

Oral Histories

The American Auto Worker Project

Conducted by Edward Savelle
The University of Alabama-Birmingham

Part of an independent study of the
UAW and rank and file auto workers
from the 1960s through 2012

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Project: The American Auto Worker
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On June 20, 2012, Edward Savela met with UAW Local 7 Retiree Chair, Harvey Hawkins in the conference room at the UAW Local 7's offices at 2600 Connor Road, across the street from the Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly plant in East Detroit.

ES *[Briefly introduces himself and asks Mr. Hawkins to talk about his career in the auto industry and the UAW].*

HH I started in 1963. I was hired in the Jefferson Summit Plant. I had just got out of the Army and was able to get employed. Shortly after that management approached me and asked if I would join their management team. I just had twin girls with no insurance coming out of the military and getting hired at Chrysler. Had I been in the military, I would have been covered by them. I got hired at Chrysler by the 21st of October, had twin girls the 22nd of October. I didn't have time to gain any insurance benefits.

ES *Did they have health and wealth fare at that time?*

HH I had to gain seniority before I could get insurance. So by me only be here one day, I didn't have that. The girls were premature and I ran up one hell of a bill with them. Had to be paid out of my pocket. I was at the hospital one day and talking to them about the bills and the lady said, "I heard your story. Why don't you come into my office?" I went in there and she said, "look, you just served your country in the military, you have a huge bill for those twins, and I want to help you." What do you want to do? She said, "I want to pay that bill off for you." I said, "You have got to be kidding me. That bill is \$62,000, you have to be kidding." She said, "I'm not kidding, I'll pay that bill off." So she told me to just disregard any more billings. I did that, and I got a dun in the mail, "you have to come pay this bill." So I called her. She said, "Forget about it. The bill is taken care of." So I got another notice. I called her. After that I never got another notice. She paid that bill. Prior to that, I had a situation, I'm saying to myself, "I have got to have greater income, so if management asked me to join the team, and it's going to pay me more money, I'm going to do that." So I did that. Later, I was promoted to General Foremen in charge of the chassis department and all those supervisors in the area.

ES *At that time you left the UAW.*

HH I left the UAW with regret. But I found out that management was really money oriented and didn't give a damn about people. Some of the things they did, I objected to. Often times I would say that to them. Then I fell in disfavor with management. I was also in disfavor with them; I didn't like them or what they did, so I quit. Went back to the union. I ran in a plant wide election and a lot of the workers said, "you can't win this, cause you just came off management." I said, "but when I was on management, I took care of my people, I think I can win this. I did win. After that I ran for Chief Steward.

ES *They probably had a lot of respect for you?*

HH They did. So I ran for Chief Steward and I won that. I did one term of Chief Steward and then I ran for Plant Shop Committeeman. I won that and then I ran for Plant Shop Committeeman again and won that. Based on some of the things I was doing. Mark Step was the Vice President and Director of the UAW Chrysler Department. He was looking at me, so he decided to put me on his staff. He did that.

ES *1-A staff? Chrysler Department?*

HH National Department. I went on staff and that was in 1985. In 1988, I was promoted to

Coordinator handling all arbitration cases for the whole department. Then in 1989, I was promoted to Assistant Director in the Chrysler Department and the General Dynamics Department. So I became the top negotiator for the Chrysler Department against the company and that's where I remained until I retired in 1995.

ES *You had some career then?*

HH I did, and I had an opportunity to go many places all over the world and you read much about that. But this union is the greatest thing that could ever happen to people. Anyone who has ever been in that union will understand that. Those people that objects to it, don't understand what we do or what we are about. They really don't. The Union's basic function is to protect its workers and negotiate for them better wages, better working conditions and benefits.

ES *And security?*

HH Yes, and job security. It burns me up when I hear politicians say, "The unions are really raping the companies. They restrict the companies to the point where they can't function like they really want to. The companies have to live under the threat of a strike," and all that nonsense they talk about when none of them really don't understand what we are about. That really pisses me off.

ES *The talk is real pervasive today, especially with the Rick Snyder and Scott Walker and the Koch brothers and all that. It seems like during the 1950's and 1960's there was respect for the union. Today it seems like all the politicians are harder on the union than they have ever been.*

HH They are because they don't understand unions and don't care to understand them. They know that they care about companies and moneymakers; they don't care about working people. The middle class, they have no concerns about them and that's the problem. When President Obama supported the American Auto Industry here and saved them really, the Congress did a heck of a job on us. They stripped us of a lot of things. There are no more pensions in this American Car Industry anymore.

ES *Is that part of it, rank & file...*

HH No more pensions. Those who were pension eligible, vested, they retained, but everyone hired since that time, there are no pensions. We are an end of an era. When we got the pensions, we had to strike the corporation for 104 days in 1951 to get it. The reason the President at this time, struck the corporation for pensions, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had started Social Security. Social Security paid less than \$100 a month. I believe something in the 1970's, something like that. Chrysler Corporation, their CEO's and top heads were receiving relatively large bonuses, even then. They had just received bonuses and we were in negotiations for pensions. All we wanted to do was increase the \$70 that the social security would pay and give us a pension equal to \$100 combined. That's all we wanted. The company didn't want to do that, so Reuther struck them for 104 days. But his words to the company was, "What do you do with a worker, when he's too old to work and too young to die. What do you do with him? He still has to live, can't die, and can't work, what do you do with him?" That was the start to the company. Any reasonable person would turn around. He's right, what do you do with him?

