

INTERVIEW OF PHIL RAYMOND

By: Shelton Tappes

For: Application for benefits from the Pioneer Organizers Fund.

This is Shelton Tappes in the Hilton hotel lobby at the International Convention in Los Angeles and I am interviewing Phil Raymond, a former UAW organizer and still a member of the UAW because he is carrying an Honorary Withdrawal Card of the last plant in which he worked, Woodall Industries, in the year 1944, the last time he worked.

Brother Raymond is now living in California and his personal income is from Social Security. There is a small pension that his wife receives from her school-teaching days, but their subsistence is principally on Social Security.

Brother Raymond has applied for benefits from the Pioneer Organizers Fund.

Phil, Mike and I have agreed that we would first like to hear from you, in your own words, about some of your activities in organizing auto workers in the pre-UAW days and those days that led up to the organization of the UAW.

Phil Raymond speaking as follows:

"Well, I first entered the auto industry in 1923 when I went to work at the Kelsey Wheel Military Avenue plant. There was practically no organization of the automobile workers at that time, we were completely at

Phil Raymond

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the mercy of the whims of the employers. (Shelton asked, "Excuse me Phil, I forgot to ask your present age. How old are you now?")

I am 78, born in 1899.

Well, of course, I looked around for organization and I found the organization of the United Automobile Aircraft and Vehicle Workers Union that had its office on Adelaide Street, the Electrical Workers Headquarters.

I joined and for some time I worked in the plant trying to get workers organized until I finally got fired for union activity.

Shelton Tappes

Phil, I find this United Automobile Aircraft and Vehicle Workers Union very interesting. Walter Reuther produced a copy of one of the convention proceedings for that union and nobody seemed to have known anything about it. We searched the country and several other people checked out many avenues in attempting to find out more about it, but he wasn't able to do it in his lifetime. You are the first person that we have found that knew anything about that union.

Phil Raymond

Well, it was really an old union, a union that was organized before the automobile industry came into existence and was first organized by the Knights of Labor under the name of Carriage and Wagon Workers Union.

Phil Raymond

We continued to be members until about 1918, when at the Convention of the American Federation of Labor we got posters and the metal workers wanted us to turn over all our members in that category to them and when we refused to do so we were expelled from the AF of L.

Shelton Tappes

In other words, what you're telling us is that the craft unions of the AF of L wanted to chop up the auto workers. In other words, what you are actually telling us is that this is one of the early industrial type unions.

Phil Raymond

Yes, and as a matter of fact, the years before that we remained in the AF of L because the United Miners and the Brewery Workers Union used to support us.

But that year through some manipulation it dropped off and so, during the war we carried on our own organization and we had more than 20,000 members in the City of Detroit.

Shelton Tappes

You're talking about World War I, now?

Phil Raymond

Yes, World War I. At the end of World War I when there was an attack being made on all the unions, when the employers wrapped the American flag around them and called it the Open Shop American Plan.

Phil Raymond

We engaged in a long frustrating strike at the Wadsworth Body plant. (Shelton asked, "Where was the Wadsworth Body plant located?") In Detroit, it was really a part of the Ford Motor Company. Of course, that strike was lost and later that plant burned down. (Shelton Tappes asked, "Was that plant on Piquette, across from the old Studebaker plant?") It may be.

Shelton Tappes

I can remember Wadsworth because that plant originally did a lot of woodworking and, of course, the bodies in those days were reinforced with wood so it would hold that they would make bodies for cars.

Phil Raymond

Then our membership dwindled (the original auto workers wheel). We kept on going and in 1926 the American Federation of Labor held its Convention in Detroit and they just couldn't help but take notice of the auto industry and they passed a resolution that they were going to organize the auto industry. (Shelton Tappes: "Now, this was in 1926?") Yes.

Phil Raymond

Now, at the same time, our little organization held a convention and there I pushed through a motion instructing our officers to send a letter to the AF of L proposing to rejoin the AF of L on the basis of an industrial organization.

