

KENNETH BANNON INTERVIEW
September 14, 1986
Tape #1

B: Hello.

Q: Hello, is Mr. Bannon in?

B: Yes, this is Mr. Bannon. Hi, this is Judy Stepan-Norris calling from Los Angeles.

B: Yes, well you're right on time, aren't you?

Q: Yes. How are you doing this morning?

B: Fine, thanks. How about you?

Q: Pretty good. A little early for me but I'll--

B: Yeah, it is, it is.

Q: Yes. Okay, do you have any questions before we begin?

B: Oh no, go right ahead.

Q: Okay, I'd like you to start by just giving a short description of your childhood, maybe where you were born and raised, and if your parents were involved in the union movement.

B: I was born back in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1914. My mother died when I was four years of age in the flu epidemic and I lived with different grandparents and aunts and uncles until I was about 10 years of age. Then my dad remarried and when I was about 11 or 12 I went to live with my stepmother and dad and moved to Pittston, Pennsylvania. My dad was not involved in the union movement as such. He was a member of a union but he wasn't active in it. My grandfather Gaffney was a member of the Socialist Party and very very active in organized labor up in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Q: Was that a coal mining town?

B: No, my grandfather Gaffney was tied in with the city workers. As a matter of fact, he caused a strike up there in the early twenties and he was fired by Mayor Durkin, Mayor German rather, so he had some pretty rough times there for a while. He finally got back to work but not in the job he had but as a person who would be hauling ashes. This was back in the hard coal fields.

Q: Was the public workers that he belonged to, was that the AFL union or TUEU?

Do you know?

B: The AF of L.

Q: The AFL.

B: Yeah, way back. You're going back to the twenties.

Q: Right.

B: But, anyhow, my grandfather Bannon was quite active in the United Mine Workers in Scranton, Pennsylvania. So that's the background but as far as my dad was concerned he was a member but not real active.

Q: Of the mine workers?

B: No, my dad was a member of the IUE.

Q: The United Electrical.

B: Yeah, United Electrical.

Q: Oh, okay. When did you start working? Did you start working immediately in the auto plants or how did you involved with it?

B: No, as a result of some of my activities back in Pittston, Pennsylvania, and after I graduated from school why I worked in the coal mines and we had a bad situation up in Dupont, Pennsylvania, one of the mines I was working in. The air was bad and so I shut the mine

down; I and another person, Patty Nardel, we shut the mine down. And at that point in time the CIO was getting very very active and Tom Kennedy, who was then Secretary-Treasurer of the United Mine Workers lived in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, and I think Mike Kosic was the Regional Director of Region I of the United Mine Workers, they said: Well, if you have that kind of piss and vinegar we could use you out in Detroit to help organize the CIO. Not the UAW at that point in time but the CIO that I was sent out here to do, to organize.

Q: Oh.

B: And so my wife and I got married very young and so my wife and I came out to Detroit in 1936, and at that point in time you could buy a job at Ford Motor Company, Harry Bennett and his group. And the United Mine Workers I'm sure, I know it was the United Mine Workers bought a job, bought me, bought a job for me at the Ford Rouge Plant.

Q: Oh.

B: So I worked at the Ford Rouge plant from '36 and helped to organize Rouge and--

Q: Which building did you get hired into?

B: The Motor Building, the old Motor Building in the Steering Gear Department.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: And I helped to organize there and--

Q: Can you describe in detail some of those early organizing efforts inside the plant itself.

B: Well they were pretty bad. Well, as you might have read, you were not allowed to talk about union. If you had a button on or anything else

you were automatically discharged. I was fired in 1938 on New Year's Eve really.

Q: Oh really.

B: 1938, 1937 you might say because it was New Year's Eve. But I was--

Q: For union activity?

B: Well they wouldn't say for union activity back then, what the devil.

Q: Yeah.

B: Of course it was quite obvious and then I was fired again in 1940, but I got back through the NLRB on both occasions.

Q: Oh really, how long did it take to get back?

B: In 1938 I would say about nine months; in 1940 I would say about three weeks.

Q: So in the meantime you continued your organizing activities outside the plant?

B: Well, no, I had to get some work, at that point in time I had a child and my wife; well, you know, you need bread and butter to put on the table.

Q: So you weren't on the CIO organizing payroll?

B: Well, no, no, no, no. I wasn't a full-time organizer, I was just in-house.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: In-shop organizer.

Q: Okay, so what they did for those guys is just get them a job inside and then go to work without--

B: Well, sure, you know, the best way to organize anything is get on the inside.