ES *Reuther was a wonderful man, tremendously...*

HH He was. This man had given you 20-30 years of his life. What do you do with him? Send him to the scrap heap? So we struck 104 days to get that pension.

ES *Was that at a time when Chrysler, Ford and GM, the UAW would all strike together?*

HH What we did we always [unintelligible]. Whatever you gained in one, you went after the same thing in the other three. But, we went beyond Ford and General Motors, because we also had unionized salary workers and Ford and General Motors don't. Our salaried, office and design workers are all unionized in Chrysler. So it went beyond. At any rate,

that gave the worker some form of dignity when he retired. How do you retire without any money? Doesn't make sense. When you look at the Congress, many of those pensions they get and they get lucrative pensions—some of them almost as much as what they make—is paid by us, but they don't want workers to have a pension.

ES *That is very true. They are also excluded from a lot of laws that you and I are subject to.*

HH Reminds me of when I was in the Army, a Sergeant told me, and "If you wreck that jeep I'm going to court marshal you. I'd rather lose 10 men than one jeep, because I'll have to requisition a new jeep and its going to take me a year, year-in-a-half to get it. But I can lose you tomorrow and I'll have a replacement within a week.

ES *[laughing together].*

HH They talked a lot about classifications and all kinds of things that we supposedly had done and it really burns me up. Classifications were not ours; it was the Company's. Classifications were put in place by the Companies, not by this union. Chrysler had 803 classifications on their books. They used about 113 of them. Of all of that 800 classification the union was involved in negotiating 5 or 6. The rest was put in place by the Company, for many reasons. It was to restrict workers to discriminate against workers, to pay certain workers less money, this is their thing. It's their Company. Those classifications that the politicians talk about restricting their big businesses, it was theirs, it wasn't ours and we never did anything to restrict anything. And we always tried to work with the Company based on those things. You'll find in that book¹, when I negotiated the first modern operated agreements we reduced classifications down to six. From 103 to 6. That was back in 1986. We've been working with the Company to reduce those things for years.

ES *Are you talking about skill-trades?*

HH Skill-trades and hourly workers.

ES *Dialed it down to just six?*

HH To six. Now I think it's down even less now. I believe they are trying to do one classification in there. Back in 1985 I reduced them down to six. Then I went on and negotiated at Twin Engine, New Council Machining and Indianapolis Foundry, Huntsville Electric in Alabama, and all of those places and reduced them all down to six. But the politicians don't know that. We are restricting the company when you hear them talk about it. The other thing that they talk about is the difference in the rates of pay. From the transplants and us. They are talking about we make so much more money than them and those transplants make about \$12 or \$14 an hour. That's not totally true. The transplant run their plant on part-time workers. They have a crew of full-time workers. They made pretty much the same thing we did. Had they not, we would have organized them. So they had to be competitive.

ES *Are you talking about the transplants of those moving to Alabama or Tennessee and so on?*

HH That's right. So they had to be competitive. There's a Honda plant outside of my own town it's in Lincoln, Alabama. Ten miles from my hometown. They have about 2,500 workers in that plant. Many of those workers, most of those workers, in fact, are part-timers. You don't have to pay them full rates of pay, because they are part-time workers. That's what they do, they run their plants with part-timers.

ES *UPS did that for a long time.*

HH So does Wal-Mart, they don't let anyone work 40 hours.

ES *At least I remember at UPS in the 1970's, you made a pretty good wage and the same*

¹ Harvey Hawkins has written a book on his experience and graciously provided one to the researcher. *Blue Collar Across the Table: The Making of a Union Rep*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2009).

benefits. Wal-Mart, I think circumvents the benefits that way.

HH They do, but the staff of workers at Honda that's permanent employees make about \$28 or \$29 an hour. Part-timers make about \$12 – \$14 an hour. That's a huge difference.

ES *Sure is. You can't support a family on \$12-\$14 an hour.*

HH They could. Those people in Alabama thought that was the best thing they had ever seen when they came in and offered them those kind of jobs, when the jobs they were working on prior to that, paid less than that often times. They thought it was great and they found out later on that it was not so great. Not so great for the treatment they got as well, cause I monitored that, because I always want to know what's going on with these transplants. I found out there are many things that happen to a worker in those plants that we don't allow to happen in an organized plant. Those plants, a guy gets injured on a job, he goes out, they may never bring him back. You don't have to bring him back.

ES *There's a lot more respect for seniority and the seniority system...*

HH If you got negotiated seniority language like we do in the UAW then you got protection. You have job security. I don't understand what's wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with that. If I can give a large portion of my life-time helping a company be profitable, putting out a quality product, making millions and millions and millions of dollars for themselves than I ought to have something coming out of that. That's the way I see it. That's the way the UAW see it. So that's what they do. We negotiate for protection for the workers and you ought to have seniority rights. I should not have spent, for example, ten years in this plant and you come in and can get a better job than me. You just walked in here yesterday. If I've served this company for 10 years, I ought to have some way of selecting a job that would give me a little confidence as well. That line is deadly. Following that line all day, 8-10 hours a day is deadly.

