

INTERVIEWEE: Carl Brown

INTERVIEWER: H. Harris

DATE: 11/13/74

SUBJECT: Foreman's Association of America

DE: Today is November 13, 1974 and we're in the office of Carl Brown who is a former officer of the National Foreman's Association of America. And with Mr. Brown is Dennis East from Wayne State University and Mr. Howell Harris, a visiting researcher from Cornell University. Mr. Harris will be the principle interviewer in this tape recording. Go ahead Mr. Howell.

HH: Right. Well Mr. Brown, I'd like to start off as Dennis said with a brief biographical sketch of yourself. How you started working at Ford's and how you got promoted to foreman.

CB: I started at Ford's in Highland Park Plant, Highland Park Michigan back in January of 1923 as an assembler. After about 15 months I was transferred to a foreman's job in a different department, worked in that capacity until the Highland Park plant closed and moved practically all the operations from that facility to the Rouge plant. And 20(?) of us transferred down the Rouge plant, oh, in the late 20's, '29 or '30 around there, as a receiving clerk. I worked in that capacity until we had gone to war, WWII, then transferred to the bomber plant.

HH: Oh, Willow Run?

CG: Yes. The Willow Run bomber plant which was operated by the Ford Motor as a general shift foreman and worked there until

CB: I took a leave of absence from the company in April 1945, one of the provisions of the contract that the Foreman's Association at that time had with the Ford Motor Car Co. While on leave of absence the active foreman at the Ford Motor Car Company went on strike. In order to do so they had cancelled the contract and, of course after the foremen by their own unilateral action cancelled the contract, the company was no longer obligated to take me back although I was offered the job later with the company. But I decided against going back.

HH: And you kept with the Foreman's Association for how long after that? You kept as an officer of it.

CB: Until 1961.

HH: 1961.

CB: Yes.

HH: And you would have seen then the end of the organization. You would have seen the organization come to its end?

CB: Yes. I was the one that closed the office.

HH: When you were promoted to foreman in Highland Park, and then serving there and then moving on to the Rouge as a receiving clerk, what would you say that the...How would you comment on the conditions at Ford's then, Ford foremen and the relations with the rank and file line workers.

CB: Well back in those days there was no union in the Ford Motor Car Company to the best of my knowledge, or any other automobile companies. This came later after the Wagoner Act was enacted, you see. I forget just what year it was now that the rank and file workers were recognized by Ford Motor Car Company.

HH: '41. '41 it was.

CB: I believe it was '41 and I was one of the negotiators that first contract for the union.

HH: You were a union negotiator in '41?

CB: Oh, yes. I represented the group in which I worked with at that time, the stock and receiving department, and assisted in the formulation of the contract for the union, UAW.

HH: Working at the bomber local then? You were at the bomber plant then?

CB: No, it was at the Rouge plant. No, we didn't go...I think it was about '43 perhaps, '42 or '43 when we were at Willow Run. The contract then had been in operation for perhaps a year with the UAW.

HH: One of the things that interested me about the formulation of the Foreman's Association was that management representatives said at various times that the impetus to the FAA was from young foremen who had just been promoted for the time of the war and were insecure about getting back to postwar, to their jobs in postwar. And here were you, you had been working for the company for 18 years.

CB: Well that may have been an assumption of only a part of the company, or maybe that was used as a convenient outlet for them to say that disgruntled new foremen on the line. But, no, that's not a true statement because I had been pretty deeply involved in organizing the foremen and I know hundreds of foremen. A lot of them had been there longer than I had been and were active members for organizing and were leaders

- CB: in the various departments and assisted greatly in developing the association.
- HH: Right. I think as we're going into the FAA itself and the organization of it, in 1938-39 there was a brief, sort of a flash in the pan organization of foremen in the United Auto Workers. What I was going to ask you was, did you know anything of it and did you know of any contribution that that made to the later formation of the FAA.
- CB: No, I know of...I don't recall any activity in respect to organizing foremen in this area by the UAW. Now I don't say it did not happen, but I didn't come in contact with any activity of that kind.
- HH: It was very brief. I think that they only had one contract with a company called Universal Cooler. And they had a few other active locals. But I seem to remember that in some of the automotive plants that later acquired foreman association lodges, there had been some organization by the other UAW affiliates. It didn't last at all because in 1939 the rank and file union included a contract clause saying that they would not attempt to organize supervisors.
- CB: Well, you see I was unaware. At least I don't recall of any activities in that respect at the Ford Motor Car Company. At least I was not involved in it and don't recall of any other foremen being involved.
- HH: So that as far as you were concerned, when in 1941 the organization of foremen started at Ford's, it was a completely new thing.
- CB: Yes. A new thing at Ford's. Now, of course, it wasn't new

- CB: in certain classes like railroads and trades. That's been traditional. But insofar as the mass production shops such as automobile, steel, and places like that, I believe it was the beginning of a truly independent foreman's organization outside of the traditional skilled trades.
- HH: Now when the FAA started at Ford's I believe that it started with...I remember from Keyes' testimony that it started just as an informal almost as an informal social gathering.
- CG: That's right. Just a small group of foremen got together discussing the issue which I had and decided to form a foreman's organization. I wasn't in on the initial because this all started at the Rouge plant where Bob Keyes and Allen Nelson and Ted Bonaventuro, Kelley were all employed in that unit. But it soon spread.
- HH: You had these meetings at the plant?
- CG: No, no.
- HH: You met at homes or away from the plant?
- CB: Away from the plant. Oh, no, they wouldn't dare meet in the plant, not back in those days. No.
- DE: I wanted to bring that out.
- CB: No. They had to meet away.
- HH: Were they regular meetings. I mean, did you meet once a month, once a week?
- CB: Well it got to be a regular thing. Yes, I'd say right from the first half dozen probably. I wasn't in on it as I say, but I do know that this was the way it started to get to holding the regular meetings. You know, they got up to as high as four and five times a week they'd meet, you know...discuss and decide