Q: Uh-huh. During that early time who were some of the most important organizers inside the plant?

B: Most of the organizers were members of the Communist Party. Because of my background, my dad, as I mentioned, my grandfather was a Socialist so I had pretty good ideas and I knew about different things. I was never a member of the Communist Party. But the people who helped us to organize Ford more so than anyone else is the Ford Motor Company by their behavior, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: You couldn't go to the john, that was a pretty deplorable situation. You had no place to sit down at lunchtime and it was pretty hectic. You had the Service Department there and you had new people coming in working next to you and particularly those of us who were kind of vocal and you had to watch what you said and it was a kind of a harrowing experience. Then you had many many people who were unable to, who, well we used to call them foreigners--I never called them foreigners but people who had come from the old country so to speak and who were unable to speak English in a clear manner. They were somewhat fearful of losing their jobs and you would see the advantage the company, the foreman would take of these people. You know call them Polehunks, you know and it was pretty pretty pretty bad. And you would see people for goodness sake fired for no reason and many of these people had no idea what redress they had, so word like that, well activities like that all throughout Ford particularly in the Rouge plant which was the key to organizing. So the activities of the

Ford Motor Company and the organizers as such were the people, the best organizers were members of the Communist Party.

Q: How important do you think that the early efforts of Reuther and his 174 Local were in the early Ford organizing period?

B: Well I think it was important that we had a base, you know we had a place to go to. You know we were members of Local 174 way back then and then when we began to organize we put up our own little offices up up on Michigan Avenue there. We got money from the CIO for that of course.

Q: Yeah. Was that when the formal organizing committee was set up with Mike Widman?

B: Yeah, well, yeah Mike came aboard I think in 1937, '39. The one who really did the job as far as Mike Widman's organization was concerned was Smith. He was, anyhow had kind of a big paunchy stomach and he chewed tobacco and dribbled all over his shirt but I can't think of his first name now.

Q: Smith, where was he from?

B: CIO headquarters. He worked for Mike Widman. I can't think of his first name now but he did the masterful job in organizing at Ford. Widman as far as the CIO was concerned from the outside.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: And you had--I'm trying to think back. I have all this stuff around here but Mike and Mike was more of a, you know, Mike was kind of a sophisticated guy. He was a sophisticated person. Dick Leonard helped too, I might add. Dick was on the payroll. He was in Local 227 which was the Chrysler local, the DeSoto local really.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: At that point in time.

Q: Who were some of the important people on the inside?

B: On the inside, Bill McKie who was a member of the Communist Party, Ed Lock who was a member of the Communist Party who worked in the same department I worked in.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Ed, you know, Ed Lock was fired for--not Ed Lock, Johnny Gallo. Ed Lock was a member of the Party too. Johnny Gallo was also instrumental. Johnny Gallo was the person who was fired for laughing by Superintendent Bayes. Johnny Gallo worked next, well for about a year and a half Johnny Gallo and I worked side by side but be that as it may--I think I mentioned Percy Llewellyn. Shelton Tappes was about the only real great Negro black leader that we had.

Q: Where was Horace Sheffield at this time? Was he--

B: Well Horace wasn't that active in the foundry back in the early forties. He did a little bit, he did some work. Don't misunderstand me, he was helpful. But the ones who were outstanding, I thought you were talking about the outstanding people.

Q: Yeah, I am.

B: Okay. Shelton Tappes who was black.

Q: How did Dave Moore compare?

B: Dave Moore, Dave helped somewhat but Dave was an opportunist. Dave was a very, kind of a slimy guy, he wasn't as forthright as Ed Lock and Johnny Gallo and some of the other people. You're talking

primarily now about the ones that we removed from office from membership for a period of time, right?

Q: Yeah, well, yeah. I was just trying to think of people that I've interviewed and the names that have come up in the organizing efforts.

B: Well, I think if you interviewed Dave Moore, see at the point that Dave Moore, at the point we reinstated these people and put Dave Moore back in the Dearborn Engine Plant. I later put Dave Moore on the staff, on my staff, the staff of the National Ford Department and, you know, just to let people know what the heck, you know, so he was a member of the Party but what the hell, you know, he could do a good job so I take him out of the plant and put him on the staff. I was criticized rather severely by some people for doing that, but as you know, in UAW we have a rule that at age 65 you go out on retirement.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So I put Dave out and I had to put Dave out the same way as everyone else went out.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So Dave, after all I had done for Dave Moore, he files charges against me and against the UAW for discharging him. He wasn't discharged, he was put on retirement the same as everyone else is put out.

Q: Yeah.

