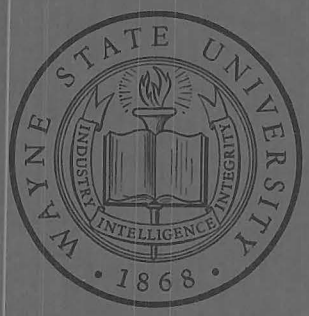
Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW
(#1, #2 & #3)

JOSEPH BILLUPS

HERBERT HILL, SHELTON TAPPES
and ROBERTA McBRIDE, INTERVIEWERS

OCTOBER 27, 1967



Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

Interviewee: Joseph Billups
Interviewers: Herbert Hill, Shelton Tappes, Roberta McBride
Date of Interview: October 27, 1967

H. This is an interview with Joseph Billups on October 27,1967, in Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Billups, where were you born, and when did you first come to Detroit?

B. I was born in Billups, Mississippi, in 1893.

H. How old were you when you left Mississippi?

B. I was about 18.

H. Did you go to school and work in Mississippi?

B. I worked on the farm and I went to school in the season. I left in 1910, and went to N.Y. City, and I worked in N.Y. City for about a year or two, and I went back. But when I went back I wasn't able to stay there. The people didn't want me there-they said I had been away and would spoil the rest of the people, telling them about the North. So I left there and came north, to Detroit.

H. What year did you come to Detroit?

B. In 1910. I worked for the New York Central at the Roundhouse, knocking fires on the engines, and shoveling ashes from the fires we knocked out. The pay was 22 cents an hour. I worked as an oiler, and fire-knocker--just ordinary work around the New York Central Roundhouse.

H. How long did you keep that job?

B. I kept that job, off and on, about three years, for we would get laid off when the ore season was off. At that time they were hauling ore by train from up North, and there would be times they laid off.

H. What was life for Negroes in Detroit about 1910? What were the conditions of living?

B. Well, the conditions at that time were -there was not the police brutality of the present time. Your rights were broader if you wanted to take advantage of it. What I mean is, there was no discrimination in hotels, and so on. But for jobs, just labor work and porter work was the most work you could find.

H. Were there any labor activities - any trade unions that interested Negroes, or that Negroes joined?

B. No, there weren't any trade unions at the time. If you were known as a unionist you were kicked out.

H. Negroes didn't get into any of the AFL unions?

B. No, no. Negroes didn't get into the unions until the CIO started organizing.

H. When did you start your organization activities?

B. I got into the IWW-the Industrial Workers of the World in Detroit.

H. Did the IWW have much of an organization?

B...Not much. The head of it was Bill Shadduck. He got killed-he died in Russia. He went over to build a railroad.

H. Were you the only Negro in the IWW?

B. Oh, there were a few more. One fellow by the name of Brown-I don't remember his first name.

H. How large was the Wobbly organization around Detroit in 1910?

B. Just a few - two or three hundred. And out of these, just a few Negroes, maybe 10 or 15, or something like that.

H. What did these other Negroes do for a living? What kind of work did they do?

B. They worked on the docks, loading and unloading ships.

H. Did the Wobblies try to organize on the docks?

B. Not much.

H. There was a Negro organizer who tried to organize workers on the docks in Philadelphia, and Baltimore, by the name of Ben Fletcher. Did you ever hear of Ben Fletcher?

B. No, but I did know Brown. Brown used to come through and speak on the courthouse steps, City Hall steps, and conduct meetings there.

H. Did you ever hear of Gene Dibs or Big Bill Haywood? William Z. Foster, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, when they came through? Jim Cannon?

B. Oh, yes. I was acquainted with Foster, and Brown.

H. There was a fellow by the name of Cosner, David Cosner.

B. I didn't know him.

H. Did you ever meet Joe Hillstrom?

B. I don't remember that name.

T. He's talking about the fellow the song was written about, Joe Hill.

H. How did you become interested in the Wobblies, and radical ideas in the beginning?

B. Well, I went out West, and my method of traveling was on freight trains, and there you would meet them.

H. Would you describe this? This is very important.

B. I was hoboing. And I soon learned that if I got with some of them I would be protected. That is, if they showed a red card, the brakeman would say, "Go ahead." So I wanted to get one myself.

H. The railway brakemen would let them go ahead if they showed their Wobbly card?

B. So I wanted some way that I could travel, and the method of traveling was hoboing. And you traveled some place and went to work on a section gang. But if you didn't have that red card, you didn't work there.

H. The red card was the IWW card. Did you ever participate in any strikes of the Wobblies while you were traveling?

B. Well, I always stayed shy of strikes because I didn't want to break up a strike, and I didn't want to get beat up. Because at that time the corporations used to go South and bring a lot of people in to break a strike. Especially Negroes. That's what they used Negroes for.

H. When did you come back to Detroit?

B. I think around 1917.

H. So during the war you were hoboing around?

B.. The time I wasn't in jail-They would put you in jail and check on your registration, and so on.

H. Well, you came back to Detroit in 19-1919 you said?

B. Well, in and out. I stayed here after 1917.

H. Then you settled in Detroit. What kind of work did you get when you came back?

B. Foundry work. I couldn't get into Fords. So I went to work at Grey Iron - Detroit Grey Iron Foundry a small plant. I went to work there around 1920.

H. What kind of job did you have in the foundry?

B. I was what you call cut sand and molder's helper, and iron pourer. I don't remember what I was paid at that time. There was no union. There were mainly Negroes in the foundry. There were whites in the foundry. They were molders.(pit?) Molding - big castings they were making, pit castings in the ground - you would have to dig down there in the ground and make the mold in the ground. Oh, I worked on the boats, on the docks, and foundry work, and railroad work - that was the

only kind of work you could get. But the man I wanted to tell you about, I can't call his name, he died in Russia. He went over there to build a railroad--Bill Shadduck.

H. I recall him. Chaplin in his book, "Wobbly," mentions him. He was white.

B. He went back there to build a railroad. He tried to get me to go too. Bill Shattuck and I were very good friends and we used to hang out there at Gratiot and Hastings in a restaurant. Wobblies and different ones used to meet there. They would go around the country hoboing. We would eat there and then go down on the boat.

H. Were you active in the IWW when you came back to Detroit?

B. No.

H. Were there any radical trade union or political organizations around Detroit in the 20's?

B. No, the IWW's were it. We worked at the docks, and so forth.

H. After your job at the grey-iron company what was your next job?

B. My next job was at Ford. The first time I went to work at Ford was in the Highland Park Plant, in the foundry, the same year they went to $5.00.

T. I believe that was shortly after World War I.

H. Were there many Negores in the plant at that time?

B. Not so many - just in the foundry.

H. Were there any efforts to organize a union among the Negroes? Among the whites?

B. No.

H. When did union activity begin?

B. I don't remember.

Mrs. B. I was told it was in 1928. It didn't belong to the AFL. The Autoworkers Union.

H. The TUUL. Now I would like to examine this matter. Now the TUUL tried to organize the Autoworkers union. In about what year?

T. Sometime between 1927 and 1929, as I recall. I want to ask Joe this. You say there was no attempt to organize Ford. But what about the other plants, like Hudson, or Briggs, or Murray?

B. There was no organization there, but we attempted to organize.

T. That's what he is driving at.

B. We attempted to organize at Briggs, and Chalmers.

H. When you say "we attempted to organize," was this just the Negroes, or just the whites or an interracial cooperation?

B. It was a left wing organization - the Autoworkers' Union.

H. Were you successful?

B. Well, to some extent, but they were able to break them up. I went up to the lake and stayed there a couple of months, and tried to organize there. Muskegon - it was a tight place.

H. You organized for the Autoworkers Union? You were the only Negro orgainzer.

B. Yes. We wasn't paid a salary - just expenses.

H. Were Negro workers responsive more than the white workers?

B. No.

H. The Negro workers were distrustful of unions. That was in part becasue of their bad experience with the AFL?

B. Well, it was because they were right off the farm - they didn't know. They probably had heard about it. But they didn't know. They were just farmers.

H. Most of the Negroes who were working in the plants up here were Southern Negroes? They had just recently left southern farming areas. Is that right?

B. Yes.

H. So they would not know very much about trade unions? Well, how far did the Auto-Workers Union get? Did it get very far?

B. Well, there were times that they would, and times that they would go down. I remember one time we had Murray Body organized, and was going to have a strike the next day, and we had Ferry Hall. And it would hold - it would seat about 4 or 500 people - it was jammed. And they got wind we were going to have a strike the next day. And they backed a patrol wagon up there the next day, and they took out 90 patrol-loads, by the count. But where I missed it, I got up on the stage and went up among the drops. And I hung onto the ropes and stayed there until they got the load out. They got 90 patrol loads out.

H. The Autoworkers Union never had any contracts signed with the bosses? No? No.

Tell me a little about what radical activity was going on in the Negro community during this time. In interviewing others, we know that the end of the 1920's and the coming of the great depression in the early 30's saw the rise of various Communist and Socialist movements.

Here in Detroit there were things like the Unemployed Councils, the Workers' Alliance. There was the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, there was the International Labor Defense. There was the Revolutionary League of the Socialist Workers Party- a whole group of organizations. Tell us about your participation, and the interest of Negro workers, or the lack of interest among Negro unemployed,during the Depression years in Detroit.

B. The International Labor Defense (name supplied by wife) was active in defense when Negroes began to struggle - say, like the Unemployed Council, and so on,because we would fight against evictions. When people were evicted we would place them back in their houses, and I've seen times when we would have four and five evictions in one block.

H. Now this was in the early years of the Depression, 1933 and 1934, and you're talking now about the International Labor Defense? The ILD? The Scottsboro case and afterward the Angelo Herndon case? Were you active in the International Labor Defense?

