

OIVA NURMELA:

A LEFTIST FINN'S VIEWPOINT ABOUT THE BERKELEY CO-OP

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED

BY OTTO GLYNN

IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA,

MAY 1979

EDITED BY PALOMA LIN AND ANN HARLOW

BERKELEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CONSUMERS COOPERATIVE OF BERKELEY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

2020

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Before the Co-op: The Finnish Community and Gas Station in Berkeley

- Otto Glynn: This is Memorial Day, May 28, 1979, and I'm at the home of the Nurmelas. My name's Otto Glynn and I'm interviewing Oiva Nurmela [for] his oral history report. So, when did you get interested in the Co-op? Right from the beginning?
- Oiva Nurmela: Of course. I was interested when the Finns had the gas station on San Pablo.
- Otto Glynn: That's at the very beginning, practically.
- Oiva Nurmela: I didn't have a car, so I didn't get in at that time.
- Otto Glynn: What's your number?
- Oiva Nurmela: 758. So it's....
- Otto Glynn: That's still right at the beginning.
- Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, I'm sure there's not too many. There's not 700 ahead of me anymore.
- Otto Glynn: Have you always lived here in Oakland?
- Oiva Nurmela: No, no, I lived in Berkeley within a block of that gas station — two blocks.
- Otto Glynn: That was at University and Acton. It was around there.
- Oiva Nurmela: No, the gas station was down on Bancroft and San Pablo. Possibly before your time now.
- Otto Glynn: Yeah, I was back East.
- Oiva Nurmela: You weren't much of anything.
- Otto Glynn: Anyway, the Finnish people, I understand, were most instrumental in starting the Co-op.
- Oiva Nurmela: Well, see, a Finn owned that gas station. What was his name?
- Otto Glynn: Although I do remember a couple of Methodists....
- Oiva Nurmela: I can't remember. [Unclear].
- Otto Glynn: There were a couple of Methodist preachers that [started] a buyers club or something.

Oiva Nurmela: The foreigners had a store somewhere near where the Natural Foods was. Remember across the street from where ours is and up the street further? They had that little hole in the wall as a food store, supposedly. Then the gas station was going good, and I suppose that was making it up there, the store, but it was a lot like it was for a while with that natural foods chain, where people were volunteering numerous — really penny-ante stuff, but everything has to start.

Then, I don't know who got smart, but they got together and they got up there on the corner of Acton there and they had the gas station. Then the tiny store — food store — and I guess that was it. Once they got that, then I suppose the Berkeley — no, the Finns did a lot of — the Finns for some reason or other really carried that Co-op way back when. Practically anybody that was anybody and into anything were into co-ops.

Otto Glynn: Well, they had a background, didn't they...?

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: ...from Finland?

Oiva Nurmela: From Finland, right.

Otto Glynn: What did you say, a couple of dozen were involved at one time?

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, I would say more than that.

Otto Glynn: There was a whole community, it seems like.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah [unclear].

Otto Glynn: Most of them from Berkeley and Albany, around there?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, all from Berkeley. The Finns were split already politically. They had what they called the White Finns and the Red Finns in 10th Street Hall. Around that time — I'm not sure exactly when that Chestnut Street Hall was built, but it was approximately in those same days. But the Co-op brought them both together. There were people from both sides of the fence that were active, and they worked together in the Co-op.

Otto Glynn: So what was your involvement in — wasn't the first president Gene Mannila?

Oiva Nurmela: No, Gene was the first manager.

Otto Glynn: I mean manager. No, Harry or....

Oiva Nurmela: I think Ahonen was the first president. I'm not sure.

Otto Glynn: How do you say it?

Oiva Nurmela: Ahonen.

Otto Glynn: He was one of the early....

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, it's either he or the guy that's up there in Napa now. What's his name?

Otto Glynn: Yeah, I know who you mean. [Unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: He's on the Center Council in El Cerrito now.

Otto Glynn: Carroll Melbin?

Oiva Nurmela: Melbin.

Otto Glynn: Yeah, he was the first president.

Involvement in the Finnish Society: Past and Present

Oiva Nurmela: I wasn't active in the Co-op in those days.

Otto Glynn: You were active in the Finnish Society.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: Where were they located?

Oiva Nurmela: On 10th Street.

Otto Glynn: Where it still is — and you're going to revive that, aren't you, again? I missed the benefit you had.

Oiva Nurmela: Well, it's continued, and one of the bases of the whole thing was the chorus. When we had our last chorus concert here and actually disbanded the chorus, it was just dying away anyway. We were down to about 18. We were at 45 and 50 at one time. Going back over the time, it was almost unbelievable to me that I've been singing in that chorus for 50 years. 50 years.

Otto Glynn: That was so nice what you did at the annual meeting of the Co-op, I mean the....

Oiva Nurmela: The Credit Union.

Otto Glynn: ...[unclear] and the Credit Union, yeah. We should have more of that.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: But I know the few things I went to at the Finnish Hall, I was impressed by the singing and [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: We had some great affairs over there, and we're going to have more. Of course, one of the things that's going to keep a lot of activity going down there is — we call it a Finnish Hall Maintenance Committee. We have people on it from the various organizations that were around the Finnish people [unclear] and people that meet down there.

Lillian Nurmela: The school.

Oiva Nurmela: The school, or what they call the East Bay Center for — what kind of arts?

Lillian Nurmela: Performing Arts Center.

Oiva Nurmela: Performing, yeah. East Bay Center for Performing Arts. Actually, that has been a real transfusion kind of a thing because when you go there, [unclear] I can remember when there was something going down there. There was practice, or there was a chorus [unclear]. We used to have a gymnastics group and our own activity was down there. The hall was busy. It was very seldom....

Otto Glynn: A kind of generation thing happened, didn't it?

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: It's happened in the German community.

Oiva Nurmela: All of them. All of them the same.

Otto Glynn: It's....

Oiva Nurmela: We saw....

Lillian Nurmela: The Germans keep it up, the Finns have, and the Greeks and....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: The Greeks have revived theirs [unclear].

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: Well, we went to a Russian chorus once, and it had all old people in the chorus. The Jewish chorus up in Petaluma died because it was....

Lillian Nurmela: The Russian — well, the younger people don't go into chorus. [Unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Bar mitzvahs. You know, there's a young group out that way.

Lillian Nurmela: Have you ever heard the [Donates] there?

Otto Glynn: No.

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah, yeah, [in ICA].

Oiva Nurmela: You see them someplace.

Lillian Nurmela: They sing songs, they have music from Eastern Europe, because they are Romanian, some....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Where do they perform?

Lillian Nurmela: They give an occasional concert. They gave one at the Hall.

Otto Glynn: There was something done at Piedmont recently — some folk dance group.

Lillian Nurmela: These people sing.

Otto Glynn: Finnish, I think.

Lillian Nurmela: The great part of it is, they themselves do not....

Otto Glynn: Or was it Greek?

Lillian Nurmela: ...they're not Eastern Europeans. They're just American kids, but the music appeals to them. They sing it with great authenticity.

Efforts to Vitalize (Improve? Energize) Co-op and Credit Union Meetings

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah, they're good.

