

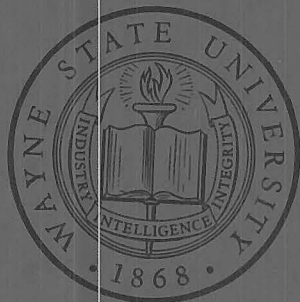
Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW

MRS. ZELINE RICHARD

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER

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Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

INTERVIEWER: Herbert Hill
INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Zeline Richard
PLACE: Detroit, Michigan
DATE: March 19, 1969

Mrs. Richard is an official of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. This interview will relate to the development of a black caucus within the teacher's union in Detroit and nationally.

- H: Mrs. Richard would you please tell us where and when you were born, where you went to school, something of your early life in Detroit, when you entered the teaching profession and also something of your early experiences with the American Federation of Teachers. Where were you teaching...? When did you start teaching, at what school?
- R: I started teaching at the Smith School in 1947.
- H: Is that a high school?
- R: Elementary school. And I was fortunate, you see, because in 1947 we were trying to pass the millage. And, they said, "If you would just pass the millage this time, we would never have a millage again".
- H: Would you explain what a millage is?
- R: A millage is a tax on home property. And, our school system is largely financed by property taxes. And, I don't think people were as much against property taxes at that time. But, nobody wants to pay any more money. And, right now everyone is just about adamant against it; it's harder to pass a millage any where in the state of Michigan today. But, our schools are financed largely by the property tax. And, they were not hiring too many new teachers. And, that time because I had a black face, I think was the reason I was hired. I was in the upper bracket of my class; maybe I'm belittling the fact. But, many of the white girls did not get an appointment and had to go on the substitute list until they knew they were going to have the kind of money.
- H: What year did you graduate from Wayne:
- R: 1947.
- H: With a degree in education?
- R: Yes, Health and Physical Education.

H: And, you went then to Smith Elementary School?

R: That's correct.

H: As a...

R: A Health and Physical Education instructor.

H: Do you mind if I smoke?

R: No, help yourself. Both Althea and myself, we were both placed, which was very contradictory; you know we should have been waiting for a job while most of the white girls were placed. So, I would either assume that at that time there was already a move of maybe to place more black teachers. I'm not sure; no one was really talking. If they were talking, they weren't yelling it out loud. Or, maybe it was because they had to place some black teachers; I don't know. We weren't blacks then; we were Negro teachers. I started off at Smith with feelings of apprehension because I knew when I was attending high school, when my baby sister was going there, they weren't particular about black students going there. And, here I was going in as a black teacher.

H: Were you the only black teacher?

R: There were two black teachers before me: one stayed very briefly and went to a college to teach, the other really didn't look too black; that was Erastein Fisher, who is Erastein Williams now. But, when I walked in, I knew the neighborhood, I knew the feeling, and I went in with a few apprehensions. I can recall the first remark that was made to me as I moved near the group and one, who turned out be very friendly individual, said to me (Mrs. Watson... I believe she's dead now)... said to me, "Why, you must be Miss McCullough. We were talking about you. We were discussing you. I hope your ears didn't itch". Well, my, I thought that was a black expression. You know, my grandmother had always used that. So, immediately I became what we would call today "up tight". And, I made the remark: "My ears only itch when my friends or my enemies talk about me; I hope I can call you friends", and walked on into the office. Well, you learn that when you're going to be alone, how to live alone. So, I made up my mind to go into the school and do my job and to do it well. Mrs. Fisher was a very friendly person and actually I had gone to Wayne with her anyway. So, we learned to enjoy each other's company and gradually we learned to enjoy the company of the other teachers. But, I made

my first mistake. My first year of teaching I was rated an "A" teacher. The second year of teaching I heard about the Detroit Federation of Teachers and I said to Erastein...

H: What year is this?

R: This is actually... It is... This is 1948. I heard about the Detroit Federation of Teachers. It was not the dominant organization at that time. I think the Board was still sort of leaning to it and working with the DEA, the Detroit Educational Association. They were professionals. So, I said to Erastein, "I'm going to join the Detroit Federation of Teachers." She said, "You can't join the Detroit Federation of Teachers." And, I said, "Why not?" "Why, that's a labor organization!" I said, "Well, what does that have to do with me joining the Detroit Federation of Teachers?" "Well, if you join the Detroit Federation of Teachers, you're going to get trouble from Mr. Brown." Well, Mr. Brown was the administrator. I said, "Well, actually all I do is work for the Detroit Board of Education and I teach in a school where Mr. Brown is the principal. And, what I join shouldn't be any of his business." She said, "Well, Zeline, it just doesn't work like that." Well, she was right, but I didn't know it. So, I joined the Detroit Federation of Teachers. I...

H: Why? I'm rather curious. Why?

R: I joined the Detroit Federation of Teachers because my father worked in the plant. This is where my livelihood, the labor movement; it came from his working in the plants that he had enough money to take care of his children and to send us on to school, those of us who would go. And...

H: You felt the sense of loyalty to the idea of the labor movement; getting it from your father.

R: Because of my father, not because he particularly participated in the labor movement, because I said he was a religious man and he did very little of anything away from his family. But, also I think because the DEA kept stressing being professional and when I went to Wayne, the mere fact that I was from the eastside; and if you were from over there, you had to be poorer than everybody else; and even some of the poor blacks from the westside, thought because I was from the east side, that I had to be less than they were. I'd never

told them I'd live fairly well, you know, until several of them came by to see me one day and they said, "Well, you live in a nice house!" I said, "I wondered if you thought that I was camping," you know. But, there was snobbery everywhere among the blacks at Wayne in the early '40s (or the late '40s, I should say), among the whites, among people who really wanted to use education to escape. And, it became to be sort of disgusting. You know, you enter into the elite simply because you're fortunate enough to go to college. And, I decided that if I had to be a professional, I had to be very different; I'd just go right along with the labor movement, you know, which seemingly at that time, they were fighting for many things. And, the DEA seemingly, to me, was just at a standstill, happy to be the right arm of the Board of Education or the left arm or which ever one it was...

H: The DEA was affiliated with the NEA?

R: Yes. Well, I joined the Federation and I don't think the ink was dry on the card that I had signed before Mr. Brown came flying down to my room. And, he said, "Miss McCullough!" I said, "Yes." "Can you tell me who the DFT is running for, is backing for the Board of Education?" Well, at that time, I didn't even know that there was a political aspect to labor movement, you know. I said to Mr. Brown, I said, "Mr. Brown..." He said, "Yes." I said, "In order to come down to my room to find out who the DFT is running or backing for the Board of Education, you had to pass Mr. Cost's room, who is the union representative." I said, "I just joined the union several days ago, so if you want information, it's best if you talk to Mr. Cost." Well, from that day on I was a "sitting duck". You've heard the song, "Everything I Do Is Wrong In Stormy Weather?" Well, the rest of that year was my stormy-weather year. Mr. Brown actually set me up to be knocked off. It was the day when you wear the long skirts down to your... past your calf of your leg, the middle of your leg; and I'd gone down and purchased a beautiful black skirt with the poplin on the back and had on a white blouse with Peter Pan collar and long flowing sleeves. I walked in that morning and Mr. Brown just said to me, "Mrs. Richard, I'd like to talk to you." I said, "Certainly." Now, he took all of the bell time telling me that Mr. Frye would not be in and could I keep an eye on both gyms. And, everytime that I thought I could get away from him,

he had something else to say. So, I walked into the gym a few minutes late. At that time all gym teachers in the elementary school had to wear culottes and socks and brown and white shoes, saddle oxfords. Or, at least, you were supposed to look professional. so, I walked into my gym, my class waiting for me, started taking attendance, was half way through the attendance when in walked Wayne University supervisor, no, the Board of Education supervisor of the Health and Education teachers, Health and Physical Education teachers. She was out to give me my second year's rating. Well, if you can imagine what it is to be in that long skirt and a flowing white blouse, blouse with flowing sleeves, not looking anything like a Physical Education teacher ought to look, and every day but that day, you have looked your role, you have looked very professional in your culottes. Well, my whole world sort of fell in because I realized that Mr. Brown had to know that she was coming and had deliberately put me in a position of looking unprofessional. I sort of pulled myself together and went through my first hour, got the kids ready only to find out that the clock was ten minutes fast. So, I had them ready for dismissal, had to go through various little games, you know, keeping them entertained. Well, of course the Supervisor from the Board didn't know that these things only happen just today. She marked me on what she saw. She could not understand what had happened to me. I had been such a beautiful and professional teacher the last time she was out. And, because I was a little angry, I said to her, "Mrs. Maine." And, she's dead now. I said, "I'm glad all of my life does not depend on a person seeing me just one day at the time when they happen to happen by," which was really being insubordinate, I suppose. And, I walked away. And, they sent down for me; she was sitting there with Mr. Brown. And, she repeated all these things to him and Mr. Brown knew better; But, he gave me no help at all. So, I just let the two of them talk, you know. I didn't have to say anything. It was already there; the handwriting was on the wall. So, after she left, Mr. Brown came down

