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ORAL INTERVIEW

NICK DiGAETANO

JIM KEENEY and HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWERS
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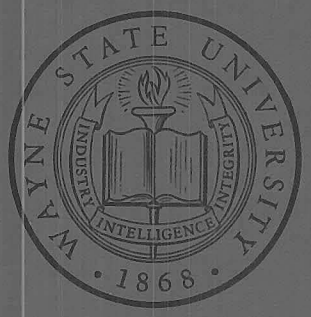

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INTERVIEW WITH NICK DIGAETANO

This is an interview with Mr. Nick DiGaetano on June 17, 1968, in Detroit, Michigan. The interviewers are Jim Keeney and Herbert Hill.

H. Nick, how old were you when you came to the United States?

D. Fifteen years and six months.

H. And where did you come from?

D. From the southern part of Italy near Palermo.

H. And you came right to Detroit? Most Italian immigrants stopped off in New York for awhile. How come you came right to Detroit?

D. My brother's family was established in Detroit, and us youngsters came right through to Detroit.

H. Did you go to work right away?

D. Oh, about a month after I arrived. That was in 1909.

H. And where did you go to work? Where was your first job?

D. My first job was working as a helper in a plating plant, a nickel-plating plant, plating, buffing, and polishing. The name of the plant was the _____ plating works. It was on West Jefferson near the old Michigan Central Railroad station. I worked there one year and then I went to work five months for a railroad, then I came back and worked there two more years.

H. When did you first hear of the Industrial Workers of the World?

D. In 1915. I was a member of the Italian Socialist Federation, which I joined in 1912.

H. When did you first hear of the Industrial Workers of the World?

D. In 1915. I was a member of the Italian Socialist Federation, which I joined in 1912.

H. How did you come to join the Italian Socialist Federation?

D. I attended one of the protest meetings in defense of Joe Etter and Arthur Gioninni involved in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers strike. I participated there, and I heard about the Italian Socialist Federation, and I joined. In 1915 the Socialist Federation voted to join the IWW, so I joined as a member of the Federation.

H. Can you tell us something of the ideas of the Italian Socialist Federation?

D. They were a syndicalist type who assimilated themselves with industrial unionism. And also they believed in political action, both the syndicalists and the industrial unionists. But in the convention they decided to go all the way over to the Industrial Workers, and became active as a propaganda league.

H. Were there any unions operating in the auto industry in Detroit at that time?

D. No.

H. But the members of the Italian Socialist Federation had the idea of unionism even though there were no unions in the industry?

D. Right.

H. So in 1915 you joined the IWW, you became a Wobbly. Could you tell us something of your personal activity in the IWW at that time?

D. My personal activity was one of seeking knowledge, learning about the labor movement, because I was a greenhorn. I attended all the meetings, all the lectures. There is an old-timer who is still living, John Panzner. John Panzner was lecturing, and I considered him my teacher, because I learned a lot of things from John Panzner.

H. Where were you working in 1915, Nick?

D. In the job-shops. From 1909, during the First World War, and after the War until 1928, I think, I worked for seven or eight years for Ferro-Stamping, then I went to Chrysler. But between 1928 and 1929 I worked in the job shops, I didn't work in the big shops. One of the plants where I worked was the Detroit, no, the Michigan Stove Works, and another Ferro-Stamping, a big shop where they had five hundred or so workers.

H. Were there any Negroes, any colored fellows working in the factories at that time?

D. The only Negroes I saw in a big shop of 500 hundred workers were the janitors.

H. Negroes were janitors. Can you tell us what you remember of the first interest in labor union organization among the workers in the Detroit auto industry?

D. I think it was in 1927, the Auto Workers Union. I didn't belong to it-I belonged to the AFL Metal Polishers Local, and to the IWW. I had two cards in my pocket-I was a two-card member. So I didn't join the other union. However, the Autoworkers Union attempted to organize the Autoworkers in 1927. And they almost succeeded. But I can't give you any details, because I was not active in that group.

H. That was an independent union, was it not?

D. It was a new union coming up, and it meant to organize all the autoworkers on an industrial union basis. But they failed because there was too much dissention created by stool-pigeons. That is the way I recall it.

