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SHELTON TAPPES

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER
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H: This is an interview with Mr. Shelton Tappes of the United Automobile Workers of America, October 27, 1967, in Detroit, Michigan. The interviewer is Herbert Hill. Mr. Tappes, would you please tell us where you were born, something about your early life, and when you first came to Detroit.

T. I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in the year 1911. My early schooling was in Omaha, and I finished high school there; I went to the University of Nebraska for one term, hoping to become a lawyer. My family moved to Akron, Ohio, in 1927, and I joined them there a short time later. I didn't stay long; I came to Michigan where my father lived-Saginaw, Michigan. The same year I came to Michigan, my mother and step-father had moved to Detroit in the interim period, so I joined them in Detroit, and went to school in Detroit for a short while.

H. When did you first become an autoworker? What plant, and what year was it?

T. I first became an autoworker in the Briggs plant on Mack Avenue, in 1928. The job was wet sanding, and it was pre-union conditions. I could say, this was just before the Depression. So it was pretty bad there. In those days, a person who worked on the job that I did, sanding bodies with sandpaper and water- the Briggs method was that you would come into work at a certain hour, and prepare yourself by putting on boots and coveralls, like that, and heavy rubber apron, and usually we would tape our fingers, the palms of our hands, and we waited for bodies. When a string of bodies were coming down the line, then our time began. The wages were 27 cents an hour, but we were only paid for the time worked, It wasn't unusual to spend ten to twelve hours in the plant, and only get paid for three hours. Usually, we averaged from five to six hours per day.

H. Where were most of the Negroes concentrated in the Briggs plant, at what kind of jobs? And if you have the knowledge, would you say how most

Negroes were employed in and around Detroit at that time, at what kind of jobs? What jobs were they limited to?

T. Well, most of the Negroes in the automobile plants, like Briggs, Murray Body, or Fisher Body, worked in the wet-sanding departments. This was the kind of work other workers would prefer not to do, if they didn't have to. It was extremely wet; you were vulnerable for colds, pneumonia, and all that sort of thing. And aside from wet-sanding, they also performed the cleaning up of the paint-spray booths, and janitorial services of various types, chip-pulling, which meant they hauled the offal, or residue from the grinding operations. Some of them did window-washing, office-cleaning, and patrolling the grounds of those plants which did have lawns and things like that. In other factories they worked in the foundries, Packard, Studebaker, Ford, Dodge. In most cases they worked in the foundry or heat-treat departments. The only type of skills which were really utilized by the automobile industry in those days were those of moulders or core-makers. Very rarely did a Negro advance to any kind of a skilled job, no matter how competent he might be, except at the Ford plant.

H. Were there any Negroes in production jobs in the pre-1929 period?

T. Very few. It wasn't unusual, if you were to visit a production line or an assembly line, where automobiles were put together. I can recall seeing the Dodge assembly line, the Cadillac line, the Ford Assembly line. It wasn't unusual to walk from one area to another of the assembly line, and not see a Negro performing any assembly operation, except that of placing the frame of the automobile at the beginning of the line.

H. A moment ago, you said, "Except Ford." I should like to ask you why Ford was different from the very beginning in Negro employment. Evidently Ford very early utilized Negro labor. Why do you think Ford was different, to what extent was he different, were Negroes, in fact, engaged in

production and some of the skilled jobs at the Ford plant in the pre-1929 period?

T. Yes, Ford was different to a degree. The jobs that were usually handed to Negroes in the automobile plants were the same at Fords, with the exceptions that there were a few skilled people. I can recall even in the twenties, seeing Negro electricians, Negro millwrights, iron-workers. There were some painters, and a few others. I think the reason that Ford was different could be that during the late teens, shortly after World War I, the market provided him with Negroes; this was because many of them had come north to work in the war industries, World War I industries. Some of them probably got in the plant at that time when he was manufacturing the boats and trucks that were used by the armies. At the same time the Rouge plant was nearing completion, and there was a need for tremendous numbers of people at Rouge. So maybe for these reasons, and many others, he-Ford, I am speaking of-had more Negro workers than others. He took advantage of a labor market which was available.

H. I have heard that Henry Ford had labor agents who operated in Southern states, where there were large concentrations of Negroes, that Ford actively recruited among these Negroes, arranged to bring them up North. Is this true?

T. This is a true fact; at the same time he had hired a man by the name of Marshall, who assisted in the hiring and placing of these people.

H. Was he a Negro?

T. He was a Negro. Mr. Marshall had been connected, I understand, with the Detroit Police Department, and was hired by the Ford Motor Company specifically for processing the Negro employees coming into the industries in great numbers.

H. From interviews I have done with some other people who were employed very early in the Ford Highland Park Plant, I understand there were

Negroes employed as early as 1922 in the Highland Park Plant, which I understand was the first Ford operation. Is that correct?

T. Well, Highland Park was the first sophisticated operation. The Ford Motor Company began in a small shop on Jefferson Avenue and moved later to a small plant on Piquette. Of course, in those days there were probably very few Negroes working for the Ford Motor Company. But when they moved into the Highland Park Plant which at that time was the largest automobile assembly operation in the world, many Negroes did work. And most of them worked in the foundries. But it was at that time the automobile industry was introduced to its first numbers of skilled workers, because there were, there still are Negroes working for Ford who got their early training as millwrights and electricians in the Highland Park plant.

H. We begin with the assumption that after the first World War, with the cutting off of foreign immigration, or at least of large numbers of immigrants, there were labor shortages, and that it now became necessary for the big auto manufacturers, also manufacturers in other industries to begin using Negro labor, much of it brought up from the South. But it seems that the other companies did not do this. The other companies resisted active recruitment among Negroes. The other companies, apparently, did not attempt to use Negro labor forces, but Ford did. The other companies were also faced with labor shortages, during post-war industrial expansion. Why do you think Henry Ford was perhaps the first of the largest industrial corporations to actively seek out, recruit Negro labor, bring them into Detroit? I understand that as early as 1922, Ford even built some homes for Negroes on Cottage Grove in Highland Park, since there was no available housing for Negroes. The question arises, "Why did Ford take active steps to recruit Negro labor, sending agents into the South, whereas the other companies which were also faced with labor shortages, were

reluctant to do so? Why do you think this was so? Was it a matter of ideology, was it a matter of expediency, what was Ford up to in this regard?

T. Well, as you say there were labor shortages shortly after World War I, because of the halt of immigration during the war. During the intensified immigration period beforeWorld War I, migrants either stopped in the East and were involved in the clothing industry, or went further west and were involved in the packing industry in Chicago, Wisconsin, Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri, which meant that the Slavic groups which became the base of the automobile labor force, hadn't come into Detroit at this particular time. Remember this: Ford was expanding. He was the first of the automobile manufacturers to realize the utility of the automobile, and he was the first to decide that the automobile could be made available to everybody, that it was not a rich man's toy. So, for that reason he had need for more workers. His production was just growing by leaps and bounds. The automobile had proven itself during World War I. It had replaced the horse in hauling equipment, guns, and things like this to the front lines. And also it became a utility vehicle for moving the officials around-generals, and lieutenants and captains from post to post. So it had proven itself during the War, and Ford was the first to take advantage of this. He began to produce a reasonably cheap car, and his orders had piled up to such a massive total that he had to reach this market. At this time, Ford was about five years behind in filling his orders. There were three others who also saw the value of utilizing the Negro labor which was on the market, the Dodge Company, who, besides producing a car of their own, also did a lot of foundry work for the Ford Motor Company. Ford bought engines from Dodge in those days. And there was also the Packard Motor Company which was, at that time, one of the leading manufacturers of automobiles. The Packard car, was, in

those days, outselling the Cadillac, or almost any other car beside Ford. So Packard used many Negro workers, for the Packard Company had a large foundry attached to its operation. Another was the Briggs Manufacturing Company, a company I worked for. Briggs produced bodies for Ford in those days, and was also a contractor for producing bodies for many other automobile companies. Another company which used a number of Negroes was the Murray Body Company. That is, of course, out of business; Briggs was, of course, taken over by the Chrysler Corporation, a few years ago. But the Murray Corporation was a large manufacturer who made bodies for Ford, Packard, Dodge, and a number of others. And they utilized a number of Negroes in their operation.