Otto Glynn: Well, we ought to get something like that going instead for annual events at the Co-op, I think.

Lillian Nurmela: It would be nice, yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: You would, it was really....

Lillian Nurmela: People who hear the Donates just go, “wow.”

Oiva Nurmela: It was really something because the annual meeting of the Co-op, which is at the school, was in this big barn, [with] bright lights and [beer].

Otto Glynn: Is that where they used to hold it, at the — no.

Oiva Nurmela: No, but that’s where the annual meeting of the Co-op was. Then, a month later or so, or less than that, was [the meeting of] our Credit Union and of course, that was one of the aims I had — that the Credit Union was going to have a nice annual meeting, whatever happened. After I got that out of my system, I quit. I bit the bullet at the Credit Union because that was such a fight. I tried to do it already last year.

Otto Glynn: What was this you wanted to [have] now?

Oiva Nurmela: An annual meeting that was halfway decent.

Otto Glynn: Yeah, so you did deliver that, didn’t you?

Oiva Nurmela: You got it. Took two years to make it. The first year they....

Lillian Nurmela: Were you there....?

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Yes. I took pictures.

[Over speaking]

Lillian Nurmela: Oh, you were the one who was taking pictures.

Otto Glynn: Yeah.

Lillian Nurmela: Oh, that’s where I’ve seen you.

Otto Glynn: It’s my first role, kind of.

Lillian Nurmela: I didn’t recognize you.

Otto Glynn: I didn’t....

[Over speaking]

Lillian Nurmela: You were all dressed up that night.

Otto Glynn: Yeah. I had to observe the occasion. Once a year I dig out my sports coat. But, anyway, I think we've had some of this color and feeling at times and people have done some [unclear]. I think [Benji] had this hootenanny once.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: Added a little life to the....

Learning from Model Co-ops in the Midwest: The Importance of Member Education and Community Integration

Oiva Nurmela: But of course one of my big [aims] — if I could only dig up the two books. There were two little books about half an inch thick that a guy wrote on co-ops — actually, Finnish co-ops in the New England area and in the Middle West. He pointed out some things that really just confirm my whole business of what's wrong with our co-op here, [which is] that we're getting away from member stuff. One thing he pointed out — in both places they were in small towns and they were around an industry. Like, if the industry went on strike or they had hard times, the co-op supported these people because they were members. They got credit in the co-op and that kind of thing.

But the co-op itself was then also the social center. They had the halls, they had the activities, the choruses, and whatever activities they had went through the co-op. The very thing that stays in my mind is that 25 percent of their income went into education. Not 0.0000 but 25 percent. Those people knew what the hell it meant [to] educate. Of course, the hardheaded Finns — one thing he points out too is that the Finns fought it to the end — that they were holding their annual meetings in Finnish, even though a third of their members were not Finns anymore.

Otto Glynn: That's right here in Berkeley[?]

Oiva Nurmela: No, this is back in the Middle West — “[If] you want to go [become] a member of this organization, learn the language, God damn you!” So they finally licked that, but it took them a long time. But I'd sure like to find those two books again. I had them at one time, but....

[Aside discussion]

Otto Glynn: I just want to intersperse here that you have two pine trees out front.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: [Unclear]. We're at 6348 Heather Ridge Road, and it's just beautiful on the edge of the forest here — the Berkeley Hills woodlands. Oiva showed me the twin pines.

Oiva Nurmela: The twin pines [unclear].

Otto Glynn: Just go up all the way.

Oiva Nurmela: Ground up.

Otto Glynn: I'm reading the Finnish-American English-Finnish dictionary and it says here, "Oiva [oivalin] is superb."

Oiva Nurmela: Oivalin.

Otto Glynn: Oivalin means first-rate, superb, grand, magnificent. Oiva said he's been trying to tell people that all along. Here I have it in translation.

Oiva Nurmela: A Co-op Pioneer (Getting Involved in the Early Co-op)

Otto Glynn: So the other thing I wanted to ask [is] when you got started involved in politics or the activities.

Oiva Nurmela: The Co-op, yeah.

Otto Glynn: You don't have to give me the date and some of that.

Oiva Nurmela: I'm trying to remember now what kind of a — I can't remember myself even on what basis I got in.

Otto Glynn: Well, you were always around. You were aware of it.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah. Always been a member, but....

Otto Glynn: University Avenue was your old store.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: Now it's Telegraph.

Oiva Nurmela: That's....

Otto Glynn: In fact, you were chair last year at Telegraph, and Center Council.

Oiva Nurmela: At the next meeting, we'll have elections again, and they can decide then whether they want to have me as chairman anymore or not.

Otto Glynn: I know this — I came out here in '49 and my number is 3301. I always associate Oiva with the Co-op. Like, a few people you [unclear]. I don't know dates. I mean, I know that he's been involved one way or another, either with the passing out the literature ... expressing his views at meetings and crucial times. This to me is an involved member, whether he holds an office here or in Committee or what. It's a ... and make your position [unclear].

Lillian Nurmela: When Oiva and I got married — we've been married about 30 years — I found early in my marriage [that] one of the key things I could do to make him angry was to shop somewhere besides [unclear] the Co-op. He really meant business. I had to do all my shopping at the Co-op.

Otto Glynn: Well, that's identifying twin pines and I know that there's strong feelings about [the Co-op].

The Importance of Employee Continuity (Retention?) and Ruminations on Life in Montclair

Oiva Nurmela: We got a Lucky down here. It used to be [Payless], I think it was. The people in there were real [great]. They weren't turned over like the Co-op. For the longest period, the Co-op was turned over, turned over, turned over, and up here we have the same old people for the longest time. Even with Lucky's it's been that way. But I don't know if I've bought \$10 worth of stuff in that grocery store in the 30 years I've been here.

Otto Glynn: No.

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah, it's just five minutes away.

Otto Glynn: Is that the main supermarket in Montclair, Lucky?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Lillian Nurmela: There's a Lucky and Safeway.

Oiva Nurmela: There's a Safeway there too.

Otto Glynn: A Safeway too.

Oiva Nurmela: Safeway, I haven't even been in there, I don't think.

Lillian Nurmela: I never buy it. It's a pretty Safeway. It looks like a Southern mansion. It's [unclear].

Otto Glynn: Yes, it is. I've never been in it, though.

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: One of the things I've noticed, and I've read in *The Montclarion*, [is] that the problem here is the more building going on in the hills, the more you're getting the problems of population growth and attendant parking and other problems.

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: So you lose some of that as [unclear].

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah, Montclair is....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, Montclair, it's pretty hard to find a parking place now.

Otto Glynn: You probably get the problems of other [unclear] and maybe lower crime or something. Some of that.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, if you read *The Montclarion*, it's surprising how much is in these hills up here. But I think it's like somebody pointed out — that so much of the dope business is not down in the poor area, but it's up here. These kids up here are the ones that are on the dope.

Otto Glynn: Yeah, it's [unclear].

Lillian Nurmela: Well, there are professional criminals too that come out and cruise around every now and again....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Lillian Nurmela: There was a story about a month ago, two housewives took [unclear] car after a couple...and nabbed them.

