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ORAL INTERVIEW

HODGES MASON

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER
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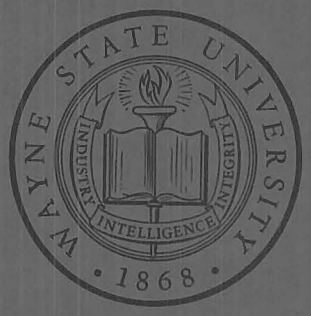

Wayne State University
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This is an interview with Mr. Hodges Mason, November 28, 1967, in Detroit, Michigan. The interviewer is Herbert Hill.

HH: Mr. Mason, I would like to begin by asking you when you first came to Detroit, what year, how old you were when you entered the automobile industry what your first jobs were, and would you generally begin describing that early period when you went to work in the Detroit automobile industry.

HM: I came to Detroit in 1926. I worked for the Michigan Terminal (?) Warehouse Company during the summer.

HH: Where did you come from?

HM: I came from Atlanta, Georgia. I was a student at _____ College in Atlanta. I came here to work for the summer and then returned to Atlanta and went to work in a hotel during the school time. I came back here in 1928 and went to work for the Prescon (?) Roofing Compnay, laying cement tile. After that I went to work for the Packard Motor Car Company, and I stayed there until the 27th of October,-29th of October, 1929 - the 30th is the day after the crash; the crash was on the 29th. And everybody was laid-off on the 30th. I went back to Prescon (?) and I worked in the plant making tile, working in the tile plant. And I went to the Bohn Aluminum Corporation, 3516 Hart Avenue, I went in first in '30, when things were slow in several of the plants. The plant was not working at that time to any extent, but they were getting in some. I worked there during the recall effort against Mayor Bowles, and because of my position against Bowles, I was not given any amount of work, and I finally quit. Then I was told that they were hiring experienced _____, and I had been an _____ at Packard Motor Car Company and I went in as an experienced _____.

HH: _____. (HM: Yes) What year did you work for the Packard Motor Car Company?

HM: 1928 and '29

HH: What was your job at that time?

HM: I was an air _____.

HH: Were there many Negroes employed by Packard's at that time?

HM: Quite a number, in the foundry - in the foundry.

HH: Were Negroes limited to the foundry?

HM: Yes, mostly.

HH: Was your job as _____ in the foundry?

HM: Yes. The Negroes were allowed to work, not in skilled trades, but

in the foundry work and in other menial jobs. Later, they went into the various skilled crafts, but there were strikes as a result of their efforts to be integrated into them. I went to work for Bohn and hired in as an experienced _____, and I saw a number of things happening there that I thought were not right. I saw the fellows working and being restricted to the various jobs - they had jobs for whites and jobs for Negroes, Negroes teaching whites how to do jobs, assuming the responsibility for the jobs, giving instructions to the white workers who were working along side them, but the white workers were making 20¢ an hour more. I didn't think that was right.

HH: Was there a union at the aluminum company?

HM: There was no union at Bohn Aluminum at all; in fact, that was before the inception of the CIO. We usually refer to these years as the "Era Before the Union" Fellows were working for 35¢ an hour on day rates, and $5.02 a day on piece-work. In the event that one would make more than $5.02, the rates on the job would be reduced, and they would be forced to do more work in order to earn the amount of money. There were many things that happened, for instance, the fellows were docked for scrap on the piece-work basis, and I had seen fellows from the core room being docked for scrap, the core makers and the core cleaners, docked for the same scrap, then they would go into the foundry and they would dock the molders for the same scrap and then into the metal room and dock the metal pourers for the same scrap, and after having docked all of the fellows for scrap testings, then they would get an electric truck and bring the same testings in, process them, weld them, and sell every one of them. Not only that...

HH: (interrupting) Were they rejected?

HM: They were not rejected. They called them scrap until such time as the fellows were docked, and then they would recover them, they would weld them, - they would process them and then weld them and clip them just the same as if there had been no defect in them whatsoever.

HH: How long did you stay at the Bohn Aluminum Company?

HM: I worked for Bohn Aluminum and Brass twenty-one years, starting in 1934, January 1, and then laid-off at the closing of the plant, December 31, 1954

HH: When you went to work in the aluminum company, it was called the Bohn Aluminum and Brass Company? (HM: Right) Where was it located?

HM: 3515 Hart Avenue. (HH: In Detroit?) In Detroit.

HH: Was there a union there at that time? (HM: No.) Were there many Negro workers employed (?)

HM: I would say 30%.

HH: 30%. Were they all in the foundry?

HM: No. They were in the foundry, the metal room, and in the core room.

HH: Would it be correct to say that they were generally in the least desirable jobs, (HM: Right.) with the lowest wages? (HM: Right.) Would you describe the initial union activities - when did a union first begin to make its appearance, what was the reaction of the Negro workers, and what was your own role in the first attempts (?) to organize?

HM: There had been an effort prior to my going into Bohn to strike; in fact I was told that they pulled a strike, and one or two fellows were fired as a result, and the effort failed. It happened, however, that in 1936, in the fall, when Chrysler was paying a bonus, in an effort to fight the union, the fellows in the Bohn plant became intensely interested in the Christmas bonuses, and.

HH: _____, I must interrupt you. What union was the Chrysler Corporation fighting in 1936?

HM: The CIO - the CIO was just born.

HH: That was not the UAW-AF of L?

HM: No. No, it was the UAW. (HH: Just the UAW.) The UAW-AFofL was a splinter from the UAW-CIO after the 1937 convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

HH: But this UAW that you're referring to at this period(?) was still in the AFL? (HM: No.) It still had no _____(?)

HM: No. It was in the CIO; not the AFL, this was the UAW-CIO. (HH: In 1936?) In 1936, yes. (HH: I see.) We were not affiliated, however. When Chrysler began paying the bonuses, then our fellows wanted to know why we didn't get a bonus. On one morning we went into the plant we saw a sign on the bulletin board saying that all rates in this plant would be increased by 5%, as of today. That was written the night before. And under it, someone on the afternoon shift had marked, "_____(?), When do we get our bonus?" This was a strike. I was contacted the following morning - on that same morning, about 9:00 by a fellow by the name of Sherman Martin, who was a metal pourer; we were making cylinder heads for the Ford Motor Car Company. And he asked me, he said to me that they were going to close the plant down, they were going on strike, wanted to know if I could close the department down. I told him that I thought that I could and that he should call me that evening and we would talk about it, because we didn't want to talk about in the plant with the stool-pigeons there. I'd like to point out that they had men that they called "dollar - a - day men" who were paid a dollar a day additional, in addition to their wages, for acting in the capacity of informers. We later found the list of all of them, the "dollar - a - day men", that they had at that time. At the time that I suggested that he would call me that evening he told me, "Call this evening, hell. We're closing this plant down at 9:30." That gave me half an hour. We promptly started the grapevine going, however, and when he signaled that they had closed the other places, that the other departments were on strike, then we were successful in closing the department down, with the exception of two people, a Negro fellow by the name of Lou Pope (?) and a Belgian that we called "Whitey.")?) We went to them and told them that the plant was on strike and we wanted no argument, no fighting or anything of the kind, and cut their machines off they were both _____(?) were going to cut their machines off and told them not to restart it, that we were on

strike and that it would have to be 100%. As a result they refused to buck against this, and they didn't attempt to start the machine again. Having had no experience, we were at a loss as to what to do, and we made the suggestion that we put up a committee to go in and meet with management and discuss the question. Management was adamant in their refusal to talk about it. (HH: They refused to meet with you?) They refused to talk about it at all saying that they would close the plant down and they would move it out of the city, and get ahold of the Ford Motor Car Company and cancel their contracts and the other contracts were not of too much importance, because they were smaller; much smaller than the Ford contract.

HH: This company was holding a supply for the industry?

HM: It was a jobbing concern, a jobbing corporation. They sold nothing to the public, but they supplied manufacturers as "jobbers." We told them that they could close the plant down, it was their plant and it was their business. After a couple of hours, they finally agreed that they would talk with us. In the meantime they had talked to the Negro workers, telling them that the white workers were using them, and talking to the white workers telling the white workers that the Negroes were going to get just as much as they, and it was not right, and they went to the women workers and told them that if they had to increase rates that they could hire men, and the men would replace the women. To my surprise, the people were solid; they refused to listen to it and as a result they received our committee. We negotiated until almost three o'clock. Finally we agreed that they would give us a 10% increase, both in day rates and in piece work rates. We objected to it, but we took it back out and the fellows felt that they had won a victory. (HH: how about a contract?) No. contract. (HH: Not even a written agreement?) No, we didn't ask for it, to be frank. The union was new and we knew nothing of it. This was a spontaneous thing, without any leadership at all. We discussed the question at length and when we came back the fellows voted that they would accept the 10%.

HH: I would like to ask you, what was the total labor force in the plant at that time?

HM: Oh, about a thousand, I would say.

HH: Would you say of that thousand almost a third were Negroes? (HM: Yes.) A third were Negroes? (M: Approximately, yes.) Of those who acted as strike-breakers during the strike, you say one white man and one Negro. (HM: Right.) All the other Negroes and all the other white workers remained solid during the strike. Is that right?

HM: Yes. I'd like to say further that this fellow Pope didn't buck against us, and neither did Nebesky (?), "Whitey (?)," as we called him. When they found that we meant business, they wanted it clearly understood that they didn't strike of their own accord, but they became good union men and Pope eventually became a blue-button steward. We were solid inside the plant.

HH: Excuse me. May I just interrupt you again? Would you say that this generally followed the pattern of that period, we have been given to understand that on more than one occassion Negroes acted as strike-breakers in the early attempts to unionize in the auto industry in and around Michigan. Was your experience at Bohn Aluminum unusual, or would you say it was typical?

HM: It was unusual at that time because of the lack of leadership. We didn't have the leadership - we had no leaders because we hadn't thought about organizing or anything of the kind. I said a few moments ago that it was a spontaneous thing. Later, after we organized the union, we found some who decided taht they didn't want to be union members and such as that, but on this spontaneous thing, if there was any opposition to striking, then we knew nothing of it.

HH: We are now in 1936. (HM: 1936.) You got a 10¢ an hour increase, but there was no immediate (?) (HM: ten percent.) That's all, 10%. (HM: 10%) Ten percent of your union (?) When did the movement to union (?)

HM: In 1937 - early '37. We had an act of doing work one day and saving some for the next. That was done in most all piece-work plants; they called it, "putting it in the bank," so that if they would run into trouble on some day, they would have something to make their day. We had heard rumors that one of the Bohn plants was going out; we didn't know for sure which one it was.

HH: How many plant did the company have?

HM: The company at that time had eight plants in the city of Detroit. We had heard the rumors, but we knew nothing of it; we were not sure. I didn't know anything about it. It happened that some of the fellows did. But on Friday we were told to go home at noon. They told us at a quarter of eleven to go home at noon, and our lunch period was 11:30 to 12:00. We were told to ring out at lunch time, which we did. When we reached home we found telegrams from the company telling us not to report to work until further notice. This meant, of course, that we had been locked-out. I was bitter. I had discussed the question of the union with some of the fellows, and our thinking on the question was that we didn't need to pay Homer Martin and the professional fellows to come in and handle our business, that we had done a good job of it ourselves. It happened, however, that when the lock-out occurred, that the bulk of the people from the plant came to the plant the following Monday morning, and we were met there by an international regional director by the name of Lloyd Jones. (HH: He represented the UAW?) He was representing the UAW, he was the regional director of the UAW. He suggested that we go down to Local 306 Hall on Hart Avenue, and they would tell us how to not only get the shop re-opened but how to get an increase in pay. I was skeptical, along with a number of the other fellows. I talked with a fellow by the name of George Wainfield Coon(?) and we agreed that we would go down and tell the fellows off, that we were not interested in a union, that we didn't want to be bothered. I was very anti-union.

HH: How do you mean "very anti-union?"

HM: It happened that in my studies I had studied the role of the Negro in the old craft unions, and I met a gentleman who ate where I used to eat, who had spent $7,500 for rolling stocks(?), trucking. I found that he had contracts, but the teamsters union threatened to boycott the man and not let anybody handle anything that he made and he wanted to ship because of the fact that he had signed a contract with a Negro trucker. As a result this fellow was put in the position that he lost his equipment because they wouldn't allow him to join the teamsters union and they would not allow the man for whom he was trucking to have him do the trucking.