ES *My Sister worked almost 20 years at Ford Wixom. She lost her job a few years ago. She fortunately got enough for a medical pension. Her neck was crushed. She was a little girl and she worked that line real hard. She's lucky she got a pension. She got out at the right time or something. Maybe Ford had a different deal. She doesn't get a lot but at least she's taken care of. I went to see her in that plant couple of times. She'd invite me in, pull some strings. I've been in some of these plants. I've been in the Honda plant you are talking about. You mentioned Huntsville and you mentioned Honda, so in your role later were you an organizing group?*

HH No, as an active worker. There was an organized Chrysler plant in Huntsville, Alabama. It was unionized. There was about 2,600 workers in that plant. Chrysler Plant in Huntsville, Alabama. Not Honda.

ES *Chrysler in Huntsville. This is closed now. Now there's a Toyota Engine plant up there.*

HH Of that 2,600 hundred workers there was only one worker who didn't join the union. Only one in a right to work state. Same thing happened when I was servicing Johnson Controls Globe Battery Division. They made car batteries and tractors and diehard batteries. I had to go down to Texarkana to service that plant. It was having a lot of problems. When I walked into the plant with the president of the local, one of the guys called me over and said, "Are you from the International Union? Are you here to take care of these problems we got?" I said, "Yes I am." And he wanted to talk to me about everything. So the president grabbed my shirt and he pulled me a little bit and said, "Look, that's the one guy in the plant that's not in the union."

ES *He didn't want to pay his dues, but he wanted to get the benefits of the union.*

HH They do, they have to give it to them. But he was the only guy in that plant that wasn't in the union, but he wanted to spend more time with me than anybody else. Huntsville was the same thing, there was only one guy who wasn't in the union. Even though you got a right to work state, it don't mean the workers won't remained unionized. They got a lot

better chances of being represented and taken care of if they are unionized.

ES *My understanding is Mercedes, Honda and Hyundai those are the three and there is a Toyota Engine plant in Huntsville. The three big ones in Alabama. Are you strictly Chrysler?*

HH I am strictly Chrysler.

ES *You wouldn't have anything to do with those. I don't think any of those are UAW plants. But it's not impossible?*

HH We are forever trying to organize. We just haven't been able to do it yet. Someday we'll get somebody. Once we get one, hopefully the others will fall in line. When you don't understand what representation is, it doesn't mean a lot. Once you've tasted it, once you know you got protection and once you know got somebody supporting you. It's hard to walk away from that.

HH When a guy is discharged on discipline at a non-union plant, he has nowhere to go. He can't go to anybody for support. You can't make a case with the guy whose firing you, so you are just a lost employee.

ES *In fact, worse than that, because if you look for another job somewhere else, you have to tell them, you've been fired.*

HH Many times, management is wrong in their firing and in their discipline. And union shops, discipline is meant to do one thing, anywhere, and that is to correct behavior. That's what it's for. So discipline then has to be corrective. A guy commit some kind of infraction, it should not automatically be a dischargeable offense. First of all, he needs to be told what he did wrong. If discipline is meant to correct behavior then how do you discharge him before he knows he did something wrong? You have to tell him, "This you can't do in this plant." Now if he do it again, he's subject to discipline. Just like you know you can't run a stop sign, if you do you are going to get a ticket, the cops are going to get you. But if nobody every tell you that running a stop sign is wrong, how do you know.

ES *So you have to have a warning system?*

HH You really do if you are going to discipline people. Discharge is a form of discipline, in fact, it's the biggest form of discipline because its affect is economic execution. That's what they just did to you. The union is there to help you through that kind of situations. The other thing about the UAW is it's a great union. You don't find a lot of wrong doing in the UAW. You really don't. then this union is so great that it has a public review board that will just look at what we did and see if we did the right thing or not. No other union has that. We try to do everything right and we try to protect workers as best we can. At the same time we want to help the company grow the business. They don't understand that. If the company lose, we lose. They don't seem to understand that. When I was negotiating with Chrysler, I told them that. "I'm not here to cause you harm, I'm here to help you increase what you are doing here."

ES *Add stability to my own job.*

HH Exactly. If you are prosperous and you are really growing then my union is going to grow, cause you are going to need more employees to build more product. Doesn't make sense for me to try to kill you. I had to make those arguments all the time.

ES *As you look at the 1960's through the 1990's, as far as the industry itself, and union, and management where there have been changes, Lee Iacocca, the venture capital company that owns Chrysler right now, what are the high points and the low points?*

HH Going back to those days, all of the CEO's they had along the way, were not great CEO's for car companies. Some CEO's were just bean counters and you had others that was just a car guy. Iacocca was a car guy. He designed and developed the Mustang. With Chrysler he did the mini-van, so he was a car guy.

ES He had a feel for the industry?