B. Yes.

H. Did you know James Patterson? Yes? Did you know James W. Ford? James W. Ford came here when he ran on the Communist ticket? Did you attend any of the big mass meetings and rallies? Would you describe a little bit that period? Your activity?

B. Well, when he would come I would most times be with him. I was assigned to go with him and kind of guide him and escort him around.

H. You were assigned by the International Labor Defense? You were active in the ILD? And when James W. Ford came here you were assigned to him? You carried him around the city? Do you remember James S. Allen? He wasn't as prominent. Did you ever meet Angelo Herndon?

B. Oh, yes!

H. Was there activity in Detroit around the Scottsboro case and the Herndon case? Can you tell us a little about that?

Mrs. B. I think he was the influence behind the march in Washington, D.C., for the Scottsboro boys. I was in it.

H. You folks went from Detroit to Washington to participate in the protest on the Scottsboro case? Did many Negroes go?

B. No.

H. Then you were rather unusual. You were among a small handful of people who participated in activities of the radical movement of that time. But more and more Negroes were becoming interested in these matters?

Mrs. B. Through the Scottsboro case. It aroused the interest of all Negroes. There wssn't any question of left, right, or middle. It was a question to save the boys, and it was a Negro problem. It was a case of discrimination. And they were very, very much interested, and I think that is how it developed, a case of fighting discrimination.

H. The Scottsboro case mobilized great numbers of Negroes and Negroes of many persuasions became involved. Was the Herndon case of interest here?

Mrs. B. Yes, but not as much. You should emphasize this. In Washington, D.C., when he and I went there-

T. In fact, I think Joe helped mobilize the organize the group who went.I didn't go. He did say that not many Negroes became involved, for a lack of transportation and a lack of money.

H. The voice you just heard was that of Shelton Tappes. The female voice you just heard was that of Mrs. Bullups, and she will also participate in the interview. We are now in the 30's. It is the years of the depression. Negroes suffered very severe hunger, deprivations, evictions. You were active in these things. You have already been interviewed on the Hunger March. We will not repeat that activity. At this period there was another kind of movement which was operating among Negroes. A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen were operating a Negro Socialist publication called the Messenger. Did you know the Messenger? They were against the Communists. They were against the ILD, the Workers Alliance. They said it was under Communist control. But A. Philip Randolph used to come to Detroit. Did you ever go to any of Phil Randolph's meetings?

B. Oh, yes.

H. What was your feeling about Randolph in those days?

B. That he was just a big Uncle Tom. He wasn't able to get an audience here, especially among the working people.

H. How about W.E.B. DuBois? He came to Detroit also some times during this period, didn't he?

B. Yes, but he hadn't changed at that time, and he was still among the -

H. Talented tenth?

B. Yes!

H. How about some other speakers who would come to Detroit like Paul Robeson? And Patterson,

B. And Moore?

H. Yes, Moore. Tell us about these people - you knew them and went to their meetings? Would they get big Negro audiences? Would hundreds of Negroes, or thousands of Negroes come out?

B. Yes, if they were advertised, and let the people know they was coming. In the meantime we had an Unemployed Council that was organized here, and there were at least seven branches of it, started from Eight Mile on over and all these people were very active around the movement at that time, and if Patterson or Moore would come, they would get a crowd.

T. Joe, I was telling Mr. Hill about some of the rallies we used to have at Grand Circus Park. I thought you would like to talk about them, because I recall one of the first ones I attended, you were prominent as a speaker, and helped organize them, and all that sort of thing.

B. Well, the Unemployed Councils we had used to hold meetings down there, day and night, in Grand Circus Park. And that's where the idea of unemployment insurance was raised, in Grand Circus Park "work or bread" was the slogan. And then it was developed into unemployment insurance, and so on. After discussion, and so on at first we asked for work or bread. And at that time, Grand Circus Park was full, day and night, and always, there was someone up speaking, and it didn't make any difference at that time, for those fellows, because they didn't have any place to stay, and they were staying in the park, and you couldn't get up a march that quick to City Hall. A guy would get up and say, "Let's go to City Hall, because they're not giving us anything." So that's where they would go.

Mrs. B. About the Committee which visited Murphy the Mayor - do you remember how you helped? There was no relief in Detroit, no welfare.

H. What year was that?

Mrs. B. In 1932, I think.

H. And there was no welfare program? And a committee went to see Frank Murphy?

Mrs. B. Maurice Sugar, Joe, and someone else. Who was it?

B. We had meetings on the steps of the City Hall. All we had to do was announce in the park that we were going to City Hall, and go there. So, we asked for a welfare program. Murphy said he didn't know what to do. So we told him about a welfare program. So he asked a committee to draw up a program. So Maurice Sugar drew it up in his office, and that's how we got the welfare. There was no relief at all. Well, there were quite a few things that came out of Grand Circus Park, because there were people who were willing to go on committees and turn City Hall over, if they didn't get some consideration.

H. Did these demonstrations and marches involve both white and Negro?

B. Oh, yes!

H. There was large-scale Negro participation?

B. More white!

H. But Negroes did participate?

B. Yes.

H. Why wasn't there more Negro participation?

B. They just didn't believe in it.

H. They thought it was hopeless? Futile?

B. Yes.

H. I would like to ask Mr. Tappes a question. Would you say that during this period of the 30's Mr. Billups was probably the major Negro figure in the Detroit community?

T. Yes, at that time he was considered the outstanding Negro in the community.

H. During this period were you still working at Ford? No? How did you manage? During this time were you married?

T. You got married in 1932, didn't you?

B. Yes.

H. In 1932 you and Mrs. Billups got married. How did you manage to live? Were you working, Mrs. Billups?

Mrs. B. Millenery. I used to be a designer. I used to design and sell hats.

H. And you made enough to support the family?

Mrs. B. No, it wasn't enough. It was very little. But we got by. He used to get little expenses from the organization.

H. From the ILD? Would you say that the ILD was the major organization of this period?

Mrs. B. Yes. I must say that the CP and the ILD were the major organizations, that they appealed to the Negroes and whites.

H. The CP operating in the open under its own name?

Mrs. B. I was not a member-

H. I don't care whether your were a member.

Mrs. B. But I worked with them. They were really the instrument of the organizations. They appealed to the Negroes, and as such they had to respond. When they had nothing to eat, they helped the family. When they had no place to stay, they saw that they got back to their homes, if they were evicted. And they got the electric lights

H. The Communist Party openly functioned as the Communist Party - and it did get response from the Negro community?

Mrs. B. Terrifically.

H. Was it a response in terms of the Party, or was it through the Unemployed Councils, the Workers' Alliance, the ILD?

Mrs. B. The small organizations like the ILD, and then the League of Struggle for Negro Rights - through them they began to think that people have to get jobs too, so they began to organize. At that the organization was working on a march to Fords for jobs.

H. We won't discuss the Hunger March,since we already have it on the record. Now, the organizations like the ILD, the Unemployed Councils, the Workers Alliance - what other groups - or were there any other groups that were operating?

Mrs. B. There were other very small groups - like the Socialist Party but they were not a success.

H. Was the Socialist Party operating in the Negro community?

Mrs. B. They tried, but they never succeeded.

H. Were there any Negro Socialists?

Mrs. B. Yes, they used to have a ticket, a political ticket. They used to have candidates.

H. Did they have any local Negroes who were active in the Socialist Party?

Mrs. B. Very few.

H. Do you remember any names, people who were perhaps active later in the labor movement?

B. We had a few members. What is his name, he died. One boy got drowned - he wa out on Davis Avenue.

T. You mean Newman?

B. Newman.

T. There were three brothers whose name was Newman. One stayed at Ford, he was there until very recently.

H. Well, perhaps you will recall their names later. We'll start with the three brothers, the Newmans who were active in the Socialist Party. They were Negroes, and they were active in Socialist Party activities around Detroit. Of course, the major Socialist figure of that day was Phil Randolph. I assume when Phil Randolph came in here the Socialist Party sponsored meetings for him. Now let us move a little further into the 30's. Were you active in the National Negro Congress?

B. Yes.

H. Would you like to talk a little about the National Negro Congress? The National Negro Congress came during the United front period, when the effort was made to build a broad united front. Included were Socialists and Communists; A. Philip Randolph was the head of it in the beginning, though later on he dropped out. There were many others. Tell us what you recall of it and its activities in the Detroit area.

B. Well, the National Negro Congress - here we organized some 14 branches: Eight Mile Road, and Inkster, one in Mt. Clemens, and another place down the River - Ecorse and River Rouge. We organized branches all around.

H. What kind of activity did the Congress engage in?

B.. You couldn't tell them from - the same thing the Communists and everybody else were doing -- looking for food, and better living conditions.

H. Were you active in the Workers'Alliance? No? Your activity was mainly through the ILD? You ran for Governor on the Communist Party ticket? You ran for Governor of Michigan? Is that right? What year was that?

T. Wasn't that right after you got married? It seems to me that the two of you made a tour of the state during his campaign. I believe it was 1932.

H. You ran for governor of the state of Michigan either in 1932 or 1934--We'll check that out -- on the Communist ticket. Tell us a little about your campaign. What do you remember?

B. Well, I came out - I campaigned on unemployment insurance.

H. Was "work or bread" still the slogan? How many votes did you get?

B. Oh, I campaigned around Grand Rapids, and Lansing, and Muskegon.

H. Since you ran officially on the Communist Party ticket, one has to assume you were then a member of the Communist Party.

B. Yes, but it was registered as the Workers' Party.

H. In 1932 it was still the Workers Party. It didn't become the communist Party till a little bit later. Were you the only Negro in the Detroit Workers Party, or were there some others?

B. Well, there were quite a few.

H. Quite a few. Now, as I recall, I may be wrong about this; you correct me, Mrs. Billups the Communist Party in Michigan was the Workers Party; but nationally it was the Communist Party - had been since 1921. But in Michigan it was on the ticket as the Workers Party. And you were a member of the Workers Party; and you say there were quite a few other Negroes? When did you go back to work at the Ford Plant?

