B. JOHNSON INTERVIEW
TAPE 1A

Q: A short autobiographical statement on how you got involved in the labor movement, where you were born and raised, if your parents were involved.

A: Well, number one I was working in the plant since December of 1936 and that was prior to any union organization and I was there of course at the time when the union got active and I was there during the pre-organizing days prior to NLRB election and of course shortly after the election, when the union was voted in by a majority of the employees, I was, I became a, what you would call an afternoon shift committeeman in what was then the Production Foundry unit of the local and I pretty well maintained a position at that level until I was inducted into the armed services in '43 and I was there until May of '45 and when I came back of course, I was asked to run for one of the local officer positions which was recording secretary and I ran for a position on what was then Tommy Thompson slate, I was elected recording secretary and I held that position from '46 to December of '48.

Q: How did you get the connections to be asked to run as a recording secretary?

A: Well, number one I completed college. I had a Bachelor's degree prior to going into military service and the push of the membership then was to try and get people that they felt were more highly educated than the rank and file in the plant because they felt there was a need to get people who were better educated to represent the workers as against the company people who were also better educated. So it was a

proposal whereby they felt that, see we have a large number of foreign-born in the plant. We had Poles, Hungarians, Eastern Europeans, some Pakistanis, some people from Pakistan. You have varied countries. A large number of blacks, of course, who were mostly southern born, and a large contingent of people from Appalachia, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia who had come out of the mines. A lot of them had been in the Mine Workers Union when they worked in the mines and when they came to Ford, you know, attracted by the $5 a day proposition back in the late teens and early twenties, a lot of them had had previous union experience and of course a lot of the people in what we call the skilled trades unit, the Maintenance and Construction unit and the Tool and Die unit, a lot of them had either experience in England when they belonged to the British Trade Unions and they learned that journeyman, they picked up their journeyman training then when they came here. They'd been hired as journeymen and millwrights, electricians, pipefitters, tool and die makers, tool makers and they, those two groups basically formed the backbone of the union structure, either those that had had previous union experience in the mine workers under John L. Lewis or they picked it up, basically, in Britain.

Q: You think the ones that had come from the Appalachias were active in the coal miners or just rank and file members?

A: Oh, I would suspect they were mostly, if they were active at all it was at a lower level, maybe job stewards or, Thompson himself had been what they call a check weighman in the mines and he had left the mines because of the cyclical unemployment in the mines, I guess. He came to Detroit and one of his outstanding features was that he had been a

check weighman in the Mine Workers Union before coming to Dearborn and getting hired at the Rouge plant.

Q: Was it in the '20s that most of them started coming into Detroit?

A: No, it would have been later than that because they weren't that old. I think the early '30s would probably be more like it, '30, '34, through '35 and '36.

Q: How about the skilled tradesmen?

A: Well most of them at that time would have been, well they would have been hired sometime in the '30s and preferably probably the middle '30s or the late '30s.

Q: Were you involved with the early organizing attempts?

A: I was involved only at a very minor level. When I was in college at Wayne, I got my degree from Wayne, and I worked afternoons at Ford but I went to school during the daytime, you know, the morning session and even in high school I had heard a lot about John L. Lewis. Of course John L. Lewis at that time was president of the CIO and I had a lot of admiration for Lewis and having watched the conditions in the plant and the treatment that the average worker got at the Ford plant in particular, because that was the only plant I worked in. I felt there was a strong need for a union and even as a high school kid I had a strong leaning toward the union even though I never belonged to it.

Q: Did your parents belong to the unions?

A: No.

Q: So you don't know where you got the sympathies you had?

A: Well basically in school and mostly from reading, you know, reading history and political science and that type of thing but mostly on my own, you know. Reading newspapers you'd hear about John L. Lewis and

Lewis was quite a prominent and powerful figure. Probably more powerful than anyone else in the organized labor movement. Even more powerful than Green who is head of the AFL. At that time the AFL was quite a conservative, very limited type union organization and the CIO was more inclined to, well they went for production workers while AFL was craft union. Unless you were a journeyman you couldn't get in there to begin with and most of the journeymen came through family membership, you know. If your dad was a brick mason, then the son became a brick mason or a pipefitter or a plumber and a lot of people were excluded but it wasn't an exclusion based on race. It was an exclusion based on occupation. If your dad had been an electrician, you had a chance to join the Electrical Workers otherwise you had a pretty slim chance. While the CIO was production workers and it was not structed on skilled trades at all although they had skilled trades as a part of it.

Q: Growing up in Detroit did you experience a pretty active political atmosphere in the city at the time? For example, in the '30s when they had Unemployment Councils and they had the Ford Hunger March?

A: No, I was in high school at the time. I was a little too young to get involved with it.

Q: You remember the Ford Hunger March?

A: I only remember from hearing talk about it if I read about it at all, and I think the march was in '32 I believe. At that time I was in high school. Only read about it and I heard about it from older people that had been involved in it but I had no participation.

Q: Was it pretty rare to find a person like yourself working in a plant with a college education?

A: In those days it was. I would say that probably less than one half of one percent would have had a college degree. And I had never intended to stay too long myself. That was why I went to college so I could get the hell out of there.

Q: So when you were hired into the Foundry the first time what job were you assigned to?

A: Well, when I was hired into Ford's I was in the Stamping plant.

Q: Oh the first time?

A: Yeah. I was never hired directly into the Foundry. I went into the Stamping plant. What is now the Stamping plant we call the Pressed Steel.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And that was manufacturing the components of the body of the car and during layoffs in '39 I got transferred to the Foundry and I stayed there.

Q: What job did you do in the Foundry?

A: Oh I was an electrical apprentice operator. I worked in the steel making unit of the foundry operation and I stayed there all the while I was in the Foundry.

Q: In the Foundry what kind of work is generally done? Is most of the work semi-skilled or unskilled or ...?

A: Well, they're all, there are three categories. You got skill work, semi-skill work and unskilled work. You got all three categories. Coremakers, a coremaker's job is highly skilled. And then we had other trades that came in and serviced, the Maintenance people, some of the pattern makers, model makers. They were the allied trades that serviced the building. Didn't belong directly to that building. They

belonged to what we call our plantwide skilled units. Either Maintenance unit or the Tool and Die unit but they were assigned here for service purposes.

