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Stoyan Menton by Warner Phlug.
SIDE 1.

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PHLUG: ...Menton on November the eighth 1976 at the Walter Reuther library. I think if you can just start in some sort of biographical fashion um-leading up, I suppose to when you came to Wayne State and your activities there would probably be the key place to start I suppose.

MENTON: Well uh- how did I get involved.

PHLUG: Yeah uh-

MENTON: Uh- my own background uh- my parents were extremely active in the Yugoslav Socialist Federation. My father who, were both born in Slovenia which was then a part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, my mother lived in three different countries before she came here- uh- my father uh- was converted to socialism in Europe through uh- a pan-slavist movement which- like many of these liberationist movements now- uh- the socialist influence is very strong and he came as an engineer, he was an engineer.

PHLUG: How old was he when he came uh-to the states?

MENTON: Uh- he was about in his early twenties. Uh- his name was Mentoni because his father was Italian but raised in Slovenia. He changed his professional name to Menton. His older brother followed and he was an engineer too. Matter of fact they - they were carriage manufacturers and most of the early auto makers were carriage manufacturers and uh- were socialist. And they led a kind of dual life,

as engineers and executives too. Supervisory engineers and executives.

PHLUG: But they were socialists at the same time.

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- but their social life was with the Slovenian and other Yugoslav ethnic organizations and were very active in the socialist movement. The Yugoslav Socialist Federation and uh- slovinian organization called the Slovenian National Benefit Society -S.N.B.J. uh- see are the titles- the initial - of the uh- abbre- of the Slovenian version. So most of their associates were blue collar workers- skilled from unskilled to skilled.

PHLUG: But they, in a sense, were management. They were executives?

MENTON: Well at this certain time, yes. My ~~father~~ father was in the management of uh- American body. I saw that John Pansner worked there. He called it American Motors body which was uh- merged by Chry- into Chryslers- our Chrysler- Jefferson plant and uh- he was also in the management engineering were engineering executives at the uh- Labarren which became Briggs Labarren and they hired socialists and a lot of Yugoslavs and trained them to become engineers. Some became very conservative as they were not-

PHLUG: Yeah- I was going to ask. Didn't that create some sort of problem for him? Uh- it seemed that there would be a conflict if he - there's management on one side and yet I suppose after hours he was functioning

more as a - as a member of the working class, I guess.

MENTON: No.

PHLUG: It didn't uh-

MENTON: Uh- it was knowⁿ by the others in management that he was a socialist.

PHLUG: They just looked at him kind of strangly and let him get his way, huh?

MENTON: Yeah. And my uncle as a matter of fact when he was a chief experimental engineer at Mary ^{MURRAY} ~~BUFFY~~ ^{Bady} who in the 1928 election ran for governor on the socialist party ticket. But they were considered eccentric guys anyhow. (Laughter). But they were very productive.

PHLUG: As long as they did good engineering work, they didn't care what else they-

MENTON: Yeah. As long as they made money for the company.

PHLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: They didn't care about their politics or whatever. A couple of screwballs who were entitled to their screwball activities. Uh- well, uh- so I was raised as a socialist like some are raised as Catholics others Methodists and Seventh Adventists as the Reuthers were raised as socialists. Uh- and uh- a number of the others who were my contemporaries in the socialist party and the Young People Socialist League- about half of 'em came from socialist families. Other half of those- at least half came from parents who were European immigrants who were-

PHLUG: Socialists there.

MENTON: Right. Were socialists there. Uh- and uh- we moved - moved a great deal

in Detroit. I was born in Detroit in 1915 and on Russell Street which was Little Balkan. That's where all the Yugoslavs, the Serbs the Croats and the Slovenes uh- first came. It remained Little Balkan until- I guess until uh- they tore it down for ^{urban} ~~urban~~ renewal.

PHLUG: Yeah, I think a good bit of that area is gone now.

MENTON: Yeah. A few years back I drove through there to show my kids my first home and it was torn down.

PHLUG: It wasn't there. Yeah.

MENTON: Yeah. It looked like a disaster area. Uh- so uh- and my mother became very active in the socialist movement and also in the Yugoslav republican movement. Uh- she was the secretary of the Slovenian section of the uh- Detroit branch of the Yugoslav, the committee for our Yugoslav republic. Of course I was just a young kid then. I just have a vague recollection of lots of meetings and a lot of interesting people. meeting in our house and uh- she was the secretary. She had three kids when they met in our house. She explained this to me later on.

PHLUG: This would have been in the 1920's you told me ?

MENTON: Well, that- that was in the 19- during the war or right after the war and Yugoslavia became a monarchy and that- the organization dissolved. But all that we moved, there were two pictures that followed us around- three. One was the oil painting of my paternal grandmother uh- which was done from a photograph and a great big oil- I still have it. Another one was a poster-size portrait of Eugene ^{V.} ~~B.~~ Debs, and another one was a

photograph of a leading Slovenian poet, essayist uh- playwright by the name of Evonne Sonker who was also a leading socialist-

PHLUG: That's in Yugoslavia.

MENTON: Yeah. In Yugoslavia. Uh- and most of our friends are Yugoslav friends that- the two of 'em Eugene V. Debs and Evonne Sonker.

PHLUG: Which portrait had the place of honor? Debs?

MENTON: I don't know. Uh- I recall uh- that Debs was still alive at that time they didn't use babysitters and they used to take us to all the Yugoslav-socialist events. They had concerts, lectures, fist-fights over politics- uh- And it was always followed by a dance but - uh- My parents went down to hear Eugene V. Debs when he was still alive and I recall my mother coming back electrified- all excited. This wonderful man-

PHLUG: Well this would have been not too long after he had been in prison.

MENTON: That's right. I remember her excited, vivid description of his speech and audience response.

PHLUG: But you didn't hear him yourself?

MENTON: No. No. Uh- Later on I asked her why she didn't take the kids. She said she knew it was going to be packed and uh- so they got a babysitter for us. I was one of three brothers. Both have unusual names; all three of us have unusual names. My older brother was Eastok, five years my elder. He was born in Newark uh- where my father worked. I think he worked for the Brewster Manufacturing uh the first engineering jobs he had. And uh- a younger brother whose name

was Valimir uh- And I was Stoyan. And the teachers changed my younger brother's name to Wilbur .

PHLUG: These were all Slovak names are they?

MENTON: Uh- They're Yugoslav names. Not Slovak.

PHLUG: I'm sorry.

MENTON: Are very common among the Sloviniⁱans, the Serbs, the Croa⁺ps and among the Czechs too and Bulgarians. Uh- Eastok's even uncommon among the Yugoslavs. Mine was a- my name is rather common in the uh- in those countries. Uh-well- so I was uh- well my associations too. Uh- We moved or changed our residence always near Woodward Avenue. Just moved further north all the time. Lived in Highland Park for a while, and then in the Palmer Park district up-

PHLUG: Near 6 -

MENTON: Yeah. Between 6 and 7 mile road.

PHLUG: That was quite a ways out in those days, wasn't it?

MENTON: Yeah. When I went to Wayne, I lived there and got a lot of studying done on the[#]streetcars-

PHLUG: Streetcars going back and forth.

MENTON: Yeah.

PHLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: Uh- well, but the family friends, friends- were all blue collared workers and their- our oldest friends were their children. My council friends were- uh- some of them became engineers, some became very wealthy. Some re- uh- experienced no upper social mobility and became

factory workers. The first socialist organization that I joined was the English speaking sub-branch of the Detroit branch of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation.

PHLUG: So the uh- Yugoslav Socialist Federation - was that a group in the United States of mainly you people from Yugoslavia I take it?

MENTON: Yes. Yeah. Originally it encompassed the Serbs, it took in the Serbs, the Croations and the Slovines who- I - they all had their separate sections. In Detroit they were together but during the split uh- between the Communist and the - those who remained in the Socialist party, most of the Croations and Serbs went with the Communist and most of the Slovines, but not all of them, remained with the Socialist party and were social democrats. But there were a number of Slovinian Communist who used to come to some of the affairs. Not the socialist affairs but the affairs of the fraternal society. Interestingly, so many of 'em are bootleggers.

PHLUG: Oh, is that right?

MENTON: Yeah.

PHLUG: That's right. This would have been during the prohibition.

MENTON: Yeah. During prohibition.

PHLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: Uh- of the about five of the Slovinian socialists ~~are~~ I knew one ¹⁹⁴ was a - owned a hardware; another one was a bootlegger, a rum-runner -

PHLUG: You got a socialist in indulging in little private enterprise.

MENTON: Well, these are Communists, see.

PHLUG: Oh, they're Communist.

MENTON: Yeah. And another one was a leading Slovenian Communist ~~uh-~~
ran a blind pig in a whore house, that's true. (laughter).

PHLUG: Well, that would make an interesting study for somebody. How
that all came about.

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- well ~~the~~ the one who was a rum-runner became a very
successful and a very rich man afterwards - stopped being a Communist.

And one of the leading Croatian Communists by the name of Keelly- the
name was Kellovitch, was one of the biggest bootleggers and rum-runners
in the - in the Detroit area.

PHLUG: I wonder how that came about?

MENTON: Pardon?

PHLUG: I say I wonder, as I say, that would make an interesting study, how
all that came about. People you least expect to be indulging in
probably the most private enterprise at the time-

MENTON: Yeah. But they were revolutionists against the law that was perfectly
a capitalist state. I remember Louie-Louis Zodomey who was
a friend of our family. I knew him quite well. In his early days he used
to stay at our house. And I think in Dynamite or was it Laughing in the

Jungle he portrayed a bootlegger and gangster as a kind of a revolutionist.

PHLUG: Yeah guess that's what it is.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah.

PHLUG: That there was a law that they thought was wrong and uh- the heck with it. Well uh- you were then chairman of the English speaking sub-branch.

MENTON: I- well, my brothers and I took turns. East and I- Eastok- sort of took turns at it.

PHLUG: Well- so then they must have then had a - in addition to the English speaking sub- branch another branch speaking in the mo- using the mother tongue. Is that right?

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes we had joint affairs.

PHLUG: But what sort of affairs and activities would you be carrying on there?

MENTON: We had debates, we had discussions on books, socialist literature. We put on plays- some light plays, some serious plays. We did uh- R.U.R. We did uh- by Carl Chopik and the- we put it on for the Detroit Socialist Party. Some of 'em who had seen it, were very much impressed by it and uh- and we had debates. And lots of social activities.

PHLUG: Did you put out a newsletter or do you publish any literature?

MENTON: Uh- no. The Yugoslav Socialist Federation had a weekly magazine called the Proletarats and which means the Proletarian- a very well edited, published one and they had an English speaking- an English section in the back page and we used to write for that occasion.

and I've written for that, too. I wrote one or two articles for it and so we use that as the- as the- our vehicle.

PHLUG: I noticed at the same time you were doing this you were out campaigning for Norman Thomas.

MENTON: Oh, yes. Uh- That came about uh- I was only 17 years old.

PHLUG: This was in the '32 election?

MENTON: Yeah. in 1932 election. And uh- That's the Vinion- I mean the ⁶mile road to John R section. Greenfield Park school district. Was very poly-ethnic- also poly-social class. We lived in the- on Hilldale which was a middle-class neighborhood. Had a large number of Croatians who were upward mobile and but- most of 'em lived in the working class area on the east side of John R.- We lived on the west side and probably had the highest concentration of Slovinians in the city of Detroit and also Croatians and Serbians. Uh it also- on the- in the working class side had a number of British working class immigrants who are British labor party backgrounds in the vicinities. Uh- so they asked the Yugolslav Federation to uh- who had its meeting in that- on John R near 6 mile road in the Croatian hall at our headquarters there - to assume responsibility for public meetings and for handling the area for Norman Thomas and uh- I was asked to do it and I gladly did. Uh- first sometimes we met in the Greenfield Park school whose principal was a man be the name of Aldendinger who was running for

Congress, I think, on the Socialist party ticket. Uh-

PHLUG: That explains why you could use the school. Yeah.

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- I recall one meeting there where it was broken up by Communists, Communist hecklers . Uh- then we met on- the Socialist party gave us a platform which was kept in our garage- a portable platform and uh- we met on John R. somewhere in an empty lot and we attracted rather large audiences but we decided we'd get larger audiences and cover a larger area, and we'd meet off Pontchartrain

PHLUG: Drive and where they used to have band concerts-

PHLUG: In Palmer Park.

MENTON: In Palmer Park. Uh - this is how I got to know many of the uh-socialists.

PHLUG: This is when your first contact with the Reuthers is at. Is that right?

MENTON: Uh- yeah.

PHLUG: I think I heard that they were in Detroit at that time.

MENTON: Yeah, I think Roy- I chaired the meetings- and I would just wave my arms and give a talk until a crowd would be attracted and I would uh- then introduce the speaker. I think Leonard Woodcock was one. At least he addressed the Yugoslave Socialist Federation . At that time the Yugoslav Socialist Federation became very active and

for the meetings, they usually had a meeting and very often a banquet and afterwards - they lecture or a concert or something like that and then a dance. Always a ball in the evening and uh- we started to use- socialists from the Socialist Party and the Young People Socialist League as speakers. I know Woodcock was one of the- spoke more than once. I think he spoke out in Palmer Park. Roy did. Walt I- whom I got to know better than the other two, uh- I don't think Vic did. Roy did several times, either I think in Palmer Park and at the Yugoslav Socialist Federation affairs. Harry Reismann, John Pansner- John Pansner was running for governor and uh-

PHLUG:

He was an old Wobbler.

MENTON:

He was an old Wobbler.

PHLUG:

Yeah.

MENTON:

He was a member- and then he became a member of the Socialist Party and uh- he was a wonderful guy. Spoke fractured English reading his oral history. But he gave- he was an effective speaker and he used to chew tobacco-

PHLUG:

While he was giving a speech?

MENTON:

...while he was speaking. Yeah. And I was a little embarassed by it.

PHLUG:

Kind of tough on the people in the first row.

MENTON:

Yeah. This was outdoors though. He almost spit on me once. Uh- another one of the speakers was Norman Thomas. Uh- I think I- yeah I've heard Norman Thomas speak before. But we were getting good-

good turnouts.

PHLUG: Was Thomas an effective speaker?

MENTON: Oh- ~~ext~~ extremely effective. Yeah. He was eloquent, he spoke extemporaneously. The few times he tried to read prepared speeches was disastrous. He uh- had a tremendous humour and he was extremely effective in the question and answer period. He was ~~ext~~ extremely effective in handling hecklers-

PHLUG: And I suspect he had -

MENTON: ...devastating wit.

PHLUG: Was there a lot of heckling going on at these?

MENTON: Yeah. There was some. The Communist party was throughout the period

PHLUG: How about other groups besides the Communists? Would the more-

MENTON: Conservative?

PHLUG: ...conservative groups show?

MENTON: No. We got- there was- I don't recall any heckling from the conservatives . Uh- I remember uh- heckling and meeting being broken up by the Communists. We were the worst enemies. See we were the social democrats. The theory- the idea of social fascism. You recall social fascists and social chauvinists and uh- and we were keeping the working classes from following the revolutionary line and the leadership and the Communists and Socialists and Trotskyist

and the Lovestones everybody was fightin spent more
time fighting one another.

PHLUG: I often wonder how one kept everybody straight in those days. There were all sorts of -ites and -isms and various groups.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah.

PHLUG: I know I have great difficulty keeping them straight in my own mind what each group represented and what they stood for.

MENTON: Well, Norman Thomas uh- spoke . It was a very funny incident. Uh- as I introduced them, an egg, not an egg- a tomato flew our way and hit me right in the face. Norman says 'who are those young guys'? They were back and they were shouting at us. They were friends of mine. (Laughter). I ran back there uh as we were- uh- I attracted quite a bigger crowd and Norman was up there laughing and uh- I got them to give me the bag of tomatoes and I stepped on it- on the bag and they promised they would behave and they were - some of uh- Hoover republicans and high school friends who- and uh- I told em - tomato wasn't meant for, you know - to hit the target- meant for me. Everytime I saw Norman, very often I saw Norman, he recalled the incident with the friends of mine and they stayed and listened to Norman Thomas' speech and were so very impressed that they went up and shook his hands, apologized for the

incident-

PHLUG: So he's-

MENTON: ...a wonderful speaker but he said if there were- so we can't pull but that we'd still vote for Hoover. (Laughter).

PHLUG: Didn't change their minds but they were impressed anyway.

MENTON: Yeah, well also they helped me get the speaker's platform to the car. They were very nice about it. But Woodcock- I was- well among the speakers. Roy Reuther- Roy Reuther was extremely popular with the uh- Slovinians. He was such a nice guy.

PHLUG: He was a good speaker too, wasn't he?

MENTON: Yeah. Walt was a terrible speaker.

PHLUG: He must have learned with time, I guess.

MENTON: Yes, he did. He was uh- of all three he was a poor speaker.

As a matter of fact-

PHLUG: I've heard this from other people that Victor was very good speaker.

MENTON: Oh- Victor was eloquent. Roy was not eloquent-

PHLUG: But very warm.

MENTON: ...Yeah. He was warm, he was forceful , very well organized. Vic- I mean Walter didn't become a good speaker until some years after he achieved province. And it seemed to me it was all of a sudden he started giving his very eloquent , very well organized speeches.

I think May had something to do with it.

PHLUG: May have been.

MENTON: Yeah. And-

PHLUG: Maybe he did a lot of practicing with her.

MENTON: Yeah. And uh- became one of the most effective speakers.

PHLUG: Oh- yeah.

MENTON: Woodcock was always an effective speaker.

PHLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: Oh we had Harry Reismann uh- was a leading Detroit socialist

I was mentioning ^{uh} Frank Mark Lords. Both became our family attorney and a family attorney of a lot of Slovenians. Uh- I think Larry ^{Davidson} ~~Davidson~~, Art Kent who was the ^{paid} ~~pay~~ organizer for the Socialist Party - during that period. ~~Davidson~~ ^{Davidson} and Pansner and Kent ^{left} ~~left~~ the Socialist Party in the 1934-1935 period when the left wing took over the Socialist Party. Norman Thomas and the others swung with the- what is it called a authority ^{caucus} caucus and a progressive caucus a revolutionary policy committee and I was very much of a matter of fact I had attended caucus meetings representing the Yugoslav Socialists Federation of the left wing. Uh- the Reuthers- were- they lived in Russia at that time but they were-

PHLUG: That's right.

MENTON: ...associated with left wing as most of us were. Like- we lost some

good people. Pansner who was a Wobbly uh- became a rather conservative socialist. Many of 'em all stayed in the Socialist Party- those who belonged to the so called old guard in the right wing- like Harry Reisman and others.

PHLUG: So it became more conservative. They group of 'em anyway.

MENTON: Well they-

PHLUG: Even though they stayed within the Socialist Party they came to be kind of the right wing of the-

MENTON: No. We were for a long time the left wingers- those of us who were left wingers grew more conservative.

PHLUG: You moved towards the center anyway.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Uh- a disillusionment with Communism, with ⁰Balshevism and first with what was going on in Russia, especially the purges disillusioned a lot of us and then finally with ⁰Balshevism and uh- we moved uh- to the - more and more to the right.

PHLUG: Uh- was it about this time then that you came to school here at Wayne or is that -

MENTON: Uh - I came in 1933.

PHLUG: Oh.

MENTON: Uh-I was going - I planned to- I graduated in January at that time it was possible to graduate. I don't know if it's still possible-

PHLUG: Yeah. You mean from high school? Yeah.

MENTON: High school- in midterm. Some places it isn't. In mid-year. And uh- I planned to get a job and go to the University of Michigan. My brother Eastok was a - went to University of Michigan and he was taking up architecture and one reason I just wanted to live away from home. And uh- I graduated in 1933 which of course was the depth of the depression. I don't think Roosevelt had taken office yet. It would be January or February and uh- depression had earlier reached its ~~point~~ Nadir and my father, just at that time, lost his job. The whole operation, Labarren, which was a sub-contractor in engineering body- experimental models, special cars, custom built cars. I think they built- my father built practically all the Dusenbergs and they did the Dusenbergs.

PHLUG: There wasn't much market for Dusenbergs in 1933.

MENTON: That's right. Well they just- they just phased out the whole plan. Uh- and just kept the general manager and a few custodians and so forth. All the others were off so it was my bad luck. They couldn't afford to send me to the University of Michigan. Uh- so I went to Detroit City College.

PHLUG: Which is the predecessor of Wayne State.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. It became Wayne State either during my Soph- I think it was during my sophomore year- It became Wayne University.

PHLUG: Right. Yeah.

MENTON: And uh-

PHLUG: Became a state university much later in the fifties.

MENTON: Yeah. Very much later and uh- I wasn't active in the radical groups during the first year . I had my radical outlet ~~sets~~ . It was still the sub-branch of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation and - however I became- I was known as one of the ~~cap~~^{cap} radicals. I was on the debating team. The uh- my junior or my sophomore year rather, I was on the varsity debating team. I was part of the university theater with Leonard Leone-

PHLUG: Oh-

MENTON: He was one of my closest friends.

PHLUG: He is still here.

MENTON: Yeah, I know he is. I gotta look him up. And we remained close friends for many years. Uh- and uh- Frank Talpo who became a T.V. producer later on. I was active in the International Relations Club. I was on the executive board. Uh- but I didn't- the Social Province Club that the Routhers spearheaded became ~~more abundant~~ ^{moribund.} Uic and Walt had gone to Russia and Roy had gone to Berkwood Labor College-

PHLUG: Right.

MENTON: ...uh- Norman ~~Drachler~~ ^{DRACHLER} just couldn't keep it alive. The National Student League uh- whose president was ~~L.R.~~ ^{Eleanor} Coperno and ~~L.R.~~ ^{Eleanor} Coperno Wolf who was communist dominated and a number of discussions was with the communists

that- and I wouldn't join, I think I recall one argument that if I-
in fact I'm not going to join the Friend Organization- I'll join the
communist party. Uh- so I started reading communist literature and
uh- Lenin turned me off uh- and Buchavain turned me on-
Nikolai Buchavain one of the leading theoreticians. But there
were other reasons. There- uh- let's- some event had occurred uh-
at Wayne which uh- was a kind of a turning point in my life. There
was a student demonstration led by the NCL and the YCL. They were
going to march on the City Hall, hunger march or something like that and
they congregated down in the main lobby of Old Main and uh- Dean of
Students, Joseph Seldon, came down and told 'em to leave. It was a fire
hazard. Carl Prussian was one of the leaders of the NSL sort of
young Communist League uh- was leading the demonstration uh- turned around
and called uh- Joe Seldon, a very, nice mild-mannered liberal person, very
liberal in his ideas- fascist bastard and smacked him in the face.

PHLUG: Oh.

MENTON: And also some of the young communists were going just a little bit too
far in the classroom discussions. Uh-were rather disruptive. In fact
it was one of the new left.

PHLUG: Oh. Yeah.

MENTON: And uh-so Carl Prussian was expelled and some of the others were suspended
and I was asked- I joined the committee to lead - to work for the
re-instatement.

PHLUG: I think we should stop here. This tape's about to run out.

MENTON: I see.

PHLUG: Why don't we flip - quickly flip it over.

MENTON: O.K.

END OF SIDE 1- MENTON BY PHLUG.

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SIDE 2- MENTON by PHLUG.

PHLUG: Well we can start in again. You were talking about the - the expulsion of the students at Wayne.

MENTON: Yeah. And I joined the committee it was an ad-hoc committee uh- to uh- see to ~~the~~ ^{re-} instatement of some of the students and ~~I~~ I found I was, became chairman (Laughter). Well I was on the debating team, IRC was one of the respectable organizations, I joined college theater. I was also a leader in the green and gold restaurant- you've heard about the green and gold restaurant?

PHLUG: I've heard of it , yeah.

MENTON: Yeah, it was a favorite con- congregating spot for students and faculty congregated and ~~I was~~ all sorts of social, extracurricular social activities as well as the- I was on the student faculty congregation committee and uh- all very respectable. And I decided I'd keep it this way. I'd work uh- and the uh- I wouldn't get too much involved in radical activities, concentrate on my studies, go to law school, get a law degree and become a labor lawyer like Clarence ^{Darrow} Daryl. He was one of my idols from boyhood and uh- now this got me involved in something that I wasn't going to do. I probably would have joined the Social Problems Club. I was dead. Well, I still have- I did have contact with the Young

People's Socialist League, with the LID uh- there were city-wide meetings and I always represented the Yugoslav Socialist Federation and uh- that summer I had two alternative. Harry Reismann talked me and my family out of my becoming a lawyer. He said 'become a teacher. There's no money in law'. (Laughter).

PHLUG: A Shows how much he knows.

MENTON: He says I'm being supported by Mada, His wife, who was a schoolteacher at least she was a steady that^{is} why, this was during the depression. ^{meal ticket}

PHLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: And uh- so I enrolled in the School of Education and also a terrific experience- almost got a job as a manager[~]- sales manager trainee uh- for the Tumpkins I think uh- some company that was just going into electrical refrigeration which was new at that time and uh- Well I ran in to Bob ^{KANTOR} ~~GANTER~~ somewhere downtown in an office accidentally and he says 'we've been trying to find you, Stoy'. I knew Bob. He was the organizer of the Young People's Socialist League at that time and they uh- they said the League for Industrial Democracy Chapter which was quite large at that time and made up mostly of schoolteachers and college professors had a rather active program, decided to offer you a scholarship to their second annual summer school in New York city. It was a six or seven week affair. So, my mother objecting very much, well she was socialist^s uh I accepted it. I think

one of the reasons- I had certain reservations about it because I thought by taking this I would have a commitment to build up the SLID at Wayne- at Wayne University and uh- I think it had become Wayne by then and uh- Well-

PHLUG: You took advantage of this scholarship.

MENTON: Oh, yes. Yes. That was the turning point in all of my life, too. Uh- there were- I think one of the reasons I was selected is that I was non-Jewish. And most of the students out at the summer school- were non-Jewish. We had a discussion there once.

PHLUG: Why uh- why was that do you suppose?

MENTON: Because the uh- radical movements were so disproportionately Jewish. For example a National Student League here was about three quarters Jewish. Uh- and uh I guess they wanted a larger Gentile base.

PHLUG: Right. So there was a little equal representation or something like that.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And uh- I was a minor league BMOC on the campus- the other thing- known as a radical and uh- so I went . It was there that I met George Edwards,

PHLUG: He was where- at Harvard at that time?

MENTON: No, he was a student the first school-summer school which was just just uh- year before. I was at the second one. George was on the organizing- was a field organizer for the SLIB- uh Monroe

Sweetland, who became one of the leaders, the liberal courses in the democratic party was another one of the field organizers. Uh- Joseph P. Lash, the author, the editor of the student outlook, it was called, the official organ- the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

PHLUG: It was quite a group of people.

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- Bob ^{SPIVAK} Speevak was one of the students. He later became a columnist of some note and somebody else was one of the students at that time.

PHLUG: Well what uh- what did you just have ⁷⁷ guest lecturers come in for these- this Programs ¹⁹⁵⁸ ?

MENTON: We had- yeah. We also visited labor movements . I got involved in picketing the American Mercury which was having a strike and a number of the students were arrested , stayed in jail overnight and I was arrested. While the cop wasn't looking I joined the picket line. And I was really rather happy because I'm claustrophobic and I couldn't see myself in jail. And uh- we had Norman Thomas, ^{LADLER} of course, Harry Ladler- some of the needle trades. I think ^{DUBINSKY} Dave Debinsky talked to the group; we visited union halls; did some leaflet distribution. So then I met Brendon Sexton, who at that time was uh- the head of the Unemployed Council or Union which was the New York branch of the Worker's Alliance headed by

David Lasser.

PFLUG: But he was living in New York at this time?

MENTON: Yeah he was living at that time. He was a member of the ^{Yonkers} ~~Mooringside~~ Heights Socialist Party. Many people came from the - Alger Hiss as a blue collar not- blue collar- blue stocking near Columbia University branch. I stayed in Norman Thomas' townhouse the first night I was there and uh- I got in town and he drove me up to camp- a camp near Bound Brook New Jersey where there was a weekend LID seminar. We had- uh- Robert Minor was one of our lecturers and uh- there were a number- a few of the students were leaning toward communism and uh- well he turned 'em off.

PFLUG: Oh, really?

MENTON: Yeah. He was a very befuddled man.

PFLUG: But what- I assume what they did that they brought in people from around the country for this-

MENTON: Uh- mostly in the New York area.

PFLUG: Oh. You came from Detroit.

MENTON: Oh. Yeah. No, the students were from all over the country. Most from the mid west and from the far west. Some from the Rocky Mountains and from the south. Only a - only about three or four from the east, but the speakers were-

PFLUG: Were- right.

MENTON: STUART Chase, Reinhold ^{Niebuhr} -uh about three sessions with us
we were very much impressed but none of us understood him.

PFLUG: Was that at the time he was still in Detroit?

MENTON: No. No.

PFLUG: This was later?

MENTON: This was later. He was in New York. Yeah he was a minister-

PFLUG: In Detroit?

MENTON: Detroit, yeah.

PFLUG: I guess it was early- in the early thirties.

MENTON: In the uh- one branch of the Lutheran church- Evangelical Reform
Church.

PFLUG: With the name of Reinhold what else would he be but a Lutheran
I guess.

MENTON: Yeah. It was a branch see, Evang- it's called- was Evangelical Reform
Church, a combina- it combined Calvinism with Lutheranism.

PFLUG: But you earned this scholarship at the same time, this is during your
summer vacation from Wayne? Then you came back to Wayne that fall then.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh- then I organized the Student League for
Industrial Democracy Chapter and uh- very successful ~~7~~ must say, within

the period of a few months we had 75 members.

PFLUG: That's very good. Well the uh- at this time then, Victor and Walter had left for Russia, is that right?

MENTON: They came back shortly after.

PFLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: This is 1936.

PFLUG: Yeah, they came back about then I think.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: '35 I suppose.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: And uh- they looked me up right away because I was sort of the ^Nheritor-
successor of the Social Problems Club was the- another name for the
Student League for Industrial Democracy.

PFLUG: It's really the same group then.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It was revived and he asked me to manage uh-
to get speaking engagements for them in the Detroit area and handle
the publicity.

PFLUG: This is their speaking tour after they came back from Russia.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Let me- my biography's a little wrong there 'cause
after reading about the Reuthers- they left and went on a national
tour-

PFLUG: Yeah, I think so.

MENTON: Yeah, but when they were in Detroit I - they spoke at Wayne first. First, I think the first meeting I arranged for them was uh- in- with uh- at Wayne University. The auspices of the Student League for Industrial Democracy.

PFLUG: But I gathered they traveled all throught the state. I recall Victor telling us he gave his speech in Onaway²¹⁰ up north which has a connection in after they came back from Russia

MENTON: Yeah. For a while they were- while they were in Detroit they asked me to arrange meetings for them and they were travelling . Yes I think they did some travelling and that's why they wanted somebody here who had contacts. I think I arranged a meeting with the Unitarian Church or -

PFLUG: Well what would their speeches consist of? Just kind of a discussion of what they had seen and done on their tour?

MENTON: Yeah. They were very favorably impressed.

PFLUG: In fact there's one letter that keeps coming back to haunt them that they-

MENTON: Well, as I said, I saw the original.

PFLUG: This is the-

MENTON: Melvin Bishop-

PFLUG: Right.

MENTON: that's while they ^{were gone} I ran into him and he was a member of the Young People's

Socialist League- I wasn't but we had a lot of joint affairs with the sub-branch in the Young People's Socialist League- around here somewhere . And as I said I just got a letter from Vic and Walt and uh- that was the first time I saw it and I went-we drank coffee^c and I read it and one version of it.

PFLUG: Yeah. It's too bad we can't find the- or do not have the original because there's so many versions of it now that uh-

MENTON: Yeah. Well, one reason for it uh- it appeared in the uh- Detroit a short little publication called the Detroit Young Socialist, in a very reduced form and that was the second time I'd seen it.

PFLUG: Now, Victor in his book devotes a whole chapter -

MENTON: I know it.

PFLUG: ...to that letter and uh-

MENTON: But doesn't he admit having written a letter ?

PFLUG: Oh, yes.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Yeah, he admits that they wrote the letter. I think he attributes it to youthful enthusiasm-

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: ...but he-his- it's his contention that most of the letters that keep

appearing and been in the Congressional Record and so on are not exact copies and have been altered and changed to some extent.

MENTON: Well- this I can uh- I know that-

PFLUG: But they- he does not deny writing the letter-

MENTON: Yeah, and it was full of enthusiasm and I think it did end "youth" ²⁴⁵ for a Soviet America because they felt that way about that time and I recall having a conversation with, not Vic- Walt and I uh- for years and I felt freer to talk to Walt- Walt consulted with me on a number of matters after his rise and I said to him why don't you admit ^{you wrote the letter} And admit that you were enthusiastic about the Soviet Union. I should have said you know I was too but with a lot of reservations. I knew some people who had gone to Yugoslavia ²⁵ ~~personally~~ personally and it was at the same time - that was during the period of the famine. And uh- they were communists in some cases, and came back in very anti-communistic. Some Yugoslav communists who had gone and then a number of other writers who - uh- some writers like Walter Durante and W.A. - was it W.C. or W.H. Chamberlain and Lawrence Hindus and Sherwood Eddy were enthusiastic and then be- shortly became very embittered. But a number of people- they kep their faith and Reuther- Reuthers were among those.

PFLUG: But was this evident in the speeches they gave on their tours, after they returned?

MENTON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Uh- the speeches I have heard- I remember the Wayne speech. It's recorded quite well in the Wayne Detroit Collegiate. They got good coverage. So you look in the back issues. Vic was eloquent. Walt didn't give a good speech and uh- his former professors were rather disappointed in his speech uh- so was the delivery. He was good in the question and answer period. Of the two he had the best-of the three he had a very good analytical mind. The face to face conversations we had- discussions. Uh- got a very good grasp of things- a very logical mind at that time when he got on the platform. But, they were just full of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. And I had an argument with Walt over it. There were certain things I pointed out . It wasn't an argument - said what about this what about that.

PFLUG: You thought he was too enthusiastic?

MENTON: Yeah. I said what about the famine? He said oh you have to make sacrifices and that was a mistake.

PFLUG: There were reactions like this in the audience too? People question him and uh- cast some doubts on what they were saying?

MENTON: No. Uh- I think there were some who raised a question of- and uh-I know of the personal conversation they discussed the- some of those things- there are excesses in every revolution- they were

in the American Revolution and it forced collectivization of the state. A terrible mistake uh- The - How people could rationalize - they were rationalizing it the same way. And uh- looking back I wondered why I wasn't totally disillusioned. Much earlier. So I wasn't condemnatory but Vic was his usual eloquence.

PFLUG: Which he has carried over to today I think. One thing we didn't touch on and it pre-dates this a little bit- Were you in Detroit at the time of the hunger marches?

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Were you involved in those at all?

MENTON: No. Uh-

PFLUG: I'm thinking especially of the one where the four people, of course were killed in Dearborn.

MENTON: Yeah. I knew somebody who knew something about it. Harry Ross I think told me this story. I haven't read his oral history but I see it isn't there. Uh-

PFLUG: That was one of the I guess dramatic events of that period and uh-

MENTON: Harry Ross or somebody else who knew Phil Raymond who was with the trade union unity and he was also the Communist Party organizer and I saw a lot

of him.