HH: When you were still in Atlanta did you have any contact with any trade unions, did you hear about labor unions in Atlanta?

HM: I was not too interested in trade unions.

HH: How old were you when you left Atlanta?

HM: When I first came to Detroit I was almost 19. (HH: That was in '26?) '26. I was a school-boy and I was interested in being a doctor; I didn't have any intention of working in a plant. I was an athlete, and I didn't think that the question of working in a plant would ever face me, as far as that was concerned.

HH: Would you say that the work you took was just temporary?

HM: Yes. I was working...I was in a position that I didn't have to worry about my schooling. But my mother died when I was 19, or almost 19, and that was my reason for having come to Detroit. My uncle brought my sister and me to Detroit with him. I got a job here and then after my sister got married, then I decided to go back and continue my education.

HH: Did you ever go back?

HM: I went back. I went back in the fall. I said earlier that I went back in the fall of 1926 and I went to work at a hotel (HH: In Atlanta?) In Atlanta, and went to school and worked (HH: ?) Yes.

HH: Did you graduate from that school? (?)

HM: No, I quit.

HH: Then you came back to Detroit?

HM: I got married and I came back to Detroit. (HH: When?) In 1928.

HH: Now let us go back to 1937. You were describing the efforts of the UAW to organize _____(?) and you said that the reason you objected to them was that you had heard about the discriminatory practices of the AFL and of the Teamsters. _____(?)

HM: Well, the only things that I had read was about the craft unions, and I met this person who was eating at the cafeteria at which I was eating. (HH: Was this a Negro?) He was a Negro, that lost his trucking.

HH: He told you the story?

HM: He told me the story.

HH: So you accepted _____ about labor unions?

HM: Right. Because I knew that they had been excluded and I knew that in the 1890's and early 1900's, the Negroes were used as strike-breakers against the union. And I thought they were justified in accepting the employment because of the fact that they couldn't get it through the union; they were barred from the union and they didn't want a person to work for a person to work for a person unless they were members of a union, and that was a method of freezing the Negroes out. Naturally, I want it understood that I am a Negro, first, last, and always, and I am very proud of my heritage. And certainly, when something effects a Negro, it effects me, regardless of where he may be. Naturally, I was sympathetic, and having read of these incidents and having met this person who had been effected, I was naturally biased against the union. The attitude of the fellows was that the whites were doing _____that the Negro fellows was that the whites would try to use the Negroes to build a union, and then they would kick them out. We went to the meeting on Hart Avenue, near Kercheval, and I went there as a skeptic, George Wainfield and I. To my surprise, I was introduced to Lloyd Jones - I had never met him. We were invited down by the guys walking up and down the streets where the fellows were milling around the plant, and suggesting that "if you want to learn how to get your plant reopened and get a wage increase, come down to the Local 206 Hall. Just follow this crowd." And we were curious and skeptical. We went in and the first thing they did was want to know was how many people there were joining the union, and that they had to have somebody to negotiate contracts, and they had to have stewards. They had to join to the organization of a union; that was what it really amounted to. They said the first thing they needed to do was to get some stewards. There was a fellow by the name of Donald Kerr(?), who had been in touch with the international union, the UAW. To my surprise, he knew Lloyd Jones, and he was a Belgian, I believe. He invited the fellows down. He was on the negotiations committee in the sit-down strike that we had had, and despite the fact that the committee was cumbersome when we had the sit-down strike, there were those of us who remembered each other. When the question of stewards came up, they said that they would secure somebody for the negotiating committee first, and then they would talk about the stewards. And to my surprise, when nominations were opened for the negotiating committee, this guy, Kerr, immediately said, "I nominate that brother from the trim (?) room." He didn't know my name. "He did a marvelous job when we had our sit-down strike; he took the lead, and we couldn't find a better person to negotiate." Kerr had already been selected. (HH: He was a white man?) He was a Belgian, yes. I objected. I told them that I declined. I wasn't going to accept any nomination for anything because I was not a member of the union. Lloyd Jones ignored that. He said,"That's all right. You will be before you leave here." (HH: Who was Lloyd Jones?) I said a moment ago, that he was an international board member, Regional Director for the UAW-CIO. And as a result, I was elected on the negotiating committee to go down to the Brooks-Cadillac to negotiate.

HH: Were there many Negroes in the union at that time? Did all the Negro workers in the plant come over to the union?

HM: The bulk of them came, yes. The bulk of them came. Then we went into the election of stewards, and again I was nominated and elected as a steward, over my objection. I was told again that I would be a member of the union before I left. And I became more bitter then than ever, because it made it appear that they were going to try to use us for tools and they were forcing things upon me that I didn't want.

HH: Were you the only Negro nominated for a position?

HM: Yes, at that time.

HH: No other Negro was nominated at that time. I was elected both to the negotiation committee and as a steward over my protest. Then they raised the question of membership in the union. There was a white fellow by the name of Ralston Beavers from Missouri, who said, "Mr. Chairman, I saw this brother here work in the strike that we had last fall, and I was very deeply impressed, and I would like to say to him that if he would join the union, agree to join the union, and serve on the negotiating committee, I would be happy to pay his initiation fee." I reported that I pay my way wherever I go, and I want no favors from anyone, that if I decide to join, I'll join and I'll pay my own initiation fee, that I don't float on anything that I do. I was highly resentful at his having made the offer. I said that there are some questions that I would like to ask, and Lloyd Jones said, "Well, we're not going to let you ask the questions." I became highly incensed then and said, "What do you mean, "You don't allow anybody to ask the questions?" He said, "Don't get mad, don't get mad. We're going to answer the question before you ask it, that's why. We're not becoming hostile, we're trying to reassure you." He said, I know what your question is and I'd like to answer the question by quoting Article 1, Section 2, of the International Union, UAW-CIO..." (He didn't use the term "UAW-CIO", he said the International Qutomobile Workers of America---CIO)" which states, and I quote, 'The object of this union is to organize into one union, all workers, regardless of race, creed, color, nationality, or political affiliation.' In other words, brother, this union is absolutely color-blind." And I said, "Give me an application, and I joined. I immediately went to the Book-Cadillac Hotel to sit in on the negotiations, and was insulted by being told that I would have to use the service elevator when I went there.

HH: Who told you this?

HM: The bell-captain did. I told him that I didn't come there to go up on the service elevator, that I was there on business, and I had no intention of using it. And he said to the bellhop, "Show him to the service elevator." He said, "Yes, sir," and we started past the passenger elevator, and I stepped on. I said, "23." Then the operator said, "Butt." I said, "Butt, hell! I said, '23.'" He took me to the 23rd floor. When I went into the room, I was introduced to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Bohn Corporation, a fellow by the name of Sanuel deNoyle. After having been introduced to him, I said to him, "You're the person to whom I want to talk. I came down here representing a bunch of people. I think I am about as well

dressed as anybody here, and I think I know how to conduct myself just about as well as anyone here, and I resent the idea of being told that I'll have to use the service elevator." And he said, "Did you use the service elevator?" And I said, "Hell no, I didn't use it. Don't have any intention of using it." I said, "I came up on the passenger elevator, and I'll be using the passenger elevator as long as I'm coming here, or I won't be using an elevator at all." He said, "We'll settle that," and he called down and told them that there would be Negroes and whites coming up there, and under no conditions did he want anyone to be relegated to the use of the service elevator. That took care of that. Then we met the other members of the negotiating team from the company, and some of the members of the Negotiating Committee whom we did not know, for the local. We were out for three weeks. During that time I went to the picket line in the morning at 6 o'clock, picketed until 9:00, went to the Book-Cadillac and negotiated, sometimes until 2, 3 o'clock, but I was back on the picket line the next morning at 6:00. At the end of two weeks the fellow that was fired in the earlier strikes, sjowed up on the picket line. The morale was high: the fellows knew that the company would have to kick in, and when he found out that we were going to win the strike, then he began to put in his appearance. At the end of three weeks, we won the strike; we negotiated to eliminate some of the piece-work, the leveling off of pay, and seniority.

HH: Were there any wage differentials (?) between Negro and white workers?

HM: There were wage differentials. I said earlier that the average white in the plant made 20¢ to 30¢ an hour more than the average Negro. They levelled off wages. We were making 45¢ an hour daily, $5.02 a day, as a maximum, as far as Negroes were concerned. When they levelled off the rates, they levelled it off at 85¢ an hour. There were two fellows that took a cut, two of the whites who were in higher classifications, not more than possibly eight or ten. But the average white was making 65 to 75¢ an hour. It happened that this same fellow, that came to the picket line late, told me after the union was in for a long time, maybe eight, ten years or so, that the Negroes in this plant - he was a Frenchman, his name was Manuel Dieu - he told me that "you guys were the ones that got the breaks." talking about the Negroes. He said, "The average white got 10¢ to 20¢ an hour, and you guys got 40¢ an hour; you got the breaks. If I had to do it again, I wouldn't do it." Now he had been a steward in the plant and had been on the bargaining committee. It happened, however, that when we won the strike, we went back to work, and management felt that they were in a position that they could abuse the union.

HH: Now, may I ask you this? At the conclusion of this strike you did get union recognition?

HM: We got union recognition, yes.

HH: The UAW became the collective bargaining agent? (HM: Right.) And you became a local union? (HM: Yes.) What was the local union number? (HM: 208) You became Local 208 of the UAW. (HM: Right.) Tell me something about the officers, before you go on about the

plant situation, who became the officers of Local 208; were you an officer of Local 208?

HM: I was a steward at that time; I was not an officer, except in the capacity of stewardship. I later became a member of the executive board...

HH: What year was that?

HM: 1938, I think it was.'

HH: You were elected to the executive board of the Local? (HM: Yes.) And you remained the steward?

HM: Yes, and I became the chairman of the plant bargaining committee. Then I was elected to the vice-presidency of the local union, and I acted in the capacity of vice-president for a number of years.

HH: How about other Negroes? Were other Negroes elected to union offices?

HM: Yes: two stewardships. One was elected - well, stewardships and executive board memberships - there were some Negroes elected as chairmen of plant bargaining committees in the various plants.

HH: Could you mention some of the names of some of the other prominent Negroes in the local, in addition to yourself?

HM: There was a fellow by the name of Joe Sanders. He was the chairman of the plant bargaining committee in Plant No. - Michigan Smeltzing (?), which was later called Plant 10. He was originally the chairman of the plant bargaining committee over there. There was a fellow by the name of Leo Jenkins that was elected to the executive board from Plant 5. A fellow by the name of Elvin (?) Mason (?) was elected to the executive board from Plant No. 3. Another Negro that was on the original bargaining committee was a fellow by the name of Curtis Browder (sp?) from, at that time, Michigan Smeltzing, which later became Palnt 10.

HH: Was Michigan Smeltzing a part of the Chemical, I mean, the Bohn Aluminum...

HM: Bohn Aluminum and Brass Corporation, not Chemical. We had a big committee, a very big committee, it was too big, really, but we were successful in negotiating a contract. Now our job was to build a local union. We had no money, and what we did was borrow $300 from a fellow by the name of Cula (koola) from Local 2, UAW, that's the Murray of which Lloyd Jones had been the president. We charged two dollars for initiation fee for the first couple of years. From that $300 and the two dollars initiation fee, we were able to build a union and get it working.

HH: What were your dues?

HM: One dollar per month. We had two organizers, one that was volunteer, his name was James Anderson, another one was named Fred Williams was on the international payroll, $40 per week, as an organizer. James Anderson was working gratis, he was not being paid, he was not on the

international payroll at all. In discussing the question with the fellows in the plant , they were telling us that they were of the opinion that they were going to be used.

HH: You're talking about the Negroes?

HM: Yes. Oh, I'd like to digress. I failed to mention a fellow by the name of John Reynolds, who was elected as blue-button steward, and he was elected on the plant bargaining committee for the plant. John was the type of fellow that, for a secondary, in a secondary position, he was a good man. He was a wishy-washy type of guy. He capitalized on the pessimism of people, he had a different face for everybody whom he met. He had no ability, but he had tried to sow lack of confidence into the minds of the people. We had another fellow there, the fellow, Sherman Martin, from the metal room, who later became a chief steward, but not at that time.