B. After the union.

T. He was placed on the organizing staff in 1940. He went through the winter and into the summer on the Ford orgaizing staff and he had a National Labor Relations Board case as a Ford workers discharged for union activiites. So when the other cases were settled, he was included. So in the order a concluding case on behalf of Joe Billups, as well as the others, one of the stipulations was that they be returned to their jobs with the same relative positions as though they had never been discharged.-you know, recovered seniority rights, and all this sort of thing. And so Joe went into the shop as a worker shortly after the first contract was signed. I believe it was early in July he went back. But he stayed on the organizing staff until then.

H. I would like to backtrack a little now, and to discuss your activities with the rise of the CIO, and the Ford organizing drive. Mr. Tappes has told us you became active in the Ford organizing drive before you actually went back to work in the plant. Now in the 30's, with the rise of the CIO, of industrial unionism, there was a new hope among the

the Negroes in organized labor, and radicals like yourself, both white and colored,began to feel that there were some new possibilities. The hope that radicals had always had for industrial unionism seemed to be coming about now. Would you tell us about your organizational activities on behalf of the UAW? You were mainly limited to the Ford organizing drive? Is that right?

B. No.

H. Would you then tell me where you started in your campaigns for the CIO?

B. I can't say just where I did start, because I went all over the state where the factories was.

H. For whom? For whom did you go all over the state?

B. First I went for the old Autoworkers Union. Later, after they were reorganized - that union - I went up to Flint and Saginaw, and I was assigned to General Motors plants up there.

H. Who assigned you?

T. Dillon-Mat Dillon.

H. Dillon of the AFL. Mat Dillon was a Western gangster. We will check out his name, but we know it was not Mat Dillon. Let's get something straight about the United Automobile workers now. We have to get something straight. Mrs. Billups says it was an independent union, it was my assumption we are talking about the AFL Autoworkers now. We are in the Homer Martin period. Now, was Mr. Billups involved in organizing efforts during the Homer Martin period? You were an organzer for the AFL under Dillon, then under Homer Martin. This is what I want to get now. Were you organizing mainly among Negroes?

B. No.

H. Were there other Negro organizers besides yourself? Who were they?

T. Paul Kirk was one,

B. William Nowell, and Bates - no, he didn't come along until later. Walter Hardin-

H. Now, Walter Hardin became an important figure. Did you know Walter Hardin well? He was a colleague of yours? Would it be correct to assume, Mr. Tappes, that Walter Hardin and Mr. Billups were the two most prominent Negroes of this period? You were on the payroll of the UAW-AFL?

B. Yes, sometimes.

H. You went all over the state organizing. Did you have any success organizing?

B. Yes. My greatest success out of town was in Saginaw, at grey-iron foundries.

T. That union still exists.

H. You were mainly organizing Negroes then?

B. Well, anybody.

T. Weren't you also in on that New Haven foundry?

B. Yes. New Haven, Michigan, right above Mt. Clemens.

H. Did you find there was great resistance among the Negroes to joining the union?

B. No, but they were distrustful of the union, any union. They just didn't trust the union. They figured they would be used - used by white people, and then kicked out.

H. You had to fight against that - argue against that? And suggest thay should have some hope and faith in the union? How did you go about doing that?

B. By telling them that they would be members of unions themselves and elected to office.

H. Did they believe you?

B.. Yes, because in most of those places they were in a majority. So I would tell them, "You are in a majority, you're not going to let someone else take it away from you, attend your meetings, and vote. You can nominate your own, and elect your own." So, in that way, the foundry in Saginaw, there were about 6 or 7,000 Negroes in that foundry and we got them organized.

H. Into the UAW-AFL. Did you have any collective bargaining agreements? Did you have any representation rights? Yes? And then when Homer Martin was kicked out and the UAW became the CIO, did you go with the CIO?

B. I carried the membership lists and the cash over to the hotel and got a suite and stayed in the hotel over there by the Lafayette,the hotel Pick Fort Shelby. Anyway, I got a suite of rooms up there for the union, and had all the names.

H. And you transferred all this list and the cash to the CIO?

B. Yes.

H. What did you then do for the UAW-CIO? What were your first jobs? Were you organizing?

B. Yes, I was organizing. I was assigned to Fords.

(intervening conversation re chronology of events)

H. Now you supported the CIO at this time? You went to the founding conference of the UAW in Cleveland? Were there many Negroes at that meeting?

B. No.

H. Were you the only Negro staff person at that meeting?

B. No.

H. Were you and Walter Hardin the only staff persons?

T. They were the only UAW staff people, although John L. Lewis sent in some of his other staff people. For instance, Chris Alston was there. I think he was organizing among the tabacco workers then. And Paul Kirk was there. By then, Kirk was working part time, and he was there. There were quite a number of Negroes like me who were there as observers, but not delegates.

H. Now, let's, for a moment digress on this point. On this point, who were the Negroes? Can both of you recollect who were the Negroes at the founding convention of the UAW? In Cleveland in 1940?

T. This was really not the founding convention. It was really a reorganizational convention.

H. But it was the first really after the Detroit Meeting?

B. And the next day they got me again. I stayed over there six months.

H. An addition to the previous tape: we wish to note the fact that Mr. Billups went to jail during the first world war as a conscientious objector. Following the IWW policy, he refused to serve in an imperialist army. Correction also, on the previous tape: the founding convention of the UAW, regarded to be the Detroit meeting - no, the South Bend meeting. Now, to establish the chronology, the two meetings which went on in Detroit, the Homer Martin on the one hand, and the meeting which was to become the CIO, those went on simultaneously in Detroit in what Year? in 1939? In 1939. Next year, in 1940 we are in South Bend?

T. We were saying Cleveland, but I believe 1940 was in St. Louis.

H. 1939 was in Cleveland? That would be the founding convention?

M. They regard the South Bend convention, when the UAW-AFL was granted autonomy as the founding convention, the 1936 convention.

H. They regard the 1936 convention as the first? Well, that was when they had an AFL charter?

T. Right.

H. When did it become the UAW-CIO?

T. In 1939.

H. In 1939 in Detroit? Well, I will check this out. But what I want to establish, however, is Mr. Billups' participation in what we might regard as the first UAW-CIO convention. Let me ask you this, and I will work out the chronology later - were you at the UAW meeting in Detroit when the AFL was still fighting for control? That was when you took the money and the membership lists and you took them over to the CIO? We shall assume that was 1939. You transferred your money and your membership lists to the CIO? Wherever the next UAW convention may have been, you and Walter Hardin were there. You were on the staff. Were you and Walter Hardin the only Negroes?

Mrs. B. There was only one on the payroll. It was someone else. It was Frank Evans.

H. Now, is that Frank Evans from Cleveland?

Mrs. B. He went with the Homer Martin faction.

H. Yes. Frank Evans went with the Homer Martin faction, and Frank Evans later became a vice president with the Allied Industrial Workers. It was first the UAW-AFL, and it be-- came the Allied Industrial Workers, and Frank Evans is still there in Cleveland. But Frank Evens at that time was still with the UAW. We've established that. We'll interrupt this for just a minute. Shelton Tappes has to leave. No, Shelton Tappes is staying with us. He is not leaving. Now, you were involved in organizing at Ford, and you went into the Ford plant in the early 40's, in 1941. Right? yes.

Mrs. B. And Local 174 gave space-

H. 174, which was the GM local, on the west side.

Mrs. B. And Percy Llewellyn was president of the Committee. And then, out of this, a Committee was formed, and they organized ? to work. Of course, he was a star organizer. You know why. Because he had the touch. Of all the nationalities, like the Italian, the Polish, the Ukranian, the Finnish, the German-

H. There was no objection that you were a Negro organizer? There was no objection from the whites?

Mrs. B. No. In fact, they had more confidence in him than in white organizers. If he went there, he used to help. I think Brother Tappes will verify that he used to help the other organizers. And they said that each organizer should bring them so many members each day, or each week, or each month. And if they fell down, he was the one who gave them his membership to them in order to keep them on the staff.

H. Now, you were in the Addes-Thomas group in the UAW at this time. Most of the Negroes supported the Addes-Thomas faction.

B. Yes.

H. Very few Negroes supported the Reuther-Leonard faction, right? The original Reuther-Leonard faction?

B. Very few.

H. Why did most of the Negroes support the Addes-Thomas faction, and very few, if any, support the early Reuther-Leonard caucus?

B. I guess it was because of Thomas.-Thomas and Addes. They were both considered very liberal and fair.

H. Was the feeling that the Addes-Thomas faction was more advanced on the Negro question? More outspoken on Negro rights, and the Reuther people more conservative?

B. I don't know why they-

T. Maybe at this point I can offer a suggestion. There were - at the point of which we are talking now, there were about 7 or eight Negroes on the payroll, and all of these people were assigned to the office of R.J. Thomas. Well, one was assigned to the office of George Addes. None of the other International board members, regional officers, or officers would accept a Negro on his payroll, so these people were all assigned to the payroll of R.J. Thomas.

H. When the fight broke out openly for control of the union, you were prominently identified with the Addes-Thomas caucus. In addition to that, I find, from reading the Michigan Chronical of the time, you were involved in various internal Negro organizations within the UAW. Do you recall any of these things?

Mrs. B. There was the Nat Turner club.

H. The Nat Turner club, the Metropolitan Labor Council. I would like you to talk about the Nat Turner club, the Metropolitan Labor Council, and other, whatever their names might be, these were essentially euphemisms for Negro Caucuses within the UAW. The newspaper accounts would suggest that you played a very important role in these, Mr. Billups. What do you recall of this? And why did Negroes organize separate black caucuses within the union?