K. That was a very poor year, wasn't it? 1927? Unemployment?

D. No, in 1927 there was no unemployment. No effective unemployment in 1927, that I recall.

K. Going back a little bit, did you notice in the 20's the number of Negroes moving into Detroit?

D. I never paid much attention, because to me a union man is a union man. I didn't classify union members, I didn't classify citizens by the color of their skin.

K. The problem, for instance, of violence when Negroes tried to move into white neighborhoods-did you encounter that?

D. The only thing I remember-there was some resentment among the German-American, and the Anglo-Saxons who resented the Italians or the Poles moving into their neighborhood. There was discrimination against nationalities; in fact the Italian or the Pole moved into a neighborhood, the German-American or the Anglo-Saxon, he moved out. I remember that very distinctly. Maybe they had a reason, maybe they had no reason. These were workers.

H. Between 1915 and 1927 you were active in the IWW?

D. Yes, as I told you, I was active. Learning a little language, the principles of industrial unionism, and that.

H. Right. Were there any Negroes who belonged to the IWW?

D. I tell you the honest truth, I don"t recall. The only one I recall was the big trial in Chicago. Over 100 leaders of the IWW were indicted; and standing in at the Chicago trial was this Ben Fletcher. This Ben Fletcher was the only Negro I saw who was a member of the IWW.

H. Did you ever get to know Ben Fletcher?

D. Yes. Ben Fletcher came to Detroit, and I attended one of his lectures. This was after the trial, after he came out of jail. He went on a speaking tour after he came out of Leavenworth.

H. Where was this lecture, Nick?

D. To tell the truth, I don't remember for sure, but I think it was at the corner of McDougall and Gratiot, the southeast corner. I don't remember the name, but the hall is still there.

H. How many people were at that meeting?

D. As far as I remember, the hall was at capacity, perhaps five hundred. I don't remember seeing any Negroes in the audience, though perhaps there were some. Ben Fletcher was a good speaker.

K. Were there a number of IWW members who worked on the dock in Detroit?

D. There may have been, but I didn't have any knowledge of it. They were working in the auto industry mostly and in construction.

K. I have heard that there were quite a number of IWW members who worked on the docks in Detroit.

D. There were quite a few isolated members who worked as sailors on the Great Lakes, but they were not in big quantity.

K. Were there many railroad workers?

D. No., not many, at least not in the Detroit area.

H. The Wobblies never had a very big membership in Detroit?

D. No.

H. This was the period of the largest membership of the IWW. They had large membership in some other cities, in the northwest, in Chicago, in Minneapolis, but not much in Detroit.

D. No. But let me tell you this. To rely on my memory now is very hard. I may refer you to some people who know more about it. Fred Thompson could give you the answer to this better than I can. However, prior to Ford announcing the five dollar a day, the Wobblies put out a handbill in front of the shops and campaigned to organize the workers. And there was a positive statement, and Ford understood. Just after that Ford came out with the five dollars a day, and I think it was because he was afraid the Wobblies would organize the Ford workers. That I remember. I can't give you the contents of the handbill, but I remember the handbill because I helped to pass it out , in front of the plant. But they didn't succeed inorganizing any workers. In fact, in 1934, at the strike at Murray Body, and the IWW were leading the strike, they did all they could to hold the organization. The strikers won their demands, but they didn't establish any union.

H. During this period of the IWW there were certain groups who had their separate organization based on their immigrant background. There were Italian and Polish and other ethnic groups. I assume you were active in an Italian group. The two major leaders in the Italian group at this time were Arturo Giovannitti and Ettor. Did you know them? Did you ever meet Giovanitti?

D. I met them both, but not until later. I didn't meet them at the strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. I met Ettor twice. He came to Detroit on a speaking tour, and I met Giovanitti twice on a speaking tour. I met Elizabeth Gurley Flynn much later. I never met William Z. Foster.

D. I knew Bill Haywood well. And I tell you frankly. As a young man my leaders were Bill Haywood and Gene Debs. Their word to me was gospel.

H. Was there any discussion in the IWW at this time regarding the Negro question? Were the radicals interested? Was there any discussion of the problems of the Negro worker?

