

**Sitting Pretty**

—By Hungerford



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## An Interview with Michael P. Weber on David L. Lawrence

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by William F. Trimble

**O**N April 30, 1985, William F. Trimble, former editor of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, talked with Michael P. Weber about the work he has done on a biography of David L. Lawrence that will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. Dr. Weber is an associate professor in the Department of History and Philosophy at Carnegie-Mellon University. He is the author of *Social Change in an Industrial Town: Patterns of Progress in Warren, Pennsylvania, from Civil War to World War I* (1976), and is the coauthor with John Bodnar and Roger D. Simon of *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (1982).

WFT: I think the best way to start, Mike, would be to try to determine why you decided to write a biography of Dave Lawrence.

MPW: Well, as you know, I'm an urban historian, and I've been working on various aspects of the history of Pittsburgh for eight years now. I also teach a course in the history of Pittsburgh at Carnegie-Mellon. In teaching that course several years ago, I was looking for material on Lawrence in order to teach a section on the Renaissance. I found, quite to my surprise, that there has been almost nothing written about Lawrence other than some occasional articles that were written while he was alive and while he was mayor or governor of Pennsylvania. I also realized that he was certainly our most significant twentieth-century political figure, and maybe the most significant in the history of the city. I felt this was a gap that really ought to be filled. I was intrigued, so when I finished my previous project, that seemed the best direction to go.

WFT: Why do you suppose he's received so little scholarly attention up to this point?

MPW: That's a difficult question to answer. I certainly wouldn't say that there haven't been people in the city who were interested in the history of the city or urban politics. Perhaps in some respects, Lawrence was a little less controversial than some of the modern

bosses, particularly Curley of Boston, Daley of Chicago, and a few others. At least his public career as mayor and later as governor was one of mostly successes and relatively little controversy. That may be it; I don't know.

WFT: I don't know either. It does seem to be strange that someone wouldn't have jumped on that right away.

MPW: Yes, particularly eight to ten years ago when there was a lot of urban writing about political bosses. His career was longer than that of most political bosses, and that may have scared people away. It was a career that was almost fifty years in length.

WFT: What general problems did you encounter in terms of your research? Did you have too many sources to work with and did you have to sort through the material, or was there a dearth of sources?

MPW: There was a little bit of both in some respects. There is a shortage of sources in the traditional sense of written material by Lawrence himself. Letters, memoirs, diaries, and that sort of thing are almost nonexistent, and those that do exist are of relatively little use. Lawrence was not a writer; he was a telephoner, he spoke quite a bit off the cuff, and the papers that do exist, for example, the governor's papers in Harrisburg, are mostly short, three-line letters from Lawrence to somebody else saying, "That's a good idea, let's talk about it at lunch or this afternoon. Signed David Lawrence." So that was clearly a problem. There are questions that I can't answer, often about motivation. David Lawrence gave many speeches written either by Jack Robin when he was executive secretary or later by Walter Geisey when he was executive secretary. They can be used in some way. Lawrence gave the speeches; he obviously wouldn't have delivered the statements if he didn't have some feeling about their value. But you have to use them very carefully. On the other hand, there was a tremendous amount of newspaper print about Lawrence, starting in 1920 and running through his death in 1966. During his Pittsburgh career there were three different papers with three different political visions, and so they wrote about him in different kinds of ways. There was a great deal of that. There is information, surprisingly, in four different presidential libraries, because Lawrence interacted with four presidents. And, I've also done now almost a hundred interviews with persons who were close to Lawrence at all levels. Local ward politicians, governors of the state, senators, business people — a whole variety of people. There's a great deal of that information available.

WFT: Do you think that because of the fact that there are relatively

few sources from Lawrence himself, that is, memoirs, letters, and that kind of thing, that you had a problem getting into his personality? Or do you think that you've been able to do an end-run so to speak with your hundred interviews?

MPW: The interviews have helped a great deal. There isn't as much of his personality as I would have liked when I started. For me the alternative was — and maybe this is related to what you asked earlier about why no one has tried to do much — the alternative was not to do it. He was much too important, and in a sense, his life has a great deal to say to urban leaders, and therefore I decided to do it. I used the interviews, in a sense, as an end-run. And they do provide a lot of information that might have come from diaries or things of that nature. It's surprising. I have a log of perhaps sixty pages on a six-week vacation he took. Each page was simply entered with the name of the city. That's all that's in there. We have no idea what he did or what he thought.

Also I have an interesting example later when Chancellor Edward Litchfield resigned from the University of Pittsburgh, which was a traumatic experience for the entire city. Lawrence was sitting on the board of trustees. He wrote a letter in which he said — this was just after he had heard about the resignation — in effect, "Don't worry about it. Good leaders come along all the time." And that's all. I don't know whether or not he was upset by the Litchfield resignation.

WFT: I wonder, too, it seems strange, do you suspect that he lacked a concept of his own historical significance? Or was he just so inwardly or outwardly directed that he couldn't look beyond the day-to-day functioning of his office and his own work?

MPW: I think there were two reasons. First, I think he was a man who operated relatively close to the vest. He was very careful about the images he presented. And that may certainly have been part of it. Second, if one looks at it — I don't know if this is true of every mayor of every city — but if you look at his daily schedule, almost seven days a week, it was absolutely filled every moment with meetings with different people and giving speeches, and so forth. He worked virtually from nine in the morning when he left his house on South Aiken Avenue to about eleven in the evening. Five days a week, half a day on Saturday, and three-quarters of a day on Sunday.

WFT: Which doesn't leave much time for reminiscing.

MPW: Right. Interestingly, I've been able to get some reminiscing. As

he grew older, there were several people, his grandson for one, David Donahoe, who is now director of the Pennsylvania Economy League, and several other young people to whom he reminisced rather freely, and talked about his feelings about things. I've been able to put some things together from that.

WFT: What about that problem that I think it is very easy to fall into with biographies, and that is having everything center upon this one individual until you tend to lose sight of the real forces that were at work to shape that individual?

