

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Don Ellis
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Glenn Ruggles
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 29, 1985
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Flint, Michigan
5 SUBJECT MATTER: UAW History

6

- - -

7 MR. RUGGLES: This is August 29th, 1985. I'm Glenn
8 Ruggles interviewing Don Ellis, retired Regional Director of
9 Region 1c. We're in the regional office in Flint, Michigan.

10 Mr. Ellis, we know you were born in a place called
11 Piggott, Arkansas in 1918. But we don't know why you came to
12 Flint, or why your parents did. Could you take us back to
13 your parents moving to Flint, and tell us about them, and your
14 early childhood?

15 MR. ELLIS: Well, back in 1918, I don't remember too
16 much about it. We came to Flint. My father died. I never
17 knew my father. My father died when I was 11 months old. And
18 so my mother had the chore of raising me and my two older
19 brothers.

20 I was around seven years old, I think, when we left
21 Piggott, Arkansas. But like most people from various states
22 back in those days, there was no work opportunity for my
23 mother, and my two brothers, who were ten and twelve years
24 older than I, and so I assume that we came to Flint the same
25 as thousands of other people back during that period of time

1 for work opportunities.

2 **MR. RUGGLES:** Where did you go to school in Flint?

3 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, when I came to Flint, I can't
4 remember exactly the first place we lived. But we always
5 lived on what you call the west side of town, which is the
6 Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants, and Fisher Tool.

7 I attended Hazleton School, which is right across
8 from the Chevrolet plant on Kearsley Street. I lived on the
9 corner of Stevenson and Bluff and went to Longfellow, and then
10 I went to Zimmerman, which is out here on Corunna Road. And
11 then from Zimmerman, I went to Flint Central High School.

12 **MR. RUGGLES:** You graduated from high school right
13 during the Depression. It was kind of a tough situation for a
14 young man.

15 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, it was back in '35. And at that
16 particular time, we were just coming out of the old Depression
17 days. For young guys coming out of school at that particular
18 time, there was not too much work availability. And so you
19 just had to scuffle along, whatever you could find to do, for
20 a few years, anyway. Back in those years, '35, '36 and '37,
21 it was pretty tough for young guys just getting through school
22 at that time.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** It was about six years after you got
24 out of high school that you joined the union. In between the
25 time you graduated from high school and your union activities,

1 what did you do for work?

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, as I recall, I think the first
3 full-time, what I call a full-time job, I worked at the King
4 Clothing Store downtown on Saginaw Street, wrapping boxes and
5 suits and things that people buy in a clothing store.

6 And then from there, that job, out on what we always
7 call the Chevrolet corner, right across from the Chevrolet.
8 Of course, I grew up there. I peddled papers there, and
9 shined shoes in all the pool halls, racked pool balls. And so
10 I worked, then, for the next couple to three years, I worked
11 in pretty near all of the pool rooms along the Chevrolet
12 corner, there.

13 That's where I was working at the time of the
14 strike. I was right across the street on Kearsley Street at
15 Plant Nine when the raid, the strike came to a head. And at
16 that point, the governor had sent in the reserves, and it was
17 all right around in that corner. I had a job, but to get to
18 it, you had to get cleared, number one, through the National
19 Guard people.

20 So really, up until about '39, I worked in all the
21 pool halls. And each one of them had a restaurant and pool
22 tables.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** You were an eyewitness, then, to the
24 sit-down in '37?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes. Yes.

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** And your mother was working in Fisher
2 Body, too?

3 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah. My mother, when we first came to
4 Flint, she worked in the Ferris Store, down in -- which was,
5 until a few years ago, downtown. And then she finally got a
6 job in the old Fisher Tool plant, and she was working at
7 Fisher Tool at the time of the sit-down strikes.

8 Back in the Fisher Tool and in all of the plants
9 that had women at that point, women were not actually
10 permitted to stay inside the plant during the sit-down strike.
11 But she was working there, and worked there until 1945.

12 She had 17 or 18 years seniority in 1945, and she
13 did not go back to work, because during the wartime, the old
14 Fisher plant went completely out of existence. And they
15 didn't come back into being until after the war. And so she
16 was a housemother for GMI. She kept GMI students. And she
17 didn't go back to work in 1945.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** Going back to that period of the sit-
19 down, your mother would come home with her hands so worn raw
20 that she could hardly prepare food.

21 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah.

22 **MR. RUGGLES:** Could you, as best you can, describe
23 the conditions that your mother had to put up with in those
24 days?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I can recall that we always kept

1 two or three boarders. And of course, mom worked. And I was
2 pretty young at that point. So it was my job to kind of help
3 her out a little bit. And she worked on what they called
4 stuffing cushions, and I really didn't know anything about
5 that until later life. But her hands would be cracked. I
6 don't know, she got something from the drugstore, whatever it
7 was. And her hands, from using the form part of the thing, I
8 can recall when she tried to peel potatoes, she'd have to
9 sometimes heat the water, warm up the water, put her hands in
10 the water, so she could let go of the paring knife.

11 And I also can recall she couldn't sleep nights a
12 lot of the times. She'd take a washrag with cold water and
13 hold her feet. Just from being young at that particular time,
14 I can just visualize that, really, things were pretty rough
15 inside the plants back in those days.

16 **MR. RUGGLES:** What do you recall, as an eyewitness,
17 about the sit-down? You were right there out in the street as
18 it occurred?

19 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, yes. As I say, the west side of
20 Flint back in those days was what we always called later as a
21 kind of heyday. It had such a conglomeration of people, from
22 all over different states. And it was a pretty rough place to
23 grow up in.

24 And I was working in the Flint cigar store, which is
25 just directly across the street from it. And my first

1 recollection was that I thought, as normal, that there was a
2 fight going on out in the alley. And that was really what got
3 us out. And we all came out of the poolroom to look. And of
4 course, it was right straight across the street from the Plant
5 Nine.

6 And at that point was when they, back at that time
7 was when the women brigade, what they called it at that time,
8 had all got together and was breaking the windows out of the
9 Plant Nine. And people inside there were breaking the windows
10 out. And we didn't know what it was about, really, in that
11 sense. But there was teargas inside the plant, and the
12 windows were being broken so they could get the teargas out.

13 And then the ambulances were coming down, and they
14 were taking people from Plant Nine. And it was quite a day,
15 there, that particular day. And it just seemed to happen all
16 at this one time, because going back now to the history of the
17 thing, there was a lot of maneuvering going on at that
18 particular time. And really, Plant Nine was not involved at
19 all. It was to create the problem in Plant Nine, so that they
20 could take over Plant Four, which history shows was
21 successful.

22 **MR. RUGGLES:** As an eyewitness, it looked like just
23 another street fight?

24 **MR. ELLIS:** It looked just really, like in later
25 life, you see, you know, riots on the streets. And for people

1 who weren't in close on what was happening -- and there were
2 very few people that were, because working in the kind of
3 places that we worked, and all the kinds of people that came
4 in, you know, rumors float. And there was no leak of any kind
5 from the people who had daily contact with those inside the
6 plant.

7 **MR. RUGGLES:** The violence you saw out on the
8 streets, was that before Murphy brought in the troops?

9 **MR. ELLIS:** No, no. No, this all happened after the
10 troops came in. And of course, I was pretty young at that
11 particular time, and I'd been out late. I had to be in the
12 next morning at five o'clock, and opened up the pool hall. We
13 had coffee and doughnuts for the guys going in to work.

14 And it was kind of cool. You know, I had a topcoat
15 on, and I was hustling in to work after about an hour or two
16 hours' sleep, and got to work. It used to be Mack's Drugstore
17 was right on the corner, across the street from Silam and
18 Kearsley. And I just stepped off of the curb, and about half
19 asleep, and a guy stuck a bayonet under my nose and said, you
20 know, halt. And I thought, "Holy Christ." I was still asleep
21 yet. And that was the first knowledge that we had of the
22 troops coming in, because they came in late at night, or in
23 the morning.

24 And it took me about an hour and a half. He took me
25 a half a block over to the personnel office, and it took me

1 about an hour and a half to get a clearance on the basis that
2 I worked over there. So I didn't really open up that morning,
3 because that one whole area was ringed with the National
4 Guards.

5 Then right after that, those who had jobs or
6 businesses there could go and come with a pass. But, you
7 know, there were grocery stores and everything right around in
8 that area, drugstores and so forth. And they had the same
9 thing as marshal law, you know. Two or three people knew one
10 another, you know, to stop on the street, you were gently
11 reminded, you know, if you were going to the grocery store, to
12 get your groceries or whatever it was, and go back home. And
13 so it was kind of a unique situation.

14 MR. RUGGLES: You had no idea what a great, historic
15 event this was?

16 MR. ELLIS: None whatsoever.

17 MR. RUGGLES: In 1941, you joined the Local 651, at
18 AC Spark Plug, and as a loading dock worker. What attracted
19 you to that job, or was it just a job?

20 MR. ELLIS: Well, I wasn't really attracted to it.
21 Previous to '41, I had been working construction in '39, '40
22 and '41 in Memphis, Tennessee. Or Millington, which is about
23 13, 18 miles from Memphis. I worked for DuPont, and they
24 built a power plant down there.

25 I got married in Memphis, to a girl from Michigan

1 here. She came down. I was in 1A, draft call, which is young
2 and single and everything. And so I got called to service
3 from Millington, Tennessee. And I'd been married four months.
4 Let's see, I got married in January -- well, six months before
5 I went in, because I went in in June.

6 My wife had never been out of Michigan, and she was
7 pregnant. So she came back to Michigan and I was drafted, and
8 I didn't tell them at that particular time that I was married.
9 I figured, well, I'd talked it over with her, and I figured,
10 what the hell, you're going to have to go, and you might just
11 as well go one year, you know, the first one. And you just
12 only had to serve one year. So she came back to Flint, and I
13 went into the service.

14 She became real ill because of the pregnancy, and I
15 can recall, she was going to the doctor two times a week, and
16 it was \$5 a trip. That was \$10 a week, and I was making \$21
17 in the service.

18 She was staying with her mother and her father, and
19 her father worked at Buick. To make a long story short, I
20 applied for a discharge. I went through the Red Cross, and I
21 got what they call -- I just finished my basic training, four
22 months. I was in from June until October in 1941. And I'd
23 just finished the basic training, and I got discharged in
24 October 1941. Then I came back to Flint.

25 I had my job still in Memphis, or Millington, and I

1 had 45 days to go back, and so I fully intended on going back
2 to work in Millington, Tennessee. And of course, my wife said
3 that she thought maybe we ought to stay in Michigan. At that
4 particular time, then, just before my 45 days was up, I
5 started applying for work up here. And of course, back in
6 1941, it was not too hard to find a job. And so I went out to
7 AC, and I was on construction work.

8 ? so I told a guy to come out, and we had to line up.
9 And I told the guy out there that I wanted to hire in in the
10 skilled trades. You know, a millwright. I'd worked in a
11 blacksmith's shop in construction. Either a blacksmith or a
12 millwright. And he looked at me for a minute, and he says,
13 well, where did you serve an apprenticeship?

14 Well, back in those days, you didn't serve an
15 apprenticeship, you just went to work on construction, and you
16 went to work as a helper, and then if you had a little bit of
17 talent, you'd get to a second class, whatever the
18 classification was.

19 Anyway, he says, what else can you do? And I told
20 him, hell, I says, I can do anything. So I wound up going
21 inside and filling out an application, and I went home. That
22 was in the morning, and I got a call that night. So the next
23 day, I went in, and they told me they didn't have any jobs in
24 skilled trades at that time, and that I had not served an
25 apprenticeship, and that if I was interested in a production

1 job, they'd hire me in, and then somewhere down the road, you
2 know, if a work opportunity was available, that they'd think
3 about transferring me.

4 So that's where I found out what a loader was. A
5 loader really was nothing but carrying boxes, and slapping
6 them into the trucks, from the dock into the trucks. It was
7 spark plugs and fuel pumps. Whatever was made.

8 I worked there for two months, I believe. And I was
9 laid off two weeks. And I was recalled, and I was moved from
10 the Dort Highway off of the loading dock into the machine gun
11 operation over on Industrial Avenue.

12 At that particular time, there was what they called
13 a hand-buff and polish operation job was open. I convinced
14 the foreman that, because of my past work outside, that I knew
15 all about that kind of a job, and so I got put in on what they
16 called hand-buff and polish. I worked at that classification
17 up until the middle part of the wartime.

18 Then I got recalled into the service. I was on a
19 24-hour recall, anyway, when I got out. By that time, I had a
20 child. The draft board in Michigan recalled me, but they
21 didn't have any of my paperwork. It was still in Millington,
22 Tennessee. And so they told me I would have to go from Flint
23 back to Millington, and then go back into the service from
24 Millington, Tennessee.

25 I said to them, well, how do I get down there? And

1 they said, well, that's your job to get there, because that's
2 where you were drafted from. And I said to them, well, I'm
3 not going to pay my own to go from here to Millington to go
4 back into the service. I knew at the point that if I had to
5 go back, which I had no objections to, that they could at
6 least send an MP for me to take me down there.

7 So, to make a long story short on that point, they
8 sent me back home. I went back to work until they could get
9 it straightened out. And they finally had the papers shipped
10 up here. And then they recalled me, and sent me into Detroit.
11 And that was during the latter part of the war at that
12 particular time, just before the war was ending.

13 And I went back through the examination, and got the
14 papers and everything, and I had a date to return to service.
15 And then the war ended, and you're reading in the papers that,
16 you know, people that were in between going back into service
17 would not have to go.

18 So I called the draft board, and they told me they
19 had not been notified by Washington, and I was to leave on
20 whatever date it was. Anyway, the day before I was to leave,
21 I got a telegram that I didn't have to go back into service.

22 The sequence of that story was that I was on the
23 shop committee at that particular time, and there was a need
24 of skilled people. And so more or less as a joke to Ralph
25 Estes (ph. sp.), who was the labor manager at that particular

1 time, I told him I had in mind a guy that could work as a
2 millwright. And they were really looking for people. And he
3 had all the background. All he had to do was check his
4 background and his records.

5 So Ralph said, what's his name? And of course, he
6 knew I was going to go into the service, you know. And I told
7 him Don Ellis. And he looked at me, and he was grinning a
8 little bit. And he said, I'm sure you're joking. And I said,
9 no, I'm not joking. Well, he said, hell, you're going into
10 the service. Well, I says, I'm not going. And I tried to
11 hire in here under skilled. So you just go check my record
12 application. That's all I ever did.

13 So he sent a guy underneath him up, and looked the
14 record up. Well, he said, if you weren't going to go back
15 into the service, he said, you know, we would take a look at
16 this. And I says, okay. So, anyway to make a long story
17 short on that one, when I finally did not have to go back, I
18 raised it again with him.

19 So he transferred me then, at that particular time.
20 I went into the skilled group under the agreement at that
21 particular time, the old upgrade agreement, as a millwright.
22 And I worked there up until the war was completed.

23 Then they had a reduction in the skilled group, and
24 I went back into the hand-buff and polish until '48.

25 **MR. RUGGLES:** Describe the working conditions from a

1 union man's point of view. How bad were they at the AC Spark
2 Plug when you went in there?

3 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, they weren't bad. Number one, the
4 AC plant in the city of Flint has always been, and was then,
5 not a bad place to work, as far as the inside of the plant.
6 It was all light work. There wasn't any tremendous heavy
7 work, because they all made small parts. It was,
8 comparatively, a good place to work. We had -- now looking
9 back, from where we are today -- we a tremendous amount of
10 health hazards and safety things at that particular time.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** Could you describe those?

12 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, when I say this, we had a lack of
13 guards on machines. We had a lack of instructions from the
14 people. You know, you hire in, "you don't put your hands
15 under these things"; "you don't do this."

16 And dust, like in the blower systems from the
17 buffing wheels, which I worked on, really weren't efficient.
18 And it was way back in those days. But really, to describe it
19 as work that I had known other people prior to the union, in
20 Chevrolet and in assembly plants, and it wasn't that type of
21 work. And they were predominantly women back at that time,
22 because a light job operation.