PFLUG: He was organizing the old Auto Worker's Union at that time.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. I remember him- run into with him - I remember one

in Wayne University when somebody was speaking, I think it was a
fellow from Milwaukee, Benson his name is- Pansner mentions him
and uh- The audience was - had communists all over. There was a
forum I think sponsored by the LID- or in somewhere there were
meeting sponsored by the Socialist Party. This I think was sponsored
by the Socialist Party. It was a big crowd and uh- Phil Raymond
was - was there with my parents and my brothers uh- and was seated
in front of us and then he heckled and somebody else got up and
heckled and raised the same damn question all the time: what about-
one of 'em was 'what about Carl Licknik and Rosa Luxemburg?'- no
matter what the subject was and then uh- when he would sit down
he would- he'd turn around and point to somebody and somebody else
would get up-

PFLUG: And ask the same question?

MENTON: Another type of question. Real stock questions. They would reel.

PFLUG: The speakers, then really could anticipate what the questions were
going to be.

MENTON: Yeah. And the same questions no matter what the subject was and there

was a fist fight. Uh- Socialists never called the cops- they tried to throw 'em out themselves. And my father liked to fight- my mother and I had to hold on to him. Uh- well we uh- I hear him speak. He was a real stereotype- he was interviewed. I don't know what he was- but then he was a caricature of a communist ~~orator~~ orator: big, horn-rimmed glasses, disheveled hair uh- very se^mitic looking.

PFLUG: Thought maybe he had a bomb in his topcoat and everything else, huh?

MENTON: Yeah and uh- shouting slogans all the time. Uh- well recording this person who was interested in drawing the Socialist Party- I mean the Communist Party at that time- he was in the hunger march but he played- this is a group with whom Phil Raymond played poker and uh Phil, after this massacre, he asked Phil Raymond where he was. Phil said he was in the back. He says those^{3rd} sons of bitches. Sent other people off in front of the^{leaders} uh- lead from behind and he said something about, Phil, shortly after that, playing poker and he was very relieved ~~about~~ ^{what happened!}

PFLUG: I think he gave 'em the cause to rally.

MENTON: Yeah, but he remembered that we went to the big funeral procession. Uh- pass the 360 Hotel and we went, now what street is that- that's Ferry isn't it?

PFLUG: Yes. And I think the funeral was on Ferry then it went down Woodward

Avenue.

MENTON: Yeah, it was an old Yugoslav Worker's Home which my parents helped build but it was taken over by the communists during the split and uh- started there and then it proceeded onto Ferry. We went all the way into Little Balkan and stood by a line. There were about 10,000 people in the procession- it was a very large procession . My parents knew quite a few of the people- Yugoslav communists. Uh- they had big signs denouncing Frank Murphy who was mayor and I thought- we thought this was terribly unfair because Frank Murphy escorted - gave police protection-
PFLUG: Kept ^{them} him safe to the city limits.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. But he was butcher Murphy, liberals and the socialists were the worst enemies. There were more signs, political signs- they were just exploiting the deaths of these four people. Uh- one was a black, I think, yeah- they were selected- one was a southern white and uh there was a feeling- I knew that something was going to happen.

PFLUG: You could almost predict that something was going to blow up.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that something was going to blow up and it did. Well anyhow, the other comment my parents made in seeing the types of people that were there- there were more people with mis-shapen faces and

mis-shapen bodies-a lot of foreign federations uh- and uh- my parents made the comment these people will never make a revolution. They're not Americans . They're not even typical workers . And uh- the reason I mentioned the Wordell, there was a very intelligent Croatian woman who lived in our neighborhood and during the depression she started working as a chamber maid- her husband was unemployed uh- and the Wordell. Wordell was a residential hotel- one of the wealthier ones and she told me that they were really scared up there. They thought the revolution was going to start.

PFLUG: This was when the procession was going by?

MENTON: Yeah, when the procession went by but the reaction of my parents was just the opposite.

PFLUG: These people would never pull off a revolution.

MENTON: Yeah- this- These kinds of people-

PFLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: ...could never make a revolution.

PFLUG: Well, then after your- still while your in school then, you became involved to some extent with Amnon Mazy at Briggs.

MENTON: Well that's quite a story in itself, how I got there. Uh- my- Briggs became- I mean Labarren became uh- was taken over- it re-opened and it became Briggs-Labarren. My father's old job was restored and uh-

I knew ~~Amil Masey~~ ^{Emil Masey} before from the Young People's Socialist League and - he and a number of others- Bob Canter-^{Kanter}

PFLUG: Were his brothers also in the Socialist League?

MENTON: Uh- Bo-

PFLUG: ~~Amil's~~ ^{Emil's}

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Both ones. It was ERnie,

PFLUG: Ernie and Bill or William.

MENTON: Oh yeah. Bill, not Bob.

PFLUG: He became a lawyer I believe.

MENTON: He became a lawyer.

PFLUG: Yeah. Then ~~he~~ ^{Emil} headed the ACLU for many years- in the Michigan ACLU.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah.

PFLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: Uh, he became the Trotskyites ⁴⁸, he left with the truck- the Socialist Workers Party when they- was to the S.P. but they came in with the proletarian party. Uh- so did Bob ~~Kanter~~ and a number of others when the S.P. began to swing left a number of proletarian party members. I believe ~~Amil's~~ ^{Emil's} father was in it but I'm not sure.

PFLUG: I don't know.

MENTON: I think he had some of the radical backgrounds- Hungarian uh-

PFLUG: Well you uh- got a job then at Briggs- Labarren, is that-

MENTON: No.

My father couldn't hire me. They had a need-all skilled worker. And uh- I had no aptitude so he had the personnel director write a letter to the personnel director at Briggs- Mack. ^{Emil} ~~Amil~~ was working there at that particular time and uh- so there were long line of people waiting outside and I felt rather embarrassed passing 'em by.

PFLUG: You went to the head of the line.

MENTON: The head of the line. Right up to the assistant personnel director. And he is sorry, right now we don't have anything in the personnel department.

PFLUG: This would have been what?

MENTON: 1936.

PFLUG: '36.

MENTON: The summer of '36. And uh- I said well, I'll take a job in the plant. I was glad they didn't have anything because I- one of the things I had in mind was uh- I help organize a union.

PFLUG: That's right. The UAW would have just been getting underway about then.

MENTON: That was when it was still a federal union. And uh- I worked in the afternoon shift and uh- well, I remember the personnel director- a little red-headed guy uh- you don't want to work in our plant- you know its reputation. (Laughter). We- just would work the asses off the workers and this one department was the one from the worst.

We really work 'em hard.

PFLUG: This is the personnel director saying this.

MENTON: Yeah- the assistant personnel director. And I says why do we get all these orders from Ford which is bad enough or even worse. He was very honest about it. And uh- well I insisted I says my point- this would be good experience for somebody whose going to work in the personnel office. And he said O.K. you asked for it - so he wrote out a slip and I got a job and I was transferred around a lot . I started uh- talking union- ^{Emil} ~~Amil~~ was working there at that time and uh- they gave me some union cards. I signed up under an assumed name because I didn't want to embarrass my father and I think it was ^{Emil's} ~~Amil's~~ advise too uh 'cause we suspected stool pigeons.

PFLUG: Well this was fairly common in that period, wasn't it?

MENTON: And uh- uh- well- uh- I recall one incident- I called in sick because I worked the afternoon shift because ^{Emil} ~~Amil~~ told me there was going to be a meeting uh- someplace nearby and he and I and several other guys showed up. Nobody came- the organizer didn't come and it turned out later on he was a stool pigeon.

PFLUG: Oh.

MENTON: Uh- So then I was- Pardon?

PFLUG: Nothing.

MENTON: But oh I was a real helluva hauler. Uh- the supervisor department was a very decent guy uh- very polite but the man under him especially the one who worked - under whom I worked- I never heard him say anything about obscenities- he was a big, beefy guy with his shirt sleeves arms like a big fist and would ~~shke~~ shake his fist in our faces and tell us-

PFLUG: Tell you you're falling behind in your quota, huh?

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He was always speeding us up and I started talking union in breaks and so forth and uh- some of the workers began to shut up like clams. A few of 'em became interested and I suspect it was because I was - they might have suspected me.

PFLUG: Did they- were they aware of your father's position?

MENTON: No. No. Uh- they wouldn't be aware of his position. I kept quiet about that. Were a few that I got interested in. One was a - also a - going part-time to Wayne University and uh- they transferred me from job to job and I thought this was- wouldn't make any contact uh- any friendships. So I was laid off. The supervisor called me in and said - 'look, we have to lay off people'. And he said 'I know we don't have a union but I believe in the policy of the last in first out and uh-

PFLUG: And that was you.

MENTON: Huh?

PFLUG: That was you.

MENTON: Yeah. that was me. And I thought it was for union reasons. And just before the fall semester started I got called back at a higher classification and I went to see uh- well I talked to Bob ~~K~~anter and I believe I talked to Walt Reuther about it. Should I go back and help organize the union or shall I uh- go back to college. And the advise was go back to college because nothing's going to happen.

PFLUG: Oh really?

MENTON: There at Briggs.

PFLUG: At Briggs.

MENTON: Uh- for- for a long while. And uh- all hell broke out. About a month later they went on strike and they won the strike and I heard from ^{Emil} ~~Amil~~ I think or- that this bowling ball through the- they threw him over the fence. He never came back. That was one of the demands I got it through one of the guys they got rid of. Uh- so I was very frustrated. Here I missing out. Uh-

PFLUG: Here you had a chance to be involved in a strike and you weren't there huh?

MENTON: No. And organizing ^{the} union there. Just started to hit. ^{Emil} ~~Amil~~ wasn't

getting anywhere. He was- none of us with this fear- long lines- they had a lot of new migrants- who were a lot of southern workers.

PFLUG: Well Briggs was a tough nut for the union to crack all along, wasn't it?

In there-

MENTON: Uh- well under ~~Amil~~ ^{Emil}, uh- they negotiated some of the best contracts.

PFLUG: Later on.

MENTON: Yeah. Later on. And some are real model clauses. But Walter, old Briggs ~~was~~ who my father got to know somewhat, not very well I understood the idea. Was a very aloof man- ~~was~~ a real s.o.b.

PFLUG: I've heard that.

MENTON: Yeah. He had a very - ~~I~~ know my father had a great reluctance of going back uh to Labarren when Briggs took it over and I think there was an understanding- yeah there was- the whole management that you can't treat these workers- they're skilled workers and engineers the way you treat the others.

PFLUG: You mean the guys at work.

MENTON: And so they were exempt and they were given a great deal of autonomy.

PFLUG: I think we're about to run out of tape again-

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: ...so this might be a good place to conclude.

MENTON: Yeah, while we-

END OF TAPE.

Warner Pflug - Stoyan Menton.

Tape 2 - Side 1.

MENTON: You skipped back or something like that. That came afterwards.

PFLUG: O.K. This is Tape #2 of the interview with Mr. Stoyan Menton. It's taking place in the Walter Reuther Library, November 16th, 1976. At the conclusion of the last interview, we had been discussing your work with ~~Amil M~~ ^{Amil M} ~~atey~~ at Briggs, and perhaps you can just pick it up from there, what events came next, then.

MENTON: Uh- well, this came- we got a little ahead. This came after the big event of 1936, the Student League for Industrial Democracy and the National Student League had merged and formed the American Student Union. And the big ev- we were- I think we were the largest or single organization on the Wayne campus at that time and uh- nationally, the organization called the Second Annual Anti-War ^{Strike} or Peace Strike which - uh- which the so-called Oxford Pledge ^{was to be taken} which uh- in fact under no circumstances would we fight in a war, uh- for different reasons. Some were pacifists; others felt that any war United States would be engaged in would be an imperialist war. Well, we broadened the committee and looking in the back issues- through the back issues of the Detroit Collegiate, we had about thirteen campus organization in addition to the American Student Union and the Anti-War Strike Committee including the Inter-Sorority Society, The Gas ^{House}

Gang, The Chess Club to name a few.

PFLUG: Well, this would have been in 1936?

MENTON: It was called for April 22 in 1936 and the- I was the I think I was the chairman of the committee. A board of education through the superintendent of schools, Frank Cody, uh- opposed the anti-war strike.

PFLUG: I think we should point out here that at that time the board of education had responsibility for the university.

MENTON: Yes. Yes. Yeah.

PFLUG: It was the governing board since it ^{was} a city college at that time

MENTON: Yes and the superintendent of schools was also the president of the university; the ~~the~~ executive vice-president was Dr. Spain. Uh- but Frank Cody had the final say and he was responsible of the board of education. Well, we organized a nego⁽tiating ~~co~~mmittee and got an audience with Frank Cody and some of the key members of the board of education. Uh- Bob Canter accompanied us down, but they wouldn't admit him. He was the organizer for the Young People's Socialist League at that time. Albert Hamilton was an ASU field organizer, formally SLID field organizer, was to be the main speaker. He was assigned to work with the Wayne students, the University of Michigan students on this- spent most of his time in Detroit because we had the largest chapter and we had all these other organization. He was allowed to sit in and we

had a few students- I think Eleanor ^{Paperno} ~~Paperno~~ was on- Eleanor ^{Paperno/wool (?)} ~~Paperno~~, _____
was in them. Nevertheless I was selected as the rep- chief
negotiator. Well we came to an agreement. The agreement was that
we could have our anti-war strike but not on school property.
In the meantime, our committee, some members of the committee had
contacted the Christian Science Church which is now the - was it
the Hilberry Theatre-

PFLUG: The Hilberry- Hilberry Theatre.

MENTON: ...and they granted us permission to use their staircase for the anti-war strike. The two main speakers were to be Ruth Wiley, who was on the women's debating team and also oratorical champ- champion- I think she was a member of the SLID and also a member of the ASU- Albert Hamilton and the main speaker was a reverend Dr. Macafee, who was the assistant uh- or vice-chairman in Detroit Council of the Churches. I believe^e he was a Unitarian minister of liberal persuasion. Well, uh- I said we would report back to the committee on this compromise and the committee turned it down and voted in opposition to my proposal that we accept- see- we'll have to face the consequences. Uh- and uh- we held the anti-war strike on school grounds on the uh- south end of

Old Main. Collegian According to the, we attracted a thousand students which was quite a large number, considering at that time Wayne had a full-time student body of only a- of less than three thousand.

Excuse me. I'm sorry we got a-

Uh- the one who administered the oath was a very good-looking, striking blond with a nice contralto voice who was an actress- member of the National Student League by the name of Lula Martin who became the second Mrs. Woodcock later on. Uh- well, the almost the entire editorial board of the Detroit Collegian only supported the anti-war strike, but also supported our defiance on the grounds of academic freedom. Uh- the consequence of that was that we got a great big spread in all the dailies with Wayne students see-in the Detroit Times- Wayne reeds defy a school ward and Macafee who was ¹main speaker called me up in the middle of night, very ^uaggrily uh- and with some justification because he didn't know we were defying the administration ruling uh- Dale Mericle who was the editor-in⁻chief of a Detroit Collegian was removed from the position as were several of the other members of the editorial board. By the way, practically half of the editors and feature writers of the Detroit Collegian were first members of the Student League for Industrial Democracy and then members of the American Student Union after the merger. So we had another free speech fight there.

PFLUG: Well, what happened to the organizers of this strike then? People like yourself?

MENTON: Well, Dean Seldon and Dr. Spain talked to me individually. Said, you know we could expel you. Spain who was a conservative, but he said he believed in academic freedom and was not going to expel me. At that time I was majoring in education. I worked towards a teacher's certificate as a meal ticket and then perhaps go back to my original plans of becoming a lawyer. And I was told by Dean Seldon, we're not going to be expelled but you might as well forget about ever getting a teacher's certificate. If you do, forget about teaching in the Detroit school system. I also got a threat from the Black Legion. There was a student here, an older student who was a fanatic anti-semitic- told me there's an organization that's going to put the skids on SLID and -

PFLUG: He was referring then to the Black Legion.

MENTON: Yeah. That all broke out. He quit school- disappeared. Well, uh- nobody was expelled. I changed my career plans and shifted majors. The consequences to Dale Mericle in particular and some of the editors of the Collegian were - career consequences were rather drastic, because in Detroit, whoever was editor-in-chief of the Collegian over a length of time, he was a very capable editor, you know and managing

editor; usually got a job on one of the Detroit dailies. And uh- so he has to forget about that. So next- next term that was the 1936-1937 academic year, we had a - almost a new editorial board of the Detroit Collegian. And the American Student Union lost official recognition which meant we couldn't meet on the campus. We met in 28 West Warren which was the headquarters for the Detroit Contemporary Theatre which was Detroit's version of the group theatre and uh- group theatre in New York- a communist influence theatre. We did some good stuff here and uh- the organization declined somewhat; some people were scared off because we- we weren't uh- officially recognized and- One of the by-products of it was a very interesting magazine we started an underground paper.

PFLUG: What was- what was the name of that thing?

MENTON: The Gadfly.

PFLUG: Oh.

MENTON: I found two issues of it. Eleanor Pernol Wool said she was going through her files- and she told me this in New York and just before we had met she was wondering what happened to me and she recalled the Gadfly and she said she found two issues. I thought I was managing editor- My girlfriend was which was the same difference. And uh- because we

had our meetings up in her apartment which was on Cass Avenue. And you know where we had it mimeographed?

PFLUG: No.

MENTON: George Addis' office.

PFLUG: Oh.

MENTON: The UAW.

PFLUG: Which would have been just up the street.

MENTON: That was in the Hoffman Building.

PFLUG: Oh, right. Yeah.

MENTON: At that time. Uh- this was partly in return for uh- some of us being voluntary workers in the CIO organizing- UAW organizing.

PFLUG: Yeah. I was gonna ask you what uh- this was at the time, of course the UAW was really getting underway-

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Late '36, early '37. What uh- were you and your colleagues at Wayne doing? Were you involved in any of these sit-downs or the strike and picket lines that sprang up?

MENTON: We- well I'll tell you one incident. This was in the- When was the Kelsey-Hayes strike?

PFLUG: That would of been December, 1936. Just- they settled just before Christmas.

