

# Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW  
(INTERVIEW #1, PART 2)

SHELTON TAPPES

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER  
OCTOBER 27, 1967



Wayne State University  
Detroit, Michigan



H. You were in the midst, Mr. Tappe, of describing your personal activities during the 1941 Ford strike.

T. Well, I'll get back to the experiences with Walter White in the days of the strike. Mr. White was contacted by our vice-president, Richard T. Frankenstein, in 1941 during the Ford strike. Mr. Frankenstein called Mr. White in his office in New York and asked him to come into Detroit to assist the U.A.W. in convincing the hesitant Negro employees of the Ford Motor Company that they should join their fellow workers on the picket line. And there were some 200 or 300 who had remained in the plant at this time while the strike was going on and were to all intents and purposes playing the role of strike breakers. So after a few days of persuasion Walter White finally agreed to come.

H. Was that over the objection of the local branch?

T. This was over the strenuous objection of the local branch. When he got here he met with the union committee at the Satara Hotel and he was asked if he would be willing to issue a statement. The press was there and the public relations men from the U.A.W. were there, so he finally agreed to do that on condition that the U.A.W. only would help him in putting the statement together. They agreed to this and they pointed out to him that Paul Robeson had already issued a statement and he asked to see Robeson's statement. Well, Robeson's statement had been issued some time previously, even before the strike and an article had been sponsored in the newspaper with his picture and this was later made into a hand bill which was distributed throughout the U.A.W. circles and labor circles. So when Mr. White saw that hand bill where Robeson was so forceful, why he said that he didn't feel that he could make a statement that strong. So finally the words were put together and were slightly ambiguous but at least he did say that he thought the welfare of the Ford workers might

be better suited if they join with their other fellow workers in their endeavors and something about N.A.A.C.P. recognized that the Ford Motor Company had been decent in their employment practices and things of that sort. So at least this did represent an expression from the major civil rights organization of the country. And it was a direct appeal to the striking Ford workers or their counterparts in plants. To get back to what I was -

H. By the way, would you like to describe a little bit Mr. White's trip around the plant and reactions to things?

T. Oh yes, I believe that I did mention that the youth chapter of the Detroit branch of the N.A.A.C.P. had gone against the wishes of the regular branch and the president, Dr. McClendon. In spite of his objections they had sponsored a sound truck which they used to circle the Ford plant, around the picket lines, and encourage the Ford workers in their effort to win victory from the Ford Motor Co. and at the same time they were appealing to those peoples who had remained in the plant as strike breakers, asking them to come out and join their fellow workers on the picket lines. And this I believe was the same bit of equipment that was used by Walter White later when he was asked to do something concrete with regards to the strike. So he did mount the sound truck and circle the plant a few times, calling on brothers in the picketlines. And now if we can get back to what I was previously talking about in regards to my personal activities I did mention that I was president of the foundry unit of Local 600 which had 13,000 members at the time. We had up until that time no rights as a union. It wasn't until after the strike that we received any kind of recognition and one of the conditions of the strike was that the unions' elected or selected representatives of the workers would be permitted to take up their grievances and to establish



a union grievance structure. This was one of the conditions for ending the strike, and that this temporary provision would be allowed to continue until National Labor Relation Board election was held, at which time determination would be made of which union workers wanted, if any. We were tolerated but I can say now that the Ford Motor Co. also allowed the same privilege to the people who were representing the A.F.L. at that time. The C.I.O. was much stronger and I believe that the peoples were joining the C.I.O. about 5 or 6 to 1. The N.L.R.B. election indicated that we were at least 3 to 1 when the result came in.

H. What year was that?

T. This was in 1941.

H. When was the certification?

T. The strike took place in April, the election was held in May, on May 20, and we were certified on May 21. The first contract was negotiated beginning approximately June 10, consummated and signed on June 22 of 1941.

Now the role I played after the certification of the N.L.R.B. election: all of the shops or plant units in the Rouge plants were permitted to hold elections for permanent officers and the foundry election which by then had grown to 17,000 because we had to take in the machine shop and the job foundry as part of our unit. At the foundry election I was elected by the workers in the shop this time as an unopposed candidate and the first officers along with me were, vice-president by name of Nelson Davis, the secretary was a fellow named Young and the seargent-at-arms was a fellow by the name of E.L. Mason.

H. Thses were all Negroes?

T. They were all Negroes, yes.

H. Were they all from the foundry?

T. They were all from the foundry; oh yes, the treasurer was white, his name was Joe Sidell, he was a white fellow; they were all from the foundry.

H. When did you become head of the foundry?

T. I became head of the foundry unit in a previous election, as far as the U.A.W. was concerned.

H. What was your formal title?

T. My formal title? My formal title as head of the foundry was Chairman, Production Foundry Chairman. Later when we were constituted as a local union why we placed the title of the unit head as president of the unit.

H. You became president of the unit?

T. I became president of the Production Foundry Unit.

H. In Local 600?

T. In Local 600.

H. And were you also a member of the Executive Board?

T. And automatically a member of the Executive Board.

H. And you were the only Negro member?

T. I was the only Negro member of the Executive Board.

H. There was one Negro out of how many?

T. Well at that time there were 13 Unit Presidents and we had a Chairman of the Board. This was before we elected the formal local officers and president of the local officers. We had a Chairman of our Board and we had one other who was a representative of the International but had a right to vote on anything else on the Board.

H. Who was the first President of this Local?

T. First president was Paul St. Marie. He was elected at the same time that I was elected as Secretary of the Local.

H. You became Secretary of the Local?

T. Yes, I became Local 600's first Secretary.

H. In addition to being head of the Foundry Unit?

T. Well, no, I resigned as head of the Foundry Unit because that was a full time job.

H. Now that was a full time job - that was what I was supposed to say. Now we're at the end of 1941, beginning of 1942, the U.A.W. is on the way to organizing the rest of the industry, this is after the Flint sit down strikes, and the organization of the General Motor, Chrysler, and the rest of the industries. And now the basic question for the Historian interested in the history of the union, especially that of the Negro workers and the U.A.W., is the internal factional situation. Mr. Tappe, (yes) Local 600 ah was generally identified as part of the AddesThomas faction, opposed to the Reuther faction. You were prominently identified with the Addes-Thomas faction. Would you now discuss please first of all the role of 600 in the factional fight, your own personal sentiments, and why the overwhelming majority of Negroes, both in Ford and in the other auto plants in and around Detroit supported the Thomas faction rather than the Reuther faction at this stage.

T. Well of course there were several reasons: the Addes-Thomas faction represented the more revolutionary thinking in the union and were principally composed of those who had in the beginning and throughout his regime been in opposition to Homer Martin. Furthermore, this group recognized that most of those who composed the other group were associated with the Southern and anti-Negro elements of the union. This is not to cause any reflection upon any individuals but as a group the so called right wing faction was composed of people who represented a more conservative viewpoint and included those parts of the U.A.W. that came from the south.

H. This other faction that we are talking about, that you now describe, was this then known as the Reuther faction?

T. Well it was known at that time as the Reuther-Leonard faction. Reuther was a Regional Director on the west side of Detroit and Dick Leonard was also a Regional Director in the west side.

H. They were generally thought of among the Negro workers as the conservative faction?

T. As the conservative, yes.

H. And the Addes-Thomas faction, the more radical faction that was more disposed to be concerned with, more sensitive to the problems of the Negro workers?

T. That's right.

H. Would you elaborate on this?

T. Well, for example George Addes was the chairman of the Anti-Discrimination Committee of the U.A.W. and was also on the C.I.O. Committee, Anti-Discrimination Committee, and I think, it safe to say that for the years up until that time, the only time that the United Auto workers ever included any articles or discourses on the rights of the Negroes or against discrimination was usually under the signature of George Addes and this, of course, caused the Negro leadership to lean in his direction and after becoming personally acquainted with him I was convinced that Addes was sincere and so I supported him.

H. Would you say that this is true of most of the prominent Negro rank and file leaders at this time?

T. Yes it was.

H. Would you mention some of them?

T. Well I can mention Luke Fennell, Hodges Mason, James Walker. Fennell was from Local 306, he was Vice President; Hodges Mason was Vice President of Local 208, that was Bohn Aluminum. 306 was the Budd Local, James Walker was Secretary of Local 205 and of course I was Secretary of Local 600 which was the world's largest local union. There was Kirby Jones

and Bill Latimore from Dodge Local 3; there were John Conyers from Local 7, Chrysler Local; and others from-

H. You haven't mentioned Walter Harden.

T. Walter Harden was on R.J. Thomas' staff and yet he was a Negro and he was the first Negro ever to be placed on the International staff of the U.A.W.

H. Walter Harden was the first Negro international representative of the U.A.W.?

T. That's correct.

H. When was he appointed?

T. He was appointed in the year 1938.

H. By R.J. Thomas?

T. By R.J. Thomas.

H. Was Oscar Noble around then?

T. Oscar Noble was around and he supported George Addes. He was chairman of the shop committee at Local 653 the Pontiac Local.

H. How about some of the Negroes outside of Detroit?

T. Well outside of Detroit there was, we called her Corkie-Corkie Wilkerson from Columbus Ohio. There was in the Chicago local, Ellis; Ellis from Chicago was president of his local and there was Edna Johnson who was Secretary-Treasurer of a local in Indianapolis.

H. Do you know what Local Ellis was from?

T. Local 453 in Chicago, it was an amalgamated Local. Ilya Ellis.

H. He was President?

T. He was President of the Local.

H. An amalgamated Local in Chicago?

T. That's right, and in Buffalo it was, oh yes, King Peterson in Chicago. And all these people, all people that I-

H. King Peterson in Buffalo?

T. In Buffalo who eventually became a member of the city council in Buffalo.

H. Now all of these were supporters of the Addes-Thomas faction?

T. That's right, they were leaders in their own right and supporters of the Addes-Thomas faction.

H. Was George Crockett in the leadership?

T. George Crockett at that time was working for the United States Government with President Roosevelt's Committee in Unemployment, Fair Employment Practices. In 1943 George Addes convinced him that the U.A.W. needed him and he agreed and became director of our Fair Employment Practices Committee.

H. Were there any Negroes who supported the Reuther-Leonard faction?

T. There were a few.

H. Their names?

T. Horace Sheffield.

H. Horace was a very early supporter?

T. Very early.

H. Was he ever a member of the other faction?

T. Only in order to get elected to a political office.

H. I see, Horace...600? It was the other?

T. That's right. Actually I can recall when the convention was held in Buffalo.

H. In 1943?

T. In 1943 although Horace was from the Foundry, my own unit, he was part of our Foundry delegation; there were 17 delegates from the Foundry to the international convention in 1943 and on every issue 16 of we Foundry delegates voted in one direction and one voted in the other direction.



H. Would you say that Horace Sheffield was the one Negro from 600 who supported the Reuther-Thomas faction? the Reuther-Leonard faction?

T. He was the only one, although at that convention in the Negro delegation of 600 there were 32 of them and he was the only one that supported Reuther.