23 But as far as Flint was concerned, at that
24 particular time, and even up until now, it really was a good
25 place to work.

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** You got involved in 651 as an
2 alternate committeeman? Was that your first position in the
3 union?

4 **MR. ELLIS:** Alternate committeeman. Well, when I
5 hired in -- of course, at that particular time, you didn't
6 have check-off. So when I hired in, because of where I grew
7 up, and knowing all the people that were involved, you know,
8 in the sit-down strikes, when I hired in, I asked who was a
9 committeeman. And they told me. And I told the committeeman
10 I wanted to join the union, and how do I go about it.

11 I had a fellow who was real busy at that particular
12 time, and he says, I'll get back with you. And he was the
13 shop committeeman. A couple of weeks went by, and I thought,
14 well, Christ, this must be a pretty tough thing to get into.
15 He didn't come back.

16 So I talked to a couple of the guys that I was
17 working with there, and I said to them, do they have a union
18 hall? I knew they had them over on the corner of the
19 Chevrolet. And so they told me where it was. And so I went
20 over there and told them I wanted to join the union. And at
21 that time, the committeeman was supposed to get you involved.

22 So I joined the union. And I thought, well, at
23 least the committeeman ought to take a new guy. If a new guy
24 goes and says, hey, I want to join the union, by God, he ought
25 to have took his money and given him a receipt, you know.

1 So I thought, hell, I can do as good a job as that.
2 So I found out when the elections were going to be, and what
3 it was going to be. And anyway, I wound up running for
4 alternate committeeman. And it was not a very responsible job
5 at that point. I mean, you didn't do anything unless the
6 committeeman wasn't there.

7 I got elected, and then from there, I just decided
8 well, if I can be an alternate committeeman, I wanted to be
9 able to be a district committeeman. And I ran for district
10 and got elected. And of course, after that, I thought what
11 the hell. It was interesting. I liked it. I liked working
12 with people. And so I ran for shop committee.

13 **MR. RUGGLES:** What do those different jobs ask of
14 you? Aside from collecting dues, what does a committeeman do?

15 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, a committeeman's responsibility
16 then, and now, is service, or serving the grievance procedure.
17 And we had an agreement, naturally, at that particular time,
18 too.

19 So you handle grievances. And I guess that really
20 about the only difference in the steps would be is that the
21 district committeeman had 250 people in a district, and a shop
22 committeeman had six or eight or ten districts. And a shop
23 committeeman would service just eight or ten different areas,
24 and was the top guy at that point for all eight or ten
25 different district committeemen handling the grievances at his

1 step of the procedure.

2 And then by going from that particular job, then, of
3 course back in those days you had caucuses. They still do.
4 And the caucus I was in, came up short where nobody would run
5 for president. And so they volunteered me.

6 I really was not interested in that particular time
7 in being president. I liked the committee work. And I liked
8 the involvement, because you were in the plant all the time.
9 And president, you moved out of the plant, and it was a full-
10 time job.

11 That was kind of, as I found out later, a little
12 different type of an operation. It's an administrative
13 position, and you can only become involved, as far as
14 grievances are concerned, over the phone or in contact with a
15 district shop committee, with the exception of under a
16 contract, the president of a local, upon notifying management
17 24 hours ahead of time, can attend all the shop committee
18 meetings.

19 I recall, after I was elected president, the first
20 Thursday, all the shop committeemen met. And I go down the
21 first Thursday, and sit with them. And Ralph Estes and Mill
22 Noner (ph. sp.) at that particular time were labor relations
23 coordinators.

24 And they all congratulated me on the first meeting.
25 And the second time, I'm down there, and Ralph says, Don, he

1 says, I'd like to ask you, he says, am I to understand that
2 we're now going to have an eight-man shop committee?

3 And I looked at him, and I really didn't know what
4 the hell he was talking about. And then all at once, it
5 dawned on me, and I thought, well, he was kind of telling me
6 he didn't want me there.

7 Well, the agreement gives me, you know, permission
8 to be there. And I said, well, yes. In my job, I can find
9 plenty of time for one day a week. And so you'll have an
10 eight-man shop committee, as long as I'm president. Because
11 that was the work I liked. And naturally, it kept you abreast
12 of everything going on in your local union.

13 And he gently then reminded me. He said, well, you
14 have a habit of reading the national contract, and only
15 reading the parts that you like. He says, there's a certain
16 obligation for you to perform.

17 And I had always had a good relationship working
18 with management. On that basis, we each had our own job, but
19 we had a mutual respect for one another. And I thought he was
20 getting goddamned obnoxious, you know.

21 And then he said, now, you know what you have to do,
22 you know, to come back into the plant once you leave. That
23 means even shop committee, you've got to notify me.

24 And I said, oh. I said, well, then, don't worry,
25 I'll handle that. So after that meeting, I went back and told

1 the secretary, I want you to send a letter to management and
2 advise them that, starting with the next Thursday, I will be
3 attending every shop committee meeting that I have time to do.
4 And so rather than give them a letter every week, 24 hours, I
5 sent him that one.

6 And I go back to the next meeting, and I figured, if
7 he wanted to be a real smarty about it, he'd make me do it
8 every week. But I sent it. And I asked him, I said, well,
9 I've read the agreement. And this really doesn't comply
10 entirely with it, but that's my intentions. Do you want me to
11 use that letter, or do you want me to send you one 24 hours
12 every week, the day before?

13 He said, no. He said, that won't be necessary. So
14 I didn't think anything about it at the time, but I would
15 think, checking back, that the shop committee, the years I was
16 elected president, we had an eight-man shop committee, because
17 I had time to go once a week to all the shop committee
18 meetings.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** You must have been a pretty popular
20 president. You were elected to four consecutive terms.

21 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I don't know. I don't really
22 think it was just me as an individual. But I was young, and I
23 liked the kind of work. I liked being with people. And they
24 had problems under the agreement that it was important to
25 them.

1 So when I became president, as I say, you move from
2 one job to the other, you find there's a difference. So I
3 guess my popularity would have been in that sense. It would
4 have been that I normally have no problem relating one-on-one
5 with people. And I was able to convince the people who were
6 elected -- and you know, it was unheard of, pretty near,
7 starting off when I was first there, for one whole slate to
8 get elected. You know, it was split up.

9 And I worked with those who weren't with my group,
10 as far as the union was concerned. And I convinced our people
11 that, you know, if you're interested, you run for a job, but
12 if you get the job, you do it.

13 So in the process of kind of setting up an operation
14 like that, why, we policed our own groups pretty good. And if
15 human beings are human beings, if one wound up not really
16 caring too much about the job, why then, we would eliminate
17 him ourselves, and wouldn't run him.

18 So I think, really, coming from where you always had
19 split groups of people, putting them together on that kind of
20 a basis, you survived every election. And so, if you don't
21 lose elections, I guess you'd be considered popular. I don't
22 know.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** When you speak of splits, do you mean
24 political splits?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes. Well --

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** Economic splits?

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah, political caucuses within locals.
3 Of which, they still have them. Certain groups of people, the
4 same as your national elections. Certain groups of people
5 band together. They feel that they have all the answers, or
6 more of the answers than the other group who's running. And
7 that was what we'd call political caucuses.

8 Going back to the old days, though, there was a
9 struggle within our own union of political caucuses.

10 **MR. RUGGLES:** At the local level?

11 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes, at the local level. And that goes
12 back to the political struggles of Walter Reuther, and came
13 back all the way back through the struggles prior to Walter
14 being elected, of Homer Martin, and who was involved under the
15 jurisdiction -- well, not jurisdiction, really, but under the
16 umbrella of the old AF of L.

17 And so you had, then, what was kind of called the
18 left and the right of the union. And they wanted to run on
19 the left side that was either supposedly a Trotskyite, a
20 commie, a socialist, of which there were quite a few back in
21 those days.

22 And it made a contribution, back in '36 and '37. It
23 made a tremendous contribution of really getting the union
24 formed, and the sit-down strikes.

25 But then their theory went a little bit beyond, you

1 know. They had the "isms," as I call it, and I really didn't
2 understand too much about them. But I was wooed, you know, by
3 all of them because I was pretty young president at that time.
4 And I think the record, as I recall -- I'm not sure -- that I
5 was probably the youngest man elected in a General Motors
6 plant as president of a General Motors plant. Because I was
7 pretty young in age, and the union was pretty young. And so
8 you still had the people who participated in the sit-down
9 strike that were, you know, holding offices in all of the
10 local unions.

11 And so the left and the right, what we always called
12 the right wing of the union, which was the supporters of
13 Walter Reuther. And the left part of the element in the local
14 unions would always support at the top level was the
15 opposition to Walter and George Addis.

16 The formation, really, of the left and the right,
17 came directly from the roots of the local union. And I guess
18 it was probably adopted at the top level, you know, as
19 caucuses, because we all belonged to a national caucus. You
20 either belonged to Walter's caucus or you belonged to Addis's
21 caucus, or R.J. Thomas. And that was the left part, what we
22 designated as the left part of the union.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** You know what I'm going to ask you
24 next, of course. Which one did you belong to?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I was always referred or known as

1 a right winger. I was always a Walter Reuther supporter. And
2 like I say, back in those days, really, I probably didn't know
3 what the hell a lot of the difference between the left and
4 right was, in that sense. But I was a supporter of Walter
5 Reuther's and always have been a supporter of Walter's.

6 MR. RUGGLES: Were the local unions like 651
7 pressured or forced to choose sides? And if so, what kind of
8 pressure was put on you? You mentioned being wooed, for
9 instance.

10 MR. ELLIS: Well, from the left side of the thing,
11 each local union had, really, left wing caucuses and right
12 wing caucuses. And we had split people elected, as I said.
13 And I know Pete Schumaker (ph. sp.), for example, and Ed
14 Bowman, and several of my local, and really at that time, Bob
15 Carter, who had been a previous president, was the left wing
16 of our local union.

17 And of course, they were all tied with the left wing
18 group, the same with the right wing group, with all the rest
19 of the plants in the city of Flint. So you had a kind of a
20 broad regional left and right, and then the broad regional
21 left and right went in to the conventions, you know, of the
22 International Union.

23 And so Pete used to talk to me. Pete was from
24 Germany, and he was a skilled tradesman. He ran as a
25 Trotskyite, and we were elected. And it wouldn't have made

1 any difference what slate he was on, he would get elected.

2 And Pete was, I think, a Trotsky. What they called
3 a Trotsky. I really, yet, have never studied it in depth, any
4 of them. I know it's a theory, you know, the Marxists and the
5 Lenins. But I never got involved too much later in life in
6 that.

7 And then I met a fellow by the name of Saul Dolinger
8 (ph. sp.), and he was kind of like a national left wing guy
9 who would float around back in those days in different parts
10 of the town. He came from Detroit. I don't know where he
11 came from prior to that. But he came into Flint. And I met
12 him through an accident.

13 Pete used to keep telling me, I've got a young guy
14 in Detroit who's with me who I want you to meet. And my wife
15 and I had four or five real close friends, and we used to get
16 together about whatever term it was, and there was four of us,
17 I think. And they'd come to our house one time, and we'd go
18 to theirs.

19 And one of this couple called and said he wouldn't
20 be able to come. It was out to my place, and he said they
21 wouldn't be able to come this Saturday because their sister --
22 her sister and her husband was visiting them.

23 And I said, well, bring them, you know. What's the
24 difference? We always had a little beer and food and played a
25 little penny-ante poker. And that's how I met Saul Dolinger,

1 and Ginore Dolinger (ph. sp.) was a sister of Lyle Klepton's
2 (ph. sp.) wife. And so that's where I met Saul Dolinger.

3 So the next Monday, I'm into work, and I was telling
4 Pete, I met a very interesting guy over the weekend, the name
5 was Saul Dolinger. And old Pete sat up, Jesus, he says,
6 that's the guy I've been wanting you to meet.

7 Well, Saul went to work here in shipping. And of
8 course, being a good friend of Ginore's sister, he spent a lot
9 of time with me, you know. He was in there at that particular
10 time to activate and try and build, you know, the left wing
11 group. And he hinted around about that I ought to come, and
12 they were going to have a party. And he tried, you know, this
13 city-wide party. And I said, no, I don't think I want to get
14 involved in that.

15 And after about eight or nine months of that, he
16 finally said to me, look, I'm sure you understand that I'm an
17 organizer. And he told me, he tried to explain how everything
18 would work. And he says, I don't know why you don't sign this
19 card and join our caucus.

20 And I said to him, no. I don't know anything about
21 all these "isms," Trotskyism, communism. I said, I think I'd
22 better just stay where I'm at. I don't want to get involved
23 in that.

24 **MR. RUGGLES:** Was this before you became president?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** No, it was after.

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** After? You were president now? This
2 would be in the late '40s?

3 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes.

4 **MR. RUGGLES:** Do you recall what the card asked of
5 you? Was it a membership card in a political party?

6 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I'm positive it was a membership
7 card. And it seems to me that Saul was a Trotsky, what they
8 called a Trotsky. I really don't know a hell of a lot of
9 difference between them. There was a different theology, I
10 guess, in their minds, and so I'm sure that's what it was.
11 But I was too dumb. I didn't want to sign one of those.

12 **MR. RUGGLES:** Did you ever hear from Saul Dolinger
13 or his wife again after that?

14 **MR. ELLIS:** Oh, yeah. Well, Ginore Dolinger was
15 very active in the Women's Brigade, the sit-down strike in the
16 city of Flint.

17 **MR. RUGGLES:** I thought her name rang a bell.
18 Wasn't she involved in the '37 sit-down?

19 **MR. ELLIS:** Oh, yes. And I think at that particular
20 time, she wasn't married to Saul. I think she was married to
21 Kermit Johnson, who was also active, and a member of Local
22 659, Chevy.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** Was there a Red Brigade in '37?

24 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes.

25 **MR. RUGGLES:** And she was involved?

1 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yes. Yes. Real active in it, and I
2 guess they made a movie of the women, and I think that she was
3 very predominant in that part of it.

4 MR. RUGGLES: This was *Babies and Banners*, I believe
5 was the name of the movie.

6 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

7 MR. RUGGLES: I believe she's still alive, isn't
8 she?

9 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yes. Yeah, she lives in California.

10 MR. RUGGLES: Let's go back a little ways to the
11 1941 Buffalo convention, just about the time that you became
12 involved in 651. Some of the people from the Flint area went
13 as delegates to the Buffalo convention supporting Walter
14 Reuther, against the wishes of their delegations. Were you
15 aware of any of the anti-Reuther, anti-Socialist concern at
16 that time in the Flint area, just as you joined the union?

17 MR. ELLIS: Well, yeah. Only in the references, as
18 I was saying, I was aware of it because every plant, every
19 local union had a left and a right wing caucus. And as that
20 wound up by them running in the local unions as delegates.

21 And so we knew that anyone who ran on the left wing
22 slate in the local union would be opposed to Walter Reuther.
23 And so it was pretty clear-cut way back in those days. And
24 they had a lot of strength. They had a lot of political
25 strength. And that's what kept R.J. Thomas and Addis elected,

1 you know, at the national level.

2 MR. RUGGLES: Did you ever hear of a fellow named
3 Bill McNarty (ph. sp.) or Bill Roy (ph. sp.)?

4 MR. ELLIS: Vaguely, but not personally. Bob
5 Travis, yes. Bob was very active in the city of Flint here.
6 And Bob Travis did a yeoman job, as far as helping this union,
7 you know, come into being. But Bob Travis was a dedicated --
8 in that sense, a left winger.

9 And let's see. Names. I really wouldn't -- just as
10 well, I don't mention names anyway, now, because there's a lot
11 of guys in different locals that are retired. There's a lot
12 of us dead now. But there's still some living that did a
13 tremendous local union job, in whatever position they held.
14 And now retired, and belong to the retirees chapter, and we're
15 good friends.

