

Interview Subject: Joseph Kaplan, Labor attorney and organizer of hotel workers

Date Recorded: 7-7-12

Location: MDPL office, Art Deco Welcome Center

Date of Birth: 1-21-29

Discharged from the Air Force in January of 1953. Parents had moved to beach. He wanted to go to the law school. Clerked for only labor attorney in the state of Florida, Lucille Snowden. She needed help so he went to work for her. Across the hall was Howard Dixon; he was assigned to work with the NAACP.

There were no public defenders, so NAACP came forward to help.

Lucille Snowden mainly represented building trades. Joseph was chief counsel of all carpenters, plumbers. Learned how to fly an airplane because he travelled so much.

In 1956 moved to Beach. There were forces that didn't want unions around. People got beaten up. When the hotel workers began to organize in 1955, they took over Local 133, the bartenders union. It was a merger of various locals. There was a major strike, thousands of people came out. Strike was intended for high season. Hotels hired "scabs." There were battles in alleys. Picket lines at all the hotels, including the Fontainebleau, which had just opened. There was a major lawsuit brought by the hotels against the union to close the strike. National Hotel and Restaurant Employers Union brought in another lawyer to work with Joseph. His name was Claude Pepper. (He was co-counsel.) They were successful in overcoming the injunction to stop the picketing. It was appealed to the state, and the Supreme Court overturned the injunction. They took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, who overturned the Florida State Supreme Court. They got a contract, the wages increased. If a worker was fired, they had the right to arbitration.

The Miami Herald was against the strike. In the 50's there was antipathy towards unions.

Back in 20's and 30's unions were perceived as being run by communists. After a while, they became more acceptable. There were carpenter unions throughout Florida who negotiated with contractors, many of whom had worked themselves up throughout the ranks.

No one ever called Joseph a communist. He didn't see slander directed at unions in 50's.

Claude Pepper was FDR's most important contact with the unions.

Joseph was never fearful. He was already surrounded by a bunch of guys who were stronger than him.

Conversation with Mitch Glazer regarding mafia involvement in the hotel business, which he wrote into *Magic Miami*.

They negotiated a contract that lasted for years.

After 1956 he handled all the strikes of all of the unions in Florida.

In 1974, Florida passed a law giving public sector workers the right to collective bargain but not strike.

The attitude against unions has grown. Wisconsin did away with collective bargaining in the public sector.

In 1945 Florida passed the "right-to-work" law, which eliminated "closed" shops. Florida was first right-to-work state.

President Reagan, who was the president of a union, ironically, was a factor in the decline of unions.

Have enjoyed enormously living on Miami Beach. Mostly enjoy a place called Books & Books with a cafe that has great food.

Racially, the union members were not black. He remembers teaching at various schools through the AFL-CIO; he would explain the civil rights laws and how it affected the unions. Leadership was composed of bright men and women.

Tobias Simon. Toby was a civil rights lawyer. He was also used by unions to effectuate civil rights programs and platforms. Went to legislature and spoke.

Jack Gordon was on school board and he asked him if he would be on PTA board of Ida Fisher. Was President of PTA when it was integrated.