Q: Were they very sizeable?

A: Well, the units themselves they were plantwide in nature. So your Maintenance unit, at that time, must have had more than 9,000 people, employees in that unit. I think the Tool and Die unit probably would run about 4,500 but they serviced all of the plants in the Rouge and they did support work, the repair work, the installation work. They did a lot of the building of the new plants during the war. When they'd need a new building, well, we would use our workforce to an extent that they have the equipment and the knowledge to do the work. They'd only bring in outside contractors when our people didn't have the equipment or the skills necessary.

Q: Did the Tool and Die workers that came into the Production Foundry stay there for a certain amount of time or did different ones come in and out?

A: They would be in and out depending on the need for them. And most of the maintenance people would be there year around but they were electricians, pipefitters, plumbers, millwrights, welders and that. They kept the equipment in shape though. If you had a break down then you brought in the skilled tradesmen and make your repairs, to set up new equipment, to set up new methods.

Q: So what would your estimate be on the most sizeable skilled category in the Production Foundry?

A: Well it varied from time to time. It would be pretty hard to give. We never carried figures based on the numbers in each building. We

had the figures based on them as units. Being a plantwide unit you'd have maybe 9,000 people in the Maintenance and Construction unit but they would be scattered all over the plant. It would be hard to tell for any one time how many would be in any one particular building or location.

Q: Would you say that the Production Foundry itself not considering the Tool and Die or Maintenance workers was mostly semi-skilled or mostly...?

A: It was mostly, I think on the whole you'd, it was equally divided between semi-skilled and unskilled.

Q: And that was a pretty big unit compared to the rest?

A: Yeah, around 9,000 people were there at the time of the war. It was one of the largest units in the plant.

Q: So the production in the Production Foundry didn't change much during the war, did it?

A: Well, with the war production. See we no longer built cars. During the war we built tank parts mainly. And we did some aircraft work, Pratt and Whitney engines. We did some of that work. But we still had a tremendously large workforce because it was cost plus in those days and it didn't cost the company anything. The government paid the tab, so we had large numbers of people that didn't have a heck of a lot to do.

Q: How good was the pay in the Foundry?

A: Well the Foundry pay, we negotiated rates in 1941 and I would say on the whole the rates in the Foundry, we had some of the highest rates in the plant, in the Foundry. My own particular classification was probably the second or third highest in the plant. At that time

production workers and skilled workers made almost the same hourly rates. I can remember when I made $1.35 I guess an hour and the average electrician made $1.20.

Q: Hm.

A: It only changed as the union developed more and more and began to split up into skilled and unskilled categories and then the skilled workers would get the general increase plus an additional increase for skilled. So over a period of time they got out of line, before they got recognized, if you want to use that term. What particular skills they had they wound up making considerably more than production workers. But in the early days we all made about the same.

Q: I've heard that the Production Foundry was one of the plants that had the largest black population.

A: Well that's true.

Q: Is there any other ethnic groups or racial groups that were common in the Foundry?

A: Well, you had a large number of blacks, you had a sizeable group of Italians, you had smatterings of Poles and Hungarians, some Arabic groups and of course you had what you would call, I guess, people of British origin who had come to the U.S. So you had a polyglotton mixture. A lot of nationalities but I think probably predominantly they were black.

Q: Where there any women in the plant?

A: No. Only during the war. During the war they brought in a handful of women. Prior to the war there were no women.

Q: Was that because it was basically heavy work?

A: No. It was because Ford didn't believe in women working in the plant. The only way a woman could get a job in a Ford plant was if her husband was killed in the plant and out of consideration of an employee's death they would occasionally hire a woman. But women had, there were, you could almost count the number of women on two hands in the Rouge plant. In the production, you know, in the hourly rated people. You had women clerical, where they were white-collar workers and not production and you had very few of them. Right after the war it come to be very plain to the union that they're going to get rid of all the women in the plant. For a period of time there was a concerted effort on the part of the union and the company to get rid of all the women. Finally we recognized that we have to give them the same rights that we gave men, seniority rights and so it began to change. That was in the late '40s before that happened because the company just had a out policy that women belonged in the home. They didn't belong in those plants.

Q: Why didn't the union go along with that rationale?

A: Well, the union felt the same way basically as the company. See there had been no women in the plant prior to the war and it wasn't an atmosphere where you were accustomed to seeing women. You just didn't see women in the plant and a lot of the men felt that with the war over and a lot of the guys coming back, those jobs were needed for them. Well of course they had prior seniority rights anyway so they could bump those women, they could displace them, because the women only had seniority starting in maybe '42, '43, and the average guy that had left the plant had seniority prior to that so, it was their preference, they could bump a woman.

Q: So it didn't matter how many years you were in the plant, just mattered what year you entered. Is that right? For example, if the women...

A: You mean for women or for men?

Q: Well, if the women came in '42 and spent three years and a man had come in say '40 and spend one year before he went out...

A: Or 41 for that matter.

Q: Yeah.

A: He had seniority greater than she did because he had military service counted.

Q: Oh, so that was counted...

A: Yeah, coupled with his actual seniority. So using that method they got rid of, not all the women, but they got rid of a substantial number of women until finally I think enough of them went to the International Union and began to raise hell and then there was a change in attitude on the part of local unions. That was not only true of Rouge, it was true of all the plants and they decided they were going to accord women the same seniority protection that they gave to men.

Q: And after that there was a change in policy?

A: Yeah. After that sometime in the '50s I guess they began, the late '40s or the early '50s they began to hire women on the same basis, pretty much as they hired men. See they didn't, by a state law in Michigan women were limited to the hours they could work and they were limited to the, course the state law was changed too. See women couldn't work more than I guess it was 48 hours a week. Sometimes you would have to work seven days a week.

Q: This is before the war?

A: No, this was after. Well the law had been in effect before the war but that was gradually modified to accommodate the fact that if you were working six or seven hours a day and you were working eight, nine or ten hours a day, then you had to change the law otherwise you'd get rid of all the women again. So the law was changed. They were lifting and bending requirements that women couldn't meet. You could only lift so much and anything over that women were automatically excluded from those jobs. That's state law.