16 MR. RUGGLES: Let me mention one name I think you
17 should recall: John McLucas (ph. sp.) was president --

18 MR. ELLIS: Of my local union.

19 MR. RUGGLES: -- of 651 when you joined it --

20 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

21 MR. RUGGLES: -- in 1941. There was an attempt in
22 '41 -- and I'm not sure if it was before or after you joined
23 -- to shut down 651 during a GM strike, without international
24 authorization. This was an attempt, apparently, by Carl
25 Swanson, the regional director. Are you familiar with that

1 attempt?

2 MR. ELLIS: Well, not really too much. But Carl
3 Swanson was a regional director. He was from Buick. And Carl
4 was an Addis supporter. And I'm not really too familiar with
5 the ins at that particular time.

6 MR. RUGGLES: He apparently was leading a faction
7 against Reuther?

8 MR. ELLIS: Yes.

9 MR. RUGGLES: From what you say. Do you recall
10 people like Irene Mitchell, Laura Howard?

11 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yes.

12 MR. RUGGLES: They were on the board of officers
13 with McLucas at that time?

14 MR. ELLIS: Yes.

15 MR. RUGGLES: And there was an attempt to paint
16 these officers of 651 as socialists, which apparently was a
17 dirty word at that time. Is that accurate? Were they
18 socialists?

19 MR. ELLIS: No. Not to my knowledge, no. Irene
20 Mitchell, because I got elected with Irene Mitchell in 1948.
21 John McLucas, I can't really recall John McLucas.

22 I'm not positive if he was our first president.
23 There's a question, and I've never really searched this out,
24 between him and another fellow in the local union. And I
25 can't think of his name now. But I've never really traced

1 that down. But John was president, and Irene was vice-
2 president. And Lawrence Speck (ph. sp.) and Basil Miller (ph.
3 sp.). And I knew them all, but I really wasn't -- this is in
4 1941 here, huh?

5 **MR. RUGGLES:** Yes, that's an explanation on their
6 part denying the charges that they were socialists.

7 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I could just tell you, they
8 weren't.

9 **MR. RUGGLES:** Why would Swanson, as a regional
10 director, try to get one of his locals to walk out in an
11 unauthorized strike? That seems to be a peculiar action for a
12 regional director. Or is that too far back for you to recall?

13 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, it is, in that sense. I would
14 assume -- was our local the one he was trying to get to do it?

15 **MR. RUGGLES:** Yes. The international board had
16 authorized a General Motors strike in just about all of the
17 plants in Flint except AC Spark Plug. And since AC had not
18 been given international authorization, they were not going to
19 walk out. But Swanson was trying to convince them to do it
20 even though the international board had not okayed it. It
21 isn't clear why he was trying to do that, except maybe he
22 didn't want them --

23 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I have to assume that none of
24 these people would have supported Carl Swanson as regional
25 director, or would support the people in international

1 executive board that they did. And I guess you could assume
2 that, if they had done this, and him being an officer, number
3 one, if he was telling them they ought to, I would assume what
4 he was saying is that you ought to join your brothers and
5 sisters in the city of Flint who had been authorized,
6 whichever locals had, and, you know, for support.

7 I'd hate to think that he would have done that on
8 the basis of had they have done this, you know, they might not
9 have a job, and they would have had no protection from the
10 international executive board, if people like this could have
11 disappeared from the whole operation.

12 I hate to believe that he would do it on that basis.
13 He could have done it on the basis of saying, what the hell,
14 join your brothers and sisters over here. But if he did, he
15 should have looked, to me, it would have seemed, he should
16 have looked at what repercussions could have happened to them.
17 All assumptions. I don't really know.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** Let's move on to some contract
19 questions. Beginning in the late '30s, '39, the UAW won some
20 nice settlements from General Motors: double time on Sundays,
21 for instance; six unpaid holidays, was short of really that
22 great, I suppose.

23 Do you recall, in your early years as an officer in
24 the union, at the local level, contract negotiations? Maybe
25 the 1945 settlement, for instance? Were you involved in the

1 negotiations?

2 MR. ELLIS: '45, or '48.

3 MR. RUGGLES: That was the one, the big GM --

4 MR. ELLIS: No, I would not have been at the local
5 -- I would not have been a shop committeeman at that
6 particular time. The only involvement I would have had would
7 have been, I would say, in '45 I think I probably would have
8 been the district committeeman. I can't remember.

9 See, I never knew John ^{McLuca?} very well. And so I would
10 not have been involved at the local, as a shop committee, in
11 negotiations at that point. The only way I'd have been
12 involved was as a district committeeman in 2d. Just local
13 union meetings, and monthly meetings.

14 MR. RUGGLES: At this period, in the late '40s, you
15 were simply one of the workers involved in the strikes?

16 MR. ELLIS: That's right.

17 MR. RUGGLES: The negotiations were done at a higher
18 level?

19 MR. ELLIS: That's right.

20 MR. RUGGLES: Did the international board, in
21 negotiating the contracts, follow the wishes of the men? Were
22 you getting what you wanted in those days?

23 MR. ELLIS: No. Back in those days, you know, it
24 wouldn't have made any difference what we got. It would have
25 been all we wanted, you know. Such as, you know, you

1 mentioned unpaid holidays. And everything that we got,
2 pensions, at the time we were getting them, we were just
3 getting our foot in the door. And number one, we didn't think
4 we were going to get anything, anyway. Whoever dreamed, you
5 know? And we dreamed about pensions, and the good slogan.
6 Our union was built of slogans. It was a good slogan. It was
7 a good thing to think about. You know, when you get too old
8 to work, and too young to die.

9 And then when you got your foot in the door a little
10 bit, with any one of them, you know, like holidays, you know,
11 you start with two or three, and you wind up with whatever
12 amount we've got now, it's something that you build on.

13 But at the local level -- and, very frankly, all my
14 life, even at the international level, I don't think any
15 negotiations ever, to me, was what you -- if they give you
16 everything you wanted, you know, which you didn't get, that
17 wouldn't have been enough anyway.

18 Because we've been going through the last 42 years
19 in negotiations, and building from '37, from nothing, until
20 what we have today. So you came up with different kinds of
21 ideas, different kinds of slogans. And you didn't get it all
22 to start with, you know. And so what you didn't get this one,
23 why, you would pick up and add to for the next contract.

24 But I think the answer, very simply, as an
25 individual, I don't think any negotiations ever gave

1 everything that people were trying to get at that time.

2 And I suppose if you just put a bundle of everything
3 you got right today, and gave it to us back in the first
4 national contract we had, we would have said, we'd have had
5 that much more on the other side.

6 **MR. RUGGLES:** In 1951, you resigned as president to
7 go on Carter's staff as an international rep. You became,
8 now, a little more involved in such things as negotiations?

9 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes.

10 **MR. RUGGLES:** I suppose, closer to it, at least.
11 Can you describe your role as international rep in 1c? What
12 areas did you service?

13 **MR. ELLIS:** You see, I had beat Carter for president
14 of the local union. And in 1951, because AC is a
15 comparatively small local union, General Motors local union --
16 see, Buick and Chevrolet in the city of Flint ran everything,
17 because of their size, bulk. All they had to do was get
18 together, and select a group of people, and that was pretty
19 much the place you went. And regional directors were elected
20 primarily by those two local unions.

21 And Buick was the largest at that point, and Chevy
22 next. And so I defeated Carter in 1948. He ran again, I
23 think, in '49, and I beat him in '49.

24 And that particular time, Bob was also 9th ward
25 commissioner, in the city of Flint, and a convention delegate.

1 And so I convinced Bob that he ought to make up his mind
2 whether he wanted to be a political opposition or whether he
3 wanted to be a 9th ward commissioner. And I got out, you
4 know, all this waste of time and effort of having to fight a
5 group.

6 And I asked him if he would like to be a candidate
7 for regional director. I'm president of the local. And city-
8 wide caucuses, at that particular time, I decided at that
9 particular time that there was a possibility, the smaller
10 local union could elect a regional director, but you had to
11 have a candidate. And rather than have myself become the
12 candidate, why, he became AC's candidate for regional director
13 in 1951.

14 And Bob had, at the national level, had been
15 considered as anti-Reuther. He really wasn't anti-Reuther,
16 but he always was associated with those kind of people, you
17 know.

18 And anyway, to make a long story short, Fisher won.
19 And I was pretty close to all the local unions, because I
20 found that my background, as I'm growing up, I had kind of
21 mingled with all these people that worked in the plant. And
22 of course, I didn't know they were active in the union, or
23 even wanting a union back at that particular time. There
24 wasn't too much goddamned talk about it.

25 And anyway, Dave McDonald was president of the 581

MacDonald *Fisher* *Loc*

1 at that particular time. Dave and I were pretty close
2 friends. So we, mathematical, put our local together,
3 delegate-wise, and we became pretty big. All we had to do was
4 get a few votes somewhere.

5 And so we put some small local unions. Carter
6 became our candidate. Dave McDonald was a candidate from his
7 own local. And of course, we had an understanding that we'd
8 run our fight, and then when that was over, why, we'd join to
9 support the one guy in the region.

10 And so that's what we did. So I'm not positive, it
11 doesn't seem to me that Carter was elected to that '51
12 convention. I think we took him down there.

13 But anyway, we elected him as the regional director.
14 And of course, at that particular time he was elected, back in
15 those days, you know, we always figured, hell, to the victor
16 goes the spoils. And when he got elected, we were going to
17 let everybody go, and he'd pick different guys from different
18 locals to come work at the International Union.

19 Well, I ran into a little problem with myself on
20 that. And so I didn't go to work. I finally got on, but it
21 took a little time, because I had never supported a candidate
22 of Walter's for a regional director.

23 And in fact, Pat Patterson (ph. sp.), we defeated
24 Pat Patterson two times. See, he ran for regional director,
25 because Pat was out of the region. And he worked for Walter,

1 or real close to Walter. And I can't remember now, but it
2 seems to me that in '51, I think Pat was a candidate in '51.
3 I think he was in '49, too.

4 **MR. RUGGLES:** This is the '51 election in Cleveland.

5 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah, Bob was elected in '51. And in
6 the process of picking his staff, he had to let people go, you
7 know. And so there was a certain number of people on the
8 staff that Walter says to Bob, you can't let go. There's no
9 way I'm going to let them go.

10 And so Archie Meyers (ph. sp.) from my local union
11 was an international rep at that time, and the only rep that
12 AC ever had in their life. And it finally got down to, Bob
13 wanted to put me on the staff, and it finally got down to the
14 only way I could go on the staff was for Archie Meyers to
15 resign and go back to work in Flint. Well, hell, there wasn't
16 any way I'm going to do that. And so we kind of manoeuvred a
17 little bit.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** And both you and Archie wound up on
19 the staff?

20 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I went to Dick Goster (ph. sp.).
21 Me and Bob did, and at that time, Dick knew Archie. Archie
22 had been a Walter Reuther man all of his life. And he had
23 quite a bit of organizing going on. And we convinced Dick to
24 transfer Archie into organizing rather than service rep, which
25 made one more opening. And then we went to Walter, you know.

1 We did it all in one day.

2 We went to Dick first. And hell, he knew Archie,
3 and he was putting on guys in organizing. And sure, he'd
4 transfer him. So then we went up to Walter, and had the
5 solution for Walter. Hell, Archie don't have to quit, Dick
6 will put him on the staff, and Carter says, Don, then, can
7 come to work for me.

8 And Walter looked at his watch. It was close to
9 noon. And he said, well, why don't we break at noon. And he
10 said, you come back at one o'clock, and I'll give you my
11 answer.

12 So we thought we've got it all made, you know. And
13 we come back up at one o'clock, and Christ, Dick was up there
14 in his office. And all at once, the job had vanished for
15 Archie.

16 So at that point, you know, I was pretty young, and
17 I said to him, what the hell. I don't have to work for the
18 International Union. I've got a good job. I'm president of a
19 local union, and I'm the goddamned boss in the local union.
20 And I wasn't bitter. That's as far as I'm going. Well,
21 anyway, Walter repented at that time, and let Archie go on.
22 And I came to work.

23 At the point I came to work, Dave McDonald had been
24 named Assistant Regional Director, or I would have come to
25 work as the Assistant to start with. And so I wound up, I

1 serviced all the Fisher Division. I'd never been in a Fisher
2 plant in my life. And I was used, then, kind of as a -- I
3 don't know what word to say, because I kind of assumed the
4 role that had gotten Carter elected to start with. And the
5 service part of the job was to "fill in here," wherever it
6 was.

7 So I worked as a rep in Chevy, a service rep in
8 Chevy. And I worked as Fisher. And then we picked up all the
9 cafeteria workers. We didn't have them. And I was the first
10 one to negotiate the first agreement they had, and several
11 after that.

12 And then Dave ^{Mac} McDonald was active -- we all were
13 active community-wise in the United Way, or the Old Red
14 Feather. And Dave really liked that kind of work, and Deek
15 Lynch (ph. sp.) resigned. At that point, it was too early in
16 time to give it directly to a labor guy. And so Dave became a
17 co-director of the Community Way. And of course he moved,
18 then I became the assistant. And I really came to work on
19 kind of the same basis, you know. ^{Donnet?}

20 **MR. RUGGLES:** Here's a list of Chapman's staff and
21 Carter's proposed staff. Some of these, there was a
22 compromise worked out. I'm taking you back just a bit, now.
23 The compromise was finally accepted by Carter, as it came down
24 from Reuther's office.

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, Meyers, as I say, was transferred

1 to organizing. Let's see. Now, these down here below were
2 not accurate, as far as Region 1c staff.

3 **MR. RUGGLES:** Okay, we can just skip that.

4 **MR. ELLIS:** They're active. They were staff
5 members, but they were not from 1c. Meyers, Ellis. Roger
6 Tomes (ph. sp.) from Buick. He wasn't on the staff in '51. I
7 don't recall whether he ever was or not. Marvin Butler we put
8 on the staff in '51. He was an anti-Reuther man. He got
9 fired from Buick. Walter and -- I can't think of his name
10 now. He was one of the first GM directors, a very precise guy
11 -- arbitrated his case and lost it.

12 And of course, Martin was always convinced anyway
13 that they, you know, because he was anti-Reuther, which is not
14 true. I mean, I know this for a fact it isn't true.

15 But anyway, Butler had been in the service. And he
16 came back, and his job was -- he was put in the mail. And he
17 got fired from Buick during some of the heydays. And so we
18 put him on the staff, or put his name on. Dave McDonald, on
19 the staff. Mitchell came on the staff, instead of Crain (ph.
20 sp.), from Chevy.

21 Lou Tanner, from Chevy, and Ed Cameron were both in
22 the same locals, and worked out a compromise, and one of them
23 had to leave. And so Walter took Ed Cameron and put him in at
24 GM Department. Everett Francis, he worked for Chapman.
25 Everett Francis had to go to Detroit. Hans Larsen (ph. sp.)

1 stayed. Russell White went into Detroit. Frank Corser (ph.
2 sp.) stayed. These are Lansing guys.

3 So my recollection was, Weston went back into Buick.
4 Later we put him back on the staff. But those who survived,
5 that Walter said you had to keep, was Hans Larsen, it was
6 Frank Corser, Lou Tanner or Cameron. And so we kept Tanner.
7 That's the only ones we kept. Russ White went into Detroit,
8 too.

9 **MR. RUGGLES:** Carter's staff was labeled by some
10 people as being a left wing staff.

11 **MR. ELLIS:** Not true.

12 **MR. RUGGLES:** And this factionalism seems to have
13 been building up for years. In 1949 there was a newsletter
14 put out. It was peddled here around 659 local, called *The*
15 *Union Builder*. It speaks of the Reuther machine, and it's a
16 very anti-Reuther publication. They're attacking Chapman, who
17 was Reuther's regional director, an appointee of Reuther's.

18 Do you recall documents like this being circulated
19 typical of the time?

20 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah, it was typical. Chrysler, you'd
21 read one, on the left hand, as you're going into the plant,
22 and a guy would give you one in the right hand that was an
23 answer to it, you know.

24 But my first convention was in '47, and we elected
25 Chapman. And Chapman really was not Walter's candidate, but

1 he would have been Walter's candidate out of the two who were
2 running at that particular time.