H. Who were some of the other candidates that supported Reuther?

T. Well there was a fellow named Carter; I think it was Robert Carter of Local 50 and there was - I don't recall this fellow's name; he was from Chicago who later went on Walter's staff. There was Jimmy Watts, he wasn't a delegate at this particular convention but he was from Local 600 and he supported Walter and eventually went on Walter's staff and the others I don't recall, and there were so few.

H. How about Bill Oliver?

T. Bill Oliver at that time was beginning to make a move in Local 400.

H. What Local was it?

T. That was the Ford Local in Highland Park but I don't believe that in 1943 he was at the convention. I think it was sometime after that he became a convention delegate. He was fortunate enough to be selected rather early to go on the international staff but he was not placed on the staff as a Walter Reuther supporter. Actually when he went on the staff Richard T. Leonard had moved into the Thomas-Addes Caucus so this would, at least on paper, place Bill Oliver in that particular group. Although I will say when Reuther was elected President of the Union the first Negro he ever appointed to anything was Bill Oliver. He appointed him Director, or Co-Director in the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department.

H. What was the major internal question that concerned the Negro workers at this stage in the factional fight?

T. I believe it came into a head in 1943 at the convention in Buffalo.

In the '43 convention in Buffalo there was a fight regarding a Negro member of the International Executive Board. Here the factional lines were rather clearly drawn. This was perhaps even more than in the 1942 convention, the issue of the Negro in the U.A.W. and the union's racial policy was very broadly presented, very sharply presented.

H. Would you please tell us about '42, '43 conventions and what happened and the role of Negroes in those two conventions?

T. Both in '42 and in 1943 the question of representation was a paramount question as far as Negroes were concerned in the international conventions.

In 1942-

H. It was in the convention, not on the Board?

T. When I say the question was in the convention, that is because the Board is elected at the convention. In 1942 the question was introduced in not quite as direct a way as it was later. There were those who wanted to sharply present a fight and the way in which it was done was round-about way because this was supposed to be a unity convention.

H. The '42 convention?

T. The 1942 convention. We were in a war and I suppose everybody in the country at that time was groping as to the best way to pursue the war and the union, the labor movement itself was in a quandary, but the U.A.W. position was that we must defer our factionalism until the war is over, unify ourselves in order that we can get together and produce the goods that our army so sorely needs, which is produced in our plants, so we finally agreed - I'm speaking of the two factions now - we finally agreed that we would not oppose the incumbent officers and at the same time revive the union structure to again include vice presidents. This had been done away with a few conventions previously because the feeling was we could cause a diminishing of the factional strike by eliminating some of the officers,

so the agreement was that there would be two Vice Presidents, one from each faction and the two factions would allow the single factions to select the man they wanted and then both factions would elect the two. The Reuther-Leonard faction selected Walter P. Reuther and the Addes faction - Thomas at that time was a neutral person: he really didn't begin to belong to either faction. The Addes faction had decided upon Richard T. Frankenstein so the Negroes in the convention felt left out by the unity move to support all the incumbents. This meant there would be no contest and there would be no vacancy. There was nowhere for the Negro to pursue the question of representation.

H. Both factions supported the move?

T. Both factions supported the move for the two vice presidents and re-election of all incumbents. There was a Negro caucus convened and I was chairman of this.

H. This caucus included Negroes in both factions?

T. This included Negroes in both factions plus many whites from both factions and-

H. But you said it was a Negro caucus?

T. The Negroes were the conveners of the caucus.

H. And in the majority?

T. And in the majority and-

H. They ran the caucus?

T. They ran the caucus and did all of the talking, and white supporters were there to listen and support the ideas. So our strategy was that we would select somebody and nominate him and at the time that the question of acceptance or declinations rose in the convention, as a strategy move, someone would get up and say since there are three nominations and speak on the question of unity, the need for unity to include all people, including

the Negroes, he would address himself to the question of Negro representation and make a motion that all three of the nominees become vice presidents. Well the mistake was in not notifying the fellow that was nominating Oscar Noble. Everybody assumed that somebody would inform Noble of this strategy, He unfortunately was unable to attend the caucus so by everybody assuming that someone else had informed him nobody informed him and when Noble was nominated he very graciously got up and made a statement that for the sake of unity and all of this, he was hereby declining, so the strategy went out of the window. And Reuther and Frankensteen of course were nominated by acclamation. Now the next move was made in 1943. We started three months-

H. Was there any continuity in the Negro caucuses?

T. Yes there was continuity in that the leadership of this caucus which were the people that I mentioned previously, heads of various local unions who were working together, convened - actually we convened several meetings between conventions because in those days a convention was held every year. About 3 months before the convention of 1943 the group decided to call a board meeting in the Fort Shelby Hotel and invite all of the international officers, the heads of all the local unions in the Detroit area, and inform the heads of local unions throughout the country so that anyone who wanted to come would be aware of the meeting and be able to come if they desired to do so. This meeting was convened in the Fort Shelby Hotel in March or April of 1943 and there were representatives from several U.A.W. regions, including Canada. There were about 300 peoples in the Ball Room of the Hotel Fort Shelby, Spanish room I believe they called it in those days. At this meeting the desires of the Negro membership were made known. The question of leadership was raised, Negro leadership, and one of the procedures of the U.A.W. is that the International Executive

board elects the various convention committees, the Resolutions Committees, Constitution Committee, and the Credentials Committee being the 3 most important. They devote most of their time to those three committees. The others are filled in by tacit approval from suggestions made by the Secretary Treasurer or President, whichever one had the most interest in a given committee. But the other three committees are very hotly contested, the composition of them being very important. So this is one of the reasons for calling all of the officers in so early before the convention in order to let them know what the strategy is or is required, so that they in turn will think about this when they are putting the committees together and I might say this resulted in a successful selection as far as the committees were concerned. The Constitutional Committee was the important one for this move, because they would have to bring out a constitutional change. One of the fellows that was put on the Constitutional Committee that year was Nat Ganly, and Nat Ganly later on proved to be the one guy that we really needed because while the question was handled quite fairly by the Committee, as the fight got hotter and hotter why some of the fellows that ordinarily would have gone along with the idea chickened out and Ganly was left alone to bring out the constitutional provision and he slightly succumbed to the pressures because he did chop the original proposal up considerably and compromised himself to a great deal. However the matter did come out on the floor in a night session and I guess it held sway for about three hours. Now there were some things done on a preliminary basis in Detroit. I took it on myself to contact every Negro leader in the U.A.W. that I knew of or could learn of, that might be a delegate to the convention. Being on the Resolution Committee I was able to get into the convention city two weeks before the convention convened and thereby used that time not only for my convention committee work but also to

make contacts so, as I learned who the Negro delegates were, this was to form the nucleus of the convention fight. I was commuting back and forth between Buffalo and Detroit, contacting the right-wing leadership of Sheffield and others that were working with us. Since we had been able to get a commitment from the liberal forces in the union we felt that the Negroes-

H. By liberal forces you mean the Addes Group?

T. The Addes group. We felt that there was responsibility on the part of the Reuther supporters to get a similar commitment from them so we challenged them to do so. Well the last 3-

H. May I interrupt? Would you be a little more specific about the nature of that commitment?

T. The Thomas, it wasn't the Thomas force, the Addes force because there is a role that Thomas played in this year that indicated that he was not part of the left wing group at the time, the Addes forces agreed to support the idea of a Negro on the International Executive Board.

H. The principal demand of the Negro caucus?

T. They said they support it and they would speak in favor of it before the convention.

H. Were there any other demands that the Negro caucus had made before the convention?

T. Yes, there was another demand made for more international, more Negro international representatives and we -

H. Was Walter Harden still the only Negro?

T. No, he wasn't the only one then. There were seven at that time.

H. There were seven? Would you recall the name of the others?

T. Oh yes in addition to Walter Harden there were Oscar Noble, John Conyer, Arto Johnson, William Bowman, Bill Lattimore, Johnson Buchanan



and Horace Sheffield.

H. Were they all from the Detroit area?

T. No they weren't all from the Detroit area because William Bowman was from Saginaw and Johnson Buchanan was from Flint. You were asking me-

H. About the other demands.

T. The other demand was that there would be at least one Negro assigned to each International department, and each regional staff and on each administrator's staff; in other words the President, Vice President, and Secretary Treasurer should at least have one Negro on their staff.

Actually, as soon as this demand was made know, George Addes placed a Negro on the auditing staff. His name was Washington-

H. Of the Addes faction, the Addes leadership agreed to these demands?

T. That's right, and Frankenstein being part of the Addes faction at that time hired Bill Lattimore before the convention.

H. Were you able to get a similar commitment from the Reuther faction?

T. Now when I was commuting back and forth my last trip in this commuting was to visit with Sheffield and his friends regarding getting a commitment from their faction. Sheffield said that he would meet with Reuther and Leonard and secure the commitment and later on the same day he informed me that he had gotten this commitment. He told me that he had driven Leonard and Reuther to the airport and while driving them to the airport they had made the commitment. Consequently, the two of us went to offices of the Michigan Chronicle, and talked with Louie Martin. Louie Martin took the story that I gave him regarding the resolution on the staff composition and the commitment to support the proposal by Addes and Frankenstein.

Actually Frankenstein had said he would not only speak in favor of it but he would allow Shelton Tappes to write his speech for him and he would make the speech as Shelton Tappes wrote it.

Then the commitment that Reuther and Leonard had made, so Louie Martin took this information and made a front page story out of it. The whole front page was used in this story. Addes and Frankenstein on one side, Leonard and Reuther on the other - total commitment and it was such a beautiful story that my faction bought a thousand copies of the Michigan Chronicle and shipped them to Buffalo. I purchased a 1,000 copies of the Michigan Chronicle and shipped them to Buffalo. Then at what we considered the ah appropriate time we took these copies and spread them out on all of the tables throughout the convention. And so when the matter eventually hit the floor of the convention much to our surprise, one of the first people to speak against it was either Walter or Victor, well anyway it was a Reuther that spoke against it. This caused our fellows to pause considerably. R.J. Thomas-

H. Now, what was it they in particular spoke against?

T. Well, it was a proposal - now it's better to read it in a book because the thing was batted around so much and chopped up so much that I just don't recall what we were voting on there towards the last.

H. You said that it was Victor Reuther?

T. Now we have some board members at large but their voting strength is equal.

H. See U.A.W. Convention Proceedings, Eighth convention, 1943, Buffalo, page 370, sub-title, Minorities Department speech of Nat Ganly on Article 9, Section 2, a proposal that the Director of the Minority Department should be a member of the International Board and nominated and elected by the convention as a whole. Section 10, paragraph C, indicates that a compromise was made on this matter.