Q: In the Production Foundry what kind of relationship did the workers have while they were doing their work? Do they work in teams or mostly individuals or...?

A: Well, they work both ways. They work as teams if the job calls for a team type activity but mainly it was individual. You had a job, if you were an iron pourer, you poured and you worked by yourself. There may be no iron pourers on the line but each person took care of his own segment of the job, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: If you were a molding machine operator, you ran your own machine. There may be 20 machines on the line or there may be 50 on the line and they may be making different types of cores or molds but each person basically did his own job.

Q: Was there much socializing in the after hours among the workers in the Foundry?

A: No, you got the hell out of there just as fast as you could.

Q: Did they work, I mean, live in the same areas, generally?

A: Well, they lived all over the area here, you know, Dearborn, Detroit, Melvindale, Allen Park, Lincoln Park.

Q: When you asked socializing, you were asking socializing outside the work, weren't you?

Q: Yeah, in bars and...

Q: Not in the Foundry itself.

A: Oh, well, you didn't have too much because the average guy when he got through working whatever his shift was, eight, nine, or ten hours and sometimes it was 12 hours a day, he didn't have much time left for. He was so damn tired when he went home and washed up and ate supper and went to bed. Didn't have a lot of time.

Q: After the union came in and started with recreational activities, the bowling league and the softball league and all that, was there much participation by Foundry workers in that?

A: Yeah. You had, generally throughout the plant, you know, you'd have a basketball team, you'd have bowling or you'd have baseball and that was handled by the local recreation department and that was based on the ability to get people who would, you know, to form a bowling team or play basketball or play sandlot baseball, sometimes golf, but it didn't actually involve large numbers of employees. Basically people that felt like doing those things did them. If you didn't, you didn't. There was an effort made, we had a fund that was set aside out of our per capita dollar. I think we put five cents into the recreation fund which paid the salary of a director and may be one other person who bought the equipment. It was his job to get out and hustle enough people to get into those activities in order to justify them.

Q: How would you describe the Production Foundry in terms of the political structure in the unit. In Local 600 as a whole there progressive slate and the right wing slate. Which one was dominant in your unit?

A: Well, the so-called progressive slate was predominant. You see, the problem you had in the Rouge plant was that John L. Lewis had been the more or less the founding father of the union at Ford. This was all prior to any involvement from Reuther. When the local was organized the mine workers paid for most of the organizational activities. They sent in people from the Mine Workers who were skilled organizers to organize the people in the Rouge plant. Most of the people in the Rouge plant looked at John L. Lewis as sort of the founding father of the union at Ford and of course John L. Lewis was the CIO president at the time. Now other than that you had R. J. Thomas who from about 1939 on was president of the UAW. So you had Thomas, you had Richard T. Leonard and you had a union structure that was led by people that were non-Reuther people basically. Reuther at that time was vice president of the union but he was the only one of his group that had any substantial voice in the runnings of the international union. You had the Thomas, Addes and Leonard group that really ran the union up until about 1946. So most of our people had never had any contact with Reuther at all. In fact they didn't even know who Reuther was. Reuther's activities have been what they call Westside Local 174 which was basically more of a General Motors type of setup than Ford. At that time we only three, Ford plants in the area anyway. We had Lincoln and we had the Rouge plant, we had the Lincoln plant and we had the Highland Park plant and it was only years later

that Ford split off into maybe 150 different plants all around the country but basically at that time it was all right in Wayne County and right in the metropolitan Detroit area. They had assembly plants outside but they were small in comparison with what we had here. The orientation of most of our people was toward the group that had got the union established at Ford which was basically the mine workers and their people and the Addes-Thomas-Leonard group that were running the union at that time.

Q: Was the Production Foundry a strong CIO building at the time when the union was doing its organizing drive against the AFL?

A: Well, you probably hadl more people that stayed in the plant during a strike in the Foundry than in any other unit because blacks basically were suspicious of unions. They'd never belonged to unions before. What few had had a lot of misgivings about unions because the only unions they had come in contact with were AFL unions and they had a structure set up where they have separate locals for blacks and whites and most blacks did not trust the old line AFL type unions and they didn't know a great deal about this CIO and it was probably, we had a large concentration of people that stayed in the plant during the strike, during the whole period of the strike. Ford brought food in there, armed guards and all that thing, and took care of those people that stayed in the plant.

Q: So those people were probably supporting neither union, neither the AFL nor the CIO?

A: Well they were loyal to Ford more so than any union because most of them felt, see at that time too Ford predominantly had larger numbers of blacks that worked at Ford than at General Motors or Chrysler for

that matter. Chrysler was probably number two and General Motors was number three in terms of the employment of blacks and blacks at Ford even in those days were able to complete the apprenticeable courses and become journeymen. I think at that time probably Ford Motor was the only company that had black skilled tradesmen. They were virtually non-existent at General Motors or Chrysler. So a lot of people, and then Ford had blacks that hired blacks. They had blacks in the employment setup and these people had extensive contacts to the black churches and black civic organizations and that was just an outright plain loyalty on the part of the large number of blacks toward the company, the _____(?)_____. Paternalism, the company paternalism fostered that type of allegiance to the company and they had a great deal of mistrust for unions because blacks as a whole had never gotten anything like a square deal of any union.

Q: Did that change once the union was voted in?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah, that changed rapidly. In a period of two or three years you could notice almost a complete turn around in the attitude.

Q: Was that because they were getting their demands met?

A: Yeah. There was basically reason for it and the union...

END JOHNSON-TAPE 1-SIDE A

B. JOHNSON INTERVIEW
TAPE 1B

A: Seniority, classifications and so forth and you didn't have to rely on being a nice guy to the foreman in order to keep your job. See in the old days it wasn't unusual for a foreman to take payoffs from employees. In other words if you didn't contribute to the foreman, you got laid off. We no longer have that problem. Although there were some that came around more slower than others.

Q: Were there mostly white foreman in the Production Foundry?

A: They were all white foremen.

Q: All white foremen?

A: Well, during the war we had one or two black foremen, maybe two or three in the Foundry, and I'm not really sure what happened in the other buildings but I think you could count the number of black foremen on one hand in the whole plant.

Q: How many foreman would be in the Production Foundry? Just a general guess.

A: Oh, you probably have a ratio of about one foreman to 30 or 40 employees.