to me and he said, "I know you must feel bad, Miss McCullough. Would you like to stretch out on the cot, or would you like the rest of the day off? You don't get along too well with your supervisors, do you?" I said, "I get along fine with supervisors, Mr. Brown. It's just the principal I don't seem to get along too well with." And, he turned red and walked away. Well, when Mr. Frye came in, and he asked what was the matter with me - he was my senior Health teacher - I told him what had happened, exactly what I thought had happened to me, and he went up and insisted that Mr. Brown have her come back out. And, he wanted to know in advance when she was coming back out because he was not going to have me railroaded because of something Mr. Brown felt. Well, as life goes, she came back out on a day when I had on my culottes, the clock was right, and I was rated "A" again. So, from that day on, I decided that I would not bow, although my father always told us, "You can't be as good as the white child; you've got to be better." I didn't know what he meant then. But, I found out that just being equal will not get you anywhere; it's too bad, but it won't. And, I decided that whatever anyone wanted to do to me, they could feel free to do it. But, I was always going to stand for what I believed in. And, if there're any decent people around, they might come to your rescue. And, if they're not around, you just keep on believing what you believe in and then suffer the fate, you know. So, I started working. I became the Building Rep at Smith. I was supposed to receive a promotion, but the Smith gym was a small gym. So, they decided that before they made me senior Health Teacher, they would send me to the Smith School. I would have had the same position as Warner Frye, the man who came to my rescue. They would send me to the Lincoln School, which is the Spain now. There was a large gym there and if they sent me there, I could get experience in a very large gym and then I would be ready to be senior Health teacher. Well, I got over to the Lincoln, and the two gym teachers at the Lincoln were already out to pasture. They walked around with a paddle in their hands all the time; the children played "Spiders and Flies" every day. And, when it was warm enough to

go out on the playground, the senior Health teacher would sit against the fence and get a very lovely tan. When I first met her, I thought she had been to Florida and as I taught there, I realized she didn't pay for the tan; she was paid to get it, you know. So, I determined that girls and boys were going to learn that there was something else other than just playing "Spiders and Flies" every day. I was told, as many young teachers are told today, "Well, what are you knocking yourself out for? Why do you want to teach them Round Dances? Why do you want to teach them Square Dances? Why do you want to teach them skills? They'll play without knowing all of that." I said, "Yes, we'll play because one thing about us is that we're all good dancers, good singers, and excellent athletes. But, we ought to know some of the rudiments that make us the very fine athletes that we are." I think she got the point. I'm not always a diplomat - Robert knows that. But, I kept trying to teach those girls and boys. So, somehow or other, they lost the paper that they had decided I was going to be a senior Health teacher. I was supposed to be there to get more experience. Somehow or other, they forgot there was ever a promotion in the offering. They forgot it and I forgot it.

At 18, while I was still at Wayne, I studied very hard to be a basketball... rules and regulations of basketball because I liked sports. And, I passed the local rating to officiate high school games. And, before I finished Wayne, I passed so that I became the first black girl with a national rating which would permit you to officiate at basketball games anywhere in the state. Well, I was officiating when I was still at Smith. I would teach and that little \$7.50 they paid you to officiate was really nothing because I officiated because I loved the game. So, the money wasn't important. After I left Smith and went to Lincoln; that was when I started playing Class A Basketball. I was the first black girl that they let in the League. And, my two sisters followed me. Then...

H: About what year?

R: This would be in the late '40s, somewhere around '50, '51.

H: Had you become active in the teacher's union?

R: I was a building 'rep' but not as active as I am now, you know. In playing basketball here in the city, we put in a black team, which

they permitted me to do because I guess I was all right. My two sisters, they were all right. I ran into the fact that we played the other team and the officials... So one day, I raised a protest over a call and I said to a certain lady who is very active now and I will not call her name... I wonder when we look at each other if she remembers because I've never forgotten it. I said, "You know, I just can't understand how you can officiate as you do when you represent the epitome of the judges in the regulation and the... You officiate and you have to evaluate other persons who officiate; they can't get through without coming under you. How do you do what you do?" And, I was working on my masters degree when one of the girls came up to me and said, "'Z'; what did you do?" I said, "What do you mean what did I do?" She said, "The next time you come up for your rating, they're going to slap you down and slap you down hard!" This was at the time a promotion was just sort of whispered about. I said, "What do you mean by slap me down and slap me down hard?" She said, "They thought you were a 'good Negro', but evidently you aren't." Well, she didn't say Negro; she said "good Nigger, so evidently you aren't." So, I went up the year earlier; I had another year to go on my rating before I would have had to take the test again. And, I had been told by Dr. LaSalle, who has passed, at Wayne University that they considered me the best official in the school area at the time. But, it happened. Girls who had gone to school with me at Wayne; they were supposedly my friends if you call your colleagues your friends--friends of a sort, one gave me a fifty and I knew, as my father had said, "I couldn't just be good, I had to be the best." So, I worked on this just in case there was something wrong. There was one person who evidently had not been tipped off, Mrs. Vanfry. And she came up and she said, "'Z', I gave you a 99. I would have given you a 100, but nobody is going to be that good with me." But, everybody else had given me 50, 72, and, you know just... She looked, and she said, "Well, what's this?" And, I said, "Oh, forget it! They didn't tell you what you were suppose to do." Then, everybody wanted to hug me and tell me, you know, "Well, you'll be better next time." I figured next time they would pass me, but I didn't need them! So, I walked away; and even though they needed officials, I never officiated another basketball game. And, the games people play when they

smile in your face and know what they've done to you. "Well, we need you, where are you? We haven't seen you." This is when I switched then to another area. We were coming into collective bargaining. And, the DFT, at that time, wanted to contend for the right to represent teachers.

H: Now, may I interrupt you? Up until now, no union was declared to be the collective bargaining agent?

R: No. No. Public Act, I can't remember, Jim Bradley and some of the fellows from labor, legislators... Jim, I think at the time, was the chairman of Labor Committee in Lansing. And, through his committee, I think they had passed the Public Act; I can't recall the number of it now. But, anyway it gave us the right to have collective bargaining.

H: Did most of the black teachers belong to the Federation?

R: Most of the black teachers, I would say, do belong to the Federation.

H: How about then?

R: At first... Then, no, because the older black teachers went the way that most of the older white teachers went. You just did not belong to the DEA.

H: How about the NEA?

R: Well if you belonged to the DEA, you belonged to the NEA... NEA is a package deal; you can't get one without the other. And, the DFT paid your per caps. You know, we just pay our dues to the DFT, but then they pay the per caps to the MFT and AFT. But, at that time, I think in the earlier years there was Frances Comfort, and then Tony Kolar. And, then just about when at the time when I was really becoming interested, I think Mary Ellen was a retirement person. I used to see her picture as a retirement representative. And, I think a little ahead of this, she must have become the president of the union. We had a meeting and teachers were talking about striking. And, I would watch the teachers. And, it reminded me of the old revival meetings I used to attend as a child. The same teachers who would get up and speak loudly about fighting for our rights and when it came time to really say, "Will you walk?" you didn't hear them. So, I got up in the meeting and said exactly what I said a few minutes ago, "This reminds me of an old-fashioned revival meeting. The preacher gets up and he preaches a good sermon; everybody gets religion. They're going to be free of sin

forever and then go outside the door and promptly forget it. So, now, I just want to say this much to you. I don't like a lot of loud talking. If you teachers are actually going to strike, I wish somehow or other you would convince me because I would walk with you, but I don't intend to walk for you." A little before that, we had gone out, some of us, however,... No, that was when I made the remark and Helen Bowers, I think, decided that I would be a good rabble rouser (out of her own word). I think she's learned to rue the day, though. She thought that I would be a good rabble-rouser. And, they'd found a person who would speak up... And, so Helen called and asked if I would run for the Executive Board." But, as we got into the fight for collective rights to represent teachers, I became one of the persons who would go out to the schools to speak. And, I began to enjoy talking to teachers. I believed that the DFT could bring the kind of equalities and the kind of dignity that teachers did not have. They were professionals, but they really had not too much dignity. And, so I went out and I sold the DFT along with quite few other teachers to the teachers of the city of Detroit.