H. You have suggested that one of the reasons for the Ford Company's large use of Negroes was that Ford was expanding more rapidly than any of the others, and therefore had greater labor needs. At the same time, you have told us (this is simply to summarize) that those companies who had extensive forge and foundry operations used Negroes to some degree, and that while there was a large use of Negroes in the industry, Negroes were, by and large, limited to the foundry, sanding, in general the low-paying, menial jobs. Was this in the period-we're still in the pre-1929 period-when Ford was paying his famed $5.00 per day, and did Negroes also get that $5.00 per day?

T. Yes, those who qualified. You know there were qualifications on those who got the $5.00 per day, and later investigations will probably prove to you that every Ford worker was not eligible for the $5.00. But those Negroes who did work for the Ford Motor Company, those who qualified, did receive the $5.00. And I might say that in those days, even, there were Negroes who were sent into positions of supervision, one of whom was a person by the name of Price-I don't know his first name. But Mr. Price

became a supervisor and worked himself up to become one of Ford's buyers. Eventually, he became the buyer of all abrasive stock used by the Ford Motor Company.

H. You've told us that one of the principal job classifications which used Negroes were the body manufacturers. You mentioned Briggs, Murray, Ford, Dodge. What about Fisher Body, which later became part of the General Motors Corporation? Were they in operation at this time, and what was their use of Negroes?

T. Fisher Body was in operation at that time, but most of the bodies were hand-made, and Negroes did not work for Fisher.

H. We are still talking about the pre-1929 period, a period of industrial expansion, and relative prosperity for the nation, that is, before the crash in October, 1929. Were there any discussions or any efforts to organize the workers in the auto industry at this time, and were there any activities by Negro workers which would suggest an interest in unionization?

T. Well, immediately before 1929-my recollection couldn't go before 1927, there were several efforts to organize within the auto industry. In fact, there was a union chartered called the Auto Workers Union as early as 1927, and there were Negroes very active in that organization. One I am thinking of was Joe Billups. Another was James Anderson. I remember one more whose name was Amiker. I don't recall his first name, but these I know. Now there were other people who were interested in auto workers' unions, but who didn't work in auto plants. The Auto Workers Union was quite a catch-all organization, in that anybody who was interested, or a potential autoworker, had a right to join. The initiation fee was very low, I think 25 cents, and only those who worked paid dues. If you didn't work, you didn't have to.

H. Was this Autoworkers Union an AFL-chartered union? What you say would suggest it was an industrial union. It was not the policy of the AFL at this time to organize undustrial unions. What was the situation?

T. I believe that at that time the Autoworkers Union was independent. It was tolerated by the AFL, mainly because most of the unions which existed in the auto industry were the craft-type, although they were in actuality industrial groups themselves. They weren't strictly craft or apprentice trades which were involved. For example, the trimmers and the metal-finishers unions-these were in existence at Hudson's, Continental Motors, and at Dodge's. At Dodge's they had what they called a Trimmers Union. Trimmers are people who put the upholstery in the car, or the chrome plating, whatever trim is on the outside of the body-they did the painting or striping of the bodies. Paint stripes were used quite considerably in those days.

H. Are you suggesting that the Auto Workers Union-by the way, was that the right name? The Autoworkers Union?

T. Yes.

H. It was called the Autoworkers Union? It was an independent union. I gather that it did organize on an industrial union basis, and it also admitted Negroes into membership equally?

T. That is true. My specific knowledge of the Autoworkers Union is that whichdealt with the Ford workers throughout Michigan-for example, the Ford workers were in Local No. 1 of the Autoworkers Union, and this encompassed every plant in the metropolitan area of Detroit, of which Ford, at that time, had seventeen.

H. Did this Autoworkers Union have any collective agreements-by this I mean, did the companies accept it, did they sign contracts with it, was it recognized as the collective bargaining representative for the workers?

T. No, it had no contracts, and no contacts whatsoever with the company.

H. However, a series of AFL craft unions did have representation rights, I assume, with the companies. You've just described the Trimmers and some of the others. Is it correct to assume that there were AFL crafts that had representation and had contracts at this time?

T. Yes, there were those I mentioned, and also some few others, for example, the pattern-makers, the millwrights, and a few others of that sort.

H. These are the traditional craft unions, and they did have some representation rights in the growing auto plants in the pre-1929 period. However, did these craft unions admit Negroes? Generally, what was their attitude toward the Negro worker?

T. I know of none of those mentioned which accepted Negroes. Now, there were two unions which encompassed trades which were found in the foundries. The Foundrymen's Association, I believe one was called; the other was the Moulders Union, in a limited way, accepted Negroes, but they were very choosey about it, and most Negroes, even though they might be in the trade were not allowed to join the union. Some of the rationale was that their insurance policies which were attendant to the membership would be injured, or some way harmed by accepting Negroes, because Negroes' life span was shorter than whites.

H. I assume you are referring to the AFL Foundry workers and Iron Workers Union. These are old AFL unions, and you are suggesting they did operate in the auto industry, they had some collective bargaining rights, and they accepted a few Negores; but, by and large, their policy was not to accept the great mass of Negroes who were employed in the foundries, and in finishing operations, but they did accept a small number of Negroes, on some selective basis. Is that correct?

T. Right.

H. We are still in the pre-1929 period. Tell us about the early interest of Negroes, if you will, in forming unions. Were there some efforts at organization among the Negroes started by Negroes themselves? Some Negro workingmen's, or self-help, or Negro beneficial societies, or Negro lodges. What were the first efforts of Negroes at union or other organizational attempts?

T. Well, it would be rather skimpy what I could tell you about those days, because I was still a schoolboy, really, although most of the time an out of work schoolboy. However, I do know this, that there were some organizations which were primarily composed of Negroes whose interest was in the right to get a job. I recall one they called the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. I used to attend meetings of this organization, and most of the discussion I can recall revolved around the need for jobs. There were clubs- this is the way they were referred to, clubs of people who had jobs, and who accepted membership of people who didn't have jobs, but who were trying to get them. I can recall one club, which mu stepfather belonged to. He worked at the United States Rubber Company, and this club was composed of guys who worked at U.S. Rubber Company, the Ford Motor Company, the Briggs Company. I had an uncle who worked at Briggs who also belonged to this club, and most of their discussion revolved around the jobs they had in the shop and the need for protection, because in those days the automobile industry was seasonal and by Ford, or Briggs or General Motors where Negroes worked in those days-when they were laying off for a model change, this usually started around the latter part of June, and lasted until as late as November some years, Negroes were the first laid off, and you were on your own trying to get back. There was no systematic recall

of workers in those days. You actually had to fight your way back into the plant. So these were some of the things which were discussed by these groups in those days.

H. I have two questions. Do you have any recollection of any organizations with radical tendencies expressed? Were there either white or Negro workers who had belonged to the Industrial Workers of the World? the Wobblies? The Wobblies had operated in the South. Were there any Negroes from the South, or from other parts of the country who had had contact with the Wobblies? or other radical organizations? And secondly, was this League of Struggle for the Rights of Negro Workers-was this affiliated with any radical organization?

