

# Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW  
(INTERVIEW #2)

SHELTON TAPPES

HERBERT HILL, INTERVIEWER  
FEBRUARY 10, 1968



Wayne State University  
Detroit, Michigan



H: Herbert Hill, Interviewer

McB: Roberta McBride, Interviewer

T: Shelton Tappes, Interviewee

Date: February 10, 1968

Place: Detroit, Michigan

H. The interviewer is Herbert Hill. In the last taped interview, Mr. Tappes, we dealt with the 1946 and 1947 conventions. The 1947 convention was the convention when Walter Reuther was finally elected president with control of the Executive Board. Of course, he was elected president the preceding year. But now the Reuther faction has control of the Board. Perhaps you want to backtrack a little bit to go back to the 1946 period, if you like. One of the first questions I would put to you is, "What were the implications for the Negro caucus of the Reuther victory?", or to put it in another way, "What were the implications for the Negro Caucus of the defeat of the Addes-Thomas faction? What happened to the leading Negro figures as a result of this? What happened to Crockett at this period? What happened to yourself? What happened to Oscar Noble? Did some of the Negro workers go back into the shop? Did they lose staff positions? Were Negro staff men knocked off?" In general, I would like you to begin by picking up the thread of our previous interview concerning the 1946 and 1947 conventions, and what the change in the national leadership of the UAW meant for the Negro caucus within the union, for the Negro staff men, and for Negro workers in the industry generally.

T. It is going to be difficult to place different happenings in the proper year; so the answer to the question will deal more or less with what happened, without my being able specifically to say when they happened.

H. Well, as best you can.

T. For example, Walter Hardin was still the senior staff member in 1946, and the dean of the staff to many people. Oscar Noble was on the staff in 1946, John Conyers, Senior, William Bowman, John Buchanan from Flint, Arto Johnson who was from Local 600, who was in the Glass Plant. These people whom I have mentioned were people who left the staff after the Reuther victory.

H. Now, excuse me. Were they fired, or did they leave voluntarily?

T. They were discharged.

H. They were discharged by Reuther?

T. Discharged by Reuther. Right. Others were scattered. For example, Leon Bates was sent to Indiana, and became permanently established there. In fact, he lives in Indiana, today. He retired from the staff of Region III, which is based in Indianapolis, Indiana. Others who remained on the staff were Lillian Hatcher and William Lattimore, for a while.

H. Lillian Hatcher, had she been in the Addes caucus?

T. She was placed on the staff through the efforts of the Addes group, but subsequently became a follower of the Reuther forces. One of the reasons, I assume, was that the Women's Bureau was placed in the War Policy Division, which was headed by Roy Reuther. But Lillian did remain on the staff.

H. By the way, all those Negro staff members you mentioned - am I to understand they all were in the Addes faction? Walter Hardin, Oscar Noble, all the others you mentioned? Was Leon Bates in?

T. I couldn't say for sure that Bates was. The fact that he remained on the



staff shows that he wasn't firmly a follower of Thomas, or Addes.

H. But Noble was?

T. Noble was. And Hardin was, of course, on Thomas' personal payroll. And Arto Johnson was on Franeknsteen's staff. So was John Conyers. And the others were either on Thomas' or Frankenstein's staff.

H. These people were discharged, you say?

T. All of the ones we've just mentioned. Yes. Some of them returned to the staff in later years.

H. Excuse me - just for the purposes of continuity - When they were discharged, did they go back to the shop?

T. Not all of them. Johnson Buchanan was unable to resume work as an auto-worker, and became privately employed. Walter Hardin had no base, because at the time Walter Hardin came on the staff there wasn't the seniority protection through contractual provision that we have today. So, when he was discharged from the UAW he had no job. Arto Johnson disappeared - evidently he had no desire to return to the Ford Motor Company. He did at times act as a minister, or preacher. William Bowman did go into the shop. But he did not go to his original place of employment, which was General Motors, Saginaw. He got a job at the Budd plant in Detroit and became active in Local 306. Whom else did I mention? Lattimore - Noble? Noble returned to his job in Pontiac. He was elected to the shop committee - the same job he left when he took a job on the staff. Bowman? Bowman is the one I said went to Budd. Lattimore wasn't fired immediately. He was transferred into the Recreation Department, and received assignments which were very menial in type. For example, he was sent to the FDR Training

School in Port Huron, and was placed on maintenance. He did work like painting and clean-up and work like this. He accepted at first, thinking he was being asked to help others get the place in shape, but after it continued for a while, he then saw that it was a very distasteful assignment for an international representative to have. I think he made a special trip to confront Walter Reuther about, with the result that he left the staff under circumstances which I am not exactly clear on.

H. What happened to you?

T. I went back into the shop - into the foundry at 600 as a member of the Bargaining Committee, and subsequently was appointed director of the Compensation and Housing Department. I held those positions until 1948, at which time it was Tommy Thompson, I believe, who in running for president, felt there was need for more support for his administration - his administration team, in the election that year. He asked me to run in the foundry, thinking my following and influence would be of assistance to him in bolstering up his support in the foundry. So I did run for president. My opponent, by the way, was Horace Sheffield, and I defeated him. I believe the plurality - the excess vote - what I mean by that is we take the vote and subtract that from the majority, and the excess in this case was more than 4,000. This is the excess which was delivered to Tommy Thompson.

H. Let's just go back for a minute to the point of your reelection.

T. In this race for presidency of the Foundry my opponent was Horace Sheffield. He was on the staff at the time he ran - on Walter's staff. His purpose in running was to assist the political group that was running for office in the local union, thinking that his influence as a foundry

worker, as a leader in the foundry would be of some assistance. If he had been elected, he would have left the staff with clear understanding that in the future, if and when he was defeated, he could return. This is not an unusual thing, even today, in the UAW.

H. So that what really happened was that after the consolidation of power in the UAW after the convention, the Negro leadership forces were in a state of disarray. They were knocked off the staff, into the shops, and some left the industry entirely. What were the consequences of this for the Negro Caucus, which, for over a decade had been developing a Negro leadership group? What happened to this group?

T. The consequences were the loss of a tremendous amount of influence for the Negro worker in the UAW. And what I mean by that is that as long as the Thomas-Addes faction was a strong factor in the UAW - and at that time they represented a good 50% of the UAW - neither group had a majority, so each group would vie for a group which would lend them assistance toward assuming the majority position. In this particular case Reuther had ascended to the majority position without the assistance of the Negro - the Negro generally, or the Negro leadership.

H. Now I want to have as accurate a formulation as I can, Mr. Tappes. You say "without the support." Would not a more accurate formulation be, "with the opposition of"? Were not the Negroes actively supporting his opposition? Would it not be more accurate to say that Mr. Reuther took leadership over the opposition of the organized Negroes?

T. Yes. So there was a decrease, a tremendous decrease in the influence of the Negro leadership - of influence in the UAW. Consequently, many of

the well-known Negroes - I'm speaking of Negroes who were well-known throughout the UAW - by virtue of the role they played, not only in their local, but in the conventions. This was where leadership stood out in those days more so than now. Their participation in convention issues. Hodges Mason was an outstanding leader because, as president of his local, he had no difficulty in being elected a delegate. Consequently, upon reaching the convention, and having this leadership quality, he would participate in the debate upon the various principal issues in the convention. And this was repeated by Negro leadership from other sections of the country, but most of it coming from the Detroit area. I, for one, had my choice of committees, and I made my selection, based on the issues. If it was an issue which was the property of the Resolutions Committee, or a number of issues of paramount importance which were the property of the Resolutions Committee, then I would choose to be on that Committee. And if, in another year - and our conventions were annual at that time - and if in another year the principal issues were the property of the Constitution Committee, then I would select that Committee to be on. And having the in with the forces which had the strength, which in this case would be the Thomas-Addes - actually, not until Thomas' position was in danger did he join Addes - before then it was Addes-Frankensteen. Either one of them, upon learning of my choice, would assign me to that Committee. The method was for the prevailing choice to get the majority on the Committees. And usually the so-called left wing had sufficient votes on the Board to name the majority on most committees.

H. Would you say that this role, this influence, this power was significantly diminished, so that this was no longer true?

T. It is almost non-existent now, in 1968, and actually this reflects what has been since 1947.

H. Why, beginning with 1947, was the leadership role of Negroes diminished, not only in the convention, although you suggest that was the most demonstrable form of this, but I assume you mean generally in the life of the union; why did this come about, and what about the Negro leadership in the union? Were there other Negro leadership groups which emerged to supplant the one which was shattered by the emergence of the Reuther leadership in 1947? I would like you to explain this - this is a very important point, because what you're really saying is that in 1947 when the Reuther leadership consolidated their control of the union, this marked the diminishing of Negro leadership, and of Negro power within the union. This is a very important point.