Q: Oh, that's quite a few. Was that consistent?

A: Well, it dropped later, you know, but at that time that was the way it was.

Q: Was it consistent between the different plants or did some ...?

A: Oh, yeah, the same policies existed in all of them. One foreman may have 50 men, 60 men. One may have as few as 20, you know, depending on the job sometimes and the nature of the work they were performing.

Q: When the union came in and they started running candidates on the slate for the local and unit offices, which slate was generally more successful in Production Foundry?

A: Well, generally, you only have one slate. The rest didn't count. You usually have what they call the Production Foundry progressive slate. That was the slate.

Q: That was it, huh?

A: Yeah. Any other slate you're just wasting your time. Just like a Republican running in Wayne County. He'd have a very slim chance of winning.

Q: Did they always try though?

A: Well, in the early days there was not too much slate division. The divisions came about once Reuther became president. Once Reuther became president then you had a real all out fight between what they called the Reuther group and the anti-Reuther group. Politics really came to a sharp peak during the early days of Reuther's administration from '46 to about '52 or '53.

Q: What side did the Production Foundry fall on generally?

A: If you ran on Reuther's slate, you'd never get elected then.

Q: Why do you think that that...?

A: The whole Rouge, the whole Rouge plant was predominantely anti-Reuther and if you wanted to win, the best way to lose would be to run on Reuther's slate.

Q: So there weren't any very active right wing...?

A: Well, we had what we call a right wing group. See at that time we had a group, the Reuther group and the Catholic Trade Unionist group. We call it the ACTU group. The American Catholic Trade Unionist, or the

Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. They were a part of the Reuther group and very ardent supporters of Reuther. In fact the only guy that ever was elected president of the local, Joe McCusker in 1945, was very active in the ACTU, the Catholic Trade Unionist group. You had some impact of Catholics but the Catholic group were opposed to the so-called communist elements that they thought were part of the progressive slate which in fact was really the old Addes-Leonard-Thomas group. That was about the only clear cleavage you could discern among the two groups, you know. The Catholic Trade Unionist by and large were the more developed trade unionists because they had a programmatic approach that the rest of the people didn't really have.

Q: Where did that come through?

A: Well, it was training and indoctrination in the trade union movement from the Catholic church's point of view, point of view of the church, and that group supported Reuther although Reuther had a pretty checkered career, you know, in his earlier days.

Q: Were they successful on the shop floor?

A: Not too often. The local was almost entirely dominated by an anti-Reuther group until 1953 when we decided we would lay down the hatchet and try to work with the union. But prior to that time all you have to, if your label was a Reutherite, you were sure to be defeated. You wouldn't win.

Q: So was there any active ACTU group in the Production Foundry or was that just in the--

A: No, they had one or two, maybe they'd have two or three people. Most in the group, most in that group came out of the Maintenance and

Construction group. A sizeable element were in the Tool and Die but they were always a minority in the Tool and Die unit and you had or a smattering of them but anywhere we had a concentration of Polish workers they would have some.

Q: Polish workers were the ones that...?

A: Polish and the Catholic were synonymous. Virtually all Polish were Catholic.

Q: What about the Italians?

A: The Italians were about mixed, they ran about half and half. Half would go along with the Catholic Trade Unionist's point of view which was to point them in Reuther's direction and the other half just stood back. And a lot of the Italian workers had worked in the mines before they came to Detroit and they had a John L. Lewis perspective rather than Reuther. So they were fairly well split. Ninety-nine percent of all blacks were in the anti-Reuther caucus.

Q: What was your estimate of the Poles? You think that the Poles were pretty much ...?

A: No, we never had any Poles to a great extent, never achieved the local union officer's status. They were committeemen and bargaining committee people. I don't think I can ever recall a Pole ever being elected to any office higher than a local trustee. Never one of the four top offices.

Q: Did you say that the ACTU was pretty influential among the Poles?

A: Well, yeah, they had a predominant influence on any Catholic group. Even if you were black and you were a Catholic, you went with that group. It wasn't racially moderated, it was religion. If you were

Catholic you automatically supported the Catholic Trade Unionist position which was generally a pro-Reuther position.

Q: Were there a lot of Catholics in that plant?

A: Oh, we had a substantial number of Catholics and we had a sizeable Masonic group too. They were mostly in our steam division and of course they didn't necessarily get along with the Catholics. In fact, Ford Motor Company's administrative staff was split pretty sharply around religious, along Masonic and Catholic lines and it shot up when Henry II married the Italian gal and then the Catholic group came into dominance. Before that the Masonic people were the top managers in the plant.

Q: So that the Masonic people were strong in the Rolling Mill?

A: They were strong in the whole steel division.

Q: That means the Rolling Mill, Open Hearth?

A: Yeah, Open Hearth, the Blast Furnace, Coke Ovens. They were the top managers. In fact they were, a large number of them were the top managers throughout the Ford upper structure. See when Henry Ford, the old Henry Ford was living, the Masonic group was dominating as his managers. It was only when young Henry took over and married into an Italian family, an Italian gal...to the Caholic who dominated, come to have any degree of control within the plant.

Q: So that filtered all the way down into the union, the workers themselves.

A: It filtered down pretty much. They were structured pretty much even among the union politicians, you know. Because if you wanted to get anywhere in the union in the steel division, you were a Mason.

Q: Even in the union?

A: Yeah.

Q: How about the Transportation Unit? Were they a strong, ACTU group?

A: They were split. It was a small unit. We never had that many people in the unit. They never, I think at the most they were about 2,000 people and when you have a number of units that had nine and ten thousand people within a unit, 2,000 was relatively insignificant. And they were plantwide. You had a polyglot type of set up there. Mostly inbred in the leadership. To come out of that unit, you would have to have been in that unit. They generally would pick and choose among leaders to support. Sometimes they would support the so-called progressive group, sometimes they would support the other group, the Reuther group. You can't always tell where they're coming from.

Q: So even in the Production Foundry the committeemen were basically progressives. Was that true at all levels?

A: I'd have to think that would be true of about 99%.

Q: Would you say that they were basically militant or middle of the road?

