

# Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW

ARTHUR McPHAUL

Norman McRae, Interviewer

April 5, 1970



Wayne State University  
Detroit, Michigan



McP: Arthur McPhaul, Interviewee

McR: Norman McRae, Interviewer

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McR: Mr. McPhaul, could you, and would you, tell me something about your early life?

McP: Well, I was born in the state of Georgia, a little place, I understand, called Enigma, Georgia. And, as a very small child, I was taken to Oklahoma, and from there to the city of Detroit. I more or less consider Oklahoma my home, really. But I was actually born in Georgia. I wasn't all such a small boy, either, when I left Georgia, because I can remember a number of things that happened, and I guess some of those are things that really shaped my life.

McR: Would you tell us something about those things that shaped your life?

McP: Yes. One of them, I remember distinctly - my father was a farmer, and he was a minister. A Methodist minister, and presiding in a Methodist church. But he also was a farmer, and raised cotton. And I remember one Saturday, a very rainy Saturday, he took my sister, which was older than I, and myself, as very young children, to town to take some cotton. And he had difficulty with the auctioneer, and so forth, that wanted to take his cotton with him. Of course, he wouldn't permit it. But the thing that I think I will never forget was that I was very hungry, you know, kids get hungry, so I was very hungry, and I wanted to eat. So he finally took us to eat and it began to rain, and he had mules. And we went in a back of a restaurant and there was mule dung, in the back of the restaurant, and it had gotten wet, and it was terrible, really. So we had to go to the back of this restaurant to eat. And when we got in the back of this restaurant, and it was just a little cubby hole that two or three people could stay in. And I...he ordered some hamburgers, and the flies were everywhere. And I remember, just as a kid, how, as hungry as I was, I couldn't eat it. So I remember this big fat white fellow came to the back - looked like a dishwasher - and came back to the back, and he says, "What do you boys want?" And my father says, "We want hamburgers." And he went back and waited on the other people, cooked, washed dishes, and first one thing and another, working around in the back. And he didn't give us the food for a long

time. And I just couldn't eat it, when I got it. I couldn't eat it. I thought of the way he treated us and that sort of thing, and I couldn't eat. So...

McR: How old were you?

McP: I guess I must have been about four or five.

McR: That young?

McP: Yeah. I can remember: my mother tells me we moved to Oklahoma when I was six. Yeah. I was very young. So I just couldn't eat it. So my father told me that he was going to whip me, and this sort of thing. And the first time I ever talked back to him, I told him, "No sir, I just cannot eat it, you'll just have to whip me." And I tell you, from that time on, I guess that it is something that has stuck in my craw. Every sentence. And I guess, if I've become rebellious against mistreatment, especially of blacks, but all people, but especially of Black people, I guess that's the thing that set it off, really. That's one of the things.

McR: Well, can you think of any other instances in Georgia that...

McP: Well, yes. I remember a farm out at Enigma, Georgia...there was a lady that lived across the road from us. Now I can't remember the name, but I do remember they lived across the road from us, and I know we had a field down across kind of a creek in the back of our house. And something had happened, I really don't remember what happened, but I do know that these people came and they killed this woman. And put her in a wagon across the road. And they went and got this woman's husband, who was working in a field with my father at the time, and brought him over and showed him his wife, that they had killed, in this wagon. Now this is brutal. I tell you. Some of the things...

McR: Do you know why they killed her?

McP: I frankly don't know. I don't actually know. I was young; it's been so long, but these are the things that just actually stick in my mind. As

to actually what happened...I think it was because of an attempted rape, or something, by one of these white men, and she hit him or something like this...This is what I recall my parents talking about, that actually led up to it. I do know that he killed her, and told him (her husband) that he was going to bring him over and show him a cow. This is what they said. I was with them when they said...this is what my parents (said), I heard them talking about what he did, but I do know that I saw the woman in this wagon, just across the road from our yard. Offhand, those are the two gruesome things I can remember...