T. I mean it that way. The prevailing forces leading up to the year 1947 were the so-called Thomas-Addes group, or the group which eventually became known as the Thomas-Addes group. This group was made up of all types of opinion and thought: there were just plain liberals there was the tolerant type of person, there were the Communists, and the general elements we apply this term "liberal" to. These were dissident groups, where, on the other hand, you have the conservatives, the status quo people, the Catholic Trade Unionists, the Socialist groups, the SWP - the Socialist Workers Party. These people seemed to have some reason for banding together, and representing anti-Communists - they were mainly anti-Communists.

H. You're suggesting that in the Reuther caucus you had a conservative group - you told us before about the Southern elements - which joined together with the anti-Communist groups, like the Socialist Workers Party,

who might be opposed to Reuther on a number of social issues, but whose opposition to Communism placed them in the Reuther caucus. So you're saying that on both sides there was a loose combination of forces. On the left, the Addes-Thomas-Frankenstein group characterized by dissidents, discontented with the status quo, the acceptance of coalition with the Communists and others, but on the other side, the coalition of the Reuther forces with conservatives and anti-Communists. And obviously, in this context, the Negro leadership felt that operating within the Addes-Thomas caucus was more congenial and more subject to Negro demand and action on Negro issues?

T. Right. And therefore the Negro was able to ascend to heights of influence.

H. I would like you to clarify a point before we go on. Many writers have assumed that the Addes-Thomas group was a homogeneous group under the control of the Communist Party. The assumption is that R.J. was a kind of amiable fool who was used as a front man by the Communists, but that Addes and Frankenstein and some of the others really were in control - that the Communist Party really was in control of that caucus, that faction, and that R.J. was just the front man - bumbling, a nice guy who drank a lot of whiskey, but that essentially there was a homogeneous control of the faction by the Communist Party. What is your opinion of that?

T. My opinion is that they were wrong. The well-known Communists in the UAW were generally in support of George Addes and the group he was associated with. R.J. Thomas was an outspoken anti-Communist, and the only reason that Thomas joined Addes was because he had to go somewhere and Reuther was opposing him. But up until the time that Reuther announced himself as a candidate for president, R.J. Thomas voted with Reuther on the Executive Board, 75% of the time. Thomas was a compromise candidate for



president, originally, in 1939 or 1940. At that time, Addes was the most popular man in the UAW at that convention. The United Mine Workers were the influential force. They put up the money for the delegates' travel expenses even. They were paying the hotel bills, and they were financing the whole show. They were interested, of course, in knocking down this last bastion of open shop, and they knew that the only way in which to make further progress in the automobile industry was to do this. If they didn't accomplish this, all they could look forward to was a gradual deterioration of what had already been built. So in the interests of the future of the automobile worker's union, the Mineworkers Union through the leadership of Van Bittner, whom Lewis had sent into that convention, and who surrounded Addes, and who convinced him that to take the presidency at that time would be against the best interests of the autoworkers; he agreed to do so - he stepped aside, and by the same token he insisted that it not be Reuther, that it not be Frankenstein, because Frankenstein, at that time, was associated with Walter. So this was generally agreed to. This was all worked out without consulting Reuther. After it was worked out, in looking around for a candidate, R.J. Thomas was selected for two reasons. Number 1, we had more members out of the Chrysler setup - and this did not include Dodge - than any other; and secondly, he was from Detroit. You see, at that time, Thomas originally was president of a Chrysler NRA local union, and when it came into the autoworkers, it came in as a group, intact, retaining Thomas as president. You will find, at this time, local unions with small numbers, in this case, Local 7, supplied the leadership. Local 3, Dodge, was Frankenstein, so this is what happened.

H. I would like you to go back to that issue which I regard as one of the most fundamental parts of our discussion. Why was there such a severe diminishing of the Negro power in the UAW, beginning with the consolidation

of the Reuther leadership, especially since you suggest that twenty years later this pattern has continued? What you seem to suggest, and please correct me, Mr. Tappes, is that now in 1968 we have not regained some of the influence the Negro had in 1947. I would like you to place this in some historical perspective, or to begin with 1947, and the disarray - the going back into the shops, the leaving of posts, and you say there was a loss of prestige, a loss of power, Then what happened?

T. I believe that the very fact that so many pioneer Negro unionists had been on the staff, but had to leave the staff, had a lot to do with discouraging Negro membership in those same unions from participating as they would have. Secondly, it became a left and right issue even with Negroes, vying within local unions, and principally, for staff positions. It got to the place where it was a sort of spoils system - the day when a person was offered a staff job and would evaluate whether he would be more valuable in his local union or on the staff before making a decision seemed to be passing away. For example, I told you that I went back into the plant after I was defeated for Secretary of Local 600. I didn't go back into the plant because I wasn't offered a staff job. I was offered staff jobs by Thomas and Frankenstein, but I felt that by going back into the shop I would be able to rebuild, and somehow, with the contacts and connections I had in other units in Local 600, we would be able to recover our losses. Nowadays that very seldom happens. Not only do they take jobs on the staff immediately they're offered, but they seek these jobs.

H. May I clarify this point? You are suggesting that now it became desirable to go back into the shop and develop your own local union base, that more

important than being on the staff was the necessity of developing the base in your own home local, securing your own power base in your local, and you're saying that for a period Negroes chose not to go on the payroll, but to secure their own base in their own locals.

T. I can recall as far back as 1941, 42, and 43 George Addes, Richard Frankenstein, and Paul Miley(?) in Cleveland calling me and asking that we give them the names of Negro members who might take a staff job and help out in organizational campaigns, and political action campaigns, and other assignments - the general assignments that a staff member has. I can recall requests for names of people who might fit in the UAW Radio program and the Education Department, and consulting with as many as 30 or 40 Negroes whom we thought were of the caliber, and had the ability, from as far back as 1943 through 1947. We had quite a time finding one who would leave his base and the work he was involved in - in building the union in his local. They would refuse to leave their locals to take a staff job.

H. They understood the strategic importance of their local union base. Why do you think this changed so drastically? Why the mad scramble to get on the international payroll?

T. I think that a lot of it would have to do with the fact that local union autonomy today doesn't mean what it did in those days. An autonomous local union, then, was pretty autonomous. Today, there have been so many changes, constitutional changes and so forth, which have limited the power of the local union officer - some of it probably by design, some of it probably surrendered.

H. Is this true even for a powerful local like 600 which historically has been an autonomous unit within the UAW?

T. Yes, it's true of 600 too.

H. Quite apart from the race question now - would you relate this to increasing bureaucratization of the union? increasing centralization of control?

T. Well, I would say it is centralization of control, and increasing bureaucracy of a certainty, but there is another factor. It is an attritional thing. The older, more dedicated union man is he who was involved in the formation and building of the union. The latter union man is one who came after the struggles and the fights. He just doesn't have the revolutionary tendencies and feelings which would give him that dedication.

H. Really, it's easier to be on the staff.

T. Much easier. In the shop, if you're chairman of the bargaining committee, you have a lot of problems. The rank and file workers bother you. You can't leave them. If I have a problem which confronts me, when I'm on the staff, and it's real sticky, what will I do? I'll put it in my brief case, and I'll go home. No telephones ringing and I can think it out. Or, if things become too intense, I'll notify the office I'll be back tomorrow. I may go anywhere. I may go to a movie, golf course, anywhere. You can't do that in the shop - you have a time clock to ring out. The workers are on your back, everywhere you go. Sometimes it will take you a half hour to go from the lunchroom to the committee room, because you're stopped at every turn. Of course, this is true not only for the Negro worker.

H. In my opinion - I'm not supposed to be giving you my opinion, but in my opinion, this is just part of the bureaucratization of the UAW.

But I want to go back to an earlier point. You've described what has happened about the diminishing power of the Negroes. You say that now, twenty years later, they have not resecured that power.

T. There's one point that hasn't been made. In 1946 and 1947 the power and influence of Negroes was ascending. The proceedings of the conventions, beginning in 1943, will show 1943, 1944, 1946, the questions of Negro rights, and Negro representation were always on the floor of the convention. Since that time these questions have been watered.