MPW: It is something that you have to be careful about. For me, as an urban historian, particularly when I deal with Lawrence in the Pittsburgh setting, a great deal of the story that I'm trying to tell has to do with the forces at work in Pittsburgh, and Lawrence played his role in those. It was almost natural for me to begin looking for these other forces and the environment of Pittsburgh. Readers can judge whether I've been successful with that, but I think it's been a little bit easier in that sense.

WFT: I think that you tend to get more balance if you approach it from that point of view.

MPW: What's more difficult, when you are talking about balance, is the balance in the view and evaluation of Lawrence and his role. In Pittsburgh in the mid-1980s it is very difficult to find anybody who can remember any negative thoughts about Lawrence.

WFT: But there were plenty at the time.

MPW: There were plenty at the time, and you can find some. And I can name a few who provided important information. But even political opponents, Republicans who fought Lawrence tooth and nail, remember very warm relationships.

WFT: What about the psychohistorical approach toward biography? You do have some things in there about how he and his wife reacted to the deaths of their sons, but not much. What's your overall feeling about that in terms of biography?

MPW: I'm not a psychohistorian, so I tread very lightly. To try to make too much of a particular event would put me on very dangerous ground. On the other hand, his focus, his family background, his relationships with members within the family, the kind of class in which he grew up influenced the way he looked at things. Clearly the death of his two sons — killed on the same day in an automobile accident — had a profound impact on his life. I hesitate to make too much of that, but I think it was certainly an important part of his life. I think also the two trials which he underwent in 1939 and 1940 had a profound impact on his later life.



*David L. Lawrence with his granddaughter, Kathy Donahoe, at his inauguration as governor, January 1959*

WFT: That was a particularly difficult period for him. Because right after getting through the trials he faced this tremendous family tragedy. Obviously he had to compensate for that some way.

MPW: There again, I think that's where the interviews become crucial. Everyone who knew Lawrence intimately at that time indicated without question that he coped with the death of his sons by working harder. Spending every day at work. And certainly that influenced the way he operated. It is very clear that that's tied to it, and I am not uncomfortable with suggesting that.

WFT: All right, what would you say were some of the principal forces in his early life that helped determine that he would eventually become involved in a career in politics?

MPW: There are three or four that I would point to. Certainly his background as a member of a blue-collar family growing up at the Point with — and I don't mean to paint the sense that Lawrence lived in poverty, because his was not that kind of career, rags to riches — but living at the Point under those kinds of conditions gave him a very strong feeling of empathy later on for working-class lives, and much of the action, particularly when he was secretary of the commonwealth in the 1930s, in bringing about labor and social welfare legislation can certainly be tied to some degree to that kind of background. Also, the lack of education is very important. It was very important to him throughout much of his life. A number of people have indicated that he relied almost too heavily on educated people, people with degrees. In some sense I think that's true, but on the other hand, I think it also influenced his career as mayor when he hired what today we would call technocrats. He worked with technocrats who worked for the Urban Redevelopment Authority, the Allegheny Conference, City Planning, and a variety of organizations. He pretty much left them alone. He gave them the big charge and then let them work out the details and operate relatively freely. If you look at the number of high-quality people who were involved in the everyday operations of what is now known as the Pittsburgh Renaissance, to some degree it is surprising that we were able to keep these people here. They stayed because he didn't really interfere with them. Part of that had to do with his over-respect for their degrees and their education.

WFT: What specifically was his background? What was the Point like when he was growing up there? And what was his education?

MPW: It was a mixed residential, warehouse, commercial district, with railroads running through it. Most of the housing was row houses

or small single-family dwellings mixed in with factories on the same street that he lived. There were two factories and a store and other establishments there. It was an Irish neighborhood. But it was clearly lower-class, there was no question about that. His father was essentially an unskilled worker. He was important in Lawrence's life. Lawrence didn't talk much about his father in later life, but it is fairly clear that even though he was not an important leader he was a sort of political and labor activist. He came home and talked a lot about labor-management relations and the role of labor and how labor was being exploited. And he gave Lawrence causes that showed up later several times in his life. His father was not home a great deal. Like many blue-collar workers of the day and age, he spent a lot of time at the local pub, which was sort of a social club. Nevertheless, when he was home, he was often expounding his views about labor-management relations, and his son picked this up. The son also picked up, of course, a love for and an education in politics by working with the early Democratic county chairman, William Brennen, who had a very similar kind of background. Brennen grew up at the Point a little earlier, worked his way through college, became an attorney and head of the Democratic party, such as it was in those days at the turn of the century. Lawrence got a job working as a clerk after finishing tenth grade, and worked for Brennen for about fifteen years, both as a clerk in his law office and as a stenographer, but more as a sort of political aide. Lawrence learned his politics from Billy Brennen.

WFT: So, in essence, he was receiving a very practical education in politics.

MPW: Yes, absolutely.

WFT: And it stood him in good stead. It certainly wasn't wasted time.

MPW: Yes, that's true. Brennen also was a labor advocate and he had defended the steelworkers in the 1892 Homestead Steel Strike and was involved in some other labor issues. So they had some of the same background. Interestingly, their paths took a little different course in that Brennen saw a solution to labor and other blue-collar problems in Pittsburgh society through the legal system, being a lawyer. Lawrence didn't have that open to him and so he saw it through politics. Lawrence turned out to be much better, of course, at organizing politics than Brennen ever was. The one last point I want to make about Brennen is that as he got older and wealthier, he became what some people described as a swallowtail Democrat.

Even though he had a blue-collar background, he associated with the wealthiest of the Republicans; he lived what some people might call a Republican life style. That's important, because later Lawrence also had the ability to get along with very wealthy Republicans, with non-Catholic and nonimmigrant backgrounds. Part of that comes from the lessons that Lawrence got from Brennen during those years. Brennen's best friends and closest associates were almost all Republicans.

WFT: A big question here is obviously you're talking about a very sick local party, namely the Democratic party, and a very healthy local party, namely the Republican party, why even bother with the Democratic party? Why not just join the Republican party and move ahead from that point?