T. But I was really disappointed in Horace Sheffield because he had turned round on us and he fought it; he spoke against it on the floor, you know the

Minority Department, and he made some statements at that time that actually came true twenty-years later, He said we're twenty-years ahead of ourselves and you know words to that effect; it was actually twenty-years later that Jack Edwards was elected to the International Executive Board, so actually I can truthfully say that I've never forgiven Horace Sheffield for the position he took in 1943 on the question of a Negro on the International Executive Board. Yes, the article was in the Chronicle. I believe, even George Crockett, I believe, made mention of this in one of his columns and there were people who actually used it against Horace in local union elections and all that sort of thing but we thought it was very ironical of him to claim to have been fighting for this for so many years when just the opposite was true; and actually we don't feel that Horace really began fighting in favor of a Negro on the board until it appeared to him that he had a chance to be the fellow. This is the way we feel about it, especially so after Jack Edwards was elected and he said "I'll never accept it and I'll never recognize him as my leader on the International Executive Board." But now he's Jack's administrative assistant. But there were some very trying days when we were working. For example, in Buffalo while this matter was pending and the Constitutional Committee was considering it we worked very hard in organizing support and one of the things that we did was to pin down the location of every Negro delegate who was in the convention at that time, and there were a hundred and ninety four Negroes at the convention, by far the largest Negro delegation we ever had and through them we began to try to reach the white delegates and we succeeded. I think we succeeded because R.J. Thomas was opposed to it. And during the intensity of the debate there were two or three skirmishes on the floor or interruption (I don't think any body was hurt) but some very heated words interrupted the speakers and lots of threats were thrown back and forth but never was it more than a

minor scufflins. However, delegates in the far reaches of the auditorium would not know that there was a fight going on, so it was a quite a confused situation and Thomas had considerable amount of difficulty in bringing the convention back to order. And you see in the Proceedings there where he says, "I'm going to recognize one more speaker and that's Brother Shelton Tappes and as soon as he's through speaking I'm going to put the previous question". So then he had a little trouble getting order. Well by the time he did get order I had walked up on the platform. Incidentally almost all of the international officers had deserted R.J. and left him there practically alone there on the platform. I believe when I walked up on the platform there was Walter Reuther left, R.J., and Richard Frankenstein, and myself. We were the four on the platform.

H. Why did the other two leave?

T. Well, they were the kind of politicians that just didn't want to face up to the issues. They were afraid that someone would say, "We would like to hear the position of all the officers," or something like that.

H. Wasn't there a strong expressed reaction from the Negro delegates to the defection of the Reutherites on the Reuther Caucus commitment?

T. Well I think this was some of the problems involved with the confusing on the floor, I mean maybe a Reutherite would say something or a Reuther or somebody would speak against the proposal and then some remarks would be thrown and someone take offense to it and the next thing you know you have a private skirmish.

H. Why do you think the Reuther caucus broke their published commitment?

T. Well I don't believe they ever made a public commitment, I believe Horace was making an untrue statement when he said they had and I think he was ashamed to admit to Louie Martin or myself that Reuther and Leonard were not supporting it.

H. After the front page story in the Chronicle the Reuther representative could have made a public statement saying they had entered into no such commitment, and that the story in the Chronicle was in fact an error.

T. No, but I'll never believe that he made the commitment, because I-

H. You think Horace made that up?

T. Walter at that time had to depend on on what support he had and I don't think he would have done anything to cause a defection among that support.

H. What is your interpretation for the behavior of the Reuther caucus on this question? Would they have disaffected their white support?

T. Some of them, I believe the Southerners would, I'm sure the Southerners would.

H. You're suggesting that the base of the Reuther caucus was essentially a coalition of the conservatives, Northern white workers, with a strong Southern sentiment, and that they really represented the conservative elements of the union?

T. It was a conglomeration of the professional anti-communists, the organized Catholic trade unionists.

H. They were active in the Reuther caucus?

T. Oh yes, Oh yes.

H. Mainly on the anti-Communist plank?

T. That's right.

H. Their so-called anti-communist plank?

T. Mostly and then of course there was the Southern element-

H. Which is very powerful in the U.A.W.?

T. Very powerful; because they were a strongly welded-

H. I think the point here is that when we talk about the Southern element

we don't simply refer to workers in the Southern plants but we refer to Southern white workers who had come north, but retained their racial prejudices who were working in Northern plants but they would remain Southerners.

T. And in some cases Southerners, per se, like the Texas group and Oklahoma.

H. They weren't very big-

T. No they weren't very big but they were solid.

H. But what was important was the great influx of southern whites into Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, etc...men who were working in the Northern auto plants but they were in fact Southern whites.

T. That's right, for example there was one delegation from a plant that had a considerable amount of southern workers in it who walked up make a roll call vote and every one of em pulled a cloth off the tables, and walked up as if they were wrapped in Klu Klux Klan outfits.

H. What convention was that?

T. That was the same convention.

H. As a matter of fact, the Klu Klux Klan influence, the black legion influence, United Sons of America

T. The United Sons of America was a new name for the Klan.

H. Operating in the North

T. Operating in the North and incidentally their headquarters was in a house in the same block as the home, the birth place of Lindberg.

H. These groups were very active?

T. That's right because you know at that time Gerald L.P. Smith was here and Father Coughlin was still very vocal; so all of these combinations created the atmosphere to which these people gave encouragement. So I guess when the matter was put to a vote my purpose for going on the platform was to be there when the vote was taken and the first vote was a hand



vote and was close enough for the President to call for a standing vote and of course through my eyes I thought that the proposition for a Negro on the Board had won, but Mr. Thomas indicated that the question was lost and although I tried to convince him that he was wrong, there wasn't too much of a challenge because people seemed to be relieved that the intense or the tense situation was taken care of so a few moments later the convention recessed for the day.

H. This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Shelton Tappes, October 29, 1967, in Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Tappes will continue discussing the events of the 1943 convention in Buffalo. Shelton, I believe that we stopped yesterday at the point where the vote was taken on the issue of Negro representation and you expressed the belief that the Reuther forces had never actually made the commitment that Horace Sheffield reported to the Negro Caucus. You can perhaps take it up from there.

T. Well, I was convinced that Horace had given us the wrong information before we left Detroit because I do not believe that Walter Reuther would have gone back on a commitment of that sort. I believe that when we were preparing for the convention in Detroit through the caucus and at the time that we confronted Horace to get some support from the group that he was associated with that he felt that here was a challenge and didn't want to create the impression that the so called left wing forces were the only ones who were interested in the cause of the Negro workers in the U.A.W. and he might have been a bit ashamed of the position that the people that he was supporting were taking on the question, since there was such a widespread demand for support in the Negro community for support of a Negro on the International Executive Board of the U.A.W.

H. What was the reaction in the ranks to the defection of the Reuther forces on this point, considering the front page publicity of the Michigan

Chronicle and all the attention that the alleged pledge had gotten?

What was the reaction among the Negro workers within the union as well as generally within the Negro community?

T. Well, to say the least, I think that at that time the stock of Horace Sheffield had gone down considerably; actually I believe that he had to take the brunt of the scorn and disappointments in the Negro community, among workers in the shops. They blamed Horace and Walter Harden more than anyone else because they knew that they had played personal roles in trying to acquire the Negro support for the people who opposed the efforts that were made in Buffalo. Horace and Walter had both worked among the Negro delegation to try to find some Negro delegates who would take the floor and speak against the proposal and they did succeed in getting at least two that I can recall. One was a fellow by the name of Hall from Local 157 and the other was a delegate by the name of Carter from Local 50.

H. They spoke against the idea of Negro representation on the board?

T. They spoke against the proposal as such.

H. Why would they do that?

T. Well, I have my personal feeling about it. I think Carter felt that through his taking the floor and speaking the way he did that his reward would probably be a position on the International Staff. It seems to me that in his speech he did mention that he would like to have a staff job.

H. Did anything positive from the point of view your group come out of the '43 convention?

T. Well, the most positive thing that I can recall was the passage of a resolution which called for the placing of at least one Negro on every major International Department, and at least one Negro on each of the regional staffs of the International Union. This resolution did pass.

H. Do you date the '43 convention as the beginning of the internal struggle within the U.A.W. by Negroes for Negro representation, that is, the open struggle?

T. I believe this was the first of the open struggle, open efforts. From then on the press for Negro representation became - it gained momentum from that point.

H. The Negro caucus remained intact, however?

T. Yes, it did.

H. The Negro caucus continued its activity, with the exception of Horace Sheffield and Walter Harden. The majority of Negro leadership on the local union level, and the secondary level of leadership remained in the caucus which in turn remained a part of the Addes-Thomas caucus. Is that correct?

T. That's true.

H. What happened in the intervening period?

T. Oh, I think we had better identify the caucus. In 1943 it was still the Addes-Frankensteen caucus.

H. Addes-Frankensteen caucus rather than the Addes-Thomas caucus?

T. Yes because Thomas had at that time remained aloof from the two principal groups that were vying for power; the Reuther group was known at that time as the Reuther-Leonard Caucus and the Addes group was known as the Addes-Frankensteen Caucus.

H. For reasons that you explained in our interview yesterday, Mr. Tappes, the overwhelming majority of Negroes remained loyal to the Addes-Frankensteen Caucus in this period.

T. Yes, a good example would be the Negro delegation in the 1943 convention. I believe we counted 194 Negro delegates in the convention from the various local unions and of those 194, there were 187 who actually voted for

the Addes program.

H. Would you describe the activities of the Negro Caucus between the 1943 and 1944 convention?

T. The Negro Caucus in remaining intact continued their meetings after the convention in the Detroit area. Meetings were held in various places in Detroit, from time to time and by this time George Crockett had been added to the staff of the international union.

H. Who was George Crockett?

T. George Crockett was an attorney who had been on the staff of President Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Commission. He was a trial examiner, I believe, and he had been convinced that his work could be very valuable if he joined the staff of the U.A.W. He did so and became the Executive Director of the U.A.W. Fair Practices Committee.

H. When was that Committee established?

T. I believe it was established either in late 1943 or early 1944.

H. Was this authorized by the '43 Buffalo convention?

T. No, it was authorized by the International Executive Board. I believe they were influenced by the debate of the 1943 convention.

H. What was the purpose and the responsibility of the Fair Practice Department?

T. Well, this Committee-

H. It wasn't Department?

T. No, it wasn't a Department, it was a Committee and George Crockett's official title, I believe was Executive Director.

H. He had never been an auto worker?

T. No, he hadn't. He was an attorney; he was employed by the Executive Board to be the Director of the Committee.

H. Would you describe the activities and purpose of the committee?

T. George drew up a set of procedures for this committee. The purpose of it was to receive complaints from minority members of the union regarding almost any problem that rose on questions of discrimination or denial of membership rights in the union. He had the right to investigate these complaints and if necessary, if it couldn't be straightened out any other way, the committee of the International Executive Board could cause a hearing to be held and the matter aired to the committee. The committee had a right to decide on action to recover for the purpose of the members recovering their rights that might have been denied them if the finding indicated this to be true. Of course he did originate policy statements and in general police the practices of the union as regards the constitutional rights of the Negro and other minority groups in the union.

H. I assume he was to carry out such educational-

T. Yes a very extensive educational program was enacted because Mr. Crockett did originate pamphlets, and booklets and things like that on the question of civil rights.