B: But anyhow Dave--

Q: How about Dorosh?

B: Walter Dorosh?

Q: Yeah.

B: Well, I'm going to tell you. Is this off the record or on the record?

Q: Well, I could turn the tape off if you want it to be off or I could leave it on, it's up to you.

B: Well turn it off for a minute.

Q: Okay.

B: Walter was President of Local 600 for a while there and how active he was in the Party it's anyone's guess.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Any meetings that I had occasion to attend and I would attend Communist Party meetings, we all did, what the hell could you do back in the late thirties?

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So what the heck, we were all grabbing at straws so to speak but as I mentioned I think, I never joined the Party although Matt Joseph who was very close to me, very dear to me Matt and I went to a couple of meetings with Matt Joseph of the Party and almost signed a card for Matt Joseph.

Q: Now what would happen at these organizing meetings or these Communist Party meetings that made it almost compulsive for people who were interested in unionization to go? Would they mainly discuss union organizing efforts or what?

B: Well you'd discuss, well it all depends upon what year you're talking about. If you're talking about during the organizing days of Ford, it was primarily getting the Ford workers into the UAW. If you talk about 1942-43, it was the Second Front, World War II was on. Let's get America moving into Europe for god's sake and help Russia.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: That was the Party philosophy at that point in time so, you know, it all depends upon the time of year. They followed the line dictated by the Soviet Union.

Q: So do you think that that was the major breaking point when the war came on and their line changed that the people who were sympathetic with their basic aims were no longer willing to participate?

B: Well I was no longer, I was never never in support of their aims. I happen to be a Catholic and a practicing Catholic and I could recognize the good they were doing to help organize Ford. But when you go to the meetings and you hear their philosophy on different issues for goodness sake, that there is no God and blah, blah, blah, you name it, and the system is no good and so on and so on and so on. Well the system still isn't as good as it could be, but it's the best system in the world and the other gosh darn thing is it's a system that you can work in and change somewhat.

Q: Uh-huh,

B: But if you read the minutes of the 1943 convention up in Buffalo and study the influence of the Communist Party in the UAW at that point in time, a good portion of that record of that convention was devoted to the Second Front.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: They wanted the UAW to come out in favor of a Second Front and we who were supporting Dick Leonard and Walter Reuther and that group we finally defeated that group.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: This is in my opinion, it was really the breaking point within UAW, of the back of the Communist Party.

Q: Was their pushing of the Second Front?

B: That's right and it's all there in the--I'm sure you can get your hand on a copy.

Q: Oh yeah, uh-huh. Okay. Can you describe what groups were the most active in the Ford organizing drive? Different groups, like were the ACTU involved?

B: The ACTU? The American Catholic Trade Union group?

Q: Yeah.

B: Ah they weren't that active. I'm a Catholic and I never joined the ACTU until well after we had organized. As a matter of fact, I think I was over at Local 400 when I joined ACTU.

Q: What year did you join?

B: Pardon.

Q: What year did you join ACTU?

B: I think it was 1945. I was in the service since '41.

Q: Okay, now what would a typical ACTU meeting consist of?

B: An ACTU meeting?

Q: Yeah.

B: Well it would open with a prayer, what have you, and the encyclicas on labor and they would support Catholics. In short, Walter Reuther was an agnostic. Well all you do is pick up a copy of The Wage Earner, pick up old copies of The Wage Earner, particularly if you get around, you know, the forties, the middle forties. They did a hatchet job on Walter Reuther, Paul Webber and Doherty.

Q: Who were they supporting then?

B: Well they weren't supporting anyone really and, furthermore, they didn't have a hell of a lot of support amongst themselves as it was.

Q: How big do you think the group was at the Rouge Plant? How many Ford workers do you think?

B: ACTU?

Q: Yeah.

B: Oh hell if they had 500 they had a lot at that point in time.

Q: Oh really.

B: Oh at that point in time we had about 60,000 people in the Rouge at that point in time. They were very small.

Q: Who were some of the active ACTU leaders? I know that Joe McCusker and Henry McCusker were involved.

B: Henry was, Joe McCusker was never active.

Q: How about, see then Paul St. Marie right?

B: Oh yeah, Paul was very very, Paul was very active.

Q: And then--

B: See your talking about people who were part of the Tool and Die Unit. In the Tool and Die Unit, the Masonic Order was very very active and to counteract that you had the ACTU becoming very active. Paul Ste. Marie was in the Tool and Die Unit. Joe McCusker was in the Tool and Die Unit. Joe would talk a good game but to the best of my knowledge Joe was never a member of the ACTU. I know Henry was.