Phil Raymond

We never heard from them directly, but around 1928 I received a telephone call from the Labor Commissioner of Michigan, Eugene Brock. You know, he was from the Machinists Union, appointed by Governor Grosebeck as the Labor Commissioner. He told me to come to his office and he informed me there was an AF of L committee in town asking him to arrange a meeting between them and the auto manufacturers. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know what good it will do, but I did it."

At this meeting, they proposed to the auto manufacturers that they should permit them to organize the automobile workers because if they didn't, the "reds" would organize them and they would have to pay through the nose.

Shelton Tappes: "You mean to tell me that this was a group of union leaders approaching the auto bosses?" Phil Raymond: "Right, right."
Shelton Tappes: "Asking their permission to organize?" Phil Raymond: "Yes, yes. Headed by Frye, head of the Metal Trades Division of the AF of L. And, of course, they were told that they think they can handle their labor force without their help, thank you, and that was the end of the AF of L effort."

Shelton Tappes: "Now was this a group put together under Bill Green who was then President?" Phil Raymond: "Positively. Positively. Then later when Frye was asked by reporters how about the organization of the auto industry? He said, "Auto industry, let Foster organize."

Phil Raymond Interview (continued)

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Shelton Tappes: "He was talking about William C. Foster?"

Phil Raymond: "Yes, yes."

Shelton Tappes: "How do we tie in this early auto worker activity with the UAW as we know it today and the UAW-CIO?"

Phil Raymond

Well, by that time, I was elected Secretary-Treasurer of our little union and we found that it was up to us to carry on that fight alone and, as a matter of fact, Knudsen once made the statement in the papers that the auto industry had nothing to fear from the AF of L, that the only ones giving them trouble was the auto workers union which comes back to the struggle again and again with the persistency worthy of a better cause. Those were his words.

So, we took help from wherever we could get it and, of course, we were called "reds" - but we led strikes and we held shotgate meetings.

Now one of the early strikes in 1928 was at the Briggs Meldrum Avenue plant where the oil sanders and the wet sanders came out on strike and we led that strike.

Another strike that we led in Detroit was at the Fisher Body #18, you know, out Fort.

We also led a big strike in 1929 at the Fisher Body plant in Flint. You know, that was the old Durant plant and the whole plant was out on strike.

Phil Raymond

It was during that strike that we had a great meeting of the workers and their families and Chief Scabarta came down with the State Police and sheriffs but they didn't dare to interfere with that particular meeting.

So, there were a number of other strikes that we carried on until about 1929 until, when as we all know, the bottom dropped out and the Great Depression came on.

Shelton Tappes: "So, that union sort of disappeared."

Phil Raymond

It kept on operating and began to turn more attention to organizing the unorganized, to build unemployment councils and so on.

We had demonstrations before the plant. The best known one is the Ford demonstration demanding jobs or relief. You remember the guns and four people were killed in that affair.

So, that struggle went on until about 1933.

At that time Green made a statement that you can't organize and win strikes during a depression. But we led a strike at the Briggs Waterloo Avenue plant, as you may remember, that was composed of skilled workers - pattern makers and tool and die workers and we won that strike.

After that strike, we had another strike at the Motor Products plant, you know the one next to the Briggs plant on Mack Avenue and that struggle was won.

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We did win some concessions from the employers and soon after that happened all the Briggs plants came out. The Hudson Motor plant came out, Murray Body came out and I'll tell you it was more than our little organization could handle.

So, when the AF of L finally stepped into the field (there was one man before Dillon, I don't remember his name) who first came. They were first going to organize more or less on a craft basis, but they finally came to some understanding that temporarily they would organize them all in one organization and maybe later on divide them according to their crafts.

Anyway, the AF of L finally stepped in and we were dubious as to whether to work with them or not at that time.