- CB: just what they were going to do, how to start, where to start, passing out application cards. Then getting a group together to decide on the by-laws, you know, under which they would operate.
- DE: Was there any attempt by the company, well you know in organizing the UAW you had your stool pigeons and your snitches and so on. Did the company have stool pigeons and snitches within the foreman's group at this early formation period that you know of.
- CB: Oh, yes.
- DE: The same sort of thing existed in respect to the foremen as it did to the guys who worked on the lines.
- CB: Yes. It sure did. Yes. It took us a while to find out about it but we suspected it all along. But we finally had concrete evidence you know. Plus we didn't...we confronted a number of fellows with their activity and about their reporting back to the company and said, All right, if you want to report back we'll give you a written report that you can take to them. (Laughter)
- DE: Well I just wanted to ask those questions...
- CB: That's alright.
- HH: But it brings out what conditions were like at Ford's at the time in regards to unions anyway. The FAA started very shortly after the rank and file union, the UAW, was recognized.
- CB: That's right. Shortly after the first contract was negotiated between the UAW and the CIO. I'd say within about six months the foremen became interested in forming their own organization.

HH: Why do you think that this was? Why do you think that this interested of the foremen so suddenly came to a head?

CB: Well, they observed how the rank and file workmen, so to speak, had benefitted their own conditions with employment. Not only in respect to wages, but the general conditions of employment. See. Prior to the organization of the rank and file there was no rhyme or reason as to who would work, when they would work, who'd get more work, who'd get less, or anything like that, you see. I mean it was up to the whims of the management. Just...I vividly recall incidents where let's say youngsters about ready to graduate from school, well they'd be off during the summer months. I've seen regular employees work for the company for years, they'd lay them off and make room to bring these people in for two or three months....Lay the old timers off. Now that's a fact. See, I mean it's things like that. That's just a minor issue, but the general conditions...And there was a lot of favoritism of employees, if they were on good terms with management. What I mean by that is say that a man goes out and he meets with his boss and drinks with him or something like that. He'd get that. Whether he was entitled to it or not by length of service or ability or anything else.

HH: And when the UAW came into the plant you saw that for the rank and file workers then, they gained freedom from that kind of run around.

CB: That's right. There was established working rules, you know...was a governing set of rules of what people did

CB: work, when, who was entitled to. If a man had been there and he had the ability why he was entitled to overtime on the basis of seniority and things like that. And another thing, of course, foremen could be transferred here and there. If management didn't like him, the department head superintendent or somebody, they'd all get him, throw him out of here. There was no recourse of any kind. That's an exaggeration. Today it may sound like an exaggeration but it's not. I've seen a lot of cases like that.

HH: I remember reading somewhere that in 1945 Ford had an industrial relations guy going through their plant. He was from another company. And on the tour of managers through the plant one of them tripped over--he sort of walked into-- a foreman and became immediately angry with him and just balled him out and said get out of here. And the guy who was from the other company said that he thought that Ford's would have improved by that time. But it still was a tough place to work for him.

Do you think that the organization of the UAW made the job of the foreman significantly more difficult?

CB: I would say that it made it more difficult to maintain production schedules because prior to the recognition of the UAW has a bargaining agent for employees, the employee was at the mercy of management. What I mean by that...let's get this out. We're going to increase production by so much this week. We've got to get out so many thousand more pieces than we did last week. It was... days don't like to get out, see. But then after they were

CB organized they had a kind of production I remember that. Time study and things like that were being made at various operations and it was agreed to, approximately, a number of pieces, pounds, that an employee would produce, you see. And, of course, under those conditions the foreman had little to do with increasing the amount that a man produced because here's the contract and he had to live with it. That was it.

HH: But the pressure was still on you from the...

CB: The pressure was on. Get it. Get it. You know.

HH: They wanted you to...

CB: If you don't get it, we'll put somebody in here who will get it.

HH: And conditions, the amount between the payment of foremen and rank and file workers also became less after the contract?

CB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You see, well there again was a point of dissention among foremen was that, again let's say a superintendent took a particular liking to a certain foreman over here. Maybe he got as much as even 25 cents an hour more than a man doing the same line of work that he was doing. Not necessarily on the basis of merit was he earning this money. Maybe it's because of favoritism that he was . And again let's say in a slack season if you had to cut down the force-- that was quite common back in those days--well again it was felt among the foremen a lot of favoritism was played.

HH: Who went out.

- CB: Who stayed. Who didn't stay. You know. Or who may be transferred back to some lesser job maybe as an assembler or whatever the case may be. Though there was in such moves, ⁱⁿ the majority of cases, merit and ability was not the determining factor.
- HH: Just favoritism.
- CB: That's right.
- HH: So you felt, you and other members of the FAA felt that you had just about the same kind of grievances as men who joined the UAW.
- CB: Exactly. You see, 99% of the foremen came up through the rank and file. And usually men who...there was a need for foremen. Usually it was the man who had over all just put a little more effort on behalf of the company. His attendance was good. His department was good... production record. So they usually were the ones that were selected as foremen.
- HH: And foremen bumped back into the ranks quite a bit?
- CB: Yes. That was permissible under the union contract. Rank and file. Yes.
- HH: Did you think that...Did the foreman's association think that there was anything at all wrong or strange with forming a union? I mean, this was one of the accusations of business, of management, that they didn't need a union. They were all individuals and they could walk into the superintendant's office any time they wanted and get their things straightened out.
- CB? Yes, that was there...

HH: That was their idea of it.

