

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
TAPE 1A

Q: Tell me about where you were born and raised and if your parents were involved in the labor movement or whatever.

A: Well, I was born and raised, I was born of Finnish immigrants and my dad, we settled, they settled up north in the copper country and that's where I was born and my dad was a copper miner. We had a big family. We were brought up, I was brought up a Lutheran and my dad was very strict but along with that he was a very religious individual but in a different sense than most religions. He was not an acquiescing type of individual and he couldn't hold a job. He was a good miner and everything and he'd get fired over and over and they finally blackballed him. And he went into contract, he'd go from farmer to farmer and say well I'll make your hay for so much or I'll pick your potatoes for so much, see.

Q: So when he was working in the mines they were unorganized mines.

A: They were unorganized, yes, and it was terrible, terrible. They used to, like on my dad, you had to buy everything from the company store so my dad he had to buy his own caps and fuses and things like that, see. So he could get them cheaper on the open market than he could buying it from the company store, see, so he just went ahead and he tried to get others to go with him to not buy from the company store and buy it on the open market but of course, fear, people were fearful of losing their job. But like him he stuck his neck out and he went and bought his equipment in an open market and they fired him for it,

see. So there was no what you call real freedom as such, you know, and of course I left home at a very young age. From there I left home and I thought I was idealistic about things and the depression hit. I was a depression youth.

Q: Were you in Detroit at the time?

A: No, I was up there.

Q: You were up there.

A: And I left home at a very young age. I rode the boxcars. I left home without a penny, well, beg your pardon, three cents. And I had another fellow with me and he couldn't take it, see, and he didn't even know the way back home, see, so I took him back home and then I left again and I went from city to city, state to state. I mostly, I always say I travel first-class boxcars, you know.

Q: How'd you get along with food and all during that time?

A: Well, we used, I used to do odd jobs and then I used to just bum it. I'd go to a, when you got hungry you went to a place and you asked people for something to eat. Now a thing that happened which had a very big influence in my line of thinking, you know a lot of people felt that well, let's go to the wealthy section and, you know, they couldn't get nothing. In fact one fellow comes running back to us and he said they pulled a gun on him. So we went to working class sections, you know, and they were just as hard up as probably I was, see, but we got a sandwich, they always made a sandwich or we got a banana, you know, or a few ears of corn. Some grocery stores, they were quite understanding and they would give us a loaf of bread and you had the jungles them days. What they called the jungles were all the hobos, you know, they congregated and some of it was disease

ridden, you know, it was terrible. And another thing that happened to me, you know I never had no experience with Blacks until I hit the road. We had one Black man up in my hometown and well I didn't have much to do with him but everybody liked him, you know, and so one day I just forget what town, somewhere in Wisconsin, and I happened to be sitting down all by myself. And three Blacks came there and they sat down and they looked at me and they said hey, what're you doing out here? I said, same thing as you, and they said how old are you. Oh, 15. Geez, they said, why don't you go home to your mother, you know. I says well I'm looking for a job, you know. I had a lot of allusions in them days, you know, and then of course it struck me funny, you know. They sensed that I was hungry and they told me now you stay right here till we come back. We're going out and get something to eat. One of them said we're going to have a harvest. I waited and sure enough they came back and they had everything. They had bread and butter and lunch meat and fruit and milk and whiskey and everything, see. They gave me some of that and they gave me even whiskey, you know, they just gave me one, and he said now that's enough for you and I'll never forget that. And I never dreamed that I would become involved like I am, like I have been, and if I would have known that and anticipated it I would have gotten their names and where they were from and stuff like that, but I imagine they're probably dead. But I saw some terrible sights. I believe, I went in Indiana, I forget, Elkhart, no it was some other town and we went to the jungles there and there was men there. They had gonorrhoea, they had syphilis. I'm telling you, it was terrible.

Q: Were most of the men there older or middle aged, younger?

A: Well they were older, they were older than I was and of course another thing that was a big influence on, you see, all towns them days, there was a lot of people on the road bumming, see. They had no homes, no nothing and I saw where families were out on the street. I saw a woman with her baby sitting on a couch not knowing where to go.

Q: This is in the thirties, huh?

A: In the '30s, the depression. And so various cities they made ordinances and they didn't want us people in town. So the whole police force, when a train would pull in a whole police force from that city would gather around that train and anybody try to get off they clubed him back on. And so at this time I was sitting up there, you know, and there was another fellow, he was an easterner by his brogue, you know, and he had a package on his lap and there was three or four fellows who started to get off and they went down and the police went after 'em and they instructed them to get back up there or you're going to end up on the rails, you know. So this easterner, he gets up and he goes down and he confronts these policemen and he tells them "now, look, we didn't ask to be here. We're here of necessity." He said "these fellows don't like your town anymore than they probably like any other town but they have a right to come in here, whether they're rich or whether they're poor, they had a right to come here." Now he told them fellows "you go on and I'll watch here. If anything happen to you guys, I'll take care of the situation." And he had a gun in that package, see, and so he, they let them fellows go. Now no doubt they picked 'em up later, see. And another thing, you talk about slavery. Now a lot of people felt that the slaves were freed and all that. This was a lot of baloney. During the last depression,

for instance, they used to work a racket. If they caught a couple of hobos, see, they passed a law, they passed ordinances that unless you had sixty cents on you, it varied, you know, different amounts in different towns and if you didn't have that amount on you, then you were put in jail. And you know what they done? They worked you, see, they worked you for nothing. So what happened these politicians no doubt they was getting money, free labor, see, and they got a cut from somebody else because they brought you over there to work, see, and the county was paying your fare in jail, you know. And all kinds of things happened. That was a tremendous influence on me, which told me that, gee, something is radically wrong, that all is not well, see, all these things. Now even in fact I happened to be a victim of it, what they call a kangaroo court, see. Have you ever, do you know what a kangaroo court is in jail?

A: Ah, ah, no.

A: No? Well,

Q: I know the name, but I can't think of it right now.

A: Well, it's rather comical in a sense the way they work it. They gotcha.

Q: Arrest, hearing and everything in one day?

A: Oh, no. For instance, I was picked up, I was picked up for trying to take a train, right out of Grand Rapids, and the detective, well a funny thing. I carried two pair of pants with me, see, one was corduroy and the other one was a little dressier pair, you know, and so the train was pulling out, you know, and I was running along the station. I was trying to get my corduroy pants on. There was a fellow in the mail car says hey, towhead, there's a dick in the cab.

I said ah-h-h. No sooner than I'd jumped in the first coach on the train and the damn thing I don't think it went 500 feet and he come a crunching stop and somebody grabbed me and threw me on the ground with a gun, you know. So we ended up, there was three of us, we ended up in jail. Well, prior to that we worked decorating Logans Port, Indiana, you know, and we made a few dollars and then I was thinking about it. I said, gee, I wonder if we took somebody else's job doing that, see. So but anyway the kangaroo court it operates this way. So they sentenced us and the funny thing about it is these three other fellows, two other fellows that was with me, they brought us before the judge, see, we were greenhorns, you know, we didn't know nothing, see. So they brought us before the judge and the judge says what do you plead, guilty or not guilty? And so the two fellows that was with me they looked at me and I says what the hell alternative do we have, you know, we don't have no alternative. So we pleaded guilty. So all right he fined us so much money or go to jail. So the fellows looked at me as if I was a banker and I had the money. I said well, hell, we got to go to jail. So the paddy wagon comes and they take us cross town to the jail and they opened the jail door and they shove us in there, see, and they clanged the door back, see. So what happens? There's a huge individual, he comes up to me and they had a chair sitting real high and he grabs my pants. I had taken my pants off, you know, and I had 'em rolled up and he grabbed my pants and I grabbed 'em back. He said now take it easy fellow, take it easy. Nothing's going to happen to you, he says, this is a procedure. Procedure, you know, I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. But anyway they puts me on that chair and they search me and

they find I had about two and a half or a dollar and a half. They took it, the prisoners, see. And from the other fellows, they had a couple of bucks too but they didn't find 'em. They found mine, you know. So there's a prisoner there, you know, it was so confusing, you know. There was a prisoner there, he comes up to me after all this happened, he said, "hey," he said, "tomorrow's going to be a trial" and he says "you plead not guilty." I said "plead not guilty?" I said "what do you mean plead guilty?" I said "hell, I just pleaded guilty at the court house," you know. He said "oh, well, this is something different." He said "they took your money away from you," see. So at the trial next day they asked me if I, they charged me with entering their premises without their permission. So I was fined whatever they found on me and of course they used to buy tobacco that went into the kitty, the jail kitty and they bought tobacco and that, see, and so things like that, see. The trial started and the judge asked me, the judge, the treasurer, the judge and all of them they were doing time in jail, you know.

A: Amazing.

A: So they asked me, one fella asked me what do you plead to this charge? And I says well I have a spokesman here and the spokesman, that was that fellow sitting there. He said he pleads not guilty. Okay, what is your proof? Show us how he got ahold of us. Can you prove that he asked us for permission to come here, you know. Did he ask us, do you know of any instance or anyone he contacted in here and asked us if I could come in there and I started thinking, what the hell is this, you know, so confusing. So anyway they found me guilty, see, and they kept the money. So all right. They took us to the cell and a fellow

comes in and he talks to me and he said, hey, how old are you? I said 15. Where you from? I told him. And he said, well he says, he says I'm getting out today and he said I'm gonna get ahold of somebody and see if they can't give you your... I told him we don't have no money to get across the straights. We were headed back home. So sure enough he did. They let him out that day. Pretty soon the sheriff comes in there and they calls that treasurer and this was funny. They calls that treasurer and the sheriff talks to that treasurer. He said now look, he said, that kid he's only 15 years old. He said now you give him that money. He says and we'll replace it some other way, he says, but give him that money and that treasurer had his pad, you know. He took that pad and he threw it down like that and he says I quit and he starts walking out and then he starts realizing well, hell, I'm in jail too, you know. But that's how they done it and they did give the money back you know. But there was a lot of it. And then sometimes what used to happen is if they caught you, if you happened to get into Illinois was bad for that where they would take a hobo, see, and they'd sentence him, see, and they'd work him for maybe give him a sentence, I don't know, maybe ten days, 30 days, something like that. They'd work him for that length of time and then they used to tell him that don't come back into this town, he says, because we're going to get you again and it'll be maybe 90 days before you get away, see. So naturally in order to get out of town he had to go through one of the next townships but this, the ring they had, these policemen or that, they'd call, what you call that, what might be in that town at such and such a time and they laid for him. There was,

one fellow was telling us, he was a hobo, one fellow was telling us. He said he got caught in that and he was for about six months...

Q: Oh boy.

A: And there was nothing he could do about it, see. And I almost got caught in it myself. Fortunately, fortunately, this fellow, the detective happened to be from my hometown. He did, I didn't know him and he didn't, he knew me but I didn't know him. And when they picked us up he says, I know you. He says I remember you when you were just like that. Oh, I said, good, I says, what's your name? He said listen, you don't ask questions. He said I do the asking. And they took us. He said I'm going to give you boys a break. There was two of us. I'm going to give you boys a break. They knocked us right off of the train. I had to jump off of a speeding train and you know how cinders are on a railroad.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I get off and oh, man, I wasn't going to get off and he hit me with a gunbut on my knuckle and I had to let go.

Q: Oh boy.

A: And I tumbled and I went in all those cinders, my elbows, knees, tore my pants and I rolled into a lot of barbed wire. But anyway he took us to another place and this was the Wabush Railroad that kicked us off, you know, and they were pretty tough which I didn't know and, but anyway, it turned out they took us to another town and he said take the Pennsylvania out of here. You know what, we had to grab that damn thing on the fly. He said and if you don't catch it, he said, we'll getcha and this time you're going on the farm. That's what he meant, we're going to work.

Q: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh.

A: So Ronnie, Gay(?) and myself and I told this, the buddy that I had picked up on the road, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I said now make sure you grab the front end, not the back end. You know, if you grab the front end it'll throw you, your feet and that up and you'll slam the boxcar. But if you grab the rear end it'll throw you right in between the two cars. You'll break your limbs you know. So I ran and I ran and I said well here goes and I jumped and I got ahold of them rails there and boy I'm telling you, my feet swung bang up against the boxcar and I hung on there's nothing would've broken my grip. I saw him. He almost slipped and fell. He caught one about four, five cars down from me, see and we went into, we walked on top of the freight trains and we thought it was a refrigerator car and on a refrigerated car there is a door and a lot of people got suffocated because they didn't know about that, there was a refrigerator door up on top and there's a handle. If you go down in there, there's a handle that you got to pull down otherwise if you leave that handle up you're caught in there for good.

Q: Oh.

A: And I seen the handle down and I said gee there must be somebody in here, let's go in here. And we opened that and there was a man about 350 pounds in there and he was eating lemons. He was just eating lemons and he said come on down boys, have a piece, you know but he said pull that handle down, you know. And well from there I, him and I, this fellow that I picked up on the road, he was from Philadelphia. He was telling me all about, that his parents, great grandparents and

that came and landed on the Plymouth Rock and you know, I told him ah-h-h, don't hand me all that, you know. But, so we went to Chicago and that's how we got in all that trouble getting out of Chicago. While in Chicago, John Dillinger, you've heard of John Dillinger?

Q: Um-hum.

A: Oh, man, he was right there by that theater. The FBI guys, they got ahold of me, you know. They frightened hell out of me, see, 'cause I got off of a train and the guy told me never get off on anything near in the 22nd or something like that. He said but especially the 23rd and 23rd station in Chicago, lay off. He said but never go downtown on a train. So I got off on the 23rd and there's a bridge there, see, and here, I heard a police siren and they was coming at me. Scared the living hell out of me, see. And I ran up that bridge, see, and that siren was going, you know, I'm just a kid, see. And what in the hell are they after me for, see. And so I says well I got on top of that bridge and I saw a telephone pole. It was a fair distance from the bridge and I saw it had those legs on it, you know, see. And I jumped over that barrier and I boom, I just timed myself perfect. I got ahold of it and I climbed down and I ran under the bridge and I ran into a neighborhood, see. It was just getting dark, you know. And so I ran into that neighborhood and there's a siren in front of me, a spotlight, you know, on the siren in front of me, one over there, one in the back of me, one over there. I was surrounded.

Q: Oh boy.