HH: What is the meaning of the position of "blue-button (?) steward?

HM: That is just a steward, just a steward. He's an assistant to the chief steward. The chief steward acts in the capacity of the district committeemen, we used "steward" and "chief steward." It happens that in order to get the Negroes into the union, we had to make pledges to them. We pledged to them that we were going to fight to see that there would be no discrimination, and we pointed out that Negroes should get into the foundation of the union and do their part.

HH: Was there any effort made to get Negroes in a greater job spread; you indicated that Negroes were, for the most part, limited to certain jobs, was there any effort to begin to get new job opportunities for Negroes in some plants?

HM: Not at that time.

HH: But at a later time there was? (HM: Yes.) Will you please continue?

HM: We told them that it was our thinking that, if Negroes would put themselves into the foundation of a union, it would be just like sand, or gravel, or cement in the foundation of a building; that if they were in the foundation, and they would try to remove any of the ingredients, the sand, the gravel, or the cement, from the foundation of the building, that that building would collapse. By the same token, if Negroes were in the foundation of a union that they attempted to remove the Negroes from the foundation that the union would collapse. We pointed out to them that they were an important part. The main thing that we promised, (we found that they had) that we had gained the confidence of them, and I promised them that if there were any type of (?) discrimination, that I would be the first one to mention it, and that I would be the first one to pull off my button and let them know the way I felt. So when we went into the job of organizing, getting the plant organization, the brother-in-law to this Frenchman came over and said to me, "Do you know who I think would make a <u>good</u> chief steward?" I said, "Who?" He said, "That so-and-so Frenchman; that fellow will fight. You know he got fired out of here once about that." I said, "Yes, and he didn't come to the picket line until he saw that we had won the strike, and then he began coming

around. We don't need that type of leadership." _____ he's a good man (?). And as a result they started campaigning, and despite the fact that I had taken the lead in the organization, when it came down to a show-down, the whites out-numbered the Negroes, naturally, and to my surprise, they elected the Frenchman as chief steward, and asked me to act in the capacity of an assistant steward.

HH: You had expected to be chosen for chief steward? (HM: Right.) Did you formally run for the post of chief steward?

HM: I ran for the post.

HH: And you were defeated?

HM: I was defeated, on the basis of color.

HH: Was the vote mainly along racial lines?

HM: Right, right. With a few exceptions. There were whites that voted for me, but it happened that the Frenchman spoke the language of those fellows, and that was one of the departments in which they definitely were opposed to Negroes on anything except the unwanted jobs.

HH: For the most part you had segregated departments?

HM: It was segregated, there was no question about it (?)

HH: The departments were segregated as far as employment? (HM: Yes.) How about plant facilities?

HM: The plant facilities were not.

HH: As far as work was concerned you did have segregated departments?

HM: We had segregated jobs within the departments. I've known a number a number of times that the foreman would tell a Negro, "I would like to put you on this job, but this is a whiteman's job." That I have heard.

HH: There were segregated jobs within the departments? (HM: Right.) You did not have all Negro departments. (HM: No.) How about the foundry...?

HM: The foundry was integrated, but as I said earlier, Negroes were working on the molding machines, operating them, telling the white guy what to do; they were the brains of it, but the white guy was getting 40¢ hour more than the Negro, who knew what he was doing.

HH: It is now 1938, and you're establishing a local union...

HM: '37.

HH: '37. You've established a local union, you've got the first step in bargaining agreement, you're setting up local union officers; did you begin to make any contact with Negroes in other locals in the UAW?

HM: The answer is yes. We met a number of Negroes in the various other locals, yes.

HH: Do you recall who they were?

HM: Yes. We met Oscar Noble from Pontiac, we met Luke (Finnell) from Local 206, we met John Conyers from Local 7, to mention a few.

HH: How about Shelton Tappes?

HM: Shelton Tappes I wrote up in the union in 1940.

HH: You recruited Tappes? (HM: Right.) During the _____(?)

HM: No. I think it was in 1940. We had the "75 Years of Negro Progress Exposition" at the convention hall. Luke Finell and I were assigned to the job of handling the CIO exhibit at that exposition, and Shelton came in with his wife. All we had was a bunch of brochures and such, and the ability to _____(?) Shelton's wife said to him. "Why don't you joint that union?" He said, "You know how Mr. Marshall is. Fellows around said I'll get fired so quickly, it isn't even funny."

HH: Who was this Mr. Marshall?

HM: Marshall was the personnel man at Ford's. She says, "To hell with Marshall. Why don't you join this union?" And he did. He joined under the name of Robert Shelton, at that time. We later worked with a number of people out there. That was before '40; I believe that was in '39. We met _____ _____, a fellow by the name of Lee, numbers of fellows that were out there in the organizational drive. I'd like to say here, now, that we met Mike Woodman, a person for whom I have the greatest respect, and regardless of what people might say about him, he was the organizer that really did the job in Ford.

HH: What is it htat people say about Mike Woodman?

HM: Some of them try to discredit, but as far as the people are concerned, the poeple who know, they know who the person was that did the organizing at Ford, the one that knocked out the strategy, and the one that did the _____work. I was assigned to that local full-time by my local. I worked under Mike Woodman and I know the type of leader he is, I know the type of organizer that he is.

HH: Now, let's go back. I interrupted your continuity. You were describing-you're to '37, right? (HM: Right.)-you were describing some of the other Negroes that made contact with, (HM: Yes.) you mentioned some names. Were there any discussions at this point about the status of the Negro within the union, the internal structure of union leadership, (did you commence to do that in this period?)

HM: The answer to the question is, we would discuss the question of improving the status of the Negro, yes. The first convention that I attended was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at the Slater (?) Hotel.

HH: What year was that?

HM: 1937.

HH: You're at the 1937 Convention?

HM: Yes. There were twenty-nine Negro delegates. We didn't do too much discussing things there.

HH: Let me interrupt again. I suppose it would be too much to ask that you could remember the names of the delegates.

HM: No. I couldn't. I couldn't tell you the names of them.

HH: Were most of them from the Detroit, Michigan area?

HM: Yes. I almost recall the name of one man...That's thirty years ago.

HH: Were you a delegate?

HM: I was.

HH: You were a delegate?

HM: I was.

HH: You were a delegate from you local?

HM: Local 208.

HH: How about Oscar Knowles (?) Was he a delegate?

HM: I don't think he was, no.

HH: ?

HM: Look, don't ask me. That's a long time. I know that Herman Barnes, from my local, and there was a fellow from Knowles wasn't there... I can't think of the guy's name from Pontiac.

HH: Did the Negro delegates, and others, (the Republicans) woh were present at the convention, did you caucus during the convention?

HM: The answer to the question was that we discussed the question of politics to an extent. I can't think of the name of the guy that became an international vice-president in the UAW-AFL. (HH: Frank Evans?) Frank Evans was there. Homer Martin at that time was the president of the UAW. He was not doing too good as far as the presidency was concerned, and the people were dissatisfied. Reuther was not Regional Director at all. He was going to run against Lloyd Jones.. Frank Evans and I became very good friends, I thought he was on the up-and-up. We found out that Martin started railroading, and being a new delegate to the Convention, the fellows were a bit skeptical, as far as I was concerned. But Martin had an applausograph (sp?), and he wouldn't let anybody see it. He would set a motion on the floor, and (?) the motion was carried or the motion was lost, and if you'd ask for a division of the house, he would say, "Go ahead and take it." (?)

The chairman of the committee, or whatever it was, would go ahead and ignore you. And then he would say, "I have this machine here that's telling us what the results are." But what he was not taking under consideration was that poeple were counting noses, and he was reading the applausograph, but he was reading it the way he wanted it to read, and people were booing and whistling, and such as that, and we staged a sit-down, at the convention. We wouldn't allow anything to come on the floor of the convention, we just wouldn't do it. And finally, after five hours, Reuther got up and yelled, "Okay, fellows, let's let him go." And I said to the fellows then, "That guy's a rat." And _____ from my local said, "You don't know him. You can't say he's a rat, because you don't know him." I said, "But you have no business letting Martin get away with anything. You should stop him right now." He said, "But you're not an experienced labor man." At any rate they allowed him to proceed, we had quite a discussion on it, and I said to the fellows, "You're going to see that Reuther is on Martin's side. You watch and see." Reuther came to me and said to me, "My name is Walter Reuther." And I said, "How do you do?" He said, "And yours?" I said, "My name's Mason." "You're from that new local, aren't you/" "Yes." "What is that local number?" I said, "208." "What is that? That's from..." But he don't know. "From Bohn Aluminum." "Oh yes, Bohn. I want to tell you something." "What?" "I'm going to run for Regional Director, and I'm going to win. I will be in a position that I can appoint International representatives. I've watched you operate, and you're so brilliant to work in a plant. I want you to be the first international representative that I appoint." And I laughed at him. I told him, "I know about that hog-wash. Suppose I tell you that, as far as I'm concerned, I will not work for you, because you are a rat. Let's have that understood. You couldn't offer me a job, and have me accept it. You are a rat." (?) he ran and was elected. Now, instead of the fellows getting together and trying to caucus for something worthwhile, - oh yes, Walter Hardman was at the convention - and he boasted that he was Homer Martin's special representative at that time. Later, he called himself (?) special representative. It happened that after that convention, Martin became angry with the various members of the board, and he began firing this one, that one, and the other one, until finally he fired the twelfth one, and when he fired the twelfth one, they declared themselves to be International union, because they had a majority of the members of the board. And that was where the splinter group came. They organized the UAW-AFL.

HH: Homer Martin did?

HM: Homer Martin did. Thomas was elected to the vice-presidency under Homer Martin, and when the group declared themselves as the official UAW-CIO, then, being the first vice-president, (?) Thomas immediately became the president.

HH: Did he seek Walter Hardman? It's my recollection that Walter Hardman was the first Negro international representative under Homer Martin. (HM: Right, under Homer Martin.) So Walter Hardman remained the one Negro on the staff.

HM: Yes. And then Billups came.

HH: Excuse me. Did Billups go on the staff?

HM: International staff?

HH: At this stage?

HM: No, not at that stage. I said later he came on.

HH: Would you say Billups was the second?

HM: I wouldn't say that: I don't know.

HH: But he was in the early group...

HM: He was in the early group.

HH: As a staff man. Then they brought in Bowman, (?), Horace Sheffield, and a number of the fellows after that. You're now in 1938. The '37 Convention is over. You made some contact, I gather, with Negroes at the convention, you were concerned about the status of Negroes inside the union, you go back to your local unions. What role did you now play in your local unions?

HM: We began discussing the question of improving the status of the Negro.

HH: Would you be more specific.

HM: We took the position that the contract said that people would be hired, laid-off, and promoted according to seniority. This was not done. They had held to the same pattern that they had prior to the union. We started a campaign on it. We went to the various Negroes, and some of the whites - and I'd like to give credit to a fellow by the name of Gil Gabley (?), who was nothing but a youngster just out of school. He was an apprentice molder, (?) molder. We were very good friends. He went to several conferences with me - at least two conferences with me - one in Chicago and, I can't remember, I think one was in Milwaukee.

HH: Were these union conferences?

HM: Yes. And he was anxious, very eager to learn. I confided in him and several of the other whites. And I'd like to say that at that time Fred Williams was doing a magnificent job. He had been dropped by the International, and we put him on the payroll of the local union at the same rate of $40 a week, which was a stupendous (?) sum at that time. However, we were handicapped...