B. Well, for one thing, they didn't trust the white workers at that time - that was one thing. And then, too, they didn't want to be identified with it - they would lose their jobs, and so on, but in those other organizations, they would get into them. In the Nat Turner Club -

H. What year was the Nat Turner club?

Mrs. B. The Nat Turner Club was earlier -

B. The Nat Turner Club was more of a left-wing group.

H. Now, the Nat Turner Club was organized by the Communist Party, to organize Negro auto-workers, especially those inside the UAW. But it did not limit itself to those inside the UAW - it was essentially a Communist attempt to organize

Negro workers, not only auto workers, tho it worked out that way, but in some other industries too. They had a faction in the Rubberworkers, too, didn't they?

Mrs. B. A Firestone unit.

H. Right. I also have some information to indicate there were some laundry-workers who later entered into the laundry-workers section of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. In any case, the Nat Turner clubs were an early Communist organized group which coincided with the rise of the industrial union period, but for all pratical purposes it really became a kind of black caucus within the UAW. The others were in a supportive role. It really became a UAW internal caucus. Now, the records indicate that you were very active in the Nat Turner club. If you were not the leader, you were certainly one of the most important figures. Now, I would appreciate it very much if you would refresh your memory as best you can, and tell us about the Nat Turner club, and about the Metropolitan Council. Now this is very important, because here begins the internal caucuses within the UAW. My recollection is that the Nat Turner club was in the late 30's. It was quite early, before the UAW became important, but it continued on into the UAW period, and then it was transformed into the Metropolitan Council. If you could remember -

Mrs. B. It was an educational trade union, in order to educate the Negro, to get the fear out of them that they will be fired, and another thing, to integrate, whatever integration means.

H. Were white workers involved in the Nat Turner clubs?

Mrs. B. No. It was an all-Negro group, and it was not only workers, even professional's if they were ready to help.

H. Now the professionals were white?

Mrs. B. Mostly white - and to be frank about it: the CP was really the instigator for organizing Ford. They were the main people who knew the nationalities and the Negroes.

H. At this period the Communist Party, operating through nationality groups - the Communist Party, as a matter of fact, was organized on a nationality basis - there were the Hungarian Communists, the Greek Communists, the Jewish Communists. The Communist Party organized on a national self-determination basis using Lenin's theory of national self-

determination. They applied it to the American working class, and actually the Communist Party consisted of various nationality units, and there were various language newspapers, and in effect one did not belong to the Communist Party, one belonged to a nationality unit of the Communist Party. At this time, it was also true that the Nat Turner Club was really an effort to organize a Negro unit within the Communist Party, organizational, agitational, what we used to call agi-prop. It was an agi-prop unit of the CP during this period to organize a unit of Negroes, and later on this took several other forms. For practical purposes in Detroit this became a black caucus, although there were some other supporting blocs. Mr. Billups emerges as a central figure. Were you the head of the Nat Turner club?

B. Yes, I was the head of it.

H. You were the head of it. Tell us all you can about your activities in the Nat Turner club. How many people you think were around, what influence it had during its period? I recall from my researches it started about as early as 1937, and it then underwent a series of transformations. But, would you tell us what activity you did. Now, obviously, you were under the direction of the Communist Party at this point, which in Michigan operated as the Workers Party when it went on the ballot. Tell us all that you can recollect about your activity in the Nat Turner club.

B. Well, the Nat Turner Club turned out to be an unemployed club, taking care of evictions, turning on the lights, and so on. Where we could get people in under a certain name, the activities didn't vary much, you know. Just a struggle to put people back in their houses if they were evicted - just take the Nat Turner Club or the ILD -

H. The specific purpose of the Nat Turner Club was to educate Negroes as to industrial unionism, to bring them into the CIO.

B. That's right.

H. With the rise of the CIO, one of the major purposes - there was a fundamental turn, the Communist Party gave up its Trade-Union Unity League, its own educational unit, its own independent unions which it had controlled, and now it called for the movement of Negro workers, white workers, all industrial workers into the new industrial unions of the CIO.

When the Communist Party gave up its own independent unions, it called for the organization of all worker into the new CIO industrial unions. The Communist Party played a very important role here - and elsewhere. It was not just limited to Detroit. Detroit, Chicago, New York, elsewhere, some on the west coast. Now, one of your most important functions after 1940, was to bring Negroes into the new CIO industrial unions, autoworkers into the UAW, primarily, here in Detroit. Would you tell us a little about that, about your activities in the early 40's in bringing Negros in the UAW?

B. Well, the only thing I can say about it, indirectly, we would get people who were acquainted with some worker in the shop and have them to concentrate on him - just so many. That was a division of work we had. Whatever factory we were trying to organize, we would try to find out how many people they knew from that plant, and to concentrate on them, getting them into the union.

Mrs. B. May I say that women played a great part in organizing at Ford?

H. Negro women?

Mrs. B. We brought in the Negro women into the organization, because the wives were afraid the husbands, the Negro husbands would join the union and lose their jobs, so we had to go in, individually, even if we couldn't get them in. That's how I began to organize the Auxiliary of the group.

H. You were the organizer of the Auxiliary for 600?

Mrs. B. I was the first chairman of it. We used to go over there, explaining to the women that they should lose their fear. If their husband joins we will be responsible, we will see to it that they have their jobs, and how much better conditions if the husband doesn't come home drunk, or the husband doesn't come home sick. We had to tell them that, that this brings happiness, in the family, and the only way to get these things is by joining, and coming in, and some of them became dear friends. And the Negro women - some of them gave me, I used to bring them to Mike Widman, applications that they didn't believe it - they used to laugh that I could bring in memberships. Each woman used to bring in one member, two members, because I was promising that no one would know but myself. I used to go to the saloon, in the alleys, to meet the Negroes.

They gave me their dues, and I used to bring them to Mike Widman. Mike Widman was in charge, and he was very much surprised. In the end when the strike was settled, he gave me a big button, "Volunteer Organizer" They got all paid for it, but we didn't get a cent. So that's how we really became a force, before the local came into existence. It was a secret underground organization it had no name, and I was a member of Local 174, and I joined the auxiliary of 174, but I really was a Ford worker.

H. I see. Now, Mr. Billups, how long do you remember being on the UAW staff as an organizer? What year did you stop being a staff member?

B. When the split in the organization - that's when I stopped, because of the split.

H. When Walter Reuther took office, you went off the staff. That would have been after the 1943 convention?

T. I think we're getting two things mixed up. He's talking about the Homer Martin split. He came back on the staff, temporarily, during the successful Ford organizing drive.

H. During the successful Ford organizing drive, 1940-41, Mr. Billups was an official, paid organizer for the UAW-CIO.

T. For the Ford organizing committee.

H. For the Ford organizing committee of the UAW-CIO. How long did he remain?

T. He remained until July of 1941.

H. Was that your last official position with the UAW?

T. I believe so. I think he was a delegate to one of the conventions later on.

H. But you remained in the shop, as a worker?

Mrs. B. That was in 1941, do you remember, we had detectives in the house asking you to become a service man? They said he was tall, and he was very well developed, and he was well at that time, and he doesn't have to work very hard. And they came to see me.

B. They wanted to make me a stool pigeon.

Mrs. B. They came back, and that was in 1941. I asked him who he is, and he said he is a service man.

H. This is an interesting point. A representative of the Ford Motor Company Service Bureau came to your home in 1941 and offered Mr. Billups a job in the Ford Service Department.

That would have been an undercover job. You rejected that, of course?

Mrs. B. He wasn't at home at that time, he had gone fishing. In 1941 you were fired. Do you remember that time? Was it 1941 he was fired? He was fired three times, I know. This was the last time. And I told them, that he was not home. They said they saw they couldn't do much with me, so said they would call tomorrow, when he's home.

H. So -by the way, when you say employed in the plant, you mean the Rouge plant?
After 1941 you were out of a job at the Rouge plant, is that right?

T. No, no. He went back into the Rouge in 1941. After he left the UAW staff he went into the plant.

H. How long did you stay in the plant?

B. I think I stayed in the plant about 8 to 10 months, something like that.

T. You were in the salvage department, you recall, in the foundry department.

H. Were you active in union affairs?

B. Yes.

H. There are some who think you were one of the leaders in the caucus in the left wing, in the Addes faction. You were one of the major ones?

B. Yes.

H. Now, there was a Negro caucus inside the union, wasn't there? You were an active participant in that caucus? In fact, you and Walter Hardin were probably the leaders of it?

T. No, Walter Hardin wasn't. He was not involved in the black caucus.

H. Who were the other Negroes involved?

T. Well, the Caucus you are speaking of - remember when Ford was organized, Germany was already marching through Europe. In December 1941 Pearl Harbor was attacked. Ford, even then, was setting up certain sections of the plant which would be involved in war production. And they were building war plants on the Rouge property. Several buildings were in the process of going up then, the aircraft building, the luna(?) foundry, the steel foundry, now known as the specialties foundry, and one or two others.

But the Negro caucus, which you're speaking of, was almost forced upon the Negro. Now at Ford, fortunately for us, we had a real vigorous organizing campaign, which involved all the people in the shop, despite the reluctance of the Negroes, to a certain extent. Their participation was much more full,in the Ford drive, than it was in the Chrysler, or General Motors-

H. Why was it?

T. I think the UAW had learned some lessons by then, and on the Ford organizing staff they had more organizers. Secondly, as I told you, the Negro Ford organizing committee, which was a volunteer committee which met every Sunday morning in the Ford headquarters, were advising the Ford organizing staff on things to do which would involve and appeal to the Negro people. One thing they did, they had a special edition of Ford Facts, which they put out during the organizing drive. They had sub-headquarters in the Negro community, west and east and north, storefront type and these were manned by Negroes -Negroes were placed in charge. Negro stenographers were put in there to process the applications, and things like this. And the organizing staff was integrated in more than one way. In other words, white organizers went out to work with Negro organizers in the Negro community, Negro organizers went out with white organizers to work in the white community. For example, during the height of the drive, most of the organizing I did was in the Mexican community. There were over a hundred Mexican Ford workers who joined the union directly through me. So this all aided in the climate which existed in Fords.

