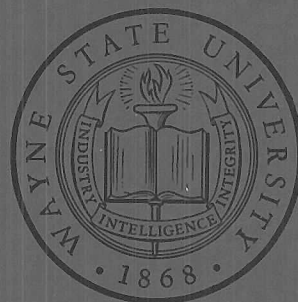


Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW

FRANK MARQUART

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER
JULY 24, 1968



Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan



INTERVIEW
OF
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BY
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ON
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Frank Marquart - M
Herbert Hill (interviewer)

H: This is an interview with Frank Marquart in Detroit, Michigan on July 24, 1968.

Mr. Marquart, can you tell us what year you were born, where you were born, when you first came to Detroit and something of your early experiences in the automobile industry and in the Auto Workers Union?

M: I was born in 1900, Brooklyn, New York, and when I was still a child my people went to Pittsburg. My father got a job in the Westinghouse and we lived in Bright, Pennsylvania until about 1914. I'll never forget the day when my father came home very excited waving the Pittsburg Press and saying that Henry Ford was paying \$5 a day in Detroit and that he was going to Detroit and quit his job with Westinghouse and get a \$5 a day job in the Ford Motor Company. Because I was tall for my age he was sure that I was going to get a job and that I also was going to make \$5 a day and my mother took a very dim view of this and felt he was going on a wild goose chase. But he was insistent, and we came to Detroit. I'll never forget what happened that morning when my father said we'll get up early and go there before and get ahead of the other people.

H: Excuse me, what year did you actually arrive in Detroit?

M: January, 1914, and so when we got to the plant there were thousands of people at the gates. It was a bitterly cold day - I didn't have an overcoat - I had a thin sweater and I almost froze. My father insisted on staying there until we could get to the gate which meant we stayed there until 3:00 that afternoon; of course he didn't get the job. That was a period when there was a slight depression in America. Jobs were hard to come by, but he was very lucky in that he had a friend who formerly lived in Pittsburg, and worked in the Westinghouse and who was a foreman here in a parts plant called the Metal Parts Company in Detroit. That plant is now Chrysler Plant. And he got a job there and shortly after he was able to get me a job in that place. My first job was working on a bench filing burrs from castings, and I had my first experience of the speed up. I remember an incident very clearly where the time study man took off his coat and plowed into the castings that he had counted out, worked as furiously as he could for fifteen minutes, and then set a time on the job. And I can still remember saying something to the effect that you don't expect anyone to keep up that pace all day. He said, "If you can get the lead out you can make good"; and he walked away.

I worked in the automobile plants for fifteen years off and on and I think during that time I worked in such plants as Continental Motor Company, Packard Plant, the Hudson Plant and Cadillac Plant, a lot of parts plants and I tried several times to connect with Ford, but I didn't succeed. But I spent most of my time working in

Cadillac where I finally got into the tool room. My last job in the factory, which was during the depression up until 1930, was in the Detroit Lubricator where I worked in the tool room of that plant. Then the depression came on. Now I might say that I didn't work steady during those years. For example, in two of those years I went to the Michigan State Normal College which is now the Michigan Eastern University and I planned to go into teaching, but at that time teaching paid so little that I thought that I could do better working in the tool room of the plants. Well, anyway, when the depression came as everybody knows who knows anything about Detroit in those days, it was called the "City of the Dead." When the automobile industry went down that meant that practically everything went down and jobs were impossible to get. I had a friend who had gone to Rochester, New York, and got a job in the Hawkeye Plant of the Kodak Company and he thought that he could get me a job there. When I went to Rochester it was impossible to get a job anywhere and I had to pick up work - little jobs like working on tables in a German Rathskeller and then finally I got a job working in the kitchen in a sanitarium, a TB sanitarium in Rochester. It was compulsory for people there to get an X-ray when they had a job and that's how I discovered I had TB. I often wondered what would have happened if I hadn't been in there and had gone on before I had discovered it when it might have been too far advanced. So I got cured of that and came back to Detroit and this is when the economic curve was moving up; hell was breaking loose in Detroit at that time.

H: About what year would you say?

M: I came back to Detroit in the latter part of 1935 and I've been here ever since.

H: It is now 1935, the worst days of the depression, you were here in Detroit.....vast unemployment. I wonder if you could tell us something of what you remember regarding conditions among the white and the Negro working class with some emphasis, if possible, upon the condition of Negro workers in Detroit and also about radical movements and about early labor organizations - early in terms of the CIO - when it was just beginning, the new wave of industrial unionism and something of your own experience with radical movements during this period.