MENTON: Yes. Yes. That's what I thought.

PFLUG: Right.

MENTON: Uh- I got a - I was in class and a dean of students, Joe Seldon's assistant came to the class and said, called me out and said that there was a phone call for me from- uh- in Dean Seldon's office. And, so I went there and a phone call was from Walter Reuther. He said, uh- our guys are all sitting down and our guys are Merlin Bishop, George Edwards uh- and Vic Reuther. And they're workers milling around on the outside. Nobody seems- They don't know what to do.

PFLUG: This is at the Kelsey-Hayes plant out on the west side of Detroit.

MENTON: Yeah. The Kelsey-Hayes. Uh- plant. So we got one of the few students who had a car and we stopped at the temporar- what were the headquarters at that time or we were given picket signs and handbills uh- and a group of students- I got to gather the group of students- with Dean Seldon's permission - you can go- I couldn't stop you anyhow.

PFLUG: Gave you the day off.

MENTON: Yeah. I couldn't stop you people anyhow and besides Walt is going to turn out a credit to the university.

PFLUG: Sooner or later. (Laughter).

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- so, we arrived at plant gate. There were Vic Reuther

and Merlin Bishop and George Edwards up the plant gate and you know we started distributing picket lines and uh-

PFLUG: So there were some people inside the plant.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: And they're sitting down.

MENTON: Yeah. The leaders were all sitting down but some of the people were out. Uh- or awfully reluctant to picket. At that time the newspapers had all sorts of caricatures of pickets and people carrying signs; not like today. And uh- we radical and left liberal students had no reservations and no embarrassment about it and before we got the workers to - were milling around with the help of George Edwards who is a good singer ~~from~~ among other things uh- taught him the refrain of Solidarity Forever and one song was very popular in picket lines in early days. Two of 'em was Soup, Soup, Soup by Morrey Sugar and the one was a little ditty- I don't know how it got started- it was the tune of uh- Mademoiselle from Armentiers when a scab dies he goes to hell, when a scab dies he goes to hell- inky-dinky parlez-vous.

PFLUG: I hadn't heard that one. The soup song I've heard mostly.

- MENTON: Yeah. Well, that was a very popular one. We got them sing, sing-single song. And then after the picket line was going, I reported ba- got back to Walt's office and uh- so everything's going alright and he thanked us for the cooperation of picket line going and if you ever need us again just call us.
- PFLUG: You became sort of volunteer pickets.
- MENTON: Yeah. Or else we also handbilled plants.
- PFLUG: Kind of a student flying squadron.
- MENTON: Yeah. We handbilled plants, talked to workers as they were leaving- some of us. Uh- we also, some of our members did voluntary work for uh- in the union offices which didn't have much funds- many funds. For example, my girlfriend, Jean Scott, uh- helped May Reuther with the typing and running the mimeograph machine.
- PFLUG: I suspect just about all their help was volunteer at that time, wasn't it?
- MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. And uh- much of it came from the students. Uh- especially from the American Student Union and other young people and members of Young People's Socialist League.
- PFLUG: I think this is an important point to make that uh- there were many other groups of people involved in these strikes other than

the uh- the ~~people~~ ^{plants} people in the, the auto workers themselves. Like, you know, student groups and I suspect other groups in the community who may have been pro-labor uh- get involved as well.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: So it was really more than just a strike of the auto workers.

MENTON: Well.

PFLUG: Well, Kelsey-Hayes is a big sample. Here you had George Edwards who had an M.A. for Harvard; you had Vic Reuther and I think that's the only time he ever worked in the plant; Merlin Bishop, according to Vic Reuther's account was a factory worker as Mel Bishop who was a tool and die maker and uh- These uh- Many of the uh- Much of the organizational work and this comes out in John W. Anderson's account, uh- came from, not factory workers but intellectuals, radicalized intellectuals entered the plants for the opera- becau- because I saw at that time the union movement, particularly the CIO as a vehicle to bring about the Socialist revolution. This was the first stage. And uh- even among the factory workers, as John W. Anderson points out, uh- many such as himself were political. Anderson was a member of the Socialist party, a person who

played a very important role up in Flint in the strike was Kerma Johnson who was a factory worker and son of a factory worker, the son of a socialist, Carl Johnson and there were a number of others. Some were communist; some were members of the Proletarian Party; some like John Pansner were ex-Wobblies and Pansner at that time was an ex-member of the Socialist Party but came to all the social activities and identified later with the- all the way through with the Reuther caucus. There were people like that. One of early, effective movements was the Mechanics Education Society of America which was led by Matt Smith who was a British uh- was British who was a left-winger- and never a communist.

PFLUG: Well, that is the union that big John Anderson came out of and brought a lot of people from MESA into the UAW I guess late '36 and he certainly was to the left.

MENTON: Yeah. Well, after- uh- Matt Smith thought he was more left than some of the others. As a matter of fact he never took out his citizenship, because he was such an internationalist. And he never met- for ~~a~~ long time he wouldn't make any contracts- written contracts 'cause this would tie the hands, of the uh-

of the union that's bargaining, you have to take a no-strike pledge and he would never do that.

PFLUG: Well, you were also involved, then, in the sit-downs up at Flint.

MENTON: Not exactly. At the- the strike was going on and uh- that time I switched to social work.

PFLUG: Were you still in school at this time?

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Uh- and the welfare load increased so much as a result of the strike that I needed extra special people and the Wayne University School of Social Work was contacted and so was Dean Seldon and he was most cooperative. I'd restored myself as a student, made up all my incompletes and was starting to get good grades again, so he gave me and my girlfriend and one other member of the American Student Union permission to leave our classes as long as we could make arrangements with our teachers uh- to go up to Flint. The first thing I did was contact Roy Reuther and uh-

PFLUG: Who had been there for quite a while before the sit-downs.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And uh- he was delighted. He had a fear that uh- some of the strikers, not those who were sitting down,

because they weren't an official- they wouldn't be eligible for relief, but their families were and there were rather liberalized- well, Governor Murphy was a very liberal governor. And those who weren't striking, weren't sitting down, weren't considered strikers and they had a feeling that some of their- the UAW members were getting the runaround and so they were happy to have two or three -

PFLUG: A friend on welfare department.

MENTON: Yeah. On each side. And I maneuvered myself into the position of being the man who- at the reception desk and wore UAW Buttons

PFLUG: So when the UAW people came in then they-

MENTON: They got preferential treatment, yeah. Yeah, well they didn't know that but they got preferential treatment, I'd make sure that they'd be taken care of first. There was discrimination in reverse.

PFLUG: I think this would be a good place to stop and turn the tape over.

MENTON: Yeah.

Warner Pflug- Stoyan Menton.

Tape 2- Side 2.

MENTON: On our off hours we attended union meetings and rallies and spent a great deal of time in the apartment of Kerma and Genora Johnson where Vic, or rather Roy was a frequent visitor and uh- Hi and Fauna Fish who later on became Mrs. Roy Reuther. The Johnsons were rather interesting people.

PFLUG: Yeah.

MENTON: I reread the uh- Curly Krause's The Many and the Few.

PFLUG: Yes, he does not treat Kermit Johnson very well.

MENTON: No. No. No. And uh- and very unfairly as a matter of fact.

PFLUG: Krause wrote the book from a certain viewpoint.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Tended to emphasize some people-

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. A Stalinist view. Matter of fact, it was like Howard Fast and some of the- waiting for leftie. Nothing happened until Bob Travis came and uh-^{he} even underplays Roy's role in it. Travis whom I met at conversations with Roy, introduced us to all the leaders. Uh- well, until they came, and he^{id} ignore a lot of people, and uh- almost ridicul^de Kermit. Everything revolved around Travis. Nothing was happening. I met Curly Krause, up there at that time, too.

PFLUG: I had never heard him given that nickname before, "Curly. I can understand where it came from, but I had never heard that before.

MENTON: Yeah. Well, that was his nickname. It's a very good book except that it's biased and the first time I read it, I got it as a gift from the west side local when I was in the hospital- the second time and a lot of signatures of the whole education committee and everything else. I was rather angered by this. One of the things he brought out was that Kermit would jump the fence and go home. There was a very good reason for it. Genora was just released from a tuberculosis sanitarium and she was still undergoing numo-thorax treatment. And they had a young child at home.

PFLUG: So he had to go and take care of his home while he was-

MENTON: Well, he was very much concerned about her.

PFLUG: Sure. And that doesn't come out in the account.

MENTON: That doesn't come out at all.

PFLUG: I guess there probably a lot of guys who did jump the fence but not for legitimate reasons like -

MENTON: No. But he- but he jumped in again.

PFLUG: And came back.

MENTON: Yeah. He came back again. I knew the Johnson's from my days, the Young People's Socialist League- I was still a member

of the Young People's Socialist League and I used to come down to Detroit very often and to the Young People's Socialist League affairs. She composed a song. They had a circle up there. A very interesting song to the tune of There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight and never forget the tune, the ditty:

Come and sing and cheer;
The YPSOL gang is here.
We have a plan to tell
~~And I can honestly~~ excel.
In economic we

(Laughter). And it goes on and on like that. Then we visited Carl Johnson... ~~he~~ was one of the steady, socialists up there, a former Deb- he was a Debsy

PFLUG: This was Kermit's father?

MENTON: Yeah. Uh- What happened to Genora- she's out in California I was told.

PFLUG: Yes. Yeah.

MENTON: Genora, among the socialists, became a sort of Jean D'Arc because of the role she played in breaking the windows and the plant was tear gas and uh- she was a very effective, fiery type of speaker.

PFLUG: She still is.

MENTON:

Yeah. She was a good-looking woman and Kermit at that time was a handsome young man and um- Olga Shol- not Olga Shol- Gus Tyler- August Tyler at that time was the leader of one of several revolutionary factions of the Socialist Party and I came to Detroit, this was after the Flint strike and he and I, at that time was drifting away from a revolutionary position. I was a damn right-winger. And uh- Gus and I- I saw him about fifteen years ago at a conference and he remembered some of the arguments and I said, my you've changed and he went up to Flint. And Gus was a very effective person and a very handsome guy. Last time I saw him he still is handsome. And uh- so he got her to join the caucus, the revolutionary caucus. And uh- then I think she join the Trotskyist faction as did little John Anderson and uh- they were expelled from the Socialist party about 1937 or '38 and they came in about '35. I was all for expelling them. I was against their coming into the party and a number of us were. I developed some very good friendships with 'em as we did, so she left with the Socialist Worker's Party and uh- left Kermit Johnson, too. ~~He~~ remained in the ^{117.} ~~We made~~ a Socialist party

PFLUG: He stayed in the Socialist Party ^{ET}

MENTON: Yeah. And uh- Kermit sort of drifted into obscurity. I met him many years later. His father was a student up at the FDR- CIO Labor Center and uh- Kermit and his new wife had come and his father told me the sad story- that Kermit had become an alcoholic but he was on the wagon and Alcoholics Anonymous and married a schoolteacher who was studying for law but he was bloated, he just lost his good looks completely; he was extremely nervous. But you know the story of Genora and ~~Genora~~ for being beaten.

PFLUG: Yes.

MENTON: The last time I remember seeing Genora, I was with Frank ~~Frank~~ ^{Margaret Marcourt}.

It was after the beatings. We had an accident encounter with her out on the street and uh- the beating disfigured her somewhat and she was telling us the terrible psychological effects.

PFLUG: Maybe you could explain this beating incident just a little bit so- for people using this interview better have some idea of what it is we're talking about.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Well, this is going way ahead- the Briggs' beating. Uh-and this, these beatings occurred about 1946, right?

PFLUG: I think so, yes.

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. Uh- a number of officers and activist in the ~~the~~ Briggs' local including Ken Morris, somebody else who is not mentioned for some reason or another, secretary treasurer of the Local 212 was beaten so badly that he was mentally disabled and Genora Johnson was beaten in her home. Uh- we thought what first we thought was a communist. Uh- but it seemed that members of all different factions were being beaten and that the beatings were done by professionals. They would not- uh- well, they would give e'm a going over in such a way that the victims could not identify 'em and see 'em and uh- well, they would damage 'em, they wouldn't kill 'em. They used blackjacks and other kinds of things. That these were real professional, strong-armed men who were hired. Later on, according to Vic's account and even before that, it was a tie in with the-some tie-in with the Reuther shootings- Brenda and - Briggs' son-in-law was involved in this but for a long time we didn't know who it was.

PFLUG: Well uh- Well, we can kind of get back chronologically to where we were.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: Another event early in '37, of course was the battle of the overpass and since you were so close to Walter in those years, did you have any involvement or did you see him at all aft- shortly after that? This would have been May of '37?

MENTON: May of 1937 I was just asking myself why I wasn't bigger. Bob Canter was there-

PFLUG: Canter and Frankenstein were there.

MENTON: Frankenstein and others. And that was after the second anti-war strike. I might have been ~~been~~ cramming for the finals. I don't know.

PFLUG: Like the story ~~Smil~~ ~~Matey~~ tells. He was on his way, but the Dearborn police picked him up and he spent the time in jail instead of getting to the battle.

MENTON: Yeah.

PFLUG: But I thought I would just ask that because it is such a big event in the history of the UAW that maybe you would have seen Walter right after that and his comments about-

MENTON: No. I saw them after that. Yeah. So he was still a member of the Socialist Party, then. And uh- Canter I saw a great deal of; I knew Frankenstein uh- and got first-hand accounts of what had happened, but why I wasn't there maybe I- I suppose perhaps

because I wasn't asked. At that particular point they really didn't need us. That might have been a reason. At one time, they needed all of the student help but the UAW was getting on its feet and had its own paid staff.

PFLUG:

Well, then up 'til at least until the time the United States entered the war, you were still involved in various anti-war activities and anti-war strikes.

MENTON:

Well this- we could talk about the 1937 strike, anti-war strike. I-lost recollection of it until Bob Canter, whom I saw this summer at a meeting of the American Sociological Association where I see him almost every year at one of the conferences, remembered Lula Martin and Eleanor Poperno- now Eleanor Poperno-Wolf coming to the UAW office and asking for a sound truck for the second anti-war strike. And uh- apparently I was on the committee again. I believe I was the chairman of the American Student Union, so I don't know why- Dorothy Detser, the national chair person or president of the International League for Peace and Freedom, was to be the main speaker. Uh- this time the, according to the reading between the lines of the

Collegian and scratching my memory, the administration gave us permission to use the uh- school property uh- and they also restored our recognition as a official student organization. But it fizzled for two reasons according to Collegian, now I remember. It was a heavy rainstorm and we moved into the auditorium and hardly anybody showed up. Here we had about a thousand students before. Many of the organizations that supported us were on the original anti-war strike committee were opposed to it this time.

PFLUG: In '37.

MENTON: Yeah. The student council endorsed the first strike but they turned against us because of our defiance to the administration. They opposed us as a vote of 6-2. I was on the student council; another American student union member Philis Eronson were on it and uh- even if it hadn't rained it would of fizzled.

PFLUG: It's curious your unofficial rally was a success but the official sponsored one fizzled then .

MENTON: Yeah. Well, many of 'em, I think many of em were scared off by what had happened. They were scared off by what had happened to -

PFLUG: The people from the paper.

MENTON:

the editor ^{the} on the paper and uh- disagreed with us on defying the administration and made us disreputable and here we had permission. But perhaps part of the reason we got a big crowd was that we were ²⁴⁹ forbidden fruit.

PFLUG:

~~_____~~ ²⁴⁹ B. Right.

MENTON:

And at that time the former NCL uh- YCL uh- members of the American Student Union who were cooling off on the idea, the Communist party line was shifting way over to the collective security at united front. Let's contain the growth of fascism , nazi-ism. Russia was- they felt threatened justifiably by Hitler and uh- so they were'nt very enthusiastic about the - the anti-war strike at that particular time. Well, this finally led, by the way to the split-off and the socialists walking out of the American Student Union, reconstituting the Student League for Industrial Democracy. That was the last anti-war strike. And it fizzled everywhere.

PFLUG:

But even after that strike you were still engaged in anti-war activities-

MENTON:

Yeah.

PFLUG: ... and working in various groups and so on. Um- I noticed for example you indicate that in 1941 you were a field organizer for Keep America Out of the War committee.

MENTON: Yeah, well there's quite a story there.

PFLUG: What was this committee. The title explains it but who organized it- what sort of people were in it?

MENTON: Uh- basically a Norman Thomas type socialist, pacifists, Quakers, pacifists of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and there were some other pacifist organization. Uh- socialists supported it for different reasons. Some because of pacificism, others because of uh- not because they were pacifists but believed in the- what now appears in retrospect to be a ridiculous position. To fight a war- not a capitalistic war against fascism but a workers war against fascism. Uh- there were- I - the reason I took that position was I - after I got out of college I had a rather rough time of it.

PFLUG: Well, you graduated when?

MENTON: In '37. And well, I took a little trip out west and our first sane greeting I got when I got back was somebody I think was

Fauna Fish who spent a great deal of time in the Socialist Party headquarters doing volunteer work. Um- then somebody else- I thought it was an irresponsible thing to do- Stoy, we had a job lined up for you.in the union. I don't know what job it was.

PFLUG: This was in the UAW?

MENTON: Yeah. Or some union. And your traipsing around the country - nobody knew where you were. Even your parents- we dropped postcard or gone , you know, almost two months. Uh- I got a bad cold and never recovered from. My girlfriend was disgusted and left me because of what I'd done and I had a hell of a time finding a job. My health broke down and I winded up with tuberculosis. Woodcock had just come out of the sanitarium- same one . I was taken down to Herman Kiefer and I just couldn't see myself in that regimented condition so I called up Woodcock asked him^f what hospital he was in and it was Detroit Tuberculosis Sanitarium. Well, he reacted the same way. He was in it a somewhat longer- for two years. I fortunately was able to take the numo-thorax and have a lung collapsed. Been a rather miserable period in some ways

but I got a hell of a lot of visitors. After the Reuther beatings in the home, you know, that episode, I got a first-hand report of it from Al Caine and several others were there who visited me. May vi- Walt never visited me. Leonard visited me with his first wife and he brought me a lot of books. And then he sent his wife back again and saying he wasn't going to visit me any- again because it brought memories- Of his stay in the hospital.