McR: You were going to say something before I interrupted you, about that if people knew the things that happened - that was a definite thought, but I interrupted it.

McP: Well, I was trying to say, if people knew the things that happened to Black people in the south during that period, if the young people knew what happened to Black people, and the deprivation which they had to accept. But, of course, many of them followed it, because my father, he was one that would fight back. I remember also once, and that's a lot of time, that he put a rope around his waist, and put his pistol in the rope, you know, stuck it down in the rope, and went into this little town, and whooped a white man in the street, whooped him with a wagon whoop. Actually did it, and this was in the south. And, of course, they said he was a crazy nigger, that sort of thing, but this, I do recall, happened. But the treatment that they used to get from white folk in the south even when I was a little fellow, and that was 50, well pretty close to 60 (years) now. It's really unbelievable.

McR: What year did you come to Detroit?

McP: Let's see: I was six. I think it was 1914, 1915.

McR: What schools did you go to?

McP: Northern High School. Well, first I went to elementary school out in Ecorse. We came and lived in Ecorse. Then I went to Miller High School for a little while, down on the east side. We used to live on Maple Street and then I went to Northern here.

McR: Did you graduate from high school?

McP: No, I didn't really. I never actually graduated. But what I did at that time, we were able to get correspondence courses, and so forth.

McR: Between 1935 and 1945, what were you doing for a livelihood?

McP: I was working at Fords.

McR: Were you involved with the union?

McP: Yes. Organizer. You know, at one time we had a lot of volunteer organizers for the union, but not '35. There wasn't a union, really, in 1935. It was the organizing period of the CIO.

McR: What part did you play in the organizing?

McP: Well, I was a volunteer organizer, like most of the people there at that time, in the plants, and so forth. However, we had quite a problem at Fords. We had a problem there in organizing. And we didn't organize that place, actually, until 1941. But in many of the other places, General Motors, Chrysler, and these sorts of thing, even people who worked at Fords worked as volunteer organizers in those areas.

McR: Could you tell me what it was like to be black in 1935 and 1945?

McP: Well, I'll tell you real frankly, it was as much difference as day and night, even today. Because in that period - we were talking a moment ago about the organizing of Ford - this is one of the things that made it more difficult to organize Fords and most of the other plants. Because Ford, at least, had some token forms of employment, as far as other places were concerned, other than the foundry. Where in the General Motors setup, the Chrysler setup, and all these other plants, Blacks could only work in the most dirtiest jobs. Of course, it's a mite different from that now, on a large scale, but at that time, it was just taken for granted, that's where they were - sweepers and in the foundries and this sort of thing as far as employment was concerned. Not only that, the pay scale was lower, openly lower. They made no bones of the fact

that blacks were paid less than whites, even though they worked right side by side, in many instances, especially in the foundries at Fords and other places too. Now, not only in the factory, this was during the period of the Black Legion situation, here in the city of Detroit. Not so much in the city of Detroit but up around Mt. Clemens and around in those areas. It was something kind of like the Ku Klux Klan. They were open vigilantes, violent, and persecuted blacks here.

McR: Could you tell me something about the Black Legion and how they persecuted Blacks?

McP: Well, they would take people out...say, if there were protests about certain things, or they felt that Blacks were moving a little too fast. Not only moving too fast, but also their efforts in organizing, to help to organize the union. There were cases where they actually took Blacks out, tarred them and feathered them - they tell me they tarred and feathered them - I don't know, but they actually killed them. It was a terrorist kind of an organization, especially against Black people. Not only that, let us say for example, you asked about the general conditions and I said it was as much different as day and night...you take, at that time, I remember in the building where Mr. Goodman, Attorney Goodman, has his office now. Blacks had to ride the freight elevator there. Actually ride the freight elevator. You tell people this and they just don't believe you. It's a fact. Had to ride the freight elevator. I remember quite a protest that we had, because Blacks had to ride the freight elevator. Couldn't ride the regular passenger elevator in that building. Not only that, it was just out of the question to talk about going in restaurants to eat, to get a meal, etc. no matter...any place in the city of Detroit, as far as the so-called white restaurants. You just couldn't do it. And many other things, well, I tell you very frankly, Detroit was just as bad as Mississippi or Georgia in a way of speaking. In a way of speaking. The only difference was the schools were integrated, yes. As a matter of fact, the schools were more integrated than they are today, because more white people lived in the central city than now. But, other than that, the prejudice, hate, the discrimination and so forth against Blacks was just...well, it wasn't much better in Detroit than the south, not a lot.