M: Well, I'd like to go back for a few minutes to the twenties. I think that this was an extremely interesting period, and by understanding some of the things that happened then I think we can understand better what took place when the CIO crusade got underway. During the twenties, Detroit was an open shop town; the AFL had made several attempts, very weak attempts to organize but never got very far. I think everybody who knows anything about labor history knows that shameful episode when Green wrote the automobile manufacturers and tried to sell them on organizing their plants on the basis that this would insure them an efficient labor force. And if

I recall correctly, they didn't even dignify that letter with a reply. They wanted no part of unionism. The Communists at that time did some very effective work. They tried to organize an industrial union in Detroit - I think it was called the Auto Workers Union and one thing that I recall which they did which was very good was put out shop papers. When I worked in Hudson Plant it used to be the Hudson paper, when I worked in the Packard Plant they would put out a Packard paper.

H: What year was that?

M: This was in 27/28.

H: Was this during the period of the Trade Union Unity League?

M: That's right.

H: These were dual unions established by the company?

M: That's it precisely. You couldn't call it a dual union in Detroit because there was no union in the auto industry. I remember that I used to take some of the Packard papers. What they would do by the way, they would get people who worked in those plants to tell about the speed up, to tell abusive supervision, to describe the health hazards, and they would write this up. Incidentally, I've always thought that it's too bad that the papers put out today by the locals don't do some of that. There's some of these sheets that the locals put out that are pretty awful, and they could be made real lively if this sort of thing is revealed as to what goes in the plants. But this is one of the things they did, and we used to take, those of us who were sympathetic to this movement, some of these papers in the plants. I remember that I would stick them in the motor block, and as the motor block went down the line one worker after another would take out the paper and the foreman tried very hard to find out who the culprit was who was responsible for this, but he never succeeded in finding out. Anyway, this was the one union activity that took place during the twenties. I'd like to say that Detroit was notorious for its vicious speed up. It was a period when people from all over the country, particularly areas like Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, the rural areas of Michigan, people flocked in to Detroit. We use to refer to them as the "suitcase brigade."

H: Excuse me, was there in this early period in the late 1920's already a large group of southern white workers?

M: Precisely, that's right.

H: My impression was the larger southern immigration came much later.

M: It came when the war took place, but they did come in.

H: But was there a large number of southern white workers?

- M: A substantial number. It would be interesting to know how substantial. And these people - in those days the industry wasn't as stable as it is now. They would work furiously in the period when the cars sold and when the model change came we would get laid off. We always referred to that period as "The Starvation Vacation" because there was no unemployment compensation and I often wondered how people with families ever succeeded in weathering the two or three months we would be unemployed sometimes.
- H: During this period, Mr. Marquart, do you have any recollection of Negro workers in the industry or in Detroit generally?
- M: Yes, in the plants there were Negro workers. I was not in the Ford Plant, so what I am saying does not apply to the Ford Plant where I understand the situation was different but in the plants where I worked the Negroes were confined to the foundry and to janitorial work mainly.
- H: You say it was different in the Ford Plant; why the difference?
- M: As I understand, it was because I think there were some Negroes in the machine shop and in other production plants where Negroes did not work, for example, Chrysler or Packard or Hudson. There is one place where they did work and that was in the Briggs Body Plant where they were sanders on the bodies.
- H: May I ask you this? Repeatedly in our interviews it becomes clear that very early the Ford operations were quite different with their utilization of Negro labor. They employed Negroes earlier and in a wider range of job occupations than the other companies, even though I think the record indicates that for the most part Negroes were concentrated in the forge and foundries and things of this sort. But you're quite right, Ford was different. Why was Ford different?
- M: I had been told that the reason is that Ford deliberately used this as a tactic to split the white and black workers. At that time it was possible for a Negro worker, if he got a letter from his minister, for example, in his little church, he'd go to the Ford Motor Company and he could get a job. I am told that this happened very, very often, very frequently. And the explanation I got for your book - this would really be something interesting to check into. It seems to me, the impression I got was that the Ford management did this deliberately in order to create a pattern that would pit the black workers against the white workers in a sense that it would make the Negro workers loyal to Mr. Ford. And I can even remember in that period when Negroes did have a reverence for Henry Ford, and I think the management believed in the event of any labor trouble the Negroes would be on the side of the company.
- H: Would there have been an anticipation of labor trouble as early as the twenties?