A: I was scared and I said hell I got to get out of here. So I just turned around and I saw a house and I saw a pretty big lot there, you know, and I said well maybe I can get across that lawn and I went to

run across the lawn but the guy was putting in a new lawn and he had a wire. I didn't see it, you know, and I tripped on it and I went ka-boom, bam. I landed down and hell in no time there was three FBI guys, one had a gun on my temple, one in my ribs and one in my back, a gun, you know. One of them was Purvis. Purvis was the head of the FBI.

Q: The man himself.

A: Yeah. So they took me into a car and they questioned me, you know. And Purvis told the others, he says well here's, this is an innocent kid. He says he has nothing to do with that, with anything here. He's just an innocent kid. So he told us, he told me, he says now you get out of here. He said there's going to be a lot of trouble here, maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day. I didn't know what it was. So the next day about 2 o'clock I was in a little different neighborhood there. Big headline news: John Dillinger shot at that theater yesterday. I was right there, you know, and strange coincidence, see.

Q: Yeah.

A: But that's, anyway with that fellow, when I met him we went to Chicago. I went, he asked, well why don't we come to, go to his hometown and he'll prove some other things for me at his hometown, see. He said I showed you the book at my sister's. They lived in Chicago. So, he says, and then from there we'll take a rest and whatever you want to do. May take a tramp steamer, get on a tramp steamer and we don't care where the hell we go, whether it's Africa or where, China, doesn't make any difference. I says that's okay with me.

We got in an argument in Toledo where it was his turn to go and get something to eat, see, and he wouldn't do it. I says, well, all right, then I'm going to head on up north. I don't know what happened to him and that's how come I ended up in Detroit, in Dearborn.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 1936, '35, '36. I ended up in Detroit. I had a brother got a job at Ford Motor and I went there. I went to live with him for a while until I got a job.

Q: What time span was this since you began the story when you first left home? How long did this whole thing take?

A: Oh, this took, well let's see. I left home several times...

END OF SAARI-TAPE 1-SIDE A

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Tape 1B

A: ...Conservation Corps. We even had a strike at the Conservation Corps.

Q: Was that also in Michigan?

A: That was in Michigan. We was in Newberry, Newberry, Michigan and my brother was the brother that I got a job at Ford's. He was with both of them, both of us were in the same camp. And I had it quite well there. I played hockey with the community, you know, and I played baseball with the community. They'd come to camp to pick me up and likewise I also became acquainted, I'm Finnish, you see, I'm a Finlander, you see. And so the Finns had a nice hall there, you know, and of course they were radical Finns.

Q: Now this is in what city in Michigan?

A: This is in Newberry.

Q: Oh Newberry.

A: Newberry, Michigan.

Q: Okay.

A: And so they used to treat us CC boys very well and also there was agitation against them, see, by some fellows in the camp. There was 225 of us in camp and some of them, you know, this of course had an influence on me also because I met a lot of the Finns up there, you know, and we kinda got along real good and they planted a lot of things, you know, told me a lot of things that perhaps was an influence in my life.

Q: They had a large community of Finns up there?

A: Oh, yeah. They had, that was predominately Finnish, see, and so they're not there anymore. The old breed is dieing out you know but there was a group in our outfit that had the ghaul as well as they were treated and they went in one time there and they started a fight there and they really wrecked the place. But Finns built it up again. But that was an influence in my life, see. I used to think about that a lot. And they were nice people.

Q: Where did they get their ideas? Did they come from Finland with certain ideas that they brought here?

A: Well, not necessarily, but, well you see you have to, I believe a person develops lines of thought from environment, see, depending upon his conditions of life, see. And so these, the Finns of course is a nation, a real small nation, see, about 5 million people the most, and they've been kicked around a lot, see. So from these experiences in their life they formed co-ops like, see, and in order to try to fend for themselves, see. But they were tossed about in the political field to Norway, Sweden, back to Russia at that time under the tsar, you know, and of course, then a lot of them migrated. They had some big battles there in Finland, strikes, and stuff like that and no doubt a lot of them had a very good speckling of political education, see, and so they came, and every place I went I used to wonder well why people would ask me what nationality are you. I said I'm Finnish and a lot of people ah, you're a good man, you know. And I wondered what did they mean. How do they know I'm a good man, you know. What they were talking about was that the Finnish people as a whole, for instance, the copper mines up there, it was the Finns that were

organizing it and the Finnish, the Finns played a tremendous role in developing a trade union culture in this country, see. And they were all socialists, pro-socialist you know and when the Socialist party kinda split up in 1919 and the Communist part was organized, the Socialist Party had 7,500 Finns. 7,500 Finns joined the Communist party.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah. So these things you know and then when they find out I'm a Finn, well, gee, you know. I used to get invited, hey, hey, come on over here, you know.

Q: By the other Finnish people you mean?

A: Well, not only that but the other people, non-Finns, see, non-Finns. And so through this process I became involved. I became involved and I got to learn a little bit about Ford's and I met a lot of the Ford workers. Some of them were right wing, some of them were left wing. I played ball, I went on a softball team. I was unemployed for a long time there, you know. And I got acquainted with a lot of fellows and there was one fellow there in particular. Well, that's how I met Paul Boatin, I met Paul Boatin, John Gallo. Well I met Archie Acciacca, let's see I think I got acquainted with him when he was in the Pressed Steel unit back during World War II. So then a lot of fellows talking to me. Well they wanted me to join organizations, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And one of the organizations was the John L. Lewis' Nonpartisan League, see. Nonpartisan. Well that didn't strike me right, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: I said how can one be a nonpartisan, you know. And I used to argue about that issue and I said how can one be nonpartisan. You can't. That's an impossibility. The minute, if you're nonpartisan you never make a decision, see. And once you make a decision you're no longer, you're a partisan. (Ha-ha, ha-ha). That was my attitude, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So I still argue that point today which I think is correct. How can you be a nonpartisan? You can't. And so anyway I learned a lot through the John L. Lewis' organization and then of course there was a lot of ferment developing about Ford's, you know. There was a hunger march here. I wasn't here. I was about a year and a half away from that, see. I came to Detroit in '35, '36 and this happened in '34, that hunger march and I know several fellows that were in it, you know. I got acquainted with them and of course I picked up a lot of good things from them. Like I say, the environment, it's all, I became active and I went to meetings and oh, there was a Finnish hall on 14th Street. That place was, we used to have meetings and them places were packed.

Q: Um.

A: And agitation going on, you know. We had several agitators. I forget, I believe a fellow by the name of Taylor was one of them. Oh he was tremendous, a tremendous speaker and I used to go home, I was awed. How come that guy remembers all that stuff, you know? And so I said well he must do a lot of reading. I started reading and once I started reading I spent almost as much time in the library as I did anywhere else.

Q: What'd you read?

A: Oh, I read labor history. I read about some of the labor, like Eugene Debs. I read about the Haymarket trio. I read about the Moonies and I read about this lawyer, oh, what the heck is his name?

Q: Clarence Darrow?

A: Yeah. I read about him and I says what a remarkable man that Darrow was.

Q: Yeah.

A: Truly a remarkable...

Q: The Story of My Life. Was that the name of the book?

A: Yeah, I think so. I may have it around here some place but I've given some of my books away and I never get'em back, you know. So anyway this, I talked to myself, gee what a remarkable individual to go through all that. He was a good lawyer. They offered him a big job on the railroads and he turned it down to be with the lowly guy down there, trying to defend him, you know. And so this led on and led on, well actually I joined the union, I joined the union, and I got a job at Ford's.

Q: When did you first come in at Ford's?

A: I first hired in at Ford's in December of '36. I only lasted one year, not even one year. I got laid off and I just couldn't get back to save my life.

Q: Where did you hire in at first, which building?

A: Which building? Spring and Upset, the old Spring and Upset. That's down.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I don't remember the chairman there but I do remember one of the committeemen there, a fellow by the name of Cunningham. And then from

the Spring and Upset I was laid off and I got a job in Square D which was organized. Square D was the United, UE, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And I had quite an experience over there, you know. I turned that place upside down agitating, you know. And so anyway a fellow, then the World War II started, see. And a fellow comes to see me and he said hey, he says, why don't you come back to Ford's. He said now is the time to do it, they're hiring, you know. And okay, okay, I said I'll come back and I was on the committee over there and everything and I was in, I didn't know whether I should leave up there, you know. I was leaving the workers flat.

Q: Yeah. You were there four years or so?

A: No, I was there about two years.

Q: Two years?

A: Yeah. And I had, I don't know whether you've read of Matles.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Have you?

Q: Yes.

A: Well I met him downtown Detroit because he wanted to see me and the fellow in the shop got ahold of me and says hey you come down with me. He says there's a fellow from the United Electrical that wants to see me, see.

Q: So you were in Square D before the UE organized it?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Oh.

A: I was in Square D before Ford's was organized, yeah.

Q: Was Square D organized at the time?

A: Square D was organized at the time but oh, the conditions there. For instance, the women, there was a lot of women working there, see, and they got paid, they was getting for the same type of work a fellow was getting 85 cents an hour and she was getting about 50, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I started agitating on that, you know, and I ended up on the bargaining committee. They had a contract, see, and negotiations were coming up and so the dominant forces in that local of course they ganged upon me, you know. They was involved in some shady stuff, you know.

Q: The union leaders?

A: Huh?

Q: The union you mean?

A: I didn't quite get you.

Q: The union or the company?

A: The union guys, some of the union guys, see and when I was on the committee I was elected on the committee because I made a speech at a meeting, see, and I really agitated on these issues, see. And so the chairman and some of the other members of the staff they kinda wanted to get me off of that platform, see, and so several fellows came to the platform, I guess they were going to handle me physically.

Q: Oh boy.

A: See but the workers came to my defense.

Q: Do you remember who the union leaders were at that time in that local?

A: Well let's see. I believe if I'm not mistaken there was Newman was the president at that time and Eugene Ladd was, Eugene Ladd he was a tool and die maker and he was the head steward. They wanted me off

the committee so they went around and everybody resigned. Then they came to me and said look, everybody resigned from the committee except you and so we're going to have new elections but you have to resign too. I says no, I'm not going to resign. I said if the workers want me off of the committee, call a meeting and let'em vote me off, you know. I said but I'm not going to resign. So we had, they did call a meeting and through parliamentary trickery which I didn't understand very well then, they got me off of the committee but as soon as they had to have nominations again for a new committee, I was the first one nominated. And I come, I got next to the top vote and then a big fight ensued. We used to meet in the Hoffman Building and Christ, guys was falling down them stairs and windows were breaking you know, but nobody came at me. I think there was a lot of Finns working there, you know, a lot of Finns working there and boy I'm telling you it was something. So this guy then, this Matles wanted me to come, he wanted to talk things over with me and I did go to meet him. I went to meet him and he said you know, he says I've been hearing about you. He said you got the right angle. He said you're all right. He said but you need some help. I didn't have a caucus, see.

Q: Ah.

A: Because at one of the meetings then, they, the rank and file, they revolted against the president, and they yelled my name and said get up there, you're the president, you're the president.

Q: Oh, boy.

A: So now what the hell do, what the hell did I do? (Ha-ha) What am I going to do? I'm by myself, you know. So I went up there and I says well, it looks like I'm going to have to open up nominations for

chairman, you know. I was just put in there but if I would've had the knowledge that I have now I never would've done it. I would've pursued it.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I was in there and I would've used the authority the rank and file gave me and I would have done the job, see, but then I felt I was talking about democracy, you know, that well, but anyway then this fellow at that time I talked to Matles and he told me he said look he said you stick with us. He said we need to clean up a couple of locals there, that was an amalgated local, various different shops were bunched into one.

Q: Do you remember what that number of the local was?

A: Ah, no, I don't remember but the UAW raided it and Silverman became the, Silver, a guy by the name of Silver became president there, one of Ruther's boys, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So Matles told me, he said look, he says you stick with us. We want to talk with you some more and he said you're gonna need help. We want to help you and you need help. You can't do it alone. He said you need help. So you stick with us and he says you're gonna be all right. He said we like what you say, we like your action. He said you caused a lotta, the workers are with you, see, the workers are with you. He said that's the big thing and so that was the time when this fellow, I run into this guy, well I used to go to the local there see, and this fellow happened to be there.

Q: Who was that? Which guy was it?

A: Let's see, oh, he had, he used to be editor of, Lieberman.

Q: Yeah, Robert Lieberman, huh?

A: Yeah, yeah. He says come on to Ford's. Jesus Christ, I didn't know what to do, you know. I said gee, I told'em I was gonna meet with them and that. Gee, I felt bad about doing that, see, but he said look, he says, we need you here. This is a big place, a hundred and twelve thousand workers here, you know. Well that made sense, you know. So I did. I quit over there and Bob gave me a letter and the funny thing about that letter was, I didn't read the letter, but at Ford's in the employment office, you know, there's employment people, here, and the head guy was over there, so I was given a letter and told to go into Gate 4 and just give it to one of the employment people there. I gave it to the first guy I come to. He opens that letter, he reads it, like that you know, and he put that letter back in the envelope and he said you got to go to that first desk over there. And that was, I believe it was Solomon, was the head guy. So Solomon takes that letter, reads it. His brow wrinkled, you know, and so he said okay, come with me. I followed him and he came down and walked beside these others and he was carrying that letter, looking at that letter and he says, well, looks like all the comrades are coming back to Ford's.

Q: Ha-ha, ha-ha, ha-ha.

A: I said what do you mean comrades? What the hell's he talking about? I didn't quite get it. So anyway they hired me and I ended up in the Pressed Steel and that's where I met Archie.

Q: Did you ever find out what that letter said or what...

A: No.

Q: Who did Lieberman know that he could get you in that easy?

A: Well, no. Lieberman didn't tell me other than he recommended that I be hired. I imagined, I never opened the letter or anything.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 194-, June 6 of '42, June 6, 1942.

Q: So Lieberman had a position in the union at the time?

A: He was, yeah, he was, I believe he was editor of the...

Q: The Ford Facts?

A: The Ford Facts and I liked Bob. I thought he was a sensible fellow, you know, and so then I became active in the Pressed Steel unit and I run for committeeman and I win and of course then trade union politics began to enter into the field which took away some of the abilities that a lot of people had to do things. It took that ability away from them for fear of not getting elected, you see. But anyway we became a strong force in Local 600.

Q: The Pressed Steel Building, you mean?