H. At this stage, the period between the '43-'44 convention, the Committee operated as the creature of the Board, it did not have sanction of the constitutional convention. There was no constitutional provision setting up this Committee?

T.No.

H. It was by Board action. Let us go back to the previous question: You were describing the activities of the Negro caucus. I have two questions to ask: Did this Negro caucus have any formal designation, did it have a formal meeting place, did it have a title, did it have officers, did it have a staff, or was it simply an informal operation existing by word of mouth, letters or phone calls? Did it have any formal structure, number 1, number 2, was it mainly limited to the Detroit and Michigan area?

H. To continue - Was the caucus operated informally? Did it have a formal structure? Did it have a specific meeting place with officers, meeting times, etc., or did it simply operate informally with an occasional phone call, telegram, letter, calling members to meetings? My second question is, did you limit the operation of the caucus to the Detroit area with perhaps surrounding cities like Saginaw, Battle Creek, etc.? Was it essentially a Michigan operation, or did it operate nationally in selected areas? How did you maintain contact with the Negro leadership in areas outside the Michigan area? They are two separate questions.

T. The answer to the first question is that the caucus was more of an informal or semi- rather than a formal group. They were contacted by letter, although a mailing list was maintained, and semi-formally we did have officers. The meetings were usually chaired by myself or George Crockett. We did have a secretary, and the mailing list was maintained through George's office. I don't recall the name of the young lady who was secretary; she was from Cadillac Local 22. I believe her name was Margaret Fryerson. We did - we called ourselves the U.A.W. Minorities Committee. We did maintain contact with a certain leadership outside the Michigan area. For instance, there were people in the Cincinnati area - Bill Beckham and Jerry Maxcy - Negro leaders in that local. There were a few others we contacted from time to time to apprise them of our plans. But, pretty generally, this was a Michigan-based group.

H. Were all the meetings of the caucus held in Detroit?

T. Yes. When there was a meeting where we felt there was need of a broader attendance, the others were informed, and if they could get into Detroit they came.

H. How frequently did these meetings occur?

T. Approximately once per month.



H. They were on call?

T. Yes. Called meetings.

H. Would you say that the leaders of the caucus were still, in the period between the '43 and '44 convention, the two outstanding leaders were George Crockett and yourself, Shelton Tappes?

T. That's right.

H. Who were some of the other leading personalities?

T. The people I've named before, Hodges Mason was one, a fellow by the name of McDonald from Local 208, and Kirby Jones of Local 3; Samuel Fanroy would come to our meetings, occasionally, and Lillian Hatcher would attend occasionally. A number of people from Local 600, Local 51, Local 7, I'd say there was a core of about 20 to 25 people, who attended.

H. You've indicated that while it was primarily a Michigan activity you also had an operational involvement with Negro U.A.W. leaders in Ohio. The only other locals you mentioned were from Ohio. How about Chicago? and how about the St. Louis area?

T. The Chicago people usually went along with our decisions and proposals. They didn't meet with us. It was usually at the convention that we would inform them of decisions made. I think mostly because in Detroit we were acquainted with the major issues that were coming up at the conventions, and things like that so there was usually a caucus meeting held before the convening of the convention - a day or two before the convention - in which most of the leading Negro members and leaders from other locals were met with or made acquainted with strategy that we planned for the convention.

H. Would it be correct to say that even though generally this informal, perhaps not so informal, as you describe it, Negro caucus was loyal to the Addes-Frankensteen faction, actually you had a high degree of independence while the opposition regarded you as part of the Addes caucus faction, you

really operated independently - you also exerted a certain pressure within the Addes caucus for Negro rights.

T. That's true.

H. You were a pressure group against both factions in the union?

T. The advantage the Addes caucus group had was their receptiveness to the proposal of the Negro caucus. Whenever the Negro leadership met in the general Addes caucus, they would bring forth the proposals of the Negro caucus. These were usually accepted. There is one person that I forgot to mention as being in direct contact with the Detroit group and that was in Indianapolis, that was a female Negro member of the U.A.W. who was Secretary-Treasurer of our local union who met with us quite often. Whenever we had our monthly meetings she was usually in attendance.

Edna Johnson.

H. How about groups in Toledo?

T. There were some people in Toledo; I'm trying to recall their names. There were two Negroes and there was one young white fellow named Joseph that would come up to the Detroit caucus meetings. For the life of me I can't remember his name.

H. Perhaps you can think of it later and we can fill it in. Did white people participate? The assumption is that this was an all Negro caucus.

T. It was an all Negro caucus to all intents and purposes. But there were times when white workers were invited. They would be in attendance.

H. White workers would come by invitation, right?

T. They weren't really members of the Caucus, but being friends there were occasions when there'd be one or two in attendance.

H. These were white workers you felt were ideologically sympathetic and would assist?

T. Right.

H. I am interested in St. Louis - where there is a big General Motors operation. In St. Louis, was there not a considerable number of Negroes? Was there not some Negro leadership in St. Louis?

T. I don't recall any from there. The unfortunate thing is that in the U.A.W. convention the overwhelming bulk of Negro delegates were from Detroit Local unions. This meant that the average Negro that showed any kind of leadership in the outlying areas was almost isolated and the only way we could become acquainted with them was to meet them at the conventions. They looked to Detroit for leadership and it was very easy to get them to join with us and they listened and usually went along with us.

H. While the base was Detroit you had a rather effective operation in other Michigan cities, Saginaw, Lansing, Muskegon, Battle Creek - would that be a correct assumption? There was regular involvement from those cities and in some instances like Edna Johnson from Indianapolis, she would attend the monthly meetings, one or two others on occasion - there would be correspondence with the Negro leadership from other cities but then before the national conventions you would have formal meetings with the delegates from other states?

T. I think the largest convention caucus of Negro delegates that we ever held was in Buffalo in 1943. There we set up a convention organization.

H. What was its formal title?

T. This wasn't formal. There was no formal title but Oscar Noble was permanent chairman for the duration of the convention and we had regular meetings. We met every morning for breakfast, we met several times during the convention for luncheon and every night after the convention recessed why we had dinner together. There was never less than a hundred in these meetings. On at least three occasions we had open sessions in which friends among white delegates were in attendance. At one point the interest had swelled to where we had over 300 delegates and friends in a session with us.

H. Was there expressed a hostile reaction from the white workers against the existence of Negro caucuses?

T. Oh yes, there were expressions against the idea from both the right wing and the left wing. We were criticised in the Addes caucus for holding them and we were also criticised from the Reuther caucus.

H. Well what was the basic charge for this hostility?

T. Well, the usual. We were criticised for setting up an all black caucus in the U.A.W. and called a pressure group and the usual accolades -

H. And indeed, you were a pressure group?

T. We were.

H. Was Willoughby Abner involved in the Chicago operation at this time?

T. No at this time he wasn't. In fact, I don't believe Willoughby was a delegate at that time to any of the convention I've talked about.

H. He came later?

T. He came later.

H. We are now anticipating the 1944 convention. What did your caucus do in relation to the '44 convention? What were your goals? What did you try to accomplish at the '44 convention and would you please describe the pre-convention activities of the Negro caucus?

T. Well, the 1944 convention was held in Grand Rapids. There had been a lot of anti-Negro activities throughout the U.A.W.

H. Describe that.

T. Well, it was, for the most part, shown in anti-Negro strike attitudes and many plants; I couldn't begin to name them all now. I believe this is when the Packard thing took place, there was one, I believe, at Hudson's too. There were a lot of small ones that didn't get a lot of attention. There was even one in Rouge plant during this time.

H. I would like you to elaborate, even though we did discuss this a little bit during our interview with Mr. Billups. We discussed the so called hate strikes at Hudsons and Packard. You now indicate that there was also a similar activity at the River Rouge plant - the Ford plant. Would you, just for the purposes of continuity, give us a word regarding the context of these strikes by white workers against the promotion of Negroes to hitherto prohibited-to-lily white job classifications? A summary statement.

T. Most of the hate strikes were created by the leaders of white groups who would object to Negroes entering their departments, which heretofore had been all white. They were departments in which semi-skilled work was performed. The only contact most of these departments had had with Negroes was as janitors, cleaners of one kind or other - those who cleaned the machines, or carried out the offal as it is called. These are scraps of grinding operations, scraps from stamping operations and work of that kind. Menial type of work and in some cases assembly operations. Until that time, plants which had foundries, most Negroes worked in the foundry, and where the machining and assembling operations were performed, or the trimming operations were performed, the only use in which Negroes were employed was that of cleaning up and preparing the job for the other workers to perform. During the war was as a result of labor shortages, and in some cases because management had decided to make a move to democratize their setup, they began to move Negroes into more preferred jobs - in some cases through seniority and in others by arbitrary decision. So the resistance came from the white worker and in many cases they would walk off the job as soon as a Negro was brought in and placed there.

H. Were these usually departmental walkouts or the entire plant? Would you describe the different situations?

T. In most cases they were departmental walkouts and sometimes it would spread. If it was a key department this would cripple the whole plant.

H. As at Packard and Hudson's?

T. Yes. As at Packard and Hudson.

H. Would you give us a word about the Rouge walkout?

T. The Rouge walkout was little different from the others. The Rouge walkout was in a sort of a white collar type department. What they did was mostly paper work. It was a clerical operation. In order for the company to keep track of the amount of work they were doing for the government, they had a very extensive clerical operation. Involved in this particular department were about forty or fifty white young men and women. The job was so clean that they could walk in dressed as we are now.

H. In street clothes?

T. And it was all pencil and paper work. A small amount of typing. The Committee in the unit, realizing that a lot of people were being hired directly into these departments and at the same time knowing that a lot of the people who were working in the plant were able to do this kind of work decided that they would up-grade some people from the plant into this department rather than hire the new people off the street. Hiring went on continuously during the war. At all times they were hiring people. It wasn't seasonal like during the automobile production days. This Committee upgraded three or four Negro men, young men into this department. They facilitated all of the preliminary work so these men were instructed to come in prepared to work in these jobs the following day. They walked in and as soon as these men were assigned their jobs and the jobs explained to them - first, the young ladies began to walk out; they walked into the lunch room, sat down one by one, encouraging others as they went along; it was about an hour before the entire department was in there. By then we had been notified at the local union headquarters. Bill Grant was President at the Local at that time. I believe

we were sitting in an officers' meeting in the President's office at the time that the word came in to Mr. Grant. All he did was grab his coat and start out the door and said "Come on Shelton". He didn't tell me what it was all about. So I got into his car with him and we headed for the plant. All the officers had drive-in passes so we went directly to the Press Steel building known as the Dearborn Stamping Plant, in those days we called it the Press Steel plant. We went right on in to the plant and right into the lunch room which would seat say about 300 or 400 people. They were sitting there.

H. About how many?

T. About 40 of them.

H. They were mainly white women?

T. White women and white men. Mostly white women - about 30 white women - 10 white men. I still wasn't too clear on what had happened except that Grant had explained to me on the way over there that people had walked off the jobs because Negroes had been upgraded. He got up on a platform and told them that Local 600 was composed of Negroes and whites and that Negroes and whites were responsible for the organization. They contributed equally to the firming up of an organization, Local 600; he said that I was there as livingproof, as one of the officers.

