

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 3 OF 16

FOLDER 31

CHRYSLER ELDON SAFETY J  
SIMS INTERVIEW 1972

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JORDAN SIMS FEB. 16, 1972

Q: You were fired from Eldon in May of 1970?

A: That's right.

Q: What were the circumstances surrounding your firing?

A: <sup>May</sup> The ~~main~~ work stoppage was the end result of the initial work stoppages which occurred in April. We had accumulated a large stack of grievances; it was a continuing thing over the last two or three years; ~~the~~ management's failure to bargain properly or in good faith; we kept repeating ~~of~~ grievances because they would give you a commitment to fix things and then they wouldn't. And we had tried to get together with top management at the plant level, ever since, you might say, ever since the black administration took over (the local union). They just didn't want to talk to the union. Especially the plant manager, whose name was ~~Engelberg~~ Engelbright. Joe Hafner ~~x~~ was personnel manager; Carl Polsgrove was the labor relations supervisor. In April we were supposed to have a special conference meeting, which we had called and set up ahead of time with management to rediscuss, again, all of our current problems, our old ones, and ones that we anticipated coming up in the future if things stayed like they were. So management agreed to the meeting, and that night, before the meeting, this "Scott Incident" ~~occurred~~ occurred; this young employee in Dept. 73 got together with this southern white foreman in 73; the guy threatened to bash his head in with a pinion, and they fired him...for telling the union. When he told the union they just went down there and said, well, as far as we're concerned, he was belligerent; they said it just like that. So, if he wants to start trouble, he's fired ; they wouldn't even discuss it with his committeeman that morning.

Q: The company claimed that the employee had threatened the foreman?

A: Right. Always...the burden of proof, the burden of responsibility, is always on the worker. They had had some type of verbal discourse that night about the young fellow and his job. He's a little fellow. If you called him peewee you'd be calling him just about right. He's about 4-8, ~~not~~ 4-7, weighed about 118-~~xx~~ 120 pounds.

They had gotten into a discussion about his production. And it went off into an argument. The foreman didn't like the idea that this little fella was even talking back to him; so he ordered him back to his job or he'd be fired, he said; he wouldn't even last the damn night; that's the way he put it. So the kid went back to work and after quitting time, after the whistle blew, he went back to the foreman on his own time to find out, you know, what was his status, what was the problem. And the argument started up all over again, and that's where the foreman broke off the argument - there were two foremen standing there - and he went over to a conveyor line, and came back with one of these big heavy duty pinions. He said get the hell out of there or he'd bust his goddamn brains out. The kid just backed away and the other foreman just grabbed this one, and the kid left. He came down to the front cafeteria, where the union usually congregated first thing in the morning to coordinate the day's activities and he found his committeeman. They went on and took him back to the office and talked to the general foreman about the foreman's conduct. Well, the committeeman doesn't automatically take the worker's word for everything all the time; so he goes to investigate. So he listened to the young boy's story, and thought that he had enough, so he took the boy back to the office to talk to the general foreman. And when he walked in with the kid, and he broached the subject to the general foreman, and this foreman was sitting down there making out his daily report - he hadn't said a word to his general foreman about the incident. And when the committeeman brought it up, they just stood up, and were just indignant that this kid had the goddamned nerve to come back in and tell on the people. So they wouldn't even discuss it with the committeeman; they just said well goddamn it he's fired, now get him out of here. He's fired as far as we're concerned - they wouldn't even talk about it. So they came back and they got me; and I went back down there with him; and so he woofed in my face. When they woofed at me and I can't quiet 'em down, I usually woof em back. In a few words, I just told the general foreman that he did not run the whole goddamned plant; that he had certain obligations there; and that if he didn't want to discuss the thing intelligently that I'd rather talk to his

and the foreman and the committeeman and the worker and we went to Lefty's office (the superintendent). First thing Lefty said, without hearing anything, was what do you want with me? Well, we've got a problem - he says well all right, I back them 100% and I don't want to hear anything else - that's the way he started off. So I had to get on Lefty a little bit. So when I finally left, they were sitting there discussing it. So later on, we had this meeting we had set up. We ~~went~~ went down there to meet with management, and they ~~chos~~ chose to ignore the union. We sat around there - the whole bargaining committee - from about 9:30, when we were supposed to start meeting, up to about 11:00. We were sitting there waiting for management to come in there; they said they were busy, they didn't have time. Walking back and forth to each other's office...this is Joe Hafner and Carl Polsgrove the personnel director and the labor relations supervisor. So Elroy got kind of impatient; and after a while Elroy went and asked them, well, we've got a meeting scheduled today. Oh, we don't have time. Will you agree to meet? Like I said, we don't have time. And they weren't going anywhere, ~~x~~ they just kept walking back and forth to each other's office. So we went around to Carl Polsgrove's office and he just slammed the door in our face. We just stayed there and waited for a while anyhow and finally we got to where we sat down in Carl's office, and Carl got up and left; he went around to Joe Hafner's office; they stood around over there. So they sent this Virgil Anderson in to talk to us. He was supposed to be some kind of corporate representative, but he wasn't really assigned to Eldon. But trying to get our problems aired out, we sat down and tried to give him a report on exactly what was occurring out there - the nature of collective bargaining in the plant, the frequent violations of our agreements, and management's failure to respond to their negotiated agreements or their ~~xxx~~ verbal commitments or anything else. During this time Charlie Thomson, the committeeman, was in the next office with Brother Scott, the general foreman, and a labor relations rep, negotiating on Scott. They just got ridiculous with Charlie, so Charlie came in while we were talking to Virgil Anderson, and related this story to the president and the rest of the bargaining committee. ~~these people weren't giving him any reasonable response.~~