McR: Could you tell me something about your knowledge of police brutality during this period, from 1935 to 1945?

McP: 1935 to 1945...well, it's difficult for me to give you exact instances, of course, I know generally that police brutality has been in the city of Detroit since I can remember. It was only after, later, when I became quite active in the Civil Rights Congress that I really became aware of instances, and began to fight it, as the Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress. I can't give you many examples, but, in general, it has always been...

McR: Do you know, or do you remember the Finnish Fowl Drive in 1938 or so? It was on 14th Street, it was near what was then Temple Baptist Church. Reverend Frank Norris was the pastor, and he was an avowed anti-Communist. And they had a meeting at the Finnish Hall, and it was alleged to have been a Communist meeting. And the people, mainly whites, who lived in that area, which was an Appalachian white area at the time, used the Temple Baptist as a staging area, where they picked up bats and other things, and then as the Communist brothers were coming out, the alleged Communist brothers were coming out of the Finnish Hall, they took a hell of a beating. Do you remember the incident?

McP: I remember the incident. I wasn't involved in it. I happened not to be there, but I remember the incident.

McR: And about how many Blacks were at that meeting, do you know?

McP: To my knowledge, or (to the knowledge of) some of the people who were there, there must have been at least, I would say, twenty-five or thirty.

McR: I see.

McP: Must have been something like that. To my knowledge of the people that were there. Because at that time, the Communists were the only ones that were really fighting against police brutality, really fighting for complete equality of Blacks. They were the only ones, as far as white people were concerned. They were the ones that were really out in the front fighting. And many Blacks attended their affairs and so forth.



They used to have what they called a workers camp, where Blacks used to go, and of course, the fascists finally burned that down. But, as I say, I wasn't there. So I really don't know how many.

McR: Another question I'd like to ask you. Could you tell me about your activities in the National Negro Congress? Such as when did you join, what did you do?

McP: The National Negro Congress? I would say it was around the latter part of the '30s.

McR: What did you do, and what were some of the activities you were involved in?

McP: Well, the main activities of the National Negro Congress were to fight for the rights of Negroes, fighting police brutality, and this sort of thing. That was its main fight, at the time. Let's see, one of the cases that they fought was the so-called Leon Mosley case. A case of police brutality. Now this was a case of police brutality fought by the National Negro Congress. This was a fifteen year-old boy that was shot by the police, shot in the back by the police that created quite a stir here. And the National Negro Congress fought that case. This was generally what it did.

McR: Could you tell me something about...what was your feeling about the NAACP during this time?

McP: My feelings then toward the NAACP? My feeling about the NAACP was it was a good organization, especially here in the city of Detroit, because of Reverend Hill. This was one of the most progressive chapters in the country. You're talking about the NAACP in Detroit?

McR: Right.

McP: It was one of the most progressive chapters in the country, and, as a matter of fact, became one of the biggest, because of the fight that was carried on by the rank and file members, which finally led to the

election of Reverend Charles Hill, who was quite a civil rights fighter at that time, and, as a result, the chapter grew, into the largest in the country. As a matter of fact, I was a member of the NAACP, worked with the NAACP. I had the same quandary about the NAACP that I have now, to a certain extent, and that is that it depended on legal avenues, while under Reverend Hill's leadership, it did take certain demonstrative action on questions, that, as a result, he was finally pushed out. But it's whole policy was one of going to the courts, and this sort of thing. But if you want my general feeling, I would say it is a lukewarm feeling.