Otto Glynn: You have to be careful who....

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah, you got to be....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Blow you away.

Lillian Nurmela: I've forgotten the whole story how they got them. It was a professional [unclear]....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: It's great if you don't end up dead.

Otto Glynn: Well, the thing is, you don't know all your neighbors now because there's more people moving around. They can come and go in cars.

Lillian Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: But they're building all over these hills, just anywhere they can....

[Aside discussion]

Otto Glynn: This is Lillian, Oiva's wife, speaking too.

Lillian Nurmela: Are you recording?

Otto Glynn: Yeah.

Lillian Nurmela: [Unclear].

Otto Glynn: I'll stop for a minute. Okay, we're on the...

Oiva Nurmela: Round two.

Otto Glynn: We're into about 20 minutes of — we got a 90-minute tape.

[Aside discussion]

The “Corporatization” of the Co-op

Oiva Nurmela: I'm thinking back on those two books this guy wrote about the regional co-op. It's a sort of a disease that I read also that has picked into or has attacked the co-op movement in the bigger co-op countries, in England and France, in Finland, Sweden. It's like these people who get elected to the board now, they very neatly quit spelling it C-O-O-P. They spell it C-O-R-P, and they

become board of directors of this corporation. I read about the same problem attacking these other co-ops. Once you get to that stage, you're in trouble.

One of the strengths of a co-op is membership. If we don't take care of our own members, we can forget it. Under this society there's no way we can compete with them, and they talk about our competition being Lucky's or Safeway's or some of these other stores. Well, that's not our competition at all because we're like the old pimple on their hind end when it comes to comparing to these guys. We're no competition and no pressure. I keep saying it over and over again that our competition — the closest thing we've got to competition — is Chicago. You got the one in Washington, D.C. There's no other real co-ops in this country, and that's our competition when it comes to competition.

But if we think only in terms of a business, we're in no way going to be able to make it. No way. There's no question in my mind that one of the reasons we are in the financial situation we are in today is that we're not using the best of the means of business in our business part. But that's not our basis, really. We've got to get in and find out... That board should take any problem that comes to them and just weigh it one way or the other — is this good or bad for our members — and that's all. They shouldn't be nit-picking the rest of this crap that the managers put on them. That's your job — you're hired to run this business for us. You have so and so parameters within which you have to work. If you can't do it, the door swings the other way too. Bye, bye, baby.

But they, as a board — that's all in that measure basically. That's where [Gene] Mannila was smart. He used to dump all his stuff on those guys, and they sat there all night long, 12, 1 o'clock, every week. They could have met every night, I guess, [and] they would have still had problems there because all of the nit-picking junk was turned over to them, and they thought, "Because we're members of this board of directors of this corporation, C-O-R-P" — just one little letter change — that they're handling it. They are running this business. Mannila sits over here, or whoever the general manager is, collects his money, and does nothing. Nothing has been done as far as management is concerned.

Shortfalls of the Co-op: Lack of Effective Management

Oiva Nurmela: The biggest problem right now is starting to come out more and more, and that is this real big lack of management. There's nobody in our Co-op that ever has had any kind of — through the Co-op at least — management training. The few managers that have had a little bit are ones who came from outside. They worked for Lucky's or they worked for one of the other stores. They might have had some little bit of managerial training, but from the Co-op, they have never had. We got such pinheads when it comes to talking about managerial training that they put them into this store, and then they put them into this store, and then they put them into that store.

Or they put them within a store to stack these shelves, to stack those shelves, and to stack these shelves as though this was some kind of managerial training. They don't even know what it means. That's how far behind we are when it comes to... Between the fact that the damn board will not stay away from the manager's part, and secondly, that we don't have any managerial people, and I mean all the way down... [Brian Lepton's] never had any managerial training. He's an operator. He's a manipulator.

He's having problems now because he used to always deal with just these big shots who were always the boards of directors' people and he's great at that. He ran those guys ragged, and that's why he stayed there all the time. But managerial training? No, he's never had it. This is managerial training that you learn by going to school, and it can be managerial training that would apply to the Co-op store, it would apply to a shoe store, would apply in [unclear], where you're dealing with the manager's [problems]. Because there are some problems that apply in the managerial sense — all of that you learn — pick up — in that way. This we don't have.

Those two are the big problems that we have. I look[ed] at some of the managers that are the so-called managers of our centers now, and it's really sickening. When [Joe Abata] was in there, there were three people who suckered up to him and got appointed as managers, and they stay[ed] on. There's no way to get rid of them. That's the crazy thing about this Co-op. I guess they have to do it like that. Always the one guy that went off [in] a

fishing boat and dumped him and the boat and everything. That's the only way to get rid of a manager.

Otto Glynn: [Unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. I don't know what this other kid did. He really must have stepped on some tender toes if he got fired, the one at University Avenue. He wasn't, I don't think, even the worst. But he must have stepped on somebody's toes. See, this is where I felt when they had [Levitt] in there that there were some possibilities with Levitt, because Levitt wasn't a part of this clique. He was from the outside. Sure, he knew nothing about the Co-op, but that's what the board was supposed to do.

The board was supposed to be taking care of that. If they would have taken care of their damn business, which is the Co-op — the membership thing — and give[n] him the parameters, the guy had no connections. As it is now, you see what's doing now. All these old guys are coming back. Look at the people who are on this Planning and Development Committee.

Otto Glynn: [Laurie Lehtin?].

Oiva Nurmela: [Lehtin], [Emil] Sekerak, and I haven't seen Zack Brown, but Zack has been in the Center Council.

Otto Glynn: There's [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, and the guy from the — [he] went to Mitchell Services, the guy with the game leg. All these guys who came out of the University Students' Co-op, all great Co-op persons [unclear] and everything, who lost it all once they started picking up some money, now they're back in again because they're the clique. They're into everything. There comes the kind of a thing like this business at the Shattuck and the Center Council where the board said, "Vote for these people." Isn't that something? The Center Council and the board committees are supposed to be a place where the board would be reaching out [to] the members to get some input from the members, and they want to control it. That's really something.

Otto Glynn: Is there any hope [unclear]?

Oiva Nurmela: I don't think so. Have you seen that last letter that [Bob] Neptune sent out?

Otto Glynn: Yeah, I sit in on his management committee, so I got the report on it and it's in this week's *[Co-op] News*.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, they printed that too?

Otto Glynn: A gross misunderstanding of the amount. There's no cash flow loss, but there is....

Oiva Nurmela: Just call it what you will. Call it what you will.

Otto Glynn: But it's not George's fault. George [Yasukochi] wanted to hold off that job and Bob took over.

Oiva Nurmela: He's not in control?

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: He's [in] control, but the responsibility for financial reports and balance sheets was taken from him, so it's kind of vindicated when now that — you know. He had it there and [unclear] was delegated to an accountant, but the accountant has now been dismissed. But I think he's got another point of view. He's written a letter to [unclear]. But it will be in Committee and [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Well, of course, I told people for weeks and weeks when — here they come out with these reports that, “Oh, everything's so rosy,” that, “After the strike, we maintained our income,” and [unclear] a little bit. All I had to do was to walk in the Telegraph store. That's one store I know backwards and forwards, and during that strike, there were times when — or most of the time, actually, and almost all times during the day — all stands were busy. I mean, they were backed up.

