HORACE SHEFFIELD INTERVIEW
October 13, 1986
Tape 1, Side A

Q: Hello, Mr. Sheffield?

S: Yeah, how you doing?

Q: Oh, pretty good.

S: Good, good.

Q: I'm sorry I'm a little bit late. My alarm didn't go off.

S: Yeah well don't worry about it. You're getting up halfway through the night. I thought it would be cheaper for you.

Q: Yeah. Okay. First of all, can we just acknowledge that this is an interview and it's--let's see what's the date--October 13?

S: The 13th.

Q: October 13 and it's an interview between Judy Stepan-Norris and Mr. Horace Sheffield.

S: That's right.

Q: Okay.

S: Okay, you've got my address and everything?

Q: Yes. First, I would like you to describe your childhood, if you grew up in a union family, where you were born and raised, and just a brief ---

S: I didn't really grow up in a union family. But, for--I grew up in a family that encouraged thought. Always suggesting I ought to think for myself. And early on in my life, very early on, I got involved in a range of activities. I guess I must have joined the Youth Council of the NAACP when I was about--I joined the NAACP when I was about 16

or 17. Sixteen or 17 years old. And that was around the time of the Depression and I guess, well I began to get a little active. You know, agitating around the Depression and that sort of thing. I was never an ideologue, you know, I didn't get strung out on the parties or anything, but I did, I began to get around with the activities, the groups in the community. But, in fact, my Dad opposed the union. That is at Ford's during the organizing at Ford's. He was a foreman. He became a foreman. He later, however, you know, changed and he became active in the foremen's union out there. That sort of thing. But I guess even earlier on, I became--even, I guess, long before then, I was sixteen I got in NAACP, you see. I guess I became very conscious of the discrimination that evolved on blacks folks. And that effected me very much.

Q: Did you get any of that from your father? Was he ----

S: Well you know, of course, my parents, they would talk about it at home and then I began to read, you know, I was aware of it--hangings and that sort of thing, and the various things that blacks felt. So that had a very strong impact on me and I was quite resistant to that. I think that kind of--at least that gave me some of the elements of militancy, you know what I mean, very early on in my life.

Q: Which city were you born in? Were you born in Detroit?

S: No, I was atually born in a town in Georgia called Vienna. It's like Vienna, Austria. In Georgia. When I came to Detroit I was about nine. Nine or so. Look, fill-in information, if you drop me a note again I can help you by putting some things in the mail to you.

Q: Okay. So what kind of job did your father do at Ford's?

S: Well my father was a foreman at Ford's. Now obviously he wasn't a foreman when he went there but he became a foreman--but fortunately I got a piece of biographical information on him. Relly the Detroit News did a story on him. I'll drop that in the mail to you.

Q: Oh, great.

S: Which will make it very--I'll just xerox a copy of that and just drop that in the mail. Just remind me when you drop me a note and I'll send you that.

Q: Okay, good. I'll just make a note of that.

S: That will help you.

Q: Okay. What was your first job at Ford's and how did you get acquire it?

S: Well my first job at Ford's was working as what they called a sander. I just got hired. I got hired at Ford's. I fortunately got hired at Ford's in December of 1933. Wait a minute, yeah, yeah, wait--it was '33 or '34. Maybe it was '34, '34. I recollect it was the 28th of December.

Q: Well what unit were you hired into?

S: I went into the "B" Building. What they called the "B" Building that was the bodies, where they made the bodies. You know they worked on the bodies and I worked as a sander. You know, that's where the cars were primed and, you know, you had to smooth them down. That sort of thing. It was a very hard job. I had learned that job. I had gotten hired at Briggs, I guess, oh in, earlier. I worked for a short while sometime in '33, you know. But anyway that was my first job at Ford's.

Q: How did you get the job?

S: I don't recall. I just went out there two or three times and got hired.

Q: Did you have to stand in the big lines or ---?

S: Huh?

Q: Did you have to stand in the big employment lines?

S: Well, there wasn't at that time--yes, I had to stand in line. I had to stand in line, no question about that. As I try to think back, I don't recall whether someone gave me a note to Marshall or what, but I just got, maybe I can look around and find out a little more about that question. I did get hired in the lines directly, you know.

Q: Um-hum. Where there many blacks hired into the "B" Building?

S: No, there were fewer blacks in the "B" Building. The massive number of blacks were in the production foundry. But there, blacks were dispersed throughout the plant. But no, there wasn't, you know, the huge number was in the foundry.

Q: Which building was your father in?

S: My father was in the production foundry. Yeah, he worked in the production foundry and I later went over to a production foundry.

Q: Okay. Were you involved in the Ford organizing drive?

S: Oh I very definitely was.

Q: Okay, can you explain some of your activities.

S: Well, I--they had, you know, set up a drive where they concentrated on the black community. I got involved in it. I'll send you some information on that too. By the way, I've got some documents on that. But I got involved. We set up an office on Milford in the black

community and, you know, it was a matter of ringing doorbells and really talking to folks in the plant. That sort of thing. Yeah, and as a matter of fact, I am, at the time of the strike, why I was President of the Detroit NAACP Youth Council. And the senior branch opposed the organization of Ford and we in the Youth Council favored it. And, of course, at the time that they had the walkout why I got a sound truck and went up and down the Miller Road urging these people that stayed in, these scabs to come out. And I was also involved, was also responsible for helping to get Walter White who was then the President, rather, the Executive Secretary, National Executive Secretary of the NAACP of Detroit to come out to Gate 4 on Miller Road there to speak and urge the scabs to come out. I got involved in the drive in the '40s. About sometime in 1940.

Q: Was the division that you're talking about between the supporters for the AFL versus the CIO?

S: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And in the foundry Ford really tried to concentrate and I just did a piece on the 50th anniversary of the Chronicle, we can talk about that. But Henry Ford really had built up a relationship with the various ethnic groups, the old man, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Gave the churches coal and that sort of thing. You had to go through many areas, to get a job or when you're laid off you buy a car. All that sort of thing. But anyway, he'd built up initially through a core leadership group that supported Ford's. Of course, this made the conflict even sharper as far as the various ethnic groups were concerned because you not only had to fight Ford you had to fight

these groups in the community. And there we were a force in the black community in putting together a collar leadership. Some of the younger ministers who supported the organization at Ford's. Yeah these were some of the elements in it.