H. Which was absent at General Motors and Chrysler?

T. Which was absent in other local unions.

H. Now I would like to ask you a question before you continue- a very important question, one that historians will be studying for a long time. The situation you have just described, very eloquently, was very different from what was going on in the rest of the labor movement, and even the rest of the UAW. Would you say that the reason for this zealous, even evangelical organizing effort, but also the sensitivity on the race question, the insistance on an integrated, intterracial operation, a real sensitivity to the problems of Negroes, would you say that the strong, Communist Party

influence in the Ford organizing effort was primarily responsible for this spirit?

T. There is no doubt of it.

H. Was this a contribution of the Communist Party?

T. I would say yes.

H. Would you want to elaborate on this point a little bit?

T. Elaboration would be along the line of several factors, that contributed, indirectly, from the pre-UAW days. For example, the Ford Hunger March, and the activities of the Unemployed Councils, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, which had paved the way, so to -speak, and created the atmosphere for collaboration among the races for efforts of this kind, for Ford, being as huge as it was, would naturally have a larger number of the people who had been involved in these struggles. So the orientation was there. I was just thinking of the little plaque up there, of the four who were killed in the Hunger March. One of those faces is a Negro face.

H. What was his name?

T. Curtis Williams.

H. Would you pick it up there? You're suggesting there was a radical theme in the 30's, which carried over into the 40's. Why was this not carried through also in the G.M. and Chrysler drives? Why did the Communist Party concentrate in the Ford plant?

T. There was one advantage at Ford. You had a high concentration of people in one place, and also a high concentration of Negroes. And each nationality group - there were large numbers of them - Hungarians, many Maltese, many Italians, Poles, and more Jewish factory workers at Ford than anywhere else.

H. More Jewish factory workers, in spite of Ford's open anti-Semitism?

T. There weren't many Jewish people working in any of the plants.

H. That's right.

T. But more at Fords than anywhere else. Now, we're really talking about the Negro caucus, so I'm really trying to get back to that. I just wanted to lay the groundwork to show that there were really very few Negroes from Ford involved in the Metropolitan Labor Council for the same reasons that the others were. Now, in the early World

War II war production efforts, Chrysler and General Moters plants went into war production faster than Ford did. Ford had to be forced into it, really, by the government. So that at Murray Body, Chrysler 7, Plymouth which is 51, and some other plants, where the Negro's rights were not respected to the degree they were at Rouge, upgrading was a problem. Packard was another I should have mentioned. So that the Negroes - I think Local 7 was the first - came to organize what they called victory committees. There was a victory committee at Chrysler Jefferson plant which was a large group of people - about 300 belonged to it. They paid dues into it, met regularly, and actually went into the local union meetings as a caucus, to fight for their rights.

H. Excuse me, this is not the double-victory committee?

T. No, no. That was, I think an NAACP committee. Well, the Pittsburgh Courier really initiated this. V for victory, at home and abroad. Murray Body took the idea and set up a similar group, under the leadership of Prince Clark. Perry at Packard organized a similar group, all when they saw the success at Chrysler. So this spread around the city. So as a full-time officer of Local 600, and becoming aware of this activity, I thought it would be better if all these groups were brought together as one body and concentrate the force of these groups. They could then apply to the International and insist on their constitutional rights as UAW members.

H. These were mainly Negroes?

T. Yes, mainly Negroes, and consequently, force the UAW to see that these local unions applied their contracts equally to the Negro and the white workers.

H. The victory committees were essentially black caucuses that were now openly functioning under the guise of victory committees, ostensibly to aid the war effort in the war against fascism, but also, if not predominantly, for the purpose of realizing the potential of the Negro piled up within the union - safeguard of seniority rights, promotions on the union staff as well as on the job, etc.

T. And force the plants to hire Negro women?

H. One of your strong demands was the employment of Negro women in non-traditional jobs Now, what was the reaction of the UAW leadership?

T. Well, by the time the UAW leadership had begun to respect these Negro committees, they had already been federated, into the Metropolitan Labor Council.

H. Now the Metropolitan Labor Council was founded formally, in what year?

T. It was founded in 1943.

H. The membership base of the Metropolitan Labor Council was the Victory Committees, which were organized by Negro workers in Detroit - Did this also include plants outside Detroit?

T. It eventually spread into Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Lansing, Muskeegon and Bay City.

H. Were there organization expressions of this outside of Michigan,or was this mainly limited to Michigan?

T. There were, later, similar groupings in Memphis, Tennessee, in the Harvester plant, and in the Ford plant in Kentucky, and in Atlanta. Actually, the Atlanta group is still in existence.

H. Now what we are saying is terribly important, for we're saying that, beginning with Mr. Billups, in early Negro trade union groups, there is a continuity of Negro trade union activity, first, outside the formal structure of the union, and then continuing as a black caucus within the union, and still existing today. Now, at this period of the Victory Committees, you were the chairman?

T. I was the first chairman, yes.

H. Was Mr. Billups active?

T. Yes, he was.

H. Who were the other leaders?

T. Oh, Hodges Mason was a leader of the group, Jimmy Walker from 205, John Conyers, Paul Kirk, Bill Lattimore, just about every - Lillian Hatcher - just about every active Negro who was working in a UAW plant.

H. So you became a pressure group. The Victory committees became a pressure group upon the UAW leadership. Up until the 1943 Buffalo convention, the Addes-Thomas forces were in control of the union. What was their reaction, and what was the reaction of the Reuther-Leonard faction? To the Victory committee, which you say now began to function openly?

They are federated, they were legitimatized.

T. There were several activities, major activities that the Victory committees and the Metropolitan Labor Council engaged themselves in. I won't say that the Addes-Thomas group were too happy about it, but they tolerated it because these people were their supporters, in the main, and the Reuther group usually encouraged their own people to join. There was Newman and Sheffield and one or two others that joined. There was Butler.

H. Now that name pops up for the first time. What was his first name? Well, that's all right.

T.. But the role they usually served was to disrupt our meetings, throw in ridiculous proposals, things like this, and object to courses of action which were decided upon.

H. Was George Crockett active in this?

T. No, no, George wasn't. I wanted to give you an example of the kinds of things the Metropolitan Labor Council addressed itself to. In the year 1943 the local - I forget the number, Graham-Paige was still in existence then. That local is now the Willow Run local, because Kaiser bought out Graham-Paige and established his plant there. This local union was not a part of the Metropolitan Labor council, but when they heard of it, they came down with a problem. In fact, I remember Mr. Carrol, who is a councilman in the city of Inkster was one of the Negro leaders in that plant. The plant was located on Warren, near Wyoming, where the Arlan store is now, that was part of it. He came to the Metropolitan Labor Council, to one of our meetings with a problem - and here was the problem: the local union members had voted to assess themselves $1.00 to raise funds for recreational activities. There were about 3200 members in the local, so when the assessment went through, the company collected it, and turned it over to the local treasury, where it went into the recreational fund, and this $3200 was made available to the recreation committee to arrange some kind of function or affair for all the members of the local. So they met, and they came back to the local with a report which said, "we'll go to Bob-lo." "We'll rent the Bob-lo boat and go to Bob-lo". The motion was put upon the floor, and in the discussion on the motion, one of the

Negro members got up and said, "Why, why do you select Bob-lo?" Negroes are not allowed on the Bob-lo island, and the answer was, "well, we know that, but we've decided we'll have a picnic for the Negro members later on, when we get back." So, of course, there was quite a row about it, but the motion passed. So Mr. Carroll came to the Metropolitan Labor Council with this problem. So we asked him when the affair was to take place - this was Monday night. And he said they were leaving Thursday, of the same week. So we had very little time to do anything, except put out as much pressure as possible.

H. What year was this?

T. 1943. So what we did was to formulate a telegram, upon which each person there was to sign his name, and everybody chipped in enough money to pay for the wire which was quite a long one, with eighty or ninety names on this wire. We dispatched this to the International President, and then I set up a committee to make some picket signs, and we agreed we weren't going to do this - the leadership wasn't - but we thought it was better not to say this, because it wouldn't have the effect. We informed the International president in the wire, by the way, that the signs were being prepared and that we would be at the Bob-Lo boats on Thursday. So he ordered the president of that local to call a special meeting, and he sent one of his representatives out there to talk to the people. The people in the local still insisted on going to Bob-lo. They had put a $500 deposit on the boat and they were going. So the only thing Thomas could do was exercise authority - I don't know what kind of authority you call it, but he called it off, and the International had to pick up the deposit- in fact, they paid the local union for the money they lost, because the boat company would not return it. But this is what we stopped; now, another function of the group was - there were no Negro women on the staff at that time. They had three or four women, but no Negro women. So the Metropolitan Labor Council insisted - we met with R.J. Thomas, we sent a Committee down to meet with him, and we asked that they place a Negro woman on, but he surprised us by agreeing right away. He said, "Find me one," and actually this is how we decided on Lillian Hatcher, and recommended her to the International.

H. Did you also conduct a struggle to get Negro women in the plants? Could you tell us about some of your victories here?

T. We organized several picket lines. We would contact the local union about Negro women not working there, and usually their excuse was that the company wouldn't hire them, and they had no contractual rights to approach the company on the question. So this usually resulted in - I might say that Mrs. Billups and her auxiliaries were very helpful, because every picket line we ever put up they were there with us, full body - the first picket line on behalf of Negro women was put out at the Ford Highland Park plant.