In many cases, you'd go in there and that whole front part of the store was full. You couldn't even walk down there on the other side of the cash registers because there were six or eight, ten people in every cash register. I've been in there the last couple of months, and there are times in there at 11 o'clock in the morning there's two checkers working. One or two people in there. I can just feel them just making that register work very slowly so that this one will last a little while so they'll have something to do and....

Otto Glynn: One of the...

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: ...not have to stand around.

Otto Glynn: ...[what] I understand now is that they have — what is it — three-quarters of a million dollars of certificates of interest coming due, say, at the end of this year. This big gain we had hopefully made through the strike [unclear] is not as large. There's no way of knowing how much ... [to] invest of this. So [we] have that to face when — anyway, the accountants and auditors have ... finance committees and I hope leadership [unclear]. Anyway this is....

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, but these are outside auditors.

Otto Glynn: These seem to me — well, we have our own auditors, but it's at our request that we really get it straight and it's going to be worked on. But it seems to me [that] one of the dilemmas of business, whether it's right or wrong — we want to see [unclear] like that. There's pros and cons. We kicked that around. You get locked into this so-called competition with the supermarkets and [unclear] there's any way of — not a hope for decentralization...which — I said it before — it's ... influence. What — you've been through a lot of these [unclear] and...

Oiva Nurmela: It's not the answer.

Otto Glynn: Is there any way of...

Oiva Nurmela: The answer's real simple actually, and that is to turn to the members. Quit this damn stuff of throwing a lot of crap and lies at the members.

Otto Glynn: Well, how would you...

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: See, when you first came, the Finns had the cultural community and the geographical community. Now we have multicultural, multi-political, and dispersed membership — 90,000. I think one of the things is: how can we have this membership [unclear]? Those people knew about co-ops in the early days. Very few know about it nowadays, or have....

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, but even....

Otto Glynn: ...this consciousness.

Oiva Nurmela: Even at that time, there was only the leadership that was really consciously conscious of the other people. There's a lot of people now, these kids of today, why do they come in and they say, "980?" They don't even realize that they ain't doing a damn for the Co-op. They're not doing a damn for the farm workers.

Otto Glynn: What do you mean, 980?

Oiva Nurmela: 980, the farm workers' number.

Otto Glynn: Oh, yes, yes.

Oiva Nurmela: So they give the number and they shop at the Co-op because of this big thing they have in their mind. They don't really know what a co-op is because where would they have found it out? Nobody's ever told them, at least from our side. We don't have the money. We put ads in the goddamn *Co-op News* instead of articles about the Co-op. So where would they learn? But there is this big thing that in Berkeley there is this great Co-op. It's a wonderful thing. The fact that there is no real — the so-called education department that we have....

We had these people locked in. I think they had shackles on their feet, [and] when they got in there in the morning, they shackled them in. They couldn't make out — they couldn't step out. To me, where they should have been were outside, and I screamed and hollered at the Telegraph Co-op, at our center councils that "Let's find out. What organizations are there in the area?" That's what we ought to do. They should be talking to these organizations in the area. They should be talking Co-op. Our Center Council should be talking Co-op. The Co-op should be talking Co-op to the people out there and not in terms of rebate because that's a lie.

Just before they dumped the whole education department — and I was happy to see that go. It was a waste of money from what they've been doing. For years they've been. I saw these kids sitting in there. I said, "What do you tell people now? Why should they join? Anybody come in here and shop? Everybody's just as much right. Anybody go in there and cash a check?" When they had the kiddie corrals, everybody wanted a kiddie corral. What reason? Why should anybody join the Co-op? You know, what could they

say? There was no reason. I mean, you tell them it's a big thing to own the Co-op, and then, what do you own? You don't have a say-so. How could you? We jumped, or we missed, the boat long ago.

But I think until we go back to that, we're lost. Until we go back to the fact that we have to — why should we worry about publicity in the newspapers to get people to know about the Co-op, PR stuff, when, if we were dealing, making our 90,000 family members happy, we'd be getting in so damn many members we'd have to start screening them. You can't come in because you don't have green hair, that kind of thing.

Otto Glynn: It seems to me you're talking about a movement, [a] co-op movement.

Oiva Nurmela: That's what it is.

Otto Glynn: How do you get a movement off the ground in this day and age, to organize [unclear]?

Oiva Nurmela: Well, [in] first place, dump everybody that's on the board.

Otto Glynn: How would you do that?

Oiva Nurmela: I don't know. Ask them to resign, I guess. If they are serious about thinking that the Co-op is a movement, and if they don't think it's a movement, then they shouldn't be there. Forget it.

Otto Glynn: [Unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: But you said the thing when you said the Co-op movement, and that's why I've always said that we don't have any competition. Lucky's are not any competition, nor is Safeway. But when you get people like [Earl Fuller], when the Co-op got up to about \$1 million or maybe \$2 million or \$5 million sales — “Now, next week we're going to go buy Safeway,” he says. That kind of thinking. \$5 million is such a big amount of money. What's the money we take in now? \$80 million or whatever it is. A Safeway must take that in in, what, two days maybe? Maybe two days.

[A]nd I'm sure if we were ever to become any kind of a threat to Safeway, any one of our centers, they would do exactly the same thing that they did — and that I can remember very clearly — in the Finnish section of San Francisco up about 15th and Market. That whole area used to be a Finn Town

area. It also used to be dotted with small mama and papa stores. You know, 12, 14, 20 hours a day, little credit books, and all that kind of stuff. Safeway went in there, and Safeway's prices were as much as 20 percent lower, and these little things were dropping off, dropping off. They can't make it. People are not going to go there.

Now it's all clean of little mama and papa stores, and Safeway's prices up there [...] they're back up 20 percent higher now. Safeway can do it anytime they want to, and they could do it to the Co-op [w]hen we're dealing in the terms that: they are our competition. If we were dealing in terms of our members and people — and I always say, I aim at myself, just like Lil says about “Where do you shop?” “I shop at the Co-op.” I told one of the kids one time — eggs went up here some time ago — one of the young clerks, and he said, “Price of eggs,” or something or other. I said, “Look, as long as I got money, I shop Co-op, and when I run out of money, then I'm going to quit the Co-op, and I'm going to Safeway and I'm going to take what I need.” The kid's eyes [unclear].

I decided that a long time ago. As a kid, I remember I was about 14 or something like that, I decided that people were crazy to go hungry [when] the stores are full like that. I'll be damned if I'm going to go hungry if the stores are full. But when I got money and I shop, I shop Co-op. When people cry to me about the price of this and I watch them when they go in and get string beans or something, they measure them down on those big scales and you must be within a half a pound or something, and they worry about it. I always make sure it's a little past the two pounds or three pounds.

Then it comes up to the cash register, and then they'll argue because, “Well, I set it for this.” What's the difference? You go in and you buy for two people or four people, you buy a handful or two handfuls or whatever you're going to use, and you buy that much. What's the difference? If you haven't got the money to buy, then tough tit. That's not the Co-op's problem. Take it up with somebody else. But it's great [unclear] shopping. Lil, of course, has been sort of tending towards vegetarian for a long time, but about the last three months now, I haven't bought meat.