H. Why did Negroes permit this to happen? In many cases the same Negroes were there. You were there, others were there. What happened that you permitted this to happen? It seems to me that the implication of what you are saying that is up until 1947 there was a Negro leadership which was based on the existence and the development of a secure, meaningfully anchored base in the union. There was a Negro caucus. Now what you are saying - correct me if I'm wrong - is that Reuther succeeded in smashing the Negro Caucus - that the Negro Caucus was broken up, that there no longer was a Negro Caucus operating now. When you went into a convention you didn't have the kind of operation going where there were issues to be debated. You didn't have the discussion, you didn't have the group, you didn't have the formal structure that was used to debate Negro interests and then make a presentation at the proper time. It seems to me that what you're saying in essence is that the Reuther leadership broke up the Negro power base inside the union, and has succeeded in keeping it splintered and powerless. Is this a correct conclusion?

T. It's difficult to say, "Yes, you're right," when you are right. But then it appears as though you're putting the blame on Walter's shoulders for everything that has happened. Walter didn't do these things, but the

whole group contributed in various ways. What I mean by that is that Walter's supporters from the South, the regional director from Atlanta, the regional director from St. Louis, and the whole southwest behind him, would be interested principally in the question, "How far are you going to let the Negroes go? What is going to be your position on that?"

H. What ways did this show?

T. Various ways. The job in the South was seeing to it that no changes took place in the attitude they held toward Negro workers. Here is a plant where Negroes have been held to the jobs of maintenance, or sweeping, as it may be, and "you're not going to come in here and change it, Mr. Reuther," or whomever you have assigned, as "Mr. Oliver." "Sure, we agree to the Fair Practices Department being set up, if they will just stay out of Georgia - or out of St. Louis, or stay out of Indiana."

H. Is there any documentation of this point?

T. I doubt it, except there would probably be chances for you to interview people who, of their own knowledge, and who lived in these areas, who know what they heard, and what the general practices were. I have had the unique experience of going to Atlanta with Bill Oliver, and I've gone to other regions with him - all of them, I suppose, in the last five years. And usually, when we go to a region like New York, or Milwaukee, or Chicago, or Los Angeles, if we get in the night before, the following morning, after breakfast we call the regional staff. Of course, they know in advance we're coming, and probably have sent someone to pick us up at the airport, and take us to the hotel. We go to the regional offices, the offices are made available to us, if we need any stenographic help it's there - in New York, in Chicago, California, Baltimore, Milwaukee. We go



to Atlanta - I've been to Atlanta three times with Bill Oliver, but I have no idea where the regional office is. Bill and I do not go to the regional office. I've never been to the regional office in St. Louis. Only recently have I been in the sub-regional office in Dallas, Texas, and that was in my capacity as Secretary of the Council of International Representatives, not as a staff member of the UAW.

H. How about Nashville?

T. I've never been in the office in Nashville.

H. What do you do when you go into Atlanta? You don't meet with the regional director. Do you meet with the staff?

T. You meet with the people who have a complaint by inviting them to your hotel or motel.

H. You mentioned St. Louis. St. Louis, very early, the late 40s or the early 50s - there were many problems regarding separate lines of seniority in that big GM plant in St. Louis, and the NAACP got involved in 1957 and 1958. I went down there - we finally did straighten it out, but that was a long-festering sore. I'm interested in the point you make when you say that in reality the victory of the Reuther Caucus on the race question really meant a victory of the conservatives - those who were dedicated to maintaining the status quo - those who were not prepared to make any kind of overt fight on the race question, who didn't want in their districts to alter the traditional limitations on lines of promotion, job advancement, and that sort of thing. Walter had that kind of a coalition with these people, and this, of course, did limit his mobility, his freedom to act on civil rights issues. What you're really saying is that it was a victory for the conservatives?

T. Yes, I'm saying that. It was a victory for the conservatives.

McB. I understand that when Reuther was elected that Negroes were added to every department. Before that time there were many departments which didn't have Negroes, and that was one of the promises that Reuther made to the Negro Caucus, that Negroes would be added to every department. Was that true, and what about the quality of those Negroes? Were they not willing to take a firm stand?

T. Well, of course there's not a Negro in every department today. I don't recall Walter ever making this promise to the Negro Caucus. The Negro Caucus as we know it, wouldn't have been the one he addressed. So it is possible that he made this kind of statement in a meeting of Negroes that he had called from the areas in which he had support. In 1947, for the first time, Walter was able to show more than 50% of the Negro delegates voting for him, so I would think at that time he might have done so, and made this kind of promise. But he would have made this promise in following through, or even in reminding them that this had been adopted by the Convention as a policy in 1943, but had never been put through. I will say this, that it is to me amazing the short amount of time that was required for Walter to obtain an overwhelming amount of support from the Negro leadership in the UAW.

H. In spite of his past history, and that the Negro Caucus was smashed?

T. Well, one was smashed, and another was created, because he did create his own Negro Caucus.

H. Now, let's pick up on this point of his creating his own caucus.

Crockett leaves the union at this point. It is after '47 and Crockett leaves the union, goes into private law practice. Oliver is appointed by Reuther

Co-director of the Fair Practices Department. What were the consequences for the Negro leadership and for the Negro worker generally of the shift of the Fair Practices operation from Crockett to Oliver, and would you, in retrospect like to make an evaluation of this period of Oliver's leadership?

T. Well, they were two different concepts. Fair Practices under George Crockett represented a Committee of the International Executive Board, and he was the Executive Director. Fair Practices under Bill Oliver represented and still represents a department of the International Union, one of three departments which has constitutionally allocated funds. So, actually, between the two, the Negro worker would select the latter system.

H. Aside from the formal structure - the differences you point out are, of course, quite correct - informally Crockett played an important role in the life of the Negro caucus, did he not?

T. He did. In the first place, he had his newspaper column which kept him constantly in front of the Negro community. It raised the issues and kept them in front of the people. Secondly, Crockett always went to the core of an issue, and addressed himself to the problems of the worker in the shop. So he was considered their leader - I'm speaking of the Negro leadership. They looked to Crockett as their representative among the Negro hierarchy. They followed him. But we must remember that this same Negro leadership who so closely associated themselves with Crockett and his leadership and his accomplishments - a considerable amount of it had become demoralized and had lost position as a result of the change which had taken place in the union administration.

H. What role did Oliver play in relation to this leadership group?

The implication is that now there was no single Negro performing the role that Crockett played. Oliver certainly didn't play this role.

T. Well, I don't think Oliver ever exhibited the kind of personality that would draw people to him. If anything, he may have lost influence among what Negroes he did know, rather than have gained. He has never been able to gain, or to ascend the heights of leadership. I think this is exhibited in the fact that Walter has had four or five opportunities to place Oliver among his administrative assistants. He has never done so, even though Roy Reuther, as head of our Citizenship Department, is Administrative Assistant to Walter. Here he and Oliver are Co-Directors of a department, and this is not even reflected in his salary, much less in recognition.

H. If one wanted to be evil in one's thoughts one could assume that it was desirable for the Reuther leadership to prevent another Negro who had the talent, the ability, the verve, the personality, of a George Crockett, in keeping alive, and keeping solidified, a Negro group, that it was to the interest of the Reuther leadership to prevent this happening, that, in fact, it did not want it to happen, and that part of the reason they chose someone like Oliver was to prevent this happening.

T. I was going to lead my conversation in that direction. You see, one provision in the establishment of the Fair Practices Department required that the Director be a member of the UAW. It was a requirement. Our first report did not include this provision, but the convention itself sent it back to committee, ordering us to include this provision. So this eliminated Crockett, because he had no UAW base. Had Thomas won, been reelected, he would not have been able to appoint Crockett.

H. Crockett told us that he went to work in a garage for a period so that he could get union membership, could belong to a local union. He did this deliberately for the purpose of getting union membership. He knew this was happening, and he did this on week-ends, and at night, he did work as a maintenance worker in a garage, and he did get membership in a UAW garage workers' local.

T. Well, he would have been able to disclose this, had Thomas been reelected. That was very clever. So Thomas would have appointed him then. That was very clever!

H. I would like to get your reaction to the point I just made - that it was to the interest of the Reuther leadership or to the leadership of any union - not to have a powerful Negro symbol which can wield the Negroes into a powerful racial bloc - this potentially represents an undesirable danger for any union leadership - and one could argue that they wanted a weak, inconsequential person like Oliver, so that never again would the Negro leadership be organized into a solid block within the union which potentially could make trouble for the leadership. This is only a hypothesis, and I want to get your reaction to it.