D. Look, the phraseology was used among the radicals, among the left-wingers at that time- the Socialits, the Wobblies, what have you, was the "workers"-those who work- they didn't say the Negro worker or the white worker; they didn't say the Italian or the Polish workers, they said the workers. In fact, the IWW slogan was, "Workers of the World, Organize" They talked of workers throughout the world, regardless of race or nationality. They never discussed racial issues, because actually they didn't feel that to belong to the union one had to be white worker; as long as you were a worker you could belong to the union. I held this belief until about 1940. Somebody in the IWW told me about racial issues. I said, "What do you mean, racial issues? We have no racial issues. This union belongs to the workers regardless of the color of their skin." But after 1940 I started to realize there was a racial issue.-to my amazement. Why didn't I notice it before? I guess I didn't realize it before because we believed that the workers are workers, regardless of color. But then someone pointed out to me that this worker is a worker also. But, then he don't get the job in the machine shop. He gets a job in the paint shop, or as a janitor. Then I started to realize it, that the racial issue is there. And I started to deal with it as such.

H. During this peroid when you were active in the Wobblies how did you feel about the American Federation of Labor?

D. The same way I feel now. I feel, frankly speaking, the way Walter Reuther feels-perhaps a little stronger than Walter.

H. You stayed in a long time.

D. I know-I've been paying dues in the American Federation of Labor for many years. It's one of those things you do because you have to do it, if you want some bread on the table. Your income is what you earn. And if you don't earn you have no bread on the table. You said a while ago, American Fakers-the American Fakeration of Labor. What the Wobblies called it was American Fakerists. Even a man like Gompers, as valuable as he was to us, was a dope-and Green, and this guy Meany. They were worse than what you say-reactionary capitalists.

H. Now let's go back -we're still at 1927. You told us of the appearance of the independent union, but you did not join. Tell us when you first heard of the efforts of the AF of L in the 1930's to organize the auto industry.

D. Well, about a month before the sit-down strike at Chrysler where I worked-

H. Now when did you go to work for Chrysler?

D. In 1928 at the Jefferson Plant as a metal-polisher. We, the polishers, had a union more or less, but the company didn't recognize us-there was no contract. However, we sent our committee to speak for us. But they didn't accomplish anything. I was a committee-man at Ferro Stamping for four years before I went to Chrysler. There was no contract at Ferro-Stamping either. But we had a spokesman. We didn't go to the boss individually if we had a grievance. The spokesman went formally

D. and talked to the guy. But sometimes something happened-sometimes they went on a strike. In 1937, as I was saying, when I was paying dues in the AFL as a metal polisher, I realized that the UAW was coming. And I was the first one in Metal Polishers Department to switch over to the UAW.I took with me three guys and we joined. The next day I took a couple more. This sit-down strike came in March. We had about twenty from the department in UAW Local 7, but we had a company union representative who was also a member of the AFL. The year before they asked me to run for company union representative-Chrysler asked me. But I refused to run. I didn't want to have no part of it. But this guy-he ran and he got elected. But he was one of the guys who even when a company delegate, he voted to join the UAW. He had a union background. And then the strike broke out, and we were in the plant for, I think, seventeen days. At that time, the only colored boys who were in the plant were janitors-there wasn't anybody else. That's all I can tell you right now.

K. Do you remember, in the 30's, the hunger marches and the problem of people unable to get work?

D. At the River Rouge plant? Yes, I remember, but I didn't go. I remember.

K. Did you ever know a guy by the name of Joe Billups?

D. No.

H. Did the members of IWW play any special role at all, in 1939 when the UAW started organizing?

D. Some, but there was no group activity, not officially. Why, I don't know. In fact, it was in 1939 or '40 that me and George Lutzai, a Rumanian Wobbly who was a member of another local and his son-in-law, John O'Neka, who is retired now, we tried to suggest in a meeting why didn't we go in, en masse, in the UAW. We tried to inject the real industrial union philosophy. And they almost booed us, the IWW guys. And frankly speaking,