H: White and black?

R: White and black. And, we overwhelmingly became the bargaining agent for the teachers in Detroit.

H: What year did that occur?

R: I can't give you the exact year now.

H: That's ok.

R: We have had three contracts. It would be the early '60s because I negotiated two of those contracts and sat in on the first one when we had the TRC, the Teachers Representative Committee, which was sort of defacto collective bargaining. And, in the early years, I think the union really put up a good fight. It fought for teachers. It held out the beautiful dreams. I think it was the year that we went to Chicago that I saw a sort of a new light, you know, a new way, when I went to the AFT convention.

H: You were a delegate from Detroit?

R: A delegate from Detroit.

H: What year was that?

R: I think that this was 1964, either '64 or '66.

H: What was your position here at this stage?

R: At that time, I was an Executive Board member.

H: You were a member of the Executive of the Detroit Federation of Teachers?

R: Yes, of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. Well, we attended that convention and I was a member of the Civil Rights Committee. And, I usually take things literally, you know. If that's what you said it is, that's what it is. So, one person came in--one little black fellow from the South. And, he was quite indignant over the Aunt Jemima Restaurant because there was this huge black woman there in this checkered skirt and the white blouse, a handkerchief around her head. And, so he felt that we must at least do something about this. So, of course, we started talking about it in the Civil Rights Committee. And, we decided that we would talk to the hotel and we would picket the restaurant...

H: Do you recall what hotel?

R: The Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Well, I want you to know, I think that was the first time the Civil Rights Committee ever decided to do anything. And, it seemed to shake up the whole AFT. I heard some of the reports that came back to us: "You know, are those folks crazy in that committee?" I guess we were supposed to talk about civil rights but not do anything about civil rights. So we decided that we would encourage the delegates to the convention to boycott the restaurant. And, we did. And, they walked around, you know, to the front and walked... Charlie Chang at that time was very active. He was supposed to be a political. I don't know how political he was. But, we all thought that we should give this lady dignity; we should save her from herself. Well, it was amazing to me to hear some of the remarks in the Civil Rights Committee. One little fat lady stood up and said, "Oh, but I've always loved Aunt Jemima. And, when I was a girl I loved Little Black Sambo. I don't see anything wrong with it." And, I saw that the people got real angry and I stood up and I said, "Well, I tell you: I'd always loved Little Black Sambo, and P _____, the little boy who was very careful how he stepped on the pies. He stepped right down the center of each one of them."

I said, "But, when I grew older, I realized that the Stephen Fetches and Little Black Samboos and Aunt Jemima, only lend themselves to hurt us as a people, because you see, at one time in life, every black man was Sambo." I said, "And, every big black woman reminded you of Aunt Jemima." I said, "So, all we're saying is that she can look just as dignified in a dress as she can selling the Aunt Jemima Restaurant." Well, when they determined that we really weren't out to overthrow the AFT--and I could say this because of some of the people who came who came to me--as Roberta knows, they would come to me sometimes now and say, "Just really, what is on your mind?" And, we just had to convince them that all they wanted to do was to dress up Aunt Jemima so she would like any other person. I don't think we even cared about being dressed up, you know, because that meant she had to buy her own uniforms. Sometimes in doing good for people, maybe you're not doing good. Well, that made the headlines. Well, after it came out, it went across the country. After, it turned out all right, I think that everybody could live with it. I can recall Mary Ellen had to go back to Detroit. And, I think when she came back, somebody must have told her, "We have a crazy woman from Detroit helping to dress up Aunt Jemima," and, she wouldn't speak to me. That was the first time.

H: May I interrupt you for a moment... Did you have working contact with the black delegates from other cities who attended the convention?

R: This is when we started growing together, over the Aunt Jemima deal. The same nucleus--Grace F_____, out of Avondale... I believe Grace was... (These are whites now.) ...Jim Sag from Fraser, the young fellow from St. Clair Shores out her. This was the issue that pulled the people together, black and white, who are today the nucleus for the new caucus.

H: Can you tell us something more about the new caucus you were in?

R: The new caucus is a group of teachers...

H: White and colored?

R: White and black who fight on issues. The issue was racism. The DFT had a beautiful conference in Washington on "Racism in Education." it was so beautiful that we came back here and put on one at the University of Detroit. And again I said, "We take you at your word." So, we fought on racism in textbooks, racism in the classroom...

H: Was this a national group?

- R: Yes, it is national now. The war in Vietnam was an important issue; poverty was an important issue... And, the thing that really started the new caucus was when we tried in Washington to be heard on the floor on issues like... The main thing: we wanted to hear what our delegates to the AFL-CIO convention would be saying when they went to Miami. I believe it's in December, right? We wanted to know what would be their positions. Well, they used all kinds of parliamentary maneuvers to shut us up and to keep us... You would raise a question and before you know it, somebody had tabled it or... Until we all learned how to use parliamentary procedures and when you don't know something people will teach you, you have to know. They taught us how to work at the microphones, you know. If I stood at a microphone and they didn't recognize me, when you get to the next microphone, somebody in there is going to say the same thing. They taught us that you don't come to conventions to party; you come to conventions to be working delegates. And, the only way that you can get your issues heard is to be there and fight for the right to do it. So New Caucus people don't party.
- H: You're serious people.
- R: We're serious people. When we leave a convention, we're ready to go on a vacation.
- H: May I ask you a question? What is the relationship of the New Caucus to the various black caucuses that have developed in the American Federation of Teachers, both locally and nationally?
- R: I would say that the leader of the New Caucus, who is Ed Simkins, who became so disgusted at that Washington Convention that he tore up his membership in the Progressive Caucus and dropped it on the floor because he said he could not be a black man. If he couldn't be a black man in dignity in the Progressive Caucus, then he did not care to belong to it. And, he explained to them that...
- H: What year was that Washington Conference?
- R: It followed the Chicago Conference... Let me go back a year: last year, '68, was Cleveland. The year before that Washington, so it was '67. And, then Chicago had to be '66. I have to backtrack.
- H: Well, the Washington meeting was not simply your convention. It was a special conference on Negro History.
- R: No, it was a convention! It happened in August of 1967.
- H: When was the special conference in Negro History sponsored by the

American Federation of Teachers?

R: That was in '66, the Fall of '66, you know.

H: I see now. You're not talking about that now?

R: No. Between...

H: You're talking about the regular conventions?

R: Yes. Between the Chicago convention, where we worked on the Aunt Jemima, we started pulling a few concerned people, black and white, together. Then the same people went to the Racism Conference and we got to know a few people from all over everywhere again who were concerned about racism. Then we went to Washington where Ed Simkins just decided that he had had it. Now, we couldn't let Ed!!!

H: Excuse me. Ed Simkins was a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools?

R: He was the first Vice-President of the Detroit Federation of Teachers.

H: And, he is a black?

R: Yes.

H: Where is he now?

R: He is at Harvard University working on his doctorate and he is a teachers at Tufts.

H: He is a teacher at Tufts?

R: Yes.

H: He went into what department, the education department?

R: I would assume so; that was his field.

H: Now, he was a Vice-President of the American Federation of Teachers?

R: Yes...

H: But, he was also...

R: Of the DFT, the Detroit Federation of Teachers...

H: Of the DFT, not the American Federation of Teachers?

R: Yes, the DFT.

H: And, he was also head of the... Wasn't there a period in which he was head of the black caucus?

R: You keep referring to a black caucus that is...

H: Of the Afro-American Teachers' Association?

R: There is no Afro-American Teachers' Association as such in Detroit. They are all over the country.

H: Why has there not been one in Detroit?

R: You see, Detroit is a different kind of place. We, at one time, felt that we did not have to move in directions such as other big

cities were moving because the blacks who were sitting on the Executive Board of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, tried to lend their expertise in their advice to the Executive Board.