T. Well, I would use as a basis for my judgment the role the Department has played through the years. Theoretically, this department is to service local unions, encourage the building and activating of local unions' Fair Practices Committees, involve them in the Fair Practices program of the UAW, and encourage them in all possible ways to disseminate information and the history of the Negro worker, so that their white brothers can understand them better, and thereby accept them fully. Of course, this is the theory, the purpose of the Department. But, under Oliver, the

Department has, does spend more time involving itself with the Urban League, NAACP, other civil rights groups, running back and forth to conferences -

H. You mean, essentially being a public relations-

T. Yes, playing the role of a public relations agency, and doing very little at local union levels. It's been a good five years since the UAW has initiated any kind of brochure on these questions. We've lately begun to buy from other groups, and we originate very little. Our Fair Practices handbook was published in 1960, and even that was a revision of an earlier one, and beyond that we say little even on national legislation on civil rights, much less -

H. Let me ask you another question - it seems to me that this is really the decisive question, in the context of our discussion. Whatever else the Department may or may not do, the fact of the matter is when in 1958 and 1959 and 1960 the issue again rose of Negro representation in the union - under Willoughby Abner and Horace Sheffield the fight began for Negro representation on the Executive Board - let me put it in the form of a question - what role did the Fair Practices Department play? Did Oliver play any role in the reemergence of a Negro Caucus in the 1950s where the major issue was, as it was at any earlier period, Negro participation in the leadership of the union?

T. I would say that Oliver made a serious effort to clear the minds of everybody that he was not involved, rather than to involve himself.

H. Did he not only make it clear that he was not involved, but did he also take steps to weaken or kill the new movement?



T. Well, he did oppose it. His opposition was purely academic. He continued to insist, since it was not a Reuther caucus decision, or a Reuther caucus effort, and since these two who were involved were members of the caucus, they had no right to bring this matter up on the floor of the convention.

H. By these two, you mean Abner and Sheffield?

T. Abner and Sheffield, and this was the whole basis around which his argument hinged.

H. There are several things which now emerge. In contrast to Mr. Crockett, who was intimately involved in the internal Negro caucus, Mr. Oliver is not in the struggle for a Negro member on the Executive Board. Number two, you have now suggested two functions of the Fair Practices Department, quite separate and apart from its alleged function. One is that it performs a civil rights public relations function between the UAW and the general civil rights community. And now you've raised a point that is even more important. By implication you have told us that the Fair Practices Department and Mr. Oliver really do not represent the Negro rank and file worker to the leadership. You've told us something very important: that his major function is to represent the white leadership to the rank and file - that his major function is to be the communicator of the interests, the wishes, the program, the desires of the white leadership, and to interpret it to the rank and file, and to play a role in subduing the rank and file when they become troublesome in terms of the white leadership.

T. I think this is just an individual role, though.

H. You don't think this is built into the functional operation of the Fair Practices Department?

T. I don't. I think that Oliver is allowed to pursue his own course, and that the others don't have the initiative, the intense interest which

would cause them to straighten his course out. It's the old question, if you're not pinched, why cry? So that the only time that Oliver might be called in, or that the Department would be called in and questioned about a situation would be - (end of tape)

T. For example, when you - I'm speaking of the NAACP Labor Department - go into Atlanta, and find a myriad of problems, and publicly explain the need for relief, and among these myriad of problems we find some UAW involvement, then suddenly the castle says, "Get down there" but as long as these things are peaceful, why stir up something?

H. You seem to be confirming my judgment that the major role of the Fair Practices Department is to represent the interests of the white leadership to the Negro rank and file, and not vice-versa - that the basic function is to be the agent of the leadership among the Negroes.

T. I don't think the leadership expects this role to be played, but since it is -

H. You really don't think it expects this role to be played?

T. No, I don't. I believe that if someone else was the head of the Fair Practices Department, and involved himself, in line with the Constitution in the problem of attacking the problem in other areas than the ones Oliver attacks, and devoted himself to expanding these local union committees, and conference activities, I believe he would get the full support of the International Executive Board. Some individuals wouldn't like it, true, but the Board itself would support him. I have always found there was criticism when the balance sheet shows the Fair Practices Department with \$50,000 or more unspent money. I've always heard criticism, but when the Fair Practices in a given quarter or period is found to be

two or three thousand dollars minus, I hear people say, "You must be busy".

H. Is this normal for the Fair Practices Department not to spend its allotted budget?

T. It is a normal thing. I was quite amazed when I saw the last report which showed the Fair Practices Department somewhat more than \$70,000 in the black.

H. It has not spent the money which is allocated to it?

T. That's right. This was, I believe, as of December 1, 1967.

H. I want to turn your assumption, Mr. Tappes, upside down - I'm just being the devil's advocate. You say that the Board knows this is Mr. Oliver's proclivity, and this is the way he does it. On the other hand, one might ask a question. If it wanted another kind of procedure it could order it - they could indicate ways they wanted things done.

T. I think you misunderstood me. I didn't say I thought the leadership had any earth-shaking ideas -

H. But they are not unhappy; on the contrary -

T. But I'm also saying that if he had a basic constitutional support for another way, they would not oppose him.

H. Well, let me ask you a question. I know that the Constitution says that each local is supposed to have a Fair Practices Committee. How many locals, in your opinion, have functioning Fair Practices Committees?

T. I don't know how many have them, but I do know there 258 which do not have them.

H. How many locals are there in the UAW?

T. Approximately 1300.

H. Would you say that 10% have functioning Committees?

T. Functioning?

H. Functioning - I don't mean that they hold a party once a year. I mean functioning Fair Practices Committees where they deal with the grievances of Negro workers, plan educational programs, hold membership drives for the NAACP -

T. 15 to 20%. No, I'm wrong, because I'm always using Michigan as my measure. Maybe 10 or 12% might be even a generous figure.

H. Well, if any other department of the UAW did not carry out its responsibilities under the Constitution, wouldn't the leadership call them to task?

T. They would probably make a change.

H. The question is then an obvious one. Why do they not do so in this area?

T. Well, -

H. You don't have to answer. We may conclude, therefore, from what we have been saying, that for the last twenty years there has not been a meaningful Negro organization. Is that a correct assumption?

T. Yes.

H. Now, what makes this all the more significant is that this occurs when there is a very significant increase of Negroes in the auto labor force, especially in Detroit. Let's just talk about Detroit for a minute. Now we know the rate of increase of Negro workers. In some of the Detroit

locals Negroes make up more than one half of the local union membership. In big, strategic locals Negroes make up 30, 40, 50 per cent of the membership. As the rate of attrition among whites increases, they are being replaced with Negroes. By and large, whites are not going into the auto industry labor force in large numbers. On the contrary, Negroes are replacing whites. Now, given the increasing Negro concentration in the labor force and in union membership, the fact that Negro influence in the union has decreased raises some very important questions regarding the wishes and the ability to manipulate and the whole bureaucratic toll of intra-union democracy. Would you say a word, first, about the essential context of all this, which is essentially internal union democracy and the bureaucratization of the union?

T. I think that we can safely say that all of this had its beginnings in the post-war period, because the immediate post-war period found most local unions retaining many of the people who went into the shops during the war. And a marked per cent of the membership which went into the armed services never returned - as many as 30% of them never returned to the shops, so this left these jobs manned by Negro workers. The post-war period is a very important period, because these are the same years in which Reuther ascended to the leadership of the union, 1946 and 1947. The UAW, like other unions throughout the country, seems to have defaulted; they have done too little in encouraging Negroes to become leaders in the union. They haven't made any direct approaches or arranged their program to the point of encouragement. The educational program has not reached the Negro worker, and the Negro has not been involved in the activities through the efforts of the union. Moreover, these who have become involved through personal initiative, to a considerable degree.

I think it was a great loss that so many of the important early leadership were lost on an International level; and this may have discouraged a number of the ascending leaders, those we would have looked to, at a future time. They could have been discouraged (new tape) You know, we talked earlier about the Victory Clubs which existed in some of the locals, particularly in the Detroit area, during the war years. These Victory Clubs, of course, had been federated into the Detroit Metropolitan Labor Council. The Labor Council was still in existence in 1945 and 1946 along with the Negro Caucus. But what had happened to the Metropolitan Labor Council was Bill Oliver, Sheffield, and some of the other leaders who had associated themselves with the right-wing group began to attend meetings of the Detroit Metropolitan Labor Council, and actually began to pack the meetings. In the election meeting of 1945, Bill Oliver had a sufficient number of people there to get himself elected president of the Council, and from the day he was elected president, there was never another meeting. The Council just died, all of a sudden. Now, the Council served a very important role in the early days, because it did have an educational program. And in these educational sessions there was an exchange of ideas between local unions, and methods were developed for attacking various problems, and especially the day-to-day shop problems, like promotional rights, the hiring of Negro women, and the question of disseminating Negro workers throughout the industrial establishment, rather than having them segregated into one specific department, for the most part. All of these methods were developed and carried out in various plants. We were more successful in the Ford plants and the Chrysler plants than in others; but I think we had a considerable amount of influence in the changes that took place in the Chevrolet plant. At the same time, as



Negroes were added to the International staff, for the most part, until Reuther became president, these people were recommended by the Metropolitan Labor Council. So that the destruction of the Labor Council might have been, and probably was a major contributing factor to the diminishing Negro influence in the Union. I don't remember the other part of your question.