Q: Yeah. So what did the Masonic Order do then?

B: Pardon.

Q: What was--how was the Masonic Order active?

B: Well in the same manner that the Catholics would like to be active or any other organization, politically, let's elect our own people.

Q: Were there, were they active in any other building besides Tool and Die, the Masons?

B: Well they may have been but of no consequence, but in Tool and Die they were powerful people.

Q: Okay, the other thing I wanted to ask you was, if you can think of any other powerful ACTU leaders at the Rouge besides, let's see there's Fitzpatrick--

B: Oh yeah, John Fitzpatrick was active. John Fitzpatrick was very active.

Q: He was Tool and Die also, wasn't he?

B: Yeah. I don't know of anyone who was active that wasn't Tool and Die.

Q: Oh really.

B: I'm talking about Rouge now.

Q: Yeah.

B:: John Fitzpatrick was very very very active. Oh Henry McCusker, by the way, was not Tool and Die. Henry was just a devout Catholic. See the Masonic Order pretty much ran that unit over there as far as UAW was concerned.

Q: Which one?

B: The Tool and Die Unit.

Q: Oh really.

B: After Paul left, Paul was elected the president I'm sure you know that. Then you have Jack Lake who was high in the Masonic Order, Scotty Campbell was high in the Masonic Order, Tom Jelley, oh christ

almighty. Tom Jelley supposedly was also a member of the Communist Party.

Q: And he was a member of the Masonic Order, too.

B: That's the word, yeah. John Orr was a member. John I don't think was a member of the Masonic Order, but supposedly John was a member of the Party.

Q: So you had a big group of people belonging to the Communist Party in the Tool and Die also?

B: Oh yes, that's where Dorosh came from, who was a Party member. Jesus Chantres. Oh yeah, you had a--

Q: So that was really a diverse group there in the Tool and Die.

B: Well, see you had the ACTU, you had the Masonic Order and you had the Commies. The Commies and the Masonic Order pretty much got along together. They usually joined forces together.

Q: Oh really.

B: Oh sure, why not?

Q: Were the Masons liberal politically?

B: Well you're now talking about some people who were in the Rouge Plant who were active in UAW, sure they were active politically. Liberal?

Q: Yeah.

B: Well, you know, people can preach their different things and practice something completely different.

Q: Yeah.

B: I don't know of any member I can recall really who was a flaming liberal. The group that I was part of, we had to put this thing together, I don't recall anyone in our group that was a member of the

Masonic Order and we considered ourselves, you know, cornerstones of the liberalism within the UAW.

Q: Were there many Socialists involved in the Rouge organizing? Socialists or Trotskyites.

B: Oh heck yes, heck yes, surely, surely. But we would do, we would not do it in the same manner that the Commies would do it. They preached a philosophy, you know, and they were more bold than we were.

Q: They would preach the philosophy to the workers on the shop floor?

B: Oh surely, surely. It wouldn't be this way in Russia. You wouldn't have to take this crap in Russia, the workers run the plant in Russia. Oh surely, heck yes. You want to remember what I said some minutes ago, they had many many people in the Rouge Plant for goodness sake, in all the plants really who had come from different countries.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Their command of the English language wasn't very good and their understanding also of the English language wasn't that good and they were pushed around like mad for goodness sake. That was one of the reasons I got active in the union, you know. After I get in the plant, you know, it's one thing you got to help organize it and then at the point you're in the darn place and you see what's going on, my god, this is hell, this is wrong. These people weren't being treated as individuals, as people, they were being treated as part of the machinery. As a matter of fact, the machinery was better treated than the men.

Q: Yeah, I can imagine. Did the Socialist Party have meetings and regular coordinating events or whatever as other groups did?

B: No, no, no, no, no more than, well the Commies would meet periodically but they were a little bit different breed. One of the problems you have and that's why we were always so careful, you never knew who the hell was a member of your organization who was also a member of the Service Department.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So you had to be very careful. You would only, you know, the only way you would get to know people is by working side by side with them and giving them false information in this way and that way and see if it bounces back.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: You know we were hearing many different things for goodness sake when you become part of an organizing drive, you have to be careful and so on and so on. But be that as it may meetings as such for organizing purposes, no, we would meet amongst ourselves, people who were active in the--how should I say it? People who were close to Walter and what Walter stood for and people like Walter.

Q: Uh-huh. So did people who considered themselves Socialist or members of the Socialist Party pretty much acted as individuals when they were working?

B: Yea, individuals, we had an anti-, what we called were anti-Commies and anti-Ford.

