

Eula McGill talks about the day that workers went on strike

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Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Jacquelyn Hall

How was that decision made to go out? Do you remember the day that you went out?

Eula McGill

No, I don't. Well, I was the second shift; the first shift struck. And then when we arrived there, see, it was already on.

Jacquelyn Hall

But you don't remember the local union . . . ?

Eula McGill

I don't remember how the action was taken; I just don't remember how the decision was made to strike. It seems like we struck over them firing Jim Rogers; seems like that was actually what triggered it, when they fired the president and this little old lady (she was older than me).

Jacquelyn Hall

Did everybody in the plant go out?

Eula McGill

Yes, we shut it down tighter than a door nail, because we were in the mining area (the mines were organized by that time). We had the support of the miners, we had the support of all the building trades—you know, we had a pretty good labor movement in Birmingham. And so we were tight; nobody worked, and we had a fence around the gate. They tried to scab, like I say; they brought a truckload of strikebreakers in there. And these two guys that I was telling you about helped recruit them; sold us out—didn't sell us out, but they turned.

Jacquelyn Hall

They were scabbing?

Eula McGill

They would come in and try to bring these scabs in, but they didn't get in—didn't get through the gate.

Jacquelyn Hall

How did you keep them out?

Eula McGill

We got in the gate; they couldn't get in. We had help.

Jacquelyn Hall

From the miners?

Eula McGill

Yes. Everybody when we had trouble, we'd all go help each other, you know. Most of our men had kind of chickened out on us, and most of us that were sticking were the women.

Jacquelyn Hall

Is that right?

Eula McGill

Most of the men in our department chickened out.

Jacquelyn Hall

They didn't go back to work, but they just what?

Eula McGill

Tried to help break the strike, recruited strikebreakers. They came in from Georgia (they brought them in in trucks), and they came in with police.

Jacquelyn Hall

Why did the men chicken out and not the women?

Eula McGill

I just don't understand that, unless they thought they were going to lose—which we did. We might not have if they'd stuck with us. This young fellow that I told you a while ago that stuck with us, his daddy (I'm trying to think of his devilish name, that old guy—I can see him now) was one of the fixers. I know when they came this little kid was standing there (he was a young fellow), and he said, "I can't hit my daddy, so you all get him and I'll get somebody else." He told me that the company gave him a hundred dollars to help recruit—a hundred dollars was a lot of money in them days.

Jacquelyn Hall

Did you have a picket line around the mill?

Eula McGill

Yes. There was a fence, that's one good thing; they had a fence and they had to go in gates, and it was easier to take care of it.

Jacquelyn Hall

Were there any violence and fights?

Eula McGill

Those strikebreakers didn't want to fight; and of course they just didn't even get off the trucks. And these two guys that I'm telling you about, they came up and tried to get us to get out of the way. No, there weren't actually no fights. They come up and we wouldn't move. [UNCLEAR] The people, [UNCLEAR] they weren't really strikebreakers, trained strikebreakers (or they would have crushed us); they just recruited them for jobs, to come to work—I don't know what they told them. They knew a strike was on but they weren't real strikebreakers in the true sense of the word; a strikebreaker is trained to break strikes and to fight, to do whatever is necessary to break the strike.

Jacquelyn Hall

How did you live during that time that you were on strike?

Eula McGill

Well, I was fixing to say. Right after we struck I was living with my sister, and all she had was what I was bringing in. So I had to go back, and I couldn't stay and continue to picket; I had to go back and stay at home. So I'd just come back now and then, you know, to help out with the union activities, because we didn't have no money to live on. We didn't have no strike benefits. I stayed as long as I could, but I had no income, I had no way even to get out to the picket line (I had no carfare), so I had to go home and stay for most of the duration of the strike in order to have some place to live and eat.

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