I was down to — of course, it's so lousy anyway — I was down to choosing between hamburger [and] beef stew and then going through maybe 30 packages to find one that looked like it would be edible. There, again, while the Co-op had the better-side-down process,¹ now, why was that changed?

Otto Glynn: Has it been changed [unclear]?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. Well, one of the butchers told me, “Well, they don't do it over there. They don't do it.”

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: ...are not educated [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, and they're cheating our members. What the hell is it? How can you expect somebody to support you when you know damn well you're being cheated just as much as you are at Lucky's? That's the competition we want? The other thing I was getting was chuck steaks.

Otto Glynn: You become like the competition when you start....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: Of course.

Otto Glynn: I think what you're saying is, the strength of the Co-op is in its members.

Oiva Nurmela: That's it.

Otto Glynn: It's a unique concept that you get everything organized to....

Oiva Nurmela: If you're dealing with members. But, if you're dealing — we started using it sometime back, centers instead of stores, but it's hard. I see it's so hard for these people who say centers. They say stores, stores because that's in their mind — that we're running another store like Safeway and that's the competition. It bugs [the] hell out of me. I just ran into a girl that works over in the [Marin] center, and every time I hear of “Marin center,” it really makes me want to blow my top because Hachi Yuasa laid that out. Hachi is an old friend, good Co-op [member], and he laid it out in terms of a co-op center.

¹ “Better-side-down” refers to the Co-op policy, implemented in 1965, of packaging meat with the “better side” face down, thereby maximizing quality transparency for customers.

I don't know how many stores we have — 25 or 30 small, little stores. Well, the idea was, with the centers, that we as a Co-op would run all of these. So what do we do? We got this great management and found out that it was so much easier to collect rent than it was to manage these things. So we got our two-bit grocery store and well, we got a natural [foods area]. All the other ones are rented out, and these people pay rent and they must be making a profit, but we can't run them. We're so dumb that we can't run a lousy little — whatever the stores are — [a] cheap store or whatever. Huh? That's the kind of thing that's....

Otto Glynn: That's a contradiction.

Oiva Nurmela: That's what bugs the Christ out of me. Think of the possibilities we'd have there. I don't remember what the membership is over there, but it must be in the area of 6,000, maybe more, families.

Otto Glynn: I think they're beginning to hurt from another shopping center [that] opened up near there.

Oiva Nurmela: I wouldn't doubt it at all. I wouldn't doubt it at all, because it's not run. But just think: if all of these things in there were Co-op... That one picture I showed you in there on the wall, I'm not sure that that's in a co-op, but right now, it's in Helsinki. There's about a six-story building. The floor area's just about the size of one of our — not the biggest markets, it may be a little smaller than Telegraph, possibly [unclear] floor level, but six floors like this. They get everything. You can buy practically anything you want to buy in that....

Otto Glynn: [Unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, clothing or whatever.

Otto Glynn: It's in Helsinki.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, and do you know there's — Helsinki, of course — Finland has a problem. I'm not sure about the other countries, but in Finland they have a real problem of two co-ops — two big co-ops. One's sort of a radical and one's sort of a conservative. Well, if you're co-op, how can you be one or the other? But my feeling of it over there — I had a cousin over there who said,

“I know the head guys of both.” He was there and a big wheel in like a wholesale...

Otto Glynn: Supplier.

Oiva Nurmela: It was almost like a wholesale co-op, actually, because they set up stores in the small towns, put guys in for business, and so on. He dealt with all [unclear]. He said, “I know that they have the big wheels on both sides.” In other words, he’s telling me there ain’t any difference, if there’s a head man on both sides, red or white, or whatever you want to call it. I’ve often thought about the possibilities and the strengths that that co-op movement in Finland would have, were you to go in there again, as I said about this board, and just level [it] off. Tell both boards to go to hell, and put them together and re-elect some new people, and make one co-op out of it. I bet you it would be four times as strong, at least [to start with].

But already it’s big, but it’s not doing this other... This wholesale thing, which is private industry, is a big set-up. Now, the Co-op should be doing that. But that slid right in there because here’s these two guys out here, I’m sure they fight against each other.

Otto Glynn: Right. They’re duplicating services and...

Oiva Nurmela: I don’t doubt it.

Otto Glynn: ...and also fighting, using energy fighting each other.

Oiva Nurmela: I’m sure they are. But they’re supposedly on the basis of co-op — well, what have you got? You’ve got radical co-ops, you’ve got conservative co-ops. Looks to me like you’re supposed to have co-ops, and if you want to be radical or whatever, you do it on the outside.

Otto Glynn: Now the Finnish community is split too, radical/conservative.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah.

Otto Glynn: They had two halls, the....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: Sure.

Otto Glynn: ...hall and today there’s two halls there.

Oiva Nurmela: Except the one on 10th Street doesn't belong to the Finns anymore.

Otto Glynn: 10th and, what, Hearst?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: The other one's on....

Oiva Nurmela: Chestnut Street.

Otto Glynn: ...and University. Now, you've sold the 10th and Hearst. Who owns that one? You rent it from them? You lease it from them?

Oiva Nurmela: No, we're not doing [either]. We got 10 years of free rent — part of the sale. That's starting to wear out, I guess, pretty soon. Three or four more years, I guess.

Otto Glynn: I remember KPFA had one of their fairs there once.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, they were thinking about buying it, but they never got the money. I guess the real owner right now is the *People's World*, the paper. I know they have their editorial offices there....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Now, what was the split in Berkeley? Have they ever gotten it together since then, or the....

Oiva Nurmela: Well....

Otto Glynn: They talk to each other, don't they, and that's that.

Oiva Nurmela: Well, somewhat. I mean, it depends because there are people like my mother, for example. She swore up and down she'd never set foot in that Chestnut Street Hall, and she never did. And that was a pretty feeling amongst many of the 10th Street people. I remember a lot of them **thought that**, [quotations?] boy, I was a gone gosling, because I was one of the first ones. I went there — took part in a play at the Brotherhood Hall over there. My mother was after me, and some of the other ones were sort of looking at me.

But there's people on the other side are saying, "Wait, actually that's pretty much..." — before we had the chorus, we used to have our concert and then the Brotherhood chorus. It would depend a lot on the director, but there was a

young fellow from San Francisco directing for a while, and when we would have our concert, they would sing at our concert as part of the program, and then we would do the same thing there. Then we'd have a party afterward and there'd be these little gallon jugs of whisky. We don't start on the light stuff.

Otto Glynn: Man, oh, man.

Oiva Nurmela: But there were still people at — when was it, the bicentennial chorus, or we got together our choruses and actually all of the Finnish organizations. The Finns are funny, but maybe the other language people are like that — even the churches are separate. There's about three different church groups. Then there's....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Are they state church? What is it, Lutheran or....?