Q: And you didn't become anti-Communist until World War II came when they supported a Second Front?

B: Well, philosophically yes we were anti then but when you were trying to organize the plant what the hell, you're not going to kick a person

in the teeth for god's sake who is helping you to accomplish what we want to accomplish.

Q: Do you think that the Communists all acted in accord with the Communist Party line at all times, or do you think that was an individual thing, that some people were more consistent with it and other people were less consistent with it?

B: I couldn't answer that, you know, I would go to the meetings now and then but I wasn't that close to them. I would imagine, well, I do know some of them. When the McClellan Committee came into town into Detroit and quite a few of them who were members of the Party, but hell I don't want to mention names here. They had informers and until McClellan began to mention quite a few names, and quite a few families started to split up or problems within the families came up in the McClellan hearings, and then a lot of denials began to take place. It was--

Q: Did McClellan investigate Ford too?

B: Surely, the McClellan Committee investigated the Party, right? Its activities and there were hearings. At the hearings many of the active members of the Party were also members of Local 600.

Q: What year did they do their investigations? Do you remember?

B: The McClellan Committee?

Q: Yeah.

B: I think it was '42.

Q: I should try to go back and find some of that.

B: Now hold on, no, no, no, it had to be after '42, hold on, hold on, it had to be in the '49-'50-'51-'52.

Q: You're not talking about the House Un-American Activities Committee.

B: Yep, yep.

Q Oh that's the same one. Okay, yeah. Okay. How much influence do you think that John L. Lewis had over the Ford organizing drive?

B: Oh John L. helped there's no question about it and put a lot of money into it and gave part of his time, his people did. Well without the United Mine Workers, it wouldn't have been organized within the Rouge.

Q: So do you think that his input was mostly by way of financial aid and lending organizers rather than--

B: Well also what he represented.

Q: Yeah.

B: He accomplished something, the mine workers, you know it was something to point to.

Q: Yeah and that held on, I notice that in the 10-year anniversary of the Local 600 they invited John L. Lewis to speak to the rally.

B: Well the reason for that, the reason for that, you have to look behind that. Carl Stellato who was then President of Local 600 was then at odds with Walter Reuther. Carl became President of 600 and we elected him, we supported Carl Stellato we defeated Tommy Thompson. Carl just felt that he should take over the entire union, anything he wanted he could get. Well, it wasn't that way. And then John L. Lewis and Walter had a very very serious falling out and there were many reasons for it. But when it comes time for the anniversary celebration Walter wasn't invited and heck I know the story only too well. Mike Rinaldi and many other people were very opposed to Carl Stellato. I knew Carl

also. I later put Carl on my staff. The reason John L. Lewis was invited was to embarrass Walter Reuther.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: That was a pretty nasty time.

Q: Okay, do you remember which groups were affiliated with the AFL in the early organizing period?

B: What do you mean what groups?

Q: Well like if the ACTU was at all active in the organizing drive would they be organizing for the AFL or CIO?

B: No, no, no.

Q: There were no groups that were working for the AFL?

B: No, no, no, I don't know of any groups. The AFL at that point in time was pretty much largely craftsmen, tradesmen. Well in Ford, when old man Ford was around he wouldn't allow any union help in that shop. He wouldn't allow the building tradesmen in there to build a building. This is one of the reasons that you had so many craftsmen within, you know your maintenance unit at Ford--

Q: Can you hold on a second I got to turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

Q: Well I have quite a few questions.

B: Well because I have to leave here about five to eleven.

Q: You have to leave in 30 minutes.

B: Yeah, about that.

Q: Okay, I'll try to hurry up. You were discussing why there are so many different craftsmen at Ford. You said the craftsmen and the maintenance workers.

B: No, the maintenance people, we had our own electricians what have you so the outside tradesmen were not allowed in, did not do any work in Ford's and the same thing with Tool and Die work. The Tool and Die workers, you know, within the Ford operation was done by our people so they didn't have any affiliation with the outside with the tradesmen who were part of the AFL-CIO building, electricians, so there was no tie-in.

Q: Okay. In Victor Reuther's book, The Brothers Reuther, he mentions that when Walter Reuther was elected in 1946 he sent out a Report of the President which he said raised a stir in the union halls, and he said that that's the point when the International tried to strengthen its caucus in different plants and he says that Jack Conway, Emil Mazey and you were very important in building up the caucus in the Rouge.