M: There were labor troubles in Ford, Highland Park, just before 1913. The IWW was very successful in recruiting Ford workers and they did lead a short strike there and there are some historians who believe this is one of the reasons why Ford decided to put in the \$5 a day. It was a contributing reason, if it was not a main one. Now this again is something that would have to be checked. This is an interesting thing to look into.

H: You were in the midst of telling us something about radical activities, union activities.

M: Yes, well the Communists were the most active. Incidents took place in that period that have often made me wonder since. For example, I remember when I was working at Hudsons one day, an organizer of the Communist union - the Auto Workers Union - came out and put up a soap box during lunch hour and spoke to the workers on the need for getting organized. He was very familiar with the conditions in that plant; he talked about them, he talked about how they had to be remedied, and what could happen if the workers got organized. He hammered on the fact that in that plant -- and that plant was notorious for this evil - the workers never knew from one pay to the next what they were going to get as a bonus, because they had a bonus system and the harder they worked sometimes the less bonus they'd get and he would point these things out. And the workers' attitude was one of ridicule. I remember their saying, "Oh, why don't you go to work? What's your racket?" and so on. I've often wondered if conditions had continued as they were in the twenties, when it was possible for workers to get jobs, except during the model layoff, and when Detroit, and this is one reason they were attracted to the city, could pay higher wages, relatively, than employers in other cities - I am wondering if those conditions would have continued, would we've had a union at all?

Now about the radical movements in that period, the Socialist Party conducted an open forum in conjunction - this was in the early twenties - with the auto workers union which preceded the auto workers unions organized by the Communists. Let me make this clear. In the early twenties, there was an automobile wagon workers and motor vehicles workers union - this was the sense of the title. And this union didn't survive the depression that took place right after the first world war, but it was organized along industrial union lines. And I also understand, that they made an attempt to organize Negroes on the same basis as whites to give them the opportunity to move to jobs from which they were barred. While this union was in conjunction with the Socialist Party, they sponsored a very lively open forum.

H: Excuse me, would you suggest therefore, that perhaps this first auto workers union was alive and affiliated with the Socialist Party?

M: I wouldn't say it was affiliated; I would say that some of the

people who were very active in it were members of the Socialist Party, and that the Socialist Party gave it some kind of ideological direction.

H: Were there any IWW remnants in Detroit?

M: Oh yes. There was an IWW branch in Detroit, that was very active here. And the IWW branch continued right on. When the organizing began, in the early 30's, they led one of the early strikes in the Murray Body Company. This strike was led entirely by the IWW. Well, to go on - the radical movement in the twenties was sporadic. They did carry on educational activities; for example the Communist Party use to have discussion groups, and the Proletarian Party had classes and discussion groups. I can categorically state that some of the people who later became very active in the UAW were people who got their training in the radical movement - movements like the IWW, the Proletarian Party, the Communist Party, and so on.

H: Would you tell us a bit about the Proletarian Party and how it differed from the Communist Party?

M: Well, the Proletarian Party hated the Communist Party's guts and the CP felt the same way about the PP. The Proletarian Party was primarily a little study group. They championed everything that went on in Russia, justified everything including the purges. But they felt the Communist Party was following crazy tactics over here. They were opposed to dual unionism, some of their members were very active in the Machinists Union of the AFL and in building trades unions of the AFL (skilled workers). They did some very good educational work here. I remember one time I and Al Renner, who was quite a guy - he was one of the big shots in the Proletarian Party, he later became a big organizer for the Hotel and Restaurant Workers here; during the twenties he worked in Fords - he and I counted the number of people who had been in the Proletarian Party, got their experience there as speakers, writers, and so on and who became prominent in the UAW.

H: In addition to the groups you've already mentioned, Frank, were they DeLeonites, the Socialist Labor Party?

M: Oh yes, the SLP was active in Detroit and during the beginning of the CIO crusade they distinguished themselves by putting out a pamphlet which showed that John L. Lewis was a misleader of labor, that he was a ruthless bureaucrat, that he was responsible for killing people and that his role in the CIO reflected the caliber of the CIO and that the workers should have nothing to do with it, but to get busy and make sure to vote in the one big union.

