

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
OF
SOL DOLLINGER

Interviewed by
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Oral History Interview of Mr. Sol Dollinger by Jack W. Skeels, University of Michigan - Wayne State University, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, July 31, 1960.

I was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1920; that makes me thirty-nine years old. My family moved to New York when I was around six or seven years old. When I was eleven, I was placed in an orphan asylum. I had an older brother who had become active in the early formation of the Trotskyist movement. I believe at that time it was known as the Communist League of America. He would visit us, approximately once every six months. When we got a little older, he would start talking to us about Socialism. When I was around fifteen years old, I started to attend some meetings of the Socialist Party. The Trotskyites at that time had already entered the Socialist Party. I joined the Young People's Socialist League and I believe it was approximately May 1, 1937. I went right from high school to the welfare role and became active in the unemployed and project workers union. I served on the Executive Board of the Unemployed and Project Workers' Union in Jamaica Queens. Later, I participated with my brother, as a volunteer organizer for the AFL Upholstery Union. Shortly after that I took out sailing papers and managed to get into the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. I sailed for approximately three months, at which time I met my wife and came to Flint in the fall of 1941 with the intentions of going on from Flint to Seattle and sailing from the West Coast. I spent six months in Flint. Then I shipped out again, took a trip to Russia, was gone for seven months and was on a torpedoed ship. My legs were frozen. I spent a little while recuperating in Flint after which we decided that we would move to Detroit since my wife was blacklisted in Flint. She had acquired some shop-work training through the AWPA School. It was impossible for her to get a job in Flint due to the black list. We moved to Detroit. I sailed on the Great Lakes. She got a job in Budd Wheel. I sailed for a period of time on the Lakes until asthma prevented me from continuing that activity and I decided that I would go to work in the automobile plants and my first job was in Budd Wheel. I spent a few months in Budd Wheel, then worked a few months in Hudson Motor Products. Around 1944-45 there were developments taking place in Flint which were of political concern to us. It appeared that some of the people that we were acquainted with in Flint had made an effort at Chevrolet to withdraw from the UAW and

go over to the United Mine Workers. It was decided by the S.W.P. that it would be advisable to send someone there and see if we could not exercise some influence to prevent this from taking place. I worked as a full-time organizer for the S.W.P. in Flint during this period and did so up until 1947 when I went to work in Chevrolet. I remained with Chevrolet through 1953.

I broke down with TB and had to go into a sanatorium. When I returned to the plant, I fully intended to go back to work there if I could obtain a halfway decent job. The company made it apparent that they had no intentions of giving me that type of job and I quit. Naturally, all through the years I have maintained my interest in the UAW. I would say up until 1945 my attention was concerned more with the political aspects of this work. From '45 on it was directly concerned with the internal activities inside of the union.

Skeels: Prior to '45 had the SWP taken a position in supporting either the Reuther or Addes caucus or had they decided things on the basis of issues?

Dollinger: The S.W.P. never solidified themselves with either of the major caucuses. They would take their stand on the basis of the issues. I think that you could see that most clearly in the Homer Martin dispute, for example. There has been something written up about it, I think, in Irving Howe and B.J. Widick's book, Walter Reuther and the UAW. Some of the internal publications of the Socialist Workers' Party which are available also refer to it. It was a period when the leadership of the organization was in the hands of intellectuals centered in New York City. Because of their antipathy to the Communist Party and the fact that Homer Martin was anti-Stalinist, this oriented them in that direction, whereas the people who worked in the automobile industry and were much closer to the situation were less concerned with the external political aspects of the question and had to deal with the problems specifically in their particular plants and localities. As a result, most of the auto workers in the industry were inclined to go along with the Unity Caucus. The national committee of the S.W.P. adopted a pro-Martin position. They went to the extent of putting out an issue of the Militant where they indicated their support for Martin. The leaders of the S.W.P. auto workers immediately sent off telegrams requesting that the issue be held up until a discussion could take place over the policy and the end result of it was that the issue

of that paper was suppressed, although some copies of the paper did get out which explained some of the confusion which developed over the policy of the S.W.P. at that particular time. As far as the militants inside the shops and inside local union, there was no question that it was a pro-Unity position versus Homer Martin.

I think that the biggest contribution of the S.W.P., and for that matter the Schachtmanites as two political groups within the UAW, was in their consistent policy developed over the no-strike pledge.