T. Well, that would have to be determined by somebody else. I would suggest there would have had to be some encouragement by somebody to establish the League of Struggle, because it seemed to have some program in the background which would indicate it was associated with some other groups. I can say "Yes" to the question of people who may have had contact with the Industrial Workers of the World-I can recall several individuals who either told me or I had good reason to believe had been involved in some of their activities, and who later bacame Ford workers, and who were involved in some of the demonstrations, the marches and other things which were engaged in in those days to whip up support either for the union movement or the unemployed groups.

H. I interviewed a white worker yesterday, who went to work at the Ford Highland Park Plant, and he very proudly showed me his membership in the Knights of Labor in 1922. He joined the Knights of Labor in Pittsburg. He came here from Pittsburg; he had been a glazier, a glass worker; and he showed me his membership card, and said there were other workers who belonged to the Knights of Labor, even though they had no

formal organization in Detroit. They met socially some times. He said the Knights of Labor did not have an anti-Negro policy. On the contrary, they accepted Negroes freely, as members, and that generally there was a hatred of the American Federation of Labor, and of Gompers among the Knights of Labor because Gompers and the Federation had comtempts for the unskilled worker, the industrial worker, and refused to organize in the plants around Detroit. They only organized skilled workers. Do you have any recollection among the Negro workers of feelings like this? Or was there any interest in the Negro workers in radical ideas? Were there any Socialists? or Communists? Were there people who expressed an interest in radical ideas? in the labor movement? inCommunist or Socialist ideology? What was the reaction of the Negro workers generally to some of these ideas which were circulating among white workers at the time?

T. Well, I would say that the average Negro worker would respond as well as the white worker to the revolutionary ideas which were expressed by the various radical parties. There were Negroes who belonged to the Communist Party and there were some who belonged to the Socialist Workers Party. I have been in contact, or have met people like this during my years of being involved with the union. I wouldn't say there was any main stream attachment of the Negro, as such, to any of these movements. It was more a matter of individual choice. However, I can say this. The response of the Negro was usually most vocal to that group who was the most vocal in expressing the hopes and aspirations of the Negro for equality, and those who spoke out for Negro rights, and tried to announce a program calling for the acceptance of the Negro generally. Most of the information we got of the attitudes toward unions came from the research produced by these groups. For example, I knew that

unions were difficult for Negroes to join, because I knew of experiences of my own family. I had an uncle who was a bricklayer for forty years, worked with white bricklayers for many years, who had been foreman on many jobs he worked on, but never was allowed to join the union-the AFL bricklayers union-and he died, still holding a work permit.

So, for forty years, my uncle worked under a permit from the AFL Bricklayers union. These experiences could be recited over and over by most Negro workers who had worked in various trades, and who had worked over a period of years. So they would respond to the overtures of any group who purported to be in favor of Negro rights. I learned at the time I joined the Automobile Workers Union, the UAW, that there were 23 unions who either by ritualistic practice or by constitutional provision, barred Negroes from membership.

H. So you are suggesting that while it may not have been widespread, there was an interest among some Negro workers in radical ideas which were circulating among the working class generally, in Detroit. There were Communist groups, there wereSocialist groups of various persuasions, and that Negro workers were interested in these to the degree that these radical organizations raised the question of Negro rights, evinced an interest in the welfare of the Negro community, and generally were concerned with the trade union practices toward Negroes as well as management practices toward Negroes. You would say, it would be correct to say, there was some interest among Negroes, a limited number, perhaps but there was an interest among Negroes who had an educational background, perhaps, in radical ideologies? And that there was some response? Would you amplify this point a little bit, and also tell us if there was some interest among the Negro workers in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People? The NAACP was formed in 1909; inDetroit,

there was a chapter very early. As I recall, the Sweet Case which took place about this time - in any case I think the NAACP had already been operating in Detroit - it was one of the first places to receive a charter. Would you tell us a little about the ideas which were circulating among Negro workers, those who were interested in radical movements, those who were interested in NAACP, those who were interested in church groups, what were the ideas which were operative in the Negro working class community at that time?

T. I believe in actuality the bulk of the Negro workers of that period depended on the church for their leadership. There was great response to the organizational efforts of the NAACP chapter in Detroit, and I think that, historically, their drives always resulted in a large membership, comparatively speaking, especially when you speak of other cities. The leadership of the NAACP in those days, unfortunately, was professional people. I think in the early days they were usually school-teachers. In later years they were ministers, or doctors, or attorneys, who, because of the lesser role they were allowed to play, either as a religious leader, or a professional man, felt that - before 1929 there was no, or little activity among the working class, engaged in by the NAACP.

H. Before 1929, you are suggesting that the NAACP was, by and large, a middle-class organization, of doctors, lawyers, school-teachers, who had no specific program for the Negro workers - just the general civil rights program. Dr. Sweet, of the famous Sweet case which Clarence Darrow successfuhly defended, Sweet himself was a doctor, and I suppose that, generally, was the composition of the NAACP at this time. Now, in 1929, the crash occurs; we enter into the depression, a period of severe deprovation, hunger, starvation among Negroes throughout the industrial

centers of the midwest. Would you please give us your impressions of life among Negro workers during the depression years, that is, the period from 1929 until the New Deal starts some kind of economic revival, the period from 1929 to 1937, any recollections you may have about Negroes, on the WPA and PWA projects? Can you tell us anything about the conditions of life among Negroes in Detroit in the depression years? What do you recall of the hunger, the misery, the lack of a place to live, the denial of the barest necessities of life, which I understand characterized the life of the Negro in Detroit, Chicago, Toledo, Akron, the industrial cities of the mid-west, and what were the ideas which were rife among Negro workers. How did they respond to the depression? Was there talk of unionization was there any effort at organization, was there discussion of radical ideas, was there increase of interest in revolutionary movements? Tell us generally, everything you remember about the condition of the Negro working class during the years of the Great Depression.

T. During the years of the depression, of course Negroes suffered terribly. The privation, the lack of clothing, lack of money, of heat, of just about everything that America provides - he got very little of it. Another thing, those who did have jobs, many of them were discharged and replaced by whites as the depression got worse. The welfare program was very bare. It was only if you were facing eviction that there was any way possible to get rent paid, and even then the program called for finding you a cheaper place of abode if possible. And you were required to assist in moving your furniture to that place. This was an arbitrary decision of the Welfare Department. There were many who listened and responded to the Revolutionary groups who decried the attitudes of the power people in the community, and it was very easy to organize a

demonstration in those days. The efforts of the labor movement, in those days, fell short of getting too much response, because most of the workers, in those days, drifted toward the Unemployment movement, and I think here the Negro became conscious of the value of organization. I know that most of the men in my family - I'm speaking of my father, my uncles, the breadwinners in the family - in those days, while they were anti-union, because of the discriminatory practices in the unions they knew of, responded to the Unemployment Council, and other organizations which called for the workers to get together and do something about their problems.

H. You are suggesting that organized labor - meaning at that time, the AFL- took no interest in the problems of the Negro unemployed, who suffered so cruelly during the depression years, but, however, a variety of radical groups did begin to organize among the unemployed workers, both Negro and white. You have mentioned the Unemployed League. I would like you to tell us a little more about this, and about Negro participation. Was this both Negro and white? Was this on the basis of international working class solidarity? What about the Workers Alliance? Was the Workers Alliance in operation at this period? What was the relationship of the Communist and the Socialist movement to these groups? And generally, did Negroes respond to the efforts of Communist and Socialist organizations to organize unemployment demonstrations? Will you tell us about those demonstrations - what you were organized for? Against whom were you demonstrating? Tell us in general about these demonstrations and whether Negro workers were becoming more and more receptive to radical ideas?