H. You were the Secretary?

T. Yes, I was the Secretary. He said that he understood that they didn't want to work with some Negroes who had been upgraded to their department. He said, "You don't have to work with them, and I'm going to tell the management that you don't have to work with these Negroes. However, you've got exactly one half hour to get your personal belongings and get out of the plant, because we need the space to put some people in this department who are willing to work with these Negroes." He said, "I'm not going to waste your time talking anymore to you and I certainly won't waste Mr. Tappes' time.



I thought it my duty as President of the Local to come over here and tell you that you don't have to work with the Negroes that were upgraded. I'll see to it that management understands that we want that department manned with a sufficient number of people to do the work and that you can be relieved of your jobs and responsibilities in that department," and with that we walked out.

H. You gave them a choice, that is, the leadership of Local 600 gave the protesting white workers a choice of working with Negroes or not working at all? That if they refused to accept the promotion of Negroes they would have to quit their jobs?

T. That's right. We left them, Grant and I went right on over to Local headquarters. Twenty minutes later we got a call from the committeeman in that district and he told us that the department was operating.

H. Did all the white workers go back to work?

T. All of them went back.

H. Not a single defection?

T. Not a one.

H. Were there any troubles at a later time?

T. We never had any further troubles at Local 600.

H. Neither in that department or another department?

T. No.

H. So as we approach the '44 convention we had a year in which the race question has been imposed rather sharply by specific plant conflict, white workers had expressed their hostility in both the Packard, Hudson and River Rouge situation; so local unions and the international did what had to be done to secure equal rights for Negroes. This gave certain pre-eminence to racial problems that your Black caucus was concerned with and my assumption is that the Black caucus also operated on local union levels to pressure management into

recognizing job rights of Negroes. You played a role, also, didn't you, in securing some promotions for Negroes, especially Negro women? We mentioned this yesterday.

T. Yes, we did a lot of work on the question of Negro women because at that time the government had training centers established in Detroit where women were taught, any of them, not only women but anybody who was interested in entering any war work, were taught welding operations, riveting operations, how to operate stamping machines, milling machines, all of the various factory operations. After receiving this training they were given certificates of competence and referred to various plants in the area but there were plants - some plants upon receiving the referral of Negro women would turn them back with various excuses. Some would say that "we don't need welders," others would say "we don't need riveters." Since there was a certain amount of compensation involved during the training period -

H. Workers were paid during the training period?

T. Yes. Nominal sums. They would go back to the training center..

H. Were they paid by the government?

T. They would go back to the training centers and report that they had been refused, and I'm sure that people in charge of these training centers would call these companies and want to know why and probably were told why. But to get around it the training centers would put these ladies on another course and sometimes women would have learned three or four operations and would become very competent, so competent that many of them became instructors at these training centers.

H. These were Negro women?

T. Yes, Negro women. They would teach white women how to perform operations. White women could go get jobs in the plants where the Negro women who had them had been turned away. So it became such an acute problem and still there

was a demand for help in so many of the plants that we, I mean the Negro leadership, of course, it wasn't confined to Negro leadership, many of us became alarmed about it, and raised the question very sharply, and we confronted the management and organized picket lines and even held mass meetings and rallies about it.

H. Would you mention some of the plants where they were picketing?

T. Well, as I mentioned yesterday there was a - the first picket line we organized was in the Ford Highland Park plant. Seemingly the Ford Motor Company just didn't want any women on their payroll, that is, if they could get around it.

H. They had a general prejudice against women and a specific prejudice against Negro women.

T. The reason we selected the Ford plant was that they had finally been pressured into putting women on the payroll. They had put only white women in their plants.

H. What year was that?

T. It was 1942 and 1943. Our first picket line was in 1943.

H. Who organized the picket line?

T. I guess we'd have to give credit to the Committee itself. The Minorities Committee itself.

H. The Minorities Committee was the informal title for the Black caucus?

T. That's right. So the first picket line was in the Highland Park plant. Now the Minorities Committee had organized the picket line and it was composed of the people from the plants...

H. Were there some whites on there?

T. I will say, most of the whites on the picket line came right out of the Highland Park plant and a number of them, some of them committeemen, some of

officers, joined in first. It just happened that coincidentally at the time the picket line operation was at its height the shifts began to change.

H. Were you trying to keep the workers from going in?

T. No. We were just trying to demonstrate.

H. What were some of the other plants where you did this?

T. We also did this at Cadillac, we did it at Ford Rouge plant, we did it at Ternstedt plant, we had a picket line at Chrysler 7, and some others.

H. And you were generally successful?

T. Yes. We were successful because it really focused a lot of attention on the facts that we were able to bring out.

H. So, as we enter the pre-convention period of 1944 the race issue certainly is an important one. The matters before the '43 convention essentially were unresolved. Negro caucus was still pressing Negro representation on the Board, and in the departments. Tell us about your pre-convention activities.

T. Well, in our pre-convention caucuses I think we dwelt more with the idea of having resolutions prepared to present to the convention. We did talk a lot about representation. We still had the so-called unity question. And we had come to the conclusion that the usual avenues open for representation had closed, and we still had a taste in our mouths from the 1943 convention. So we decided, the caucus decided they would propose someone for a vice-presidency, realizing the 1942 convention had put up two vice-presidents and had accommodated itself to the fact of a strong right wing and a strong left wing group. So we felt the best move in 1944 would be to appeal to the Convention to increase the number of vice presidents by one more, by unanimous Convention action elect a Negro Vice-President.

H. Is the Vice-President automatically a member of the board?

T. Oh yes.

H. What happened?

T. Well, a lot of things happened. In 1944 there were strong indications Walter Reuther was going to have problems being elected - reelected to a vice presidency. The CIO sent in Allen Haywood to work on this particular problem. When we got to the convention-

H. Allen Haywood was the Director of Organization for the CIO. Why would Allen Haywood be sent in on an internal political matter within the union?

I would like to have your views.

T. While Haywood was Director of Organization, he was actually a confidante of Phil Murray. And Phil Murray, for some reason or other, couldn't get here himself. This also required more time than Phil Murray had, even if he had been able to come to the convention. Allen Haywood worked for a number of days behind the scenes during the convention in support of Walter Reuther.

H. Why do you think the CIO was interested in assisting Walter Reuther's political ambitions within the union?

T. First, I don't think it was so much Walter's political ambitions as it was - well, it was the natural inclination of the parent body to support incumbency. Number two, they felt that the Reuther forces were strong enough to create some more of the factionalism, and split the union wide open, reopening the rift which had existed in the Homer Martin days. Many of Walter's supporters were former Homer Martin people, and they were afraid there would be these defections. Some people might go so far as to try to establish a new union. These were some of the threats.

H. You just said something very important. You said that some of Walter Reuther's supporters were former Homer Martin people. Would you explain this a little? Considering the fact that Homer Martin had been so discredited, in the U.A.W.?

T. Well, when Homer Martin left, there were still a few left who switched their allegiance to Reuther - maybe some switched their allegiance to Thomas.

I wasn't trying to indicate that all the Homer Martin supporters as a group had suddenly become Reuther supporters. But there were more of the former Homer Martin people who were in the Reuther camp than were in the Thomas group.

H. You are suggesting that the interest of Phil Murray and of the national CIO was not at this stage motivated principally by political considerations, that is fear that Communists were about to take over the U.A.W., but that a legitimate concern to prevent the formation of a new union, or dual unionism, or to prevent a further deepening of the internal crisis.

T. I feel that this was the problem to which Allen Haywood addressed himself. While Allen was in Grand Rapids he would call representatives of the Reuther group and confer with them, and call people from the Addes group and confer with them. I was usually in the meetings when he was conferring with the Addes group.

H. You were a leader of the Addes group?

T. Yes. He appealed to us along these lines. And I must say that he succeeded in reducing the opposition to Walter. I would give him more credit than any other individual for saving Reuther at this time.

H. Why was there a danger that Walter Reuther might not be reelected as vice president?

T. Well, I guess it was just a simple fact that the votes were not there for him.

H. Had he been losing support in the ranks?

T. It seems that way. Well, I suppose it was because Thomas was a strong supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his program. Part of the program was no strikes during the war, I should say, and the U.A.W. had taken this no-strike pledge, in a special convention which was held in Detroit. There was from the Reuther group opposition to the no-strike pledge. This was a principal issue during the 1944 convention, because the no-strike pledge was reaffirmed; the compromise was that there would be a referendum vote, and the Reuther forces led the fight for a referendum vote. So I think this contributed to the problems



that Walter had.

H. Wasn't there also (just to understand this a bit better) a left wing group? in the Reuther caucus which pushed for a no-strike pledge? That is, some people who would not support an Addes-Thomas faction, and who for their own reasons remained loyal to Reuther, constituted themselves as a left wing of the Reuther caucus. They, in a way, provided leadership in agitating for a no-strike pledge.

T. Yes, there were.

H. Would you identify some of those?

T. Well, there was Larry Yost. I believe Jack Conway was associated with those. Paul Silvers. I don't believe Sam Fishman was. If he was there, he was probably there on his own.

H. Paul Silvers was in the Reuther caucus.

T. Yes, the so-called loyal opposition.

H. Exactly. In the Reuther caucus, but in an opposition position of some consequence. And they had an ideological position that the no-strike pledge was wrong, was evil, was unacceptable to the workers. They were in the Reuther caucus, and were adamantly opposed to the Addes-Frankensteen faction. They pursued a struggle against the non-strike vote. But this lost Walter some support in the ranks.

T. So, anyway - actually, what we're driving at are those things which caused the cause of the Negro to become lost so to speak. The ascendancy of these other issues were of such tremendous importance that the cause of the Negroes was more or less lost, so the strategy reverted to the decision to nominate a Negro during the nomination period, with the understanding he would decline with a speech, bringing the issues out. This was what actually happened.

H. You declined? Why?

T. Well, everything was stacked against me. There was no chance to be elected,



so we felt we would decline, but leave the issue there.

H. This was one of your major roles in the forthcoming 1944 convention?

T. That's right.

H. But in a certain sense, the Black Caucus felt that its function was, no matter what the other issues were, whatever the other crises facing the union, it was the responsibility of the Caucus at all times to pose the question of the Negro workers inside the union, and to press for progress.

T. That's right. And it did happen that way. In fact, I was the one who was nominated, and I declined.

H. Who nominated you, do you recall?

T. I don't recall who nominated me.

H. But you were nominated by another Negro from the floor; and the question was called for to accept or decline, you took the microphone, and you stated your reasons for declining. Would you want to give us a little summary of that speech you made? My assumption is that it is in the 1944 Proceedings? For the full text of Shelton Tappes' declination at the 1944 convention see the printed Proceedings. What else happened at the 1944 convention?

T. Well, a Committee was set up to take a vote, to administer the taking of a vote, a referendum vote on the no-strike pledge. I was placed on that Committee.

