1946.

In 1946 the police shot and killed a 13 year old Black lad for no reason, no provocation whatsoever. He happened to be running through the alley in the neighborhood where he lived and he was shot down for no reason whatsoever. His name was Leon Mosely. I mention that because I participated in an effort to arouse the city's attention to the prevailing police brutality in the Black community. The family was devastated by the murder but it didn't know where to turn and was even reluctant to make any public outcry for fear of reprisals which others had experienced in such situations. However, when the funeral arrangements were made public in the press, I contacted the Civil Rights Congress in Detroit. I became involved after reading about Mosely's murder in the papers. The press made nothing of the action of the police and simply reported that this boy had been killed. I suspected that what was involved there was the usual. Police shoot first and ask questions afterwards. They often didn't ask any questions in the case of Black youth in particular. At that time, it was notorious that police were stopping and searching Black people on no excuse whatsoever. Stopping people on the street, demanding to know what they were doing in the neighborhood, searching them without warrant, searching people's cars without warrant, if the driver was Black. This was well known in the mid 40's.

When I learned about the funeral arrangements that the family had made at a church on the east side, I contacted the

Civil Rights Congress. It was an organization that had come to the defense of victims of police brutality. It had helped arrange legal assistance where people were unjustly arrested and charged. Wherever there was a case of racial discrimination, the Civil Rights Congress took an active part in mobilizing public sentiment against the perpetrators. We talked the situation over and we decided to get as many white people as possible to attend the funeral services in sympathy and solidarity. However, we had other plans as well as to how to bring this to public attention. We prepared placards which each of the people that we got to attend the service put under their coats to be used later. When the services ended and the funeral cortege formed out in the street, we joined in the procession. As it proceeded down the street, we whipped out these placards denouncing police brutality, particularly focusing on police commissioner Toy whom we charged with responsibility for the brutal behavior of the police. Calling for Toy's removal. Then when the cortege reached downtown, we urged onlookers to join us as we formed a procession headed towards City Hall.

The old City Hall was on the area that is now Kennedy Square. I led the march to the steps of City Hall and mounted them. The police were very much alarmed. They thought we were going to invade City Hall. They locked the doors, they barred them, set up a cordon of police on the landing. By that time we had close to 100 people with us. I addressed the

crowd from the City Hall steps, pointing out that this murder of the young lad was typical of the brutality that the city police engaged in against Black people in general. It was part of an effort to terrorize the community and to prevent it from joining in any demand for equal treatment, whether in employment or in housing opportunities or in welfare and so on. I raised the call for the removal of police commissioner Toy. There was no interference with the gathering. The police were extremely alarmed. They thought that this was going to be a raid and they acted that way but took no action against the gathering.

In my early childhood I had an occasion to experience many labor struggles, many labor strikes. My family was very conscious of labor development and supported those labor struggles. I can remember a bakers' strike when I was about 11 years old. I remember my father saying "Don't buy that bread. There is blood on that bread." What he referred to was that the striking pickets had brutally assaulted. That was an example of my early upbringing.

May Day, 1919, I was 13 years. My parents marched in that demonstration. It was a demonstration soon after the end of World War I, and it was primarily motivated by anti-war sentiment. The head of the parade consisted of returned army men in uniform who carried the flag and called for no more war. That was brutally assaulted by the police in an organized attack. It wasn't just a matter of the police

barring a procession. I saw young men in boy scout uniforms and others in Western Union uniforms equipped with baseball bats and billiard cues with spikes driven through them which they swung against the marchers from flat-bed trucks which were provided for them. In other words, this was an organized, planned assault. It wasn't just the usual police confrontation with a procession that they were trying to stop. In fact, the first thing I recall being struck by before the parade started was that there were no police in sight. I thought that was strange because ordinarily you expected the police to lead a parade and be there in an organized way but there were no police whatsoever.