McR: Tell me something about Reverend Hill. He seems to be quite a man.

McP: He was. Reverend Hill was one of the outstanding Black leaders of that period. As a matter of fact, he's one that sort of blazed a trail as far as speaking out on the issues that affected not only the Black people, the Black community, but all poor people. And as a matter of fact, because of the position that he took in that early period, he was ostracized. But he never gave ground. Never backed down; he stood his ground; he was one of the first that began to give real leadership on the electoral front, on political action. He was a fearless man; he took his position based on principle, on the basis of whether it was right or wrong; he never compromised as far as principles were concerned. As a matter of fact, I was at his funeral. He died just this year. And even from the time I knew him until his death, I never knew one single instance in which he compromised on the question of principles even though many people disagreed with him, or said that he was wrong. He took his position on the basis of what he believed was correct. In the days when Paul Robeson was under real attack, every time Paul used to come here...whatever he did...he put on concerts in Reverend Hill's church. This was the kind of a person that he (Reverend Hill) was.

McR: Very good. Now, could you tell me something about the merger between the National Negro Congress and the Civil Rights Federation and to the Civil Rights Congress?

McP: The Civil Rights Federation was organized mainly as a sort of defense for the struggling trade union organizations at the time. They gave

support, furnished legal service, etc. for the unions that were organizing at the time. The National Negro Congress was an organization that was primarily interested in fighting against police brutality, for the rights of Negroes, etc. This was its purpose. So it was finally decided that a national organization would be created that would take on both of these things, that is the fight for Negro rights, and so forth, because the union at that time had grown to the point that it really needed no defense; it had become quite strong, so it needed no defense. It had its own lawyers and this sort of thing. So then the two merged and became an organization to fight for civil rights and civil liberties of all people. Number one, Black people, and number two, left progressives.

McR: Do you remember what year that was?

McP: I've been trying to think since I've been sitting here exactly what year it was.

McR: It was around '45...the reason why I raised the point is that in the Labor Archives they have a copy of the charter which was either '47 or '48. But the spade work had gone on-

McP: That's right, before that. And, not only had it gone on before that, there was sort of loose meetings, working together.

McR: As I gather from reading the correspondence, the Civil Rights Federation had a kind of working agreement with the NAACP.

McP: Yes.

McR: And sometimes with all manner of - Vito Marcantonio, the International Labor Defense ...

McP: That's right.

McR: So they were more like a linking agent...

McP: Right.

McR: Now, could you tell me something about the Sojourner Truth?

McP: Yes. Now this was another place where Reverend Hill really played a role. This was out on Ryan Road and Nevada, and it was just at the beginning of the building of these projects. That one was an all-white project out there, and finally, it was decided, after a long struggle, that they would move Negroes into the project too, to integrate the project. So, as I was saying it was a fight carried on to integrate the project, to move the Negroes into the project too. And the whites fought back. And the real fight that took place was on Ryan Road, Ryan Road and Nevada. And as a matter of fact, many of us went out there, and became quite involved in the fight. As a matter of fact - I don't know if I have the pictures here now, it was in the folders with that of the Civil Rights Congress - where I have a shotgun under my arm...we actually had guns out there, to win...and the police were riding horses, running down Blacks and so forth. They more or less kept the whites across the road, the Blacks on this side of the road, and they kept the confrontation from really taking place. But the police were running down the Blacks and supposed to be protecting them, but was running them down with their horses, and this is what caused people to threaten to shoot. because of this situation. But Reverend Hill is the one who led the fight, the main leader of that fight. Lebran Simmons played quite a part in that fight too, also Coleman Young, he's now Senator Coleman Young, he played quite a role in that struggle. But we finally won, you know.

McR: Could you tell me something about your perception of Lebran Simmons? And his role in the National Negro Congress.