HH Bob Lutz was a car guy. Lynn Townsend was a bean counter. When you don't have a car guy, running a car company, then things are never easy, cause he doesn't understand. Iacocca comes along. I think Ford fired him for whatever reason and Chrysler hired him at a time we were facing bankruptcy and he was at the helm along with Doug Fraser with UAW and Mark Step was the Director of the Chrysler Department. Doug Fraser was the President of UAW. Chrysler was under and went to Washington many times, begging for a loan guarantee. We got beat to death from the Congress because of that and the government didn't put up one dime. It was a guarantee, 1979. And we got it resolved in 1980. Thing was, we just barely beat the deadline, because Jimmy Carter was President, but he had just lost in election to Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan made it clear he would not sign it in the law. We had to get that thing done and signed in the law before January 20th when Ronald Reagan would be sworn in. We just barely beat that.

ES That's good. Almost like the Mitt Romni story. Mitt Romney's tried to take credit for what Obama put together.

HH Iacocca comes and he was a car guy.

ES Was he behind in putting that together or did he come after the deal.

HH Oh yeah, he was involved in it.

ES Were you in the International Union then? So you were involved in that to some extent too.

HH No I wasn't at the International Union, I was a Plant Shop Committeeman here. The President and the Shop Committee throughout all of Chrysler runs the Chrysler Council. The Chrysler Council is what makes up the authority in the union. So the President of the UAW and the Vice President of the Department merely share that. They have to come to the Council for whatever they want to do and the Council votes on it. We had to go to Washington many times, trying to get that loan guarantee. Faced a lot of opposition. Faced a lot of hatred. It was just unreal. I just couldn't believe it.

ES A lot of anti-union rhetoric?

HH Yes, of course. Iacocca made it clear that everybody had to come to the party. The company, the union, the supplier, everybody. "I'll take \$1.00 salary." And he did that. For two years after that, we had reached profitability and he took \$17 million.

ES It was fair though in that case.

HH He didn't lose anything.

ES He took a chance, he took a risk.

HH But he was already filthy rich. Doug Fraser and Iacocca marks led that charge. He put the new K car that was a new small car that saved his corporation at that time and he lost it here in this plant.

ES K car? I'm trying to remember what that was.

HH It was a small car, can't describe it you. I don't know if there is one out there on that board or not, but I'll take a look when we go outside.

ES It was called a "K" car?

HH Yes, they called it a K car, it had other names. They called it a K car because it was a K body design. A-bodies, D-bodies, C-bodies and K-bodies and it was a compact car and that's what we lost in this plant.

ES When did they buy Jeep?

HH 1986 or 1987. It was American Motors. American Motors was going out of business and

Chrysler bought American Motors.

ES *So in 1986 it was still American Motors?*

HH *Yes 1986 or 1987.*

ES *That was a good deal for Chrysler. That became your big seller? That's your plant right here.*

HH *That's right. They got that Jeep.*

ES *I had a Cherokee. I drove a Cherokee for a long time. Probably was built right here.*

HH *I think about Romney sometime. They talk about, "Governor Romney was such a great politician". I don't think that he was, I don't think that he was a good businessman. Because anybody that's running American Motors as a CEO will approve the building of a Pacer and a Gremlin can not be in his right mind. Do you remember those two?*

ES *The Pacer looked like it was in outer space, the George Jetson car.*

HH *The Gremlin was the same thing.*

ES *Now the Javelin was a nice looking car.*

HH *I just couldn't believe, how in the hell are you going to be a CEO and approve the building of those two.*

ES *George Romney was governor when I was a teenager. I lived on Mark Twain on the West Side, right near Plymouth Road. Right down the road is where that plant used to be. I guess they moved the HQ out to Southfield or something. George Romney was a decent human being.*

HH *But he was CEO of American Motors.*

ES *But he may not have been a good car guy.*

HH *That's what I mean, by not everybody is a good car guy.*

ES *It's in your blood. The union is in your blood. I had the good fortune to talk to Lloyd Allen yesterday. I don't know if you know Lloyd at Local 900 out in Wayne, he's the retiree chair out there. I thought ya'll maybe knew each other. You know Linda Ewing at the Solidarity House?*

HH *Yes.*

ES *I met with her, she's a nice lady. But on the highs and lows—of course that was a low point—and you got the loan just before Reagan. One thing somebody had told me was, one of the biggest mistakes the unions in general made, and I'd like to get your opinion on this, is when Reagan came in, when he fired those air traffic controllers and unions really didn't back him up, that was the beginning of a lot of this union busting and decline of the middle class and so on and so on. Do you remember that?*

HH *Yes, I remember that. This is my own personal opinion. When the Air Traffic Controllers struck they know that they can't strike. They know that.*

ES *Was that in their contract?*

HH *Yes they have a no strike clause in their agreement, so you cannot strike. In often times the police departments, firemen have the same kind of "No Strike Clause."*

ES *Because of public service?*

HH *Yes, so what they do, they have what they call the "Blue Flu." You've heard of that term before?*

ES *Yes, sir.*

HH *A lot of guys call in and take off sick. When what they are really doing is objecting to something and rather than strike officially, they call in sick, so they call it a "Blue Flu." Those guys knew that. I couldn't understand at the time, I'm saying to myself, I've got more knowledge of how you run the unions, than these guys running these air traffic controller's unions, because if I wanted to cause havoc and I was running it, I would have struck them. But I would have used their guerilla tactic. I'm going to shut you down in Cleveland, but everybody else is going to keep working. You going to come to me and*

you going to say to me, "If you don't tell these guys to go back to work, I'm going to fire them." A couple of days have gone by, tell the guys to go back to work. Then I strike St. Louis. Same thing.