3 MR. RUGGLES: Who was the other one?

4 MR. ELLIS: Marvin Butler. Marvin Butler. And
5 Marvin is the one that we put on the staff who had been fired
6 from Buick. And I voted against Marvin, and voted for
7 Chapman. And of course, I never conversed with Walter, but
8 I'm certain, you know, that Walter -- I mean, that was the
9 right thing to do, as far as Walter was concerned.

10 I have to go back. If there ever was one person
11 that we did agree on, it would have been Chapman, but we did
12 not do it by him and I talking about it. You know, because
13 when I went to the convention, in that particular convention,
14 they had already counted my vote for Butler. And someone
15 surprising in my own local union. That kind of hurt me a
16 little bit.

17 MR. RUGGLES: They just assumed you were a Butler
18 man?

19 MR. ELLIS: They assumed that I was going to vote
20 for Marvin Butler. But I didn't. I had no intentions of
21 voting for him at all.

22 MR. RUGGLES: Did anyone at the convention approach
23 you, try to get you to switch to Chapman?

24 MR. ELLIS: Oh, no. I was lined up with Irene
25 Mitchell and with everybody, as far as Chapman was concerned,

1 from the local, with the exception that there were doubts,
2 naturally, in Walter's mind, where in the hell I was going to
3 be. You know, he didn't know me. I was new, and we knew one
4 another, but not to the point of being personally involved too
5 much.

6 His personal involvement, in our local union,
7 Walter's, was Irene Mitchell, and McLucas, and Speck, people
8 that are this group, see. And that was just a little bit
9 before my time.

10 **MR. RUGGLES:** Your vote in '47 was quite important,
11 though, because Reuther had been struggling for a year with an
12 executive board that wouldn't back him.

13 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes. That's right. That's right.

14 **MR. RUGGLES:** He had to turn things around, and
15 Chapman's victory was rather significant.

16 **MR. ELLIS:** It is. Well, I think --

17 **MR. RUGGLES:** Along with a lot of others.

18 **MR. ELLIS:** It's true, but being our region was -- I
19 don't know where we were at that particular time, but we'd
20 always been a big region. And we were always up around third
21 or fourth in size.

22 And you're damned right it was, because had Butler
23 got elected as regional director, you know, he would not have
24 supported Walter. No way, because in his mind, he was
25 convinced that Walter deliberately sold him down the road.

1 And that is not true.

2 I call Butler Butch, I know all these staff guys
3 from way back. There's a lot of them I helped through Carter,
4 and later through Paterson, I put them all to work, and then
5 myself. So I know these guys. And, well, I got along real
6 good with all of the guys. Me and Butch were great friends.
7 And he and I did not agree, naturally. I never would agree
8 that Walter would deliberately do anything to get rid of a
9 guy.

10 MR. RUGGLES: What occurred that made Butler think
11 that Walter had sold him down the river?

12 MR. ELLIS: Well, he had a grievance and procedure
13 through the grievance procedure. And he went to the highest
14 step of the level.

15 MR. RUGGLES: Butler did?

16 MR. ELLIS: Butler did.

17 MR. ELLIS: Butler. And Walter and -- this name
18 just flipped in and flipped out of my mind -- personally, the
19 two of them, arbitrated his case in front of the umpire. And
20 they lost it. Because, number one, Marvin Butler was guilty
21 as hell. He had a wild-cat strike, and he was the leader of
22 the goddamned thing.

23 But you could never get Butler, out of his mind, to
24 say that they didn't do as good a job as they could on these
25 agreements. And he's full of crap. You know, he'd dead now.

1 But I told him in all that time, you're full of crap. You
2 didn't have a grievance to start with.

3 Normally, in later time, hell, it would never got up
4 to umpire to start with. You know, there were no facts we
5 could merit doing it. And they did. They took it, to the
6 highest step through the grievance procedure as they could go.
7 And they lost it.

8 I know, when we elected Patterson, I was a candidate
9 when Bob quit, as far as the staff was concerned, to become
10 director. And we went to Patterson, and asked him. We'd beat
11 Pat twice. And then we went to Pat in 1959, when Bob
12 resigned. I went to Pat and just asked him how he'd like to
13 be regional director of Flint. And I guess he thought I must
14 have fell on my head or something, because we'd defeated him
15 twice.

16 And I took Lou Tanner and Charlie Zie (ph. sp.) from
17 Chevy -- they're both dead now -- and he told us that if we
18 had any more jokes, we could come back some other day, you
19 know, and I'm going home. I guess we thought, well, Christ,
20 they must think I'm nuts.

21 But anyway, on the way home, we stopped and had a
22 few drinks, you know, and Christ, these guys from Chevy, they
23 were a pretty obnoxious, rough bunch of guys, you know. And
24 they said, Jesus Christ, you want him for director, Holy
25 Christ, the dummy, we want to give him the job, you know, the

1 hell with him. But anyway, to make a long story short, I
2 called Pat the next day, and convinced him I wanted to come
3 back and talk with him.

4 I came back with myself, and left him home. And I
5 convinced him that, you know, it wasn't bullshit, because we
6 had the delegates already elected. We had to have a special
7 convention. Hell, the ones that had voted for Carter were all
8 ready, you know.

9 And so I convinced him that we really meant it. And
10 so he agreed to be the candidate. Of course, I'm positive now
11 he only agreed after the whole staff was -- Walter insisted we
12 all come down to Detroit, the whole staff, and meet with him
13 and Pat. And, you know, after you give Patterson his word,
14 Walter says, that's fine, now, you know, you're a practical
15 politician, you take off your arm and sign with blood.

16 And at that meeting, Butler was present, naturally.
17 And so each one of us had their little discussion. It started
18 with Carter. He went with us. He had resigned, but he went
19 with us. And then me. And it went around the staff. And it
20 got to Butler, you know, and Butler wouldn't look at Walter,
21 but Butler says, my candidate is Ellis.

22 And that's the only one that had said anything.
23 Everybody else was for Patterson. Walter just skipped right
24 on. You know, one out of the whole staff don't bother Walter
25 any. And he got to the next guy, and when he did, I said,

1 just a minute Walter. And I said to Butler, I says, Butler, I
2 can't be your candidate. You know, there ain't no goddamned
3 way I can be the candidate, because Patterson is my candidate.

4 And this staff was a team. And Butler says, okay.
5 Well, Patterson's all right. And that's where Pat came in.
6 Pat then ran, and we didn't have any problem electing Pat in
7 '59.

8 And then the following convention, it was a short
9 time. I don't know how long between the special convention
10 Pat was re-elected. And of course, he was re-elected until he
11 had the stroke and couldn't run again.

12 That particular time, I was, of course, his
13 assistant at that time. And he didn't change it after he was
14 elected. He left me as assistant. And so the staff insisted
15 at that particular time that I be the candidate for the
16 director then, in 1970, and so I ran in 1970 until I retired
17 in '83.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** Let me take you back to the period
19 when you just got on Carter's staff, and that period when his
20 staff was labeled "left winger."

21 This factionalism, you mentioned a few minutes that
22 lc has always been sort of a separate radical, or rough-and-
23 tumble region. Could you describe those conditions, and why
24 it happened that way? Why lc was so separate?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I really don't know. The people

1 in 1c are all leadership. They're quite vocal, and they're
2 quite independent of one another. They're not like other
3 regions. In other regions, you know, you belong to a group of
4 people, and there's no mummies. Even though we belong to a
5 group of people, in a caucus, we mummured a hell of a lot, you
6 know. We always had better ideas than anyone else, at the
7 local level, even though we were together.

8 We always had a free expression, being able to say
9 what you want, or kick hell out of one another. Not to the
10 point of, if it was ideas and contract negotiations, or
11 whatever.

12 And other regions just didn't seem to be that way.
13 Once whatever their problems were, either the regional
14 director or Walter or one of them would say, "That's it," and
15 that's it.

16 We exercised, I guess, what we would call our
17 democratic right of being a part of decision-making. And we
18 raised a lot of hell up until at the point that you have to
19 finalize it. And then the grumbling stopped, we'd finalize
20 it. And once it's final, we'd grumble some more, even amongst
21 ourselves. And it hasn't changed, even today.

22 It's not as bad as it used to be, but ever since Bob
23 -- well, going back to the question, you know, you consider it
24 as an anti-Reuther staff member. That isn't true, you know.
25 Because I had a long discussion with Carter, prior to him

1 becoming a candidate. I told him that he couldn't still play
2 this role and be an anti-Reuther. If you're elected on the
3 board, you can't just be "anti."

4 You have a right, in the process of doing things as
5 a board member, you have a right to your say. But you can't
6 serve as regional director and just be labeled on everything
7 that comes up. You can't be that, you know.

8 And so, it didn't really make that much difference
9 to Bob. And so when he went on the staff, while he was not
10 considered a pro-Reuther, he never did anything. And the
11 staff guys, with the exception of Marvin Butler, were all pro-
12 Reuther. And it's Larsen, Christ, got shop in of my mother's
13 local, and we tried to fire Hans. We couldn't. And, looking
14 back, thank God we couldn't Christ, he worked with this union
15 and for Walter, where he didn't get paid, as a staff guy.

16 And so we really did not have what you'd really call
17 anti-Reuther staff. None of them were. And so Bob was not an
18 anti-Reuther board member. The problem was that he was looked
19 on as an anti- board member, because he had always supported
20 Addis and the group prior. And while he never did anything in
21 the region, he couldn't have if he had wanted to. But he
22 never evidenced that he would want to.

23 It's kind of a shame, in that sense, because Bob was
24 a very intellectual guy, a young guy. And I think all the
25 times he served, he was sitting in that kind of a spot. I

1 think he could have done it a little different, you know, done
2 a lot better, and I think he just accepted it and I don't
3 think he said a hell of a lot on the board, because they
4 always looked at him.

5 And back then, there were other board members that
6 had come from that kind of a background. So he had very few
7 friends on the board, Bob did. But he really never did
8 anything that you could call, through the press or anything
9 else, that he was anti-Reuther man.

10 MR. RUGGLES: But this independent streak just grows
11 out of the history of 1c. When we speak of 1c, are we really
12 talking of Flint, though, primarily?

13 MR. ELLIS: No. Well --

14 MR. RUGGLES: I mean, I know geographically, it's
15 much larger.

16 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

17 MR. RUGGLES: It's 11 counties.

18 MR. ELLIS: We did start with, but then Lansing
19 began to slowly, gradually expand. And we never had Jackson,
20 Adrian and Battle Creek until the 1959 convention, after the
21 special convention.

22 Then Macauley (ph. sp.), we had seven international
23 board members in Michigan. And Macauley had been, Christ, I
24 guess the regional director in the area, he had ever since,
25 you know, they had a ward.

1 And so when he retired, we took Macauley's region.
2 Really, we did not have use for seven board members out of
3 Michigan. So we took Macauley's region and put it into all
4 the existing other than Detroit regions, and into our region.
5 And so there we picked up Jackson, Adrian and Battle Creek.

6 Lansing always was in our area, Flint and Lansing.
7 But Flint had the membership. We had seven local unions, and
8 GM locals in the city of Flint. And so nobody could get
9 elected. Nobody but Patterson. Of course, he came from 652,
10 Oldsmobile. And he wouldn't have gotten elected, hadn't,
11 really, the staff and I given him the job to start with.

12 Of course, once he's elected, he was a very
13 knowledgeable man, and a very dedicated man. And then he came
14 out of Lansing, too. So that, then, kind of solidified Flint
15 and Lansing.

16 But there is a distinction yet in our region. We
17 have what we called Flint, and then we have the western part
18 of the region, you know. That goes to even my retirement
19 party. I've never been one for too much fanfare of anything,
20 and I really did not want to have one. And then they
21 convinced me, well, they're going to have it, it's just going
22 to be small affair, just the staff and maybe some officers.

23 And then they wound up by making it regional-wide.
24 And at that point, the western end of the region says, we're
25 not going to have one. We're going to have one for Ellis. So

1 I'd have two.

2 So I had one in Lansing, for Lansing, Jackson,
3 Adrian and Battle Creek. And then I had the other one here
4 from Flint.

5 MR. RUGGLES: Did you enjoy them both?

6 MR. ELLIS: Well, I did, with the exception of, you
7 know, after I got through the first one, I thought the second
8 one was murder. It would have been better if we'd just had
9 one, but they wouldn't do that. The leadership says no.

10 MR. RUGGLES: It's a huge region, stretching all the
11 way from Otisville, northeast of Flint, on down to the little
12 town of Bronson, close to the Ohio border?

13 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

14 MR. RUGGLES: That's 100,000 members?

15 MR. ELLIS: Yeah. At one time, I think our highest,
16 I think, was up to about 120,000.

17 MR. RUGGLES: You have about 81 locals?

18 MR. ELLIS: Yes.

19 MR. RUGGLES: That's a whale of a region to service.

20 MR. ELLIS: Really, it would have been, if you take
21 a look at the make-up of the union in different regions. But
22 area-wide, we are the closest area-wide region, closest to one
23 another of any other region in the UAW, you know, furthest
24 from one point. So normally, everybody would work out of
25 Flint, you know.

1 But that didn't make any sense. You work out of
2 Flint, even going from Flint to Lansing, what the hell, you're
3 an hour and a half to get there. An hour and a half to get
4 back. And you can't really service a membership in that
5 sense.

6 So really, to service a membership, you've got to
7 practically be where you're not on the road all the time, or
8 staying over, as far as cost and so forth. And so we
9 determined the amount of service jobs, you know, out of each
10 unit, Flint, Lansing, Jackson, Adrian and Battle Creek.

11 And so when we put staff guys on, we put them on
12 from those areas, and then they were in daily contact, just
13 like we are here, with all the ones in Flint. Lansing, the
14 same way. You know, three service guys in Lansing to service
15 grievances. And you know, within 30 minutes, they can get out
16 to any one of their plants. Same thing in Jackson, Adrian and
17 Battle Creek.

18 And so, our international reps are in closer contact
19 with the local union leadership, and the local union
20 membership, than any other region. They're closer connected
21 with them.

22 **MR. RUGGLES:** Do the regional lines, as they're
23 drawn, make sense to you, or would you rather see some
24 changes?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, they've gradually been kind of, I

1 guess you call there gerrymandering a little bit, from the old
2 days. They gradually are doing this. Yes, they could stand
3 some revampment yet. We have too many vice-presidents
4 positions. The last convention, we didn't fill one of them,
5 and the intention of not filling another one.

6 You know, we need to get a little bit smaller. And
7 the future, in less organizational things, it's going to
8 continue, unless you can pick up a different segment, you
9 know, like the banks and hospitals and universities and things
10 like that.

11 But the blue collar workers, and really the average
12 unskilled work is disappearing in the automotive industry. So
13 we're going to get smaller. Not just our region, but the
14 whole union, the International Union.

15 So at this present time, we really don't need six
16 regional directors in Michigan. They're close enough in
17 Detroit to combine a couple of the regions. And it still
18 won't be up to 120,000 people, see. And that can be serviced
19 out of one office, rather than have four different regional
20 directors.

21 And that will come about, but it's tough because
22 when you start trying to draw the lines different, and put
23 merge, you run into guys that have been there all of their
24 life. And so you've got to wait until he dies or retires.

25 And so we could have done the whole thing at the

1 last convention. Me and Doug and Gerber (ph. sp.) and all
2 these guys. We could have done that at that point, but we
3 couldn't get enough togetherness on the board to do it without
4 a hell of a fight.

5 And so we kind of laid the groundwork. We got rid
6 of one vice-president, and the next convention, I don't think
7 we -- in other words, if something happens to one, we're not
8 going to fill the job.

9 And the same theory is behind the scenes. And after
10 Tamasi (ph. sp.) retires in Ohio -- see, there's three
11 regional directors in Ohio -- kind of merging away some of it.
12 We've got to wait, I guess, until some of the old-time
13 politicians die. Just like they say they want to do away with
14 Flint, and put it in with 1d.