T. Yes, there were many organizations. You mentioned the Workers Alliance. I recall that now. The Workers Alliance, the Unemployed Council,

the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the Autoworkers Union; most of these organizations merely had to run off a few handbills and go up and down the main streets in the Negro community, and wherever the site of the demonstration was to be, at the time it was to take place, there was usually a considerable crowd there. Many of the rallies were held right in the Negro community - Hastings Street, and I can think of some of the corners: Hastings at Leland, Hastings at Willis, and Hastings at Vernor. Many of them were held in the down-town area, like Grand Circus Park, or in front of the old City Hall, or in Cadillac Square. Usually, these meetings were attended by hundreds, or even thousands of people. Negroes did participate in very large numbers. I mentioned Joe Billups before. He was one of the leaders in the unemployment movement. And later as a member of the Communist Party, he was a candidate for governor. Now, I can't say what the elections showed in those days, but I do know the Communist Party was on the ballot in those days, as well as the Socialist Workers Party, on the Michigan ballot - also the Socialist Party. All three of these organizations put up candidates and ran national slates in those days. So their activity among Negroes, was to a great degree spread through the neighborhood. And I'm sure the vote of the Negro was heavily in that direction - much more heavily than it is today. So these programs were directed toward correcting a very serious situation. It's only natural that people who are hungry and are deprived of the bare necessities of life, would respond to these kinds of calls.

H. In 1932, James W. Ford, a leading Negro, ran for the vice-presidency on the Communist Party ticket. I'm curious if you recall if James W. Ford, and other leading Communist leaders like James S. Allen, came to Detroit to address rallies of Negro unemployed workers, whether some of the white leaders like William Z. Foster, or William Patterson, who was a Negro - whether you remember Patterson, Allen, Ford? Do you have any memory

of the period from 1930 to 1938, roughly, of Communist trade union groups, like the Trade Unity League, the Trade Union Educational League - these were Communist groups - do you have any memory of them, and generally, I'd like you to tell us if whites participated in these demonstrations? If there were white spokesmen and white leaders from Communist and other radical groups, or were they mainly Negro? Specifically, I would like to know a little about the personalities that were emerging among the Detroit working class that were later to play a role in the organizing drive of the CIO at a later date.

T. I do recall when James Ford ran for vice-president of the United States on the Communist Party ticket. In the early 30's there were many rallies, many Communist, many Socialist rallies, and other revolutionary parties. There was one called the Proletarian Party. I recall going to many meetings of the Proletarian Party. I must say these parties had no trouble getting response from the Negro community. The Trade Union Unity League probably had as many Negro members as they had white members. The Trade Union Unity League in Detroit always ended their meetings with a social hour which might be a dance, or something like that, and in the summertime they had picnics, where the families would go to someone's farm, or a park, or something like that. Hundreds and thousands of people would go every year to this kind of affair, so the activity in the Negro community was quite extensive. Emerging leaders - its pretty hard to go back and recall. I think of Veal Clough, and I always have to go back to Joe Billups, because he is quite a fellow, quite a leading figure in those days, but Veal Clough is one I have to recall. He started out as a member of the Pullman Porters Union, and I think he eventually thought he would make more and not have to travel as much if he got a job in an auto shop, which

he did. He became one of the pioneer union leaders in the Ford organizing drive. Another I can think of is James Anderson, who was also a Ford worker, but he started out at the Packard Motor Company. And then there was Christopher Alston. There are a few others, if I could just get their names in mind. But there came in to being some outstanding Negro leaders, very good speakers who could keep a crowd's attention, and who made their mark in the early days of the UAW. Some of these people, Paul Kirk is one of them, some of these people were put on the early organizing staff of the UAW. William Nowell was an early pioneer, and officially a charter member of Local 600, and Bill Nowell, when I first knew him, was the Educational director of one of the Detroit chapters of the Communist Party of Michigan. Jimmy Anderson was also an active Communist and didn't bite his tongue letting people know he belonged to the party. There were others whom I don't recall at the present time, but I think Paul Kirk, James Anderson, William Nowell, and Veal Clough were Negroes who came up out of the ranks of the unemployed, developed as leaders of the movement, and were actually successful and well-known organizers of the autoworkers.

H. What were the purposes of these demonstrations? Were they to get people on relief or on WPA? Were they against people who were forced out of their homes? I recall theWorkers Alliance was especially adept when people couldn't pay their rent, and the marshalls would come and carry out their furniture. I remember the Workers Alliance would then carry the furniture back in. I remember some things I participated in where we would carry the furniture back in, and the marshalls, some half-dozen times would carry the furniture back out. Were these some of the things the Unemployed Leagues, the Workers Alliance, various Commusist froups were doing, jobs for Negroes, on WPA, onPWA, on home relief, getting

people back in the houses after marshalls carried out the furniture, were these some of the immediate demands?

T. Yes, those were the immediate demands. They would demand increased welfare, allowances, they would demand jobs, and they fought evictions. They were the ones who were on call any time, day or night, who could be expected to provide the means for placing people's furniture back in the house, once it was set out in the street, or protect it until the people were able to find another place to go, depending on the situation. Hardly any demonstrations were held which didn't demand increased welfare allotments. And of course condemnation of the auto manufacturers finally resulted in the great hunger march of which we will probably talk later.

H. In 1934 one of the great events in the history of the organization of unions in the automobile industry took place in Toledo, Ohio, the great Autolite strike. This was probably one of the earliest attempts to organize unions in the auto industry. Toledo is not far from Detroit. The Autolite strike in 1934 bacame a rallying point for all the radical movements, and all the people interested in industrial organization. The Autolite strike anticipated many of the great strikes in the auto industry, when the CIO was born. Do you recall any participation of Detroit labor and radical people in the Autolite strike, any Negro involvement in the Autolite strike, any discussion? In general, what was Negro reaction and interest, if any, in the Autolite strike of 1934, and how do you assess its significance among the Detroit workers?

T. The Autolite strike was of major interest to the people in Detroit, because at that time it represented the workers' fight for freedom that all of us wanted. And this was a key situation because it was one of the first in the auto industry to grow to such a proportion and become such a gritty struggle. The interest of the Negroes was principally what was

done in this area to raise money for the strikers. The demonstrations were, those that were involved in the Autolite demonstrations or the picket line activity - there were hardly any picket lines - it was mostly just battling at the gates of the plant to keep -

H. Did you or any Detroit Negroes go to Toledo?

T. The answer to whether any Negroes went is Yes, there were a number of Negroes who went to the Autolite strike. They went because the Workers Alliance and the Unemployed Councils got them there. It was usually on the basis of volunteer. Those who could get transportation - usually three or four would get together in somebody's car which they hoped would get them there, and they went in that fashion. Detroit did contribute to the Autoworkers strike by sending a number of people down there, but the support they got in Detroit and other areas, Pittsburg, Minneapolis, Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, Cincinnati and Cleveland in other sections of the country was by keeping the issue alive in all the discussions and demonstrations that were held at that time on other matters and other issues, so that everybody who was involved in any kind of movement in those days was involved in the Autolite strike, and did what he could, even if it was no more than talk about it.

H. You mentioned the hunger marches. Would you describe the hunger marches and tell of Negro participation, also do you have any recollection of self-help organizations within the Negro community during the depression years?

T. Of course, the hunger marches and the self-help efforts are two distinct things. The hunger marches - of course, everybody thinks of the one - I believe it took place in 1933 - I don't recall the year exactly now. But that was the hunger march at Ford's which resulted in tragedy. This particular hunger march was, as far as I know, organized in the park down town, Grand Circus Park. In those days, Grand Circus Park had a number of

trees, and it was really a park, not as it is presently composed. But it was one of the favorite places where the organizing of downtown demonstrations - people would be told to meet at Grand Circus Park at a certain hour and after hundreds of people had amassed themselves there, speech-making would take place - something like Union Square in New York City. And then the instruction would be given for whatever activity the group was going to be engaged in. Most of the time it was the Unemployed Council or the Workers Alliance that called these meetings. In this case it was a joint meeting called by the Unemployed Council, the Autoworkers Council, and the Workers Alliance, and I suppose the Communist Party too. The idea was that all umemployed...