A: Well you had to be, in order to get elected, you had to be pretty militant. Otherwise you didn't have much chance. Particularly in the earlier days. You had to be fairly militant. You had to take an anti-company stance if they thought you were close to the company at all, you wouldn't get elected.

Q: Were there a lot of wildcat strikes in the Production Fjoundry?

A: Only in the early days of the union. There were hardly no wildcats in the whole plant after '45. We probably had one of the ___(?)___ group of people and we numbered, even after the war, we had about 48 to 49,000 people in the Rouge plant. Wildcats were relatively unheard of after the war. Most of the wildcats came during the early days

right after the union was started. Wildcats were used to enforce bargaining positions but after that there was no need for them because we had a contract and we had a grievance procedure.

Q: So that was during the war that they had the wildcats?

A: It was prior to the war. From about '41 to '43 you may have wildcats but they pretty well died out and Ford management, you could usually deal with Ford management a lot easier than you could deal with Chrysler or GM. Ford management was always a little better to deal with.

Q: You mean at the bargaining table?

A: At the bargaining table and throughout the entire history of the UAW Ford probably with one or two exceptions accounted for most of the gains, you know the Ford pension was the first pension. Subpay started at Ford.

Q: Was the, is the Ford first pension, did the pension come first to Ford because it was originated there or because demand for a pension was thought of at Local 600 or did they try to get it...

A: Well, there was a demand throughout the UAW. It wasn't just at Ford. It was a bargaining goal at conventions that mandated that that be one of the items that they can bargain on but it came easier at Ford. See Ford would have had a pension in '49 because Ford Motor Company put a proposal on the table what they call partnership in prosperity. We call it "pip plan," p-i-p plan and along in that plan was profit sharing and a pension, but because Reuther was involved in GM and was getting nowhere in GM and at that time Reuther was president, the plan was killed because it had been negotiated on the local level, the plant level. Reuther found all kinds of fault with profit sharing.

The first pension plan he claimed wasn't funded. It was killed and it was only in '50 when Reuther was able to put the demand on all three of the bargaining tables, Ford, Chrysler and GM. But finally a breakthrough occurred in Ford first of all and then later at GM and of course you know they had a long strike at Chrysler before Chrysler would agree to a pension. Ford was the only one that was receptive. Ford had offered profit sharing, something that they have now but could have had back in '49, from Ford.

Q: Would you say that the Local 600 as a whole and that the Production Foundry in particular had a lot of democracy in the running of the union?

A: Well the democracy existed at the same level throughout the plant because democracy is controlled by the union structure. See we had what we call amalgamated local union. At that time we had 18 different units and the UAW constitution and the Local by-laws set up the whole democratic structure of the union so there was basically, I don't think you can honestly say there was any difference in substance in the democratic set up of 600 as against any other local, they were all the same because they were controlled by the UAW constitution and by the local union by-laws which had to be in conformity with the constitution.

Q: Was there any particular by-laws or rules that Local 600 had that were separate or in addition to?

A: Well, each local had its own by-laws who were conditioned on the local's conditions, you know. But all the election procedures were controlled by the UAW constitution. They were standard throughout the United States, even in Canada they were standard. There's the same

constitution that prevails there. So the democratic structure was built in from the constitution down, not from the membership up. Of course the membership sent the delegates to the convention that had adopted the constitution.

Q: Did you get pretty good participation at the membership meetings...?

A: In the early days we did. In the early days it wasn't unusual to have 8, 900, maybe a thousand, two thousand, people at a membership meeting but as the years went along it got to a place where you'd hardly have enough people to justify holding a meeting. You know I can remember when I was president of the Foundry Unit. We would be lucky to have 50 people at a membership meeting.

Q: What year was that?

A: 1950, 1951.

Q: So it was just the very early '40s...?

A: Well, no, this was 10 years after. The union came in '41.

Q: Yeah.

A: I was first elected president of my unit in 1950 and subsequently elected in 1952 I guess it was. It got real bad at that time as far as membership participation was concerned because most units would be lucky to have 25 or 50 maybe 75 people in a meeting and unless something very unusual was going to take place such as nominations for office, you may have so few people that it wouldn't be worthwhile having a meeting. You have to have a meeting anyway but participation would be very slim.

Q: So it was only good in the '40s?

A: It was only large during the early days of '41, '42, '43. I wasn't there during the war years because I was in service myself. I don't

really know what it was like. But in '45, '46 you could begin to see the membership meetings. Now if you had a real hot issue coming up, you may have six or seven hundred people attend the meeting. You may have as many as 800 people. But those were the exceptions to the rule. You were lucky by and large sometimes to get 50, 60 people out to a meeting.

Q: How about voting participation? Did most workers ...?

A: Well, we had a large turn out in votes because we provided transportation. See the local, oh I guess as early as '46 or '47, would rent DSR buses. We would run the buses right through the plant on a regular shuttle type system. When you want to go and vote, why you'd meet one of the buses at your gate so to speak and they would pile on those buses. The buses took them over to the Local, they'd vote and you could grab any bus going back. So we got a large turn out in votes because we provided transportation to and from the voting place and of course we had enough money to do that. It took money to rent those buses, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: We'd have 30, 40 buses running at the same time, regular city buses along with individual cars. Some guys would drive their own cars but it got too congested. When you're voting 40,000 people, you don't have room for them to park so we would encourage them to take the buses, leave the cars back in the parking area.

Q: Would you say a lot of the workers kept themselves informed of what was going on in the union by reading the union paper and Ford Facts?

A: Yeah. We had a union paper that was published weekly at that time. Now it's published monthly. We had a paper published weekly and each

unit had a space allocated for a column, unit column, and you had a lot of material that would come from the local offices, particularly the local president, the local financial secretary and treasurer, and then we had material that came in from the International Union and sometimes we'd run a paper of six, seven, eight pages on a weekly basis.

Q: Was it widely read in the Foundry?

A: I think it was widely read all over the plant.

Q: How about other labor papers?

A: Well, we had The AFL-CIO News. We had Solidarity that was published by the International Union. We had Ammunition which was a monthly magazine but those were not distributed generally to all members. It was, sometimes the mailing list was, the International Union's mailing list was mostly the local offices and unit offices and sometimes we just make them available in piles. If you were in the local, you just pick it up.

Q: Did many workers read papers put out by other groups like ACTU had their Wage Earner.