MPW: Of course, most people did. But because we believe in democracy, you have to have a second party. It was really a sham. The members of the second party — and there is one person that I didn't mention, and he's important and illustrative of this was Tommy Toole. Tommy Toole was a ward chairman of the Democratic party who had gotten his job through the Republicans and who essentially campaigned for the Republicans; at the time of national elections he worked for Democratic presidential candidates, but at the local level he worked for Magee and Flinn. Lawrence had a minor job working for Toole for a while. The point here is that Toole as a Democrat was taken care of by the Republicans. And this was true up to 1932 when the Democratic party went into ascendancy. In fact there were many of these people — this comes from an interview that I did with Art Rooney, who was a personal friend of Lawrence — the Republican party drew lots each election to see who the Democratic candidate would be in that particular election. There had to be a candidate; democracy requires it. But it was a sham. And Brennen did little to change that. Every time I quote the figures I'm astounded; as late as 1929 the registration in the city was 174,000 Republicans to only 5,900 Democrats. When I first saw that I had to double check it. Not 59,000, but 5,900.

WFT: Did Lawrence — maybe this comes through in the manuscript — but did Lawrence really have any conception that ultimately the Democrats would become the dominant party and he would find himself to be the leader of one of the major segments of the Democratic party in this country?

MPW: No, I don't think so. I think he would have been a fool had he thought that that was going to be the case. He took the position when Brennen gave it up.

WFT: This was, of course, 1921, when he became chairman of the Allegheny County Democratic party.

MPW: Yes. He was at that point, through Brennen and Joe Guffey, who later became senator, dabbling a little bit in national politics, going to some conventions. He liked politics. This was a position that was open. He in fact did exactly what Brennen had done for the last twelve years. He played his position as the surrogate of the Republican party. The Democratic party continued in its subordinate role, and it was accepted. Everyone knew that the Republicans were going to win, and Lawrence did, too. He fooled around with reorganizing the party several different times. But it really didn't make much difference. He himself got some minority jobs, just as Tommy Toole had. He sat on the election voting board, for example, which was a paid position. So he also got jobs that some Republican owed as a debt to the Democrats. It is like the arrangement we have today, for example, of one minority county commissioner. That was the same kind of thing. And he benefited by this. He was really not very successful in building the party, as those voter registration figures would indicate, throughout the 1920s.

WFT: Is there anything that he could have done that maybe would have speeded along the Democratic party? Or was it simply just locked into this thing nationwide, and nobody could break out of it without a major economic crisis?

MPW: You're talking about the Depression. That's actually only part of it. The crash and the Depression and the move toward Roosevelt and the Democrats were only part of it. The Republican party had to help. That is, had the Republican party been strong and united, I think you would have seen the Republicans continue to dominate in the 1930s and 1940s, which happened in many cities.

WFT: Despite the Depression?

MPW: Yes, despite the Depression. If you examine what happened in the elections from 1932 to 1938 and look at 25 to 30 cities across America, as a matter of fact, most urban governments did not switch from Republican to Democrat. Some did, but many did not. The Republican party here was weak, it was fighting amongst itself, it was certainly alleged to be corrupt, and there's a lot of evidence to suggest it was in fact corrupt, and it was crumbling of its own weight. They had been fighting amongst each other for a decade.

WFT: And, of course, in a negative sense, those were lessons that Lawrence learned. You can't have public infighting, and you must maintain at least a facade of solidarity. The Republican party never

learned that lesson throughout his formative political career.

MPW: Yes. It was a crucial lesson, and I think it leads to something that I see as one of the big weaknesses of Lawrence as a political leader. There was a crucial lesson in watching the Republicans and also what happened to him in the 1931 county commissioners race. This political infighting occurred, and he learned — anybody who tried to analyze the system would be a fool not to see it — he learned that primary battles were dangerous to the party, and would probably lead to defeat. This led later to what I see as a weakness, and that is, he was determined throughout all of his political career to avoid those primary battles. In so doing he selected and helped to select candidates who were the least offensive to the most factions within the party. Many candidates that Lawrence selected didn't have a chance. They could win the primary, but they couldn't win the election because they were just not good candidates. Some who did run and won the election, such as Governor George H. Earle, were relatively weak candidates, and he was not a very good governor. It turned out to be good because Lawrence dominated Earle when he went to Harrisburg. One of the reasons why Earle was selected was because he was the least offensive. In some respects a candidate is the least offensive because he hasn't done anything. There were a lot of weak candidates throughout this whole period. When you look at Lawrence as a political leader, this has to be considered a weakness.

WFT: I think another weakness that he developed, too, was his feeling that anyone who was Catholic had no chance of winning. And therefore he may have overlooked some people who did happen to be Catholic and may have been very vigorous candidates.

MPW: On that one I'm not quite sure that the word weakness is appropriate in the sense that he may have been right most of the time. But he did overlook some candidates because they were Catholic. He opposed a strong candidate for governor in 1938, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Kennedy, in favor of a political unknown, Charles Alvin Jones, at least in part because Kennedy was Catholic. He also took himself out of the running for the governorship for the same reason. Lawrence himself, of course, was Catholic. He had supported Al Smith, and he had lost. He had thought a lot of Al Smith, and that was a serious blow to him. He himself lost in 1931, partly he thought, incorrectly, because he was Catholic. So there were several candidates who were good candidates that he didn't support because they were Catholic. In analyzing his own

candidacy for governor in 1958, however, if you identify the Catholic and non-Catholic counties, across the state, you find that he got a great deal of support in the Catholic areas, many were of course urban, but very little support from the more non-Catholic areas. So while it influenced his decisions through his entire political career, he was probably more often correct than incorrect on that particular score.

WFT: It's funny, but from the perspective of 1985, you would wonder how a Catholic Democratic candidate could fail to win in a working-class, Catholic situation. But obviously, it was a great deal different in the teens and twenties than it is now.