Oiva Nurmela: Lutheran, yeah. They're all Lutheran, but they're all different shades of it, whatever. Very, very strictly divided. So during our bicentennial thing, we got all of them — 30-some organizations, all Finn organizations — together. I was co-chairman with this woman from down the Peninsula, I think, and we did pretty good. We did pretty good in that terminology. But when we had the chorus that we wanted to sing together, we rehearsed a couple of times at the Brotherhood Hall. All of our chorus went up there, and then somebody said, "Well, let's have the next rehearsal down at our hall on 10th Street," and I think four came down there. You see, there was feeling on both sides, "I'll be damned if I'm going to step foot in the other hall."

Otto Glynn: Even during the bicentennial.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, even when we were outwardly supposedly going together. Now, of course, most of the older people are damn near gone. The older on our side — there's only a few older women left and they're in their 80s, and the men are pretty much gone. They [never did] last that long.

Otto Glynn: The offspring haven't married the other?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, they just have not been into the activity. Our chorus, as I say, was down to about 18. That was mostly the second generation, born in this country. I think we still had three people in there, only one thing. But in very

close [unclear]. People like me that sang in the chorus for 50 years, other ones 35 and 40. But this kind of a split was pretty silly because their chorus is getting down to about the same thing. I don't know. We talked a little bit about the possibilities of setting up a joint chorus, which would be separate from either place, but there's enough opposition to this kind of thing, so that didn't go through. Might just as well be that both choruses will die. We'll see, I guess this fall, whether they're going to make it or not.

Otto Glynn: Are you serving on any committees? Are you still active in the Center Council? You were chair last year and you're still on the Center Council?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: Are you sitting on any committees [unclear]?

Oiva Nurmela: No. One of the things I was intending to get into was the 4Cs but they seem to have their meetings on Thursday nights, and when the chorus was still going, that's when the chorus met. Our Center Council, which I've been on for years, and I've watched — one of the sickening things to see [is that] a lot of people come in with all kinds of charge, and people are active in the [unclear] boycott, for example. They come out in the goddamn ... in the stores, and they just quit. They just quit. Many other kinds of things.

One of our girls, some years ago, three or four years ago, she went through the past minutes from the previous year of all the motions we made to the board and to management, and she came up with practically three pages — legal-sized pages — of motions that we got nothing. Nothing. Not even, “received your motion,” or, “it was transferred here,” or — nothing at all. Three pages of that thing. That's the kind of stuff that has been real rough up there: trying to get people to stay on that Center Council. It's dynamite. So there, in reality, we've had very few meetings. We've had meetings with three or four people for the whole last period — six or eight months.

Otto Glynn: You had a little spurt of activity there when they were going to move the bookstore.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, but that didn't even bring in a lot of our Center Council people. It brought in the people — one of the things that I really got some hope for now is that we've reached the neighborhood because we finally reached the real

core of the neighborhood, which are the neighborhood groups. There are four of them right around Telegraph and [Ashby]. One of [them], just about on [College], that we've got contact with — the elected representative used to come to our Center Council.

To me, when they represent anywhere from 600 to 800 families, it's a hell of a lot more than going through all of this game playing of elections and having 40 or 50 people vote [unclear], even 30 votes for somebody for Center Council. [Unclear] from me, I'm up here, 6 miles from the goddamn store. These people are right there.

Otto Glynn: They're interested in natural foods [there, price and that].

Oiva Nurmela: We've had some meetings and discussions with people there, and then we had one of the fellows get in real ambitious and put up a questionnaire with a catchy Jelly Belly slogan. What do you think? We got over 100 [responses]. He's just tabulating this stuff. I know he got over 100 of these things back. I know we also got about 15 people who signed in and wanted to participate in some activity on this thing. What has been the problem in getting them to some kind of a meeting — I guess I don't know what it is because they don't show. They did come [unclear]. Originally had the liquor store going in there. But now we've had discussions in there, and there, again, is a good example of the kind of stuff that we have to contend with. We talked and talked with the — even though we haven't had them all at one big meeting — I talked to, I'd say, at least a dozen people who have been interested and involved in what's going to be now. We got this space over here. What do we do with it? Pretty much agreed that what we've got to do is go for moving the pharmacy from here over to there. I didn't realize the space, but in talking to the pharmacist there, [Adolf], it gives him almost double the space, which is not really still big enough, but if it's double what we've got....

Otto Glynn: What they got now, yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: ...it ought to be quite a relief. But, also, that that will then open up all of that area there, the big hallway that's such a waste of space, and....

Otto Glynn: Yeah, you could make that into one...

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: ...and open all that area out where produce [is] and, from there over, use that area to expand into some natural foods areas. Maybe even drag some of the stuff in because there are some natural foods too crowded on the shelves.

Otto Glynn: Sure, it's a matter of....

Oiva Nurmela: Bring some of those over here and maybe we can order something else over there. Move maybe that first rack by the produce down into some of the other areas. So that whole area then will be sort of a blend of produce and natural food. But, then it should be open to the pharmacy. You can have the door, sure, because that's right coming down. It's handy from the parking lot. But open into the center, so the whole area's nice and open. So if we start that, figure it out.

So what the hell are they coming in with, [with] the proposal from management, and what, they're going to the state board? [They've] proposed for a wall right through there so that they're separated. I haven't found one person in all of our discussions who's — even Adolf there, the pharmacist now, is not interested in it. He wants an open area.

Otto Glynn: So now in numerous [unclear] Bruce Miller got together with...Harris and a group and pursued the architectural design of that relentlessly for several years to get some input. I understand that's [unclear]. I don't know how you'd go about it — it might not be too late.

Oiva Nurmela: Well, I don't know. See what happens with the pharmacy. There's another thing that is pretty sickening to have to contend with. We knew when the bookstore was going to go out of there about a month ahead of time, and we had enough discussion there that it was too small for a liquor store and [that] the neighborhood wouldn't let a liquor store in. We knew it was too small for a natural foods store as a separate thing. So the basic, best thing was to slip the pharmacy 'round. Well, it's not so easy to move a pharmacy. They don't even know this until all of a sudden, a month or two later — that to set up and open a pharmacy, you have to present your plans to the State Pharmacy Board. So that's why they're doing nothing now: because they had to get some kind of a plan and send it up to them.

Otto Glynn: Well, maybe they....

Oiva Nurmela: Now for us to change it again, I don't know....

Otto Glynn: Are there regulations that you have to have a separate....

Oiva Nurmela: No.

Otto Glynn: If they have it shut — if the hardware variety is a wall — there's an opening [unclear]. The hardware variety.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: At the end there's the pharmacy.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: You deal through a window, so there is a wall between them.

Oiva Nurmela: Well, yeah. But that part would be there, a counter and a....

Otto Glynn: Are you saying so you could still buy...?

Oiva Nurmela: Well, see, in my terminology, the pharmacy part where they make the scripts and fill those parts — that would be separate. There would be a wall and a cashier, actually, there. But that is only a part of that area.

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: They want to wall off that whole area?

Oiva Nurmela: They want to wall this completely off.

Otto Glynn: Well, why don't....

Oiva Nurmela: See, and what they'll do — they'll have [duplication]. We talked about some of the stuff that's over there — toothpaste, a lot of that junk. A lot of that could be over there.

Otto Glynn: It seems to me they're planning....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: But now they're going to have [unclear].