PFLUG:

MENTON:

His stay in the hospital. And she says, frankly I won't either because it brings back memories of me. And uh- for a long time I was a semi-invalid. I- my lung was collapsed. I was limited- there were limitations of what I could do. I was an ambulatory patient and uh- Well, a period I was a special investigator for Detroit Welfare Department during one of the periodic dips in the recovery and I liked dishing out emergency relief but were tried me out on social casework and these were a hard core poor and I became so depressed and so I was transferred to certify people for the white collar projects and the uh- these were very enviable positions: \$20.00 a week for twenty hours work and I did some very productive stuff. And

my - Frank Marcoy²⁷⁸ was working or on it; several of my friends were working on the writer's project. There was a theatre project and so I quit and applied for welfare then and I was living at home and just then my father got the job.

PFLUG: (Laughter). So you couldn't qualify.

MENTON: I couldn't qualify. And I couldn't go back. My job Welfare Department was filled. Quite a few people did. This one story that went around was that the uh- I had it all set up for the writer's project. I saw Dorothy Hubbard or Merlin Bishop and they didn't have any adult education then but I knew the uh- one of the person who was directing the uh- writer's project who former director of the American Youth Congress and I was an executive board member. And he was CP; became very conservative shortly afterwards and a very successful advertising man. And uh- I had a job all set but I couldn't qualify. One of the stories that I heard at- there was one woman who couldn't qualify because she had too many sa-as much savings. A couple hundred bucks. And uh- so she through a big party - a weekend celebration

PFLUG: Tryin' to spend all the money.

MENTON: To spend all the money.

PFLUG: Then she qualified.

MENTON: Yes. And I remember one celebration and uh-John Pansner's house. John Pansner got a job and the two boarders- one was Art Kent and I forgot who the other one is- Art Kent was a former organizer of the the Socialist Party here. Walked out when the- after the Socialist Party went left wing. And it was a triple celebration, I think. John Pansner got a job as a pattern maker and Art Kent got a job - on the white collar project and the other guy had a job too. So they bought themselves a lot of liquor - I did happen to run into 'em.

PFLUG: I think this tape is about to run out so we can stop and uh- put in another.

~~MENTON:~~

PFLUG: Oh, that's fine. Yeah.

MENTON: Yeah.

END OF TAPE 2- SIDE 2.

TAPE 3 - SIDE 1.

Warner Pflug - Stoyan Menton.

PFLUG:

O.K. I think we can pick up where we left off.

MENTON:

Yeah. Well, I didn't qualify and uh- oh, I tried all sorts of jobs but I was hanging around the Socialist Party headquarters all the time. My living room, my parents' living room, became a gathering place for all those who were unemployed or didn't have anything to do. So many- very nice aspects. I had an excuse for not working in a way and I- 'cause I was still ungergoing numo-thorax. There was another episode in between when I started getting involved in the labor movement. Bill Jenkins who later on became one of the rank and file leaders to the- leaders of the rank and file caucas. He was a- quite a remarkable fellow, in many ways. He was a hillbilly. Extremely intelligent; a very articulate person uh- married Betty Smith who's now Betty Downs. She joined th Socialist Party. She was part of the Student League for Ind^ustrial Democracy group. Uh- so Bill decided to have workers' education classes. Woodcock did this for a while in the transition period, too. Picked up ad-hoc "Bj" and workers' education according to his oral history and according to my accounts. So I taught labor history.

| ?

PFLUG: What sort of groups were you teaching ?

MENTON: This was in his local, 490, your factory workers. One very bright person ~~in the~~ ^{at} class who knew a great deal and this is why some of the workers are very intelligent. Irving Capilowitz turned out here. Was a Trotskyist from Minneapolis and had a college degree. Later on became Irving Cobby. He went back to college after he became disillusioned with all forms of radicalism and he's now one of the outstanding logicians. He's much published and uh- then the Neisner strike, Tucker Smith was the uh- came from Brookwood who came to Detroit uh- became a national board member of the CIO retail clerks etcetera, etcetera union and the uh- head of the organization in Detroit. The Neisner strike was a strike against a Cleveland-based chain stores.

PFLUG: Does the till still exist?

MENTON: No, it's a big enl mv ⁴².

PFLUG: Yeah, I think there is still some around because of the old dime stores were-

MENTON: Yeah. Yeah. So, Bill Jenkins was put temporarily on the staff. He was a part-time president. The only full-time officer. There was a financial secretary and the secretary, Betty Jarowski, I think her name was- big Betty. And uh- so he was anxious to get something full time then temporarily. I was put on the staff and I was assigned two stores: one in Highland Park and one on John R. near

6 Mile Road- picket captain and occasionally - this made me feel rather guilty- we would walk in the store and scare the hell out of the manager. The police were most cooperative. I think, it's in one of the newspapers, but I think on the part of the police result of a certain amount of anti-semitism. It was a Jewish firm with Jewish managers so I was told by the police, the Detroit policemen was unassigned and uh- a Highland Park policeman, whom I knew, he was a neighbor of mine, and start anything- let me know and we'll walk away or pull our guys away. Uh- well- uh- we were'nt getting anywhere. It was in the first strikes that got any sympathetic support from the Detroit newspapers- thought that the uh- Neisners were being very obstinate. So, they still didn't give in. Well, then it was planned to give' em some real rough stuff. And they had picket leaders. People assigned to different stores throughout the city. And there were- we had - got factory workers joining the girls and others in the different stores and somebody was supposed to give us some kind of a signal when the stores was gonna be invaded and smashed up. They smashed up one.

Bill Kensick recalled ones going- one that was smashed up and how much fun they had smashing- going on this rampage.

PFLUG: But the police didn't try to stop you.

MENTON: No. Didn't try to stop them. Fortunately, my store was not selected. I was rather happy about that or maybe I missed a good time going on a rampage of vandalism for a great cause. Well, the company capitulated. They were ready to sign an agreement, and almost overnight, it was announced that they signed an agreement with the teamsters. Sweetheart agreement. A union shop. checkoff, and no changes in working conditions.

PFLUG: The whole works, huh?

MENTON: And uh- several- our guys when they try to talk to the workers, were beaten up very badly- Tucker Smith was beaten up very badly- took him a long time to recover from the emotional shock as well as some of the physical damage done- a professional job. Pop bottles full of BBshots. He said if it weren't for his bushy head and thick skull they might of cracked it. And uh- so, knowing my condition, was told, we can't use you 'cause if you take a beating like this you would be killed. We used- they also used a number of fired Ford workers. This happened just

before the Ford strike.

PFLUG: In '41.

MENTON: Yeah, '41. And they were a brave bunch. They were beaten up by the Ford goons and now they were being beaten up by the Teamster's goons. They were just used to being beaten up, but it was a hopeless business and Tucker finally- the others decided- well you can't- if you can't- you can't fight this kind of intimidation. And uh- so Neisner became dominated by the teamsters. Uh- well, then I was offered the job of being, after a period of unemployment again, I was offered a job of being a field organizer for the "Keep America Out Of The War" Committee. And a field organizer for several states: for Ohio, Kentucky-northern Kentucky- and West Virginia.

PFLUG: What were your duties then as a field organizer?

MENTON: Uh, to recruit people to attend the conference. It was at that point, when , after meeting the kinds of people, starry-eyed pacifists and even some America. first types- uh- who were anti-semitic and pro-Hitler that I decided that I become pro-interventionist. Now Woodcock had already left so he was on the national executive board of the Socialist Party. In his biography over that issue, he

was in the first- along with Paul Porter and Arthur MacDowall to break with the party. And uh- so I wrote- oh- one of the turning points is that the- my contact from Columbus, Ohio was a member of the coordinating committee there. Was also a member of the America first and I was his houseguest.

PFLUG: That must have made for an interesting stay.

MENTON: Yeah, and I had. He was a very nice guy. Lived in this great, big mansion. He was an editor of some kind of advertising magazine. And I went to this rally. Lindberg was a speaker; so was um- Senator Phil Lafollet who was starting his own movement at that time- a Fascistic type of movement. And uh- Lindberg, well he wasn't exactly anti-Semitic. He would make references to Jewish bankers and Jewish names uh- as being interventionists and the crowd would boo and jeer and Phil Lafollet was doing the same thing and Norman Thomas at one rally, which really hurt him for a long time, appeared with and America First uh- meeting and so I sent into- a tele- long telegram collect saying I've changed my mind. I ^{am} no longer for Keep America ^{is} Out Of The War. I'm now an interventionist.

PFLUG: That did you out of a job right there then, didn't it?

MENTON: No they said- well, uh- we'll send you your check, attend the conference

and you'll get a ride back home- we'll pay your expenses here. These were pacifists. There were some nice people. Then I went back and I became one of the active people in the so-called interventionist faction of the Socialist Party. You recall the state convention of the Socialist Party that year and where the issue was debated. Apparently I did a- quite a good job in presenting the interventionist position. Frank was still a purist and Manny Sidler was arguing against me and both of 'em came up afterwards said, you won the debate but we got- we wond the vote. So Frank thought, at that time, I didn't know him too well - and he and I became good friends. We were^s debating partnership- friendship. We had arguments over Marxism, Leninism and so forth . Also I - the Chicago convention- Young People Socialist League shortly after - I was the one who drafted a pro-interventionist resolution.

PFLUG: This would have been in early in '41 then.

MENTON: Yes, this was in the summer. both of these events were in the summer of '41. This one in Chicago. We were- and I think the majority of Detroit Young Socialist League members supported it. We were split. Well we lost- we won the debate we thought.

PFLUG: And lost the war.

MENTON: And lost the war.

Uh- Then I came back and decided I really needed a job so I took a civil service job or it was called Junior Technical Clerk- It's now called Junior Personnel Aide. Uh- and passed it with flying colors. Now Francis King was the assistant- or vice-executive secretary. Francis King was an important member of the Socialist Party with Branch 1 and L.I.O.¹⁸⁵ I knew him for a long time. His background was engineering but he went into the civil service. So I passed the test so I'd have a good job. Uh- and I joined the uh- the CIO stat, County, Municipal Workers Union. Bill Lamson, who who wanted a civil service job at that time and so did Ernest Masey and we were the anti-Stalinist faction. And- within the uh- civil service set-up. I was in the career. These were- the classification I was in- career classification and was testing uh- and I told- I was so bored with it and Frank was then educational director of Local 600. So, he asked me to teach some classes for him. Uh- I think I taught public speaking, I sat in his classes on grievance procedure; I taught some parliamentary procedure. I believe Larry Ozes ~~was~~ was his assistant then- or was it Al Tracy- uh- There was one very bright young man in one of my classes- he was older than I but young. Uh- at that time a man with a Southern accent read some books and wanted to discuss them with

me- I don't know which class it was, Later on- that was Ed Lee and uh- I told Frank about this man. I said, look use this fellow. He's articulate; his grammar isn't perfect but he- and he's very intelligent. And later on he became Frank's assistant and I think, for a while, education director of Local 600. I'm not sure about that. Uh- well, at that the Ford locals were under the UAW administrat^fship. Uh- Dick Leonard was the director of the Ford division and somehow or another along the line I got to know Dick Leonard and Frank sugge- got a request to uh- either teach or find somebody to teach classes at Local 400 and uh- parliamentary procedure. And uh- I think it was Dick Leonard or one of his aides who says, you know what you're getting into. They're a bunch of wildmen.

PFLUG: This is at the Ford Highland Park Plant.

MENTON: Yeah. Ford Highland Park Plant. Yeah. And uh- but go ahead. And they were. But I taught them parliamentary procedure. So I was still working for the civil service commission so they just- they decided uh- that they agreed with Dick Leonard and Frank Mark where they oughta have a

full time education director because the local is expanding- they could afford it and I was suggested for the position. Uh- the real power group at that time consisted of Joe Bailey, uh- Ben Garrison, uh- an ex-gangster Al Ponzay - Poncho we called him uh- a Highland Park hoodlum by the name of Joe Rigolroy and uh- they interviewed me. I'll never forget the interview uh- Joe Rigolroy decided to put me to the test whether I could take a bunch of pencils with the points sticking up and he broke the points off. (Laughter).

PFLUG: What did you do about that?

MENTON: He had nice shiny shoes so I rubbed my shoes- the soles of my shoes over his shiny shoes.

PFLUG: You passed the test then.

MENTON: And I was told that Joe said, you've passed the test. (Laughter).

PFLUG: That's an interesting way to hire an education director.

MENTON: Pardon? Yeah. Well, uh- they thought maybe I was too much of a sissy. I was thin, I was educated- I had a college education and all of that uh- Well, as I said before, most of my- a lot of my friends from the Yugoslav or Slovenian organizations were working class and they were pretty tough guys too. Lots of fights and so forth. I knew how to handle situations like that.

And I thought Well, I might as well do something. Nothing to lose. I still had a job. But I insisted, knowing what the situation was, Dick Leonard and Monroe Lake who was his assis- one of his assistants told me about the background of Local 400. Ken Bannon goes into it somewhat. Bill Oliver doesn't. The Ford Motor Company policy was a parole uh- people out of Jackson prison. Ford's motivations, might of been humanitarian. He was a very complex type of person in a sort of simple way. Uh- and - but Bennett who was an extremely intelligent man uh- like tough guys- liked to be a tough guy and so uh- a lot of people were paroled out-gangsters and also there was a Michigan dealers which Ken Bannon mentions.

PFLUG: A Michigan Dealers?

MENTON: Yeah. Division. It was a division of the Ford Highland Park Plant which uh- packaged parts and replacements and this particular division consisted -not entirely- but were a large percentage of disbarred lawyers- uh- one of their committeemen was a cashiered-out- court martialled uh- cavalry officer. Uh- swindlers, con-men; some who were arrested, some were simply disbarred- guys on the production line were more apt to be the Italian uh- toughs. Some of 'em were bootleggers and gunmen-

PFLUG: A real collection of people.

MENTON: Oh, yes. And uh- by the way, many of these guys made very good union members. The ones that we didn't trust were these lawyers. Uh- I recall one of 'em; he was a man who was very ambitious. His name was Carmen Martin. Turned out uh- and this is an episode in itself- he was close to the first president- elected president of Local 400- a man by the name of Milard Durante who was a disbarred lawyer. Uh- who asked me to stay on. And uh- Al Ponzay said, watch that guy. He's a crook and uh- and he said, he's been to Jackson and he's a crook. I said, go to hell. You've been to Jackson and you've been a crook, too. But he said, but he's a creep crook.

(Laughter).

PFLUG: There's a distinction, right?

MENTON: And he was right, after we found out later on. This guy was a real creep. And I heard two stories that he was a spy- not only at Ford's but in Jackson prison- a stool pigeon. Uh- well, uh- to make sure that, knowing what the situation was and then Franks' advice- he did the same thing. Uh- well I had the executive board approve of me but the District committeemen's body which was a very powerful group and the Ford locals and then the general membership as well as the director. This gave Frank and me some security. The president uh-

PFLUG: The presidents could come and go but you had the backing of the membership.

MENTON: Yeah, the membership especially the real- the two important, powerful uh- groups were the- was the district committeemen's body and the uh- Plant bargaining committee. They were the most desirable- especially the plant bargaining committee attracted usually the most able people. Uh- well, so I continued teaching parlia- I was hired full- time and uh- I recall one of the very early meetings- it was for the committeemen's body and there - it was a great- this was in their hall on Victor Avenue. Uh- moved from a smaller quarters to the big quarters on Vicotr Avenue. John Eldon was then uh- I don't know what his position- he was in education- he was at one time education director and he was an enthusiast about audio-visual education and he talked me into having a showing of movies before the meeting started. And uh- he started showing these movies. They were pretty good. He didn't know when to stop.

PFLUG: Never got around to the meeting then.

MENTON: Yeah. And the guys were getting real angry. And Hal Ponzetti and some of the others started to pull out the plug. Al - uh-

so I put my foot on his hand and Hal was ready to take a poke at him and somebody took a poke at him and John Alden picked up his uh- equipment and he said, Stoy, I'm leaving, I'm not coming back. If I were you, I would do the same thing. Well- uh- as education director I had a rather interesting - more rule than education director. They voted make training for committeemen compulsory, so at that time I didn't know anything about it, so I attended some of Franks' courses and I used Monroe Lake and, from the international representatives uh- the help and later on through them I learned a great deal about uh- grievance handling but then they found out it was illegal, unconstitutional to make this a requirement. However, it was decided that after the committeemen were elected they were supposed to come and see me. I would hand them all these amterials uh- some were materials that Frank and I wrote together and put out- printed uh- jointly. Throughout my local would be my name as director and of course 600 would be his local. And a contract and I was supposed to sign a slip and they would get their steward's badge and credentials and I'd give 'em some brief instructions on how to use a book and so forth and I would

suggest their attending classes. Uh- Ken Bannon, as experienced as he was, had to go through that.

PFLUG: I bet he appreciated that.

MENTON: No, he was most cooperative. Uh- I also was required to attend all the committeemen's body and uh- I was learning so much about grievances. I was helping them write grievances, uh- for the committeemen with a voice but no vote and I was put on a terrible spot several times. There would be big controversies so they would turn to me and get my opinion and my analysis of the uh- grievances. I remember one guy that wanted to beat me up- he was so mad because of you don't have a grievance there.

PFLUG: I think we're gonna have to stop. We're about out of tape, I think.

INTERVIEWEE: Stoyan Menton
INTERVIEWER: Warner Pflug
SUBJECT: Career in LOCAL 400
DATE: 11th November, 1981
TRANSCRIBER: Linda M. Swiderski

Pflug: This is a continuation of the interview with Stoyan Menton. The date is November 11th, 1981. The interview is being conducted at the Walter Reuther Library by Warner Pflug.