A: No, I mean we spread in that plant like wild fire.

Q: Oh, you mean the progressives?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, we considered ourselves, yeah, I think we called ourselves the progressives at that time and we became a tremendous, we were winning elections three to one. Nobody had a chance. So what happened, I think, a lot of infiltration developed, see. They saw that we're winning and therefore they should infiltrate our group, you know, and then try to get our support when they run for office like we did support certain individuals and they were not worth a damn, I mean, from my standpoint.

Q: You're talking about the right wing caucus within the local?

A: Yeah. But aside from that, aside from that the reason all these things happened of course was the war came to an end, see, and Europe lay broken down ready for any force to be taken and American industrialists wanted to be that force. So, what did they do? They knew that they had to defeat us, us folks, they had to defeat us. They could not, they needed labor peace. They needed somebody to head the UAW and all other unions that was able to hold everything in check. No strikes, they didn't want no strikes so that they could go to Europe with the Marshall plan and all these other loan plans and take over in Europe which is coming to play now, see. It is coming to the fore, see. So this started a turmoil. You see before, there was a real democratic movement going on in Local 600. There was one, two, three factions, see. Now we never, not to my knowledge, at least I never did, do anything to hurt or to tear their literature down of the other factions but our literature was tore down all the time. Plus the fact that at that time the rank and file was getting well informed. Our agitation, the middle group and the right wing they was getting, well a good diet of historical knowledge, political knowledge and what have you and they had to destroy that, the company to realize that they had to destroy that. They got to get something to go on a one track and who was their choice of course the right wing, the right wing.

Now in order to defeat us, here's some of the activity that they done. They had labor relations people, see, all right. I was a committeeman. I was elected, there was two of us to be elected and I was elected and the right wing was to be elected. One right winger

was running and actually there was another left guy but he was weak and I wanted him to run with me and maybe both of us could get elected and I went to talk to him, a guy by the name of Chauncey Saunders, and I said Chauncey, I says, why don't you and I run together. I said we'll both get elected and we'll beat them two right wingers, see. And he said well, I gotta think. He was afraid of getting...

Q: Associating?

A: Yeah. Associating with me, see. The guy was all right, see. He was all right. So he come back to see me the next day and he said no, I'm gonna run as an independent. I said Chauncey, you are beat, you're beat. Who's gonna beat me? I says I'm gonna win and Freddie Cannera and that's how it turned out.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah. And after, he quit two days after that and he left, see. And I won. Now Freddie Cannera was of the right wing. Now labor, all the tough cases, all the tough cases, the labor relations they called me, see, because if they called me there was plenty of justification for them to fire these guys and when the news would come back, gee, Whitey was over there, he represented two guys, they both got fired yesterday, blah, blah, so that makes it look bad for me, see. And so I went to labor relations, you know. That teed me off. I didn't know that was going on but I noticed, well why are they calling me all these times. And so I finally went to labor relations and Hupkey(?) was the labor relations man at that time on the midnight shift. And I told him, I says you know you're interfering in trade union policy and I said I don't like it and I says I'm asking you not to do what you're

doing and I says if you don't, I'm going to make a hell of a big issue out of it and he quit, quit doing it.

Q: That was your first term elected?

A: Ah, no, no, I was elected in Pressed Steel and I was elected in the Motor building, yeah, that was the first time I, the first term in the Motor building when I went back to the Motor building. That's where Paul, I met Paul, oh I didn't meet him there but he was an officer there. He was a bargaining committee member, I believe, at the time. And the Motor building had about 12,000 workers at that time.

END OF SAARI-TAPE 1-SIDE B

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 2A

A: No I went to the B Building and then from the B Building I went to the Lincoln plant and from the Lincoln plant all the way to Highland Park. Oh gosh, and I lived over here off of Telegraph.

Q: This was in the '40s that you were doing all this transferring?

A: Yeah. It was after, you know, after the war.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And so I couldn't get a base nowhere. Well I was kind of getting a base in Lincoln, not Lincoln, but Highland Park but that traveling got me so, what you call it, and the elections were coming up. I was a member of a caucus there, but the traveling, I was away, I rode the bus. I didn't have a car. It used to take me two and a half, three hours to get to work, you know, so I went to the committeeman whose name was Agrouso, see, and I says, I was a job setter. They put me on job setting, see. So I told Agrouso, I says, well, I says, I want to get transferred back to Rouge. Oh no you can't go back. He said they need you here, you know. I said ah, don't hand me that stuff, you know. There's a lot of workers here. They can do that job just as well as I can and probably even better, I said, so don't hand me that. He said well no you can't. So I said, Agrouso, I said, you want to be committeeman don't you? Well yeah, what's wrong, why, who's going to take me out? I said I am. He laughed. Yeah he laughed. I said don't laugh. I says I'm going to run, I'm going to run for committeeman. Oh he laughed, that was something funny. So we had the elections and he beat me by 20 votes.

Q: Ah, close.

A: Yeah. He got 420 I think, and I got 400. There was a lot of Finns working over there and of course I wasn't there a very long time, you know. I wasn't able to really get acquainted and they elected their committeeman on a plantwide basis, see. But anyway the next day who comes to see me, Agrouso. Hey, Whitey, you want to go back to the Rouge? I said yeah. He said tomorrow come on to the labor relations and pick up you whatcha call it and you can go back to the Rouge. I went back to the Rouge and I ended up in the Motor building. Paul was a bargaining committee member and let's see, a fellow by the name of Bill Cooper was president. He was one of our guys and then he kinda, I don't know, I don't know too much about him, you know, but he kinda, Paul and him they kinda gotten odds, you know. Paul wanted to run for president and then we had Jimmy O'Rourke on the right wing and Walter Bell, Walter Bell is dead.

Q: But he was a right winger also?

A: Yeah, yeah. But anyway, now the reason why, I want to get down to the reason why all this was happening, see. So Reuther wanted to run for president of the UAW and of course all these, whatcha call it, they were for him. He got publicity, oh he got favorable publicity.

Q: What, you mean the newspapers were for him?

A: Yeah. Well in a way they called him a labor statesman, you know, all that hogwash, see and then of course he made a deal. Oh yeah, in order to, for him to maintain his presidency he had to get Local 600 under his wing, solid and he couldn't do it. The election time come around he would just hold his own and we would come right in there, you know, boom, boom, just like that. So then, well actually when

Reuther got, became elected, he started all this red stuff, you know. You know what I mean?

Q: Yeah, red baiting.

A: Red baiting, yeah. Now this had a terrific affect. People were afraid to open their mouths for fear of getting ostracized but he was doing the job that he agreed to do and then finally when they couldn't beat us in Local 600 they calls in the Un-American Activities Committee and Paul was taken off, there was, let's see, five building chairman were just arbitrarily taken off. I was a district committeeman, I was taken off. Several other committeemen were taken off. In other words they got to our core, the core forces we had. They got to us. They got us off of the floors, see, they got us off. We couldn't do our daily duty so to speak, see. So, then of course, the Un-American Activities Committee there, a lot of us, well of course, we used the Fifth Amendment, and the right wing was after us, accusing us of disloyalty and blah, blah, blah, you know, as if, as if, one using the Fifth Amendment, one is disloyal. Why the Fifth Amendment is for the use of guilty and those that are not guilty, either one can use it. That's why that's in there. But anyway this is the first time in political history that the Fifth Amendment, and who popularized it? Us guys and who later, why the very individuals that insisted that we not use the Fifth Amendment, they themselves turned around and used the Fifth Amendment.

Q: Who's that?

A: Absolutely. Jimmy Hoffa.

Q: Oh.

A: The old head of the whatcha call from Seattle, what was his name?

Q: Not Bridges.

A: Oh, no, not Bridges, no.

Q: Ah, Seattle. Which union?

A: He big heavy-set guy, Jewish fellow, I can't think of his name but oh, he used to be head of the teamsters.

Q: Oh, the teamsters.

A: Yeah.

Q: I can't think of it either.

A: Yeah, it'll come to me anyway. So Reuther then was the vice-president of General Motors, you know, vice-president of the UAW. He wanted to, he run for president and he win and he does all this damage to the trade union movement. He put administrators over locals in order to rip out the, whatcha call it, like he done the Local 600.

Q: So when you go removed from your committee position, what'd you do?

A: What did, you mean what did we do about it?

Q: Yeah, or did you have to go back on the job?

A: Yeah. I went back on the job. Some didn't. Some that were accused they flocked over. Some of them flocked over. I don't exactly remember what a lot of them did. So anyway they were out to get us and they were using the arm of the government, see, to get us.

Q: Now they meaning Reuther, the right wing, maybe Ford, the company, were all out to get you guys, kinda like a conspiracy?

A: Oh definitely, definitely. It's as plain as that organ right there. It's as plain as can be. And really for instance I recall some elements during the organizational days at Local 600, some of the elements there were anti-union. Now I know we're not born pro-union, you know and if a guy was a right winger and he runs for office and

wins and he does his job well it makes no difference whether he's a right winger or a left winger. If he's doing his job, you know. But that wasn't the case here. So when, when the red baiting and everything started, then there was a lot of worms crawled out of the woodwork, see. And a lot of good people got hurt, a lot of good people got hurt, hea. And I remember when they came in and told me that a guy by the name of Nelson Samp, he was on the international staff, and he came in to the labor relations, and they called me in and Nelson Samp says this is official policy of the UAW that, don't recognize me as representative anymore. And Nelson Samp gives me a letter and I read that letter and they charge me, guess what they charge me with? Malfeasance and I told Nelson Samp, I said, Nelson, I said take this letter back will you and I says that I would rather you, they charge me with communism or whatever you have, than with malfeasance. I had no trial, no nothing. Although the five building chairman they had a trial but it was all cut and dry, you know, it was all cut and dry, take them out. One guy got fired, a fellow by the name of Nelson, no, Art McPhaul, a Black. He got fired. A few others got fired. And so then the right wing took over solid. Then you went downhill.

Q: Because the left wing just wasn't there?

A: Well, no, they couldn't get elected. The rank and file, you know, the issues were not Reuther, now here. Here they talk about democracy, a believer in democracy, going to war, we favored and we agitated for a no strike pledge for the duration of the war. The right wing, they was against it, they was against it, see. And our attitude was that well, there is a life and death struggle taking place in Europe which

could have broad repercussions: should this man Hitler, win, see. We felt that we have to get first things first and we advocated that and oh, we were ostracized for it but anyway we won, we won that issue. Now Reuther was against it. The right wing as an organization, they were against it.

Q: Why do you think they came out against it?

A: Well, you know, we live under misconceptions. A lot of people, American people live under misconceptions. They have, they seem to think that if you're an American citizen you believe in democracy. That's a myth, that's a lot of b.s., you know. That isn't so. They don't. You mean to tell me Ford believes in democracy, the General Motors executives, they believe in democracy. Yeah, they believe in democracy, for themselves and they want to exclude us, see. So anyway Reuther then, when he became president, now mind you, this is a very important thing which I'm going to say that's going to bring to light his demagogue. He was a demagogue A-1. Now after he was elected he comes out and fights and signs a five-year contract in peace time, in peace time. Who did that benefit? Why that curtailed grievances, that curtailed everything, that curtailed.... Then not only, now we been having five-year contracts for about 38 years plus now they've dropped down to three-year contracts, whereas we felt that a contract every year has two purposes. One is the economy whichever way it goes. It gives you a chance to recoup and renegotiate things. You get what I mean?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Plus the fact that it is a, contract time is a good educational process, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You get people thinking. You know, you get them to think and we was always distributing literature. We used to write up a piece of literature and we'd be looking for a mimeograph machine at three o'clock in the morning and we had to be at the gate at five to pass them out, you know, but we were there. And this was a tremendous whatcha call it, but like Reuther, opposing a no strike pledge, going to fight against Hitler and there was a lot of other people tied into it, you know, with that, and a lot of elements. They were at least unconsciously they were pro-Hitler. If not consciously so, unconsciously they were promoting a policy that would help Hitler.

Q: Who were the other elements that you talked about, that you think Reuther and the people ...?

A: Well, most of the people were, he was surrounded with, you know. He got, well, for instance the ACTU was real active in behalf of Reuther.

Q: Was that a big force at the Rouge plant?

A: It was. Oh yes it was. Now here's another thing that is rather strange to see how things change, you know. During the '30s, early '30s when the movement for organizing started moving, the churches, ACTU, they were opposed. The ministers in churches and the priests, every Sunday they'd preach sermons against joining the union.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah. They promoted this God and country idea, you know. Don't join, don't join that red organization, you know, all this, and they used the idea that they'll be strikes everyday and you'll never be earning wages and all this sort of stuff.

Q: Was this the Catholic church in particular? The Catholic or the Lutheran church?

A: Oh, they were all, the Catholic was very prominent in that but so were some of the other churches, you know.

Q: What area was this in? Dearborn?

A: All throughout the city.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: All throughout the city. All throughout the nation because they split the United Electrical workers and they run a guy by the name of James Carey who was an outright right winger and he got the support of the churches and all that, see. Probably even financial help, I don't know. I can't say that for sure but no doubt the case. James Carey, you've heard of him.

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: Yeah, okay.

Q: The Black churches too, you think?

A: Huh?

Q: The Black churches also?

A: Well, oh no, no. I don't, I knew of a prominent Black minister that was very much involved in the local drive here. Oh I can't...

Q: Charles Hill?

A: Who?

Q: Charles Hill?

A: Hill, yeah, yeah, Hill. He was very prominent and there was a not of antagonism between the Black and the white, you know. Some of the Ford workers and not only Ford workers but I would say that in the other shops these things happened and racial animosity, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And a lot of people guided their vote against a union primarily on the racial issue and there was a strategy was developed by Hill and the organizers, I mean Wyndham Mortimer, I think, was in the local there. He was an organizer there.

Q: Do you recall any ministers that were preaching this ACTU? Things that you're saying, that a lot of churches were, do you recall any particular ones? The reason why I'm asking is because half the people we're interviewing are saying that, like you, that ministers were preaching in the church don't join the unions and some of them are saying no they never heard it and they always went to church. So that's why I'm saying this, there's two different stories and I just wondered if there's any particular ministers that were kind of...

A: Well, it's difficult for me to remember those but now I don't know whether I should even if I did know whether I should mention any names, you know. For instance, in Local 600 your dominant officers became, oh they were all mostly Catholic, see, Paul Ste. Marie, Joseph McCusken, this guy from Dearborn Heights, I can't think of his name.