Q: Uh-huh. How important do you think the so-called charity effort in the County of Inkster, or the City of Inkster, effected the attitude of blacks toward Henry Ford?

S: I don't really think that effected them a hell of a lot. Not, that may have effected somebody different but I don't really think it had that kind of an impact. The thing that had the greatest impact really was Ford shelling out the hard dollars. I mean really the tremendous amount of money that he gave these folks. Now clearly, it effected, this leadership that I had spoken about.

Q: Um-hum.

S: Because you had this leadership and really they were subsidized. I mean he did things for them that, you know, retained their loyalty. But once we got, you know, you've got to keep in mind that the relationship with the labor movement had not been that good, coming into 1941 you had, you know, Randolph and the locomotive firemen and that fight, and all kinds of exclusionary things about the trade union movement. Now clearly the CIO, of course, you know, they gave a totally different picture and the blacks, you know, could understand that and began to gravitate towards that. But, you know, there were sufficient elements in the black community that understood really what the relationship of a labor movement was to the black struggle. Of course it was easier for me because by that time I had been exposed to

some Socialist groups, you know, young groups. I had gotten involved with the war, to fight against the war, youth groups. And I had been part of the National Youth Group to fight against the war. And of course there were other blacks in Detroit who really got caught in these kind of movements too. And so I was certainly ready for leadership in this kind of effort to organize Ford's. And as far as the labor movement was concerned in Detroit, we had a little trial run back a little earlier, I guess it was in '39 when Chrysler tried to break the union, break the UAW and we broke that. Helped to destroy that effort. So we had had somewhat of a trial run, you know. But by and large, Ford relied heavily on mercenaries. Black mercenaries and all these various groups to, you know, weld support for his movement.

Q: What kind of groups were you active in during the Depression? I know that in Detroit the Unemployed Council was a big movement. Did you ever have any contact with that?

S: I don't recall actually having any contact with the Unemployed Council. There were youth groups. You see, in other words, at 16 when this thing really began, that was in '32, people began setting out, folks, say, out in the streets. That was a common practice. Furniture all up and down the street, now that effected me. But I guess it was sometime after that that, you know, I was in high school and I can recall some of the groups and we'd--in other words, you know, we'd support like I'm sure some of them were Communists. well we'd help, you know, put the folks' furniture back into the houses. But at that time, beyond my membership in the NAACP I was not actually a physical member of any other group outside of that. I guess my

involvement in other groups later on came back there in that time, there was trying to get the Youth Act. What was it? As I try to recall now, there were some various measures that helped unemployment that we got involved with groups, with other high school youngsters around the state. And joining, actually joining, I had not--the NAACP had been all I joined.

Q: Do you remember in 1934 when they had the Ford Hunger March?

S: Oh yeah, I remember the Ford Hunger March very well.

Q: Did you participate in it?

S: No, I didn't participate in it. No, I didn't participate in the Hunger March but I remember it very well. But certainly it was one of the things that the brutality (?). It was one of the things that certainly helped to mold my feelings about it. Yeah.

Q: Let's see. Were you at Ford at the time or were you still at Briggs at that point?

S: I didn't go until '34--Ford until December. At that time, no. You see, at that time I was at Midland Steel.

Q: Oh.

S: You see Briggs is only a short experience for me. I just happened one day to get out of school, well skipped school with some other fellows who went out to look for a job. And I was the only one to get a job and that was at Briggs. But I stayed at Briggs--that work was just so killing. I don't think I ever went back to get my pay. I must have stayed a day or so or two or something. But I never went back to get my pay. Then I subsequently went to work, I got a job at Midland Steel. So I was ---

Q: What were you doing at Briggs that was so hard?

S: I was the same, wet sanding.

Q: Really?

S: The same wet sanding. Yeah, yeah.

Q: What made you take the job at Ford's when you knew what the work was like ----

S: Well by that time, after that I had gotten, I worked a job at Briggs and I guess my whole attitude had changed. My whole attitude changed. And I didn't find it as hard as I did at Briggs. But I soon got, was able to get transferred off that and went over to the foundry.

Q: Back to organizing a little bit. Who would you say were some of the important individuals who contributed the most to the organizing attempt at Ford's?

S: Well I certainly would say, oh, I think of blacks, I think Walter Harden who was black, Chris Alston, that was in the black community, also. But in terms of the overall movement and as well as I know his name, I can show you that, but was assigned by the mine workers here.

Q: Mike Widman.

S: Mike Widman. I would certainly credit Emil Mazey with being a great factor in the organization of Ford's, yeah.

Q: Do you remember a gentleman named William McKie?

S: Bill McKie? Sure, I knew Bill McKie very well. Bill McKie was one of my good left-wing antagonists. Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: What did you think of him as a unionist?

S: Well, Bill, clearly--he came out of a great tradition of unionism. And very articulate. He was (?) when we organized it. He was kind of

an ideologue but that's beside the point. He made a great contribution. Now I wouldn't say he made a key contribution--made the key contribution. But he certainly made a contribution. That part, talking about a melting pot, that was it. And you see Ford had really balkanized that plant. He got the Italians, he got the Poles, and he had his fingers in all of them. You see what I mean.

Q: Yeah.

S: And so to say that, you know, you had to look at it in that aspect in terms of say of Mike Widman, to be able to pull all these forces together. We worked in the plant and obviously, you know, we just didn't have the leverage at that time. Now actually we were getting organized and we were beginning to get into meetings. We were beginning to develop that sense of solidarity. Now Bill McKie, he like and others contributed to that. Out of their ideological background. They knew the sense of what it meant, solidarity and that sort of thing, which really for the CIO, for blacks, and others out at Ford's was a new thing. Because they were talking about integration and solidarity the ranks, you know, that sort of thing. So really they contributed greatly and the spirit of the whole movement.

Q: How important do you think spies were in disrupting the ----

S: Oh spies were critical. My God, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, you know, I ran into that myself. Oh yeah. Because really, you see, they reported on the activities and they instilled fear in people. Yeah, yeah. There was no question about it. It wasn't something that, you know, you're imagination got the best of you. Ford actively employed

spies. And I guess those outside were professionals as well as those in the plant, snitches.