H. Was there any particular sentiment among the Negroes on the no-strike issue?

T. I think the Negro workers, almost to a man, supported the no-strike resolution. This was the position of the International Union.

H. Did it have something to do, too, with the feeling it would interfere with the war effort?

T. Yes. Well at the end of the convention - you asked me what else took place at the convention - there was, of course, the usual resolution against discrimination, and one thing that struck me during that convention - it

took place during the elections - at this convention R.J. Thomas was elected by acclamation, and the Packard delegation - I believe there were 30 or 40 there, led by Norman Matthews - the Packard delegation was the delegation which was elected following the so-called hate strike at Packard - and the delegate elections were held just a few weeks after the people had gone back to work, so the tenseness within the local union was still there. I was still on duty; for R.J. Thomas I would still go to the local union at least three times during the week, keeping my eye on the situation. So I was present during the delegate elections - during the electioneering outside the local union, and later on in the counting of the ballots, this sort of thing. It was a most unusual thing to me - the first time I had seen anything like this in a U.A.W. campaign. The Packard Local Union was located on Mount Elliot. Actually, the freeway goes right through - if the Packard Local hall was still standing, it would be standing right in the middle of the freeway. But the electioneers were on each side of the walk leading into the hall. And of course the Matthews slate was a completely lily white slate. And the opposition slate, the one Chris Alston and others were supporting, was a mixed slate. But it was what was being said. For example, when I walked up, nobody knew me. Most of the fellows didn't know who I was from any other member of Packard Local. So when I walked up, I was walking into the Packard hall, running the gauntlet so to speak - you know how these fellows are rather vigorously handing out their election material. There was a white fellow walking in front of me, and I can recall a fellow handing him a slate, and he said, "There are no niggers on this slate. Vote for this one." At the same time the fellow next to him had asked him had asked him for a match to light his cigarette. - he was a colored fellow. I thought this little vignette indicated at least something. It tells you something that here is an anti-Negro group just vigorously pursuing their cause, and here is a Negro who is just as vigorously supporting their group, but they ignore the things that are said about each other. And they are still brothers

in the union to the point where I'll ask him for a match, even though he has no use for me, on a racial basis. Needless to say, the Matthews group won - their whole slate was elected.

H. The Matthews slate was pledged to Walter Reuther, wasn't it?

T. Yes. And this was the year Matthews was elected to the International Executive Board.

H. The other slate - the interracial slate - was pledged to the Addes-Frankensteen group.

T. Yes. When Thomas was elected at the convention, he was elected by acclamation. No one was put up to run against him, and he was declared elected, as soon as the usual procedures were disposed of. Upon his being declared elected, Norman Matthews asked for the floor, and it was granted to him. So he walked up to the front and he said the Packard local wants to go on record as not voting for R.J. Thomas. And I thought this was very significant, for Thomas had taken such a strong position when the hate strike had taken place. And I still recall that on being assigned to work with that local, I had never been able to meet with Mr. Matthews. I had attempted to meet with him on several occasions, and I was rebuffed, by Norman Matthews, president of Local 190. So I followed Norman Matthews' career with reservations during the entire period. He later became Vice-President of the International Union, and became director of the Chrysler Department - he held very important positions.

H. He actually came out of the Packard plant, and he was a spokesman for the white workers. Somewhere, before we lose this point, what was the outcome of the vote on the no-strike referendum?

T. The No-strike pledge was retained. I don't recall the exact figures, but it was retained.

H. The majority of Negro workers voted for it? So that the issue of Negro

representation was rather easily disposed of in 1944. My assumption is that the Negro caucus was not very happy? What did you do during the intervening period from 1944 to 1945?

T. We were not very happy. We revived our activities and decided we were going to run at least person as an officer, and that we were going to select one or two regions where we were going to run men for regional officers.

H. At this stage there was no elected U.A.W. officer? There were U.A.W. staff people, a handful of international representatives. By the way, had any more come on by then?

T. I believe there were some additions. Bill Oliver had come on the staff, as had Lilliam Hatcher. I believe Maurice Hood was on the staff, and a few others. There was a fellow from Chicago who came on the staff, Wesley Thompson, and there was one who has since passed. But anyway, the number of Negro staff representatives had by then doubled.

H. George Crockett was still the Director of the Fair Practices Committee? There was no action taken in the 1944 convention on the status of the Fair Practices Committee?

T. No.

H. You mentioned Bill Oliver. When did he come on the staff?

T. He was placed on the staff just before the 1944 convention. He came out of the Highland Park, Local 400, plant. He was a sweeper. I believe he was the first Recording Secretary of Local 400. He would attend an occasional meeting of our committee, but

H. No commitment?

T. No commitment.

H. He was not an overt supporter of the Thomas-Addes Caucus?

T. Right.

H. Why had he been placed on the staff? Had he become prominent?

T. Well, remember, there was still this vigorous pressure for more staff members. Despite all the convention lack of success, the Minorities Committee and the Metropolitan Labor Council was still in existence.

H. There was a continuous barrage of attacks in the Negro press, within the union, outside the union, in the community for more representation?

T. That's right. And for the representatives who were on the staff to be assigned to something, to some sort of responsibility.

H. Are you suggesting that the Negro staff members were not assigned to responsible tasks?

T. I am asserting that. The International Headquarters located at 411 West Milwaukee, and Walter Hardin, William Bowman, Oscar Noble, John Conyers, Arto Johnson, Buchanan, and Bill Lattimore were not stationed in the Solidarity House of those days.

H. Were the white representatives?

T. All the white representatives were. All those who were assigned to the international staffs, and operating in the region. They either worked out of 411 West Milwaukee, or other designated spots. For instance, the Education Department operated out of the Maccabees Building, the Recreation Department was on West Warren, the Housing Department was in one of the buildings downtown. Naturally, the reps on those departments worked out of those offices.

T. Of course, we couldn't ask R.J. Thomas - they were all on his staff. But the Negroes reported together to the Paradise Lounge on Adams.

H. This was in the Negro ghetto?

T. In the Negro ghetto on East Adams. So that when you wanted one of these fellows, you called the number of the Paradise Lounge.

H. I want to get this very clear. The Paradise Lounge was a bar, was it not?

T. It was a bar, a tavern, a bowling alley.

H. When you wanted to contact a white who was an International Representative you called International headquarters at 411 West Milwaukee. But the Negro representatives did not have their offices at 411 West Milwaukee. If you wanted to contact a Negro representative, you called a bar in the Negro ghetto called the Paradise Lounge. Was not there some concern among Negro workers? Was not the question raised?

T. This was a matter of concern, and the question was raised.

H. Did the Negro representatives sit in the Paradise Lounge waiting for phone calls?

T. No, they didn't. You could find one or two of them there, usually.

H. How did get their assignments?

T. They didn't have any assignments. They went to 411 West Milwaukee to pick up their checks. Usually if there was a conference, or a meeting of some kind, they were permitted to go, but otherwise they remained at Paradise Lounge. The only time that these fellows had assignments, really, was during the Ford drive.

H. So what you're really saying is that the Negro reps were representatives in name only. They really had no function.

T. They had no desk, no telephone, nothing. So this was the situation that the Metropolitan Labor Council addressed itself to.

H. The internal Negro caucus cooperated rather closely with the Metropolitan Labor Council. Did you raise this question, that is, the operational role



of the Negro representatives within the union?

T. We did.

H. Was this condition exposed within the Negro community? Was it called to the attention of the NAACP or the Michigan Chronicle?

T. The community leadership was aware of this situation, and Louis Martin of the Michigan Chronicle, Father Dade, Horace White, Charles Hill and others confronted the international union about it, and with their assistance and with the pressure of the Metropolitan Labor Council, and this question being raised with the Minorities Committee. There was a reason for the Minorities Committee being a separate entity from the Metropolitan Labor Council: the international officers would meet with the Minorities Committee, but they refused to recognize the Metropolitan Labor Council.

H. Was that the full title of the Metropolitan Labor Council?

T. Originally, it was known as the Metropolitan Negro Labor Council, whose base was the Victory Committees.

H. And its base was essentially the Negroes working in the plants?

T. That's right. Now the Minorities Committee was not composed only of local union people. Most of the Negro staff people attended. The Minorities Committee at times invited international officers to meet with them, and they would meet. Addes, Frankenstein, Leo La Motte, and others met with us, to discuss the U.A.W. program, and what the Negro leadership could do to help formulate it. It was here the question of assignments for Negro international representatives was first raised.

H. Was it ever presented to George Crockett?

T. Yes. He, of course, was the leader. The Minorities Committee would meet and discuss this matter, and then, when an international officer or board member would come, Crockett would present the question.

H. Crockett was active in the Minorities Committee?

T. Yes, very active. And usually when we would issue a call for a meeting,



the secretarial work and the letters were through his office.

H. So, even though the Minorities Committee, and the Metropolitan Labor Council were active supporters of the Addes-Thomas caucus, you also had your differences.

T. Yes, we had our differences and our problems. But I will say this, when the question was raised of assignments of these Negro reps, we were reminded that felloew worked for the International President. They were on his payroll, and assigned to him. So no other officer had the right to take these men and assign them to anything.

H. Was that different from the status of the white reps?

T. This is the same precedure.

H. Whom do the white reps work for?

T. The same way. I work for Walter Reuther. Emil Mazey cannot assign me to anything. He has to go to Reuther, and ask to borrow me.

H. Who are the white reps working for?

T. The white reps are working for the board member, the officer who hired them.

H. Were there also any white reps who worked for R.J. Thomas?

T. Yes, there were.

H. Did they sit in the Paradise Lounge? Where did the ones who worked for R.J. Thomas sit?

T. 411 West Milwaukee with the usual amenities, secretarial help, and so on.

H. It would seem to me that R.J. - his hands were not very clean on this question.

T. Well, actually, there was no more room in his section of the building for them, but you see we're missing the main point. The main point is that if R.J. had not hired these men, they wouldn't have been on the staff at all.

H. But they were on the staff in not quite an equal position. Every one is equal, but some folks are more equal.

T. I would like to say this. When the question was raised, George Addes was the first to hire a Negro. He hired a Negro by the name of Washington, and made an auditor out of him. Frankenstein hired William Lattimore, and placed him in his Washington office. Frankenstein was then also the director of the political action arm of the U.A.W., and maintained a Washington office. Then Addes discussed the problem with his supporters who were members of the International Executive Board. Joe Matson was the director in Chicago, and Joe Matson made arrangements with Addes and Thomas to take John Conyers, and someone else, it might have been Arto Johnson, into Chicago, and gave them an assignment. In the New York area, I don't recall the regional director, that someone was taken into the Philadelphia area, and Buchanan was given as assignment in the Flint area. This was the result of focusing attention on the fact that the Negro representatives had no assignments.

H. Do you recall the address of the Paradise Lounge?

T. It was on Adams Avenue, between St. Antoine and Hastings, in the heart of the night life of the area, in Paradise Valley.