CB: That was the picture they created

HH: The open doore policy.

CB: before congress and the National Labor Relations Board

. But that was not a true picture at all. No. And besides the foremen knew from experience that it wasn't. If they had a complaint they just grinn and bear it. They wouldn't go in because they know what could happen and probably would happen if they went into the superintendant's office and made a beef.

HH: So the foreman's association got organized from small beginnings at Ford's as a kind of a social gathering that got into a proper organization and then you got other chapters forming.

CB: Well we didn't...No, the intent was right from the very beginning was to form a collective bargaining organization. It wasn't a social gathering at all. I know that picture has been portrayed but that's not the reason. The Foreman's formed for the exact purpose that the rank and file formed their union and that was to better their conditions and to form a collective faction. That was the reason for it.

HH: Was there any mission...What you could call the mission re-activity towards other plants to get the other chapters to form?

CB: Oh, yes. Well surprisingly we didn't have to go out of the way to make contacts. They were coming to us. You see, after foremen began to sign up quite rapidly we opened an office over here in Dearborn, the old Carmen Theatre building

- CB: on Schaefer Road. Well, foremen throughout this area, I mean they became aware of this. Well, they made inquiries in order to check into what we were doing. They became interested. They wanted to form their own groups too. That's the way they thought about it.
- HH: Conditions you'd say were pretty much...you know, some places better and some places worse, but pretty much the same throughout most of the automotive industry.
- CB: That is right. The general overall conditions for mass production foremen were not the same. See, a lot of them intertwined. Now you take the time the Briggs manufacturing company made bodies for the automobile industry. I mean it was all interrelated with the production of automobiles. And Briggs used to make bodies for Ford's. Well, all of Briggs, I believe, was chapter number 2, the second one to come into the association. Chrysler was number 3, and old Detroit Lubrication out was 4. Packard, I believe, was number 5, Hudson Motor number 6, and Garwood number 7. U.S. Rubber (was) number 8. All, I'd say the first 25 chapters of the association, were of the metropolitan area of Detroit.
- DE: Did the FAA have organizers just like the UAW had sent out to organize?
- CB: We had a member...what we called a membership director, Harold Kelley. He was also from Ford's. He was...After we opened the national office, see after we began to spread, it was quite rapidly. And then we had to have a membership director to help coordinate the affairs of these various

CB: groups, you see, because we were getting inquiries from...

HH: All over the country.

CB: Yeah, and then it got to be...we just...unless we had some one designated for that purpose we just couldn't handle it.

HH: But it was most of the early organization. It was just spontaneous.

CB: That's right.

HH: contacts inside the metropolitan Detroit area.

CB: You know, we soon found that there were a lot of foremen who felt just like the Ford foremen. They wanted organization to benefit their welfare and effort association that the companies did make conditions much better for the foremen. I remember out here at Cadillac plant after, I don't know just what percentage, but a good percentage of foremen had formed a union and their own little chapter association and, if I recall, a foreman was adversely effected. I don't know whether he was laid off or discharged because of his activity in trying to form this union there

And we filed a unfair labor practice with the National Labor Relations Board. Well, anyway, the company then had a change of heart in respect to foremen. That's when they first started to give foremen three weeks vacation with pay at Cadillac, and also something unheard of before was... here'd come the superintendant around and say to a certain foreman You'd been hitting the ball pretty hard lately, why don't you take a few days off and go fishing on company time. They did make conditions much better for foremen throughout the industry.

- HH: General Motors was the hardest nut for the FAA wasn't it?
- CB: Yes. General Motors and General Electric. But surprisingly in most of the firms that recognized the association as bargaining agent for their foremen were very good to deal with. Now Kaiser-Fraiser, couldn't ask for better dealings. Nicholson Transit, you know they operated vessels on the Great Lakes and the mates and engineers, we represented the mates and engineers there--couldn't ask for a better relationship. Consolidated Paper here in , Mich. The city of Highland Park foremen. Baldwin Rubber out here in Pontiac. General Ceramics and Steel Type Co over in New Jersey, and Detroit Edison. We had good relationships in dealing on behalf of the foremen.
- HH: It was the automotive world, strictly companies like Packard and Chrysler that were hard on you.
- CB: Well, yes. General Motors...Well the facts is, I found we did have to strike the Ford Motor Car Company to get recognition. It was my group that shut down the bomber plant during the war. It was, you know...
- HH: Yeah...
- CB: We only had it down for two days. What I mean by that when I say down, we didn't put a picket line around the place, we just walked out. Put production down because the...
- HH: No organization of it.
- CB: Well, I mean there was no one there to guide the workmen and production just plummeted, you see. And it was the company that was anxious to get us back in the plant because the second day we were out I received a call from Mr. Mack who,

CB: at that time, had a lot to say about industrial relations for the company. Get those foremen out of the beergardens and get them back out there. I said, Harry it's not going to be quite that easy. We have to sit down and have some kind of an understanding under what conditions we're talking about. He said that'sll take two weeks. I said Harry, you should have thought of that when we were trying to deal with you for the last several months. So he said well how soon can you get over here. I was over at the administration building on Schaefer Road. I said well I can get over there in a couple hours or so I guess. I have to get my group together. [He said] What group? Well, I said, Bob Keyes, the national president, Allen Nelson, president of the chapter--of course they were both sitting there within hearing distance--But I decided we had a few things to talk over before we went. So, anyway, a couple of us, four of us, went over there--Keyes, Allen Nelson who was then president of the chapter. I was in charge of the Willow Run bomber group. So we went over and within about four hours the company agreed to recognize us as a bargaining agent and would sit down and negotiate a contract. So that's the way it started.

HH: You had to then, the FAA had to strike in 1943 and '44 because the NLRB avenue was closed wasn't it?