ES *You are a smart guy. I would hate to be up against you.*

HH You have to protect your people. Taking them out into the street knowing you are violating a "No Strike Clause." You are not protecting them. So you hit them with guerilla tactics. In my opinion that's what they should have done.

ES *You could still build coalitions with other unions for some support.*

HH We do support each other. All unions pretty much support each other. They need us for anything, we help. For an example, I had a Chrysler plant on strike here around 1989 or 1990 somewhere around there. The guys from Transportation call me and say, "What do we do because the plants on strike and we don't want to cross the picket lines?" So I told the guys in Transportation, you have to drive that truck through there. You are not on strike and if you don't go through there, they are going to fire you."

ES *Teamsters?*

HH No, these were UAW Drivers, because we have Chrysler Transportation as well. It's organized as well. So what they do, they drive all these trucks delivering parts from location to location. So when he arrive at the location there's a picket line of his own people. He says, "How do I cross this damn picket line, these are my people?"

ES *So it's a local strike?*

HH Yeah, it's a local strike, it's an official strike. But the guys from Transportation are not on strike, just that local plant.

ES *So you have to tell the Committeemen and the Shop Stewarts they have to back off.*

HH You have to let these guys through, otherwise they are going to be fired for not delivering those parts.

ES But if a Teamster shows up with Borg Warner parts or something, you have to let them in.

HH Let me tell you what I did, talking about Teamster guys. I went to Local 404, in New Jersey. It was a parts depot. They were in local negotiations and they asked me to come help them get a settlement. So I went up there to get a settlement. I'm looking at the drivers that were coming in, they were Teamsters. But their agreement had expired. So while I'm negotiating with Chrysler, I'm telling Chrysler, "Look, their agreement has expired, they don't have an agreement. I want that work. I want Chrysler Transportation to have that work."

ES *Mostly because a lot of it was automotive related?*

HH Yes, because it's a Chrysler parts dealer. What we do is package and deliver parts to all Chrysler dealerships all over the country. The Teamsters had the delivery system. I wanted it. At this time, I'm just an international rep working out of the Chrysler Department. I fight the company and fight them. The company says, "If that's what it's going to take to get an agreement, I'm going to give it to you. But then what are you going to do?" "What do you mean what am I going to do?" "I don't know how you are going to get by the Teamsters?" I said, "You let me worry about that. I want that work." They gave me the work. When I came back to Chrysler Department, Homer Jolly was my Assistant Director. I went and reported to Homer, "Homer look, I just got an agreement at Newark Parts Depot and in addition I got the Transportation out of that plant as well." He said, "How'd you get that?" I said, "I put the squeeze on the company and I was able to get it. I negotiated it away from them." He said, "I don't mean that. How are you going to do it?" I said, "What do you mean, how am I going to do that?" He said, "The Teamsters aren't going to let you have that work. I don't care if you did negotiate it, they aren't going to let you have it." I said, "Well, it's mine, I got it." "They are not going to let you

have it.” When the company told them what was going on, I started getting phone calls and I was saying to myself, “You are a Teamster, why you calling me?” They were threatening me, they were threatening our drivers. “If you put it on the road, we are going to take care of you.” So I had to give it up. I had to give it back.

ES *How many jobs are you talking about? 200? 500? A thousand?*

HH No, nowhere near that. It was just a handful of jobs. But a job is a job.

ES *At least you gave it back you had a point or two on them. You kind of got to stick together and respect them.*

HH Yeah, you do, but they didn’t have an agreement. If you don’t have an agreement then it’s wide open. Why don’t you have an agreement? They’re not on strike, what’s going on? Company didn’t jail me, so sense they didn’t jail me, I just wanted the work. That’s what happen. I had to give it up.

ES *What do you think of Walter Reuther. I have read some things about him and began to study about him. What is you opinion of Walter Ruther?*

HH I think he was a fantastic person and certainly a union leader. He had ideas and opinions that had never been thought about in this business. Cause you know we back in the 1940’s now. We just got organized in 1937. He showed great leadership.

ES *He was ahead of his time?*

HH I really think so. That was his statement, “What do you do with a worker that is too old to work and too young to die.” I think he was just fantastic.

ES *What would the UAW have done without Walter P. Reuther’s leadership?*

HH We still would have made it. No question. Walter Ruther was not the first President, he was the third. We still would have made it. He brought so much more to the table, so much more understanding.

ES *Would you say he was a visionary?*

HH Yes, I really believe he was. Then he could stand on a podium and make you feel his presence. You could feel him. He was powerful. You could just listen to him and drive you nuts. He was fantastic. Too bad that plane went down. He was really a great leader.

ES *Let me ask you about that. He was going to Black Lake and he and May went down with that plane. He was very much a liberal progressive champion of his day. Do you think that was all an accident that plane went down? Do you have any thoughts? Or don’t want to talk about that?*

HH You heard all kinds of things back in those days. But I think it was an accident. I don’t think it was brought down purposely. I think it was an accident. But now, you have to look at his whole history. He was ambushed and almost killed in his own kitchen. him and his brother Victor.