The influence of the CP inside the UAW was tremendous and the union went on record in support of the no-strike policy. If you recall, Roosevelt came out with a program of Equality of Sacrifice; I think one of the proposals he made at that time was that there should be no salaries over \$25,000 a year, there was going to be no profiteering in the war. Inside the union this proposition was handled very demagogically by some of the leaders who were most sensitive to the proposition. I would put in that category Walter Reuther. The people that were around the CP were very crass and crude. The way they presented it, the United States was allied with the Soviet Union and this was in the best interest of the Soviet Union and, therefore, the no-strike pledge had to go. Reuther had a greater difficulty because he had to maneuver between the militants who resented the fact that they had to give up their strike policy and his desire at the same time to support the war effort. It presented him with great difficulty. But, by riding along on the proposals that Roosevelt had made, he sugar-coated the whole proposition.

Skeels: Now, were your people connected with the rank-and-file caucus or the no-strike pledge caucus?

Dollinger: Yes, we were with the rank-and-file caucus. The problem still remained of speed-up, bargaining over grievance procedure, the fact that the wages had been frozen. There was no way that the workers could solve any of these problems without resorting to wildcat strikes. Now these strikes, if you examine that particular period, began very slowly in 1942 and picked up speed and by 1943 there was a rash of wildcat strikes throughout the Detroit area. I think there was a period of time in Briggs when almost once or twice a week you had a strike in one of the departments in

the Briggs setup, which was the most militant local in the UAW. The national press referred to them as the "dead-end kids." We had a tremendous amount of influence among the militants in Briggs as a result of our consistent militant position on the right to strike. In spite of the war effort in many local unions people were forced into this type of action, they identified with us, and our influence began to grow apace. Of course, this was going on not only in Michigan but in New York State. I recall the strike in one of the Brewster Aircraft plants that was led by DeLorenzo. I think Walter Winchell labeled them Trotskyists. These girls who had probably never heard of the word before had labeled with lipstick on their blouses that they were Trotskyists. Similar actions were being demonstrated in many different situations across the country. In the no-strike pledge caucus, we played a considerable role along with the Workers' Party or Schachtmanites.

Skeels: This would probably explain the reason why a demand for independent political action probably got tied up with the no-strike pledge?

Dollinger: Yes. When a person broke with the governmental policy, these workers did not reason it out politically to the nth degree but consciously or unconsciously they realized that they were in opposition to Roosevelt's policies. There was no turning towards the Republican Party. That was simply out of the question. Our proposal for the organization of the labor party began to get larger hearing although you have to remember that in 1937 as a result of the sit-down strikes, there was a spilling over from economic action into political action in the mine fields. Lewis had organized the Non-Partisan Leagues in order to mobilize the vote behind Roosevelt. In New York State they felt compelled to organize the American Labor Party. In Detroit they supported independent labor candidates for mayoralty offices. With the no-strike pledge development, you had along with the struggle for independent political action which finally gave birth to the Michigan Commonwealth Federation. I was at its first convention. I did not play any major role in it. That was at the time I was interested primarily in the building of the Socialist Workers' Party. My activities were orientated in that direction.

Skeels: Would you say the Michigan Commonwealth Federation was an outgrowth of this drive to oppose the no-strike pledge, or do you think they developed independently?

Dollinger: The people who participated in the fight against the no-strike pledge were also the leaders in the fight for independent political action. Once again it was spearheaded by the people in Briggs, Chrysler 7, Local 490. There was the Willow Run plant with Brendan Sexton and Yost. There were people here in Flint, in Chevrolet. There was the Bell Aircraft Local in Buffalo, New York. There were some California locals. But in Michigan itself I would say that there were around twenty or thirty union presidents who sponsored the move for the establishment of the Michigan Commonwealth Federation

Behind the scenes I would say that Walter Reuther tried to play both ends against the middle on the no-strike policy, while he could not very well oppose it because these were basically his people who were involved in this type of action and which will explain his straddling position at the Grand Rapids Convention over the no-strike pledge. He was in the middle on it because his people were in our caucus and while he had to maintain the no-strike pledge policy at the same time, he could not divorce himself from these people who were moving in a different direction. This explains why he was the first to move out so quickly with the '45 strike. These were his people and some way or another he had to get back in the leadership of them. You recall this policy at that time was that he was for striking in those plants that were not on war work and maintaining the policy in plants still on war production. Well, it was a ludicrous policy because those plants were doing both types of work but in the same plant. One section of the plant might be turning out bombshells. Therefore, his position did not attract any support. As a result of that struggle over the no-strike pledge, the rank and file caucus won at that convention a referendum vote.