15 It won't happen, because of the amount of membership
16 we've got in Flint. They don't like to do that. But
17 eventually they're going to have to.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** I mention it because I think it was
19 during Patterson's tenure as regional director, there was a
20 suggestion that Lapeer be brought in to 1c because so many
21 Flint workers live in Lapeer, and politically, it was
22 difficult to run a good political campaign, since they were
23 across the line in another region.

24 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah. Lapeer is 1d.

25 **MR. RUGGLES:** There was a feeling that Merrelli,

1 especially, would object to that.

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Oh, yeah. Well, that's the whole
3 problem. The past directors, see. Now, of course, George is
4 retired now, and Tamasi will be retiring at the next
5 convention, from Ohio. And Frereman (ph. sp.) from Id is
6 going to quit. So as the old-timers quit, I'm sure that
7 they're going to find some way to get this job done.

8 But we can service, in the state of Michigan, we
9 could service the membership just as effectively with at least
10 one less regional director. Of course, it would have to come
11 out of Detroit. And you know what that's going to be.

12 But they're going to have to be forced to,
13 economically, down the road, to get it back in line. As they
14 decrease, we're going to have to find some ways, really, to
15 kind of decrease.

16 We already have found ways. We've already had to
17 decrease staff throughout the International Union. And that's
18 going to continue.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** Let me go back to the time that you
20 were assistant director, or administrative assistant -- I had
21 two different titles for you there in '54. One of our
22 documents showed you as assistant director, and then the other
23 listed you as an administrative assistant. I'm not sure if
24 there was much difference.

25 But I don't want to keep coming back to that issue

1 of communism, except it keeps popping up. In 1954, there were
2 four members that were discharged by GM Flint for falsifying
3 their work records. But the belief on the part of a lot of
4 people was that they were communists. The names Trackinberg
5 (ph. sp.), Falk (ph. sp.), Engles (ph. sp.) and VanDirdios
6 (ph. sp.), I believe that's the way they pronounced their
7 names, were the four.

8 Bob Carter, in fact, was subpoenaed by the House
9 Unamerican Activities Committee. There was a congressman
10 named Clarty (ph. sp.) who you probably recall raising a big
11 stink about that time. Could you tell us about your role, and
12 the role of Region 1c in that issue?

13 MR. ELLIS: Well, those names, are familiar, but
14 it's a long time ago. But the people, what you'd really call
15 people connected to the left wing came as a result of the war.
16 And some of them were working in the plants, you know. And so
17 it was pretty rough.

18 MR. RUGGLES: This was in '54. This would be right
19 after the Korean War was over.

20 MR. ELLIS: That's right.

21 MR. RUGGLES: Okay.

22 MR. ELLIS: But the aftermath of that thing is that
23 if any of these guys in local union positions, in a local
24 union, you know, where a guy is just coming back, and
25 politically had been expounded a long time before, and he was

1 working in the plants, and then the Korean War is over, and
2 Christ, guys are coming back from the war, and service, and
3 going back into those plants.

4 It was rough for those guys, Jesus Christ, to
5 protect themselves. People get hysterical. All those names,
6 they were connected locally.

7 **MR. RUGGLES:** I don't have the local they belonged
8 to. It just said GM-Flint.

9 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I'm pretty sure you'll find it
10 would have come out of Chevy and Buick.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** I think you're right. The Buick plant
12 and Chevy, Fisher 1.

13 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah. 581.

14 **MR. RUGGLES:** Why do you acknowledge that so
15 readily?

16 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, as I said earlier, we've got some
17 retired people who really played a tremendous role in this,
18 and are retired now, and still living. And there's no
19 question about it, they were not only anti-Reuther, and pro-
20 Thomas and Addis, but there's also no question that they
21 either belonged to the Communist Party, or belonged to the
22 Trotsky Party, or were socialists. You know, there were no
23 bones about it.

24 Because in their bid, right after the war, they were
25 pretty strong in these local unions. You know, it don't take

1 a hell of a lot of numbers, and if you split them up in each
2 local.

3 And they vied for all these different local spots.
4 And once they were branded, in that sense, you know a left
5 winger, and a left winger was an ism, you know, communism, all
6 the isms were the left wingers. And they had no bones that
7 they were members of either the Communist Party. Cap Kenny
8 (ph. sp.) from Buick was.

9 What the hell? Communists. And he'd run. And he'd
10 tell them that. You know? And so after the Korean War, it
11 got to where anyone who was really tagged, and who had really
12 publicly admitted, or even was associated, it wasn't safe for
13 them in the plants. It really wasn't. They got hell kicked
14 out of them.

15 And they went to the police, and Christ, the police
16 couldn't bodyguard somebody all the time. Christ, they'd come
17 in our office. And they were pretty rough times back then.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** Do you think that Clarty committee, or
19 the House Unamerican Activities Committee was a witch-hunt of
20 sorts?

21 **MR. ELLIS:** I think in that sense. It goes back to
22 McCarthy. Sure I think it was, because McCarthy was a pretty
23 popular senator way, way back.

24 **MR. RUGGLES:** For a while.

25 **MR. ELLIS:** That's what I meant. And hell, you

1 know, that's all he was doing was, really, witch-hunting. And
2 it was his full job. And yeah, I think it was an outcome of
3 the national politics.

4 **MR. RUGGLES:** I found a work report of yours, from
5 1955. I was impressed with the amount of work that you put in
6 in the course of a short period from May to October of '55.
7 Do you recall that? You must have run yourself ragged running
8 around the region. I'm just wondering, was that a normal
9 routine that Carter required you to file work reports?

10 **MR. ELLIS:** I don't know where it came from. You
11 might be bringing up something new to me, here, now. Oh, now
12 this was from the international executive board. This was
13 from the president's office.

14 Periodically, you would have to file, as a regional
15 director, a work report on all the staff. You know, what
16 their assignments and what their work report was. And of
17 course, in '54, I was the Assistant Regional Director at that
18 particular time. Plus the fact that I was the swing guy, I
19 guess you could say. I don't care what it was, service.

20 So just during that period of time, there had been a
21 couple of illnesses, too, in some of our staff guys. And I
22 had picked up a lot of their assignment, too. But as
23 assistant director, your job was to do everything that the
24 director was supposed to do. And leave him time to do the
25 things that he was supposed to do, because they're time-

1 consuming.

2 MR. RUGGLES: You looked like you really earned your
3 pay here.

4 MR. ELLIS: Because each job you move to is a
5 different operation, and each one takes more time. So the
6 assistant director, you know, you talk about 24 hours a day,
7 and seven days a week. We used to say, Christ, we could do
8 good if we had a 36-hour day and had an eight-day work week.

9 You really didn't notice it working. I mean, to the
10 extent that, well, it just seemed to me that there's not a
11 hell of a lot of difference. Once you get involved in a
12 union, you're involved. And if you're in elective positions,
13 if you're going to stay elected, you've got to stay involved.
14 And that's seven days a week, and that's 24 hours a day, or
15 you don't last.

16 MR. RUGGLES: Pretty rugged schedule.

17 MR. ELLIS: Some people can handle it. Some can't.

18 MR. RUGGLES: Well, by 1950, you'd made an awful lot
19 of gains for your men. In 1950, in fact, that at a GM strike,
20 you won the union shop, pension, disability. Did any of these
21 great gains that the UAW won at General Motors grow out of
22 Flint in particular? Did you have a role in developing these?

23 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yeah. I think we had a role in
24 everything that's ever come out of any negotiations.

25 MR. RUGGLES: Up to this point, when you become

1 Regional Director, or Assistant Regional Director, can you
2 recall specific gains that you went after and got at the
3 international level?

4 MR. ELLIS: Well, the pension came about, I think it
5 was in 1950. I can't, date-wise, specify whichever one of
6 them came into being at that particular time.

7 MR. RUGGLES: Well, by this time, you had vacation
8 pay, of course.

9 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

10 MR. RUGGLES: And COLA.

11 MR. ELLIS: And so whatever they were, were add-ons,
12 so when we proposed, we said to ourselves, Christ, if we'd
13 thought we were going to get it, we would have proposed some
14 more. So those are add-ons things that came along. The
15 pension in '50 was the first one, you know, the first pension
16 that we had. So from the first pension until now, you know,
17 they're all add-ons.

18 MR. RUGGLES: Some of them seem fairly reasonable:
19 A pension; maybe even hospitalization. But when things like
20 sub pay were proposed, didn't GM go right through the roof?

21 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yeah. You know, GM went through the
22 roof on anything. Way back. The most asinine, goofiest
23 thing. I don't care what it was. If it made sense, they'd go
24 through their gourd on it.

25 General Motors never gave nothing to this union.

1 Nothing. And they haven't given nothing until today. In
2 fact, they're taking back. And that's normal. You have to
3 accept it. That's normal. They're a business. And they're
4 vicious business people way back.

5 Well, you've got younger people coming along, and
6 different theories. But the theory isn't that we're all
7 brothers. And that's the image that's being portrayed now.
8 And it isn't true. I say this very honestly, and I say it
9 sincerely. And I say it without any bitterness.

10 But GM particularly -- because I have no Ford,
11 Chrysler, nothing but GM and parts in this region. I think
12 it's true in Ford, too. I think it's been true in Chrysler.
13 But I don't think it's been as true as it's been in GM,
14 because GM has been the largest and the most arrogant group of
15 people in the world. They're the elite. And they have never
16 given this union nothing. And everything that we've got
17 there, even some of the minor things, somebody in this
18 organization -- not only leadership -- but somebody in the
19 membership suffered and paid for it.

20 And I suppose it would be that way. But I guess I
21 come from the old school. But I cannot think of one goddamned
22 thing, even a minor thing, that GM gave this union without
23 costing something. Not only money, but costing somebody
24 something.

25 Shift preference. Jesus Christ, they had no logical

1 answer for a guy on a same job, who had been doing the job 15
2 years more than the guy on the second shift, and then wanting
3 to work second shift, and put the other guy on days.

4 You know, no, you can't do it. You know, you've to
5 break in. Well, why in the hell do you have to break a guy 15
6 years on the same job? It's something good for the company.

7 **MR. RUGGLES:** They just wouldn't let him change
8 shifts?

9 **MR. ELLIS:** No. Why? Jesus Christ, they fought
10 that as hard as they fought the pension plans. You know, some
11 things that were good for the company, you had to cram down
12 their necks. And then later, Jesus Christ, that's working
13 beautifully, you know. So I guess that's the way it's been.

14 But they're being portrayed now, to me, it's got the
15 membership confused. You can't pick up anything that it isn't
16 a joint operation. So a guy goes to work in a plant, I don't
17 know, unless he comes from a labor background, or on his own
18 as an individual, gets so involved that he understands where
19 you're coming from, and what it took to get there, I can
20 understand why they're a little confused.

21 **MR. RUGGLES:** They think GM gave it to them?

22 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah. Everything that's in there, a guy
23 comes along and now, then, they see that everything's
24 administered jointly, even our 50th here, Tuesday night, you
25 know. Al Warren shared the platform with the president of our

1 union. You know, Al Warren is a great guy. He don't know
2 what the hell he's doing on the job he's got, and he publicly
3 said so in the paper in his first goddamned negotiations. But
4 through whatever way you get somewhere in the corporation, he
5 wound up doing the job.

6 And when his a good friend who sat underneath him
7 got sick, he's lost, and hell, he's said in *The Free Press* and
8 *The News*, I'm not familiar with this kind of a thing.

9 And now then, all of our affairs, you wind the
10 goddamned thing up and all of a sudden, you know, solidarity,
11 and got hold of -- and Al Warren, and says, it's going to be a
12 different union down the road, than it used to be.

13 So the rank and file people -- and that's been one
14 of our problems, anyway, is communicating. And it's hard to
15 communicate through literature and through the mail. The only
16 way you can do it is from the ground up, and that's from the
17 start. The alternate committeeman, the district committeeman
18 and the shop committeeman, that's your communication system in
19 the plant.

20 And all that occurred in the time that I was
21 involved. Each one of those guys, at that particular time,
22 knew what the issues were. They knew what we wanted. And
23 hell, the membership was involved, because district
24 committeemen had 250 people. And hell, he knew them all, or
25 he should have. I don't think that's true today.

1 MR. RUGGLES: I had one example of that. And I was
2 going to ask you about such things as poor attendance. Even
3 in the late '60s --

4 MR. ELLIS: Right.

5 MR. RUGGLES: -- there was a ratification vote where
6 less than 10 percent -- this was a Buick Flint local --

7 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

8 MR. RUGGLES: Less than 10 percent voted on
9 ratification of a contract. What do you think the underlying
10 cause of this attitude is?

11 MR. ELLIS: Well, what date was that?

12 MR. RUGGLES: That would be in '68.

13 MR. ELLIS: '68, that's comparatively --

14 MR. RUGGLES: To get to be specific.

15 MR. ELLIS: To go from '48 to '68, that's 20 years
16 difference.

17 MR. RUGGLES: Right. But even then, it's way back
18 there that the problem existed.

19 MR. ELLIS: Yeah. Well, same thing, even though way
20 back in my time, we really had a small participation of the
21 membership in voting on contracts. But the further back you
22 go, you know, the people who worked in the plants at that time
23 knew what the issues were. They knew what the settlement was.
24 And if the leadership in there, once it was over, said hey, it
25 ain't enough, but that's the best we can do, and we ought to

1 accept it, you know, because they were familiar with the
2 people. And so that was good enough for the people.

3 The only time you had a big uprising was when
4 somebody didn't like anything. So they said, well, the union
5 is like anything else, I guess, the regular membership that
6 holds its own position on it says, Hey, that's your job, Mr.
7 Committeeman. You know, you attend the membership meetings.
8 That's what I elect you to do.

9 But those people back then kept them so informed
10 that they knew. And if something came up they didn't like,
11 they'd come to the membership meeting. And hell, anytime
12 you'd go to a membership meeting and you had 150, 200 people
13 out there, you knew goddamned well somebody didn't like
14 something. They wouldn't have come over there because they
15 liked something. And so I think that really generated
16 complacency, I guess is what you would call it.

17 **MR. RUGGLES:** Is there a weakness then, at the local
18 level, in communicating or educating?

19 **MR. ELLIS:** No, I don't think back even as late as
20 the '60s, I think even then, that would have indicated that
21 the local leadership, even at district, were communicating.
22 And those people, the membership, knew what they were going to
23 vote. And instead of going over, really, and supporting the
24 thing, there was not enough opposition anywhere to know they
25 were going to get voted down, that they just said, Hey, that's

1 fine. Now, you guys have been doing this right along, just go
2 on over and vote for me. Really, that was their sense of it,
3 you know.

4 I think maybe from '68 until the present time -- it
5 didn't just happen -- I think slowly, I don't think that's
6 true. I don't think the membership is familiar, as familiar
7 with what this union is doing, as they used to be. I don't
8 think they are.

9 And you're not going to do that by putting this in a
10 paper to them, you know, sending it to their homes. They just
11 aren't going to -- so I don't think there's a close enough
12 communication, close enough of working and dedication.

13 **MR. RUGGLES:** Are the workers getting too fat and
14 sassy today?

15 **MR. ELLIS:** I think this could be true. I think
16 that's why our political and our showing for the last 20 years
17 has come about.

18 We come from a place of being able to say, you know,
19 you've got a two-party system. My age, you'd come from
20 Depression days, and nobody had nothing. You weren't mad at
21 anybody, but it was just common. What the hell, it wasn't
22 tough. There's no use you crying about it, because hell,
23 everybody down the road is the same base.

24 And so that goes back into the Democratic and the
25 Republican Party. See, the Democratic thing, the Democrats

1 was always forever economic and a social thing. And coming
2 from where nobody had anything. You know, the old WPA. Take
3 you off in welfare, and give you a shovel and didn't have
4 nothing to dig. Same thing as in the service, you know. A
5 guy would hand you a shovel, and tell you to dig a hole. And
6 you'd get it all done, and he's say, now this afternoon, fill
7 it up. But he paid you. They'd pay you for doing it. You
8 didn't have to stand in line for a handout.