CB: Because what?

HH: The Labor Relations Board avenue was closed after the Maryland drydock case.

CB: Yea.

HH: You couldn't take your cases there any longer.

CB: That's right.

HH: Do you think that...was the FAA strike action then, was it just against the company or was it also to bring pressure on the Board to change his mind?

CB? To change his mind about what?

HH: About taking recognition cases to the Foreman's Association.

CB: Well, no, all we struck for was to be recognized by the company as a bargaining agent. We didn't go through the National Labor Relations Board. We just struck the company and that was it. Because we had no access to the National Labor Relations Board.

DE: But the strike strategy, the strategy of striking was not to try to bring pressure upon the NLRB to change or anything like that?

CB: Oh, no, no. Oh, no. Because we knew that the National Labor Relations Board...the fact is that would take, that could drag on for a year or more. But we wanted to...

HH: To get something immediate.

CB: We wanted to get action right now because conditions were becoming pretty rough.

HH: Because you had a kind of arrangement at Ford's for a while and then they stopped it and then you had to get back...

CB: That's right. You see, in three weeks time I was docked 83 hours for attempting to take up foremen's complaints. I was docked 83 hours in over a three week period, you see. And short, you know, once a month. So I just let it pile up so that 83 hours. Well one day at noon I called

CB: department representatives, you know, I had a foreman for maintenance and a foreman for this, and assembly, and a foreman for stock receiving and shipping...all these. It was at noon one day, and I just got them together in a huddle and I said well, we've got to have an understanding. I explained to them I had been docked for attempting to take up their complaints and I said let's lay the cards on the table. Are we going to have recognition or aren't we? The foremen said we're going to have recognition. I said O.K. [They said] You got any plans? I said yes, tomorrow morning I want every foreman on the day shift to meet right here in the center of this building. Just stand there. Just walk off their job and come around here. We did. I mean they passed the word around to their respective groups, you know. Well here come three or four men down from the personnel department. A fellow by the name of Fuches, he walked up to where I was standing with my key men. He said go to work or go home. That's all he said, see. So I quietly said to my leader, I said get all your gang and just follow me. We're going to clear every foreman out of this plant. Just follow me. Well he did. Foremen and I just started marching down the aisle and the foremen and I

. We took out, on the day shift, over 700 foremen walked off the job. And I got them all together down at the end of the building and I climbed up on the wing of a plane and said I'd like every foreman down at the Carmen Theatre building, which is an office, where there was a full chapter office, to have a meeting there within an hour and a half. So

- CB: we all just piled out of the plant. I got on the phone and called the president of the chapter, Alvin Alson, and said rent the Carmen Theatre there. I mean in the theatre part, not the offices upstairs that we have. He said why. I said there's going to be 700 foremen down there in the next hour. (laughter) He said you can't do that. This is war time. I said I know we can't but we've already done it. So we'd gone down there. We addressed the foremen, told them to go home and stay there until they heard from us, pay no attention to the radio or newspapers or anything else because we figured the company would be putting ads in the paper that everything was settled, and over the radio. We just told them to stay there until...stay home until they heard from us.
- HH: Because the pressures that were brought on you by the War Labor Board and so on were very great as soon as you went out on strike.
- CB: Oh no, the War Labor Board didn't contract us at that time. No, it was the company. The next day, the next day I received this...I figured the company would be calling so I had my key men with me right down in the Ford chapter office. I said we were going on 24-hour duty. So the next morning, after we walked out this one day about 11 o'clock, about 10 o'clock the next morning I received this call from Harry Mack that I was telling you about. Get those foremen back in here.
- HH: That would have been about, what, 1943 or '44.
- CB: I believe that would be in '43.
- HH: Yeah. There were a lot of foremen strikes in that year weren't there.

CB: Quite a few.

HH: For the same kind of reason. That was the only way to get recognition.

CG: we had to do. I mean we ran across a stubborn employer and the conditions were such that the foremen felt they had no alternative.

HH: So out the door.

CB: Out the door.

DE: You never had any information that the War Labor Board or the federal government--you touched on this a minute ago--the War Labor Board or the federal government was involved in this. Did they contact you directly.

CB: Oh, yes.

DE: Or did they contact the company?

CB: Well, I don't know, of course. They probably did contact the company. Of course they eventually would because it interfered with war production. But we had hearings before the War Labor Board. There were meetings set up. In fact, here in Detroit we had a hearing before the War Labor Board. Of course I anticipated this all along and I had a bundle, I think it was 257 complaints. So I was ready for them and these hearings. Of course they wanted to know about what's bringing all this about and so forth and so on. Well at the proper time I just laid out all these complaints. I said to them--I knew it would take a long time to go through them--but I said I got some samples here of the conditions under which the foremen work. I said here they are. I said they were unresolved. We tried to settle them but without success.

- CB: I know the colonel from the air force out there who was in charge, after we had come back out there, come back to work, he was asking me about what was this all about and so forth. I explained it to him. Well he said you know this is wartime. I said yes I know it's wartime. I said we're alleviating these adverse situations for everybody but the foremen. I explained it to him what it was all about. He started to walk away. He said I probably would have done the same thing. (laughter)
- HH: So what, in 1943-44 then you reestablished a relationship with Ford's.
- CB: Yes.
- HH: On a decent...
- CB: It's right here with this...We did have a in our agreement prior to this but I mean as far as this established grievance procedure, full recognition, and the first rates of pay for foremen, was established in there. Prior to that there was no establishment, rules, pay.
- HH: It was just whatever the...
- CB: They did recognize or come up to you, you got something serious enough, come on, we'll discuss it. But that's as far as it went. If they felt like doing anything about it they did. If they didn't feel like it, no. That was it. That was the last of it.
- HH: How were your relations after that with the Ford Company?
- CB: Well, I was there from the time this contract was negotiated up until the time I took a leave of absence from the Ford Motor Car Company. I considered the relationship with the