Q: Llewellyn?

A: Who?

Q: Llewellyn?

A: Oh, no, not Llewellyn, oh no. I had a lot of respect for Llewellyn.

Q: I think he's just talking about right wing.

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, oh, I thought you meant you were talking about Catholics.

A: No.

Q: Oh.

A: Llewellyn wasn't a Catholic. I don't think he was a Catholic, no and I knew Llewellyn real well. I've known Llewellyn ever since I've been in the movement. In fact him and his son-in-law and I are very good friends.

Q: Yeah. I just talked to him on the phone today. He said to say hello to you.

A: Oh, did he?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Did you talk to him today?

Q: Yeah and I talked to him the last time I was out here.

A: Oh. So well you see there was a fellow from Washington University, the Catholic University of Washington, D.C. So he calls me up one time and he says he wanted me to, if I'd, I've had several call me and they wanted an interview you know, and I, you know...

Q: Was this Lichtenstein?

A: Huh?

Q: Nelson Lichtenstein? Is that his name? Or Roger Keeran?

A: No, I got his name, what was that name?

Q: Keeran, Roger Keeran?

A: No the other one, the long one.

Q: Lichtenstein? Nelson Lichtenstein?

A: Yeah he was here and he interviewed me and he called me I was a little leary about, you know, and then I says well he posed a question. He said, look I'm 37 years old or something like that. He said how am I going to know the truth if guys like you don't say something.

Q: Yeah, that's right.

A: He said how are we going to know the truth? He said you boys, the old hands are dieing off and this is the issue, I wanted Kenny to give him an interview, you know, and Kenny wouldn't do it.

Q: Oh, yeah?

A: But Percy did, Percy did and another fellow did, a guy by the name of Mike Cinzori, Mac Cinzori. He was chairman of the tool and die and I knew him way back when I first come to Dearborn. But anyway where were we at in terms of philosophical and, where were we?

Q: Let's see. You were talking about the role of the church and its attitude.

A: Oh, yeah. Okay. But that is the truth now and you can see the role of some of them. You can see the role of some of them even today. There's a terrific struggle going on in the Catholic church and I happen to be a part of it and I'm not a Catholic, you know, I'm not a Catholic. And that's over this peace letter, this peace and justice letter. A very good thing, a very good thing. But during the '30s also the schoolteachers, they were anti-union. The used to teach anti-unionism in school, see, and what a contrast.

Q: Yeah.

A: Thirties, about 20 years later, teachers turn out to be some of the most militant elements in the trade union movement, see. So people will change, you know. And likewise of course the churches are changing, they are changing alot. They had to. The movement goes on. But anyway then we had, in the grievance procedure, of course, at Ford's, that was, the umpire thing, you know.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

A: And they give us the little ones and they took the big ones. And that was the deal in terms of your grievances. If there was no settlement at a local level, Schulman, I think, at that time, Schulman was the umpire. But we used to get the little ones and they got the big ones. So there's nothing, you're not going to win a thing. Well you have to negotiate but you got to have fervor down below, you know. You got to get people in movement before they recognize you and in fact I had a little demonstration when I was a committeeman in the motor building, see. On the midnight shift they started to, they used to pay us on a Thursday night, but some of the fellows that were heavy drinkers and stuff like that, you know, well okay then they'd get their check Thursday night and we was on a six-day week, even seven-day week. They was hard up for workers, you know. Well these guys, a lot of guys they never wouldn't show up Friday, Saturday and probably they'd come in the following Tuesday. So management decided to do something about it. To withhold them paychecks, see. And so I went around and I, well some of the fellows came to me and said can they get away with that. Well, I said, they'll get away with it unless we do something. Well, what we gonna do. I said well, number one, we gotta stir up the forces in here, gotta stir them up. What do you mean stir them up? Why don't we have a demonstration at lunch hour, you know, because the contract was in there. You couldn't do nothing during working hours, you know. In fact, they had me fired one time because, you know, they wanted to get rid of me and they thought they had me, you know, on a production issue, a raise in production. But anyway so I says okay, I got a hold of the, I had two job setters and one was a conservative individual. Now this is something to study and think about. This,

Let's see, what was his, in fact, he's in California. The fellow's name was Hart.

Q: Hart?

A: Yeah, and the other one was Hal Gerou (?).

Q: The first one was H-a-r-t? Hart?

A: Yeah, H-a-r-t. And I think that's what his name was and the other one Hal Gerou and Hart were very good friends and they were both job setters and I'm telling you them fellows used to do a big campaigning job for me.

Q: Hum.

A: Oh yeah. And Hart was a real conservative individual, you know, but hell he always supported me. It's rather something to think about. Why, you know, and they're in California now. So anyway I went to them and I told them what we're gonna do. Why don't you call a demonstration. I says I'll lead the demonstration and I said when that bell rings, I says you can take your lunch with you and start eating it or you know, and I says I'll be right down at that corner over there, and they turned out, oh, they came out and I said oh-oh and I said well, we'll just march to old Sheridan's office. He was the superintendent, you see. We'll march to Sheridan's office and we'll have a little confab with him, you know. He'll see all these guys. So the funny thing about it. Here's, the right wing committeeman, he's way, way down....

END OF SAARI-TAPE 2-SIDE A

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 2B

- A: The workers says why weren't you with John up there? You're a committeeman, why weren't you up there with John? Oh hell, that made me look like a hero. So we went to the superintendent's office and I walked into, I opened, there's a stair going up from the superintendent's door, there's a stair going up, and a platform up there, but the superintendent was in his office. I opened the door and I said Mr. Sheridan, I said, I've been talking until I've been blue in the face about this issue. I says now there you go. You get out there and you tell them, you know. Get out there and tell them. And oh, he was like this, shaking. I looked. He started to walk out and then he saw that paper, he had that paper. He had everything all written up. Took that paper and he climbed up them steps and he was up there reading, you know, and he stated the reasons which the workers didn't like, you know, and he said we cannot reinstitute the Thursday night payday. Funny thing happened. After he said something like that a fellow jumps in the air and he said, break the windows, break the windows (laughter). So I went down to him, I said, no, we don't have to do that yet. We don't have to do that yet. I said I think we got the issue beat. Okay, okay, he says. By God, he says, if they don't we'll break the windows. There's a lot of comedy to that you know and that week they paid, went back to paying us Thursday.
- Q: Oh yeah? How many people did you get out there to come to the demonstration?

A: Oh, we had, two of us, we had 700 people, see. Freddie Cannera and I, there was two committee, in fact, in order to try to beat me, I think, they had a habit of, well any leftist, you know. What they would do is they'd gerrymander the districts, see. So when they gerrymandered this district it was just predominantly the gear job and one was elected so they thought they would have a better chance if they included another department, a couple of other departments in it, see, but it didn't help because I won. I got top vote, see, I got top vote. But this is what they used to do. Well the left used to do that too, you know. Some of the left element did. I never was in favor of that anyway, I wasn't, you know, but they used to do that. Maybe that's a strategy to defeat somebody.

Q: Yeah. Do you ever think of running for office other than committeeman?

A: I gave it a thought but you know I think one of the weaknesses of my character was that I always felt the other guy could do a better job, see. But I have come to learn that that isn't so, that isn't so. Oh, during the committee hearings when I came back from the committee hearing and I went into the building, holy Christ, there was ropes hanging, you know. And some of them had toilet paper in the noose form you know (laughter) and I had a fellow almost he started to hit me with a piston rod and after I was taken off the committee, he became the committeeman.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah. And when I went in there they seemed to be laying for me in the main aisle and these workers, they jumped on me. Why did you lie? Why did you lie down there? I said I didn't lie, what do you mean

lie, I never lied, you know. Yes you did. I said why, where were you? He said you never named anybody. Oh, I said, well hell you wanted me to be a stool pigeon. He says no. I says, I didn't even name anybody and I didn't even deny that somebody was or wasn't. What the hell did you do? I said I used the Fifth Amendment. You shouldn't have done that.

Q: Were these right wing guys?

A: Well, yeah, it was obvious. So some of them I knew and I just stayed on my two feet. I think I could outbox them, you know. So there was one guy there especially, a real outspoken and I said look, I said, let me tell you something. I says, we all try to speak the truth but sometimes we have to lie. You have to lie. I says, how about your income tax return. Did you tell the truth on your income tax return? Ah... I've been to labor relations with you. I defended you at labor relations. I says, I believed you, I believed you. Did you tell me the truth all the time? Did you tell me the truth the day that I've been down there at labor relations with you. I said apparently the company apparently showed plenty of proof to show that you lied but I can see why you had to lie. You were trying to save your job and I was trying to save your job and we did save your job. Then others started in terms of all kinds of junk, you know, that why don't I go to Russia and all this sort of stuff. And that was when this McGee, this was happening by McGee's department and he happened to be standing there.

Q: Was that Mike McGee, you mean?

A: Huh?

Q: Mike McGee?

A: No, no.

Q: Oh, this is somebody in the Motor Building?

A: Yeah, well this was happening in Dearborn engine because the Motor Building moved to the Dearborn engine room, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And he was there. Oh, he grabbed that thing and he was going to slug me with it and I just stood there and I said, if you feel you have to do that, go ahead. I says, then that will tell me what I have to do.

Q: How about the workers on the whole, the workers on the whole. Did they go along with the red baiting and that?

A: Not really. What happened there was, naw, I don't think, some of them did, due to the church, you know, due to the church. They didn't want to offend the church. But a lot of people tell me that they were angry to some degree at the Catholic workers, see. There was division between the Protestant and the Catholic. I always said, now look, I said, all during the 30s the Catholic church, the priests and that were preaching anti-union, anti-don't join, don't join, but if we didn't have the Catholic worker voting for the union we'd have never made it. So who did the Catholic worker believe? He believed us. And that's a historical fact, see. So all in all I think, a lot of Protestants were bad in there too. Then you had, some churches they were neither way, you know. They believed that well, like Jehovah's Witnesses, they don't believe in voting, you know, they don't believe in unions and then there's several other Black congregations that go along with that. Seventh Day Adventist I think is the same. Boy, they can be a problem. I had some in my, you know they will not,

Saturday is their Sunday and they will not work Saturday. Finally we made, some accommodations were made with them.

Q: Were there a lot of them over at the Rouge?

A: Well, in my department there was about seven of them where I was a committeeman, not too many. And then we had a lot of these displaced persons who came, there were hired in.

Q: You were on midnight shift the whole time?

A: No, no, I was on afternoons, I was on afternoons, midnights, days.

Q: Every time you shift you have to get a new base to run for office, right?

A: Yeah, unless you happened to be staying in the same department but if you get shifted elsewhere, well, you know, you got to get a new base.

Q: Well, what about when you shift from different shifts, from day to afternoon or afternoon...?

A: Well, as long as you remain within the department.

Q: The same people, do other people also...

A: Yeah, because you become known. In fact when I was a committeeman, I was a committeeman on midnights and I had fellows off of the afternoon shift come over to see me and explain that they had a problem.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: And their committeeman not taking care of it. So I told them, I said, well, I'll tell you, you know, I says, I don't like to interfere in another man's district but two of these guys were laid off, see, and they asked me to investigate it and I did and they had people with lesser seniority working on their job, see. And so they went back but they come over and told me about it, not that I was a good committeeman or anything like that. I'm not saying that. I could be

incompetent in many things, but a lot of committeemen that were elected during the Reuther era were absolutely incompetent.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah and they were pro-Reuther and of course in some cases we had within our own group we had incompetence. They were good in one field but in this field they weren't, you know. And this is where all your jumping takes place, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But all in all, this is a good, it was a tremendous educational process not only for me but for thousands and thousands of other people. And as I have told a lot of people they say, well, where do you get your knowledge, I say, well, what knowledge I have, I says, I went to the college of hard knocks. I says when you learn something from there they knock it right in your head and it never, never, never leaves. It never leaves. And we used to, Kenny, I like Kenny, Kenny Roach, I like him. In fact I was over to his place a couple of days ago and we were talking about a lot of things, you know. So, you know, now you have a period of retreat although there's an upsurge taking place. You take Doug Fraser, all his regional directors, the right wing, they're little empire builders, you know, building a little empire. And they started this wage cut like Chrysler but the Canadian worker showed the Chrysler worker, showed them, and that's one reason why the Chrysler worker voted against something there. The Canadian worker voted against it, see. So we can get the American worker, everything moves in ups and downs, you know. You kind of have to, when your troops are going the other way, you just got to go with them, see, to bring them back.

Q: Yeah.

A: If you don't, they'll keep going. So I saw a movie on TV here about a Black guy doing that, during the packing house strike in Chicago. And they had a racial riot and everything.

Q: What year are they talking about? Recently or back?

A: Around 19__, I think 1919, after World War I. How old are you?

Q: I'm just 27.

A: Twenty-seven. How old are you?

Q: The same.

A: The same thing, 27.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, let's see, 27, well you were born in '54, no '57.

Q: Yeah.

A: '57 and union Ford's was organized in '42, see. A strange and a bad feature about this is that as a social phenomena why are not the school's teaching trade unionism or the philosophy behind trade unionism?

Q: Yeah. Today you mean?

A: Hum?

Q: Today, why aren't they?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's a social phenomena.

Q: Well, the college's are starting to teach labor history more now. I think after the 1960's. There's some people that thought that that would be important to add to the curriculum. In the history

department they have labor history offered and at UCLA I took it as an undergraduate.