Otto Glynn: Owe it to the Center Council, if you requested to bring the blueprints of the preliminary design.

Oiva Nurmela: No, they're....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Because University Avenue — you know what a long struggle that was.

Oiva Nurmela: Oh, yeah. But they're going ahead with that one. As I say, even the pharmacist who's going to be involved....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Because University Avenue was [our own store]. Telegraph is leased.

Oiva Nurmela: It's leased, yeah.

Otto Glynn: What do you think about leasing versus ownership? It's not too good a lease either, is it?

Oiva Nurmela: No, it's one of the worst goddamn things [unclear].

Otto Glynn: How did we ever get into that?

Oiva Nurmela: Stupidity. That was back when we had the George Little board. It was really corporation kind of thinking: dig, dig, get some more. That was like the way we used to talk about Acorn Projects in West Oakland. The whole idea was that we'd just go down there and build up a box and put a label on: "Co-op." I know a lot of people down in this area [unclear]. Who the hell knows ... Co-op? Don't they realize if they put a store down there like that it will be empty in three weeks? They'll rip it out and you'll be lucky to have bare walls. But if we went in there....

Otto Glynn: Built up a membership base.

Oiva Nurmela: A membership. I don't know what West Oakland is like now, but it used to be that West Oakland was organized. There were so goddamn many organizations actually down there. But I'm sure that, had we — I said, for example, "If you really want to go into there with a co-op," I said, "[unclear] \$100,000, whatever, hire somebody, one person, two people, get a center, get a store with a meeting room in the back. Agree to have an office in the front and a meeting area, and then ask for volunteers and go down there and make an organization there."

I said, “The goddamn — the building will come up like a mushroom.” I’m doing as good talking to you now as I was at that time talking to [unclear]. How do you tell a multitude? But that, see, that doesn’t register. To them, the Co-op is one of these square boxes with a sign “co-op” on it. Co-op doesn’t even mean co-operate.

Otto Glynn: Now....

Oiva Nurmela: They’d be lost over [unclear].

Otto Glynn: North Point in San Francisco did a good job of building up a group first, and they had 150 families that [unclear] before they went in to find the site.

Oiva Nurmela: I think Marin has more than that.

Otto Glynn: Marin — I’m sure Marin — yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: But then the problem is that that interest was great, but it was stopped. Again, once they got the building, forget it.

Otto Glynn: Well, now West Oakland has a [unclear]. It’s high unemployment, probably the highest....

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: East Oakland. Yeah, East Oakland.

Otto Glynn: Eastern did worse. But that doesn’t mean — even more so, we need a Co-op presence. But the other thing is that there’s [unclear] freeway store coming...hasn’t been redeveloped. It’s starting to open up again as a possibility.

Oiva Nurmela: I think that’s going through now.

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Yeah, yeah. It’s temporary stuff because of the [unclear] hiring their contractors.

Oiva Nurmela: Have they begun?

Otto Glynn: Well, I don’t really think — two weeks ago, they started that. Yeah, but I think that [unclear]. But there’s real poverty and high infant mortality and

illness in East Oakland. The highest out of — other than some of the Third World, there in East Oakland. Malnutrition and....

Oiva Nurmela: There was a — what they call an East Oakland housing committee, I think it was. There was a group of young people. I think they were from the University. They went out there and they started a new survey of, I think, about 20 and up to 80 [unclear] — something like that. I don't know, it went up to maybe — I don't remember how far up. I remember I saw the big map they had — about a half of that wall — of that area of Oakland. Part of their survey was in terms of how many abandoned buildings, houses there [were]. At that time, it was 1800 abandoned.

Also, they had a survey and they made a survey very consciously of five different savings and loan outfits: two of the big ones, one or two I guess of sort of smaller ones, and also, in their own words, a Twin Pines Savings and Loan, which claims to be a people-oriented bank. Looking at that map, they stuck in pins where these loans were in East Oakland area, and you'd think the bay had gone into that area. It was all black. All the pins were up above, all the way up above up there. None of them down there, no more....

Otto Glynn: Red line.

Oiva Nurmela: Red line. No more Twin Pines than Great Western or whatever the other two big....

Otto Glynn: [Unclear]. In other words, the Co-op should be a movement in all areas of life.

[Over speaking]

Oiva Nurmela: ...movement.

Otto Glynn: I think that's what you've been saying. If we lose that, we've lost the heart.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. You have nothing. There are these penny-ante characters who can't make it to a board of directors of any corporation on the outside. They want to get onto the board of directors of the Co-op. That's simple. Then you just change the "o" to an "r" and you sit there. It's almost comical, if it wasn't so goddamn sickening, to watch these people who, for the longest period now, have had these so-called slates of "radicals" and "conservatives." Once they

get their butts into those seats up there at Shattuck, they change and they just blend together so beautifully. You'd have one hell of a time to try to figure out which one was running on a radical slate and which was on a conservative slate.

What really is the ultimate of the ultimate there [is that] they would like to sit there and, in their mind, is how they are on this board of directors of this corporation and how they would like to be smoking a big cigar with their feet on the desk because that means that you lean back. They haven't got the goddamn guts to put their feet on the desk. It's really sickening to see such little penny-ante brains. That's what is in their mind. I can read them as well as [unclear] say it because you can see it from their actions. That's their approach to the Co-op movement.

Your board committees, they're another thing that gets in my craw once in a while. I can't understand, for example, why board members will run for Center Council. I don't see why they function on board committees. To me, immediately, that puts a blanket on any kind of discussion. You've seen it yourself. You [unclear] down on MacArthur [and] Broadway. The first thing, whether you lot did it or others, but pretty soon it's, "Well, what do you think," and, "What do you think the board will think of this?"

Otto Glynn: Yeah.

Oiva Nurmela: You stop....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Everything has the over [unclear] of the board.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, to me, the whole idea of, well — God, I can remember back when Bob Arnold was the chairman of the Member Relations Committee and he said, "People should come to several meetings at least before we made them members." I said, "Bob, what the hell are you doing in between? Do you wash their feet? Do you anoint them with some goddamn thing? What the hell is the difference?"

Irv Rautenberg.

Otto Glynn: Don.

Oiva Nurmela: No, Irv.

Otto Glynn: Don Rautenberg?

Oiva Nurmela: No, Irv. Irv.

Otto Glynn: Irv Rautenberg.

Oiva Nurmela: Rautenberg. He's about the best. He went to nine meetings of the Management Committee and was still told that he hadn't been around enough to become a member. [Unclear].

Otto Glynn: He's done a good job in the [unclear]. He's a good man.

Oiva Nurmela: He doesn't give up. So how many people could there still be around when they get slapped in the face like this? But George and Angela Little, when she was on that committee, the....

Otto Glynn: Consumer Protection?

Oiva Nurmela: Protection, yeah. She had the same thing: that people should come to four or five meetings before they become members. I asked her, I said, "What in the hell is the difference between when a person comes in tonight" — the first goddamn meeting I ever came in, I came up with a valid suggestion — "Why can't you have them both? Suppose they voted five times, and suppose the Committee vote unanimously and they take it to the Board and the Board dumps it, now, what the hell is the difference whether this person is here one meeting?" Throwing up a goddamn [unclear] with this kind of crap that you have to be members so long before you can vote at a committee meeting.