I should like to digress. We mentioned the matter of the election of stewards and the first election of chief stewards, at which time the Frenchman was elected over me, on a racial basis. I had promised the fellows that if I found any kind of discrimination I would be the first to mention it. At the time we found this had happened, we immediately challenged them and stated our position, and told them that we were keeping our promises. The fellows were very bitterly disappointed throughout the plant, for they were of the opinion that I had played the key role in the organization of the plant, and the Frenchman had done nithing, really, and they were very bitter about it. There

was an undercurrent, and there was no question in my mind that we were going to break, there was no question about it. I told the fellows that I had promised them, if there was discrimination I would be the first one to take off my union button and I said that I keep my promises. And I'm sure that Frenchy was elected along racial lines, and I don't intend to tolerate it. And it you are of the poinion I'm going to, you're wrong. And I reached up and got a fellow's hat and said, "Everyone of you who feels this was done on a racial basis and is unfair, bring your buttons and put them in this hat. I don't care whether you are a Negro or a white." You would be surprised at the number of workers, Negro and white, who came up and put their buttons in the hat.

H. Did a great majority of the Negroes do that?

M. Every Negro did, and quite a number of whites. As a result Fred Williams who was the business agent of the local, the representative I should say, jumped up and said, "We can't afford to let this go. We have to save the union." And this was going to stop the union, there was no question about it. The only thing to do was to nip it in the bud when it started. As a result, he said, "Mr. Chairman, I move that we split this department in half, that we have the lower end represented by a chief steward, and the upper end represented by a chief steward." They voted that, and both of us were elected chief steward. There was never any love lost between us, as a result. But we were able to save the union.

H. There were two chief stewards in the plant?

M. No, in the department. It was a large department, about four hundred, and they split it right down the line. There were some Negroes in the other end in the capacity of sand blastmen, and in the shipping room. They were not allowed to work on inspection, pulling wires, and the like. Those were white workers' jobs, management had ruled, and the union had accepted it. As a result we did have a chief steward. I was the only Negro at that, who was a steward, and who was on the bargaining committee.

H. I want to take up the continuity from the last tape. We were back in 1938. The period is 1936, 37, 38 was the period of the depression, a very bad period for the Negro, a time of deprivation and hunger, starvation and eviction from homes. It is my understanding that a number of Negro community organizations developed. There was the Metropolitan Council, there were various groups operating in the Negro community like the Unemployed leagues, the Workers Alliance. Did you have any involvement with those?

M. Very little. I worked with them a number of times, but as far as being extremely active, I was not.

H. All right. Let's pick up the story where we left off. We were talking of the 1937 convention. R.J. Thomas becomes president, replacing Homer Martin who sets up the UAW-AFL. You are chief shop steward in your plant. Would you pick up the continuity there?

M. I was - we started working to improve the status of the Negro. I would like to say here that I was handicapped by the instability of

the men I had tried to develop into a real union man. I insisted that the Negroes would begin learning parliamentary procedure, public speaking, and so forth, discussing labor problems and preparing themselves for leadership. There were two things that I insisted on, first, that you have to be qualified to do a real job; secondly, I pointed out a number of things that I didn't think were right but were still true, that in order to be recognized in any field of endeavor a Negro has to be able to stand head and shoulders ahead of any white and I insisted that they would attend the various classes. I succeeded in getting one fellow, Frank Hargreaves, to attend a six-month class at the high school of commerce under Leonard Woodcick, whose political thinking is well known, and certainly is not communist, was the instructor. And he commended me for not taking the class away from him, because he admitted he couldn't compare with me as far as parliamentary procedure was concerned.

H. This was 1938. What was Leonard Woodcock then doing in the UAW?

M. He was not then a wheel. I don't remember his local. I was saying the instability of some of the fellows in building themselves - I was saying that this fellow Reynolds, if you could get him to agree with the thing, and you could give him instruction, he was a good man. But you couldn't depend on him, for he would go and tell the fellows, "There's that hot-head trying something again. "And all he's going to do is get someone in trouble." We found ourselves in a position where we were not going to be able to accomplish anything. I got kicked out of the plant in January of 1938 for union activities and I jumped the fence and went in and got the fellows to go back to work - for the international had said they didn't want us fellows to strike, and a fellow by the name of Morris Field came out, and they threw him out, and I went in and got the fellows to go back to work. And when I started out on the negotiating committee, they closed the door and wouldn't let me in, even though I was an elected member of the negotiating committee. And we were out for a period of three months. And that was when, April 26, 1938, the police jumped me at plant no. 1 of the Bohn plants; I was beaten up by the police, broke a Detroit Times photographer's camera because he was trying to take pictures without permission; a guy by the name of Whirsowki? was the one who told them to be sure to get me.

H. Why was there a strike in 1938?

M. Because of the fact that the compulsory examination came up, the state occupational disease, and it was understood that they wanted to establish the condition of the present employees, and it was understood that no one was going to be fired or laid off as a result of the examination, unless it was hazardous. And they found that some of the fellows in the higher age group were affected with silicosis, to a certain extent, and they decided to fire six workers from plant no. eight. We tried to reason with them, to bargain, and they refused to bargain. I was not on the negotiation committee at that itme. They called me in and told me to hold the metal in the furnaces, not to tap it out, that they were going to strike. We warned them, the day before, told them we were going on strike the following morning. We told them not to charge the furnaces. A lot of people don't know it, but aluminum will oxidize just as water boils away. They called and said I shoud not allow the metal to be tapped out. I agreed.

I'm a stickler for orders. We went on strike at 9:30, and I said to the oldest man in the department - his name was Charles Harrel - "Work that metal and see that it doesn't oxidize; keep it stirred. I'll see to it that you are paid. For we don't want it said that we froze the metal." Unless it's stirred it solidizes on the bottom. He did that. They came and wanted to tap the metal out, but but we refused. They called the police then; I went in the office and told them that I understood they had some police officers, and they did - they had sixteen of them there. They came and said they were going to tap it out. I told them, very quickly that I wouldn't advise it, because if you do, someone is going to be hurt, and it's not going to be one of our guys." He asked me what did I mean, and I said I meant exactly what I said. We knew and they knew there was going to be a fight, so what we did was give four fellows some water and four fellows some sodium, and we warned them that if they came out to tap it out, they came at their own risk, that we would throw the water, then throw the sodium on top of the water. And you know that's an explosion, sodium on water is highly combustible; water on sodium causes no trouble. They found that we meant what we said, and the manager of the plant said,"We're going to come out anyway." And I said, "Whenever you want to it's all right." And I went to a fellow named Jack Nitsky, a Polish fellow, and a big Negro named Richard Gentry who weighed 280 pounds. And I said, "Your job, together is to keep this plant going, because they're going to put me in jail, and I know it." Now I pointed out to them that there were 300 people around the furnace who were not going to let it be tapped out. We finally got it settled - we burned up $30,000 of metal, and we were highly criticized for it, but I was going by orders. When we were picketing the police jumped us and beat us up. We won the strike and went back to work. Now we decided we were going to put on a drive. We campaigned among the fellows - the whites whom we could trust and all of the Negroes, and I insisted they would come to the meeting. I told them I was going to put a motion on the floor to put into action the seniority clause. I wanted seniority in reality instead of lip service. I begged the fellows to come. To my surprise, the fellow Reynolds was going around telling the guys that the hothead was up to something again. I informed them that if there was not another Negro there, I was going to put such a motion on the floor. I walked into the meeting that evening, and there was not another Negro in the hall. I put the motion on the floor: "Mr. chairman, I move that we put into effect the seniority clause in reality."

H. You are suggesting that even though the contract had a seniority clause, there was a kind of tacit collusion between the company and the union not to enforce it?

M. I pointed out that they kept the lines drawn that they had before the union and I don't know whether there was an agreement, but it was just not touched. The stewards wouldn't do anything about it. You would begin to discuss the questions. Some of these Uncle Tom Negroes would jump up and say,"You're pushing too hard." I just became sore about it, and I had the promise of every Negro in that plant that they were going to be there. Not one appeared. Well, I put the motion on the floor. I had to lie about it, of course.

"Mr. Chairman, I move that we put into effect the seniority clause in reality. If it is supported, I would like to speak on it." Fred Williams supported it. Then I got up and spoke on it. I told them, "I suppose you wonder why the Negroes are not here. They're not here because they're putting you on trial (I had to save face) You say that you are union men, and that you believe in the union and in seniority. You believe everything the CIO proposes and advocates is correct. Then our contract stipulates we should be hired, advanced, laid off according to seniority. You know as well as I that there are whites who are receiving instruction from Negroes every day who are working on the same jobs with them and are getting 20¢ more. Now I want that stopped. Negroes in this plant want that stopped. And if you are union men and women you want it stopped. Now the contract was signed to be lived up to. And it is my thinking it should be. Now, if you want the fellows to know that you are union men, vote for this motion, if you want them to realize you are hypocrites, then vote it down. But I'll tell you this. You vote it down, I dare you! Because you will then be telling the fellows what you've said all the while, that you are using them for tools would be true. So you're in a position, Mr. Chairman, you have to vote on the motion. And I want a division of the house on it. I want those who are hyprocites to stand up and be counted." It passed unanimously. The following morning Kerris came into the plant and told some of the Negro fellows, "I'm tired of you fellows suffering the way you do, and I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to put you on the better jobs." And that morning they put a Negro moulder on. That broke the ice. The fellows appreciated it so much they got up a committee to make a token of appreciation at the following meeting, and a fellow by the name of Greene, came to me. Jake Gably, my friend that I talked about, was there, and he told Bill what had happened, the night before. And the guys got in the washroom and began talking about the hot heads who agitate and the guys who really do things. "Now, Kerris didn't do a lot of talking, but he went and got this." And these guys who do a lot of talking, and raising a lot of Hell, and never doing anything (this was Reynolds who was supposed to be my right-hand man) and they selected him as the spokesman for the group, and they appeared at the next meeting en masse to express appreciation, and he called for the minutes. When the minutes were read, they were non-plussed. Their mouths flew open. I swore this fellow (Green) to secrecy (he was a Mason, as well as I) He said, "These guys are just riding you to death. Why don't you tell them what the score is?" I said, "No, I don't want to do that. The important thing is that the thing is done." We had scratched the surface, got our foot in the door, then we went into the core room, and we had a dreadful fight there, but we began putting Negroes on better jobs there and the fellows didn't like it, but there wasn't a great deal they could do about it. Finally, we decided to break ice in the trim room. We had a southerner by the name of Norman Smith who was a metallurgist, and extremely anti-Negro, and first we put a Negro into the inspection room, a thing that had never been done before, a little fellow who didn't weigh but 135 pounds, by name Charles McCarthy. The guys started putting pressure on him; we had voted it. The Frenchman was the chief steward and committeeman, and we had three Negroes and three whites on the Committee at that time, including a Southerner by the name of Dempsey Dillon. We had John Reynolds, Henry Moore, and I as a Negro,

and a fellow by the name of Stanley Adamski and Nick Swetnick who, in my book is the best union man I've ever seen, and we talked to management about putting Negroes into the Inspection Department, and they agreed. The Frenchman said, "I have three hundred men out there, and if you put a Negro in there, every so-and-so one of them is going to walk out. Management said, "The union is handling it now," and he said, "I don't care about what the union says; if you put a man, a Negro in there, every one of them is going to walk out." This was a rotary filing job, but we were breaking the ice with that; we were going to start promoting people according to seniority throughout the Department. Management said, "What shall we do about it?" As the chairman of the plant bargaining committee, I said, "Put the Negro on the job!" "Well, you guys are going to back us?" "To the hilt," I said, "Put him on the job.: As a result they came to the committee and siad they were going to put Charlie McCarthy on the job. Charlie had known me for years. He came in there before he was eighteen years old looking for a job, and they told him to come back when he was eighteen. He was a very small guy, and when he was eighteen he walked in just as big as could be - he knew the superintendent by name: "Paul, you wouldn't give me a job when I was out here before. You told me to come back when I was eighteen. Well, I'm eighteen today." The superintendent looked at him and laughed, and told him to come on in. He did, and they gave him a job. Well, at any rate, when the guys began putting on pressure, he said, "Look, I can't go down and face them." I asked why. "They're going to beat me to death down there." I told him he had to go because we had made the arrangements. He said, "But they're going to kill me." I told him he hadn't even had a whipping threatened, and that if he didn't go he was going to be beaten, sure enough, becuase I was going to do it. He looked at me and siad, "Hey, man, wait a minute." "Well, take your choice," I said, "Do you want them to jump you with us supporting you, or do you want me to kick you around the place?" He said he would go. The following morning, no, that afternoon, they were going to put him on. We said we would like to be there when it was done. I said there was one thing I wanted understood, that no man there except the foreman was going to give him instructions on what to do. He said he would agree to that, and sure enough, that afternoon, we held the committee intact, and when they came back from lunch they asked if we were ready. We said yes, and we held a committee meeting right around the bench, and the Frenchman was there. And when they put him on, that Frenchman took his steward's button off from one side, and his union button off from the other and slammed them in my face. I stepped aside, and they fell. Then I said, "Frenchie, I would bust you down, but I have too much to lose, and too much to gain." I picked up those buttons and held them in my hadn, and I said, "I'm going to put these on somebody who is worthy of wearing them. But you remember one thing, you will never wear another one in this plant." No other white worker walked off the job, or even protested. They didn't like it, but we had fought so consistently against unauthorized stoppages of work until they were afraid to move on it. So we put McCarthy on the job.