H: Now do you have any recollections of any Negro participation in these radical political movements?

M: In the Socialist Party, there was a Negro -

H: By the way, would you say that the SP was the largest one of these groups?

M: No, I think the CP would be, very definitely. I know there were Negroes in the CP. Since I was not in the CP I only know about CP members by my contact with the Auto Workers Union. I can't speak too well about the Negro participation in the CP at that time, although I know that they definitely were there.

H: Would you say that most of the Negro involvement in the radical movement was in the CP?

M: I would say that.

H: Why do you think that was the case?

M: Well, I think that very definitely that first of all the CP did more than the other radical groups who concentrate on the Negroes as a group. Off hand, I would put it this way: the CP hammered on the idea that the Negro had special interest. You will remember that during that period they talked about the self-determination for Negroes. And I think that this is what appealed to Negroes - this is the appeal that the CP had for Negroes in a way that the SP did not have and other radical groups did not have.

H: Would you say that the CP had involvement with the Negro workers, with Negro intellectuals, auto workers, for example in the CP among the Negroes?

M: Gee, you've got me there. I don't know. It's been so far back I couldn't say. At one time when I went to the auto workers meeting, there was a Negro speaker who talked in a very knowledgeable way about what was going on in the plants. And my impression was that he was a Negro worker because I don't see how he could have talked that way without having been one of them. I'm just not sure.

H: To contrast CP with other radical groups of this period, the CP already had some national Negro figures like James S. Allen,

M: Oh absolutely!

H:who ran for the vice-presidency of the national CP ticket. And there were other figures like the Scottsboro case, and Angelo Herndon case, at a later time; already the CP identified with Negro causes.

M: In addition to that, I would also say that every time a Negro would pick up a piece of CP literature, he would always find something that pertained to the problems of Negroes. And this was not true - that's a mighty good point you've brought out because I want to express this. Emil Mazey, whether he has this attitude today or

not I don't know, but for a long time he had the SP view.

H: Now Emil was in the SP in Detroit, wasn't he?

M: He was in the Proletarian Party first, and then he went into the SP.

H: About what year would you recall?

M: '36 or '37. And he had the view, which I'm sure he picked up in the Proletarian Party, that look, Negroes are workers, white people are workers, workers are workers regardless of nationality, skin color or so forth and it's a lot of nonsense talking about Negroes having special problems. Now as I put it in those bald terms, this may exaggerate it, but that's the general idea.

H: As a matter of fact, I don't think you've exaggerated at all. What you've just stated characterized the SP position for many long years. I think you've said it very well. All right, would you please pick up the thread of your remark?

M: Well, there was in the SP a very, very effective orator, Negro orator by the name of Brown - I can't remember his first name. Matter of fact, I used to like to hear him talk. He not only talked in the halls, but he "soap boxed". By the way, soap boxing was quite an institution in Detroit in the early 30's and in the 20's. Sometimes the whole area of Cadillac Square would be packed with people; there would be hundreds of people coming to hear soap box orators, and this Brown -

H: You don't recall his first name?

M: I don't, I wish I could.

H: If you think you might be able to find out by checking, I'd appreciate it.

M: I think I can find out. But that's the only Negro in the SP so far as I know, that played such a prominent role.

H: May I ask you another question, do you by any chance have a recollection of the man who was probably the most well known Negro Wobbly of the period, a man by the name of Ben Fletcher, Benjamin Fletcher? He went to jail with Big Bill Haywood during the first world war. He worked as an organizer in several IWW organizing campaigns. I wonder if you've ever met him in Detroit?

M: I don't think I have.

H: I've been told that he came to Detroit.

M: By the way, you know that one of the editors of Solidarity was one

of the leading lights in Chicago, I'm sure you must know him. He was in Detroit when the Labor Archives had kind of an IWW memorial here. He was one of the people who helped to lead the Murray Body strike. If you ever get to talk to him in Chicago he'll probably tell you about Negroes coming into Detroit.

H: Is he active, by the way, in Chicago racial affairs?

M: No, no he is active in the IWW, what's left of the IWW. He's one of those people still putting out the paper "Solidarity". They still put out Solidarity?

H: Yes they do.

M: He could give you a lot of insight that could cover that period.

H: You were describing the atmosphere of the radical movement in Detroit during the late 20's.