A: They had their Wage Earner, right.

Q: And then The Millitant and The Daily Worker...

A: The Militant had theirs and The Daily Workers had theirs.

Q: Were those popular papers?

A: It's actually hard to say. They were all, I guess they were all subscribed to. I'm not absolutely certain of whether you had to have a subscription. I guess in some units where you would have people selling them in the plant I guess but I think by and large you were

subscription. Of course being subscription they get them at home. You can't tell what they have in the plant.

Q: How would you describe the foremen in your unit? Were they basically pretty strict or pretty easy going?

A: Well, prior to the union they were strict. The foreman had a lot of power, before the union. After the union, foremen were relegated to the status of a leader. See one of things that developed at Ford was that shortly after the union came in, the union, the company realized that in order to have some kind of conformity and continuity in grievance administration they had to hire skilled outsiders to handle it. So it wasn't long at Ford before foremen were removed from the grievance procedure altogether and in each plant we have what they call a labor relations an hourly personnel individual that would give the dispositions on all grievances. All the foreman would write on the grievance would be refer to the LRO. In other words refer to labor relations. The union was basically responsible for that because I can recall back in the early days I used to tell the company's labor relations guy how to write the dispositions on a grievance and we always won, we never lost. So finally the company got wise and they hired people from the outside and we would tell them there's no point in fooling with the first stage grievance because the foreman has the authority to settle it anyway. So the hell with that. Just tell them you refer it to labor relations and we will argue at second stage. We never argue a grievance at the first stage because if the foreman didn't know as much about the contract as the committeeman did. The committeeman would go to school. See we had a school in the local and the International Union had steward training programs, committee

trainee programs and we had the UAW educational department conducted programs year round that trained people on how to write and handle grievances and negotiate wages and so forth, health and safety and that type of thing. So foremen were too busy trying to control production in order to be experts on contracts. So by and large Ford foremen had very little to say about a grievance. They generally did what they were told to do and if an argument ensued from that they would refer it to labor relations.

Q: So the second stage would be the one where you have the bargaining committee on a unit basis?

A: Yeah and they would bargain with the labor relations.

Q: How often do they meet to decide those grievances?

A: Oh, they meet weekly. They usually had an agenda each week and all the cases that were timed within that agenda came up at that meeting.

Q: So that was the real stage where the ...?

A: That was the real bargaining stage on grievances and then we had special procedures. See we had a health and safety procedure. We have rates on new jobs. We had classification procedures that are handled separately from grievances. So we had about four different levels of negotiations that could be going on almost simultaneously but they would be separate and different people would be involved. In other words if the company brought in a new method or a new operation, then from the local union and sometimes even from the International Union we would have an International rep come in and meet with the unit president and they would meet with the company's rate and classification people and they'd negotiate the rates on the job and that was separate and apart from the normal grievance procedure. When

we had what we call was a health hazard then we had, this was later of course, we had one guy assigned in the local union that did nothing but health and safety and then we had health and safety people in the plant that would do nothing but check on health and safety grievances and then we had rates on new job and production standards. Production standards was not a separate procedure because in the Ford contract we could always strike over rates on new jobs, health and safety and production standards. Those were three strikeable issues during the life of a contract. We didn't have to wait until the contract expired. We could strike on those issues as separate issues.

Q: That was all the way through the '50s?

A: Yeah. That was from the late '40s on up. It exists at the present time.

Q: I have a bunch of questions about World War II but you weren't there.

A: No.

Q: When you came back from the World War did you notice the change in the types of workers in the plant given that there were women hired in during the war and a lot of southerners coming up to work in the Detroit area?

A: Well, we had a lot of southerners there before the war so that was really not a big deal.

Q: So it was the same type of people that were coming in?

A: Basically the same type.

Q: So were they also ...?

A: We had a few women coming into the workforce after the war.

Q: Were the southerners that came up during the war also previously coal miners?

A: Well depends on the part of the country they came from. A lot of them had been farmers, you know, and well I guess you'd have about an even split between coal miners, people from the Appalachian region and people from just the South generally and who had been mostly farmers, small farmers.

Q: In 1952 when Reuther put the administratorship over the Local, how did, what was the reaction in the plant?

A: Well, it was bitter. It almost became an iron camp because the membership felt it was done for political purposes. There was no other justification for it. I think by and large they felt that Reuther was trying to consolidate his hold on the UAW and the biggest Local being the 600 that consistently opposed Reuther and Reuther's policies and I think they felt that, see Reuther was elected in '46 and he won his slate in '47 or was it '49.

END JOHNSON-TAPE 1-SIDE B

B. JOHNSON INTERVIEW
TAPE 2A

A: But Reuther was always one who didn't take too well to criticism. We wouldn't hesitate to criticize Reuther if we thought he was wrong. In fact we kept a running gunfire of a barrage of criticism against Walter Reuther.

Q: From all over? From the lower to the ...?

A: Yeah and as a result of that we got Reuther to change a lot of his policies. You see his supporters wouldn't criticize him so since we didn't support him we felt we had ...

Q: An obligation.

A: We had an obligation to criticize him and keep him on his toes, you know, and it got hot and heavy and in '52 or was it '51. See Reuther put administratorship over the Local twice. He did it in '47 because he wanted to get, we had a big argument over the Taft-Hartley, over compliance with the Taft-Hartley Act and signing noncommunists affidavits. A lot of the people felt that why the hell should union people have to sign the affidavits when management people were not required to sign. They felt it was an undue imposition on union leaders in presumption that they were all communists therefore they have to sign these affidavits saying they weren't. So we had a big fight with Reuther over that issue. Reuther was in favor of it and in '47 they put a limited administratorship over the Local, supervising elections and some of Reuther's people, well some of our people who felt they had to go along were elected and that was the first instance

although we think they stole the election we never could prove it. And then in '52...

Q: They just came in and headed the election campaign process?