ES *Is that right? I don’t know that story.*

HH They shot-gunned him. He was in his kitchen and shotgun ripped up one side of him and Victor Reuther lost an eye. They almost killed him.

ES *When was that?*

HH I think this was before 1950? Everything he did, once he organized Chrysler, Ford and GM, there was strong opposition to it. When he was on that bridge over Miller Road, the “Battle of the Overpass.” In that battle he was trying to help a women’s auxiliary, or a women’s auxiliary was on that bridge at the same time that they were on that bridge when Ford sent his goon squad there and they attacked Reuther and Frankenstein. We had a President of this local union. First colored guy, RJ Thomas, he was on that bridge as well. Frankenstein died from that beating he took on that bridge.

ES *That was in 1937.*

HH 1937. I guess you read about that. So they have always tried to stop him one way or another. Ford fired him, in fact. He went back to Europe. When he went back to Europe

he went back to school and study some things. He was a skilled-trade person, he came back and got back in, and got back involved and never looked back. He commanded an awful lot of respect. He deserved a lot of respect.

ES *The shooting, did they know who did that?*

HH No. Probably Ford goons.

ES *I learned this the other day about a guy nicknamed Jack who was murdered.*

HH Nelson Jack Edwards.

ES *Murdered out here a couple years after Ruther died.*

HH It was later than that. You mean after the plane went down?

ES *Yes, the plane went down in 1970, and this guy was killed in 1972. But he was the first African American Executive Board Member for the UAW. Do you know much about him.*

HH My mom knew a lot about him and I got it in that book. He helped her organize a nursing home and it had nothing to do with the UAW. But she knew him. In her struggles organizing that nursing home, he gave her pointers on how to do things. He also told her, "When you do this, you are subject to get fired." And she was fired. She was successful in organizing that nursing home, but she was fired for her efforts. So he was right and he told her that was going to happen to her. But she didn't care. She said, "These people need some kind of justice and I'm gong to do this." So when she got fired, I said, "momma you don't have a job. What are you doing?"

ES *She won the war, but lost the battle.*

HH She was employed later on, but that's the way she was.

ES *You have to have a passion and you have to believe in the dignity of people and fairness.*

HH You do. They gave him an assignment in the IPS Department. He had all the independent part suppliers. I think initially he was a Vice President at large on the International Executive Board and they gave him the IPS departments and he handled those things. He got killed in a bar. Someone shot him in a bar.

ES *Between you and me, I remember Bobby Kennedy, MLK, and Walter Ruther. People seem to die when they got so much to bring to bring to the table. I've only heard of him recently. I haven't had much time to study him that much.*

HH It's just a great union and great to be a part of. It hurts me when I hear how the politicians run it down, run the working people down.

ES *A lot of the people, like the media sell it to the common man. I was mostly a CPA and business owner in my life. In fact I ran a temporary staffing firm. I always thought someone should get in on unionizing temps. Because companies will hire temps, give them no benefits, fire them just like that – easy come, easy go. So much of what you hear from the media is negative about it. What I try to tell my CPA and my accounting friends, "A 40 hour work week, overtime in pay, weekends off, OSHA, Workers Comp, Health and Welfare, Pensions is a result of unions."*

HH Everybody rode our coat tails. Even if you are not associated with a union of any kind and you are working in a facility, the income you are making was probably improved upon because of what the unions did. Because as union salary and wages went up, everybody else's wages went up. People don't even know it, but they were riding the union coat tail.

ES *It works both ways. So if Scott Walker gets in and busts the collective bargaining down after awhile it snowball down that way too.*

HH There is one thing, I still don't understand. The Wagoner Act on Roosevelt, gave workers the right to organize unions and bargain collectively. That's the Wagoner Act. That's what it says you can do. National Labor Relations Board came out of that. I don't understand how they can separate public and private sector in a country that says, "You have a right to organize and bargain collectively." I don't understand.

ES *You would think the federal law would take precedent over the states?*

HH You would think so, but apparently it don't.

ES *The same concept on right to work states?*

HH I can understand that being governed by the state. I can understand that. But the Wagoner Act is a Federal law and I just don't understand that.

ES *How would you approach organizing those plants in Alabama?*

HH I don't know. I'm not an organizer. We've been working at it for a long time and we will continue to working at it. I thought about it once, "You know how to organize those plants? Give them all a copy of my book." You will organize that plant. When you read that book, you'll see some of the things I did. When you read some of the things I did and this was during a time when those crazy things I was doing had to be done. Not like today. Things are different in the workplace today. Because they have improved over the years. The relationship with management has eased somewhat, but let me tell you, management is still way off the farm, so to speak, when it comes to workers. It is probably always going to be there. But it's not as bad as it was in the beginning. It improved over the years. So now we do things where we have to try to work with management on certain things, to help them remain competitive as long as we still get to enjoy some of the fruits of that labor. Oftentimes they don't want to do that. They don't really care about their workers. You are just another tool, like the wrench in the toolbox.