H. What year?

T. That was in 1943. Another at the Plymouth plant, but it wasn't so much to get them to hire Negro women as it was to get them to upgrade them. Plymouth was placing them all in one department, and holding them in that department, and restricting their promotional rights and their seniority rights. We won that one. And the largest picket line we ever had was at the Ford Rouge. Ford, for some reason or other, just wouldn't place women in the Rouge. And when we approached him on the hiring question, officers of the local approached the Ford Motor Company on the hiring of Negro women, they said they would; and they did, through the Rouge hiring facilities, but they shipped them out to Ypsilanti and other hiring plants, but wouldn't hire them at Rouge. So I took the question to the Local 600 Executive Board. The Board agreed to sponsor a picket line, involving the entire Rouge local union structure. So, despite the objections of our president - Paul St. Marie objected to the picket line, the officers of the local and the officers of the auxiliary. And the line stretched all the way from Gate 2 to Gate 4, and I think it lasted about three hours that one day, and the company informed us they would talk about it; in our negotiations with them, we agreed we would not wait until they hired and trained. We insisted they transfer the women from the outlying plants into Rouge, because most of them lived in Detroit anyway. We thought since they were Ford workers they should have the priority rights to work at Rouge. And I might say that Liz Jackson

was one of the girls, and she is on the staff now. I'm sure you've met Juanita Cunningham - she was- another. They've been there ever since.

H. What was the reaction of the International union to your activity?

T. I don't now recall the International taking a position one way or the other. I know Richard T. Leonard was the national Ford director, and I don't recall that he was in the picket line, but I do believe his assistant was, a fellow by the name of Podi.

H. Did Reuther give you any support?

T. No.

Mrs. B. May I say something here? Leonard and I once had a very strong conversation on racism. Of course, he knew of my marriage to Mr. Bullups, and he made a remark that he couldn't make it out, and then I knew he was a Fascist. He knew the activity of Mr. Billups, and he knew the activity of myself, and he made a remark, he couldn't understand how I came into to marrying Mr. Billups, and later in the conversation I realized what he was talking about. I tried just to ? to talk, and then I realized he is even on segregation in the factories, he had the same opinion: not to be too fast to advance Negroes. I said, "You mean to tell me, a Negro who is there twenty years, and he's just as good - he cannot be promoted on his job? Cannot take up his grievances as good as a white one?" He said, "I didn't say that." He was afraid, so I said, "What did you say? You said we should not push them so fast in the factory." "Educate them," "Well," I said, "we certainly agree on one thing, that the union should educate the worker, and tell them how difficult it was to bring the union into the shop. But don't tell me they cannot be advanced. Educate the workers as trade unionists, but don't push them too fast? You're supposed to have men to take care of Ford factory, aren't you? Just then someone else came in, and I had one man talking about discrimination. I don't know whether Brother Tappes knows it, but when we were supposed to get a charter for the Women's Auxiliary, I was called in, but I will not meniton that name, because the party has changed very much, and he said to me, "Rose, you deserve all the credit in the world. You are a born organizer, and through

your efforts-" he gave me a very high honor, but he had about 50% Southern workers,and we would break up the Auxiliary (we had about 1000 women) "and you would break it up if you became president." And do you know what I said, I said, "I'll never break the union, and I'll never break the Auxiliary, and if you feel that way, I'll just be a member, and elect anyone you want." They did; they elected another woman, a charter member, Ena Butts (?) but I refused to be on the Board. But Mike Widman persuaded me, when he said, "You are the life of it. Please do me a favor and remain." And Babe Gelles (?) came over, and she cried, and she said, "Rose, remain on the Board," so I remained trustee for about 19 years, but I refused to take the chairmanship.

H. I would like to go back a little bit now,back to Mr. Billups. Were you active in the fight between the Reuther-Leonard and Addes-Thomas factions.

B. I don't remember now.

Mrs. B. He was.

T. Oh yes, he was. Actually, I think I have to give Joe the credit for teaching the differences in philosophy to the foundry workers in our meetings, and I will say that through the efforts of Mr. Billups, of myself, Veal Clough,and a few others, we have a record, or,had a record in the foundry of pretty much consistently following the program that was advocated by the Addes group through, and including the year that Reuther was elected president.

H. Would it be correct to say that Mr. Billups and you performed an educational function that you tried to raise the disputes and the program to an ideological level, that you did not simply want to proceed from one fight to another, from one argument to another, but you attempted to maintain some ideological unity among the Negro workers - that you anticipated what in a later period was called "Black Power" in an attempt to realize the potential of Negroes within the union?

T. When you put it that way, I suppose it is true because I personally felt that the Negro had lost out in too many years of the growth and the development of the labor movement, and therefore was short of his share of the participation in the fruits=

H. You refer to 1943?

T. I'm speaking of 1943, and even earlier that -

H. That the Negro was being denied the potential sharing in the victory?

T. Right. I felt that his best opportunity of evolving was through those segments of the union where he had the strength -the strength in numbers, and therefore in Local 600, where he had the foundry as a base of operation that this was the best opportunity we ever had for developing Negro leadership. Actually, it took a lot of convincing to get me to run for office in that local union, because I wanted to build a strong, forceful union in the foundry. We were way ahead of the other units at the time the Local was granted autonomy. We already had our educational committee, we were going very thoroughly: people were learning their parliamentary law, they were learning their contract, they were learning union procedures, they were learning something about their constitution. We had already raised enough money to purchase a sound car for the foundry, we had a newspaper which was published every two weeks.

H. What was it called?

T. The Production Foundry Spotlight, that was the name of the foundry in those days, and we had a massive recreational program.

H. How many were there in the production foundry at that time?

T. Well, the total population of the foundry was about 13,000. I remember getting the foundry administration (I'm speaking of the company now) into an agreement that we would work on the plant level, that the Administration would have to turn over to me the population figures each month, and the highest figures I ever got was 13,208.

H. This was around 1943-1944?

T. Well, earlier than that, around 1941-1942.

H. And what proportion, would you say, of those were Negro?

T. I'd say at that time, around 70%.

H. You perceived this as developing leadership not only within the union, but also within the community, as well?

T. That's right. And I think that the development of the leadership in the foundry became so well known throughout the city, that I think it encouraged Negroes to participate in union activities in other plants and other locals.

H. Right. Now, with the emergence of the Reuther leadership after 1943, in retrospect, looking backward, would you say that leadership, and the smashing of the Addes caucus represented a step backward for the Negro worker? They began to lose their control and their power?

T. Well, I think we may be placing too much blame on an individual-

M. The Reuther leadership. I'll say it this way, the destruction of the left wing destroyed the strength and the voice and the potentiality promised by the Negro leadership, and has failed to create any further development of Negro leadership. The Negro leadership, before the destruction of the left wing, was pretty widespread. It was at a healthy level, and there were numbers of literate, well-spoken Negroes who could handle themselves on the floor. And they weren't all from one source. They were from throughout the International Union, but for some reason or other, whatever it is, this development reached a certain level, and then it seemed to decline. It may be that too many are placed on the International payroll, the cream of the local leadership is taken out of the locals, placed on the International payroll, made subser-vient to the administration, and lose their independence and their base.

H. And of course some were forced out of the union, out of the shops entirely. What you're saying is that the left wing - what we will call the left wing - for want of a more accurate term at the moment - raised the level of the debate about the Negro question, made it into an ideological question at conventions, and at union meetings, continued to make the Negro question a crisis issue within the unionn at all times; continued to persist in introducing the Negro question on a host of issues, and also to function within the community. With the samshing of the left wing, this really came to an end, didn't it?

T. The Negro issue lost a champion.

H. In the period between 1943 and 1949, when the Communists were formally expelled from the CIO, and even though tomorrow morning when we talk, we're going to go into greater detail about internal compromises and developments within the Fair Practices Department, the setting up of ehe co-administratorship, and all - we'll take that in more detail tomorrow=

but now I just want to develop more generally with the question of ideology. Would you say that the expulsion of the Communist-controlled unions, and the Communist-controlled figures in the 1949 CIO convention, that this, what you've just described, became generally true of the whole CIO, with the expulsion of certain Negro figures like Vittorio Garvin(?) You knew Garvin, didn't you, with Blackie Meyers, in the Maritime Union, with the Negro leadership which emerged in the Office and Professional Workers - would you say this in general - this could be generalized that the situation you just described in the UAW became general in the CIO?

T. Yes, I think so. One union I think gave promise of great possible future leaders was the Farm Equipment Workers. They had some young men-

H. Who were some of them?

T. One of them was named Jones.

H. Do you remember some of the Negro names? Well, maybe you will later. How about the Food, Tabacco, and ? union-Henderson union?

T. I remember meeting a few of these people but I don't recollect now personal contacts too much. And then in Mine-Mill, they had staff people, they had officers, local union officers, all of whom were lost.

H. One of the great riddles, and you have touched upon it, but let us pose it very sharply now - was that during the 40's, Negro leadership emerged in several union, packing house workers, UAW, rubber, FTA, FE,OPWA, National Maritime Union, and to a lesser degree in steel, and ? Negro leadership began to emerge which gave great promise - which showed real leadership talent, and emerged as a very significant force in Negro community life and in the general civil rights struggle articulate, and in many ways far more educated than the white workers, gave promise that here was a potential for the emergence of a new Negro leadership cadre. This potential, this promise was never realized. In the UAW, in Packinghouse, in no union was it realized. We have to raise the question, "Why was this Negro leadership beheaded?" Why did it never go anywhere? Why was it destroyed? You've given one factor as an explanation, the general smashing of the left wing in organized labor. To a significant

degree, with very rare exceptions, the context of this new Negro industrial union leadership was within the context of the Communist orbit, if not within the Communist party. The Communists provided a certain framework for the operation and functioning of these groups. Is that correct?