H. You were in the midst of describing the Ford Hunger March.

T. Well, as I said, the Ford Hunger March resulted from a demonstration meeting which was held in Grand Circus Park. This meeting was called jointly by the Workers Alliance and the Unemployed Council, and the Auto Workers Union. I believe the Communist Party was involved in the background. The original purpose of the Hunger March was to cause all the unemployed Ford workers and their families to meet at a certain point, and to march down Willow Road, meeting at the railroad, and going down Miller Road toward Dearborn. The idea was to display the workers' wives and their families with their banners, exhibit the hardship these people were suffering, and appeal to the Ford Motor Company to do something about putting these people back to work. The parade started with the American flags and the people marching down Miller Road. I'm only speaking from second-hand knowledge.

H. You were not a participant?

T. I was not a participant. I was just young enough to oversleep, or maybe not want to get up as soon as I should. So when I reached the point, when I took a trolley car out to the Ford plant, the people were coming back. They had been scattered by Ford water hoses and machine guns, and all this sort of thing. So as the thing was put together for me, I learned that as the people reached the Employment Office Gate, which was known in those days as Gate 2, they began shooting from the roof of that building- the Ford Motor people began shooting at them from the roof of that building. Of course the people began scattering and running in all directions. The Dearborn police were there on their horses, and they trampled quite a number of people. There were four killed. Three died immediately, and one died later, I believe-three white, and one Negro fellow. There was quite a number of women and children injured; it turned in to quite a bloody mess.

H. At this time, operating in Detroit there was a group called the People's Labor Party, led by one Arthur Caruso. Do you have any memory of that?

T. No, I recall Arthur Caruso, and I remember meeting with people assembled along the various intersections in the Hastings Street area to hear him speak. He was a Negro, and he used the old Harlem method of walking around with a step ladder, stopping, and leaning it against a building, and mounting it, and calling the people together to hear him speak.

H. Was this mainly a Negro movement?

T. It was a Negro movement, because Caruso always started out saying what the Black man wasn't getting, what he should do, what his rights were.

H. At this period there emerges in Detroit the first significant Moslem movement among Negroes. In the depression years there emerged in the ghettoes, in Paradise Valley, the first significant -though there were earlier expressions - it was in the 1930's that in Detroit, we began to have the first Muslim activity. There was a man by the name of Elijah Poole who operated here. Do you have any recollection of this?

T. Yes. The reason I do was because the earlier meetings of this movement were held about four blocks from where I lived at the time. The meetings were held either at Leland or Illinois on Hastings Street. It was in the sub-basement of a house - you could enter the basement from the street. You go down about four steps and then you enter the basement. This was where the meetings were held. I recall on two occasions meeting this man who they later said was a Lebanese, or something like that. I remember his addressing the group on a couple of occasions. Later, I found he was a kind of Messiah, as far as these people were concerned. But at the time I wasn't impressed with this particular fact. In fact, they didn't call themselves Muslims then - they were referred to as Moorish-Americans. The fellow who is now known as Elijah Mohummed is the brother

of the son-in-law of the minister of the church which my family attended - his name was Poole, - his brother was Charles Poole. He married one of the daughters of Rev. J.S. Williams, and we went to Williams' church in Omaha, also, before we came to Detroit.

H. So you would say the early Muslim efforts in Detroit was not very significant. Far more significant was the work of the radical groups through the Workers' Alliance, and the Unemployed Leagues. Is that right?

T. That is right, because the Muslim movement didn't seem to call for any activity. And the people in those days seemed to want to be actively involved or engaged in something.

H. Were Negroes getting a fair share in the W.P.A. and other work relief programsof the day?

T. Not significantly, and this had a good deal to do with a new surge of Negroes into the radical movement of that time.

H. How significant was the surge of Negroes into the radical movements? Which radical movements are you referring to?

T. Well, I'm now referring to the activity of the Communist party, and also to the activities of the Unemployed Workers Councils. It was between these two groups that a vocal protest was made. I'm sure that the black participation in the demonstrations was significant, so that people just had to listen, resulting in the fact of people getting more of an opportunity on W.P.A. projects.

H. Now, as I recall, to become a little more concrete as concerns what we've been referring to as radical groups, it is my recollection that the Socialists were not really active at this time in the Negro community. They had a vague general program, and there was no effort among Negroes. The Communists - and if I'm wrong about any of this, I want you to correct me, I want your own point of view, your recollections - really

forced the surge of Negroes (you use the expression) I would like an estimate from you of how large this surge was, some approximate figures. How many Negroes really became involved in Communist and Communist-led movements? the Workers' Alliance? You also mention the Socialist Workers Party which was a Trotskyite split-off from the Communist Party. In the early 30's,'33 or '34, the Socialist Workers party split from the Communist Party, after Leon Trotsky was expelled from the Communist International, and they had some activities in the Negro ghetto, in Detroit and elsewhere. But you suggest that the major, the most successful effort was that led by the Communist Party. Would you give us an estimate of Negro participation in Communist-led activities at that time?

T. That would be a little difficult for me to do, because I would have no idea what the figures would be; there were a lot of meetings which were sponsored by the Communists which a lot of people attended, while not necessarily embracing Communism per se. I was one of those with a considerable amount of curiosity, and because of the educational program which was conducted, whenever I could, I attended one of these meetings. So when I said surge, I probably should have said increased interest. Interest increased considerably, and participation in the meetings increased to a considerable degree, and I am in a position to say that from personal observance, because I was there. Also, I think the campaign which was conducted by Ford for the presidency on the Communist Party ticket had a lot to do with it, because Ford visited the industrial areas several times during his campaign. In fact, I believe he did a lot of jumping from Detroit to Cleveland, to Pittsburgh, to Los Angeles, and he hit the major cities. I doubt that he did much campaigning anywhere else, and none in the South. We saw him quite often, and there were some Negro churches to which he had access.

H. Would you say that there were thousands of Negroes, tens of thousands of Negroes, hundreds of Negroes? What kind of vague approximation would you make of the number of Negroes who became involved with radical political movements at that time?

T. I would say, dozens of Negroes.

H. Were these dozens a leadership cadre which later became important in union organization - in CIO organizing drives when the UAW got going in Detroit?

T. I would say yes. There was some Negro union leadership which developed out of these people who responded to the Communist Party activities. I could only name those who were, admittedly, Communists. We'll say Paul Kirk, Joe Billups, I had better not name anybody else.

H. So we can conclude several things. First, the Communist Party really emerged as the most vigorous voice in giving expression to the sufferings of Negroes, raising immediate demands for Negro jobs, Negro relief, Negro homes. The Communist Party emerged as a major voice of protest, of expression against the deprivation, the suffering of Negroes during the depression period. Correct? Secondly, while not vast numbers of Negroes were involved (you said dozens) but it is significant that these dozens became important as a leadership group who played an important role at a later period. Is that correct?

T. Yes, that is correct. Of course, I only named two who were active in the labor movement. I might name others, but not knowing for sure, I would not name them as Communist activists. There were others who not being involved in the industrial activity in the community, who were very active and gave leadership on a community level. But here again, its better that I don't name them.

H. Now at this period, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, who were

Socialists, edited a Negro socialist paper called the Messenger. Do you have any recollection of the influence of the Messenger, and of Randolph and Owen and some of their colleagues? Now they essentially represented the Socialist point of view. They were very careful to demarcate themselves from the Communists, the Communist-controlled organizations, while at the same time being very critical of the NAACP, and very critical of DuBois, because if you examine the Messenger, you find them being very critical of DuBois and the "Talented Tenth" leadership not paying enough attention to the Negro working class, not having an orientation toward Negro workers. Do you have any recollection of A. Philip Randolph, of the Messenger, and of their group operating in the Detroit community?