H: Did it work?

R: It was working.

H: Is it working now?

R: I will not say whether it is working now. I will only say this: at the last election every black person and liberal white person who had supported New Caucus, was not carried on Mary Ellen's slate. And, as such, I could have been re-elected if I wanted to run a popularity contest. But, if you believe in issues, then you stick with people who believe in issues.

H: No, I just want to get a chronology...

R: So, what I'm trying to say to you is that whether it will work or not depends on how the next few months go.

H: I'd like to establish a chronology properly in my own mind. Where was it that Edward Simkins and when was it that Edward Simkins tore up his...

R: That's where I was when you injected the question.

H: I'm sorry.

R: It was at the Washington Convention and we decided that...

H: What year?

R: 1967. We decided that we were not going to let Ed walk out by himself. At least, I decided and I said to those who were seated around me, "Well if Ed goes, I go." Most of what I know in the labor movement I learned through Ed, you know. Most of the ability to fight and to realize where the next move is, I learned through Ed. In a way I think Ed was the labor movement because he would go out into the schools and fight the battles. And, it freed Mary Ellen to be the figure-head, you know, to be representative of the labor movement, of the DFT. But, when we walked out, we thought it would be a handful of us. And, I'm not so sure; we might not have walked back in after we thought it over. But, so many people had walked out that you couldn't walk back in. And, that was how the New Caucus was formed.

H: The New Caucus is an interracial group?

R: It's an interracial group.

H: What is the program?

- R: The program is to speak to the issues, to fight for the rights of teachers, to fight for the rights of the community to have a true meaningful input into their...
- H: Does that include decentralization and community control?
- R: Yes, it does. To fight for the ability for teachers to speak out and be heard...
- H: Do you run candidates for office within the union?
- R: Yes, we do. We did it...
- H: Did you recently run for office?
- R: I recently ran for office. We did not challenge; I had Hong Kong flu. I came within 23 votes of being re-elected. I'm sure they...
- H: Being re-elected for what?
- R: To the office of Vice-President:
- H: You were, until this last convention, a national Vice-President?
- R: Until this last election in November...
- H: Of 1968?
- R: I'm talking about DFT now. I'm not talking about the national. Oh, I ran against Dave Selden if that's what you want to know.
- H: Yes, well, I knew that. But, I wanted you to tell me that. I was trying to pull that out of you.
- R: You see, in my mind, I keep national business one place and DFT in the other.
- H: But, you see, I knew this and I was trying to get you to tell me this.
- R: Yes, I ran against Dave Seldon.
- H: All right then, let's (if I may, Mrs. Richard) let's sort of dis-associate Detroit; let's separate Detroit from it.
- R: OK.
- H: You are a member of the Executive Council of the Detroit Federation of Teachers.
- R: Yes, I was a Vice-President.
- H: You were a Vice-President of the Detroit Federation of Teachers?
- R: Yes.
- H: Now, when did you also run against the national president of the organization?
- R: All right, all right. I ran against Dave Seldon...

H: Dave Selden was president, and he was trying...

R: No, he was trying to be president; he was trying to become president.

H: He was running for office.

R: Cogan was still president. And, actually Dave had been a person I've always had respect for, you know. But...

H: Did you support him against Cogan?

R: No, Cogan did not re-run for office.

H: Run again, that's right.

R: Actually we were so sure Dave was going to be the president that nobody even questioned it. I mean, he was heir-apparent.

H: So, what happened?

R: So, we went to the convention. And, this year, this past summer, we decided we wouldn't be on MFT steering committee, you know the union's steering convention for the national convention, that we would let new teachers do that. And, those of us who were the leadership in the New Caucus would be about the business of building up the New Caucus. So that when they called the DFT caucus at the convention, the teachers came back from the steering committee where they had heard Dave Selden speak. And, they said that Dave Selden was anti-self-determination. And, I looked at one of the girls, you know, and I said, "Are you sure you heard that?" And, she said, "Yes, Zeline, that's what he said." Well, Mary Ellen said, "Oh, I know Dave Selden. Dave thinks as I do; he wouldn't say that, you know." And, I didn't think really Dave would say that. So, I suggested that we invite Dave Selden into the Michigan Caucus. Well, when Dave came in, this question was put to him. And, he said, "Yes, I'm anti-self-_____." Well, he didn't say it anti; he said, "Yes, I'm against self-determination."

H: By that he meant community control of the School?

R: Well, when we say self-determination, we mean the right of a people to lift themselves up.

H: But, in practical terms, it was in reference to decentralization.

R: I can't say what David had in mind.

H: Well, what did you have in mind? Did you have in mind school decentralization?

R: Well, I will tell you what I said to David. I stood up and I said,

"Dave..." He said, "Yes." I said, "I've known you for quite a while in the labor movement and I have always had respect for you." I said, "But, it's inconceivable to me when three men who are running for the highest office in the land--when McGovern, when McCarthy, and Hubert H. Humphrey and find some way to express a belief in self-determination--that you, who desire to be the president of the American Federation of Teachers, could stand there and tell us you're anti self-determination." He said, "Well, I am, Zeline, and that's what it is." And then I ran down to him: "You mean the right of a people to fight for the same dignity and the same things that other folks have, you would want to lead a group of teachers and not be for those kind of things?" He said, "Well, if you put it that way, I could be for it, but I'm not so sure." I said, "That's what everyone is saying." I said, "Thank you, David." And, I picked up my purse and my little attache case and went on back to the room.

Well, we got a call a little later to meet; you know the New Caucus people. And, they wanted to know what can we do. We certainly can't let him be overwhelmingly elected and plus his only other platform, his only platform, was to somehow join with the NEA, you know, to see if we could...

H: Merge...

R: Merge with the NEA. And, well, of course, those of us who are really from a labor background or from a poor background were taught to sort of look down on NEA or look at them as the "devil" or whatever you want to call it; couldn't see why in the world he wanted to merge. Well, I supposed there would be more money there. I can see maybe a large organization with all teachers pulling together. There would be strength there, you know, if you could get one to give up the other. And, I couldn't in my mind see NEA. To me, NEA is so much larger than AFT that I figured we'd have to give up too much to merge with the NEA. So, where would the AFT be and how much would we be willing to give up AFT just to have a merger with the NEA? And, where would those of us, who know that blacks really aren't accepted in the NEA--they still have segregated locals--where would that leave the blacks who have been a part of the AFT? So, these are things maybe that never crossed anyone else's mind but crossed our minds. So, they wanted

to know, "Well, we've got to run somebody against Dave Selden." I said, "Well, there's some man running against him, Ed Bowstead." Well, we sent out invitations to all of the candidates to all of the different offices, to come before us and speak. Well, the people of the Progressive Caucus were told that if any of them appeared before the New Caucus or any other caucus-(I'll be fair)- they would not be supported by the Progressive Caucus. Now, I want you to know the Progressive Caucus once was a part of the National Caucus. And, they became disgusted because the National Caucus had become so conservative that they bolted from the National Caucus and became the Progressive Caucus. And, Mary Ellen and I guess Al and a few others were in that group who bolted few years ago, probably quite a number of years. But, they became the dominant caucus. But, they became the dominant caucus. And, it was almost laughable to those of us in the New Caucus that we had about 100 votes in our delegation. But, you just couldn't come and tell us what you stood for and we had not intended to run a slate. We were going to back Ed Simkins because the Michigan delegations had decided that they would back both he and Mary Ellen for the offices.

H: Now, what was Ed Simkins running for?

R: He was running for one of the vice-presidents on the national ticket. Both he and Mary Ellen were running. And, we were going to back both of them. But, as far as the rest of the positions, we had no original intention of running a slate, just that short slate. Then when Dave Selden came out with his announcement... Well, no black today, who has any belief in anything can accept that and stay in the organization. So, we had Ed Bowstead in and he really had nothing to say. I mean we'd just assume go with Dave Selden as to go with a person who's going to have to spend two years learning what to do before he could function properly. And, we were sitting and looking at each other, wondering where do we go from here, when somebody sent me a note up. It read: "Z, you run against him." And, I sent the note back saying, "You have got to be kidding." And, the person sent the note back saying, "No, we're not kidding. You can speak well enough and can get the point

across to draw some strength from the Progressive Caucus." And, I said, "Ah, you've got to be joking." Well, they moved around with this. And, I walked out of that room.