Then I went to a fellow by the name of Frank Gosdowski, a Polish fellow, after three or four days, saying we had to have a steward in the cepartment, and I started discussing it with some of the fellows. I said, "Maybe Frank would make a good steward. So I asked the shipping clerk to send Frank Gosdowski upstairs. So he came

up, "You wanted to see me, chief?" I said, "Yes, Frank, I'm going to appoint you as chief steward on an interim basis." "Gee, chief, I don't know nothing about the union." "You know right from wrong, don't you? The only thing a steward has to do is be sure he is right, and then fight. Do you agree?" He said he would act until we got somebody. I said we didn't want that, we wanted him to act until the next meeting, and that he was to get out and campaign for himself, and that I would campaign also, and that we would elect him on a permanent basis. "Gee, "He said, "That's great." To be frank, the guy was on the other side of the fence, but he became active, and he turned out to be an exceedingly good steward.

H. Now, am I right in assuming that after breaking the ice with Charlie McCarthy, you progressively secured more jobs for Negro workers, and that after that the demonstrations by Frenchie, there was no more trouble? They didn't like it, but they went along with it, you said. Now, I want to move in to the internal situation within the union. Could you move on to the '38 convention? Did you go to the '38 convention? Would you tell us what happened there, of your meeting with other Negroes, what issues concerning Negroes were presented, and something about the emergence of factions within the UAW, and your role, and the role of other Negroes? You've told us a great deal of internal shop conditions. I would like to pass that for the time being. Can you devote yourself now to talking of the internal factional situation and the interest of Negroes in the factions?

M. To be frank about it, most of the Negroes were left-wingers. When we say left-wingers, we mean anti-Reutherites.

H. Why?

M. I can only answer for myself. I stated that I had been fighting consistently for union policy, and I boasted I was so fighting. But the guys came up and began talking about the Reuther program. Reuther talked to me, as I told you, in the 1937 convention. He was playing politics at that time. And I complained that with 29 Negro delegates we should be trying to do something constructive for the Negroes instead of trying to fight to see who was going to be the next president, or the next regional director.

At the 1938 convention we met and we began talking about things. But the international representatives were the ones who were playing the key roles - laying down the leadership, they called it, and they were leading in the direction they had been told to lead. The Negroes were prone to follow them to a great extent, so that we were not able to accomplish a lot. The factions were decidedly there. It happens that the guys began talking about the Reuther program. I had not known about any program which Reuther had except one to make him president of the international union. I was a middle-of the roader. When I went into the trade union movement, I went in of my own accord. I was not tied up with any group or any thing of the kind. When the issues arose, I agreed or disagreed. And when one person representing the group came over and said this or that, I would think about it; and another group would come over and say do this or that, I would use my judgement.

H. You supported the Thomas faction?

M. I supported the Thomas faction against Martin, and at a later date the Thomas faction against Reuther.

H. And most of the Negroes, with certain rare exceptions, in 1938, were in the Thomas faction?

M. Right, including Horace Sheffield.

H. We know who those persons were - from previous interviews we've established who those persons were. Would you want to give us a generalization of why you think nearly all the Negroes supported the Thomas faction against the Reuther faction?

M. There were several things which were responsible. For one thing, Thomas carried the hopes of the Negroes. Reuther is, first of all, a West Virginian. And, despite the fact that he denies it, Reuther has no use for Negroes in any shape or form, except as he can use them.

H. Are you talking about the situation then, or now?

M. Then and now. To be frank about it, I think you recall that Thomas went to Texas and refused to use a segregated door and was put in jail there. That was in 1938 or in 1939 - something like that. That went a long way. It was a hall - I think it was the civic auditorium. I think it was at Dallas, and they arrested him. That had a terrific impact for the Negro. Point two, Thomas insisted that the contracts would be lived up to, that Negroes would be given an opportunity on the upgrading. Thomas' mistake was that he was brutally frank, he was fair. He was not a conniver who made a lot of bogus promises. He made mistakes, he was misled in certain instances. But I think he tried to be honest about it; I think the majority of Negroes did.

H. At the 1938 convention did the issue of Negro representation on the International Executive Board come up?

M. It did, but it was brushed off. It was lost in the Constitution Committee's report - it was pigeon-holed.

H. Now, in 1939, were you a delegate?

M. 1939 - that was in Cleveland, wasn't it? No.

H. Were you a delegate to the convention in 1940?

M. Yes.

H. Between 1938 and 1940, just in a word, what was your situation inside you local union?

M. Conditions had improved. Negroes were working on the various jobs, with the exception of the heat treat. And it was not the fellows who were responsible, but the attitude of the company.

H. Isn't that rather unusual? In most plants Negroes are in the heat-treat departments.

M. The heat-treat department in an aluminum plant is a good job; they do burnelling (?) The white fellows had the jobs, and the Smith fellow whom I mentioned a few minutes ago refused to accept a Negro unless he had a college degree. In fact, they laid down a decree that a person would have to have a college degree in order to work in the heat-treat degree. And there this fellow Frank came in very handily. He came to me and said, "Butch (the leader on the heat-treat) is not a college graduate." We wrangled over it and it was really a threat, because we were going to close the plant down And management met with us, and this guy Frank came back and said, "Bring them out there - bring management and the committee out there, and we'll settle it." And we met about strategy. We had the steward and the foreman, and the ocmmittee. The negotiation committee from management also was there. I said to Frank to get Butch. He brought him over. We told him we wanted to ask him some personal questions, and asked if he minded. "Not at all, chief." he replied. "How far did you go in school?" "To the eighth grade." As a result we busted it right down, and they agreed they would accept a person with a high school diploma. We objected to that, and the fellow who was going on the job, name of Sullivan Johnson, said to take them up on it. I said we wouldn't do it, but he said to do as he told us. As a result we agreed, but we asked him why he said to take them on since he was the fellow who was to have the chance on the heat-treat. "I'm going to have it," he said. "I graduated from Miller High School." So the following morning, he brought the high school diploma, and he was put on the heat-treat job. The main part of it is that we went right down the line, through every guy in the heat-treat department, and the man with the eighth grade education had the most education of any guy in there - one guy was a third grade man.

H. Now, what was your own position in the plant? You were still a steward?

M. No, I became the chairman of the Bargaining Committee.

H. Did you go to the 1940 convention?

M. We didn't accomplish anything as far as improving the condition of the Negro. There was debating but we accomplished nothing. There was debating, both oeft wing and right wing. Dick Leonard, and that bunch. We found they were playing politics with the Negro question. That happened at all the conventions, to be frank. They raised the question of a place for a Negro on the Board, and then they would talk about the constitution committee's report, which had to be held at a certain time. And the constitution's committee's report couldn't be given until after the elections, and then after the elections when you go to talk about the constitution committee's report, the elections are over, and there's nothing you can do about it. And I would like to say that the left wingers were no more interested in the election of a Negro to the Board than were the right-wingers.

H. But a majority of the Negroes stayed with the left wing?

M. Right. There were people in the left wing who were interested in numbers of people. In particular, Addes was interested, Mortiner was interested, Ed Hall was interested. Thomas was opposed - it was one of the great mistakes that he made. And Reuther was opposed. Reuther told me to my nose that there was not a Negro in the entire UAW qualified to sit on the Executive Board. That was in 1943.

H. Were you at the 1941 convention?

M. It was the same thing. At the 1942 convention we were in a position where we could have beaten Reuther. We went into the convention, and believe it or not, Louis Martin and I got together. Martin was the editor of the Chronicle. And that was most unusual, because we didn't set horses, period - he, Horace White and I. Louis and I couldn't get along - but he came to me and said, "Hodges, I want to know what the chances are of electing a Negro to the International Executive Board?" I said we had a good chance. Our strategy would be to make them amend the Constitution, or we were going to defeat either Reuther or Frankensteen. I said, "What we should do is defeat Reuther." I talked to the left-wing caucus, and I pointed this out. "Reuther is a threat. And he is in a position now in consistently arguing the Reuther program, the Reuther program, the Reuther program. We're in a position now where we can destroy him. And what we should do is kill him politically, right now. Now we're going to run a Negro, whether you like it or not. We're going to run a Negro, and we would like for you to support it. Either support a Negro, or a constitutional change for three vice presidents in the UAW. It makes no difference, so take your choice." They pussyfooted about and hemmed and hawed. They made no promises. Neither side made any promises. Finally, when the day of election came, Reuther was nominated. They had said, "We want to show our feeling of solidarity. We want to stick together. We don't want to kill Reuther. But we want to keep control." I said, "You'll be sorry. You can kill the guy politically, right now. You should do so." They didn't want to do it, so we said we would, for we were going to run a Negro. That was at the 1942 Convention in Chicago, at the Hotel Stevens. Louis Martin and I talked about it. I told him what had transpired. He asked if anyone was going to run, if I was going to run. I said that I was not interested.

H. Why were you not interested?

M. I wasn't interested because I had a job to do in my local union, and I was the leader of the left-wing caucus, and was leading the fight in the conventions.

H. You were the leader of the left-wing caucus in the 1942 convention?

M. Yes, and I didn't want it to appear that I was fighting a personal battle. Noble had been servicing the Ford locals and was very popular out there with them. We began talking about whom to support, and the question came up of Oscar Noble as vice president of the UAW-CIO.

H. To clarify for my own sake. This was the 1942 convention. Reuther was a vice-president. You nominated Oscar Noble to run against him?

M. To run against him and Frankensteen. Frankensteen was the stronger of the two, and the person who was going to be eliminated was Reuther. We were going to win, and there was no question about that. We were going to crush Reuther.

H. Was this the general strategy of the Addes-Thomas faction?

M. No. It was our strategy - Negroes got together and decided it, and we had the bulk of the people on our side.

H. You said you were the leader of the left-wing faction, the Thomas-Addes faction. Was there a difference of opinion between the Negroes and the whites? In the left wing faction on this point?

M. On this point, yes. To be frank about it, Thomas was not opposed to having a Negro in a top post. And we took the position that nobody knows better how a shoe fits than the fellow who wears it, because if it pinches it hurts, and you know about it. And we felt nobody could speak the sentiments of a Negro better than a Negro, because a Negro knows the things with which a Negro is confronted. As a result, we wanted a Negro on the Board. The caucus voted - they refused to support a Negro.

H. I want to get this absolutely certain, Mr. Mason. At the 1942 convention the Thomas-Addes faction voted, as a faction, not to support Oscar Noble's candidacy. Is that correct?

M. No, I didn't say that. They refused to vote - a motion was put on the floor that a Negro would be supported, and they voted it down.

H. And the Negro delegates within the caucus then took an independent position, and bucking the sentiment of the top brass, you put Oscar Noble's name up, even though it did not have the support of Thomas and Addes?

M. Right.

H. Were there any Negroes who did not go along with you in the faction on this?

M. None but the international representatives - Horace Sheffield, but I don't think he was on the staff at the time; Bowman, who was brought in from Saginaw, didn't go along.

H. Then, aside from Bowman, and one or two other Negroes on the staff, bucked the leadership, and supported Noble?

M. Right.

H. The position of the Thomas-Addes faction was there was no formal position, but they urged you not to make a fight? Not to make a convention issue out of it?