McP: At that time, Lebran was a young man, and quite a militant one. A real fighter, no questions, he was a real fighter. As a matter of fact, he was one of the few Black lawyers in the city of Detroit that would take a position along the line, as I say that Reverend Hill used to take. He was one of the few, very few. So he was quite a fighter, no question about that, quite militant. Took his position even at what you might call personal sacrifices and this sort of thing. He did that. There's no question about that.

McR: Do you remember Jack Raskin?

McP: Oh yes.

McR: Could you tell me something about your perception of Jack Raskin and his role as Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Federation?

McP: Jack was a slow, easy-going kind of person, a good person. He didn't have what I would consider a working class background or anything of this kind. He was a more or less sort of middle class intellectual. I couldn't say anything really outstanding about Jack. He was the leader of the Civil Rights Congress. It's just about that. He was a slow, plugging, honest fighter for Civil Rights and for Civil Liberties and so forth. But that's about the best I could really say about Jack.

McR: Alright. What about the 1943 race riot. Where were you and how did it affect you and what activities were you involved in?

McP: Well, I was, at that time, still working at Ford Rouge.

McR: What department? Foundry?

McP: No. I was working at the time of the riots, in what is now called the stamping plant, it was what they called pressed steel at that time. It was one of those things that happens. There was not a great deal of difference in what happened here in 1967...well, yes it was...a good deal of difference, really, because what actually happened there was that the whites...their racism became so strong that they openly harassed - not the police, the police always did it - but this was the citizens themselves, who openly harassed Blacks. And it began on Belle Isle. That's where it actually started, on Belle Isle. All the people go out for their Sunday recreation and this sort of thing, and I'm told that a fight started between Blacks and whites there and spread across the bridge into the city of Detroit, and the thing was really on. So it happened that when I got up that morning, I believe it was on Monday morning, I got up to go to work, and I heard the shooting and everything.

McR: Where were you living then?

McP: I was living on Palmer, between Brush and John R. And when I got up I heard the shooting and everything, and for days, we weren't able to get out of the Black community. And there was looting, shooting, and killings and all of this sort of thing, all over. And one example of where we were able to go all up and down on the east side of Woodward there, and I saw a situation where people were coming home from work, on a streetcar, and these crackers actually took sticks and irons and chairs and broke into the streetcars and fought. They were the aggressors in that '43 riot. Now, you're talking about a riot. That was really a race riot, that's what it was. This '67 thing was no race riot. But in '43 it was an actual, very, very brutal, riot. With the police-

McR: Like the ones we've been used to having in American history.

McP: That's right.

McR: Now, could you tell me about any other activities that you think that were important in this period of 1935 to 1945 in which you were engaged?

McP: In '45 I was quite engaged in union activities. That was my main bag, as they say.

McR: What were you doing in the union in '45?

McP: In '45, I was Chairman of the Political Action Committee. We organized the Political Action Committee. There were three of us here in the state of Michigan that organized that. At that time, it was a policy of the union not to take an active part in the politics; they figured they'd work on the economic question, but not politics. So it was the left that organized, and pushed for, working on a political front. So a fellow by the name of Paul Bolten, who, as a matter of fact, at one time was Chairman of Political Action Committee of Fords, and Stanley Novak, who at that time was State Senator, and myself organized the first political action committee here in the city.

McR: Was this before Novak's trouble with the government or after?

McP: Before. Yes. He was still Senator when we organized the Political Action Committee. That was really my front, during that period, the political action front. The way I became really involved in political action...I... as a matter of fact, I got fired from Fords. It was during a period when the company was beginning to really drive, the automation was just beginning to take hold, and they began to lay off workers, and they were going back over to the production of cars. And they began to drive the workers. I was a Committeeman in the building in which I was, and I really fought the company. We used to haul these big presses where they stamp out bodies, and I called a big meeting of the workers in front of the superintendent's office, because these big presses were dropping oil all over people and it caused their skin to become raw, and this sort of thing. And the company would do nothing about it. And so this was a protest meeting we called at the superintendent's office, and this was the only way. I carried on this kind of struggle in that plant, and was the only one, actually the other committeemen, they'd kind of go along with the company. Not only the committeemen, but the president of the building, and this sort of thing. But because of militant fights that I carried on, we were able to force a number of changes, force the settlement of a number of grievances. But it also brought the company to the point that they felt that I had to go, and they did finally discharge me.