H: You ended up running.

R: I ended up running. Well, the elevators were slow and I was invited into many of the Progressive Caucuses. I went into the Chicago Delegation. And I went into many groups. You know, they finally decided they wanted to hear me speak.

H: Now, may I interrupt you. Did you have a full slate?

R: Yes, I think now. We did have a full slate at this point. And, this came out of what you might call the oppressive actions of the Progressive Caucus.

H: Now, the Progressive Caucus is Selden, Al Shanker,...

R: Yes, yes, because they forced us to do things that we had never intended to do. I mean, since they weren't going to let any of their people speak to us, we decided to go for broke. We might as well find out if there is a New Caucus or there isn't a New Caucus.

H: Well, at the 1968 convention, you headed up a full caucus--a full slate--sponsored by the New Caucus, you ran against Selden and you were defeated by how many votes?

R: Oh, I was defeated by... I got 586 votes, let me put it this way because we don't look at it in that manner. We look at what they expected us to get, which was maybe the 100 votes we had, as against what I got. Ed Bowstead poled, I think, 506; Dave Selden poled, I think, 1300 and something; which means that all we had to do was to have poled a few more votes and there would have been a run-off, you know, because he had to get at least a decent edge, you know.

H: He poled 1300?

R: I believe it was 1300 and we poled almost 1100 together.

H: You alone poled what?

R: 586 and I was something like a 12-hour candidate.

H: All right, now where do we go from here? What is your perspective?

R: Well, I'll tell you what my perspective is, or was: I was gradually backing out of the labor movement, you know, on the DFT level, other than to be just a member and to fight on issues.

H: Why?

- R: Because after this last election where literature was sent out and I could see the Al Shanker 'thing' coming into Detroit. And, teachers were being turned against teachers by--Mary Ellen said she didn't know about it--but they were members of the Reardon Team, where union teachers would stand up in school out on the periphery and say, "All members of the New Caucus were black extremists and white extremists." I could begin to see that there was going to be a real show-down somewhere along the line.
- H: Now, excuse me. A moment ago, you referred to Shanker, you said, "People are _____." What did you mean by that?
- R: When I said, "We fought in Washington, in Cleveland this past summer for the positions of decentralization and the New Caucus, and very few but, we have people who stick to issues. And, I think a few New Caucus members are as strong articulating as any other five or six hundred members sitting back saying nothing. Well, we fought on the floor for decentralization because as I had heard earlier, "Detroit is not New York. We do not have to have that kind of confrontation."
- H: Why not?
- R: Because we felt that we could sit down and break bread together and come to a decision...
- H: But, you're not so sure now.
- R: No, "I'm not so sure because in this literature here... We sent it out and it would get into community where the president of the organization says that "I will not let frustrated students in a hostile community tell my union what to do." Then, you are inviting trouble because those frustrated students are the students of the school and, the hostile community is the community in which we work.
- H: Now, pardon me. I want to clarify one other point, if I may. Your group is the slate that you headed in the previous election in 1968. You ran, I assume, on a program requiring the endorsement of the program of decentralization by the American Federation of Teachers; Selden did not.
- R: That's right.
- H: May I have this?
- R: Yes. I think that I have another one in the room. If not, I'll be sorry.
- H: Well, I can make a copy and send it to you.

- R: OK. It will tell you what we ran on.
- H: What was Shanker's position?
- R: Shanker's position at first, I think, he really wanted nothing coming out on decentralization. Plus, you know, the reason I will not let you call this a black caucus is because we get much of our information from many white members in Al Shanker's group in New York who have fought for other positions. And, we know the story of Oceanhill Brownville better than most folks around, you know.
- H: What role did Richard Parrish play?
- R: Well, Dick was one of the persons who congratulated me in the beginning on my willingness to run and asked me not to be disappointed, and was quite shocked himself, you know in a nice sort of way, to see that I could pull 586 _____ votes.
- H: Did Dick support you?
- R: I would say ... Well, there comes a time when we say that "we're all brothers." OK?
- H: OK.
- R: If Dick went into vote, I didn't see how he voted. But, we have not said that he is not a brother. I think that Dick, has learned something from those of us who started fighting in the convention.
- H: Yes, that the position has changed.
- R: Yes, I think he learned some thing. We had a black caucus which I think he might have, when he first walked in, wasn't quite sure of himself, but I think he listened to the issues and what not. And, I was quite surprised to receive a position statement of the black caucus of the AFT.
- H: In the past year? In the past six months there has been no real change.
- R: Yes.
- H: In the past year there has been no real change:
- R: Yes.
- H: Now, is it your contention, Mrs. Richard, that black caucuses may be your _____?
- R: Oh, you're not...

END OF SIDE ONE

NOTE: INTERVIEW BEGINS ABRUPTLY ON PAGE 24. THE OPENING REMARKS FROM SIDE TWO ARE MISSING.

- R: Separate from the New Caucus.
- H: All right hold it. OK, now. I'm going to ask you the question... Where were we? Is it your feeling, Mrs. Richard, that...
- R: That, I think, is the only copy I had in the bag. So, you'll have to see Dorothy Jones who keeps theirs.
- H: All right. I'll make a copy of that; I'll xerox it and send it back to you. Is it your feeling that while it your feeling that while it may be necessary to organize black caucuses of teachers in many other cities, it is either undesirable or unnecessary to do so in Detroit? And, if that is your position, would you please tell me why?
- R: We felt that could work within the frame-work of the Detroit Federation of Teachers and could accomplish, those blacks of us who had not just visible reasons to be there, you know, like the black in the front office, but did indeed help to make some of the decisions, we felt that we could guide this thing and keep it going where we could all exist, or co-exist, which ever way you wanted to put it. But, since Ed Simkins has left and his guiding hand isn't in that office all of the time, the kind of decisions have been made that will either force us out of the union because we cannot live in dignity in that union; we're not going to let that union move against the community. We want to be able to sit down and be able to break bread and talk about how you don't need to move in this direction. But, since we have not been able to do this, then the only other thing you do is to continue your new caucus. And, as recently as these three black teachers who were unilaterally dismissed from the Detroit Public School and a regional superintendent walking in, saying at 1:05 p.m., "Here is your release." An administrative bid is called. We waited for the union to take action. In our contract, page 22, section E, it says that: "a regular teacher, a certified teacher, must have a two weeks notice before she can be transferred from one regular assignment to another regular assignment. These teachers were just told literally: "Pack your things up; you're through at Cooper School." One is a twelve year teacher in math..

H: Why were they dismissed?

R: Well, it seems as if these teachers aren't sociable enough. It was aired last night in a public meeting. They aren't sociable enough, they make some teachers feel uncomfortable... Well, I talked this over with Roberta... I know that many...

H: These were all black teachers?

R: Pardon?

H: These were all black teachers?

R: These were all black teachers. I know that there were some white teachers in this too who harassed them, but they weren't transferred out.

H: Did the union spring to their defense?

R: I'm getting to that. No, the union did not spring to their defense.

H: Why not?

R: Those girls tried to reach the union. They had a letter prior from John Elliot who is a black vice-president who replaced Ed Simkins. And in the letter to John, they had mentioned some of their problems. John Elliot told them that those were administrative decisions. The administrator, you know, had the right to make decisions in his building and that the union didn't like to become involved in that. The formal grievance procedure could not be used for this.

H: Why not?

R: Don't ask me!

H: That's what the grievance procedure is for.

R: Well, they found this out, but we fought it out last Thursday on the union floor. Incidentally, that's when I got back on the Executive Board.

H: Oh, you're now back on the Executive Board?

R: I'm back on the Executive Board. There were two vacancies. I had not intended to run because, as I said, I'm involved in many things now.

H: So, as of now, you're a member of the Executive Board of the Detroit Federation of Teachers.

R: Yes. The teachers called and said, "Z, you're the only person who will speak up. And, somebody has to speak up for us." They don't know that they can speak up for themselves.

H: What proportion of the teachers in the public school system of

of Detroit are black?

R: 40%.

H: 40%?

R: That's why we say Detroit is no New York!

H: It's 37% in Chicago.

R: You see, you have 11% of the teachers in New York...

H: 40%. And, they all are in the teachers' union?

R: I would assume that most of them are in the teachers' union.

H: Is membership in the teachers' union voluntary?

R: It's voluntary. There's about 7,000 of 11,000 teachers in the teachers' union.