- CB: bomber plant excellent. We had good conditions, cooperation. If we had a legitimate complaint it was usually handled to our satisfaction. Now, of course, the industrial relations changed greatly at Ford Motor. You see Bennet, at the time we struck the place Bennet was in it. You heard of Harry Bennet?
- HH: Yeah, the service department.
- CB: Well then, after we struck this place John , well after John came in the conditions, labor relations policy, changed for the better. So my experience was after this contract my relationship with the company at Willow Run bomber plant was excellent. Good.
- HH: Did you have any further cause to take an official strike action after that.
- CB: Not at Ford's.
- HH: Not at Ford's.
- CB: No. As I say in my opinion the foremen pulled a foolish strike in '47 at Ford's. I was on leave of absence with the national office. While I was still at that time a member of the Ford chapter, my activity was traveling around with new groups. You know, organizing new groups or helping them to set up rules and regulations, by laws, organizational procedures...help negotiate contracts.
- HH: Like an international representative of the UAW.
- CB: That's right.
- HH: That's...We could get into...Talking about the FAA organization, some of the personalities in it. I'm thinking about people like Keyes. Well Keyes particularly. He seems a

HH: fascinating character from what you read about him.

CB: Well yes he was. Well he was a type of man who made friends right away. I mean I knew him. He was a likeable sort of chap and he was persuasive. I'd just like to let it go there. There are some things I could say. I'd rather not. The man is still .
And we all have a difference of opinion.

DE: But you said that he was the primary mover?

CB: He was the initial mover. That is correct. He was, up to 1948, he was the top man in the association.

HH: He seemed to be good at public relations.

CB: Yes, yes.

HH: That was important for the FAA I suppose because...

CB: That was his big forte. Yes that is true.

TAPE #1, SIDE #2

HH: I remember that there had been articles in instances that I've seen, they almost were--when they were talking about the Foreman's Association--just what Keyes said it was, as far as they were concerned. And in terms of representation before congressional committees, he seemed to make a good witness at occasions like that too.

CB: Yes. He was very

HH: Do you think that the organization of the central office of the FAA functioned pretty much like any other union? Any differences?

CB: Well, I'll tell you. Most of our group came up through the rank and file like all foremen, nine-tenths of the foremen do. And a lot of them had been members and some, like me, had been representatives of the union. So our by laws and so forth were patterned a great deal on the basis of the constitution and bylaws of the auto workers.

HH: The Mechanics Education Society did some organization of foremen too, didn't it?

CB: Yeah. Yes and then too there was a company group. The company organized a group of foremen, I forget the name of it now. It was the United Foremen or...I don't recall the name. But anyway there's what we then referred to as some stool pigeons that the company had. I don't say this happened at Ford's, but there were other companies that had some of their favorites to form a union to try to offset ours. Because I understand from their policy and constitution

- CB: they did not want anything to do with collective bargaining. That was a social organization.
- HH: The idea was just to head off any kind of that there might be.
- CB: Yea. They were trying to offset the association, to get as many people formed into there as they could and have a social organization rather than an organization trying to better the conditions of employment for foremen.
- DE: Did you have any troubles with Mechanics Education Society? Any competition?
- CB: No, none whatsoever.
- DE: Did you have any assistance from the UAW?
- DB: No, except this. In some cases they respected our picket lines. There were not too many instances where this happened, but there were some cases where they...
- HH: They also agreed not to allow temporary promotions out of the UAW in some cases to take over foremen's jobs.
- CB: I know of no instance while we were on strike that any non-supervisory employee took or attempted to take our jobs. I know of no cases like that.
- HH: And that was about the full extent of UAW cooperation with you?
- CB: That's right.
- HH: Because this is a very big accusation, about the biggest one made against the foremen, wasn't it. That whatever...
- CB: That we were subservient to...
- HH: That you were just the horse for the UAW.
- CB: No, that was a wild assertion. No basis in fact.

- HH: In fact the FAA and the UAW, I mean your members' interest seemed to be quite apart on a lot of issues.
- CB: Oh yes. Because we were well aware of the fact that the very nature of our work required us to be set apart. Because it just isn't natural for a man to be loyal to two...I mean we had a job to do set apart from the rank and file workers. We had to oversee, supervise, lead the group and we could not do that and sit side by side of another man's union meeting where we were getting hell from the podium, you know, foremen as such and...We had to be separate on part to be effective.
- HH: That company assertion when you look at it in review is pretty ridiculous. But it was any time a company spokesman got up that's what he'd say, wasn't it.
- CB: Yes. But as I say there was no basis in fact for that assertion. No.
- DE: The attitude of the men who worked at Ford, did their attitude toward the foremen change after the FAA was formed and was engaged in its own collective bargaining...
- CB: I'm sure it did. It is my observation that we got better cooperation. We got better cooperation, I mean that they felt, the rank and file felt better toward a union represented foreman than they did a non-union foreman. I mean they seemed to cooperate with the foremen better.
- HH: Yeah, I remember that in the, in some evidence of foremen before one congressional committee or another--I think it

HH: was the Meade committee that came to Detroit in 1945 to investigate the defense program--there were foremen speaking then who said this very thing. That they got better cooperation in the shop. That, you know, foremen and steward did straighten things out a lot better.