M. They said they didn't urge us not to make an issue of it. They said they didn't want to destroy Reuther, because they didn't want to destroy the solidarity of the union. Now that was the position

they took, and so that the records may be straight, Addes was in favor of it. In fact, he carried the ball to support a Negro.

H. Then there was a split between Addes and Thomas on this point? Addes did support the aspirations of the Negro within the left-wing caucus on this point?

M. Right.

H. Reuther's position was what?

M. The Reuther caucus was opposed.

H. What happened?

M. I nominated Oscar Noble for the vice presidency. Shelton Tappes supported the nomination - made a supporting speech, and a white delegate, I don't recall his name, made a supporting speech. When the acceptances came, they got down to Noble. Noble made a beautiful, a very beautiful acceptance speech, and at the end of it, we knew he was going to say, "I accept," and we were all elated because this was our chance. He concluded by saying, "I appreciate all the confidence which has been shown in me, but I go along with the wishes of the CIO (Phil Murray was working to save Reuther's neck) and I decline." Louis Martin and I cried in each other's arms.

H. Oscar Noble makes a speech after your nomination and the other two nominating speeches and he graciously declines?

M. He said that he would go along with the wishes of the CIO and he would decline.

H. Now, what does that mean, to "go along with the wishes of the CIO"?

M. Phil Murray was at the convention, and Phil Murray told him not to run, because they wanted to save Reuther's skin. I'll tell you very frankly why, because Reuther was through. If Noble had run, Reuther was going to be beaten, that is why.

H. Phil Murray was interested in salvaging Walter?

M. Right! I'm being perfectly frank about it. He may have regreted it.

H. Now, let's backtrack for a minute. You said that in addition to working for your own local union, you were also assigned to the Ford organizing drive? I would like you to tell us about that - what year you started in the organizing drive and tell us something about your activities then.

M. It was in 1939-1940. I was assigned to the Ford Drive, under Widman, but my local paid me, not the International.

H. Wasn't that a rather unusual arrangement?

M. Well, the organization of Ford was unusual. Other locals were doing that.

To be frank about it, we won a plaque - Local 155, 206, and 208 for having written up more members in the drive than any other locals in the country. I worked as an organizer, organizing the workers, contacting them at night, and even during the strike. I happened to be the one who talked the strikers out of the plant. They had been in there for a couple of weeks, and they wanted to get home, and such as that.

H. Were you there when Walter White made his famous trip around the plant in a sound truck? Horace and the NAACP Youth Council asking the workers to come out of the plant?

M. I wasn't there at that time. Shelton and I were together, working the sound truck, and we had a lot of fun about it. A very beautiful woman came down the street and she had a platter in her hand, and one of the guys said, "My goodness, look!" And we were just devilish and having a lot of fun, and I said this was an opportunity, and I kidded around. I said, over the public address system, "My, my, my! Have mercy, my, my, my! I wonder whom she's going to see." It had hit upon me that I could play upon somebody in there. So I said, "What a beautiful lady coming to see somebody!" I said, "Lady, as beautiful as you are, why would you come out here and support a scab, bringing him something to eat? Don't you realize you are bucking against the union, and the union is fighting for a living wage for your husband and that means more money for you, lady!" She smiled. "Lady, don't take him anything to eat. Give it to one of these guys picketing out here." I was just kidding. Shelton said to lay it on, it was going to work. She walked over and gave him the platter and leaned over to kiss him. I said, "Lady, don't kiss him; he's a rat, he's a scab. You should have him come home; why don't you take him home, lady?" I just kept talking, talking. Finally she decided to leave. I said, "My, my, my! Fellow, you going to let your wife go home alone? Don't you know better than that? You've been away from home for two weeks. You'd better go home and see about your wife. Lady, if he doesn't come home, as lovely as you are, he thinks more of Mr. Ford than he does of you. He's making a terrific choice." She started grinning. "Fellow, as lovely as she is, you should be there at all times. Fellow, you'd better go home and see about your wife. Someone as beautiful as that one is at home? You'd better go see about her. You've been out here for two weeks." Shelton said, "Keep talking, keep talking." "If you don't go see about her, someone else will." Her husband said, "Listen, fellow, I don't play that." "-I said, "I'm not playing, I'm serious. Lady, if he won't come home with you, leave your telephone number with one of those guys. They'll give it to me. And I'll come." The woman - she nearly died laughing. I kept agitating until she got out of sight. Shelton said, "You've got that guy worried." I said I was serious. Pretty soon, the husband said, "Come over here." I went over. "I want to come out, but I'm scared of those guys - they're going to kill me." I said, "They aren't going to bother you. I'll pull the picket line back. And if the line is back, they're not going to bother you. But you better go see about that woman." I told the fellows the man wanted to come out. They cheered him. I asked them to move that line back fifty feet, and they did. I said, "That's the kind of sports we are, fellow! You don't have to worry about anything. We want you out,

we're not going to bother you." He came out like a blue streak. Another guy said he wanted to come out. I said, "All you guys had better go home and see about your wives. You've been away for two weeks now." You know, all those guys finally came out of there. That was what really started it.

H. What were some of the other organizing efforts you were engaged in besides your own local union?

M. Ford - and I worked with the Frigid Food strike - 300 Negro women and five Negro men came out - they were handled at that time by the Food and Tobacco Workers, and they were in trouble. The CIO assigned me to that Council - I think it was 47.

H. Now, let us go on to 1943, the historic 1943 convention.

M. Well, the 1943 convention was held in Buffalo, New York -

H. There was a functioning Negro caucus now, wasn't there? And you met before the convention? Would you tell us what happened, what the demands were going to be?

M. There was a fellow by the name of Otis Eaton at Ford Local 600, who steadfastly fought for a Negro vice-president, along with me. We discussed it at all the caucuses preparatory to the convention. The international representatives were moving around. We insisted upon a Negro being elected vice president. We discussed it at length, but we were never able to get together completely, because the international representatives kept sticking their noses in, as per instruction. We went up to about a month before the convention. Walter Hardin and Horace Sheffield came up with a proposal that they elect a Negro at large. They issued a press release of their plan, and the guys began kicking it around.

H. At this stage, Sheffield had joined the Reuther faction?

M. No, Sheffield was a left winger. He was in the Thomas-Addes caucus

H. When did Horace switch? I though Horace got the statement of Reuther before the convention...You were discussing the 1943 convention which was an important one in terms of press for Negro demands. The Negro caucus is active; you are an important fugure in the Negro Caucus.

M. I'm not saying I was an important part of the Caucus. A few weeks before the 1943 Convention was held Horace Sheffield and Walter Hardin came out with a joint press release.

H. Hardin was in the left-wing caucus; we have now agreed that Sheffield was working for McCusker, that is in the Reuther, right-wing caucus?

M. That is correct. It happens that they came out with a joint press release that they were going to come out for a Negro Board member at large. We were not able to resolve the question. There were a few of us who insisted on running a Negro as a vice-president, arguing that it was discrimination in reverse to ask for a Negro Board member-at-large. There had never been a position of that kind before,

and we argued that a Negro should be elected on merit, not on color. The other fellow who led the discussion on this point was Otis Eaton who at that time was quite popular and prominent in Local 600. We went into Buffalo, still not agreed. A meeting was called for 8:00 p.m. at the Vendome Hotel. We went. The question came up of a Negro member at large, which, as I said was proposed by Sheffield and Hardin. Eaton and I led the fight against it. Uncompromisingly we fought. We sent delegates to the left wing and the right-wing caucuses demanding support for a Negro on their slate. The delegates whom we sent returned, after midnight, with a "No," from each group. They would make no commitment whatsoever, either the right or left wing. The meeting wore on. Eaton and I were uncompromising, but the others got together. Shelton Tappes was chairman of the meeting. At about 1:30 or 2"00, Shelton said, "This meeting is not going to adjourn until we are together. We are going to be together for one time. We're going to fight for one simple thing, on a unified front. We're going to demand either a vice-president, or a member at large." Finally, I said I would go along, that I was going to stop fighting, but Eaton said he wouldn't agree, that he was going to continue fighting. I said I was going to keep my mouth shut. "Since you are arguing for the sake of unity, I'll let it go, even if I don't agree. It is my opinion that they are going to cut us to shreds. And the way they are going to do it is by using the usual Reuther tactics. They're going to tell you it is discrimination in reverse, and it's going to work effectively." Eaton was left out there alone, and by the way, Eaton stopped speaking to me as a result of my having left him out there in deep water. But for the sake of unity I decided to stop fighting, because I couldn't win. And the guys were determined to follow Sheffield and Hardin. As a result we finally adjourned, but we didn't know until such time as they went on record demanding that a Negro at large be elected at the Convention. Then they said to me, "You're the leader of the Caucus, you're always fighting on the floor, you're the most photographed man in the Convention, and if you're not going to help the fight we might as well forget about it. Now we want you to take the floor." We discussed this at length, and finally I said I would go along with them. This was against my will. I want this clearly understood. I am bitterly opposed, and I always was to a Negro at large. I wanted the Negro to occupy a regular office, didn't want a special Negro position created. But I was in a position where we had pledged ourselves to come out of the Caucus unified, and we weren't going to be able to unify it in my way.

H. I would like to ask about a few people and their position. What part did Bill Oliver play?

M. Well, Oliver was there, but he didn't take a very prominent position.

H. Was Willoughby Abner involved?

M. Yes, Willoughby Abner was involved. Abner was from Chicago, he and Florence, whose last name I forget. Abner was in favor of a Negro at large. He argued from the viewpoint of unity. Oliver had his reasons for not taking too much of an active part. He was in the Addes-Thomas Caucus and he didn't want to antagonize Thomas. He joined the Reuther Caucus after Reuther was elected, after he found

out that Reuther had really counted noses and was going to be elected. You see, Oliver was not one of the original fellows. He came here with the Ford four, a quartet. He came in with his so-called gracious manner, and he was able to convince the fellows in Ford 400 that he was it. Oliver was a tenor singer in the quartet. Oliver was a fellow with no union background, just a singer. Now, Oliver aspired to the job of FEP director. I wasn't interested because I didn't want to have it said that I was fighting a personal battle. Anyway, we went on the convention floor and they started playing politics with it. I put a resolution in that the Constitution Committee be authorized to bring in a report before the elections were held. And I made the mistake of swearing on the floor. I had met an old retired railroader from out in Iola, and he said he came there for the purpose of seeing how the convention was run. I think he said he was Swedish. He said, "You have been so brilliant on the floor, you have been carrying this convention all the way. My wife would like to meet you." So I went out and met her. She was complimenting me for the manner in which I was conducting myself on the floor. And I made the mistake of swearing on the floor of the convention. I told them that they were using the Negro issue as a political football, and I was damned tired of it. Anyway, they voted to authorize the Committee to bring in a report. That was in the morning session. I thought we accomplished something. Just before lunch we walked out, and that old guy was there, red as a beet. He said, "My wife is so disappointed in you doesn't know what to do. She is crying." She told me how ridiculous I had made myself. I felt like the cat which had swallowed the canary. I apologized to her. That afternoon the report hit the floor, and the fellows had insisted that I take the floor. I took the floor, and to my surprise, the second fellow who took the floor against was Horace Sheffield, and it was their proposal.

H. I want to go back to this incident. Am I to understand that Horace was to have gotten a pledge from Reuther that Reuther would support the election of a Negro to the Executive Board? that a front-page story appeared in the Michigan Chronicle to this effect? Horace allegedly was supposed to have secured assurance from the Reuther Caucus, then at the Convention Reuther does not support the proposal.

M. I don't believe he got the commitment.

H. Are you suggesting that Horace made it up?

M. I'm suggesting that he told a lie. It's that simple.

H. Did Horace vote for the proposal.

M. The answer is that not only did he vote against it, he spoke against it. That's what I'm saying. The second speaker following me was Horace Sheffield speaking against it.

H. Even though, in the pre-convention issue of the Michigan Chronicle, the statement from Horace Sheffield was to the contrary?

M. I mentioned that he and Hardin issued the press release jointly - it said that Sheffield and Hardin had this proposal to make - I'm sure you saw it in the Chronicle.