H. Well, about the decreasing amount of democracy, generally, and the increasing centralization?

T. The increasing centralization and resultant diminishing democracy I think all begins with the constitutional changes which were made very slowly, but very effectively, to the point where local unions had to look toward the International for more and more services, and thereby became more and more dependent on the International union. In the earlier days the local union made its own decisions on the types of educational programs that they wanted, or that they engaged in, their recreation programs were their own decisions, everything that a local union did was its own property. Now, of course, the International Education Department makes a decision, and automatically, the local union becomes involved. But they are always becoming involved in an international education program, so that it's only through the inclination of the International union that a program would be tailored to fit the needs of a local union. Unfortunately, it would be almost impossible for the International Education Department to have enough knowledge of the situations existing in the hundreds of local unions we have to the point where they could honestly fit a program to those needs, and without a determined effort on the part of a local union they could not be serviced properly. And this

same thing would hold true in other areas. Of course, in the matter of Fair Practices, I have to go back to some of the previous statements, that if it is true that the role of the Fair Practices Department is quite adequately serving the purposes of the international officers, it would be impossible for us to find a way for us to break out of it and do anything about it.

H. Well, now, a revival of Negro caucus activity took place in 1958, 59, 60, with the new demand, the revived demand for Negro representation on the Board. And you have already indicated that the Director of the Fair Practices Department took infinite pains to dissociate himself from that, and furthermore indicated the opposition of the Fair Practices Department to such demands, and to the campaign led by Willoughby Abner and Horace Sheffield, which resulted, was it in 1962, in the election of Nelson Jack Edwards to the Executive Board. In the two previous conventions there were open fights on this subject. This suggests that there was a revived Negro Caucus. One of the significant differences was, of course, that during the Crockett period, Crockett was, of course, actively involved in such demands. Now, after the 1959 convention of the AFL-CIO in San Francisco, a break occurs between Randolph and Meany and the Negro-American Labor Council is formed; in Detroit we already have the existence of the TULC, led by Buddy Battles and Horace Sheffield, and in 1959 and 1960 Horace and Buddy become the leaders of what is in essence a new Negro Caucus, even though we call it the Trade Union Leadership Council, and it is an affiliate of the Negro American Labor Council, this is, in reality a revival of the Negro Caucus tradition, and this is part of its significance. Now, to what do you attribute this, what is the reaction of

the Reuther leadership to the emergence of the TULC? I would like to have your general comments on the rise of the TULC, and the role of the Fair Practices Department, if any, in its first period of conflict with the union leadership?

T. Well, the TULC was originally organized by the Negro members of the UAW staff which was based in the Detroit area in 1958. Unfortunately, I was not based in Detroit at that time. I was either in Buffalo or Chicago, assigned to the Organizing Department. But I had knowledge of the efforts, and was a member. I could have been a charter member, but since they had a limited number of charter members, and I, being based out of the city, thought this should be left to those in Detroit. The Negro staff members in organizing the Trade Union Leadership Council - at that time it did have that meaning, that it was leaders of the Trade Union - and the purpose was to organize members of the UAW into a meaningful organization for the purpose of improving membership attendance among Negroes, education, and promotion of leadership to higher posts, one of which included assigning meaningful staff responsibilities to those who were already on the staff, because at that time we had several staff members in the UAW who had no assignment, or minor assigned responsibilities. For instance, there was one who was supposed to take care of Fair practices in the region. He was not to seek them, he was to answer those questions which came in. Another spent most of his time acting as a chauffeur for the regional director.

H. Would you care to identify this person?

T. I would rather not, on tape.

H. You were describing the early days of the Trade Union Leadership Council - why it was formed, what it was to accomplish.

T. Essentially, what I have said were its initial purposes. The group made the mistake of giving Horace more latitude than they wanted him to have; and they began calling him to task for certain pronouncements he was making and statements which were being quoted in the newspapers, and of course Solidarity House was getting up in arms about it. So they didn't know how to handle Horace, and I remember getting a call in Chicago, and they asked me if I would come back here and try to help them bring Horace to task; so I came in, and we - when I say "we" I mean the Negro staff in the Detroit area - there were only about ten or twelve at that time - so we secured a suite at the Gotham Hotel, and we got the word around to everyone to be there. So every staff member showed at that meeting.

H. Was Oliver included?

T. No, Oliver was not included. He was considered as an administrator, and not as a staff member. At this meeting everybody had his say, and they very soundly criticized Horace for his pronouncements and for his recruiting of people outside the UAW, and people who were not in leadership. They told him this was not the purpose for organizing this particular organization, and if they wanted another kind he could get with the people who would have interest in that and do so. He gave his word that he would adhere to the original purposes of the organization, and from now on, he would always consult the proper people before he went any further. Now, at that time Buddy Battle would not have been eligible for TULC. He would have been able to take advantage of the teachings, and sit in the

classes, and whatever else came up, but not be a member. At this time, to be a member of TULC you had to be on the staff, and he was not; instead he was a leader in Local 600.

H. But this policy was changed, was it not?

T. Horace continued to ignore the wishes of the group, and after a while he had accumulated so many local union people into the organization - rank and file - that the staff could either continue along with them, or leave it, as they chose. So, later on, it was expanded to include white workers, and, later, expanded to include the public at large.

H. Now, this became a very sore point between Horace and the UAW leadership. It is alleged by some that Emil Mazey led an attack on Horace.

T. Well, Emil Mazey led an attack on Horace after Horace had attacked him openly in a Michigan Chronicle article in which Mazey's name was mentioned uncomplimentarily on the race question.

H. Do you think there was any justification for that?

T. I don't.

H. There are many who do, you know.

T. In my personal experiences with him, I don't. Then later on he mentioned a couple of board members - I would say justifiably so. Horace isn't wrong all the time - he has done some wonderful things. I only try to be objective in my reciting of the role he has played. I never felt that Horace ascended to any heights or positions of leadership as a union man. I think he has always had to go to the outside to get the kind of support that he has had. But the rank and file has never pushed him

forward. He has never had the plant support.

H. For a while there was some talk that Mazey was going to argue in the Board that Horace should be called on the carpet and told that he had to choose between the UAW and TULC. Roy Reuther, I understand, was a sort of moderating influence at this stage, and prevailed upon Walter not to permit such confrontation, but Horace was told that he must not continue what the leadership regarded as violating union policy by his activity in the TULC. All this time, or at least for a couple of years, in 1962 and 1964, Horace seemed to be successfully bucking the UAW leadership on this point; and then Battles came in, and they began to develop a big community-based organization. There was some indication there was an open break between Horace and the UAW. What happened in this period?

T. During that period, TULC had grown by leaps and bounds. When they opened their membership I think at one time they had over 10,000 members, and the secondary membership had looked on the TULC as a vehicle which they could speak out, and many of these people having influence of some nature, were able to make the International leadership back up on their demands. Therefore Horace was able to get away with things which ordinarily they would have prevented him from doing. I might say that the international staff members, including myself, didn't agree that they had a right to suppress his voice, because this was his right to believe what he wanted. There was this mixed emotion sort of thing, because we realized that the policies of the union should not be harmed to the point where you defeat your purposes in the legislative field, and so on. However, through this vehicle there were times when the UAW was told that it was wrong, and made

to understand why it was wrong. The best example I can think of was the Cavanagh vs. Miriani business, in 1960, I think. Now, I wanted to talk a bit about this resurgence of the Negro Caucus. There is some misunderstanding of just how far these efforts had gone toward drawing support from among Negro membership. Unfortunately, it didn't have any widespread support among the Negro membership, because there was no effort to obtain this support. This was an organization which was built from the top. Willoughby and Horace selected - they were selective in drawing support to them, or bringing people under their umbrella.

H. Was this different from the Negro Caucuses you had in the 40s?

T. That's right. The caucuses you had in the 40s were built from the bottom up. Local union leadership was drawn in as a whole. Anybody was welcome. While it was a Negro Caucus, there were times when a good third of the people were white.