McR: Was this around '45?

McP: No. I was discharged in '50, but this was back in '45, and before '45 that all of these things took place.

McR: I see.

McP: So, when I actually became active as far as civil rights was concerned, was after I got discharged. And after I got discharged, then I took over the Executive Secretaryship of the Civil Rights Congress.

McR: What year was that?

McP: That was in 1950.

McR: Where was Jack Raskin, then?

McP: I took over from him. He quit and I took over.

McR: So you took over during the dying days of that.

McP: That's right. More or less during the dying days of the Civil Rights Congress.

McR: About your life as Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress from 1950 on...

McP: When I was working at Fords, and as I told you before, some of the things that happened there led up to my discharge there. It was the beginning of the McCarthy period, when things were really getting rough in harassment against the Civil Rights Congress, and all progressive organizations, for that matter. But I took over as head of the Civil Rights Congress at that time. And one of the first cases that we had was called the Martinsville-Seven Case. There were seven boys in Richmond, Virginia, that were executed, they were finally executed, for the so-called rape of a white woman. But actually she was a white prostitute. It was not rape at all, but they finally killed them. We carried on one of the most demonstrative educational campaigns, I am told, that had ever taken place in this city. To really bring vividly to the attention of not only the Black community, but other people too, of what was taking place, and the lynch atmosphere in the South. We didn't save them, but as I say, we carried on a real educational campaign. Right here in Michigan, as well as the rest of the country, but I'm speaking of what we did here. I was in Richmond, Virginia, when they killed them...when they executed them down there. And incidentally, the prayer vigils and so forth that took place in the south in the early 60's, with Dr. King - pray-ins and so forth - we had one, then, and actually it was started, of course, by the people in Richmond, Virginia. It was suggested by the people in Richmond, Virginia, but we had a week's pray-in at the vigils and so forth, in



trying to prevent the killing of these seven boys of Richmond, Virginia. We also handled another case, called the Willie McGee Case. That was Willie McGee in lower Mississippi. He was finally executed too. For so-called raping a white woman. When what actually happened, he had been going with this white woman, and she had forced him, more or less, on the threat of exposing him. He did, for a long period of time, and somebody finally got wind, and caused his arrest and final execution. We played a part in the Trenton Six Case. There were a number of cases here that we fought. But I think during the period that I was Executive Secretary, as far as the city of Detroit was concerned, in spite of the fact that we were under severe attack by reaction, not only reaction, but reaction nationally as well as here in the state and in the city, I think that the greatest contribution that the Civil Rights Congress made in this period was its fight against police brutality. After they were able to harass us, after they were able to force us out of business, the police brutality, the brutality against Blacks in this town just skyrocketed, and everybody said that it was the Civil Rights Congress, against great odds, that was the only effective fighter against police brutality in this city. As a matter of fact, I used to have to come into our office - at least every week the inspector from one of the three stations, at that time, it was called the Chene Street Station, which is now Woodward, the Hunt Street Station, and the Canfield Station. In there apologizing to us for having to beat up somebody. We'd put out leaflets, and we'd go into court and this sort of thing, but our main hope was demonstrations, putting out leaflets, exposing them, and this sort of thing. This was the real contribution in that period, in its dying days, shall I say, that the Civil Rights Congress made, as far as Detroit was concerned.

#### INTERFERENCE

As I was saying, I thought this was one of the high points of the Congress, but there were also other things that we did. This was also at the period of the witch hunts. The Un-American Activities Committee, going throughout the country, witch hunting. And at a later period, the Smith Act Trials.

McR: When did the Smith Act Trials begin?