MPW: Sure. Remember that up to 1945 when he was elected as the first Catholic mayor of the city of Pittsburgh, he was aware when he was organizing the Democratic party and beginning to look for party workers and so forth, that he needed Protestants. Fred Weir, the judge, tells several stories about his search for Protestants. Weir was one of the early Democrats who joined the party in the 1930s. He said that Lawrence embraced him because he was a Protestant, and continued to ask him if he couldn't get more Protestants for us. It led in a sense to what later became a "virtual representation" that Lawrence created in looking for candidates for the city. In such places as city council, you would never have under Lawrence the problem you have today of most of the city councilmen coming from one neighborhood. They would have been scattered across the city. There would have been a black, an Italian, a labor councilman, a Jew, and a woman — a whole mixture. He was always certain to get that kind of cross section. I call it virtual representation of most of the groups, or a numerically significant number of the groups, in the city of Pittsburgh. Part of that stems from the concern about the Catholic-Protestant differences.

WFT: Another thing you mention in your study is the whole concept of Progressive reformism in the early part of the twentieth century. He was really brought up with that surrounding him. How much of an effect do you think that had on him?

MPW: It certainly had a strong effect. I'm thinking particularly of the reforms that occurred here in 1911, for example.

WFT: The municipal reforms?

MPW: Yes, the municipal reforms. Lawrence was born in 1889, so that would have made him twenty-two years of age, and he had been involved in politics since about the age of fifteen, so he certainly must have been — although he doesn't ever say this — aware of the

agitation for reform that was going on during that period. He was also probably very aware that the only Democratic mayor of the city of Pittsburgh, George Guthrie, although he was sort of a fusion mayor, was essentially a failure because he never did get the party behind him. Lawrence certainly must have understood that if you're going to effect reforms you are going to have to have a broad base of support for them. That may have had something to do with the incredibly broad base of support he worked so hard to generate when he became mayor. He saw the reforms that did come about in the 1911 period as coming from the elite members of Pittsburgh society, and that is the group he called upon later when he wanted to bring about physical reforms in 1945 and thereafter. I think the whole movement had a strong influence on him.

WFT: Of course, historians like Sam Hays and Richard Hofstadter have looked at that reformism in a very critical way. In that sense, would you have to look at the kinds of things Lawrence was aiming for in terms of reform more critically as well?

MPW: Sure. And certainly one has to examine the charge, if one wants to call it that, that the physical reform of the city and the redevelopment of the city in the 1940s and 1950s was an elite-dominated movement. There is no question that it was. And to that extent, I think that Lawrence stands guilty. He would say that these were the forces that existed and he was marshalling those forces to carry out the redevelopment that was necessary. Interestingly enough, he was able to maintain his touch with the nonelite groups in the city by virtue of spending many of his evenings in the neighborhoods talking with the people. There are other charges, for example, that the Renaissance really was only concerned about the central business district, and some areas like that.

WFT: Roy Lubove is the most critical about that.

MPW: Yes. And the charge that the Renaissance wasn't concerned about housing and so forth. I think now, looking at the Renaissance itself, that is inaccurate for two reasons. The dominant effort in the Renaissance was the central city and the Lower Hill and those areas. The concern particularly with housing — not so much with neighborhoods— was a long-standing Lawrence concern. His efforts grew out of the attempt, which was common in the 1950s, at slum clearance. If you analyze, for example, the Lower Hill, and the housing that was in the taking area of the Lower Hill, most of it in fact had already been listed as, or certified as, deteriorated housing.

WFT: If you look at the pictures of it, there wasn't a whole lot that could have been done with it.

MPW: Yes, it should have been torn down. In regards to the groups that had responsibility for relocating people, the evidence indicates that the people who were relocated out of that area overwhelmingly (80 percent or so) moved into housing that was significantly better than the housing that they had left. Now, two problems are created with that. One is that the housing tended to be in segregated neighborhoods. That had to do with the structure that existed in the city.

WFT: But the neighborhoods were already segregated.

MPW: They were already segregated, but became in a sense more segregated. That had to do with the lack of open housing covenants in the city itself. Blacks who had lived in the Lower Hill District now had a choice of where they could move because they had help and they had the funds, but in effect they had only a couple of neighborhoods that they could select, because that's where they could get the housing. What it meant was that the Upper Hill became more densely settled and more segregated. There is no question about that. It's true. But that had more to do with the structure of racism in the city than it had to do with a lack of concern on the part of the administration. We also have to put it into a historical context. One of the better approaches might have been to create a lot of subsidized, individual, single-family-type housing, as we might try to do today. But nobody was doing it anywhere across the country. Federal funds were not available. That just wasn't happening. To look back and say that should have happened here takes it out of historical context.

WFT: To get back to the Progressive reforms, particularly in 1911, and the municipal reforms in Pittsburgh, the criticism has been that it was an attempt to remove local, ward control over what was happening politically, socially, and economically and making it city-wide where it would be more accessible to the middle classes and upper classes. Very much so, we seem to be indicating that Lawrence was playing a role in that. And yet, at the same time, Lawrence was very conscious of the political base that he had at the ward level. When a problem would come up, he would say "Hey, I can't handle that here downtown. You go talk to such and such ward chairman." He was very conscious of that local control. In a way, was he not straddling the fence in terms of reform?

MPW: Sure, I think he was. We have to remember that Lawrence didn't view the city in the same way as those who created that reform in 1911. The problem did in fact exist prior to the reform of

the city council in 1911 of local ward politicians running their own ward as if it was a private fiefdom. Just parenthetically, it's interesting that now we have a lot of talk about going back to that method of apportionment. So changing the structure doesn't solve a lot of operating problems. He was in fact straddling that. He was aware of the need to maintain contact at the ward level, and ward chairmen did have a great deal to say in hiring, in dispensing patronage, and giving assistance to people, certainly through the Depression and even later. One of the anecdotes I think I mentioned was about one of the Hill District ward chairmen who regularly used to get a load of coal and take it up on one of the streets in the Hill District and dump it there and invite the people to come and get it. This was during the Depression. That was really old-time ward politics, and it existed through much of the Depression era. Later it changed a little bit, but it didn't change a great deal. Ward politicians can still help you get a job. As we look at the city today, people get jobs through politicians. And they provide services now that are more community services rather than individual services. They can help you get a playground. They can help get a street paved if a lot of people want it. This continued throughout all of Lawrence's administration — it has broken down somewhat since that time — but the ward chairman had something to give in return for your vote and your effort. If you were looking for a job, or service, or anything of that nature, his favorite phrase always was, "Have you talked with your ward chairman?" You did not go over the ward chairman's head. This was unlike Daley, for example. If author Mike Royko and others are to be believed, he spent a lot of his time sitting in his office talking with anybody who happened to walk in with a problem from any neighborhood in Chicago. Lawrence never sat and chatted with individuals; they just didn't have open entree to his office when he became mayor. If you had a problem in your neighborhood, you went to the committeeman or ward chairman. And the ward chairman took the problem to the mayor.

