

## Conversus Transcript

DM - I'm Don Merrill and I'm talking with Mr. Tom Getts who is an attendee at the 2013 Portland Troublemakers School. We started out the conversation by Mr. Getts clarifying for me the difference between a troublemaker and a problem solver.

TG- I'm at the conference here. They call it a troublemakers school.

DM – Right

TG - Every place I go I'm called a troublemaker

DM – OK

TG - And I usually correct them because I think that's a vanity slogan that comes from our oppressors. And I would rather have them instead of saying, just calling it a troublemakers school, calling it, is it a troublemakers school or are we really problems solvers for the task in the interest of the working class - union and unorganized.

DM - So you're a union member?

TG - Oh yes.

DM - How long have you been a union member?

TG - 50 years, 49 years actually.

DM - In what union?

TG - Well it's been a number of them. Mostly in the international labor, international union North America.

DM - So do you stay pretty much up on what's going on as far as labor issues around the country and the world?

TG - Yes. Not only union labor but unorganized labor as well. And all the issues that are particularly important to labor in the big picture.

DM – Right

TG - For example, the stewardship of nature is the task of labor. I firmly believe

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in that. The question of women's equality, the questions of war, the questions of education. Those are absolutely essential, and labor solidarity above all. Absolutely essential. And we see it unraveling. We see the specter and shadows of those five issues I just enumerated defining all these movements from Africa, Asia, Central America and North America. In the words of the songster Leonard Cohen, he said in his song Democracy, "Democracy is coming to the USA."

DM - Why do you think it is that union power has slipped in recent years, whether you're talking about the teachers union, whether you're talking about manufacturing, why do you think it's happened?

TG - If you examine the de-industrialization of America that has occurred for the last 30 or 40 years, actually it was the international crisis promoted by international Capitalism that I believe is promoting the attack on the auto workers. The autoworkers historically have been an example in the 50s, 60s, 70s for the success of working conditions, the invigoration of the ideal that everybody strove for and conditions that the autoworkers were able to achieve in that industrial powerhouse.

DM - So you're saying the autoworkers set the standard for everybody else.

TG – Detroit has basically been destroyed. And everything they represent. It's coming back, non union throughout the South, so called right to work states, The de-industrialization of America, that the model, a capitalist model that's been followed internationally, not just in the United States. But it's that and more.

DM – Why do you think that's happened? There was a time when you would have thought that as a member of a union or a member of a strong union family that could never happen.

TG – There's always blowback. After WWII, when those millions of soldiers, working class men and women came back, they knew how to use guns, they knew how to organize. And the labor movement was an upward grade. And that took a long time, a lot of persistence, coordinated assaults, very scientific assaults by the opulent elite and their managerial forces to undo those. That was a real danger. That gave impetus to the human rights struggle. And the ripple effects of those are still continuing and growing. A lot of times, we just think of them as over in the past. The civil rights struggles of the African American community, I mean the discrimination, the inequality before the law, just before the law. The ending of that. Many of these movements are seen to be

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in the past but they're still with us. And we're human beings and that's what motivates us. We don't want to be unfree.

DM - So why are you here? What is it about the Portland Troublemakers School that drew you here today?

TG - Like I said at the beginning, most people always refer to me as a troublemaker and then they realize what a great smile I have, they compliment me on that even though I've already told them, and I tell them again I'd rather now, I'm not really a troublemaker, it's what the capitalists define me as and their manages. I'm a problem solver. I'm here to solve the problems in the interest of the historical task of our class.

DM – And so surrounded by all of these other troublemakers, what problems do you hope that you'll be able to solve or at least get a common vision of?

TG – That's a long, educational struggle. Education is one of those great tasks of labor. And talking with one another, explaining the same relationship I just explained to you about I'm not a troublemaker, I'm a problem solver. Most of these people, if not all of them, are enamored with the vanity idea that they're troublemakers. They're being defined by their oppressors that define us that way.

DM – So the school shouldn't be called the Troublemakers School.

TG - They should raise the question. Are we troublemakers or problem solvers? I think that would be a better step.

DM – Thank you very much.

TG – Thank you very much.

DM – I'm Don Merrill, and I've been talking with lifetime union member and problem solver Tom Getts. Thanks for listening.

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