Q: Yeah. Were many people that you knew that were helping with the organizing, fired for their organizing activities?

S: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah, quite a few of them. Oh yeah I would say Shelton Tappes. That Shelton Tappes made a contribution too. Yeah well I'll send you, I'll make a xerox for you. You send me a note and I'll put some stuff into the mail for you that I'll go get it myself.

Q: Okay.

S: But, yeah, I knew quite a number of, black and white, that got fired. Because as you--not that you recall--but many of them on the court order of the NLRB got back into the plant and became active in what-have-you, you see.

Q: Okay, let's move on to a discussion of the caucuses at the Rouge now. You were affiliated with the right-wing caucus, correct?

S: Yeah, yeah. Now the right wing in the context of those times. I don't want you think it was the right wing of the context of the present time.

Q: Right. Could you describe what you thought the right wing caucus could be characterized as? What you think of or what you associate with the right-wing caucus at the Rouge.

S: Well let me tell you, I became, let me, how I became associated with the right wing because they were more, the socialist element was more involved in that. And I become in the anti-war movement--Tucker Smith was a socialist around in the metropolitan area. And oh what's his

name that--a nationalist anti-war activist. So naturally I gravitated towards that element. Also because the tactics of the Communist Party, and the Communist Party was quite a factor at--well I won't say quite--but it was a factor. They had a strong presence. Especially in the foundry, among blacks. They really tried to organize there. And of course their tactics bothered me and really what I saw is some of the nonsense about their advocacy. So I just gravitated--I got involved in the right wing and I got to know Walter Reuther and so on and so. Now they had their differences on the question of the war. And Communists, you know, they didn't change their position until after Hitler invaded Germany. So all those things, they had a bearing also on my decision.

Q: So what were your sentiments in relationship to World War II? You said that you were against the ---

S: Yes. In other words, I followed the militant line of black people. I mean that really the black people at that time were still fighting in Jim Crow's army. The problem of discrimination in America was rife. And during those years, the Pittsburgh Courier, which was a black paper, came out with a slogan, a double v: victory at home and victory abroad. And that caught, I was caught in that. And one of the things, until the Soviet Union, until Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the commies kind of want blacks to soft pedal whereas, you know, obviously that was just something that we weren't about to do. And that was another mark, a line of cleavage as far as myself and blacks who felt like I did about the war and their attitude towards it. Now, I guess the thing about the right-wing movement, and the

leadership is that, maybe I just found out, to me, they were more thoughtful. There was much more reasoning went on. Really there just wasn't this coercing almost, so to speak, to a point of view or to the line. You know, you had more flexibility about that.

Q: What do you think the division between blacks on that issue would be? Did most blacks during the war support the position that you did or did they side with the Communist line?

S: Well you see now you can't take what happened in the trade union movement and extend that across the blacks as far as the Party. The Party had little or no influence in the black community generally across the United States. Okay. But the black community overwhelmingly, almost totally so to speak, whatever element there was that disagreed was infinitesmal and they would have been effected by that far left group. But they were militant on the question of blacks demanding their rights. Like they said they had to go and fight and die in the war, demanded their rights to be treated equally in the army and at home.

Q: So you're saying that the right wing had a more clear ideological reasoning. What do you think were some of the leading ideological factions of the right wing?

S: Well let me say that number one, that the--we could see through the position of the commies on the war. We could see through that. Okay. So that would be a factor. But I think that what attracted, I can just speak for my own, the likes of a Walter Reuther who was able to articulate the needs of workers so well. And they were not bound by any ideology. Okay. I mean they weren't caught up in the shifting

lie of some--they weren't ideologues. Only to the extent of their passionate enhancement, advocacy of the trade union movement, you see what I mean. And in terms of the demands and that sort of thing. I can say this now. The left-wing movement, though, consistently at every turn stressed equality between blacks and whites. Now that was, you know, the right-wing you didn't get that continually thing. Now look Walter Reuther obviously, you know, he understood. But, you know, again you can see that, and it was needed. No one would (?) but that was an agenda item to them because it advanced, they really wanted to go about prostelytizing the black community. In the plant and out of the plant. The Reuther forces of the so-called right wing were primarily, totally an in-plant activity, an in-plant movement. You see?

Q: Yeah.

S: So they were doing no prostelytizing outside of that. They were organizing around trade union issues. Taking on Henry Ford and that sort of thing. Just a (?) about the fat cats so to speak.

Q: Yeah. So who were some of the groups that made up the right wing at the Rouge?

S: Well, let me tell you, there was very little of the right wing in my plant because they had that pretty well--there were right-wing forces, but my plant was the one that had the heaviest percentage of blacks. And of course a large number of them were foreign born and some of them just barely spoke English, belonged to the left-wing movement. But didn't have a very large movement. I think this was hard pressed of this moment to identify all of the forces. They were a minority at

the Rouge. They were definitely a minority at the Rouge. I can tell you that. But largely, you know, they were kind of a citywide group and you attended caucus. Walter Reuther called caucuses and you attended those. You know what I mean?

Q: Uh-huh. How close was the right-wing caucus at the Rouge affiliated or associted with Reuther?

S: Well, very, very closely. They were very, very closely associated. Joe McCusker, for instance, who became president of the local union and went on to become a regional director. He was one now that I think of it, comes to mind. An there were others around the plant that ...

Q: Joe McCusker was close to Reuther?

S: Oh yes, Joe McCusker was, yeah.

Q: So would Reuther attend the caucus meetings and make suggestions or ---

S: Well not out there, not out there. In any words, we might invite Reuther to speak to the caucus on some occasion but we all considered ourselves a part of a broader caucus that went beyond the plant. Yeah. And, you know, there would be large occasions, not that frequently, during the year, when some major thing and we attended in a huge citywide caucus. You know we had a citywide caucus that met from time to time.

Q: When were you first elected to the presidency of the production foundry. That was '47?

S: Oh no I was elected in '45.

Q: And were you elected on the right-wing ticket?

S: Oh yeah, I was elected, on the right, yes.