H. Now we are coming to the period of the 1945 convention.

T. While preparing for the 1945 convention, the 1945 convention was not allowed to be held because of wartime travel restrictions. There was no 1945 convention. So next was the 1946 convention in Atlantic City.

H. This was the historic convention when the factional fight of the right and of the left came to a head? Would you please describe the pre-convention activities of the Minorities Committee and of the Metropolitan Labor Council and of the various Negro groups? What did they anticipate for the convention? What issues were they going to pursue? What were their fundamental demands? What role did the majority of the Negro delegates play in the fight between Reuther and the Addes faction?

T. In 1945 I was defeated as Recording Secretary of Local 600. I was defeated

by Wise Stone, a white man. For the first time the major group in Local 600 ran a lily-white slate, and I was defeated.

H. To what faction was the lily-white slate committed?

T. This faction was headed by Joe McCusker. And Joe McCusker was always a Reuther supporter. And I suppose this was the only strategy which could have been used to defeat the so-called left-wing of Local 600. We were completely wiped out, and unfortunately, the race question was used.

H. How was it used?

T. It was used by the McCusker slate, and, unfortunately, they got the assistance of the mayor of Dearborn, by the way. Hubbard was very active in the campaign against us.

H. Was Orville Hubbard as much of a racist, as he has acquired public reknown for being?

T. He wasn't as much of a racist then. He didn't make the public expressions he does now - well, at least, this was the first time he ever made any such expression. The role he played, was that of holding meetings, citizens of Dearborn who worked at Ford's. And he held a series of meetings in four or five of the high school auditoriums.

H. And this was Hubbard. And Hubbard and McCusker worked very closely together?

T. No, no they didn't. Through some agent, I suppose, of Joe's, but Joe never attended any of these meetings. But Hubbard lent obvious, outright support. People who were sympathetic to the slate I represented, attended these meetings, people who lived in Dearborn, for example John Gallo who is even now president of the Dearborn Engine Plant at 600, attended these meetings, and would report to us on some of the things that were said. Well, there was a letter that the Board of 600 had written to the City Council of Dearborn, requesting that they assist the local union in helping

to provide quarters for war workers. We had a tremendous housing problem, and the government had programmed funds which could be used in providing temporary quarters, but the city in which these quarters were built had to take action, agreeing that the government could build certain temporary war housing in certain locations. So the housing committee of Local 600 had made a survey of Dearborn, and had found certain sections of Dearborn where housing could be located. So, as Secretary of the local, I was asked to send a formal request to the City Council asking them to take this kind of action. So this letter was used, and Hubbard assumed we were talking about democratically built housing that would accept war workers on a first-come basis.

H. Was it true, then, as it is now, that the city of Dearborn refused to let Negroes live within the confines of Dearborn, Michigan?

T. That's true.

H. So no Negroes lived in Dearborn, and the city government, headed by Orville Hubbard, was known for its overtly expressed racist views. You are suggesting that Mr. Hubbard, acting on behalf of the McCusker slate, intervened in the election, held a series of meetings which had as their obvious purpose a vote for McCusker, and against the established leadership of Local 600.

T. I'll say that McCusker was the beneficiary of the activities against the Grant-Tappes regime of Local 600.

H. Now, would you describe in as much detail as you can the use of the race question by McCusker and his supporters in that fight?

T. Well, for the first time, as a candidate for office in 600, I was opposed by only one person. In previous elections I had always had three or more opponents. But this time, even though I knew there were six or seven nominated, by the time for the ballots to be printed, everyone had declined except for

one person, and I think this was obviously designed so that the race question could be used for...

H. And the McCusker was an all white slate?

T. Yes.

H. This was unusual; given the history of Local 600, wasn't this very unusual?

T. There had never been such a slate on a local union level before.

H. What was the outcome of the election?

T. The outcome was that McCusker and his entire slate was elected.

H. They were pledged to the Reuther caucus?

T. I'm wrong there, because Tommy Thompson was on our slate as vice-president, and he was elected. Everybody else on the McCusker slate was elected, from the presidency right on down through trustee.

H. Was Thompson a Negro?

T. No.

H. So you had all white leadership for the first time in 600?

T. Yes.

H. What happened to the leadership of the foundry, the production foundry? Were they just swamped?

T. No, I was only speaking of the local level slate. But in those days the unit elections were held after the local election was completed. But the foundry administration was retained.

H. But there were no foundry representatives on the local union board?

T. No, there weren't.

H. McCusker's election in 1945 could perhaps be regarded as anticipation of developments in the 1946 convention.

T. Elections in those days were annual. Now, the local union elects its officers every two years. In those days, it was every year. And conventions were held every year until 1945, when we were unable to hold a convention because the government wouldn't permit us. So that though McCusker succeeded

in getting himself elected, along with a totally white regime, in the local union, he still had to face the people in the following year, 1946.

H. That was before the convention?

T. The election was before the convention, and McCusker was defeated.

H. He was defeated?

T. Defeated before the convention. The one survivor of our slate, Tommy Thompson, was elected president of the local union, and with him we succeeded in electing William Johnson as Recording Secretary. This was a young fellow, William H. Johnson, who became Recording Secretary of the local union. As I said, the foundry was not affected by the all-white slate, except that they no longer had representation in the local. But by this time we had more than one Negro on the Executive Board, for on a unit basis, in the jobbing foundry, the President was Hal Johnson, better known as "Old Man Johnson".

H. Why was he called "Old Man Johnson"?

T. Well, he named himself, really. Of course, at this time he wasn't known as Old Man Johnson. He was just Harold Johnson, president of the jobbing foundry. That name Harold conferred upon himself later when he was in a contest for president of the production foundry. I think the jobbing foundry had been eliminated as a unit, and it had become part of the production foundry. But Harold was running for the presidency of the production foundry. When he announced his candidacy, some of the fellows jokingly referred to him as an old man, and they said, "What do we want with this old man as president of the foundry?" So he took on this name and used it in all of his campaign literature.

H. Was there much bitterness after McCusker's sweep in 1945? among Negroes?

T. Yes, there was a considerable amount of bitterness.

H. Generally, McCusker was regarded then as now, as a conservative on race and other social issues?

T. Yes - well, not so much now. Actually, Joe had two Negroes on his staff.



There is no other regional director who has two.

H. Perhaps he's making up for the past?

T. Perhaps he is making up. The unfortunate thing about the Joe McCusker administration was that even in the appointment of staff members, and I think at that time there were eight, that the president had a right to appoint, to help him run his administration, Joe followed the same theme; everyone he appointed was white, and he displaced James Oden who was director of the Compensation Department, he replaced him with a white; and Sam Lewis who was co-director of our Housing Department, he replaced with a white, Ray Beloff, I believe. So this is what put the bad taste in the mouths of the Negro leadership in the local, and they were determined that Joe would be a one-term president.

H. What happened at the 1946 convention?

T. Well, at the 1946 convention, the remnants of the Negro Caucus - I say "remnants" advisedly, for my office had been used as a focal point for disseminating information and holding the thing together - when I was no longer in a position where I could do that, there had been some diminishing of intensity.

H. Did you go back to the shop?

T. I was elected a delegate; yes, I did go back into the shop. I had been offered a job by Richard Frankenstein, but I thought I could be of more service to the cause by going back into the shop and rebuilding. The fact that I didn't become Recording Secretary in 1946 is another story which I'll have to tell you some time. This is when I had my problems with the Communist party, but in 1946 we did revive the Negro Caucus at the convention, just before the convention. The Chicago group came with more strength on this occasion, Hilliard Ellis in Local 453, had a strong Negro delegation; they came in from Chicago very vigorously demanding representation. The Detroit area people were very easily got together, and



and we were hearing from places like Saginaw, Grand Rapids, Bay City, and other points in Michigan. We were hearing from Memphis, Tennessee, and Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia, Dallas, Texas, Los Angeles - there were new names, and new faces appearing on the scene, and there was vigorous participation.

H. New Negro faces?

T. New Negro faces, and vigorous participation by these new Negro leaders.

H. Had Bill Abner appeared then?

T. Bill Abner had appeared by then. But he represented a Reuther point of view, and he didn't work with the Negro caucus.

H. Bill Abner who was from Chicago was in the Reuther caucus?

T. That's right. The major move the Negro caucus made was to raise money, and they decided to run somebody for vice-president, and I was the person selected to do that.

H. The Negro caucus plan was for a Negro run - seriously run, not decline, as at past convention - for Shelton Tappes to run. This time Shelton Tappes was put up by the Negro caucus to run for the vice-presidency.

H. This became the major demand?

T. Right.

H. Now, will you tell us about the pre-convention preparation, and what happened at the convention?

T. Well, the pre-convention preparations were organizing a campaign, having literature printed, raising whatever funds were necessary. Also, we secured time on one of the radio programs in Atlantic City. Now, I was on the Constitution Committee of the Convention, therefore was very busy preparing the provision for the establishment of a Fair Practices Department, so the preparation was more or less left to a few volunteers. Hilliard Ellis, and a few others who really took over the Jummy Higgins work of the campaign. So there were really two struggles going on - to get a Fair Practices Department

established, and to run me for the Vice-Presidency of the International Union.

H. Now the other demand, besides your running for the Vice-Presidency, was the establishment by convention Constitutional action of a Fair Practices Department as distinct from a Fair Practices Committee?

T. Right.

H. Why do you think a Fair Practices Department authorized by the Convention would have been more powerful?

T. Well, as long as it was a Committee established by the International Executive Board, it could be obliterated at the whim of the International Executive Board.

H. And it had limited power.

T. And it had limited power. By having a constitutionally created Department, it would have the complete backing of the International Union, and be responsible to the membership as a whole, independent of the officers. So the provision for the Department was to give it that standing, that independence - and by that I mean, giving it certain stipulated funds with which to operate. So this, we thought, was very important.

H. This proposal originally came from the Negro caucus?

T. Yes, it came from the Negro Caucus, and the provisions were drawn up by George Crockett and myself.

H. What happened to these two points?

T. Well, the point concerning the Fair Practices Department did reach the floor of the convention, and the only objections were to some of the mechanics, and the matter was referred back to the Committee, once or twice, and was brought back on the floor of the Convention. Demands of the delegates were that stipulations be included that the head of the Department must be a member of the Union. I'm sure this was a smack at George Crockett but since it was a general consensus demand, the Committee had no choice.

But the matter was passed.

H. Was it supported by both factions? By the Reuther faction and the other?

T. Yes, it was - for the Chairman of the Convention was a member of the Reuther faction, Ben Garrison. I took advantage of the situation, when I saw that the Committee went along with the proposal; then I prepared a minority report to stipulate that this person should be a member of the International Executive Board, and we had a pretty good time over that, even though I was defeated. In fact, there was only one member of the Committee who went along with me on that.

H. Who was that?

T. John Orr, from 600. So after the minority provision was defeated, we joined the majority, and assured the delegates we-

H. So at the 1946 convention, by constitutional revision the Fair Practices Department was established. And I assume it was also voted upon that one penny of dues would be allocated to the Department. That was done at the same time. Any other amendments relating to this point?