T. Well, I never considered myself a follower of the Communist line, but I was a left winger. I'm sure there were many others. I think the Communist Party was blamed for too much it was not guilty of.

H. Actually, I think we give them much more credit than they deserve.

T. I don't think credit is the word - actually, I said they were blamed too much.

H. I interpret that as a sort of credit.

T. I worked with Joe Billups. I knew him from a young man- as a teenager, really, and I knew him as a leader. And then I knew him as a fellow worker in later years. But Joe Billups as yet, for the first time has to ask me to join the Communist Party. And of all the Communists I knew, and of some I suspected were Communists and never told me, but of all those who I knew were Communists because they told me, but I never agreed the only purpose the Communists had was to build the Communist Party by using the people in the trade union movement. I found that they were working people who wanted to better their conditions, and the conditions of their fellow workers. And of course there were certain functionairies who had assignments and responsibilities. And there were programs which were brought in to the union for the assistance and support of the union, some openly, some sinisterly, that's true. But I don't know of any group which was innocent of the same thing. When the Catholic Trade Unionists would meet and pass a resolution, this resolution would appear in some form before a local union of the UAW, and the same thing about the Socialist, or any other group. We in the trade union movement have a responsibility for evaluating a program; you heard Mr. Billups say that back in the early 30's in mass meetings held in Grand Circus Park, the Unemployed Councils, which everyone agrees was formed mainly through the efforts of the Communist Party, but a very precious...

H. Let's do one other thing- let's go back to the continuity of black cauceses inside the UAW. We can say that first was the Nat Turner Club, then the Victory Committees which became the basis for the Metropolitan Council. Was that the full name, by the way?

T. No, the full name was the Metropolitan Detroit Negro Labor Council.

H. The Metropolitan Detroit Negro Labor Council.

T. Then it became the Metropolitan Labor Council

H. The Metropolitan Labor Council. What were some of the other groups after the Metropolitan Labor Council that were essentially forms of Negro caucus activity?

T. Well, the very latest, in which the format has changed considerably, is TULC.

H. Was there anything in between?

T. None that I recall. There may have been within local unions. For instance, Dodge at one time had a Negro caucus. And there are probably several locals now where the Negroes get together and make certain decisions which they take together to a larger caucus. But I know of no standardized Negro caucus operating very strongly or within a local.

H. Mr. Billups, did you participate in any way in the developments in the Packard plant, or in the Hudson plant, where the white workers struck against the participation of Negroes? Were you involved in anyway in any of that activity?

B. Well, I was an international representative.

H. You were an international representative in what situation?

B. I was an international representative and sent into that situation.

H. Into the Packard situation?

B. I don't remember now what union it was, whether it was the Autoworkers, or the UAW now. I think it was the UAW.-not the old UAW, the later organization. But I wasn't sent out there.

H. What year were the Hudson events?

Mc. 1943, the same year as the race riots.

T. Yes, 1943, before the riots, I believe.

H. What year was the Packard?

T. That was before the riots, too. It must have been late in 1942, or early in 1943. I believe both incidents were in 1943.

H. 1943? After the great Southern influx into Detroit?

T. Yes.

H. Would you like to discuss the response of the International union? In 1943 Reuther was in control? He didn't control the Board, but he was president?

T. No, he wasn't president in 1943. Reuther became president in 1946. R.J. Thomas was president in 1943.

H. R.J. Thomas was still president in 1943?

T. Yes. He was on the National War Labor Board, and most of R.J.'s work was in Washington,D.C.. The President called on him very often. I guess, next to Sidney Hillman, the President leaned on R.J. Thomas, quite a lot. So that UAW operations were mostly conducted by his assistants, George Addes, and Victor Reuther, who was head of the War Policy Division. When the Packard - I'm more familiar with the Packard situation, for R.J. called me at my office, and asked me to be his personal representative, and told me that whatever I did to clear up the situation and get people back on the job, would have his complete backing, so I went to Packard.

H. Would you describe what the situation was at Packard?

T. The situation at Packard was this: a lot of pressure had been put on the local union because Negroes were restricted to certain menial jobs in the production area. They worked in the foundries, but during the war they had been sent into other areas of the plant, the machine sections of the plant where machining was being done, work that had been denied them earlier, riveting and thing like that. The main contract that Packard had was the making of the Rolls Royce engine which was used in the bomber plants in England, principally for the defense of England, and this was through a contract with the Rolls Royce corporation of the British Isles - of Great Britian, so there was a critical need for these engines, and the labor shortage which was throughout this area was very acute. The company decided they would begin upgrading some of the people in the shop. There were many pressures in that direction anyway, so they responded by upgrading a few Negroes. The result was that people began walking off their jobs.

H. Excuse me, but could we be a little more specific here. What specific jobs were the Negroes promoted to?

T. They were promoted to machine operations - milling machines, punch presses, lathes -

H. These were production jobs?

T. All production jobs. Now, heretofore, Negroes were working, but they were working a s chip -

H. Helpers?

T. Helpers, cleaners, and thing like this. So the white workers in several of these rooms walked out. This crippled the plant to the point that the plant went out of production.

H. How many workers were there?

T. The workers then were about 15,000. So I was asked by R.J. Thomas, as I said, to go to the plant and see what I could do. I went to the local union headquarters and tried to, attempted to talk to the officers. The president of that local was Norman Mathews. I don't believe they had a vice-president, because the vice president had gone into the war and Norman Matthew as vice president had moved up into the presidency. I was - I never got a chance to meet with the president, so I talked with the members of the bargaining committees, and asked them to get permission from the president to hold,to call a meeting of the local union. I never heard from the president, so I called one anyway, in Dom Polski Hall. There were about a thousand came to the meeting. The Hall wouldn't hold very many more, in fact, I doubt that it would actually hold a thousand seated, for there were so many seated around the walls and on the outside of the building, I had convinced the regional director that he should talk to them.

H. Who was the regional director?

T. Leo La Motte. The officers of the local never did come to the meeting. The director did talk, and his assistant talked. I don't remember his name, but his face is very clear to me. The regional director talked, and his assistant talked, and then they left the meeting in my hands. The only people on the platform were myself and one member of the plant bargaining committee. Well, I talked to people and they listened; but they didn't go back to work. So this went on day after day. Several days we held these same meetings. Finally, after about four days they agreed to go back. So they went back into the plant, and that afternoon the Negroes refused to go to work. On the afternoon shift the Negroes refused to go back to work.

H. The whites -

T. The afternoon shift, it would have been the production shift. So the word had gotten around town that the Packard people were going back to work, so the afternoon shift turned out quite well. A large percentage of that shift, I would say, was ready to go back in. But most of the Negroes who worked in the plant, other than in the foundry,came to the local union hall, so we had a meeting with them. They were refusing to go to work.

H. Was this why you had the meeting?

T. Yes. They were saying, "These white people walked out because they didn't want to work with us. Why should we respond as soon as they are ready to go to work? Why should we go in there under the same condition as when we left? If they can strike, we can strike." So we, we - I am speaking of myself, and one member of the bargaining committee who stayed with me all through this, John K. Daniels, by the way, who is on the International Staff now. We had quite a talk with these fellows. Christopher Alston was the leader of the Negro group. He was the chief steward in the foundry, and finally talking with these fellows we convinced them they should get back to work, the only terms on which the Company would sit down and agree to discuss the matter with us. So they didn't go back to work that afternoon. The whole plant was out of work, but we finally got them to agree they would go back to work the next day. So finally we met with the company, and the company said, "There's no need to meet with us, for our position is the same. These people shall be upgraded." So this put the onus, of course, on the local union. Well, not to go into too much detail, the problem was eventually solved on the basis of every worker to be upgraded on the basis of his seniority, and respecting their rights to be promoted, not only upgraded, but to be promoted through the bid system on job openings. Of course, there was the appeal by the Army through a Col. Strong, on the basis of patriotism.

H. Excuse me, what was the basis of this appeal?

T. Well, he appealed on the basis of need.

H. I mean, did he make a speech?

T. Yes, he made a speech.

H. He told all the workers together.

T. He attended our meeting.

H. He talked to the Negroes. Did he speak to the white workers?

T. Yes.

H. Was there ever any discussion of the Army taking the plant over?

T. Well, there was always this threat, but very seldom was there ever an attempt to do this. I think only once or twice in the Detroit area during the whole course of the war, and they were small plants, really tool plants.

H. So, essentially, you regard it as a successful resolution at Packard?

T. That's right.

H. So they held permanently to their gains.

T. There was an advantage, during these meetings we were holding with the Negroes, to pump a little more unionism into them, because there were many Negroes who would pay their dues, and then if their grievances weren't solved, they wouldn't pay dues any more. This was the only way they could punish the union. So we told them the only way they could maintain the right to fight for the things you are entiltled to, is always to be a member in good standing in the union. So I got a lot of people to pay dues, and in the course of our meetings we found out that the by-laws of Local 190 provided that any vacancy among the Exectutive officers should be filled at the next regular membership meeting. And we pointed out to them that the average meeting of a Packard local consisted of a turn out of about 300 people. And we told them there were more than 300 in this room right here. So if you are to turn out at your next membership meeting in the same numbers you are here now, you could elect a Negro vice-president.

H. Was there a similar situation at the Hudson Plant?

T. Well the strike was similar type strike. Actually, Hudson and Continental Motors - I believe they both went out at the same time. Continental was right next door well, I should say, next block.

H. Describe the situation at Hudson.

T. Well, I don't know exactly the details of the Hudson situation; I know it was a hate strike, as we called them, and it was based on either hiring or upgrading. I suspect it was more hiring than on upgrading, because Continental, even today, doesn't hire as they should.