Skeels: How was that referendum ever carried out?

Dollinger: Ballots were mailed out to all the members of the union. A majority supported the no-strike pledge, but I think it was questionable. You have got to understand that the counting of the ballots was under the administratorship of whomever was in office in a particular locality. When referendum votes are not closely supervised by third-party arrangement, it is easy to stack the ballot box. In spite of the fact that there were all kinds of mismanagement, the vote was extremely

favorable for the opposition caucus that did not have a share of the national leadership of the union. It was the first major challenge by a rank-and-file caucus independent of either group in the leadership of the union and came within a nose of changing the policy of the union. The MCF on the other hand never developed into anything of any consequence. The war came rapidly to a close and, of course, with Reuther moving out on strike policy, all of the militants flocked behind him to give him support on that particular action.

Skeels: You would say that the 1945-46 GM strike then helped Reuther?

Dollinger: Tremendously. Reuther all during the war years was the administrator of the General Motors Department and by virtue of the fact that grievances were not being resolved, Flint was always hostile to Reuther for this reason. It was considered to be an Addes region. While Reuther had supporters in the plant, they were not the major administrators of any of the locals.

Occasionally he would have partial administratorship of Chevrolet. But basically, Flint was considered an anti-Reuther region. This was their way of expressing their hostility to the failure to settle grievances and bureaucratic actions of Reuther. As you know, in the Chrysler Division they established, through the '37 strikes, the shop steward system recognized in the contract that was written at that time. General Motors never achieved that. It existed in some of the plants, for example, in Chevrolet and in Fisher 1. If you had a militant committeeman, he saw to it that he had stewards elected underneath him and he saw to it that they achieved some power within their districts. The militancy, and the spirit that existed from '37 carried on into the war period.

Somewhere around 1940, Reuther appeared before the committee bodies in all the locals in the city of Flint and suggested to them that if they bought his proposition, I think it was on the no-strike pledge, they in turn would sometime in the future get a recognized steward body. Of course, they gave up something for nothing because they never achieved that. The militant phraseology was always utilized by him and from '37 on gains were given up and nothing was achieved in return for it. That is one reason General Motors' conditions have been and continue to be the worst in the automobile industry. At the last convention or the prior convention to the last one, criticism was raised that the attempt is now being made by Chrysler and Ford to establish the conditions that

existed in General Motors. This has been the constant source of difficulty in the city of Flint and explains why he never succeeded in obtaining control of this district until the '45 strike.

Skeels: You came into the plants in Flint. Did you find that the Addes caucus was very effectively organized up here?

Dollinger: No, neither caucus was very effectively organized. When I first came to Flint and attended some of the first meetings, the impression that you would receive was one of the ultimate in democracy where any rank and file worker, who could speak could get on the floor and make a speech and had the opportunity of winning if his ideas were acceptable to the audience. I remember R.J. Thomas making a speech. It was nothing unusual for a rank and filer to get up and walk up to the rostrum in the IMA auditorium, take the floor against him and defeat him on a particular proposition. The thing that was liked about him was that he would gracefully accept defeat and not do attempt to steam-roller, for the simple reason he knew he could not do it. When I returned in '45 it had become a little more controlled, but the basic democratic procedures were still observed in the local unions. By large I would say the leadership of the unions around here were not the most competent.

The best people were already in the no-strike pledge caucus or had entered the Army. You had this tremendous influx into the plant as a result of the war period. And there was a leveling process on the militancy and the conditions that existed around the city.

Skeels: You came into the area in '45 when there was this attempt of one of the locals to go over to John L. Lewis.

Dollinger: Yes, we had misinterpreted, due to lack of information, what was actually behind it. The Chevrolet Local, as a result of the no-strike pledge policy was in a running warfare with the International, Reuther, Addes, and Thomas. In that particular situation, Reuther remained behind the scenes for the simple reason that it was his people that were fighting on this particular policy and he would make no effort to antagonize his people. They were a substantial force but not large enough to win the local union, although as I explained, on the issues they could from time to time. Terrell Thompson was president of the local union. He was a Missouri school teacher and in

Chevrolet 75 per cent of the membership was from the South and it carried considerable weight to run for office and to be known as a former resident of the South. That still applies today, more so, for example, than in Buick. Hiring policies between plants vary here. For example, in Fisher 1 they had an anti-Semitic, anti-Negro policy. To my knowledge, I believe, that up until the war period, they never hired any Negroes even on janitors' jobs. In Chevrolet there were approximately four hundred Negroes that were all on janitors' jobs.