ES *It seemed to me like it was a social thing, and I'd like your opinion on it. If my brother's hurting and he doesn't have a job, I'm going to say a prayer for him. If guys run out of gas on the highway, I'm going to help him out, if a lady falls down the stairway at the department store, I'm going to pick her up. If my neighbor or relative doesn't have any food, I'm going to share what I have. I think maybe sometimes its greed verses concern about your brother.*

HH I think its more authority than anything. I think management doesn't like rendering authority to an employee, when this is their business. I think that's what it is more than anything. It's their business, they ought to have the authority to run it. They ought to be able to run it the way they see fit and we disagree with that. Run your business as long as you treat your employees as human beings and not like toolboxes. That's the way we think. We have to be concerned about workers and their rights when management don't have to be.

ES *At the end of the day, management and shareholders could not make those cars were it not for the workers.*

HH Exactly. Many of them don't understand that. They see it every day, but they don't understand that.

ES *How did automation...*

HH Let me tell you how big and important automation was to the company, but it was detrimental to the unions. First piece of automation I saw going to the Jefferson Plant, not that plant [referring to the plant across the street] cause that's the new one, but in the old one. It handled the work on the front end of the car, the frame. The tie rod ends and those kind of things have to be secured down so it had this robotic thing that you clamped the front of it and you had drivers on there and they would run the nuts and tighten the whole thing and then they would back off. It replaced six jobs. So we argued then about having that thing installed there and losing six jobs and we would argue with the company about it and would tell the company, "Look, you brought that piece of equipment in here and it ain't going to buy one car. Not one." The company would counter us and say, "Well, it ain't going to take a day off either." It began to increase over time until it went into the metal shop here. The metal shop before they put in what we call the Turkey Farm – all these robots that do all this welding. Cars used to be welded together in a gate line. The

gate line, you would take the body parts and put them in this frame and clamp them down and then you had spot welders to weld them. All these spot welders. So it's called the gate line. The gate line brought in the robots. The line could run 100 jobs an hour. The robots could have welded them all. We had over 900 people in the welding shop that were reduced to 300. Boom. Like that, 600 people gone, when they brought in those robotics. But the robots would do things that the workers couldn't do. For example, the robots have to be programmed. They have a tape and you program them to do the welds. If the tape malfunctions or anything like that, the robot might clamp to weld, but it won't let go. It was powerful enough to pull a car right off the line. We started having those kinds of programs. We also found out, the robots at that time, had to be cooled, so they had fans on them. It's a 100 degrees in the plant and every robot has a fan on it and the workers don't. The workers are just dying in there.

ES *It got better?*

HH It did get better. If you recall the first computer was as big as this room nearly. But they had to be cooled or they wouldn't function well. So it was the same thing with those robots.

ES *The computers got better.*

HH Have you ever seen the robots run?

ES *Yes, in the Wixom plant. I don't know if I saw the spot welding. I've seen it on T.V. But I bet, during that period of time, the quality probably suffered a little bit because they were still getting used to them.*

HH Every car has to have so many welds. Too many welds cause a problem and not enough cause a problem. Cars have to flex. They are not rigid like people think they are. So you are suppose to have so many welds in it. Each robot is programmed to apply so many welds to that position. As long as it does that, everything is fine. If it don't, then you have a problem. It's never going to do more, but it can do less. Just because the tape may start to malfunction. When you had workers physically doing the welds, we had problems with those as well. It's just going to have problems in a situation like that, cause it's extremely hot, fire is flying everywhere.

ES *That's got to be one of the harder jobs.*

HH Yes. Either way you go with it. Over time the robots have settled down and do a much better job than they used to. Workers are not suffering in that heat and them sparks flying all of them and everything. We hate to loose workers, I don't like to see any worker go. But sometimes we have to do what's better for them.

ES *Some of it's inevitable.*

HH It's going to happen.

ES *There is a book by Thomas Sugrue that talks about the spring coils and what a dangerous job that was to forging those and putting in them in.*

HH Well let me tell you. I never did anything like that, cause you didn't do it in the assembly plant. But we had to take spring coils and on the struts. To show you how dangerous that was, the guy who was assembling it, he would put that spring in this machine and he would put the pieces on each end, down the shock of each middle and then he would have to close it up and it would shrink the spring. Then he would secure both ends, and then he was done. Sometimes this thing would malfunction before he could lock it in and push it back. And the spring would go out, it would shoot out across the parking lot. We always kept them off to the side. You have to have technology to improve to make things better for workers. Even before that, I recall back in the 1960's when the real springs to the body, often times he had to balance it with his shoulder, so he could hang it. You hang it to the rear, you put a couple bolts in it to hold it. Then they came out with a spring stretcher, so he hardly had to use his shoulder. The spring stretcher would stretch it out,

so when it would go up, you automatically start the bolts without having to hold it up. But the spring stretcher was dangerous because it started cutting fingers off. It had one button on it. The guy accidentally pushed the button with his hand there cuts his finger right off. So what we did was, we came up with an idea of putting a safety button so you would have to push both buttons at the same time. That way your fingers cannot be in the way of this stretcher. You have to push both at the same time. But that happens after many fingers were lost. Technology improves, things get a little better. Safety gets better.

ES *There is now a dual wage system?*

HH A two-tier wage system. You have the guys who have been here all along having one wage, the guys who are the new hires who came in after that loan we had just gotten, they came in at a lesser wage.