T. There haven't been any changes - I don't believe there ever have been any changes in this provision.

H. All right. What happened then to your candidacy, and to the demands of the Negro Caucus and the demand that a Negro be elected to the vice-presidency?

T. This did create a problem in the Addes Caucus, which by then was the Addes-Leonard Caucus, the Addes-Leonard-Thomas Caucus.

H. Now Leonard had switched over from the Reuther Caucus?

T. Right. All of this happened in the interim from 1944 to 1946. Now this did create a problem, because the Addes-Leonard Caucus realized this created a defection on the part of the Negroes on this one point. The Negro Caucus continued to support Thomas for president, and Addes for Secretary-Treasurer, and really didn't oppose Leonard for vice-president. But Frankenstein at

this time had decided to not run to succeed himself. I don't recall who the Addes group had selected to run in Frankenstein's place, if anybody, at this time. But as events turned out, Thomas was defeated. Each office was voted on individually. So, once Thomas was defeated, he became a candidate for vice-president, and, incidentally, was elected that year as vice president. But as you, my decision to run that year was based on the decision of the Negro Caucus, first; and secondly, for the purpose of focusing the attention of the Convention on this problem they had been neglecting so severely for a period of years, and anyway, we presumed there were approximately 4 to 400 votes I would get out of the convention of 5000 or 6000 votes, but we surpassed that figure. We got in excess of five hundred votes.

H. You received 500 votes for the vice presidency?

T. Yes, I believe it was 581 or something like that.

H. Where did your major support come from?

T. Well, I guess I got more out of my local union than anywhere else. The major support came out of the Ford locals.

H. Did you get general support from the Addes faction?

T. No.

H. The Addes faction did not support you?

T. They supported their own slate.

H. I see. You did not run on the Addes slate for the Vice-Presidency?

T. No. I ran as an independent.

H. You ran as an independent. Not only did you receive no support, but you were opposed by the Addes faction.

T. That's right.

H. You, of course, received no support from the Reuther faction either?

T. None at all.

H. But the Addes faction did not support you. Now, this is an important point

which has been obscured by many commentators. Actually, you ran against the wishes of the Addes Caucus.

T. That's right.

H. You ran against their advice and counsel. The Negroes took an independent course. You were defeated. Did you pick up any white votes?

T. Yes, I got quite a number of white votes. There were Negroes who voted for me, there were Negroes who voted against me - who adhered to the Caucus line in the left wing, as well as in the right wing.

H. You mentioned a little while ago you had some trouble with the Communist Party. Was it about this time?

T. No. Actually, that was before 1946. As I told you, I was defeated for Recording Secretary in 1945. But rather than take a job as an International Representative, as I had been offered by Richard Frankenstein, and George Addes, I chose to go back into the plant. While I was on vacation, and still making up my mind what I would do, the fellows in the foundry ran me for Foundry Bargaining Committee, elected me while I was out of the city. I didn't even know I was being run, so when I came back to the city, I found I was an officer in the Foundry. So this did give me some opportunity to maintain contact with people who had composed the Minority Committee. We did continue to meet, but we weren't able to meet in the same office we had when I was an officer in Local 600. I didn't have the facilities of the Local available to me, and the freedom to go wherever I chose, during the day to handle some of the problems of the Committee. But, in the meantime, we in the Local left-wing caucus, were preparing ourselves for the following year - of course, we maintained a year-round caucus at 600.

H. You're talking about what year now?

T. This was 1945 leading into 1946. So, we were meeting people from the various units in Local 600, who composed the Left-Wing Caucus. We were

meeting constantly, making arrangements for the 1946 campaign in the Local. Late in the fall of 1945, during one of our meetings, we set up what we called our Program Committee and our Nominating Committee. These two committees are charged with the responsibility of drawing up a program representing the point of views and the platform on which the officers would run. This was the job of the Program Committee, drawing up a platform which was then brought back to the Caucus for revision or acceptance, or adoption. In the meantime, the Nominating Committee was charged with the responsibility of bringing in a slate of officers for this group. The Nominating Committee brought in a slate of officers some time in November. Previous to this, I got a call one day at home from a member of the Local Union, who said there were a group of people who wanted to meet with me - people from the Local, the various units, who wanted to meet with me. And upon my asking on what subject, he said it had something to do with the coming Local election. The person who told me this was a person by the name of Byron Edwards, who was at that time a member of the Glass Plant, the Glass Plant unit of the local union. And he gave me an address on Michigan Avenue, so I went. When I got there, there was a meeting going on.

H. Was it in a private home?

T. No, this was a hall, just a meeting hall. So when I got there at the appointed time, I still had to wait - for about an hour, because there was a meeting going on, and they weren't quite ready for me. So, after they did let me in, as I looked around the hall, I realized that most of the people I saw there were people I usually identified with the Communist Party, or I knew to be members of the Party.

H. How many people were there?

T. Oh, about forty, in the room, Negro and white - mostly white. The

H. Selected by Reuther?

T. Yes, although Oliver was not the outright supporter of Reuther that Horace Sheffield, or James Watts, or some of the others were.

H. Why do you think Sheffield and Watts did not get it?

T. I guess Reuther had his own personal reasons for not selecting them.

H. I see.

T. It might have been the fact that they were not stable, or some other reason.

H. We now conclude the second installment of the interview with Shelton Tappes at the conclusion of the U.A.W. convention. In the next installment we will take up the next eleven years with Mr. Tappes.



administrative posts. Whoever was assigned a department had the right to pick the director, and the staff, which went along with that department. So there was the horse-trading for the various departments, and Fair Practices was just one of those departments - but it was an unknown quantity at that time. I don't think either side was too interested in having it. But I did learn that after the various departments, the Public Relations Department, the Education Department, the Recreation Department, all these various departments, had been assigned to one group or the other, there was left what was known as the Competitive Shops Department, which is now known as the Organizing Department, and the Fair Practices Department. Reuther wanted Competitive Shops, Addes wanted Competitive Shops. Now this was one of the reasons this department was left to the last. This department carried the largest staff, at that time it was about 60 or 70. And he who had the largest staff had the better chance of corraling delegates, getting in to local unions, influencing these locals, and all this sort of thing. So this was why it was so attractive a thing. The Addes forces had the majority of the Board, at that time.

H. The majority of the Board, and, also, R.J. Thomas was vice-president.

T. R.J. Thomas was vice-president.

H. Actually Reuther was elected president, but he didn't have effective control of the leadership?

H. When did he get real control?

T. The following year.

H. So it was in 1947 that Reuther gained full control?

T. It was in 1947 they swept out all the departments of left-wing officers. So, anyway, the Addes forces took advantage of their majority, and took the Competitive Shops, and gave Reuther the Fair Practices Department.

H. Was Oliver the first director - I know the formula, the co-chairman?

T. Yes. He was selected.

Committee any longer, we call a plant-wide caucus and let a Caucus decide. They agreed to do this, so one was held at Northern High School in which there were about 800 people present. I wasn't there - I didn't go. So various names were put up for various positions, and on the position of Recording Secretary, Bill Johnson was nominated, and I was nominated. Bill Grant stood in for me, and they have always told me that the reason I wasn't elected was because I didn't show up. The result of the contest for Recording Secretary was 360 for me and 360 for Bill Johnson.

H. One final point before we conclude, Mr. Tappes. Was there a debate at the 1946 convention on the issue of Negro participation on the Board?

T. I don't recall there being any debate on that question specifically. The debate which did take place, would be that which surrounded the establishment of a Fair Practices Committee. As I said, I did take advantage of the situation, to bring in a minority report, and get the question on the floor.

H. What convention was it where Walter Reuther made his famous speech on the question of Negro representation on the Board?

T. I believe that was in the 1943 convention. Now there might have been some later action. Later action is rather indistinct to me from 1947 to about 1950. I had lost the leadership, because Reuther had the presidency, and the Committees were always selected by his people. I didn't figure in it.

H. One other point. With the adoption of the constitutional revision to establish the Fair Practices Department at the 1946 convention, and the election of Reuther to the presidency, George Crockett was required to step down. Was Bill Oliver appointed immediately as head of the department?

T. No, he wasn't appointed immediately, because immediately the Reuther forces and the Addes forces were dividing up the pie, so to speak. - the

seem that I was here. He said, "Before you answer, I would like you to hear from some of your fellow workers." And various ones of the ones there got up and spoke, and very vigorously mentioned, or said to me they didn't see why I had resisted all these years. They had worked with me closely, they liked me, and the way I had conducted myself in this area, and they approved generally the things I had done, and they mentioned some of the things they didn't approve of, but they still thought I had no right to refuse to join them. Well, then my chance came to talk. They allowed me to talk. So I told them that the simple reason I had never joined the Party, the Communist Party, was because I didn't want to. I didn't see why I had to give any explanations, that I was a member of the U.A.W., and this was all I wanted - to be of service to the U.A.W. Well, there were a few more words said, and the summary of it was that they were not satisfied with my answer, and they hoped I would change my attitude before it was time to select a slate. Well, of course, I never did change my mind - I never did meet with them any more, but I did notice that some of these persons were on the nominating committee of the group that I represented, and in subsequent meetings of the nominating committee there never did seem to be any jelling of the slate selection, and usually they were divided. There was a tremendous amount of resistance to the slates they brought in. The Nominating Committee continued to bring in my name, but there never was a possibility of firming up a decision. So this went on in November, in December, in January - we were approaching time for the election, and the devious means which were being employed to procrastinate on the questions were becoming so apparent that I decided the only way we were going to get a program started, and a slate selected was for me to stay away from the meetings. So I finally proposed instead of fooling around with this

The spokesman of this group was the Detroit spokesman of the Daily Worker.

H. Who was that?

T. That was Billy Allen. I wasn't particularly perturbed, because I knew these fellows. I had worked with them in various projects and campaigns of the local. Some of them were office-holders, most of them weren't, but they were active members of the Local, and most of them were members of the Caucus I represented, anyway. So Allen showed me to a seat. There was a big round table in front of the seat where I sat. And the other fellows, from where I was seated, were sort of in front of me in a fan-shaped arrangement. So, Allen told me the reason I had been called was because the fellows were concerned that was going to be a candidate for my old position as Secretary of the Local Union. They understood this was my ambition, and they had no quarrel with that. They agreed that I had been a good secretary, a good officer, and represented the people in the plant very adequately. They had no quarrel with the way I had conducted myself in the office. However, what they were disturbed about, in his own words was, "Several people in this room have been assigned to work with you on occasions, and have asked you to join the Communist Party, and you have never responded by doing so, and they want to know why. Secondly, they have determined among themselves that from now on, anybody they support for office in 600, would have to give them some very good reasons why he does not accept the Communist party." I could hardly believe what I was hearing. He also said, "We're not just singling you out, because we either have or will confront many other persons - W.G. Grant, Percy Llewelyn, Virgil Lacey -" he named other people who were leaders in the local union, and who possibly would be considered for candidacy for one or more of the offices on Local 600. I could hardly believe this - it just didn't