Buick, of, course, has a large foundry. That is where the majority of the Negroes were. Buick also seemed to employ more of the people of European extraction and more of the native Michiganders which gave it a different character. Speed-up policies were much more intensive in Chevrolet than in Buick. Therefore, the speed-up struggles never were too much of a problem in Buick which will help to explain why the strikes broke out in Chevrolet and not in the Buick factories. When I came to Flint, I came here I think around August, and shortly after the strikes broke and all of our activity was centered around the strike.

The S.W.P. had a considerable influence in the strike. We ran a very loose caucus arrangement. We held our own meetings in the YMCA and the meetings were open by invitation, but we invited only those people who would play a leadership role within their local union. Many of the people who attended had participated in the sit-downs, but there were many other officers who had never participated in any kind of strike, for example, people from the AC Local. AC did not participate in the sit-down. We had a good number from Buick. Many of them were committeemen, shop committeemen, top officers and the leaders of the strike in Flint.

They had a central strike committee which consisted of the president, financial secretary, shop committeeman, and it even went beyond that. Through this policy body we could influence developments. At that time Jack Holt was the regional director. From time to time we would present policies. While we supported Reuther, we did not always go along with the way the strike was being handled. The only way that we could bring pressure to bear was through the adoption of resolutions. Now this worked very well for Reuther. He was very tolerant of this particular situation because he could turn around to management and say, "Now look, you had better deal

with me because if you do not deal with me there are people that are more extreme than I.” That gave him some bargaining leverage.

During the war as a result of John L. Lewis’ strikes against the Government, there was a big furor about what was going to be the attitude of these veterans that were coming home. Management was attempting to see how far they could go and this was the first opportunity to test the effectiveness of the propaganda that they had put out over a period of several years that the workers on the home front were sabotaging the war effort and John L. Lewis and these unions. In Flint, General Motors attempted several variances of the Mohawk Valley procedure of breaking strikes. One phase was the effort to organize the returning veterans. Their point man was a veteran, Captain Packard. If he succeeded, they would have been used as a battering ram against the UAW picket lines. Well, each time they tried one of these things, they failed. Packard planned a meeting at a county courthouse. The UAW packed the meeting. That was the end of the veterans’ gambit. The next thing was the housewives. And the union packed that meeting with UAW housewives. That was the end of that. On one occasion they tried to work up a big campaign on Trotskyists running the strike. They had some fantastic headline about 5,000 Trotskyists being imported from New York led by myself at AC. It developed over a skirmish on the picket line where they attempted to move the office workers through the picket line. One of our guys was the strike captain and the UAW repulsed them. The next day they announced that they were going through again. It was around ten degrees below zero and around 2,000 or 3,000 pickets showed up there. One car attempted to go through and the pickets just picked that car up and bounced it out into the middle of Dort Highway and that was the end of that. Then it was followed with the redbaiting action, previously mentioned. Well, each one of these things failed completely.

From our political observations of the strike, the worst thing that could have happened was to permit this thing to drag on endlessly. Now in that respect we were in conflict with Reuther’s policy. Reuther understood, as he was an astute strategist, that the longer the strike continued, the more headlines he would achieve. As a result of the prolongation of the strike, it made for

effective propaganda. The longer that he was in the public eye, the more sure were his chances of moving on from vice-president to president. Undoubtedly, this was a factor behind this lack of concern over the prolongation of the strike.

But from the point of view of the morale of the strikers it was bad policy. The workers had accumulated savings as a result of the wartime years, many hours of overtime and not being able to buy anything, many workers had accumulated several thousands of dollars and even more. From the point of view of strike policy, the objective should have been to bring the strike to a head as quickly as possible and force a decision. If you recall, the plants were in the process of transformation from wartime production to peacetime production and General Motors was not particularly concerned about how long the strike continued because their profits were being guaranteed by the Government. So it seemed that both the policies of Reuther and General Motors were seemingly in agreement. Neither wanting a speedy conclusion.