9 And even if you stood on the shovel, there wasn't
10 really a hell of a lot he had to do. But at least it gave him
11 a sense of earning something, rather than being donated a bowl
12 of soup or something.

13 And I think through the years, and through all of
14 the good times that we've had, we still say to our membership,
15 you know, you are the working poor. They aren't the working
16 poor working in the goddamned plants. And you are the blue
17 collar, you know. And you can't live.

18 Well, the guy in the plant very honestly said to
19 himself, well, whoever them poor bastards are, I feel sorry
20 for them. But shit, he ain't talking to me. And so, I don't
21 think he's right.

22 And so they started, then, the independent thing,
23 the individual independent thing, and saying the old
24 expression, I don't vote any straight ticket. I vote for the
25 man. And that's a good theory. It's just that, you don't

1 elect a hell of a lot of people voting for the man.

2 And so, as we have become all of the things we've
3 got, the people we're talking to, very honestly, you know,
4 what the hell, you make \$40,000 a year, shit, I ain't the
5 working poor. They ain't talking to me. So I'll do what I
6 want to do.

7 And then, of course, times change, and the
8 politicians change. And it seems that, while the Democratic
9 Party platform can't be the same as it was 50 years ago, but
10 now it gets kind of like the union.

11 You can't tell the union from a management guy. You
12 can't tell a Democrat from a Republican half of the time. You
13 elect a Democrat in one spot, and Christ, the guy who was
14 there who was a Republican was a better guy than he elected.
15 So I guess that's just the nature of going through certain
16 periods of time.

17 **MR. RUGGLES:** It poses some great problems for the
18 union, doesn't it?

19 **MR. ELLIS:** It certainly does. And for the people.
20 And those people who have either sat home and not done
21 anything, or working people who have exercised their right,
22 and says, the union is not talking to me, and so I vote, you
23 know, for Nixon, or I vote for the present president, because
24 I think he -- just he -- is a better man than the other.

25 And it's going to create some problems down the

1 road, because in my mind, there's a definite place as far as
2 the difference between the Democratic and the Republican
3 Party. And I suppose that's because of my age, because I had
4 nothing, and then as Roosevelt got elected, and he made all
5 these social things, all the different kinds of programs, they
6 paid people. You know, you got paid for it.

7 And the Republican theory is you pull yourself up by
8 the bootstrap. That's fine, if there's opportunities and
9 availability, then its easy for a guy to pull himself up by
10 bootstrap if his old man's got 15, 20 million bucks.

11 And the Government is run like anything else.
12 Corporations, you know, every time we meet with them in
13 contracts and in political things, what the hell, where are
14 they at? Actually, on the other side, and they're doing it
15 for their own reasons. So I guess we're kind of drifting.
16 And when we get down the road 15 or 18 years, it's already
17 happening.

18 But with all these governmental appointments -- and
19 some are for life, for Christ's sake -- and the National Labor
20 Relations Board has slowly been changing as we've been losing
21 the president and the appointed positions.

22 And where Chrysler presently is re-writing some of
23 the old goddamned labor laws. They're rewriting some of the
24 decisions the National Labor Relations Board has lived with
25 for years and years. They're rewriting them. They ain't no

1 good anymore.

2 MR. RUGGLES: Is the NLRB becoming actually anti-
3 labor?

4 MR. ELLIS: Oh, they aren't becoming. They have.
5 They are. There isn't any question about it, and no bones
6 about it.

7 MR. RUGGLES: In what specific ways?

8 MR. ELLIS: Well, what little rights we've had under
9 the law, the National Labor Relations Act, you know. Jesus
10 Christ, in some of our existing contracts, language-wise, in
11 the closing of plants, and different kinds of things, they
12 don't apply anymore. It didn't mean that. And it's getting
13 to where anything that would go to them for a decision, you're
14 not going to win it, before you go. There's no question about
15 it.

16 The Supreme Court, the same thing. I guess they've
17 got two now that are real, real old, and they're pumping life
18 into them, hoping they can live until after the next election,
19 you know. If they don't, well, then, Reagan is going to
20 appoint these two to the Supreme Court, and with different
21 philosophies.

22 Some are for social -- in other words, when I say
23 social, at least work opportunities are available, or some
24 kind of something, work, for those people who really want to
25 work. I'm not talking about somebody who doesn't want to

1 work. Although we've got people whose grandfathers, for
2 Christ's sake, didn't work. They just happened to get caught
3 in the chain of something like that, and they don't know any
4 better.

5 And some of the laws, women that are working ADC,
6 and those kinds of things. I've helped several of those,
7 wherever I could. I've helped them find jobs. Because, I
8 don't know how many, but there have got to be a hell of a lot
9 of them that's drawing and don't want to. They don't want to
10 just sit and draw. But if they didn't have some of these
11 opportunities, then Christ, I don't know, you've got to feed
12 them.

13 **MR. RUGGLES:** Not to get off that subject, but let
14 me take you back for just a second. Let me take you back to
15 negotiating. You were talking about General Motors being so
16 tough. Did you sit across the table from some real tough ones
17 in negotiations? Who were they, do you recall?

18 **MR. ELLIS:** I think all.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** Who was the toughest?

20 **MR. ELLIS:** You'd have to pretty near go by
21 divisions. I think the Chevrolet Division is the most
22 arrogant and the toughest of any of them.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** During particular periods, or just
24 historically, across the board?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Now. Still are. From the lower level

1 up. I think it's bred into them. I really do. The only
2 difference that I see is that even as mean and tough as, well,
3 guys like this Seaton (ph. sp.), and Norm Ellis (ph. sp.) and
4 some of the old old-timers, once you came to an agreement with
5 him, you know, you could go to bed with him. Once you got an
6 agreement.

7 Today, you can have an agreement, and somebody will
8 change that guy from management, and he has to come back right
9 after you've got it in writing, and tell you, I can't live
10 with it.

11 They don't have the authority, in that sense, as
12 they've grown up, that the old ones did. The old ones, once
13 you made an agreement with them, even at the national level,
14 that was it.

15 **MR. RUGGLES:** There's a different code of ethics?

16 **MR. ELLIS:** They had complete authority. That's
17 disappearing from the corporations.

18 **MR. RUGGLES:** When you went in to negotiate, did you
19 go in with very specific plans or goals, or were you flexible?
20 Were you willing to bend?

21 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, you're flexible. I don't care
22 what you had. But there was specific emphasis on different
23 things. Well, you know, like the pensions, or whatever we've
24 got would be, at the national level, were specifics.

25 You always had enough to be flexible, even way the

1 hell back, you know, with the exception of when you got into
2 work rules, way, way back. And there was no flexibility
3 there. If some guy got fired, nobody worked. What the hell,
4 that's only if he got fired. So they had flexibility.

5 **MR. RUGGLES:** I want to talk to you about violence
6 in the strikes, and jurisdictional questions. Over the years,
7 there have been a lot of jurisdictional questions between
8 different unions, and sometimes within the union. And quite
9 often, that led to violence.

10 Is there a way to avoid this type of thing in the
11 future? Shouldn't the jurisdiction of a particular union be
12 known ahead of time, so that such things as violent outbreaks
13 around a plant could be avoided?

14 There was one, for instance, you might recall, and
15 it must have been a rather bloody battle, down in Grand Blanc,
16 between pipefitters and riggers. I'm not sure that the UAW
17 was actually involved in it.

18 **MR. ELLIS:** We weren't. No, we were not involved in
19 that. That's a jurisdictional fight between the craft unions
20 themselves.

21 **MR. RUGGLES:** But, they occurred in the UAW also, in
22 different locals, or even some regions disputed who had --

23 **MR. ELLIS:** If it was. That would have been outside
24 contracting work in the Fisher plant, for example. You had a
25 jurisdictional argument on who would do certain work. And

1 just because it's in a UAW plant, you know, it would cause us
2 some problems.

3 The only thing I can think of in that light that
4 we've had within our organization is the fight with the
5 Skilled Trades Society, which we --

6 MR. RUGGLES: Skilled Trades are members of the UAW,
7 aren't they?

8 MR. ELLIS: Were, they were members of ours, but
9 they were being misled into trying to get into a craft union.
10 In other words, of their own. To get out of our union, and go
11 into an organization all their own.

12 MR. RUGGLES: And that would be the ISST?

13 MR. ELLIS: That was the ISST. And the leadership,
14 very simply, on that, was individuals who were seeking to take
15 our members out. And naturally, if they had been successful,
16 whoever their names were -- I can't recall one guy that I
17 should, but his name slips out of my mind -- he was out of
18 Chevy.

19 MR. RUGGLES: It wasn't Joe Denebeck (ph. sp.), was
20 it?

21 MR. ELLIS: Yeah. Denebeck. Joe. And really,
22 later, he was tight up with the Republican Party. And he
23 created us a hell of a problem within each of our GM plants,
24 to the extent that they were going to picket the plants. With
25 no jurisdictional arguments. They were all UAW people.

1 And in the hopes that, naturally, our people see a
2 picket line, what the hell, they're going to go home. They
3 don't work. And it was outside of their constitutional
4 rights. And we were forced, while we had kind of put up with
5 them in that sense, we had to fight them politically within
6 the local unions, within the structure.

7 And we finally did what we probably should have done
8 when it first started. We said, you're not going to do that.
9 And you hadn't ought to be out in front of our UAW plants with
10 a picket line. I don't give a shit if you are dues-paying
11 members. You shouldn't do that, because you don't have the
12 right to withhold. You don't have a right to make that kind
13 of a decision. And there's nothing the UAW is involved in to
14 keep those people from working, and so we're going to see that
15 they work, and you people ought not to be out here.

16 And so we had -- it only took one day, after all the
17 putting up with it. We had one day that we moved them,
18 starting here from Chevy, we moved them from in the front of
19 the plant, and from here, they went down to the manufacturing
20 plant. And we moved them out from there.

21 **MR. RUGGLES:** When you say you moved them?

22 **MR. ELLIS:** We moved them, and moved some of their
23 cars, you know, without batteries. And explained a few things
24 to people who were hard-headed, and had to have it explained
25 to them, you know. It's kind of, you take a kid, you slap

1 him. You take a man, you hit him.

2 And in one day, we stopped it. We put a whole
3 complete stop in the city of Flint. And it finally winded up
4 over at my local, in AC. And I had about 25 -- I don't know,
5 by that time, I had 300 or 400 State Police, and deputy
6 sheriffs, and we were very fortunate, in really working out a
7 solution to the problem before the shift started. We had
8 about 30 tradesmen parading around in front of the goddamned
9 gate where the people was.

10 And of course, they wound up over there, because of
11 these two fracasas we'd had here at Chevy. And we were really
12 fortunate, in one sense, as to convince the head of the law
13 enforcement that they ought to move those guys themselves,
14 before we did. Because we were going to move them. And of
15 course, they were saying, when you move them, and the law is
16 going to say they have a right, that's city property. And we
17 were able to convince them that it didn't make any difference
18 what they were going to do. They were either going to get
19 them the hell out of there, or we were going to.

20 And so we worked out what we thought was a
21 compromise. We got them out of the gate. They took the
22 police and ringed these 30 guys, but them moved them from in
23 front of the gate where the people could go to work. And they
24 had them all ringed with officers.

25 And Christ, they looked kind of funny, you know.

1 Here are these guys, a little bitty bunch, like cattle. And
2 they had all the officers. Well, by that time, we had guys
3 from all the local unions that had been involved, a little bit
4 in the morning, and then a little bit more down here. And by
5 that time, in the afternoon, hell, we had all the leadership
6 from different locals, you know.

7 And our people went to work. But in the meantime,
8 while they went to work, the 20 or 30 policemen, and the 20 or
9 30 picketers got roughed up a little bit. At least, it didn't
10 get them all involved. And a few went to jail. But the
11 people went to work.

12 MR. RUGGLES: Did you go to jail?

13 MR. ELLIS: No. No, I was the director, I guess, at
14 that time.

15 MR. RUGGLES: '66 --

16 MR. ELLIS: No.

17 MR. RUGGLES: -- is the one situation.

18 MR. ELLIS: '66?

19 MR. RUGGLES: It's the one thing I'm -- well, this
20 is when Denebeck was speaking.

21 MR. ELLIS: Yeah. Well, that was its heyday,
22 because Patterson -- well, '66, that could be it. No, '59 was
23 when we had all that confusion. But we really kind of got rid
24 of that feeling of a separate craft union.

25 MR. RUGGLES: How can the skilled trades be kept

1 happy within the UAW? They don't seem to be.

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Never have. Because, naturally, they're
3 a craft union. They come from where you have to go to school.
4 You have to be knowledgeable. You have to know a lot more
5 than you have to know as far as production people. And so
6 once they go through the apprentice route, and become a
7 journeyman skilled tradesman, it's like there are no poor
8 people, you know.

9 They feel that they're a group of their own, and
10 they want no identity with anyone else. And they've always
11 had this kind of a feeling. And it's kind of hard to convince
12 them that, in one sense, there's room within our structure for
13 individual crafts. And they're a hell of a lot stronger with
14 115,000 or 120,000 production people helping them get what
15 they want, to get it. They never get it.

16 And during this going, because it has been this way,
17 they've always wound up a little better off, you know, than
18 the production people.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** And that's a continuing battle?

20 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes. And I think, it very honestly will
21 be until either they're all skilled. Because what we're going
22 into now, you've got to be more skilled in everything. And so
23 it will be a problem.

24 **MR. ELLIS:** Maybe it will become a big plus for the
25 UAW?

1 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yeah.

2 MR. RUGGLES: Rather than a dissident group that's
3 always --

4 MR. ELLIS: In one sense, and that is that if
5 there's reasonable, dedicated people in that group. You know,
6 because they're a very jealous group of people. Because way
7 back, production and skilled represented one another. And
8 very honestly, a production guy can represent skilled people a
9 hell of a lot better than a skilled tradesman can, you know.
10 It's just a very simple fact. Because they've got so many
11 (indiscernible - tape change.)

12 MR. ELLIS: ...he ain't a skilled tradesman. You
13 know, he ain't a millwright. He's not a pipefitter. He's not
14 a tool and die maker. He's an electrician. And so he's a
15 good fellow for all electricians. But then he's into a group
16 of himself. And then trying to represent all the different
17 trades, he's got a minus.

18 Now, you take a production guy, who knows nothing
19 about the trades, the craft, but at least knows how the
20 organization ought to work, he can represent the grievance
21 procedure a hell of a lot better than they can. Because,
22 Christ, history will show that they've given away a lot of
23 their work. Each class, lines of demarcation.

24 Electricians say, what the hell, it works fine, that
25 little piece of it, and I'm not going to do any more.

1 Somebody's got to do it. There are a lot of fringe parts.
2 Well, a pipefitter winds up doing it.

3 I know in the Grand Blanc plant, the service in that
4 plant, and Jesus Christ, they had the most versatile
5 membership out there as far as skilled people, because it was
6 predominantly skilled. They could do one another's work.

7 And the company, management, was very smart. They
8 didn't give a shit who did it, as long as the work got done.
9 So Christ, we'd meet once a month, the trades guys and I.
10 We'd meet once a month. And they'd line up. "Well, I did
11 this last month as a pipefitter. I'm not going to do it
12 anymore."

13 So I'd go over here in this classification. I
14 really didn't give a shit, because they were capable of doing
15 it. So one month, I'd give away a little bit. They'd say, as
16 long as it's working regular and everything. Next thing, give
17 away this. Next thing, there ain't any work left. Start
18 laying off. You go, oh, Christ, we want this back now. Oh,
19 what a hell of a mess.

20 We used to have a meeting once a month when I
21 serviced their plant. Skilled guys. Go through the lines of
22 demarcation, knock off so many jobs in this job, put it in one
23 of the other skill groups. Management would say, fine. Here.
24 We'd shut -- those were the most versatile workers you'd ever
25 seen. Every goddamn one of them could do anything.

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** They just didn't want to?