Yesterday we had talked some about your work as education director at 400, and maybe if we could just go over some of that again now that we have a tape recorder.

Menton: Yes. I don't know where we left off, that was five years ago. So yesterday was five years ago.

Pflug: You started to mention, discuss some of the people who were active in the local. You had discussed the fact that Harry Bennett had sent some of his people over to work in the Ford Highland Park plant.

Menton: Yes. Frank ^{Markboard} and I were old friends. I was working ^{Marquart} for the Detroit Civil Service Commission in the testing division and I felt the prospect of being a civil service bureaucrat was quite dreary. Everything was too predictable. Frank ^{Marquart} and I were good friends from the Socialist Party and, of course, I knew Walter and Emile [?] all from the branch ² of the Socialist Party, before branch ² ~~II~~. Frank, at that time was education director of Local 400. All the Ford locals, this is in early 1942. . . .

Pflug: Excuse me, was he 400 or 600?

Menton: Who Frank?

Pflug: Yes.

Menton: Frank was 600. That was the big local. Willard Martinson was an education director of 50, the bomber local at Willow Run. Frank had me teach some courses part-time, after work; I was working at the Civil Service Commission, parliamentary procedure mostly. Dick Leonard wanted an education director ^{of THE FORD} ~~for~~ a Highland Park local, Local 400. At that time the Ford locals were under ^{an} administratorship. They didn't receive their autonomy. Frank recommended me. Dick knew me slightly, and I knew Dick slightly too. I had an interview with Dick, and he said, 'You don't know what you're getting into, ^{story} One reason we need an education director there is to tame that wild bunch. It was the wildest of all memberships, full of ex-convicts, retired gangsters trying to get jobs in war plants to avoid the draft. ^{one of} The things that you want to teach them is parliamentary procedure. All our meetings are chaos.' Something to that effect. Well, I accepted that as a challenge and he suggested, 'well, conduct a couple of classes there part-time so those guys can size you up and you can size them up.' Well the first couple of classes I had were ^{for} parliamentary procedure. And I must admit I had a hard time taming some ^{of the} fellows, getting order. I managed to get order and they started listening and asking questions. I think some of them--yeah, they told me later on--were deliberately giving me a hard time to see how I could take it, a matter of sizing me up.

Pflug: Didn't you indicate somewhere that many of these ex-convicts, people that Harry Bennet^t had put in there, ended up being good members of the union.

Menton: Yeah.

Pflug: How do you suppose that came about? Was it the result of your educational activities?

Menton: Oh, no. (Laughter) ^{A lot} ~~One~~ of them were, especially the Italians, came from a working class background, and had a basic loyalty to the working class. That's their explanation to me. I discussed this with them and they would tell me about their backgrounds. A few of them were members of the young communists league at one time.

Pflug: Some of these ex-convicts were?

Menton: Yeah. This is a rather interesting bridge path, the communist party and Al Lovansetti (sp?), who was a real hoodlum, was telling me, and also Micky Marcon, it was Marconi, who were both ex-members of the mob, they were very much impressed by the Communist Party in the 1930's when people in the Italian neighborhoods and other neighborhoods were being evicted, and the Communists Unemployed Union, is that the . . .

Pflug: Unemployed Council

Menton: Yes. . . would put the furniture back. These young hoodlums who made a living hijacking, or guarding beer trucks from rival hijackers, got very involved. That was their speed. An illegal activity, but serving a good social purpose; serving their people. So they joined the Communist Party or the Young Communist League. Both went broke because of the, they were good Catholics primarily and they didn't like a ⁸⁹ atheism of the Communist Party. But they had a basic loyalty, people like that, to identify with the blue collar workers, the working class.

Pflug: In your resume that you sent me quite some time ago, you indicated that one of your activities was resolving ethnic and racial problems that existed in the local in the plant. I'm interested in what you did in that area. And, of course, you also would have been there during the '43 riot.

Menton: Yeah, I'll come to that. Well, I made a great deal of my own background. My family name was originally Mentoni. Of course I let that be known. My first name is Stoyan which is a Yugoslavian name. I'm not going to go into my family background, but I had an Italian grandfather who was raised in what is now Yugoslavia. From early infancy I was raised by Yugoslavian foster parents. So when the word got around that I was really Italian,¹¹⁰ that my name use to be Mentoni and with mixed ethnic background, that helped a great deal. In my youth I was very active in the Yugoslav ethnic organizations, in my teens and early twenties. There wasn't a great deal of conflict between the various ethnic groups and the blacks and whites got along fairly well.

Pflug: What sort of ethnic groups would have been in that Ford Highland Park plant?

Menton: There were Italians, a lot of WASPs, mostly of southern background. . . .

Pflug: These would have been people like, say, ^{Ken} (Tim) Bannon who came up out of the coalmining area.

Menton: Yes, ex-coalminers, lot of southerners. Some of them were former members of the KKK and a few of them, I was told, were at one time involved in the Black Legion. That surprised me. And there were Poles; the ethnic mix of. . . .There were a lot

Menton: of criminals of concern. Carl Bolton was an ex-con too, but he was of Polish background. Most of them were of Italian background; those who were the gangsters. The gangsters made good union members. They believed in solidarity. The ones that gave us a really hard time were the white collar criminals: The disbarred lawyers, the con men, and most of those were WASPs, and a few Jews.

Pflug: These ex-convicts ^{WHO} ~~would~~ ~~had~~ been convicted of various white collar. . . .

Menton: Yeah, embezzlers, confidence men. . . .

Pflug: The out-and-out mobsters that we think of, they didn't give you a problem.

Menton: No. Yes they did. They fought one another, and ~~they~~ had their feuds. For some reason or other, because I'm really basically a mild personality, ^{well} usually, not always, and because I was a tall skinny guy, they liked me. In a few cases I resolved some of the personal feuds that the Italians had among themselves I'd meet separately. ^{with} Anyway they wanted to get together, you know, and I hated this being apart so I became sort of the arbitrator in the situation. But to get back to this the mobsters, because of the mob you had to have group loyalties, a very important aspect, did make good union members. They assured me they wouldn't steal from the local because the union belonged to them. But the white collar people were, embezzlers were, as some of the Italian toughs, ex-hoodlums told me, were creeps. I've got to tell you an incident to illustrate this. There was a very ambitious person, his name was Herman Martin. This Herman Martin, that's

Menton: quite a story in itself.

Pflug: Not to be confused with Homer Martin.

Menton: No. Who (was) very ambitious and he was a sidekick of Millard Doran who was the second president of the UAW local was reputed to have been a disbarred lawyer. He was always edgy on that when I asked him the question. Ponsetti or Joe Rigaroy who was a Rumanian, a real pal of Carl Bolton's, one of them said, 'Look, this guy Harman Martin ¹⁷² ~~the son of a bitch~~ he's a crook.' I said, 'So are you.' (laughter) He said, 'Yes, I'm a crook, but he's a creepy crook.'

Pflug: He'd steal from his own brother.

Menton: Yeah. 'You can trust me.' As it turned out, he was right. Harman was put on my education committee by Doran. This was an ethnic situation there. When I first came there Joe Bailey was the first candidate of our crowd, the crowd that got me, ⁱⁿ who leaned toward Reuther. Diamond was wrong, there was a strong Reuther faction there. I ~~was~~ ^{could never have} forgotten that. Loyalty was primarily to Dick Leonard. Joe Bailey was defeated, that's right, by this guy Doran who represented the white collar workers. Most of the white collar were criminals and there were white collar jobs in the factory, hourly paid jobs there, and the division called them Michigan dealers. Were you ever told about that?

Pflug: No.

Menton: And they did all the packaging and shipping of parts.

Pflug: So it was kind of a parts depot.

Menton: Yeah, a parts depot. You had to be literate. You had to know how to write. They were really white collar ¹⁹⁷ ITEs.

Menton: That's where the embezzlers, ex-cons would go. So Joe Bailey and--who ran on that ticket?--and some Italian fellow, it became sort of an ²⁰² ASPECT? fight and, of course, they were roughnecks so the respectable war workers, most of them were WASPs--middle class people were getting jobs in war plants about that time--swung behind, and the southerners, swung behind the good WASPs, like ~~R~~oran. And Joe Bailey lost and then Millard Doran came in. I had my resignation all written up and Millard Doran called me in and begged me to stay to help him run the local. So I consulted with my friend, Ben Garrison and Sam Liccavoli (sp?), Carl Bolton and the others, 'What should I do. ²¹⁷ Well help me keep the local going. 'We're glad you're going to be around. The guy knows where you stand.' I couldn't support anybody openly because I was an employee of the local. So I stayed on. The blacks were divided, finely divided three ways: Some of the blacks worked in the Michigan dealers at the semi-white collar jobs. The second secretary-treasurer, I can't think of his name, was a black.

Pflug: Secretary-Treasurer of the local?

Menton: Of the local. He was a short fellow, very clipped accent, very diligent and intelligent person. All factions would have somebody on the ticket for vice president. Later on we had Bill Oliver as vice president.

Pflug: You mentioned there were three factions of the blacks, where would Bill Oliver fit in?

Menton: Bill was with all of the factions: The Bolton, Garrison, Joe Bailey had left for a while.

Pflug: Would Ken Bannon have been in that group then?

Menton: Ken Bannon wasn't there when I first came in. He was in Local 600 and then he came over. He was with our faction. It started out really as a Dick Leonard. Did you ever interview Dick Leonard? Or know of him?

Pflug: Yeah, sure.

Menton: Dick Leonard was quite a personality too. He'd elicit a great deal of personal loyalty. Unlike Walter who was more intellectual, Dick operated on the personal level. He was very good in personal relations; a handsome guy, a nice speaker, not a thrilling speaker. I respect Dick a great deal. That was really the Dick Leonard faction. Then, later on the communist faction which backed Herb Heinmarsh a complete opportunist. A bright guy. An alcoholic. A very sick person.

Pflug: What was his name?

Menton: Herb Heinmarsh. The Italian fellows also said watch that guy. They swore he was an ex-Nazi, that he was a Nazi before the war. I didn't know that. But I wasn't sure of that. He was very intelligent, and very good. We were good friends. He became a candidate of the communist faction. But getting back on the racial mix all factions tried to get a leading negro candidate. I forget who the negro candidate was on the Heinmarsh slate.

Pflug: Roughly what percentage of the members would have been black at that time?

Menton: No more than 10%, but it was a pivotal group. They were very active in the union and tended to be very articulate.

Pflug: So even though it was only 10% of the total membership it was an important 10%.

Menton: Yeah, it was important because there was high participation, attending meetings and union elections.

Pflug: But, you mentioned that at least one of these groups had some people who had been members of the Klan, members of the Black Legion. You must have had some interesting membership in those days. You had this small, but articulate black membership and then you had a group of former Klan members. Surely, a lot of Harry Bennett's people were not known for their racial tolerance.

Menton: You know Henry Ford was. The reason he had so much loyalty from the black community, was better with the black than all the other employees. . . .

Pflug: Yeah, although it's been pointed out that. . . .

Menton: Not a great deal, but in context of that era.

Pflug: But it's been pointed out that when asked why did he have this interest in the blacks and of course he had been asked if he had this interest because he really was concerned about the well-being of the blacks or he saw this as a way to, among other things, keep the union ³¹⁰ AT BAY ~~that~~ ~~so~~ That sort of thing....

Menton: Yeah, but ³¹² cover? of black, the motives, wouldn't that be as important as the fact. I'm inclined to agree with you but you're never sure. You just assume that. . . . Ford was a very eccentric and contradictory person. He hated Jews but he started out. . . . I think he was generally interested in rehabilitating criminals. I think. . . .

Pflug: He was a very complex man.

Menton: . . . very complex man and he might have had complex feelings about blacks. But the fact is that blacks got better jobs.

Menton: at Ford than any other place. I think even there were a few black supervisors over predominantly black departments under Ford and Bennett. And in all the other plants all black departments, like the foundry workers, had white supervisors. But, by comparison again, and I forget what their motives were, but old aggression seemed to _____ . I think it's interesting to question. I think it's very important. But we did, as a result of that, we did get a very articulate group of blacks. There was no black faction. Again, all three of the factions made a play and these people were ex-Klansmen and black legionnaires, they played it down. I think some of them bent over backwards. I know in one case the person who was reputed as being the worst racist, and I think it was a genuine conversion, became one of our leading local union members, one of our leading exponents of black equality. 334

Pflug: How do you suppose that came into. . . . Was it something that the local was doing? the union was doing, that converted this man. . . . _____ I know it's very. . . you can't pinpoint exactly. . . What I'm getting at was that something that the union did that brought this about?

Menton: Not directly, not consciously. I think one thing that helped a great deal, more than anything else, the fact that the blacks were active and, although they were no more than, I say, 10%, maybe 15% of the membership in close elections they were pivotal. The fact that these ex-Klansmen.

END OF SIDE #1, TAPE #1

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Menton: Well, I felt this directly as a result of Local 400 experience, but ³ ing, preaching, wasn't as effective as the real experience. Now the blacks were a, as I said, a pivotal group. They were only 10 or 15 percent of the membership, but a very active segment of the membership. So when the ex-Klansmen had to court the black vote and make deals with them, they had to do it on the basis of an equal relationship and this would bring about psychological changes. The blacks before were always down here, inferior people served by our local and the image of the black as the shuffling, grinning like a _____ negro, in fact I'm going to say nigger, and here was a person who was courting your vote for support, making a deal. This was bringing about important psychological changes, reevaluations. The guy's not so stupid. I remember one fellow, ^{his NAME WAS,} he was on the black bargaining committee, he represented the maintenance workers, the maintenance clean-up men. There were a lot of blacks there, but I think it ^{was} still predominantly negro. George Davis is the man. And he was a ~~fa~~ tall fellow with big feet that hurt all the time, and he was very negroid and had very slow speech that reminds you of Stephen Peckett. In fact, the guys told me, before the union came, they use to refer to him as Stephen Fetch-It over there. When the union came he attended the meetings, and he was very intelligent, He wasn't educated, but ~~he~~ had a very good mind, and they said here that Stephen Fetch-It turned out to be a real smart guy.

Pflug: Nobody knew it. No one realized it before.

Menton: Nobody knew it. Fortunately he was in our faction, the Dick Leonard, Walter Reuther faction. ^{ga} Mostly not for ideological

Menton: reasons: Loyalty to Dick Leonard, loyalty to friendships with other people. Ideology was not too important.

Pflug: So you're saying many of these factions then were based more on personalities involved than any philosophical issues.

Menton: Yeah, that's right, except the Italians, especially the Al Fonsetti's and Nicky Marcons who were ex-communists and became very active anti-communist because of their Catholicism. There was some ideological basis there. Well, I guess this is true of all these. Those of us who were ideologues were a very small group in the UAW and the CIO.

Pflug: I guess that it's true that the large numbers of people were involved because of the leaders, the people, the personalities, and, I suppose, they feel that this is the person who can solve our problems for us.

Getting back to the role of the blacks in the racial problem. I'm interested in what took place within the ^{PLANT + TH} locals during the '43 riot.

Menton: Oh, this is very interesting. Well the first battle was when the UAW, this executive board, all factions were ~~united~~ united on this, would go along with the executive order: No discrimination. Roosevelt's executive order. We were almost forced into it.

Pflug: This was the order that could demand no discrimination in a war plant, which probably included almost ~~any~~ ^{every} plant in the United States.

Menton: Yeah, just about every plant. Of course the Ford locals were, came entirely as war plants.

Pflug: So you're saying that there was little or no opposition within the local. . .

Menton: Among the leadership.

Pflug: How about membership?

Menton: That was a different question.

P: Did you have this feeling...

M: Yeah we had that feeling

P: that if you had taken a pill that you would have lost?

M: ^{Yes} Of course, everywhere

P: Sure they were no different than

M: They were no different than anybody else.

Menton: We were, of course, all working to implement the order. The word got out that if there was any resistance, and that a person was fired for creating trouble, we represent ~~them~~ ^{through} for the first stage and then if he were guilty the company could fire him without the union's blessing. No arguments. Nothing. It was really a fiat order. That's the only way you could do it from on high, 'cause if we consulted with the membership it couldn't have happened.

Pflug: Are you saying then that a vast, not vast, a large majority of membership then were opposed to the consequent issue on equality?

Menton: We never polled them.

~~What~~
Pflug: Did you have this feeling ~~that if you had taken a poll that you~~
INSERT → would have lost?

Menton: Yeah, we had that feeling. Of course, everywhere, we would have. They were no different than anybody else. Except the blacks, some of the blacks were in a leadership in the local and George Davis was on the plant bargaining committee. He got reelected despite all the factional changes. One person, tool and dye maker, who was reputed to have been a former Klansman, I wasn't really sure, but he and George became real good friends because they were comrades. All leadership went along with it because orders from on high, fiat, and so forth. And I was, as education director, and Frank Markboard and Lloyd Martin were up to the same thing, ^{X₃} conduct an educational campaign. I said, "No, don't do this." Well after it was accomplished, I circulated, made available, Ruth Benedicts' "Henry's Backyard." This interesting cartoon-like pamphlet put out by the government during the war. Ruth Benedict is the anthropologist. But nothing

Menton: happened. Nothing happened in any of the ^{no}_____. We expected a lot of resistance and were prepared for it. And blacks were being upgraded to positions that they could never have aspired to before.

Pflug: So even though you had this feeling that the membership didn't agree with it, they didn't create any problems.

Menton: No, and a lot of them liked it. I know one fellow, ~~who~~ had a southern background, he was a very bright, ~~and~~ articulate young man, he came to my office and ^{was} argued with me about it. Then he had to accept blacks; he was a ~~co~~mmittee man. And he came and said he thought it was the greatest experience for him. And so this fellow I looked down upon was working next to me and he's as hard as I am. He was the one who came in and said 'give me all your "Henry's Backyar" pamphlets.' He distributed them all over. And this was a dramatic, sudden change in the man, after a few weeks. He was glad that we did it.