WFT: It sounds almost like a military organization.

MPW: There was a clear organizational chain of command.

WFT: You mention Daley. That was going to be one of the questions I was going to ask later, but we might as well talk about it now. In terms of looking at big-city bosses, Daley stands out, obviously, as the archetypical twentieth-century or later twentieth-century boss. Obviously he worked in different ways than did Lawrence, who was

maybe a lesser light in terms of bosses. But both seem to be fairly effective in terms of getting the job done. Was it simply style, or personality, or what?

MPW: A good part of it was style. Lawrence, first of all, was not nearly as heavy-handed with his boss role. He played it in a much more subtle way. He attempted to build consensus rather than bull his way through a particular situation. This is the best concrete example I can think of. Those who have lived in Pittsburgh for some time know that Lawrence, once he became mayor, would on a regular basis have a Monday morning meeting with the nine members of city council, all of whom he essentially put into office. Certainly these people owed their positions to him. He originally did this, but later his executive secretaries conducted most of these meetings. Yet from what I can tell from people who were involved in those over a long period of time, he never went into the meetings and said this is the way it's going to be. Although many people thought that's what occurred, with city council simply rubber-stamping what Lawrence wanted. What he essentially did was to go into these meetings and talk about a particular issue, or program, or plan, and try to build consensus. And usually these were people who were generally willing to go along with him anyway, so there wasn't a great difficulty. But if he sensed resistance, he frequently pulled the issue back and asked that it not be dealt with that particular week or the week after, and then went around and built that consensus. He talked with councilmen to get them to join in — on the team so to speak. If you cut through that, you can really see that he's still the dominating figure, and the most perceptive councilmen certainly understood this. Again Fred Weir is an example when he was a councilman. Weir explained this process. He said, "We knew that Lawrence was running the show, but we also knew that we could disagree. Most of the time we didn't want to disagree." But it's never that sort of bulling his way through that you might expect from a Daley. That's true also in the selection of candidates. I can think of only a few times when Lawrence didn't get his way, so the results may have been the same. The style was really quite effective.

WFT: Which was an extension of his personality.

MPW: If you wanted to work with the Republicans in the twenties, you built a consensus. It was the only way to do it, and he continued to do it later on.

WFT: What events would you say were most critical in shaping his

early political career? And by events, I mean his early bids for office and early election campaigns. For ten or fifteen years he determined he was not going to run for office and he was going to make sure that other people ran. Now, all of a sudden by 1931 he changed his mind. What happened to change his mind? What happened from that point on?

MPW: In 1931 he ran as a candidate almost by default. As I noted earlier, it was difficult to get people to run for Democratic slots for various positions — other than William McNair, who ran for everything, and who later became the mayor of the city of Pittsburgh.

WFT: We could spend several hours on William McNair.

MPW: There are some marvelous stories about William McNair. By 1930, McNair had run probably for six different offices at various times, including senator once when he garnered over one million votes. Essentially it was difficult to get candidates. It's like the Republicans in Pittsburgh today; you become a sacrificial lamb to some degree. When he agreed to run for county commissioner in 1931, it was to some degree by default. He couldn't find anyone else, and now it was his turn. He had been getting others to run for the last ten years, and now he had to try it. So he did. But out of that experience came a changed Dave Lawrence, perhaps chastened to some degree. He won the Democratic primary, but everybody knew in the city, and certainly the charges were made, that for a long time there had been a history of collusion between the Democrats, the weak party, and the Republicans. That charge was, of course, laid against Lawrence, because he didn't build the party during his first decade as party chairman. He was not very successful at all. If Lawrence was a boss in the 1920s, he certainly wasn't a very effective boss. But in the 1930s things changed once he won the primary. The Republican party had been feuding among themselves, and there were several independent Republicans who were also running for these county commissioner slots. Remember there were two from the dominant party, and one from the minority party. The organization, which was run by Mayor Charles Kline, State Senator Jimmy Coyne, and to some degree by William Larimer Mellon, didn't want independent Republicans in office. They wouldn't toe the organization line. They determined among themselves that it was better to have a Democrat that they could depend upon — Dave Lawrence — in office than to have an independent Republican. The Coyne regime — the Coyne, Kline, Mellon regime — supported Lawrence to become commissioner, along with the or-

ganization Republicans. They gave financial aid to the Democratic party. Lawrence went along with this for several reasons. One is that the only way to get elected was to go along with the Republicans. Secondly, he and Jimmy Coyne, for almost a decade — remember Coyne was one of the heads of the Republican party — had been close personal friends. Lawrence essentially ran as a Democrat for the Republican party. The charges against him began to come from his own party once it grew stronger. The result, essentially, was that he's got a split party himself. He ran as a sort of nominal Democrat, running with a Republican, and the Republican party was also split. So, of the four candidates, he came in fourth.

The lessons he got from this are two. One has to do with primary battles within his own party, which he began to avoid, as I mentioned earlier. Throughout the rest of his life he did anything he could to avoid a primary battle. He wasn't always successful with that. A second lesson was, if you're going to continue in this position as Democratic chairman, as a candidate or whatever, it was time now to oppose the Republican party. With the exception of Guthrie, the fusion Democrat I mentioned, there hadn't been a Democrat in the mayor's office since the Civil War. The Republican party was beginning to collapse of its own weight. The next time there was an election, Lawrence wouldn't make the same mistake and go with the Republicans. He would openly oppose them.

WFT: What about the 1932 national elections and their significance?