M. Now when I took the floor I had made a terrible mistake, and I knew it. So I said, "Mr. Chairman, before the timekeeper starts the timing, I would like to ask a point of privilege. I have a statement to make to this convention. This morning I lost my temper, and I used language not befitting a gentleman. I would like to say to this convention that I am extremely sorry, and that in the future, I will use language befitting a gentleman." Well, the rafters fell. I had reestablished myself completely. Horace took the floor a couple of speakers after I, and Walter Hardin was sifting around the floor, "Speak against this, and I'll make R.J. give you a job." A little guy named Danny Carter from Local 50, Willow Run, was one of the guys, and Grant, Local 600, called for a point of order and said that the Rules had made a recommendation which was accepted that no international representative should allowed on the floor unless he was a duly elected delegate. Thomas' answer to him was that "You are more out of order than he is." and said to go ahead with the deliberations. I then called for a point of order, and said he had better get Hardin off the floor - that if he didn't I would. Well, he didn't and I did. I cracked him on the floor. Tempers were high, there was no doubt about it. We argued that they were doublecrossing. I had no business hitting him - I had promised this lady and the convention that I would conduct myself as a gentleman, and I cracked Hardin.

H. What is your explanation that both caucuses, both the left and the right wing, refused to support a Negro? Did they have the same reasons, did they have different reasons, did they have contradictory reasons?

M. The left wing was afraid of losing a following. The right wing was trying to build a following.

H. But on the other hand, the left wing already had the Negro support. Weren't they endangering the continued adherence of the Negro?

M. The answer is yes. The results of the next election proved it. Thomas was defeated by 67 votes, despite the fact that Reuther told me from the floor of the convention that there wasn't a Negro in the entire UAW who was qualified to sit on the UAW Executive Board. He said that for the record, in the 1943 proceedings. He told me that my local had done pretty well by me - I was the president of it. I told him that it wasn't because of any help I got from his group. That was the exchange between us. At any rate, Reuther was building his votes on the southerners. Reuther is from West Virginia. The left-wingers were afraid to press for a Negro because they thought they could keep the Negroes in their pockets anyway, but they might alienate some of their white following, and the thing had gone pretty close at that time. Now it happened at the next convention there was a delegation from New Jersey headed by a Negro, and he was as anti-Thomas as he could be. I don't recall his name. We had it out, and when I saw he was going against Thomas - they had 117 votes, or something like that - and they ahd pledged themselves to go the way he went. I told him at the next convention, "You're talking about the position that Thomas took? What are you going to say about the position that Reuther took? Reuther told me to my nose, that there was not a single Negro in the UAW qualified to sit on the Executive Board. You

You have Mathews, and that bunch of guys too dumb to go in out of the rain. You mean to tell me that he's going to hold Negroes lower than Pat Greathouse, Gosser, and that bunch of guys. I don't believe it." One of his guys said, "We're going along with you - we want to talk seriously with you about this thing." "Did Reuther say that?" "Yes, he said that!" "Can you prove it?" "Yes, I can prove it." And the guy said, "You prove it, and we'll vote for Thomas." I called a young lady, told her to pick up the proceedings from the last convention. "There it is - you read it - I don't want to read it." They read it, and that guy welched. He said, "The difference is, Reuther was not the president, Thomas was." Now he lost by 67 votes. Had that delegation gone the other way, Thomas would have won by 200 some votes the other way. See what I mean?

H. What you're suggesting is that the strategy of the Thomas faction did not work for them? It hurt them?

M. Right. To be frank about it, Shelton ran for vice-president, was that in 1943? Yes, and Dick Leonard knew he was going to lose, and ran in opposition to Shelton anyway. The right-wingers were going to win, but certainly they could have gained more Negro votes. For instance, Holley from Midland Steel, was a right winger. And he got up on the floor, and siad, "Sam Holley, a right winger, voting for Shelton Tappes. They got together, and, wanting a Negro on the Board, they were willing to go across factional lines.

H. Their racial identification was greater than any caucus loyalty?

M. And the thing that puzzles me now, is that they couldn't amend the Constitution at that time, to amke room for one Negro. Thomas' argument was that he wanted to appoint, because he didn't want to lose control of the Board. And the persons who were talking were all Thomas guys. So 85 votes more (what the vice-president had at that time) and he would have been elected. He wanted to appoint the head of Fair Practices, not elect him. We beat him, we demanded a count of the house, and on that basis we had him beaten, but here's what happened. One of their guys jumped up and demanded a roll-call bote. And you couldn't beat them on a roll-call vote, because I don't care how progressive the average white is, if he has to sit around for five or six hours - so that was their strategy. Instead of standing up and saying, "I want a Negro to have a chance," they wouldn't. And it's mighty unlikely that a majority of them at this time would do it. It was a great mistake.

H. What role did Crockett play?

M. Crockett? He was a lawyer for the UAW, and a good one.

H. He was director of Fair Practices. He was appointed by Thomas before Reuther took over and Fair Practices became a constitutional department.

M. I believe Crockett was appointed once, but Oliver was the main guy in Fair Practices.

H. He succeeded Crockett, after it became a department by constitutional mandate.

M. Crockett is a good man. I tell you very frankly I respect him for standing up for what he thinks is right. He was sent to prison for representing people who were accused of being Communists. And I thought it was commendable he would be willing to go to prison rather than compromise an ideal.

H. Now, until your plant closed up in 1954 you remained an officer in your local union?

M. Yes, I was president, from 1943-1948, of my local union, and I was vice-president of the Wayne County CIO. As the vice-president of the County Council I might as well say as a matter of record that for five years I was acting in the capacity of president. Pat Quinn at that time was president, and, as you know, he was not at that time very active - was off the wagon most of the time. In reality, I could have been president of the Wayne County Council. But I would have had to take a cut in wages. And to be honest, I didn't think the honor was worth taking a cut of that amount.

H. But you never did actually go to work for the International Union?

M. Nol I was offered a position, but I didn't take it, for I would have had to sacrifice principles. I don't agree with the theories advanced by Reuther and his group - raiding, conniving, lying.

H. What do you think of his position today on the civil rights issue?

M. They're window dressing, just as they have always been. He says that he's in favor of Negroes having equal opportunity, but he is lying. I can't see, to save my life, how he took the position in 1943 that a Negro Board member at large was discrimination in reverse, and then twenty years later he endorses Nelson Jack Edwards on the basis of his color as a member at large. If it was wrong in 1943, certainly it was wrong in the 60's. If it was discrimination in reverse then, certainly it is discrimination in reverse now. They couldn't amend the Constitution to put a Negro on then, but when they got in trouble and had Greathouse and Mathews fighting, the only way they could quiet them down, was to amend the Constitution and give two of their guys a spot. See what I mean? See, it has reached the spot that Negroes are not fools and they look at things from a realistic point of view. And certainly, except those who are willing to sacrifice a principle in order to make a dollar. As for me, I was relegated to a job of manager of a building, making $150 a month rather than go to work for the International Union. Joe Cranshaw came to me and begged me to go to work for the International, and I wouldn't do it. I supported a right wing guy for president of the Local, after the guy who was running on my slate for the presidency was defeated. And I met with Mathews and that bunch, and I told them right away, that I was going to support Jenkins, but "I don't go along with your policy; I don't go along with your theory. I am trying to save our local union. My caucus is supporting Reo Jenkins, not because we disagree with Fred and his bunch to such an extent. As a result, Mathews told Jenkins, "That guy is opposed to us, but you've got to respect him because he's so brutally frank." I don't go along with Reuther - I don't think he is anything like the leader he should be. People talk about Hoffa. They say Hoffa is a bad guy. But if the truth were ever known about

Reuther--if they would ever get to the _____ to Reuther, they would find that Hoffa is a Sunday School teacher.

H. How would you describe the status of the Negro leader inside the UAW?

M. You mean within the various plants?

H. As members of the union - within the union.

M. They are relegated to second-class citizenship within the union. Nelson Jack Edwards was elected to his post, and the job which was assigned to him was to organize a group which would rival the TULC. And I'm not sympathetic to the TULC, because Reuther dominates it. I'm not saying in the beginning whether he did or not. When the fellows contacted me and asked me to fight in an organization against Reuther, I was a bit skeptical. There were a lot of fellows in there who were serious and were willing to do so. I was invited to join, but I was not in a position to do so at that time. I told them I would consider it later. The convention that they held at the hotel, it was the Tuller Hotel, I believe, I said I think I will go down there and see what's happening. Daisy Bates was supposed to have been the principal speaker. I went in to register, and I ran into a kid from Philly. "Hodges, how are you doing I haven't seen you around." "I've been around - "

H. Was it Matthew Adams?

M. I believe it was Adams.

H. Adams who was the president of an amalgamated local in Philadelphia.

M. I think that was who it was. I don't recall his name, but he was from Philly. I said, "Where are the committees meeting?" "What committees?" "You don't have committees, working committee? You don't have any committees to bring in reports to the session of the Convention tonight? Who is the principal speaker tonight?" He said, "Walter." At that I said that I thought this was an organization for the purpose of fighting Reuther, and he is the principal speaker. So I went home, didn't even register. To be frank about it, Battle and Sheffield take their orders from Solidarity House. They do the printing down there. What they're doing is taking their instructions from Reuther to keep these Negroes in line - and to give themselves a job.

H. Will you give me your equally candid evaluation of the UAW's Fair Practices Department and William Oliver?

M. The Fair Practices Department is under an Uncle Tom.

H. Do you think there is a Fair Practices Department?

M. No - No. Reuther is -

H. Do you have any information regarding the Fair Practices Committee which each union, constitutionally, is supposed to have?

M. I couldn't tell you about that. I've been out of touch with the

union movement, except that I know the things we fought to take away from management Reuther has given back to them. I'll tell you how effective Oliver has been. Oliver was called into the Bohn Corporation, in the 40's, in plant no. 1, which was at the corner of Grand Blvd. and St. Aubin. They had a set-up whereby they would pay a Negro the top rate in the plant on availability, and keep him as a laborer, rather than break him in on one of those jobs. They had an agreement with management to that effect. We went in to negotiate on it and offset it. We got hold of Oliver. He came in, and we told him what the score was. It was there, unquestionably, and they made no bones about it. The first thing that Oliver did was to pussyfoot, and then he came out openly and siad, "Hey, what the Hell are you fellows trying to do - put me on the spot?" That was his attitude.

H. A close associate of yours who worked with you very actively for a number of years, who now works for the International, Shelton Tappes - how do you feel about Shelton?

M. Shelton Tappes - I'll tell you very frankly. Shelton and I worked very closely together. I'm very bitterly disappointed in him.

H. Why?

M. Shelton and I swore to each other that under no conditions would we go to the right wing. I'm no left-winger by choice. Those fellows told me that if I was not in their corner I was against them. And I told them, "Then by God, I'm against you." That made me their corner I was against them. And I told them, "Then by God, I'm against you." That made me their proverbial enemy. Now Shelton and I agreed that under no conditions would we split from the left wing. When Christoffel was being tried - he and 97 others-and Bugas, who was the vice-president, I believe, of Ford Motor Company, was Christoffel's attorney and came into the convention defending Christoffel - what the average person doesn't know is, cards were sent to the employees of that company while they were off on strike - they were strike-breakers - they constituted the new local union. Christoffel had been fighting to maintain a real, militant union, so I have been told. They had no definite charges against him - it was just a matter that sentiment was against him. Shelton sat and listened to the deliberations, discussed it and all, and then voted to expel Christoffel from the Union.

H. Why do you think Shelton now works for the union - particularly in the Fair Practices Department?

M. Pork-chopper; to keep a job, to make some money. For myself, I'd rather starve than sacrifice a principle.

H. How do you describe the status of Negroes in the industry? Say, around here in Detroit? Do you think they have made any significant progress?

M. Yes, quite significant. Unions have been responsible for that progress within the industry, but not within the union.

H. You think Negroes have made progress in the industry because of

because of union policy, but the status within the union leaves much to be desired?

M. And it is my thinking that it has not improved.

H. How do you explain this contradiction? Why would the union be helpful on the one hand of advancing the cause of Negroes at the shop level, but not within the union?

M. Because they do not want to lose their jobs.

H. They don't want to share control of the union with Negroes?

M. That's right, and they don't want to share those large salaries.

H. They're quite prepared to push for Negro jobs within industry - that doesn't take anything away from them - but they're not prepared to share power over their own institution.