M: Well,

H: By the way, if I may interrupt you one more time - you started to tell us that there were many current leaders of the UAW who really had their origins during this period from the radical pressure groups. Would you like to elaborate on that a little bit? Do you think it's a significant point?

M: Well, I really think it is. You know in those days anybody who was vocal would get recognition and then when it would come to electing people for shop committeemen, for local officers..... well, you know so and so; he's a good speaker, put him in there. So this is how those people got their training. They also had to get logical training. I'll give you just one example and then we can generalize from that. Morris Field was a chap who worked in all kinds of plants like I did, but eventually he became a machine repairman in the Ford Motor Company and before he got fired or laid off before the depression he was in the tool room and during the depression he had a very hard time getting by, supporting his family. He finally got in Dodge, and then when the upsurge came he was in the plant and zoomed into prominence with his ability to speak on the floor and also for understanding implications of the struggle between labor and management and pointing out things to these workers, putting it in workers' terms that made sense to them. Things that he had learned in the classes, he himself for example, used to teach the first volume of Marx' Kapital and he had a faculty for using examples from the shop. He'd study using things like the sale of labor power; he'd say the companies buy your energy and they put you on the job and they pay you enough so that you can keep your energy going and so on. They would understand him and they were impressed by him. And he became very skillful as a negotiator, he and Frankenstein worked together, Richard Frankenstein, that's right; and he became very able as a negotiator.

When the Homer Martin factional fight took place he was on Homer's side and he became an educational director. The first educational director was fired by the Martin group and Morris Field became the director. Because of his radical background, he did some surprisingly constructive things. For example, he took people out of the shops and put them through a training so that they in turn could train other workers. And later some of these people, in fact, one of them became a regional director, and many of them became able as international representatives. So this is an example of what the radical movement did in the way of giving people a background from which they could proceed.

H: One might say that these radical movements never succeeded in achieving any ideological goals. Primarily, they were perhaps training institutions creating the generation of trade union leaders.

M: I never heard it put that way, but that's really something to think about. One of the criticisms made of these people - I include the Reuthers in this; I include Leonard Woodcock and all those who have gone to this socialist movement and this is true of many of the Communists, too, like John Anderson - one of the criticisms made was that as soon as they became active in the union and particularly got positions in the union then they forgot their socialism and became trade unionists. Whether this was a just criticism or not, whether this was inevitable or not is still something that I am not sure about.

H: Would you suggest - perhaps you would like to give us a generalization on this point that there was something important in all of these early groups. The Auto Workers Union and the various radical organizations and the general ideological ferment in the late 20's and the early 30's and the IWW and a host of radical ideas, all of this somehow fed into the creation of the UAW. Would you say, in retrospect - you've spent many years in the auto industry and in the UAW - has it left its mark on the UAW as an institution? Was it significant in the organization of the union? Did it create some kind of tone or atmosphere? Has it had an institutional effect in the life of the union? What is your estimate in retrospect of this?

M: That's a profound question and a very difficult one. I'm going to just give you my reflections. It absolutely had an effect on the UAW in the early days. I think one of the things that helped to shape the UAW into the kind of progressive social unionism organization that it became was the fact that these people, in the position of leadership, had this kind of socialist background. I'll say radical background, that will include the SP, the IWW and so on. I would certainly say that the radical movement helped prepare the minds of people for industrial unionism because they constantly hammered on that theme for years. I would say that the radicals did more than any other groups to put forth the idea of equality between the races in the union.

H: Was this an issue in the early days?

M: It most definitely was an issue in the early days, because in the early days I can remember it showing at union meetings among the radicals when they took the floor, and I think you'll find this when you look through the convention proceedings. I remember in 1939 in Cleveland when John Eldon, a radical who had some training in the British Labor College who then came over here and worked in the Briggs plant in Highland Park, then became an international representative - when he was a delegate before he was an international representative, and took the floor and spoke on the race issue and pointed out how important it was to keep racism out of the union; that in this country, Negroes, if we ever get a reaction, that Negroes would be singled out because of their color, and they would become the victims of a fascist offensive as the Jews were in Germany. And I am sure that the convention proceedings show example after example of how the radicals took the floor and took a good position on this race question. And I don't think any other group did it that well. I would definitely say that the impact that was made on this problem in the unions was largely the work of the radical movement.

H: Would you say that in the early period there already was vying between the CP and the SP within the union for the allegiance of the Negro worker? When did this begin to be a meaningful question?