MPW: They were very significant. I said earlier that the Republican party contributed to its own demise. Some of the efforts of Lawrence contributed to the rise of the Democratic party. But one of the key ingredients had to be the Depression which hit Pittsburgh harder than most cities, since Pittsburgh as an industrial city was always hit by economic slowdowns and recessions. The Great Depression hit the city very hard, and the rise of a Democratic candidate [Roosevelt] who was promising something different was really significant. In 1932, a lot of Republicans began shifting over to the Democratic party. They were picked up in 1933 when McNair as the Democratic candidate ran for mayor. The process continued. People were shifting for two reasons: One, they shifted to get away from the dying, corrupt Republican party; two, they were looking to the Democratic party as the answer to the economic problems that existed. When you ask who were the people who were shifting, many blue-collar workers changed because they saw the Democratic party at both the national and local levels as the

answer to their dire economic conditions. Many of the middle-class and upper-class Republicans shifted parties because of their objection to a lot of problems within the Republican party. This is the time when Mayor Kline had been charged and found guilty of forty-six counts of malfeasance of office and given a prison sentence that was later commuted. That's the visible symbol of Republican corruption that was occurring within the Republican party.

WFT: Do you see any of these shifts happening before 1932, and that simply culminated in 1932, as some historians, looking at national election patterns, have determined?

MPW: There were certainly some. You're referring, of course, to Bruce Stave's work on the rise of the Democratic party in Pittsburgh. There were some early shifts, but they tend to be up and down. That is, shifts toward the Democratic party at the national level, and then back. But if you look at the local level, there is very little shifting. Only at the national level did some people begin to support Democratic candidates. Certainly the mayor and county commissioner races all through the 1920s and into the 1930s showed no perceptible shift away from the Republican party, and there was no registration shift that would suggest permanent changes. That figure of 174,000 Republicans in 1929 was only three years before a Democratic president was elected and only four years before a Democratic mayor was elected. That's a very short period of time. There was a permanent shift when people switched their party registration. It was more than just interest in a particular candidate. So I don't see it as a shift that was beginning, as Bruce Stave suggests, as early as 1924.

WFT: He goes back as early as 1924?

MPW: I believe 1924.

WFT: That is probably stretching it. What about Pennsylvania's Little New Deal, as it's referred to, and the whole concept of bossism in its relation to the New Deal and urban problems? What kinds of roles did patronage play in the New Deal programs? Can you elaborate on those in terms of Lawrence's career in the thirties?

MPW: First of all let me mention that Lawrence absolutely hated the term boss. He never called himself — even when he was a boss — a boss. Certainly he would throw you or me out of his office almost bodily if we used the term boss. I can think of an example in 1958 when he was elected governor. Certainly he had been hardened to politics by 1958. At his first press conference in Harrisburg, a Philadelphia reporter opened his remarks by using the term, "Well,

Boss Lawrence," or something to that effect. Lawrence climbed all over this man to clearly indicate that he was not a boss, and essentially said that if you ever use that term again we will never have a news conference at which you will be present in the future. He had done the same thing thirty years earlier with John Jones, who was a reporter with the *Post-Gazette*, and he didn't speak with Jones for almost six months. He absolutely hated the term boss. He thought of himself as a leader.

WFT: Whereas someone like Daley would have considered boss to have been essentially a compliment.

MPW: Yes. If you contrast the two of them, Lawrence wanted to avoid any connection with corruption. In a sense boss has a connotation of someone who pushes a great deal and throws his weight around. This attempt to build consensus was much more his style. Having said that, I am under no illusions that he didn't dominate politics from the 1930s on.

The Little New Deal is an interesting period. Many people who talk about Lawrence say that he was a boss until 1945, and when he became mayor some miraculous changes occurred and he became a civic leader. I don't think that's the case at all. If civic leader means one who uses one's position to bring about change that has the interests of the community at heart, I think you can clearly see that in Lawrence's role in the Little New Deal in the 1930s. And it clearly came out of his own background. He was responsible for the selection of George Earle as the Democratic candidate for governor in 1934, and Earle was elected as the first Democratic governor of the twentieth century. Earle was a Philadelphia playboy from a very wealthy family who had one experience that he told about when he became concerned about the plight of the poor when he visited Chicago and saw some poor people.

WFT: There weren't any poor people in Philadelphia?

MPW: Not that he had run across. Probably not in the section of the city where he lived. He had spent some time as ambassador to Austria. When he became governor, he was ill-equipped to handle the job, and he had no understanding about how politics operated. Lawrence was asked to be secretary of the commonwealth, which meant he became the assistant governor, if you want to use that term. He was not very successful in the first two years of Earle's term in office, because there was a Republican Senate and a Democratic House of Representatives. He couldn't get the Republican Senate to go along with most of the bills. But he used that time to

educate Democratic representatives and some senators, who were almost all first-timers, because, like Pittsburgh, the state of Pennsylvania had been heavily Republican for years. So most of these guys were in office for the first time. Lawrence educated them. He held party caucuses almost daily, sometimes with large groups, sometimes with small groups, formal meetings at which he presided, and very much the way he operated later with the Monday morning group. He talked about issues and tried to get them to go along with him, cajoled at times, pressured at other times. He also ran informal educational sessions at a restaurant named Davenport's in Harrisburg. Lawrence spent his weeks there and came back to Pittsburgh on the weekends to deal with politics. He met at Davenport's almost nightly with anywhere from six to eleven different representatives, and they would chat about various issues that were about to come up. He would find out who's strong and who's not strong on the issues. He would meet with other people in order to build this larger base and get these bills through. When the Democratic Senate came in in 1936, he was then ready to move, and he in fact pushed through almost the entire Little New Deal. He operated very much as the governor. He attended both House and Senate sessions and sat usually in one spot so everybody knew where he would be on the floor. When bills came up, he would nod or glare or be available for consultation to the senators and representatives as they considered all sorts of social welfare legislation. It was very much due to him that these pieces of legislation were passed.

WFT: How much, in some of these federal and state programs, of a role did patronage play, and how did Lawrence use that?

