

**Subject: Jim Ritter (JR)**  
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**Interviewer: Anne Greenleaf (AG)**  
**Transcribed by: Mackenzie Powell**  
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AG: This is Anne Greenleaf, I'm the interviewer. It's Thursday, November 18, 2010 and I'm here with Jim Ritter. Can you just introduce yourself and state your title?

JR: Hi, I'm Jim Ritter. I'm a maintenance mechanic, lead in the Maintenance 6<sup>th</sup> Southwest Maintenance Zone, and I work for facilities.

AG: Great and you are also a member of the...

JR: And I am a member of the Advisory Committee on License and Trademarks.

AG: Great and this is for the Brand Responsibility Project at the University of Washington. Today we are just going to talk about the Nike negotiations. Maybe you can just give a little bit of background about how you came to serve on the ACTL committee?

JR: Okay, I think that's really pertinent because at the time I was, I'm on the state Executive Board for my union, as well as the local [board] which represents about twenty eight hundred members here at the University from custodians, trades, other jobs. And at the time we were in bargaining and I was on the bargaining team, and the chair of the internal organizing committee. Our members kept insisting that we try to work with the students as they had done at Yale and other universities to create a coalition, and that we also reach out to SEIU - the other union, to try to create a community coalition of activism and with a focus on fair working policies and the usual things that you negotiate for and worry about. That went through a process where my union gave me the authority to start working with the students, with which I had some meetings, and that's when I became aware of SLAP's interest in the Nike project. They were also reaching out to us. And some of the people that I met there, Stephanie and some of the others with SLAP, we created some rallies together that were very successful, with SEIU and others, Jobs for Justice, different groups. And then later when the group of SLAP students went before the Board of Regents and I don't quite have the date on that, but they basically went before the Board of Regents and I gave a speech representing staff for my union in support of SLAP's activities and their attempts to change the relationship with Nike, basically to suspend them until they got this moved out. And I gave a small speech, and I don't remember the exact words, but the point was that I'm a Vietnam veteran, I've attended schools in North Columbia, Seattle Central, Western, and came back and went to school here at the University of Washington in the seventies. And as a Vietnam veteran I was active in the student resistance to the Vietnam War and that whole strike that took place at that time. And I pointed out to the regents at that time, there was no Department of Women's Studies, no Department of Minority Affairs, there were very few minorities on campus, there was no way of grading our instructor, a whole bunch of things that are

now common place and part of the university system, were considered outlandish and impossible at that time. And I just emphasized that, you know, pay attention to your students, they are your future leaders, you know. And at that point I think Norm Arkans was probably there and I know that, gosh my mind is going, others were there, and I was invited. Actually I got a letter from Dr. Emmert asking me to be on the advisory committee, and it was approved by my director Rick Cheney, and so at that point I became part of the team and, and brought with it my role as an activist and a union activist. And you know, I eventually took my English degree in 2001 from the University while I was working here. And so I think I had something to contribute and it's been a really great experience, and a really wonderful committee. We do a lot of business and we are very agreeable, we meet on time, close on time. It's a really effective committee. So that is sort of the history of my involvement initially. And then working with such professional people, the students, the graduate students, and so on, I'm really not. I'm not tasked with a lot on the committee although I appreciate being listened to, I feel like I do make a contribution because I feel that I do have the worker perspective, and also the whole point that we all made was that when you put that Husky gear on, whether you're a worker, a fan, alumni, which I am, you really want to feel that it is a clean product. You don't want to feel that someone was abused to make that product, and that we have a trademark of our own which is the University of Washington and we want to protect that the same way that other organizations, commercial organizations would protect their trademark.

AG: Just to restate for the record, what is the union that you belong to?

JR: AFSCME: American Federation of State Municipal and Federal Workers. And my local is in WFSE: Washington Federation of State Workers local 1488, Council 28

AG: I'm glad you got down all the acronym, I can never remember.

JR: Yeah, people have trouble with it.

AG: So, okay so I'm just going to follow up on a couple things. It sounds like the Nike issue came to your attention from the students, which I think is how it came to the attention of pretty much everybody.

JR: I think they deserve a lot of credit for that, yeah, exactly.

AG: So, did they contact you about it, or did you just hear about their...