CB: Yes, that is true. I found that to be true. Yes, sir. And that was the opinion of management representatives. What I mean by that, personnel people that I dealt with. We discussed all those points and I'd ask them point blank if the foremen were performing ok. I got no complaints whatsoever. You know, I mean, that's true. These people I mentioned, the Consolidated Paper, Kaiser-Fraiser, the fact is the industrial relations council for the Kaiser-Fraiser outfit at my request appeared before the House Labor Committee which was considering revision of the Taft-Hartly Act and spoke of his company's experience in dealing with the association. Did you ever run across that?

HH: Yeah. I've seen that. That was in 1949.

CB: I believe it was. Yes. The fact is I have a copy of it there... I believe it was bill 249.

HH: To revise or amend the Taft-Hartly Act.

CB: That's right.

HH: But, it was the Lazinski Bill wasn't it.

CB: Yeah.

HH: Congressman Lazinski of Michigan. What, he was a Wayne County congressman wasn't he?

CB: Yes.

HH: Well I think we have a look at the, a lot at the war time FAA. What do you think about...how conscious do you think that the FAA was of the importance of government policy to it. What the Labor Relations Board was going to do. What the War Labor Board was going to do. What congress was going to do.

CB: How conscious were we?

HH: Yeah.

Well, we were very much interested...We were down there to all the hearings and appeared wherever we could and lobbied too.

HH: Did you think that you had much chance of an even break?

CB: Well we always felt it was an uphill battle. Because there was Taft and Smith and other influential people in congress because, you see...and then because as you know the congress overrode Truman's veto of the Taft-Hartley. He vetoed it, then the congress overruled it. So the employers put in a very good campaign. They really persuaded congress to go along and leave foremen out of the act before the National Labor Relations Board.

HH: Yeah it seemed to me you read in the House Committee hearings on that that there were just no understanding and no sympathy of the foreman's case at all. Well you know from the majority on the committee, that is from the republicans and conservatives.

CB: Well it was...However, we did have some of them there that...M_____M_____ and the man from Minnesota, around there...

HH: Minnesota? _____? No, _____ was the other side.

CB: Yeah, No. the guy who was for president here. The democrat from Minnesota?

DE: Humphrey?

CB: Humphrey.

HH: Oh, yeah.

CB: But Nixon, he was on the labor committee at that time. There was O'Connell, at least I recall.

HH: At the same time that business groups were mounting this political and propaganda offensive, you know, on foremen, do you think that after the war there was the same kind of harder line in the plants by management?

CB: No. As I say, of course, by that time the employers became aware of the fact that they had to change their policy in regards to foremen. They made conditions better for the foremen. After we began to become recognized and had a few strikes, they had become aware of what foremen could do if they were determined to carry on a strike. But with the enactment of the Section 14A of the Taft-Hartly act, which denied foremen any access for the National Labor Relations Board and plus the fact that the employers changed their policy a great deal, they still had foremen under their thumb. But the conditions were much better. They gave more consideration to compensation, working conditions, everything. Of course while we as an organization was hurt, and in fact it put us out of business. Let's put it that way. Nevertheless,

CB: the foremen had greatly benefited throughout industry.

HH: What it did was that even though they couldn't, management couldn't afford not to take attention to the foremen, they just didn't have to pay any attention to the association any more, right?

CB: That's right. That's right. All in all they made conditions much better.

HH: Yeah. What about the '47 strikes. You were saying you thought it was stupid to pull it at that time.

CB: Well the only reason that they went on strike was on a union shop clause. They wanted a condition or a provision in the contract that it was mandatory for the foremen to join the Ford Motor Car Company. That was a very weak point to pull the foremen out of the plant on. We had the ivory soap percentage anyway. We had three building representatives in every plant. And these representatives were allowed to use as much time as they deemed necessary for the purpose of collecting dues or any other activity that they deemed appropriate. And the idea of the union shop to me was a very weak point. They're not only going to keep 5,000 foremen off their jobs indefinitely because here they're all paying dues anyway outside of the 1 per cent pay maybe that didn't belong.

HH: So it wasn't necessary. It wasn't a good thing to strike.

CB: That's right. That is absolutely right.

HH: It wasn't a good time to strike either was it?

CB: It wasn't a good time and it was a flimsy excuse. Malcolm

CB: _____ was still with the company in the capacity as vice president I believe in charge of industrial relations. Just prior to walking out he called me and said the problem is if you fellows can't sell this to the foremen...we know you got the ivory soap percentage. He said, if you can't sell it to the few remaining foremen, you expect us to shove it down their throat. You know, that's the way he put it to me. Hones and truthfully. I said Malcolm, I had nothing to do with this here. I said you asked me a straightforward question, I'm going to give you a straightforward answer. I think it's a flimsy excuse. And I still feel that way about it.

DE: Was there a break in the leadership over this issue? I mean the people at the national organization. Or was the...I mean, for example you and Mr. Keyes or somebody else. Was there a split in this respect or was it something that came between the national officers and the chapter officers, or the chapter membership.

CB: Well, the chapter members...now I don't recall if they had the sanction of Keyes or not. Keyes, at that time, was the national president and I was a representative, you know a national representative. And while theoretically that Ford chapter came under my...I was assigned the Ford chapter. Nevertheless on that issue I was bypassed and I don't recall whether or not Keyes sanctioned that action or not. I was against it because it was too

CB: flimsy. I mean with the relationship we had had with the company, and it wasn't like we were restricted in contacting foremen and selling the association, collecting dues, taking up complaints. We had adequate representation on company time for that purpose. So I just couldn't go along with the idea to strike the company over that issue. It wasn't that important.

HH: Do you think that Ford wanted the FAA out of the plant anyway?

CB: I think after that experience there they did. I can recall while I was there from the time the contract was negotiated up until the time I took a leave of absence, perhaps 15 months or better. I had no reason to believe the company wanted out because our relationship was on a mutually agreeable basis. The fact is, in my opinion, the relationship was good. But we had some hotheads too. Let's get away from them. Among 40,000 people you're going to find some. They're always there to drop the hat, you know. Let's go at it. And in this instance I think they happened to prevail. I think they sold the rank and file a bill of goods membership. It was uncalled for, unnecessary.