M: Well, let me go back to the factional fight. You know the SP and the CP were together in what they called the Unity Caucus.

H: What year?

M: This was from '36; it was particularly true in '37, and '38; and then they broke apart when they began to fight for power in '39 after the Cleveland Convention. But in the period when the Unity Caucus was intact, they emphasized, to a degree that the Progressive Caucus did not, the need for fighting for Negro rights, the need for saying the Negroes had an opportunity to move up into other classifications, to break down, what we used to call the management pattern of race relations in the shop. I would say both the SP and the CP, and the CP more than the SP played that role in that period. Now when the split took place I would say that the SP very emphatically expressed this kind of approach.

H: Now, before we move into the forties, I would like to jump back a little bit, and have you talk about the Workers Alliance and the Unemployed League. Do you have any recollection of them?

M: Well, the Unemployed Leagues were active in Detroit during the time when I was in Rochester and as a matter of fact I was active in one in Rochester for awhile, but you'd have to talk with somebody who was active here.

- H: Usually, those people who were involved with the Socialist Party were engaged in the Workers Alliance, and the Communist Party had control of the unemployed men.
- M: That's right, that's the way I understand it.
- H: We're now at the end of the thirties, UAW and the rise of the CIO is beginning. You just referred to the Unity Caucus and the Progressive Caucus inside the UAW. What was the difference between these two caucuses? And who were they?
- M: Well, in the Progressive Caucus you have people like Homer Martin, Richard Frankenstein, Morris Field, I can't name them all. By the way, allied with them and directing them and directing Homer Martin was his brain trust, the Lovestonites, at that time.
- H: Why were the Lovestonites supporting Homer Martin?
- M: Because the Lovestonites believed that there was a serious danger of the UAW being taken over by the Communist Party and they knew that Homer Martin hated the guts of the Communist Party. They fed the flames of his hatred against the Communist Party; this is the reason, in other words, they thought that he was their boy, and he was their boy.
- H: Was there any Trotskyite organization operating at the time?
- M: Yes there was and this is something that Trotskyites don't like to be reminded of. For awhile the Trotskyites stood apart from the Homer Martin forces and then in the spring of 1938, when a kind of deal was made, Bert Cockran got a job. Homer Martin put him on organizing the WPA workers here.
- H: Bert Cockran worked for Homer Martin?
- M: That's right, that's right.
- H: Please tell us more about this, it's fascinating.
- M: So that, if you'll read the Militant of that period you will see how they took off against the Unity group.
- H: Bert was already a Trotskyite up to this point.
- M: Oh yes, well, how long that marriage lasted, I don't know, but you will know that later on when the split came within the Unity group, when the struggle for power really took place within the UAW after Martin was washed up and after the Cleveland Convention, then the Trotskyites began to support - this was particularly true in war years - began to support the Addes-Thomas group against the Reuther group. In other words, that was no longer the Unity Caucus; that folded up after Martin got cleaned out and then you had this fight

between the Addes group and the Reuther group.

H: In later periods the Trotskyites did support Reuther. So then the point we made earlier about the continuity of radical ideas, ideological sensitivity, continued into the early days of the UAW life.

M: Oh very definitely! I think that this is so forcibly brought out in the Proceedings, for example, in the 1939 convention, and even in other ways. For example: the radicals, those particularly who did not have jobs in the upper echelons who led the fight against the no strike pledge; the Trotskyites played a real role there and so did some of the Socialists - they didn't all go along with that no strike pledge. And as I said before, the emphasis on more rights for Negro workers and many of these issues was the radical slant.

H: It might be correct to say, therefore, that while the UAW was not a radical union it did have a radical leadership. It had a leadership whose roots were in the radical movement, their own formative years were in the radical movement, and this created a certain kind of environment and atmosphere in the UAW that made it significantly different in the early periods.

M: I would agree with you very definitely. By the way, one of the criticisms that has been made against the leadership is that they have done nothing to prepare initiates who could carry on in the tradition in which they themselves served. The educational program of the UAW is, in the opinion of many people and including myself, very weak in this respect and I think the union is paying the price for that. The thing that you hear over and over again by some of the old timers in the UAW, some who are still in the shop and some who are out, is that we don't have the kind of people left any more that we had in the early days and then they mention them by name and everyone was a Socialist or Communist or something like that; and then they say the old timers are either dying out or they're retiring, they're tired, they're just out and these young people have no background like that and you have an entirely different kind of a union in the shops today than you had in the early days. As a matter of fact, I just talked to somebody yesterday who put it in almost those words. Sometime I wonder if Walter Reuther and the leadership realizes the extent to which this is a problem in the UAW today.