B: Well, you know, no. 1, Victor Reuther was never really an active member of our unit, well not an active shop member of our unit. I don't think he ever worked in a plant. I was Chairman of the Reuther Caucus back in '46 and '47. I was President of Local 400, well I was a member of 600 and then I transferred over to Highland Park after the 1943 convention. But be that as it may I was president of that local union. Yeah, I, we pulled the Ford thing together, no question about it. I don't know what your question is.

Q: Well the question is, what did you do at that time to strengthen your caucus? What would be the actual activities that you would--

B: Well what I would do, anytime they made a mistake, for godsake, I would put out a paper on the thing.

Q: You would do what?

B: Anytime I thought they made a mistake I would put out a paper on it. I was President of Local 400 and the membership supported me dearly over there, and when I would put out a paper I would put out enough to pass out at the gates of Local 600. So I would take some of my staff of 400 and we would go over to Rouge and pass the papers out at Rouge.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Well, you know, finally the people at Rouge were getting a different story from what they were getting from Tommy Thompson and that group, and then in '47 they came up with a pension program that was stinking, really, really, really bad and I, you know, I would go to the Council meetings--I had the right to go as President of Local 400 and I would raise all kinds of hell about what they were trying to sell us on that pension thing and I got the pension thing knocked down and I did it nationwide. I sent papers out to every Ford local union in the country. But the important thing is as a result of the Ford Council meeting I was able to speak with the leadership of the Ford Council every time we had a Council meeting.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: I raised an awful lot of hell, believe me I did. I mean I raised enough hell for godsake that the pension program in '47 was knocked down, and the reason it was knocked down was the contributory program,

was jointly administered two from the companies and one from the union and it wasn't funded, it wasn't guaranteed and I just cut the living hell out of the goddamn thing. I had a great time doing it too and that took quite a few months I think.

Q: Were there any people on the inside of the Ford Rouge Plant that were cooperating with you in that effort?

B: Oh sure, I had my own caucus at Rouge. Sure I was at 400 but I had my own caucus. I had Gene Prato and Bill McIntosh, what the hell, I had a big caucus at the Rouge.

Q: So those were the people that were basically considered to be the right-wing caucus at Rouge.

B: Okay, well they can call it right-wing but it was a hell of a lot more further left than the Commies and the Commies were only concerned with the war at that point in time. Come on, what the devil. How we could help Russia? Russia was in the doldrums then.

Q: Okay, to change the subject a little bit. You became Ford Director. In which year was that?

B: '47.

Q: '47.

B: 1947.

Q: Can you describe what your basic duties were as Ford Director?

B: Well, the same as anyone, the same as they are today for Steve Yoakige. You negotiate the contract, administer the contract, meet with Ford Motor Company, protect the membership, the same activities.

Q: When you first became Ford Director, were you dealing with Harry Bennett or John Bugas on the Ford side?

B: Harry Bennett was the top guy.

Q: Can you explain how dealing or handling contract negotiations with him was? Was it very difficult?

B: Well, no, I never did business with him directly.

Q: Oh.

B: He was only there a short while after I took over. No, the person I did business with was John Bugas. John Bugas was the guy who, you know, supposedly had Bennett fired.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So John is the person I did business with.

Q: How was dealing with him?

B: Well, he's dead, I don't want to say too much about him. You know, he had no background in the labor movement. He was with the FBI, he was a policeman.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Not that I'm saying anything is wrong about, bad about a policeman but their point of view is so much different than a labor leader.

Q: Did he use his FBI information or contacts to his advantage at the bargaining table?

B: Oh, knowing John as I did and I knew him quite well, John would use anything that would be helpful. What the devil that was the way it was back then. It was a pretty messy game, it's changed a lot since of course and all to the better.

Q: How much input did you think that the Ford workers had in the creation of contract demands? Do you think it was a relatively democratic process?

B: Well Ford workers had more input than General Motors or Chrysler. The reason I say that, you want to remember that our contract did not expire at the same time until after 1955.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: You know the mistake people make is they think, okay, you know, we have always had contracts that expired at the same time which is not true. So the way it came about in 1955 we put the SUB program together, we put it together at Ford. Then we went to GM because the GM and Ford men were always fairly close together and Walter put it together over there, but you had to wait a little while before you got together because you've got to (?) the contract. I don't think it expired until July 15 at that time. Now we go to into the '58 negotiations with a three-year contract. In 1958 the inventory of cars was great, great, great, great, great, and our deadline was I believe in September, September the 10th or thereabouts, the middle of September. And again the Ford thing and the Chrysler plant, the Ford thing and the GM thing were tied together a couple of days apart as far as their deadline. We had an understanding with Mr. Ford that because they had the inventory it would be wrong to have a deadline, strike date, and we wanted the contract extended. I mentioned September and I'm wrong. It was May.

