

## Excerpt 2 from Oral History Interview with Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair was interviewed by Joe Toyoshima, a professor of History at Pierce College, in 1966. Sinclair was an American writer and political activist, best remembered today for authoring the muckraking novel *The Jungle*. Sinclair moved to Los Angeles in the 1920s, and was the Democratic nominee for Governor of California in 1934. In this clip he describes why and how he co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union in Southern California in 1921.

### Transcript:

JT: Mr. Sinclair, you're...I believe one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union in Southern California. How did that come about?

US: That is true. Well, it's quite a long story. There was this...there were no civil liberties in Los Angeles whatever back in...let me see. I think it was 1921. And there was a big strike of the dock workers and...

JT: What was the issue? Do you recall what the issue was?

US: Yes. Over the right to organize and have a union. And they wouldn't recognize the union and they wouldn't deal with union people. And they...the strike came and they attempted to hold a mass meeting down at the harbor. And it was broken up, they were beaten, and I think about two hundred of them were put in jail. And I went down to that jail to protest against the conditions that I'd heard about, and they were packed in... they couldn't sit down and they were screaming in torment. It was a most harrowing thing.

And I came back and called a public meeting. I got permission from the mayor to hold a public meeting down at the harbor. They had what was called Liberty Hill, where the strikers had meetings. But the meetings had been forbidden. I got permission of the mayor to hold the meeting, and I and four friends, who were interested in Civil Liberty, went down there, and I told...went to the chief of police, and I told him we had the mayor's permission and he said, the word of the mayor didn't go down at the harbor. Legally, the harbor was part of the city, and if we attempted to speak, we would be arrested. So we went up there and there was a big crowd, but nobody was allowed to on Liberty Hill, and we went up there and started to speak to the atmosphere, and I got up and said, we are here in the cause of civil liberty, and I was told that I was under arrest and one after another...three of my friends were...had the same experience.

And then my brother in law, who was a young fellow, got up and started to speak, and he was arrested. And we were taken down through a crowd of people, all lined up, and we were taken into a car and we were driven around and around by different roads so that we wouldn't know where we were. I learned after that we were taken to a jail across on the other side of the harbor. I don't remember the name, what they called it. Anyway, we were put in there. We weren't booked. Nobody knew where we were. We spent the night and we kept demanding our rights. We had a right to be booked and we had a right to communicate with our attorney. We had no...but they gave us no right whatever. Wouldn't speak a word to us.

And along about half past three, I would say, in the afternoon...we spent the night and the day. They brought us food, I remember. I didn't eat anything I...'cause I never eat in jail. I don't trust [Laughs]...at four in the afternoon, I say half past three because I don't know just when courts close, but they put us in a car, the four of us, and drove us up to Los Angeles and took us to the city...it's the city jail and there's a courthouse... courtroom in connection with it, I think.

JT: Probably the Hall of Records.

US: Well, whatever it was, they took us there. And they took us into the courtroom at the moment, just before the court adjourned. And through some freak...somebody had called up my wife and told her what danger we were in, and she had called everybody we knew in...in Los Angeles. Old Dr. John R. Haynes, I remember, was one of the most prominent men in the city and a millionaire, and he was a civil liberties man and he went to work. And somehow or another, my wife found out where...what...where we would be taken, and she knew a rich woman, Mrs. Kate Crane-Gartz, and those two...Mrs. Gartz took her into court and we were in the courtroom.

They tried their very best to keep us from knowing, but somebody had tipped us off. We were taken into that courtroom just a few minutes before the case they were trying came to an end. It was all a plot. And then the announcement was made that the court was adjourned. And the lawyer... my wife and Mrs. Gartz had got a lawyer, John Packard. And John Packard sprang up and said he had been to the judge an hour or two before and said that he had a case to present to the court. A bail case. And when the court was declared adjourned, John Packard sprang up, and he said, "Your Honor I've given notice to this court that I have a bail case to present, and I demand that you hear that case." And the court said, "The Court is adjourned." And John Packard said, "If you stand by that decision, I will report you to the Bar Association, and you will be barred from the bench." That's pretty severe talk from a lawyer to a judge.

JT: It certainly is.

US: The judge knew he was right. He knew if that story were told to the Bar Association, his career would be ruined. So he heard the case. Mrs. Gartz was worth several million dollars, and she put up, I think...I don't know, five thousand dollars for each of us. Something like that. And we got out of the hands of the police. But there's no question but what that drunken police chief, he was...well, I'll tell you that story in just a moment. He intended to give us the third degree that night, you see.

JT: Oh.

US: That's what his idea was. Well, you'd know his character because we...we raised such a fuss over his conduct, that we got him discharged...oh, let me see. We made a case out of it, and we made publicity out of it, and we made it so hot for the mayor, that they decided that had to get rid of him. And what they did, they found him...there's undoubtedly a plot, you see, they found him in the a with a jug of whiskey and a woman after midnight. And that was...

JT: That was in the days of...

US: ...and that was the reason they discharged him from the force.

JT: This was in the days of Prohibition?

US: Yes, oh, yes. And undoubtedly that was a put up job, you see, to get rid of him.