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah. They didn't want to, as long as
3 they were working seven days a week, and ten hours a day. But
4 it creates some problems because once they start laying off in
5 a classification, then that guy's saying, hey, I used to do
6 that guy's work over there. You know, give it back. By
7 agreement, that's pretty tough to do.

8 **MR. RUGGLES:** It was a never-ending battle?

9 **MR. ELLIS:** A never-ending battle.

10 **MR. RUGGLES:** The UAW, for years, going way back to
11 the early '30s and '40s, has been a defender of civil rights.
12 And yet, at the local level, there have often been instances
13 of racism. And I guess Flint has probably had its share. I
14 wanted to ask you about racial problems in the region. In
15 1965, for instance, your regional office was picketed by the
16 NAACP, because I guess they felt there should have been more
17 black representation on the board, at least on the staff of
18 1c.

19 And in 1963, the Ford and Redmond (ph. sp.) plants
20 in Owosso were apparently a little edgy about having to hire
21 negroes. Those are all white communities, aren't they?

22 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah, in Owosso. Always has been.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** And management was a little edgy or
24 nervous about the fact that they were going to have to allow
25 negroes to apply. That was one other situation. And then, in

1 '65 also, the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, Robert
2 Shelton, bragged that 700 union men had been signed up with Ku
3 Klux Klan applications in the Flint area.

4 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah.

5 **MR. RUGGLES:** He was bragging, although I don't know
6 that that actually happened. But could you tell us about the
7 racism in the Flint area, in these areas of representations of
8 blacks, number one, and then the Ku Klux Klan activity, number
9 two?

10 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I guess that goes back from the
11 history of the union. Not only the union, because that's as
12 far back as it goes as people.

13 The bulk of the membership, from probably -- I'll go
14 just from my time, from '26, and it could be a few years later
15 than that -- and the bulk of the work force in the plants, GM
16 plants, was all white. Very, very few blacks at all, unless
17 they were -- well, later in life, they became -- but there
18 used to be janitors. And we had to fight like hell to get
19 them broadened out.

20 And Flint was a transient labor place. You know, it
21 was made up of three or four times transient people, rather
22 than people who lived in Flint, because of the work. And
23 predominantly, people from the South and the West came to
24 Flint back in those days.

25 And so it was kind of, you know, a membership made

1 up predominantly of people from different areas. It goes back
2 to the Civil War days. So there were very few blacks that
3 took the initiative at that point to get active. And the few
4 that did had a goddamned rough time.

5 So it was just a period of time. Earl Crumpton (ph.
6 sp.) was the first black who came to work on the staff here in
7 Flint, in 1951. He was from Chevy. He's dead now. He and I
8 came to work in the same year, out of the convention.

9 I know the reason that I didn't put more on --
10 because I put -- well, Earl came on with me, because it was me
11 and Carter. And we put Reuben Burk (ph. sp.), who is the
12 assistant now. We put Mack, who is our educational director
13 now.

14 But we didn't have blacks holding various local
15 union high positions, like shop committee jobs, or chairmen of
16 the shop, or presidents of the local. And that's where our
17 work force comes from.

18 I had the same problem with women. Women would say,
19 why don't you have more women on the staff? I'd say, you've
20 got to go out and get yourself elected somewhere, because when
21 I put somebody on the staff, I can't put a black or a woman on
22 the staff. You can't teach them this job. You've got to have
23 some background, some experience.

24 And the locals just didn't supply that. You know,
25 so I'd say to women, I can't put you on the staff just because

1 you're a woman. And to the blacks, I'd say, I can't put a
2 black on the staff just because he's black.

3 Well, Reuben Burk, a very credible man. It was easy
4 to put him on the staff. And the reflection shows. He's the
5 assistant now. And Cyril McGuire (ph. sp.), who's Mack, we
6 call, from the president of his own local union, did a
7 commendable job. He'd been on the shop committee. He had the
8 background to do the job, which he was put on.

9 And so they didn't supply it through the locals.
10 And unless a guy, a black, really had enough desire and enough
11 belief in the union to fight like hell and get somewhere and
12 stay there, politically -- and to get there, particularly in
13 Chevy and a lot of the plants had a different element of
14 membership. And you know, being a politician, some will make
15 no bones about it. You know, make a picture. Want to make a
16 picture. Or, if they had read a slate of a group, and there
17 was a black guy, you know, they'd say, they'd put in his
18 picture and going to call you black.

19 So they used this thing. And Sam Duncan (ph. sp.),
20 who was the president of Local 598, I don't know how many
21 years. But of course, I'd known Sam for years, ever since he
22 was a young guy. He was active, but he was in this union.
23 And once he applied himself, you know, it didn't matter how
24 many kicks you kicked him. He always came back. And he kept
25 doing better. And he got elected president of that local, and

1 got elected by people who didn't have no black background.
2 Opposite.

3 **MR. RUGGLES:** Sam was black?

4 **MR. ELLIS:** Oh, yes. And I don't think -- well, Sam
5 was never defeated as president. He died. He had the
6 ability, and the desire, and did not give up. And because
7 they're elected positions -- you've got to get elected, you
8 know. And you can be the best available around, but if you're
9 not elected somewhere, you're not going to do anything with
10 the union.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** In 1970, Howell was the home of the
12 Michigan grand dragon, Bob Miles. I don't know if that means
13 anything, except it's in your region. Did you see any
14 reflection of Klan activity, and that 700 union men that
15 Shelton claims to have signed up? Was there any real proof
16 that that occurred?

17 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, it was evident. And they did have
18 membership. I wouldn't dispute the fact of the amount he had,
19 you know. I really didn't know. But I do know that there
20 were people from various local unions that, hell, they made no
21 bones about it, joining, you know, that they were members of
22 the Ku Klux Klan.

23 But it's kind of like the ISST in that sense. It
24 didn't get so overwhelming that before, evidently, each
25 individual local union, however, in their own way, combatted

1 it enough to where they quit running around I want to wear a
2 banner, at least, you know. So it died.

3 MR. RUGGLES: It never amounted to too much?

4 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

5 MR. RUGGLES: I know Patterson was aware of it.

6 MR. ELLIS: Oh, yeah.

7 MR. RUGGLES: He talked to Reuther about it, and
8 Mazey and those. And I was wondering how you might have
9 handled it at the local level, or at the regional level?

10 MR. ELLIS: Well, we really, as I say, it was
11 concentrated, it seems to me that the biggest one unit of
12 them, or the strength of it was out to 326, in Turnstead (ph.
13 sp.). Because I can't remember now who it was, but it seems
14 that, hell, he was getting public press releases in *The*
15 *Journal*, and of course, he thrived on that.

16 And I would think, the way it was handled was, as it
17 was drawn to the attention of the local union leadership,
18 that, you know, it had no place in our union, and they ought
19 to combat it on the basis of letting their membership know,
20 and what the hell there was doing, and what the intent was.
21 And I think the local union themselves, those guys and women,
22 really, once they became aware of everything to that extent, I
23 think they handled it, so that it died right out.

24 MR. RUGGLES: Did you know Brother Trammel?

25 MR. ELLIS: Who?

1 **MR. RUGGLES:** Brother Trammel. Does that ring a
2 bell?

3 **MR. ELLIS:** Trammel?

4 **MR. RUGGLES:** Trammel. He's apparently the one that
5 had the conversation with Shelton, the grand dragon, when
6 Shelton bragged about signing up 700 people in Flint. But
7 that's 20 years ago.

8 **MR. ELLIS:** No, that name, evidently it wasn't such
9 a threat at that point that it made any impression on me. So
10 I don't know.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** We've talked about some of the
12 problems with the union, the attitudes of new workers, and the
13 changing times. One of the others that keeps popping up is
14 the issue of plants moving south into right-to-work states, or
15 at least where labor is not so organized.

16 And you've had several plants in your region, the
17 Revco plant in Deerfield -- they opened a plant in Williston,
18 South Carolina, if you recall, in the '60s. And the LA
19 Darling (ph. sp.) Company in Bronson, which had been there
20 since 1909.

21 **MR. ELLIS:** Old time.

22 **MR. RUGGLES:** That's a long time.

23 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes.

24 **MR. RUGGLES:** They opened up a plant in Paragould,
25 Arkansas. This must have been causing you a great number of

1 problems. What inducements can be made, do you think, in the
2 north, to keep labor in Michigan in particular, or is that
3 going to continue?

4 **MR. ELLIS:** I think it will. I think we're going to
5 have problems. What I said at this period of time, because
6 coming from the South, I said, you know, it's ironic as hell.
7 Because a person comes from the South to Flint. It was a
8 transient labor group. Before the unions, they'd come, they'd
9 work six months and go home. They didn't bring their
10 families, you know.

11 Once they got the union, and got the seniority
12 thing, then the question of working six months for three days
13 and off and on was stopped. And seniority provided steady
14 employment. The guy came up. His wife says, well, now,
15 you're going to be working nine months. I'm not going to stay
16 down here. Me and the kids are going to go with you.

17 So we went through a period of those families
18 moving, and they didn't buy homes then. What the hell, they
19 all came up and rented, or lived with one another, you know,
20 in groups.

21 And then you go through that guy, and then his kids
22 going into the plant, and then his grandkids, through this
23 period, being into the plants. Now, then, all at once, here
24 we are, the corporation, for what ever the reason, is moving
25 back down into the South.

1 And I said, you know, the ironic thing of this
2 goddamned thing is that a guy who came from Paragould,
3 Arkansas, back in 1926, you know, worked here 40 years of his
4 life, his son worked, as he got old enough. His grandkid now
5 is working. And the only goddamned job they're going to have
6 is to go back to Paragould. You know, if you had a right,
7 contractually, which we really have just kind of scratched the
8 surface a little bit on.

9 But, you know, it's ironic as hell. It would be
10 like building a plant in Piggott, Arkansas. You know, I leave
11 there at seven years old. I know nothing about Piggott,
12 Arkansas. I went back there two times, since I came up here
13 in '26. Once in '36 for two weeks, and once in '72, I think,
14 when my mother died. She lived here, but she was visiting in
15 Memphis and of course, my father and sister are buried there,
16 and so I went, when she died on vacation, and visiting in
17 Memphis with her sister. And so I've only been back twice
18 since '26.

19 It would be like building a plant down there. And
20 if my kids is working in the shop, you know, all kinds of
21 opportunities for the kids, but he'd have to go back to
22 Piggott, Arkansas. And he hasn't been to Piggott in his life.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** Do the workers have the right to
24 transfer to these new plants?

25 **MR. ELLIS:** Under certain conditions, now, we do.

1 And this is just lately. What eventually is going to happen
2 in this union, and it's going to have to be, because we're
3 getting smaller, there's going to have to be industry-wide
4 seniority. At least, they could have the opportunity; whether
5 they'd do it or not remains to be seen.

6 Because we've found, even though they have the
7 opportunity, from there, if a family has been here, own a
8 home, their roots are here, their kids and their grandkids are
9 going to school, they don't want to go back down there, even
10 to have a job.

11 But if they had the right -- because in certain
12 instances, we have had the rights, and, Christ, you never get
13 the amount of people you'd dream that you knew is from down
14 there. Hell, a grandkid, he don't know anything about down
15 there. He don't want to go down there.

16 **MR. RUGGLES:** And in the case of Williston, it's 800
17 miles from Flint. It's difficult to expect people to pack up
18 and move 800 miles.

19 **MR. ELLIS:** That's what I meant. Their roots are
20 here, now, see.

21 **MR. RUGGLES:** Sure.

22 **MR. ELLIS:** They came from a transient group of
23 people to rent, and then they bought homes, and their kids go
24 to school, they pay taxes. Their roots are here. It's their
25 home. Hell, Michigan is my home. My home state. I know

1 nothing about Arkansas. I don't have anything against
2 Arkansas, but I have no ties or nothing. I'm retired, and I
3 haven't been back since I've retired to even visit anyone. I
4 don't know anyone down there. One or two relatives, but
5 that's all.

6 **MR. RUGGLES:** Patterson had written a letter to
7 Senator Phil Hart at the time suggesting some king of
8 legislation to prevent, in the case of the Bronson plant and
9 the Deerfield plant, in an attempt to prevent communities from
10 floating industrial bonds as they were doing in the South, to
11 lure industries, perhaps reversing that and getting
12 communities here some type of financial help to induce plants
13 to stay.

14 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah.

15 **MR. RUGGLES:** But of course, that was not going to
16 happen overnight, that legislation. How did you handle the
17 loss of those plants? You must have had a tremendous number
18 of workers out of work.

19 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, we had no friends anywhere to keep
20 it from happening. And it went from economic things. It went
21 to where a guy just said, what the hell, I'm going to move.
22 I've got a contract here, and the goddamned contract, I'm not
23 going to live with it. The hell with the union. By contract,
24 you used to not be able to do that. You couldn't just do it
25 because of the union.

1 The laws have been flim-flamsied (sic) around to
2 where, Christ, you can't win one of them anymore And you've
3 got no help anywhere, to keep someone from just doing those
4 kinds of things.

5 And it's sad. I don't know how many plants I've
6 been through that are closing, because each one of those
7 employees who quits has got a family. The independent parts
8 and supplier people working, you know, are having a rougher
9 time anyway than the big plants. And it's just the nature of
10 not being able to do anything about it.

11 You take a small community that's got three or four
12 plants that hire 2000, 3000 people. They all move or drop out
13 one by one, why, pretty soon, that community has got nothing.

14 And I really don't know. That's why I say, new
15 plants, if they're GM, Ford or Chrysler, and they're under
16 contract, there's got to be some kinds of opportunity for
17 displaced GM workers that have got seniority to work there.

18 Now, naturally, that's going to create a problem in
19 that town. But because we are getting smaller, we are going
20 to have to go to protecting those members that we've got, at
21 least they have the opportunity. Though I can see -- I don't
22 know how far down the road it will be -- that eventually,
23 there's got to be some industry-wide seniority clauses.

24 Chrysler you have a fit if you had them right in
25 front from one local to the other, although now, under the

1 area-wide, we're applying that within the city of Flint. You
2 know, you can't hire new people if you've got someone laid off
3 from a GM plant.

4 But that's a small, compact area, and it doesn't
5 bother these people too much. They don't like it, but if you
6 worked at Buick, and you're laid off, and they're hiring over
7 here to Chevy, we say you're offered a job. You've got to go
8 to work.

9 Well, they didn't like that at first. But at least
10 it keeps it wieldy, and right there it protects a little bit.
11 Flint could be a ghost town, if the automotive industry shut
12 down. Everything in Flint is tied to the automotive industry.
13 I don't give a shit what it is. Banks, insurance, everything
14 that lives and breathes is tied to the automotive industry.
15 If that automotive don't do good, you've got problems here in
16 Flint.

17 Like I say, you get one hiccup, and a layoff in
18 general in the UAW, and we get pneumonia here, because we've
19 got more people to start with, and so more of them are going
20 to be involved.

21 I don't know what the answer is to them moving
22 existing operations to different states. I know it's tougher
23 than hell on organizing. I can understand this: I can
24 understand that you take a small town, just like where I'm
25 from now, Houghton Lake. There's no work opportunity at

1 Houghton Lake for those kids that are going to get out of
2 school. You'll get a minimum wage, if you can get a job.

3 Well, it's the same thing with these small towns.
4 You put a goddamned plant in Houghton Lake that would hire,
5 for example, 3000 people, at a decent pay, and it would be an
6 opportunity for those kids to remain in that community. I
7 don't know what the hell they're going to do when they get
8 through school. There's a lot of people. And that's just a
9 little small town, Houghton Lake.

10 And the kids, when they get through school, they
11 can't work there. There's not even enough work there now to
12 keep them. The same thing in the South.

13 So when an opportunity comes, and they put a plant
14 in one of those small places down South, and the wage
15 structure, you know, what the hell do they need a union for?
16 Christ, they're being offered \$4 an hour more than they've
17 ever made in their life, or their dad has ever made, you know?

18 So they have no sense of wanting a union. They
19 don't need it. So there's no sympathy there right now. If it
20 stays long enough, there will be. It won't be by us creating
21 it. It will be by the companies, because we never organized
22 nobody down there anyway. The goddamned companies organize
23 it, not us.