H. So as long as you were a member in the shop organized by the UAW, you could belong? You were invited? Efforts were made to draw you in?

T. Yes. Efforts were made to draw you in; and to convince you, also, that the cause represented by this group was just, so that the Negro Caucuses, in their efforts at conventions beginning as far back as 1942, the Negroes were never alone; they were able to get floor support from white workers who spoke with them on these questions. They were also able to get support from some of the International Executive Board members.

H. Please go on, this is good. You were saying that the difference with the activity of the TULC was that they were not organizing the rank and file, in contrast to the 1940 Caucuses.



T. And I mentioned the fact that even International officers had spoken in behalf of the cause represented by the original caucuses. And of course we always had this leadership which was provided by George Crockett who, on an international level, was able to help coordinate a nation-wide effort. But these latter caucuses were very selective, and very abortive. It was a last minute sort of thing. There was no general organization leading into the convention. Phone calls were made from Horace to Willoughby, and then Willoughby to Horace, and then a few friends were told what they were trying to do, but there were no meetings to which Negro delegates were generally invited.

H. Why do you think this made no appeal to the Negro rank and file?

T. I don't know. I wouldn't be able to say about this. This is something that Horace and Willoughby would have to answer, because I would not say that I would not have been involved with them. I was never invited.

H. You see, this was characteristic not only of the TULC, it was characteristic of the whole Negro-American Labor Council, which, in my opinion, explains to a significant degree their demise today. If you went to a national convention of the Negro American Labor Council, it was a convention of Negro pork-choppers. I doubt that there were two rank-and-file workers there. This was the essential weakness of that whole operation - really very sad. Now, in the early sixties, Abner and Horace also attacked George Meany - within the Negro American Labor Council they led the Caucus that took on the attack on George Meany, and the NAACP's demand for decertification of labor unions which discriminated. They were, in a sense the left wing of that caucus, and that also did not, I

think, please the leadership of the UAW at this point. What is significant is that for a period, whatever the limitations and weaknesses were, the TULC, under Abner and under Horace, did seem to be going on an independent path, and did seem to be manifesting open dissent; it challenged not only Walter, but Meany as well. It publicly attacked Meany for the failure of the Federation to fulfill the pledges made at the time of the merger in 1955 to eliminate discrimination and segregation from the ranks of organized labor. So that we see again, at least in its own special form, the resurgence of a Black Caucus, but with the qualification this time, which is terribly important, that there is no appeal to the rank and file. Do you think this has changed lately?

T. I think there is a change beginning to take place. I think the new TULC, in 1968, is drawing to it more and more rank and filers. I believe that their membership recruitment is showing this. It's quite probable, that while they were losing membership for a while, now I think they will gain in ascendancy to the old figures they had.

H. I would like to go back to a point you made regarding the Fair Practices Department. You said that unless a complaint was filed, unless some organization raised the issue, unless the Negro workers complained to a federal agency, the Fair Practices Department did not move against a discriminatory pattern in a plant or a local union, even though the leadership was aware of it. We could take some examples over the period of years - through the fifties, through the sixties, when the NAACP Labor Department filed with federal agencies complaints against General Motors plants and the functioning of UAW locals in say, Atlanta, or St. Louis. There are some other situations. What was the initial reaction of the

leadership in UAW solidarity House, and that of the Fair Practices Department when the NAACP took independent action against discriminatory practices by companies under UAW contract, and in some instances involved, implicated UAW locals as being at least partially responsible for the discriminatory practices?

T. Well, I think most of this activity may have taken place before I came into the Department. I would have to look at it from an outsider's point of view. As I recall it in Atlanta, the Fair Practices Department, wasn't it Red Henderson - what they would do was send a representative down there to check into this situation, into the charges, from the point of view of protecting the UAW's name in the situation, and then recommend action if the UAW was found to be at fault. If the charges had some basis in fact, they would recommend some action on the part of the UAW. I know this was true in Atlanta, and I have heard statements made that UAW went in and succeeded in getting x number of people promoted to the line, I think this was a problem in Atlanta.

H. Let me ask you why - well, there were also problems as regards local union meetings - Negroes were required to sit in the balcony, and there was a fight when Negroes didn't sit in the balcony - some white workers smashed a chair over this Negro's head. The Negroes were segregated in that local union hall. Now, the whole point which I would like to raise very sharply is that the UAW knew of these situations. Why did they wait until the NAACP or some other group filed a formal complaint with some federal agency?

T. I wouldn't attempt to answer it because the people who knew this was going on would have to answer it for themselves.

H. Did you know about the fight which went on around Local 25 in St. Louis for a period of about 15 years?

T. Only what you get through the so-called grapevine. I was never sent into the situation. I can recall, I think, John Livingstone, when he was regional director, at the time he ran for vice president: he came to see me in my hotel room with a couple of his assistants - wanted to sit down and talk with me. I was surprised he wanted to talk with me - and very curious. So I said, "What did you want to talk to me about? What is it?" He wanted to know why I labeled him a Ku Kluxer. Of course, I never remembered saying John Livingstone was a Ku Kluxer. So I said this was something I had never done. "I don't know whether you are a Kluxer or not, I have no information, no reasons - no one has ever told me that. And I don't know any Kluxers who would tell me." He said he had heard that I had labeled him a Ku Kluxer. Well, I could understand why, if this had been said, it had been blamed on me, because I was playing a major role in the opposite caucus. Who would be interested in whether John Livingstone was a Ku Kluxer or not, but the Negro leadership in the caucus? So this figures. But other than that - other than Caucus information coming from someone in that area, I knew none of the facts surrounding the situation in St. Louis. I did know you had the Ford local there, you had those two major General Motors locals there. And I also knew, even in the Ford local there, there were very few Negroes working and even those who were were in a very menial classification.

H. So, what you are saying is that there is no ongoing, sustained effort to eliminate discriminatory practices. What you have instead, is a passive complaint-taking agency waiting for complaints to come in from

one or another source. There is no affirmative, day-to-day effort to rout them out, to find them and then to attack them. You wait for complaints.

T. We are a fire station, and when the bell rings we run to put out the fire.

H. That speaks for itself, especially when you told us that, in your opinion, only about 10 to 12% of the locals have Fair Practices Departments. And even where they do exist, they are pro forma departments.

H. Let us move on, then, to the contemporary situation. I would like to backtrack a little bit, and get your comments, in retrospect, about the merger of the AFL and the CIO in 1955. Do you think the merger has been a good thing or a bad thing for Negro workers now that it's thirteen years later?

T. My personal opinion is that the merger has not helped the Negro worker. In the first place, the AFL-CIO has not improved the leadership position of the Negro. Randolph was on the old Board of the AFL as it was constituted, and the CIO had Willard Townsend on the Board. So the two were part of the merged Board of Directors. Willard Townsend passed away, so this left A. Philip Randolph, who, in my opinion, is quite senile. So this means, if anything, that the Negro leadership has deteriorated in the thirteen years of the merger. Furthermore, the voice of Randolph in the AFL Council is weakened in the merged Council, because he gets no more than vocal support, but no effective action in any of the International unions along the lines which would call for improvement in these areas. The various bureaus of the AFL-CIO are seriously lacking in Negro manpower and representation, from where you

would expect an effort to increase Negro involvement in the union and play the role of improving the lot of Negroes in the union. Most of the action which has been taken by the AFL-CIO has been reaction to the Federation from outside.

H. Do you have any comment to make on the Fair Practices Department - the so-called "Civil Rights" Department of the AFL-CIO, led by one Don Slaiman?

T. I believe Don Slaiman holds his position because of some friendship with Meany. I know no history of the friendship, but I know of no other reason for putting him there. It's an unfortunate thing that in so many unions they feel they must have so-called experts.

H. He is a very dubious expert. You know that he came to that job from the Jewish Labor Committee in Detroit. Did you have occasion to know him then?

T. Yes, I knew him.

H. What is your evaluation of his work here?

T. All I can say is that we tried to be of assistance to the Jewish Labor Committee whenever they had a project that we thought was worthwhile. Their role, in connection with the labor unions, has always been to announce their support of a given issue, and to initiate a pamphlet or brochure on those questions which they thought required more attention than some other issue. But as the head of the Jewish Labor Committee here in Detroit, I never thought that Don Slaiman burned any fences down.

H. Do you think the Jewish Labor Committee played any role in Detroit, or elsewhere, for that matter, in advancing the cause of Negroes in organized labor?