I'll tell you this experience was repeated throughout. The only place there was any active resistance, there was a wildcat strike over it, it was ^{was} the Local 190, the Packard problem. You heard of it.

Pflug: The heat strike.

Menton: Yeah. The heat strike.

Pflug: Were there any other strikes like that at places other than Packard that you recall?

Menton: Not that I know of. We expected this. Not only the Ford locals.

Pflug: ^{no}

Menton: Nothing happened.

Pflug: Then in '43 when the riots broke out, ^{was} were there any ^{sent} carryover from what was happening on the streets. Did that carry over into the

Pflug: plants, And in ^{the union}.

Menton: No, we expected ^{ix} this. I was on the mayor's of Highland Park interracial commission. So I was very much involved. The chairman of the commission was an Episcopalian priest, Paul Mosell, ^{man?} he was also ^{he was} a good friend of mine. He and I wrote a column together "The Highland Parker" on labor. We interviewed various characters including Carl Bolton, and others I'd bring in and write this article about the character. Paul Mosellman(sp?), then, was also commissioner of police in Highland Park during the riots and I was the vice chairman and I became the acting chairman during the race riots because Paul Mosellman was commissioner of police.

Pflug: He had his hands full with this.

Menton: No, they wanted, they said, the mayor thought, and the police chief thought that they ought to have a person who will be an overseer who wasn't involved, and I would write reports and, as a matter of fact, the few incipient riots they had, the police chief's car would pull up in front of my office, once at my home, and come along and see how we were handling this. And Paul Mosellman would be in the car. And what happened, I think Ben Garrison was ^{he} president then, or was it Willard Thorn, it doesn't matter, we had a meeting of all the committee men and all the acting officers and myself. We issued baseball bats. They were issued out of my office, the education director's office to certain designated people. And the whites, if there was any trouble, the whites would take care of a white, and the blacks would take care of the blacks.

Pflug: ^{of} This was kind of a union police force within the plant.

Menton: Within the plant. But, we didn't have to use it. Again, nothing happened. The great concern of all the members at that time, and this was ^{not} only true in Highland Park, but the other locals, except perhaps the Packard local, was getting to and from work safely. Then we organized one of the problems of the workers going through the riot area. We got cars. We issued a big revolver to one ^{15'} _____. The driver and the guard of the ^{the} cars would be either black or white depending upon the passengers. So if they were taking blacks through a dangerous white neighborhood, it would be a white driver and a white driving shotgun, so to speak, driving ~~with~~ a shotgun. There was a great deal of cooperation. Of course, we tried to get the toughest looking to ride shotgun and be intimidating. So I remember Tom G ^{16' ?} ANVON riding shotgun and once he was telling me he went to a white neighborhood with blacks and they were stopped and Tom said, "I'm not going to do any arguing" and he pulled out the gun 'to speak for me.' They scattered. So the blacks would back for the whites. So that's the kind of cooperation they had. There was a great concern that the riots would not affect the plants.

Pflug: Did you ever have any feelings ~~though~~ that the people in the plants, ^{maybe} after working hours, were participating in the riots ^{right} along with everybody else?

Menton: No. As a matter of fact, well I, ^{Paul} ~~Law~~ Rosellman ¹ ~~got~~ ^{in the} ~~night~~ all the reports from the police from all of the suburbs? and among the rioters; #1. very few southern whites, this surprised me, and #2. practically no auto workers or union members. So just an example of what. . . And this just came shortly after

Menton: the executive order. You might have heard others spoken,
I know Cramer wrote an article about it. . . .

Pflug: Yeah, I had always heard that while all this turmoil, ⁺ shooting
and rioting, was going on in the streets that within the plants
there was relatively little trouble and I guess I was always
curious whether that peace among, or some sort of truce, only
held within the plant and once they got out in the streets. . . .

Menton: The rioters were the kind of people always ¹⁹⁰ _____ the
_____ a lot of the whites and blacks _____. A lot
of the white rioters came from groups that were considered
ethnic minorities _____ Syrians, Italians, and _____ and
so forth. And the black rioters were _____ very volatile and
both of them steadily employed _____

Pflug: No so much different than the '67 riots.

Menton: No, the same things, same type of situation. And in the plants
there were, with the possible exception of Packard, no I think
even at Packard _____

Pflug: Although they did have that heat strike,

Menton: Yes, this was before.

Pflug: Well, why do you suppose just that one local fought the idea of
the executive order?

Menton: I don't know. You know when. . . .

Pflug: Of course that local was always in turmoil anyway.

Menton: It had a communist leadership for the longest time and the ^{t's} irony
of it. . . .

Pflug: Yeah, I was going to say, the traditional line is that the
communists were greatly in favor of racial equality and so forth.

Menton: It was, yeah.

Pflug: And yet you have a local that, for so long, was allegedly run by communists and yet that's where the only strike broke out against the executive order of racial equality.

Menton: Well, the communists had nothing to do with it. It could have been a reaction to the communists. I guess that's a possibility. It's just happenstance that a lot of ex-Klansmen and black legionnaires concentrated in that local and maintained some kind of contact and unity unlike Local 400 where, ^{it} apparently in some of the other locals, everybody dispersed and, as I said, some of them bent over backwards to ^{is} prove that. Dan Patch, the police chief of the city of Highland Park, was reputed to have been an ex-Klansman. He was a southerner. So I ~~wasn't~~ ^{wouldn't be} surprised. He bent over backwards. . .

Pflug: To not give any. . . .

Mentonto give any ^{22^a} . If anything, this helped in this situation. To disprove this was part of this past.

Pflug: Well, in your work both on the mayor's interracial committee and within the local, and the period right after the riots, did you take part in any sort of investigation or work to try to just figure what brought about this riot and what could be done to make sure it didn't happen again. In Detroit, for example, the mayor's interracial committee did a large number of studies on causes and on what's to be done to ensure this didn't happen again. Did the same sort of thing go on in Highland Park?

Menton: Yes, Paul Mosellman and I worked for the. . . .Somebody came across the reports some years ago. Someone I met at _____
~~Miss~~ Carla M _____ was another name _____ on what we did in Highland Park, ~~the~~ the situation. A descriptive report. We relied on the Detroit report on that.

Menton: But what happened in Highland Park, there was a large black community. It wasn't solely black, but close to it. And it was on the east side of Highland Park. They were blue-collar workers, mostly Ford workers.

Pflug: Living near the plant.

Menton: No. That was quite a ways from the plant actually, on the outer edge of the city. It's a very stable community. There were blacks who lived near the plant, over on LaBelle and those streets that were some, incidentally, black neighborhoods. Some of them lived there. It was pretty much of a stable blue-collar area and they were the ones ^{we} represented on the mayor's inter-racial committee. So we didn't have a volatile ^{black} crowd. We had a volatile white crowd. Dan Hatch, I think it's Dan Hatch, the police chief. I'm not sure of his name. I think it was Dan Hatch, a name something like it. It wasn't going to happen in Highland Park. One thing he was going to do, ^{that I bet would be} was no temporizing. What happened in Belle Isle, he thought, was due to temporizing. The Belle Isle bridge. Had the police acted decisively and didn't argue there they could have nipped the riot in the bud. And so one of the three times I rode with him we stopped at the local union hall, detoured, the police station was only about two blocks from the local hall, so we detoured around. And Paul Mosellman was in the car and told me to jump in and said, "I'll show you how we're going to handle the riots here." On the corner of Woodward and Davison there was a situation, and he explained to me as we were going along, some blacks threw a stone through a white car and a bunch of whites were starting to assemble and chief Hatch had already gave the orders, ^{he} had deployed police cars

Menton: and motor cycle cars and fellows on foot on Davison on both sides, north and south on Woodward and when the . . . and sure enough there was an ugly crowd there picking up rocks to throw. . . They were going to move on into the black neighborhood, ~~and~~ so we heard from informants, and we stopped all of a sudden about a half block from it and blasted a siren and in all the directions the sides turned 30°.

Pflug: All closed in.

Menton: All closed in and Don Hatch jumped out of his car and jumped on the hood with two revolvers and said, "Break up. If you don't break up right away we're going to arrest you." Some of the fellows started to argue with him and he turned to the cops-- "Arrest that man. Arrest that man." And they arrested them.

Pflug: No fooling around.

Menton: No fooling around. Also, we got, I think Paul Mosellman, got ~~g~~ hold of leaders of the black community and the black community warned them that the police were coming there to protect them. They cordoned off the streets to the black neighborhoods just in case they couldn't contain the riot. And that was the answer. Dan Hatch was right. If he temporized he might have had an ugly situation. There were in all, maybe 100

and more of them coming in the one's who lived in cheap hotels were on Woodward and George?

Pflug: Well, that brings us to about the end of your career at the local 400.

Menton: Oh, no.

Pflug: Is there more that you want to add to. . . .

Menton: Oh, yeah. There's another episode. . . Do we have time?

Pflug: Yes.

Menton: That was one of the most ^{exciting} ~~satisfying~~, more grafitying episodes there, of course, ³³⁴ kept out the riots. Of course, I didn't stop there. I wrote a report about what had happened for the interracial commission on how it was handled. I think Joe Kowalski was education director of ^{the} Michigan CIO council at that time. He was director of workers' education for the WPA and the WPA was part of Tom Brown's system. Did you ever interview Tom Brown?

Pflug: I've met and talked to him, yes.

Menton: When the WPA was being phased out. . . Frank Markboard was working for the WPA, worked as education director when I first ³⁵⁸ ~~first~~. They were phasing out the WPA theatre and Joe asked me to come down and meet him with a woman who was ^a director of, of one of the officials from, WPA. She came from Washington. They had a man by the name of Harry M inteen who was a former Broadway matinee idol who was director of the WPA theatre. They had to find a job for him and she thought maybe he could be used. And they organized some entertainment projects in the locals. Now getting back to Harry Bennet. I'll have to go back. . . .

END OF SIDE #2, TAPE #1

SIDE #1, TAPE #2 continued on following page (Page 22)

Pflug: Just before the tape ran out you mentioned something about Harry Bennet.

Menton: Yeah, I was talking about Harry Mitner, but we'll get to the guy named Harry Bennet. Harry Bennet was a connoisseur of the arts, the lively arts. Music, you know, he sponsored the Detroit Symphony for many years and he had an understanding, and general appreciation of good music and the arts that wasn't put on. He was a field (or failed?) artist, and a field musician himself. Did you know that? A field ^{a PRIZE FIGHTER} writer too, when Henry Ford picked him up. So he liked to consider himself-- I think the word, the expression--saw himself as a kind of a renaissance character, ruthless, aesthetic, appreciated the arts. Somebody told me he was introduced to Harry Bennet as a ^{the} That he was very well versed in renaissance history. He was very much a romanticist. He romanticized himself. Well, when the Keith ²⁰ circuit, the Largo circuit, failed, he gave them all the jobs ^{WE HAD A LOT OF JOBS} and most of them wound up in Highland Park, Michigan ²² throughout the plant. Well Harry Mintern needed a job and Joe Kowalski got the very good idea that, they argued about, perhaps a good place would ^{be} the Ford local. They organized a review. I didn't want to be a producer. I was so damn busy. I was wearing all these different hats and Willard Martinson, who was the education director of the banber local at that time was having certain difficulties and I thought well maybe Willard will help you, if you give him a chance. And Willard was enthusiastic about the idea to become the producer. So I helped him. And the Willow Run plant had a lot of ^{talent} ~~talent~~ and the poor Highland Park plant we had the most

Menton: talent because the old vaudevillians were there. So Willard and Harry M., and I helped them, and Frank helped a little bit, started recruiting talent.

Pflug: What did you have in mind? Were you going to produce a play?

Menton: A review.

Pflug: A review. Would this have travelled around the state then, was that the idea?

Menton: Yeah. We did two productions of. . . . I don't know who thought of the name, maybe I did, or Willard, I think I did. Thought we'd call it the Swing Shift Frolics. Minter was a producer with Orson Welles in the Black Makado. Ever hear of that? I think he shared my office at one of the Willow Run ⁴⁷_____ we were just getting underway. So I circulated, and Willard did, and Frank did mimeographed posters, a recruiting poster to any talent who could sing or dance, joke, to apply in my office and I was just full of people: Old fellows, old gals with scrapbooks. There were jugglers, musicians, sword swallers.

Pflug: These were all Ford employees.

Menton: Yeah, were Ford employees. And musicians. Happened Ted Biogini showed up. If you were a jazz, musician of jazz, he was a very important character. That's quite a story in itself. He was one of the leading. . . He was originally with the Casa Loma band.

Pflug: Ph, that ⁶⁰_____.

Menton: Yeah. One of the top trumpeters in the jazz groups. He was a maintenance electrician in the Ford Highland Plant. So Willard got fired. We didn't save his job.

Pflug: He got fired, what, from. . . .

Menton: From education. And I told Harry M., you handle it. (He said)

Menton: 'So you've got to have an impressario. I'm the director.' So he talked me into it, into taking the impressario's role, the producer. That's logical, somebody has to say yes or no. I might be the final authority. I have no experience in this. He said, "All I can tell you is. . . ."

Pflug: Somebody has to keep it going.

Menton: Yeah, somebody's got to keep it going. Oh, we had jugglers, and amateurs. I had to get going on the ADVA and get an ok that the professional members, some of them would still carry their cards, could perform with amateurs.

Pflug: So it not only had to be UAW members, but members of good standing of the. . . .

Menton: ADVA. But the rule was, I think, they were not suppose to perform with amateurs. And I got a waiver on that. I got a waiver from the musicians' union on that too.

Pflug: Did you get a waiver for yourself, for your activity in this thing?

Menton: I became an honorary member of the Musicians' Union, the Detroit local; gave me drinking privileges in some of the clubs. I took advantage of it too. So we put on this big review ^{AND} ~~that~~ we thought it would be packed and hardly anybody came after three days. We put it on at Wayne State, at the Wayne State Theatre. We tried to get the Art Museum, ~~but~~ they were booked up. Wayne State auditorium, ^{AS} _____ auditorium,

Pflug: Oh, yeah. When ^{would this have been} ~~was this again~~, now? What year?

Menton: About. . . , I left in 1944; 1945; early part of 1945. It'd be in 1944.

Pflug: I see. And you say the attendance was less than you ^{had} hoped for.

Menton: Yeah. It was a flopperoo.

Pflug: As a producer, then, you didn't do so well.

Menton: No. (Laughter) As a director, Mintern was very discouraged.

Pflug: Well, what was the purpose of this review? It just wasn't to raise funds or anything?

Menton: No.

Pflug: It was just an activity.

Menton: An activity.

Pflug: To bring people together. You weren't trying to get across a particular message or you weren't trying to raise money. It was just a social activity sort of.

Menton: Pins and needles. A cultural activity, like having baseball teams to give a break to all these frustrated vaudevillians and musicians. Some of these musicians were in the war plants ^{so} where they could get out on an entertainer's, or get draft, deferments. Well, in fact we got so many of them, Mintern and I would interview them and audition them, ^{THAT} ~~that~~ we could afford to be fussy. We didn't have to beg.

Pflug: But you still flopped.

Menton: We still flopped. I must say that the ones from the Ford Highland Park plant were the best. Because we had the best pool of ^{talent} ~~help~~. I had nothing to do with it, but it just happened that way. The ones from Willow Run tended to be very amateurish and we didn't get many from Local 600. I guess ^{it was} Harry Bennet ^{who} sent these ex-musicians and performers to the Ford Highland Park plant as happenstance. Mintern was very discouraged, fighting with these vaudevillians. Oh, they were a tempermental bunch fighting over who'd be first, who'd be last. Mintern never handled vaudevillians before. He ^{WORKED} ~~was~~

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W ACTORS. After the ³⁰⁰ ~~first~~ performance, we tried to salvage some of it. The ³⁰⁰ ~~first~~ performance was a little better. He got

Menton: very ruthless, and I backed him on ¹¹⁹ _____ drop certain acts and _____ cut 'em up. We fired the emcee.

Pflug: You fired who?

Menton: The emcee. And the illness, we'd been hit. . . Harry M. was a man in his late 50's, early 60's, he was about to. . . . I think we did manage to _____ . Mintern, he got a job himself, something he hated to do--become the director, the producer or the director, of a dirty play, "The Maid of the Ozarks." Did you ever hear of that one? It became a sort of Broadway hit. But he said "I got to eat" So he left and said, 'It's all yours now.' But we had all this talent. I didn't want to handle the vaudevillians. One good group was Ted Biogini's band. It was a

Pflug: Was the band made up of men of all Ford employees and union members?

Menton: Yeah.

Pflug: You just found people all over the place in these plants.

Menton: All from the Ford Highland Park plant.

Pflug: I see.

Menton: Ted Biogini came in and I knew, I was surprised. . . . 'Are you the Ted Biogini?' 'Yes.' I asked him what he was doing in a Ford plant. The same story I heard from all the musicians -- he got married and started having children and he didn't want to travel anymore. He was going to have a married life. He loved his wife, loved his kids. So he became an electrician. He became a maintenance electrician at the Ford plant.

Pflug: But he still kept up his skill as a musician.

Menton: Yeah. And Pete Vera, who was Bing Crosby's musician, I saw him on a movie recently playing the piano, the pianist, showed up.

Pflug: He was out in the Ford plant too?

Menton: Yeah. And, but our pianist, and people like that and some amateurs. Al Mecelli became the drummer.

Pflug: Oh, really,

Menton: He was an aspired drummer, never heard as good a steady beat.

Pflug: He ~~then became~~ ^{ended up being} president of Local 400.

Menton: I was looking all over hell for a picture of the band. The band was called the Swing Shift Frolics.

Pflug: Did the band stay together even though you. . . .

Menton: That stayed together.

Pflug: And, then, what would they play at various meetings and parties?