H. And at Hudson it was mainly promotion?

T. Mainly promotion.

H. And did the union also win there?

T. Yes, they also won there. In fact, Hudson became one of the better plants in later years.

H. The International on the whole played an honorable role in these disputes?

T. Yes, always.

H. Both factions?

T. Both factions. On the local union level, both sides would use there matters. But at the International level, it was never used.

H. Would you say the existence of a factional situation was favorable to the winning of Negro demands?

T. I'm sure they were - at the local union level, and in the demands we made at the International level.

H. The fact that both factions were vying for the Negro vote gave the Negro power. It varied from time to time, it wasn't a Negro organization, but the factional situation gave the Negro additional leverage?

T. For many years the factional fight in the choosing of sides, especially in elections Local 600 always guaranteed there would be at least one Negro officer, so that my opposition was usually a Negro chosen by the other side.

H. So this was guaranteeing that Negroes ran for office. No matter which side won-

T. A Negro would be elected.

H. Mr. Billups, what do you see for the present and the future? What is your feeling -are you unhappy, depressed about the present situation in the UAW? Do you feel that some of the hopes you had many years ago that a strong, powerful union would come about, and that Negro would use that union as a significant force for community change, and that Negroes would share in the power of the union? How do you feel about the current situation?

B. I don't take any part now -

Mrs. B. You know for the last five years - for 10 years he's practically out.

H. So you have no feelings about the present situation?

B. No.

H. Do you have any hopes for the future?

B. Yes, I see hopes for the future - but I don't take any part in politics - stay home and read the papers, to tell me what's going on.

H. How do you feel, Mr. Tappes, about the present situation? Do you think the potential for Negro leadership and power has been realized? Are you optimistic about the future?

T. Well, that's something I would prefer to do a lot of thinking about. There are so many factors that enter into present day activities and situations. The transition that has taken place hasn't firmed up yet. You have the new production methods, the changeing character of the autoworker. We estimate that 70% of the people working at the Rouge have less than than ten years seniority, and half of those less than five years, which means there is a terrific turnover. Most of these people don't have the orientation we had when I was in the shop, or when Mr. Billups was in the shop. Up till five years ago I could walk through the factory, the rolling mill,the open hearth at the Rouge units, and it would take me over a half-hour to walk from one part of the plant to another, because there would be so many people who would want to shake hands, talk, things like that. But now I can walk through in five minutes. So, you wonder what these people's loyalties are. When you go to a union meeting, you're sure it's not to the union. The desire these people have - some of the things we fought against were the long hours. Now they want these long hours because there is a premium attached to them.. So most of the people working in the plants now, their programs, their spending, the things they acquire are based on the amount of overtime, the hours they receive the time and a half premium for. So they don't consider the basic wage as their income. They expect so many weeks at 10 and 12 hours a day. And so they buy and live accordingly. That's why it's such a difficult thing for these people who are involved in a strike. So all these things I have to think of, before I give an answer.

H. What you are saying, if I may put in another way, is that these new young workers, perhaps both Negro and white who are coming in now have no connection with the past, with the history of labor, that they regard the UAW, or any other union, as essentially a sort of service organization.

They belong to the American Automobile Association, the AAA, and they pay annual dues, and they get certain services. They get annual trip cards, they get insurance, they get the car hauled off the road in case of an accident, they pay dues to the AAA and the AAA performs certain services. It seems to me that increasingly union members tend to think of the union as a kind of service agency. They pay their dues and they get certain services. They don't think of the union as an instrument of social change, an instrument for Negro rights, or for the transformation of society, except that they pay their dues as a kind service change, and they want to get their dues value back. Now, if this is true, what I am saying in a vulgar way is that there will be increasing conservatism, increasing retrogression, that unions will be less of an instrument for social change than they have been in the past, that unions will not have social goals, that they will represent that part of the American workers, which has a greater investment in the society, in keeping order in that society, in maintaining the status quo, that unions will not be instruments of social change. Unions will not be social organizations, but will be a kind of service organization for the working class. Do you think this is happening?

T. I'm sure it is, because there was a time when I got up to talk to a group of workers, that I would mention the words of Philip Murray, that "the CIO is a great crusade for human justice." If I were to use words like that, some people would look at me as if I had said something silly. So the appeal now is what you can get out of it in terms of monetary gains.

Mrs. B. In the past the union came into existence through struggle. They struggled and became politically agitated. The union gave human dignity. But more than that, the union gave the worker seniority, paid vacation, grievance machinery, sick pay. But when they came into the union they don't think of that. And do you know why? Because there's very little education in the union now, of union history or any of that. Everything is given them now when they come into the union, on a platter.

H. What is the implication for the Negro, coming into the labor movement now, given this kind of labor movement? The union is not interested in education now; it is simply run as a bureaucracy, like any other kind of institutionalized buraucracy. Now, if my assumption is correct that the labor movement bases itself on a narrower social base the skilled white workers who

will have stability of employment, with no concern for the unemployed, the underprivileged, for those outside the white society, no interest in effecting basic changes in social life in America, increasing conservatism, increasing involvement with the political parties which control the government, when they become the junior partners of the employers in maintaining the social order, and of the labor force - if all this is true, what is the labor movement going to mean for Negroes? Anything?

T. I suppose no more than any other agency - to him it's no more than an agency. It will to some extent see that his wages are raised.

H. If he's inside the union.

T. If he's inside. And it will give him the minimum measures of protection he's entitled to. But many of the Negroes who have grievances now against an employer will go to government agencies, or the NAACP, or the Urban League.

H. One of the reasons for increasing tension between the Negro protest movement and organized labor is that Negro workers now come to the NAACP or the Urban League, or the EOOO they don't go to the Union anymore, because they don't trust the Union.

T. Our department probably receives as many as a half a dozen cases a month from the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, and even referrals from the Detroit Community Relations Commission.

H. So workers do not file charges with the FEP Department, but file charges against the union with the state FEPC or the City agency.

T. There are some -

H. Is this true around the country?

T. More around the country than in the Detroit area.

H. This is of course true for the whole union movement. The AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department. Do you see any significance in Walter Reuther's attack last April on the federation, and the possibility that the UAW may pull out ot the AFL-CIO? And go its own way inreviving the American labor movement? As a social agency with a new concern for social goals?

T. It's possible there will be a higher concentration on social goals within the UAW because they will have to prove their point, and I believe the expansions of staff which are taking place in these areas indicate that the UAW is taking inventory of their programs. There may be a change, more into the social areas.

H. Well, then, we have to say that the hopes that we all felt in the early 40's, the early sit-downs, the rise of the CIO and the UAW -- this was going to be a new day dawning for the Negro worker in America. Twenty-five years later we have to revise our original estimate of that situation.

T. Yes, I'm sure we will.

H. Do you see the emergence of any new Negro trade union groups?

T. Well, at the present time I see none. For some reason there has been no jelling of the present leadership. I'm fearful that the Negro as a deader in the labor movement unless there's some upsurge soon, he will be lost in the shuffle.

H. What do you think of A. Philip Randolph's role?

T. Well, Randolph has no influence in the labor movement, and I don't believe he has ever been accepted as their leader. His appeal has always been more to the white-collar class than to the working class. You heard Mr. Billups refer to him as an Uncle Tom, and I believe this has been the impression generally carried by most labor leadership through the years. Critically, I can say that Phil Randolph has done a very poor job with the Pullman Porters. A lot of people look at their wages now compared with what they used to be. But I look on the Pullman Porters as an organization which never did grow. They got as high as 9 or 10,000 workers, but no further. As an industrial organization they could have gotten as high as 25 or 30,000 if they had reached for the kind of people I think the Pullman Porters naturally were - in the aircraft industry, those that Townsend's union took in, or those that formed Townsend's union should rightfully have belonged to Randolph's union. He made no effort, no effort at all to reach these people. He made no attempt to take the Pullman Porters beyond a union which he could control.

H. Do you feel the Negro American Labor Council is dead?

T. I don't feel it was ever alive, really; it was more a paper organization.

H. Except here in Detroit-TULC.

T. Yes, here in Detroit, TULC was the iniator, at the founding of the Negro American Labor Council, and was the largest auxiliary or adjunct of the Council, so TULC existed before, and it will continue to exist.

H. There is discussion amont Negroes in the ghetto to form independent black unions. In Blatimore CORE has had significant success with the Maryland Freedom Union.

In Detroit?

T. Yes. Theoretically, segregated locals no longer exist, but in actuality they are.

H. Are there different wage rates where you have Negro and white chambermaids?

T. Not in the same establishment. But in an establishment where you have all Negro maids, and another where you have all white maids, there are possible differences. But this is not a general program, because any hotel which has all Negro maids might pay more than where they have all white maids.

H. But there are segregated locals?

T. There is no standardized wage scales?

H. You would not have a separate local of chambermaids which would be all white - there would be a white chambermaids' local and a Negro chambermaids' local?

T. No, it wouldn't be that

H. How would it be?

T. The hotel that had white chambermaids would try to maintain the segregation. Now this is not necessarily true anymore, because in many hotels and in the larger motels they have mixed maid groups. But this was the old attitude, but I think the future will see the newly established black unions eventually become part of the main stream of the labor movement, the unions, and through attrition most of them will be joined.

H. Mr. Billups, do you want to add anything?

B. No.

On October 27, 1967, Shelton Tappes, Herbert Hill, and I spent the morning with Joseph Billups and Mrs. Billups at their home on Kenilworth. Mr. Billups was not feeling well, and his memory was dimmer than usual. We had hoped to interview him, but, instead, Shelton Tappes filled in a great deal, explaining what Joe's role had been, or what Joe didn't tell us. The result was an interview more properly classed as Tappes' than Billups' It should properly, be included in the Tappes sequence.

Rough copy

Roberta McBride
January 6, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH BILLUPS

INTERVIEWERS:
HERBERT HILL
SHELTON TAPPES
ROBERTA McBRIDE

OCTOBER 27, 1967