JR: Well we were reaching out to each other. Our members were insisting that my role as internal organizer, that I try to reach out to the students, meanwhile the students were trying to, even though how they did this work in Honduras and so on, they were also looking at the Yale model where they were looking at the workers here on campus and weren't sure about whether, we have a lot of, we have a huge minority population on campus in general. And our custodians especially are predominantly immigrant minorities and there was some question, for various reasons, whether or not they were

being treated fairly. And I have to say, generally speaking, they are. A lot of issues that come up have more to do with cultural and language problems than they do with actual workplace problems we're accustomed to. And it's always the union and management, that's a perpetual dynamic that is a struggle. You are always trying to get more, and they're always trying to limit, you know, their expenditures and also keep control of the workplace, which is their right. That's a permanent dialectic. So they wanted to become involved, so we were reaching out to each other. And I was approached by several people, and I'm trying to remember his name - Rod Palmquist - and we had a couple of informal meetings, and then I attended some of the SLAP meetings. Then with the authority of my local, you know, we don't necessarily endorse non-labor causes, within the United States. So when I was appointed to the committee, I not only made sure that my local and my council were informed, but I worked through the international, I was given a contact person in Washington D.C., I'm spacing his last name out, but his name is Mark.

AG: We can come back around to it.

JR: Yeah, that is a name I could pull up or email you but he is an advisor and a specialist in Latin America and Central America, a labor specialist. I was actually lucky enough last year to meet with Bill Lucy who is just retired as Vice President of our union, and the founder of CBTU, and a really important black labor leader in this country, and he kind of guided me on that too. He said that the clothing industry, that is fine, go ahead. But don't get involved in transportation issues, or automotive industry, or china, because those are very delicate issues and affect workers in different ways. And so I kind of had a mandate to, if I'm representing my union, focus on the issue that [ACTL] does which is perfectly fine, and then get a little feedback about what is going on elsewhere, which is pretty much universal because [ACTL] is working nationally with other universities and so on, and with the manufactures, so there is no big surprises there. But the unions, as well as industry, is really working, as the post-NAFTA atmosphere hasn't really settled out to anyone's satisfaction at this point, you know, it's an ongoing development. And so that was a concern for the union, that we weren't committing ourselves formally to any particular solution. And so my role on the committee is not as a representative to my union, it's a representative of the staff here at the University of Washington. And that would mean that SEIU, professional staff, all, everyone that works here at the U, graduate students and so on, all have an interest in this issue, And we just, I just happen to be the particular staff person that is on that committee.

AG: Great, so another thing that I wanted to follow up on is the joint activities that you guys did with SLAP. Can you say a little bit more about what those were?

JR: Well, primarily we had a rally that was associated with our bargaining at the time and [SEIU] was bargaining at the same time, so we did some sort of street theater type of thing. People dressed up, and SLAP showed up and publicized it and showed up for our rallies, and when they had events we tried to get people out with our union colors to show up at their events so we would make it clear that this wasn't a standalone issue, a special group, that it was of interest to the entire university community. And I can't remember

the dates but they had some information booths, some red square type rallies and that was to educate our members to the issue and show them how, that these weren't jobs that they were losing, that these jobs that people had down in Honduras were fair jobs, and that they had the opportunity to unionize and improve their lives and that it didn't detract from what we were doing. So that we needed to support this, that we needed to support the students in the same way that we were asking them to support us. And so that is how it evolved. I think they were mostly red square events, there weren't any, I mean there were some appearances at the Board of Regents and those are all controlled, that's not a wild cat thing. You know, you had to have permission and so, they were very respectful and there were times where they, you know, you have an element of the less respectful, that's part of the, what would I say, drama of the thing. But the real thing was to steer the Board of Regents to a reasonable understanding and to, you know, to effect change, not simply to protest. So I think that is one of the things that we talk about in the advisory committee. In that we're an advisory committee, we don't lay down the rules, or tell Phyllis Wise, Dr. Emmert, they have to do this or they have to do that. If we come up with something they can't swallow, they won't take our advice, we have to be reasonable. We have to be, to present. So we've been, I've been, I'm really happy with the solutions that came up before Dr. Emmert left and I think it's a real step in the right direction, because University of Washington is basically leading the way on this, we're really way out front you know. Cornell and University of Wisconsin have been with us on it. But we're trying to set a standard and I think we've done a really good job. I mean, not just the committee, but I mean, the people in authority, Dr. Emmert and Phyllis Wise both. You know, she [Phyllis Wise] takes a lot of flak for her position on the Nike Committee. Right now we don't have an argument with Nike, so she has no reason to lose herself in anything at this point, and I'm sure she's intelligent enough, and sophisticated enough to know if that did come up, that she wouldn't play that position. So I don't feel like we're in a hostile relationship with the person we're supposed to be advising, that's an absurd situation. We need to be, you know, working with them and have our advice taken seriously.