D. from then on, I didn't go to the meetings any more.

H. But you were an active unionist-you supported the UAW.

D. Yes, I did. I was in the sit-down strike. And I did what I could. I did my bit-not much.

H. What was the attitude of the Negro workers to the UAW in its attempts to organize?

D. Well, I'll tell you this much. This guy, Sam Fanroy-he's retired now, he was a sickly fellow-he worked in the paint shop. And he was very good material for the union. He did all he could. In fact, he was the first Negro admitted in Local 7 that I know about.
Then came this other guy, whose name is Johnny Conyers-the father of the Congressman. Johnny Conyers had more speaking ability than Sam Fanroy. But Sam Fanroy had more solid conception of unity. And Johnny Conyers did his bit, too. In fact, now he works for the International union. And now, a little later, came John Hatcher-he's a committeeman, now. And his wife, Lilly Hatcher, she works for the international union. John is a quiet fellow, but he's solid. And there are many more now. This Leon England, he's a real sparkplug. There are many more now. But these are the early guys, the ones I remember.

H. So Negroes were responsive to the idea of unionism. Weren't there some Negroes who were opposed to the union?

D. Naturally, there would be. There were also a lot of whites who were opposed to the union. During the sitdown when we stayed in the plant, some of them disappeared in the night. They got scared, and went home. They didn't show up again until the strike was over. But I'll tell you this much: the immigrants, the Slavs, the Italians, the Rumanians who worked in the shop- they were more union-minded than the Anglo-Saxon. That's a fact. In the picket line you would find more of them; in representation election more of them voted almost 100% for the union. And in the picket line you would find

D. almost two foreign-born to each Anglo-Saxon.

H. You are suggesting that the foreign-born were more interested in unionism. They had more experience with the class struggle than native-born American workers. By Anglo-Saxon I assume you mean native-born American workers. By Anglo-Saxon I assume you mean native-born whites.

D. I mean American-I don't mean to discriminate. These foreign-born, the immigrants, because they had been more discriminated against, I know for a fact that at a loading dock at Chrysler this foreman, who was having men load a boxcar, actually used a whip on the men. And he didn't have a decent word for them, "You so-and-so, go ahead and do the job." That's a fact. When I took over the job as chief steward in 1939-

H. What was the highest union office you ever held?

D. Committeeman and editor of the local union paper, and I'm still a member of the Education Committee-from 1937 on, and I was an Executive Board member for Local 7. Then I was chief steward for 17 years, (From 1939 until I retired) committeeman for two years, Board member and what not. And two years I was nothing-I lost the election.

K. You worked for a rubber factory once?

D. Oh, yes, U.S. Rubber.

K. Were there any Negroes working down there in those days?

D. The only thing I remember was Negroes in janitor work. I tell you very frankly. I don't say they didn't have other jobs. They may have had other jobs. But that is all I saw.

K. Did they segregate Negroes in the dining room?

D. They never sat with us at lunch. I don't remember seeing any. I remember them at lunch only at Chrysler, started about 15 years ago.

K. Were there segregated bathrooms in any of the shops?

D. I don't remember a segregated bathroom in any of the shops.

H. How did you feel about the so-called factional fight that went on in the UAW between on the one-hand, R.J. Thomas, and Addes, and on the other hand, the Reuther group who challenged the Thomas-Addes faction? What was your feeling-where were your sympathies?

D. Well, let me tell you this. I respect R.J. Thomas. He was a member of my local. But I had more respect for Addes. In my book, R.J. Thomas was a plain bozo. I'm sorry I have to say that, because he is dead now. But he was sincere. Let me tell you this. R.J. Thomas was sincere, but he was a plain guy. To my thinking, in my book, he didn't have the educated mentality, the capacity of being a leader of such a great union, numerically speaking. He was a plain guy. That's why I did not-naturally, how would you feel when Walter Reuther was shot? Almost killed by the top men of the Briggs Corporation, because of his activities How would you feel when R.J. Thomas was playing poker? When we had a convention he was playing poker and having a good time. Now, I thought that Reuther had some ideology and R.J. Thomas didn't have no ideology. Addes, now, was a substantial guy, but Addes didn't have no leadership. He didn't have the drive to lead the workers.

K. What about Richard Frankensteen?

D. Richard Frankensteen it seems to me, was a chatterbox-that's all.

H. What did you think of him when he ran for mayor, back in 1946?

D. I didn't change my mind-just a chatterbox. He talked like a regular politician, not because he believed. He wasn't promising anything for the community, but he was promising something for himself.