Our proposals at that time were for the extension of the strike and the exertion of political pressure on the Government. We passed a resolution through the central strike body here for a march on Washington, for a national congress of labor, for the unification of strike policy between the auto workers, the steel workers, the rubber workers who were all faced with the same demand. Reuther fought us on this. In fact, at a Chevrolet meeting he sent in Victor Reuther to deal with us on this particular issue. Our people were defeated in putting it through although we had succeeded in getting it through the central strike body. And our people on the national negotiating committee were also pressing the same proposition.

During this time, to co-ordinate our policies between Detroit and Flint, we had brought in Vincent Dunne, leader of the Minneapolis strike in 1934 and Bert Cochran. Anyone who goes back and reads the Militant of that period and compares it with the events as they occurred, can recognize the astuteness of their judgement, because they were in advance of governmental decisions and union decisions by weeks and months. I think anyone who is objective can recognize that there were people who were experienced in the union movement and knew what to do in this particular situation. As a result, our influence grew by leaps and bounds on the picker

line because we distributed in the city of Flint 3,000 copies of the paper each week. Naturally, workers reading one week what we were predicting was going to happen in the future and then seeing that come to fruition thought that we had some kind of pipeline to Washington or to the General Motors Corporation. We grew in numbers and in influence all through the whole strike period. At the end of the strike, of course, you had the '46 Convention. The events leading up to it were Reuther's fight for the presidency.

Skeels: Was there much feeling going around at the time that Reuther was really riding two horses, one the General Motors strike and the other one his candidacy for the UAW presidency?

Dollinger: I think that people with any intelligence knew that. As far as the rank and file, there was never anything raised along those lines. The Addes-Thomas people just did not know how to get around it because they had opposed this strike and they were fighting a rear-guard action there and yet, once the strike took place, they had no alternative but to support it. In that sense they were different than the Harry Bridges group on the West Coast that proposed a five year no-strike pledge even after the war ended. These people made their fight and Reuther called their bluff and they had no alternative but to go along with the strike or else their throats would have been cut right then and there.

The General Motors workers felt they were entitled to the wage increase. They supported the strike loyally. Now when the strike was concluded, a reaction set in. That usually does after big events of this kind. I do not know what the reaction was in '37. From all the people that I have talked to and from what I have read about it, the numbers that were involved in the '37 strike, I doubt if the union had more than one-third of the membership at any time. There was no dues checkoff and there was a constant process of keeping these members in the union, and the only way you did that was by being militant in the shop. The way you established your militancy, if you had a grievance, you just went in and you threw the switch. When you tell the workers today of the way union committeemen operated in 1937, they look at you like you are from Mars. This is absolutely inconceivable to them, which gives you an idea of the kind of discipline that has been established in those plants today. Not only that, if they see pictures of the violence that

accompanied the '37 strike, they stare at it with amazement. They say, "You mean to say this happened in Flint?"

But there was a big reaction after the '45 strike. The company propaganda was that they went out on strike for four months, they received 18 cents an hour. Now if you multiply that out, it is \$40 a week and so on and you spend \$2,000 and all you got back was what? Eighteen cents an hour. And many, many, many workers, the biggest proportion accepted that propaganda. There was a tremendous propaganda campaign and Reuther could not counteract it because he did not make the effort that we had proposed of bringing this thing to a head instead of just trying to outlast the corporation.

This propaganda did not hurt him adversely when he came into the '46 Convention. He was riding the crest of the wave. Remember the people who are elected to go to conventions are usually your best elements, the most vocal elements, those who are most active on the picket line, those who attend the meetings. He was riding this crest and the reaction had not had time to set in.

You could only judge what the reaction was in 1947. I believe it was when the next round of contract negotiations came up. And for the time in the history of the UAW a strike vote was rejected. That was in Buick. This was a terrible blow. Some of the politicians in the local utilized this issue, turned it against the union, and said we do not want any more long strikes; and these workers just ate it up and voted down strike action. We did not have that in Chevrolet, but this practically ripped the guts out of any kind of negotiations that you were going to conduct.

But to go back to the '46 Convention, Reuther won by some 124 odd votes, I believe. If you break it down, each delegate carrying an average of 4, 5, 6, or 7 votes, the number of delegates involved are not too many. The S.W.P. had been an independent force. If I am not mistaken, we had something like 25 to 35, maybe even more party delegates at that Convention. We played a role on various issues that were raised at the Convention. I remember at that Convention the Negro issue was raised again. It had been raised previously by the CP. We were quite conscious of the fact that the two major caucuses had played politics with the Negro issue for a long period of time. The question always arose of a Negro offices on the Executive Board.