Q: So how do you think that you were able to pull a victory while running on the right-wing ticket in the foundry when there was ---

S: Well becuase I had become, notwithstanding the opposition that I faced, I had become well known and established. I was the President of the NAACP, I had played a role in the organization of Ford's, and I just stood my ground and they could not, they were not able to defeat me.

Q: Now who did you run against in that election?

S: That election, the first election, I ran against a fellow by the name of Eddie Hester as I recall. Yeah, yeah. But that was based probably, because hell I articulate, I could articulate the issues too and I took advantage of the other side's weakness as you do in any political situation.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B
TAPE 1

Q: How close was the right-wing caucus with Ken Bannon? Did he have any contacts with it?

S: At Ford, well Ken Bannon came along later. Ken Bannon, as I recall, was at Highland Park. Well that's still a part of Ford, so it was Ford's obviously. Ken, yeah, he was involved in the right wing. He was involved in the right wing and he went on obviously later on to become a member of the Board and first became a director at Ford's and that sort of thing.

Q: How important was the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists to the right wing?

S: The ACTU?

Q: Um-hum.

S: Yeah, I think they exerted some influence. Yeah, yeah, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Yeah, they did exert some, and in some instances a very positive influence. I was just trying to think of--he's dead, just died not too long ago--but yeah, he was a leader who really also understood the needs to weld black and white together. Yeah, they exerted some influence but I clearly ---

Q: This fellow you're thinking of ---

S: You know they weren't a major factor.

Q: The fellow that you are trying to think of was an ACTU member that was a white man that was ----

S: Yeah he was a white man. In other words, he, he--I'm trying to think of his--oh my God.

Q: What building was he in?

S: No, no. Actually he didn't work at Ford's.

Q: Oh really?

S: No he didn't work at Ford's.

Q: Oh Weber?

S: Yeah, Weber, yeah, yeah. But we got to know him. He had, you know, he was visible around the trade union movement and quite a resourceful person. So yeah, yeah.

Q: What kind of a relationship did the right wing have with the ACTU formally, for example, Weber, would he come and talk at the caucuses or would they just have their own meetings and ---

S: They had their own meetings. They had their own meetings. There was not that kind of, at least visible, alliance. I'm sure Joe McCusker belonged to the ACTU. You know he was quite a staunch Catholic. His brother Henry and others out there. But it wasn't anything that they wore on their arm. A badge or anything they wore on their arm, so you could tell that they were members of the ACTU.

Q: Can you remember any of the others?

S: It didn't the greatest amount of favor with some forces out there, you know.

Q: Um-hum.

S: The left wing made a, beat them down and called them fascist or whatever, you know.

Q: But your impression of them is much different than that?

S: Oh yeah, my impression--you see, really, one of the things that I did in the trade union movement, you know, I can see through the CP

propaganda and hell I can see through it on the other side. Yeah, yeah. There's no question about it that they made some positive contributions.

Q: Can you remember some of the people who were active in it? In the ACTU that worked at Ford?

S: Well it would be difficult. Well you see, as I'm saying, the people that I mentioned worked in it. You know, I don't think that they were any real activists. I really would be hard pressed to try now to think back to any of the guys at Ford's. As I say, the ACTU was a known organization but their members didn't go around wearing it on their sleeve. You see what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

S: You know, they were those who really just stood up opposition to them.

Q: How about influence by the Catholic labor schools. Do you know of many right-wingers who were trained in the Xavier schools or some of the other Catholic labor schools that were around Detroit?

S: No, no I didn't know. But I'll tell you then later on you had Father, oh he just died, just got killed, as well as I know him, well anyway, you had this Catholic priest who was very active. He was active in helping, you know, poor and helping, and he was very friendly toward the labor movement. That kind of thing but he was not identified as far as the ACTU. He was just a liberal priest, you know ---

Q: Is that Father Rice you're thinking of?

S: No, no, it will come to me, it will come to me. As well as I know him, well my God, my God, my God! Monsignor Kerns, Monsignor Clement Kerns.

Q: Oh yeah.

S: Yeah, um-hum. He became a monsignor.

Q: Uh-huh. Okay. Let's see. Which caucus do you think overall was more concerned with fighting racism? The right-wing caucus or ----

S: Well, let me tell you. Let me be perfectly candid now when you say more concerned. If you wanted to say who was more vocal, I would say the left wing. That was, meetings, and every place else. That does not say that Walter Reuther was not less concerned. Some of the forces in the right wing were not less concerned. Now I would say one of the differences, there may have been a more larger number of members in the right wing who were not as concerned as some of the leadership like Walter Reuther and the rest of them. But now when it gets down, and really being vocal though, being extremely vocal during those days was important, for whatever reason they did it, that's what got them a lot of credit.

Q: Yeah.

S: The left wing. Okay? But I would say that there were forces in the right wing, or else I wouldn't have stayed who, who--as concerned.

Q: Uh-huh. Were ---

S: Who were deeply, who were deeply concerned, as a matter of fact, I'd put it that way.

Q: Okay. Were there any socialist groups that were affiliated with the right wing?

S: Well they made now, you know, well I don't think--I can't recall whether they--at that point early on I don't, I say the Norman Thomases and people like that, you know the members of the Socialist

Party, they supported the right wing but in terms of actually being a dues paying member of the Socialist Party, I don't know that. But clearly they supported the right wing.

Q: Uh-huh. How about any other socialist groups like the Socialist Workers Party?

S: Yeah well, of course, then you get into the Shachtmanites and the Cannonites and all that sort of thing. And of course there was a more seculsionist kind of thing. At times they supported and at times they didn't, as I can recall. You know, I mean sometimes depending on who it was they saw--the doctrinaire socialists of Norman Thomas and that were consistent in their support. My recollection of the Trotskyites and Shachtmanites and all those, you know, it was more vacillating, no, no, that's not a good term. Anyway, I guess they took it issue by issue.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Now clearly, obviously, that's not--now you know, of course, they didn't get in bed with the left wing. I don't need to tell you that.

Q: They didn't get what?

S: In the bed with the left wing, you know, with the communists. But the question--there was no such thing as blind support. They could be very critical and at times they were supportive.

Q: Why do you think it is that they ended up aligning with the right wing against the Progressive caucus? Those Socialist Party ----

S: As opposed to the left wing?