Then we all left there, we went in and got in on this Scott incident. The complete bargaining committee was brought up to date on what had occurred. People got kind of indignant then, a little bit, and we sat down and tried to discuss that with them and they just weren't reasonable or sensible at all. And we told them that if this kid gets fired, with the state the plant is in, the way things have been occurring in recent months, snowballing, that the plant will have to go down. So we tried to get them to at least suspend both of them, take the discharge thing out, and suspend both the foreman and the employee, have them both out in the street, so that the union could at least be shown some consideration while the thing was investigated - otherwise, let them both work while the thing was investigated - but don't fire the kid then. They didn't have to talk about it. They didn't have to understand. They didn't have to be reasonable. They ran that plant as they saw fit, and the hell with what the union says.

Q: This kind of treatment that Scott received - is this typical of the way workers are treated at Eldon if they get into a dispute with a foreman?

A: It still is. Yeah, it's typical. You don't talk back to a foreman without becoming insubordinate. You ask questions. If a man walks up and gives you a job assignment .....you know, I'm not going to tell you every foreman out there is like this, but this is the general pattern because this is the one that has been established by the top people in supervision. They are to me rather short-sighted and rather ignorant, because any time you incur the animosity of an employee and you provoke him every day trying to dominate him you're not going to get a good day's work out of this ~~damn~~ damn man. And so, hell, it behooves them to try to maintain some reasonable personal relationships ~~employee and management~~ employee and management,

Q: The company's ~~present~~ position was that Scott should be fired--

A: Period.

Q: --and that Ashlock, the foreman, would remain?

A: Well, there was no question as to Ashlock's integrity (laughs). In the ensuing discussion, since they wouldn't listen and we bargained there half the day,

told them if they can't reistante the man, or at ~~■~~ least back up off this and be reasonable, that behind all the other things, we'll have to close your plant down. That's what the president was telling us. We'll teach you son-of-bitches a goddamn lesson.

Q: This is what Elroy Richardson was saying?

A: This is what Elroy was rapping.

Q: Elroy was saying at that time, we'll close your plant down.

A: Right, we'll close your goddamned plant down, maybe you'll understand that. He was talking like that then.

Q: This is significant because he later was to deny that he authorized the strike.

A: That's right. Certainly. See, Elroy is the chief negotiator, not me. O<sup>N</sup>ce you bring in your total bargaining committee, see I'm only there at the committee level. This is Elroy's level there. They gave him this type of ultimatum. And they called in the ~~■~~ chief stewards and told them what the deal was, that the kid was fired, and they wanted the plant to go down. Was the plant in readiness? The stewards all said yeah. All right, well, we'll let you know what these people desire to do. So they more or less told us to go to hell. Close the ~~■~~ goddamn plant down. And we stayed out three or four days.

Q: This was in April?

A: Right, this was in April. And we made it perfectly understood, perfectly clear, that we wanted no workers picketing. All these activities would be handled by the local union leadership. And this is the way we did it. The leadership picketed the gates and the plant and just got it ~~■~~ locked up tighter than a drum. Initially they fired...after they got 'em back...they were going to come back and discuss it. We told them we weren't going to talk to the local plant manager because they didn't even recognize the local union. We couldn't make sense with them at all, ~~■~~ someone else had to be there. So they brought in Lowell Perry and Hoffman, and we got Homer Jolly from the Chrysler Dept. Wally Waller was there. We all went back and we sat down and discussed the thing. And they decided that, behind the scenes, they had discussed this thing and the proposals that the union had made. But, see,

On dealing with this matter, I guess they knew best how to treat their boys, and to keep them in line. This is the attitude they displayed. So they provoked it, and the plant just went down. We went back in there - they fired all the stewards on afternoons, and a trustee on afternoons who was working; he wasn't active on the floor at the time; they fired him too because he was union. Even though he led or provoked nothing. And they fired a trustee on midnights. This was around the 15th-16th of April. So we sat down and we had this meeting on this. At this time no one was fired when we went back. So they were discussing the fact that it's such a serious thing that's involved, that discipline must be considered. So we asked them, what do you mean by discipline? Well, they weren't sure, but they were going to investigate it, and they would come up with something. And since the convention was pending, that we would go ahead and attend the convention, and when we came back we would all sit down

and discuss this thing again. <sup>We said,</sup> ~~THEY SAID~~ we want a guarantee from you, your promise, that no one will be discharged until we sit down and ~~we~~ discuss ~~this~~ this thing. All parties involved would have a chance to sit down and review the situation,, and consider what type of discipline you ~~may~~ may be considering. They said okay - they agreed to this.

Q: This was while the first wildcat was going on?

A: No, we had just ended it.

Q: And Scott had been rehired?

A: Right. We got Scott reinstated. With back pay.

Q: So this was a discussion not so much over Scott but over whether the company would be taking reprisals?

A: Right. So after we got this commitment, we up and went to the convention.

So we came back, and everything's quiet - nobody said a word about anything.

(At meeting with company reps, they said...) this is our program, this is what the meeting

is all about: We've had our investigation, and we're going to assess discipline.

If you don't like what we've done, you can set a meeting for sometime in the future.

They wouldn't tell us who the names were until we agreed to accept whatever it was.

We all supported Elroy's position; which was that if this was what they considered good

collective bargaining, then they had a lot to learn in the whole area. We told them that if anyone is disciplined, worker or leadership, the plant would not be operating that night.