AG: So just to follow up again, when you are talking about educating people on campus about the issues in Honduras, what form does that take? A dialogue between...?

JR: Well a lot of it has to do with, when you buy these goods, like you know we buy union goods, they're made in the United States, they're union made and they're 100 percent cotton and so on and so on. These options are available, it's not necessary to use child labor, sweatshop labor, people chained into buildings where they have fires and can't get out. That is unnecessary to produce a fair market good. And when students discovered situations like that, they brought it to the attention, it's everybody's business, and that's the thing we showed to our members. We tried to show to the public that this is not a good way to get cheap goods. You know, it's one thing to buy US. In fact there's nobody in this room doesn't have on clothing that's made in some other country, it's simply impossible for somebody to completely dress in American made goods, they are not available. But the manufacturers based in the United States and elsewhere have the option of choosing how and where they make things and to the extent that we can make sure that those people were treated fairly, that they have a fair livable wage, and they

have opportunities for you know, advancement, whatever is fair in that situation. It should meet the highest standard possible for that location. And when these people, just basically got screwed out of their severance pay, and when it becomes obvious to me that the tracking of how goods are made, or where they are made, becomes a game where our factories close or an inspection takes place or some things are not on the up and up. Then it is time for people to be made aware of, and to become alarmed about this. And you know there were actions, I think university employees responded well [slowly], and with little resistance. But generally there were a lot of ideas floating around, oh we could do this, we could do that, different kind of, what I say, more street theater type of presentations and games, or alumni games or something like that. And it never got to the point where people felt that it was necessary to take it that far because we were still in a dialogue. That is something you do when negotiations go down or something. I feel the university has maintained an interest in making these changes largely in part because of people like Margaret and Rod and all of the other people on the committee, Kathy, everyone has worked so hard to try and find that reasonable path to a good solution because you can slam your fist on the table and say this should be done, and this isn't right, this is wrong, but unless you have an actual plan that's going to be implemented, listened to, then you are just wasting your breath. You are just complaining. And so I think we reached, we reached a real point where our committee has a real viability and ability to make change as far away as Honduras through dialogue, letters, pressure, local pressure, professors that came out and signed the petition. Those are the kind of things that are way more effective than a little street march or something you know. And in the end I think that is what helped make a change was the solution approach to it. That this could happen and we could go to the media. [In Russell], which is a sidebar, but they took a beating and I think it demonstrated all the manufacturers that they really needed to pay attention to these issues. That producing a competitively priced good is good, but they're all in the same boat. So they can all raise their standards equally and still compete. And I think that's what we arrived at.

AG: So one of the things we usually do for these interviews is just have you walk through the process of the negotiations as you remember them. We already talked about it in bits and pieces, and you've already started with how you got involved in the first place...

JR: Yes

AG: So maybe just say a little bit about the process after you got appointed to the committee until ACTL came to their final decision that they passed on to President Emmert.

JR: Well, I'm a little vague on all this. I don't have any notes with me meeting by meeting, but essentially I came aboard late, this was already in process, and Nike was pretty much taking the stand that this was out of their control, that these were subcontractors. And we looked into that and we had, they came and made presentations to us and other people made presentations to us. And meanwhile we were in contact with all the different agencies, you know, the manufacturers, oversight group, and the colleges type oversight groups, and so on, which ones they can participate in, and which ones they