A: Million people. He has hurt one hundred million people but you see you have the Democrats. They are beginning to look a lot like the Republicans every year. So where do we go? How do we handle the situation? Well a lot of people always say I'm too independent. That's the answer. That is the answer. You go tell the Democrats, okay, now this is it. You better come across or else. I watch that TV there, I got cable TV and I watch that and I watched the Democratic convention. I'm telling you. Oh the Democratic convention but I mean the house in session.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And Tip O'Neill, why he's a (noise). If it wasn't for the Democrats, the Social Security cut, my Social Security was cut and why they never would have got that through, see, they never would have got that through. But we have a problem and it's going to take educational work. I'm still involved in many projects. The fact is, I'm not a religious person, although I read some religious classics, you know. So I seen an ad in the paper about a St. Lioness church in Dearborn Heights. They were having a nuclear freeze deal, you know, peace letter. So I says well, I'm going to go over there. I want to see what's going on. So I calls up a fellow and asked him if he could, if he wanted to go with me. Yeah, okay. So I picked him up and we went. Here I am, in a Catholic church, I am not a religious man and we're sitting there talking and they organize a committee and they point to me and they say, you're on the committee too. That's quite a contradiction. You know, I feel gee, well, all right. I got the

peace letter and I got a lot of their material, you know, and I read it and some of it sounds very good, sounds very good. I mean there's a tremendous struggle going on in the Catholic church and they need help. So I'd like to make this statement too. So by being active over there they had a huge conference in the University of Detroit, oh, about three months ago and they had all these bishops, you know, and there was this Juliana Casey. She's a provincial in the Catholic church and she attended and she was in the process and she witnessed all these meetings in drawing up this peace letter. And so they didn't permit anyone to speak from the floor but afterward they had a question and answer period, see. So a funny thing. I tell this friend of mine, I says, now look I'm going to, I got to ask a question. I says, well go ahead and so I put up my hand and boom, and whatcha call pointed to me, and so he said, what's your question? I said, well, okay, I said, look all my life I have been living under anti-red pressure, you know, under anti-communist agitation and they was always saying the Russians are coming, the Russians are coming, you know, and all that. So I says the Russians did come, but they came with their hockey sticks. They played a few hockey games, they won a few and lost a few and went away, you know. But my question is after this organization, I said, the Catholic church, has been a generator of this theme and I says now we are faced with the possibility of a burnt up universe and the Russians are involved and we are involved. I says now my question is do you now reject the past on this issue and do you now move to come to accommodations with the Soviet Union. Oh, one priest, started looking at one another, you know. Some got kind of red in the face, you know. I said gee, I may

have done the wrong thing, you know, so finally they all kept looking at Juliana Casey and she looked at me and she smiled and said that is a very, very important question. She said yes, we must reject the past on this issue. But by rejecting the past on this issue doesn't mean we are rejecting our faith. This is how she answered it.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So I've been going around, the Catholics I know and telling what Juliana has said, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: That registers.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Are you Catholic?

Q: Well, I was raised in a Catholic home.

A: Oh. Are you Catholic?

Q: I was too, I'm half-Italian, that's the same.

A: Yeah, oh well. What nationality are you?

Q: Well my father was from Czechoslovakia.

A: Oh, Czechoslovakia, yeah, yeah. They have a fine thing going for them over there, I think. Yeah, I used to know in the shop a lot of Czechs.

Q: Were there a lot in the Ford shops?

A: Well, yeah, I think the Czechs, Yugoslavs, you know, and that, yeah, I can't remember any names right now but oh, yeah, they were always, they were good union people, good union people. Italians too, you know. Oh, yeah, Armenians, there's another militant group.

Q: Where there a lot of Armenians at Fords?

A: Armenians?

Q: Yes.

A: The dominant force there I think was the Anglo-Saxon, see, because most of our early trade union leaders there were Anglo-Saxons. The top guys.

Q: Those were the skilled guys?

A: Skilled guys like McCusker, well McCusker wasn't. He was anti, really. He wasn't until later he became local president. Let's see, Joe Couser, Pat Rice, Johnny Orr, all these. They were from the skilled trades and they played a prominent, oh, W.G. Grant.

Q: So you think in the rank and file too, the Anglo-Saxons were more numerous?

A: Well, I would say they were probably as a single race so to speak probably they were dominant but if the others coalesced, they wouldn't be dominant, see. Now I also, I don't say that this theory of mine is correct but I can see where in the course of years, well for instance, we started agitating about running women for office. We started to agitate about woman officers.

Q: What year did you start that?

A: Oh, hell, that was way back in the early days of the union, you know, but I've heard pro-woman arguments way back in '35, '34, in that era. So it takes quite a while. But what's happened is that and then we promoted Blacks, you know, for office and stuff like that and some of them, a lot of them came along with us and they got a good education. There's some very intelligent Blacks now in trade unions. So what is happening? If you go in history, you take all your hockey players were what? Anglo-Saxons. All your baseball players were predominantly Anglo-Saxon. There's a few other smaller whatcha call

that came in but not on a scale and in the trade union movement you take most of the steel workers, the leadership of the steel workers, they were Anglo-Saxons. McDonald, Able, and then in Meritime Union you had, who the heck was this guy, he kind of turned around, he used to be with us.

Q: Mike Quill?

A: Who?

Q: Mike Quill?

A: Oh, no, Mike Quill was New York, he was New York Transport.

Q: Yeah, Transport. Then you're talking about...

A: I'm talking about Curran, Joe Curran.

Q: Oh, Curran, yeah.

A: Joe Curran, yeah, and that was pretty much Anglo-Saxon. Tommy Bridges, or Bridges, and oh I met Bridges several times, yeah, down here in Detroit or at Book Cadillac, we used to have several affairs. He was a very admirable person, Bridges was.

Q: Now he's still going strong today.

A: Yeah. He's still going strong and there's a funny saying that developed, you know, during World War II, prior to World War II when he, they was trying to deport him, see, and so contract negotiations were coming up, no, no, the contract was signed, yeah, but the government tried to deport him under the red clause or something like that, see, and well we all came to his defense, naturally. And so then the government, the owners, the ship owners they went to to the government. It is said that they went to the government and they told the government, hey, leave Harry Bridges alone. Don't you see what the hell you're doing? Everytime you try to deport him he says we got

to sign a new contract. Another thing there was a British, when they was in the process of deporting him back to England?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Well, there was a English labor leader says, well great. We are...

END SARRI-TAPE 2-SIDE B

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 3A

A: Yeah. We're trying to work to get it under the Dearborn ballot now.

Q: Got to get a lot of signatures, huh?

A: Yeah. We're supposed to have a meeting, some of the people are supposed to have, I don't live in Dearborn, see, I'm in Inkster, see. Incidentally, I run for, I joined the Democratic party. I used to be a member many, many years ago and then I got away from it. So then I rejoined the state apparatus and so I went over here and I attended a meeting at the Inkster Democratic club and you're ready to go?

Q: No, go right ahead.

A: And I was going to join the, I didn't go there to join exactly. I just went there to get some information, you know. And there was a Black woman there who I met from, let's see, this is the Women International for Peace and Freedom, some organization with that name and she was there. And I got up and I spoke. I said a few remarks. So at this meeting down in whatcha call, this Black woman gets up and says we have a guest here today that we better get ahold of him and not let him go because I have seen this man operate and he's very convincing, see. So I found out that there was a vacancy for a couple of precinct delegates, only it would have to be a write-in, see. So all right, I thought, gee, if I take on that job I got to go along and give priority to them on some things, you know, and I thought, gee, maybe I'd be doing the wrong thing. So I said well I'll try it and see what happens. So I didn't get a card made out. I took Kay Barret's card. I was supporting her for the county commissioner. I

took some of her cards and I wrote on the back "write in John Saari for convention delegate", you know. I went to some of the neighbors here and then I was at the polls, you know, talk to some people and so I win. So now the 7th, the 18th I got to appear, the district is having their convention and then the 25th and the 26th the state is having their convention. So I'll be going there.

Q: Keeping active, huh?

A: Yeah. I think I'm too much. Then I'm trying to learn how to play the organ.

Q: Oh, just learning now, huh?

A: Yeah. Involvement of course is the best teacher. You can meet some awfully interesting people, very interesting people. This International Women for Peace and Freedom, something like that, they have an agenda that is really something. So now they're going to organize a study group after the elections, you know, and we're going to have democracy, capitalism, discuss all these things.

Q: Sounds good.

A: Yeah, and so I'm going to be a part of it, see. I'm going to be on the committee to get that so I got to do a lot of freshing up. Things change, you know, times change. But in any case you take throughout the country, you know, the people had, the workers are on an upsurge, they're on an upsurge. It's developing slowly but surely and you're going to find a pretty good blow-out one of these days.

Q: You think because of the cut backs and the give backs?

A: Well, you see, they say the economy, no matter what happens, they say it's good for the economy. If inflation goes up, they say it's good for the economy. If inflation goes down, they say it's good for the

economy. If the interest rates go up, it's good for the economy. No matter what it is it's good for the economy but really it isn't. You can't reduce the wages. Common sense will tell you, you can't reduce the wages of 20 million people. You can't reduce their purchasing power and expect the economy to go. Plus they're going to have more lay offs coming, all these robots, chip and robots. By 1990 General Motors is going to have about 9,000 of them and so now they seem to think, you see, we've lost our structural base, our industrial base in this country. It's lost. Where is it? Scattered all over the world, scattered all over the world and that's what the issue is, that's what the issue is. For instance, you got the American revolution, right? Okay, fine. They've done a tremendous job and they were, when the revolution was completed, they assisted peoples in Europe and other countries to overthrow the aristocrats and barons and all this sort of stuff, right?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But it didn't last long, it didn't last long because what happened in Local 600 I can see where it happened in the American revolution. People become apathetic. For instance, there were forces in America that were fighting the revolutionary forces, they were pro-king, pro-England, see. Okay, so then they saw that the revolution's going to win. They saw that the revolution's going to win, so what did they do? They switched and they became great revolutionaries. They got prominent positions and positions of power, see, and they said well the hell with England. We want to be the exploiters and they want position. For instance, all the turmoil about the constitution, oh, they watered that thing down, you know, and then of course we had the

Monroe Doctrine and we had Teddy Roosevelt with, carry a big club, you know, and we invaded, way back in 1833, I think, we invaded Cuba. I had a friend of mine in the Marines, but we invaded Nicaragua way back. But went again in there in 1929. A friend of mine was in the Navy and he said that the navy boats were there and they could see with the binoculars. And at that time the Nicaraguan workers were organizing, see, and they caught these ones right near the beach. They sent the Marines in and the Navy was protecting them, you know, lobbing shells. This fellow tells me, he said, you should have seen what I saw. The American Marines took these poor fellows, they put, they had a what you call a bulls eye on a piece of rope or string and they put it over the Nicaraguan's back and they turned him around and a Marine would pow, shot him. This is what this fellow tells me and I couldn't believe it at first. I said, gee. Then, of course, later I believed it. Yeah, I believed it. I believe it now. What we're doing over there now and the same thing with Isreal. Really when you come down to it we built Hitler. The United States, England, France, the wealthy people in Germany, they was afraid of a socialist government but there was more than that. They was afraid of the Soviet Union. You knew that we invaded Soviet Union, didn't you, back in 1918, '19, 19__, something like that?

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

A: And we helped to build Hitler and we're doing the same thing with Isreal. There's no difference between, they call it religion but they've really twisted that Jewish religion around. Zionism is the Jewish version of Hitlerism, that's all it is. It's a funny thing people can't see the fact this so-called anti-communism, you know.

The fact is we invaded Nicaragua, right, long before there were communists, long before. We invaded Cuba long before there were communists. So they're still using that issue. That's a destructive, negative, whatcha call it, but that's the centerpiece. Every nation in the globe that followed an anti-communist policy went down the drain. You name it, any of them. All these countries in Central Europe, all these countries in Latin America, Japan, well with the exception of the Norwegian countries. Although you have your anti element there too, with Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, you name it. They were all victims of anti-communism. How are you going to take a policy like that out of the history book and make it work? Are we such an exceptional people here that negativism is negativism. That's all there is to it. You want a beer?

Q: No, thanks.

Q: Can we get back a minute to, you were talking about the presence of the Finns in Detroit and I didn't get, I don't think I asked you about the presence of Finns in the River Rouge plant. Was there a large ...?

A: Well, there wasn't, you know, we're a small minority really. I doubt whether we have, I don't think there's a hundred thousand Finns in the country. I doubt whether there's 50 thousand any more and plus the fact that I'm a member of the Finnish center and well the old breed, I'm just about one of the last.

Q: What about in the '40s?

A: Oh, the '40s. Well the Finnish organization was split in the '40s over the Finnish Russian war and they split the right and the left, the split, they broke up and then after the war around 1956, in fact,

one of the fellows right from my home town he died here about a year ago. He was the originator of it but his wife is still active in it and she's about 83 years old and that woman is still active. I'm telling you it's something. She teaches the Finnish language there and I'm on the choral group there. I'm trying to learn how to get my vocal chords in tune and I was also supposed to go on the drama club there. I don't know what the population of the Finns are in Detroit, I really don't know but I found out that right here in the neighborhood here there's about four or five of them.

Q: You mentioned all the different progressives that were at Local 600 in the early days, that they were getting elected all over the plant. Where do you think most of those people came from? How did so many progressive people end up in the Rouge plant?

A: Well, really, let me think now. During the Taft-Hartley drive we lost a few and in fact I think we lost, one of them was a very prominent individual and a very good fighter, Joe Couser, and he was an officer of Local 600 and he just simply refused to sign that. But others, well, I don't know what they done but some of them signed and they capitulated. Some of them, a lot of people quit, a lot of people quit. I quit in '64, see.

Q: So once you were removed in 1952, you were never a committeeman after that?

A: No. Well, I'll tell you, red baiting and everything and then I was being, there was a bad shake up in the plant. I was being transferred. You know only 42 seniority. I was being transferred here, I was transferred there, you know, I was transferred all over the place. So you got to have a base and a permanent base. In the

Dearborn engine plant I had a permanent base. These fellows in there, in fact, when all this started I had fellows come to me and they wanted me to hang around their job because they hear a lot of stuff going on, that they're going to carry me out of the building and all this sort of stuff, so you stay with us here. I said no I'm a committeeman and I says it's my duty to go around and I says I'm not afraid of them, I'm not a bit afraid. I says I think I can handle it. Thank you for your support. That motor line was a bad, rough one. I worked on that motor line for a while and there was a lot of red apple boys there. But most of these fellows, some of them went into business, some of them that left. You know they went into business but pretty much most of them, Paul stayed, I stayed, Kenny stayed, Couser left, let's see, oh good gracious, Godfrey Franklin he left, no he didn't, no. He retired, yeah, that's right and he almost won for mayor of Highland Park.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: So when they started the organizing drive at Ford's did these people come around at that time or how'd they end up with so many good progressive organizers at the Ford plant?