Menton: Yeah, then we started a monthly activity called the Swing Shift Frolics where we'd have a dance and a floor show. I didn't want to fool around with the vaudevillians, ~~and~~ the headache they gave to Harry M. I was busy doing everything else: Putting ^{out} ~~up~~ a newspaper, consultant to the plant bargaining committee, writing arbitration briefs, and all of that. But I set out, and again Ted Biogini said, "We gotta have a producer." A manager.

Pflug: But this was just for the band, for the monthly. . . .

Menton: Just for the band. But I found the fellow who was an old vaudeville producer, and he took over the vaudeville unit. He knew how to handle it. He thought he did. I once ^{had} cards. The rationing for, the gasoline rations. They gave me whole batches of gasoline ration cards.

Pflug: ~~For~~ for use of the band.

Menton: ~~And~~ for the vaudevillians mostly. There was a dispute between the directors and some of the entertainers about the vaudeville review, the variety show. But somebody threatened to cut off their gasoline

Menton: rations. And that worked for a while. But the band, the band people were quite different. They won't compete. They can't compete, they had their band. The musicians were very, very cooperative. I didn't have that trouble with them at all. We use to go to the prison, the USO, and we had our great big show in the auditorium above the Ford local, it was a ¹⁹⁷ _____ singing society _____ owned the building. It had this very nice stage and big dance floor and bar.

Pflug: Where was the local office then?

Menton: On Victor.

Pflug: That's where it was, then, all this time.

Menton: Yeah.

Pflug: Because, I beleive, that's where it was when they finally folded, they left.

Menton: So the girls went around the USO's ¹⁹³ _____ their own _____ GI's they would pick up in the streets. And they would put on this very good band with Ted Biogini and Tim, or Life, was going to do an article on this.

Pflug: All this was in addition to the work in the plant. This would be after they put in their shift in the plant.

Menton: But Bennet was quite cooperative.

Pflug: He would give you time off,

Menton: He'd give us time off to take trips.

Pflug: Particularly the entertainment business.

Menton: Yes (laughter) or anything, He had a genuine. . . . I never spoke, but if I needed time off to go anywhere he'd. . . .

Pflug: This is an interesting side light to Harry Bennet.

Menton: Yeah. Oh I've got to tell you this, something else about that guy.

Menton: Just when Life contacted us about doing, we were suppose to do a big show for the USO, the vaudevillians, and they heard about it and really started ²¹⁰ _____ one another, fighting and the director gave up _____ "I give up." I was very disappointed, this big show and spread in Life magazine. I had to call up Life to say it was all over. 'Can't you get 'em back together. We have the people down here, the photographers.' *hope*. But Ted Biogini's band continued after I left. There's an ironic footnote to that. Ted Biogini, that was after I left, and his band went on some kind of ^{an} engagement and the car had a blow out and sideswiped a utility pole. Biogini was decapitated. Shortly after, and downbeat at the publication of ~~The~~ Jass Musician, there was a big box "Where is Ted Biogini," They were looking for him.

Pflug: He had been killed by then.

Menton: He was dead, yes. This was just shortly afterwards.

Pflug: I wasn't in the local, but somebody told me, showed me the box. I said, 'Well, ~~and~~ they write and say what had happened.' Well, I didn't get the subsequent issue with the big obituary-- Man Had Disappeared and they were wondering what happened. He was a beautiful person. Well, ^{well} the Swing Shift Frolics and dances continue for as long as I was there.

Pflug: Well, you were with the local, up until 1945.

Menton: Yeah.

Pflug: One of the things I remember, I recall about Local 400, there may have been a later theory but perhaps not, ~~that~~ they had an active coop store going. Would that have been during the time you were there.

Menton: No.

Pflug: That was later then. . . .

Menton: That came later when I joined Aet 's Board of Education.

Pflug: Was there anything else then about 400, the Local 400, that you ~~didn't~~ ^{hadn't} cover before we go on to the. . . .

Menton: A lot of very notable people, union, Ken Bannon, Bill Oliver, and some of 's people.

Pflug: Maybe we could just spend a couple minutes just discussing some of the people who came out of that local who went on to leadership roles in the UAW. Ken Bannon, for example, what do you remember about him.

Menton: I remember this fellow came from Local 600, and I think I said they voted for all the new committees ^{NEW} to have sessions ^{SS} with these and 258 I didn't compete him to attend classes. We gave him a test, a before and after test. They have to pass this test based upon the contract, _____, and the grievance procedure.

Pflug: So they had to take some qualifying exam before. . . .

Menton: It was, I was told, completely unconstitutional.

Pflug: Weren't these people elected?

Menton: They were elected.

Pflug: But they still had to pass your test as well.

Menton: Yeah. We gave them the impression that ~~they didn't really~~ ^{it was} compulsory it really wasn't.

Pflug: If they chose not to take the test then there really wasn't much you could do about it.

Menton: They wanted to, and they wanted to attend the classes too. After they talked, ^{to me} I'd give them the instructions, all the materials and

Menton: I also gave them the committeemen^y that had some potential. I was^{it} authorized to do that. But I was really trying to help them. I was in a helping role there. But Ken Bannon^{was} once ~~was~~. ^{for} came from 600 and very shortly after he was elected to the plant bargaining committee and he was one of the most ²⁸² ate people. As I recall, he was very emotional. Once he got in a fight with some of the people in our faction, it was then the Reuther faction. . . .

Pflug: He wasn't in that faction?

Menton: He was, yes, the Reuther faction. It was then that it was Leonard, I think I Dick Leonard. . . .

Pflug: But Ken would have been part of this faction.

Menton: Yeah, and the rather thorny leaving, with tears in his eyes turned on some of the people and said 'I didn't fight for the UAW to turn it over to gangsters like you.' He was crying. The tears were coming down. He was a very, very, very good person. Bill Oliver is another character and Bill is a real character.

Pflug: What do you mean by that?

Menton: Well, he was a very interesting, unusual type of person. He also was brought in by Bennet.

Pflug: Is that right?

Menton: He was part of a singing group. I forget the name of it. And they would sing with the intermissions of the Detroit Symphony for one year. It was a spiritual group. He was a beautiful singer. He was a baritone. He was brought in as one of the. . . .

Pflug: So he got his start in the Ford plant because of Harry Bennet?

Menton: Yeah, because of Bennet's appreciation of music. He was very

Menton: active, use ^{to} speak up at meetings 32 the
 Garrison, Joe Bailey, Carl Bolton factions picked him up
 and he became vice president or secretary before he _____.
 One of his jobs was to work on arbitration BRIEFS. He was
 very _____.
 He liked to use big words. But, oh yeah, this is another
 episode. . . We had the dubious honor of having more wildcat
 strikes than any other local.

Pflug: Any other Ford Local? Or any. . . .

Menton: Any other local.

Pflug: Any UAW local.

Menton: Yeah.

Pflug: This was during the wartime period.

Menton: During the wartime.

Pflug: I hadn't realized this.

Menton: Yeah, and. . . .

Pflug: Why was that?

Menton: The strikes were mostly, the wildcat strikes were mostly on the
 departments with a lot of middle class people: Ex-bankers.
 One of them was a banker who started a wildcat strike, an old
 banker who didn't like the obscenity that the foreman used: 'Get
 the rag out of your ass.' or something like that. He wouldn't
 take it, and the other middle class people 'We're not going to
 take ^{this} ~~your~~ kind of abuse.' And they all walked out. So we had
 an agreement with the war. . . the Army representative with the
 management, that there would be a strike, don't try to stop it.
 They'll come down to the local union hall. And we had a battery
 of speakers s to try to persuade them to go back.

Pflug: So the management and the army would leave it up to the union then to get these people back to work.

Menton: Yeah, to get them back. No reprisals. That was the part.

Pflug: Let them do their thing for a few hours and. . . .

Menton: Yeah, for a few hours and go back. We'll get 'em back. That was the most important thing. And they use^d to march in about once almost every week, you know, we'd have the auditorium full, standing room only.

Pflug: What would the whole plant go out or just various units?

Menton: No, just units, or the smaller departments. It would fill up in a hurry. First I tried to explain grievance procedure but they wouldn't listen to me. Finally we started using Bill Oliver, and he was a really effective demagogue. He'd denounce the company and get cheers and 'You can't treat me like that.' And then he'd calm 'em down and somewhere along the line I'd be on the program and ^{i'd} explain the grievance procedure, what they could have done. And he was so effective. And these were all white departments, people with middle class prejudices against blacks. He became the popular hero all the time. END SIDE #1, TAPE #2
And then afterwards the key people, the committeemen and the others, ~~and~~ the person who had the grievance, would meet with me in my office and we'd work out a grievance, you ^{could} call it a grievance procedure. But without Bill we could not have done anything.

Pflug: So the men would go back to work while the grievance process was. . .

Menton: Yeah. We'd persuade 'em to go. . . Bill . . .

Pflug: You had to go through this, you say, about once a week, wouldn't you?

Menton: At one time it was once a week. I remember once, who was it, Harry Ross, or somebody else, came down--or was it Monroe LAKE -- and he

Menton: sat, we did this more than once, too bad we didn't have tape recorders then, this was in '56. He'd ask people why they were wildcat strikers.

Pflug: What would they say?

Menton: It was always the same answer. They can't do. . . Everybody has a different grievance and most of the grievances were what the regular auto workers would call chicken shit grievances.

Pflug: Like they didn't like the way the forman talked to them.

Menton: Yeah, they didn't like the foreman, or didn't like discipline. The average workers, the regular workers worked in factories for years.

Pflug: Were use to this sort of work.

Menton: Time schedules and expected to be reprimended if they came in late. But somebody who worked in a bank or ^wan office, or was a salesman, we had a lot of those, this wasn't too important.

Pflug: And you weren't willing to just use the normal grievance procedure to solve these things. . . . Just shut it down and walk out.

Menton: Yeah, it's not that the union want~~ed~~^s to be militant, there are parts of the union to be militants. And practically all the strikes were in that 31. And Bill, Bill was marvelous in getting them back. He was the only one who could and they were all white, mostly middle class people. He became the popular hero--cheers. Once in a while, once he sang a song. ~~It~~^{He} was beautiful th~~rough~~.

Pflug: Who else in that local, where you, were, comes to mind.

Menton: Well, Carl Bolton. That happened after I left. I understand he was defeated. The reason they thought that, suspected him. . . .

Pflug: Just ⁺a minute, we ought to explain that Carl Bolton's involvement in, alleged, in how he got involved in the investigation of the Reuther ⁴⁶_____. Just to keep the tape and the story straight maybe you could explain that and then we could back up to what you mean about _____.

Menton: Carl Bolton, he had a Polish name, I forget the Polish name, originally, was a handsome, articulate fellow who could get up and speak at union meetings. He became one of the, well we knew about his, that he was an ex-convict ⁺but Local 400, of course, he couldn't vote on any action. We assumed he had reformed. He became very ambitious _____.

Pflug: Within the union?

Menton: Within the union. The ^{ss}Shack ^{man}ites were after him. At one of the UAW conventions ^{Max Shachtman}~~Mark Cochran~~ had a meeting with Carl Bolton because he was a fellow with a background; _____ background _____, A victim of injustice. He was very, very tempermental, would fly off the handle and quite capricious. We always had to calm him down. _____.

And this was after I left. He was running for some office and was defeated and I think the Reuther faction thought he was too tempermental or something to run for a certain position. And he blamed, this I got second hand, he blamed Walter Reuther for doing a job on him.

Pflug: I see. And that's how he got caught up in the investigation of the ⁴⁹_____.

Menton: Yeah, and then he quit and got involved, became a stick-up man. And he was arrested and convicted on these stick-ups. He became

Menton: a _____. They thought, and then there was all, I guess, circumstantial evidence which the grand jury thought that there wasn't enough to _____. So he was, of course, acquitted.

Pflug: But at the time you knew him in Local 400 he was a fairly solid union man?

Menton: Oh, yes, and one of the enthusiastic Reuther supporters.

Pflug: But somewhere along the line you thought that, as you say, he ought to get a job at it.

Menton: Yeah, he did. I think, I'm not sure, that the . . .

Pflug: Carl felt this strong.

Menton: Yeah, he felt that strong. They say he went into a rage and tore the telephone off the hook and started smashing furniture, started _____ Walter Reuther _____.

Pflug: So then he quit Ford's.

Menton: Quit Ford's, and became. . . .

Pflug: And became an independent entrepreneur.

Menton: Yeah. The last I heard, I use to have contact with Joe Rigaroy who was also fired from Ford's. He expected it. In one case, through, we tried to get him back _____ wouldn't do it again. He just didn't show up for work, leave his job, things like petty grievances. We got him back once when Harry _____ agreed with us, the company was _____ without telling him and they warned him _____.

Well, Rigaroy became the bouncer of the Main St. Club. Are you familiar with that?

Pflug: No.

Menton: That's where a lot of these judges and UAW characters would hand out. I use to have contace with, follow up on what happened to Carl Bolton from Rigaroy _____. He told me that Carl was released, was paroled and became a building contractor _____. I guess he did straighten out.

Pflug: Well that was quite a group of people that came out of that local.

Menton: Same Fishman was an education _____.

Pflug: Was he active in the local at the time you were?

Menton: Yeah, he was.

Pflug: So he's been around for a long, long time. No insult to you, but you know Oliver, Ken Bannon, and all these other people retired and Sam Fishman is still very much active.

Menton: Well, he was young then. My education committee was _____ make sure the ethnic balance of Italians, Jews, the Sh^{achtman}ites were there, a lot of Sh^{achtman}ites--Fishman was a Sh^{achtman}ite-- socialists, Republicans. We had quite an ethnic and political mixture, communists and a couple of _____ we made sure of that, so they wouldn't take over, keep your eyes on 'em. Better have them on the committee, _____ people who were surprised they were put on the committee, under Garrison. And Fishman was an active member.....

Pflug: Of course, he's now the UAW's main political person within the state.

Menton: So I hear.

Pflug: Did he show this sort of talent and aptitude _____ when he started out in the local?

Menton: No. Oh, he was a very nice guy, very intelligent. He was a Sh____ite, that was limited. They were very pure. And to be a politician in those days you needed someone opportunistic. I was at the University of Michigan, away from Local 400 for once, and Walter had his final triumph. He was perjuring all the avid Frankenstein fellows. He had, I think it was, nearly _____ ^{well,} practically all the blacks, including Shelton Tappes who was a very effective leader and another fellow who was suppose to be close to the, close to us and _____ blacks also from Local 600 were in the Frankenstein-Addes faction and they were among others _____ position of the black to be in charge of the, what did they call it, Commission for further Employment Committee, or department, or anti-discrimination, it was before _____

Pflug: They went through ^{a whole} ~~this~~ series of fair employment practices.

Menton: So I suggested Bill Oliver. I also suggested Ken Bannon.

Pflug: Who, of course, then ^{became} ~~had been~~ director of the Ford department.

Menton: Yeah, the Ford department, at that time, for a while was under communist domination, or the communist faction, let's put it that way, and the most effective people in the department, in fact, ^{all} were Leonard people and Walter? Leonard had split.

Pflug: So there had to be a change. This would have been in '47.

Menton: The logical people. . . . I was no longer there, I was at the University of Michigan. They knew I was familiar with some of the people. Of course I taught classes for the UAW, _____ workers education _____. And I remember I had mentioned Ken Bannon was there, as I said he was probably _____. I don't think Bill Oliver was there. But they were really hard up

Menton: for a black who was effective and had leadership qualities.

Pflug: There probably weren't that many around at that time.

Menton: Most of them, the best ones, the ones that I would have liked. . . .

Pflug: Were on the other side,

Menton: Were on the other side. Horace Sheffler^{ield}.

Pflug: Horace Sheffler^{ield}, Shelton Tappes, were all in the other factions.

Menton: Sheffler^{ield} was ~~with~~ with Dick Leonard faction at first.

Pflug: Many of them, of course, later worked with Walter and became active in many ways.

Menton: But very, very _____^{ield}. This was difficult _____ to that. Horace Sheffler^{ield} was, we thought, was number one, the ablest.

Pflug: He was very articulate, very sharp.

Menton: Yeah. And he was on our side and then he went over to the other side. So Oliver was a very favorable person, one of the few favorable blacks _____, And Fishman remained for a while. I mentioned before he was active in everybody's education because for people, for idealogues, education was the place to be.

Pflug: That was the place to be.

Menton: That was the place to be because of _____
I'm sure there were others around who were not idealogues, I usually named most of the committees.

Pflug: So you made sure it was a mix.

Menton: Yeah, the one thing I made sure of was that it was a mix.

Pflug: So in those days, then, the education committee was really sort of a hub of activity. Did they really, sort of set policy for the local. Did it steer the local?

Menton: No, it became sort of the conveyor belt _____.

Pflug: I see.

Menton: I, as I said, when I was there they didn't think I had enough work to do so they'd add, they'd give me extra responsibilities. So I became consultant to the plant bargaining committee, and I worked on the arbitration briefs with Bill Oliver. Bill Oliver's _____, And I also did some work on the disciplinary cases. I got a lot of people back. _____ arbitration. I worked with Monroe Lake on some other _____. _____ with Dick Leonard. Was Harry Ross in that _____?

Pflug: I believe so. He was in the Ford Department.

Menton: Yeah, Harry Ross.

Pflug: Yeah, he was active in 600. He was involved in work at Local 600.

Menton: Yeah. It was Harry Ross and I who _____ in the wildcat strike. I thought it was Harry Ross. Monroe Lake would get up and be one of the key speakers to try to get them back. The only one who could, as I said, was Bill Oliver.

Pflug: Well, does that pretty much conclude your Local 400 career, then?

Menton: I can't think of anything else, other interesting things to tell.

Pflug: Yeah, I'm sure. It sounded like a

Menton We sounded like a _____ of criminals there.

Pflug: Yeah, fascinating workers. Well this might be a good place to close then.

The END