24 **MR. RUGGLES:** Spring Hill was organized by the
25 company.

1 MR. ELLIS: That's true. So we'd have never had the
2 UAW. If it wasn't for all the things we've got, if the
3 goddamned companies had just recognized that they were dealing
4 with human beings. They didn't mean nothing to them.

5 It's sad to say, but it's fact. There's numbers.
6 And, you know, there's 6000 people in the city of Flint
7 they've got to get rid of, they're just numbers, as far as
8 they're concerned. It's not people, it's 6000 displacements,
9 you know.

10 So we're going through a change. We've been through
11 the heyday in the automotive industry. The last 42 years has
12 been a heyday. We've come to a point of time, not just now,
13 but a few years back, that with all the unemployment we've
14 got, we can't build more goddamned cars and put on the road
15 anyway, even if they could sell them.

16 We've already more built. That's why the towns are
17 dying. We've got more built in the big cities -- we've got
18 more goddamned cars than can go down and shop. There's no
19 parking. And that's what's killed all the big towns. There's
20 no place to park.

21 So the guy says, what the hell, why don't we buy ten
22 acres and put in 15, 20 little stores and a supermarket? And
23 it kills them.

24 So we've gone through the heyday in the automobile
25 industry. And as I say, you can build more cars than you can

1 put on the road. There ain't room for them. And we can do it
2 right now, with the unemployment we've got. I don't know how
3 many thousand that could be laid off, with all the technology
4 and robots and stuff they've got.

5 My only thinking, all through the years, was the
6 only thing in our favor was that there's just a certain amount
7 of them they can use, because they've got to sell these cars
8 to somebody. But they're still building plants, and
9 automating them to where you walk down through the son-of-a-
10 bitch and you don't see any workers.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** Robots don't buy cars.

12 **MR. ELLIS:** No, unless they teach them. They can
13 sell them, I suppose. I guess it's for (indiscernible), but
14 not that much. Just create one to punch a clock, and then pay
15 them, and then take back the money and hell, he drive a car.
16 Shit, they can drive. They've got a sense of smell. They can
17 feel. It's astounding what can be done. So I don't know what
18 the hell the answer is.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** Let me ask you about some of the
20 people that you must have encountered as the Regional Director
21 here in Michigan, especially since you covered not only Flint,
22 but the Lansing area. A lot of governors. You've been around
23 through a whole bunch of them.

24 But let me start with one person, of course. I'd
25 like to get your impressions of Walter Reuther. We've

1 mentioned him briefly. I've heard him called everything from
2 an S.O.B. to a saint. A lot of people have attacked him. A
3 lot of people have revered him. You had a lot of personal
4 dealings with Walter. Tell me about Walter Reuther.

5 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, I guess you've covered it, really.
6 He did all them things. Walter Reuther came along in the
7 labor movement at the right time and at the right place and
8 was the right guy. And there are people who looked at him as
9 God, you know. And still do.

10 And there never will be or never has been another
11 Walter Reuther. By the same token, there never has been and
12 never will be another Leonard Woodcock, or another Doug
13 Fraser. And even the latest one you've got, another Owen
14 Bieber, because there's really no two individuals that are
15 identical.

16 The thing with Leonard and with Doug, and with Owen,
17 is that they all were a part of the Reuther, growing up
18 together, and working and living together. And I don't think
19 we'll ever have another period in history come by for another
20 man to come along in that.

21 And so the whole history of the union, as it goes
22 along, you aren't going to remember anybody but Walter
23 Reuther, you know.

24 **MR. RUGGLES:** There aren't as many people talking
25 about Homer Martin or R.J. Thomas --

1 MR. ELLIS: Why, yeah. You talk about Homer Martin
2 or R.J. Thomas, or George Addis --

3 MR. RUGGLES: George Addis, yes.

4 MR. ELLIS: Who the hell are they? That's because,
5 you know, as a guy is there and stays, the history is written
6 differently.

7 MR. RUGGLES: I was down at the Dave Miller Building
8 the other day, and George Addis got up to speak, and I
9 couldn't help but reflect on the fact that the two cameramen
10 with the videotape machine, when Addis got up to speak, they
11 shut it off and left.

12 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

13 MR. RUGGLES: They didn't know who he was.

14 MR. ELLIS: No, that's a shame.

15 MR. RUGGLES: It is a shame.

16 MR. ELLIS: It is a shame, because George Addis made
17 a tactful decision, you know. He could have been the
18 secretary/treasurer with Walter Reuther, because he had the
19 ability. And George Addis was the guy for R.J. Thomas. R.J.
20 Thomas was the president, but George Addis was the backbone of
21 that group of people. And he was a smart man. And as far as
22 dedication to the union, no question on that.

23 MR. RUGGLES: Why do you suppose he made the
24 decision not to go with Walter?

25 MR. ELLIS: He didn't think Walter was going to get

1 elected.

2 MR. RUGGLES: He just chose the wrong side?

3 MR. ELLIS: That's right. He just didn't think he
4 was going to get elected.

5 MR. RUGGLES: But after he did get elected in '46,
6 Addis was still secretary/treasurer for that first year,
7 wasn't he?

8 MR. ELLIS: Yes.

9 MR. RUGGLES: He could have stayed on? Or couldn't
10 he have?

11 MR. ELLIS: Well, I still think maybe, yes. But he
12 still was in the same position, because Walter was the only
13 one elected. Hell, the rest of the board was all Addis
14 people.

15 MR. RUGGLES: For that first year?

16 MR. ELLIS: Well, sure. And what they did is they
17 made a very bad mistake with Walter. You know, they wouldn't
18 give him anything to do. They didn't give him an office. No
19 nothing. So they wouldn't give him nothing. So, what the
20 hell, he didn't have nothing to do, so he went out and
21 strengthened up his caucus.

22 They should have kept him busy as hell, and
23 insisted, you know, you do this kind of work, instead of get
24 lost. Because Walter didn't get lost, you know.

25 So really, George, at this particular time, still

1 was very simple of mind. Hell, he only had a one-year
2 convention. Only put up with him for one year.

3 MR. RUGGLES: You didn't become regional director
4 until the year that Walter died?

5 MR. ELLIS: '70.

6 MR. RUGGLES: '70. But prior to that time, you had
7 some personal contacts with him, even though you didn't sit on
8 the executive board?

9 MR. ELLIS: Right.

10 MR. RUGGLES: Did you see the organization, at that
11 time, the International Executive Board, and the UAW general,
12 as a democratic organization? Or was it Walter Reuther's
13 baby?

14 MR. ELLIS: Well, I think it was Walter's baby. I
15 think -- I don't want to say it wasn't democratic, because I
16 think our union has always been the most democratic union in
17 existence, and even to our own detriment, a lot of times.

18 And nothing democratic that was not to the detriment
19 -- would be a detriment either to the union or to Walter, it
20 wasn't going to happen.

21 That's why I say, so he fits very good in both. He
22 was a saint to so many people, because he was a good man. And
23 he worked seven days a week, 24 hours a day, for this union.
24 And he built terrific political power within the union
25 structure, you know.

1 If he was anti- -- there were no anti-regional
2 directors, you know, from '51. From '51. There were no anti-
3 regional directors. Carter wasn't an anti-regional director.
4 He couldn't be, because we wouldn't let him be if he had
5 wanted to be. You know, he didn't want to be, but those were
6 the rules. And so Walter just eliminated, within the
7 democratic structure.

8 I think there's a lot of things that democracy, it
9 really don't mean a hell of a lot. Just the sound of it gets
10 in your way, you know.

11 But this union will be remembered, really, unless
12 there's a political change from the officers and the board in
13 the next six, eight, ten years -- and I don't see that -- in
14 this union, there's going to be Walter's union rules.

15 Because the history is going to be that. Because
16 when you way Walter Reuther and Doug Fraser and Leonard
17 Woodcock and Owen Bieber, it's all Walter Reuther, you know,
18 because they have the same philosophy, and just different
19 personal approaches. They have the same. That will gradually
20 change, as each of the old ones leave. That will change. But
21 he was a great man.

22 **MR. RUGGLES:** You became regional director in '70,
23 after he died?

24 **MR. ELLIS:** After Walter?

25 **MR. RUGGLES:** Yes?

1 MR. ELLIS: No.

2 MR. RUGGLES: Before?

3 MR. ELLIS: Yeah. See, the day Walter was killed, I
4 had a regional educational meeting at the Civic Center in
5 Lansing. And at the convention, Walter had agreed to come.
6 He was supposed to be at our convention the night he was
7 killed. But he sent Doug Fraser. This came up, the problem
8 of him and the architect happened to go to Black Lake
9 unexpectedly.

10 Irv Bluestone was scheduled to go with him. And
11 right at the last minute, I don't remember now what it was, a
12 family thing, or something, that Irv says to Walter, do you
13 really need me? And Walter says, well, under the
14 circumstances, no. I can fill you in tomorrow, or when I get
15 back.

16 He was scheduled to go with him, and didn't go. And
17 so we had our educational seminar. I don't remember now, we
18 got through about ten o'clock. And Doug stayed at the Capitol
19 Park Motel. I drove. For that distance, I'd drive back and
20 forth. And he thought I was staying. And he said, let's go
21 down after this is over, and we'll have a beer. I says, Okay.
22 He says, are you staying at the hotel? I said, No. He says,
23 You drive back and forth? I said, Hell, yes. You know, I'm
24 gone so much anyway. It's only an hour.

25 But anyway, I went down, and we sat there until

1 twelve. Yeah, it was twelve o'clock I think, or 11:30 before
2 I left. He goes to bed, and I drive home. And I get home,
3 and I got in bed. I don't remember now exactly what time it
4 was, and Christ, he called me. They had called him. And we
5 didn't know it until, I don't know what time, one or two
6 o'clock in the morning. He called me and told me over the
7 phone. They had just called him, and Walter, you know, in
8 that wreck, had been killed.

9 **MR. RUGGLES:** That was a traumatic period. The big
10 debate then was, would it be Woodcock or Fraser for president.
11 And of course, it --

12 **MR. ELLIS:** It was all done real quick, too.

13 **MR. RUGGLES:** Was it? How?

14 **MR. ELLIS:** I think very simply. I think we did it
15 in a week. Real quick.

16 **MR. RUGGLES:** Was it a fairly unanimous decision for
17 Leonard?

18 **MR. ELLIS:** No. No. As I say, we're all -- no, it
19 was no unanimous at all. In fact, my recollection is that
20 Fraser had one more vote than Leonard had, but he didn't have
21 the membership, you know. In other words, the directors who
22 represented the bulk of the membership. See, I supported
23 Leonard over Doug. Hell, I'd known them both a long time, but
24 Leonard's from the GM Section of our agreement.

25 So numbers of the board members, I am not positive.

1 But I think the record would show that Doug had one more vote,
2 actual vote, on the board than Leonard did. But I don't think
3 he had a GM regional director. Well, hell, that's the bulk of
4 the membership. And so Doug withdrew at that point, and
5 suggested that we elect Leonard.

6 And then right after that, we have a two-man appeal
7 committee, made up of officers and board members. And right
8 after that, then, right after the goddamned election, Leonard
9 put me and Doug together. I had to work seven years with a
10 two-man committee, an appeals committee, with Fraser.

11 **MR. RUGGLES:** Well, you spent your entire life in
12 the union, Mr. Ellis. Let me ask you a couple of questions,
13 before we wrap it up, relating to politics.

14 Back to all the governors that have served. You've
15 served as regional director and at some lower position in the
16 union under Soapy Williams and George Romney and Bill Milliken
17 and a whole bunch of people.

18 **MR. ELLIS:** Swanson.

19 **MR. RUGGLES:** Swainson.

20 **MR. ELLIS:** Swainson, right.

21 **MR. RUGGLES:** And now Blanchard.

22 **MR. ELLIS:** And now, then, our last one.

23 **MR. RUGGLES:** And I've forgotten a couple, probably.

24 **MR. ELLIS:** Yeah.

25 **MR. RUGGLES:** But if you could pick one, as a labor

1 leader, if you could pick a governor of Michigan during your
2 lifetime, who would your choice be?

3 MR. ELLIS: Well, during my lifetime, that would be
4 easy to answer.

5 MR. RUGGLES: Frank Murphy.

6 MR. ELLIS: Is that damn right.

7 MR. RUGGLES: I didn't mean to put words in your
8 mouth.

9 MR. ELLIS: Well, you're correct. Naturally, it
10 would have been Frank Murphy. The rest, it would be a real
11 chore for me. I guess I would, in answer to that, say Soapy
12 Williams. I think I probably would, naturally, because he
13 served a long length of time, and I was personally involved
14 with him, and knew him.

15 And oh, there are many things about it that I didn't
16 particularly like. But there are a lot of things about a lot
17 of people that I didn't like, and I'm sure there's a lot of
18 people that didn't like me.

19 But in that group, and I think I'd base it on the
20 amount of years, because I guess he served about 12 years, or
21 something like that.

22 MR. RUGGLES: You had an automobile man up there,
23 once, George Romney.

24 MR. ELLIS: Yeah.

25 MR. RUGGLES: Did that give you any trouble, as a

1 labor leader?

2 **MR. ELLIS:** Yes. It didn't -- it did, in that
3 sense, my association with him. He was an arrogant guy, as
4 arrogant as hell. And his approach, when he was running, his
5 approach, as far as the union was concerned, or anyone in
6 opposition to him, was, you know, to just walk in your house
7 uninvited, and spit in your eye.

8 You know, I resent that kind of a thing. And so it
9 was just a normal barrier. I didn't know him personally very
10 well. I never worked with him personally. So I didn't like
11 too much about him, any part.

12 And he came into some of the local unions and he was
13 very arrogant. And it evidently paid off politically. It
14 helped him.

15 **MR. RUGGLES:** Do you feel like you're a part of
16 history? It sounds like a silly question to me, but --

17 **MR. ELLIS:** Well, it's not a silly question, because
18 yes, I do. I don't know how to express it in that sense. But
19 when you've lived through and represented the people in the
20 plant, and the book and instructions and agreements you could
21 put in your shirt pocket.

22 And then, come into a period of time now to where,
23 you know, a district committeeman and a shop committeeman are
24 going to have a briefcase, and they need three or four trunks,
25 and people to carry it around with them, you know.

1 And all of the things that have happened during the
2 period of time that I was afforded the opportunity to work
3 with this union. I never dwelt on it in my own mind at all
4 until, you know, as you get older, and each one of them you've
5 been a part of. And it has been history in the last 42 years
6 of this union.

7 And so I'm real contented, and happy, and real proud
8 that I've had the opportunity to do that, recognizing, number
9 one, that most of all of my life, any opportunity that I've
10 had, you had to get elected, with the exception of the
11 appointment as an international rep.

12 I worked two years in a job where I was appointed.
13 Then I spent the rest of my time in appointed positions with
14 us being the only two guys that could be moved if the director
15 got beat.

16 See, our constitution provides if the director is
17 defeated, the assistant automatically is gone, because the new
18 director has the right, in our constitution, to select his own
19 assistant.

20 So I've been in a position of elective positions.
21 And ever since '53 -- 54, I guess it was. If Carter got beat,
22 I don't have a job. And the same thing in the local union.
23 If you get defeated on one job, you've got to run again.

24 Well, I've been fortunate, I guess. I never said
25 this until the last convention, you made a mistake when you

1 elected me, because that was the last one until '83. I said,
2 I want all you delegates to understand this. I never told you
3 this, but you made a mistake, because you had an opportunity
4 to do something to me that no one else ever has. I've never
5 lost an election. You just elected me. There's nothing you
6 can do about it, because I can't run in '83.

7 **MR. RUGGLES:** That's a good place to stop, Mr.
8 Ellis. '83 was the place you stopped.

9 **MR. ELLIS:** That's right.

10 **MR. RUGGLES:** And we're just about out of tape right
11 now. I want to thank you very much. It was a beautiful
12 interview.