Q: Yeah.

S: Well of course the left wing was (?) to them. Look they felt it was a scourge. Scoundrels they called them.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Oh yeah. Well that had to do with what went on in the Soviet Union and, you know, the changing forces of leaders there--Lenin and Stalin and Trotsky. The expulsion of Trotsky and later his murder in Mexico. And of course, as they saw it, and I'm sure correctly so, the Communist Party over here was nothing but an appendage of the Party in the Soviet Union. As an appendage, I guess, but just as a indivisible part. Hold the line.

Q: So they didn't try to work within the Progressive caucus. There were other groups in the Progressive caucus besides the Communist Party that were ----

S: Oh sure there were, sure there were.

Q: Why didn't they take the tactic of working within the Progressive caucus against the line?

S: Well that I don't know. I mean I didn't function in it. I didn't work in the Progressive Party myself. The Progressive caucus myself because it largely became labelled as the left wing. And the left wing back in those days out there was a euphemism of CP.

Q: Yeah.

S: Which was not entirely true as you yourself just suggested. Yeah

Q: Earlier you mentioned ---

S: You know CP was, what were you going to say.

Q: Earlier you mentioned that you didn't like the CP tactics in the union. Can you describe some of those that you were against? The tactics that they used that you were against?

S: Well of course to me, first of all, the blacks that they put into leadership, to me it lacked so much of what we needed. Yeah, really they were pure lackeys for the most part. Clearly there were exceptions. But for the most part they were lackeys and men who were opportunists themselves, you see. Because with the large force that they had they were a pretty powerful group. And there were those who belonged to the Party because they adhered to all the things. There were those who joined it and adhered to it because they saw it as a power base. They were opportunists themselves.

Q: Yeah.

S: But by and large, you couldn't think. In other words, if you wanted to think yourself, do any independent critical thinking about things, you had no place in the Party.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: And though I never joined I could see that in the lines that they followed. I saw how abruptly, overnight, they changed from a party that opposed the war to one who went all out. They wanted to scuttle the "No Strike Pledge," they were for the "No Strike Pledge" before. They opposed the strike pledge after. In other words, before the war, before the Soviet Union entered the war why they, you know, they believed you ought to keep the right to strike. But overnight they changed once Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. That was just one extremely graphic example but it went on all of the time.

Q: How closely do you think that the people who were affiliated with the Communist Party followed that line? Was it always or did they have some variation?

S: Well not being in it I couldn't say. You know, I couldn't say it from my own firsthand observation but outside whatever the line was, they followed. They operated on the base of democratic centralism. I don't know democratic it was within the Party because, you know, that centralism was, but when they came out that was the line. I don't know, now sometimes there were those who walked away from it and just got out. But they became marked persons but they pretty well acted together.

Q: Well in the end most people ended up dropping out or being expelled anyways by the late '50s, correct?

S: Well I guess a combination of things. The other things were the right wing, the Walter Reuther forces grew stronger so that clearly allowed the opportunists, the opportunists began to drop out, gravitate because they saw a new power, the power base shift, the power base was shifting. And of course, you know, the witch hunts and all that--Martin Dies and all that sort of thing. The Un-American Activities rather.

Q: Why do you think that the Communists acquired such a prominent position in the Local in the first place?

S: Well they were right out in front, in the organization of Ford's they certainly championed black liberation, you know, especially coming in the war, when Hitler marched into Poland in '39. You had great national youth movements. They got involved in some of those things,

opposing the war. That clearly, you know, their position on the war, before and until the shift, was one that certainly blacks espoused. Okay. And many whites. You know, give us butter and not guns sounded good. You know what I mean. In the early days of Ford's some of the stances were stances that went beyond, that attracted, you know, that made some sense to folks. Especially on some domestic policies. But they were all clearly also actively involved in the organization of Ford's. So that gave them some leadership base beyond being Comminist, you know.

Q: What do you think of some of the more prominent blacks that were involved with the Progressive caucuses, especially the Communist Party, for example, Nelson Davis or Dave Moore. Do you think that their position was any different than the average communist being that they had a special concern for the black issues.

S: Well Dave who was a more articulate, more well read than Nelson Davis, he was strong on the black liberation thing. You know, he was strong on that. That was almost his forte. Nelson Davis who was, for example, a decent guy but rose to be the bargaining committeeman in the foundry but really just didn't have all of the tools. Didn't have the kind of tools that--unfortunately didn't have them that would have enabled him to really be the kind of bridge that I would have expected of a man between the blacks and the Communist Party, you know, even though he was a Party member would have made him much more effective.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Now he parroted whatever the line was. Now he talked black liberation but Dave Moore was certainly, he articulated much better and that sort of thing.

Q: How about the forums that Nelson Davis held. Did those get pretty good attendance? Do you ---

S: Well I think in a relative sense back in those days, in a relative sense, how much influence they had, I don't know. You know he stayed in office for quite awhile. But, you know, when it came to the issues in the foundry, you know, we had a caucus and we put bills through, to a considerable extent, from time to time.

Q: And then Shelton Tappes sort of maintained more distance from the Party although he did align with the Progressive ---

S: Progressive caucus, yeah, yeah. Shelton, yes he did, yes he did. That distance varied from time to time but you just don't wait for anybody to say--all his worst enemies accused him but I would say he maintained a distance. A minimal distance at all times.

Q: Going back again when you were elected in the production foundry in 1945, what kind of appeals did you make running on the right-wing ticket?

S: Well I just put out the literature dealing with the problems of the plant. I could always do some writing and I put out not only the issues of the plant but I also had a caucus. I had some of the leadership, not as much of the elected leadership but I had quite a number of the leaders but I had built up a caucus across the plant there. And I guess also, as I recall also, the administration itself had made some pretty bad mistakes. At the time, as I recall, the

issue of some dues, a dues question, arose. I think it was a time when for some reason--at some time in the administration when I guessed we'd had a strike or something and rather than check off they were collecting dues, anyway there were a number of issues, that was one of them, but there were a number of issues that arose that helped also to bring about defection as far as that administration who was running for election.

Q: Uh-huh. So that year you supported Joe McCusker for the presidency?