Otto Glynn: One of the nice things about — these young people are coming up, and they work here [on] collecting and buyers' clubs — it's a whole growth of those [unclear]. I sat in on one of these action groups from — I think it was a [Tarmac] demonstration down at [Diablos] — and they were reviewing it with their friends at the meeting house. The way they run their meetings — no one gets up and talks [unclear]; the whole group makes comments from the floor, and they decide on the collective approach so that no one is dominating the group. I don't know, it seems we have to reconcile in the Co-op. Why shouldn't we talk [unclear]? I think sometimes we're thinking these things.

Oiva Nurmela: Right.

Otto Glynn: It's how we can reconcile the board, the management, and the grassroots membership and make an effective [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Were you around when they had the [parliament] Co-op?

Otto Glynn: Yeah. I didn't get involved in it, but that was [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: There's a good example of what happened. When they first started out — boy, this is great. It sounded — all of the words were fine and God, we had 30 or 40 people. I think maybe these people are still around the Co-op. Boy, they were really going to go out there and make this into a real movement. We had a couple of meetings, and it became very obvious in about the second meeting — I knew it wasn't going to be [unclear].

I told them, "I hope you people aren't going to be too damned disillusioned, because you don't have any power. You can make all the fine decisions you want, but that board is the one that's going to decide what you're going to do and what you ain't going to do." They would come up with some great ideas and they'd go to the board — go up with their suggestions, boom. So in about three or four meetings, the membership was down. It's not 30 or 40, it's down to 20 or 30 — it's down to 15.

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: That was just — they would get [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: Then I think the Center Council grew out of that.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: The 4Cs doesn't function too well anymore. The question is, can the Center Councils be effective?

Oiva Nurmela: There, again, the center — the 4Cs thing, where that was twisted around so that that became like a board committee.

Otto Glynn: I should say here, 4Cs, or Center Council Coordinating Committee, [is] made up of [unclear] and any delegates the Center Councils send. This is an attempt to bring the Center Councils together.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah, but they twisted it. When it first started, as I understood, the beginnings of it was — and I was in favor of it — that it was a separate thing [from] the center councils — separate from the board. But somehow it's eased into so it's like another committee. Very much under the control and the....

[Over speaking]

Otto Glynn: Well, it's kind of dissolved into nothing really.

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: But that doesn't mean it couldn't be revived if the....

Oiva Nurmela: But there, again, it would have to be a separate thing from the board. Yeah, and of course, I've got to get in a plug. During the time when there was this movement when Levitt was in and everything — the recall movement, so-called — and the board people — I talked to some of the people about why they were so much against Levitt. I said, "If you get rid of Levitt, this board hired him, what would they hire in his place?" That was the big problem. The guy's name may be something else, but it would be another Levitt. That was your problem. So they told me that it was more expedient. I said, "Oh, shit." That's what I told them straight.

But I went to one meeting, I guess it was, of this so-called recall movement, and it was so disgusting because they had finally chosen four people out of that group that they were going to oppose. I don't know what criteria they used to choose those four because there wasn't that much difference, as far as I'm concerned. They could have been pretty much blindfolded — pick four. So then I said, "Okay, two things: what is the other side of the coin in terms of who are you going to run against those four? And secondly, on what program?" You know, I could get nothing. They'd tell me, "Well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it." I said, "Oh, come on, are we really out there blowing in the wind?"

I mean, there was nothing because they — then there was another meeting I went to. It wasn't on that, but it was at the same period of time and there was talk again about breaking — "The Co-op is too big of an organization, you have to break it down into smaller units." To me, that would really finish the Co-op up. We have some kind of strength right now. I remember when I ran

for the board one time when there were about 60,000 families. I had got a hold of some figures the government made on employees of United Airlines. They had worked out their expenditures — the food, the clothing, for transportation, for whatever — and there were some 20,000, maybe 25,000, employees of United Airlines at that time.

In my own mind, I figured that wouldn't be too much of a difference between Co-op membership and those people working down there. So I just interpolated the figures — the 60,000 families from the 25,000 or whatever — and we came up with these figures like the total income of something like \$800 million. Today, I think, if we took a gross income of our membership, it would be a billion and a half. What are we selling to our Co-op members today? \$60 million or something. That's how much we sell to our members. How much....

Otto Glynn: \$70 million [unclear].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. How much of this is out of our whole take? There's no approach to doing something for our membership — for our members. I mean, I went for a couple of years on the basis of, "Why don't we sell cars?" At 90,000 families, we must buy 20,000 cars at least every year. That's 20,000 cars.

Otto Glynn: Should have a [unclear] agency.

Oiva Nurmela: If you break it down again, half of them must be Chevys — maybe now it's changed with this gas thing, but it ain't too far away. I had it all broken down. I even worked up some deals with some of the agencies in Berkeley — just in Berkeley — on how we could do it without going into a separate agency, which might be a problem because the big auto companies are not interested in that. But it's possible, if somebody would go to work on it, because I had it worked out and we could have done it.

But I'd just as soon talk to this wall or get out here on the porch and scream out there. There was no contact. We don't sell — how many other things we don't sell. Clothing. How many shoes do the members buy? Tell me we can't find somebody in this whole area that could handle the management of a shoe operation. Clothing.

[Aside discussion]

Otto Glynn: Can we think of anything that we haven't covered?

Oiva Nurmela: Quite likely, when you go away, there will be a million things come up in my mind. Sure.

Otto Glynn: I think this has been probably a good, round discussion.

Oiva Nurmela: Pretty much. I think the hottest things that's on my mind are pretty much on there. [Like] the fact that we don't deal with members if you're not a member [unclear] organization or a movement [unclear] that's forgotten. We're not using the best part of the business in terms of — we've got the University of California, I mean, plus other universities in the area. There must be management courses that we could run our people in, but they waste time in talking about educating our clerks.

Well, that's the last thing. The clerks are the ones that have some contact with people. Nobody knows who the hell Bob Neptune is. They know the clerk that they deal with. [Old Moss] over there at Telegraph, I'm sure he knows more damn people in the Co-op, and they know him as the Co-op because he's there and he deals with them every day. But Bob Neptune is in there, what, once a month, once every two weeks. The Co-op board people are never in the Co-op. I don't know where the hell they shop. I've never seen them. I've never seen them on the buying side of the cash register. The only one that used to buy at Telegraph and I used to see her there — what was her name? Can't remember. One girl, one director.

Otto Glynn: [Linda Arkulian]?

Oiva Nurmela: No. I never saw [unclear].

Otto Glynn: In the Telegraph [unclear]?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. She's been on now for about....

Otto Glynn: Jane Lundin?

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah. Jane.

Otto Glynn: She got elected to the [unclear] board this year. She's been travelling in China somewhere. Well, I want to thank you very much, and we can get you a copy of the tape if you'd like. I'll see what [they say].

Oiva Nurmela: Yeah.

Otto Glynn: It's been really good. We'll play it all back so you can hear.

END OF TRANSCRIPT