MPW: Patronage was very important. It was at first divided among several people. Joe Guffey, who was the senator from Western Pennsylvania and who became the first Democratic senator, and who had been a long-term ally of Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected in 1932. He moved to Washington at the same time Roosevelt did, and immediately set up a patronage office. And it was called that. This was Guffey's patronage office. To my knowledge, he was the only senator in Washington to have done that. He dispensed federal jobs. At first he tried to dispense all the federal jobs, but as they began to mount in number, he dispensed only those jobs that were available in Washington, D.C., working for the federal government. Pennsylvanians got about five thousand jobs through Guffey.

He eventually turned over his patronage in the state of Pennsylvania to Lawrence. Lawrence became the patronage dispenser for

Pennsylvania, with some help from others. So Lawrence had the federal patronage for the state of Pennsylvania, and then once we got a Democratic governor, and he became the secretary of the commonwealth, he also had a huge amount of state patronage at his disposal. And he would have liked to have had the Pittsburgh patronage, except that William McNair, whom Lawrence really put into office, refused to turn it over to him. The number of jobs at one point ran in the midst of the Depression to well over 200,000. You could get a job if you were a Republican. Republicans did get jobs, basically at the lower levels. I don't have a great deal of evidence that people were held out of jobs at that lower level — blue-collar level mostly — simply because they were Republicans. They got those jobs pretty much on a basis of need. Now you had to go through a Democrat to get it, and many of those people developed a gratitude for the Democratic party. Others became Democrats. Certainly that was the intent. Higher-up jobs went almost always to Democrats.

Patronage was tremendously important throughout almost all of the Depression. By the time the Depression ended and the number of patronage jobs began to decline, the party base was already built. And there's an upward curve running into the 1980s. As civil service and labor unions came into being, patronage became less and less important, except at the higher levels. At the higher levels we don't call it patronage. We use different kinds of terms. We're looking at administrators, but it certainly helps if you were of that political party.

WFT: What about the critical year or two between 1939 and 1940, in which Lawrence was indicted and tried on two occasions? And of course the death of his two sons in the automobile accident?

MPW: Those are years of real trauma for Lawrence. The trials of 1939 and 1940 came out of a couple of things. One, was that as there was sort of a rush to the Democratic party in the 1930s, both statewide and locally, that rush brought with it a lot of people who one might say were not necessarily committed Democrats, but who joined in the rush because there was opportunity. One of those, and I think the greatest opportunist of all, was a brilliant Pittsburgh trial criminal lawyer, Charles Margiotti. Margiotti shifted from the Republican to the Democratic party in 1934. Margiotti by this time was well-known in Western Pennsylvania — giving his support to George Earle. Lawrence induced him to make that shift because Margiotti among other things was a prominent Italian, and it was

thought he could bring Italian votes to the Democratic party. As a reward for his shift, Margiotti was made attorney general of the state of Pennsylvania. There is some indication that it was also promised that Margiotti would have been the party's choice for governor in 1938. Earle, of course, by law could not succeed himself. I don't believe that Lawrence ever made that promise. In fact, Lawrence saw himself as a candidate in 1938. The promise had also been made to Warren Van Dyke, who at one time had been state party chairman. Also, I think conditions in 1934 were just too unsettled for that promise to have been made to Margiotti. But he certainly believed it was made. When from his view it came time for the party to pay its dues, Lawrence blocked Margiotti from being the party's choice for candidacy for governor. Margiotti responded by making a whole series of charges about corruption in high places. Very vague charges. At first, when those charges were picked up by the press and they began to gain a great deal of notice, he added some names and places to those charges, and eventually accused Lawrence of several criminal activities — Lawrence and a number of other Democrats.

There were two investigations. One operated by the Democratic party at the state level in which the Democratic party exonerated the top Democrats of all charges. And, of course, that resulted in charges of coverup. There was also a grand jury held in Harrisburg, in Dauphin County. It was an all-Republican grand jury because at that time Dauphin County was controlled by the Republican party and they of course brought charges against all these Democrats. There were two trials. One trial had to do with some gravel that was sold in Erie County — a kickback charge, essentially. Lawrence was eventually exonerated from that charge. We don't have time to go into the whole case. The best testimony to his innocence was that there were nine Republicans on the jury — nine Republicans as well as three Democrats — and they exonerated Lawrence. In the second trial there were twelve Republicans on the jury, and he was exonerated of those charges as well.

WFT: The second trial was for macing.

MPW: Yes, the second trial was for macing, which was almost not illegal.

WFT: It's a really fine line there legally in terms of what you can do to get donations from state workers.

MPW: That's right. Certainly there were all sorts of donations from state workers. A number of witnesses who were brought in original-

ly contended that they had been maced. By the way, as far as I can tell, macing is a local term; you don't hear it in other states. A number of witnesses who were brought in made two charges: "I was either told to make a contribution or I would be fired," or, "I was told to make a contribution or I wouldn't receive a promotion." With one exception, those people did not make a political contribution. None of them was either fired or denied promotion. The case sort of fell apart on this. I think in this particular case there's no question that Margiotti was acting vindictively. That influenced Lawrence later in his incredibly strong desire to have the party in harmony.

WFT: It would certainly reinforce it anyway. It would certainly demonstrate how vulnerable everything could be. I'm sure the Republicans were delighted throughout the whole thing.

MPW: The immediate result, of course, was in 1938 when it seemed clear that the Democrats had done what they were supposed to in Harrisburg. There was a great deal of social welfare legislation. People were getting jobs and assistance, and yet the Democrats were swept out of office. That was clearly the result of that particular battle that went on for a long time. Not more than eleven months later Lawrence's two teenage sons were out one April afternoon and were killed in an automobile accident. That, of course, greatly influenced his life.

Those two things happening so close together were a most serious and traumatic time for Lawrence. He carried it along most of his life. Later he frequently made references to Margiotti and the accident as "my time of trials." Later he participated as a character witness for almost everyone who was on trial on anything related to political issues. Two people come to mind very quickly in which I think a very courageous stand resulted from his feeling about his own trials. One in the mid-1950s in the height of the McCarthy scare throughout the country. There was an assistant district attorney, Marjorie Matson, who was accused of being a Communist by the state attorney general and by Michael Musmanno. That state attorney general happened to be Charles Margiotti. There was a hearing. Lawrence testified on her behalf. It was a courageous thing to do in the 1950s if one was concerned with one's political career. Also later in the 1960s just before he died, at that time the assistant superintendent of police, Lawrence Maloney, was on trial for all sorts of illegal activities. Lawrence testified on his behalf as well. It's very clear in my mind that Maloney was in fact guilty. Lawrence's experience of being on trial was a factor. He said it was

the worst experience he had ever had, at least until the death of his sons.