M. I don't think, frankly, that Negroes or whites in the trade union movement, are being represented fairly now, because the union has lost an awful lot of its power. I'll tell you this very frankly, that if they would have a referendum vote in the UAW, as they do in the Maritime Workers, for instance, Reuther wouldn't stay in as long as a snowflake would stay on a red-hot stove. But he has control of the committees, and all that, and he sends his men in to the local unions to corral all of the Reuther men he can to elect him. But as far as the militancy of the union is concerned that is a lot of hogwash. I just don't see it.

H. Let me just go back a little bit. Did you know Paul Silver?

M. Yes, I know Paul, well, quite well.

H. What is your opinion of him as a trade unionist?

M. Paul has done a lot of good.

H. Is he straight on the race question?

M. I would say yes.

H. He was in sort of the left-wing of the Reuther faction for a number of years - at least that is the way he used to describe it.

M. Well, anyone can go into Reuther's caucus who wishes it; and, as far as I am concerned, I don't sacrifice a principle.

H. Did you know Nat Ganley?

M. Yes. Nat was a good trade unionist. I'll say this about both of them. It makes no difference which side they were on. Neither side took the correct position as far as advancing the Negro in the trade union movement. I'm saying that very frankly. For instance, when the fellows in the plant where Oliver was called, and he replied, "What do you guys want to do - put us on the spot?" Those people, when

they found they couldn't beat me for the presidency, went clamoring for a separate charter. And their campaign slogan was, "No Nigger president." Addes fought it tooth and nail; Thomas went along with it. Thomas later admitted he didn't know what the score was, and he went along in his ignorance. And he apologized and said he didn't know what it was about. They asked for a separate charter when I first became president, in 1943. They asked for a separate charter when I first became president, in 1943. They asked for a separate charter, and got it - Local 29.

H. Even though it was the same shop?

M. No, the same group of shops. All the plants in Detroit were in one local, but when I became president they pulled out.

H. How many locals were then set up?

M. Only one, Local 29, of that one plant. And their campaign slogan was, "No Nigger president."

H. And the International agreed to that?

M. I don't think the International knew that. But they carried it to the International.

H. Didn't you let the international know? You were in the R.J. Thomas caucus. How come you didn't tell the International? You were president of the local union.

M. Look! As far as R.J. was concerned his mind was made up. You couldn't talk to him about it. Addes knew what -

H. But the strange thing - I find this very interesting. According to many Negro - and white workers, too - around Detroit, you are the leading left-wing leader. You are identified as someone who is very close to the top leadership of the Thomas faction. People think you were very close to Addes. So how do you permit a thing like this to happen?

M. What are you going to do about it? You talk to them about it. You try. For instance, Thomas told me at the time that he wanted to appoint the head of the Fair Practices Committee, "Don't bring it on the floor. I'll appoint the head - and I'll appoint you." He said, "I've tried to reason with you. Now, if you bring it on the floor, I'm going to fight it." And I swore and said, "Let's fight, then. It's going to hit the floor."

H. Now, I just want to get this straight. He offered you the job before he offered it to Crockett?

M. He offered me the job before it was even passed in the Convention - told me not to fight it and he would give me the job. I told him that my local needed me and I was making more money than his international representatives were making.

H. Do you think the Negro workers would be in better shpae if the left wing had won, and Reuther had not got control of the union?

M. Sure, because the sincerity - I won't say the complete sincerity - but they were more sincere than the right wing.

H. But by your own statements throughout the interview, you have been saying that while one side may be better than the other, that as trade unionists, you couldn't trust either one of them on the race question.

M. I said this, that both sides were unfair as far as support of the issue of having a Negro in the top echelon of the union.

H. Do you think the left-wing caucus was more sensitive to the aspirations and needs of the Negro workers?

M. Of all workers, in my thinking. The most important thing, as far as Reuther's group is concerned is perpetuation of themselves in office, feathering their own beds. I have no respect for the trade-union movement now, and I loved the trade-union movement. I wear three scars on my head because of that love. And there are people in the right-wing caucus now who are consistently wanting to know, "Why aren't you working for the International Union? With the contribution you've made to the trade union movement, you should be up in the top echelon." I'm telling you what they said. And I'll tell you very frankly - I'm not crowing about it - but had my face been white, I would have been. There's no question about it.

H. How old are you?

M. I'm sixty years old. And very proud of it.

H. And what kind of work are you doing?

M. I'm working as a worker for the DSR, for the city of Detroit.

H. What kind of work do you do?

M. Coach attendant, working in the garage.

H. You feel no regret that you're not in the UAW, not in the labor movement?

M. The only regret that I have is that I love people, and I love to fight for them. But I have no regret for having failed to sacrifice a principle.

H. Do you feel that if the left wing had stayed in power you would have been on the payroll?

M. The answer to the question is - that's a hypothetical question but I will answer it. Ultimately I would have been an elected officer of the International. It was a hard fight for me to become the president of a local union. I was insulted by members of the left-wing caucus. I acted as vice-president for about five terms. The policy had been that if a fellow had been vice-president he would be supported for president when the tenure of the encumbent ended - that he would be given consideration before anyone else. Now, a fellow by the name of Jimmy Walters from the same plant as I referred to a few moments ago,

was dropped. They had decided they were not going to support him. He had become so anti-everything. And the left-wing caucus met. They by-passed me, reached a motion on the floor, much less put a motion before the house. I was considered a top-flight parliamentarian. They said, "We still want you to run for vice-president, because Joe is weak and he needs you." I said, "If you think I'm going to continue making presidents for you guys, you're crazy. I'm not running for anything," and I didn't.

H. Did you have much contact with Billups? You worked with him in the Ford organizing drive? What did you think of him?

M. Billups is a good organizer, in my thinking.

H. Was he active with you in the left-wing caucus?

M. Yes. He can't be trusted too far, but he's a good organizer. I don't have much confidence in him, however.

H. Would you like to make a comment concerning the oft-repeated comment that the left-wing caucus was dominated by the Communist Party? What is your feeling about that, since you are in the left-wing caucus?

M. To be absolutely frank about it, I don't say that the left-wing caucus was dominated by the Communist Party. What I say is that there were Communists in the left-wing caucus, but as far as dominance - I was not dominated by anybody. I'll say this, since the question is raised. The group, and I'll say it without any reaservations, equivocations, or apologies, that organized the UAW was the Communist Party. Now, I've had my differences with them.

H. Would you like to describe some of them? Were they on the race question?

M. On the advancement of the Negro, yes. For instance, I was told to buy buttons, and they wanted to support me for the vice-presidency. And if I decided I didn't want to run, I would change my support to somebody else. I would go out and buy a bunch of buttons, and have fellows wearing buttons; and when I know anything, orders are handed down to support Shelton Tappes. Those were orders to delegates to the convention, and the same thing held true as far as the Wayne County Council. When I was nominated for an office on the state CIO I knew that Gus Scholle hating me the way he did, and Barney Hopkins hating me the way he did, even if I had won there wouldn't have been any possibility of getting along with them in the office, and such as that. And, as far as I was concerned, I wanted Negro leadership - that was the thing in which I was interested.

H. You saw the left-wing caucus as a vehicle for securing the aims of Negroes?

M. Right. When the question came up, I said, "Let's be realistic about it. I have as much chance of winning as a sno-flake on a red-hot stove. I would suggest that you support someone else who has a chance of winning. And then I will run. Since I am the vice-president of the Wayne County Council I have broken the ice, and I have a following in the Council. I feel that I have earned the right to be promoted.

If there is going to be any money involved, I think I have made many contributions. If there is going to be a full-time job, I think I am entitled to it." I had attempted to get the job of announcer - Sam Sage's - when they had the radio program. The question came up: Sam was on full time - the question of Mason getting that job - and I think I'm well qualified to act as a commentator for the union. I thought I was entitled to it. Some of the fellows raised the question whether I knew anything - but Sam took the job just like that.

H. Would you say that most of the Negroes thought as you did - that it was not because of ideological reasons that they were drawn to the program of the left-wing caucus, but they saw that as a friendly vehicle, a more friendly atmosphere to advance the goals of Negroes, and, what is very important, you have given us several instances, the Negro group in the left-wing caucus actually maintained a high degree of independence and split on several questions, where the interests of Negroes were concerned? Are both of those assumptions correct?

M. Yes. And the reason for that is, as I said a few minutes ago, no knows better how the shoe pinches, than the fellow who wears it.

H. Do you think there were some Negroes who were under party discipline during that period?

M. Yes, and there were Negroes who were under the International's discipline too. All the International representatives were following instructions at the various conventions. Yes, there were Negroes who were carrying out instructions from the Party.

H. Who were the Negroes?

M. I wouldn't do that. But I will say this, that I was branded as a right-winger going into the last convention which I attended, which I think was in 1947, no, 1949. The rumors were spread all over the country; did you know Hodges Mason was right-wing? That was because I supported one guy over the person who was running on the other slate. But to their surprise, Reuther was running rough-shod over everybody. And I challenged him on the floor - I was the only delegate in the convention who would stand up and fight him. A fellow came to me and told me, "Now, here's the way we want you to vote." And he wanted me to vote for a right-winger. And I told him, "You don't tell me how to vote. We're not instructed, and I'll vote as I please." He said, "You'll vote as I tell you to vote." And I looked at him and laughed and walked away. Nobody was nominated to run as regional director against them, and I nominated a guy. I knew he couldn't win, but I nominated a guy in order to be able to cast my vote against the Reuther group. And the guys were coming to me and saying. "Why you're not a right winger! You're the only guy in this convention who has stood up and fought Reuther all the way. I thought they said you were a right-winger!" I said, "When you came to me and told me that you heard I was a right-winger, I told you to wait until this convention was over, and then come and tell me what you think I am."

H. Let me ask you one last question: what do you think of George Meany and the leadership of the AFL-CIO?

M. Well, when they were talking merger - I told the fellows this: in my thinking Meany was a rat, and that in my estimation Reuther was two rats. I'll tell you this frankly. My opinion of Meany has improved, because he hasn't allowed Reuther to push him around to the extent that Reuther expected. And as a result Reuther is going to pull the UAW out of the AFL-CIO and have an independent union where he can perpetuate himself in office and control it. He found that he couldn't control the AFL-CIO with Meany in it. I's a case of dog-eat-dog; one wants to be the big wig, and the other wants the same thing. To be frank, in my thinking, Reuther is the kind of guy who wants to be head of the show.

H. Do you think the merger has benefited Negro workers at all?

M. I think it has. Some of the CIO has been woven into the AFL and it has liberalized to a certain extent. So as there will be no misunderstanding, I don't want to be considered anti-union at this time. My thinking on the question is this, that the CIO is the greatest salvation the Negro ever had since the coming of Christ, that is my thinking. But I don't go along with the UAW as it is operating now, I don't go along with the CIO.

H. What do you see as the future of the Negro working class in this country? Do you think they are going to stay with the labor movement as it is now organized? Will the Negro workers increasingly be organized in separate caucuses, and even in separate Negro unions?

M. No, I think the Negroes of today have been educated in the union point of view to realize that they can't fight alone, and I think they are smart enough to stay in the trade union movement and fight to make it what it should be. That is my thinking.

H. Do you have any plans to go back in the ranks of organized labor?

M. I'm in organized labor now, I'm a member of Local 312, but there's no leadership.

H. Yes, but your real arena of combat is the UAW.

M. I couldn't get back in there if I wanted to - I'm sixty years of age, and you'll find that I'm a realistic person. And the only way I would go back into it, is that I would go in a local union and start from scratch and make my way up. And I would build one of the most-anti-Reuther groups you ever saw in your life. I have no respect for that group. They talk about one side being dominated by the Communist Party. Isn't the other side dominated by the Socialist Party? I have no respect for the guy who advocates the overthrow of the American government, but I have more respect for him than I have for a Socialist, and that's putting it mildly. They take the attitude that they're smart and that they know how to handle people and all that. But that's a lot of hog-wash. And I certainly didn't go before the Un-American Activities Committee as some of the members of organized labor did who were members of the Communist Party.

(end of tape)