H: Black teachers make up 40%?

R: 40%. So, you can see the difference. If the union moves in Detroit against the community, a great percentage of the people who would be moving would have to be blacks moving against and we ain't hardly about to buy that.

H: Now there is a general feeling in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and the West Coast... I've spoken to black teachers and they say, "Our concerns are not only to make the teachers' union work as a union, but we have a responsibility that goes beyond that. We are the representatives of the black community and the teaching profession. And, we want to make the union, responsive to the needs of the black community."

R: I will grant you that we want to make it relevant to the needs of all communities, but the black community in particular!

H: OK, I accept that.

R: You see, because most of the other communities can take care of themselves. But, we feel now that we are the "keepers."

H: Now, 40%?

R: Yes.

H: You represent... You are a voice of that 40%?

R: Well, let me say, I don't say I'm a leader of the 40%.

H: I say that.

R: I'm one of the 40%--one of the many in the 40% who will speak out and be heard.

H: Well, I said that you are a voice of that 40%. You aren't "the" voice, there probably is not one voice, but you are a voice of that 40%.

- R: That's right, but then you almost said that I'm the one voice.
- H: But, I didn't want to say that. All right, now what are your perspectives and motives and what is the perspective of the other black leadership? Do you think that you can stay in and make a fight and transform it or do you think that you have to get out and form your own union? What is your perspective?
- R: Well, if we move out and form our own union, it will be because we were forced out. Now. It will be because we were forced out. Now, a case in point: when we have to get on the floor to fight for the union to support three black teachers (and I say to you not just three black teachers, if it were three white teachers and they did not jump to their aid, we would have fought them.
- H: Well, where do you get this "of them not jumping to their aid?"
- R: Because there already was instructions to the building rep in this particular building, as I'm given to understand by talking to some of the teachers. The building rep had been told by a member, a teacher who worked at the union, that if she got enough petitions--signatures on a petition--to oust these teachers, the union would support them.
- H: Why did the union want to oust them?
- R: I'll tell you. Give us enough time and we can document any number of schools where teachers who speak out and who have close rapport with the community are now being harassed. You know Maria Williams, how quiet and soft spoken Maria is. She is the head of the Racism Committee of the union. She heads the CARE committee. We call it now the Committee Against Racism in Education. Maria came up to me yesterday and said her principal came in to her and told her Mrs. Hambleton wanted to meet with her. I said, "For what reason, Maria?" This is after I left Cooper School. "Well, my room is cluttered." Well, I know Maria. I call her a "pack rat" because she saves all kinds of little things to use for her special education children. And, she has a lot of ingenuity in transforming nothing into something. But, now she says, "My room, Zeline... I've been moved into a smaller room." She said, "My room, is one of the cleanest rooms in the school." And, I said, "So, you go to a head shrinker because your room was cluttered?" Mrs. Hambleton is

the psychiatrist. "But, Maria Williams, you go to the head shrinker? Why didn't they send you to Building and Grounds? Maybe a janitor could have helped you clean it up. They haven't sent you to the right department." So, I told her to call Mary Ellen and tell her to get over to the school and help you. And, if she has not received any support from Mary Ellen and we find out... Now, if she didn't call Mary Ellen--because I told Mary Ellen that she was in trouble... Now if Maria called Mary Ellen and Mary Ellen didn't get over there--because I told Mary Ellen that it looked like it was a conspiracy against all teachers of the New Caucus and all black teachers who speak out and are fighting for an accountability and the rights of children to learn--and if Maria called and they didn't get out to that school to find out why that principal is harassing her, there will be another battle on the union floor tomorrow. And, if we have to fight each step of the way and find out that we are not going to get any help, we don't need it any more. But, that's going to be the choice.

H: Like the Kerner Report...

R: Like the Kerner Report, that's going to be the choice of Mary Ellen, which way she will go. We don't want at this point to walk away from the union movement, but we're not going to let the union movement destroy us either.

H: What do you think of Al Shanker?

(A LONG PAUSE)

Do you want to read this for the record?

R: I'm not even going to say anything. The mere fact that I'm not saying anything tells you what I think.

H: Well, I've just been handed a leaflet by Mrs. Richard...

R: This was given out when Al Shanker came her to speak at TULC. You remember it, Roberta. Anyone who could be as mealy-mouthed as Al Shanker up there and insulted many black people sitting in there as he did, and not even be sensitive to the fact that he was insulting them, can't deserve your respect--not that he did anyway since what he did, many of us feel, in New York, to his own teachers' union, the cry of black anti-Semitism, you know, begging the issue between black people and people of the Jewish faith. There's not that many black people in the world who are anti-Jewish. Now, they may be anti-position. And, if it happen that many of the people

of New York were of the Jewish faith, it was the issues that were being fought. And, if you would do this to a union movement, if he would set us back as many years as he has--now many people aren't saying this, but many people black and white feel that Al Shanker did a disservice not only to the teachers' labor movement, but to all aspects of the labor movement.

- H: Who put this leaflet out? This leaflet, by the way, says: "As Detroit teacher trade unionists, we do not support Al Shanker." And it goes on to attack his position in the teachers' strike in New York City and his fight against decentralization. Who put this out?
- R: Concerned teachers.
- H: Black and white?
- R: Black and white.
- H: The majority black?
- R: Concerned teachers, black and white.
- H: The majority black?
- R: He walked through a picket line. If it was still out there, it was all white.
- H: Now, was this the meeting sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee?
- R: Yes, at TULC.
- H: Right. All right, Al Shanker spoke in Detroit at a meeting sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee?
- R: Yes.
- H: Your group of Detroit teachers put a picket line in front of that meeting. Is that right?
- R: Just say a group of Detroit teachers.
- H: A group of Detroit teachers... Black and white?
- R: Black and white... Well, no, there were no black teachers in the picket line; they were all white, come to think about it.
- H: Why?... Well, let me ask this: Were you on the picket line?
- R: No.
- H: Why weren't you out there on the picket line?
- R: Because I have to hear what is being said. I told you I fight issues. You can't be outside walking in a picket line.
- H: Why was the picket put in front of the meeting in which Al Shanker spoke under the _____ of the Jewish Labor Committee.
- R: Well, I'll tell you. The Jewish Labor Committee brought Al Shanker

here, I think as an information item, you know. So, it was not against the union...

H: You say they were just interested in the information.

R: Yes, I would want to believe this, you know. So, we weren't picketing then.

H: You're a very charitable and Christian lady, if I may say so.

R: Well, let me say this: I believe the best in everybody until I find out. And, when I don't find the best in you, then I move as I have to move, you know. I told you that I grew up in a religious family. So, if one girl said, "But, you're bitter," I told her, "I'm not bitter; I have more love in my heart than most people. If I ever get bitter _____." you know. So, I think most of us are fighting maybe to keep some of the saneness. We still would like to believe, but there is only so far one can go with this, you know.

H: What was your impression? Since you were in the audience the night that Al Shanker spoke, what was your impression of Al Shanker's speech?

R: Well, first of all, he came to an agreement in Cleveland with us that he was for decentralization or would support it. The resolution that we got out on decentralization at the convention, Al Shanker had to word that resolution. One of the black fellows-- and, I'll give you another article that was in the Saturday Review, where I, on record, said the same thing that many blacks have said across the country... But, I knew that Al Shanker was going to move against those people. I just hoped it wouldn't happen. I just hoped that resolution would sort of guide us. But, you know, paper doesn't necessarily guide anybody, I guess. But, as I said, Al Shanker was insulting to me and to every black person there. Many black people got up and walked out. I stayed because I don't want anybody to tell me what you said, I want to be able to hear it for myself. If anybody tells me what you said, I'll listen. But, I try to find out myself by hearing you. Then, I make my own decision. I think he did nothing for better relationship here. And as one black person behind me remarked, "If they bring him here two more times, we'll have the unanimity in the black race that you've never seen in your life. And, it has taken 400 years and we haven't quite had unanimity. And, if he can do it in

3 speaking engagements, he's something else."

McB: What did the meeting do to people's feelings about TULC?