S: Oh yeah, oh yeah I supported him.

Q: How did you view Carl Stellato?

S: Well Carl Stellato, I think I've got enough of the--did you get any copies of The Ford Facts out there, back in those days?

Q: Yes, I've got most of them.

S: Okay, well then I wont'--well look then that tells now I viewed it. My problem with Carl was that now--actually earlier on, we had a relationship, as I recall, but Carl in my judgment, you know, got a little too opportunistic. On the dues question and a number of other things. I had my differences with him about letting Hubbard have the hall there. But we just squared off. Yeah, we just squared off. Now you see I happened to also, and of course it was exacerbated, because I had gone on the stand when I had been assigned out in California. What year was this? This was 195- I don't recall. Anyway, the Reuther forces that I belonged to, belonged, and am still a member, a showdown came between them and Stellato and a number of us was asked, went back in the plant to run.

Q: Now how do you think that he was selected to run on the Reuther slate in 1950? You know when he was originally ---

S: Yeah, because well that's how I got acknowledged because as I say at that time, at that time he had been on the staff too. And at that time he was a positive, he just identified with the Reuther forces.

Q: And so was he selected by the Reuther caucus to run as ----

S: I don't recall. That I don't recall, I don't recall.

Q: What do you think turned him around after about a year?

S: Well really he, the power, the power, and I guess his growing ambition to become a greater power in the International Union. Not I guess, I know. Yeah because he built up quite a force outside of the local union on anti-Reuther policies.

Q: Yeah.

S: Yeah, so that was the design. Whatever else he might have stood for, that just went down the drain.

Q: When he was first elected in 1950 he set up that trial of the five who were accused of being Communist Party members. How did you feel about that?

S: Well of course to me that was just opportunism. Yeah, really, I mean. That was part of the politics that he saw that would enhance his own image and enhance his power base.

Q: So you don't think that had anything to do with the International? There was no ---

S: Well let me say I don't think it had anything with principles as far as Carl Stellato was concerned.

Q: Okay. Now what was the reaction of the right wing when Stellato, who was elected as a right-winger, turned more to the left?

S: Well of course consternation and opposition. Yeah, yeah, I mean but that was--as I think back to those days, yeah. Clearly betrayed, yeah he had big Ford Facts headline "Betrayal" but they felt betrayed because he saw this as an opportunity to enhance his power. It was just that clear.

Q: Okay. When did you go to work for the International Union?

S: I first went on the International staff in about September of 1941.

Q: Oh really.

S: Yeah.

Q: So you went back and forth between the International?

S: Oh yeah, I went back and forth, yeah.

Q: Can you explain how that happened.

S: Well it happened. I went back in the plant in '44 when a political shift, you see, back then in '44 and I went back into the shop.

Q: Because you thought your efforts were more valuable inside the plant than in the International?

S: No, no, no. Back in those, I'm trying to think now, back in those days, you know, when you're side lost, you went into the plant. This matter of surviving the political shifts did not come about until a couple or so years later. About '46 or '47 the union drew the policy that, you know, really whoever was director that didn't mean any wholesale--or new president, new International administration, did not mean any wholesale dismissals of staff and bringing on new ones, they ended that.

Q: So who were you hired under in 1941 when you went initially to the International?

S: I worked under R. J. Thomas.

Q: And then the shift in '44 that caused you to go back to the Rouge ---

S: The shift in '44, I'm trying to think now, I'm trying to think now, that came out of the big fight--and I'm trying to think now. The Reuther forces suffered some kind of defeat as I recall back in those--I'm trying to think what it was. Was that the fight between Leonard and Addes? I don't recall. I'd have to go back and try to think. But anyway, I went back in the shop about December of '44, something like that.

Q: And then you stayed in the Rouge until when?

S: I stayed in there until--I'm not sure, I don't recall, I don't recall. Let's see I served a term, I came out in '46, about '46, no about '47.

Q: Uh-huh. Okay, at that point that you stayed with the International the whole rest of the time?

S: Yes I've been with the International the rest, yeah.

Q: How did you feel in the late '40s when they enacted the Taft-Hartley Act?

S: Well of course I felt as the trade unions did all over the country. In the kind of climate, genesis, and the people, you know, who sponsored it, it was an anti-union act. Yeah, yeah, it was an anti-union act. That was universal.

Q: How did you feel about that non-Communist affidavit that was part of it?

S: Well I had worried then as I would have now when you begin to single out one political group. I saw it as regressive.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Yes, as regressive, yeah. And I would still say today.

Q: How important do you think the 1952 House Un-American Activities Committee's investigations were, when they came to Detroit?

S: In what respect?

Q: In terms of the political struggles inside the Local itself.

S: Well I don't think they had much impact. I think, you know, when you go--well during that time and in retrospect, really the poeple that were leading were so unprincipled, with Martin Dies and that ilk. It was a witch hunt. And really they had actually the grind and they had no qualms whatsoever about the way they ground them. No, it seems to me that was a very low point in our history.

Q: And do you think that was the general attitude of the right wing towards the HUAC hearings? That the right-wingers disapproved?

S: Well you had within the right-wing movement now, you had ideologues just as passionately as you did now in the left wing. And of course some of them took glee in it. I didn't, I didn't but I think most--a significant number of the people in the right wing saw it for what it was, really. You know it's there now and if we don't oppose this thing, one day it will be the Methodist, you know, or the Baptists.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

S: And so they took a rational attitude towards it.

Q: And how do you think the Reuther forces looked upon that?

S: Well I know how Walter and--especially Walter, when you say the forces you are just talking about the whole body as I indicated, clearly there were those within the right-wing movement who took glee in it because they so passionately opposed the left wing in the same way that the Commies would taken of some of the Commies would have taken the same attitude if it had been the reverse.

Q: How about Reuther himself?

S: Well Reuther had a very principled position on it the same as--I mean he opposed it on principled grounds.

Q: Okay, immediately following the HUAC hearings he put administratorship over Local 600 and he cited failure to comply with UAW policies and the Communist problem as violations of the International constitution.

S: Yeah.

Q: How did you feel about that administratorship?