T. Oh yes, I recall the Messenger very well, because it was hardly possible for a group of Negroes to get together without someone bring copies of the Messenger, and distributing them among the people. I can even recall attending meetings of the National Negro Congress at which copies of the Messenger were distributed. A. Philip Randolph did have a standing in the Negro community in Detroit, a great deal of respect. Whenever he came to Detroit he did not want for an audience. So I think this indicates Negroes were not necessarily inclined toward Communism. They chose to respond to the call of the Communist Party, for the Communist Party had a program which included equality. But when Philip Randolph came here to make a speech, he was always well received by the Negro community.

H. Even though Randolph very strongly attacked the Communists, and the Communists attacked Randolph? You find no contradiction in the fact that on the one hand a not inconsequential number of Negroes flocked to Communist Party marches, demonstrations, meetings and organizational activities of the Workers Alliance, League for the Struggle of Rights,

etc. At the same time they were not sufficiently controlled, or ideologically motivated that they did not heed the attacks upon Randolph, but that they were interested in what Randolph had to say, they ignored the Communist Party attacks upon Randolph, and did read the Messenger and did go to Randolph's meetings? Is that a correct assumption?

T. That's correct.

H. You mentioned the National Negro Congress which originally began as a broad united front in which the Communists were one among several participating outfits. Phil Randolph was a leader, I believe the first chairman of the National Negro Congress. Later this organization was entirely taken over by the C.P. and lost its United Front character. I would like to hear what you had to say in terms of you recollections of the National Negro Congress and also if you have any recollections of the International Labor Defense whose leader at that time was William Patterson, a Negro Communist leader. The ILD was very active in the defense of the Scottsboro boys. Do you have any memory of the Herndon case, Angelo Herndon who came to Detroit? Let's hear, Mr. Tappes, what you have to say concerning the ILD and the National Negro Congress. Do you have any memories of Angelo Herndon, the Herndon case and the Scottsboro case?

T. Naturally, I know of the ILD because they were very active during the same period I've just gone over. I did participate in fund-raising activities for the Scottsboro boys. The ILD used to put on many programs in Detroit among the unemployed people. We became very well acquainted with all the factors of the Scottsboro case as a result of the ILD, and it was hardly possible for a demonstration or rally to take place without some mention being made of the Scottsboro case and probably the hat being passed around for ILD funds. The Angelo Herndon case resulted

many rallies being held in Detroit. I can recall one in the Greystone Ballroom at which Angelo was presented, and I believe it was a fund-raising affair. But cases of that nature were presented to the people who were active in the movements in Detroit, and we had some interests in them.

H. Do you have any recollections during this period of either William Patterson, or W.E.B. DuBois coming to Detroit? Do you have any recollections of Walter White, or James Weldon Johnson coming to Detroit and addressing either Negro working class rallies, or speaking in the community generally? or any other important Negro figures?

T. I remember Pattersonvvery well, because he was one of the principal figures at the ILD meetings. He was chairman of the defense fund, or something like that. We had a Scottsboro chapter of some sort. I don't recall what the exact content was, but it was a group which took the responsibility of informing the community of progress. and seeing to it that funds were raised, and rallies were held in behalf of the Scottsboro boys. So Patterson was a visitor to the city on many occasions, and addressed groups when he was here. James Weldon Johnson, when he came here, came to a Negro church, and after the morning services usually there was an afternoon service at which he talked on Negro history and other topics. W.E.B. DuBois, I can say the same thing about him. He, of course, was more slanted toward the social problems of the day, and discussed the immediate problems much more than Johnson did. White was Mr. NAACP of that time.

H. Already in the 30's?

T. Yes, he was quite a popular figure. But he appealed more to the upper class people, the school teachers, the doctors, the attorneys, the white-collar class.

H. Now these groups we've been talking about, the ILD, the Workers' Alliance, the National Negro Congress, the marches, the demonstrations, the Peoples Party, all of the things of this period - did whites participate, was there a white leadership, or were these mainly Negro or entirely Negro? Was there interracial cooperation, was there interracial participation, or were these for the most part Negro groups?

T. These groups mostly had white leadership, with some Negroes who were more active being among that leadership. But the Workers Alliance, the Unemployed Councils, even the League of Struggle for Negro Rights - most of these organizations had a white leadership.

H. How about the National Negro Congress?

T. The NNC did have Negro leadership. The first of the presidents of the Detroit chapter that I can recall was LeBrun Simmons, who was a Negro attorney.

H. Do you have any recollections of the young Benjamin Davis, who was beginning to emerge as an important Negro Communist figure or of James S. Allen? Did they come into Detroit during this period?

T. I don't recall Allen, but I do recall Davis very well. He made quite an impression in Detroit. He was quite an able speaker, and quite a vigorous speaker, I might say. He was quite a popular man in Detroit.

H. We're wtill in the 30's. How about Paul Robeson? Did Paul Robeson come in?

T. Oh yes. Paul Robeson came in quite often. He came in with his performances, but before he left, there was usually a meeting with the various groups, in which he would be the principal figure in a reception for the purpose of raising funds for the efforts we were engaged in.

H. Now, as we pass out of the period of the 1930's, we pass into the period of the rise of the CIO, and of the UAW. I would like you to tell us from

your own recollections two things. First of all, the first interest among Negroes regarding the UAW, and the conflict that went on within the Negro working class, the Negro autoworkers, specifically, and generally in the Negro community, regarding the anti-union feeling among many Negroes because of the old AFL unions' anti-Negro practices? There was a problem, was there not, because many Negroes were anti-union because of the experiences you have already told us about? Everyone had a father, or a brother, or a grandfather who suffered at the hands of the AF of L. How did this affect the organizing efforts of the CIO, UAW? What do you remember of Homer Martin and the first organizing drives of the UAW-AFL? Generally, the transition of the organizing efforts of the AFL in the auto industry into that of the CIO, and the role of Negroes? Perhaps from that you would lead into the decisive developement which was at the Ford plant, the Ford organizing effort when the NAACP and Walter White came down here to attempt to persuade the Negroes not to be strike-breakers, that the UAW presented a new kind of developement? When did the feeling come about among Negro autoworkers that the UAW represented a decisive break with the old AFL tradition of discrimination and segregation, and generally, your personal recollections of that period, the transitional period of the late 30's and the early 40's, and the beginnings of the UAW organizing drives among Negroes?

T. I think we would have to go back to some of the existing plant unions before we got into the UAW. First, I did mention that there were trimmers' unions, metal finishers' unions, small groups like that which had organized themselves in the auto plants.

H. These were AFL crafts which did not admit Negroes?

T. Those which were affiliated with the labor movement were affiliated with the AFL. Many of them were independent unions.

H. Were there Negroes in these unions?

T. There were no Negroes in any of these unions. They existed primarily in the Hudson, Continental, Briggs and Murray plants. There were some in the Ford plants, the pattern-makers, and the millwrights and ironworkers.

H. At this period, the early 40's, would it be correct to say that the major concentration of Negro workers was to be found in the Ford plants?

T. That is correct. Ford at that time had about 11000 on his payroll out of a total of about 72,000. There were a number of Negroes in Dodge Foundry and Heat Treatment Shop, and a number of Negroes in the Chevrolet Hammer Shop, but none of these were accepted in existing unions.

H. These Negroes, in these shops were not accepted in either the independent or the AFL unions? They remained outside the union structure?

T. They remained outside the union. Now in this climate the early UAW organizational efforts really did not embrace Negroes to any great extent.