HH: Didn't I think some time in early spring, early summer of '46. I seem to think, to remember, that he sent a letter to the FAA saying that Ford wanted some changes in the contract too. I think they wanted to make things, to toughen things up a bit.

CB: Well, I'm not in a position to say, but I wouldn't be...

- CB: that would be a normal procedure. That would be a normal...
- HH: That would be a normal negotiating procedure.
- CB: Yeah, that would be normal. We had quite a bit of that. We'd find a clause maybe throughout the course of the...Months after the contract was negotiated we'd find a clause that's not operating properly either from the company's viewpoint or from the association's viewpoint, you see. But usually we straighten those matters out. Of course, under UAW or something like that they can't so they have to go to arbitration or something like that, see. But in most instances why we got together with the industrial relations people and straightened out these things without going any further.
- HH: You weren't interested in arbitration? The FAA wasn't interested...
- CB: We had the reason to go to arbitration, yes. We did have it but we found little cause to use these services.
- HH: So you think that the change in policy at Ford's towards the association was after the experience of the strike? That unless they had the strike then they might have continued the relation in '47?
- CB: Well that's my opinion. Oh, yes. You see we were the moving party. We cancelled the strike to begin with. We had to. I mean we had a no strike contract for the duration of the contract. Well they cancelled the contract in

CB: order to go on strike which was a wrong move. See, you're not going to keep 5,000 foremen out on the job on a flimsy excuse.

HH: And when the association went back it went back without any recognition.

CB: That's right. It went back without any recognisiton. And in fact it went back disorganized because a number of foremen started to pile back in. You know, they went out for a few days but then they began to think well what are we out on strike for. Because Bill Jones don't belong to the union? And they were aware of the fact that it was a minor problem.

HH: So that you think that the strike really did fix the union. I mean...

CB: Yes.

HH: From what you've been saying, you had very good coordination between...

CB: Two things: cancelling the contract and pulling that strike. That was the, that was the move.

HH: So you went back disorganized.

CB: To me it showed...To me and I'm sure that the Ford Motor Car Company executives looked at it as being irresponsible.

HH: And they just didn't want anything to do with you after that.

CB: Well they had no reason to because they were disorganized. I mean it split the foremen. Here's the foremen going back in past the guys in the line

CB: going back in there,
dropped us or leaving us. Scab, you know, the terms
they use. Times like that you know, I mean there
was dissention where before we had an organized group.

HH: Yeah.

CB: But it was just a bad move on the leaders out there
on that issue. Because we had had success at Willow
Run. But we had reason. We had good reason for doing
what we did. But we got recognition, got a contract
covering Rouge. You see the Rouge foremen didn't go
out when we went out on strike at the bomber plant. But
we got the contract for the foremen at the Rouge plant.
And also under the terms of this agreement any time we
could show a majority membership, majority of the foremen
in any Ford plant in the USA, they would automatically
recognize it. Well that was true in Chicago plants, and
out here, the place in New York, up in Lion Mountain and
Buffalo. I don't recall the other one. But what we
could show them was membership, the majority
of the foremen had signed up as members of the association
the contract was automatically applied to that plant.

DE: Did they form their own chapter? At those plants?

CB: Yes, oh, yes. Because I mean we'd be too far apart. They
couldn't attend meetings here in Detroit.

DE: If you had Ford forement in Chicago, they didn't become
members of chapter 5?

CB: No, they were a different chapter. They had their own
group, officers...

HH: And you, as effective international representative, would have been for coordinating their activities and so forth?

CB: That's right. Of course along with...Well, I had the Consolidated Paper and Nicholson Transit. I had probably about 50 chapters at that time that I worked with coordinating, you know. And the Ford group naturally because I was more acquainted with the operation at Ford's. And then the groups that I organized like the Nicholson Transit group down here and the Consolidated Paper and groups like that, General Ceramics, Steeltypes, Eagle pencil company.

HH: What happened...What about the last, say, 12 years in the organization. In other words after the Taft-Hartley Act when the thing was just slipping apart.

CB: Well, yes you see the foremen had established a pretty good relationship especially where we were recognized. Now some of the chapters, you see, folded after that. Now let's take Kaiser-Fraiser. See, they went out of business here. Nicholson Transit sold their boats down here. You know, we had no more mates and engineers. Packard closed. Hudson closed. And so, I mean they were only chapters in the association. They disappeared. There were no longer in operation. Well then too it got harder. Foremen were discouraged. New groups especially, well in terms of the Taft-Hartley Act, realizing they could be discharged plus the fact the employers made conditions so much better.

HH: So they didn't really feel the need to...

CB: They didn't actually feel the need, that is true.

HH: Then do you think that the FAA was, you know, really just a product of the situation of the war years, the first years after...

CB: No, no. I think the advent of the UAW organizing the auto workers, and making the gains the improvement in working conditions that they had made both in the eyes of the foremen too. We need it. And let's say the employers woke up to that fact. They had to do something for foremen and they did. So it got to a point where the foremen felt well I've got as good a condition as the people under contract. And they did. The unorganized as a general rule got better treatment. In fact their conditions were on the par of the foremen who were organized or just about.

HH: So it no longer had a sense of grievance that there was let's say in '41.

CB: That is true. Yes. Plus the fact that there was that deterrent to lose my job because I signed an application card to the union.

HH: Yeah.

CB: Without any recourse.

HH: No where to go, huh?

CB: That's right.