McP: The Smith Act Trials began around '53, '54. In '52 the Un-American Activities Committee was doing the witch hunting and so forth. And then, I guess around '54 that they began to indict the Communists under the Smith Act. And then throughout the rest of the '50's the fight went on. Our organization, the Civil Rights Congress, had to furnish lawyers for those who went before the Un-American Activities Committee, etc. and you just couldn't get lawyers then. Lebran Simmons and Ernie Goodman were the only two that we were able to get. Well, there were a couple of others--Judge Crockett, who was at that time a member of the Goodman front. And people like these were the only ones that we could get to defend people going before the Un-American Activities Committee. But they began to escalate the thing, till we had so many, so one day we just didn't know what to do as far as the attorneys were concerned. I thought about Gosset, William T. Gosset, who was attorney for the Ford Motor Company. So I said to Anne Shore, who was the secretary, I said, "Well, at least Ford can do one thing; he fired me, so I'll just call and see." So we were talking about how we could get lawyers. Well, he had written a very good article in the Detroit News on the question of the right to counsel, and we were talking about how we could get to him so I said the best way to do it is to call him. So I picked up the phone and called and got right through to the Ford Motor Company and talked to him. He asked me to meet him down at the office downtown, so the next morning I met him down at the Penobscot Building - didn't meet him, but I met one of his assistants down at the Penobscot Building. And he took some action through the Bar Association to break the log jam, and then we began to get lawyers for that. And, other than that, as I say, we fought for the defense of the \_\_\_\_\_, raised bail and this sort of thing. That was about it, because those were the dying days. It wasn't too long after that, after the Smith Act Trials before I was... OH! - I was cited for contempt of Congress. I didn't tell you this.

McR: What year was that?

McP: I was cited in 1952. I was cited for refusing to turn over the books and records of the Civil Rights Congress. At that time we had the records not only of the Civil Rights Congress, but the Civil Rights

Federation, and so forth. And there were many people who had become prominent in government and unions and everything else, later on, who had made contributions. As a matter of fact, at one time we had a number of trade unions that were affiliated with the Civil Rights Congress, especially the Civil Rights Federation and then the Civil Rights Congress. And to have turned the names of these people, and these organizations, over to this committee--!!? I couldn't have done it. There wasn't nothing illegal about it, but what they would have done, is harass them, red-baited them, and this sort of thing, and you know what the situation was at that time, so I just flatly refused.

McR: Did you have your files locked, or what?

McP: Yes. They never did try to break in and take them, but frankly, all the files weren't at the office, either. They couldn't have gotten them, no matter what they'd have done.

McR: I see.

McP: They couldn't have gotten the files. Especially not the ones that they wanted. There was some of our files in the office. Many were openly in the office. They just subpoenaed the records, I refused to give them to them, and that was it. So they finally cited me for contempt of Congress. We carried the case all the way to the Supreme Court, and lost, 5 to 4.

McR: What year did you go before the Supreme Court?

McP: I don't remember when we actually fought the case, because we fought it for a long, long, time, after it went up to the Supreme Court. But, it was in 1959 that the decision of the Supreme Court was handed down.

McR: And that's when you had to go to...

McP: That's when I went to prison.

McR: And you were sentenced to prison for how long?

McP: Nine months.

McR: Now, one question. What was Mrs. Macki's role in the Civil Rights Congress?

McP: She was more or less a member of the board and did a great deal of work as far as helping to raise money, helping to raise bail, etc. And it seemed to me at one time she was Treasurer. I'm not sure about that, but it seemed to me that she was, at one time. She played a real active part. During the Civil Rights Federation, she was quite active, I think even held a position during the Civil Rights Federation. But as I say, I'm not clear about the interworkings of the Civil Rights Federation at that point.

McR: I assume that the Civil Rights Congress was predominantly a white organization.

McP: It was.

McR: And how did they feel, or how did you feel they felt about you, a Negro, being the Executive Secretary?

McP: They didn't like it.

McR: They didn't like it. ?