H: Of course, the question is if they realize it do they care?

M: That's the point exactly.

H: What you're suggesting, of course, Frank, is that there was really no substitute for the function of the radical movement to perform as a training institute for union leaders.

- M: I would say that very definitely. Now they have an educational branch in the UAW, you've heard about it, the Leadership Study Center. So far as it goes, it does good work, but its role is to do primarily two things: to provide the international representatives, the staff personnel, with insights and training to do a better job and also to indoctrinate them with a line and I can assure you that line isn't the kind that gives a kind of perspective that the radicals started with in the earlier days.
- H: Now, I wonder if I could ask your views regarding the struggle between the Reuther Caucus and the Addes-Thomas Caucus and why, given the fact that the battle went on for years, and the Reuther leadership took control in '47 finally, why do you think that most of the Negroes, with very rare exceptions in the UAW, especially in Michigan, were in the left wing corner and did not support Reuther?
- M: I think that the reason is undoubtedly that the Communists stressed and emphasized those things that pertained to the problems of the Negroes in the shop and this goes especially, I can give you a concrete example, when I was the Educational director of Ford's Local 600 - I can remember very clearly -
- H: What year?
- M: This was 1943. I was Educational Director there from '41 to '44, and this was in '43 and I don't even remember his name. He was a Communist or a supporter of the Communist group, as many of them were supporters without being party members, and he led a vigorous fight to open the way for the entry of Negroes into the skilled trades. He talked about the need for getting a larger percentage into the training programs, and well, this would be one example, you see, of Negroes who listened to him and would immediately feel that the side that guy is on is the side for me.
- H: A suggestion that the Communists were perhaps the first to raise the question of the Negroes' possibilities of getting into the skilled trades and some job mobility?
- M: I'd say they were in the lead of it.
- H: They started very early. I'd like to back track just a little more.
- M: Can I say one thing as it occurs to me in the SP and he was still in the SP at this time you had Emil Mazey leading the fight in a very courageous way in his own local, Local 212, Briggs. This was during the war when the Negroes were coming into departments where they had never been before and Emil Mazey was on leave and he was working for Norman Thomas and he was assigned to Ford Local 600; he helped to set up machinery after that local won union recognition from the company.
- H: You said Norman Thomas?

M: I'm sorry, I meant R.J. Thomas. So that Emil was assigned to them - one day he got a call from Jesse Ferraza who was then a plant committeeman in Briggs and Jesse said, "We have a very serious problem here; the whites in this department," (I'm sorry I can't remember what department) "who are saying that they are not going to work and that they are going to walk out if these Niggers come in, now what the hell am I going to do?" And he was calling from the management room in the plant because management was very concerned about this; they had Faye Taylor who was one of the production managers of Briggs in on this problem. And Emil said, "Let me talk to Faye Taylor," and he said, "Look, I'm going to instruct Jesse to tell those white workers - this is the policy of the UAW and if they don't like it they can walk out, they will be fired. These Negroes are coming in and if they in any way appear or if they in any way refuse to work with them they will be fired."

H: What year was this?

M: This was in '42.

H: And Mazey told the company to go ahead and fire the white workers who objected to working with Negroes?

M: Yes, he said, "First you just tell them that." Then he called Faye Taylor to the phone and said, "You fire them if they refuse to work with the Negroes."

H: And this was at Briggs Body?

M: Yes, and then he got Jesse back on the phone and said, "Now you tell these white workers that there will be a meeting right after work in the local hall and I will be there with them." And he went out there. Incidentally, not one of them walked out or indicated that they refused to go along.

H: At this time Emil Mazey was an R.J. supporter?

M: That's right.

H: Emil Mazey came out of Local 212; he was a worker formerly of Briggs Plant.

M: That's right. He was president of that local, one of the militant presidents.

H: But why wasn't R.J. Thomas?

M: This brings up something I've always felt that if the local leaderships in the UAW as well as the international unions had taken the same strong stand in implementing those good resolutions that were passed in the UAW convention that they would be much farther ahead today in Negroes being in jobs in which they were barred.

H: Where are we today?