A: Yeah. Well, what happened was this someone had been tampering with the ballots. I was a Local officer myself. I really never knew what the hell went on but they claim one or two members on the election committee had ballots in their pockets or had stuffed ballots. Well, unless you were in the voting area where you might have seen it, you wouldn't have known it was going on. I never knew whether it was true or not but based on those allegations they put in a supervisor, they instituted a supervisor to control the election brought their own people in and to a large extent they were successful in that election and we thought they actually just stole the election. Because the results would never have gone that way ordinarily. And then in '51 they put the Local under the administration, under what they call a board of administration and they actually ran the Local for about a year I guess it was, until '52 and then they set all the Local officers aside and brought in one regional director and several people from the international staff, Jack Conway, who was Reuther's chief administrative assistant, at the time came, along with one or two guys from Mazy's office who were mostly in the auditing setup. The regional director who was Joe McCusker was part of that team and they actually ran the Local until they thought they had it ready for a take over. So when they held the election we defeated everyone of them. The membership returned and all the guys to office, even though they supervised the election. They didn't really supervise. We had a certified public accountant who supervised the election and we swept

the election and defeated all of the Reuther team. So after that time we sat down and we felt well maybe the fight has gone on long enough. Maybe we ought to seek an accommodation on each side and that's what happened.

Q: When did that happen?

A: In '52, '53 and from then on there was very little infighting between the Local and the International Union.

Q: Was that a policy of Stellato?

A: It was a policy that we all more or less agreed to, you know. I myself felt that it was becoming destructive, you know, and it was not really doing the Local union or the International Union for that matter any good. So we just felt well we'll just extend the olive branch if they will and we'll sit down and quit fighting each other and start working together. That was basically what we did.

Q: So in that period when they had the administratorship over, there was a red baiting that was going on but was that ...?

A: Red baiting had taken place during the House Un-American Activities committee. See the House Committee came in '51 I guess.

Q: How did that go over in the plant? Were the workers frightened by it, do you think?

A: The only ones that were really frightened were foreign born. It was part of the old McCarran type. Well the McCarran Act of course was involved at the time. The FBI was involved and they scared the hell out of a lot of foreign born people because they felt they would be deported. Those who were not born in this country, but who had come here to get jobs from Ford, I think it frightened them. It didn't really affect any one who was natural born but the threat of

deportation was the biggest fear that a lot of the foreign born had. To some extent I think they were frightened but I don't think anyone else was bothered by it too much.

Q: Do you think that the removal of the, 5 progressive candidates from their positions in office, was it, Boatin, Moore, Davis.

A: Davis, Boatin, Moore, Davis...

Q: Gallo.

A: Gallo and I can't think of his name. He had been president of the plastics plant.

Q: Oh, Lock.

A: Lock, Ed Lock, yeah.

Q: You think that was very important?

A: No. It was important to them because they were rendered ineligible to hold office and a lot of the membership resented the hell out of it because these guys basically had been very active in organizing the union and had been very active in the early days of the union and to some extent some of them, well Locke had been a chairman of one of the units. Boatin had been chairman of a unit. Dave Moore had never been a chairman because he was in a unit where there was just a handful of blacks but he had always been very active in the unit. Nelson Davis of course had come out of my unit and he as much as any single individual did more probably to organize the union in the Foundry than possibly anyone else. In fact he had run ins with the Ford goons that tried to run him out of the plant because of union organizing and that was one of the work stoppages we had. Everybody left the job and chased the Ford so-called plant protection men and hired goons at Ford Motor Company, chased them out of the plant and ran them a substantial

distance down Miller road. They felt that much about Davis, you know, and actually the activities were, none of them were engaged in any activities that you could even remotely ascribe to being communist. We didn't know what their political inclination was but we knew what they did in the union and they were basically solid rock unionists. But it was a politically contrived thing and for some reason they felt that they wanted to make examples out of these guys and of course in the trials in the Local they were exonerated but as a result of the administratorship they put over the Local they were expelled. They were not expelled from the union, they were rendered ineligible hold office. You see, at the same time, along this same period of time Sam Sage and Tracy Doll were actually expelled from the UAW and Sam Sage and Tracy Doll had been head of the Wayne County Council AFL-CIO. They were actually expelled for life from the Union by action of the convention.

Q: Were they from Local 600?

A: No. I think Doll was from Dodge Local 3. Sam Sage I think was from Chrysler. I'm not sure. Neither one of them were from 600 and at that time Coleman Young who is the mayor of the city was also thrown out of office as the, he was an officer in the Wayne County Council at the same time.

Q: Hm.

A: This was done by what we call Reuther elements who had taken over the Council.

Q: How did they go about taking it over?

A: Well, I think it was, see at that time if my memory serves me right now Reuther was AFL-CIO president I believe. I'm trying to recall the

time and it was one of those things where you just label a group as a communist dominated group and you just expel them from office and they were expelled that way but the convention subsequently ratified the expulsion. The UAW convention that is. I don't think Reuther was president of the AFL-CIO. I think it was just CIO president at that time. In fact he never was president of the AFL-CIO come to think of it.

Q: I think he was vice president.

A: He was only CIO president. He was the vice president but never a president.

Q: Do you think that the committeemen and the officers in the Local had much influence over the workers' political decisions on the outside, when they're voting for president of the United States and so on? Was there much politicing going on inside there?

A: Well, we always had a Democratic slate. All the locals endorse democrats and that came from the International Union on down but I was never really convinced that it was too effective because you know when you get behind the curtain you vote for whomever you please. I think to some extent it had some influence. I lost all ideas of credibility when Wallace won the state in the Democratic presidential primary. When George Wallace took over the state I concluded that the UAW didn't have much influence because they were strictly anti-Wallace.

Q: Yeah. What about when in 1948 when Henry Wallace ran the progressive slate?

A: Well, Henry Wallace appealed to I guess the more liberal group in the plant but I think basically they went along with the main democratic

stream ambivalence. Didn't support Wallace. Nationally he wasn't supported too much.

Q: So in the Rouge plant itself there was not too much campaigning for Wallace?

A: No, I don't think there was. There was some involvement but I think it was mostly on a level of whether or not you really believed in Wallace. There was never any organized effort to get Wallace elected by the UAW or by the Local for that matter. Whatever happened that was done on an individual basis.

Q: How was the employment situation? Was there a lot of ups and downs and layoffs and then a period of employment, especially in the Foundry?