A: Well John L. Lewis, this is one thing about John L. Lewis. Now to me John L. Lewis wasn't exactly what I would call a good labor leader. I don't think he had the real genuine best interests of the miners, but on occasions he would arise, he would arise, like going to CIO. Some CIO guys went to see him and he had a hell of a fight. He was in the AF of L and he had a hell of a fight, see, and the AF of L did not believe that the industrial worker could be organized and the AF of L

is a craft union, all skilled and they just believed in that. Of course they didn't want something to happen that would shake the boat. Industrial worker, we don't know which way they'll go. But John L. saw an opportunity there and he also will go down in the history books as doing the right thing and he had a hell of a fight right on the platform at the convention with a fellow by the name of, I believe his name was Hutchinson, and he knocked that guy right down and Lewis walked away and he then organized the CIO under the mine workers and he threw in a lot of money, almost probably over half a million. Lewis when he ever wanted a job done, who did he get? The communists. And when the job was done he fired them.

Q: That old saying, who gets the bird, the rabbit or the dog, I mean the hunter or the dog?

A: So now that's what he, oh, we had, oh, there was, we had some fellow by the name of Leo Orsage. He died quite a few years ago and he was a mine worker.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah, he was a mine worker. We had quite a few mine workers but what happened because of the popularity of John L. Lewis for what he'd done, naturally a lot of the so-called people who wanted to run for office they spoke of John L. and in fact they even portrayed themselves as mine workers. I then said I'm going to do the same damn thing only I'm not a coal mine worker, I'm a copper mine worker, you know. I never done that but I was just kidding the fellows, you know. And he brought in some tremendous, we had a guy by the name of Taylor and we had a fellow with only one arm. I think he was in the Spanish civil war. He fought with the Loyalists.

Q: You don't remember what his name is?

A: No, I can't remember his name, I can't remember his name.

Q: So you mean when John L. Lewis was involved with the organizing drive of Local 600, he brought in communists to organized there?

A: Well, he had some. I guess he had some of them. I don't know which ones they were but he had, yeah, he went along with them and he hired them and he brought in a fellow, I don't know whether he was a communist or not. Let's see, Wyndham Mortimer.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: Tremendous individual. And then in Flint, you had Travis. He was a tremendous individual. He was a very very tremendous individual. Mentioning Travis' name it brings to mind that you know the younger generation. I was amazed. I went to a couple of educational classes at a Ypsilanti local, I forget the name of the local, 735, and they had, and all these international officers would come there and talk.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And they were all right wing and they all talked from Reuther to this time.

Q: Nothing before.

A: Nothing before and so I talked to the financial secretary over there and I talked to, I believe he was a vice president, and as far as they knew Reuther was the only president of the UAW. The first and only but that's not the truth. Homer Martin was the first, R.J. Thomas was the second, see. The fact of the matter is I got the thing right in there. The first contract that was signed by General Motors, memorandum of agreement, you know, was signed not by Reuther but by Mortimer, Wyndham Mortimer. I got it right in there, I mean in my

files somewhere. So they talk about Ruther. So I'm sitting there and I said jiminy crickets, something's wrong here. So I go to the president of the local and I'm talking to him, see. He's a right wing, you know, I'm talking to him and there's Kenny Bannon. I knew Kenny Bannon real well. He was a regional director and when I went to the meeting there Kenny Bannon is on the podium, you know, and I seen him look my way, you know, and so then he made a talk, you know, about organizing Ford's and he mentioned, he said, oh there were all types of individuals involved and he claimed to be a mine worker, that John L. Lewis sent him over there and I don't believe that. So anyway he got done with his talk. He said oh there were socialists. I was a socialist, he was a socialist and he said there were communists and he says I must admit they were very helpful, see, they were very helpful and then he done a job on us on that no-strike pledge, see, you know, and then of course, I didn't want to get kicked out of the meeting or prevented from going. I said, well I'll let this bypass so then I can go back and listen to him. So Vic Reuther was there one night, Victor. He made a speech and well Stanley Nowak, I don't know whether you, have you heard of Stanley Nowak?

Q: Yeah, we're going to interview him later on.

A: Oh, are you?

Q: Yeah.

A: Very good. He was a great, I used to campaign, I remember back in I believe '36 or was it '38. He run for state senator and he won. Oh yeah, he's a tremendous individual. He can give you a lot of, he's well versed on the Polish question and he's been over there several times. He, well, there's, a lot of them, they kind of, people have a

tendency, they fall by the wayside. In fact I did by quitting. I consider that I fell by the wayside and so I'm back now. I'm not exactly steeply involved but I'm pushing 70, I'll be 70 soon and what can I do and the young generation don't exactly believe in us older people, you know. They seem to think we done everything wrong and I always tell them, I says, well, all right now, let's look at it this way. I says, we didn't do everything right but we done some things right. We done a few things right and each generation is got a job and one of the things that he can't do is to reject the good things that the other generation brought in. You have to grab that, enlarge it, make it bigger and to build democracy you got to fight for it. You have to enlarge it. If you let it stagnate, you lose it. So you have to grow. You keep growing, growing, growing, and I've had a lot of fellows tell me you know, you guys didn't know what the hell they were doing. Oh yeah we knew what we were doing but our forces were limited. He didn't know, you know, a lot of people don't know what we're up against. You got TV, you got radio, you got, at that time you had three Detroit newspapers. You had every community newspaper. Gee whiz, that's a tremendous thing to face. Those are big odds. They threw the book at us. They hurt us, oh they hurt us but they didn't frown us. We're not drowned by any means. We got hurt real bad and a lot of them, it split their families, wives got divorced, you know. It was a terrible blow. McCarthyism especially. The schoolteacher, the best teacher, we're paying for it now. McCarthyism, we're paying for it. They changed the educational system, they reduced the standards of a lot of things. A lot of good professors, some of the most best, got fired. They got railroaded

out. So we're paying for it. We're paying for it. It has reduced, assuming none of this would have happened do you realize that the intellectual level of the American people would have been way up there? It would have been way up there. Unfortunately it's the struggle between right and wrong. It's been going on for centuries and centuries...

END SARRI-TAPE 3-SIDE A

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 3B

Q: Yes, it takes a long time. A long process.

A: On the question of El Salvador. You know I have a nephew, where do you live in California?

Q: I'm in Van Nuys which is outside of Los Angeles.

Q: It is Los Angeles, suburb of Los Angeles.

Q: It's in the Valley.

A: Oh. I have a nephew, he lives just out of San Francisco.

Q: South or North?

A: South, I think.

Q: That's where her sister and our brother-in-law, we were just there a few weeks ago.

Q: Santa Cruz, is where they live.

A: Well, he's a pretty good fellow. He's pretty much in line when he comes. He's going to come here in about the month of October and he always come here. He loves to talk politics. He's about 20, oh no, he's in his 30s. But it's nice to, I only hope that I've helped you a little.

Q: Oh yeah, a lot.

A: That's the thing that's uppermost in my mind and I hope some of this stuff gets out somewhere.

Q: Yes.

A: I'm not telling you anything out of my mind. I'm telling you something that I witnessed and I felt. So one cannot, one can disbelieve me but that doesn't mean it's not so.

Q: No. That's why I'm trying to get perspectives from people who were actually there and involved because otherwise we just do research at the archives. There's no way you can get the full truth of what actually went on. You have to talk to people who actually experienced it.

A: Well, you see, I have, let's see, whom did I, I forget who mentioned the fact at one time and he says what I mentioned about it's a shame that labor history is not a more prominent position in terms of education, schools, you know, even from the grade schools. Well, what the heck, this individual I believe he mentioned something like, well he says the reason for that there isn't much labor education. It is being left to the enemies of labor. They are writing it, see.

Q: Yeah, that's why we have to get busy and do this history.

A: Course a lot of things I've forgotten. As I go along why things, you know, they come to me.

Q: Is there any questions that Mr. Saari didn't answer?

Q: Yeah. You went on a roll. You answered most of my questions just by yourself without me asking them but let me look through these and see what other questions I had. Did the workers that work at Ford generally socialize after hours in the neighborhoods and so on?

A: Oh absolutely. We used to politic like nobody's business. Why them bars around Local 600 were just crammed, but not no more. You know what I call Local 600?

Q: What?

A: I told Kenny: Kenny, I says, the morgue has got more activity than Local 600. I feel sad when I go down there and I don't see anybody. I'm telling you, you should see the rank and filers packing in the

meetings. They were just packed in there. Our local couldn't hold them. We had to have auditoriums, we had to have high school auditorium with a balcony and hell, they'd be standing outside. This is (?) one I attended. We used to have generally, well each unit meets.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You know.

Q: Right.

A: Each unit meets and then within the unit you have your various districts used to meet, district committeemen, you know, they had meetings.

Q: You mean you meet with the rank and file or just the...?

A: With the rank and file, with the rank and file in his district, see.

Q: Oh.

A: And then of course the building would meet on a Sunday and then once a month Local 600 as a whole would meet and this particular time Tommy Thompson was the president and this was kind of cute and I'll never forget it. You know all laborer contracts, you know, they have this language if, and, and when necessary, you know, a lot of flukey language, see, and I used to agitate against that. I said, we're going to get rid of that if, and, and when necessary, wipe it out of the dictionary, we don't need it. Anyway Tommy Thompson was one of them guys with his if, and, and when necessary, you know. So we had a meeting there one time and I forget what the issue was. It was in relation to, it was in relation to adding people to a job, I think, under certain stress conditions, you know, and so that was an issue and then Tommy said that that had been negotiated and that situation

will be alleviated in the future if, and, and when necessary. So there's a Black guy way in the back there: Brother Chairman, brother chairman. Tommy Thompson points to him and says, you got the floor and said yes, what's your question. He says, what do you all mean by if, and, and when necessary. I laughed for weeks about that, you know. He was, you know, you get what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

A: He was thinking see, he says, now that guy is trying to fool us, see. I'll never forget a committee like even the guy there was six ballots to be counted. This guy was leading by eight votes so even if all these six ballots were counted in favor of the other guy he would still win by two votes. So he gets his gang you know and they come on, I won, you know, and he goes to the bar, see, and so he comes when the election was official return he lost, he lost the election. I don't know how that could happen.

Q: Recount of some sort? Recount?

A: No. Probably when he saw an opportunity, his opponent saw the opportunity, well what the hell, he probably took a few ballots away. You know, another thing that I think we have a myth. We kind of have to destroy a lot of myths, you know. We believe, like for instance, we say that a person if he's a dues-paying member doesn't mean he's a union man. He's a dues-paying member, period. It doesn't mean he's a union man. Just like citizenship. You can't equate citizenship in United States with a belief in democracy. You can't do that. Otherwise if it was so we wouldn't be having all these problems. Somebody is disturbing the equilibrium. So if there's any more questions, why...

Q: Yeah. Can you comment on the recreation life of the UAW at the Local 600? I notice in reading the papers they have baseball games, bowling leagues and was that a way to get workers together and...?

A: Yeah. I played on a softball team and I was really one of the, before the union was organized I was on the baseball team there. They had recreation, and I used to get a little flak. I was single then and I lived in a hotel and some Ford workers in the hotel used to say, how the hell, what do you wear, a UAW sweatshirt, you know? I said, okay, I like to play ball. What do you like? I like to play ball. What the hell I care whether it's UAW or what. I like to play ball and they shut up. What difference does it make? But recreation programs are very prominent there. Did you know that Local 600 has got about 13,000 retirees?

Q: Yeah. Lot of people there.

A: Good gracious, there's oodles of people and they have, they're going to be meeting every, I believe it's the third Sunday of the month till election.

Q: Is that retirees chapter pretty active?

A: Well, yeah, yeah, they're active but it's pretty much under the control of the right wing, very much so.

Q: McCusker? McCusker?

A: Yeah, Joe McCusker.

Q: Henry.

A: Huh?

Q: Henry.

A: No, not Joe, Joe's dead. His brother, Henry McCusker. Yeah, I remember Henry from way back. He used to be, I believe he used to be

in the old aircraft building before they turned it into the motor building.

Q: We interviewed Henry and got nothing but yes and no's. That was it, yes, no, no.

A: Yeah. You have, oh, did Paul get you in touch with Lou Rinaldi?

Q: I've been trying to get in touch with him but I don't know if I have the right number or not. I have a number for him that I got out of the phone book but I'm not sure if it's the right one. I have gotten no answer since I've been in Detroit.

A: Well, of course, Lou Rinaldi's with the right, you know, although I don't have any misgivings with him, you know.

Q: Would you say in general that comparing left wing to right wing committeemen back in the '40s and '50s, would you say that there was any difference in the way that they pursued grievances and just the general way they acted with workers on the shop floor?

A: Well, I would say that as a rule they were more knowledgeable.

Q: The left were?

A: Yeah, they were a little more knowledgeable and probably the explanation for that results from their interests, number one, and their activity, you know, and the activity, it kind of, like for me when I first, what you call, I started, I studied a little law, you know, and otherwise I probably wouldn't have. I didn't go through with the law of course because I didn't think, well when I was a young fellow about 13, 12-13, I thought well I think I'd like to be a lawyer, you know. Then we have, everybody is good at certain things. They, course they had classes and I never attended grievance classes. That's probably, although I was familiar with the grievance procedure.

I could write as good a grievance as anybody but even on a grievance, you see, this right and left thing, it destroyed the workability of winning something for the worker. See, the right winger didn't want the left winger to do it and probably the left winger didn't want the right winger to do it. So this is a bad, bad feature although I never done that. I'm saying that maybe some of them did. I don't know who they were even that would do that but I'm saying that those things happen.

Q: Would you say that either were more militant? Were the right or the left committeemen more militant?

A: Oh, the left was by far the most militant. You know, I'll tell you, when Ford's local was first organized, when Ford's was first organized, they had what you called before an official contract, they had a shop steward and hell, there was nobody, hardly anybody. The only ones that were there were the left.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: In a sense, yeah. See but then what happened, Reuther negotiated the contract, oh, I don't know whether it was Reuther, I think it was, whereby the committeemen, district committeemen, would be on a full time basis and boy that's when the thing started downhill. Oh, Jesus Christ, if one guy wanted to win, he'd call the other guy a Red whether he was or wasn't, you know, in order to get votes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the guy would win the election, didn't know nothing, just wanted to get out of work. There was a lot of that went on.

Q: So that workers were influenced by red baiting sometimes?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. They were, I wouldn't say, what happened there is a silence fell upon them. You know, all people, there's some people that are outgoing, there's some people that are passive. You get what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

A: And now for the outgoing person he'd probably stand up, right?