M: Well, I understand that even in the Ford local which was supposed to have a whole background of Negro progress and moving up the ladder, there are still very serious restrictions in moving into the skilled trades and, maintenance, electrical workers, and tool and die, and so on.

H: You say the major problem area was skilled trades, tool and die, maintenance, electrical; very, very few, if any, Negroes have moved into these classes.

M: That's right.

H: But what about the UAW's much vaunted position on these things?

M: Turn that off for a second.

H: Frank, in retrospect, given the hopes, dreams, that you and other young radicals had in the early days in building the UAW - the hopes you had in trade unions that would negotiate the terms under which labor was bought and sold in the auto plants and creating a meaningful instrument for social change - how do you view the UAW and its leadership today?

M: Well, I ask that question of people when I take tapes like this because I want to find out how those old timers who played a significant role in the early days feel about it, what their experiences were and how they evaluate the situation today with what it was then. And in the works of the chap I talked to yesterday, it's all very, very sad because the kind of idealism you had then is no longer current in the union. They will point out in terms of economic gains the auto workers today have concessions that were undreamed of by us who were active in the early struggles. For example, the pensions that they get are far and beyond what we ever expected to get. You can say in a sense that even the automobile production workers are among the aristocracy of labor, economically. But you talk to these workers about what goes on in the plant, there is none of that fraternity, the feeling of solidarity, they don't sing anymore like we used to in the old days. There is a kind of emphasis on overtime and getting as much as they can. I am told that most of them are so committed to their installment payments that they live from pay day to pay day; they just aren't interested in the union anymore. This is particularly true of the young people and -

H: How about the Negro worker, does all of this relate to the Negro worker? Do you think the average Negro worker regards the UAW as a instrument in the struggle for Negro rights?

M: My feeling is that he has a hard time reconciling that with what he knows about the Negro workers in relation to the skilled trades.

Just recently, I think it was Local 306 - that's the Bud Wheel - there was a flare up because of the fact that a Negro, this is the way it was explained to me, was supposed to be upgraded into the skilled trades and then at the last moment he was denied this job. I give another example of a Negro worker who was a machine repairman, and when he began to do some repairing in some of the machine departments, the white workers said that if he comes in here he's going to have a hell of a time of it. He was sabotaged and then one day he dozed off, and the person who told me this said, "Well, hell, everybody once in a while, you know when you sit at a machine and it runs back and forth you doze off - the watchman caught him and he was fired instantly on the spot." It's things like this, minor incidents, that make the Negroes wonder about the union. However, I want to say this, now that the Negro workers are in the majority, I'm wondering myself -

H: Majority of what??

M: In some of the production departments, 60% of the workers are Negroes.

H: Now I understand that this is true of the Chrysler plants in Detroit. Is it also true of the GM and the Ford plants?

M: I wouldn't know, but I would say this - the ratio is growing larger and larger all of the time.

H: All right now, why do you think - this is a very important point because this will change the context of the entire racial situation, in Detroit and certainly in the union - Why do you think Negroes are increasingly becoming the basic automobile labor force in and around Detroit? Why aren't white workers coming into the industry? Why is there such a very significant growth rate in the increase of the rate of Negroes in the past ten years in the industry? I understand that at Local 7, for instance, that Negroes now comprise at least 60% where ten years ago it was about 35%

M: Well, isn't one of the reasons the fact that more and more Negroes are living in the center of the city and in the city of Detroit?

H: Certainly, the population factor would be an important one. But what I'm really trying to get at is a suggestion, I don't know if it's true or not, that white workers are not going into the industry and Negroes are, in terms of social mobility. The proportionate number of Negroes are moving into the industry, white workers are going elsewhere. I don't know.

M: Neither do I; I would say that wherever it would be possible for white workers to get jobs outside of the plant for the same amount of money, they would certainly take those jobs. There is no question about that.

H: Why?

- M: Because, I'm glad you asked that question, over and over and over again workers will tell you, "Look, the economic gains we've made since unions came in are wonderful, but boy, you work just as hard today as you did back in the pre-union days." When I express shock when they say this and when I say, "Are you sure that this is true?" then they will give you example after example. The tempo of work in the plants is fierce. Look, anybody that can make a living outside of the plants will do so.
- H: You're suggesting that the white worker has option and social mobility that the Negroes have not.
- H: Exactly!
- H: I think it would be good to stop at this point.