Q: Okay.

B: May, our contract expired on May 30th and GM's expired on May 31st. Now I may be off a day or so one way or the other.

Q: That's okay.

B: And so in May of 1958 we had this heavy inventory, lots of cars and rather than set a deadline we wanted to extend the contract which in the past we could always get. Henry Ford agreed in an off-the-record manner. The following day he must have gotten hell from General Motors because when we went to GM with the same type of agreement, GM said no we're not going to extend the contract. Well, then Henry got pretty damn angry with us and he said, go ahead, shut us down. Now I can't talk about what happened at GM, I can talk personally with great knowledge about what happened at Ford. Go head, shut it down, the hell you whatever you want to do, blah, blah, blah, blah. So we would be darn fools to shut them down. So they wouldn't extend the contract so we worked at GM and Ford all of June, all of July, all of August, all of September into October.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Now at this point in time we finally got Ford, we had no contract, we picked up the dues hand by hand, person by person. Our committeemen were not supposed to be devoting full-time to anything and so on and so on. So finally at Ford we got the company to agree to a new contract in October. Then we went to GM and they agreed to the Ford thing and Chrysler agreed to the Ford thing. At that point in time we had the Ford contract expire if I remember correctly on September 5th three years later. Then the Chrysler thing was also put on that date and so was GM and as a result of no extension of the contract we forced the companies to have one termination date and the termination date was the same for all three companies. That's when we came in

contact, that's when we began to put together the, well, we worked a panel.

Q: And was the reason why you went back to the three-year contract rather than five-year?

B: Oh the five-year contract was no good. What the hell the five-year contract came about as only the Korean War. You see we were fearful because during World War II wages were frozen remember?

Q: Uh-huh.

B: So we put together a COLA factor and we said, okay, we have a five-year contract and with COLA well we'll get, you know, as the cost of living increases we'll get wage increases for our people, try to lay them even. But that five-year contract turned out to be a stinker.

Q: Yeah, locks you in for a long time.

B: Yeah, well.

Q Okay, I want to ask you a few questions about Carl Stellato. He started out in the Motor Building at the Rouge and came to work for the International under Percy Llewellyn, right?

B: Yeah.

Q: And at some point when Walter Reuther gets elected in 1946, Llewellyn leaves the International and I guess he goes back to the Rouge and Stellato stays. Is that the point when he switched from being a Left, aligned with the Progressive Caucus, to the Reuther slate?

B: The thing that happened. In 1943--we're going to Buffalo now--we made a deal. We ran Dick Leonard against George Addes up at Buffalo. We made a deal with the people in Local 600 through to Dick Leonard. Okay get 600 Dick as Ford Director, get Dick Leonard, Dick Leonard get

the Ford workers to support you and if you can and Dick works this out with them--Percy Llewellyn was President of Local 600 at that point in time--if you can, then Dick Leonard says, I will not run for Regional Director and you can take it over. The understanding was whether he won or lost he would not run for Regional Director and Percy Llewellyn would take it over.

Q: Okay.

B: That happened, Dick lost by a very small margin and Percy Llewellyn became Regional Director so Twyman becomes President of Local 600 automatically right then. Now we go to the next convention, okay?

Q: Uh-huh.

B: Grand Rapids. I was in the service then. Then Walter is elected in '46 and Dick Leonard is elected Vice President, R. J. Thomas is elected Vice President, George Addes is Secretary-Treasurer. Percy was defeated in '46. I think Percy was defeated in '47 if I remember correctly I don't think Percy was defeated in '46. In any event Percy was, in '47 we took the whole union over, ran Joe McCusker. Joe McCusker became Regional Director and let that whole gang go. Carl Stellato had to go back into the plant.

Q: Oh he did.

B: Pardon.

Q: I didn't know that Carl Stellato went back into the plant.

B: Yeah, Carl went back into the plant.

Q: Then when did he come back to the International?

B: When I put him on the staff, gee whiz I think we elected Carl President of Local 600 in 1949 or '50.

Q: '50. It was '50.

B: For an old man my memory isn't too bad is it?

Q: No, it's very good.

B: So Carl, when did Walter Dorosh become President. I worked the deal out between Carl and Walter Dorosh?

Q: Let's see, I think Stellato was in 15 years or something like that.

B: Whenever Walter Dorosh became President that's when Carl came to work for me.

Q: I thought he came from the International before he went to run for the Presidency at the Rouge.

B: He did, he worked for Percy Llewellyn as a staff member.