S: Well let me add, I had not problems with it. I had no problems with it because I had come out of the Local and I know some of the things that happened in the Local. But in addition to that, you know we--again you did have, you know, constitutional--he had constitutional grounds to do or he couldn't have done it. And really, the first interest had to be protecting your union. You know, the good name of the union. And so that, yeah, I supported it.

Q: (OKAY, HOLD ON.)

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Q: Now the administratorship was held over Local 600 for a period longer than six months. Is that correct?

S: I'm sure, it seems to me it was because I knew one or two staff guys there.

Q: Now the UAW constitution says six months is the limit. Is that correct too?

S: I can't, you know, I can't tell you, I don't recall now. I couldn't say for certain but clearly there are provisions, there are provisions for making exceptions. You know I do know that or else they couldn't have done it.

Q: Okay so that they just made an argument that there was a need to hold it longer for certain reasons and ----

S: Yeah, yeah. And there is due process that you go through to extend it.

Q: What was the reaction in the plant when it was maintained that long?

S: There was no general uproar. I mean in other words there was no meaningful uproar. Clearly, you know, that the left wing agitated against it but in terms of any huge ground swell, there was none.

Q: Would you say that the right wing ---

S: Because by and large, after all, the local union took care of the workers' business just as usual and the grounds for their taking it over were well-established. People understood it out there. And see our--there's one thing about the UAW, the UAW has never had the reputation for being a dictatorial union or one that abused workers'

rights and, you know--some of the bad things, the dishonesty and other things that prevailed in some of the other unions.

Q: So the right wing was pretty solid behind the administratorship effort, do you think.

S: Oh sure. There's no question about that. I mean for probably a number of reasons, yeah, yeah.

Q: And do you think that Reuther accomplished his goals in the administratorship?

S: Well I don't know what you mean when you say his goals. His goals there were no different than they would be in any other local union. There had been many administrators. They go in for a specific purpose. I would think he did or else they'd, yes I think he did.

Q: Did you think that was an important step in preventing the Communist influence from being so big?

S: I don't think it is that significant a step because really I got elected out there as I told you. It had been almost seventeen thousand votes. So look, I think their influence had begun to wane. I don't think it was that significant. It may have had some minimal impact but I really don't think that was any crucial watershed or anything like that.

Q: So you think their popularity just started to wane with the times?

S: Yeah started to wane but also effective leadership and the unison. You know, people who really weren't Commies and who were effective leaders. You know articulate and addressing the workers' needs. A whole range of reasons why, you know, the hold on the local unions began to wane.

Q: Where do you think this capable leadership came from?

S: Well it came out of the fact that the local union had been in effect long enough to attract the interest of non-ideologues. People who wanted to make the trade union movement their career. People who studied for it and that sort of thing. You know, one thing about the UAW is that they do a tremendous education job. So these people began to come to the fore. You know people who had other reasons and credentials other than they worked in the mines and their daddy worked in the mines and people whose daddy didn't work anyplace else but in the plant and had no union background, but people who had some abilities and who trained themselves, just a whole new breed. Guys who had, some of them had gone to college. You began to get young people who were college graduates and what have you in leadership. You see at that time, you know, about ten or more years old, it's just a shift in the leadership. A career opportunity as people saw it which did not diminish their belief in the union but I mean they saw it, as a thing they wanted to do the rest of their lives.

Q: Okay, for example, if you take a committeeman position do you think there would be a difference in the way that they would fight for grievances and so on, between a person who was a career unionist, the kind that you just described, versus a person who was more ideologically oriented?

S: Well you see the problem there is, I think it balances off, because too many people who were ideologically motivated, they had little or no educational background. Some of them could barely write, spell or anything else. And to get a young person, a person who really brought

some of these abilities, who also was committed, it gave far better representation because obviously, you know, in the final instance there was a contract that you had to go by. You see you could holler and scream and, you know, do all of the other things that were motivating, galvanize people and all that, but you still had a contract to go by.

Q: Yeah.

S: And understanding that contract and by that time you had built the--you know you had the umpire system, you had built up a whole, just a whole raft, of umpire decisions, case laws so to speak, that you had to go by. And you had to be able to read, you had to be able to conceptualize. And the whole thing changed. And workers began to understand that. And more and more workers, younger workers, would coming into the plants and the older workers were going out.

Q: So you thought that in that later period it required a different type of person?

S: Oh certainly it required a different type of person, by all means. By all means.

Q: Do you think that had anything to do with a different type of militance? Did the old guys have a different or more militant attitude than the ----

S: Oh no. You see to suggest, and I think it is implicit the question, that somehow militancy didn't equate with being educated, that isn't the truth. I mean some of the most militant people I know out there were, turned out to be people who had gone to college, whatever no. The same thing expressed to a less degree because changes were made

that fired the old militant, fired these folks too. Injustices, inequities--while there may have been less of that in the plant the union itself began to take on these other things. And our society, the impact on the working people. The impact on people in the community so there were enough compelling things to infuse, infuse a creative, imaginative trade union leader. One who really saw the trade union movement as a vehicle of social change. That he could still--he or she could and by increasing, they began to get women in the movement too. Let me drop this one gender. So it meant that there was still enough to motivate and carry guy--make a guy want to do this all of his life.

Q: So you think that was a motivating force like maybe the ideology was motivating force in the earlier period?

S: Oh yeah, yeah. Now keep in mind now the ideology, you had just a handful of people who were really caught up in, you know, the Communists in terms of numbers at the Ford local, see people, don't think they had the members by the thousands. They didn't. They were an organized, well-disciplined group and, you know, they could make it appear that they had thousands by the way they galvanized people.

Q: Okay, now outside the war period when their Communist Party line was different, would you say that the Communist committeemen and those were more militant or would you say that the right-wingers were more militant or was there no difference?

S: Well yes, I think--when you talk of committeemen ...

Q: Yeah.

S: You see I think it all involves on the individual abilities. You see, you know, getting workers out of the hazardous jobs doesn't depend on whether you are a Communist or not. I mean really you're talking now about the application of what the union steward forms with the contract and otherwise on the job and that's why you need more brain power than you need ideological power. You see what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

S: Because in the final analysis you got to put it down on paper, you can argue it for awhile but if it doesn't sell you've got to put it down on paper, you've got to know how to write it, you've got to express it. Okay?