Reuther, Thomas, and Addes were united on the proposition. They were for a Negro on the Board providing he had the ability and qualifications to get elected. Now no Negro can get elected in any region that is predominantly white. The prejudices of the time, especially of these times, were too strongly against him no matter how much ability the man had. We came in with a simple proposition that just cut the ground out from under them. At that Convention they probably had around 400 or 500 delegates, most of them in the Addes caucus, heavily influenced by the Communist Party. We proposed to both caucuses: if they were sincere in having a Negro on the Board that they select a region like 1A, 1B, or 1C or 1D and both caucuses nominate a Negro to run against each other in that region and that would eliminate the caucus politics. This was embarrassing, but they managed to get over their embarrassment. I think it was a very telling argument. I have not heard of it being raised again in that form at any subsequent UAW convention.

In any case, we voted for Reuther for president on the basis of his role in the strike. Immediately following his election, Reuther called a caucus meeting at which every delegate in the convention, almost every delegate, attended, plus the press. It practically represented another session of the Convention in which he announced what his policies were going to be in his first term of office. In the course of his speech, the core of it was on the question of the "reds" and how he was going to rid this union of outside communist influence. Some delegate from the floor yelled out, "What about the socialists and the Trotskyists?" And he was forced to respond that that applied to the Trotskyists, the socialists, any outside political influence. Of course, he did not go from there go the the Democrats and Republicans. In other words, left-wing politics was outlawed. Well, when he concluded his speech, the atmosphere in that meeting was so depressing. Here was a man that had just achieved the pinnacle of power and he was not R.J. Thomas that had achieved it. Here was a man with capability, talent and a forceful speaker, an organizational man. Everybody understood that the old happy days of R.J. Thomas were gone, and here was a man that was going to take the guts right out of this union. And I recall that in the front row, there was a drunk and he kept getting up out of his chair and babbling and that broke the

ice in that meeting, people laughing and giggling a little bit about his antics in the front of the hall. That gave Johnny McGill the courage to take the floor because it was a pretty rough deal to be the first one to lead off. And he pointed out that this had been the first time that he had ever voted for Reuther for any post and he voted for him only on the basis of his role in the '45 strike, but if this redbaiting was the only kind of policy that he could present to this union, then he had to come to the conclusion that he had made a mistake. Now you know in Flint all through the sit-down strikes, all of the leaders had been redbaited fiercely. Reuther, Travis, Mortimer and all the secondary leaders were called agents of Moscow, working with Moscow gold. There had been firmness established among people against redbaiting. I think that McGill was expressing this. To my knowledge, McGill never belonged to any political party and this was an expression of an independent force inside the union in that particular meeting. For us, the S.W.P.ers, we were rapidly coming to the conclusion that we had made a serious error.

When we returned to our respective cities, we found that Reuther's promise was going to be bearing fruit very, very rapidly because inside each one of the caucuses that we were participating in, the Reuther wing immediately turned around and made moves to get us out. It was quite apparent that the battle was on and either we were going to fight and resist or lose out completely. Now shortly after that, this issue went back into the S.W.P.. Once again the national leadership, Cannon, Dunne and others, were supporting Reuther inside the automobile union. They were receiving our reports and for some apparent reason were not connecting the various reports that we were sending in. The national leadership of the organization was pro-Reuther. And here we were in one mad battle after another with the Reuther forces and more often than not taking a beating.

We had a summer camp up near Jackson, Michigan, and we had a meeting of the national committee where these issues were debated. The auto worker delegates were solidly against supporting Walter Reuther. The national leadership was just as solidly for supporting Reuther. The upshot of it was that the leadership reluctantly, extremely reluctantly, went along with the auto worker representatives.