Q: Oh, okay. But then you said he went back to the plant.

B: Yeah, after Percy was defeated.

Q: Uh-huh, so he was--I thought Stellato came from the International, that means he was actually on the staff in 1949 and he came back to Rouge just to run.

B: No, no, no, he was back, he was back.

Q: Okay, so but he had the backing of the Reuther slate, right?

B: That's right, and then this is right when Walter was shot in '49. We met in Walter's basement on Longfellow and we agreed to support Carl Stellato as President.

Q: How did you come to support him if he had been previously associated with the Left?

B: Tommy Thompson was very very close to George Addes and that group.

Q: Uh-huh, so he was just the lesser of the two evils.

B: That's right.

Q: Okay, so that when he gets elected on the Reuther slate it's not as if he was a real solid Reutherite.

B: No that turned out to be unbelievable, but anyhow.

Q: Yeah, okay. Do you know if the right-wing in the Rouge supported him wholeheartedly during that 1950 election?

B: Oh sure, that I know. Well see he barely won. That was when Joe Hogan almost knocked the living hell out of him and there's a question as to whether or not Joe Hogan won or not. As the result of that close election Carl Stellato began to play games with the left-wing.

Q: Uh-huh.

B: That's what happened there.

Q: Now how did Carl Stellato get the backing of the Rouge right-wing if they were not part of the deal that....

B: Because of Tommy Thompson.

Q: Oh, just because of that. Okay, so you're saying that when he comes back he starts that housecleaning, he puts the five officers on trial for Communist sympathies and, you know, it takes a whole year to do that and it turns out backfiring on him. The General Council rejects the trial committee's report and then Stellato starts sympathizing with the Left more.

B: Well because he doesn't want any more opposition. You see he knew he wouldn't get too much opposition from the Right because we kind of destroyed ourselves over him. At the point that we take Carl Stellato and make him our candidate and he begins to build up his forces, he uses the right-wing group and then he leaves us and goes to the left-wing group how are we going to get all of our people back?

Q: Uh-huh. So when he's--

B: It took us a while to do that.

Q: When he came back, after he was elected and he started this trial, do you know where he got the idea? Did that come from the Rouge right-wing caucus or the International or what?

B: The International Union.

Q: The International Union had--

B: Because of the Taft-Hartley affidavits what have you.

Q: Because of, oh okay. So they wanted to have the Local take care of it themselves and the way they did that was in getting, supporting the candidate that would do that.

B: They put the administration over the local.

Q: Yeah, that was after the HUAC Hearings, right?

B: Yeah.

Q: Okay. So what was Reuther's reaction when Stellato started affiliating with the Progressive Caucus in the Rouge?

B: The same as yours would be, double cross.

Q: Yeah, okay. Did Reuther then try to support another figure for his own slate?

B: Oh sure, we ran, he did pretty well out there, and then we made peace. What the hell, I mentioned to you Carl was getting tired of being President over there. Oh no, we put it altogether and the way we put it together, it's okay for the President of Local 600 to be against the International, but what you want to remember is you're not going to make a hell of a lot of progress. You're not going to get the recognition. It's all you're doing is hurting the membership. I'm

talking about the leadership wants different things. You think for one damn minute we would give Carl, I wouldn't give Carl anything, I had to give it to him.

Q: So do you think that his political career can be explained by opportunism, Stellato?

B: (?).... Carl was a decent guy and I can understand he got mixed up somehow and he thought he was doing the right thing. Everyone likes to be no. 1 except me.

Q: When the HUAC hearings came to Detroit, I found a letter in the Wayne State archives from the Chairman of that Committee, that's Wood, and Walter Reuther and it was a reply to a letter that Reuther had sent to Wood requesting that he speak before the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings and Wood said that he wouldn't be able to fit him in in Detroit but he may be able to schedule him for Washington. Do you know if Reuther ever testified before them?

B: I don't think so.

Q: Do you know what he would want to have said at the HUAC hearing?

B: No, no. Listen time is running out.

Q: Okay.

B: We have a church picnic and I told them I'd run one of the games over there at 12:30.

Q: Okay, well I appreciate your participation.

B: Well you have about an hour of my time or thereabouts so good luck to you now.

Q: Okay, would you like a copy of the interview?

B: No, I don't need one. I haven't said anything that I would be ashamed of or would want to deny. What is it for your doctorate?

Q: Yeah and then we're also working on a book for the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations which is a compilation of oral history testimonies.

B: Okay, great.

Q: Okay, thanks a lot.

B: I'm glad to be of help.

Q: Bye.

END OF INTERVIEW