WFT: He reacted in one way, of course, to his sons' deaths. His wife reacted in another way. In what sense was she somewhat of a burden?

MPW: I try in my biography to paint a picture of how devastating this event could be. People who have done analysis and research on traumas of this kind suggest a whole variety of different responses. Research indicates that the accident had all of the worst elements of this kind of trauma. It was sudden. It occurred to young people. The Lawrences were informed in a most impersonal way by telephone. A whole variety of this kind of thing, all of which suggest that there's going to be tremendous difficulty getting over it. Lawrence's response was to work even harder. He was already a man who did not spend a great deal of time with his family because of his political activities. Also, he owned a company. It was mostly run by others — it was an insurance company — but he spent some time there, as well. He now spent even less time with his family.

His wife's response, which again was a normal response, was to begin drinking heavily. In the 1980s they would have counseling available, but in the 1940s they didn't have that kind of assistance available, and they were left to themselves. They didn't lean on each other. They couldn't lean on each other. When he came home she was often despondent over the accident, so coming home became less pleasant. So he simply stayed away even more. They didn't lean on each other and they didn't help each other.

WFT: Did she participate in any political functions at any point?

MPW: Very little. Certainly not to the degree that one pictures, for example, the Kennedy clan. Mrs. Lawrence was a shy, very quiet woman. She was never comfortable with that sort of thing. She had a very large family and she spent a great deal of time taking care of that family — not only her own children, but she took care of a lot of relatives. Lawrence recognized that he was away from home a great deal. One way of compensating for that was for her to bring other relatives into the house. To some degree they were replacing him. She certainly participated to the extent that when there were banquets or gatherings that she was expected to attend she would be there, but not a great deal. She avoided it as much as possible. She went to Harrisburg when he became governor, but never enjoyed Harrisburg. She did not go to Washington when he became chairman of the president's Council on Equal Opportunity in

Housing. He spent almost four years there from 1962 to his death in 1966. She lived in Pittsburgh, and he came back to Pittsburgh on the weekends.

WFT: What finally precipitated Lawrence running for mayor in 1945? What events led up to that decision?

MPW: The immediate story is that he was drafted. A group composed of John Kane, who had been county commissioner for a number of years, and a small handful of other members of the party's executive committee supposedly sprang this on Lawrence at a party caucus. He said, "Well, I have to go talk to my wife." So he went and made a phone call and came back and said, "O.K. I'll take the position." That's not exactly the way it happened. Things almost never happened in that way. There had been some question about who was going to be the mayor in 1945. Cornelius Scully, who replaced McNair in 1935 when McNair resigned, had been a two-term mayor. There seemed to be general agreement that this was to be Scully's last term. Scully had been a marginally effective mayor. In his last election he had won by less than ten thousand votes. He had just barely won the previous election. They had two other choices. John Kane was one choice; another choice was a very close friend whom Lawrence supported and who had held some nonelected city offices — Jimmy Kirk. Others thought Kirk would not make a very good mayor, and they turned him down as a candidate.

Two things occurred before this caucus that I mentioned. Kirk, John Kane, and a handful of others met with Lawrence for lunch at John Kane's house out in the South Hills. They prevailed upon Lawrence to accept the candidacy. They pushed him very, very hard. He in fact raised again this issue about his being Catholic. They tried to convince him that this would not be a problem for him, and that he really ought to run. Lawrence also contacted Jack Robin, who had been Scully's secretary and who was now in the army down in New Orleans. Robin also urged him to run. He finally decided there wasn't another candidate. He agreed to be the compromise candidate. So that when they met at this political caucus, when John Kane mentioned Lawrence, it had pretty much been decided, although he did in fact make a phone call to his wife. The other members of the executive committee fell in line. After all, he had been a leader in the party for twenty-five years. If he wanted to run for mayor, who was going to deny him? Lawrence emerging as the so-called civic leader after 1945 was not a sort of miraculous thing that occurred overnight.

I think the term civic statesman for Lawrence from 1945 to 1958 is quite appropriate, but it was not an overnight transformation. He had new responsibilities, and he handled them in a different way. Lawrence all through his career was really an organizer and a manager. He did that with the party; he loved politics. Really, it was well organized. He knew what was going on everywhere in the city of Pittsburgh at the ward level and at the district committee level. In many ways he ran the city in the same kind of way, except there he delegated authority politically. Ward chairmen had authority. If they couldn't handle it that's something different. He did the same thing when he operated the city. He delegated authority. He had little patience for details. He told you to do the job and expected you to do it. He didn't want to hear a reason why it couldn't be done even though the reason might have been valid. He just wanted it done and done right. His impatience with details got him into difficulty in some areas. In running the fire and police departments his impatience and unwillingness to deal with details ran into some serious problems and some serious damage with those two departments. They were left to operate independently, and there was a considerable amount of corruption in both departments. He never really had a handle on that.

WFT: Are we likely to see another Lawrence?

MPW: In a sense it depends on which Lawrence you're talking about.

In a managerial sense I see some of that in Dick Caliguiri. I think he's well aware of Lawrence's success in the operation of the city. But conditions have changed. There's more education involved; there are labor unions to deal with; there are other constituencies involved like neighborhood and ethnic organizations that are more powerful than they used to be. I don't know if Pittsburgh can be run today the way Lawrence did in the 1950s. Everybody has written about the last of the big-time bosses. But big-time bosses in this era operated differently than did some of the early ones. We see Lawrence in that transition. He was able to operate effectively as long as he did partly because he wasn't the nineteenth-century boss who gave orders to be followed. He was more of a twentieth-century manager who built consensus.

WFT: Thank you very much, Mike. ■