I was here at the time that Paul Robeson, for example was barred from public appearance in most places. I participated in efforts to secure meeting places for concerts with Paul Robeson. I got to know Rev. Charles Hill and was part of the group that asked him if he would receive Paul Robeson at his home, which he did, and made his church available for Robeson's concert. I also participated in the Civil Rights Congress which organized for the security of Paul Robeson when he was in Detroit. I chaired some public meetings for Paul Robeson.

As a member of the Civil Rights Congress, I had to make arrangements for refuge for one of the Scottsboro Nine who escaped from a prison farm. There were nine young Black men, teenagers, who were apprehended by the railroad police for

riding the freight train which was very common in those days, used for traveling across the country. They'd hitch onto them and travel looking for work. When the police took them off the train in Mississippi, there were two young white women in the freight train and the police immediately charged all nine of them with rape. They were all convicted, sentenced to death and some to life in prison. The women were used as government witnesses against them though one of them later repudiated her testimony and said it was under coercion by the police and the prosecuting attorney. That didn't affect the jury. That was standard practice in the south. A Black man could be charged with rape if he simply was accused by a white woman of having looked at her. I participated actively in the campaign for the freedom of the nine Scottsboro youths. Later, one of them was on a prison farm, that was where he was doing his time and doing work as a prisoner under guard. He escaped and I got together with the Civil Rights Congress and arranged for his refuge on a farm here in Michigan.

He knew people who suggested that he might come here and seek out the Civil Rights Congress. Arrangements were made for him to live on a farm. Later of course, all of the prisoners were released but that was after they had served many years in prison in the south. The women had nothing to do with them. They weren't any part of any other group nor were the nine an organized group of any sort. It was characteristic of the times. Unemployment was then that young

people would hop on a freight train in hopes that it might be better someplace else. These happened to be on the same train. I'm not even sure that they were in the same boxcar. When the railroad police cleared freights as they frequently did of hobos, they found these nine youths and the two women. Ruby Bates, as I recall, was the name of the one who repudiated her testimony and said that while she testified that she had been raped, it was not true. Of course, medical evidence at the time failed to substantiate the charge. But nothing would count.

Certainly a very important thing is the organization of the UAW at the Ford Rouge plant because Rev. Hill played an important and a very likely decisive role in bringing the workers in the Ford Rouge plant to support the union. That was no mean achievement because to talk in favor of the union usually resulted in immediate dismissal. Black workers had been coming up north at the time and getting jobs in the Ford plant but they were discriminated against. They were permitted to work only in the foundry or in the coke oven, the dirtiest and the hardest and the most dangerous jobs. They were not permitted in any of the skilled trades, no matter what their qualifications might be. Many of the white workers were themselves practicing prevailing discrimination against Black people. When the union organizers called for a strike in support of the demand for recognition of the union, Black workers at first felt that they had no stake in it. Rev. Hill

played a very active part in appearing in the picket lines and talking to Black workers and inviting them to come out and join the strike. In fact it was a turning point in the strike when the Black workers came out and joined the strike because the company had figured that it could play the Black workers against the others and get more Black workers to come to Detroit and take the strikers' jobs. That didn't succeed and the union succeeded in gaining recognition. 

When I was on trial under the Smith Act, I asked for Mr. Crockett to be my attorney and he accepted. For his pains he served four months in prison on the contempt charge which the judge put in effect. There were eight attorneys and eleven defendants. Judge Badina cited all the attorneys in that case for contempt. They had repeatedly called his attention to his illegal rulings, any number of them all through the trial. He was outraged that anybody would dare to challenge him but they called him on legal points. They raised objections and he'd say, "Sit down!" "But I have a right to make an objection" and he'd say "If you don't sit down, I'll cite you for contempt". He did this all through the trial but didn't cite anyone until the trial was ended. Then he summoned all the lawyers to the bench and he cited every one of them and he gave them six months, four months, so on, distributed sentences which they all then served. In fact, some of them were disbarred, lost their legal rights as attorneys. It was some years later that they regained the right to

practice law. Crockett was not disbarred; he served that four month term and returned to legal practice.