HH: What do you think about the attitudes of.... You know, why do you think that business management adopted so violent an attitude to the FAA as it did. I'm think of people, of

- HH: people like General Motors, what Harry Cohen and Harry Anderson and people like that.
- CB: Well they just wanted to keep the foremen right under their control. We don't have to deal with foremen. But they realized that something had to be done and they did it. For the benefit of the foremen. Without the foremen having any voice in it. They just made conditions better for the foremen without any collective action or any action of any kind on the part of the foremen as far as...
- HH: Just made sure that they kept that number of steps ahead of the workers.
- DE: That was a conscious policy by GM you think?
- CB: Not only GM. I think it was general throughout industry. I think it was general...I think there was a general improvement.
- DE: To kind of head off FAA by...
- CB: That's right. That is true.
- DE: So it did have its influence even though they didn't come about with organization.
- CB: Oh, sure it stem from...because we were making headway. We were making headway. There they could see the handwriting on the wall. If they didn't change the foremen were going to get organized. Well just like Ford's. We had no outside help. I mean we had...we didn't go to the board or anything. We just got recognition at Ford's through our own action.
- HH: Easy as that.

CB: That's right.

DE: On that...We're taking up a lot of your time. But I want to go back to where we started at the beginning of this interview and ask you a little bit about your family background in terms of: were you from Detroit and did you come here with the idea of going to work in the plants or were you born here?

CB: I came here with the idea of going to work.

DE: Tell us where you were born and your family a little bit.

CB: Well I was born in Kentucky. Yes sir. My family, my parents moved to Texas when I was a couple of years old and moved back to Kentucky about four years later. My father died when I was 8 years old. I was the oldest of four brothers. Well then the family was split. My grandfather took myself and my brother next to me down to Texas. We had a farm out there in the western part of Texas. Well in 1918 they moved back to the old homestead in Kentucky. Well I stayed there one year, 1919, then went to Illinois. Worked on a farm for three years then came here in December of 1922. I started to work at Ford's on the 8th day of January, 1923.

DE: Did you come here because you knew that there were jobs and work in industry that...

CB: Well there was an article in the paper, the Chicago paper. It used to be delivered down 150 miles south of Chicago where I was

DE: Where were you in Illinois?

CB: A town called M_____. M_____, Illinois.
About 150 miles south of Chicago. About 38 miles
from Molene (sp?), the tri-city.

DE: Oh, Yeah.

CB: And Ford's paying \$5. a day.

DE: The old thing. The old bring 'em in...

CB: So a fellow by the name of Hoffman and I decided
well there's nothing to do here in the winter months
so let's go up there and see what the score is.

DE: Your dad was a farmer in Kentucky?

CB: No. He was a blacksmith.

DE: Blacksmith. Have any union background in your family
before you got...

CB: Oh, no. No. None whatsoever. No they were very
rugged individuals. They were farmers and...I mean
he was a blacksmith and my uncles and my grandfather
were farmers.

DE: You were born about what, 1910?

CB: 1904.

DE: 1904?

CB: Yep, 1904. And I worked at Ford's until I took a leave
of absence in '45.

HH: What did you think of working at Ford's when you first
went there? What was it like?

CB: Ford's?

HH: Yeah.

CB: Well it was good as any place in the industry in my

CB: book. I always had steady work. Of course, I worked. I put out. I mean I'd seen conditions there though that I thought should be corrected. What I mean by that...there was a lot of people discriminated against. Not me necessarily. But I'd seen a lot of people hurt. I tried to, you know, I was going a good job. It was just a policy that needed changing and eventually was changed. But personally as an individual, nothing against the Ford Motor Car Company, because they were the conditions of the time. It wasn't only unique at Ford's, it was all over.

HH: All over.

CB: That right.

DE: Did you like Detroit when you came here? Having been basically out in the contrary in the rural areas, was it a problem of adjustment when you came to the city?

CB: Not too much.

DE: Not too much.

CB: No, of course, I came here with a man much older at that time. I was just 18, 17 or 18.

DE: It was a big adventure for you then?

CB: Well, yeah. Came here and well we got a job. Both of us were lucky. Got jobs, started to work at Ford's. It didn't take long to become acclimated to the

DE: Area

CB: conditions. That's right.

DE: I wanted to ask you where were you born in Kentucky. I wanted to...for the record.

CB: Well, I guess you probably never been there. But you read enough about Abraham Lincoln's cabin, born in a cabin...born just 18 miles from there. Hodginsville, Kentucky, in LaRue county. A little place called Gleening.

DE: Gleening, hugh?

HH: Oh, nice.

DE: Yeah.

CB: It was a log cabin.

DE: I don't have anything else. Do you have anything else? Is there something you want to add, you're welcome to. But I think we covered an awful lot of ground here today.

CB: Well, I would like to say this. I was elated, pleased very much with the conditions and with the relationship that we had with the employees that did recognize us while we were an association.

DE: It was a good relationship?

CB: Yes. These companies that I mentioned to you like Kaiser-Fraiser, Detroit Edison, Consolidated Paper, Nicholson Transit, Baldwin Rubber and other places. But we had recognition, recognized as bargaining agent for the supervisors. Our relationship was good. The fact is that, as I said if it weren't for Harry Morgan, for Kaiser-Fraiser, at my request appeared before the House Labor Committee and told of his experience in dealing with the association. I mean he made the statement that unless congress enacted a law prohibiting employers from dealing with their foremen they were going to continue to deal with the Foreman's

CB: Association. I mean I was pretty proud of that accomplishment, establishing that kind of a relationship with various employers. And as I say while at Ford's I found after this contract was put in force, our relationship was good even though a group of people pulled a foolish stunt like cancelling the contract and going on strike. That's not the company's fault. That was ours.

DE: I think that pretty well does it. Thank you very much.