McP: No. I'll tell you very frankly, that I think that...and I feel that it would be absolutely wrong if I didn't say this, that these people like Jack Raskin and Anne Shore and even Eleanor Macki - and these people were the best white people that had been developed up to that time, but their chauvinism was - white people in general, I don't care how good they are, not only do they not want to accept leadership from Blacks, but they don't even want to recognize it, no matter how good they are. They just cannot do it. I guess a part of the racist system in which they live, but they don't want to do it. And I had a running fight all the time with Anne Shore, who was the secretary working with me. She is now in New York, and a very good person, I want to say I have a great deal of respect for her, but she was full of chauvinism. Just

could not accept leadership from a Black person. Of course, this has been traditional with white folks. Everything else is alright, but just don't try to lead them. It's just now that white folks are beginning, especially on campuses, to accept leadership from Blacks. But this has been a problem so I can't say that they were any different from other white folk, even though I consider them some of the best white folks that had been developed up to that time. See, they want to use you as a figurehead, use you as a front, etc. But if you insist on being a leader in fact, this they can never accept. My case is no different from most other Blacks who were in that position.

McR: When I interviewed Lebran Simmons, I asked him, "Is there a question that I should have asked?" And he said, "Yes, you should have asked 'What has this cost me personally?'" And so I'd like to ask this question of you. The fact that you were militant and, to use a cliché, you marched to the tune of a different drummer, and you saw things that people are just now beginning to see, and this caused you to act, you decided to do something. Now, what has it cost you?

McP: When you say cost, are you figuring from a monetary front, or what?

McR: What has it cost you personally? I know you told me that your wife had a stroke and she's been ill, an invalid because of your being in prison. I'd like to know what it cost you personally, what it cost you monetarily, in terms of the whole thing.

McP: That's a good question, really. You know, as far as monetarily is concerned, it cost me a great deal. Let me put it this way: had I not taken the position that I took then, I could be financially well-off. But you see, that would only be the monetary part of it, you understand? I would not have the satisfaction that I had done all I could to help bring about at least a little...to help bring about a condition that we have today where I think we can win. This gives me great satisfaction. At least, I fought the man all the way, you understand? I fought them all the way. Had I taken the position of "Well, I gotta make mine" then well, I might have been financially well-off, but I would have also been a very, very, I don't know the word to use for it...

McR: Frustrated?

McP: Frustrated, and not only frustrated, but even worse than that, I think. A very poor man as far as my feeling and so forth is concerned. I would have felt certainly I'd absolutely made no contribution at all. So, in this way, I don't think I've lost anything. Now, for example, I take it this way, well, my wife, she had a stroke. Alright, she had a stroke, but she might have had a stroke anyway. And if she had not had a stroke, this is the price that we have to pay, this is the price we have to pay. It is better to pay this price for freedom and equality than it is to just sit back and do nothing and live. I have always said, and I feel, I tell you, I really feel this way, that Black men and women who were born in this world and make no contribution to attempt their freedom, there's no reason why they should have been born. No reason why they should have been born. This is the way I feel. So, actually, when you ask this question, that's why I say it's a good question, I really don't think that I've lost anything as a result of this fight. I think I've become richer, really. This is the way I feel about it.

McR: Good. Is there anything you'd like to add as a postscript to this interview?

McP: Well, I don't know. I can only say that, just to continue along the same line, that I do feel a good deal richer, personally, because of what little contribution I made in this overall struggle for freedom, dignity, justice, for Black people in particular, and all people in general. For liberation of Black people and for the emancipation, shall I say, of whites and all others, and especially poor people. So if I have done anything along this line, I feel grateful. I feel that at least, though I'm beginning to grow old, that, as I say, I've helped laid the basis for these youngsters that are coming along, and I feel good that they are doing the thing that should have been done many years ago but we didn't have enough of them to do it. And I could just only close by saying to them and to all those who will continue to fight, ride on, ride on, ride on.

McR: Thank you, Mr. McPhaul.