H. Now, when you say the early UAW organizing efforts, are you referring still to the AFL, the Homer Martin period?

T. Maybe pre-Homer Martin, because the first president was a fellow named Dillon. In this period organizational efforts were directed more toward gathering in the existing unions, such as the ones which I just mentioned and some of the NRA established unions, as at Dodge where Richard Frankensteen, though, that in his union he did have Negroes, because Negroes in the heat-treat department had responded to their organizational efforts.

H. Did Frankensteen's union have an AFL charter? and what did they call themselves?

T. Yes. I don't recall the name, but we could probably get it from Bill Lattimore, but

H. was Frankensteen's union limited to the Dodge plant?

T. Yes. Now, there was another industrial-type union at the Chrysler plant out on Jefferson Avenue. I don't believe they accepted Negroes in the beginning. Now this climate of indifference toward the Negro workers was corrected very quickly, because when the UAW was organized, they had met so much resistance in the AFL convention when John L. Lewis and others were able to get them to agree to establish the Committee of Industrial Organization. However, I think that you know, when later on, the Committee of Industrial Organization made its report to the convention in Atlantic City there was a considerable amount of criticism which resulted in the physical combat between Hutchinson and Lewis, do that after that convention they organized the Committee of Industrial Organization independently and some few AFL unions, such as the Mineworkers, and Packing Workers, and others, went into this Committee, and the UAW attempted to respond - I say, attempted, because we had some problems by then with Homer Martin who had ascended to the presidency. In the Homer Martin period, when the UAW was still an AFL affiliate, in several plants which by then had become organized to some degree, in Pontiac, the Buick in Flint, the Chevrolet plant in Detroit, some of the Fisher body plants, the Murray body plant, Midland Steel, Federal Mogul, and a few others, had become organized and affiliated with the UAW. Almost every one of these plants which had Negroes in them had Negro leadership. They had Negroes in them who were vocal and were participating in activities.

H. Were these some of the same Negroes we spoke of earlier, who were active in the radical movement in Detroit?

T. Some of these Negroes were the same, but there were others who had come to the fore then, such as Luke Fennell at a Budd local, actually one of the first Negroes to be elected to one of the higher posts. He became vice-

president of the Budd local. And then there was Hodges Mason in Local 208, which was the Bohn Aluminum, and there was Prince Clark at Murray Body, and a fellow named Perry at the Packard local. There were others. At Briggs there were two or three. So, these fellows were members of the union, were active in just about any union activity which took place. You know, in those days, the fact that you belonged to one local did not exclude you from activity in another local. If they had problems, everyone went to help them out. The sit-down strikes, while fellows from Local X were involved in a sit-down, the entire UAW was participating in it. So you had Negroes in every major activity of the UAW. In the 1939 Tool and Die strike, when they had a ring around the General Motors Building, there were many Negroes from Ford, Chevrolet, and other places involving themselves in the activity. But, on the other hand, the bulk of the Negroes refused to respond, because of their experiences, and because of their knowledge of the general attitude of labor America.

H. At this time, you say the bulk of Negro workers, you mean the majority of them, did not differentiate between the AFL and the new UAW-CIO? How was this overcome?

T. It was overcome by a lot of hard work. The people I spoke of were very busy holding meetings of all kinds. Fortunately, Prince Clark had become chairman of the Detroit chapter, NAACP Labor and Industry Committee. Luke Fennell carried his leadership outside of hos local union, and there were many Negro workers who began to hold meetings among themselves to figure ways and means of appealing to the Negro Autoworkers generally.

H. Did the NAACP become an important factor in this developement?

T. Only generally through the Labor and Industry Committee, because the Chapter refused to become involved in many of the things the Labor and Industry Committee was doing.

H. I would like to get back to an earlier point. We were both agreed that while not vast numbers of Negroes in working-class Detroit participated in Communist and working class radical movements, that the most important developement was a developement of a leadership cadre. I'm particularly interested in knowing what was the role of this Negro leadership cadre within the UAW organizing drives at the end of the 30's and the beginning of the 40's. The Communist influence in the Union at that time was not insignificant. Negro Communists, as white Communists, were indoctrinated with the new progressive idea of industrial unionism. There was a commitment on the part of the whole left toward industrial unions. These Negroes who in the 30's had participated in left wing movements were very much involved in bringing that message to the Negroes. I'm interested in knowing what was the role of the radical Negro leadership in swinging Negro support to the new UAW-CIO?

T. At that time there was established what was known as a volunteer organizers group. Now, who organized this group I do not know. They were very active, and there was a great number of Negroes involved in these volunteer organizing groups. There was a leadership cadre which had come to the front during the radical movements of the 30's. Some of these became active, and ascended to a leadership role in the early automobile workers' organizing efforts. I'm thinking especially of the group which organized what they called the Negro Ford Organizing Committee. This was a group which met every Sunday morning in the headquarters of the Ford Organizing Committee. It was composed of citizens, ministers, attorneys, Ford workers, Dodge workers, Murray, Packard, and every large plant which had a Negro membership in the UAW was represented on the Ford organizing committee. And the leadership, for the most part, came from the same leadership which had been developed during the 30's. There was a

considerable amount of education and information which was disseminated among Ford workers, in order that they might understand what unionism meant, and the importance of they're carrying the message back into the plant. I believe that the Negro leadership which grew out of this, and which developed on the Ford plant - I think to this group is due most of the credit for it. I think the U.A.W. is obligated to this group because the white leadership of the U.A.W. got many lessons from these people. For example, when the major Ford drive was started, in 1940, after the Homer Martin fiasco, and the problems of an earlier period form '37 to '40 in which the Ford workers lost considerably because of the sell-out of Martin, and the Martin forces. So the 6 or 7 thousand who had been earlier organized into the Ford union - many of them had been fired, and many of them had drifted away from the union. But the nucleus which was left over was composed of many Negroes who had made similar sacrifices to the others. So these people, along with the Negro Organizing Committee formed a nucleus through which the U.A.W. was able to get into the Ford plant among the Negro workers, and bring them into the Union. The chairman of this group was Luke Fennell. Some of the others who were involved were a fellow by the name of Kirby Jones, and Bill Lattimore from Local 3, John Conyers from Local 7, John Miles, there was a Reverend from a progressive type of church, Charles Hill from the Hartford Avenue Baptist Church. I think he was the vice-chairman. Horace White attended meetings when he could. Unfortunately, the meetings being held on Sunday morning, many of the ministers weren't able to come.

H. The ministers were important?

T. The ministers were important, for many reasons, one being that the Ford Motor Company had attempted to obligate the religious leadership of the community to them through gifts during the depression of coal and

coke, and allowing the ministers to recommend persons to them for jobs, and paying the rent on some churches, and like activities.

H. This may be true only of Ford? or was it true also of the other auto companies?

T. I think Ford did it to a larger extent than other manufacturers. I'm sure that the average minister, if he went to Chrysler, or to G.M., could probably get something from them. But Ford, as a matter of program policy would seek out a church to see if there was a need, and then they would try to supply it in a limited way. One thing which we have not touched on was Ford's activities among Negroes who were on his payroll. For example, there is a community west of Detroit which is known as Inkster. I don't know whether it has yet cecome a city, but it was known at one time as one of the largest villages in the U.S., because there were more than 40,000 people in the town, but it was still a village. But about half the population of Inkster were and still are Negroes, and I suppose 90% of the people were Ford people. During the depression days, when Ford reduced all wages to $4.00 a day, arbitrarily, in 1931, a man could be making $6.00 a day and tomorrow he's making $4.00. In Inkster all of those who were laid off, or most of these who were laid off, who were buying homes, were sent back into the plant and the $4.00 a day they were to receive was not given to them in cash. It was given to them in some complicated way wherein their rent, or their house notes were paid, food was supplied, etc., and a dollar per day was given to the man in cash. I think the food purchases were on the basis of the coal mining community furnishing business, and this went on for two or three years during the depression period. I don't know whether the purpose was to make sure they had a labor supply when the depression was over, or just a paternalistic way of attempting to take care of the Negro people, but this was what went on in Inkster.