Q: Uh-huh.

S: And you just can't talk to some "pie in the sky" you've got to relate it to a document that you have. Okay?

Q: Okay.

S: So you may talk a good fight but when you get in the trenches and you've got that contract to go by and the workers are hurting, you've got to try to win that grievance and you've got, you know, there's a certain way you've got to go about it.

Q: Yeah. Okay, later on after the left-right struggle in Local 600 dissipated a bit, a lot of the left-wingers wound up on Reuther's staff. How did that happen?

S: Well Reuther made it that--I thought it was a wise decision. Reuther set out to try to unite the union and all he asked is just that you come on the team and let's play as a team member. By that you didn't have to tell him, you know, you just put Karl Marx on the side, his

"Manifest" on the side, they knew enough to do that. And I thought it made sense. That it really helped the union, really, and it gave the union strength at times, and at a time that it needed it.

Q: Okay. Now a few questions about World War II. How did you feel about the "No Strike Pledge" during the war?

S: About the "No Strike Pledge?"

Q: Yes.

S: Look I opposed it. I was opposed to the "No Strike Pledge" in principle. You know I thought that the workers ought to have the right to strike. Now clearly I'm conditioned. I'm conditioned to black, by the injustices that we face and by the fact--that blacks were facing in the country--and by the injustices they faced in the army. So I didn't caught up in all that patriotic hoopla. Okay?

Q: Yeah. So did you participate in the movement against the "No Strike Pledge?"

S: Well I didn't get out and carry signs or anything such as that. No, I didn't get out and carry signs. But wherever I had an opportunity to express myself--I expressed mine in the fight that I carried on in this country, carried on for civil rights notwithstanding, whoever it embarrassed. Okay? That's how I expressed mine.

Q: Do you remember Larry Yost who was in the aircraft unit during the war?

S: Yes, I knew Larry Yost very well.

Q: He had an important role in the reaction against to the "No Strike Pledge."

S: Well I think that was the critical overriding issue, I think, in the 1940 convention in the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, as I recall.

Q: He did have much support at the Rouge?

S: Huh?

Q: Did he have much support at the Rouge against the ---

S: Larry Yost got to be chairman of the Aircraft Unit if I'm not mistaken so that would certainly indicate that he had some support.

Q: Yeah. How about outside that unit?

S: Yeah. But you know that wasn't really any raging issue that the trade unions got out in the street and fought each other about at Local 600. Yeah but I don't think workers gauged their support, a lot, to a great extent on whether you was for the "No Strike Pledge" or whether you weren't. You know, if you were in a unit where the leadership advocated it, what have you, clearly they had more support. But no I don't think that was a critical overriding issue, as I recall.

Q: Uh-huh. What do you think about the World War II working conditions. Were they any different than the working conditions outside of the wartime?

S: Well by and large, as I think back, the work was still hard. I don't, at that time, at that time. You know that's long before they had automation and all these other sort of things in plants, what have you. And at that time I don't know that they were ideal or were they, I would say, a sweatshop. As I look back, you know, we had made some progress in the foundry with the dust and the grime and that sort of

thing. I think there had been continual improvement in the working conditions so that no I would not say they were any worse.

Q: Okay, so they were pretty much the same as they were any other time then? I'm talking about the workload and the organization in the factory.

S: Well I guess, I'm trying to think. You know we had a lot of overtime. I think perhaps maybe the fact that it was a war effort. Maybe as I recall, the lot were making good money. I think some of that tempered--you know, people gripe on a whole lot of conditions. I mean these people always wanted to see things better. I think that tended to temper that. But as I recall, I don't recall that, no, conditions were bad.

Q: Now I'm going to ask you about some big issues that came up in Local 600, and in the International. How did you feel about the "30 for 40" movement?

S: Well the "30 for 40" movement, I expressed myself in one of the Ford Facts that you have.

Q: Oh yeah?

S: Yeah, I expressed myself in one of that. I was supporting the general right wing line, Reuther line, that, and I don't recall now all the specifics, but I mean that generally it was unrealistic. I guess basically you could say that generally it was unrealistic. And my recollection is that there was some counterproposal. But generally was unrealistic.

Q: How did you feel about the fight for pensions before they were won?

S: Well I was all for that. That, as you recall, Reuther led that fight. Oh yeah, clearly, that was just like a vacation with pay. Yeah, yeah, those were things that really it was to make working people hold in the same respect that folks outside of the plant that, you had to go to that.

Q: How do you feel about the decentralization of the Ford Motor Company?

S: Well, clearly you keep in mind, that the Rouge plant had almost ninety thousand people at one time. And that meant just a tremendous amount of employment in the Detroit area. Well decentralization was a key factor in really helping to cut that down. Of course other things too. To a point today where you have, well I guess at Rouge you've got about seventeen thousand folks. So I would, yeah, I know why management did it but look I would like, yeah, if I had my druthers yeah, I would like to have all that work done here. But, you know, with the impact of the foreign imports and all that, there's just a whole lot of things that.

Q: Yeah. Now when they, let's see I think it was 1952, when Stellato brought a case, a court case, against the Ford Motor Company for the decentralization move. And there was an argument made in the court that the International Union was the one that signed the contracts and so the International would have to participate in the court case if they were to pursue it. And Stellato asked Reuther to join and he refused. Do you know anything about that?

S: No, I don't recall that. That eludes me now.

Q: Okay. So one last one is the 1949 speed-up strike.

S: The 1949 speed-up strike.

Q: Were you still in the plant or were you in the International?

S: No, no I was out of the plant.

Q: Okay, so you don't have too much information.

S: No, no.

Q: Okay. Well that's the last of my questions. If you have any other comments or ----

S: Well you drop me a little note now and I'll try to think about some things that I think might fill out some of the questions you asked or that bear on in, okay.

Q: Okay. Well I really appreciate your taking the time to do the interview.

S: Well how could I do otherwise. Well how could it do otherwise. You're a very convincing person. And I needed one more thing to do this morning like I needed another leg, but I thought I'd go ahead and do it.

Q: Well I really appreciate it.

S: All right. You have a good day.

Q: Thank you. You too.

S: Be good.

Q: Good-bye.

END OF TAPE 2