R: I'm not going to get into that because, you know, I'm one of the few blacks in the labor movement now, Roberta, who say what I want to say it and you know it. And, there's a difference you see, because by virtue of the fact that my father worked in the plants and wanted us to maybe have a sort of an independent living, it means that when I speak out in my union or as a person, I'm not waiting for somebody to put me back on the assembly line. You know, like that happened to Horace Sheffield a few years ago. You see, when the fellows have not been provided for and unfortunately in our race, girls are educated and boys are left to sort of shuffle for themselves. But, when they speak out, even though I'm sure many of them feel just as I do, then the heavy hand of penalty is dropped on them. And, they are isolated as Horace Sheffield was down in Mississippi. And they learn well. So, you have to be... You have to know that when you speak out, that you might go back on that production line; you might not be an international rep. But, I cannot believe that all of those black men are as docile inside. In fact, I'm rather sure they're not.

H: ...If Al Shanker was to run for the presidency of the AFT, what would you do?

R: Well, if Al Shanker ran for the presidency of the AFT, he just wouldn't get my vote.

H: He wouldn't get the vote of any black teachers?

R: Oh, I don't know. Some might support him, but I doubt when they went into the room to vote, whether they would vote for him. And, I'd like to say there would be a whole lot of whites who would be keeping us company too. But, I think that he would get a large number of votes for this reason: just as George Wallace almost became our president, or almost made it very embarrassing for the people of the United States. There are many people who live in fear. And, their fear makes them do strange things. And, it seems to be that if we can put enough policemen out there, if we can oppress you just a little more, we'll be safer by stepping on you. But, you see, when you step on me or stand on me, you got to stay there to keep me down. So, you ain't going too far either.

- H: What is your opinion of the New York teachers' strike?
- R: You mean that illegal strike that they had a few days ago?
- H: Yes, I'm referring to that illegal strike in New York. In all seriousness, I'm referring to the strike that Shanker has lead against the...
- R: You know several of them, you know...
- H: Yes, I know.
- R: The last one--the Oceanhill Brownsville Strike...
- H: I'm referring to the Oceanhill Brownsville Strike.
- R: I think it was a sin against children, against the grown-ups of the community and, as I said earlier, it's the kind of thing that labor will spend many years living down. And, he may have won as far as far as Oceanhill Brownsville. ~~Brownsville.~~
- H: Well, you know that's not saying too much.
- R: Well, he may have won in his mind, but technically he is the loser.
- H: You think that most of the black teachers that belong to union across the country feel as you do?
- R: I think that black teachers today feel that their job is to teach children. Money is nice; but unless you think of children first, they aren't too interested in dollars.
- H: I see. You're saying the first responsibility really is the black child in the black community?
- R: The first responsibility is to all children in the community where you teach because there aren't... A point that I'd like to mention, and I said this to Mary Ellen the other day...
- H: Now, who is this Mary Ellen?
- R: Mary Ellen Reardon.
- H: Mary Ellen Reardon?
- R: Yes.
- H: Now, who is she?
- R: The president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. And, I was here one Sunday morning--I'm up and down the road between Lansing and Ann Arbor; I never stay home-- But, I had a chance to be home one Sunday morning about 3 weeks ago and I got to the magazine section or the pictorial section of the Detroit News, I believe, and I looked at this little girl with her hand up in the classroom, a beautiful smile, and they said: "She is one of the lucky ones." And, I wondered why was she lucky, you know. It was a catching little

sentence and I started reading. And, I was just horrified to find out that right here in the city of Detroit is a group of Spanish-American people and these people are as left out as the blacks feel that they are. Maybe we are a little fortunate; at least we can speak, or try to speak, the English language.

H: Was there a concentration of numbers there?

R: Yes. But, here are kids of Spanish decent going to school, and this little girl is lucky because she is bilingual; she can speak the English language and the Spanish lanaguage. The other children are being taught by teachers who only speak English, with the exception of a very few, and many of them only speak Spanish. And, I said, "My gosh, we're in a horrible position if we can half understand the teacher. What in the world is happening to those children?" Now, we have a union, you know. We could have gotten federal funds I think, Roberta, to maybe give the teachers a "crash course" in Spanish, you know. To me, this is uncalled for.

H: So, what you're saying is that the union has become insensitive to the needs of the children.

R: I would say that once you become big business, be you union or management, you tend to forget the little people underneath.

H: You think the AFT has become big business?

R: I would say that there are several unions within the AFT that are big business. I think New York is big business; I would say Detroit is big business; Chicago...

H: By big business you mean...

R: They are the large unions; they're respected across the country, you know. And, you're more of a symbol of unionism than actually the hard-hitting union that you should be...

H: By being insensitive are you really trying to say that...

R: Will you let me tell you this about these 3 black teachers! Now, you let me tell you and if it were 3 white teachers... And, I said this to Mary Ellen, "Do you know what I would have done when they pulled those teachers out of the school--what would Walter Reuther have done--they would have had a work stopage, wouldn't they?" You don't do that? All right, I wouldn't have pulled teachers out because I teachers should be teaching. But I would

have gone down to that School Center Building and I would have jumped up and down in front of Mr. McCutcheon and Dr. Dracula and I would insist that those teachers be put back in their classrooms and I would have, because my contract had been violated. Then if you have a grievance against it, file the grievance. And, I would have pursued the grievance and if those teachers were indeed guilty, at least they would have known that we had done all we could for them. I said, "Then if they were guilty, Mary Ellen, they're just out, I mean, however you take care of guilty people." We would have to have compromised or resolved it in some manner. But, to have people pay you \$80 a year for dues and other people, black teachers, new caucus people, have to lead a fight on the floor for those teachers to even tell their story. In new business, you fumble around and kill new business. I had to call for a special order of business and say, "If I'm supported, I'd like to speak to it," and had to make sure I had fifty people out there in the back that were going to hollow support, you know, to get the story on the floor. Now, how can teachers keep believing in a union like that? And, it was black and white teachers! You know, you might do it today because a girl was wearing an Afro, or a fellow is wearing an Afro, but you start these kinds of heavy handed things, and the next person is going to have slanted eyes and next it will be people with grey hair, and the next, your shoe size is too large. You're supposed to support your membership, fight for them, have the grievance process used, and if they're wrong, they get whatever the consequences are.

H: What you are suggesting is that the leadership of the union now has interests that correspond to the interests of their own bureaucracy, but not to the interest of either members or the children.

R: I would say that is what we are saying. I would say in Detroit, if Mary Ellen had not pushed out and supported Al Shanker-- and she supports him whole heartedly--if she had just listened and had called in community people--you know enough of them now: Mrs. Kelley and people who had an interest in the school-- and said, "We are a teacher's union. There are rights that teachers have by virtue of a contract. We understand the need for you to have involvement, participation, and indeed some control.

And, we want to sit here and talk with you as to how we can do this and you be able to have your controls and the teachers know that they are protected. Now, I think that we could have done that. We still had time when I was talking to you last summer, Roberta. But, I don't know where we are now. I know this: there is going to be some kind of decentralization and community control. And, it's so easy to sit down and talk. But, nobody wants to give up any power. And, as someone said power, you yield only to power, then not without a struggle. So, are going to break heads." Look, this could have been resolved right on the local level. The parents have worked behind these girls, the parents have kept their kids out of school--there are 1600 kids at the Cooper School. They have kept most of those children home and supported these teachers. Now, if I was a union president, and I think that was one of the reasons, maybe that I had to go (they were so sure I was going to come back here and run against Mary Ellen and I wasn't even interested in that because I told you it was a joke to me when they mentioned running against Selden) but, if I was a union president and I had a community that supported union teachers, I would certainly sit down with that community. We haven't even had anyone to go in and sit and talk with these teachers, you know together, you know the staff. So, as a result, that staff is polarized.

H: All right, now, you... I've spoken to people, you know, who generally share your approach around the country and I'm struck by the fact that you generally take the position that if there is a walk-out or the formation of a new union or the development of an internal caucus within the AFT, either locally or nationally, your feeling is that it will not just be an all Negro development but that it will have substantial white support. In fact, it will be interracial.

R: Well, I'll put it this way. I'll put it this way. If there is... In AFT there can be new caucuses. Now, there may be a black caucus, you know, getting together to talk over some things at the union where the blacks in the other caucuses, you know, national, progressive, and new caucus might sit and talk with each other about things that are germane to black people where even some of you who are very liberal don't quite understand what we're getting at.

So, we have to get our own decisions together before we can sit down with you and bring you together on what we're talking about. So, there will be that kind of thing, I think, on the AFT level.