ES *So that just happened with the bail out?*

HH Right. Because everybody was paid the same in our system. Where Honda had two-tiers all the time. We never had that. When we started that two-tier system, the new guys come in about \$14.00 an hour, the guys who are already here make \$30.00 an hour. It got some dissension right away. It soon settled down. Workers understand. They are not like I was when I came along. These kids are smarter today than we were. These kids today are much more educated than we were. There were guys in the plant when I came along, who couldn't even read or write. You'll find an example of that in that book. Today it's not like that. Everything now is kind of smooth. They are not raising hell about it. In the last round of negotiations, Bob King, the President, was able to negotiate an increase for those and bring them up \$2 - \$3 an hour. They are happier all about that.

ES *Is the top tier frozen or that could still it go up with the cost of living.*

HH It would have to be negotiated. Every time you get a wage increase when the contract expires, you go in there and try to negotiate a wage increase.

ES *Your intention is to get them both raised up.*

HH Exactly, you would try to get an increase for everybody. You don't want to separate it out. Sometimes you might have to try to do more for the lesser pay than you do for those on top. You try to bring them closer to a living wage.

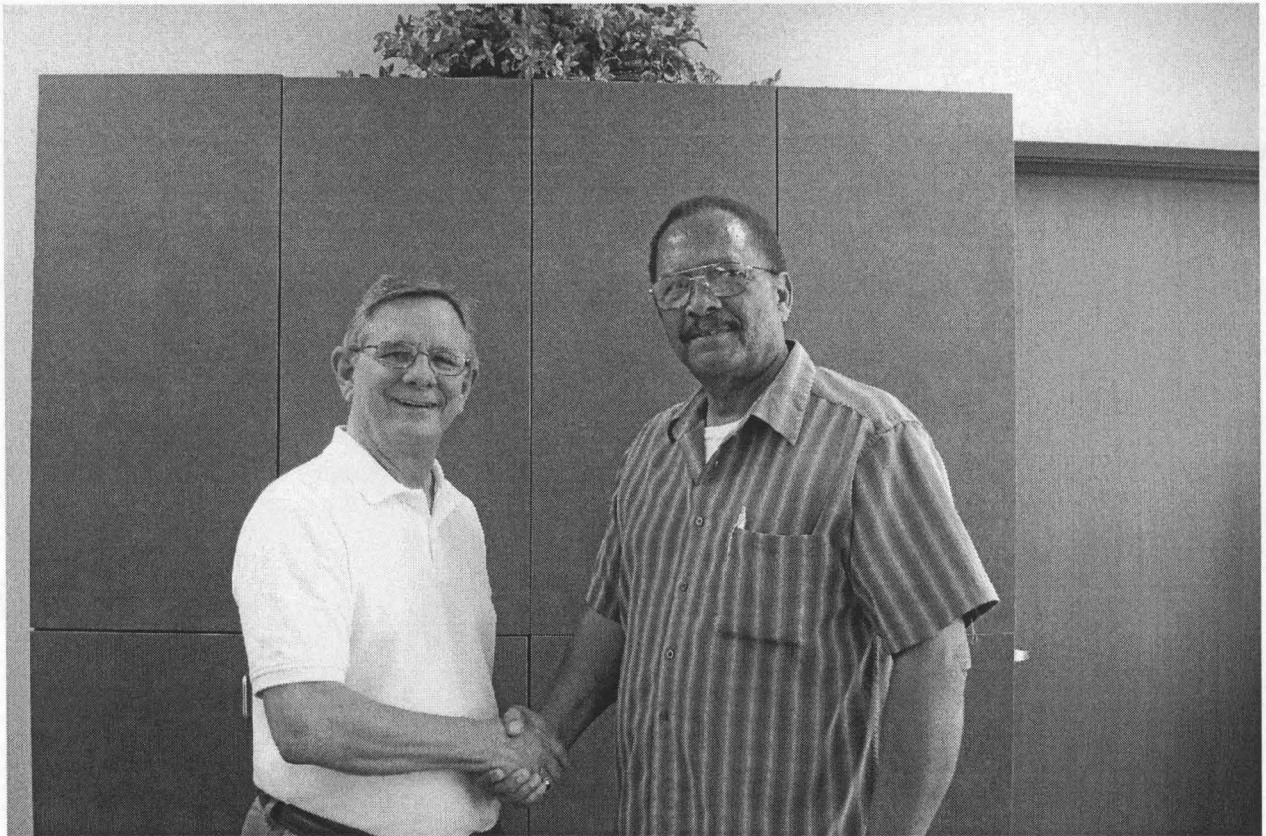
ES *There's no more retirement*

HH What they do now, all of the new people who come in have to be in this 401K. It's pretty much mandatory. Pensions are a thing in the past.

ES *But they are honoring those pensions?*

HH Yes, for all those employees who were on at the time the other guys came in. The cutoff time is when the new guys came in. So all them have to have a 401K plan and that's what they are going to have to live on.

ES *Thanks Harvey.....[researchers ends the interview with his thanks].*



UAW Local 7 Retiree Chair, Harvey Hawkins and researcher Edward Savela, UAW Local 7 offices, June 20, 2012.