can't, and the stuff that SLAP was bringing us and we kept focusing on. What it really came down to, and I think Aseem had a really good perspective on this, that the responsibility lies with the contractor, not the person who is, subcontracting. That is, the argument that Nike did not have control over those subcontractors or the suppliers didn't hold water, and I think that's what we kept coming back to, is if you, and we used the example, I mean it's not my background but, if you hire a building contractor to build your house and you don't have any hot water, you can't just say: 'well that's not my problem as a plumber', and the plumber is already moved to another state. It is still the primary contractor's responsibility and that is what we were, we were reviewing our own code, our own standards and finding that they needed to be re-written upgraded, which is our next step actually, but that it seemed to hold them responsible, even for the actions of their subcontractors. So that is what we kept coming back to. And emphasizing - that there were letters back and forth, and different people came and did presentations about what couldn't happen, or shouldn't happen, and that it was not their responsibility. And it was just a whole series, I mean I think people like Margaret and Rod and some of the other folks have a much clearer picture of, and especially Kathy, letter by letter, negotiation by negotiation, event by event, where we traveled, someone traveled and participated in discussions and came back. I think they have a really accurate picture of how that unfolded, much more than I do as a lesser member, quite frankly, of the committee. It's been a lot for me to educate myself to all of this, and bring myself up to speed. I'm an English major. I can read but I don't know much about economics or, you know, international studies, or have the background that some of these folks have, I mean it's a really incredible committee. But I do have a feel for what the university represents and what we would like to see for our Husky gear, and so on. We want to have it be clean, basically, I mean we're proud of the University so we are proud of what we do basically. And you know, you don't need a protest football game or, that sort of thing doesn't look pretty. But that process was very businesslike and, you know, Nike was invited to come and talk to us, and they sent people to talk to us and other people came to talk to us about the conditions in Honduras and so on. And so we've tried to invite as many people to give us their perspective as possible. I think that it's, looking back it's really hard for me to remember what happened when, or how we felt about a particular letter that didn't answer the question, or didn't speak to it. Some of Nike's responses were not satisfying and we let them know. And ultimately when we were dissatisfied we let Dr. Emmert know that we felt he had to write to tell them that, which he did. We were not surprised, but we were comforted that he was taking us seriously. He didn't [IINAUDIBLE] us on at all, at any time, I mean it's pretty courageous actually for somebody in his position and especially considering the position he moved to, to take on something like the Nike thing strictly basing it on ethics, because that is a vague issue and, you know, in the business world ethics and money are two different topics almost. And so the fact that he took that on is remarkable, and that he succeeded at it is even more remarkable. But the process was what made it happen, and we didn't just go to him and say, send them a nasty letter or something like that, we had to build our case and wait for the responses for them, and then we discussed it and decided whether we were satisfied or not. And when we weren't satisfied we finally let Dr. Emmert know. We went through the same process with the reinstatement of [Russell]. We met with them, they told us things, we decided to accept them back under certain conditions, and it was the

same process of dialogue back and forth and then a group agreement, and pretty much always we, any important agreement was unanimous. That was more or less essential. So I feel real good about how it was done and the people involved, all the way though the top to the bottom. The students, and the people from the Daily, and so on. The way it was handled, there was not a lot of negative or false propaganda out there. I mean the treatment of the people in Honduras is shocking, or shameful enough, I should put it that way. Not shocking because it happens so much all over the world, but the fact that we were able to stand up and say we don't want to be a part of that, I think speaks well for the entire university community.

AG: So one of the things we also like to ask people is when you were on the committee and you were thinking about these issues, what were the sources of information for you that were sort of the most crucial to your decision making? We've heard various things about the WRC providing valuable information, or the students providing valuable information.

JR: And that is exactly true. What the students provided, and the WRC, was the actual straight press, New York Times, that you could search stuff out. And, you know, my contact with the union, Mark, gosh I can't think of his name right this second, and also my wife, is a Latin American specialist. She's an art major, I mean art historian, in Bothell although I think she is now a cultural historian actually. So I've traveled a little bit in Latin America and she has traveled extensively. So no surprise to me to know that children are working from the time they are little and that they don't necessarily go to school and that people were mistreated in the workplace. But it's not when you see it, it's not necessarily institutionalized the way this was, where you have a big factory. You don't see that as much as a tourist or a traveler but you know about it. So I have enough to know about these conditions, you know, this isn't made up stuff. And then we had a stack of documents that were always coming though from WRC and so on, and there is a lot of reading involved in being on this committee, quite frankly I mean, and I attended, and you know we had guests, and my boss, I have to say, has been very very open and generous with allowing me release time to go and do this on the clock, you know on my paid time, and to attend some of these seminars and lectures that were not in the normal meeting format and to educate myself basically and to get up to speed on the University of Washington, especially on our perspective on this, on our portion of it. So now we're going to a new phase and see how, I mean it's almost like you know, you've got the concept of the lawyer, and the person with the international studies attitude, and the manufacturing issues, and marketing issues, all of these things, the book store, all these factors that are really complex and so they have a team that can present this in such a way that we all get our head's around it, is really great because it's not simple. It's not as simple as just saying no we don't want to do this. Where are you going to buy this stuff, you know, this shoulder pads and shoes, all the stuff - the athletes need a football itself and you know, if you don't go to these manufacturers that make these things, what leverage do you have on them when there are so many other schools. And you know one of the things I learned that was really remarkable was that Husky gear is really popular and sells really well even when our games aren't necessarily doing well, that it's one of the leading products, even though we may not be academically better than a lot of

schools, you know, especially on the Pacific Rim, but the fact that our Husky gear sells so well speaks really well for the university as well because we don't always have a winning team. But the manufacturer sees this valuable market, and they are willing to play ball with us. Maybe if we were like Reed College or something we wouldn't have any leverage, you know. And so that's another thing, using the leverage we have has been a good thing