H. As an old Socialist, a man of radical ideas, do you feel that radical ideas were important, that they played a role in the development of the

H. UAW? Do you think there is any place for radical ideas now, in the UAW?

D. Well, I do believe this, that at the present time the UAW and the present leadership of the UAW is one of the most progressive labor unions in the United States among the big unions in the Federation one of the most progressive. However, there's a big drawback. Now don't forget this. Let's face a reality. I remember years ago, in the Wobblies, we asked for retirement with pay, for retirement pensions. Now all these things are reality. The Wobblies used to make issues, actual issues. But now these are reality. Workers have a pension-well, maybe not the best, but there are lots of improvements in the life of the automobile workers. The Wobblies, and the Socialists, when I was young, they used to preach to the high heavens. That was the main issue they raised. Now, those things are established facts. Those gains took the wind out of the sails of radicalism. Let's face reality. Radicalism, now, uses different approaches. I understand there are two things the youth of today are concerned about. They are concerned with the racial issue, the Negro, that's one. But the young Negroes and the whites-there are two things they are concerned about-nuclear weapons and war. And they don't want this war in Viet Nam. They are concerned about that. Now I was surprised the other day-I guess it was yesterday-at the convention of this student group, this SDS at Lansing, and they had some radical literature. But to me, this youth-I see them on television, on radio, in the newspapers- they have initiative, they have gumption, they have fight, but actually they have no goals, no direction as to what they are trying to achieve.

H. Years ago, you and many others had a dream of building a powerful union in the auto industry to take on the very strong automobile companies, Chrysler, General Motors, Ford. You had an idea that the union would change the life of the working class, would free the working class. The union would usher in a good life for workers. You tell us that you have pensions, you have vacations,with pay, many of the things that Wobblies fought for, it's true. But if you try to remember the hopes and aspirations you had many years ago when you were a young man-the attempts to build the union, to liberate the the workers and you compare that dream to what you have now-you do have a big, powerful union, the UAW, you say, the best union. How do you feel now, in looking back? Have your dreams been realized?

D. I will give you my dreams in this song by Joe Hill, and then my reactions:

Workers of the World, awakening
Break your chains, demand your rights
...Arise, prisoner of starvation,
Demand your own emancipation...

Now, that's part of my dream in those days. However, some part of this dream to ameliorate the condition of the workers in the plant through representation, grievance procedure, working conditions, better wages-all those things are things the Wobblies fought for. Those things more or less have been achieved but the part-I'm thinking of my grandchildren now, and your grandchildren-about the war, that menace is still there. The exploitation, the millionaires still looking for a foreign market, a field in which to make millions from the sweat of the people. Now, that part of the dream is what I think the young for, because that

D. part of the dream has never been realized. And if that part of the dream is not realized, then that part of the dream which has been realized through the UAW is going to be eliminated. It is going to disappear, because there will be a chance for the reactionaries to start shooting the liberals, like Reverend Martin Luther King. That's what I'm afraid of- I'm afraid of that, because this younger element who is trying to reform now, social reform, radical reform, to make those gains made by organized labor stick instead of evaporating, instead of disappearing, I think they're going to do it. And that's the only hope I have of this younger generation fighting for these things, see? Because after all, let me tell you this, in Russia, they have achieved lots of things in Russia, in the Soviet Union. They have changed the face of the old Russia completely. But then you don't have the freedom you have in some capitalist countries. But the educational system in Russia, the working system in Russia is very superior, for the working people, to what we have in America. And at the rate they are going, the Soviet is going to have the upper hand over the capitalist countries. And that's why the capitalists are afraid of it, to be showing off. America, as a leader of the reactionary element, afraid, and they are watching every move that the radicals are making. Now this is my impression of the situation.

H. During the long years you were in the Chrysler plant as a shop steward and committee-man did you notice an increase in the number of Negro workers in the plant?