Reuther's victory was made easier by the fraternization that took place between the press of the country and Reuther. If you go back and examine the press, they understood exactly what was involved. This was preceding the Marshall Plan. He opened up the redbaiting long before that. The Marshall Plan only came later, the McCarthy period followed on the heels of it. The strength of opposition or communist opposition or left-wing opposition and liberal opposition represented by people like Johnny McGill could not have been brought down without the national press giving Reuther so much aid and comfort through its editorial columns and news reporting. In addition to it, you had a very, very incompetent opposition in the Addes-Thomas caucus. When we went into opposition to Reuther, we by force had to ally ourselves with one of the major caucuses. We no longer could play the role of independents because Reuther did not intend to permit us that kind of independence. We had to choose sides with a lesser evil force and reluctantly we went into the Addes-Thomas caucus. In the city of Flint there was nothing here. I remember the first election that we ran against the Reutherites in unity with them. We took the worst trouncing that any opposition group had ever taken in the Chevrolet local union. I think we achieved something like 2,400 votes. Any kind of an opposition in Chevrolet is usually good for 30 per cent of the vote and this was nowhere near it.

Skeels: Did you try to renovate the Addes machine at the time or was that almost impossible to do?

Dollinger: Well, following the UAW Convention, Thomas ran again for president. I do not know the details of how this was arranged. Paul Silver was a staff member of R.J. Thomas. He suggested to Thomas that he get in touch with Bert Cochran who dates in the automobile industry to the early '30s through the MESA prior to '37 and that he hire him as an editor of a small union newspaper that was put out called FDR. That was arranged. At the same time, John L. Lewis was giving support to R. J. Thomas and sent in a big press agent, I believe, from Chicago. So you had two campaigns being run concurrently, the one under the direction of Cochran through FDR and the other through this press agency. While they had all kinds of money to spend, it was a very ineffective campaign. As I explained earlier, reaction had set in following the '45 strike, Reuther rode that reaction and coupled that with the witch hunt and the redbaiting which swelled into one

tremendous tidal wave. No matter how effective R.J. Thomas was and who he hired, it is extremely dubious that he could have overcome the tremendous external forces that were at work. There just was not an opposition worthy of its salt in Flint. People could see the drift that things were taking and started to join the bandwagon. You could not turn it back.

Skeels: How about the effort of Addes to bring in the Farm Equipment Workers? Couldn't he stir up much enthusiasm here?

Dollinger: The red issues played a role there and that finished that. No, there was nothing that anybody could have done that could have stopped Reuther once he unleashed the redbaiting and, the Cold War issues developing between the United States and the Soviet Union. A left-wing opposition was finished for a long period of time. In fact, it has never come back. To give you an example, in Chevrolet our people were the people who had led the sit-down strikes. For example, Kermit Johnson, who of course, had been away in the Army. Many other of our people had been away in the Army. They returned as did thousands go young people. They were entering the factory for the first time. They went in for a few days prior to the '45 strike and then they were out on strike. Reuther had control of the Chevrolet local at that time. We were part of the administration and the orders came in that they could spend money, limitless sums of money, to line up people, which was done. Up until that time most of your work was done on a voluntary basis. There was very little lost-time money. This was the first time paid lost-time made its appearance in the Chevrolet local and by virtue of the fact that they had the administration, these little crumbs were being passed out. If you knew the right guy, you get a coal check or a feed check during the strike. It would make a difference in lining up a local union. Redbaiting became a very potent force in that particular period, with these people coming out of the Army. They flocked into the Reuther caucus and we were being inundated by these new forces. The role that a person played in the sit-down strike had no significance to them whatsoever by virtue of the fact that Reuther was getting his stamp of approval on a policy that anything could be done no matter how base or deceitful it was.

Skeels: There were some remnants of opposition, weren't there? Here, I mean, this was one of the last areas really to hold out?

Dollinger: Yes, it was quiet opposition. For example, they said we had a share of the leadership of the Chevrolet local union by virtue of the fact that we were participants in the Reuther caucus. That caucus had been maintained as an independent caucus almost up until the time that he was elected. It was not until Reuther achieved the presidency that it became recognized as a Reuther caucus. And as I say, we went into opposition there. The vice-president was Jack Palmer and the president was Don Chapman. At the subsequent convention, Chapman got elected regional director, or was it at the '46 Convention. No, it must have been a little later. I think the '47 Convention. We were still in that because Palmer went up from vice-president to president. Now you had anti-Reuther leaderships in Fisher represented by Larry Finnen. There was Bill Conway in Fisher 2. There was Bob Carter in AC and Joe Berry in Buick.

One of the problems that concerned us was the rapid rise in the cost of living. In the space of a few months wage gains were dissipated. In the First World War, I was aware of the fact through labor history that I had read. This was a big point that Trotsky had made in some discussions around 1937. There had been escalator clauses written in contracts in the first World War period.