Q: Yeah.

A: See. Now for the passive people in order for them to go along with that there has to be more following that outgoing person before they'll go along. You know I had a man tell me one time, he said, you know, he says, when you look at it, he says, if you're in a group, talking with a group, and I have used that, he says, if there's five, say there's five people talking, see, and you bring up an issue and all five of them say something, see, so if this one individual brings it up and say four or five of them go along with them, see, and then another issue comes up and the same thing happens, he says, don't waste your time with them other four, he says, get to him because he's the guy that convinced them others. He said that's the logical way to go at that. And, in other words, in each group I find that to be so. In a group there's always a spokesman, right? They'll say well what do you think, Jack? Well, I think this, I think that, I guess you're right. You find that a lot. So that's a good way to look at things. That's a very good way to look at, as a means of strategy, you know, means of strategy.

Q: You mentioned earlier that there was a lot of literature that was put out in the Rouge plant in the '40s and '50s. Were there a lot of newspapers around, labor papers, besides the union Ford Facts?

A: Well, yeah, well, we had the Militant, the Trotskyite paper, and then of course we had the, it was, at that time, it was the Daily Worker.

Q: Were those papers very widely read?

A: Well, they were, but not to a big extent. There was some of it going into the shop but what we used to do is, our caucus, we use to have a caucus and we use to come out in leaflet form, see, and distribute.

Q: So the Progressive Caucus had their own paper?

A: Well, at election time, yeah, we used to have kind of like maybe something like a tabloid, see, but in between elections on some issues we used to just have, well, 8 x 11 leaflet, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: See, 8 x 11 leaflets. There's the international. You know I went to an Iraq meeting. A fellow asked me if I'd come with him and it was way up in Royal Oak, up in that section. And there was a lot of people, Iraq, and so the band started to play the first number and I'm looking at my friend and he's listening and I'm, they played the international. And I told, he looked at me and I'm looking at him. I said, Chris, that's the international. I never expected that, you know.

Q: Yeah. That's interesting.

A: And being a blonde I guess they saw I was out of place being there and so quite a few of them came over and talked to me, you know. I got a couple of names and addresses. I never got around to what you call... Now you got some more?

Q: Yeah. What kind of influence would you say that Local 600 had in the UAW as a whole during the '40s and '50s?

A: Oh, they had a tremendous influence. Local 600 was the programming, the center of programs and...

Q: Lot of new ideas coming out of it?

A: New ideas and militancy and tremendous, very very good. I would say as Local 600 went so went the UAW.

Q: Until Reuther.

A: Huh?

Q: Until Reuther.

A: Yeah. Until Reuther got ahold of it and of course he knew we had to do it. He wanted to do what he wanted to do.

Q: Getting back to the people in the Progressive Caucus for a minute. There were communists in the Progressive Caucus, right? What about socialist, people in the socialist party. Were they part of the progressives or in the right wing caucus?

A: Well, not really. I think they had their own grouping. I think mostly they were involved with the Socialist Workers Party.

Q: That's the Trotskyite group?

A: Well, no, that was again the Socialist Workers Party and the Trotskyite party they had not merged. I believe many years later they merged. In fact I think it's only in the last couple of years. But they used to be separate but some of them probably used to come to our caucuses.

Q: Did those people, the people that ran communist party, people who ran socialist party, did they generally talk to the workers about socialism, about socialist's ideas and so on?

A: Some did and some didn't. I used to have some of them talk to me, you know, but then there was a certain amount of fear. Well, I used to

make, myself, in fact a guy, we got in a hell of a discussion one time, a group of us fellows, you know, and they started red baiting me, you know, the argument going on, so they started red baiting me. So I just says okay. I says, all roads lead to Moscow and I says, I'm on that pavement and I says you're going to get off that pavement and you're going to sink. That's what I used to say, that's what I used to tell them. But you know it's a strange thing. How come I never got beat? I used to very outspoken, I used to be very outspoken.

Q: Well, there must have been a lot of progressive workers supporting you, huh?

A: Well, there was, yeah, we used to have some pretty good caucuses. We used to pack them, we used to pack these, it was, it makes me sick to think that all that is practically over with, you know, because those were the interesting times, those were interesting times. There was always activity.

Q: Yeah, boy, it sure sounds like it, always something going on. Reading that newspaper, the Ford Facts you can see all the things they had.

A: Well, you know Ford Facts of course that's changed alot. That's moderated, that's under dominantly right wing editorship, you know.

Q: Would you say that the progressive and communists and socialists influence differed from plant to plant, were there some plants had more or stronger left wing involvement than others?

A: Well, I would say that probably yes. You take I believe the Buick local in Flint or the Chevy local was it.

Q: Well what about within Local 600 itself, the different building units?

A: Oh, yeah, we had bigger forces in some buildings.

Q: Really? Let me...

A: But as a rule we practically controlled the whole with the exception of, with the exception of the steel.

Q: The rolling mill?

A: Rolling mill. Gene Prado, Gene Prado was pretty much in control there and then let's see, who else? Well, we had once in a while the Tool and Die tipped and the B Building also, but at the time, right after McCarthyism why, of course, a lot of them, they went that way.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: See. They found a way to beat us, I guess.

Q: Which would you say had the strongest left components? Which buildings?

A: Which locals?

Q: No, which buildings in River Rouge had the strongest?

A: Well, at the time, at that time the Motor Building, the Press Steel unit, Tool and Die.

Q: How about the foundries?

A: Well, yeah, the foundry was, let's see, there was, who used to, Nelson Davis I think used to be in the foundry and he was quite a, he was quite an activist.

Q: Harold Johnson and Bill Johnson?

A: Yeah, there was a Johnson, I forget, oh there was several others, Press Steel. Well the Spring and Upset wasn't too bad. The Gear and Axle, oh, the Gear and Axle, yeah. Our dominant buildings was the Motor Building, Tool and Die, Motor Building, Gear and Axle, Press Steel, Spring and Upset. Let's see, there was at that time I believe 15 units.

Q: Let me name so for you. How about Open Hearth?

A: Open Hearth was under Prado, under the Prado forces.

Q: So that's right wing?

A: Yeah.

Q: And Maintenance Building, Maintenance Unit?

A: Well, that used to be, some of the guys that got elected there, well there was Pat Rice, he was from the maintenance unit. Now he was all right. He was chair of the maintenance, he was also vice president of the local.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Now some of the guys that were elected in the maintenance unit at that time after Pat Rice, well, they were pseudo, you know.

Q: Like Spagnol?

A: Ah, you can't, well, there was either one way this way or one way that way. In other words they were not following a positive field until in the last few years. Like for instance this guy from, he's retired now. He always used to talk God and country, that's all he had on his mind, was God and country. He lives in Dearborn Heights over here. In fact he is treasurer in Dearborn Heights.

Q: Hum.

A: I can't think of his name. But those were our dominant buildings.

Q: Okay. What about the Miscellaneous plant?

A: Uh, the Miscellaneous? Well, oh the Miscellaneous, that plant's not in the Rouge complex, that's over on Telegraph somewhere.

Q: Before in the '40s I think it had, Tom Yeager was in the presidency.

A: Yeager?

Q: Yeah, Yeager.

A: Yeager rings a bell.

END SAARI-TAPE 3-SIDE B

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 4A

A: . . . with us until after the Reuther period.

Q: The B Building was strong left?

A: We had some prominent blacks in there that were very good but they kind of fell on their face.

Q: How about the Transportation unit?

A: Well, the Transportation was mixed, it was, we had some progressive committeemen in there but the unit presidents, they were mostly to the right, you know, I would say. There was five strong units in there that always pretty much elected the dominant, the bigger unit. They always went kind of left.

Q: How about the Glass plant? That was a smaller plant, right?

A: Yeah. The Glass plant was a smaller plant and of course that was mostly right with the exception, let's see, there was an Italian boy in there, well, there was...

Q: Zarro?

A: Who?

Q: Is it Mike Zarro?

A: Mike Zarro, yeah, but he wasn't exactly of the left. He was somewhere in between and then you had Bardelli.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And then you had, I forget the Polish fellow there, but they were mostly I would say to the right. We, it was in our camp, they came out and voted for the national, the Local 600 officers when Zarro won there, see.

Q: Huh.

A: But then it just went the other way. I worked in the Glass plant for about a year.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah, two years. They was all, what's happening there now is that you see all the fighting is, there is no left wing. It's a sad thing. There is no left wing. There's just right wing. They fight one another and then in order to maintain unity they make deals, see, to keep themselves so they'll say well I'll run for president for two years or for four years, two terms. And he says then you can run for president and I'll support you and I'll run for something else. This is how they do it there, see. That's how they work that out.

Q: Okay. You remember the Plastic plant, Plastic unit?

A: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. The Plastic is the old Steering Gear.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yeah. Ed Lock was our fellow there. Ed Lock is dead, passed away. He was an early organizer. He was a very brilliant individual. He'd done so much that's unbelievable.

Q: How about the Parts Depot, the Parts and Accessories?

A: Well, Parts Depot, now that's out on Telegraph I think.

Q: Uh-huh. It used to be two buildings, right, Parts and Accessories and Lincoln-Mercury Parts, right?

A: Yeah. That's out on Telegraph. That was, at that time I do not remember exactly whether that was operated by some inner unit in the Rouge. It did not become an autonomous unit...

Q: Until the '50s, I think the early '50s...

A: Late '50s I would say.

- Q: Rinaldi was elected, Lou Rinaldi, to Lincoln-Mercury Parts and I think, let's see, Mike D', well let's see, Mike D'Agostino.
- A: Oh yeah, I knew him. Yeah, D'Agostino. He wasn't all too bad. I had no qualms about him, you know. A lot of people did but I didn't.
- Q: And the last one we haven't talked about yet is Foundry Machine Shop.
- A: Oh, Foundry Machine Shop. Well, let me think. Scotty, no he didn't come from there. Who in the hell was the...
- Q: I know that Stanley Ranieszski was chairman for a while.
- A: Who?
- Q: Ranieszski and Jack Poole for a long time.
- A: Well I knew Jack Poole but Ranieszski?
- Q: Yeah. Stanley.
- A: Well he must have just lately.
- Q: No, he was just one term. I think '45 he was in.
- A: '45? Ranieszski, Ranieszski. Poole rings a bell but that other one doesn't.
- Q: Well, he was only in one term, maybe that's why. Yeah, Poole was in I think, a lot of terms.
- A: Yeah, Poole, I think, in fact I think Poole lives in Garden City. I couldn't give you too much on that. I'd have to refresh my memory by talking to some of the other individuals, you know, but there's not very many more to talk to.
- Q: Yeah. Can I ask you one more question about the wartime? During the war they had a lot of guys go off to fight and women and southerners, a lot of them came into the plant at the time. Did you notice any change in the way that the workers responded to the union or the union

to the workers once you had these new people who weren't that experienced with the unions, come into the plant?

A: Well, you see, that like everything else is now the, there was a resentment yes. There was many resentments. For instance the women coming into the shops, the men didn't like it and of course the southerner, they didn't like the idea of the southerner coming into the plant, see, and then of course the blacks, you know, the southern blacks that came up, see, but I was a committeeman where they brought in a lot of southern whites. There was quite a few southern whites.

Q: Into the Motor Building?

A: Huh?

Q: Into the Motor Building?

A: Ah, no, this was into ...

Q: Press Steel?

A: Ah, ah, let's see, Motor Building, no, this was in Dearborn Engine because I worked on the industrial line, making the industrial, Dearborn Engine and there was about seven, eight of them right in the department where I was working, see, and with the exception of one. Now this amazed me. I says, it's just a coincidence, you know, but with the exception of one I found the others to be very good, very good, considering their background and everything, I found them to be very good. And this one, oh, gollee, he was just hopeless. I never, oh, I used to talk to him and all that, you know, but I never tried to convince him of anything. He was so biased that I don't think he knew, I don't think he knew which side of the bread he was buttered on. But the others although they didn't speak favorably of the black, but from the union's standpoint of view, they were, they spoke very

militantly, yeah, but I would say that was probably just a fluk that I happened to be in contact with so many. It just happened that they were put there. I don't know how widespread that was but there was a lot of resentment even before the union. When I worked at Ford's before the union, oh, the resentment was something against the southern worker, southerner coming up there. They used to say well, they're taking our jobs, you know, that old thing, you know, that old argument. That argument is valid today with a lot of people. They're still saying that but, well, a job, I don't know, it's their country too, I suppose. Huh?

Q: Yeah, that's right.

A: But I think that's abaiting, that is abaiting. My first wife was a southerner from Tennessee. My present wife is from Kentucky. So I must love the southerner. But when I married the first one, she passed away, died of tuberculosis, well, the people she knew up here they wrote letters to their hometown, you know, and said that Blanche married a black foreigner, you know. So I told Blanche well gee it's about time we take a run down to your hometown, you know. She was afraid, you know, because I was foreign, foreign name, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so there's nothing to worry about there. So we went down and when I was being, when they introduced me, you know, they saw me and they expected to see, you know with them they attach blackness with being foreign, you see.

Q: Hm, that's interesting.

A: So they got an education there, you know. They say, well a foreigner can be white too.

Q: What part of Tennessee was this? Do you recall?

A: What?

Q: What part of Tennessee?

A: Hillsboro, Manchester, in that, Tallahassee, in that section.

Q: My dad's family is in Kingston, Knoxville, at the eastern end of Tennessee. They're from that area.

A: Yeah. Her mother, my wife's stepmother or my mother-in-law rather, she lived, they lived almost at the foot of the mountain, Cumberland Mountain.

Q: Ah, yeah.

A: Just across from the mountain from Chatanooga.

Q: Yeah, yeah. That's just a little south of Kingston.