AG: So the sort of happy question I get to ask everybody is about the final settlement that happened on July 29<sup>th</sup>, I think it was. At the very end of July Nike announced that they were going to set aside, what was it, two and a half million dollars for the workers as termination compensation as well as extending a year of health coverage through the national health care system and giving them priority job re-hiring. So can you just say what you thought about the final settlement? How you, I know it's speculation to some degree, but why you think Nike may have come to that decision, and what kind of precedent do you hope it sets for the future?

JR: Well I was really happy that they did that. It took the next step away from us, which would have been hostile and more aggressive. And Dr. Emmert leaving would have been really a mess for Phyllis Wise to do her job, which is tough enough without this issue. I feel that there may have been some political pressure on Emmert considering the job he was taking. He didn't want that issue to follow him I'm sure, and have demonstrations at games all over the country, but I don't know if that would have happened. But I think he was trying to leave on a good note, and so I think he may have brought pressure. I think Phyllis Wise and her roles both as interim president, and being on the Nike Board, would like to see the issue off the table, so they may have brought pressure to bear from inside as well as outside. And the fact that it was settled, you know one of the things, I'm really happy that it did get settled, there is always questions of how will this be implemented - we know there is corruption in these countries and so on, how will it actually play out? I think, coupled with the solutions that Nike has come up with, excuse me not Nike, but Russell, kind of set a standard for their allowing the union to help advise, and getting rid of certain employers that were abusive, and so on. Making the changes they are making I think also helps Nike make the same steps because they are competing on a level playing field, essentially. But also, all the time this was going on, the politics in Honduras was a complete mess, you had two presidents, you had a version of military law and you know some, one group was telling us, oh yeah we just had someone over at that factory the other day, and they took some pictures, and another person saying, oh we can't even go there, it's dangerous and we won't expose our agent driving us to that place. So you're getting multiple stories about what was really the truth on the ground in Honduras. So I think the settlement is good. I think we'll probably get feedback on how well it's implemented, and if everything takes place because there's always suspicion, well that 2.5 million dollars could kind of disappear into the woodwork, and that some worthy worker somewhere would not get it, but some manager somewhere else, you know that kind of skepticism, I think that's just healthy. But I think in general, I don't think Nike is an obscene business entity in and of itself. I think they would love to have a clean slate. I think that the people who work for Nike, and who manage Nike are honest, reasonably honest, as business people are. They don't really want to make their profit off of



somebody else's blood, you know. So I have a lot of faith that this will be implemented as best as possible, but we have to remember that we're always, as Americans we're very insulated, and they're operating under Honduran law, not United States law. So what happens with severance pay rules and the availability of jobs and so on, is what happens in Honduras, not in the United States. If you want a sense of how horrible it can be in Latin America you should catch the movie up here called Waste Land about Muniz who's the artist who makes stuff, the world's largest landfill in Brazil. And it's an incredible movie when you see what people go through simply to make a living. And it reminds us of how much we have, and how much we take for granted. And the fact that we're making any sort of progress from up here in Seattle, for people down in Honduras and elsewhere, that we're doing that through meetings, letters, and the threat of protest and exposure, I think it's really remarkable that we live in a society that allows for that kind of discussion without violence and without you know... I'm just really proud of the committee and the university, and Nike in some sense. I mean, you know, we feel that it is our job to continue to monitor and make sure that, I mean, we're not, you know we aren't Polly Anna's. You know, unchecked I'm sure Nike would fall back into whatever was cheapest and under whatever manufacturer would, I mean that is why we have consumer protection laws and all of that, to make sure that doesn't happen, it's not automatic. Yeah, I was real happy with the solution. I was happy it didn't drag on because it was really time for it to be solved.

AG: Great, well I think you managed to cover all of my questions without me even having to ask all of them.

JR: Good, good.

AG: So I don't have anything else to add at the moment, but did I miss anything that seems pertinent to you?

JR: Not really, I just want to commend all the committee members for really being involved and being the people they are, they're really professional people, they're really great, all of them. So I've been real proud to be part of that committee. And again I'm proud that Dr. Emmert and Phyllis Wise paid attention to what the committee had to say. I think that speaks well for them too.

AG: Great, thank you.

[END TAPE]