Through the instrumentality of the five presidents we worked up a campaign for the sliding scale of wages. Immediately after Palmer was elected, the first releases were issued. The presidents had all been lined up. Shortly after he took office and by a fluke, we achieved national headlines. The Detroit News apparently thought that Reuther was running a flyer in those negotiations and gave banner headlines which was picked up by the AP and spread across the country. Immediately, different locals jumped on the bandwagon. I do not think that all of them were anti-Reuther locals either. They may have been taken in, too. Reuther was in a very embarrassing position. Not only that we came out for a sliding scale of wages, but we also incorporated into the demands a wage proposal. It was 25 cents an hour to bring us up with the gap in the cost of living over previous years. We set the figure and he did not know how to get

around it. He could not very well come out and say 10 cents is the figure for this year. In the previous round of negotiations if you recall following the '45 strike, in spite of the fact that he had lost this big strike vote at Buick, the corporation practically donated them 11 cents an hour wage increase and five paid holidays. The corporation had already switched its line. They had tested this union. They had realized that there was quite a bit of resiliency left and now it was just a question of keeping the boys happy for a period of time. Well, to our amusement, Reuther came into Flint and proceeded to do a redbaiting job on us. He knew that none of the people involved were members of the Communist Party. He called a meeting at the Metropolitan Building. There were around seven hundred officers and stewards in attendance. Reuther would get up and he would quote from the Daily Worker which, by the way, was opposed to the escalator clause, but he would quote them, and in the next breath he would be quoting from the Chevrolet local union newspaper, The Searchlight, some remarks made by Jack Palmer as president and never indicate that he had ended his quote from the Daily Worker but gone into something else. And by running the quotes together, the impression was left that the Communist Party was supporting the escalator clause. In spite of that, we had worked up a tremendous campaign. We had gone on the radio. We could still successfully win a meeting whenever we had to. Whenever we would win the meeting, we would come in with an omnibus resolution which permitted us to go on the radio, to put out handbills, to organize meetings and to carry out an educational program without being contested for a period of time. And we had a sufficient period of time to make a very indelible impression in this town on the escalator clause.

Around that time Reuther got shot and wound up in the hospital. And the person left in charge to conduct the negotiations was Johnstone, (who later became a public relations man for the newspaper industry). While he was in the hospital, C.E. Wilson came forward and accepted some aspects of the escalator clause. Well, to this day, Reuther claims the credit for the escalator clause. I would say that, that was the last big battle that we gave Reuther in this town. From then on it was a guerrilla fight and finally petered out to nothing with the McCarthy witch hunt. Finally, the guys were being driven out one by one with the hearings coming into town, Communist Party ex-

members, or members and sympathizers were thrown out of the plants forcibly by the workers. There was very little that anybody could do from then on.

Skeels: Well, did Leonard come up here at any time to try to organize a caucus?

Dollinger: Yes, there was a sputtering rear guard action. There was one occasion that he came in and Stelleto came in at a later date. They had support, but it did not amount to too much. The last big one was Stelleto . Coburn Walker became president of Chevrolet. He had been a Reutherite and went into opposition. He was a very personable man but very incompetent, incapable of making a very telling talk or coherent talk for that matter. But he represented opposition but it was never consistent opposition. With the presidency of the local in this town, it was still possible that you could have done things. There were all kinds of political situations that you could have gotten into if you had some perspective for that kind of work, but the man did not have the ability to follow through on anything. In the support that he gave Stelleto, I sometimes wonder whether it hurt him more than it helped him. But it was opposition of a kind.

Skeels: The Searchlight has been silent more or less, hasn't it?

Dollinger: The traditions in that local were such that they had conducted some many fights around The Searchlight going back to R.J. Thomas, that it would have been very difficult to stifle the paper. I do not think that Reuther was prepared to go that far. He had control of the union. A little opposition group here or there did not amount to much as long as it was not going too far, and through the Coburn Walker administration I am sure he knew that there was no real serious threat presented to him. Some of the stuff that they wrote was not handled too well. It was on the reckless side. They did step in and put the clamps on them and they still suffer from that fear of intervention; but as you notice by reading the paper in the last few months, there are very few sharp pointed articles that appear. People do not go out of their way to get into a fight with Reuther because there is no opposition and for what purpose. I am sure there is more opposition in the ranks to Reuther, although not all of it is of the healthy variety. A lot of it is the anti-union variety.