A: Yeah, and I done a lot of, I went up in the mountains, I went to some court cases, oh boy, what I saw was revolting. The way they treated black or white, the tenant farmer. Oh, it was, I'd come home and good gracious and I'd say, that goes on, all that goes on. Unbelievable. But they stacked the juries. Like this one I went, they was accusing this young fellow. He had a wife and a child. He made a contract sharecropping, you know, and I don't know what, I don't exactly remember all the details as to what happened but the landlord accused him of leaving the place, leaving the place for a week or something and when he went back a lot of his crops that he had, you know, they were destroyed, see. So the landlord then was suing, the landlord owed him money, the sharecropper owed, he owed him money. So the landlord wanted the judge to rule that he doesn't have to pay that money plus the fact due to the damage to the crops that he has to work there, see, and so I'm listening to this and oh, this lawyer for the

defendant, he put up a tremendous battle. And I talked to him later. I had to, you know, and so what happened the jury were all sitting there, you know. They had a door like going in there and the jury room was behind that wall and a door out here. So they had a fellow sitting on a chair there and the judge told the jury to file out and he, this fellow got up and opened the door and the jury filed out. He closed the door and he went over here and opened the door and the jury came out and they found the defendant guilty. And that poor lawyer, you know, he got up on his feet. In the hallway I caught him and I talked to him, see, and I told him. I said, boy, I'm glad that I am not a lawyer down here, you know.

Q: It's hard to deal with that.

A: They had all those, you know, black couldn't go to the toilet and all that sort of stuff, you know, and some of them I used to point out. I said, you know why things are bad down here, why your wages are so low? No, why? I said, right there, you see that. They didn't make the connection, couldn't make the connection but that was it. Yeah, my first wife come from a huge family, yeah, huge family. So the Cumberland mountains, well those roads, holy cow. I damned near went over, a bus was coming down. I'll swear that thing was going to hit me.

Q: Oh boy.

A: And then the boy, her brother, he had a Model A and we went up so far, there was a little landing up there and when we come down and he coasted down, and oh, boy, I was going to say I'll never make it to Detroit, I'll never make it to Detroit. He was pretty good at the wheel. He knew them curves.

Q: Guess he'd have to.

A: Yeah.

Q: Let's see, one more question here. In 1948 when Henry Wallace ran for the presidency on the progressive ticket against Truman and Dewey.

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there much activity at the Rouge in favor of Wallace?

A: Well, I'll tell you what happened there. Just for the heck of it, I favored, I liked Henry Wallace.... Well, let me tell you, it was surprising. So I lived in Dearborn at the time. I lived in Dearborn at the time and I says well gee whiz, here the guy is talking, he's talking against the Korean war. Was there a Korean war then? Yeah, wasn't there?

Q: '48.

A: '48, yeah.

Q: Not yet.

A: Not yet?

Q: Yeah, I don't think yet, right?

Q: It came in '50. '50 was the bad winter so that was the first year.

A: Oh, it was about employment, 65 million jobs and those were the issues, yeah. And so I says, gee whiz, there's no activity for Wallace in Dearborn so I took it upon myself and I sent out a little bulletin and I called for a meeting and I called it the "Dearborn for Wallace Committee." And I found a hall on Michigan Avenue, this side of Central, Central and Michigan, and boy I was flabbergasted, the people that came there. I had a, well, I don't think the hall was much bigger than this, with my bedroom, and we had about a hundred people packed in there.

Q: Hm.

A: Yeah, and I said, holy cow, about a hundred people, good gracious. So we worked at it and we had a good thing going but there was one thing that was missing. You see, Reuther and all these forces they agitated that, the lesser of the evil. You get what I mean, the lesser of two evils?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And that Wallace is going to split the Democratic vote and the Republican will get elected. All this, and the worker ate it up, see, and we didn't have too many labor people from the top involved, see, although the ones that I had, most of them were Labor people but we did have some schoolteachers, a few board members, oh, we had the church. We had a fellow from the church in East Dearborn and we had secondary leadership from the union.

Q: From the UAW, from Local 600?

A: And the Local 600 but we lacked the board, the top officers were just constantly, and then of course at that time I think the right wing was pretty well on its way to total control.

Q: You think you got many Ford workers to vote Wallace?

A: I don't think so. Oh, the flak I used to get. We used to pass literature out at, see the Motor Building at that time was right on Miller Road and there was a gate going right in there and we used to be there passing out literature. Well, I'll tell you there was a lot of the progressive forces that laid away from the Wallace for president because of perhaps their own position within the trade union movement in the building, you know. They were an officer and maybe didn't want to get defeated, see.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And to me things like that don't make no difference, you know. I didn't care. In fact I really didn't care to be a committeeman, I really didn't. I resigned one time because with the way things were the top controlled everything you had to compromise yourself, see, you had to compromise and I just wasn't all that, I didn't care about that, you know. I thought that maybe it'd be better if you took the issue and fought it out really, you know, and whether you got elected or not the issue wasn't you getting elected, you know, but people, politics doesn't allow you, you see, that's why there is no freedom. You know freedom is a precarious, it's something that's, well it's on cloud nine somewhere, you know, but that individual although he may have believed in Wally, he didn't have the freedom to move. What influence was he under? He was under the tyranny of the majority. Right?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: He was under the tyranny of the majority. He was afraid to move or chances are, well like me, I, they didn't defeat me and I used to put up a fight for the guy, for Wallace. And I used to pack a lot of literature in that place. And I used to also be watched over, you know. If I went in with literature, a lot of other left wingers went in with literature and they caught them, boom, boom. They used to watch them and they got a couple of days off, couple of weeks off, something like that. Depending upon how many times they got caught. But they watch you, see. But the right wingers, I don't know. You know when Reuther ran for president, the delegate selection, there was these committeemen, they had a huge sign made out. Vote the green

ticket, Walter P. Reuther, the green ticket. That's what they called a ticket, yeah the green ticket.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there was a committeeman there and a committeeman there they had that sign and they was walking up and down the aisle and the company let them. Now I would have been on one end of that or on the other end of it supporting somebody else. I'd have been out.

Q: Out.

A: Out. So that's how it went and boy I pointed that out to the workers, I pointed that out to the workers. I told them look at that.

Q: Who did Reuther beat? Who did he beat to win his election?

A: Who what?

Q: Who did Reuther defeat to win?

A: R. J. Thomas.

Q: He was left wing?

A: Yeah. He was, yeah, whatever was left about them but he also took a job. See we had Leonard, Frankstein, R. J. Thomas, oh, quite a few others but these were the prominent ones and they all capitulated. Reuther gave them a job in California. I believe R. J. Thomas went to California and Leonard went to California and I don't know where Frankenstein went.

Q: Addes.

A: Huh?

Q: How about Addes?

A: Well Addes went to Florida, yeah, Addes, you know, I couldn't see why that man done what he'd done, you know, but I guess the defeat hurt him so that you have to take it all, you got to learn how to take it

all. Take it with a smile but it's rough. You work hard. Addes was a good joe, Addes was a good joe. Percy Llewellyn was a good joe. Oh, they crushed him. Yeah, Percy was a good fellow and the guys we have in there now, oh boy.

Q: Nothing like the older guys.

A: No. They've lost sight of the meaning of trade unionism. It's not in them. Them days are, in the early days a fellow would run for committeeman, man he agitated against the company, you know, man that was, now, wage cuts, you know. They come up with a phony job security deal. With all the robots coming, hell, there ain't going to be no job security. That's going to be in one hell of a shape. I feel for the younger generation because I know how, what happened to me but maybe good will come out of it to them like it did to me. I mean in terms of opening your eyes, you know, and seeing things for what they really are and not let these myths, you know, somebody pulling the wool over your eyes. Oh, I also worked at Kerr's when that place was organized. I was working there when they organized the place. That was a small shop. When I quit Ford's I went up north a while and I come back down. Oh I worked at Macy Ferguson, I got a job at Macy Ferguson. Now, oh boy, you take this equal opportunity employer, you've read about that, haven't you?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: All right. Here's how that works. Now I was hired under that equal opportunity employ, you know, by Macy Ferguson. They had a gear shop on Chicago and I used to be a gear grinder in the shop too, and so they hired me, let's see, what the heck was their wages, \$5.80 an hour plus your fringes. And under this plan they were paying me, all the

company had to pay me was I think a \$1.00 an hour or \$1.80 an hour and the government paid the rest, paid Macy the difference, see. And they made a racket out of it, they made a racket out of it. How? Okay, okay. They hired me, see. Now you have 60 days, I believe over there it was 60 days and you couldn't join the union until 60 days. Okay. So they hired me and a lot of others and I know when I first started working there I saw guys coming out and guys going in, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Something's funny here. This must be a hell of a place to work.

Q: When did you work there? What year was this?

A: This was in 197_

END SAARI-TAPE 4-SIDE A

JOHN SAARI INTERVIEW
August 1984
Tape 4B

A: Okay, I'll take care of it so he watched me for a while, you know, and then he left and I went to the workers there and I said, hey how much you put out on that machine, how many pieces do you put out on that machine? Oh, about 85 one day, give them 90 another day, 92, drop down to 85, 87, something like that, never over 95, see. Okay. So that was what I was doing. So the boss after, I worked there I believe 30 days so then the boss started pestering me, see. He says, look, you're not doing enough, you not putting out enough. I said, what do you mean? He said, you're not putting out enough gears. I said, well how many am I supposed to put out? Oh, he said, we don't have no standards here of how many. Well, then, how many would you say I have to put out? I said you got to have a number. He said you got to put out more than what you're putting out. I said how much more. He was very evasive. He was setting the stage for me. I knew that, see. I was approaching the 60 days where I could join the union. I was defenseless until I could be a union member.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: All right. So for about, well from there till about the 58 day he pestered me everyday, everyday he was in there. He got his own time study clock and he'd stand behind me and all that, you know. Then he said, well I got to put you on a different job. I said okay. He says, I don't think you know how to run it. I said, look, I said, you don't have a machine here that I don't know how to run. I said I run them all. Okay, get on that machine over there and the job and

everything is right there. Okay, I went there. So I was working along, you know, nothing difficult about it. Then every once in a while he was coming by and he was taking, what I'm grinding, he was feeling what the micro was on it, you know, whether it was coarse, fine, blah, blah, see. So the print is right there, see. So he went back and forth and then on one time he came back he took one of them off me, Jesus Christ, he says, man, don't you know how to grind? I says, yeah, I know how to grind. I know how to grind, absolutely. I've been grinding for years. And he says well look at this. Look how coarse that is. I says don't you know your job? Here's the print, the print. I'm going by the print. Is the print wrong? If the print is wrong then I'm sorry. I went by the print. He looked at the print and threw the print back down and he walked off and then he told me that tomorrow before you go to work you come into my office. So okay, I went into his office. So he says, you see the desk there? I got two slips there, a pink one and a blue one. I says, yeah, I see them. He said, now I'm going to give you one last chance. He said, either you're going to go out on that machine and do more than you have been doing or I give you that pink slip. I forget what his name was. He was a staunch Catholic too. And so I says, now well okay, look, I says, I don't know of anybody that I would prefer to get along with better, than you see them workers out there? I says, I want to have good will with them workers and I says I would rather live with them workers than live with you. I said, give me that pink slip and I took the pink slip and I went. So I says, I'm going to the office, too, so he tried to stop me from going to the office.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: Yeah. I went to the manager, where they hire and I gave him a piece of my mouth, you know. He asked me, well what are you going to do? I can put you on another job. I said, I wouldn't work here if I was starving to death. I said after all we got a welfare department. No reason why I'm going to put up with anything like that. So you see the 60 days was up, see. So they hired somebody else and they keep that thing going. Now some guy would come in there and he wouldn't do as I'd done. He would go ahead and break records that these workers made. He'd put out see. That's how they're doing it. And I knew that, fortunately I knew that, but they don't know that, a lot of them don't know. And that's why these workers were going in and out like that. A lot of them were doing what I was doing. They wasn't giving in you know. So I left there and then I went to work at Kerr's. I come home, yeah, I come home, yeah, and I got the Free Press. I looked at the Free Press. I was looking at the ads. I see an ad in there grinder hand wanted at Wick Road and Kerr Manu... So I says what the hell they're grinding wire for? I was curious. So I decided to go over there. I went over there and I put in an application and what you call, and I told the employment man there, I said, now I'm not really looking for a job. I'm a curious individual and when something gives me that curiosity feeling I have to get on my feet and find out about it so I'm here. In my interview, he says, you'll have your interview in a few minutes and he said you'll be talking to the superintendant and he said whatever you have on your mind you tell him. So we went in a little office and we talked about grinding, see. So I asked him, I says, Mr. Belding, I says, I'm not really looking for a job. I'm just curious. Will you take me down there and show me

why you're grinding those wires? I was thinking they had wire that big, you know, so I goes down there and I see different size wires, 10,000ths, 15,000ths, 20,000ths, 30,000ths in size. So I says, well, they put that wire, they had them cut in lengths like that and you ground them and you put a taper on them for root canaling.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh.

A: So he asked me about grinding. I told him well. So I went home and I hadn't no sooner stepped into the house the telephone rang. My wife answered it and it was Belding. He says, hey, why don't you come to the office now. We'll give you your slip and you will get your medical exam down on Michigan Avenue in East Dearborn and then the next day you come in to work. And I worked there six years.

Q: And you retired from there?

A: Yeah. The reason I retired, I wouldn't have retired but they went on terrific overtime and I hated overtime. I loved my weekends and so they went on overtime, 10 hours a day, five days a week at eight hours for two Saturdays and eight hours for two Sundays in a month.

Q: Oh boy.

A: And income taxwise I, oh Jesus Christ, I wasn't getting no benefit from all that time in a job. I wasn't getting a bit of benefit. So I says well, all right, I'll try to play ball. So I went in to the office and I talked to the guy and I said, now look I'm willing to play ball. I said now. He said well, what do you mean? I says, well, on this overtime, I says, I'll try to work 10 hours a day for five days a week but never and never on a Saturday or Sunday. He

said, I'm sorry but you'll have to work like the others, you know. I says, no sir. I said, write me up. I'm out of here. Then I left and I said well I'll retire. I had another job lined up but, when I retired I did work in a little tool shop, you know, and then I thought, well geez, they're taking advantage of a guy. They was paying four and a half an hour, see. So I says, Jesus Christ, I'm a fool. I'm a fool, you know. And so they was going to lay off two fellows, two young fellows and I told the guy that owned the shop, I said, well you can keep one of them now. I said I'm leaving, no more after today. So I could have got a couple of other part time jobs like that but I feel they take advantage of you. Why should I work for four and a half an hour, right?

Q: Yeah.

A: And the going rate on that job is about \$7.80, see. So they're taking advantage of you. They turn everything into a profit, right? They turn everything into a profit.

Q: Any more questions?

Q: No.

END SAARI-TAPE 4-SIDE B