H: All right, let me get this straight just so I can understand it. You anticipate a parallel development in which many blacks who belong to a black caucus, but simultaneously being with the new caucus.

R: Would, hopefully, would be in the new caucus. Now, that's going to depend on the AFT.

H: Why?

R: Because the one thing that they kept asking me in Cleveland is "Are you going to ask the black teachers to walk out?" Well, I know that they wanted to sell papers so I told them, "I can't tell black teachers what to do. They do what they want to do." But, now, in many of the big cities, black teachers don't want any part of the union movement.

H: That's right.

R: Black folks don't even want any part of the total labor movement!

H: That's right.

R: And, we are going to either one day have to stand over here and when we move over here, we can look at you and say, "We did all we could. Now, we're over here because none of you would listen."

H: Now, at the present time the new caucus is a national caucus operating within the AFT with both black and white.

R: That's right.

H: Is there a preponderance of blacks?

R: The leadership was basically black. When I say leadership, I mean that the leadership consisted of blacks and whites. But, the three people who by virtue of having had the experience that we've had in Detroit and by virtue of not having a feeling of inferiority--you know this is why we thought that we still had hope--we lead the fight. I had no particular... I was on the Executive Board, Ed was the president and there's a white fellow named Steve _____ out in New York who was one of the officers...

H: Were most of the members of the new caucus Detroit people?

R: The strong people in the new caucus, I would say, are Detroit people. But, what you have with the others are an organizational ability. This is why we could get leaflets out at the "twelveth hour,"

you know, and throw things together; while the progressive caucus had to almost call--I don't know what you might say--to get themselves together.

H: All right, something else: the immediate period you see as a parallel development of the new caucus plus a black caucus a black caucus and blacks will belong to the black caucus and will also participate actively in the new caucus.

R: That's right.

H: Some whites will be part of the new caucus, but you don't know how long this will be a viable approach...

R: I'm not talking about... I think the new caucus can be viable for a long time because it brings us together with the white people who sense the need for a change as against the black people who know that there must be change. Now on the national level the new caucus can exist; the progressive caucus will not continue to destroy.

H: And, by the progressive caucus, you mean the kind that Selden leads?

R: That's right.

H: OK. You see, I know that in New York City something that the newspapers really didn't give enough attention to was that there were hundreds of white teachers...

R: Who went into those schools and look, this is why I really can't respect Al too much, not at all...

H: Most of them Jewish...

R: Because I knew that there were Jewish teachers working in Oceanhill Brownsville...

H: All the way through...

R: I have any number--at least I did until I went up to a meeting in Lansing and left my attache case up there and I had a whole folder on Oceanhill Brownsville and I had letters that had been sent to me and copies from the very good New Republic and various newspapers in New York where people cut out, xeroxed, and sent to me. And some student up at Michigan State evidently must have realized that this is the newest thing. Everything came back in my attache case but that material on it. But, I have some more here. But, I didn't realize--until everybody started coming to you or calling you asking, "What do you have on community control?"--that it was a hot issue because as usual in life, I move through fighting

battles and somebody else comes along and writes a story and makes the money on it, you know. But, that is the one thing that's missing out of my attache case--that whole thing on Oceanhill-Brownsville.

H: Do you have any other material?

R: I have other materials. Now, we're building up some material. You have to, you just can't go around saying, "I don't like Al Shanker."

H: You have to have it documented.

R: You have to say these are the things that are happening. Then we had a mother come in here, up in Pontiac, from New York, who told us the parent side of it. And, she was just an average mother, just dynamic, you know. Then, the other week, Rhody McCoy was up in Ann Arbor--I couldn't get up there, but I understood that he did a pretty good job. Let's see, the one thing that I would say about this, if the Jewish Labor Movement wanted to do...

H: Jewish Labor Committee.

R: Committee... wanted to do really an informational service, they should also bring Rhody McCoy here and let people hear the side of it, you know.

H: You've been very helpful and this has been a very fine interview, Mrs. Richard. Is there anything that you would like to add?

R: No, I'd like to say this: that because of what happened--in this case, it could have been resolved, these three teachers being dismissed, could have been resolved without the conflict that we have now. And, I think they will be sent back. And, if they are sent back, it will maybe be--and I'm not taking any credit because again when you stick your neck out to fight, I've been with them just about every minute--I know that one day I can get cut down, but that's the price you pay. They had the open hearing last night and the principal did a good job setting them up because he knew they were going to get a chance to speak on the program. And, I told them, "You're not going to speak at all because when somebody even hear charges against you for the first time, you sure don't get up in a public meeting to defend yourself." They had refused, because of some things that happened at Cooper School, to even let Mary Ellen see any of the documents that they had. They don't

believe that they can trust her. And, it's not a black and white issue; it's just because of some things that have happened since they have been involved, and because they feel she had no concern about them at all. It could wait until after the contract. Well, their membership was on record last week when we should have been talking about contract proposals for a new contract and saying, "We don't hardly need to be talking about a new contract when we're not enforcing the present contract." And, that's sort of odd. That means that teachers are growing up. But, what I'm saying here is that this has pushed black teachers together. And, there is a black teacher's organization and it will be getting stronger and stronger. All we need to do is continue to have these kinds of things happen. I think it's like, you know Richard King--I was listening to him over the television one night and the newspaper reporter asked him this question: Well, Richard Henry said, "_____ (that's what they called him), what about the rest of the blacks in their four cities that they want, are they with you?" And, M _____ said, "I am not worried; I can be patient because the white man will send them to us." And, what I am saying today to you is that let teachers continue to be harassed and let the union continue not to know, or seemingly to know, or not to fight the battle, then they will push us together with the kind of strength that we will need just to survive as teachers. And, if you then have to fight for yourself, there is no need for union. So, I am on the "Fact Finding Committee" for these three girls, and I have done everything I could at this point to let them know that the union has agreed to take the first step because they know those girls should have not been moved out of the school... Twelve years, and you're out there working as a day-to-day "Sub"... Neither one of them have worked since the day they pulled out; they've been yelled at every day. Now, you know that you can do better by your teachers than that. Even if the teachers are wrong, wait until they are declared wrong when you have found the facts before you reject them. You don't run around and find out what the facts are so the union can see if the union will support them. You don't have three teachers standing in your union membership, wanting to tell their stories to the teacher, and you tell them:

"Well, we have contract proposals to do today and that's what we are going to discuss." You don't let your whole membership, black and white, have to beat you down just for you to tolerate one person telling her story. So, all that I'm saying--and I know Roberta looks at me sometimes and she looks like I'm frightening the living daylights out of her, you know... But, I'm just saying to you--and I know it isn't true, Roberta... but, people who have worked with black people and who have tried--we have to tell you the truth and I don't bite my tongue, you know. We are going to continue to try. I wouldn't have gone back on that Executive Board. I did not want to be bothered with them any more. I mean, I would work, I would pay my dues but, I didn't want to be bothered with even having to say too much to them because I don't think at this time, unless there is some changes, that that union is going to be the kind of union that we can continue to support, not and have dignity in your own community because at the end of the day, I'm right here with black folks. I can't go out in suburbia somewhere. And, when the criticism that black teachers in Detroit and across the country will be in the same position as black policemen everywhere because, you know, black people don't like policemen period! But, a black man that has to work in that blue uniform is in a very poor position today.

H: True.

R: And, black teachers don't intend to get into that position. Now, if the union wants to fight, if the union wants to be where it was a few years back when I helped fight with them for collective bargaining and for the kinds of things that made teaching beautiful and meaningful, if the union will stop concentrating on terrific salaries and the more money we get, the less accountable we seem to have become, if they will do these kinds of things, then black teachers can be their strongest supporters...

MCB: I think we're so lucky to have Zeline with that attitude in your position.

R: But, I'm saying at this point that I don't know how long any of us will continue and I think the reason, Roberta, that I can say any of these things is because maybe I've been more active across the

labor movement than most black teachers, you know. I've had a chance to see the structure of the UAW, you know, AFL-CIO and to work with other labor people and I've tried to understand. But, when it comes right down to me letting teachers get "thrown to the wolves" and my turning my back--as many black people have had to do against it to survive as "the first black"--we're not buying and selling ourselves so cheap any more.

McB: Zeline is doing her best to educate Tom Turner for our Wayne County president.

R: I think that he is beginning to see the light.

H: Well, thank you very much.

END OF SIDE TWO