey spendin countin. Sum mijishuns. I ask Eddie, howdja vote, Eddie? He sez thums down. I ask Mike, howdja vote? Mike? Thums down, he sez. Jerry an Jack an who knows who else de same ting. An de vote toins out una-nimus in dem Chahley MicCarty ballot boxesish deirs.

Enuff tuh make yuh wanna jump on de CIO. Dey may be uh bunchah radicals but dey and' do no wise. Am I gawn back timorrer? Yeah, tuh duh pickit line. Dis ain't ovuh yet. 47 an 1. Where duh dey cum off wid dat stuff? So insteduh twenny minits maybe we get toity minits relief. Duh original idee wuz tuh make maw jobs so's de udder guys widout jobs coulda jumped intuh duh jobs. Ohm a lock-out man an I know de way dose poor suckers feel. I lawst plenty by stickin up fuh de union. I wuz locked out on accountuh de goddamn union. Den too I broke my leg an I got discouraged much tuh my sorrow. Ten or fifteen years back yuh try an tell me dat I'm gonna be an indoor aviator I'd ah laffed at yuh. Nuttin but duh Greeks an furrinuhs wuz in duh racket. I remembah de ol' Woild, how it use tuh run de Help Wanteds. De whole page, Elevatuh Man Wanted, Elevatuh Man Wanted. Nickel uh bunch. Aah, wot's duh use talkin?... I hate like hell tuh face de 14 tenants timorrer. Dey'll give us de hawse laff right an left. 47 an 1. An all duh papuhs'll be sayin, "BAMBRICK CLAIMS MAWRUL VICTORY FUH UNION. Maybe dis ain't dah place tuh say it, but nobody kin stop me frum tinkin. Honestly, ohm disgustid. I dunno, maybe I'll go home an brood, maybe I'll get stewed, I gotta do somthin.

——- THE NEXT DAY (Newspaper headline) STRIKE SETTLED, ELEVATORS RUNNING LEMME ALONE

(Elevator operator by his post)

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Aah, lemme alone, willyuh. Stop bodderin me. Dat's ainshint history awreddy....Gawn up?