T. I think they have always supported those issues which might be advanced in connection with the cause.

H. But their role is very much tied to the Meany leadership.

T. Their role was always following the leadership or dictates of some higher authority.

H. Do you think the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Committee functions on behalf of Negroes in organized labor - on behalf of Negro workers?

T. I don't think they have the concept of what is needed along those lines. I don't think they have a staff which is large enough, or capable enough of presenting the kind of programs the AFL-CIO should represent. I believe that every department of the AFL-CIO is much larger than the Civil Rights Department. I believe its staff is three or four at the most. And the average International Union which has a Civil Rights Department has a larger staff than the AFL-CIO, and much more money.

H. What do you think are the consequences of Reuther's attack upon the Federation? You know in his criticism last year of the Federation he described Meany's leadership, and that generally of the Federation as being "complacent custodians of the status quo". Among his criticisms of the AFL-CIO leadership was their failure to move affirmatively upon civil rights issues. Do you think this is of some consequence, or was it just thrown in as an additional area of disagreement?

T. Well, I believe, truthfully, that this civil rights issue was just thrown in. I believe at the time this pronouncement was made, Walter was seriously considering leaving the AFL-CIO by a certain time clock or schedule, but I believe that since then he has changed his mind about



it after checking all the complicated questions involved, and possibly some of his good friends have reminded him about the bureaucratic positions that are established by being associated - after all we do control the Industrial Union Department which is a very large and far-reaching section of the trade union movement, and, further than that, he has probably learned by now that there are several of the old CIO unions - the National Maritime Union, and others - who would not go along with him, and I seriously doubt that the Steelworkers would even go along. Now that there has been a change in the IUE leadership, he couldn't depend on them. So we would be left high and dry, something like the Teamsters are - out there alone, so I just don't believe it will happen. I believe you will recall, about two years ago, that he offered Carey a chance to merge with the UAW: the reaction from the rank and file of IUE scared Carey off. I will always believe Carey had agreed.

H. Carey said he didn't know anything about it until he read it -

T. He disclaimed it, but I can't believe Walter would have made the announcement otherwise.

H. I want to go back to an earlier point which we just touched upon, but upon which we did not elaborate - and that is that we both agreed to the fact, the incontrovertible fact that there is a tremendous increase of Negroes in the auto industry labor force. Well, given this fact, why hasn't - in your opinion - given the fact of revolutionary changes in Negro aspirations, in Negro demands, in a period in which the race question is being presented as a crisis question to so many institutions in the society, given this vast increase of Negroes in local unions, especially in Detroit and elsewhere in Michigan, if not in other places as well, why

has not there yet emerged new Negro caucuses, and new effective Negro leadership in the UAW?

T. The more questions you ask, the more you indict my opinion of the role of Bill Oliver and our Department; I mean, the attitude of the leadership to the role he played. I don't know; sometimes I think I am too close to the situation to realize what is happening. And on the other hand, maybe I'm too critical of the rank and file, and not critical enough of the leadership of the Union. But I apparently haven't impressed you with one fact, and that is that Negro leadership has been destroyed and not allowed to emerge.

H. Why?

T. Because it would not suit the purpose of the power structure of the UAW. I'm thinking of some of the dialogue in the days when we were seriously trying to get a Negro on the Executive Board of the UAW, and attendant with this push were resolutions and demands for more staff - personnel. One resolution which passed in the 1943 Buffalo convention - it may be a rather crudely written resolution, but it was rather specific in what it wanted - it did say at least one Negro on each Regional staff, and in each major department of the International. This did not become a fact until about a year and a half ago, when we could say that each major department, and each region had a Negro. Today we have yet to reach the mark of eighty staff members of the 973 people on the International staff.

H. That is the total International staff?

T. The total International staff - these are appointed staff members. Of

course, included in these are professional personnel - technicians. Nine hundred and seventy-three, and, of course, if we reduced the professional staff, we would probably take a hundred people off there, the Public Relations, and the Research, and - you know, this group. Some of the teachers, and some of the interns we have can be utilized in the teaching areas, but this is quite a figure. And who is to say it should be 10%? And wherever this figure comes from, we all say it shouldn't be on the basis of percentage anyway.

H. Well, what per of the staff are Negroes?

T. Well, we'll say 80 - I think it's 76, or something like that. And of the 76, we are counting technicians: there is Bernard Asch who is an attorney; and there is Bernie Bailey in Public Relations, and Don O'Neal in research.

H. How about fellows in the Engineering Department? Kermit Meade?

T. Meade retired, but he did have a UAW base.

H. Would you like to comment on the future? Given the rather dismal conditions you have described in the contemporary labor movement, the contemporary UAW, let us for a moment remember the aspirations, the hopes, the anticipations we all had, as you also had, Mr. Tappes, the hopes that the UAW especially, but the whole organized labor movement would have great meaning for American workers generally, but specifically for Negro workers, more so for the UAW than for any other union, because of the rôle of ideology, and because of the historic concentration of Negroes in the industry, that the UAW was destined to play a very special role in the Negro liberation movement - all the aspirations we had. Well, now, twenty years

later, how do you feel about two questions: a) What does the UAW mean for the union member? and b) What does the UAW mean for the Negro union member in the whole Negro struggle, in the context of the hopes we had in the early days of the UAW, and in terms of the early emergence of the Negro union member?

T. In the early days the UAW held a promise, based on the announced principles of the CIO. And to the Negro who accepted this promise and involved himself in UAW and CIO activities, there was a great idealism; there was very enthusiastic acceptance of this great promise. I am speaking for myself, and I think this is reflected in the reactions of other Negroes. We were young, we were enthusiastic, and we had a lot of hope - we were very idealistic. The words of Phil Murray (John L. Lewis had a ponderous way of saying other things: but Phil Murray was the idealist, John the realist, I think) but the two of them were really personified in Allen Haywood because he brought in both sides. But there were people who could impress you so much, that I think this was a new hope which was dangled in front of articulate Negroes who had courage and were willing to go out and fight for the things they thought they were entitled to. So we adopted the UAW as the vehicle to the future, and worked in it. I think this included most of the white members, too. But, as time went on, of course, the selfish tendencies of people came out, and the old habits and customs began to take hold. Gradually, I think, the whole thing leveled off to just another American institution that contained all the Americanisms which we had hoped were not there - the racisms. I can remember the day when a reporter appeared with a camera, if there were three white brothers, they would look around for a Negro brother to prove

that our organization is democratic; but now, the white brother will preen himself and try to show his best face to the camera, or if it is a Negro brother, the same thing. The selfishness is coming out, more and more. And by the same token the rivalry and the political lining up, and all of these things, just destroying the idealism.

H. What we are saying, then, is that the UAW has succumbed to the racism of the general society, and that the assumptions we had that this would be a different kind of instrument are wrong - our hopes have not been borne out; our promises have not been fulfilled.

T. Have not been fulfilled.

H. Do you think that other Negroes of your generation who have literally devoted a lifetime to the UAW share your feelings on one or another level of awareness?

T. I would say they do. Their expressions may differ from mine, but the general feeling would be the same. Their disillusionment is there in all. The young Negro, in my opinion, looks to the union in a more objective fashion. To him it is an agency which is supposed to do and perform certain things in his behalf, in return for so many dollars per month. Now, it either does it, or it doesn't. If it doesn't, he wants to know why. And he is ready to go in there and fight anybody for that answer. So where you saw the idealistic member in days gone by, who was following the leader, and encouraging him, and pushing him forward, and joining him, now you have the Negro member who is critical of that leader and his shortcomings; rather than pushing him forward, he is ready to knock him down for his failure to deliver.

H. Do you see any hope for the reemergence of Negro caucuses? After all, "Black Power" slogans are in the air, a new dynamism, a new radicalism permeates the Negro movement. Generally, is this going to have its expression within the UAW?

T. We may be a few years away from that, because I don't think the Negro member, yet, realizes his power, or strength in numbers, and may have been discouraged from developing within the movement because of the disappointments he may have received, and because the original leadership was dissipated and knocked down at certain points. He drifted into the civil rights organizations as a means of satisfying his problems. The average young union member who has any ability to articulate himself is articulating himself in civil rights organizations, and he is bringing this program, and is articulating it on labor union floors.

H. Increasingly -- I think this is one of the reasons why organized labor is disturbed - the union member does not come to the union with his complaint. He comes to the civil rights organizations. He has no faith in the Oliver's and the Fair Practices Departments, in the Don Slaimans. He goes to a state agency, or the NAACP or some other group, rather than taking it up with the union.