A: Prior to the union it used to be you'd work six months and be laid off six months. Sometimes you were laid off for longer periods of time than that. But after the, in the prewar days from about 1940 on we began to build up for the war effort. There were no layoffs at all and that continued up through '45 and then '46 when we went back to automotive production then you would begin to get cycles of employment and unemployment but never to the extent that it existed in the old days and I guess that in large part was controlled by the growth of the industry. The industry was much larger at that time. But we had deep periods of layoffs even in the middle '50s. I can recall when we had people with 30 years seniority, that were laid off, in '52, '53, '54. Anytime you had a cutback in sales you would get a big reduction in employees, you know.

Q: I've been asking you a lot of questions about the Iron Factory. Is there very many similarities between it and the Jobbing Foundry?

A: The Jobbing Foundry was a part of the Iron Foundry for most of its existence. Prior to the union the Jobbing Foundry was of course pretty much separate but after the union was recognized in '41 the Jobbing Foundry assuredly after that became a part of the Foundry unit and at one time the Foundry had the Produciton Foundry, the Jobbing Foundry, and what we call the Steel Foundry, the New Steel Foundry, later the Specialty Foundry. So at one time in 1951 I had all of the Foundry units, the Specialty Foundry, the Jobbing Foundry and the Production Foundry as president of the unit but those were small units. The Jobbing Foundry I don't think had much more than 2-, 300 people there and it worked only on the start up of new models. It would generally taper out so that you would have very few people over there and some of them of course worked in the Foundry, jobbing molder and jobbing coremakers. The Specialty Foundry was, came in when we started a new process, a moldmaking process which went away from the old process to what we call, I can't think of that name, but it was a different way of making cores and moldings and much more rapid method, and that became largely controlled by production, rather than hand effort shell molding, is what it was. And as they lightened the weight of the car and took a lot of the cast iron out of the engines and automotive components the Foundry just went downhill. Until there is no Foundry in this area at all now.

Q: When the Specialty Foundry became its own separate unit, I know they elected Buddy Battles as their president and he was considered to be a right winger?

A: Yeah. Buddy was always considered to be a Reuther guy, although sometimes it was hard to tell where he was. I was president of the

unit at the time we transferred him from the Foundry to the Specialty Foundry and we, he was the only committeeman in that plant. Geographically it was too difficult for us service. I remember once Stellato asked me if I had any objection to Buddy going over taking over the building. I said no, I'd be glad to get rid of him, send him on over because he and I never agreed, Buddy had some peculiar ideas. Basically they were racial ideas that I didn't agree with. While he went on to the Reuther banner, Buddy believed in racial polerization and none of us felt that.

Q: How did he get his popularity in the Specialty Foundry as a right winger?

A: Well, Buddy practically lost the election two times in a row. He barely eeked through, running against a guy that couldn't have gotten elected dog catcher in the Foundry and that was how popular he was.

Q: Who was that?

A: Cleveland Clayborn.

Q: Oh. Never heard of him.

A: Cleveland Clayborn. Cleveland almost beat Buddy twice, two elections running.

Q: He ran on the progressive slate?

A: Well, I don't really recall what slate Cleveland ran on but it was just a personality problem there. It wasn't so much a caucus problem because Cleveland never had any followers to speak of in the Iron Foundry even though he came out of there. We had transferred him over there because he had been fired for hitting a foreman with a bucket of red paint and in order to save his job we finally persuaded the company to reinstate him but transfer him over there, you know, get

him out of the situation where he was at. Actually I was just as surprised as anybody else that he ran Buddy such a hard race. I never could figure out how he did it because I was his president when he was fired and I was able to get him back and of course he was only over there two or three years before he, I think he quit. But to show you how popular Buddy was, Buddy had been a committeeman in the Foundry at the time he was transferred over and Cleveland had only been a worker. He'd never held any elected office that I can recall. But he ran Buddy almost to a dead heap two times in a row and Buddy was never able to get elected president of the Foundry. I was Buddy's president for two terms.

Q: Was the specialty Foundry a small shop?

A: It was a small unit. I think we had 500 to 600 people.

Q: So you think his success as a right winger is just a lack of an alternative?

A: Lack of anyone else that was capable, that wanted to run against him actually.

Q: When you were president of the Foundry I notice that in the elections you and who they called "old man" or Harold Johnson alternated a few years. What was it? Were you running against each other every year?

A: Oh yeah. Let's see, when I first ran in '49 he won. See he had come out of the Jobbing Foundry and he and Buddy both had come out of the Jobbing Foundry. They had not started out in the Foundry. I ran aginst him in '49 and he won. I was determined I was going to beat him so I beat him in '50 and then he beat me in '51. I'm trying to recall the time. I know I lost against him the first time. I beat him the next time and I can't remember now whether the Reuther

administration came in between that time and I was elected after the Reuther administratorship.

Q: Did he run on the right wing slate?

A: Not really. He was never, see he had been an international rep. when R. J. Thomas was president so he was never really identified with Reuther. Although, being a politician, he would take support from wherever it came. But he was never really identified as a Reuther guy.

Q: So did he run on an independent slate?

A: Oh no. He ran on a slate that he was able to put together in the building. It wasn't, neither he nor I had a clearly ___(?)___. It was mostly a personality race between him and I because he and I had been very good friends when he was an International rep. and I was the secretary of the Local. During those years '46, '47, and '48 he worked for the International Union and he had been appointed by R. J. Thomas when Thomas was president and he and I had been very friendly but I never really liked the way he conducted union business because it was more politic than clear-cut negotiations. I felt that we needed someone that would go in and do the job the union needed doing and I didn't think that he was doing it. So when I ran against him the first time I lost but I beat him the next time around.

Q: Do you recall Zack Benford who came out of the Jobbing Foundry?

A: Yeah, I recall Zack. I think Zack is still in River Rouge. I think he lived in River Rouge. I didn't know Zack too well. The only knowledge that I had of Zack was that he had been president of the Jobbing Foundry I think in '45, '44, I can't recall. When Zack was defeated, I think Johnson defeated Zack I believe. Zack quit. I

think he went to work for, I think he went to work in the school district of River Rouge, he left the Foundry.

Q: Oh, way back in the '40s?

A: Yeah, he left the plant back some years ago. I'm getting close to my time so we better wind up.

Q: Yeah. That was the end of my questions.

END JOHNSON- TAPE 2-SIDE A