D. Yes, definitely. In fact, I think at the present

D. time it is 60% Negro workers at Chrysler Jefferson. I'm told by one of the Negro officers that is true.

H. Why do you think that is so? Why so many Negroes entering and so few whites?

D. I'm not sure, but I can give you an assumption. I assume, due to the location of the plant on the lower east side, and due to the liberality of the management, which has tried to eliminate discrimination, in fact, three or four guys who were officers of the local, one of whom is recording secretary, the other chief steward whom I know personally, and there are others-they try to promote them. Through that fact, but mostly due to the locality-if this plant was in a suburb, in a white people's district, maybe there wouldn't be so many. The company wouldn't discriminate against them, because the union objected.

H. Do you think that it is also because young white workers are no longer coming into the industry-they can get better jobs at more pay, they have a chance at education, they don't go into the auto industry as workers, they go into middle class occupations, whereas Negro workers (I do think you are right that plant location has something to do with it) but generally it is becoming true throughout Detroit that Negroes are becoming a more important part of the basic industrial work force? Do you think it may have something to do with the fact that young white workers don't go into the industry?

D. I can't make an assumption because I really don't know. Nevertheless, let me tell you this, there are some white workers who haven't got it, to work in the office, at white collar jobs. There are some white workers who haven't got it, and there

D. are some Negro workers who have, and now things are balancing a little bit. Some of the Negroes are working in the office too. But at the Chrysler Jefferson plant the reason there are more Negroes than white is because of the geographical location.

K. Were Negroes ever used as strike-breakers in the industries of Detroit?

D. I was telling you a little while ago of this experience which I refer you to Fanroy to check. The experience I had in 1939 in the Dodge Main lock-out, where they imported some Negroes from the South to break the strike. They started to operate the plant. I don't know how many there were, I assume there were a couple of hundred, they brought them up in box-cars, and then they loaded them in the trucks and took them to the plants. This was in 1939. There was a picket line at Dodge-and some of the boys had picket lines ? so this fellow Fanroy and a few colored boys, I suppose some were from Plymouth Local, some were from Dodge Local-and Fanroy told us from Local 7 who were in the picket line, "Hold on -don't do anything drastic. Let us handle that," he said. Fanroy was a colored guy. And if I remember correctly, from the two hundred , only about fifteen went in the plant. The rest didn't go in.

H. Even though you said the company brought in over 200 workers to break the strike, only fifteen crossed the picket line. Was it true that at this time all the companies also brought in white strikebreakers?

D. I don't recall them. Nothing was said.

H. You don't recall some of the other plant situations with white strikebreakers?

D. Oh, yes. White strikebreakers in other plants, yes.

H. But you see some writers seem to think that only Negroes were used for strikebreakers. But actually it turns out from other interviews that I have done that many more whites than Negroes were used. Actually there was only a relatively small proportion of Negroes.

D. Look, let me tell you this. I don't remember the union now, but it was before 1927 between 1920 and 1925 there was a strike at Deveraux Plating Works. The building is next to the Budd Wheel, on Charlesvoix near the railroad. It used to be owned by Deveraux. And Deveraux was also owner of Federal Stamping. And they had a strike over there of the fellows who were doing polishing and buffing and plating work. And the union asked us to go on the picket line after we left the plant. So we used to jump in the car, three, four, five loads of us and go picket the Deveraux shop. And there were scabs, white scabs, no colored scabs, scabbing on the strikers. In fact, let me tell you this. One day I was on the picket lines over there, and along came a friend of mine, an Italian, scabbing. And he said, "I didn't know the union was behind this. Don't worry, we'll fix it up." Three days later, the scabs went on a strike. And there was a guy, a leader of the strike-breakers. His name was Moon. He actually stabbed a couple of strikers, because they tried to interfere with a couple of scabs. He was arrested for that, but I don't know what happened to him. So talk about white scabs-sure, there were a lot of scabs.

K. Do you remember any time when large numbers of Southern whites came up?

D. The only thing I have in my memory is this-very confusing, I don't remember the details, but

D. I tell you this: there was a strike in the foundry shop, Dodge foundry shop, I think it was before the union. I think it was before the first world war, or something like that. There was a strike in some foundry, and they brought up southern whites to break the strike. But I couldn't give you the details because I don't remember that.