H. Would you contrast the difference between the response of the overwhelming number of white workers to the first UAW organizing drive in the major auto manufacturing plants in Detroit, with the general Negro response, taking into account what we have already said about the Negro's bad experience with the AFL, and therefore a residue of anti-union feeling? How would you compare the response of the white and the Negro workers to the first meaningful industrial organizing efforts?

T. I would say that the white worker responded about 70 to 75% while the Negro's response was maybe 10% or less.

H. So we're faced with a very important question in labor history: how, in a relatively brief period of time was this significant shift in attitude made? You've indicated part of the answer, you've told us about part of the organizing efforts, and about the general involvement of the Negro community, especially the church leadership in effecting a change. Now, it seems to me, the 1941 strike at Ford probably was the decisive developement. You've told us that in the preceding years the NAACP was mainly a middle class movement, appealing chiefly to teachers, doctors, laywers; you've told us that when James Weldon Johnson came to town, and W.E.B. DuBois, they did not, for the most part, speak to Negro working class people, but mostly to middle class, the "talented tenth" people. You tell us, however, in the late 30's when Prince Clark becomes the chairman of the NAACP Labor Committee, at least through the Labor Committee there is an orientation toward the worker, even though the branch itself remains uncommitted to to union movement. However, I recall that during the 1941 strike at Ford, the NAACP national organization directly intervenes. Walter White directly intervenes, participates in that UAW sound truck which goes around at the Ford plant, asking the Negro strike Breakers to come out of the plant. Shortly thereafter the NAACP Board of Directors made a fundamental change

in its policy. They declared that they would now support bona fide CIO unions which did not discriminate. I would like you now to address yourself to the NAACP's role and what you know of Walter White's participation in the 1941 strike.

T. Well, we'll start with Prince Clark becoming chairman of the Labor and Industry Committee. Now the only way he could form a Committee was to go to those people he knew who were giving leadership in the labor movement in various UAW locals. So we have principally a UAW Industry and Labor Committee.

H. Was Dr. McClendon the president of the Branch?

T. He was, but Dr. McClendon was extremely indifferent - he refused to go along. He said that he felt the CIO was detrimental to the welfare of the Negro at the Ford plant, and he felt they should demonstrate more loyalty to Mr. Ford, because he had given so many of them jobs, and this would be harmful not only to the Negro who worked at Ford, but to the Negro community, because if we were going to take on the Ford Motor Company, then not only would Ford look askance at the community, but also all the other auto manufacturing companies would say, "Well, if they take on Ford's, then are we next?" - words to that effect. I shouldn't try to put words into his mouth, but I've heard him so many times on the subject. I want to give you a general idea of his thinking. Now if we go right into the Ford organizing and Walter White and the NAACP, I'll have to tell you this. Not only did the Industry and Labor Committee support the Ford Organizing Drive, but also the NAACP Youth Group supported the organization of Ford. Now, I think there are two reasons for that. Number 1 is that Glouster Current was member of the Youth group, and Horace Sheffield was a member. They were both very active in the youth chapter at that time, and, coincidentally, Horace worked at Ford's. I think the

reason Horace concentrated his activity with the NAACP youth was because his father, working at that time at Ford's, was a foreman, and he didn't want to do anything as a worker in the plant. "My father recommended me for the job, and was able to get me the job. If I join the union now, it might reverberate against my father." But as a member of the NAACP, I suppose his thinking was that he had a little more latitude. But the youth of the NAACP during the Ford drive put their money together and hired some sound equipment which they put on somebody's car, and they were going around the plant, all during the Ford strike, trying to appeal to the people who were in the Foundry to come out.

H. Even though McClendon and the local branch leadership did not support the strike?

T. That's right. This was in spite of the pleas of Dr. McClendon.

H. The formal position of Dr. McClendon was contrary to the position which Glouster Current and Horace Sheffield and Prince Clark were taking?

T. Absolutely.

H. But they tolerated it?

T. I suppose you could say there was nothing they could do about it, because they pronounced their objections publicly from time to time.

H. You will find this in the Negro press?

T. I'm sure you will find statements in the Negro press in which they are making clear that the Branch is not condoning these activities. And Dr. McClendon went from church to church to let this be known. During the strike, when the strike was about 8 days old - during these 8 days, of course the Governor, Van Wagoner, was meeting with the Ford group and the union's committee. Now, I was on the union committee at the time. We met in the Hotel Statler, and during these meetings, Van Wagoner was trying to mediate the strike and see if he could propel it toward its

end. Now it's unfortunate that most people think that the strikebreakers who remained in the plant were all Negroes. By the plant I mean the Rouge plant. The reason this impression is so widespread is because it was a chilly period of the year. It was in April, and those who remained in the plant, in order to find warmth went into the foundry, because the big furnaces were still operating. The union did permit the manning of the big furnaces. the blast furnaces in the foundry, the furnaces in the glass plant, and in the rolling mill and the open hearth. These continued to operate, bacause if the metal is allowed to cool and harden it will take months to get the plant back in operation. It was very necessary that the temperature be up at a certain point. Even hot metal, if it hits a cold ladle, is ruined. So, by these furnaces continuing to go, there was a place of warmth. Now, remember these people were in the plant for ten consecutive days. They didn't come out for anything, because they knew if they came out they couldn't get back. And the company supplied their food for them. I understand they did manage to get cots for them to sleep on, and that they had to use the regular wash-room facilities for cleanliness. But they couldn't get changes of clothing. There was a structure, an anti-CIO structure maintained by the AFL in which most of the leadership was white, but Negroes did participate in this. Their structure called for leadership in each of the Rouge units, and the foundry leadership was Negro. In fact, a neighbor of mine was plant chairman for the AFL while I was the CIO plant chairman.

H. I want to go back to a very important point. All of the history books make a big point of the fact that Negroes were the major strike-breakers in the 1941 Ford strike. You are now saying that at the Rouge plant, as well as in the other plants, or do you just mean the Rouge plant?

T. I was just speaking of the Rouge.

H. that Negro workers were not the only strikebreakers, that there were many whites also. Would you give us a general indication of the relative proportion, and also something about the other Ford plants?

T. I'll say at the very worst, 60 - 40, 60% Negro, 40% white were strike-breakers at the very worst, and that the leadership, the strike-breaking leadership inside the plant during the strike was white leadership.

H. That's a very important point. Are you suggesting that the AFL craft unions played an important role in the maintenance of the strike-breaking attitude?

T. This is a very important point to make, because a considerable number of the strike-breakers were skilled tradesmen.

H. Now, would you say that this was true in the other plants, besides that of the Rouge?

T. No, the only strike that took place was at Rouge; the other plants were down because Rouge supplied them - and couldn't supply them during the strike.

H. I want to ask you about your own personal role at this time. You were employed at the Rouge plant? You were in the foundry? Tell us something about your own activity during this period.

T. During this time I was the foundry plant chairman. The foundry population at that time was just about 13,000. Negroes were about 65%; the operation was a three-shift operation, and the day shift was about 6500 population, the afternoon shift was about 4000, and the balance were mid-night shift people. There were many jobs which operated round the clock, 8 hours per shift. As plant chairman, I had no, I had very few rights then because the union was not recognized. Everything I did, I did on my own and before the strike, of course, I had no privileges, whatsoever. What I did in those days was to try to find leadership for the various operations, jobs,

and shifts. It was difficult because I had to slip around and do it surreptitiously.

H. Was your job inside the plant?

T. My job was that of a machine moulder. I made cam-shafts. We - one thing I did was to call a meeting every Saturday of those people who gave any indication of a desire to participate in the organizational effort. The meetings usually contained upward of a hundred people.