Well, I'll tell you that in the first Administration of Roosevelt there was little talk of easing up but there wasn't any real progress made until the second Administration and you know that's when Wagner Troppone made his proposal. There was the Wagner hearing on labor conditions, etc.

Now when Dillon came in, it looked like this was the real thing. We came to the decision that our little organization couldn't do the job, it would take the whole labor movement to do that job. We decided to disband our organization and send our people into the AF of L and that's what we did.

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For instance, we had a strong outfit in the Ford Motor Company. You may remember everyone was saying that's a "red stronghold."

Now, one of the things in 1938, for instance, it was announced there would be a hearing in Washington on labor conditions. Bill McKie and others, we organized a group of Ford workers to go down to testify at Washington. Also, there was a hearing in the Masonic Temple right here in Detroit.

This was the time when Dillon was in charge and I was working with McKie. The night before that hearing at the Masonic Temple, McKie was at my house and we worked out his report that he was to give. He gave that report and it was quite impressive. I remember Dillon came to me and said, "Well, what do you think of that report?" I said, "It was darned good, wasn't it?" He said, "Yes, we have some good people in our organization now." He didn't know that I was working with them at the time.

Around this time, one of the organizers in our group, in Dearborn, George Marchuck, was waylaid and killed on his way to the union meeting.

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We later had a meeting with McKie and others and we decided that we wouldn't have so many meetings just of the union openly where the spies could take note and so on, that we would organize on the basis of small meetings in homes and fraternal organizations.

It was this time, I think, that Stanley Nowak was put in charge.

So, between Stanley Nowak and John Zeremba and Bill McKie, I was practically working for the organization. Shelton Tappes: "What do you mean practically?"

Phil Raymond

Because I wasn't made an official organizer, but I was working with John Zeremba and Stanley Nowak and I was getting paid about \$20 per week at this time and we were meeting in fraternal organizations, particularly the I. W. O., with groups of workers from all over, not only from Dearborn and Detroit, but from towns all around we were having these meetings, signing them quietly, etc.

Now in 1936, at the first convention, it was in Detroit, I believe (the Auto Workers Convention) that I became more active with Bill McKie.

Shelton Tappes: "Was that when Dillon was appointed President of the union?" Phil Raymond: "Yes." Shelton Tappes: "Were you at that convention?" Phil Raymond: "I wasn't in the convention itself, I was in the visitor's gallery."

Phil Raymond Interview (continued)

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Now in 1939, when that Labor Day parade took place, I worked with McKie, Nowak and Zeremba to organize this parade where the Ford workers would participate with masks on.

Shelton Tappes: "Were you being paid at that time by the CIO or the UAW?" Phil Raymond: "Yes, yes." Shelton Tappes: "1939, you say?" Phil Raymond: "yes, yes."

Phil Raymond

Yes, this was 1939, but in 1938 I was working with McKie on the proposition of the workers in the Case Hardening Department of the Ford plant where two of the workers were poisoned while eating their lunch by cyanide poisoning.

Now in this plant they were actually shoveling cyanide poison by the shovelful.

The papers carried on a campaign to the effect that these workers were poisoned by their wives. They were bringing in reports that in a garbage dump near the plant some dogs ate some of the food and they died of cyanide poisoning. Together with McKie and a few others, we put out leaflets and we forced the coroner to come out with a statement that it was a job related incident.

Shelton Tappes

Well, we would like to get back to 1939 when you were involved in organizing. The important thing to us is to have a clear understanding of

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your involvement with the UAW's organizing program. What assignments were you given while you working with Stanley Nowak and John Zeremba?

Phil Raymond

To meet with a group of workers that we could involve in the various fraternal organizations. Now we would get 5 or 6, in some cases, a few more together who were auto workers.

Shelton Tappes: "When you say fraternal organizations, can you be a little more explicit? What kind of fraternal organizations?"

Phil Raymond: "The Croatian IWO, there were the Romanians up around Dearborn and the Italians had an organization. It was with these outfits mainly that we worked together."