T. He will go to the NAACP, the Urban League (I'm speaking of the order) or a state agency; at the same time he will write a letter to Rap Brown without expecting an answer. It's a funny thing.

H. But you think it is only a matter of time till the Negro senses his concentration in the shops and in the locals, that this is bound to happen?



T. Oh yes, this is bound to happen. There will be those who have the ideas of a take-over, and there will be others who have the ideas of systematically running for office. I think it will begin with someone running for president, some Negro leader, running for the presidency of a major local union, and winning. And this will draw the attention of Negro members of other local unions, to look around and see what is there. And then you will have a general - I think it will be a repetition of Cleveland and Gary, because since Cleveland and Gary, there are some twenty candidates for mayor throughout the United States.

H. Given the prognosis you just indicated, how do you see your role in this development?

T. As an individual?

H. Let me put it in a different context. You and George Crockett were the most important Negroes in the early days of the UAW. You were the most important expressions of Negro aspirations, so that when I say you as an individual, I mean in terms of the continuity you have played, in the UAW for some thirty-five years now.

T. Well, I'm hopeful of one thing, and that is the new leadership will realize the aspirations and the hopes of George Crockett and myself. I hope they will understand what we were trying to do - and when I say understand, I mean that they will recognize that these were important steps, and will understand that the steps we attempted to take were steps that were taken firmly. We had backing and we had the general membership - I'm speaking of the Negro membership - behind us, and we had the good will of forces, who, while not Negro, were basic union people and sympathetic to the cause. If



they will realize that they need all of these things, and will make a serious effort to gain this kind of support, I can see only success for the young Negro. If he's going to be the firebrand type who does more talk than actual work, he will be lost. But I feel - I really feel that the role we play will be that of advisors and educators, and a source of encouragement.

H. How old are you?

T. Fifty-seven.

H. What is your present position in the union?

T. International Representative, attached to the staff of the Fair Practices Department at Solidarity House.

H. How long have you had that position?

T. I've been in the Fair Practices Department for four years, and an International representative for seventeen years.

H. Are you still a member of 600?

T. Yes.

H. Before you were assigned to the Fair Practices Department, you were attached to the Ford Department?

T. Yes, but for a short time I was loaned to the Organizing Department.

H. And now, an addendum to the formal interview. Why do you think the UAW so obsessively attacked George Crockett in his candidacy for the Records Court judgeship? And why, previously, in his earlier campaign for the City Council, did the UAW carry on such a strong campaign against him, considering that by and large the Negro community, and, I judge, autoworkers, supported

Crockett, and last year, this had severe ramifications on the whole Negro community and the UAW's political leadership. Negroes demonstrated, rather decisively, that the UAW was not going to make policy for the Negro community. Why do you think the UAW, even in terms of its own political interests, was prepared to split itself off from the Negro community's clear sentiment? Crockett was elected. What is your interpretation?

T. I think it was mostly personal. This anti-Crockett force was led by Roy Reuther who still remembered that George Crockett, as a staff member of the UAW, had vigorously campaigned for the election of R.J. Thomas, and against the election of Walter Reuther for the presidency of the International union. And Crockett didn't bite his tongue in telling the type of administration he thought Reuther would head, and what it would do to the Negro Caucus.

H. Do you think Crockett was right in his evaluation?

T. Well, I think last twenty years will speak for themselves.

H. Beginning with the Cavanagh campaign, and then Crockett's first campaign for the City Council, and his campaign for Recorder's Judge, and the campaigns in the various districts conventions of the Democratic party, and the Conyers' campaign, they reveal a very significant split between the UAW's political leadership and the Negro Community's political role. Once upon a time they were the same thing. Increasingly we have an indication the Negro community is going its independent way, and that it will no longer permit the UAW to make political decisions for the Negro community. In a sense the whole coalition is coming to pieces. What is your opinion of this?

T. My opinion is that what you said is essentially true. However, I do know there are enough of the Negro leadership - I'm speaking of the staff who are based in Detroit - who are concerned about this, and who intend doing something about this.

H. Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing that the coalition is being shattered, and that Negroes insist on political independence?

T. I think there are some good things and some bad things. The bad thing, of course, would be the drifting apart of the two groups, the breaking up of the coalition. I think the good things are the determination of the Negro community to decide its own destiny. However, the coalition should be drawn back together, because it's very important that the UAW and the Negro community move as one, if possible. I think one of the ways this can be done would be if the UAW recognizes the fact that a coalition requires that each side recognizes the rights of the other. One of the criticisms of the UAW in the coalition was that the UAW would select the portion of the slate to be supported, and ask the Negro community who they wanted to complete the slate, and then censor names until a name was selected of which they approved, therefore, owing, to all intents and purposes, the entire slate. So I guess at this point I can bring out the fact that we did have a very significant meeting on this very question in the Board Room a couple of days ago, of all the Negro staff members who were based in the first Congressional district and who were in the city at the time. The first Congressional district is assumed to be the Negro Congressional district, and the district from which John Conyers was elected to the Congress. Well, also included were 13th district people. It was mentioned

by a representative of the staff of one of the International officers that it was a tragedy that information had come into Solidarity House, creating an atmosphere, and causing them to take a position against the election of George Crockett, who, in turn, was the choice of the Negro community for judge. He mentioned the fact that this kind of misinformation had to be overcome, and for that reason, before the International officers, or the official family of the UAW made a decision for the Community, from now on they must consult the entire staff, rather than depend upon previous sources of information.

H. There are three instances, now, that the UAW suffered significant political defeats in Detroit, where the Negro community supported and elected its candidates against the opposition of the UAW: first, the Cavanagh campaign, then the Conyers campaign, and finally, the Crockett campaign. There have also been some district battles. But this would suggest that the UAW's political power in the Negro community is not as great as one would have anticipated. Increasingly, Negroes are going to determine political positions for themselves. They are not going to allow the UAW, or any other group, to determine what is best for them. There must have been a very serious problem for certain staff members - I know, at least, that Horace supported Cavanagh against the UAW - the UAW supported Miriani; there were UAW people who supported Conyers. Why do you think, for instance, in the Conyers campaign, John Conyers Sr., an old UAW man, on the staff as an early organizer - why do you think the UAW refused to support Conyers Jr. for Congress?

T. The UAW didn't refuse to support him - what the UAW did in the primary election was to endorse both Conyers and his principal opponent, Mr. Austin.

They would not choose between the two. Conyers had begun his campaign several months in advance of anyone else, and Austin had played the role of approaching the leadership of a political arm of the labor movement, which was the Wayne County AFL-CIO COPE organization. He depended on them for his political support and went through the top echelon to gain endorsement. So, eventually, the thing came to a head at the meeting, and the COPE meeting endorsed Conyers. This was the AFL-CIO which endorsed Conyers. But at the same time Emil Mazey, the Secretary-Treasurer, had a close, personal relationship with Austin. The two of them had been schoolmates, and had graduated from high school together, and Austin, being a Certified Public Accountant, had done some work for the UAW, and had even bid on some of our larger elections where they utilized the CPA work. So he had established this close relationship with Emil Mazey. So Mazey favored him - I think it was more that he knew him better than anything else. But after - there's always the time when people begin to choose sides. The more they choose, the more intense becomes the battle in which they are involved. I think it's very unfortunate it created the battle it did, because it created a division in the UAW staff to the point where choosing Conyers, or Austin, and so on.

H. Did the UAW support Conyers in the general election?

T. In the general election they did, but they didn't in the primaries. In the primary the money which assertedly was put into the district was divided between the two.

H. Well, how could they support two opposing candidates in the primary?

T. For example, in the district 200,000 slates were printed, 100,00 with the full slate, with Austin at the top, another 100,000 with Conyers at the top, sort of a flip the coin, and take your choice.

H. Then it's not correct to put the Conyers campaign in the same category as the Crockett?

T. No, it isn't. It is a separate issue. Now, in the Crockett campaign, he was not on the official slate, and those of the UAW who wanted to support Crockett, they did so anyway. They had their own novel ways of doing this.

H. There were UAW staff people who openly supported Crockett, weren't there?

T. Yes, there were.

H. Is there anything you would like to add to any of this?

T. No, except that I am glad that it is over. I will say that this has been a real refreshing thing to me, because it has given me an opportunity to go back into the depths of memory and recall things I probably never would have thought of, and it has given me hope that a lot of forgotten people and a lot of forgotten events will now become a part of the history of the labor movement; and I know that in editing the transcript that I will be able to recall even more. So I appreciate this opportunity.

H. We want to thank you very, very much.