K. I know they had a big strike in the Dodge Foundry in 1921.

H. I thing it is important to establish that, contrary to many assumptions, many whites were strikebreakers. The oft-repeated statement that Negroes were strikebreakers is greatly exaggerated. And I also want to establish for the record that in a great many situations where Negroes were invited in the union, and where unions did not behave in the AFL tradition, but held an open hand to the black member, there were white strike-breakers.

D. Let me tell you this about strike-breakers. In Briggs, in the ? plant at Briggs. They had a strike over there, the trimmers, and there was an Italian banker who was hiring scabs among the Italians to send over there to break the strike. Another member, I don't remember what year, but it was before the end of the first world war, told the Italians not to be strike breakers. I remember that distinctly. That's one. The other one is this. In the 1932 strike at Briggs there was an agent who was banker, but this banker no more existing, but his brother had an agreement with Briggs to hire scabs, and used to bring a wagon, a funeral home wagon to take the scabs. They used to charge the scabs two dollars to get the job at Briggs. We tried to bust this. In fact, we sent guys to

D. try to find out where the wagons were waiting to pick up the guys-on a certain corner, and we notified the strikers, and a picket went over there to get in the way of loading the scabs. I remember that. In fact, when that big guy threatened me with a body harm, if I didn't mind my business, I said that was my business, because if the Briggs boys lose the strike, I lose the strike-I lose my fringe benefits, my rights as a worker. I said they were going to get $2.00 from the company (for each scab they brought in, Briggs was paying two dollars.) That was in 1932.

K. Do you remember in the early days police harrassed Italians a lot in the city? That there was the same trouble that Negroes have today with the police? Did the Italians have that same trouble with the police in the early days?

D. Well, I'll tell you an experience I got, personally. I was coming from the Wobbly head-quarters on Brewster. They had a little library, a Wobbly library there. And I was going home. It was about 10 o'clock, and I lived about a mile and a half from there. When I got down to Sherman and Russell there were a couple of cops and they said, "Is there a weapon in your pocket?" I said no. He said, "We're going to search you." I said I didn't want to be searched. "Come over to head-quarters," they said. "We'll search you there." I said, "Look". There were a couple of Negro guys who would slug you over the head, take your money but they didn't kill you, they just took your money. I said, "Look, we're under a street light over here. And under the street light they look at us from around the alley there. If you search me, and someone is watching you, they will know I don't have any weapon in my pocket. I'll let you search me if you will escort me home." All right, they

D. took me almost within a block of home. I let them search me-but it was because I was an Italian. The neighborhood I lived in, there were Sicilians-Black Hands, Mafia, and all that. I realize that.

K. Did you know that the Police Department had a black hand division and that when Negroes started to come up to Detroit, the Black Hand Division was enlarged to take in the Negro population? This comes out in the sweet trial.

H. You said a little while ago that you were told that the Negro membership at Chrysler Local 7 is now 60 per cent. Who told you that?

D. I think it was the vice-president of the local about a month ago.

H. I was told it was about 50 per cent.

D. I tell you, the recording secretary of Local 7 is a colored guy. His name is Tisdale. You could call him at Local 7 and ask him directly. Tis dale would tell you.

H. You have been around for a long time. How do you feel about the attempts of Negroes to organize all-Negro caucuses? Groups like the TULC?

D. Let me tell you this. For English-speaking, I don't like it. If they have a caucus on the basis of principles and policies of the union, that is natural. But a caucus just on the basis of race-I think that is wrong. Because in the union we have one interest-the interest of all the workers who belong to the union, regardless of race or color.

H. But supposing that doesn't happen?

D. If it doesn't happen, then it's a question of policy, not of race. Because in the constitution if it says no discrimination against sex, nationalities, or race, then you have a policy. Then if you have a caucus of Negro and white on the policy, then it is

D. all right.. But if you have a caucus of Negroes on one side, whites on the other, that's no more a question of policy, that's separation. That's worse than the AFL policy of American Seperation of Labor. That's the way I feel about it.

K. When the union, when you joined Local 7, and the union went into the second world war, did you find that they hired indiscriminately, that they didn't have any discrimination against Negroes?

D. All the people who came into the shop in those days came through the government employment agency. The government hired the people. If the companies needed help they called the government. How the government picked them out I don't know. I know in Chrysler Jefferson

end of tape.