Shelton Tappes: "So, your job was to organize the foreign-born and, of course, the second generation people who were from the various ethnic groups. Was this done under Stanley Nowak and John Zeremba?"

Phil Raymond: "Yes, yes."

Shelton Tappes: "John Zeremba, of course, originated from Dodge Local 3 and Stanley Nowak -----?"

Shelton Tappes: "How long did you work with them in that capacity? You say you were working with them in 1938 and 1939, but how long were you on the UAW payroll?"

Phil Raymond Interview (continued)

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Phil Raymond: "Just before 1941 I would say." Shelton Tappes:
"Oh, just about three years."

Shelton Tappes, "Did you work under Homer Martin as President?"

Phil Raymond: "Yes, I did." Shelton Tappes: "Were you still on the UAW
staff when Homer Martin was succeeded?" Phil Raymond: "I certainly was."

Shelton Tappes: "The new President, of course, was R. J. Thomas. In
fact, I thought he was one of the persons we had to keep away from in
organizing these groups. What was the main reason?" Phil Raymond:

"Well, for some strange reason, a lot of our fellows were being laid off
who became too active in the union activities."

Phil Raymond: "Around 1944, I finally got to working at
Woodall Industries, part of Local 205, and I worked there until just before
the last election campaign of Franklin Roosevelt when I was taken out by
the local. Shelton Tappes: "Oh, they put you on the P. A. C. program?"

Phil Raymond: "Yes, they put me on that program to participate in the registration
drive."

Phil Raymond: "Lloyd Jones was working." Shelton Tappes:

"He was at that time President of Local 2?" Phil Raymond: "With Tracey
Doll who seemed to be in charge of that whole region. So, I worked on
the registration and after that in the campaign itself. I was getting my
pay from Local 205."

Phil Raymond Interview (continued)

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Shelton Tappes: "So, this was the end of your career as an auto worker in 1944. Was it because Woodall went out of business?"

Phil Raymond: "No, there were quite a few laid off and there was a strike there too. And, of course, production went down very much right after the war."

Shelton Tappes: "And, you didn't have very much seniority anyway."

Phil Raymond: "No, no. So, in 1945, I took a Withdrawal Card."

Shelton Tappes: "After you found out you couldn't get back?" Phil Raymond:

"Yes." Shelton Tappes: "You haven't worked since then?" Phil Raymond:

"Not in the auto industry."

Shelton Tappes: "Now you are retired." Phil Raymond: "Yes."

Shelton Tappes: "You are how old?" Phil Raymond: "78. I was born in 1899."

Shelton Tappes: "So, you are living on Social Security?"

Phil Raymond: "Yes."

Shelton Tappes: "I can't think of anything else to ask you. The input here shows you covered quite a span of years as an active organizer and member of the UAW and that you now have a Withdrawal Card."

Shelton Tappes: "We will see what our committee thinks of it and you will be notified as quickly as we can get word to our committee."

Phil Raymond: "Thank you very much. Well, that will probably not be until July or August."

Shelton Tappes: "Well, maybe not that long. We will do the best we can." Phil Raymond: "Thank you, I would appreciate it."

Shelton Tappes

After we finished this tape, I understand there are a few more things you wanted to say.

Phil Raymond

Yes, to keep the records straight, I just wanted to say that our old organization went into the AF of L from the Knights of Labor around 1890, just a matter of historical record.

The other thing is regarding that cyanide poisoning. What the papers were trying to imply was that the wives may have had something to do with it because dogs who ate out of their garbage cans around their homes died a mysterious death from cyanide poisoning.

The other thing I want to mention is that during the Ford campaign I was assigned by both Stanley Nowak and John Zeremba to participate in working on the radio campaign.

Shelton Tappes: "Did you speak on radio?" Phil Raymond: "I didn't. It wasn't advisable you know."

Note: There was a partial sentence at the end of the tape and the tape ran out.

Also, I had no background material for the spelling of the names in this interview, so they may be incorrect.
